*Friends & Enemies* was funded through the Documentary Fellowship Scheme, a brilliant innovative scheme thought up by filmmaker Tom Haydon, and administered by the Australian Film Commission I was one of the very first 3 recipients. The others were Gary Kildea and Brian Mckenzie. I had a budget and I could make any film I liked within that budget amount. From memory it was around !20,000k. (I ended up running out of money in post-production, so got a top up at the end). A year into the awards there was a tie-in with the ABC, which ran a season of documentary fellowship films. *Friends & Enemies* was the first film in the series.

*Friends & Enemies* started with another strike. This time in Queensland. 1985 was a bit of a watershed in the industrial landscape.. It was the first time that the idea of individual contracts started to be put on the industrial agenda and it took the Bjelke-Petersen State Government to actually do that. This was regarded as an assault on traditional union values and the traditional notion of the 35 hour week and a job for life.

Now this was really quite new: the idea that people would be employed by contracts for the duration of the job, this might be one or two years and then their contract would be possibly renewed, or possibly not. Essentially workers were put on notice. They couldn’t just go out on strike. If they did they’d risk being looked on in disfavour by the employer. So it really did change the industrial landscape. So 1985 was a turning point. It was a time when suddenly people who thought they had a job for life realised this wasn’t the case any more.

Very cleverly the Bjelke-Petersen Government decided to essentially start their gambit with a small union, a union that they thought they could easily push over. And this union, the Electrical Trades Union, suddenly became a place where the members and officials struggled to work out a strategy to take on the government.

The union had no option but to make alliances with other unions, and with the Queensland Trades & Labour Council, the peak union body. But the rank and file workers, who initially trusted their union, over time came to realise that possibly the union wasn’t necessarily representing their true interests. A rift developed between the people who were put on notice for individual contracts and the union officials that were representing them.

What followed was a very bitter internal struggle within the union itself. Not only was the union actually dealing and fighting the State Government, the people who in fact were employing these very same workers, but they had to contend with people within their own union who themselves weren’t confident in defeating this very, very powerful Government. Inevitably the Labour Council became involved, but eventually this peak council had to turn to the federal body, the A.C.T.U, for help.

All this took place over nine very dramatic months and I started quite early - around three weeks into the strike.

The workers themselves worked in small crews repairing and maintaining the electricity system in Queensland - essentially, monitoring and maintaining its operation. they were the people that climbed up on telegraph poles to fix the electricity cables. There were others that rolled them out. There were others who drove the trucks. There were still others who dug ditches and installed electricity cables underground. There were a variety of jobs, and there were quite a number of people employed.

It all started when the prenier Bjelke-Petersen, Joe Bjelke-Petersen the Premier of Queensland announced that he wanted to renegotiate the permanent contracts of 1000 employees working for the state company SEQEB, andc dcscsuddenly all these workers were put on notice, 1000 of them rather than agreeing to having their employment renegotiated went out on strike immediately. Overnight in Queensland the lights went out, there was no power for two days, everything just ground to a halt.

The people working in the SEQEB offices went out and became the linesmen to maintain the operation of the system. Anotherwords you had the bosses doing the jobs that the workers normally did ] just to keep electricity actually functioning in the State. Naturally those people were labelled ‘scabs’ by the SEQEB workforce, and they were the ones that somehow managed to restore the power and keep things going on a piecemeal basis over a long period of time.

I had this feeling that, a bit like when I started *Kemira* that what Bjelke-Petersen had just done was so dramatic and what was at stake was so important in the overall industrial landscape here in this country, that it would not be something that would simply be resolved overnight and would continue for a fair while, so I resolved to pursue the possibility of getting in on the inside.

*Kemira – Diary of a Strike* was a bit like a calling card for me. I contacted the union and said “look I’ve just done this other film”. I had people who were from the Miners Union contacting the Electrical Trades Union and vouching for me as somebody who would do a fair and accurate film, that I was in sympathy with the overall aims of the strike and that I would not essentially rip them off in any way.

I also spoke to a colleague of mine, Martha Ansara. She actually proposed to me that she could probably help me with some of her own contacts. She knew people who had progressive politics in Queensland and she did put me in contact with some who were quite useful.

So I arrived in Queensland in February 1985. I recall it being very hot and steamy. The reason I was able to respond so quickly was because I had succeeded in obtaining a Documentary Fellowship. It was a scheme that was initiated by Tom Hayden and funded through the Australian Film Commission, and I was one of the first recipients. There was myself, Brian Mckenzie and Gary Kildea.

And so for a few months I had the money sitting in the bank and I was looking for what to do. I wasn’t necessarily particularly aiming to make this particular film but it seemed that well why not? If I can get access inside the union it could be a terrific fly on the wall observational doc. And I was really loving making films that were simply using observational devices – ‘actuality’. It was going to be on 16mm, so I knew I had to be very careful with the ratio, but I I looked at my budget and thought if I could just get by for a few months - not filming every day but, because I was based in Sydney, just going up to Brisbane once every couple of weeks at the right time and capturing enough of the ongoing story that I would in the end knit together a film.

And that’s indeed what happened. I very quickly found a cinematographer, Larry Zetlin in Brisbat ne who agreed to work with me. He had an Aaton camera. He’d done some filming before, not much observational work but he was more than adequate for the job. I did the sound recording. I’d already done a little bit of that on *Kemira* so I had some experience. Myself and a friend here in Sydney Russ Hermann had purchased a Nagra recorder so I knew apart from being a director and producer, that I had also to be a sound recordist as well an editing assistant syncing up the rushes when I got back to Sydney. Les McLaren had agreed to be my editor soon after I started shooting. We’d met each other when I was doing some research at Film Australia on a series The Migrant Experience. He had edited two of the eps.

My first week in Brisbane I rapidly met the relevant people including Bernie Neville who was one of the most outspoken of the striking linesmen. He formed a rank and file committee, which represented the linesmen and rapidly became a ‘thorn in the side’ of the unions officials. Bernie - argumentative strident and articulate - became a key character. In more ways than one Bernie represented the conscience of the rapidly escalating ‘affair’.

But I just want to back-track, and mention what happened to me during the first few days in Brisbane. The people who had the audacity to actually confront the Bjelke-Petersen Government, to organise demonstrations and pickets, were very closely monitored by the Queensland Special Branch. Naturally they were paranoid. I remember turning up at someone’s place and as I was approaching the house I for some silly reason flipped open my notebook and made a few notes. Unfortunately I was observed. Well I hardly even got through the door they thought I was somebody that had come in to spy on them rather than just a filmmaker from Sydney. Such was the atmosphere at the time.

Anyway, I befriended a lot of people who from a variety of different political y for the far left to the Labor Party right - all people who were part of a militant opposition to the government. I also met a number of journalists who I found very useful including Quentin Dempster. My intention was to try and get inside the Queensland Government, and as close to Bjelke-Peterson as I possibly could. I was interested in looking at the both sides in the dispute. .

Quentin told me “look you’ll never get inside the Cabinet room. I think Joe will be a very difficult person to actually get close to but how about the person who’s actually running the strike, the Industrial Relations Minister Vince Lester? He’s a bit of a weirdo, a bit of a crank. He’s interesting; he’s got a reputation as being very eccentric”. And he told me the story of how one day simply as part of a publicity campaign he walked backwards for charity. He did all these odd things that Ministers often don’t do - but he didn’t care. So I said well OK I’ll try and ingratiate myself into his presence, and maybe I can possibly eavesdrop on a few things and perhaps spend some time in his orbit, in his environment.

I was lucky enough to get his press secretary to agree and before I knew it I was on a plane bound for his electorate. In the plane was Vince Lester, and Flo Bjelke-Petersen Joe’s wife. And we were off to a debutante ball – an annual gala event in the town of Emerald. There was I suddenly filming this debutante ball and I had a radio mike on Vince Lester and there was suddenly chatting big noting himself to one of the young women, dancing around the floor with her. Here we were recording the whole conversation!

But at the same time back in Brisbane I had another crew there filming a big rally at the University protesting Joe Bjelke-Petersen being presented with an Honorary Doctorate. It was an important occasion which typified his ‘born to rule’ mentality. When I planned this simultaneous coverage, I knew I would probably end up inter-cutting the debutante ball with Joe receiving this ironic accolade in the midst of this very active, hostile demonstration. And that’s exactly what happened in the edit a few months later, indeed those two events cut together. Given that I was filming pretty much in sequence it made sense to cut these things together.

After the Emerald trip I had no trouble obtaining further access to Lester’s Ministerial schedule. Once I filmed him at a garden party run by the National Party . We were operating out of a van and I had a change of clothes there ready in the van just in case I had to rush quickly to another location. At that particular garden party I had on some nice black trousers and black shoes and a shirt and tie to impress Vince, but after filming and I would take off those trousers and put on my jeans as Larry my cinematographer drove the van to the next location – which would probably have been a rank and file meeting.

Oh yes, he was definitely aware I was filming the other side. But you know he was so cocky that he didn’t think the Government was anything but on the winning side, and that the others were just rabble anyway. Occasionally he would ask me a few questions about the leader of the Labour Council, a guy called Dempsey and what he was up to. But as far as he was concerned they could easily demolish the union and the peak council, they just needed a bit of time that’s all.

However shooting periods often clashed with responsibilities as a Dad. Sam had been born 3 months into the strike, and I was backwards and forward between Brisbane and Sydney. There was one particular weekend when I needed to shoot a scene late on the Sunday, and couldn’t make it to the airport in time to catch the last plane home. This was the mid 80’s before mobile phones were invented. I did manage to change my flight but I couldn’t contact Julia and she turned up at the airport expecting to find me there .and she had a crying baby on her arms. I wasn’t there and she was quite shattered and she still recalls that story very vividly. And I felt terrible.They were very difficult times. It led to a lot of tensions in our relationship. I had to get this film in the can and finished but yet we had this young baby to look after as well.

In the end the film comes out very strongly on the side of the rank and file who realise that by the end of the film that they’ve failed, and that they can’t turn things around. And there’s very strong sense that after 8 months the A.C.T.U and the Queensland TLC were basically following their own agendas regardless of the rank and file. Unsurprisingly there was a lot of bitterness. The sacked workers who had been replaced by scab contractors thought that their officials weren’t doing enough. I filmed some very strong arguments around the table which demonstrated the increased bitterness between the officials and in turn the peak body, the Labour Council and then the A.C.T.U.

As time dragged on I knew it would all come to a head, especially when the A.C.T.U started to become involved. It was already eight months into the strike. Anyone with any sense of a history of union movement would realise that eight months into a dispute you don’t try and restart it again. And you certainly don’t get the A.C.T.U involved because in many ways that’s the death of a dispute. Once the A.C.T.U gets involved there’s inevitably a compromise and that’s exactly what happened.

It all came to a head one day when Simon Crean walked into the union office. I saw Crean come into the room. I was with DoP Larry Zetlin, and we’d been filming a bit with the rank and file. He came into the room, there were some officials there and the rank and file gravitated to where he was standing. One of the officials who was near us said “go over there, go on, film him, film him”. I thought “shit he’s probably liable to chuck us out”. Anyway we approached him with our cameras. Everybody knew me, everybody was on my side. I spent months in the union office. They were all comfortable with me – except for Crean for course.

Anyway I crept closer and I told Larry to stand back in one position rather than move around the group, just not to really draw their attention to the cameras. Crean saw the camera quite early and said “who’s this? “. The union officials who were there arguing the case with him told him: “look this is a film crew, they’re on our side, let them film”. That’s all they said and Crean just kept talking. We were very fortunate.

Anyway we filmed for about ten minutes, the camera ran out as it always does in a ten minute roll, so we loaded another magazine. We had another one on standby but it was in the other room. I remained in the room with Crean and fortunately recorded what then happened. Crean was proposing a compromise to the officials and the rank and filers - a compromise which would involve possibly saving 300 of the jobs, keeping them as permanent but still allowing the others to become contractors. The rank and filers blew up. They called him all sorts of names. It was the compromise that many saw coming, but neither the officials of the union nor the rank and file could tolerate what they saw as a sell-out.

We continued rolling but Crean wanted us out. It could have been the end of the film but no. A few days later the Labour Council and officials met on the top floor to have a final meeting to actually discuss this proposal, this compromise. And the rank and file weren’t allowed to that meeting. By that stage they were very demoralised of course.

But guess who came and who wanted to get into that meeting, it was the wives of the striking workers and their mothers, a group that had formed quite late in the piece, just when the men’s morale was sinking. The women’s group had nothing to lose. It was their big moment, they were there standing outside the meeting room. Inside was the leader of the Labour Council and the Electrical Trade Union officials. They hung around the doorway and Pat, one of the women, said let’s go in and tell them we’re here. I thought well I’d better not go in, I just better to stay slightly outside. But I still had the Nagra going so I could record what this woman was yelling at the officials.

Anyway she came out and then told the other women what had happened and they all resolved to commit to not giving up. I was filming this, but then one of the officials came out of the meeting and told me to turn the cameras off. Larry panned the camera towards me and I tapped my mike for a back slate. Apart from conveying the tension of the moment, I thought it was important to remind people who were viewing the film that there is somebody behind the camera, that the creative presence is not invisible

And that was the last time we were ever allowed back in the building. I thought that was probably an appropriate end for the film, at any rate. The strike ended in bitterness and it ended badly really for the people who essentially were the victims of the whole thing. It’s interesting how the women’s voices came through and stook out at the end. The men start feeling helpless and the women actually became quite optimistic that perhaps they could turn the whole messy thing around.

When the documentary was premiered in Brisbane nine months after the strike started, it caused a huge ruckus. The screening was at the Schonell Theatre in Brisbane and I knew that not everybody would like it, particularly one of my main characters Bernie Neville. There was a scene in the film where he’s being ticked off by his own wife, by not being strategic enough. No he didn’t like that scene remaining in the film. He hated it but I thought well actually it said a lot about him, the decision he made and why the rank and file weren’t as effective as they possibly could have been. And in the editing I thought it was a very important scene that needed to remain.

So in the end really the film was my take on the dispute. I knew everybody would have something, find something about it that they didn’t like. Bernie Neville thought I could have been more critical of the officials who he thought were weak. He also thought I could have been more critical of the Labor Council itself. But I actually thought that from the film one could make that assessment anyway and it wasn’t really up to me to add anything.

However this didn’t stop him publicly stating about how much he hated the film. He wasn’t at the premiere at the Sydney Film Festival – one of the women came down for that – but Bernie arrived unnanounced a few weeks later when the film started a season at the Chauvel Cinema in Sydney. He jumped up on to the stage and started berating me. Ironically 25 years later he called me to apologise, and said that we wanted access to the ¼ inch magnetic sound tapes so that he could write his own analysis of the dispute. Obviously he’s been re-living this whole episode in his life for many years.

I learnt from *Friends and Enemies* that so much of any documentary like this is actually made in the edit. With *Kemira* we had the luxury of not editing it in one go, but actually editing it in pieces and sections at the same time as the post-strike events unfolded. This didn’t happen so much with *Friends and Enemies* but it happened with all my subsequent films. There wasn’t actually enough time in *Friends and Enemies* to start an edit, as I was constantly shooting. However I still managed to involve the editor Les McLaren in looking at the rushes, and giving me feedback about what I’d shot and how it might all fit together.

I remember keeping notebooks and drawing arrows which led from scene to scene to scene to scene. This would often lead me thinking “ah but this person’s character hadn’t developed that sufficiently and oh I’m really interested in his mother, she’s a terrific character etc”. So minor characters sprang up in the shooting, some of whom I thought I would follow, at least get a little cameo that would end up in the film. And in fact that pretty much happened. Very few scenes actually were never used. Virtually everything that I shot had a purpose. I had to have a sense of the structure of the final film in my head all the time I was shooting. I was always looking towards the future based on what I’d shot before, how much story had been completed, and what might there be still to go. Also. I really had to keep close to the unfolding story: “who’s going to make the next move”. So the need of being there at the right time made absolute sense to me.

I never used narration in this film. The only technique that I adopted to knit the story were inter-titles. Music that Paul Charlier’s composed ran over these title shots. Paul did a great job, and I was really pleased how this technique worked – often taking the audience from one period of time to another.

I was lucky to pretty much have captured everything really that was valuable and useful over those many months. All the essential story beats! I had to keep very close to people in Brisbane who were my informants who would tell me what was just around the corner. One of the things that I filmed was some quite illegal activity – the striking linesmen actually trying to sabotage some of the electricity depots themselves. However I concluded if this ends up in the film this could be very, very compromising as far as the strike was concerned and could lead to all sorts of legal issues for both me and my subjects, so I had to be really, really careful with that material. I did suggest that something untoward was possibly going on but I couldn’t really develop it into anything particular.

*Friends and Enemies* was a film that left me completely breathless. I remember walking on a beach with a friend of mine who was just north of Brisbane in Caloundra at the time - Peter Kennedy, an artist, somebody who’s been through these battles with me who knows my work very well, and said Peter what do I do? Nobody likes this film. He said well later in years to come it’ll be seen as having made a very, very good film. Let history be the judge.

So anyway, it took me a little while to personally, emotionally work through all those feelings. And one of my responses was actually to find a totally different subject, totally unconnected to the unions and that’s why I happened across this story up in Broome about Lord McAlpine. That’s how I made *Lord of the Bush*.

With *Friends and Enemies* I sense a real maturing of the filmmaking craft or art there. I had a sense of really coming into my own as a director. I could attack this film with a sense of confidence having made *Kemira*, having learned with *Kemira – Diary of a* strike, a previous film that so much of a film like this is made in the edit.