Intellect of the left frightened the right
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MAX EDWIN TEICHMANN, ACADEMIC, COMMENTATOR

UNIVERSITY lecturer, public affairs commentator, controversialist and scourge of comfortable
types of the left and the right, Max Teichmann, has died of respiratory failure at his home in North
Fitzroy, aged 84.

Teichmann was a leading member of the "Monash Soviet" many believed turned Victoria's second
university into a hotbed of dissent and revolution in the 1960s.

The outspoken anti-communist Dr Frank Knopfelmacher once warned a colleague: "You are soon
getting the most dangerous man in Australia — Max Teichmann."

He was active in the early stages of the Vietnam anti-war movement with Dr Jim Cairns; prime
minister Robert Menzies already had conscription but Teichmann knew it was for Vietnam. He
spoke at a seminal forum at Monash in 1964 and a rally in the Fitzroy Gardens early the following
year.

Teichmann, who was conscripted and served in World War II, said: "I used to think when I saw the
photographs of these young kids in the Hitler youth, there but for the grace of God go I. If you think
the war is unjust, why shouldn't you have the right to object to it?" Pacifism was the only objection
allowed. In time Teichmann, who held to more traditional views of learning and the university,
proved himself a critic of the youthful activists and the external forces of the left and the right that
sought to control them. He saw the student revolution quietly put to bed with the election of the
Whitlam government in 1972.

After he retired in 1989, Teichmann continued to write for periodicals — although never captive to
their agendas. Colleagues once derided him for contributing to the "girlie mag" Penthouse, until he
told them what he had been paid.

Teichmann was born in Melbourne to a German-born father, also Max, who jumped ship in South
Australia, and an Adelaide-born mother, Kathleen. She was the daughter of an Anglo-Indian, a
former soldier in the British Raj who married a Parsi woman and for a time was the elephant
keeper in the Calcutta zoo.

Teichmann and his elder sister, Jean, grew up in Carlton in the Depression. His father was a factory
caretaker, sub-landlord and itinerant chef. Everything was second-hand and their Lygon Street
basement dwelling deemed "unhealthy".

A move to Rathdowne Street brought more communal culture. "Pale and Germanic, with a very
square head," Max was jeered at by street kids but shielded by his mother's love, her "schmaltz
factory", he called it. He was a perfect student at the local state school and went on to University
High. But at his father's behest, he left school early to help support the family. Jobs as a salesman,
a messenger and at Dunlop rubber followed, with night study at Taylor's school. At the Herald
newspaper he served tea to Sir Keith Murdoch. It was a limited world. "I escaped only with the
good grace of Tojo and Hitler. Otherwise I would have been Garry McDonald (of Mother and Son)."

Conscripted in 1942, as an army signalman ("my version of the good soldier Schweik") he saw
outback NSW and Queensland, devoured books in local libraries, and served in New Guinea. Before
his discharge in 1946, he was an army pay clerk at Royal Park, and sat in on university lectures,
including those by a young economic historian, Jim Cairns.
At age 20, he wanted to paint and learn philosophy. Army service entitled him to a university place, and he won first class honours for his BA and MA degrees at Melbourne University. Later, philosophy professor Boyce Gibson thought him the best tutor he ever had.

Justus Jorgensen’s city art school led to Montsalvat, where artists lived a “free” life outside the city. Dinner discussions presided over by Jorgensen ranged across "psychoanalysis, philosophy and theories of art, to views on love and marriage". Freud and psychoanalysis became a lifelong interest.

A favourite of Jorgensen's first wife, Lily, a doctor, Teichmann married her niece, Jenny, introducing her to philosophy, which she made her academic career. He remained disrespectful of all ideal communities, from kibbutzim to urban communes to heaven. They built their Eltham district mud-brick house outside Montsalvat's gates and in 1955 left for Britain as a new wave of aspirant Bohemians from the suburbs arrived.

A scholarship led to a degree in philosophy at Balliol College, Oxford, and with many Canadians, Indians and Australians about, he joined the Labour Party to meet more English. Branch leadership and the party executive followed. He helped start the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and to divert nuclear bomber flight paths away from Oxford.

The Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 and Khrushchev's secret speech denouncing Stalin provoked the exodus of intellectuals from the Communist Party of Britain. There was a rethinking of Marxism, humanism and social justice. Teichmann’s research was on the theory of a just war and human and natural rights. He joined the famous 1958 CND march from Aldermaston, was active in the Labour Party and the New Left in Oxford and London, where he took up a fellowship at the London School of Economics.

He somewhat reluctantly moved back to Melbourne following the birth of his children, Erik, Roger and Emma, obtaining a job at Victoria’s new university, Monash. He applied for and got a lectureship in the politics department, with references from such leading British academics as Isaiah Berlin, Max Beloff and John Plamenatz.

Teichmann was a memorable lecturer. Self-assured but without pomposity, he spoke freely, often without notes, in his clear Australian drawl and with wit. His first-year politics course attracted more than 1000 students. He ran a popular second-year course on foreign policy and was an advocate for a non-aligned and armed Australia.

He published on Australian foreign policy and wrote for left-wing journals such as Arena, Dissent and New Left Review. He was a Nation Review regular and newspaper and ABC radio contributor.

Although not Jewish, he wrote for the Australian Jewish News, an association that was terminated when Sam Lipski became its editor.

Teichmann had an affection for the Jewish community; he spoke to Jewish womens’ groups, befriended Israeli diplomats and travelled to Israel as a guest. This was a connection strengthened through his second wife, Helene.

He was living in the historic Old Colonists Homes in Rushall, close to his childhood origins and despite emphysema still smoking his trademark cigars, eloquent to the end. "Freud was the same," he said. "He said he couldn't think without them." He is survived by his wives, Jenny and Helene, and his children Zac, Roger and Erik, and granddaughter Emma.

Dr David Dunstan is deputy director of the National Centre for Australian Studies at Monash University. He was a student at Monash in the 1960s and is helping to prepare a collection of Max Teichmann's writings.

By DAVID DUNSTAN

This article was found at http://www.theage.com.au/national/intellect-of-the-left-frightened-the-right-20081222-7300.html?page=-1