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# En masse, young people demand Priority Now

By BERWYN LEWIS

THE MC addresses the crowd: "There was to be a youth rally here but there's a piano recital in the Town Hall and it looks like we'll be moved on, en masse."

The "en masse", about 100, are young. Some ride skateboards. Others play with helium-filled pink balloons. A blue cattle dog called "Blue" (the same dog seems to be at every rally) is at the feet of a young man who wears patched jeans and Rastafarian hairstyle.

The rally crowd is gathered to launch the Youth Priority Now campaign for young people disillusioned with politicians. The scene is Sydney's Town Hall Square, the noon hour yesterday.

The theme of Youth Priority Now is "We Are Watching You", so grown-up young people don spectacles and hoist telescopes to symbolise their scrutinising of politicians. It is sort of Big Brotherish.

A Democrat, Paul McLean, takes the stand. Everyone is now supposed to peer through their telescopes and spectacles.

"Congratulations for having lunch here. Vote Demos No. 1 on Saturday. Young Australians are the most neglected group in Australia today ... you're obviously not Priority One with the Labor Party. Did you notice what happened at the Opera House? Another plastic performance."

Pigeons squawk. Bells ring. Pink balloons float against a blue sky. Paul McLean's eyes sweep the rally crowd, now down to 60 or so.

Says Paul: "You know why you're being clobbered. You (young people) are not organised. Take the initiative like here today."

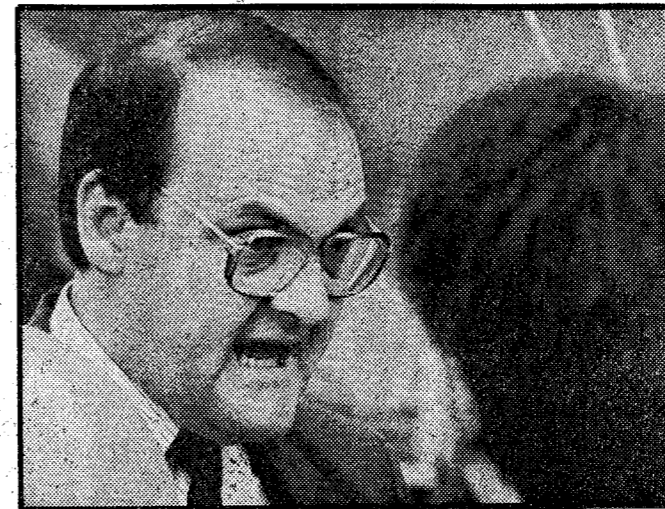
The next speaking slot belongs to Labor. But there's not a Labor representative or a Labor youth policy in sight. Not even through a telescope.

Sharon Purcell, Wollongong Out of Workers Union, steps to the megaphone.

"Unemployment on a slave labour scheme ... cheap labour ... making the rich richer and the poor poorer ... take to the streets ... unite to fight ... the rich must pay."

A balloon explodes with a loud bang.

John Dowd, Liberal, NSW:



The Liberal Party's Mr John Dowd makes a point

"We're creating jobs for young people ..."

Cries of "Boo!" "Fascist!" "Hissssss!" Or is that the helium tank springing a leak?

Dowd: "The ALP doesn't have the guts to turn up today and face the young people."

"Off! Off!"

The rally is melting away. About 40 diehards are hanging on.

Dowd tries valiantly: "Nega-

tive gearing ... education ... jobs ... accommodation ... investment opportunity ... vote for ..."

"Get off!" It seems the young people are not prepared to listen.

MC: "Thank you John Dowd." The MC is a woman, not particularly young.

Pagan Hunter of People for Nuclear Disarmament: "PND is a movement, not a party.

PND wants an Australian government that will make a clear commitment never to have nuclear weapons."

Applause for Pagan.

Ian Cohen, Greens: "Youth are making far more sense than adults ... geriatrics and bureaucrats are making the laws to keep them in their fat, cushy jobs."

Wild cheering. On the sidelines John Dowd is being harangued. "What about fees ... jobs ... the dole ... survival?"

Dowd tries to stem the avalanche. On jobs: "We will create opportunities for business to create jobs."

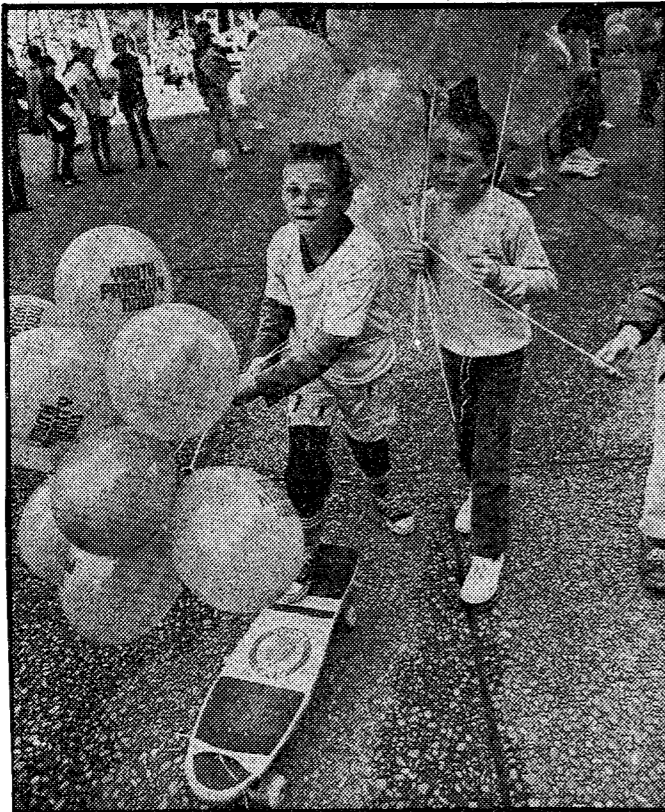
"What about single mothers?"

On the dole: "Do you want to consume or be productive. Ninety per cent of the workforce gets jobs in the private sector. How do they get jobs? By incentive!"

"What about single mothers?"

"What about them?" But the single mother is engaged in a heated exchange with a young man.

There's a pop. A shout. A bouquet of pink balloons is released. The Youth Priority Now campaign is launched.



Balloon dispensers ready for action at yesterday's Youth Priority Now rally in Sydney - Pictures: BOB FINLAYSON