

The Genesis of Red Brotherhood at War

Kelvin Rowley¹

Abstract

The paper traces Grant Evans' intellectual development from university times to his early academic writings presented as a pre-history of the book *Red Brotherhood at War* (1984). It situates this development in the historical circumstances of Australia between 1968 and the early 1980s, which were dominated by the Vietnam War and struggles between various leftist factions. The core of the argument concerns Grant Evans' reflexive attitude to dominant intellectual trends and his early critical attitude towards the totalitarian tendencies in countries that called themselves socialist at the time.

Introduction

I first met Grant Evans in 1969. We both came from farming backgrounds, came to Melbourne to attend university, lived in the student quarter near Melbourne University, and moved in the same social circles. We soon became good friends.

Over the following years, we engaged in constant discussion. There's a lot that could be said about Grant's personal qualities – his generosity, good humor and other qualities. I will not go into that here. Our discussions ranged freely over a myriad of topics, from pop music to astronomy. Most of these issues I will ignore.

What I will do here is to recall how our views on issues relevant to the writing of *Red Brotherhood at War* evolved. This is a retrospective summing up which brings coherence to discussions that were actually rambling and often confused. It ignores the diversions and sidetracks we explored from time to time, and does not attempt to give a full picture of the range of Grant's interests. This article simply tries to draw together the threads of what Grant and I discussed which led to *Red Brotherhood at War*.

I had begun a science degree at Melbourne University in 1966, but soon became more interested in politics and history. In 1969, I was doing night school to qualify for entry into an Arts course. Grant was majoring in English literature at La Trobe University, and completed that course. However, he became increasingly unhappy with discussions of Leavisite literary criticism.

This was a time of political and cultural ferment. The conservative hegemony in Australian politics forged by Robert Menzies in the early 1950s was unraveling. Social and sexual taboos were being swept away with the rise of the "counter-culture" of sex, drugs and rock'n'roll. A New Left emerged in the US, stressing empowerment of the powerless, human rights, and participatory democracy. The War in Vietnam provoked widespread protests and criticism of US foreign policy. China was swept up in Mao's Cultural Revolution. In 1968, the Soviet Union occupied Czechoslovakia to put an end to the "Prague Spring."

¹ Formerly senior lecturer, Faculty of Life and Social Sciences, Swinburne University of Technology, Australia; kjrowley101@yahoo.com.au.