

Protests and Riots

Investigation 4 TROUBLES AT BONEGILLA IN 1961



Table of Contents

	Page
Introduction	4
Background	4
Key Inquiry Questions	6
Inquiry 1 – Protests Riots, 1961	7
Newspaper Reports	7
Archive 1	7
Reading accounts of the protest	10
Inquiry 2 – Riots , 1961: Secret Government Reports	12
Examining Government Reports	12
Archive 2	12
ASIO analysis of events	16
Newspaper reports within the file	18
Inquiry 3 – Protests Riots , 1961: Bonegilla Reception Centre Records	20
Examining Bonegilla Records	20
Archive 3	20

(Cont...)

Table of Contents (Cont...)

	Page
The reception centre director explains what happened	21
Dealing with the problem of unemployment	21
Improving conditions at Bonegilla	22
Inquiry 4 – Protests - Riots , 1961: Migrant Perspectives	23
Archive 4	23
Subsequent unrest and protests	24
Imagining broadcasting news of the unrest	26

Investigating Protests and Riots

Introduction

Bonegilla became newsworthy nation-wide with protests and riots in 1952 and 1961. This investigation looks closely at Bonegilla troubles in 1961.

Background

Bonegilla was primarily a labour distribution point. It was established as a marshalling place where new arrivals were gathered, processed, interviewed and assessed for an appropriate work placement. From Bonegilla the new arrivals were dispatched to jobs all over Australia.

The Reception Centre generally operated efficiently sending each new arrival to a job within three or four weeks. However, the centre had troubles in dispersing the newly arrived in 1949, because there were larger than usual intakes of people to be placed in jobs. There was also a crippling coal strike that disrupted railway traffic and the transport arrangements for newly placed workers.

The centre also had troubles during the economic recessions of 1952 and 1961, when there was nation-wide unemployment and not enough jobs for the migrants. In July 1952 unemployed Italian migrants staged protests and demanded, 'Give us work or repatriate us to Italy'. Their protests attracted the notice of the metropolitan press, especially when troops from the adjacent army camp at Bandiana were armed and readied for dispatch to Bonegilla in armoured vehicles to quell a riot and protect Commonwealth property. The government worried about communist involvement in fostering unrest.

ITALIANS' GRIEVANCE

Armed Troops Stand by at Migrant Camp

Two hundred armed troops last night stood by at Bandida, near Bonegilla migrant centre, following a deputation to the Minister for Immigration (Mr. Holt) by Italian migrants who complained that no work had been found for them.

You can find more about the troubles of 1952 in Trove, by doing a simple search on "Bonegilla" between the dates 1952-07-08 to 1952-07-28.

Scan the headlines to get a sense of the tone of the reports.

Newspapers all over Australia ran reports on the plight of the unemployed Italian migrants and the way they were being treated in Australia. They used the incident to raise questions about whether Australia should be continuing with its immigration program, especially when there were too few jobs for either the new arrivals or the longer settled during an economic recession. Even more worrying for immigration officers recruiting migrants from overseas was the fact these critical reports also appeared in overseas papers.



On 17 July 1961, unemployed migrants held a noisy protest procession. In a variety of languages they chanted 'We want work' and paraded signs criticising the immigration system.

The demonstration became worrying when the participants attacked

and damaged the Employment Office which had not provided them with work. Police were rushed to the centre. There were scuffles. One policeman was hospitalised with a dislocated shoulder.

Later in the evening, the demonstrators reassembled and threw stones, breaking windows in the canteen and the street lights. Police launched a baton charge to disperse the crowd and imposed a curfew. The next day even more police were mustered. Migrants booed the police and threw stones at the police cars.

Police raided Block 13, where further mischief was allegedly being planned. Within the next week or two charges of riot, assault and damage to Commonwealth property were issued against eleven men.



Key Inquiry Questions

- What caused the disturbances at Bonegilla in 1961?
- How did people respond to the protests?
- What were the consequences of the protests?



Inquiry 1 – Protests – Riots, 1961

Newspaper Reports

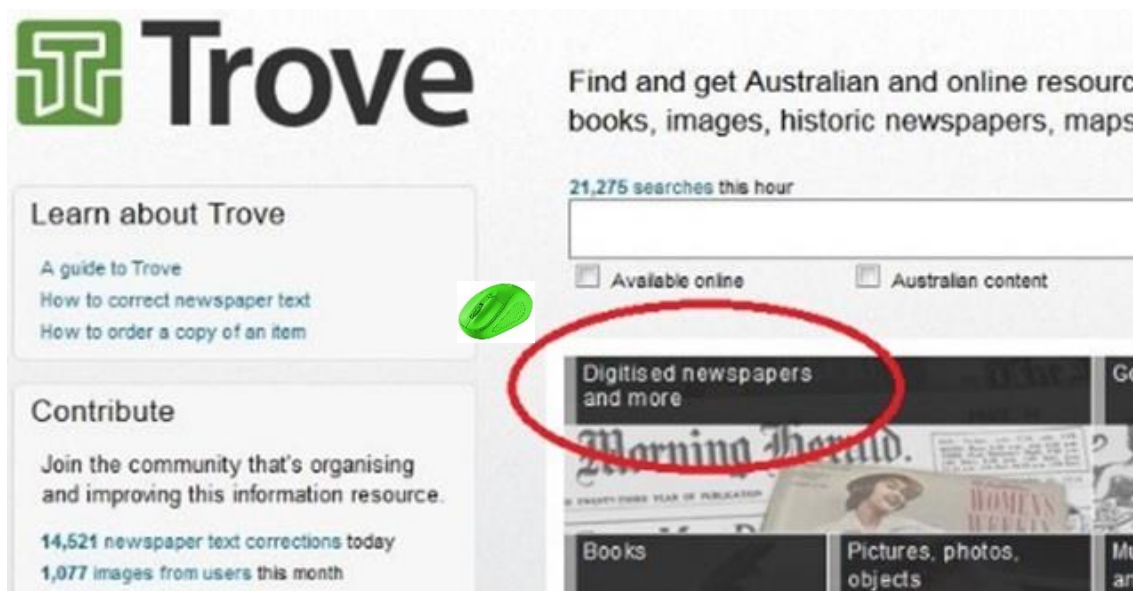
You will be conducting a simple broad search of newspaper reports and then reading some selected reports.



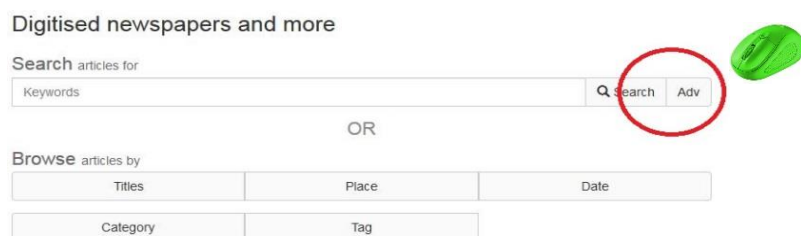
Archive 1 – Open the link below to go to Trove at the National Library of Australia

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/>

1) Find and open the link: "Digitised Newspapers and More"



2) Click on the Adv (Advanced) search function



3) Enter at 'all of these words': Bonegilla

Advanced search - Digitised newspapers and more

Enter search terms in at least one of the fields below ?

☐ All of these words

☐ The phrase

☐ Any of these words

☐ Without these words

4) Type in the date range: 1961-07-10 to 1961-08-20 (10th July 1961 to 20th August 1961) and select "Articles"

Advanced search - Digitised newspapers and more

Enter search terms in at least one of the fields below ?

☐ All of these words

☐ The phrase

☐ Any of these words

☐ Without these words

Limit your results to (optional)

Search Scope

Limit keywords to only match in the field(s) selected

- ☒ Search anywhere in article (including tags and comments)
- ☐ Search anywhere in article (excluding tags and comments)
- ☐ Search headings only
- ☐ Search headings, author or 1st 4 lines (news articles only)
- ☐ Search captions only

Publication Date

Return only items published between dates (yyyy-mm-dd)

 
From pub date - to pub date

Places and Titles

To search all newspapers, do not make a selection

Only show titles in the list below that ... [\[SHOW FILTERS\]](#)

- ☐ National - 3 title(s) [\[SHOW TITLES\]](#)
- ☐ ACT - 8 title(s) [\[SHOW TITLES\]](#)
- ☐ New South Wales - 476 title(s) [\[SHOW TITLES\]](#)
- ☐ Northern Territory - 8 title(s) [\[SHOW TITLES\]](#)
- ☐ Queensland - 100 title(s) [\[SHOW TITLES\]](#)
- ☐ South Australia - 142 title(s) [\[SHOW TITLES\]](#)
- ☐ Tasmania - 104 title(s) [\[SHOW TITLES\]](#)
- ☐ Victoria - 368 title(s) [\[SHOW TITLES\]](#)
- ☐ Western Australia - 226 title(s) [\[SHOW TITLES\]](#)
- ☐ International - 9 title(s) [\[SHOW TITLES\]](#)

Article Category

☒ Article

5) Now click "Search"

6) Sort the results by "Date (earliest first)"



The screenshot shows the Trove search interface. At the top, the search term 'Bonegilla' is entered in the search bar, with a green 'Search' button to its right. Below the search bar, there are filters for 'Available online', 'Australian content', and 'In my libraries'. On the left, a 'Refine your results' sidebar shows filters for 'Category' (Article) and 'Dates' (1961-07-10 to 1961-08-20). The main results area is titled 'Digitised newspapers and more' and shows 'Showing: 1 - 20 of 26 Refine search'. A red circle highlights the 'Sort by: Date (earliest first)' dropdown menu. Below the menu, the first result is 'Trip for Bonegilla children' from 'Good Neighbour (ACT : 1950 - 1969) Tuesday 1 August 1961 p 3 Article'. The second result is 'Rising Demand to drop charges at Bonegilla'.

Not all items are relevant to this investigation. For example, there is an unrelated report on a goodwill trip to Canberra. The most frequent stories (see the column on the left under title) come from the Canberra Times (17) and from the Tribune (6) which was a Communist paper and was critical of the way the disturbances were dealt with. Note there are reports both of the protests and of a subsequent trial, which ended when the charges were dropped. Other newspapers not represented on Trove for copyright reasons include Sydney Morning Herald and Melbourne Sun. Cuttings from those newspapers appear in the official records.

? Question

01

Why did the protests attract media attention?

Reading accounts of the protests

7) Go to 'Migrants riot at reception centre', Canberra Times 18 July 1961

Refine your results:

- Place
ACT (17)
- Title
The Canberra Times (ACT: 1926 - 1995) (17)
- Category
Article (17)
- Illustrated
- Decade

Digitised newspapers and more

Showing: 1 - 17 of 17 [Refine search](#) Sort by: Date (earliest first) [Sort](#)

Migrants Meeting "Great Hardships"
The Canberra Times (ACT: 1926 - 1995) Monday 10 July 1961 p 3 Article
... receiving up to 20 appeals a day from young men. She said more than 3,000 German migrants were in Bonegilla ... 318 words

MIGRANTS RIOT AT RECEPTION CENTRE
The Canberra Times (ACT: 1926 - 1995) Tuesday 18 July 1961 p 6 Article
... at Victoria's largest migrant reception centre, Bonegilla, near E. Albury, to-day. The men ... Bonegilla is Victoria's main reception centre and at present is occupied by 3,000 men, women and children ... 343 words

Migrant Camp Quiet After Riot

? Questions

02 Why was there a riot?

03 Why did the report include a description of the injuries to the policeman?

8) Go to 'Eight Charged On Migrant Camp Rioting' Canberra Times 26 July 1961.

[?]an [?]o The [?]anberra Times WEDNESDAY, JULY 26...
The Canberra Times (ACT: 1926 - 1995) Wednesday 26 July 1961 p 2 Article
... unemployment figures and undoubtedly the Bonegilla incidents, which have been exaggerated beyond their real ... 390 words

Eight Charged On Migrant Camp Rioting
The Canberra Times (ACT: 1926 - 1995) Thursday 27 July 1961 p 14 Article
Wodonga Court of Petty Sessions to-day on charges arising out of last week's riots at the Bonegilla ... afternoon charged another migrant at Bonegilla camp with having damaged Commonwealth property. The man ... 211 words

In Queensland This Week Rumblings Of Revolt In Country Party Has Premier Worried
The Canberra Times (ACT: 1926 - 1995) Friday 27 July 1961 p 14 Article

? Question

04 What crime(s) were the men charged with?

9) Go to 'Protests win results for migrants' Tribune 16 August 1961.

CHARGES ON RIOTING WITHDRAWN

The Canberra Times (ACT : 1926 - 1995) Wednesday 16 August 1961 p 13 Article

... participated in rioting in **Bonegilla** migrant camp last month were withdrawn by police in Rutherford Court to ... 420 words

PROTESTS WIN RESULT FOR MIGRANTS

Tribune (Sydney, NSW : 1939 - 1976) Wednesday 16 August 1961 p 12 Article

... [?] RUTHERGLEN (Vic): Migration Minister Downer's threats of "firm action" against the - **Bonegilla** In his address, Mr, Clyde Holding, for the migrants, said conditions at **Bonegilla** were like those in ... 200 words

Italian Minister Visiting Australia

The Canberra Times (ACT : 1926 - 1995) Friday 11 August 1961 p 3 Article

centres in Adelaide, **Bonegilla** and Perth ... 54 words



Questions

05

What is meant by withdrawing charges in a court case?

06

Why were these charges withdrawn?

07

Why was the *Tribune* pleased?



Inquiry 2 – Riots, 1961: Secret Government Reports

Examining Government Reports

The different accounts presented here are drawn from two sets of official files held in the National Archives of Australia.

- The first set gives immediate responses to the disturbances by officers at the reception centre.
- The second set gives the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation's analysis of events to determine causes.

Note that files begin on what is now the last page, though the contents are not always arranged sequentially. Sometimes there is more than one copy of a document within a file. References here are to screen page numbers in the digital file. The page numbers in the pdf are one number earlier than those in the digital file.



Archive 2 – Open the link below to go to Trove at the National Archives of Australia

<http://www.naa.gov.au/>

1) Scroll down the page to: 'Search the collection'

visitors only. [read more]


SEARCH THE COLLECTION
Search our extraordinary collection – find your story here


FOR GOVERNMENT
Find information and records management policies, standards and guidance


EXHIBITIONS AND EVENTS
Come to our events, from public talks to exhibitions and more!

2) Find and click on 'RecordSearch'

The screenshot shows the National Archives of Australia website. The top navigation bar includes 'Home', 'The collection', 'Information management', 'Engage', and 'About us'. Below this, a breadcrumb trail reads 'Home > The collection > Search the collection'. On the left, a sidebar lists various search options: 'Search the collection', 'Ask us a question', 'Using the collection', 'A-Z for researchers', 'Fact sheets', 'Family history', and 'Popular research topics'. The main content area is titled 'Search the collection' and features an 'Important Notice' about record pricing. Below the notice, the text 'Use [RecordSearch](#) to search our collection' is circled in red. A green mouse cursor is positioned over the 'RecordSearch' link.

3) Select 'Advanced Search' and go to 'Items' at the bottom of the page to bring up the required search window.

The screenshot shows the 'RecordSearch' page. The top navigation bar includes 'Home', 'The collection', 'Information management', 'Engage', and 'About us'. Below this, a breadcrumb trail reads 'Home > The collection > Search the collection'. On the left, a sidebar lists various search options: 'Search the collection', 'Ask us a question', 'Using the collection', 'A-Z for researchers', 'Fact sheets', 'Family history', and 'Popular research topics'. The main content area is titled 'RecordSearch' and features a navigation bar with 'Basic search', 'Advanced search', 'NameSearch', 'PhotoSearch', and 'Passenger arrivals'. The 'Advanced search' tab is selected and circled in red. Below the navigation bar, a diagram titled 'Commonwealth Record Series (CRS) System' shows a hierarchy of search levels: 'All levels', 'Organisations', 'Agencies', 'Series', and 'Items'. The 'Items' button is circled in red. A green mouse cursor is positioned over the 'Items' button. Below the diagram, a note reads: 'Hover over the buttons for more information about each level. Click to search at that level.'

4) Enter the following number in into the "Item Barcode" panel:
30030518 and select "Search"

Basic search

Advanced search

Name Search

Photo Search

Advanced search - Items

Search for information about record items.

Keywords in title

Keywords in title

using

all words

Exclude

Exclude keywords in title

using

all words

☐

also search notes

Series number
(eg A1838)

Series number

Exclude

Exclude series number

Control symbol

Control symbol

Exclude

Exclude control symbol

Item barcode

30030518

Date
(eg 1921 or 1939 to 1945)

From date

To date

Physical format

Any

Exclude

None

Location of items

Any

Exclude

None

Access status

Any

Exclude

None

Digital copies only

☐

Search

Clear

5) The report is titled "*The Communist Party of Australia Interest in Migrant Communities Migrant Hostels, Bonegilla Vic, Volume 2*". Then you need to select to 'View digital copy'

Item details

Welcome guest

New search

Refine search

⏮️⏪️⏩️⏭️

Displaying 1 of 1

List report

Details report

View digital copy

Item details for: A6122, 2383

Title	Communist Party of Australia Interest in Migrant Communities Migrant Hostels, Bonegilla VIC Volume 2
Contents date range	1961 - 1970
Series number	A6122 Click to see which government agency or person created this item.
Control symbol	2383
Citation	NAA: A6122, 2383
Item barcode	30030518
Location	Canberra
Access status	Open with exception
Reason for restriction	33(1)(a) 33(1)(d) 33(1)(e)(ii) 33(1)(g)
Date of decision	17 Oct 2008

6) The digital copy opens in a new window.

https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=30030518

NAA

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF AUSTRALIA

NAA: A6122, 2383

View multiple pages

Rotate image

previous

next

Page 1 of 87

jump to page

go

12/28/13 Vol. 2

CPA Interest in Migrant Communities

Migrant Hostel

Bonegilla VIC

Title

Communist Party of Australia Interest in Migrant Communities Migrant Hostels, Bonegilla VIC Volume 2

Contents range

1961 - 1970

Series number

A6122

Control symbol

2383

Access status

Open with exception

Barcode

30030518

🐦

📘

👤

📧

📄

Protests and Riots

Bonegilla
Migrant
Experience

15

This file comes from ASIO (Australian Security Intelligence Organisation) and is file number A6122, 2383.

There are three newspaper reports and two confidential reports which provide analysis of the situation made by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation.

4. During inquiries concerning CARDAMONE, a Yugoslav named (N/T) volunteered information which indicated that he had spied upon the Italians prior to their march on 18th July, 1961. [redacted] stated that he saw CARDAMONE speaking with a group of Italians in the Block area; CARDAMONE appeared to be addressing the Italians and was instrumental in the painting of placards with the assistance of Italian-English dictionaries. [redacted] further stated that CARDAMONE has boasted of affiliation with the Italian Communist Party prior to arrival in Australia. However this allegation may only be taken at face value due to the fact that [redacted] has a marked fear of the Italian Communists as he claims the Italian Communists "killed all my family". [redacted] born [redacted] lives in Block [redacted] and arrived per "CASTEL FELICE" on [redacted].

5. Further evidence against CARDAMONE was given by [redacted] when questioned by Police. [redacted] claims he saw CARDAMONE outside the Employment Office during the riot; CARDAMONE was carrying a short iron bar. [redacted] - CARDAMONE made no protest.


6. CARDAMONE was also sighted by the [redacted] to be the first man to enter the employment Office and start wrecking the reception counter. [redacted] stated that at this time CARDAMONE was wielding the iron bar and appeared to be the leader of the rioters. It is interesting to note that when [redacted] was questioned by Police at a later date about this incident he denied any knowledge of the rioters, and denied that he knew anything of CARDAMONE's activities which he stated on being first questioned. Warnock is of the opinion that [redacted] is

The Australian spy agency has restricted access to this file. Be aware that there are redactions, that is, parts are blocked out. This is usually done to protect the identity of informants. The focus, as the title indicates, is on identifying troublemakers who may have been Communist.

Present day investigators may be interested in what the file reveals of the Cold War or immigration policy in the 1960s and not just conditions at Bonegilla in 1961.



ASIO analysis of events


7) Go to a preliminary report dated 27 July submitted 2 August on pages 34-40. There is an option to 'jump to page' and you should enter 34 in the pane and select 'go'.



NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF AUSTRALIA

NAA: A6122, 2383

[View multiple pages](#)[Rotate image](#)



previousnext

Page 34 of 87

jump to page

34

go

Title

Communist Party of Australia Interest in Migrant Communities Migrant Hostels Bonegilla VIC Volume 2

Contents range

1961 - 1970

The report provides an analysis of what happened on 17 and 18 July and tries to determine the causes of the disturbances. It frames ASIO's investigation by giving an early indication of the people who may have been involved in fostering unrest.

? Question

08 What did ASIO think explained the unrest?

8) Go to the secret report, 9 August on pages 29-31 which are based on an interview with Detective Sgt Warnock of the Victorian police.

? Questions

09 How did this interview help ASIO understand the cause of the disturbances?

10 Did Communists stir up trouble?

11 Did the migrants have good reason to feel discontent and to protest?

12 Why was it necessary to declare this ASIO file 'secret'?

Newspaper reports within the file

Newspaper accounts are not always bland reports of events.

9) Go to the Sun 18 July 1961 on page 82.

? Question

13 What may have been intended by publishing the photograph of the injured policeman?



10) Go to The Guardian, 27 July, a Melbourne based Communist Party newspaper, on page 54.

? Question

14 What was intended by the use of headlines such as 'Police used excessive violence at Camp'?



11) Go to Pat Tennison 'A Migrant's First Home' on page 83.

? Question

15

How is this account sympathetic to the plight of the unemployed migrants?



Inquiry 3 – Protests-Riots, 1961: Bonegilla Reception Centre Records

Examining Bonegilla Records

One file from Correspondence held in the Bonegilla Director's Office is called *Bonegilla migrant reception and training centre - Unemployment Disturbances*. The file number is A2567, 1961/168.

There are 85 pages in the file. Sometimes there is more than one copy of items. This file gives access to the words of many migrants and to the camp officials.



*Archive 3 – Open the link below to go to
Trove at the National Archives of Australia*

<http://www.naa.gov.au/>

- 1) Scroll down the page to: 'Search the collection'
- 2) Find and click on 'RecordSearch'
- 3) Select 'Advanced Search' and go to 'Items' at the bottom of the page to bring up the required search window.
- 4) Enter the following number in into the 'Item Barcode' panel:
2017896 and select 'Search'
- 5) Then you need to select 'View digital copy'

The reception centre director explains what happened

6) Go to pages 46- 48 and 43-45 for immediate reports on the protests by the reception centre director, Henry Guinn, who insisted that the disturbances were nothing more than a 'storm in a tea cup'. See how his explanations try to reassure everybody that the disturbances were caused by only a few troublemakers.

? Questions

- 16 Why might he argue that way?
- 17 How did he try to convince his superiors that he tried to prevent the unrest?

Dealing with the problem of unemployment

Before the disturbances the Department of Immigration and the Minister reassured all those waiting for work that they would find it available soon.

7) Go to pages 74 – 75 and 59.

One short-term solution to the problem of finding jobs involved employing more breadwinners at Bonegilla itself, even if that meant sacking married women workers.

8) Go to page 30.

? Questions

- 18 Would these reassurances have calmed the men who were impatient to get work?
- 19 Why was it not considered unfair to dismiss married women so men could have jobs?

Improving conditions at Bonegilla

9) Go to pages 33 – 34 for improvements the Minister suggested.

? Question

- 20 What do the improvements tell the reader about the conditions at Bonegilla before the protests?



Inquiry 4 – Protests-Riots, 1961: Migrant Perspectives

Finding evidence of migrant complaints

The file shows unrest and complaints well before the demonstrations and protests in July 1961. The complainants before and after the protests came from a variety of nations: they included Belgians, French, Italian, German and Yugoslav newcomers.



*Archive 4 – Open the link below to go to
Trove at the National Archives of Australia*

<http://www.naa.gov.au/>

- 1) Scroll down the page to: 'Search the collection'
- 2) Find and click on 'RecordSearch'
- 3) Select 'Advanced Search' and go to 'Items' at the bottom of the page to bring up the required search window.
- 4) Enter the following number in into the 'Item Barcode' panel:
2017896 and select 'Search'
- 5) Then you need to select 'View digital copy'

6) Go to pages 78-83, 72, 55-56, and 21 to see what migrants had to say about not getting jobs. Note that new arrivals were in a vulnerable position and needed to be careful in voicing complaints.



? Questions

- 21 What did they complain about?
- 22 Where do the migrants try to express themselves respectfully, but have difficulty in adopting an appropriate tone?

Subsequent unrest and protests

There was another disturbance in November 1961, but it related to ethnic rivalry.

7) Go to pages 14 – 16.

There was yet another protest in November 1966.

8) Go to page 10.

? Question

- 23 What light, if any, do the subsequent disturbances throw on those of July 1961?

In the same file there is evidence that seems to relate only indirectly to the protests, but which provides insights into the nature of the arrivals and conditions at Bonegilla.

9) Go to page 11.

? Question

- 24 What does this show of the impoverished nature of refugee arrivals in 1966?



Imagining broadcasting news of the unrest



Bonegilla Camp – Shots of damage after migrants rioted over unemployment (No Sound)

https://youtu.be/FAKs_NyCSmc

10) A 60 second film clip from the ABC news files shows the damage done to the Reception Centre during protests about unemployment in July 1961. Police officers arrive to inspect the damage to the walls of the Employment Office and the windows of the Canteen. It ends with a depiction of Constable Bersford who was hospitalised with a dislocated shoulder after he confronted the protesters. The clip has lost its soundtrack.



Thinking about the news broadcast

Can you tell from the vision if the soundtrack was sympathetic to the protesters?

What might the voiceover have said?



Key Inquiry Questions

Now return to the Key Inquiry Questions on page 6 and record your responses to these historical inquiry questions.

