

THE AUSTRALIAN JULY 1987

Ian Cohen and the Greening of Room 3

By BERWYN LEWIS

VOTE 1 The Greens, says the poster outside Room 3, Carlaw Building, Sydney University.

Inside, Ian Cohen, Greens (to which author Patrick White yesterday pledged his support) Senate candidate for NSW, addressed the students.

Well, they looked like students. There were at least 60 there and you could tell they were students because some had plaits, some wore overalls, some ate apples, some sipped milk and one or two had babes in arms.

It was not like the old days when grand orators addressed roaring seas of humanists, anarchists, communists, libertarians, animal lovers and Fabians; when staff and students crunched each other's skulls into quadrangle walls.

Somehow it was more polite. But in Room 3 big questions were being asked of top-of-the-ticket Ian, his running mate Daphne Gollan and Greens supporter Bob Hunter, president of SANA (Scientists Against Nuclear Arms).

Possum

The first big question went something like this: "About nuclear annihilation. We can be blown away! By a Chernobyl or a blast from a weapon. But what about forests, pollution, rivers, oceans? Civilisation needs a major change of direction. Since the Industrial Revolution the numbers of people have increased. What about our resources? The nuclear possibility is only one possibility..."

"What's ya question?" floated loudly from the back of Room 3.

"Can't we learn to be more simple, use fewer resources?"

The answer comes from Bob. He's a kindly, practical, almost possum-looking person.

"The world spends \$1000 million a year on arms. Redirecting these resources, addressing world health and poverty, is a side issue which comes out of a disarmament policy. Once we get into a reciprocal redirection of arms, through trust, expenditure will be reduced. But these are technical solutions and there are no simple answers."

Hmmm. Difficult to tell whether this answer was directing the inquiring young mind to the ballot box or the depths of despair.

More big questions followed, including one on generating electricity using a Japanese-

developed "amorphous silicone base" technology.

Bob admitted: "It's promising. The problem is we're in the grip of economists ... and everyone knows economists are cheats. I can say that. I'm not standing for Parliament."

No one laughed. No one sneered. No one guffawed or snorted. Are today's young people all non-responders?

As some students started fleeing back to lectures, someone murmured something about refusing to accept nuclear arms by getting on to the bases; putting pressure on giants; a couple of minutes to midnight (it's actually about 2pm, they mean that countdown before the bomb goes off); flying more Cessnas into the USSR; advancing human rights; turning society into a decent, free place...

Another big question: "Are your policies very different from the Democrats?"

Brief groaning, giggling, booing and "Demos are boring!".

Then the answer which went something like: "Democrats are not as in touch with the grass-roots issues. We Greens are casting a net to the protest vote. If someone votes Greens (someone must!) and we don't succeed (is that a possibility?), the Democrats get our vote and then eventually the Labor Party."

Casual

The really big question concerns how would they deal with Ian in the Senate?

After all, he's known for his surfboard riding (alongside the USS Oldendorf), walking the Sydney monorail, slipping aboard the Sterrit (the nuclear-capable US cruiser), and most recently for surf-matting into the prime ministerial launch. He's fairly casual and outdoorish. He eschews the tailored-pin-

stripe and network-tie look of Canberra.

But Ian knows exactly what he would do if he were elected to Canberra.

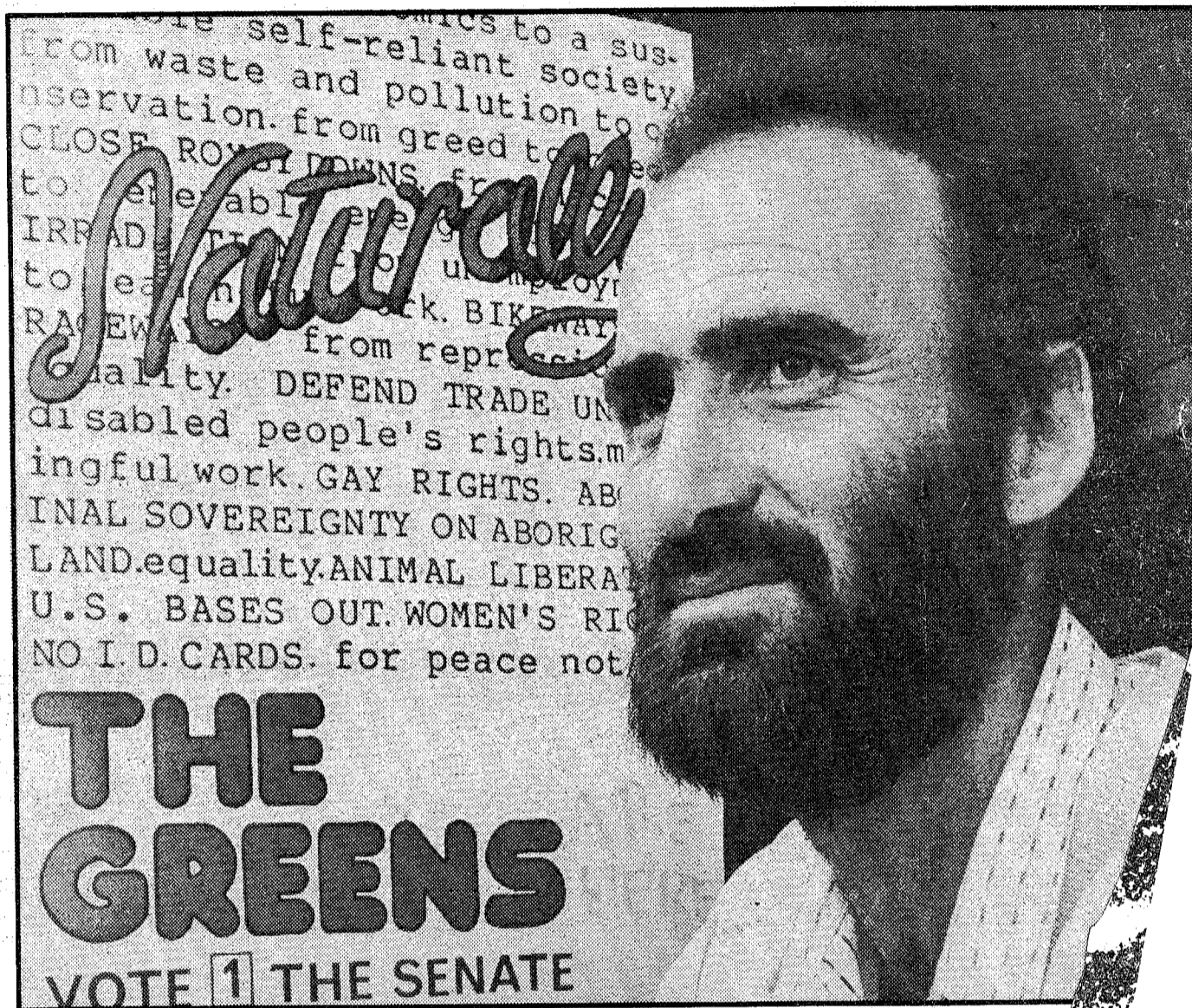
For starters he would put breathalysers outside the Parliament House bar.

But politicians don't drive. They are driven.

"But they're driving the country. One would hope they're not driving under the influence of alcohol. It'd be nice to know they're straight. Short of cutting out the Parliament bar, we should give them all breath tests."

"I'd like to send up the system. I'd like to embarrass politicians. Show them up as the hypocrites they really are. I feel confident that if I get elected Parliament will never be the same again."

He's right there. With Ian Cohen in Canberra, other parliamentarians will be a shade or two greener — around the gills.



Greens candidate Mr Ian Cohen at Sydney University yesterday — Picture: DANIEL RAFFAELE

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