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Worker for Peace from behind the Iron Curtain

Doris LeRoy

This paper examines the life of Professor Josef Hromádka, his close involvement with the Soviets, his visits to Australia and his influence on those Australians who shared like views. Hromádka was a Czech Lutheran pastor, who became an influential theologian worldwide despite embracing socialism. He was a founding member of the World Council of Churches. Hromádka was an undoubted worker for peace, but also was a supporter of the Soviet Union and world communism and awarded the Order of Lenin, whilst remaining the ideological leader of the evangelical movement in Czechoslovakia. The Australian receptions given Hromádka in 1954 and 1956 were extremely mixed. They verged on hysterical anti-communist vitriol to an acceptance that he was a genuine worker for peace, attempting to find a middle way for those Christians forced to live under Soviet rule. Those Czechoslovakian refugees living in Australia regarded Hromádka as a traitor.

Professor Josef Hromádka was an ordained Czech Lutheran pastor, who had served also a chaplain during the First World War. Extensive theological studies saw him become a leading theologian in his own country, holding teaching positions at the Protestant Theological Faculty of the Charles University in Prague—from 1920 to 1966. During World War II he escaped to the United States where he held the position of visiting Professor, Theology, at Princeton Theological Seminary until 1946. He also was supportive of socialist ideology. On his return to Czechoslovakia after the war he became a member of an Action Committee for the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren set up in 1948 which welcomed the new communist government, anticipating that it would "preserve the deepest traditions of freedom and justice" in Czechoslovakia.¹ The Protestant Evangelical church to which he belonged had ties to the Presbyterian church. Hromádka "advocated dialogue with the Marxists, arguing that the Marxist revolution was a revolt against unjust social orders, not against God". Hromádka regarded the birth of socialism in Czechoslovakia with "sober Christian realism". The church, he said, stood "amid great historical changes" which could not be sidestepped. It could, of course, ignore the new situation and look to its past, "but such an attitude to the problems of today would weaken us spiritually, would withdraw the church to the fringe of events".²

Hromádka was a founding member of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1948, and had a debate with John Foster Dulles at that time which indicated the deep East/West divisions that were to follow.³ "Henceforth the West must share world responsibility with the East, and this means that the West must get over its 'almost metaphysical horror' of the new world trends and their eastern leader, Soviet Russia".⁴ Hromádka served on its executive from 1954-1961. This did not save him from the unwelcome attention of those in the West who mistrusted any who espoused Christian-Marxist principles, and who co-operated with the Communist regimes. As well, Hromádka was the founder of the Christian Peace Conference (CPC) working behind the Iron Curtain for peace. Despite there being people in the organisation recognised as wanting peace, the same charges of control from Moscow and infusion of "Moscow Gold" were levelled as with the communist-influenced World Peace Council (WPC), of which Hromádka was also a member. Western opponents of communism claimed the WPC as being the

organisation through which the Soviets organised their “front” organisations and the CPC was listed as a “front” organisation.⁵ Hromádka was influential beyond the Iron Curtain, often compared with Anglican Dean Hewlett Johnson, another priest who claimed that there was no incongruity in Christians working with communism, and who extolled the benefits of the socialist system. However Hromádka’s theological standing far outstripped that of Johnson. Johnson’s visit to Australia in April 1950 had created extreme unrest among the Australian populace.⁶

Australia

Hromádka’s influence extended to Australia, in particular on the so-called “Peace Parsons”, Reverends Dickie, Hartley and James of the Victorian Branch of Australian Peace Council (APC), which worked closely with the WPC. There were some clerics who were prepared to defy their churches and become involved in organisations such as the APC, even though this organisation was closely aligned with the Communist Party of Australia (CPA), had some union support and was subject to ASIO surveillance. The Peace Parsons claimed the situation in Czechoslovakia between Church and State proved that communism and the church could co-exist, with both working toward the betterment of mankind. Since the political and religious climate in Australia was, in the main, anti-communist during the Cold War, the Australian reception given Hromádka in both 1954 and 1956 was extremely mixed, verging on hysterical anti-communist vitriol to a more measured acceptance that he was a genuine worker for peace, attempting to find a middle way between those Christians who lived under Soviet rule and the State. An additional complication was created by the influx into Australia of immigrants from Eastern Europe, some of whom were avidly anti-communist. The CPA had a negative attitude to those migrants who had chosen not to live under communist rule and who came to Australia instead. The CPA actively campaigned so that these migrants were discriminated against in obtaining employment.⁷ The mainstream Australian religions had adopted an anti-communist stance, despite some being prepared to host Hromádka’s visit in the hope it might lead to better understanding.⁸ Most certainly the Australian Government followed the anti-communist line adopted by both the British and US Governments.⁹

Reverends Victor James and Frank Hartley, of the APC, had met with Hromádka when they visited Czechoslovakia. James and Hartley have been assessed as unable to objectively appraise the communist societies they visited, since they had a blinkered view regarding the role played in those societies by the church. Hromádka played a vital role in establishing that view.¹⁰ Hartley recorded in his diary that Hromádka had been extremely helpful to them, that he and James dined at his home, and that he travelled with them to Moscow. This connection was bound to place Hromádka under greater suspicion in Australia, as Hartley and James were considered by many to be colluding with communists. In 1951 Hartley wrote “To me, Professor Joseph Hromadka represents a bridge between East and West, that is why I crossed the world to see him”.¹¹ Rev. Alfred Dickie had also formed strong bonds with Hromádka, and followed Hromádka’s utopian vision of “the church as a bridge between East and West”.¹²

World Council of Churches

The WCC was an important link for Australians to become informed of events occurring overseas, since isolation was one of the major problems encountered in Australia in the 1950s. To some extent this isolation was counteracted by newspapers and magazine reports, but of course such sources had their varying stances. A prime example of this was the Anglican press in Sydney, where the competitive *Anglican Church Record* (ACR) and the *Anglican* very often provided alternate versions of the same events. So it was that Hromádka’s first Australian visit after the 1954 WCC Evanston gathering came at a time of unrest.

Hromádka and other Iron Curtain clergy had met antagonism from within the US for their attendance at the WCC meeting at Evanston.¹³ Also complicating the WCC meeting was the attitude of the US security forces toward those eleven clergy from behind the Iron Curtain that had been granted visas to attend. There was opposition mounted to the WCC by the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC) a fundamentalist international council headed by American Dr Carl McIntire. This organisation held its meetings at the same time as the WCC meetings, and claimed that the WCC was "communist inclined, because it included people like Hromadka who co-operated with communist regimes".¹⁴ The emphasis on anti-communism in the US also made for an uncomfortable visit for some clergy, since participants were asked to keep other Iron Curtain clergy under surveillance. Norman J. Hjelm—later to be acting deputy secretary of the Lutheran World Federation—outlined the inability of those from outside the Iron Curtain to appreciate the difficult conditions confronting those forced to find accommodation with the communists.¹⁵ The pangs so obviously felt by Hjelm regarding incompatibility of East/West surfaced when:

the Australian Council of Churches chose not to issue an invitation to Dr Hromadka to speak when he visits Australia next month. The general Secretary of the Council, Dr Malcolm Mackay reported that the special committee of Australians appointed to discuss Dr Hromadka's visit had decided it could do no more than welcome Dr Hromadka since it cannot align itself with the various 'peace' councils sponsoring his visit.¹⁶

Hromádka had moved a motion at Evanston supporting "the communist intervention in Korea", passed despite opposition from "the Americans and some members of the Australian delegation, including Malcolm Mackay". Mackay was formerly a member of the University of Sydney Student Christian Movement. The Australian Student Christian Movement (ASCM) did not endorse Hromádka's Australian meetings even though Hromádka was involved in the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF). Hromádka, who "believed in being in 'critical solidarity' with the post-war communist governments" was described as a "mentor" for Hartley and Dickie. Boyce Gibson, a stalwart of the University of Melbourne SCM also opposed Hromádka's visit and meetings.¹⁷ This stance was not adopted by all ASCM identities. Margaret Holmes acted as chauffeur for Professor Lonsdale when Lonsdale and Hromádka were in Sydney. As well, the formation of committees for International Affairs across Australia, as an initiative of the WCC¹⁸, caused dispute amongst ASCM members.¹⁹ The fear was that these committees would be under communist control—a suspicion also voiced regarding the WCC, because of the membership of identities such as Hromádka.

Anglican Rev. D.W.B. Robinson published his critique of Hromádka in the *ACR*, where Hromádka was the subject of a two page critical spread.²⁰ Dr Mowll, Archbishop of Sydney and Primate of the Anglican Church in Australia, was unmoved. He advised the Clergy School at Moss Vale the day of his return from Evanston that he:

would act as host for Dr Josef Hromadka the distinguished Czech theologian and member of the World Council of Churches, who reached Australia yesterday at the invitation of the Peace Forum in Melbourne. Dr Mowll made it clear he was welcoming Dr Hromadka 'as a convinced fellow-Christian' and that he was not associated with the groups who invited Dr Hromadka, nor did he necessarily endorse their views.²¹

The *Anglican* editorial welcomed Hromádka to Australia, claiming the Peace Quest Forum (sponsors of the Peace and Goodwill Assemblies) was what it purported to be: "a band of true Christians, mostly ministers of religion, and including Anglican clergy and Quakers, genuinely

and constructively interested in peace” and urged Anglicans not to be deterred from attending the meetings and to make their own independent decision.²² Other influential Anglican clergy showed support for Hromádka; Bishop J. S. Moyes of Armidale gave an interview to the *Anglican*:

Dr Hromadka was a valued member of the WCC, a spiritual hero, a symbol of the hopeless division of the Christian world between East and West. He decided he had to co-operate with those who denied his Christian faith to take part in the reconstruction of his country, he was disappointed at the abandonment of Czechoslovakia by Western allies 1938. He fled on the advice of police. He taught in the US at Princeton—returned to Czechoslovakia, all along a convinced socialist. The men who rule Czechoslovakia are honest and hard workers. He could have joined the party years ago but not now, he is too well known. “The Lord asks that I live among Communists, I love them; Christ died for them also’.²³

Hromádka’s ASIO file reveals that written protests against Hromádka’s visit were received by parliamentarians and forwarded onto Prime Minister Menzies, in addition to protest letters being published in the local newspapers.²⁴ Rev. John James Eric Owen, of the Peace Quest Forum, was not aligned with the WPC. He was a Presbyterian minister, who had been Moderator of the Presbyterian church in Victoria, and was shocked that the Menzies government did not accept that Hromádka was a genuine worker for peace between the East and the West. Owen’s protestations fell on deaf ears, despite having previously had an interview with Menzies regarding the credentials of the Peace Quest Forum. Though the Peace Quest Forum had been explicitly formulated so that there was no communist involvement, it still was subject to scrutiny by ASIO. This prompted Menzies to make a statement in the House of Representatives that there was evidence that there was communist infiltration into the Peace Quest Forum, and especially into the Australian Convention of Peace and War, which was being organised for September 1953.²⁵ Owens then met with Menzies, who made another statement in the House that “I entirely accept what Owens has told me”. However Menzies still claimed, despite Owens being “a man of great character” and “certainly not a communist”, that the government had information “there had been a great deal of Communist activity...quite real, and giving a character to the proceedings that will occur”.²⁶ This led to the reluctant withdrawal of Dr Harold Woods from the Forum, his position as headmaster of the Methodist Ladies College in Melbourne made his involvement in any such suspect activity undesirable. While Owen decided to stay in the organisation and the convention was held, the Peace and Goodwill Assemblies a year later came under the same suspicion from the Menzies government.

The attendance of the two overseas visitors, Professor Hromádka and Professor Kathleen Lonsdale (a Quaker and noted nuclear physicist who worked for peace) for the Peace and Goodwill Assemblies was noted and they received the full attention from ASIO. In Sydney Hromádka addressed meetings with Professor Lonsdale. However, it was typical of the times that Lonsdale, as a woman, did not receive the accolades due to her status as a physicist and less ASIO scrutiny. Their meetings were well publicised. Margaret Holmes was charged with the duty of chauffeuring Lonsdale. Her recollections reveal that the meetings in Sydney were slightly less confrontational than those in Melbourne—and when appeals were made to contribute to the cost of bringing out the speakers huge amounts were raised from working class people.²⁷ The ASIO report on a NSW CPA meeting on 18 August claimed Hromádka’s visit “is to be organised by the Peace Council” and that “he will make a lecture tour of N.S.W. prior to going to the Assembly”. The report claimed that “attempts may be made by W.C. Wentworth to organise the Fascist New Australians in a demonstration against this visitor. For this reason it is important that there may be many comrades present wherever he should appear”.²⁸ W.C. Wentworth was the strident anti-

communist Liberal Member of the House of Representatives, who frequently associated with Eastern European anti-communists. It must be remembered that the WPC was a suspect organisation, which many unionists joined, and the muscle provided by those unionists certainly was used to ensure meetings could be held.²⁹

Unfortunately for Hromádka, the influence Dr Mowll had in Sydney was not reflected in the Melbourne diocese. Hromádka had a very difficult time in Melbourne in 1954. While he did receive assistance from some sections of the churches in Australia, when he spoke at the Assembly Hall in Melbourne on 16 September 1954, he was met with an unruly mob. Earlier the same day he spoke to 800 students at University of Melbourne, where "New Australians hissed and booed him and distributed pamphlets against him. They were sent away by the University authorities". Hromádka maintained "that Christians who had been persecuted in Communist countries had been persecuted for political rather than religious reasons". He also claimed "the Christian Church has been identified with the middle classes and is out of touch with the workers". Rev. Don McCrae, who chaired the meeting, refused permission to "a Roman Catholic clergyman the right to reply for just two minutes".³⁰

The "Peace and Goodwill rally" at the Collins St Assembly Hall that evening met with even more violent confrontation. The ASIO report listed Stephen Murray-Smith (a member of CPA) as "a journalist returned Czechoslovakia" and "one of the main persons associated with the organisation and holding of the meeting". While there can be no doubt of the support received from the CPA for the Peace and Goodwill Assembly meetings, evidenced by the ASIO files on the CPA meetings around the country, it is doubtful that the CPA initiated the meetings. The Peace Parsons (Reverends Dickie, Hartley and James) were listed on the platform with Anglican Canons Maynard and Thomas—all active in the APC. The platform was completed with Professors Hromádka and Lonsdale, Reverend J. F. Long and Reverend J. Eric Owen (Peace Quest Forum). Owen was the chairman. The meeting "was very disorderly, anti-Communists and members of the Czechoslovakian community interjecting profusely". The ASIO lists of others at the meeting included those suspected as being complicit with suspect peace overtures, such as the Australian Convention on Peace and War in 1953. Also listed as antagonists were Vladimir Borin (Free Czechs); Rev. Norman Hill, Vicar of St Marks Anglican Church, Fitzroy; and another "Nicholls", supposedly the son of a Presbyterian minister.³¹ The newspapers widely reported the meeting. "Crowds of New Australians bearing banners with anti-communist slogans milled about the Assembly Hall ... Nearly five hundred people jammed the footpath ... The police had to separate several groups when blows were exchanged".³² Inside, Anglican priest Rev. Norman Hill grabbed the microphone to criticise Hromádka, physically fending off Rev. Eric Owen.³³

Hill was identified by Peace Quest officials as the "ringleader" of the problems at the Assembly Hall. Objectors had entered the hall in the dark and were already seated before the meeting started. Rev. Owen appealed to Hill to "behave". Hill claimed it was he who brokered the agreement that "Mr Vladimar Borin, leader of the Free Czechs" could answer Hromádka. It was only after this a concession was made that the meeting could continue.³⁴ Rev. Hill thus totally ignored the tolerant lead of his primate, Mowll, toward Hromádka. Hill was avidly anti-communist and a supporter of Eric Butler—an Anglican layman who became the backbone of the Australian League of Rights. Professor Lonsdale was permitted to address the meeting in relative calm, stating "she was not a communist, but a Peace-lover. She spoke of the effects of war and the atom bomb, and of the damage to property and the loss of life in war". However, "then Hromádka endeavoured to speak, but could not be heard through the uproar. To stop the noise the National Anthem was played three times." Rev Hartley then made the usual collection toward the cost of hosting the overseas visitors, and £124.5.0 was collected.³⁵

The *Anglican* decried the behaviour; it was "unthinkable that an eminent Christian visitor be howled down. Were the mob new or old Australians?" and considered the conduct was

“harking back to the Petrov departure”.³⁶ Since the “Red” Dean had not met similar treatment in 1950, the likely cause was Hromádka's visit, and his connection with the communists. Any organisation that claimed to be working for peace was suspect; so was any person advocating co-operation with communists. Meetings were addressed across Australia. ASIO informants detailed that the CPA vigorously encouraged their members to attend these meetings, which enabled ASIO to make detailed lists of those under ASIO surveillance who attended. The Rev. Gordon Locksley file was maintained until 1962 when his visit to Papua New Guinea for the Assembly of Papua Ekalesia received attention.³⁷ Locksley had played host to Hromádka at Cromwell College, St Lucia, in 1954. In 1962 Australia was sensitive to the possibility of communist infiltration from the north. The contact made in 1954 was sufficient to raise suspicion. ASIO considered “International communism is taking an increasing interest in Oceania”. Hromádka was described in the ASIO report on his contact with Locksley as “one of the cleverest men ever to visit the West from Iron Curtain countries”.³⁸ However the Regional Director in Papua was able to reassure headquarters that the assembly seemed innocuous, being the handover to Papuans of the London Missionary Societies activities. A full list of clerics attending was proffered, but services were conducted mainly by Papuan clergy with the visitors being mere observers.

Hromádka departed Australia on 7 October 1954 after a torrid visit with lasting repercussions for those associating with him. His departure was observed by ASIO, the report listing all those farewelling him.³⁹ Hromádka reported on his return to Europe that “In America it was in particular the press that made it unpleasant for me and my assistants. In Australia they tried to break up public meetings at which I appeared. They did it with pamphlets and newspaper attacks and with the most crude means in the meetings themselves”.⁴⁰ It is uncertain what part did W.C. Wentworth played in the animosity displayed to Hromádka. What is certain is that he did not intend to leave matters lie, even after Hromádka had returned to Czechoslovakia. Wentworth was prone to seek information from ASIO. On 7 October 1954, he wrote to Senator Spicer, Attorney General, claiming he “had heard a rumour” that Hromádka had been “one of the people who carried out the purge at Carolus University in Prague in 1948”. He requested that “your Department” check up on this and “let me know if it is correct”. This request was forwarded to Charles Spry, Director-General of ASIO, who replied on 7 November, “We have no comments to make on this matter”. Wentworth was advised by Spicer to ask the Department of External Affairs. This Wentworth did, ultimately receiving an acknowledgement from R. G. Casey, Minister for External Affairs, on 8 December that he would have enquiries made. Again a reply came from Spry, on 16 December, “we have no information on Hromdaka regarding this matter”.⁴¹

WCC Executive Consultation in Sydney, 1956

Both the archbishop of Canterbury and Mowll, the primate of Australia, were supportive of the aims of the WCC. The Sydney Consultation was attended by the Central Executive of the WCC, which included Hromádka, as well as 100 Australian church leaders. At the end of the four days consultation a Festival of Faith evening was held at the Sydney Showgrounds. The Festival was attended by 25,000 people, with the official party including such luminaries as Prime Minister Menzies, Dr Evatt, Leader of the Opposition, Queen Salote of Tonga, the Lord Mayor of Sydney, the Governor of New South Wales, the Premier of New South Wales and 15 members of the WCC Central Executive.⁴² The format of the meetings was WCC consultations during the day with public meetings in the evening. Douglas Dargaville, an Anglican, attended this consultation and has left invaluable recollections of the event. As has ASIO, who had extensive files on some attendees—including Hromádka. Dr Hromádka and Bishop Otto Diebelius, the head of the German Evangelical (Lutheran) church who had openly opposed the Nazi party during WWII, both spoke regarding differences between the nations, and argued that national differences should

be disregarded so that individual Christians were be able to work towards the establishment of the union of churches across national borders.⁴³ Diebelius was not a supporter of communism, and had great difficulty in administering to a church with connections in the East. Dargaville observed that the press concentrated on these two churchmen, who were attempting to cope with church life within communist jurisdiction. Hromádka shunned publicity. Dargaville felt “this was understandable since the press treated him as a plaything, prying into every detail of his life to see how far he is a communist”. Rev. Eric Owen, who had had previous contact with Hromádka on his visit in 1954, tried to protect him “from this embarrassment”.⁴⁴ Such protection was difficult, since the ICCC also held their rival meeting in Sydney in opposition to the WCC. Protest rallies had been organised around the country by the Bible Union of Australia. Their express target was Hromádka “because he was serving the communist cause”.⁴⁵ McIntire addressed a rally to welcome the church leaders to Sydney: Dr Kinney from America; Burgomaster Waarnaar from Amsterdam; Rev. Mazierski of the Polish Reformed Church in exile in London; Rev. Ormeo, president of the Far Eastern Council of Christian Churches in the Philippines; Rev. Tow of Singapore; and Rev. Kennedy of California. McIntire specifically attacked Hromádka, claiming that “Thousands of Christians behind the Iron Curtain believe Dr Hromadka has betrayed the Church of Christ...The International Council of Churches repudiated both Dr Hromadka’s doctrines and concept of the Church”.⁴⁶

Hromádka’s ASIO files reveal that surveillance was maintained, both on him (including reports from overseas, and until his death) and those with whom he had made contact during his visits. Recorded also was Hromádka’s comment during his 1956 visit regarding the Royal Commission on Espionage, prompted by the defection of Vladimir Petrov: “Hromadka decried the breaking down of relations between the USSR and Australia on the evidence of a man who, he said, must rate as a traitor to his own country. It was clear that his views followed the Communist approach to the question”.⁴⁷ One added to the ASIO list was a John Fisher, who had contact with Hromádka previously in Czechoslovakia and wanted to catch up with him. As a contact of Ric Throssell, son of well-known communist Katherine Sussanah Pritchard, Fisher was of interest.⁴⁸

Australian branch of the World Council of Churches—1965

In 1958 Hromádka had written to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, taking up an invitation to all Czechs to comment on the construction of the state. In that memorandum he stated that he regarded himself as “a co-worker” beside the communists, but believed that being a member of the party should not privilege them above “all those workers, farmers, educators and men of letters” who were needed to assist “Communists to shoulder the burden of the tasks facing them”. Hromádka “recognised the reasons inducing the Communist Party to rid our public life of all vestiges of superstitions and lifeless religious traditions and in particular of all attempts to use the Church and religion for false restorative aims”. His church “took the purification of the Church and religious thinking very seriously”. Hromádka repeated his claim that he “cannot complain of even the slightest attempt to restrict my intellectual or public activities or my teaching”. But “I know dozens of people who work in schools, public institutes and public life...who are being forced...to give up their faith...and their membership of the Church”. He decried that such people had to announce to their Evangelical Czech Brethren congregations that they had to quit them in order to retain their much-loved position as educators. Hromádka also cited instances where Brethren members were afraid to visit their pastor during daylight hours, as it “might jeopardise their jobs”. As well there were entire towns where surveillance was carried out to identify those who followed a religious path and there was discrimination in obtaining places in schools against any from a religious family. Hromádka felt the school education did not provide children with the inner convictions based on religious traditions which would enable “the zeal for truth and the goals for socialist society”. He ended

with an offer to meet and discuss any problems the Party may have with his church. So it would seem that all was not quite as favourable in his country as Hromádka had portrayed it when he was in Australia.⁴⁹

The liberalisation of Czechoslovakia under Alexander Dubcek in 1968 gave hope to those who wished to live independently of the USSR. However reservations were held regarding those who had co-operated with the communist regime, such as Hromádka. In 1965 the ACC sought reaction from the Prime Minister's Department for approval in principle for two representatives of the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Czechoslovakia to visit Australia.⁵⁰ The Department of Immigration was advised there was no security objection to this invitation being issued.⁵¹ Both Hromádka and Milan Opočensky went ahead with arrangements to visit. Hromádka applied for a travel visa for Australia and New Zealand, and included his wife who was to accompany him; the stated aim was to visit "Churches and Theological colleges".⁵² A cable was sent on 7 October from the Australian High Commissioner in London to the Department of External Affairs seeking advice regarding issuing visas to the Hromádkas noting that "In June 1956 ... applicant reached notoriety in Australian press as being pro-communist".⁵³ The application for Hromádka was forwarded to the Director General of ASIO to approve the visa. A four-page hand written negative summary was forwarded to Spry, which claimed that Hromádka would again cause problems by espousing the "glowing picture of the sound leadership of the Government (of Czechoslovakia) and the tremendous and glorious strides his country was making towards great prosperity in conditions of democracy and freedom" as he had done to a meeting in Sydney in 1956. Reference was also made to Hromádka's stated opinion at that time that Petrov was a traitor. The agent compiling this summary considered "Hromádka identified himself completely with the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia".⁵⁴ A vetting report was also prepared.⁵⁵ The Director General decided that security clearance would not be given to Hromádka, since "he could only be considered a risk".⁵⁶ This unwelcome decision was never conveyed, either to the ACC or Hromádka, as the ACC advised the Department of Immigration that they had "received from the Council in Czechoslovakia, word that this visit had been postponed 'due to present situation'". The ACC hoped "to be able to renew the invitation at an appropriate later date".⁵⁷

Whatever the reason for the change of heart from the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Czechoslovakia in 1965, Hromádka underwent qualms regarding his support for the Soviet Union, when it sent troops into Czechoslovakia in August 1968. The "Prague Spring" was over. Hromádka voiced his objection to this invasion of his country through a letter to the Soviet Ambassador. In it – after citing his credentials as a Lenin Peace prize recipient, that he and his wife had visited Russia many times, and that he had "many friends in the Soviet Peace Committee and the Russian Orthodox Church" – Hromádka recorded that:

In the past few years I have felt more and more disquieted by the feeling that in our State, the old pre-January regime was diminishing the affection of our people for the Soviet Union, our Communist Party was losing its authority and the very structure of our socialist society was paralysed by the political, economic and cultural ability of the Party and State leadership.

Hromádka went on to praise "the process of renewal which started in January 1968" (the "Prague Spring"). He had claimed many times that he did not consider Soviet intervention would happen in his country "because I valued so highly the statesmanship and wisdom of Soviet Political leaders". He stated "the Soviet Government could not have committed a more tragic error... Only a speedy withdrawal of the occupying forces can partially diminish our common disaster".⁵⁸ In Moscow, where he and his wife were receiving medical treatment courtesy of the USSR, Dickie came out to support the "preservation of socialism and maintain the unity of the socialist state".

While the WPC backed the Soviets, on a motion moved by Isabelle Blume, Co-ordinating President, and seconded by the Secretary General, Hartley reported that there was dissent.⁵⁹

A few days later, before the meeting of the Working Committee of the CPC that was to decide “the hard task of coping with the occupation of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic by socialist states, and on taking a stand on it”, Hromádka reflected that his letter to the Soviet Ambassador was “written at the moment of greatest emotion and with feelings of great bitterness”. He needed to explain his position as President of the CPC. He had encountered from the renewal period commencing in January 1968 two interpretations of his actions over the past two decades.

Many friends, especially abroad, are coming to see me and congratulate me on certain results of my activities. But many people, especially at home and in my own Church, are discovering in me an old quizzing, a man of the old Stalinist era, and are calling me to account. One of my young former students accused me in a letter that, because of my positive attitude to communism and the USSR and at home, ‘I had led Czech Protestantism to moral disintegration, to a spiritual and political disintegration.’⁶⁰

In a long résumé of events Hromádka claimed that there was a “tremendous difference between our Czechoslovakian situation of August 21 and the Hungarian events of October 1956”. In Hungary there was a “chaotic situation” with “bloodshed, loss of life and a divided nation...some loud voices called for a renewal of the capitalistic order”. In Czechoslovakia,

the unity of the people was strengthened from hour to hour; the trade unions, the working class, the farmers, the Army, the Public Security, the People’s Militia, the intelligentsia, the youth, Czechs, Slovaks, and other nationalities were closely gathered about the Communist Party and the deported statesman...The week between August 21 and 27 is a glorious part of our history. The unity of our nation in the presence of tanks and machine-guns grew in strength day by day.⁶¹

Hromádka claimed that the “change in our political life after January 1968 was a revolutionary step forward”. He also realised that now the “trustworthiness of the Christian Peace Conference was at stake”. He stressed the need progress through “self-criticism to courage”.⁶² What is clear is that Hromádka, though heartbroken by the incursion of the Warsaw Pact troops into Czechoslovakia, still maintained his Christian-Marxist beliefs. Moreover, his Australian disciples could not bring themselves to condemn the invasion or alter their world view, that an amalgam of Christianity and socialism was the way forward.

In the aftermath in 1969 the secretary of the CPC, J. N. Ondra, was forced to resign. While Hromádka was not asked to resign, he did so, in support of Ondra. Existing Western regional CPC were disbanded, but Assemblies were still held in 1971 and 1978, with “increasing participation of Third World delegates whose expenses are fully met, if need be, by the CPC”. It was evident that the Sixth All-Christian Peace Assembly, held in Prague from 2-9 July 1985, was following the model adopted after the “CPC Crisis” of 1969, in that it was “more than possible for participants to learn nothing of the local political, social and cultural setting which must inevitably condition the Christian Peace Conference in Czechoslovakia”. However, Ondra was “rehabilitated after long exile”, and after Hromádka died in 1969, his widow was elected an honorary vice-president at the Conference.⁶³ In Australia, clergymen such as Rev. Hartley continued their support for the USSR. Hartley was involved in the welcome and inspection of the Soviet Whaling fleet to Melbourne in April-May 1964.⁶⁴

Conclusion

With the benefit of hindsight it is easy to classify as unrealistic those like Hromádka who believed in the possibility of co-operation through churches, for the cause of peace, across the East-West divide in a world where political differences seemed insoluble. But worthy men could be self-delusional and unable to rid themselves of their utopian dreams. The Australian Peace Parsons reflected the same values as Hromádka, and possibly the same naivety. However, the attitude of those in the West who believed that change was impossible, and that those who attempted reconciliation were little short of being traitors was also mistaken. The influence that hard-line clerics, such as McIntire, exerted across the globe to accentuate bitterness that prolonged the Cold War, cannot be over emphasised. In any event, working for peace became a suspect occupation, where there was a plethora of individuals, organisations and nations all striving to implement their own conception of peace to the world.

Dr Doris LeRoy gained her PhD for the study of Anglican attitudes in Australia to communism in the early Cold War from Victoria University. Her interest is in the nexus of Religion and Politics.

Endnotes

¹ See Helen Cameron, "Seventy Years of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren (1918-88)," note 5, accessed 16 November 2013, http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/rcl/17-3_230.pdf; J. L. Hromadka, *The Church and Theology in Today's Troubled Times* (Prague, 1956). NB The accent on Hromádka's name was often not used in cited material.

² *Ibid.* note 5. S. R. Rican, *50 let Komenskeho evangelicke bohoslovecke/akulty v Praze*, 54. Quoted in Dorothea Neumarker, *Josef L. Hromadka, Theologie und Politik in Kontext des Zeitgeschehens* (Munich: 1974) 120.

³ Paul Bock, "The Dulles-Hromadka Encounter Revisited," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe – OPREE*, Vol XI, No 3 (May 1991) 37-42.

⁴ Geoffrey Beck, "Observer's Report on the Prague Christian Peace Conference", *Chronicle*, http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/rcl/13-3_335.pdf, 335.

⁵ Edith Temple Roberts, "Communist Hold on 'Christian' Peace Movements," <http://osaarchivum.org/files/holdings/300/8/3/text/17-1-95.shtml>. For a discussion on communist front organisations, see Richard Felix Staar, *Foreign Policies of the Soviet Union* (Hoover Institution Press, Stanford CA, January 1991), 79-101 esp. 79-80.

⁶ See Doris LeRoy, "Pyrrhic Victory? The 'Red Dean' Visits Australia" (Honours Thesis, Victoria University, 2006).

⁷ Douglas Jordan, *Conflict in the Unions: The Communist Party of Australia, Politics & the Trade Union Movement, 1945-60* (Resistance Books, Sydney, 2013), 230-231.

⁸ Doris LeRoy, "Anglicanism, Anti-communism and Cold War Australia" (PhD diss., Victoria University, 2010), <http://trove.nla.gov.au/work/38883583?l-format=Thesis&q=LeRoy+%282010%29&c=book>.

⁹ Staar, *Foreign Policies*, outlines the US position.

¹⁰ See Robert McArthur, "Locating Christ in a Communist World: The Reverends Frank Hartley and Victor James as Political Travellers," *Australian Historical Studies* 40, no. 2 (2009), 178-196.

¹¹ Marion Hartley, *The truth shall prevail : the Rev. Cr. Francis John Hartley, B.A., B.D.: a noble life in quest of truth, reconciliation and peaceful co-existence / a biography by his wife Marion Hartley* (Melbourne: Spectrum, 1982), 146-147, 155, 166.

¹² Cited in Robert Iain McArthur, "Christ and the Cold War: an exploration of the political activism of the Reverends Frank Hartley, Alfred Dickie and Victor James, 1942-1972" (PhD diss., University of Melbourne, 2007), 138.

¹³ LeRoy, "Anglicanism," 160-163.

¹⁴ Carl McIntire, *History of the ICCC*, <http://www.iccc.org.sg/>.

¹⁵ LeRoy, "Anglicanism," 161-163.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, note 769, *Anglican*, no. 108, 3 September 1954, 6.

¹⁷ Renate Howe, *A Century of Influence: The Australian Student Christian Movement 1896-1996* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2009), 272-273. It is probably for this reason that the Hromádka meetings do not receive attention in Howe's history of the ASCM.

¹⁸ Keith Rayner, "There is work for every Christian here – The Churches are combining in a world peace drive," *Brisbane Courier-Mail*, 26 March 1954, 2.

¹⁹ Howe, *A Century*, 272.

²⁰ LeRoy, "Anglicanism," 163, note 770, *ACR*, Rev. D. W. B. Robinson, "Josef Hromadka, What does he stand for?", 19 August 1954, 3,12.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 165, note 775, *Anglican*, vol. 109, 10 September 1954, front page.

²² *Ibid.*, 165, note 776, *Anglican*, vol. 109, 10 September 1954, 4.

²³ *Ibid.*, 166, note 778 "An Interview with Dr J. S. Moyes. Bishop of Armidale", *Anglican*, vol. 110, 17 September, 1954, 9.

²⁴ National Archives of Australia (henceforth NAA), A6119, 2622, esp. folios 43, 46-8, 56, 59-60, 62,67-8, 79-80, 84, 94-5, 111, 142-3, 147-149, 152, 154, 160, 183-6.

²⁵ See Phillip Deery, "War on Peace: Menzies, the Cold War and the 1953 Convention on Peace and War", *Australian Historical Studies*, no. 22 (October 2003): 248-69.

²⁶ J. E. Owen, *Road to peace: an experiment in friendship across barriers* (Melbourne: Hawthorn Press, 1954), 4-22.

²⁷ Michelle Cavanagh, *Margaret Holmes: the life and times of an Australian peace campaigner* (Sydney: New Holland, 2006), 154-155.

²⁸ "Peace and Goodwill Assembly–Professor Hromadka–Extract from NSW 'Q' report dated 18.8.1954", 157, NAA A6119, 2622.

²⁹ "South Australia. Annual State Conference of the C. P. of A. 17-19 September 1954, Dr Joseph L. Hromadka, 7 October 1954" 172, NAA A6119/2622.

³⁰ "Student Uproar over Clergyman", 86; "Peace man booed", 121; "Peace and Goodwill Assembly held in Sydney and Melbourne 10th to 20th September 1954", 175-180, NAA A6119, 2622. The Roman Catholic Newman society organised the meeting at the University.

³¹ "Hromadka's Rowdy Melbourne Reception", 115, 179, NAA A6119, 2622.

³² "Hostile reception for Hromadka," *Canberra Times*, 17 September 1954, 1.

³³ "Wild crowd wrecks 'peace' talk," *Argus*, 17 September 1954, 1. Hill was a supporter of Eric Butler, an Anglican who formed the League of Rights, a racist, sectarian, anti-communist organisation. Hill issued a "How to vote" pamphlet from St Mark's vicarage, identifying himself as a Church of England Vicar who advocated putting Dr Evatt's party and the communists last in the 1955 State election. See "A Church of England's Vicar's view on the Victorian Elections: A warning on the Sectarian Question", issued by the

Victorian League of Rights, authorised by Eric D. Butler. Butler met Spry of ASIO in Hill's vicarage. See "Eric Butler's Lunch with Malcolm Fraser", ALOR, *The Australian League of Rights*, 7 October 1994, <http://www.alor.org/Volume30/Vol30No38.htm>.

³⁴ "Cleric Tried to ensure a Fair Go", *Herald*, 17 September 1954, 1, 7.

³⁵ "Peace and Goodwill Assembly held in Sydney and Melbourne 10th to 20th September 1954", 179, NAA A6119, 2622.

³⁶ "Church and Nation – The Man in the Street", *Anglican*, vol 111, 29 September 1954, 4.

³⁷ "Rev. Geoffrey Lindsay Locksley", 276-277, NAA 6199, 2622.

³⁸ "Assembly of Papua Ekalesia (L.M.S.) Port Moresby – Director General of ASIO to Regional Director for the Territory of Papua and New Guinea, October 22, 1962", 8, NAA A6199, 2623.

³⁹ "Professor Joseph HROMADKA, Travel Officer "C" Section to PRINCIPAL SECTION OFFICER B.1. October 8, 1954" 161, NAA A6119, 2622.

⁴⁰ "Prof. Hromadka, Berlin Memo No. 175 from W. B. Pritchett, Secretary to Secretary, Department of External Affairs, Canberra–Translation from a statement 'At the Service of Humanity' in *Neue Zeit*, 27 November 1954 by Professor Hromadka regarding his impressions of America and Australia", 204-205, NAA A6119, 2622.

⁴¹ Wentworth to Spicer October 7, 1954, 158, 166: "Memo to Director ASIO from Secretary, Attorney Generals Department, 22 October, 1954", 167: "Memo to Secretary Attorney General's Department from Director General, ASIO", 168: "Spicer to Wentworth, 29 November 1954", 199, "Letter from Wentworth to R G. Casey 3 December, 1954", 199 : "Letter to Wentworth from R G Casey, 8 December, 1954", 200, "Memo to Secretary, Department of External Affairs from C. F. Spry, Director General of Security, 16 December, 1954", 187, NAA A6199, 2622. Wentworth was well known for his constant requests for information on those he suspected as being communist.

⁴² "Record Crowds hear Church Leaders" *ACR* vol 21, no. 3, 16 February 1956, 1.

⁴³ "Voices from Europe", *ACR*, vol 21, no. 3, 16 February 1956, 4. Also "Debelius and Hromadka, Christians who do not agree", 229, NAA A6119, 2622.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 200, note 926, Douglas Dargaville "WCC Executive Consultation, 1956" unpublished notes. I thank Rev. Dargaville for allowing me access to this material.

⁴⁵ "HROMADKA Josef Prof.", 105, NAA A6119, 2622.

⁴⁶ "Protest Rallies Planned. Czech Cleric's Visit Opposed January 22 1956", 216: "Facts sought on Church Council", (*Mercury* January 23, 4)", 217, NAA A6119, 2622.

⁴⁷ "Meeting of Czechoslovakian Community in Sydney, February 22 1956", 271: "Evaluation – Remarks – New South Wales – Discussion", 274, NAA A6119, 2622.

⁴⁸ "NSW John FISHER Jan. 20, 1956", 266, NAA A6199, 2622.

⁴⁹ See J.L. Hromadka, "A Letter to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia", 5 May 1958, in *The Field is the world : selected writings from the years 1918-1968/ Joseph Hromádka*, edited and prefaced by Milan Opočensky (Prague: Christian Peace Conference, 1990), English-illustrated edition, 303-310.

⁵⁰ "Proposal by the Australian Council of Churches to invite Czechoslovakian Church Leaders. Letter to Secretary, Prime-Minister's Department from Secretary, Department of Immigration, August 18, 1965", 15-16, NAA A6119, 2623.

⁵¹ "Proposal by the Australian Council of Churches to invite Czechoslovakian Church Leaders. Letter to Secretary, Department of Immigration, from C.F. Spry, Director-General of Security August 26, 1965", 17, NAA A6119, 2623.

⁵² "Application for Visa – British Embassy Prague", 41-42; "Dr Milan Opecensky Dr Josef Hromadka and wife - Memorandum for headquarters ASIO from G.R. Richards October 15 1965", 43, NAA A6119, 2623.

⁵³ "Dr Josef Hromadka to Trade, PM's dept and ASIO, from Australian High Commissioner, London October 7 1965", 21, NAA A6119, 2663.

⁵⁴ "ASIO Minute paper Joseph Hromadka, October 26-28 1965", 27-33, NAA A6199, 2623.

⁵⁵ "Secret and Personal – Dr Josef Hromadka ASIO 'vetting' report November 1965" 33-34, NAA A6119, 2623.

⁵⁶ "Dr. Joseph Hromadka, Czech – Letter to Secretary, Department of Immigration from Director-General, ASIO November, 1965", 35, NAA A6119, 2623.

⁵⁷ "Letter to Mr P.R. Haydon, Department of Immigration from Rev. J.R. Neal, Australian Council of Churches 22 October, 1965", 38, NAA A6199, 2623.

⁵⁸ J L Hromadka, "Letter to the USSR Ambassador, August 22, 1968", in Opočensky, *The Field is the world*, 428-429.

⁵⁹ McArthur, "Christ and the Cold War", 218.

⁶⁰ J. L. Hromadka, "New Questions before the Working Committee Meeting" in Opočensky, *The Field is the World*, 429-445.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 439.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 443.

⁶³ Geoffrey Beck, "Observer's Report on the Prague Christian Peace Conference," *Chronicle*, http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/rcl/13-3_335.pdf, 335-336. Beck was an observer at the ACPC on behalf of the British Council of Churches.

⁶⁴ "HARTLEY, Francis John, 4 May 1964", 127, "Soviet Whaling Fleet to visit Melbourne April/May 1964)," 140, 143, NAA, A6119, 1104.