

# RECORDER

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## Protest!

### Launch of the University of Melbourne Archives Exhibition, 20 February 2013

By Peter Love

Based on material held in the University of Melbourne Archives between 1960-1980, the exhibition charts the progression from protest to resistance in social movement activism across a number of campaigns in and around the University of Melbourne. It spans subjects such as the Immigration Reform Group, the Anti-Conscription movement, Women's Liberation, The Carlton Association, Student Activism and Gay Liberation. As University Provost Margaret Sheil said in her introduction, the speakers at the launch encompass many of these matters in their passionate engagement with their respective causes.

Michael Hamel-Green recalled his transition from his activist apprenticeship at University High School to his involvement in the peace movement after he had been conscripted for the Vietnam War and had it deferred while studying at the University. He recounted his period 'underground' dodging the Commonwealth Police, and their ham-fisted raid on the University to arrest him. Looking back on decades of agitating for peace, he was proud of how they had made a real difference to some of the issues they confronted, but did not want to claim too much.

Harry van Moorst, a slightly junior comrade in many of the same struggles, traversed an even wider range of activism including the anti-war movement, founding Students for a Democratic Society, campaigns against urban poverty and inequality, numerous fights against environmental degradation, university reform and the famous 4 July 1968 demonstration at the US Consulate that signified a wider transition from Protest to Resistance. He thought the SDS, in particular, had a very potent role in shifting opinion on many of these early campaigns.



Germaine Greer. Photo by Peter Love

Germaine Greer recalled many campaigns going back to 1956, her first year at the University. She thought insufficient attention had been paid to the tumultuous events of that year, including the protests against the Soviet invasion of Hungary and the Suez Crisis.

Recalling a march on State Parliament, where they were met on the steps by Jim Cairns, she regretted the minimal presence of Cairns in the exhibition. Referring to his role in the University and in the Peace Movement, she suggested that there is much to learn from the university's records of his academic role there. This led her to make a plea for the preservation of records since 'Archives are the pay-dirt of history.' Speaking of her own extensive archive, and suggesting that she is the least interesting person in them, she reminded the audience that good archives are utterly necessary to record protest around significant issues. In a ringing peroration, she urged all present to preserve their records and lodge them in the Archives. The cry was greeted with enthusiastic applause and the meeting wound down with gracious thanks from the University Librarian, Philip Kent. The exhibition is open at the Baillieu Library until 2 June 2013.

## Fabian Forum on Insecure Work

By Peter Love

The Fabian Society presented a forum on precarious employment at the Melbourne City Conference Centre on Wednesday 6 February. It was moderated by Josh Bornstein, a prominent member of the MUA legal team in the 1998 Maritime Dispute, and now a Principal at Maurice Blackburn Lawyers. The two speakers were Ged Kearney, President of the ACTU, and Brian Howe, former Deputy Prime Minister and Leader of the ACTU Enquiry into Precarious Employment.

In his opening comments Josh Bornstein noted how the cases he is now conducting show increasingly sophisticated employer strategies to engage workers on a totally insecure basis. He explained IBM's latest innovation in 'flexible' engagement where a 'globalised' contractual arrangement puts the relationship beyond the reach of national labour laws.



Josh Bornstein. Photo by Peter Love

In talking about the findings of his Enquiry, Brian Howe reminded us of the purposes of the Webbs' pioneering social research and drew a disturbing picture of the employment landscape he has recently been investigating. It involved an accelerating rate of social inequality that was directly linked to the increase in precarious employment. In bringing together a large body of work by researchers like Pocock, Buchannan and Campbell, site visits and interviews with workers and their families, they have been able to see the larger picture more clearly.

Together, the evidence shows how the structure of workplaces is crucial to the lived experience of workers, where those structures lock out so much talent and consign something like eighty per cent to

insecure employment in the services sector of the labour market. Although this trend is part of a global tide of change, he did acknowledge that the 'reforms' of the Hawke-Keating years were part of the process. The challenge before us, he suggested, is to re-imagine a future for work through a social democratic rather than neo-liberal lens.



Ged Kearney. Photo by Peter Love

Ged Kearney deplored the way that precarious employment deprives people of the chance to manage and plan their lives in the medium to long term. In surveying the transition from standard employment to 'independent' contractor, to contract and casual work, she described some of the ingenious scams that unscrupulous employers use to cheapen and casualise labour. She is particularly concerned with the way employment relationships between companies and the people working on their projects can become attenuated. She recalled a bizarre case where she confronted a developer at the front of a Perth building site and asked him to explain why workers on the job hadn't been paid for ten weeks. He had no idea. He thought they were contractors and since he had not been 'invoiced' for their work saw no need for him to pay them. In fighting these pernicious trends, she suggested, we should clearly identify what constitutes a decent job. It is one that is reasonably predictable, gives workers a say in the nature of the work and has some basic rights associated with it. She was looking for, it seems, a campaign of measured advocacy backed by energetic activism – Your Rights at Work all over again.

At the end of the speeches there were questions and general discussion characterised by anecdotes and affirmation of the arguments the panel had presented to the 80-100 member audience.

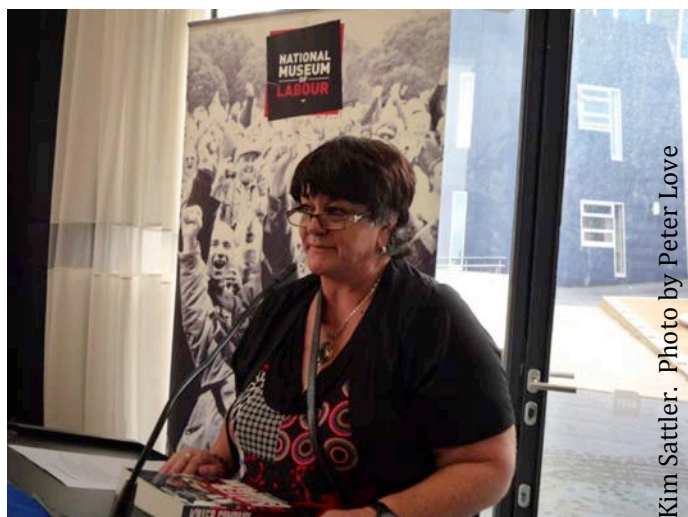


## Eureka Dinner

By Peter Love

To commemorate the Eureka Rebellion of 1854 and to celebrate the restored Eureka flag's return to the Gallery, the National Museum of Labour (NML) held a fundraising dinner at the Ballarat Art Gallery on Saturday 1 December 2012.

Kim Sattler welcomed the guests on behalf of the NML Board of Directors and reported on the progress of the Museum, its current activities and publications, and its strategic directions. In addition to building an initial collection, the Board is seeking land within the Parliamentary Triangle in Canberra, with plans to construct a building (or occupy a suitable existing one), which will be shared with commercial tenants who will provide the necessary income stream for the Museum's base running costs. She urged the diners, and the organisations they represented, to support the Board in getting all that done.



Kim Sattler. Photo by Peter Love

Andrew Reeves delivered the main speech of the evening on the Rebellion, the history of the Eureka Flag and the interpretations of its significance. It was a salutary reminder of how a symbol such as the flag can be so variously appropriated to represent anything from a foundational fight for democratic political rights to a libertarian revolt against taxation. A particularly interesting theme throughout Andrew's address was the provenance of the flag itself, including some astonishing tales of how some custodians during its long history thought it permissible to cut small squares from it and present them to important visitors! Some of these neat little holes can be seen on the restored flag that now hangs in a dedicated room at the Gallery.

Brett Edgington, President of the Ballarat Trades and Labour Council, spoke about the Rebellion and how the dramatic events at the Stockade have tended to overshadow the importance of the Chartist program of political and economic reforms contained in the Ballarat Reform League's manifesto. It was a timely

reminder of the continuity of these democratic ideas that were a persistent theme in the Eight Hour Day campaign in 1856 and the Land League agitation a little later. Then, as now, we might properly attend to the importance of the ideas that underlie dramatic actions.



Andrew Reeves. Photo by Peter Love

Since it was a fundraising dinner (\$100 a head) there was the usual auction of items related to the Rebellion and the Museum. After a succession of commonplace items were sold to a mildly interested audience, the pace quickened when a large rug/wall hanging of J. Howard Miller's famous 'We Can Do It' image of 1943 came up. After hotly contested bidding it was eventually knocked down to a group of women labour activists for several hundred dollars. Proudly displaying their new won banner, they looked like entirely suitable custodians.

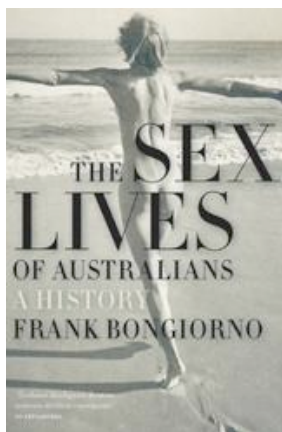


Photo by Peter Love

As a supporting member of the National Museum of Labour, the Melbourne ASSLH wishes our comrades on the Board every success in developing the plan for the Museum.

## Sex and the Australian Psyche A review of *The Sex Lives of Australians*

By Lyle Allan



A review of Frank Bongiorno, *The Sex Lives of Australians. A History* (Collingwood: Black Inc., 2012) \$32.95.

This book is a first. It is the foundational academic work on a subject that no one else has been prepared to write. Bongiorno's book is both readable and reliable; complete with a number of valuable illustrations that add greatly to its worth.

Frank Bongiorno is an Associate Professor of History at the Australian National University and a distinguished labour historian. He is, with Nick Dyrenfurth, the co-author of *A Little History of the Australian Labor Party*, a book published in 2011 and well known to many readers of *Recorder*.

Bongiorno's work covers the entire period of European settlement in Australia. The themes of repression, tolerance and backlash continue to occur, with different emphasis in different eras. In the early chapters, which cover the period of penal settlement in New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land, there is a clear emphasis on repression. We have never been told in our history books the real reason for the ending of transportation. Bongiorno argues that increasing concern with the moral behaviour in the colonies was the major factor. The official condemnation of sodomy among the early Australian European settlers was frequently suppressed.

The preoccupation of English elites with 'sodomy' and 'sexual depravity' in the colonies highlights the puritanism and changing moral landscape in England. Sexual conduct in the colonies was seen as a danger to family values, and Colonial administrators were expected to conform to some puritan code of behaviour. William Sorell, Lieutenant Governor of Van Diemen's Land, was returned to England after it became known that his partner was not his wife. Corruption or actions such as ill treatment of indigenous peoples, were more likely to be covered up than sex scandal.

Bongiorno's language is colourful and direct. One example is his description of the evangelical preacher, Henry Varley, as a man likely to see lasciviousness in places where others did not. Another is his comment on the intellectual status of 1860s Melbourne women. They were supposed to be totally ignorant on sexual matters that might be extensively discussed in medical journals like the *Lancet*. Well bred women

might know all the anatomical details but they were not supposed to talk about them.

A distinction is often made between art and pornography. Norman Lindsay, a great painter of nudes, might be regarded in either category. Arguments about the artistic value of *Chloe*, the famous nude painting at Melbourne's Young and Jackson's Hotel, are dealt with at some length.

Prostitution is well covered, from the gold rushes to the late twentieth century. As is the theme of war. War added new dimensions to sexual behaviour. In the Second World War the patronage of brothels was clearly tolerated. The influx of American soldiers also changed the lives of many Australian women. They had more money and were often more adventurous. Rates of venereal disease were also a problem. It was not always the clergy who attacked sexual promiscuity. During the Vietnam War left-wing Victorian ALP Secretary Bill Hartley would claim that American troops on rest and recreation leave could pose a threat to the health of Australian women.

Very few sex scandals have entered the popular imagination in this country. The Goosens and Orr scandals are two that come to mind. A future edition will almost certainly discuss Craig Thomson, whatever the result of forthcoming legal proceedings.

Sex education is another subject few people have ever wanted to talk about. When Prime Minister, John Gorton said during a television interview that sex education was best conducted in the home. The conservative Christian Father and Son Welfare Movement acted as quasi sex educators in Victorian schools until the 1960s. Sex, according to their presentation, was for procreation. Masturbation, homosexuality, pre-marital sex and houses of ill repute, a code phrase for brothels, were sinful.

Attitudes towards sexuality liberalised in the 1960s. There was a general sexual revolution in the Western World, and Australia was not immune from this influence. This was a great period of sexual tolerance. While there were differences in certain states, with Queensland under Joh Bjelke-Petersen less liberal than the rest of Australia, abortion became more available, homosexuality was de-criminalised, brothels were licensed, bikini swimsuits became de rigueur, nude bathing was legal on certain beaches and pornography became easier to buy. There was talk of a further education course for sex workers, which never eventuated. A trade union for prostitutes was even advocated. The political advancement of one ALP Victorian parliamentarian effectively ended when he made the crude suggestion that they ought to join the Meat Workers Union.

Bongiorno is to be congratulated on an outstanding book. In tracing the sex lives of Australians he illuminates the changing dynamics of Australian society. No doubt this book will be re-published and

see many editions. The present standing of the author rests on his several political works. This book is different from these in that it is primarily social rather than political history. Its publication ought to add significantly to his fine reputation. Bongiorno is a great historian.

## Primary Elections and the ALP

By Ainsley Symons

The ALP is presently debating so-called 'primaries' to pre-select candidates in parliamentary elections. One of the earliest recent advocates of primary elections in Australia was Ian Baker, an unsuccessful ALP leadership candidate in the Victorian parliament against John Brumby in 1994. Baker's argument was about party democracy, increasing electoral participation in the political process, and to ensure the selection of better quality candidates. Baker subsequently lost preselection and recontested his parliamentary seat as an Independent in 1999. He lost to Telmo Languiller, who currently holds the seat of Derrimut. Julia Gillard, the current Prime Minister, has also expressed limited support for primary elections.

A primary contest was conducted as an experiment by the ALP in the Victoria lower house seat of Kilsyth in 2010. ALP officials saw the experiment as successful, but the seat was a very marginal one and the winner of the primary lost at the general election. The contest was applauded by Liberal web-site Menzies House, which some ALP members consider a warning sign.

We need to define a primary election. A primary election is a ballot to select a political party candidate in the general election, or even in a by-election. It is also a ballot to select delegates to a political party nominating convention for State Governor or for President. Americans distinguish between open primaries and closed primaries. In an open primary all voters can elect to participate in whichever political party primary they wish, regardless of political party membership or registration. In 2008 many otherwise Democrat voters elected to vote in the Republican primary for candidate John McCain, who was regarded as less conservative than other Republican nominees. A closed primary limits participation to registered voters of a particular political party. Democrats in a closed primary could not cross over and vote for a Republican nominee.

In the case of the ALP in Victoria preselection is currently by plebiscite, with the local vote among ALP members in the electorate counting for fifty per-cent of the final vote. The plebiscite vote is combined with the vote from a central panel or Public Office Selection Committee, which counts for the other fifty per cent. A primary system would mean that the plebiscite vote would itself be the decisive vote, and that participation would be increased to account for voters who wish to register as ALP supporters. This would

be equivalent in many ways to the American definition of a closed primary, but there is no guarantee voters of other political parties would not register as ALP supporters. Criticism of the current system is that there is substantial factional control, and that party members not affiliated to a faction have a limited say.

Primaries are not new in the ALP, and academic authors do not seem to realise this. The rank and file preselection ballot held before 1955 was in fact almost a closed primary. Members of affiliated trade unions who pledged allegiance to the ALP could vote in preselections without being members of the ALP. Bob Holt, a former Minister for Lands in Victoria, claimed that when he was the local member for Portland, which he held from 1945-47 and again from 1950-55, local Liberal employers urged their workers who were members of affiliated trade unions to vote for him, regardless of whether they were ALP voters or not. These employers wanted a man from Warrnambool, where Holt lived, as their parliamentarian, and not a resident of Port Fairy, another town within the electorate.

There are several primary preselection ballots that are well documented in the ALP's history. One is featured in *Power Without Glory*, Frank Hardy's fictionalised book. In it he describes the rounding up of Catholic trade unionists by the supporters of B.A. Santamaria, who voted *en masse* for candidate Stan Keon, who successfully won preselection and subsequently election to the lower house safe ALP seat of Richmond. The other is the preselection for the upper house seat of Melbourne West won by Albert (Bert) Bailey in 1952. Bailey again represented the Santamaria Movement, and his defeat of Pat Kennelly, a leading opponent of the Movement, was a factor in the subsequent ALP split of 1955.

Primary elections are not new to the ALP. The record of preselection ballots, an almost American style closed primary, ought to be considered before the party launches in to any further experiments in their use. Nor will they end factional control, as experiences in the Victorian ALP with the Movement before 1955 clearly demonstrate.

### References:

On Liberal praise of the Kilsyth ALP primary, see <http://www.menzieshouse.com.au/2010/04/liberals-need-to-trial-open-primaries.html>

On Keon's preselection in Richmond, see Frank Hardy, *Power Without Glory* (Melbourne: Lloyd O'Neil, 1972 [1950])

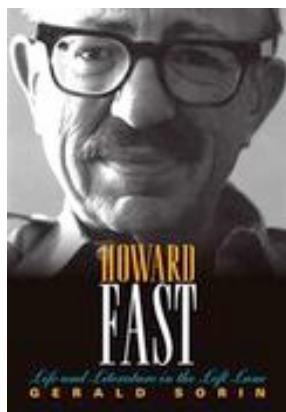
On Bailey's preselection in Melbourne West, see Robert Murray, *The Split. Australian Labor in the fifties* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1984)

*Ainsley Symons is a political activist in Altona Meadows*



## In the Fast Lane: A review of *Howard Fast*

By Phillip Deery



Review of Gerald Sorin, *Howard Fast: Life and Literature in the Left Lane* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012) \$40

In a previous issue of *Recorder* ('Red Letters', No. 269, March 2011), I referred to some of the correspondence between the Australian communist writer, Frank Hardy, and the American communist writer, Howard Fast. The publication of *Power Without Glory* in 1950 was echoed by the publication of *Spartacus* in 1951: the first, with the help of friends in the Communist Party and the union movement; the second, through self-publishing due to Cold War blacklisting by publishers. As Pauline Armstrong's *Frank Hardy and the making of Power Without Glory* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2000) documents, and as many *Recorder* readers would know, Hardy's novel was printed clandestinely, bound in batches in 'safe' houses, and initially sold 'under the counter'. Fast's novel was published in an equally unorthodox manner:

*'I had no money with which to publish the book, but I had friends and I knew that over ten million people in America had read my books. I wrote to these friends. I asked them to buy in advance, sight unseen, a novel called Spartacus, which I would publish if and when enough of them sent me five dollars for a subscription to it.'* [*Compass*, 6 January 1952]

Enough did, emboldening him to offer a pre-publication regular edition for \$2 and a \$1 special paper edition for trade unionists. When it was printed, his self-marketing was relentless; like *Power Without Glory*, it was sold at 'cottage meetings' in the private homes of Communist Party friends and associates. Despite these difficult beginnings, both books became best-sellers.

This parallel between Frank Hardy and Howard Fast, and their friendship, does not feature in *Howard Fast: Life and Literature in the Left Lane*, the first major biography of Fast, published in November 2012. But much else does. His biographer, Gerald Sorin, examines his life and his work in all its complexities and changing contexts. With the exception of *Spartacus*, Sorin is dismissive of the quality of Fast's writing in the period when he was most active in the American Communist Party from the late 1940s until 1956. Novels such as *The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti*, *Silas Timberman* and *The Story of Lola Gregg*, were polemical, didactic and, outside the communist

press, ignored. However, those books for which Fast is best-remembered, and which found their way onto the bookshelves of innumerable left wing households in Australia – *The Last Frontier*, *Citizen Tom Paine*, *Freedom Road* and *April Morning* – were both influential and of considerable literary merit. Sorin quotes a demobilised soldier who wrote to a friend in 1946:

*'I've been feeding myself a concentrated literary diet of Howard Fast ... I don't know whether Fast is a great writer – who am I to say? – but I know he moves me as few writers have ever moved me. And a faith is restored to me ... a faith in the essential dignity and integrity of man, a faith I thought I'd lost.'*

It is when Sorin moves away from appraisal of Fast's sixty-five novels to analysis of his personal life and character traits that the reader finds a darker side. The biography provides abundant, and depressing, evidence of Fast's egotism, self-serving disingenuousness, unkindness and insensitivity towards his children, voracious sexual appetite and remorseless marital infidelities, and a hunger for fame and the adulation and money that accompanied it.

After his death, a close relative bitterly described Howard Fast as 'this huge force, completely obsessed with getting and staying famous, the one who needed to be the only star in the family, the one who ... went alone into that dark night'. The book is littered with similarly unflattering judgements from other family members.

This biography, then, leaves one wondering: how should a writer of Fast's importance be measured? Should his literary legacy outweigh his personal deficiencies? Or does callous treatment of those close to him constitute an unforgivable flaw? The same question could be asked of Frank Hardy: the penultimate chapter in Pauline Armstrong's biography is titled simply, 'Betrayals'. However, *Howard Fast: Life and Literature in the Left Lane* remains an intriguing biography, not least for its examination of how Fast interwove his political activism, his Jewishness and his art during the heyday of McCarthyism. Recommended.

**Jean Culley**

Charlie Ward is trying to locate material and anyone who might remember Jean Culley (Jean Zakaria). According to Charlie, Jean married an Indonesian Independence activist during the Second World War and helped establish the Australia-Indonesia-Association in Melbourne.

She was in the CPA in the 1940s/50s. She worked as a nurse, spent much of the 1970s in the NT at Wattie Creek. Jean was later a volunteer on 3CR. She died in 1979 in Kensington. If anyone remembers Jean, Charlie would appreciate hearing from you. His email is [groundlevel@fastmail.com.au](mailto:groundlevel@fastmail.com.au)

I'll be there

The Victorian Trade Union choir performed their memorable production, *I'll be there*, to a full and appreciative house in the Trades Hall on 16 and 17 November 2012. The Victorian Trade Union Choir has been singing together for 22 years – a period shaped by the hard grit of fighting the Kennett Government's attacks on the union movement and the public sector, the waterfront dispute, and countless more struggles big and small.

Throughout, the Choir has been a comforting and inspiring presence at hundreds of worksite pickets, community protests and labour movement celebrations. Taking this as their inspiration, the choir, led by amateur Rebecca Lister and musical director Michael Roper, have created a production which tells this story of our times, as well as that of the choir and the personal journeys of its members.



Photo by Peter Love

In all, sixteen songs, including *Joe Hill*, *I'll be there* and *Bring out the Banners* were performed. Each song was chosen to represent a key moment in the life of the members of the Choir. Interspersed with the stories of when a song was performed (*Which side are you on at Webb Dock*) the show was at times touching, at times humorous and throughout, highly enjoyable. It served also as a reminder of how fortunate the labour movement in Victoria is to have its own Trade Union Choir. As one of the sponsors of the event, the Melbourne Branch congratulates the Choir on a wonderful performance.



Photo by Peter Love

The Whitlam Forum

By Peter Love

The Melbourne Branch of the ASSLH combined with the New International Bookshop and the Search Foundation to organise a forum to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Whitlam Government's election. It was held at the Melbourne City Conference Centre and attracted a modest but highly engaged audience of about 30-40 people.

Jenny Hocking, Whitlam biographer; Paul Strangio, Cairns biographer; and Moss Cass, Whitlam Government minister offered their assessments of the government elected on 2 December 1972. They reminded us of the significant, long-term reforms within the ALP that enabled the development of the elaborate 'program' which addressed the hopes and needs of an electorate weary of the Vietnam War, the Coalition's crumbling competence and eager for major social policy reform. Both Jenny and Paul explained how, three years after Labor made significant gains at the 1969 election, a clear majority of voters agreed that 'It's Time'.



Moss Cass, Paul Strangio and Jenny Hocking. Photo by Peter Love

In discussing the dramatic early changes, especially in the first few weeks when Whitlam and Barnard comprised an interim ministry, the panel reminded us that much of the 'program' was about basic, modernising social democratic reform in conventional policy domains such as health, education and urban



renewal, including sewerage for outer suburbs. Most of these required a massive increase in Federal funding to the States through the expanded use of Section 96 grants.

It was worth remembering that so many of the things we now take for granted; no-fault divorce, a comprehensive national health scheme, an enhanced Federal presence in many domains of State responsibility, and many smaller measures such as the abolition of appeals to the Privy Council, were all Whitlam Government initiatives.

In light of the recent Mining Tax debate, the moral panic surrounding Rex Connor's loan raising adventures for nation building projects seemed a distant, tragic memory. Paul suggested that the present state of the ALP made it utterly unrealistic to imagine a 'second coming' of a visionary Labor Party such as Whitlam's.

Moss Cass offered a fascinating insider's account of the day-to-day workings of the Cabinet, the Government and the Party. In recalling the circumstances of his election to the Ministry and how policies were really determined, he explained how the processes of government were quixotic and contingent on transient political conditions, and the will of powerful personalities.

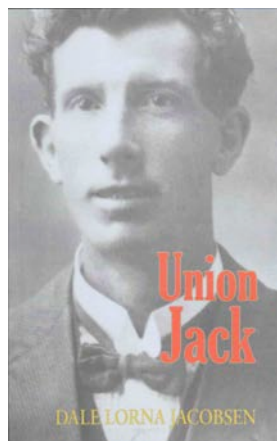
At this point there were some in the audience who contemplated parallels with the events of 2010. All were absorbed in hearing Moss's recollections of both the broad vision and the minute detail from a participant in one of Australia's most dramatically reforming governments.



The NIB folks, most notably Cavell Zangalis and Liz Aird, did much of the organising and all of the catering, for which we offer them hearty thanks. The Chair, however, deserves a comradely rebuke for neglecting to arrange for the recording of what turned out to be a fascinating forum, especially since the speakers had given so much time and attention to their talks.

## Union Jack

By Doug Jordan



Review of Dale Lorna Jacobsen, *Union Jack* (Brisbane: Copyright Publishing Company, 2011) \$25

Last year's massive defeat of the Bligh government was not unexpected. And it was not the first time there had been such a dramatic break between the ALP leadership and its working class base.

Dale Jacobsen describes the defeat of the McCormack ALP government in 1929 in the

following way:

*'After fourteen years, the workers of Queensland finally said no to a Labor government, preferring a government that owed nothing to the labour movement over a government that had turned its back on them.'*

The Australian Railways Union (ARU) was one of the focal points of opposition to the conservative policies of the early Queensland ALP governments. A key union activist was Jack O'Leary, the author's grandfather. The story of his struggles for militant policies is presented in a fictionalised form.

Historical fiction can, at times, be problematic because the combination often doesn't work. But Jacobsen has produced a compelling portrayal of O'Leary and the Queensland labour movement of the early twentieth century.

Unlike other radicals who joined the Communist Party of Australia, O'Leary remained a member of the ALP where he fought for radical policies. As Secretary of the Annerley ALP branch, he led the unsuccessful opposition to the imposition of the anti-Communist pledge.

His attempts to gain pre-selection were thwarted by the party hierarchy, who made veiled threats to expose a deeply buried secret about his service in WWI. Disillusioned, he thinks 'the bastards are winning.' He was right – O'Leary was expelled from the ALP in 1931 for his support for Jack Lang.

But his main political activity was in the ARU. In 1912 he becomes a delegate when working as a navy building the Mary Valley rail extension. When he marries Mary he takes her to the bush camp, fully expecting her to share his love of the isolation and the solidarity of the worksite. But she demurs, and eventually after a year-and-a-half convinces him to move back to the city and a job at the Ipswich Railway



Workshops. It is to be one of the few times over the next two decades that O'Leary was prepared to subordinate his political activity to his family life. But Mary, despite venting her frustrations at times of his priorities, was supportive of many of his activities.

When WWI breaks out, O'Leary enlists, despite protests from Mary. When he returns his health is permanently damaged. There is also a charge of desertion - a secret which he wants hidden despite his eventual acquittal. The experience turns him into a committed opponent of imperialist war. By 1926 he is actively involved in organising union support for the Hands off China campaign.

In 1926, O'Leary is elected as the Organising-Secretary of the South-Eastern District of the union - a justified advancement for years of rank-and-file activity. The job was arduous, involving weeks away from his family, sometimes walking large distances before the union supplied all organisers with a motorbike.

His family life again suffers, because even when he is home he studies late into the night to acquire the skills he needs to represent the workers he cares so much about. The job also has a negative impact on his health as he succumbs to repeated TB infections. From time-to-time, when the pressure of work and family become too heavy, he indulges in an overuse of alcohol to escape the constant pressure.

Throughout the mid-1920s the union was in constant conflict with ALP governments as it fought to regain wage cuts and retrenchments that had been imposed in 1922. Fred Paterson, the future Communist Parliamentarian is a constant source of support. Bashings, stalkings, sacking of militants and other forms of intimidation were used by the dominant ALP leadership to silence its critics.

But the tide of history was already running against union militancy. The onset of the Great Depression saw a conservative leadership elected and O'Leary and other militants were quickly sacked. After almost twenty years his union career had come to an abrupt end.

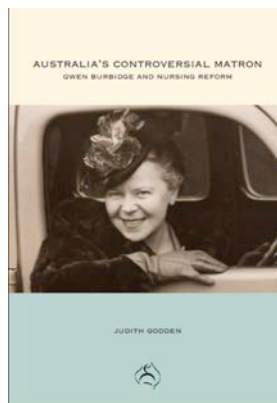
However, it is not the end of his political involvement. Despite bouts of ill health, he takes an active role in anti-eviction fights and the establishment of a Lang support branch. But then, fate intervenes in an unexpected way, for which there are questions, but no answers. This is a book that should be read by anyone with an interest in labour history.

### Santamaria's Salesman

Kevin Peoples' memoir and history *Santamaria's Salesman: Working For The National Catholic Rural Movement 1959-1961* has been reprinted. It can be purchased from any good bookstore or Garratt Publishing for \$44.95

## Australia's Controversial Matron

By Jocelyn Angus



Book Review of Judith Godden, *Australia's Controversial Matron: Gwen Burbidge and Nursing Reform* (Burwood: College of Nursing, 2011) \$30

The accepted canon of traditional nursing history is often marked by progressive reforms in nursing that ignore the epistemic shifts in a particular moment in history.

Dr Judith Godden sets the stage for a deeply researched and compelling moment in nursing history — the story of Gwen Burbidge's nursing career which began and ended in the wake of two world wars (1925-1960). It is here that Godden consolidates her standing as a leading historian in nursing history in Australia.

This captivating story of Gwen Burbidge's career is about the shift from isolationist tendencies of a nursing culture deeply entrenched in moral and vocational callings to sisterhood and her often-treacherous and controversial struggle towards professional recognition. It is within this context that Godden provides an intriguing analysis of politics, power, hierarchy, social and gender control in a period of radical change in medical technology, bureaucratic intricacy and modes of nursing practice. Within this epistemic shift the richly woven story of Gwen Burbidge — nurse, matron, educator, scholar, political nurse activist and reformer — is told.

Despite bouts of ill health throughout her career, Burbidge embraced the crucial importance of nursing leadership in both professional and public life. She stood solo amongst, and often in contention with, male dominated professional, research and industrial forums to advocate better nurse education, pay and conditions in a discipline dominated by, and frequently in conflict with, women. Gwen Burbidge referred to the 'telltale marks' of long-term nursing on one's body and personality, from which no matron emerged unscathed. She encouraged nurses to challenge traditional isolationist barriers and engage in professional, social and political activities inside and outside the nursing community. Her focus was her passion for educated and enlightened professional nurses motivated by improving quality of care for patients.

I, and many of my nursing generation in Melbourne who trained in her wake during the 1960s, benefited from her unrelenting drive to improve the lot of patients, family and nurses at Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital where she was Matron from 1939 until her retirement in 1960. Limited knowledge of

infectious diseases in the general hospital training school curriculum served to foster fear of the consequences of infectious diseases and dread of being sent to Fairfield. In reality, those allocated as trainees at Fairfield Hospital benefited from her legacy. Word soon spread about the amazing 'home like' accommodation for nurses. I have embedded memories of the open vista, verandahs and comfortable cane chairs to put our feet up to debrief on the vivid and sometimes shocking images that marked the lives of patients living with the effects of infectious disease.

This book will be of interest to a wide audience. For those interested in the history of twentieth century Australian attitudes, politics of healthcare and the changing role of hospitals, it has much to offer. For those whose interest is in nurse education, leadership and policy development, it is a valuable tool to identify with the broader professional agenda and policy impact on critical issues such as nurse staff education, recruitment and retention, then and now.

For the broader audience, it is a story of leadership, of professional risk and controversy. It teaches us that controversy challenges, and sometimes transforms, accepted wisdom, and that there is, inevitably, a cost. Gwen Burbidge was, as the title of this book suggests, a truly controversial Matron.

*Dr Jocelyn Angus is a senior lecturer at Victoria University.*

### The BLF History Committee

The BLF History Committee has put together a booklet which celebrates the life and contribution of Norm Gallagher. A controversial figure in the labour movement, interest in Gallagher's contributions to the working lives of builders' labourers has increased in recent years. This booklet, *The Builders Labourers Federation "Never Powerless": Lessons for the 21st Century*, has contributions from retired BLF officials, Norm Wallace and Paddy Donnelly; CFMEU organiser, Dave Kerin, and poetry by George Despard. *The Builders' Labourers* is introduced by Brian Boyd.

The stories reflect the various BLF campaigns in Victoria including 'no ticket, no start', workers' compensation, the many health and safety issues in the industry, site allowances, green bans and more. They also talk of the culture of the unionists, the drinking haunts, and the humour — evidenced in the 'footpath serenading' of Gallagher by a couple of his organisers. In Wallace's piece we are told of a sign over Gallagher's door: 'In any dispute between the worker and the employer, the worker is always right'.

Malcolm McDonald of the BLF History Committee has provided us with an electronic copy of *The Builders' Labourers*. It can be downloaded from the Melbourne Branch ASSLH website.

## 13th Biennial National Labour History Conference

### Good Times, Hard Times? Making Australian Labour History, Remaking Australian Society: 13th Biennial National Labour History Conference

#### *Call for Abstracts*

The 13th Biennial National Labour History Conference will be held 11-13 July 2013 at Unions NSW, Trades Hall, 4-10 Goulburn Street, Sydney. It has become something of a cliché to suggest that the organised labour movement is in crisis, both within Australia and globally.

It has also become received wisdom to suggest that the crisis of labour has triggered a decline in interest in the themes of labour and social history. Seen through a different and more positive lens, one might consider crisis as a means of creating heightened opportunities to pursue old questions in new ways and ask new questions of old subjects.

Indeed, the central purpose of labour history — bringing a historical perspective to the lives of working people and the nature of work itself — is more valid and pressing than ever before. The conference theme, then, encourages participants to reflect on the activist dimensions of labour history and the challenges and opportunities our field currently faces.

A particular concern is how labour movement activists and historians have engaged with each other and the wider community, both in terms of conflict and cooperation.

Presenters are especially encouraged to take into account not only class, but other constitutive elements of working-class identity and activism, such as gender, ethnicity, localism, religion, and nationality as well as comparative and transnational approaches.

Presenters can submit two forms of abstract. For the first time, we will be accepting abstracts with a view to putting them through a formal process of review. These should be between 450 and 500 words and establish the main purpose, arguments and findings of the proposed paper. We will also continue to accept non-refereed abstracts which should be between 250 and 300 words.

Please email your abstracts to Yasmin Rittau [yasmin.rittau@sydney.edu.au] with the email subject 'Labour History Conference' and indicate whether you intend for your abstract to be reviewed.

All abstracts are due by 31 March 2013.

This conference is co-sponsored by the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History and Unions NSW.



## Tributes and Obituaries

By Brian Smiddy

**George Crawford**

13 January 1926 – 7 August 2012

With the death of George Crawford the life a remarkable person has come to an end. For over half a century George served the labour movement, first as a member of the Plumber's Union, joining in 1944 and subsequently becoming a member of the Committee of Management.

He was elected Secretary in 1985, holding this position for over 25 years. Following his retirement, George was elected to the Victorian State Parliament.

He was a delegate to the State ALP Conference for over 50 years and was also a past State President.

The contribution George Crawford made to the improvement of worker's standards of living cannot be measured in words, however he was guided by working class principles.

We mourn his passing and extend our deepest sympathies to his family.

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**Molly Hadfield**

14 July 1922 – 10 November 2012

The Melbourne Branch mourns the passing and celebrates the incredible life of Molly Hadfield, OAM. A moving obituary of Molly, written by her granddaughter, Melissa Marino, was published in the *Age*, 19 December 2012. Molly, a member of the Union of Australian Women for over 50 years, lived a life of activism. In the process she helped to improve the lives of countless people, young and old. To her family we extend our deepest sympathies.



Molly Hadfield and Edith Morgan at the Maritime Union of Australia Dispute in 1998. Photographer unknown.

**Michael O'Sullivan**

25 November 1941 – 7 January 2013

The life of Michael O'Sullivan, a highly respected trade union official and superannuation administrator has come to an untimely end.

Michael became well known to delegates who attended the weekly meetings of the Victorian Trades Hall Council. He was a delegate from the Federated Clerks Union and during the fiery debates that ensued at the meetings, he was always prepared to get to his feet and present his viewpoint.

While he sometimes may have won the debate, this did not mean he always had the numbers when a vote was taken on a particular issue. He was loyal to his union and always prepared to consider other points of view. At meetings Michael would greet other officials and delegates with a smile.

In later life, he became very active in the superannuation industry representing the interests of workers. He held a number of important positions, including Chairman of Care Super, an industry superannuation fund taking care of the affairs of clerical and administrative workers.

To Michael's family we extend our deepest sympathies at his passing.

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**Peter Redlich**

13 June 1936 – 3 January 2013

Peter Redlich, a lawyer, made a lasting contribution to the labour movement. He was a former State President of the Victorian Labor Party and was deeply involved in its reform in the 1970s.

Along with the late Clyde Holding he set up the legal firm, Holding Redlich, which went on to become a very successful labour law firm. Many workers and union officials are grateful for the advice and assistance they received from the legal partnership.

Peter had many interests and he was appointed to a number of Government Agencies. For over 40 years he worked tirelessly for the principles of social justice.

To his family we extend our deepest sympathies and mourn his passing.

## Pat Murray

By Max Ogden

On 13 February 2013, John Morland O'Brien died at the age of 95. During his days underground for the Communist Party of Australia, he was "Pat Murray", and this was the name by which he continued to be known. Several years ago I took Stuart Macintyre to Pat's place to interview him for his history of the Communist Party. His was a fascinating story, and Pat had prepared by writing it out in longhand.

From the time he was about 13 he was known as "Nuts", because of his brilliance, even then, with building and repairing motor bikes and cars, and the surfeit of nuts and bolts after finishing a job. His motto was "never buy anything that you can make or build". When the Communist Party was banned in the early 1940s, he built two printing presses for the Party from scratch – basically out of his head. Several years ago, one of these underground printing presses came to light in the backyard of an old Communist Party member in the NSW Southern highlands, was identified by a couple of ageing comrades and is now in the National Museum of Australia. Pat remained underground for several years. Just when it seemed he could resume a normal life after the war, the Communist Party Dissolution Bill of 1950 threatened the Party's existence once more. Pat was asked by the Party leadership to resume his underground identity and activities. This was an incredible sacrifice that had a huge impact on his marriage and family life. In recent years he re-connected with his son whom he hadn't seen since he was a child.

Pat worked as a fitter at GMH in Dandenong as was an active member of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. For many years he was a shop steward at GMH, Fishermen's Bend, after he swapped over to the AMWU. We first met him, out of the blue, at our CP Metalworkers' Branch, but we did not then know his amazing story.

During his recent illnesses he became, as you would expect of Pat, a great supporter of the nurses' recent wages/conditions battle. Despite becoming more frail he would regularly turn up to join in their picket line. He was loved by those nurses who would look after him. At his funeral, about 15 to 20 nurses in their ANF tops, together with flags and a photographer, gathered outside the chapel at the cemetery about twenty minutes before the ceremony. The cemetery management panicked thinking that this was some sort of demonstration or publicity stunt, and were about to ring the police until assured that the nurses were part of the celebration of Pat's life.

His funeral, attended by some of his old shop steward colleagues from GMH, was held in Buninyong on 18 February, and he was given a great send-off. He was a person for whom it can truly be said that he lived his life as he meant a better society should be lived.

## Free Trade Hall



Manchester packs its history tightly. The Free Trade Hall, which stands on the site of the Peterloo massacre, was later the place where Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney were arrested for insisting on women's right to vote. The incident gave the initial impetus for the Suffragette Campaign to turn from moral suasion to direct action. No one has yet put up a plaque to commemorate the damage caused by free trade! (Peter Love)

## Melbourne Branch News

The Melbourne Branch received nine entries for the inaugural Sam Merrifield Prize. The prize celebrates the best piece of writing on labour and radical history by early career historians. Our panel of judges (Phillip Deery, Peter Love, Geoffrey Robinson and Judy Smart) will announce the winner on Labour Day, 11 March 2013.

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Find us on Facebook: type in 'Labour History Melbourne'

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