

The role of religion in the 1951 referendum to ban the Communist Party: the South Australian example.

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The Cold War Setting

Six years after the end of World War II, most Australians saw Communism as a threat. Russia's brief period as a gallant wartime ally in the desperate fight against fascism was over, Eastern Europe had fallen under totalitarian regimes of the Left, and China became 'Red' in 1949. Closer to our shores, socialists and communists were influential in the nationalist forces fighting for independence against the return of the former colonial powers. Under a Prime Minister predicting the imminent outbreak of a third world war, defence spending was increased, national service reinstated and Australian troops dispatched to the Korean Peninsula.

Domestically, the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) resumed its pre-1942 role as the embodiment of everything 'un-Australian'. Industrial unrest was usually portrayed by governments and in the media as the work of Communist agitators and the impression conveyed that if only the Communist 'wreckers' and their allies could be rooted out of the workplaces of the nation, strikes would cease, harmony prevail, productivity rise, and irritating shortages and bottlenecks disappear. Menzies therefore proposed to ban the CPA, seize its assets and ensure that 'named' Communists could not gain office in unions and the public service. It all seemed so simple; yet six of the seven High Court judges found in March 1951 that the 1950 Communist Party Dissolution Act was unconstitutional, primarily because the powers it sought were *ultra vires* in peacetime.

That the new Labor leader H.V. Evatt was able in the end to 'win' the referendum is one of the minor miracles of Australia's political history. Both sides of politics proclaimed their anti-Communist credentials. The ALP had since 1946 operated its own Industrial Groups to wrest leadership in key unions from Communist officials, Chifley had used every power available – troops, gaol and confiscation of funds – to end the crippling 1949 coal strikes and both sides had initiated legislation to clean up union elections. Yet Labor's enemies still portrayed the party as tainted by its past history and its organic connection with a wider Socialist labour movement. One result of this relentless stigmatising was that by 1951, any floating Labor voter who had doubts about the ALP's anti-Communist credentials was already in the Coalition camp. Those who were indifferent, or who gave credit to Labor's own efforts to clean up the unions, were unlikely to desert their party in the referendum

itself.

In the campaign the two chief protagonists strove to win over the other's supporters while maintaining their own. Evatt's task was the greater. The ALP, especially in Victoria, contained significant Catholic anti-Communist elements alienated by his leading of the CPA/union challenge in the High Court and actively hostile. Menzies, in contrast, seemed in command of his largely quiescent party and a public conditioned to think of Labor as 'soft' on the enemy within. However, despite early opinion polls predicting an easy victory, the arguments which came to dominate the later stages of the campaign began to eat into support. These debates hinged on the threat to civil liberties. So draconian were the powers being requested (especially the placing of the onus of proof on those 'declared' to prove that they were **not** Communists), that it was not just the CPA, unions and ALP who sounded the alarm. One of the voices in what was hardly a deafening chorus from the small and timid intelligentsia of the day (Henderson 1953) was that of Zelman Cowen, Dean of the Faculty of Law, Melbourne University. 'It is because the Commonwealth proposals ask for too much that I believe the referendum proposals are unsound'. (*News*, 21 September 1951.)

Increasingly what was at issue became the risk to the liberties of all Australians. In the words of a contemporary political sociologist, 'it was a question of whether enough liberals (normally supporting the government) would be found to balance the numerous authoritarians breaking Labour ranks.' (Davies, 1966:138) What did happen was that an estimated 90% plus of people who had voted Liberal in May 1951 voted YES in September, while an even higher proportion of Labor voters stuck with the party line.¹

While most referendums are strongly influenced by party politics, that there was so little apparent straying from the party line when the referendum votes were cast is one of the more remarkable and depressing features of this attempt to alter the Constitution. Far from being a vindication of the Australian respect for individuals to speak freely and organise collectively, the 50.56% NO vote was due rather to 'Dr Evatt's sustained campaigning against apparently hopeless odds and by the innate democratic convictions of a bare majority of the Australian people.' (Davies & Searle, 1954:11-12) The larger study on which I am engaged leads me to the conclusion that those who voted YES were largely expressing their anti-Communism, without much concern over the methods to be used. The vast majority of NO voters were reflexive Labor supporters who distrusted and even detested Menzies. The accretion of power to the Commonwealth viz a viz the states concerned some, while more were swayed by the threat to civil liberties..

The Churches' response to the referendum

While Menzies knew that elements in the Catholic hierarchy were unhappy about the referendum, due to the Labor sympathies of so many of their flock, he did

not welcome the intervention of some senior Protestant clergy, his own constituency. Leicester Webb's seminal contemporary study of the referendum (Webb 1954) devotes a brief chapter to the churches, noting the absence of strong direction from either Catholic and Anglican bishops and the unfortunate injection of sectarianism when the otherwise liberal Bishop Burgmann's urged fellow Anglicans to counter with their votes the alleged pressure being exerted on Catholics to desert the Labor Party and vote YES. Bishop Moyes of Armidale cautioned against measures which might prove counterproductive, while an ecumenical group of clergymen - three Methodist (including evangelist Alan Walker), two Anglicans (including Dean Barton Babbage), two Presbyterians, two Congregationalists and a Churches of Christ minister publicly expressed concern that the bill 'would allow governments to use the powers outlined to the detriment of the liberty of the human person, whether he is in fact a Communist or not.' (Webb, 1954: 92,95-96) That there was not whole-hearted support for the powers requested in the referendum would have been obvious to those who looked to church leaders for guidance. On the small stage that was South Australia, where was each denomination placed and what was its response to the referendum?

South Australia: the religious setting

The following table illustrates the distribution of the denominations within the state and highlights the extent to which South Australia's religious profile differed from the other states'. Free of convicts, and for decades a haven for Germans fleeing religious and political persecution, the colony had from its inception been home to a smaller proportion of Irish Catholics and a significantly larger proportion of Lutherans than any other. The discovery of huge copper deposits brought Cornish miners and Welsh smeltermen to boost the non-Conformist ranks, with Methodism benefiting also from periodic influxes of urban workers seeking a better life. The result, by the mid twentieth century, is reflected in the 1954 Census, the one most relevant to the referendum.

Table 1: Denominations as a percentage of the population

	<u>Aust</u>	<u>NSW</u>	<u>Vic</u>	<u>Qld</u>	<u>SA</u>	<u>WA</u>	<u>Tas</u>	<u>SA's ranking</u>
Major Denominations								
Church of England	37.9	42.8	34.0	34.5	28.0	41.9	47.7	Lowest
Catholic	22.9	24.7	23.0	24.0	15.8	22.4	17.2	Lowest
Methodist	10.9	8.0	10.3	11.1	24.2	10.7	12.4	Highest
Presbyterian	9.7	8.9	13.4	11.5	3.9	5.9	5.1	Lowest
Minor Denominations								
Lutheran	1.3	0.5	0.9	2.2	5.3	0.6	0.3	Highest
Baptist	1.4	1.2	1.4	1.5	2.4	1.1	2.0	Highest
Churches of Christ	0.9	0.1	1.4	0.5	2.4	1.2	0.7	Highest
Congregational	0.8	0.6	0.5	0.7	2.0	1.1	1.4	Highest

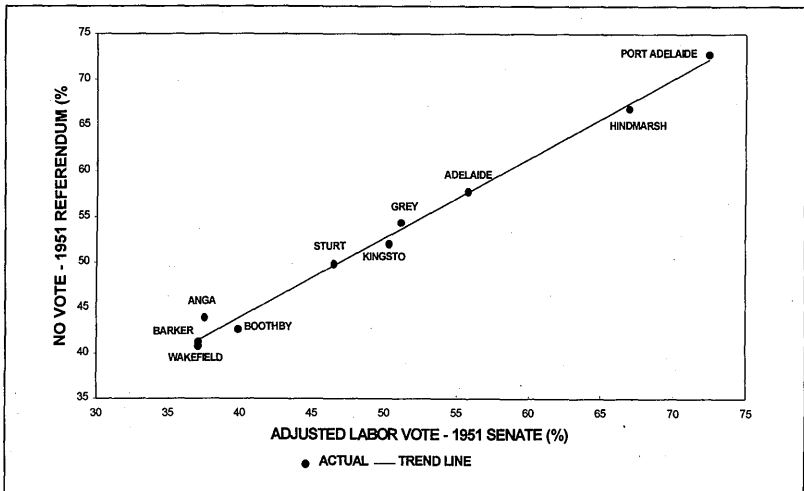
(Australian Bureau of Census and Statistics, 1954 Census: Vol VIII, Ch XIV,184)

The four minor denominations accounted for 12% of South Australians, compared to less than 5% in the others, while adding the Methodists to the tally brings the non-conformist element to a huge 36.3%, a level approached by no other state. Although its historic status as a 'Paradise of Dissent' had been somewhat attenuated by the fifties, non-Conformism remained a salient characteristic of the state. Its role in South Australia's response to the referendum was, however, ambiguous.

Methodology

In order to talk meaningfully about the direction of the denominational vote, we must establish the political and religious complexion of the optimum units of comparison – the electoral subdivisions. Of the 10 federal Divisions (or House of Representatives seats) the six metropolitan Divisions each contained between five and eight subdivisions, while the four more expansive country Divisions comprised from 16 to 20 smaller subdivisions. (The 39 state seats were also aggregations of the same subdivisions). Correlating the percentage NO/YES vote of the referendum of September 22 1951 with the percentage Labor/Liberal Senate vote cast in the double dissolution held some five months earlier allows the plotting of a 'line of best fit' and the ability to detect the subdivisions in which significant cross-overs or 'defections' occurred - from Labor to YES and from Liberal to NO. The extent of deviation from this line which represents the 'predicted' referendum vote, will appear in the tables below as plus or minus values. Figure 1 shows the outcome for the Federal Divisions.

Figure 1
Comparison between Labor and NO Votes
South Australia – Federal Divisions



The 70 country subdivisions are small enough, especially outside the bigger towns, for significant swings to appear, and it is upon these 70 that most of the statistics in this paper derive their authority. Accurate demographic profiles for all but a handful of them can be established, since most were composed of multiples of the 150+ local government areas which were the base units of census data collection. Less can be gleaned about the 39 metropolitan subdivisions which on average contained four times the population of the rural ones and were covered by only 21 local government areas, the newer ones very large. When compiling estimates for the proportions of the various denominations in 1951, I have taken a reading midway between the returns for 1947 and 1954 censuses, a technique which also gives a more 'dynamic' picture of whether the various denominations were in a process of growth or decline. In this exercise, we are particularly interested in tracing and testing whether the 'deviant' subdivisions were characterised by particular denominational configuration and vice versa.

The Results

Anglicans

As might be expected, the politically and socially conservative Anglicans of the affluent eastern suburbs and older beachside parts of Adelaide (Hilliard 1989) are revealed as enthusiastic supporters of the proposed ban on a party so inimical to their temporal interests. Particularly strong in the municipalities of Glenelg, Walkerville, Brighton, Mitcham and Burnside, they contributed to the result in federal divisions of Boothby and Kingston (see Figure 1). In the poorer industrial parts of metropolitan Adelaide, Anglicans are less visible. In rural areas, where Anglicanism was quite weak (Van Dissell 1989:58) and where they congregated more in the larger towns, a trend can be seen, despite usually being 'buried' in larger population bases and the acknowledged high rate of nominalism in the denomination.

Of the 10 rural subdivisions with the highest proportion of Anglicans (30-40%), three were in the top eight which recorded the greatest excess of YES voters. Since the rankings in both denomination and deviation refer to 70 rural subdivisions, the first 15 or so rankings are highly significant. The plus and minus signs indicate the degree of deviation from the predicted referendum vote, the overall tendency here being positive i.e. with an excess of YES voters.

(Not too much significance should be attached to the results or religious composition of Port Augusta West, a 'guesstimate', since it included a vast unincorporated hinterland as well as a proportion of the suburbs of the city of Port Augusta.) Naracoorte's position comes as no surprise. A historically prosperous and conservative pastoral region in the state's South-East and recently augmented by soldier settlers, the fact that Presbyterians were also strongly represented was possibly equally as important as its Anglican complexion. (Murdoch and Parker, 1975:32-33) Like a number of such rural areas, Naracoorte took pride in its high enlistment

Table 2. Most Anglican Subdivisions

		<u>% Anglican</u>	<u>% Deviation</u>	<u>Rank</u>
(1)	Kingscote	40.5	+1.7	
(2)	Robe	38.2	-0.9	
(3)	Port Augusta West	35.5	+4.3	(4)
(4)	Aldgate	34.8	-2.6	
(5)	Elliston	34.4	+0.7	
(6)	Port Lincoln	31.9	+3.0	(8)
(7)	Meningie	31.2	+1.1	
(8)	Naracoorte	30.8	+5.9	(2)
(9)	Willunga	30.4	-0.4	
(10)	Port Augusta	30.4	-0.8	

rates in both wars, generous contributions to war funds and loans and its memorials to the fallen. Overall this table suggests a conservative trend among rural Anglicans.

Anglicans were served by two church monthly journals which took rather different perspectives on political matters, and hence their attitude to the referendum. Editor of *The Adelaide Church Guardian*, the lively, erudite and independent Reverend R P Hewgill praised *The Advertiser* for publishing Professor Walter Murdoch's measured and passionate opinion piece on the morning of the vote and observed that a majority of voters seemed to have endorsed Murdoch's view 'that the Government's proposed remedy was worse than the disease...even a small dose of the disease itself...[being] a threat to the individual' (*Guardian*, 1 November 1951). Very different was the tone of *The Willochran*, the diocese monthly from the vast north and west of the state. Published from Gladstone, it was largely the mouthpiece of the long-serving and 'increasingly vague and eccentric' Bishop Richard Thomas (Hilliard, 1989: 82-3) who had a history of fulminating against 'the basic wage, state-run enterprises, universal franchise, free compulsory education and "crafty, scheming politicians"' (Hilliard, 1989: 108), and had a particular animus against trade unions. On the eve of the referendum he wrote: 'All patriotic people wish the Federal Government success in its efforts to deal with Communism' (*Willochran*, 1 September 1951). These two churchmen may have represented significant sections of the Anglican opinion on the referendum, although neither spoke to or for a body of working-class people who voted NO out of union or Labor loyalty.

Presbyterians

While not a major denomination in South Australia, Scottish migration and inflows from western Victoria in the mid nineteenth century laid the foundation for the strong Presbyterian complexion of the state's lower South East. Long languishing as an extension of the powerful Victorian General Assembly, the south-eastern churches experienced a boost in numbers and finance after 1950 when the Penola Presbytery transferred to the South Australian Assembly (Scrimgeour, 1986: 157).

The Presbyterian Church gave no overt guidance on the referendum, and the church paper was silent. Interestingly, a (surely audacious) motion to direct all Presbyterians to vote NO was 'easily' gagged by a show of hands at the General Assembly of the Church in Australia meeting in Melbourne (*Advertiser*, 19 September 1951). Presbyterians and others may have been influenced by the 'yellow peril' scenarios of the Moderator-General, the imposing Reverend J R Blanchard. Speaking to packed open town hall meetings during a sweep through the South-East in April, he claimed that Australia could not afford 'Drinking, Gaming, Escapism' while 'a Communist Fifth Column strongly operated among Asia's 1,200 million people' (*Border Watch*, 12 April). Less apocalyptic views were being put by the Presbyterian China missionary Alex Yule, also talking to (much smaller) church audiences and conceding that while the role of missionaries was now very restricted as local Christians took more responsibility, life for ordinary people in Red China had improved (*Quorn Mercury*, 31 May and *Wyalla News* 1 June 1951).

A similar message was being conveyed to Congregational audiences by their retired missionary the Reverend Kate Hutley (*Leader* (Angaston) 10 May, *Border Chronicle* (Bordertown), 24 May and *Bunyip* (Gawler) 29 June 1951) suggesting that there were quieter voices within some churches not unremittingly one-dimensional and hostile to Communism. At the other, evangelical, end of the denominational spectrum fear of Godless Russia was particularly manifest among the 'Voice of Prophecy' doomsayers who travelled about predicting all-out war and wholesale destruction (eg *Port Lincoln Times* 1 June, *Naracoorte Herald* 6 June, *Murray Valley Standard* (Murray Bridge) 14 September, 1951).

Outside the South-East, Presbyterians and more especially the other minority denominations were heavily outnumbered by the 'big three'. Yet we can learn something from looking at the subdivisions in which they were present in higher than average concentrations. They probably contained fewer nominal adherents, and thus leavened to some degree the 'background noise' of the majority denominations. When the results in the most Presbyterian subdivisions are listed, it is apparent that again the trend was to the positive side of the ledger. Of the four most Presbyterian subdivisions, the one with the most farmers and fewest workers in the timber, cellulose and fishing industries, Naracoorte, recorded a significant excess of YES votes, compounded as suggested above, by its relatively high complement of Anglicans. The large service centre of Mount Gambier and the mill and forestry workers of Millicent modified the vote there, and it seems likely that it was the synergy between rural lifestyle and denomination which accounted for the greater authoritarian response of Naracoorte voters.

Table 3. Most Presbyterian subdivisions

		<u>% Presbyterian</u>	<u>% Deviation</u>	<u>Rank</u>
(1)	Mount Gambier	23.0	-0.9	
(2)	Penola	23.0	+2.2	
(3)	Millicent	19.1	+0.4	
(4)	Naracoorte	15.1	+5.9	(2)
(5)	Jamestown	10.7	+2.6	(14)
(6)	Spalding	10.0	-0.6	
(7)	Whyalla	8.0	+1.3	
(8)	Murray Bridge	8.0	+0.6	
(9)	Clare	6.6	+3.0	(7)
(10)	Woodside	6.4	+2.4	

Methodists

As the state's most active denomination, Methodist dominance, in rural South Australia especially makes very accessible their political leanings and referendum behaviour. In the absence of an established church in colonial South Australia, the church/chapel distinctions had faded, although Anglicanism still retained its associations with power and privilege, and Methodism its more working class aura. As so graphically described by its historian (Hunt, 1985), South Australia proved extremely fertile ground for this denomination. Less inhibited than the Anglicans, Presbyterians and Congregationalists by the lack of a highly-educated clergy, and making good use of cohorts of enthusiastic, biblically literate laymen (and a handful of laywomen), the several varieties of Methodism flourished, especially in rural areas. Many settlers became Methodists through lack of contact with their own church representatives and the ubiquitous attractions of evangelical Methodism.

As the farming community prospered, and workers became more affluent, Methodism become more middle-class. Nevertheless, in the absence of large numbers of Catholic workers, (until post-war immigration Catholics made up only one in eight of South Australians), active Methodists must have constituted a substantial proportion of Labor voters. While church-going is associated more with the middle than the working classes, and church records of 1951 show that along with the Anglicans, other Protestant denominations had their biggest congregations in the better-off eastern and southern and older beach-side suburbs. (e.g. Knightsbridge Baptist, Maylands Church of Christ and Clayton Congregational), Methodism still drew enormous congregations and Sunday School attendances in working-class Kent Town, Prospect, Woodville, Alberton and Semaphore and the western suburbs, as well as from the more middle class beachside suburbs and those along Unley and Goodwood roads to the south.

What lead, if any, was offered by the Methodist spokesmen and the religious press? Nationally, as noted earlier, little was said, although one very prominent overseas Methodist made an unexpected contribution – the famous London open-air

preacher and Labour pacifist, Dr Donald Soper. Arriving in Sydney only eight days before the poll and launching in the Domain a 'crusade to the nation' campaign, he apparently caused a stir among his hosts by advocating a NO vote (*Advertiser*, and *News*, 17 September 1951)². His stance, although reported out of context, was not retracted, and he remained 'unrepentant about having taken sides on the referendum' which he regarded not as a local or political matter, but 'a fundamentally ethical one' ('Evangelist says he is not Communist', *Advertiser*, 23 October 1951).

The fortnightly *South Australian Methodist* offers insight into the range of views available to the reading faithful. No obvious ideological line was promoted, and the independently-minded 'Susie Salterton' (Edith Casely) was a regular columnist covering a variety of public issues. In June 'A Message to the Nation' reported the Pronouncement from the national body, the Methodist General Conference, which rejected 'as an oversimplification any view of the world situation which presents it exclusively in terms of a conflict between Communism and Christianity. While repudiating Communism in its basic philosophy and political expression', the statement went on to 'recognise that in its social programme it [Communism] seeks certain goals which must also be the concern of an awakened Christian conscience', concluding that it would 'never be defeated by mere negative policy, or by resort to arms.' (*South Australian Methodist*, 14 June 1951.)

On the referendum itself a small and inconclusive correspondence was sparked by an article on July 27 entitled 'Communism Then and Now. A Christian Approach to Present Day Politics'. Commenting on the referendum result, editor the Reverend G B Stribley wondered what steps could 'lawfully be taken within the existing Constitution to meet the Red challenge to our Democratic way of life'. (28 September 1951.) While the neutral and more liberal tone of the journal may have resonated with some urban Methodists, more country people seem to have been influenced by the blunter message conveyed in the sermons preached by the likes of the Reverend H P Lambert in Moonta, railing against 'lotteries, drink and the decline in spiritual values', and warning of the twin dangers of 'land-hungry Asiatics to our North' and 'within our midst ... the rising tide of Communism' (*The People's Weekly*, 24 March, 1951).

Although in greater Adelaide Anglicans showed up as conservative referendum voters, less can be said about other denominations which were more evenly distributed around the suburbs. In no municipality did the proportion of Methodists exceed 29.5%, the median being 23.5%. Payneham and Prospect topped the list, but there was nothing distinctive that can be detected about their referendum voting.

Country South Australia was a different matter, characterised by two not unconnected phenomena – the dominance of Methodism and of the conservative political party, the Liberal and Country League (LCL). Whereas metropolitan Adelaide was home to about 60% of the state's population, nearly half (47.5%) of Methodists lived outside greater Adelaide, compared to only a third of both Catholics and Anglicans. While Anglicans and with a few exceptions Catholics were clustered

in greater numbers in both the bigger centres and townships, Methodism was, *par excellence*, the faith of the state's farmers, most noticeably in the prosperous parts which were the province of the LCL. Analyses of voting patterns in the Playford era and earlier demonstrated time and time again that the backbone of the LCL in rural South Australia were the Methodist 'yeomanry', the small farmers of the Methodist heartland centred on Yorke Peninsula and stretching east and north to encompass the state's best agricultural land.

As expected, rural Methodists were strongly disposed to follow the party line in their referendum voting. However, the fervour with which they voted to outlaw Communism exceeded that of any other denomination. Those state seats and subdivisions which deviate most strongly from the norm towards an excess of YES votes are, almost without exception, also those where Methodists were strongest. The extremely strong correspondence between Methodism and the YES side is illustrated in the following table

Table 4. Most Methodist subdivisions

		<u>% Methodist</u>	<u>% Deviation</u>	<u>Rank</u>
(1)	Bute	70.0	+2.8	(9)
(2)	Snowtown	53.1	+3.4	(6)
(3)	Wallaroo	50.9	+1.6	
(4)	Two Wells	49.6	+0.9	
(5)	Lameroo	48.7	+2.2	
(6)	Crystal Brook	48.7	+6.9	(1)
(7)	Minlaton	47.3	+3.5	(5)
(8)	Orroroo	45.9	+2.8	(11)
(9)	Maitland	44.7	+3.3	(7)
(10)	Clarendon	43.7	-0.8	

All bar Wallaroo were overwhelmingly rural. But although the predominantly Labor small tradesmen, labourers, waterside workers and retired miners and smeltermen of the 'copper triangle' towns which comprised Wallaroo also voted on party lines in the referendum, even that subdivision fell definitely into the positive, meaning that a higher than average proportion of them drifted to YES. This Methodist dominance of the YES vote can be only partially accounted for by the fact that the Catholics and more especially the Lutherans had reasons to deviate the other way. As the dominant rural denomination with no particular countervailing perspective, Methodists therefore appear very positively in the YES camp.

The minor denominations

Before treating the other major denominations, we test the small denominations who might also be suspected of tending towards a more authoritarian response to a Communist menace far removed from the everyday experiences of the rural voter. Their journals, where they existed, were not very informative. Often parochial and very much the domain of their editors, few showed a consistent concern with national matters. However, close to the event, some comment was reported. The nationally

circulated *Australian Baptist* showed a willingness to see domestic and overseas conflicts as 'not military, nor political, but moral and religious', and admitted that it was 'too simple to blame Russia for the disaster in Korea' (15 August 1951). One of the best comments on the referendum, a thoughtful and non-directive editorial by the Reverend A C Prior, was marred by an outburst of sectarianism. Alluding to Bishop Burgmann, he asserted that 'we do not give place to anyone in our resistance of Roman Catholicism and in our condemnation of its meddling in Australian affairs. There is probably as good a case for an Act directed against Roman Catholicism as there is for one against Communism' (12 September 1951). Although Prior finished with reports from Baptists in America that the fear of being labelled a Red was 'stifling initiative and independent thought in the universities', it seems likely that Baptists here were as anti-Communist as they were anti-Catholic, and voted accordingly.

In the only reference to the referendum I could find from the Churches of Christ, delegates at the 77th annual conference in Adelaide, of the South Australian Churches of Christ Evangelical Union were reminded by their outgoing president, 'No matter how you vote on the referendum on Communism, it won't be the answer to the chaos in the world today'. (*Advertiser*, 13 September 1951) The monthly *South Australian Congregationalist* reported in March that the Australasian delegates at its Youth Fellowship conference spent much time discussing relationships between Christians and Communists, being conscious of the need to present the Gospels more clearly and 'to put into effect its social implications'. As befitted a denomination with the first ordained women, the Reverend Kate Hutley was featured talking not only about China, but also urging women to educate themselves in public affairs and get actively involved in politics (April 1951). Both these congregationally-based and relatively egalitarian denominations, and more especially the Congregationalists, contained independently-minded and educated leaders and laymen and women, though their liberal attitudes were more evident in the suburban context.

Catholics

Here is one denomination whose fear and loathing of atheistic Communism should have left its adherents in no doubt as to which way to vote in the referendum. While the tension between working class Catholic loyalty to the Labor Party and their church suggest the potential for the greatest drift of votes during the referendum, there is little evidence that this happened consistently or to any significant extent. Mixed messages from the hierarchy, plus the fact that a section of the wavering middle-class Catholics had already deserted the ALP by 1951 meant that for only a few did the referendum provide a one-off opportunity to abandon the party line. All Catholic MPs, including the Leader of the Opposition, Mick O'Halloran, were able to reconcile their faith with a commitment to defeat the referendum, with only federal member for Adelaide, Cyril Chambers, openly unable to (Cameron, 1991a: 443; 1990b: 81).

That the Catholic church (like the South Australian Labor movement) escaped

much of the torment and division experienced elsewhere as the result of the activities of Communists, the Movement and the Industrial Groups can be explained by several factors peculiar to the state. Apart from lack of industrial militancy (Wanna 1987) and regulated harmony between the industrial and political wings of the labour movement (Stokes 1983; Cameron, 1991a,b), there was the position of Catholicism itself. A small denomination of the Irish labouring poor and small farmers, the Catholic Church had never amassed in the 19th century the sort of institutional wealth and prestige embodied in imposing cathedrals or impressive churches on commanding sites. The colony's early abandonment of state aid retarded the development of a Catholic school system which, even until very recently, has presented no challenge to government schools. Only rarely perceived by Protestants as any sort of threat, Catholics have, along with other minority faiths, generally enjoyed a benevolent tolerance in South Australia. While sporadic sectarianism was not unknown, and the occasional 'rant against Rome' surfaced in the pulpit, since 1940 especially there have been conscious and successful efforts at ecumenical co-operation by most heads of churches.

Here Archbishop Matthew Beovich was crucial. Arriving in Adelaide in 1940, this still young but experienced and intelligent Melbourne-born educator and publisher broke with past practice by beginning at once to work collaboratively with leaders of other churches and of both Labor and Liberal parties. Determined to empower the laity, he inaugurated a new phase in Catholic spiritual and secular life (Press, 1991:161) and encouraged workers to take up positions in the unions and Labor Party. (The LCL was not then a hospitable environment for Catholics.) Initially supportive of layman B A Santamaria's approach to the Australian Bishops in 1945 for endorsement of the Catholic Social Studies Movement (CSSM) to covertly take on Communists in the unions, the bishop later began to have doubts. A close and lifelong friend of Arthur Calwell (Hepworth, 1982:102; Kiernan, 1978:17), and aware of developments in the eastern states, Beovich became concerned lest tensions within the Movement and the ambitions of some of its members pose a threat to the stability of the Labor Party as a vehicle for working class and Catholic advancement. His intervention in 1947 enabled the less political aspects of Catholic Social Action, the Newman Society and the Groups, to continue in his diocese when he withdrew official support from the Movement in 1955. (For more on this Byzantine story, see Warhurst 1977, Press 1991, Hepworth 1982 and Little 1968.)

Although Catholics formed the backbone of the anti-Communist Industrial Groups, and ordinary laymen as unionists were involved in unions as voting members, preoccupation with the crusade against Communism was not the overriding concern of most workers, Catholic or otherwise. On the factory floor it was rather what a union leader could achieve for his members than his suspected or avowed political affiliations which tended to convince the rank and file. When his effectiveness as a promoter of workers' welfare was seen to be compromised by commitment to some outside power, be it Moscow or Rome, to that extent he lost credibility and support.

When it came to the referendum, far more ‘census’ Catholics would have been influenced by the Labor Party’s views than their church’s. Membership of the CSSM and hence the Movement men in the Industrial Groups was largely confined to Catholic-educated, Mass-attending devout men closely involved in parish and diocesan life. Such were also the pool of Catholics most likely to have already switched away from Labor over its perceived weakness on Socialism and Communism.³

Of all the denominations, the Catholic church was the most obsessed with Communism. The local Catholic weekly, *The Southern Cross*, ‘organ of the Catholic Church in South Australia’, told of atrocities and repression in distant lands where the Church and Communism were in conflict, but headlines like ‘Reds’ aim is conquest of Australia’ and ‘Reds and Unions’ signalled more immediate dangers. Right-wing journalist Denys Jackson’s syndicated ‘Sulla’ column, ‘As the Earth Turns’ appeared regularly, and the paper was a platform for the views of high-profile local author and lecturer Paul McGuire. McGuire was one of the few speakers to whom Santamaria was prepared to entrust his seminars for community leaders (Hepworth, 1982:105), and readers were encouraged to tune into to his ‘Moscow on the March’ series broadcast on ‘The Catholic Hour’ throughout much of 1951.⁴

On matters more relevant to local readers, the *Southern Cross* editor, the ‘exuberantly polemical anti-Communist’ Fr P P Kelly (Hepworth, 1982:104), labelled strikes as ‘unsporting and against the spirit of democracy’, and Communist union leaders ‘the worst enemies of Australia and the workers as well’, using workers as ‘pawns to bring about an ultimate Red triumph in Australia’. (4 May, 8 June 1951) On the referendum, little specific was said, although the *Southern Cross* was the only denominational paper to accept advertisements – and from both sides. Readers were informed of Archbishop Mannix’s stance that, Catholics were free, like he himself, to vote ‘without compulsion from any quarter, and with the sole desire of defeating Communism and saving Australia.’ The referendum eve editorial also rejected ‘the sectarian claims’ that Catholics had been instructed by the hierarchy to vote YES. (21 September 1951.) The result was nevertheless a disappointment to Kelly, whose column ‘No infallibility here’ protested against ‘the assumption that a public majority was *always* right’. (5 October 1951.)

When they came to vote, Catholics knew that Communism was evil. The faithful may have been aware that only Archbishop Duhig of Brisbane had declared his personal support for a YES vote and that their own archbishop, like the influential Archbishop Mannix of Melbourne, did not. In any case, Catholics were only marginally less likely to disapprove of direction from the pulpit on how to vote than other denominations. More importantly, the party with which they were historically most aligned was leading the fight to have the referendum defeated. Whether or not the civil liberties aspects registered, the fact that all Labor leaders and MPs (except Chambers), their unions, bar elements in the Ironworkers and Shop Assistants’ Unions (Little, 1965:15) were so hostile to the proposition seems to have outweighed for Labor Catholics the relentless anti-Communism of their church.

Again, not much can be deduced about the vote in Adelaide. While about 17% of the metropolitan population were Catholics in 1951, they aggregated significantly in only a handful of local government areas. Highest, at around 28% in Adelaide, its working class cottages augmented by transient and recently arrived migrants, and in Campbelltown, the council stretching north-east along the Torrens Valley. Much of Campbelltown's spectacular growth 1947-54 was due to the influx of European settlers, especially from Italy. Like a proportion of the city's transients, many of these would not have been enrolled to vote. Working-class inner-city Thebarton and Hindmarsh also had above average numbers of Catholics but, as observed with the Methodists, the big and more heterogenous electoral units do not allow for extraction of a Catholic vote here. Fortunately, comment can be made about the top dozen or so Catholic rural subdivisions.

Table 5. Most Catholic subdivisions

		<u>% Catholic</u>	<u>% Deviation</u>	<u>Rank</u>
(1)	Hawker	30.1	-3.4	(11)
(2)	Spalding	28.5	-0.6	
(3)	Carrieton	25.4	-1.8	
(4)	Peterborough	24.7	+1.1	
(5)	Orroroo	22.9	+2.8	(11)
(6)	Port Pirie	22.4	-0.5	
(7)	Clare	21.5	+3.0	(7)
(8)	Jamestown	20.4	+2.6	(14)
(9)	Mount Gambier	19.9	-0.9	
(10)	Terowie	19.7	+1.8	
(11)	Penola	17.3	+2.2	
(12)	Streaky Bay	17.2	-3.7	(9)
(13)	Port Augusta	17.2	-0.8	

While the distribution of deviation seems random, a pattern does emerge. Many small producers in the marginal farming areas of the upper north and Eyre Peninsula - Carrieton, Hawker, Orroroo and Streaky Bay had been affected by Treasurer Fadden's unpopular and short-lived Wool Sales Deduction Scheme, and appear to have used the referendum as an occasion to register their resentment against the Menzies Government (Fadden, 1969:117, 156). Peterborough and Terowie were railway centres whose workers almost outvoted the more conservative farmers of their hinterlands. Most Catholics in the big more homogenous centres of Port Augusta and Mount Gambier would also have been workers, while Penola's forest and mill workers behaved more like their farmer co-religionists. The vote in Clare, a centre of Jesuit activity, reflects turmoil in the local ALP sub-branch, most of whose members were expelled in 1951 after calling on the party to abandon its Socialist objective (Little, 1965:11).

Lutherans

Of all the denominations examined in this study, the Lutherans proved to be the most interesting. Church records show that South Australia was in 1951 home to 46% of baptised membership of the two Australian Lutheran Synods, and of these 27,000 or so, 71% lived outside greater Adelaide. Though small in total numbers, their concentration in areas of first settlement and later dispersal means that their voting behaviour can be scrutinised in ways not possible for the other minor denominations. Like the Catholics a little later, their numbers were being significantly augmented by the inflow of migrants, many of whom had negative experiences of Communism in post-war Europe. In 1951, however, virtually none of the Displaced Persons, Baltic Catholics or Lutherans had fulfilled the five years of residency required before applying for citizenship, and so did not vote in the referendum. Although they may have influenced the pastors and priests who ministered to them, it is doubtful whether they had much personal impact on the wider church communities. The two national Lutheran fortnightly papers, like the other denominational papers, carried reports on the fate of their compatriot churches in Europe and China (*Lutheran Herald*, (United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia, published in Tanunda in the Barossa Valley) and *The Australian Lutheran*, (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia, Adelaide).

Proudly 'conservative in moral values and social and political outlook', (Leske, 1996:248) Lutherans and their leaders were as anti-Communist as anyone else. Historically inward-looking and believers in the separation of church and state they were, as the *Lutheran Herald's* pre-referendum editorial put it, 'not politically active as other Churches often have been and still are'. Obedient to the civil authority, at election time they did pray for the election of 'pious and faithful rulers, GOOD GOVERNMENT – peace - discipline - and the like' (*Lutheran Herald*, 15 September 1951). Their own history in Australia as a 'German' church inevitably coloured their approach to the referendum. The same editorial went further, and indicates the depth of emotions this issue aroused. 'However, we as Lutherans, who more than once have been under a cloud, when extreme nationalism has run riot, and individually have suffered under the enforcement of a law that theoretically at least seemed good, will make sure that there is nothing in the proposed statute which will endanger the liberty of law-abiding citizens'.

This reminder of the 'persecution and injustice' (Leske, 1996:161) endured during World War I, and the more recent experience of their homeland being once again 'the enemy', does seem to have struck a chord. For, although Lutheran farmers were as solidly LCL as the Methodists, and the majority followed the party line in the referendum, it is obvious from the statistics that Lutherans feature strongly among those who crossed over to vote NO. The federal seat of Angas, encompassing major concentrations of Lutheran settlement, stood out in Figure 1 as particularly deviant in its voting, a trend elaborated in this table.

Table 6. Most Lutheran subdivisions

		<u>% Lutheran</u>	<u>% Deviation</u>	<u>Rank</u>
(1)	Eudunda	62.0	-5.0	(5)
(2)	Angaston	54.6	-3.0	(12)
(3)	Kapunda	40.8	-1.0	
(4)	Mount Pleasant	37.7	-4.4	(6)
(5)	Mannum	31.3	-5.9	(2)
(6)	Loxton	31.1	-2.6	(14)
(7)	Morgan	26.4	-5.5	(4)
(8)	Saddleworth	23.6	-4.2	(7)
(9)	Waikerie	23.3	-5.3	(5)

Conclusions

This study has demonstrated that whatever else was going on to influence the referendum vote in South Australia, the most salient factor coincident with deviation from the party line was religious denomination. Of the large denominations Anglicans tended towards the conservative side. Rural Methodists were most in favour of the ban, a greater proportion of their normal Labor voters breaking with the party on this. Catholics were split, there being evidence that those most affected by the Movement and the Groups had already made the jump, or did so on this occasion, while the Catholic working-class stayed with the ALP. Least enthusiastic were the Lutherans. The Lutheran vote is in some senses an echo or reprise of their vote in the far more divisive conscription referenda of 1916-17. Then they were a crucial and identifiable element in the 40% drift from the Liberals in rural South Australia, a drift which more than compensated for the 20% drift from Labor (Stock 1982). While their reasons for resisting conscription in the first World War were more immediate and cogent than for opposing the outlawing of Communists in 1951, this voting trend would seem to confirm that personal experience of discrimination heightens the awareness of the potential for abuses of power by the state.

One can speculate, too, about the effect on the faithful of the pronouncements of their leaders. Church leaders have tended in recent years not to involve themselves in political comment, and for good reasons. Even in the more hierarchical and authoritarian denominations, few would claim to be the voice of their flocks, and see no point in alienating a proportion of their adherents by being seen to take a partisan stance. Even on purely moral issues, most would also doubt their ability to persuade their audience, denominational or more general, especially on contentious and problematic issues. When they do speak out, they become part of the cacophony of voices to which the citizens may listen and respond. As this study indicates, it is not prudent, even in the early 1950s, to accord them much authority.

The more subtle influence of long term exposure to the religious press is also open to question. Readers, as always, are free to agree or disagree with the content

and opinion of whatever they come across. To the extent to which denominational papers accorded with what their readers were seeing, hearing and experiencing elsewhere, to that extent they had the potential to reinforce existing opinion. Like the public utterings of church spokesmen, their accuracy as a reflection of denominational opinion is highly debateable.

This study also illustrates the observable and documented (Oeser and Hammond; Oeser and Emery 1954; Holt 1946; McIntyre 1944) tendency for rural people of that era to be more conservative than suburban, and especially city congregations exposed to a greater variety of people and ideas. Their ordained ministers, with the benefits of some tertiary education, could be expected to have taken a broader view of the issues thrown up by the referendum. But clergymen also live in communities and tend congregations whose horizons are often more limited. Having to adapt to the prevailing climate of opinion, is still relatively rare for a rural minister to publicly espouse radical social or political views. At the same time, in their overwhelming endorsement of Menzies' referendum proposals, rural Methodists were demonstrating, (more convincingly than can be deduced from the bigger aggregations of the metropolitan area) the tendency, noted in numerous United States' studies, and in Black's (1983) Australian collection, that 'on a whole range of issues, theological, ethical and political, church members are consistently more conservative than clergy'.(Black, 1983:9).

Endnotes

1. In order to calculate the notional 'two-party preferred' support for the two major parties to match with the binary referendum vote I have used Senate figures, which are more accurate for purposes of computing the base party vote. In any case, the Federal seat of Hindmarsh was not contested in 1951.
2. This was a little misleading, as his '30 minute exposure and denunciation of Communism' and his heckling by Communist sympathisers in the audience was not reported. To the inevitable question on the referendum he had given 'a frank answer in terms of his own convictions' which, in the context of the meeting, 'gave little concern'. By the time this corrective account was published in the *South Australian Methodist* (12 October 1951.), the referendum was over, and not until early November did thousands of South Australians attend his rallies in Elder Park, the Tivoli Theatre, the Town Hall, Port Adelaide and Port Pirie. (Hunt, p 363.)
3. My dating of this switch is a little earlier for South Australia than that suggested by Warhurst's findings on the realigning of upwardly mobile Catholics away from the ALP over the Communist issue, although he concedes that the smallness of poll samples in the three smallest states reduces their reliability. (Warhurst, 1979: 231).
4. McGuire's mission to alert Australians to the menace of Communism led him to an audience far beyond his fellow Catholics. He gave the inaugural Junior Chamber of Commerce's 1951 lecture series on the subject of 'The advance of imperial Communism' (*Advertiser*, 27 April 1951), spoke at recruiting events, (*Advertiser*, 5, 13 March, 27 April 1951), toured country centres under the auspices of the United Services Association. (*Murray Pioneer* (Renmark)

13 September, *Transcontinental* (Port Augusta), 28 September, *Whyalla News* 5 October) and lectured National Servicemen at Woodside Camp (*Advertiser*, 18 September 1951).

5. A Gallup poll in 1956 showed Catholic disapproval at 80%, compared to a mean of 87% for other denominations (see Mol, 1985: 205).

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