CONTENTS

Welcome vii

Full Papers (alphabetically, by first named author)
* indicates that the paper has been refereed

Rights to welfare and rights to work: challenging dole bludger discourse in the 1970s
Verity Archer* 1

A Campaign of Thought Direction: House Journals in Australian Industry Before 1965
Nikola Balnave* 8

Eureka’s impact on Victorian politics: the fight for Democratic Responsible Government in Victoria, 1854-71
Anne Beggs Sunter and Paul Williams* 15

On the Cusp: The Marginalisation of a Coal Mining Community Caught Between Tradition and Modernity
Peta Belic* 22

How to create a tradition: the Seamen’s Union and the Great Strike of 1917
Robert Bollard* 29

The IWW in International Perspective: comparing the North American and Australasian Wobblies
Verity Burgmann* 36

Rupert Lockwood abroad, 1935-38: genesis of a Cold War journalist
Rowan Cahill* 44

Dr Evatt and the Petrov Affair: a reassessment in the light of new evidence
Frank Cain* 50

Labor people – 1930s to 1960s
Robert Corcoran 56

Asian Airlines: An Early Australian Cold War Mystery
Drew Cottle and Angela Keys* 62

ASIO and the Communist Party: New Light on an Old Tradition
Phillip Deery* 67

Mal Colston: The worst rat of the lot?
Jacqueline Dickenson* 75

Raging against the Machine: Unions and technological change in Australia 1978-1996
Tony Duras* 81

Unions as the Nation: The Israeli and Australian Labour Movements
Tim Dymond* 89

‘No more fit for use than a wax-work image would be for a gas-stoker’: ‘Scabs’ and the cultural politics of late Nineteenth-Century Australian labourism
Nick Dyrenfurth* 95

Aristocrats of labour or pioneers of unionism? Traditions of printing unionism in New Zealand: 1860-1913
Peter Franks 102
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From Harvester to Work Choices</td>
<td>Ian Harriss and Bill Robbins*</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bert Cremean and the Birth of ‘The Movement’</td>
<td>Stephen Holt</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was There an Alternative to <em>Liberal</em> Representative Government in 1856?</td>
<td>Terry Irving</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics, Pragmatism, and the Platform: The ALP and federal industrial relations powers</td>
<td>Tommy Khoshaba and Michael Lyons*</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communists, Conservatives and Continuity: The Democratic Labor Party and its Legacy</td>
<td>Michael Lyons*</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.V. Evatt and the Petrov Defection: A Lawyer’s Interpretation</td>
<td>Laurence W Maher*</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can unions be an indispensable force for productive performance?</td>
<td>Max Ogden</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial apprenticeships – another dying Labour tradition?</td>
<td>Bobbie Oliver*</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The culture of long working hours</td>
<td>Mikael Ottosson and Calle Johan Rosengren</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public finance and income redistribution in interwar Australia: towards a class analysis</td>
<td>Geoff Robinson*</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructing a tradition of women’s labour: Representing women’s work at the Brisbane Exhibition</td>
<td>Joanne Scott*</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gippsland Trades and Labour Council and industrial agency in the Latrobe Valley, Victoria</td>
<td>Kathryn Steel*</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 1977 State Electricity Commission of Victoria maintenance workers strike</td>
<td>Kathryn Steel</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How was labour divided? Working class politics in the 1940s</td>
<td>Jonathan Strauss*</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Working Class Political History: Towards a Reassessment</td>
<td>Jonathan Strauss</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewing the 1937 Spanish Civil War debate at the University of Melbourne 70 years on</td>
<td>Fay Woodhouse*</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Abstracts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Losing the lessons of the past</td>
<td>Yossi Berger</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Union Defence Campaign</td>
<td>Brian Boyd</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which side are you on? Women versus the steel giants in Canada and Australia: songs of struggle, stories of sectarianism and solidarity</td>
<td>Diana Covell</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Margaret Creagh and Peter Riley 208

Who was Miss E. Mulcahy? an argument for biographical research
Wendy Dick 208

From Robe River to Work Choices
Braden Ellem 208

Art in Working Life
Paddy Garrity 208

‘I’m a printer’…but what does that mean? The social impacts of technological change within the newspaper industry
Paula Geldens and Jessica Tatham-Thompson 209

Michael Savage
Gerard Hill 209

‘Prison before Slavery!’ Ship’s Desertion and Incarceration as Industrial Tactics on the Australian Waterfront, 1890s to 1930s
Paul Jones 209

‘They Came to Australia With the World’s Largest Shovel!’:
The SUA’s Campaign Against Utah
Diane Kirkby 210

Trade Unions and Beyond: A Comparative Biographical Study of the Leadership of Harry Bridges, Ted Roach and Jack Mundey
Harry Knowles and Greg Mallory 210

Variations on an Antipodean Theme? The Labo(u)r Party in Australia and New Zealand Compared
Ray Markey 210

Historical Patterns of Participation and Safety: BHP at Port Kembla, 1935-1996
Ray Markey and Greg Patmore 211

Labour and the nuclear option
Sigrid McCausland 211

Popcorn, Pickets, Cellphones and Brass-bands: Organising Young Workers in the Cinema Industry 2003-2006
Grace Millar 212

Sydney’s ‘Power without Glory’: the Fitzpatrick- Browne affair as an event in labour politics during the Cold War
Andrew Moore 212

How Can Unions Make Themselves Indispensable?
Max Ogden 212

Labour Traditions: Is the Your Rights At Work campaign challenging our labour traditions?
Jeannie Rea 212

Late Communism and late social democracy: Indian Communism today
Geoff Robinson 213

The Sofinsky Affair: Anti-communism in New Zealand
Lisa Sacksen 214
An Australian labour tradition of interest in Scandinavia
Andrew Scott 214

Intimidation, solidarity and the 1998 waterfront dispute
Chris Sheil 214

Lessons from the 2006 Beaconsfield Mine Rescue
Bill Shorten 215

Respect not Relief: Feminism, Guild Socialism and the Guild Hall Commune in Melbourne 1917
Judith Smart 215

Guido Baracchi and Marxist continuity
Jeff Sparrow 215

Berry, Berryism and the early Victorian Labor Party
Paul Strangio 215

‘New Zealand’s Road to Socialism? the CPNZ and the New Zealand Political Tradition’
Kerry Taylor 216

‘What Can Women Do?’: Female Political Activism on the Ballarat Diggings in the mid-1850s
Clare Wright 216

FILMS 217

About the contributors 218
WELCOME

We would like to acknowledge the East Kulin Nation who are the traditional owners of the country on which we gather for this conference.

On behalf of the labour movement in Melbourne, we welcome you to the 10th National Labour History Conference. The Australian Society for the Study of Labour History’s Melbourne Branch is proud of its close association with the wider movement. Indeed, this Conference is sponsored by the Trades Hall Council and several affiliate unions, as well as the University of Melbourne and Swinburne University of Technology. Our collective exploration of Labour Traditions is led by a mix of activists and academics. In the nature of the Labour History Society, most of our members are proudly both.

This conference occurs at a historical moment when the labour movement is at a crossroad, as organised labour confronts a sustained attack from militant employers and a truculent Federal Government. It is, therefore, especially timely to consider the movement’s traditions. These traditions are more than merely memories of a shared past; they also contain sources of reflection and inspiration for present and future struggles. The breadth of our interests is evident from the programme and embodied in the papers printed here.

The people and organisations who have helped us get here are too many to list individually. They can rejoice in both our gratitude and the modesty of their anonymity. However, on behalf of the Organising Committee, we wish to thank the following for their support in different ways: Joy Damousi, Jackie Dickenson, Terry Irving, Gabrielle Murphy, Judith Smart and Margaret Walters.

We also wish to single out one group who are necessarily anonymous: the referees. Academic refereeing of conference papers is a necessary but thankless task. You know who you are and we thank you. We did not request referees to correct stylistic imperfections in these papers and, as editors, we have allowed authors some stylistic variations.

Julie Kimber, Peter Love and Phillip Deery


Editors’ note on the second edition: these conference proceedings have been reprinted to rectify typographical errors that were introduced into some of the papers during the production process. The contents otherwise remain the same.

Rights to welfare and rights to work: challenging dole bludger discourse in the 1970s

Verity Archer*

This paper will examine the response of pro-welfare-state actors to the dole bludger discursive frame that emerged in the 1970s. It will argue two things. First, that the depletion of pro-welfare-state influence within the institutions of media and parliament enabled the construction of a New Right frame within which the debate about the welfare state took place. This resulted in a New Right colonization of Keynesian and left-wing discourses about the suffering of the poor, thereby disabling them as left-wing pro-welfare discourses. Second, it will draw on Barbara Hobson’s work on collective identities in political claim-making to argue that while pro-welfare advocates lacked the institutional resources dominated by the New Right, the erection of collective identities which drew the unemployed into larger ‘mainstream’ cognitive frames offered the possibility for effective resistance. The major example of this is a socialist discourse that framed the unemployed as part of a larger ‘worker’ constituency. This discourse threatened to undermine the New Right frame by creating its own ‘mainstream’ constituency committed to ‘workers rights’ and the ‘right to work’ which cut across and undermined the New Right’s ‘taxpayer’ constituency and shifted the debate outside of taxpayer versus dole bludger dichotomy. An examination of this discourse will offer insight into the possibilities for Left-wing mobilisation around the issue of unemployment.

Liberal rights and empowerment for the poor: ‘Whitlam era’ discourses and policies

In the late 1960s and early 70s a ‘rediscovery of poverty’ occurred in Australia. Early attempts at this rediscovery occurred in the early-to-mid 60s, the first of which appears to have been economic historian Reg Brown’s ‘Poverty in Australia’ published in the Australian Quarterly in 1963. Following this, other studies of Australia’s ‘hidden’ poverty began to emerge. Economic historian Reg Appleyard spoke in 1965 of ‘pockets of poverty’ evidenced by his own study published in Social Service July-August issue. Other surveys were launched in Queensland and in Melbourne in 1965 and 1966, and a book written by journalist John Stubbs and titled The Hidden People: Poverty in Australia provided further evidence for ‘pockets of poverty’. The publication of Ronald Henderson’s interim report of the Melbourne poverty survey represented the major breakthrough for anti-poverty campaigners. It provided a percentage that was soon publicised and debated in the press. Larger estimates followed, most notably from Peter Hollingworth, Associate Director of the Melbourne-based welfare lobby group the Brotherhood of St Laurence, in his 1972 book The Powerless Poor. Outside of the politically powerful percentage estimates delivered by these studies, an equally powerful discourse emerged that acknowledged and articulated the suffering of the poor. Readers and policy makers were faced with ‘hidden’ distress in the midst of plenty and implored to look beyond traditional nationalist sentiments that characterised Australia as the ‘lucky country’. These ‘forgotten people’, unlike those ‘discovered’ by Prime Minister Robert Menzies in the 1950s, were not middle-class shop keepers and small farmers desirous of government attention, they were: the elderly, migrants, widows, single parents, the sick and disabled and homeless. Stories of their day-to-day struggle with poverty became a key element of left-wing advocacy.

The ‘rediscovery of poverty’ by academics and the press increased the political power of the Left as key voices in academia and media began demanding policy change. Both the Gorton and McMahon Governments extended social welfare, concentrating on subsidies for voluntary agencies and services rather than cash benefits. The pressure that McMahon, in particular, felt is evidenced by his attempt to quash the national debate through the suppression of the Doyle Report on poverty in Victoria in 1972, the year of the Whitlam/McMahon election. Pressure applied by social welfare experts in collaboration with the press led McMahon to establish a National Inquiry into Poverty, to be headed by Ronald Henderson, in the lead up to the 1972 election. The election of the Whitlam Government ensured further development of social welfare policy and pride of place for anti-poverty experts on government committees such as the newly established Social Welfare Commission. From this vantage, new ambitious goals including welfare rights and empowerment for the poor looked achievable.

On 21 December 1972, 19 days after the first Labor Government in 23 years had been elected to federal parliament, Bill Hayden, the new Minister for Social Security wrote to Clyde Cameron, the new Minister

---

3 Ibid., pp. 314-315.
4 Ibid., p. 318.
5 G. Elliott and A. Graycar, p. 95.
for Labour and Industry. The letter identified what Hayden saw as the wrongs of the past. It argued that the Department and employers in general held too much power over the claimant and should no longer dictate terms and conditions contrary to a ‘free, tolerant, liberal society’. Under Hayden, welfare recipients would be allowed a greater degree of autonomy and freedom, especially when it came to personal appearance and job choice.6

The following month, a review of the work test began. The work test, used to measure a claimant’s willingness to work, was altered dramatically to accord with the rights of the welfare recipient in a ‘free, tolerant, and liberal society’. Media reports were mixed. A report in the Fairfax paper The Sun, titled ‘New Deal for the Jobless— Hayden’s Pledge’, was largely sympathetic to Hayden’s agenda, allowing his words to be printed with very little journalistic interruption. In this report Hayden indicated his new policy agenda and his welfare philosophy. ‘The aim of the new Government will be to administer these benefits sympathetically without moralizing or passing judgement on applicants. We must develop a new philosophy based on the belief that benefits are a right and not a charity’, he said.7

Hayden’s ideas were advanced through caucus very quickly. On 19 April a memorandum was sent from the Director-General of Social Security to State Directors containing the amended procedure manual items. Claimants were to be offered work of an ‘equivalent kind’ to the work usually performed and ‘in which the persons training would be used’. Those who were new to the workforce were to be offered work in keeping with skill and personal preference. No claimant was to be work tested on their willingness to accept jobs that did not accord with these criteria. 8 The rights of welfare recipients to determine their own working lives were first and foremost in the new procedure manual. For Hayden, the right to welfare benefits existed in cases of economic need, and independent of personal character. The right to economic sustenance did not exist to the exclusion of other rights. Other rights, such as the right to autonomous decision-making, acted in conjunction, leaving the welfare recipient free to exist on benefits if they chose to do so.

Within the welfare sector, workers began to be influenced by the ALP’s attempts to shift social welfare ideology. The Brotherhood of St Laurence in particular revolutionised its approach to the poor in 1972. The organisation itself had always pursued the dual functions of charity and anti-poverty activism. During the early 1970s the Brotherhood believed that a change had indeed come about. In the years that followed the election of the Whitlam Government the Brotherhood began shifting the focus from activism on behalf of the poor to empowerment for the poor. The organisation now believed that its role was to facilitate the poor in their efforts to gain power through autonomy and political participation. This included the facilitation of alternative, anti-materialistic lifestyles where desired by the claimant together with a social work approach that focused on ‘consciousness raising’ and the structural nature of poverty. In praise of the Whitlam Government’s initiatives, Associate Director of Social Issues and Research at the Brotherhood, Concetta Benn, announced that:

[a] new social ethic has been produced by the alienating effects of increased industrialisation and partly as a backlash to the inhibiting Protestant ethic which still prevails in our community. Its main characteristics are a demand for participation in the decisions which affect people’s lives, a questioning of economic growth for its own sake, and an assessment of the materialist values of our society.9

The shift to New Right frames

By 1974 the climate in which empowerment and rights for the poor had developed as policy goals was beginning to change. The media no longer viewed the rediscovery of poverty as news. Instead newspapers began to discover other things about poverty. In 1973 press articles began speaking of undeserving welfare recipients that had benefited from government policy. These undeserving types were identifiable by their hair and clothes and by their lifestyle choices. The stories were cast in the mould of crime and law and order exposés, intended to shock and disturb middle-class readers and boost sales, while simultaneously chastising the government for its lax approach to welfare administration.10

The real shift, however, occurred in 1974 when inflation and unemployment rose sharply and an economic crisis was declared. New Right ideas had been developing in Australian economic think tanks, in bureaucracy and in business organisations since around 1972. Their proponents helped to discover and

articulate this crisis, announcing the end of Keynesianism and the end of the welfare state in its current form. The media and the Opposition latched on to this crisis and used it to support various agendas, chief among them the removal of the Whitlam Government.11 When the Whitlam Government itself began shaping its discourse and policy around the crisis, a major shift occurred which transferred power and public influence to the New Right. By 1975 anti-poverty activists were sidelined in favour of advice from the increasingly New Right Treasury, a section of the public service with whom the Whitlam Government had always had an acrimonious relationship. Welfare became a highly publicised area of policy through which the government could demonstrate its commitment to fiscal management.12

In January 1974 the Minister for Labour and Industry, Clyde Cameron, began appearing more often than Hayden as the spokesperson for social security. While Cameron had never been a supporter of the Hayden initiatives, he had always maintained a low profile in relation to them, and his opinions were rarely sought. Suddenly, and almost certainly by direction of the party, Cameron stormed the stage, declaring Hayden’s initiatives finished. In January the media began reporting Cameron’s policy initiatives and heralding a new and ‘ambitious’ welfare era. The Murdoch press in particular gave precedence to Cameron’s plans to de-register claimants who did not comply with new benefit rules.13 The autonomy that had been granted to the unemployed was returned to the administrators. Decisions as to what constituted reasonable dress, what constituted a reasonable job offer, and where an unemployed person should and should not move in order to take up a job, fell back into the hands of the Department of Social Security. To these ends, an expert working party was established. Unlike previous working parties on welfare, it contained no anti-poverty activists.

The outcome of Cameron’s expert working party was to reinstate the lifestyle, appearance and personality assessment previously removed by Hayden from the work test procedure manual. The right of the taxpayer to see his or her money directed only to ‘genuine’ and ‘worthy’ recipients became a cornerstone of both Cameron and Hayden’s welfare rhetoric. In contrast to Hayden’s earlier assertions that welfare recipients possessed a right to choose an alternative lifestyle, it was reported that the review would attempt to wipe out ‘hippies’ and ‘commune dwellers’ who ‘collectively receive enough money through unemployment benefit to live’.14

Other ALP members, such as Mick Young and Tasmanian Senator Don Grimes, began to express their commitment to welfare by highlighting the suffering experienced by welfare recipients. Discourses of suffering did not speak to welfare recipients as discourses of rights and justice had done. Instead they spoke directly to those in power and to ‘average Australians’. From 1974 onward, the dominant pro-welfare discourse both within and outside of parliament, attempted to counteract and to educate the proponents of anti-welfare discourse. While stories of suffering had formed a particularly powerful part of the rediscovery of poverty, the shift to New Right frames in media and parliament shifted the meaning and effect of this discourse.

**Discourses of suffering and appeals to the right**

In October 1975, one month before the LCP were instated as the new Federal Government, the Brotherhood of St Laurence produced the first in a series of studies it termed ‘action research’. The studies were developed specifically to show politicians and the public how wrong they had been in branding the unemployed as ‘bludgers’ living in ‘luxury’. It was hoped that the research, by proving otherwise, would end the campaign against the dole bludger. The first publication was titled *Workers Without Jobs*. Its author Graeme Brewer, a senior research officer with the Brotherhood, would become the organisation’s primary author of action research.

One of the key aims of the publication was to provide proof that the unemployed were not willing participants in their own unemployment. In order to prove this Brewer set about surveying 160 unemployed participants in order to gauge their level of work ethic. Among his findings Brewer wrote:

> It is apparent from a considered analysis of the past work experiences of the unemployed and their current job seeking activities that their commitment to work is strong. They did not choose to become unemployed nor do they choose to remain out of work. The desire to

---


13 ‘No dole unless switch in jobs. Cameron threat to unemployed’, *Daily Telegraph*, 8 January, 1974, p. 1

In addition Brewer claimed that the fact that 57 percent of persons interviewed had never been unemployed before proved that these people at least held a strong commitment to the work ethic. He stated that only two participants in the study had expressed anti-work attitudes. The conversations that had led Brewer to conclude the possession of ‘anti-work attitudes’ were not analysed or included. While ‘anti-materialist’ lifestyles had been respected and even encouraged by pro-welfare groups during the early Whitlam era, they received less attention under the changed political circumstances. Now the focus was on challenging the images of the unemployed that had emerged in parliament and media discourse. Chief among these was the dole bludger. The immediate aim of action research was not to raise the social awareness of the unemployed themselves, it was to counteract New Right discourse.

Even those within the ALP who had eschewed the work-ethic assessment as belonging to a past ‘draconian’ welfare era began to counter claims of dole bludging with stories of men and women desperate to work. These stories usually consisted of claims that the person ‘just wanted a job’ and would ‘take anything’ offered. He or she did not wish to be dependent. While this type of work ethic rhetoric did not dominate ALP welfare discourse, the fact that it appeared at all is evidence of a major shift in welfare discourse within the party.

In other stories the unemployed were represented as suffering financially, physically, emotionally and psychologically. The advent of unemployment caused previously stable, healthy individuals to experience life changes and personal changes that could only elicit sympathy from their detractors. The defensive nature of this discourse is apparent. Anti-poverty activists who had previously forged ahead with radical strategies for empowerment were now forced to construct images of the poor for an audience influenced by the media and parliamentary shift to New Right discursive frames. This meant defending images of the poor that they had, themselves, attempted to dismantle.

Some activists recognised the dangers in using these discourses in a media and political climate dominated by New Right welfare frames. In his role as head of the unemployed activist group, Coalition Against Poverty and Unemployment (CAPU) and as a researcher at Footscray’s Urban and Social Research Centre, Harry Van Moorst was the first to coin the term ‘dole pathology’ to describe the effect of discourses of suffering within social research at this time. He reacted against work that focused upon psychological disorder, family violence and drug and alcohol abuse as the major issues surrounding the unemployed. His main objection was not that the unemployed did not suffer, or harbour drug and alcohol problems, or commit crime. Rather Van Moorst argued that by focusing upon these factors, activists failed to counter right-wing discourses that promoted ‘personal change’ rather than social or economic change.

Discourses of suffering were indeed good intentions amidst bad politics as Van Moorst asserted, but they were more than that, they were representative of the New Right’s newfound power to shape the terms of the debate. The role that suffering played in left-wing discourses had not necessarily changed, though it had intensified. What had changed was the frame within which these discourses were interpreted. The shift from Keynesian frames to New Right frames in media and politics ensured that the social, physical and psychological difficulties experienced by the unemployed could be transformed to strengthen New Right claims about dole bludging and the detrimental nature of welfare benefits.

Collective identities and welfare claims – Uniting workers and the unemployed

Alternatives to discourses of suffering existed in structurally focused cognitive frames that drew workers and the unemployed together into the same struggle. Ironically, CES and DSS staff used this frame with greatest effect. Front line ‘bureaucrats’ were despised by many unemployed activists, but in other instances they took on a different character and ceased to be part of the bureaucracy. Unionised DSS and CES workers became comrades of welfare advocates and the unemployed during the late 70s and early 80s. While the unemployed were most affected by the welfare policies of the Fraser Government and undoubtedly most affected by dole-bludger discourse, these workers suffered an undeniable strain. Workers at the CES, DSS and CYSS had suffered staffing cut backs commensurate with the Fraser Government’s attack upon a ‘bloated’ public service. At the same time they had seen their workload increase rapidly throughout the mid-to-late 70s as the rate of unemployment had continued its climb. The government’s campaign against dole bludgers pushed the workers to breaking point. Rules were tightened, work tests were applied more rigorously and more often, staff members were increasingly sent away from the office on targeted field-

16 Ibid., p. 66.
17 Ibid., p. 75.
18 Mick Young, I Want to Work, Cassell Australia, Stanmore, 1979, p. 10.
officer investigations, and workers became the first stop for frustrated and angry clients. The President of the union, Paul Munro, expressed fears for the safety of members claiming physical violence to be the inevitable result of the government’s harsh policies. Every time a decision was made to hunt down the dole bludger, every time the minister implemented new and tighter policies, CES and DSS workers saw their workload spiral. In 1977 Senator Don Grimes reported that the CES and DSS were on a staffing level sufficient only to cope with 100,000 unemployed, and not the 340,000 registered. These workers could not be ignored. They belonged to a strong union, the Administrative and Clerical Officers Association (ACOA), and were responsible for the front-line implementation of the government’s policies.

In July 1979, the Minister for Social Security, Ian Viner, unveiled a ten-point plan to tighten the work test. Included within his statement was a plan to ‘help young people maintain their employable skills’ by directing them into ‘volunteer’ work at which dole rates would be paid, plus an extra $6 a week to cover out-of-pocket expenses. The scheme was to be administered by the CES and DSS. In its article ‘Work test is key to dole blitz’ the Daily Telegraph outlined the main features of the ten-point plan, which they claimed as ‘an attack on those who have used the Social Security System as a “bankroll” to opt out of work and join “the alternative society”’. From now on people would have to accept casual, short-term, part-time and temporary work. Unemployment benefit recipients were to provide details of employers they had approached in an effort to find work. Unskilled workers, and after six weeks, skilled workers, would have to accept any job considered within their capacity. Anyone refusing a job involving considerable travel to and from the place of employment would have to prove that the travel cost more than 10 per cent of wages earned or lose the dole. Anyone who ‘voluntarily’ left a job or who did not meet the requirements would lose benefits for between six and twelve weeks. In addition, the CES were ordered to recall all beneficiaries regularly for fresh work test ‘interviews’.

Talk of the new requirements in the months before their announcement had strengthened the ACOA’s resolve against them. In advance of Viner’s announcement the union issued a discussion paper outlining its dissatisfaction with government policy and urging its members to act contrary to it. Within a month of Viner’s announcement the union began surveying staff to gauge the level of support for a work-test ban. Opinions were mixed, but of the 431 Victorian branch CES respondents, 353 supported a ban if industrial objectives were not met, while 350 also supported a ban on ‘humanitarian grounds’.

In addition, ACOA members were asked to consider, as trade unionists, the effects of the policy on fellow workers. The union saw a link between unemployment benefit policy and the oppression of all workers. Tighter benefit policies were seen to impede the effectiveness of all trade unions by punishing those who refuse unsafe, ill-paid or unsatisfactory work. ‘There can be no clearer example of perversion of social security arrangements for political ends—in this case divisions within unions are fostered, and a check upon industrial action is attempted.’ In August a representative of the union, Paul Munro, met with Ian Viner to discuss ACOA action. Viner was informed of the union’s plans to implement a work-test ban. An unproductive discussion led to the bans being implemented almost immediately.

Three months later the ACOA began a public campaign as CES, DSS and CYSS members joined forces with the radical UWU to form an Anti-Work-Test Committee. On the 17th, the Committee led 100 protesters in a rally staged at a Melbourne swimming pool being opened by the Minister for Health, Ralph Hunt, who had become notorious for his ‘dole-bludger bashing’. One speaker threatened the minister claiming that ACOA members were ‘willing to put their jobs on the line’ if it meant that they would no longer be ‘compelled to do the hatchet work for a government more concerned with neat statistics than the needs of human beings.’

By April the following year the campaign had strengthened. The ACOA had become more involved with the UWU and together they began distributing pamphlets urging the unemployed to ‘take action’. One pamphlet stated that changes to the work test had been intended ‘to bring about short-term political gain and to greatly benefit big business interests’. The ACOA also assured the unemployed that its dissatisfaction with government policy and urging its members to act contrary to it. Within a month of Viner’s announcement the union began surveying staff to gauge the level of support for a work-test ban. Opinions were mixed, but of the 431 Victorian branch CES respondents, 353 supported a ban if industrial objectives were not met, while 350 also supported a ban on ‘humanitarian grounds’.

In addition, ACOA members were asked to consider, as trade unionists, the effects of the policy on fellow workers. The union saw a link between unemployment benefit policy and the oppression of all workers. Tighter benefit policies were seen to impede the effectiveness of all trade unions by punishing those who refuse unsafe, ill-paid or unsatisfactory work. ‘There can be no clearer example of perversion of social security arrangements for political ends—in this case divisions within unions are fostered, and a check upon industrial action is attempted.’ In August a representative of the union, Paul Munro, met with Ian Viner to discuss ACOA action. Viner was informed of the union’s plans to implement a work-test ban. An unproductive discussion led to the bans being implemented almost immediately.

By April the following year the campaign had strengthened. The ACOA had become more involved with the UWU and together they began distributing pamphlets urging the unemployed to ‘take action’. One pamphlet stated that changes to the work test had been intended ‘to bring about short-term political gain and to greatly benefit big business interests’. The ACOA also assured the unemployed that its

20 ACOA, Media Release, 27 August 1979, ACOA Papers, Noel Butlin Archives Centre (henceforth NBAC), Z237 Box 225 file 34/9/15; Geoff Walsh, ‘PS may ban dole test: Fears for staff security’, The Age, 26 September 1979, p. 13.
22 ‘Work test is key to dole blitz’, Daily Telegraph, 24 July 1979, in Administrative and Clerical Officers Association (ACOA) papers, NBAC, Z97 Box 50.
23 ‘The work test, the Commonwealth Employment Service, and unemployed workers’, Bulletin from Barry Cotter, Secretary NSW branch ACOA to ACOA members, ACOA papers, NBAC, Z97 Box 50.
24 DSS application of Work Test. ACOA survey of members, ACOA papers, NBAC, Z237 Box 25; Geoff Walsh, Among those opposed to the ban, RJ Fowler, of the Department of Employment and Youth Affairs stated that he ‘welcome[d] the opportunity to protect the Australian taxpayer…from certain members of the community’. See RJ Fowler, Letter to the Editor, Administrative and Clerical Officers Journal, 13 November 1979, NBAC, Z97 Box 50 34/9/15.
25 ACOA Federal executive agenda item 2. Administration of unemployment benefit, 27 Nov 1979, ACOA papers, NBAC, Z265 Box 140.
27 Draft ACOA leaflet. A statement authorised by the federal executive of the Administrative and Clerical Officers Association, NBAC, Z265 Box 140.
members would interpret the dole rules as liberally as possible and that they believed that ‘if you are unemployed you have the right to receive benefits, and at least at poverty line rates.’ 28 The work-test ban was lifted in 1980 in response to government concessions to employ more front-line workers in its CES and DSS offices. However, the politicisation of the ACOA workers in regard to their role as public servants, the rights of welfare recipients, and the impact of welfare policy on industrial relations remained. Many workers continued to apply the ban covertly well beyond 1980. 29

The impact of the government’s welfare policy on industrial relations did not escape the ALP. Members such as Keith Johnson, Senator James Cavanagh and Deputy Opposition Leader Tom Uren made passionate speeches about the work test and its potential as a weapon for employers. In response to the work test introduced to parliament on 30 March 1976, Johnson argued:

It is a blatant attempt to cow those who are in employment and to discourage the taking of any action which may be regarded as being an assault on the established way of doing things or more likely a threat to the holy cow of profit. The new ‘guidelines’ as I think they are referred to place an enormous and terrible power in the hands of employers and can place an intolerable burden upon those who are employed or who seek employment… Very few if any people like being unemployed and most will go to extraordinary lengths to retain their employment. If there is no prospect of alternative employment or the receipt of unemployment benefit the employee is completely at the mercy of the employer. 30

At one public rally, held at Trades Hall in Sydney in 1976, Tom Uren urged workers to see the ‘dole bludger’ as a tool used by employers and the Fraser Government to divide workers. 31 These words had the potential to speak directly to the workers who were told that the Liberal Government were vanquishing their economic enemies through the use of harsh new welfare policies. The potential existed for workers to see themselves as the victims of welfare policy and to see the benefits to the working class, and particularly the unskilled working class, in the introduction of a more relaxed welfare policy. Although concerns to this effect were at times expressed in parliament, they did not make their way into the papers and never really became a part of public welfare discourse. The most public use of this discourse was within the newsletter publications of the UWU and the UWM. The socialist influence within the UWU and the UWM led to the promotion of unity between the working class and the unemployed. It was claimed that their interests were the same, that they were of the same class and that they shared the same enemy: capitalism. The names of both organisations suggest not just a feeling of unity with workers but an identification of the unemployed as workers.

This type of discourse and action, which draws the unemployed and workers together into the one cognitive frame, is reminiscent of the struggles of the 1890s and 1930s. As Charlie Fox has pointed out, organisations of the unemployed in the 1930s were generally founded by, and closely tied to, reformist labour unions or to the Communist Party. Both reformers and radicals fostered solidarity between the employed and unemployed organisations under their direction. The Communist Party, for example, feared that fascism would become an attractive option for the Australian working class and saw unity between the employed and unemployed as an antidote, urging that workers join the unemployed in their struggles and vice versa. 32 In addition, the ACTU and Trades Hall Council became principal organisers of unemployed activism. While communists drew on a discourse that pitted the unemployed and workers against capitalists, reformers saw ‘the money power’ as the enemy of the unemployed and workers. It was they who had created unemployment in an attempt to smash the working class. 33

Despite the discursive solidarity displayed by the UWU during the 1970s and 80s, organisational solidarity between labour unions and the unemployed is difficult to find. Up to this point the UWU in particular had attempted to forge links with more powerful labour unions. For a brief period following its formation in 1977, the UWU was keen to establish an infrastructure upon which unemployed activists could rely for support. While unemployed activists had very little in the way of financial and power resources, it was agreed that if they could manage to establish themselves as part of a broader labour movement network, these all-important mobilising tools may become accessible. To these ends it courted Trades Hall and attempted to gain the support of the ACTU, and there is some evidence of success, with the ACTU releasing in 1980 a circular calling on local Trades Halls to organise protests against unemployment. 34 Aside from isolated instances however, labour organisations were largely unwilling to connect themselves with unemployed politics.

---

28 Ibid.
29 Law cites ‘several sources’ who have informed him of this, Law, op cit, pp. 299-300.
31 Uren, T, MP, Speech to Public Rally on Unemployment, Trades Hall, Sydney, 6 October 1976, pp. 913-16.
33 Ibid., p. 54.
34 Ibid., p. 32.
Discourses that sought to frame the ‘worker’ to include the unemployed were largely unsuccessful in the public arena. This was partly because they competed with more successful New Right cognitive frames that mobilised institutional and financial resources to establish the worker as ‘taxpayer’. Although alliances between workers and the unemployed received some attention in the press during the ACOA work-test ban, they were never really framed within the media as anything more than opportunist radicalism on the part of the unemployed. More attention was given to the claims of overworked CES and DSS staff. Other distinctly anti-capitalist discourses that framed the unemployed and workers as allies in their fight against capital were virtually ignored by the media. These discourses were mainly relegated to activist pamphlets. Their potential as counter discourses was never fully realised within the public domain.

**Conclusion**

The shift to New Right frames in media and parliament depleted the institutional power resources of the Left and led to a colonization of left-wing pro-welfare discourses by the New Right. The shift to New Right discursive frames therefore transformed the meaning of these discourses in such a way that they supported broader New Right agendas. Within these dominant frames discourses of suffering reinforced claims that the provision of welfare is bad for the poor and that bureaucracy fosters welfare dependence. This reveals the extent to which resistance can be contained by dominant discourses.

It also reveals the potential within left-wing discourses to erect alternative cognitive frames that challenge the taxpayer/dole bludger dichotomy. As Barbara Hobson has argued, the ‘process of identity formation itself is crucial for understanding the ability of collectivities to articulate claims and exercise power in welfare states.’ But when these collective identities are denied access to the power resources that exist in media and parliament they are destined to remain peripheral. The New Right were able to combine a process of agenda-supportive cognitive framing with financial and institutional resources unmatched by the Left. It is this combination that has led to the domination of New Right welfare agendas in Australia.

---

35 Hobson, p. 2.
A Campaign of Thought Direction: House Journals in Australian Industry Before 1965

Nikola Balnave*

House journals have been used by Australian employers to mould worker attitudes and build worker commitment to managerial goals since the late nineteenth. While also a means of communication over work-related matters, the propaganda value of house journals was of primary importance to most employers, with such publications being central to a company’s welfare policy. This paper provides an examination of house journals during the period of welfarism in Australia, 1890-1965. It begins with a brief discussion of the welfarism movement in Australia, followed by an overview of house journals in this context. The content of house journals is then analysed, with emphasis on the weight afforded to propaganda and general items relative to education and management communication. The labour response to employer-disseminated literature and propaganda is then examined to determine the value of house journals as a communication tool, and as a means of creating a spirit of cooperation, loyalty and esprit de corps.

House journals have been used by Australian employers as a means of fostering worker commitment to managerial goals since the late nineteenth. While also playing an educational or communication role, the propaganda value of house journals was of primary importance to most employers, with such publications being central to a company’s welfare policy. This paper provides an examination of house journals during the period of welfarism in Australia, 1890-1965. It begins with a brief discussion of the welfarism movement in Australia, followed by an overview of house journals in this context. The content of house journals is then analysed, with emphasis on the weight afforded to propaganda and general items relative to education and management communication. The labour response to employer-disseminated literature and propaganda is then examined to determine the value of house journals as a communication tool, and as a means of creating a spirit of cooperation, loyalty and esprit de corps in Australian industry.

Welfarism

Welfarism was defined by the United States (US) Department of Labour in 1919 as ‘Anything for the comfort and improvement, intellectual or social, of the employees, over and above wages paid, which is not a necessity of industry nor required by law’. Thus, it did not involve a definite set of practices, but covered a wide range of programs of a voluntary nature. Welfare schemes that could have been introduced in conjunction with house journals include provident funds, educational facilities, housing and stores, recreational facilities, medical care, and other forms of superior amenities. Essentially, employers were concerned with the supply and efficiency of labour in the introduction of welfare schemes. In terms of supply, the goal was to improve the quantity and quality of the company’s labour stock. In dealing with efficiency, management wanted to convert labour power (the potential to work) into labour (actual work effort). To achieve this objective, welfare schemes were designed to enhance managerial control of labour, and to maintain this control in the face of attempts at resistance or regulation by individual workers, unions, and the state. In other words, welfarism was a method of reinforcing managerial prerogatives over production and personnel decisions at the workplace.

Welfarism was a popular management strategy overseas, particularly in the US, during the first three decades of the twentieth century. However, the movement was slower to develop in Australia. The vast majority of private sector enterprises remained small-scale prior to WWII, and entrepreneurs or the foremen relied on personal contact and simple forms of control. Despite the limited number of companies experimenting with the strategy, the number of workers covered was considerable. Public sector employment was proportionately significant in Australia, and such enterprises were often leaders in the establishment of welfare schemes. Furthermore, while the single comprehensive survey of inter-war industrial welfarism in Australia, conducted by Mauldon in 1931, found only seventy-six private establishments with organised welfare schemes, because of the size of most of the firms, the aggregate number of employees affected totalled about 40,000. In other words, welfarism in the private sector was generally introduced by larger organizations seeking new ways to manage a growing workforce, and that had the financial resources to experiment.

However, it was during WWII that the welfare movement expanded rapidly in Australian industry. In a

---


similar way to the British and US Governments during WWI, the Australian federal Government played a crucial role in promoting welfarism as a way of reducing absenteeism and improving morale amongst an industrially inexperienced workforce. The government initiated an emergency training scheme for welfare officers who were subsequently employed in both public and private establishments. State departments were also instrumental in promoting welfarism as a labour management strategy to private industry. By mid-1945, more than 100 welfare officers were employed in Australian industry, 30 per cent of these in the private sector.  

State advocacy for welfarism continued into the immediate post-war period, with the continuation of training courses for welfare officers, and the promotion of the strategy through government publications. This period witnessed rapid economic growth and an expansion in product demand. Labour markets became far tighter and employers were faced with a full employment economy in which workers and their unions had significantly greater bargaining power. This context saw a renewed focus on welfare provision in an attempt to attract and retain scarce workers, and to reduce labour militancy. At the same time, these contextual challenges prompted employers to expand the personnel function, a development again promoted by the state. Overseas, the personnel movement had taken root and, as in the pre-WWII period, local subsidiaries of foreign companies imported personnel techniques and provided examples to local industry of more advanced labour management practices. The role of personnel officers was subsequently extended beyond traditional welfare provision to include formalized employment, induction and training procedures and financial incentive schemes. As a result, welfarism was gradually subsumed as part of the personnel management movement in post-War Australian industry.

**House Journals - Overview**

House journals were not used extensively by Australian employers in the period prior to WWII. Indeed, Mauldons's 1931 survey found that of the 76 welfarist firms, only four had house journals. Some journals appeared early in the century such David Jones’ *Between Ourselves* which ran between 1919 and 1921. In the public sector, the NSW Government Railway’s Institute launched the *New South Wales Railway Budget* in September 1892, the first in a continuous series of staff magazines until 1930 when the constraints of the depression forced its discontinuance. However, it was not until the war year that house journals became popular in Australian industry.  

During the war years there was a move by the Department of Labour and National Service (DLNS) to establish factory newspapers or magazines in factories where no such publications existed and to improve the standard of the established magazines. At a conference called to discuss these possibilities in 1943, it was decided that the publication of factory newspapers or magazines was desirable for factory morale and unity and should be encouraged or initiated by welfare officers. A ban on paper supplies was mentioned as a stumbling block, but it was decided that steps be taken to lift this ban to facilitate the publication of house journals. This was achieved, a permit then being required for the release of the necessary amount of paper.  

The need to improve morale and limit the threat of labour disruptions during the post-War period caused an increase in the publication of these journals. A 1948 survey conducted by the DLNS examined 83 house journals across NSW, Victoria and South Australia, while a 1958 survey received information from 53 establishments in Melbourne alone. The latter survey was based on answers to questionnaires sent to all establishments in Melbourne known to publish or to have published, house journals. Of the 53 completed, the most heavily represented were chemical and oils (8), paper products (5), and metal manufacture, vehicle construction, and retail (4 each). This suggests the need for new approaches to assist in the management of growing workforces in these industries during the post-War period. However, all told 21 different industries were represented thus suggesting the value of house journals to a wide range of employers. Indeed, in 1956, the Industrial Services Division of the DLNS reported on the large and increasing number of organisations finding house journals ‘to be a worthwhile investment’ due to their ‘effectiveness for passing on vital information to employees’, and the contribution that a journal could make to ‘team spirit’.

---

6 ‘To Discuss Possibility of Establishing Factory Newspapers’, 20 May 1943, AA, SP 146/1; 575/5/2; Correspondence from S.D. McPhee, Deputy Director, IWD to E.J. Moran, Welfare Officer, West Maitland; Factory News Sheets, 27 Nov 1943, AA, SP 146/1; 575/5/2.
By 1963, the trend, particularly among larger companies, was one of making public relations departments responsible for the production of house journals. This was accompanied by the reduction in the number of welfare or personnel departments having editorial responsibility for the magazine. Such arrangements were in line with a wider trend amongst companies of shifting the responsibility for schemes from welfare committees or departments to other departments or outside organisations.

**Communication or Propaganda?**

The two primary aims of employers when introducing a house journal were to keep employees informed, and to create an esprit de corps. However, evidence suggests that it was the latter goal, and its role in enhancing managerial prerogative, that took precedence. As the General Manager of the Bank of NSW wrote in the first issue of *The Etruscan*, the Bank’s journal:

> The acquisition of further knowledge and the development of efficiency are essentials, but no aim is more important than the maintenance, throughout the service of the spirit of fellowship, mutual confidence and co-operation, that are characteristics of our staff. It was in the minds of those who moved for the establishment of this magazine that, in drawing us all still further together, it would strengthen the unity that is a feature of our service today.

The ‘one big happy family’ rhetoric of house journals often depicted itself in the names of the magazines, for example, *Between Ourselves, We at Shell*. Other titles sought to dispel the harshness of industrialisation by injecting a touch of humour such as *Gunam Flash, Hendon Howl, Wrangler.*

How were house journals designed to create the ‘one big happy family’ image? On the one hand, the goal was to convince employees that the company cared about their personal goals and aspirations. This is apparent in the large amount of space devoted to issues such as births of children, marriages, travel, promotions and general gossip. Indeed, the 1948 survey of 83 house journals found that on average these journals devoted 42.7 per cent of space to material of special interest to employees including in-plant and off-plant personal items and company sporting and social activities. As Brandes has noted; ‘When employees saw their own goals and those of their work-mates materialising, they would develop a consciousness of their stake in the company’s success. The feeling that personal goals could be achieved by association with a company would manifest itself in an enhanced spirit of cooperation, mutual respect, and esprit de corps’.

On the other hand, house journals often aimed to build worker trust in management. Executives would often write a column for the journal, an editorial or a series of articles, depicting themselves as an expert and in turn impressing upon the employees their management’s wisdom. Similarly, magazine editors often tried to build trust by personalising management. In general, this meant portraying executives, not as impersonal bureaucrats, but as humans. For example, the front page of the Sulphide Corporation’s employee magazine at its Cockle Creek Chemical Works was devoted to ‘Potted Biographies’ – photographs and autobiographies of one staff and one non-staff member. This could create the impression that every individual was equally valuable to the organisation. Once the employees accepted management’s expertise, so the assumption went, they would be content with their place in the organisational hierarchy. This would increase compliance to management’s dictates, in turn fostering industrial peace and harmony.

Finding the right balance of space devoted to workers and to management was clearly difficult. A 1949 study of James Hardie & Co. indicates that too much focus on management as experts, and as humans, could breed resentment amongst employees. The following comments were typical of employee views about personal items in *Fibrolite Trimmings*, the house journal of the company: ‘The men are interested in news of the factory doings’; ‘There is too much about the lives of senior company men. They forget that some employees also have very interesting lives’; ‘Some fellows like the bits about their work friends the best’; ‘Trimmings only contains items about the office people. I submitted a notice about my mate’s engagement, but it wasn’t published. Who cares what the office people do, or whether office blokes plant lawns or build houses in their spare time?’ This suggests that workers were more likely to identify with each other on a personal capacity through house magazines than with management and the company as a homogenous unit.

The above discussion indicates a subtle approach to moulding worker attitudes and building unity

---

and commitment. According to Brandes, most editors of house journals in the US preferred this indirect method of conveying their message. A 1922 report by the National Personnel Association ‘showed that editors treated frank discussion of controversial topics much like a cat treats water’. The content of these journals focused mainly on trivia and ‘folksy humour’, however they were still designed to sell a social message. As one editor said: ‘Call it education or propaganda or what not, a continuous campaign of thought direction is necessary…in order to produce the greatest degree of loyalty and efficiency.’

Nevertheless, the NSW Government Railways, one of the Australia’s largest employers and a leader in welfarism, rejected the subtle approach, and directly promoted managerial goals through house journals. While the NSW Railways Budget contained the general light-hearted content found in other journals, the goals of unity and efficiency were explicitly promoted. The initial editorial of the NSW Railways Budget, stated that it aimed to increase the workforce’s ‘esprit de corps’ and that the railway’s success depended upon the co-operation of all, that there could not be any ‘drones’, as ‘all must be working bees in this hive of industry; each in his allotted sphere must work with earnestness to build a complete and harmonious whole’. The aim was the same 32 years later when The Staff was launched as the next in the series of house journals of the Railways and Tramways. ‘Its sole aim, its one ambition, will be to inculcate a spirit of fraternity and to create an atmosphere of contentment throughout the entire service. Efficiency and public approval will inevitably follow.’ In the next issue it was noted that ‘in whatever respects its scope is extended, the original intention remains fixed – that is, that the goal of every railway and tramway man’s ambition must be the betterment of himself and the improvement of the service we render to the public.’

The Staff incorporated the existing publications of the Railways – The Railway Magazine, The Commissioners Monthly Bulletin, the Safety First Pamphlet and It’s Your Service – Help Improve It. The latter was a monthly four-page publication launched in November 1921 with the aim of ‘securing the better co-operation of staff in their efforts to achieve the highest possible efficiency’. It presented the previous month’s results of working and indicated paths to future improvements, and stressed the importance of public relations, economies, cooperation with and loyalty to management. In addition, the publication emphasised that it was the worker’s fault and not his job, if he disliked his work, and pointed out the opportunities of advancement and community service through hard work.

The content of this publication remained unchanged when it was incorporated into The Staff. Separate sections were devoted to ‘It’s Your Service’, and to ‘Safety’. Quotes about efficiency were often scattered throughout the pages of The Staff such as this from Henry Ford: ‘A manual labourer must have a limit on his hours, otherwise he will wear himself out. If he intends to remain always a manual labourer, then he should forget about his work when the whistle blows; but if he intends to go forward and do anything, the whistle is only the signal to start thinking over the day’s work in order to discover how it might be done better.’ And this from George Ade: ‘Every man is a busy bee when he finds the work he likes. He is called ‘lazy’ only when he hangs back on a job that does not arouse his interest. Get friendly with your task and the hours will be short.’ In addition, the journal reported the results of student’s exams, published lists of names of workers receiving bonuses and commendations for suggestions and inventions, encouraging the men to better themselves. Clearly then, The Staff was not an exercise in the subtle moulding of worker attitudes. It directly promoted its goals of unity, co-operation and efficiency and, indeed, emblazoned its motto of ‘Safety, Courtesy and Efficiency’ on the cover of each issue.

House journals were also a public relations device. Indeed, they provided an opportunity for companies to publicise their efforts to improve the physical and cultural wellbeing of workers. A 1963 survey found that those companies distributing magazines by mail did so with a view to fostering good public relations. Thirty-one of the 41 undertakings studied distributed copies outside the organisation. Recipients in order of frequency were retired officers, agents, parent or associated overseas companies, members of Parliament, customers, newspapers, unions, radio and television stations, schools, libraries, and other undertakings. The recipients demonstrate the widespread publicity gained from house-journals. While this could cultivate favourable public opinion, the focus on parliamentary members and unions also indicates a direct strategy to curtail outside intervention and regulation.

The NSW Railways provides an example of an undertaking using a house journal for public relations purposes. In December 1921 the Railway Commissioners appointed a Publicity Officer whose role was to supply information to the press concerning railway operations and to reply to correspondence and newspaper criticisms. By July 1925 the Publicity Officer supervised all management publications, including The Staff. Consequently, a large proportion of the house journal was devoted to ‘Public

---

15 Brandes, American Welfare Capitalism, p. 65.
16 The Budget, 15 September 1892.
17 The Staff, Vol. 1, No. 1, January 1924, p. 5.
18 The Staff, Vol. 1, No. 2, February 1924.
19 It’s Your Service – Help Improve It, November 1921.
20 The Staff, Vol. 1, No. 2, February 1924.
Relations’. This section replied to the criticisms, complaints and misrepresentations laid on the railways by the media and press. The aim, according to the editor in the first issue, ‘is to assist every member of the railway and tramway staffs to be prepared to answer criticism, because we are all concerned when the service is attacked. If we are wrong, we will admit it; if our critics are wrong we will say so in plain terms.’

And in plain terms they did reply. Indeed, some readers resented the deliberate frankness that characterised this section of the journal. But as stated in the journal; ‘When people who profess to speak on behalf of the public suggest that the railway and tramway services are inefficiently operated and staffed with incompetents, or worse, The Staff intends to stand up to them.’ However, this attitude could only be maintained if the services rendered were efficient. For this reason, it was stressed to the workers, ‘The Staff has no more time for the incompetent or inefficient employee than it has for the unjust critic…The Staff will fight both, because we realise that only in that way can we ensure for the services the measure of public approval which we are convinced is their legitimate due.’ Thus, the public relations section of The Staff served a number of purposes. Firstly it defended the company against public criticism and calls for outside intervention in the service. Secondly, it promoted reciprocal loyalty from workers – as was stated in the first volume of The Staff, ‘Help us, and you will find that we will be able to help you!’

If the enterprise was willing to so publicly defend the efficiency of its employees, the workers were encouraged to provide work effort worth defending. It also created an ‘us against them’ atmosphere, in which ‘us’ were the entire Railway service, from the high commissioner down to the ‘lowliest’ employee, hence creating unity within.

So what then of the communication role of house journals? The weight afforded to this and the more general appeal topics designed to promote unity and disseminate company propaganda varied between companies. The 1948 survey of Australian industry discovered a trend away from persistent gossip in house journals, a trend that was also occurring in the US. When the various topics in the journals were grouped, matters of special concern to management (company policy and practice, technical matters, safety and health) were given 27.2 per cent of the space, material of special interest to employees (letters to the editor, in-plant and off-plant personal items, and sporting and social activities) received 42.7 per cent, general material received 26.4 per cent, and advertising 3.7 per cent. While this compared favourably to a study conducted in the US, it still fell short of the break down recommended in an influential book of the time The Successful Employee Publication - management matters 40 per cent; employees’ interests, 50 per cent; and other material, 10 per cent. If these recommendations were valid, the typical house journal in Australia should have devoted more space to management issues if it was to effectively fulfil its functions as a communication tool. The large amount of space devoted to general topics may be indicative of the need to provide general magazine appeal. More importantly, it suggests that Australian house journals were designed with an eye to creating unity and building contentment and commitment.

Particularly in the period prior to WWII, house journals emphasised the perceived role of women in industry and at home. For example, the Bank of New South Wales often included articles that would interest the females such as ‘A knack with Nylon’, ‘Women and Television’, ‘Wine, Women and Devilled Crab’, as well as advice on how to create a healthy diet for a family. Reekie demonstrates how house journals in the retail industry promoted the gendered expectations of staff. David Jones’ Between Ourselves for example urged male employees to ‘stick with the firm’ by pursuing long-term career goals, while ‘women were subjected to numerous, if chatty and often humorous, injunctions relating to their physical appearance, deference to male authority and the adoption of middle class values of respectability’. A common theme was the necessity for a saleswoman to be ‘charming’ to her customers. As Reekie notes, ‘A charming feminine and deferential sales assistant would not only secure more custom for the store but was also less likely to challenge her employer over wages and working conditions’.

Nevertheless, the 1948 survey of house journals found that those of department stores devoted the most space to ‘management communications’, perhaps due to the nature of business. It was reported that department stores tended to include their employees in their public relations policy as not only were the employees in close contact with the buying public, they were also potential customers, hence the need to keep them informed on company policy, practices and developments. Consistent with pre-War findings, however, the magazines from the ‘women’s’ industries devoted most space to topics not related to the plant. The distribution of space between topics shown by ‘men’s industries’ magazines was very similar to that shown by the overall total. Textile mill magazines had the least space devoted to communications from management, with 70 per cent of space allocated to material not related to the work situation. The survey also found that companies based in more than one state devoted much of the same space...

23 The Staff, Vol. 1, No 4, 22 April 1924, p. 197.
24 The Staff ,Vol. 1, No. 1, January 1924.
to employees’ interests as the other groups, although these magazines paid more attention to in-plant personal items. This arose from the need to keep employees informed of other branches activities, a need not so prominent when employees were in one establishment.  

While there was a trend towards allocating more space to management or work matters during the post-War period, journals needed to be readable if they were to serve as an educational or communicative tool. Most studies of house magazines during the post-War period used a method based on the length of sentences used together with syllable count of the words in a set sample passage in order to determine readability. A 1949 study of the readability of 83 Australian magazines based on this method concluded that nearly three-quarters were either fairly difficult or difficult to read. In human interest, they performed better, although 19 were ‘dull or only mildly interesting’. The authors concluded that ‘This evidence, which agrees with what one might have thought from a critical scanning of the magazines, suggests that house magazines suffer as a means of communication because they are not as readable as they might be’.  

The nature of the information provided was also limited in the eyes of some workers. Workers at the Brooklyn factory and South Melbourne office of James Hardie & Co., for example, desired greater information on working conditions, company problems, and company products to be included in the company’s journal *Fibrolite Trimmings*. While a 1949 analysis of five monthly issues of the journal found that *Trimmings* devoted a greater proportion of space to management topics than average (when compared to the 1948 survey above), this was mainly made up of technical issues rather than company policy and practices. When interviewed about the journal’s content, typical responses of the workers included the following:  

‘Management, not only at Hardie’s, are at their wit’s end to stop people leaving, and the things we now have and the way management is now treating us may be only a means of overcoming present difficulties. What if work becomes scarce? Will all these things be suddenly taken away?’  

‘Yes, I’m on bonus, but I don’t know how long it will last.’  

‘If things take a turn for the worse, will these Committees and things disappear?’  

‘The firm has done a lot for men’s working conditions, but will it last?’  

Workers, therefore, were concerned about security of employment and were suspicious of how long the co-operative effort of the company would continue. They were not convinced by the company propaganda disseminated through house journals. In turn, while management was happy to use the house journal as an educational tool to update workers on the technical aspect of their work, it remained guarded in terms of how much information regarding business operations should be shared with employees. A 1956 survey of 48 NSW house journals supports this conclusion. Seventy-four per cent of these house journals contained details on company products, and allocated on average 21.7 per cent of space to this subject. However, only 24 per cent of the journals included details on the future plans of the company, and allocated an average of 5.8 per cent of the journal to this issue. Thus, in general, house journals represented a façade of consultation with the workforce regarding production and personnel decisions.  

In some cases, workers used the house journal as their own medium through which to criticise management practices. As Reekie notes, the employees of David Jones used *Between Ourselves*, the company house journal between 1919 and 1921, to express discontent with, for example, ‘irksome house rules, dress regulations and an unequitable distribution of the yearly bonus.’ The ability of workers to speak out in this fashion was clearly determined by the editorial location of the journal.  

For other workers, employer-generated literature was perceived as ‘a deliberate falsification of what “life was really like”’. As Lyons and Taksa discovered, working people tended to identify their own interests with those of their fellow workers, and thus preferred the literature disseminated by the labour movement to house journals. Popular papers read by workers in the period 1890-1930 included *Labor Daily*, the *Australian Worker* and the *Tribune*. Unions often used their own journals to undermine the propaganda disseminated through company house journals. Frances notes that in 1922 the Clothing Trades Union retaliated against the welfarism of Pelaco in the union journal, warning workers not to mistake the better wages and conditions for philanthropy, ‘since it paid the bosses to keep the workers contented and willing’. The union also warned that the propaganda in the Pelaco house journal was ‘an insidious weapon against unionism and class-consciousness, and that workers should not feel too contented since

---

that was the “first stage to retrogression”.” 34 Similarly, when The Staff was launched in 1924, the NSW ARU advised its members to return it to the postman unopened as it was a ‘bucket of whitewash for the Commissioners and their satellites’. 35 Patmore notes that the Railway and Tramway Officers’ Association’s Gazette was less critical, congratulating the first issue of The Staff, but at the same time stated that the editorial gave the false impression that the Commissioners were ‘philanthropists’. 36 Overall, the labour response largely thwarted management objectives to create a loyal and efficient workforce through the use of house journals.

Conclusion
In the period 1890-1965, two objectives were foremost in the minds of employers when introducing house journals. Firstly, these journals were used as an educational or communicative tool, to keep the workers informed. Secondly, house journals were designed to mould worker attitudes, and build morale and unity. The latter goal, and its role in enhancing managerial prerogative, was afforded significantly greater weight during these years. While there was a trend towards allocating more space to management communications in the post-War period, particularly in male dominated industries and department stores, the information provided on production and personnel matters remained limited. Such information largely represented a facade of consultation, and made the propaganda role of house journals even more evident. Overall, labour resistance to employer-disseminated publications and propaganda in Australia undermined the role of house journals in providing the ‘continuous campaign of thought direction’ needed to build a content, loyal and cooperative workforce.

35 Patmore, A History of Industrial Relations in the NSW Government Railways, p. 400.
36 Ibid., p. 400.
Eureka’s impact on Victorian politics: the fight for Democratic Responsible Government in Victoria, 1854-7

Anne Beggs Sunter and Paul Williams

This paper examines the impact of radical political movements on the development of parliamentary democracy in Victoria, Australia. Radical political groups sprang up in Victoria following the discovery of gold in 1851. Alluvial Gold has been described as the most democratic of minerals, allowing all classes, races and ages an equal opportunity to win material gain. When gold was discovered in abundant quantities in Victoria in the early 1850s, the old pastoral ascendency that had dominated political life in the colonies was challenged by the flood of immigrants from all parts of the world. These immigrants gathered on the goldfields to demand their political rights. In making their demands, they were strongly influenced by ideas and examples from other continents and colonies, notably by the English Chartists and by the achievements of the Canadian colonists after their rebellions of 1837-8. As in Canada, so at Ballarat blood was shed by men uttering the cry ‘no taxation without representation’. This paper argues that the Eureka Stockade did indeed have a democratizing impact on the implementation of the Victorian constitution.

The notion of responsible government, or an executive responsible to a legislature, and through it to the people, was raised by Canadians in May 1829 when they petitioned the British parliament for self-government. Canadian precedents were very important for democrats to use in Australia in their fight to secure self-government and parliamentary democracy. A strong democratic movement, organized on the Victorian goldfields between 1853-5, was able to re-write the Victorian constitution after it had received Royal Assent in 1855. But as Peter Lalor, the Irish Commander-in-Chief of the diggers at the Eureka Stockade, commented in 1855; ‘a British Government can never bring forth a measure of reform without having first prepared a font of human blood in which to baptise that offspring of their generous love’. Lalor’s statement was made soon after the Eureka Stockade incident of 3 December 1854, when 30 miners were killed by Her Majesty’s police and soldiers while in the act of protesting against the policies of the Victorian government. Lalor’s argument was that blood had to be spilt before political reform could be gained. This view was radically different from that of Sir Edmund Burke, who at the end of the eighteenth century had extolled the need for ties within the Empire that were ‘light as air but strong as iron’. This seeming paradox became the theme for Peter Cochrane’s recent study of the evolution of responsible government in New South Wales. Here was a paradox that the Colonial Office and the Secretary of State for the Colonies would take a long time to come to terms with.

London was not prepared to listen to the demands of its Australian colonists for self-government as long as they remained convict colonies. But the clamour of the free citizens for a stake in government increased, led by the Australian Patriotic Association in Sydney from 1835. The Australian Patriotic Association, with W.C. Wentworth as Vice President, aimed to win representative government for New South Wales, albeit on behalf of propertied interests. Charles Buller MP was employed by the Association as their London agent in 1838, and he proved an able advocate of the citizens of New South Wales. Australian advocates of self-government were interested to read of rebellions in Upper and Lower Canada in 1837-8. Democrats in Lower Canada (French speaking Quebec) and Upper Canada (Ontario) were dissatisfied at their system of government, where the elected Legislative Assembly could be overridden by the nominated-for-life upper house and the Governor, whose ministers were not responsible to the Assembly. It was ‘an arbitrary, arrogant, vindictive and fraudulent oligarchy’. In Lower Canada, the Assembly under Louis Joseph Papineau had sent a petition signed by 80,000 citizens to London with 92 Resolutions seeking responsible government and a more liberal franchise. The petition was rejected

3 Anne Beggs Sunter, ‘Birth of a Nation; Constructing and Deconstructing the Eureka Legend’, Ph D thesis, University of Melbourne, 2002, which explored the democratic, republican and cultural contributions of Eureka to Australian society.
4 Quoted in Peter Cochrane, Colonial Ambition; Foundations of Australian Democracy, Carlton, Melbourne University Press, 2006, p. 9
5 Cochrane, Colonial Ambition.
6 Sweetman, Constitutional Development of Victoria, 1851-5, p. 97.
7 Benjamin Wait, quoted in Audrey Oldfield, The Great Republic of the Southern Seas, p. 42.
and the governor issued warrants for the arrest of the militants, some of whom had declared a republic. A separate political reform movement arose in Upper Canada, led by the democratic minority in the Legislative Assembly. The militant wing of the movement took up arms but as in Lower Canada, the movement was ruthlessly suppressed by the Governor – by 1838 the Governor was none other than Sir George Arthur, late of Tasmania, who ordered the execution of captured rebels found guilty of treason, or else transportation to the Australian colonies.

Lord Durham was sent to take over as Governor-General of Lower Canada in 1838, with the special task of reporting on the political situation in Canada. His *Durham Report* profoundly influenced the political future of Canada, and of Australia. From June to September 1839, the report was serialized in the pages of the *Sydney Gazette*. According to Sweetman, Governor Richard Bourke declared in the NSW Legislative Council that ‘every man would do well to read it’. Durham recommended that the two Canadian provinces be united, that the Legislative Council become elective, and that the Executive Council be made responsible to the Assembly. This was in fact the platform of the democratic movement which had been suppressed, and these reforms would be introduced in 1848. Peter Lalor’s words about the necessity of a font of blood preceding reform are certainly true of Canada in 1838, as they were also true of Ireland in 1798 and 1848.

The *Durham Report* would influence the Australian constitutions of the 1850s, but before that report was adopted, the British government looked at offering some form of self-government to New South Wales. When James Macarthur was visiting London in 1842, he drafted with Charles Buller’s help a document that became the basis of the ‘blended house’ concept of representative government offered to the Australian colonies from 1842 – one third nominated, two thirds elected, but with no concept of ministerial responsibility. This was a concept unique in the Empire to the Australian colonies – the concept of a single legislative chamber that blended appointed and elected representatives. Such an assembly was considered quite liberal by English standards, avoiding the problems of an ‘appointed for life’ upper house used in Canada. The Governor was however firmly in control of the government, for he chose his ministers who were responsible to him, not to the Legislative Council. Nor did the Legislative Council control funds derived from the sale of Crown Lands, an important source of income firmly controlled from London.

The rapid growth of the Port Phillip District of NSW led to a demand for separation and in 1850 the NSW Legislative Council debated the ‘Victorian Electoral Districts Bill’, deciding on the electoral franchise for the new colony, and the Victorian representatives – most notably William Westgarth – fought unsuccessfully for the Chartist points of equal electoral districts and vote by ballot. On 1 July 1851 the new colony of Victoria came into existence, and writs were issued for the election of its first Legislative Council, modelled on the NSW Council. But within a week Victoria was convulsed by news of the discovery of gold within a hundred miles of Melbourne. By the time the new Council met in November, thousands of people were living and working on the goldfields, localities that were totally unrepresented by electorates in the new Legislative Council.

When the Victorian Legislative Council sat for the first time in November 1851, one of the first motions of the elected members was to ask the British Government to grant control of the Crown Land fund to the Council so that it could manage the goldfields. Significantly, the Governor had decided that taxes raised by the gold license system would go into the Land Fund, which the Legislative Council did not control. From the very start, antipathy was set up between the elected and appointed members, and conflicting interests of the pastoralists and the urban merchants. The vast new population flooding into the colony to look for gold were not entitled to vote because they did not own or rent property, and had to rely on a few urban elected members of democratic inclination to represent their interests.

A Secretary of State who probably agreed with Bourke’s concept of bonds ‘light as air but strong as iron’ was Lord Pakington (Secretary of State briefly at the end of 1852). He wrote to the Australian Governors giving them permission to draft responsible constitutions. His letter to Lieutenant-Governor Joseph La Trobe was tabled in the Victorian Legislative Council on 30 August 1853. The letter conceded self-government, proposed a bi-cameral legislature with an appointed Upper House, and indicated that control of land revenues would follow. He also stipulated that the Crown would retain a veto over legislation of imperial concern.

8 Oldfield, p. 44.
9 Oldfield, p. 47; Beverley Boissery, *A Deep Sense of Wrong*, St. Leonards NSW, Allen & Unwin, 1996, deals with the Lower Canadian rebels and their transportation to NSW.
10 From 27 June to 12 September 1839, according to George Nadel, *Australia’s Colonial Culture*, p. 103.
11 Sweetman, p. 10.
12 Ibid.
13 Wright, *A Blended House*, p. 3-4
15 Wright, p. 32-3.
16 Wright, p. 20 suggests William Westgarth, John O’Shanassy and John Pascoe Fawkner were the leading advocates for the diggers.
La Trobe and his executive were determined that control of the government of Victoria should lie in conservative hands, and when the new constitution was drawn up late in 1853, it represented very firmly conservative interests. The franchise was based on property ownership; only property holders could stand for parliament; there was no payment of members, and the seats were distributed in such a way that rural interests could dominate metropolitan interests. The goldfields, which had the bulk of the population in 1853, were allocated no seats, so the mining interest was totally unrepresentable.

The issue of nominated versus elected upper house became lively after the Cape Colony (South Africa) secured an elected upper house in 1853, followed almost immediately by New Zealand, and the Melbourne Argus ran a campaign in 1853 during the debates over the Victorian constitution for an elected upper house. Such was the strength of popular feeling against the concept of an appointed upper house that it was never a question in Victoria, even though New South Wales chose that style. However the wily drafters were aware of a Canadian precedent of how a nominated upper house could be manipulated to suit government interest, and saw the effectiveness of an elected upper house, representing wealth and property, as an effective bulwark against a democratic lower house.

Strangely, there were few popular meetings to discuss this important process of drafting a constitution. The largest component of the Victorian population were on the diggings, and from the beginning of the gold rush, their concerns had been directly linked to the licencing and administration of the gold fields. The first protest meeting was organized at Bunninyong on 25 August 1851 when news arrived of a license fee of 30 shillings a month being levied on all miners. The Geelong Advertiser’s reporter Alfred Clarke attended the meeting under the stars and wrote:

> there has not been a more gross attempt at injustice since the days of Wat Tyler… It is a solemn protest of labour against oppression, an outburst of light, reason and right against the infliction of an effete objectionable Royal claim… It is taxation without representation. Tonight for the first time since Australia rose from the bosom of the ocean, were men strong in their sense of right, lifting up a protest against an impending wrong, and protesting against the Government. Let the Government beware!

The seeds of Eureka were sown. This early agitation was followed by a number of protest movements, beginning with the formation of a Miners’ Association at Mount Alexander (Castlemaine) in December 1851. Geoffrey Serle traces these embryonic movements, which rose and fell with the movement of diggers from goldfield to goldfield. Bruce Kent’s 1954 analysis of agitations on the goldfields still stands as an astute investigation. He argues that the protests were driven by opposition to tyranny and issues of social rights, rather than more explicitly political issues. There were protests at the Ovens and at Bendigo, a Colonial Reform Association was formed in Melbourne in 1853, and in Bendigo the Red Ribbon agitation was led by the Anti-Gold License Association. At Bendigo in the winter of 1853 protesting diggers wore red ribbons, refused to pay their licenses and collected a monster petition which was presented to Governor La Trobe on 1 August 1853, seeking immediate reform of government administration, the right to vote for the unrepresented diggers, and land reform. The petition - all 13 meters of it containing 23,000 signatures collected throughout the Victorian goldfields - was couched in Chartist terms.

Protest meetings were held at Ballarat, involving Dr. Alfred Carr and J.B. Humffray, and a Chartist newspaper, the Diggers Advocate, was founded in Melbourne in October 1853 by Henry Holyoake and George Black, with H.R. Nicholls as an assistant editor. The newspaper was circulated around the goldfields, and its editors visited the various communities and organised public meetings and petitions. Its editorials called the Victorian government ‘an arbitrary despotism… which denied the right to assist in making the laws under which they (the diggers) lived’. On 3 November 1853 the Argus reported the
formation of a Gold Diggers’ Association.

The continual movement and volatility of the gold rush experience made it difficult to organize the diggers, and these political movements were short lived. However the arrival of a new and severe governor in the guise of naval man Sir Charles Hotham in July 1854 had cause to re-invigorate the popular movement. Although at first he had been popular, he soon showed a strong autocratic tendency. He chose to ignore even his Executive Council, and govern the colony personally. He ordered that the diggers must pay their licenses, and ordered his police and military to conduct regular inspections at the point of a bayonet.

This unconstitutional and un-British situation was highlighted by James McEachren, a Sydney radical activist who personally experienced the arbitrary goldfields administration in 1853. He had come from Sydney with his brother to make some money selling spirits on the Victorian diggings, and had his stocks confiscated by a Police Magistrate in Wangaratta in November 1853. There is no evidence that this radical, who had been an agent for a diggers’ movement in NSW in 1852, had any contact with Holyoake or Black and their Diggers’ Advocate. But McEachren did make his personal protest with a pamphlet published in Melbourne in May 1854, The Dynasty of La Trobe and Foster Illustrated: or, The Evils of Summary Jurisdiction and Irresponsible Government Exemplified. Certainly some key principles emerge from his pamphlet – the issue of the qualifications of magistrates, respect for British justice, and the tyranny of a police force being armed with bayonets. He asks the Legislative Council:

Whether the liberty and property of the subject are to be left at the mercy of a generally incompetent and irresponsible Magistracy, wielding the unconstitutional and dangerous powers of summary jurisdiction to an unprecedented extent, and backed by a semi-military police to enforce their most tyrannous decisions at the point of a bayonet and with the edge of a sword.

His pamphlet appeals to the new Governor Hotham to purge the magistracy and appoint only men with knowledge of the law. He quotes Blackstone’s Commentaries on summary justice and appeals to the Legislative Council ‘to revise and retrench the summary jurisdiction system of this colony and of fixing, by a declaratory law, the liability of magistrates and the ultimate responsibility of Government for the acts of its paid officials.’

Neither Hotham nor the Legislative Council took any notice of McEachren’s pamphlet. The issue of corruption of the magistracy continued to fester until it flared into public indignation and action at Ballarat with the formation of the Ballarat Reform League on 1 November 1854. Basic Chartist democratic demands were central to the movement, symbolized most strikingly by the Ballarat Reform League Charter, and its flag of the Southern Cross, representing nationalist aspirations. The League adopted five points of the British Charter for democratic parliamentary reform – manhood suffrage, equal electoral districts, abolition of property qualifications for members of parliament, payment of members, short term parliaments - and presented its charter to Governor Hotham, demanding political representation and reform of the constitution. The Governor curtly dismissed the delegation. At that point the physical force arm of the League took over the movement. The Irishman Peter Lalor, son of an Irish MP and brother of the dead ‘Young Irelander’ of 1848, Fintan Lalor, stepped forward and shouted ‘Liberty’, and called for men to swear a solemn oath ‘to fight to defend our rights and liberties’.

In a situation echoing Canada in 1837, the Governor over-reacted and sent troops against the protestors, resulting in the attack on the Eureka Stockade where the physical force activists had armed and gathered. Robin Gollan reflected on the importance of the formation of the League. For a revolt against established authority to succeed, he argued there must be two components of a popular protest movement; there must be specific grievances, and there must be a political program. The Charter couched the popular unrest in political terms, and the League became the representative organisation of the diggers. As Gollan states, the protest at Ballarat ‘decided that the language of Australian politics would from then on be the language of democracy’.

The Ballarat Reform League came too late to influence the drafting of the Victorian constitution. The dramatic events of late 1854 took place when the draft was safely in the Colonial Office, having arrived in England on 31 May 1854, right at the end of the parliamentary session. In London the Crimean War totally occupied the Parliamentary benches, and the Victorian Legislative Council became angry at the
delay in hearing about its fate. On 14 November 1854 it prepared an address to the Queen, stating that there was no reason for the delay and that ‘public opinion was making itself felt with regard to the system of Ministerial irresponsibility to the people’s representatives.’

Sweetman argues that the Eureka Stockade unexpectedly gave rise to an important feature of the doctrine of Responsible Government. Almost a year before the Constitution returned home, the Colonial Secretary handed in his resignation to the Governor following the Eureka Stockade and the public outrage at the deaths of 30 diggers at the Stockade. Hotham accepted the resignation for ‘if I were to decline accepting your resignation, the Queen’s colony would be in jeopardy.’

The political climate in Victoria had changed dramatically. Hotham began the hearings of a Commission of Inquiry into the Goldfields. Petitions poured into Melbourne from the diggings. The Bendigo Reform League ‘earnestly warned’ the governor on 13 March 1855 against proceeding with the treason trials against thirteen diggers captured at or near the Eureka Stockade on 3 December 1854. Between 22 February and 27 March 1855, juries refused to convict the Eureka men charged with treason; and on the last day of the trials, 27 March, the Goldfields Commission report was released, recommending sweeping changes to the administration of the goldfields, and the introduction of the Miner’s Right which gave virtual manhood suffrage to Victorian citizens. To top off the successes, Hotham agreed to give representation to the goldfields electorates, and Humffray and Lalor were nominated by the diggers of Ballarat to sit in the Legislative Council, within a year of the Stockade.

Bob Walshe, writing on the significance of Eureka in Australian History in 1954, shows quite convincingly by his quotations from the press that radicals in Victoria gleefully awaited the return of the conservative constitution in order to remodel it in a democratic caste. Weston Bate makes a similar point in his history of Ballarat. The question of responsible government was taken up by another radical-liberal with Empire experience, the lawyer Henry Chapman, who arrived in Victoria in October 1854, having edited a radical newspaper in Montreal in the lead up to the troubles in Lower Canada. He published a pamphlet in Hobart in 1854 called Parliamentary Government or Responsible Ministries for the Australian Colonies. This lucid explanation of responsible government was informed by his experience in Lower Canada in the early 1830s. His argument dwelt on the virtues of the Durham Report and the way it had achieved responsible government in Canada, and how this model should be applied to the Australian colonies seeking responsible government. Prior to writing this pamphlet, Chapman had been the paid employee of the Colonial Office as Chief Secretary to Tasmania. However his Radical Benthamite conscience demanded he could not support his governor on a vote in favour of the continuation of transportation to Tasmania, and he had absent himself from a crucial vote in the Tasmanian Legislative Council. For this action he was subsequently sacked by the Colonial Office, but he became a staunch democratic lawyer and politician in Victoria, achieving local fame with his pro bono defence of the Afro-American John Josephs at the Eureka treason trials in Melbourne in March 1855.

In England debate did not start on the bills until December 1854. When news of the Eureka Stockade reached London with publication of a report in The Times of 27 March 1855, Robert Lowe (former NSW liberal MLC) remonstrated in the House of Commons that the Eureka incident was caused by the absence of self-government. Dr. Thompson, who was the agent for Victoria in London, actually made the difficult journey to Vienna to see Lord Russell (Secretary of State) and tell him that further riots might occur if he did not act on the constitutions. Lord Russell, preoccupied with the Crimean War, gave Thompson a promise of action and the bills were passed in early July and dispatched on 20 July 1855.

W.C. Wentworth was in London whilst the bills were being considered, lobbying for the landed interests in NSW. He was championing his nominated upper house, and was disconcerted when a request came from Canada to change their nominated upper house to an elected upper house, and to introduce payment of members. These requests were agreed to by the London parliament. News that Wentworth’s constitution bill had been criticised in London, followed by news of the Eureka Stockade, gave impetus to the Sydney radicals, although Henry Parkes greeted the news from Ballarat as ‘melancholy’ in his editorial for The Empire on 12 December 1854. However Lang and Hawksley welcomed the rebellion as a revolutionary step that would strengthen the cause of republicanism, writing in The People’s Advocate of 9 and 16 December 1854. They advocated the unlocking of the land so as to avoid further bloodshed,
and advocated the formation of a Land League, though it did not eventuate at that time.48

Meanwhile back in Melbourne the Legislative Council had grown impatient about the Constitution at the end of the parliamentary session of 1855, and on 12 June 1855, John O’Shanassy foreshadowed a motion for the next session whereby he would call for immediate Responsible Government.49 The beleaguered Governor Hotham was alarmed by this notice of motion, and wrote urgently to the Secretary of State for advice. If no advice was received, ‘either I must accede to the wishes of the people, prepare for an excitement which will border on revolution, or leave the colony without a government’.50 Hotham was torn and unhappy, wishing himself away from Victoria and in command of a ship at the Crimea. He tried his best, but was totally unfitted for the situation. He was derided in the popular press, especially the new satirical journal Punch.

He was mightily relieved when news of the passing of the Victorian Constitution arrived on 23 October 1855. But this presented a complicated and unclear scenario about the transition to Responsible Government. Hotham issued a memo to his executive in which he set out his understanding of the new constitution, and his understanding that it allowed him a veto over all legislation.51 The elected representatives of Council were outraged by this interpretation, but before they could force Hotham to withdraw it, he died suddenly on 31 December 1855 after catching a chill whilst doing an official duty.

At the beginning of 1856, Victoria had neither Governor nor Government, for the Haines Ministry had resigned over the failure to pass the secret ballot legislation, introduced at Christmas 1855. Edward Macarthur, brother of James and head of the military in Australia, was appointed temporary Governor, and Haines was able to form a Ministry a few days later. The new electoral act was passed, which introduced Chapman’s rules for the operation of the secret ballot – one of the Chartist points and a world first.52

This was the last act of the blended house before it was prorogued by the acting Governor, in expectation of the new bi-cameral parliament meeting at the end of 1856. When the new Legislative Assembly met, it was brimming with members from the urban areas and the goldfields who had been influenced by Chartist ideas. Geoffrey Serle outlines graphically the clash that occurred in the new parliament between the democratic lower house and the conservative Legislative Council, elected on a very limited franchise and a heavy pastoral gerrymander. In fact this impasse had been accurately predicted in an article in the Dublin Review of 1837, probably written by Henry Chapman, where the writer predicted with uncanny accuracy the obstruction which a Legislative Council elected on a conservative franchise could do to a democratic lower house.53

A number of political reform associations sprang up in Melbourne, Geelong and on the goldfields, with the Chartist points as their agenda, plus the demand to unlock the land.54 Early successes in the Assembly, led by Henry Chapman, were the secret ballot, the abolition of the property qualification for members of the Assembly, and the introduction of manhood suffrage and short-term (three year) parliaments. The Victorian Legislative Assembly led the British world in its democratic reforms, apart from the model colony of South Australia, that ‘paradise of dissent’ that had been founded by English dissenters upon liberal-Chartist principles, and so never had to shed a ‘font of blood’ to win reform.55

The democratic members of the Victorian Assembly provided a great stimulus to the Land League and its People’s Parliament that met nightly at the Eastern Market in Melbourne for three weeks in July 1857, in close proximity to where parliament was sitting at St. Patrick’s Hall. Eighty-nine delegates from 32 centres throughout the colony met to formulate a people’s land policy and to fight for the People’s Charter, especially payment of members, which would allow working people to stand for parliament. The excellent debates of the convention, chaired by the able Wilson Grey, were fully reported in the newspapers, and the League organized a monster petition signed by 70,000 people, demanding that Crown Land be placed on sale to former gold miners.56 As David Goodman explains in his analysis of the language of the 1850s, ‘democratic politics in the 1850s...placed the issue of right to the land at the very centre of public discussion’.57 One of the most powerful and articulate justifications of land rights was written by ‘Peter Papineau’, who published a pamphlet Homesteads for the People in Melbourne in 1855. This pamphlet has all the hallmarks of Henry Chapman’s writing.58 These very public discussions

---

49 Sweetman, p. 57-8.
50 Ibid., p. 64.
51 Ibid., p. 59.
52 Wright, p. 124-6.
53 Dublin Review, Vol. 3, July & October 1837, p. 91, 94, an article headed ‘The Canadian Question’, written on 22 May 1837, before the Canadian rebellions occurred and most likely written by Henry Chapman. There is a clear identification of the political demands of the people of Canada with Irish liberal aspirations for democracy.
54 Serle, p. 253.
56 Serle, p. 272.
58 Peter Papineau, Homesteads for the People and Manhood Suffrage, Melbourne, S. Goode, 1855, copy in the
by the Land League had a strong impact on the Land Acts passed by the Victorian Parliament in the 1860s to unlock the land from the squatters’ grasp.

Unfortunately one aspect of the conservative constitution proved very difficult for the democrats, as the Dublin Review had predicted in 1837. When the draft constitution was being reviewed by the Colonial Office in 1854, the legal officer Sir Frederick Rogers worried about the property qualification for the Victorian upper-house, and that it entrenched the power of one small and elite group. He thought that in the event of a serious deadlock, there should be a provision for the Crown and Assembly to legislate. But this important suggestion was not listened to, leading to many deadlocks over the next 40 years. Hence the radical program of the democrats was amended or blocked by the entrenched pastoral interests of the upper house.

But in spite of the conservative hold on the Legislative Council, and its attempts to frustrate land legislation, politics in Victoria was deeply marked by Eureka. R.N. Ebbels commented that “the concessions to democratic government which followed the Stockade produced a political framework and an atmosphere which facilitated the development of Australian trade unionism.” The Ballarat Reform League could be counted a very successful political movement - the envy of its Chartist antecedents in Britain. With its basic demands won in 1855, it developed into a new organisation, the Victoria Land League, with its emblem the Southern Cross, and its motto “Advance Australia.”

Thanks to the democratic reforms instituted after the Eureka Stockade, the Victorian constitution came to echo that evocative phrase of Sir Edmund Burke: “ties light as air but strong as iron”. In granting responsible government and the possibility of parliamentary democracy to the colony of Victoria in 1855, the British Government had granted a “virtual republic”, but in its graciousness it won the devotion of colonists to their British heritage. Had Lalor, full of Irish romance, spleen and passion, exaggerated when he spoke of the necessity of a “font of blood”? No other Australian colony had to shed blood at its birth in the way that Victoria did, but we would argue that because blood was shed at Ballarat, and because of the memory of that blood, the language of Australian politics would ever more be democratic.
On the Cusp: The Marginalisation of a Coal Mining Community Caught Between Tradition and Modernity

Peta Belic*

When Macquarie Colliery opened at Teralba, a suburb of Lake Macquarie NSW in 1978, solidarity was a way of life for miners, and a tradition. ‘Cleanskins’ learned about solidarity through the narratives of old miners, and traditional expressions of this solidarity such as district stop work meetings, family Christmas parties, and union organised institutions such as a miner’s village for retired miners. The new generation of miners adopted these traditional expressions of solidarity, although their lives and the structure of their community was very different from miners of the past. Thus these modern miners were able to meld modernity and tradition, as the traditional unifying factor of solidarity was unchanging. Sadly for these miners, their community was alienated from other mining communities as a significant political event in 1988 saw the destruction of the solidarity the Macquarie miners had depended on. This destruction saw this community move away from the wider mining fraternity, and internalize, its members only expressing their beliefs and feeling through narrative. The end result was that with the loss of tradition, this community was marginalised and largely forgotten.

Coal mining traditions, in the form of inherited knowledge and beliefs, are well-documented facets of many coal mining histories. Some coal mining histories have been produced with the sole aim of ensuring these traditions are not lost with the changing face of the industry.¹ The emphasis placed on the coal mining industry by historians is not surprising, as it was as crucial and old an industry in Australia’s development as agriculture.² Coal remains a major export industry to this day.³ Coal mining is also popular in traditional labour and social histories, as coal miners had one of the strongest trade unions in the country for almost one hundred years, and this representative body makes an institution-based study of society appealing. However, there is a lack of literature focusing on coal mining in the mechanised period and even less looking at coal mining during the 1980s. A study of a coal mine found at Teralba in the 1980s shows that some of the unifying traditions amongst miners were in a state of change over the decade and this change led to the marginalisation of a community established in this time. Solidarity, the staunch adherence to an identified group, expressed through faithful support of fellow workers and adherence to union doctrine, was one such tradition that was destroyed in the 1980s within the Teralba community, which in turn prevented the community from growing and prevented future coal mining communities coming into existence based around the tradition of solidarity.

When Macquarie Colliery opened at Teralba, in the city of Lake Macquarie in 1978, it existed in a place that already had strong historical and contemporary connections with coal mining. The city of Lake Macquarie can be found on the east coast of New South Wales south of Newcastle. A city of the Hunter Region, it boasts many picturesque natural features, the most significant of these being the city’s namesake Lake Macquarie, a salt water lake covering approximately 110km².⁴ From 1828 the picturesque nature of the scenery in the area was seen as attractive to those wishing to retire rather than those wishing to make their fortune in agriculture.⁵ Likewise the lack of military order found at the convict settlement of Newcastle⁶ resulted in a more piecemeal approach to the city’s development, with the suburbs sprawling over a massive area with suburbs becoming populated in relation to industries appropriate in the immediate environment or simply the view. The term ‘city’ is used now as an administrative description, as the area falls under the governance of the Lake Macquarie City Council, but has no identifiable city centre. The unifying feature of the area is the geographical feature of Lake Macquarie, and this is reflected in the history books written about the region, which tend to focus on suburbs rather than the entire ‘city’.⁷

The north west of Lake Macquarie, made up of the suburbs of Edgeworth, Barnsley, Holmesville, West Wallsend, Killingsworth, Teralba and Booragul, has an identity of its own. The area is made up of

---

small suburbs mostly established in the 1880s,\(^8\) surrounded and disconnected by scrub bush. Rather than being centred on the lake, the north west of the region is situated around ‘Salty Creek’, a major creek running from the lake. This creek is now heavy with silt and pollution after many years of servicing heavy industry and a sewerage plant. The creek does not present the beautiful views of the lake as most of the creek is lined with mangroves. Thus, this area attracted industry workers rather than retirees.

There has been a coalmine at the same site in Teralba since 1886.\(^7\) Initially known as the Great Northern Coal Company and financed by its employees, the colliery was re-named Northern Colliery in 1890.\(^10\) Soon after this the name was changed to Pacific Co-operative Colliery in 1893 then finally its most popular name, Pacific Colliery, in 1914.\(^11\) The mine retained this name until it was shut in the 1960s by BHP, the new owner.\(^12\) During this early period, the mine had worked the Great Northern Seam of Coal, which was quite close to the surface and also did exploratory work in the Fassifern Seam of coal.\(^13\) When BHP reopened the mine in 1978, it was decided that the mine would extract coal from the Young Wallsend Seam.\(^14\) The mine fell under the lease title of Westside, as was its neighbouring mine Stockton Borehole.\(^15\) However, Stockton Borehole mined the second lowest seam in the area, known as the Borehole seam.\(^16\) BHP also had ownership of Stockton Borehole and this assisted in the movement and washing of coal in the new mining venture.\(^17\) The company built modern buildings on ‘pit top’ including a bathhouse for the miners. A shaft was sunk at the old Pacific Colliery, which was re-named Macquarie Colliery by the new owners.\(^18\) The neighbouring mine, Stockton Borehole (commonly referred to as Borehole) had a drift entrance to the mine, thus making it easier to move large pieces of machinery down into the new mine site. For this reason, in the late 1970s, the small number of new Macquarie employees began developing ‘pit bottom’ via Borehole mine. Once the work was completed and the shaft sunk at Teralba, the Borehole access was no longer required and the two pits were divided off from each other via a pair of metal explosion proof doors.\(^19\) BHP received approval from the Department of Industrial Relations to mine the two pits as separate entities.\(^20\) Thus, the employees who started at Macquarie Colliery were mostly new to the job, or from Burwood Colliery, which was also owned by BHP and was being ‘wound down’ during this period.\(^21\)

The establishment of a mine is not automatically synonymous with the formation of a community. Yet a community (named the Pacific ‘blokes’ or community after 1988) was formed based around the mine at Teralba, although it was not defined by the geographical existence of the mine. In effect the mine brought together a number of like-minded individuals who proceeded to acquire traditions from older miners and this unified the group into a community. As Taksa states, community is ‘a web, a social formation that assembled as a result of the creation of the mine chose to adopt traditional expressions and beliefs relating to solidarity. This occurred as a result of their dependency on older miners (who already believed in solidarity) to teach and protect them in such a dangerous physical environment. This dependency led new miners to quickly learn about and believe in the tradition of solidarity, which they saw as a necessity in the mining environment and this merged the miners into a community. Thus the Pacific community at Teralba was not based around the mine but was based around narratives.

As the Pacific community at Teralba was based around narratives, no written sources existed to account for its existence and it was necessary to depend upon oral history to find and examine the community. The changing nature of memory is often presented as the weakness of oral history.\(^23\) This stems from

---

\(^9\) Ibid.
\(^10\) Ibid.
\(^11\) Ibid.
\(^12\) ‘Pacific’ in Department of Mineral Resources Coal Resources Administration Branch Colliery Index,” (Viewed September 2006).
\(^13\) Ibid.
\(^14\) J.F. Dey O.C, Submission to the Inquiry into Longwall Mining of the Young Wallsend Seam at Pacific Colliery (Sydney: NSW Coal, 1988), 20.
\(^15\) ‘Westside’ in Colliery Holding Register Northern T-Z. (Viewed September 2006).
\(^17\) Ibid.
\(^18\) Ibid.
\(^19\) Interview with David Jones, 11/7/06.
\(^20\) ‘Pacific’ in Department of Mineral Resources Coal Resources Administration Branch Colliery Index,” (Viewed September 2006).
\(^21\) Environmental Engineering Section Central Engineering Division, Stockton Borehole Colliery Development Environmental Impact Statement, 4.1.
\(^22\) Lucy Taksa, ‘Like a Bicycle, Forever Teetering Between Individualism and Collectivism: Considering Community in Relation to Labour History’, Labour History, no. 78, 2000, p. 8
the perception that memory is constructed in relation to social groups and that time results in changing
social groups and thus memory becomes fallible as it moves further away in time. Alternatively, further
experiences taint the memory of the past to formulate meaning in relation to the present. This research is
not attempting to ignore the effect of memory on the participants’ narratives. It is celebrating this natural
function of recall, as memory allows the information that each participant perceives as most significant
to be recalled. This gives the information provided more significance, as it identifies similarities in
belief between the community members, as the narratives remembered give insight into the perspectives
the miners did and still do hold about their community. If the informants believe the information to
be true, this provides the researcher with the most important information about the way an individual
interpreted an event. The interviews referred to here were collected in an attempt to identify and define
the community that existed at Teralba during the 1980s. However, the oral testimony presented by the
participants identified inherited traditions as one of the key binding points of their community and this
inspired the current paper.

New miners, often referred to as ‘cleanskins’, learned about solidarity through the narratives of the old
miners who established pit bottom and other traditional expressions of solidarity. This solidarity was
presented as necessary and worthwhile to new miners in a number of different ways. The most obvious
of these presentations was through formal political action often taken in the form of strikes, protests and
stop work meetings which provided men with a feeling of control over their own working conditions and
rights. Robert Burton tells of the effect such mass meetings could have on men, especially if it was their
first stop work meeting, and how it was an out-pouring of power. Robert remembers how:

> Every pit in the North stopped for twenty-four hours. And you’d go up there and there
might be three thousand or four thousand men would be at the Kurri Kurri sports ground.
And they’d say right we’re here to discuss the log of claims. But going back to going to the
aggregate meetings, and never having been to one, and the first one the hair went up on the
back of your neck, and I thought how good’s this. And you know they’re screaming this is
what we’re going to do, and we’re going to demand [sic] this, and we’re not going to do
this.

These meetings were the ultimate display of political power for miners and they were happy to physically
present their strength to make a point. Burton goes on to discuss the way the men at a protest threatened
to storm an open-cut mine they were contesting until finally they pressured the authorities into bending to
t heir demands. Burton laughs as he remembers the innocence of the miners: ‘had they [the mine owners
and police protecting the mine entry] stopped and defended it [the open cut mine], it would have ended
up like, like all havoc would have broken loose. But they let them [the protesting miners] in and once we
got in we didn’t know what to do’. These mass political actions and successes allowed new miners to
understand the importance and great power formal expressions of solidarity could bring.

The miners saw their solidarity and the power it provided them with, as a way of protecting their
employment interests but also their families and their futures. Solidarity between miners was established
through community building exercises such as family Christmas parties, spontaneous socialising of work
‘units’ at race days and family holidays and formal institutions such as the miners retirement village
at Teralba. Men working in the mines were immersed in a traditional culture of solidarity, emphasised
to them through narratives of old miners. The importance of solidarity was not expressed explicitly, but
rather old miners structured most of their stories through a battle narrative, which implicitly identified the
importance of solidarity in the face of such opposition. These narratives constructed miners in opposition
to a number of enemies. The first enemy a miner had to ‘fight’ was their employers and their bosses.

While the men took great pride in their work ethic, they saw in their bosses, particularly deputys and
under managers, as a largely non-threatening enemy that could be taken advantage of. Burton uses a battle
metaphor to explain the relationship. He states that working in the mine ‘was like being in a prisoner of
war camp, where it was our duty to escape and it was their duty to catch you’. He went on to say that if a
man got caught it was his responsibility to accept it, and it was the bosses responsibility to accept it if the
men got away without being caught. Their employers, however, could not be taken so lightly. Paul Jones

26 Interview with Robert Burton, 12/7/06.
27 Interview with Robert Burton, 12/7/06.
28 Ibid.
29 Interview with Philip Owens, 4/7/06
30 Interview with Robert Burton, 12/7/06, Ken Brown, 7/7/06
31 Interview with Paul Jones, 13/7/06
32 Interview with Peter Faull, 23/6/06
33 Interview with Robert Burton, 12/7/06

Labour Traditions
states that employers were often faceless names, who only appeared to take money from the men, so they were hated.\textsuperscript{34} As a result, the men rarely dealt with the managers' themselves, and left dealings with such high levels to their union representatives.

The second enemy a miner had to battle was the most threatening, their environment.\textsuperscript{35} The mine was a living enemy, and a real enemy, which always had the capacity to injure, or kill. In fact, the area of the mine that most men who worked at Teralba saw as most dangerous was the walls, which were called ‘the rib,’ a human body part given to a personified enemy. Many interviewees spoke casually about death, aware that it was a reality, but still willing to take the risk. Many identified events that were ‘near misses’, that reminded the men of the daily war they were fighting, and their own fragility in comparison with their enemy.\textsuperscript{36} Paul Jones relates his perspective of death and serious injury and the way miners were able to deal with it in a conscious way. He states that ‘fear was something that was not a good thing to have down the pit cause you could, you know, I always thought that if you were pretty fearful you were probably going to make mistakes for yourself or for others around you, you know, you were too worried about it’.\textsuperscript{37} This shows that each man felt he had a responsibility to those he worked with to protect them and be protected by them in return.

The final enemy the miners felt they were at war with was their own bodies.\textsuperscript{38} Most of the men I interviewed had serious long-term injuries sustained in the mines.\textsuperscript{39} These injuries prevented the men from reaching the pinnacle social status of a miner, that being a physically fit man with a high work ethic. Thus, many men continued mining with their injuries. While none of the men discussed this issue directly, it was clear that working as a unit and working with other miners was the daily reality of working at Macquarie/Pacific/Teralba. To be injured meant that other men would have to do more work to make up for an injured miner. Thus, no miner wanted to be injured as it would not only effect the way they viewed themselves as people, but would also effect their capacity to work in a unit, which secured the highest pay.\textsuperscript{40}

Cleanskins adopted these narrative topics and forms and most of the miners who provided oral testimony of their time at Macquarie were able to tell of a time when a workmate saved them by helping them when they were hurt,\textsuperscript{41} by showing solidarity in the face of a boss’ attack\textsuperscript{42} or of physically saving them from injury in the mining environment.\textsuperscript{43} Prior to 1988, these miners believed that these were the only enemies they had to battle and all miners were their allies in this battle.

The Macquarie miners celebrated the successes of those miners who had achieved significant industrial change before them. The cleanskins were grateful for the opportunity to work with miners who could teach them about solidarity, and were keen to maintain the achievements these old miners had made. Robert Burton most eloquently explains this when he stated:

\begin{quote}
I think that’s why I was so lucky when I started, because you went into a unit of blokes and I worked with old Johnny Hughes and he’d started in the pits in 1948, so this is 1981. So this massive experience there. You know he’d been through all the hard times, and the bulk of them had come from Burwood to Macquarie, because they were both BHP pits, and when Burwood was winding down it was started up and you had these real old hard heads. You know union wise and fighting for the conditions which they’d all fought for, which is all gone today. Its all, that’s the thing that I really see as sad, how from when we started how staunch everyone was, and now its just gone, totally gone. In the space of twenty five years I think they’ve gone backwards. They’ve gone back sixty years or seventy years. You know they’ve gone back to the days, I’m sure that they’ll be what’s ya, in another five or ten years they’ll be calling under managers mister again. That will be tragic [laughs].\textsuperscript{44}
\end{quote}

This form of learned memory was very important for the cleanskins, as they did not have their own experiences to refer to when establishing the tradition of solidarity. Miner solidarity was a feature of political movements of the past, which the cleanskins had not been part of. Thus, their adherence to this form of collective identification was a tradition, rather than a personal necessity.

The solidarity taught to the new miners as a form of tradition would not have spontaneously existed without this education as the social structures did not exist in 1979 which had led to the outpourings of solidarity in Australian coal mining communities since the depression. Metcalfe identifies the importance

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{34} Interview with Paul Jones, 13/7/06
  \item \textsuperscript{35} Interview with Jim Richardson, 29/6/06
  \item \textsuperscript{36} Interviews with Paul Jones, 13/7/06, Phillip Owens, 4/7/06, Peter Faull, 23/6/06
  \item \textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{39} Interviews with Peter Faull, 23/6/06, Phillip Owens, 4/7/06
  \item \textsuperscript{40} Interview with Phillip Owens, 4/7/06
  \item \textsuperscript{41} Interview with Paul Jones, 13/7/06.
  \item \textsuperscript{42} Interview with Robert Burton, 12/7/06
  \item \textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
of geography and place in establishing a coal mining community up until the 1960s in his study which focuses on ‘the lives of the people who lived in Kurri’, a coalmining town in the Cessnock region.50 Yet, by 1979, the Macquarie coal mining community could not be connected through geography, as the eleven participants who provided oral testimony regarding Macquarie Colliery, were not based in Teralba. Improvements in transportation, conditions and pay by 1979 meant that miners were not forced to live close to their place of employment. The oral history participants cited lived in the north west of Lake Macquarie, through to the east of Lake Macquarie, Newcastle and Cessnock. The close social contact between miners Metcalfe identifies in his study, did not exist in Teralba in the 1980s and so presented no geographical basis for solidarity. The traditional mining village where the lives of everyone in the village depended on the mine, no longer existed. The geographical variance found in the miners who worked at Macquarie Colliery resulted in the miners depending on narrative and the various expressions of solidarity already identified to maintain their community.

In 1988, the Macquarie miners learnt concepts of solidarity were destroyed with the merger of the Macquarie and Stockton Borehole mines. The ‘event’ referred to as either the ‘takeover’47 or the ‘amalgamation’48 by the interviewees began in 1988. BHP determined to close down the operations of one of their coalmines, and to merge Macquarie Colliery with its neighbour Stockton Borehole Colliery. Explosion proof doors joined the two collieries, and although an inter-seam drift needed to be completed, which took many months, the physical merging of the two mines was not a difficult task.49 It is not clear how the union came to be the deciding factor for who kept their jobs and who lost their jobs. Regardless of the politics behind the situation, it became clear that in 1988, half the men mining in the two mines known as the Westside Colliery Holding50 were going to lose their jobs.

Traditionally, the union decided job cuts by seniority.51 Many of the interviewees emphasised the importance of seniority in the mines.52 It gave men security and was a driving force to keep working, as they knew their solidarity and their union would protect their jobs. Yet this case was different. Two mines meant two union lodges, and two union lodges meant two lots of seniority. The result was that the union had to decide which lodge was going to be made redundant. Thus, for the first time in the Pacific community’s history they were not fighting with a traditional enemy for their jobs, they were fighting other miners. This destroyed the learned solidarity the miners at Macquarie (renamed Pacific Colliery by 1988) had used as the basis of their community. The community was further destroyed when it was announced the Stockton Borehole Lodge were to keep their jobs, and almost all of the Pacific miners were going to lose their jobs at the mine. Only approximately thirty Macquarie/Pacific miners were forced to retain their jobs, most under duress as they were threatened with not receiving their redundancy packages if they did not continue on in a casual capacity.53 The effect was a dispersal of the community, as the members rarely maintained close contact. Yet all those interviewed proved that the community still existed on the narrative level, as the miners’ belief in solidarity was not diminished, rather it was internalized, as the miners felt they could trust no institution or miner other than those they worked with at Macquarie.

The reality of the war discourse prior to 1988 was that the miners at Pacific Colliery were not required to forgive their enemy. They were expected to respect their enemy (in the case of the mine itself) and to continue working in the face of difficulties and injustices (as in the case of employers) yet they were never expected to forgive the enemy for their actions. Nor did the miners accept the actions of their enemy in many cases, even when the decisions were final. Paul Jones’ presents a narrative about fighting his under manager even after he had been removed from his unit, which is a testament to this attitude.

Thus, when it came to forgiveness and acceptance of the events that occurred in 1988, many of the men had trouble. They were not used to fighting their own ‘family’54 and so each man had to make a decision regarding their reaction to the situation. Brown remembers that one miner who lost their job at Pacific Colliery had a brother who worked at Stockton Borehole Colliery, and these two men did not speak for an extended period of time after the merger.55 The reaction was made easier for those who no longer worked at the mine. They were able to come to terms with the issue in their own time. If they chose to forgive the miners who had taken their jobs, they were able to do it knowing they were bestowing a form of benevolence upon other miners, as they themselves held the moral high ground of a victim in the situation. Faulk states that time and hindsight have tempered any animosity he felt towards the men.

46 Interview with Jim Richardson, 29/6/06.
47 Interview with Ken Brown, 7/7/06.
48 Interview with Stanley Juchniewicz, 13/7/06.
49 Interviews with David Jones, 11/7/06, Jim Richardson, 29/6/06.
51 Interview with Paul Jones, 13/7/06.
52 Interviews with Paul Jones, 13/7/06, Robert Burton, 12/7/06, Peter Faulk, 23/6/06.
53 Interview with Robert Burton, 12/7/06.
54 Interview with Paul Jones, 13/7/06.
55 Interview with Ken Brown, 7/7/06.
who worked at Stockton Borehole.\textsuperscript{56} For those who continued at the mine it was a different experience, with traditional inherited expressions of solidarity being undermined, many of the miners in the Pacific community felt degraded and alienated from the mining community they had believed in. Being forced to continue working at the mine, as they were told by BHP that refusal of the casual work being offered would forfeit their redundancy packages further degraded them.\textsuperscript{57} Thus, they felt their rage on a daily basis as men from Stockton Borehole began moving into their pit. Paul Jones details the insult small, daily occurrences would have resulted in. Jones speaks of the importance of showers and lockers as physical markers of seniority and pride in a miner’s job and hypothesises these things would have been taken over by the incoming miners.\textsuperscript{58}

Likewise, as the miners in the Pacific community also lost their seniority to the incoming Stockton Borehole miners, they were forced onto ‘back shifts’ that they had worked years to ‘escape’ from. The Macquarie miners were forced to change their entire lives and return to working night work to enable them to keep their jobs and continue the battle for their families. Thus, the battle with the new enemy continued on a daily basis, even if it was not a verbal dispute between the men in a literal form.

The Stockton Borehole miners who provided testimony generally show very little animosity towards the Pacific miners. Both Stan Juchniewicz and David Jones state towards the end of the interview, after having time to think about the circumstances of 1988, that they felt a level of guilt for taking jobs away from other miners, however believe that the miners at Pacific Colliery were fighting for their jobs just as hard as the men at Stockton Borehole Colliery and this justified their actions.\textsuperscript{59} Both strive to convince the interviewer, that the Stockton Borehole miners honestly believed that the Macquarie/Pacific/Teralba pit was there own, and that they never doubted they would simply move into Macquarie when Stockton Borehole finished.\textsuperscript{60} However there seems to be a great deal of bias attached to this argument. The narratives suggest that this was the point of argument that the Stockton Borehole Lodge president made to allow the Stockton Borehole miners to keep their jobs.\textsuperscript{61} As this argument had been successful, the politically aware miners, such as Juchniewicz and Jones had adopted this point of view as truth and a moral justification for their actions in the face of the accusations of unethical and immoral behaviour thrown at them by the Pacific miners. Horder, however, who was not able to remember the events which took place between the two mines, summed up his perspective by saying ‘one day we worked at one pit and the next day we worked at another’.\textsuperscript{62} In his memory, the two mines were separate and he started mining at another mine the day he started at Teralba Colliery. His perspective is supported by the primary evidence which suggests that in legal terms, the two mines were legally separate and this would suggest that the Stockton Borehole miners had no reason to believe Pacific Colliery belonged to them.

The acceptance and justification of the political point of view which won them their jobs, does not show that the Stockton Borehole miners were immoral or unethical. Rather it shows how similar they were in culture to that of the Pacific miners in relation to moral superiority and being able to justify their actions in relation to the group. It is not clear if the miners at Stockton Borehole had the same emphasis on morality and ethics as the Pacific community, however, it is clear that when they moved into Pacific Colliery (which was the same time the name of the mine was changed to Teralba Colliery) and began working with the men remaining at the mine, that the Stockton Borehole miners felt it imperative to have an ethical position from which to rebut the often aggressive and constant comments from the old Pacific miners.\textsuperscript{63}

The Pacific community miners had no problem in establishing their moral and ethical position. They had been treated as unjustly as any miner could be without loosing their job. They had lost their seniority, their workmates, their redundancy packages, and their pit to an invading source. They had been let down by their own union and had no trust in the new miners that were entering the pit. Their community had been dispersed as they no longer were able to keep contact with any great ease, and they felt they had every right to continue the fight against the ‘Borehole C’s’\textsuperscript{64} as Brown expressed.

While both the former Pacific and Stockton Borehole miners all stated they had to simply get on with the job and even eventually made friends on an individual basis, as they were all still miners and had a lot in common, the war between the Stockton Borehole men and Pacific men never stopped. Both sides had men who ‘would not let it go’,\textsuperscript{65} who would make reference to the fight as often as possible. Individual men made stances against the event in different ways, such as Brown’s refusal to call the mine Teralba,
but generally there seemed to be a significant level of taunting to and fro between the two sides. It seems that the urge for friendship may have been influenced by the fact that the Stockton Borehole men were aware that their moral justification of their actions was not as convincing in the face of the Pacific miner’s grievances. The Stockton Borehole miners present the view that they were miners also and just wanted to ‘mine coal’ and to keep their jobs. The reality for the remainder of the mine’s operating history was that the miners seemed to have established an uneasy truce. However, Paul Jones summarises the situation when he states that ‘as far as Teralba goes . . . there was two cultures. Borehole and Pacific’.

The internalisation of the community still working at the mine and the marginalisation of those who were made redundant had far reaching effects for the wider mining community. The Macquarie miners were not able to educate new cleanskins in the importance and necessity of the tradition of solidarity. The miners still working would not trust other miners enough to engage in expressions of solidarity as they once had. Thus the Pacific community was marginalised as being seen as unimportant, or simply trouble-makers and this resulted in a loss of the tradition of solidarity.

This research is important as it records a significant event for not only the miners at Macquarie/Pacific, but also for the functioning of the union, and the beginning of the new era for the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) who eventually represented them. The changes experienced in the 1980s with redundancies, downsizing and eventually union amalgamation, are hardly amenable to a heroic-style labour history, although today the CFMEU is able to put a positive spin on such issues. The events, which took place in 1988 during the Stockton Borehole merger, placed the union in a position of immense power over the lives of its members. However, rather than representing its members, it was deciding which of them to abandon. This event can be seen as a product of the time and obviously had a profound effect on the members of the community who worked at Macquarie/Pacific Colliery. It is important to note that this event, as a result of the union’s unusual position within the dispute, has largely been forgotten or ignored. Yet it remains a clear metaphor for the industrial relations that were to come for the members of not only the community being studied but also coal miners in general. This research shows that traditions, such as the expression of solidarity through action and the formation of unions which seems so under threat by the nations hostile federal government, were in fact being disintegrated in the 1980s. Only through recognising the failures of the institutions which represented individuals and by understanding the traditions of those individuals which helped them bind themselves into communities, can we ever hope to achieve Thompson’s aim of labour history being the ‘history from below’ where ‘lost causes’ and ‘losers’ are ‘valid in terms of their own experience’.

---

66 Interview with Paul Jones, 13/7/06.
67 Interview with Paul Jones, 13/7/06.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
How to create a tradition: the Seamen’s Union and the Great Strike of 1917

Robert Bollard*

Looking back from the present at the vibrant and powerful labour movement of the twentieth century, it is all too easy to succumb to nostalgia. The culture of unionism that prevailed in places like the waterfront or the coal mines seems so powerful and so ingrained. The traditions of collectivism, the hatred of scabs, the automatic assumption – extending out from the bastions of the movement into less organised sections of the class – that unionism was a good thing: all this appears in retrospect as a golden tradition from a golden age. It appears at once magical and unattainable – something that has slipped from our grasp never to return, like periwigs or top hats, suburban football teams or long-playing records. To recover it seems as impossible as the recovery of old forms of civility or deference must appear to commentators from the right.

Culture and tradition can appear, like the weather or the economy, to be forces that are beyond the control of human agency. They can be seen as static reflections of more profound forces and relations, or as simple accumulations of prejudice inherited from the past, waiting for the blast of technological innovation and economic change to eradicat them, like a sandblaster on a sandstone edifice. But they are more than this. Traditions are not simply accumulated, they can also be invented, and they are invented, moreover, for a reason. That reason can involve the justification of oppression and exploitation; it can also involve the justification of resistance to oppression or exploitation. More than this, traditions like the culture of unionism are not simply a reflection of economic relations, they also reflect the actions of men and women that are embodied in those relations; they reflect the class struggle – and this reflection is not passive. Traditions in turn influence the struggle they reflect, strengthening a political attempt to alter the prevailing economic relations. The working class, as Thompson argued, makes itself, and it does not make itself in a passive way, simply voicing opinions that reflect everyday experience. Nor is the process gradual. The development of tradition is driven in a powerful way by the rhythms of class struggle.

The Seamen’s Union, before it was decimated by technological change and flags of convenience, was, for most of the twentieth century a bastion of left-wing politics and militancy. For much of the century it was under Communist leadership – it was one of the unions that were rebuilt by Communist militants in the 1930s and 40s. It was at the forefront of political intervention by the left of the trade union movement against the Vietnam War. In fact, the Seamen’s Union is the one union in Australia to have come under Communist leadership before the watershed of the Great Depression. For seven tumultuous years, under the leadership of Tom Walsh, it served as a beacon of radicalism and militancy; its temporary eclipse, in the years after 1925, accompanied as it was by the arrest and attempted deportation of its leaders, demonstrated the horror with which it was viewed by the conservative governments of those years.

This paper looks at the beginning of the Walsh years. It attempts to explain how the militancy and left wing traditions of the seamen were established in the final years of the Great War. It focuses, inevitably, on the wartime radicalisation of the labour movement and on the accompanying strike wave. It also includes a discussion of the great seamen’s strike of 1919. It particularly focuses, however, on what was, arguably, the most cataclysmic event in the class struggle in the early twentieth century in Australia – the Great Strike of 1917. The seamen were caught up in this tumultuous event and transformed by it. Investigating how this occurred provides a fascinating insight into how sudden and profound transformations in the culture and traditions of groups of workers can take place – how militancy ingrained itself in a previously passive and conservative section of the class. Moreover, to understand how such a transformation occurred is to understand how it might happen once again. There was nothing automatic in the militancy of the big battalions that dominated the class battlefields of the last century; those militant traditions were a creation of human agency. Militancy had to be argued for, and an understanding of its contingency reminds us that there is nothing automatic or inevitable about the passivity and disorganisation of the new sections of the working class that have been created by the economic re-organisation of the last few decades.

The performance of the union under Walsh was impressive. In 1919, the union won a dramatic strike outside the bounds of arbitration, winning a 35 shilling a week increase in pay. Cahill and Fitzpatrick, in their history of the Seamen’s Union, made the observation that real wages for Australian seamen continued to rise up until 1925, while British seamen over the same period, under a notoriously right-wing union leadership, saw their wages halved.1

Yet the Australian Seamen’s Union, before 1917, had no reputation for radicalism. The following table shows the growth in strike rates in the wharf and shipping sector in NSW:

Before 1917 there were no big strikes on the waterfront or in the shipping sector, which were lumped together by the Bureau of Statistics Labour Reports. The union reflected this passivity in the politics of its officials who were not only industrially conservative, but aligned with the right-wing of the movement.

What caused the sudden transformation in 1917? In discussing the 1919 strike, Ian Turner made the point that there was an accumulation of wartime grievances that the Seamen’s Union officials, wedded to the creaky mechanism of arbitration, were unable to address. This was clearly a key element in the transformation of the seamen. The following chart shows the dramatic effect of the wartime, and immediate post-war, surge in the cost of living, and the wage rises of three different groups of workers: the coal miners, the wharfies and the seamen. It illustrates the failure of arbitration to cope with the explosion in the cost of living generated by the war, and explains why the seamen eventually abandoned arbitration for direct action.

### Strike days lost in NSW – Waterfront and Shipping

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Days Lost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>7,060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>10,730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>8,645</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>677,243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>1,182,933</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The three groups of workers achieved widely varying wage outcomes over this period charted here. The miners received a small increase in pay from Justice Higgins in January 1916. The dramatic spikes in their pay, shown on this chart in 1917 and 1919, were due to direct action – the famous successful strike of November 1916 (reflected in the 1917 rise) and a threatened strike when coal stocks were low in April 1919. The wharfies, who remained wedded to the idea of arbitration throughout this period, received only a modest increase from Justice Higgins in 1919 – which, as this chart shows, amounted to a real wage cut of some significance. The seamen were also granted a modest – dare one say ‘piddling’ – pay rise by Higgins in December 1918. This was a powerful demonstration of the ineffectiveness of arbitration and clearly played a role in their adoption of direct action.

The problem is however, that, as the first table indicating strike days lost shows, the initial spike in

---


4 Commonwealth Parliament, Report of the Royal Commission on the Basic Wage, Together with Evidence, Supplementary Report, 14 April 1921, provides separate figures for the cost of living rises in each state, but no national figure. The figure here is an average of the two figures for NSW and Victoria (which were close to each other in each of these years). ANU, Noel Butlin Archives, ACSEF papers, E165/10/9, ‘Position on the Northern Coalfield of New South Wales May 1929’ (Northern Collieries Association), p. 14, ‘Daily Wage Rates’, provided the figures for the coal miners. Fitzgerald & Cahill, Seamen’s Union of Australia, pp. 50-52, provided the figures for the seamen.
strike figures in the shipping sector precedes the wages strike of 1919. It was the seamen’s participation in the Great Strike of 1917 that was the decisive break in their industrial behaviour – an event that also preceded Walsh’s takeover of the union. Why then did the seamen join in the strike of 1917? The accumulation of grievances – particularly wage grievances – might explain why they were discontented, but they did not strike over wages in 1917. What happened was that, as part of a movement of a hundred thousand, which included the coal miners and wharfies among others, they struck in solidarity with the workers in the railway workshops in Sydney. More specifically, they followed the lead of the wharfies who had struck a few days before them. In Melbourne the seamen’s strike was most clearly connected with the wharfies’ strike. The seamen walked off ship-by-ship rather than work alongside the scabs who filled the waterfront. In Sydney, however, there was more to the strike than this. A Newcastle paper described the scene in Sydney on 10 August 1917:

There was a complete stoppage of work along the waterfront to-day owing to the wharf labourers’ strike. The seamen are restive, and any attempt on the part of steamship owners to introduce free labour would bring them out immediately. It is not likely that the owners will try to utilise any other labour.

Yet, though the possibility of working with strike-breakers may have been part of the seamen’s motivation in striking, it was not all. As the quote above implies, the owners in Sydney were in many cases willing not to load or unload their ships in order to keep the seamen at work, but their crews struck anyway. This was the case, for instance, with the steamer, the Bombala. The Sydney afternoon paper, the Sun, described in detail the story of this particular steamship going on strike:

A conference had been held during the morning between representatives of the wharf labourers, seamen, and trolleymen and draymen, at which it was agreed that...goods, providing they had been loaded before the wharf labourers’ strike, could be unloaded. The seamen [on the Bombala], however, apparently took the matter into their own hands, and said that they would not allow anyone but members of the Wharf Laborers’ Union to touch anything aboard the ship. The shipping companies accepted the seamen’s ruling, and made no attempt to discharge the goods. They were prepared to leave these on board and run the risk of their going to waste, rather than precipitate trouble with another union.

**BOMBALA FIREMEN REFUSE DUTY**

It was confidently expected then that there would be no further trouble. However, the Bombala, which was the first of the Inter-state boats to leave, only got clear of the wharf when the firemen took action.

The reason why the firemen on the Bombala suddenly decided to refuse duty, after their steamer had already left the wharf, is revealed in the trial of two seamen for conspiracy later in August. Thomas Robinson, who was described simply as a seaman who ‘has been in the country for only two years’ and William Daly who described himself as ‘a native of Wales and a free thinker’ and who was both a working seaman and the Vice President of the union’s NSW branch, were very active on the day the Bombala struck. In the words of the police report, quoted at their trial:

It appears that Mr. Cooper, general secretary of the Seamen’s Union, was engaged at Trades Hall, and a number of members headed by William Daly, insisted on having a meeting to deal with the strike question. Mr. Cooper gave way to them, and they, including Cooper, adjourned to the rooms in Clarence-street. Daly then took the chair, and passed a resolution calling all the members out. Most of the members present at this meeting were men who were not employed on any ships in Sydney Harbor. It had been explained to me that no strike could be passed by the union, except by the executive. It is pointed out that members of such executive reside in Brisbane, Melbourne, and Adelaide, as well as Sydney. Therefore the declaring of this strike is a gross violating of the union’s regulations.

Robinson was delegated by the meeting to inform the ships in port that a strike was on, as the report of the trial in the Sun continues:

William Stone, gatekeeper at Howard Smith’s wharf, testified to having refused to allow

---

5 *Age*, 18 August 1917, p. 11.
6 *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners’ Advocate*, 11 August 1917, p. 5.
7 *Sun*, 11 August 1917, p. 5.
8 *Sun*, 24 August 1917, p. 5.
Robinson to go on the wharf on August 11. Witness afterward saw Robinson addressing a number of the *Canberra* men outside the gate...Captain Harry Tryer stated that he heard Robinson call out: ‘On strike; come out!’ The men he called out to then came on shore.\(^9\)

Another of the ships in port that Robinson called out was the *Indarra*. Its crew had decided to strike but were still on board when the outward bound *Bombala* passed by. As the *Sun’s* original report of the *Bombala* firemen’s action described it:

> The vessel [*Bombala*] was just about to pass the stern of the *Indarra* when the seamen on the outward-bound vessel were hailed from the *Indarra*. They notified the firemen of the message they had received from the *Indarra*, and the firemen came up on deck and notified the chief engineer that they could not keep up steam. The vessel went as far as Neutral Bay and there dropped anchor.\(^10\)

So unexpected was this sudden walkout by the seamen in Sydney that a number of delegates from the Labor Council’s Defence Committee were reportedly stranded on board the *Indarra* and the *Canberra*. They had been en route to inform interstate unionists of the strike.\(^11\) The attitude of Secretary Cooper towards his rebellious members after being press-ganged into the ‘unconstitutional’ mass meeting of 11 August is not entirely clear, but there are some clues. With regards to the meeting itself, Cooper quickly let the press know that he wasn’t responsible for the strike decision. Hence an article in the *Sun* on 13 August headed: ‘HOW THE SEAMEN LEFT; UNION SECRETARY’S STATEMENT: Executive Advice Turned Down’, in which Cooper is quoted as saying:

> The executive advised the men to take no action until called upon by the Strike Committee; but the meeting unanimously voted that work should cease immediately, and appointed delegates to convey the resolution to the men on the ships in port.\(^12\)

The police report, cited above, makes great play of the allegation that none of the members at the meeting of 11 August were currently working on a ship. It also alleges that the meeting was packed with Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) sympathisers. This is extremely unlikely given the state of that organisation at the time – the IWW had been banned and most of its leading members arrested. The prevailing hysteria around the IWW explains why a policeman might see the organisation’s hand in any left-wing agitation. Significantly, the policeman giving the report made it clear that he was relying heavily on an interview with Cooper. His comments regarding the meeting’s unrepresentative nature and unconstitutional status are likely to come from this source. We can only speculate whether Cooper shared, or indeed was the source of, the paranoia regarding the IWW. In any case, a *Sun* article of 13 August makes the allegation regarding the unrepresentative nature of the meeting somewhat redundant when it mentions a follow up meeting on 13 August:

> Mr. Cooper added that practically the whole of the members of the union in Sydney attended a meeting at the Trades Hall to-day and unanimously endorsed the decision to come out on Saturday.\(^13\)

There are a number of elements here that point to a more complex explanation of the motivation for striking. There is the principle of solidarity – the idea that to work would involve, at some level, collaborating with the waterfront scabs. This clearly is not sufficient though – as the example of the *Bombala* shows. There is also a question of political intervention. Who were these seamen who marched on Trades Hall to confront Cooper and force a mass meeting? The police allegation that they were IWW members may be dubious, but it is likely that they were a militant and left-wing minority. Daly’s proud description of himself as a ‘free-thinker’ is suggestive. We are, moreover, dealing with a period of significant radicalisation, in the wake of the Easter Uprising and the conscription referendum and in the midst of the political crisis engendered by the war. It is not hard to understand why there would be a significant left-wing developing within the union and that this would be influenced by the prevailing syndicalist enthusiasm. More importantly, that minority was able to sway the majority – to convince them to strike. This is shown by the swift reaction of the seamen on the ships in Sydney Harbour to the strike call and the subsequent, more representative, meeting which voted to make the strike official. This can be explained by a combination of resentment at accumulated industrial grievances and the enthusiasm engendered by the mass strike that was sweeping the State. This latter factor is particularly important and will be dealt with in more detail later in this paper.

---

\(^9\) Ibid.  
\(^10\) *Sun*, 11 August 1917, p. 5.  
\(^11\) *Daily Telegraph*, 13 August 1917, p. 5.  
\(^12\) *Sun*, 13 August 1917, p. 5.  
\(^13\) Ibid.
There is another element which is peculiar to the experience of the seamen in 1917. A comparison with the wharfies is instructive. The wharfies also faced a group of federal officials who were hostile to their participation in the strike. The Waterside Workers’ Federation Committee of Management (its federal executive body) tried in vain to engineer a return to work by the wharfies in 1917. Their efforts, however, were above board and consisted mostly of arguments made, unsuccessfully, in mass meetings. Cooper, the General Secretary of the Seamen’s Union played a much more unpleasant role. The minutes of the Steamship Owners’ Federation record that as early as 16 August he was active in trying to undermine the strike:

> It was reported that Mr. Cooper had visited the various Companies at Sydney and had intimated that the railway strike would probably collapse shortly and the seamen would be prepared to go back if payment were made for the time they have been on strike.

There is no evidence that this underhand approach to the employers was known to the rank and file of the union. More significant was a dispute with the Melbourne Branch about the ending of the strike in October. The seamen returned to work nationally on 9 October, but when the crew of the _Oonah_ in Melbourne found that they would have to work with 17 scabs (with 17 of the former crew thus victimised) the Melbourne Branch walked out again. The shipowners retaliated by locking seamen out nationally. Cooper, who was now firmly in control again in NSW, engineered a motion at a meeting in Sydney that NSW seamen would man vessels if the Victorian members refused. In other words, the NSW members were willing to scab on their Victorian comrades. Cooper then travelled to Melbourne where he delivered the message to a furious mass meeting and was chased down Exhibition Street by an angry mob for his pains.

Cooper soon abandoned the union, and the attendant dangers of facing angry seamen, when he vacated his official position for a Government job in 1918. His departure provided an opening for Tom Walsh to join the ranks of officials. Walsh had been active in radical circles during the war and was a delegate on the National Committee of the union. When Cooper departed, he was temporarily replaced by one of his supporters, the NSW secretary, Edwards, and Walsh replaced Edwards as secretary of the NSW branch. From this toehold in Sydney, Walsh then challenged Edwards and narrowly won an election as General Secretary in early 1919. This was in the immediate aftermath of the tiny pay rise awarded by Justice Higgins in 1918. Walsh had the support of only a minority on the National Committee, but a rank and file rebellion soon changed that. In January 1919, seamen in the Eastern states had joined a strike initiated by New Zealand seamen. This had not been supported by the National Committee and all but the Queensland branch members returned to work. Walsh supported the strike and, in May, won a second ballot for General Secretary by a substantial margin. Almost immediately the Victorian and then the NSW branches struck again. The seamen’s strike was on, and Walsh’s position was made more secure by a decision of some of the old officials in NSW to resign their positions in disgust.

The militancy of the seamen’s union in 1919 was not, then, simply a reflection of the politics and character of Walsh and his close supporters like Le Cornu, the new union President. Walsh and Le Cornu’s radicalism, particularly their open denunciation of arbitration, was as much a reflection of a new found militancy in the rank and file. This had its roots in economic discontent, in the disappointment of Higgins’s miserly eleven percent pay rise in 1918, in the political radicalisation associated with war and with the experience of the mass strike in 1917. The leadership betrayal in Victoria in 1917 was clearly important. Gibson, the Victorian secretary throughout this period, had been indistinguishable politically from the federal officials before 1917. He had opposed striking at the beginning of the 1917 strike. Yet,
by the end of the strike, he had clearly sided with his newly militant members as they roasted Cooper.22 In 1919 he was a Walsh loyalist and, when the strike began, despite the fact that Walsh had first obtained official status in NSW, it began in Victoria.23 During the dispute between Cooper and the Victorian branch in October 1917, an unnamed Sydney official of the union was cited in the press complaining that the Victorian branch had previously ‘not been staunch unionists’ and that its new militancy came as a shock.24 It is significant then that this once-backward branch should initiate the 1919 strike.

The extent to which the rank and file had moved to the left was shown towards the end of the 1919 strike when they proved to be more militant even than Walsh and his supporters. After Walsh was arrested, a deal was cobbled together which would eventually result in the seamen obtaining all their demands – though this was not immediately clear. All the officials, including Walsh loyalists, recommended a return to work. Walsh wrote a letter from prison pleading with the members to go back, but the Victorian and NSW branches refused.25 This time it was the turn of the NSW branch to be the most intransigent. They held out the longest and even briefly replaced the fiery Le Cornu with a more militant delegate on the National Committee.26 The radical mood is summed up by the revelation, in a secret report on the strike prepared for the Prime Minister, that before one of the strike processions in Sydney ‘some of the strikers’ asked President Joyce of the Trades Hall ‘if he would advise them to carry firearms’.27

From this brief narrative it is possible to list the elements that led to a transformation in the political and industrial traditions of the seamen. First there was a general discontent with wages in particular which was exacerbated by the wartime economic conditions and the inability of arbitration to remedy grievances in a sufficient or timely manner. Next there was a general political radicalisation associated with the war and the agitation around conscription, the Easter Uprising in Ireland and so on. Associated with and flowing out of this generalised left-wing shift was the crystallisation of a layer of politicised militants influenced by syndicalist ideas, most importantly, a belief in the superiority of direct action over arbitration. Finally, as we have already noted, there was, in 1917, a mass strike movement which, by the time the seamen began to consider strike action, had involved the coal miners and the wharfies and had begun to fill the Domain and the streets of Sydney with thousands, even tens of thousands of strikers and their supporters.

The atmosphere in Sydney during the early days of the 1917 strike was one of almost millennial enthusiasm, tinged with more than a touch of larrikin energy. The daily strike processions were orderly but far from solemn. One thing, for instance, that stands out from descriptions of both the demonstrations and the mass meetings is the ubiquity of the song Solidarity For Ever.28 The song had only been written two years earlier by a member of the IWW in the United States.29 It has since become accepted as an anthem of the union movement, but in 1917 it was new and had a radical aura. It summed up, however, the nature of the great strike. The introduction of the card system into the workshops at Randwick and Eveleigh did not directly affect the vast majority of strikers. They were striking in solidarity with the railway workers – and so the song was particularly apt.

What the enthusiasm and energy of the strike movement and its associated protests demonstrates is the way in which a mass strike can electrify the labour movement, particularly if it is built from below – how the momentum of struggle can build in such a way that new groups of workers are inspired to act. This phenomenon was famously described by Rosa Luxemburg. Her description of the way in which political and economic struggles can feed off of and into one another, seems particularly apt for the 1917 strike, sandwiched, as it was, in between the anti-conscription campaigns engendered by the two referenda of 1916 and 1917.

Gibson, to defeat a strike call at a mass meeting on 14 August. Age, 17 August 1917, p. 8, after relating a rumour that seamen were likely to leave their vessels one by one rather than work with the scabs who had replaced striking wharfies (a correct rumour, as this is what in fact occurred), added: ‘This attitude, however, is not supported by officials of the Seamen’s Union’.

22 Sydney Morning Herald, 16 October 1917, p. 7: ‘It is stated that the local secretary, Mr. Gibson, participated in the condemnation of the attitude of the Federal Executive.’
24 Sydney Morning Herald, 18 October 1917, p. 7.
25 Age, 5 August 1919, p. 5.
26 Age, 18 August 1917, p. 7. Le Cornu had as incendiary a reputation as Walsh. See, for instance, Age, 9 June 1919, p. 6, citing a speech by Le Cornu: ‘He [Higgins] said we have deliberately flouted the court. I admit that, and we are going to flout it for all time.’ This indicates the extent of the radicalisation that the Sydney Branch considered him to be insufficiently militant.
28 Daily Telegraph, 10 August, p. 5, and Sydney Morning Herald, 13 August 1917, p. 8, record it being sung on street processions. Daily Telegraph, 18 August 1917, p. 5, notes that badges were being sold inscribed with ‘Solidarity For Ever’. Sydney Morning Herald, 14 August 1917, p. 8, describes Painters and Dockers leaving the mass meeting which voted to strike: ‘They trooped out, singing with great hilarity “Solidarity for ever, for union makes us strong”’. Daily Telegraph, 11 September 1917, p. 6, also describes wharfies leaving a mass meeting singing ‘Solidarity’.
The worker, suddenly aroused by the electric shock of a political action, grasps immediately and above all that which is most distinctly present to him: the resistance to his economic slavery. The stormy gesture of the political struggle causes him suddenly to feel the weight and the pressure of his economic chains with unexpected intensity.30

It helps explain the readiness of the seamen to strike – obeying a single shouted call from the dockside in Sydney, or walking off ship-by-ship in Melbourne. The experience of that strike enabled the militant left-wing minority to win over the mass of ordinary members to the idea of direct action. The Melbourne Branch, in particular, was transformed from one of the most backward branches of the union to one of its most militant. The experience of defeat momentarily restored the influence of the conservative officials within the Sydney Branch, though only at the cost of further alienating the Victorians who would become a key section of Walsh’s support base. Even in Sydney the restoration of Cooper’s influence was short-lived, as Walsh’s election as Branch Secretary in 1918 showed. Disgust over Justice Higgins’ pitiful wage increase of late 1918 then helped tip the balance in Walsh’s favour and, under a leadership which concurred with their new-found distaste for arbitration, a pattern of militancy and political radicalism was set that would last, despite setbacks, for most of the twentieth century. When Thomas Robinson called out to the seamen on the Canberra on 11 August 1917, he was helping to create a new tradition. He deserves to be remembered for that.

The IWW in International Perspective: comparing the North American and Australasian Wobblies

Verity Burgmann*

American labour historiography has tended to assume, as Patrick Renshaw does, that the Locals of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) that appeared in countries like Canada, Britain and Australia ‘slavishly followed all the American trends, debates, and schisms’. However, it is true that the Australian, New Zealand and Canadian IWW Locals inherited their ideology and organisational principles more or less intact from their American parent after the founding conference in Chicago in 1905, intriguing contrasts nonetheless emerged in the application of these shared ideas and principles on the two sides of the Pacific Ocean. The Australian IWW, established in 1907, was especially distinctive. The most significant differences between the North American and Australasian expressions of revolutionary industrial unionism were: the degree of opposition to political action; the social position of their supporters; relations with existing trade union structures; the responses to the Great War; and the manner of their persecution.

Opposition to political action

To the American IWW, political action was less a practice to be rejected as a matter of principle but an irrelevancy, because those to whom the IWW most clearly appealed had no political means, because they were estranged from the electoral process by the racial, linguistic and residency requirements for voter registration. Accordingly, the American IWW, while rejecting control by political parties, never expressly condemned political action and many American Wobblies were active members of parties such as the Socialist Party. In 1908 the American IWW had split over the issue of political action. Those who believed the IWW should remain unaligned with any particular political party were in the majority; they remained headquartered in Chicago and became what is commonly known as the IWW. The minority under Daniel De Leon argued the IWW should engage in parliamentary politics by linking up with the Socialist Labor Party, and these ‘De Leonites’ set up a rival IWW based in Detroit; and this division was replicated in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Britain. Yet even the Chicago IWW was ‘non-political’ rather than ‘anti-political’. J.R. Conlin insists too much has been made of the deletion of the political clause in 1908; equally significant was the rejection without discussion by the 1911 Chicago IWW Convention of an amendment to the Preamble that referred to ‘the futility of political action’. The situation in Canada was similar, according to A. Ross McCormack:

Like their fellow workers south of the forty-ninth parallel whose attitudes have been described by Dubofsky and Conlin, the Wobblies in western Canada were essentially non-political rather than anti-political; their syndicalism was empirical. The IWW disdained political action because the great majority of its constituency was, what Wobblies called, constitutionally ‘dead.’ Either because they had not been naturalized or because they could not meet residence requirements, most itinerant workers were without the franchise.

Mark Leier likewise explains that one reason the Canadian IWW eschewed the ballot box was that its members, usually migrant workers who could not meet property and residency requirements, and immigrant workers who were not citizens, could not vote. For instance, during the 1909 British Columbia election, the Industrial Worker commented on the Socialist Party of Canada’s call for electoral support by pointing out that, of the 5,000 Wobblies in the area, only 75 were eligible to register and vote.

Göran Therborn’s examination of the onset of democratic processes in the current OECD countries shows that Australia and New Zealand, important racial restrictions apart, were the first of the modern OECD countries to achieve the four defining variables of a bourgeois democratic political order: a representative government elected by an electorate consisting of the entire adult population, whose votes carry equal weight and who are allowed to vote for any opinion without intimidation by the state apparatus. Australia attained this situation in 1903, New Zealand in 1907, Canada in 1920 and the USA about 1970.

The preconditions for working-class representation in Australasian parliaments were established prior to

---

3 Conlin, *Bread and Roses Too*, p. 35.
the period of ascendancy of the IWW; in Canada and the USA such circumstances did not pertain at the time and, indeed, have barely materialised subsequently in Canada and not at all in the United States.

In New Zealand, in 1890, organised workers won unprecedented political gains when six unionists were elected to the House of Representatives and another 30 members enjoyed union support. These men ensured the newly elected government responded to the demands of labour and the new government became known as Liberal-Labour or ‘Lib-Lab’, passing laws that cemented workers’ loyalty and improved their lot. Over the ensuing decades, most working-class families remained loyal to the Lib-Lab coalition. The New Zealand labour movement was therefore less politically advanced than its Australian counterpart, with a false start in 1904 with the formation of an Independent Political Labour League, which became the United Labour Party in 1910 but subsequently foundered and split. Only after workers experienced significant industrial defeats between 1908 and 1913 and the conservative Massey Government was particularly harsh on striking workers did the New Zealand Federation of Labour become converted to the need for political representation independently of the Liberals, leading to the establishment in 1916 of the New Zealand Labour Party that has endured to this day. The situation in New Zealand thus bore more resemblance to that in Britain, with a similar experience of parliamentary cooperation with Liberals. It is thus hardly surprising that in both Britain and New Zealand, the Detroit IWW Clubs were stronger in relation to the Chicago IWW Locals than in Australia, because they were able to argue that political action could indeed be highly productive if pursued independently of Liberals.

In Australia, on the other hand, independent political action had already been tried and found wanting. Len Richardson notes that in New Zealand it was miners who had worked previously in Australia who were most sceptical about the prospects of keeping honest any workingmen elected to parliament, pointing to the ALP’s endorsement of compulsory military training to press their point. Australia, even more than New Zealand, was a white democracy, with labour parties viable because of this democratic status, many years before the USA and Canada with significantly better-developed economies. Also significant was the relative ease with which the migratory worker could secure electoral registration in Australia; electoral registration was even compulsory under the Commonwealth Electoral Act and fines were administered to those who did not register, a decided contrast to the situation in North America. It was alleged that the IWW encouraged workers to avoid registration and many Wobblies did choose to avoid electoral registration and were accordingly fined under this Act. However, disenfranchisement was their illegal choice; it was not imposed upon their kind, as in the USA and Canada. With workers in Australia forcibly enfranchised, Labor Parties were spectacularly successful in comparison with similar parties elsewhere in the world, forming government briefly in Queensland in 1899 and federally in 1904. During the heyday of the Australian IWW, Labor was in government federally in 1908-09, 1910-1913 and 1914-1917. It was also in government for much of this period in most of the six States.

The IWW was able to point to the behaviour of Labor governments to warn against political action. ‘I was absolutely convinced,’ explained leading Wobbly Tom Barker, ‘particularly after seeing [Labor] politicians in both New Zealand and Australia that a strong and even ruthless working-class body was necessary to see that people were properly protected and properly paid.’ The IWW claimed the doings of the New South Wales McGowen Labor government should ‘serve as a warning to the working-class, not alone of this country but of the whole world.’ Direct Action had a running commentary on the futility of political action, sell-outs and betrayals by Labor politicians, their huge salaries and perks, and so on. The defining message of the IWW was that Labor politicians could not be trusted. The best-known song of the Australian IWW was ‘Bump Me Into Parliament’, which ridiculed the pretence of Labor MPs to advance working-class interests while enjoying so much the pomp and circumstance of parliamentary life. Also to ‘Yankee Doodle’ was a less well-known Australian IWW song, ‘Hey! Polly,’ which began:

---

14 Direct Action, 15 June 1914, p. 2.
The politician prowls around,
For workers’ votes entreating;
He claims to know the slickest way
To give the boss a beating.

Chorus:
Polly, we can’t use you, dear,
To lead us into clover;
This fight is ours, and as for you,
Clear out or get run over.  

Australian Wobblies were in a peculiarly strong position to make judgments about the experiment of working-class parliamentary representation, to indulge effectively in polemical abuse, based on concrete evidence about the performance of Labor representatives: ‘Workers of Australia, you have raised up unto yourselves gods, in the shape of Labor politicians, and behold events have proved that their feet are but of clay.’  

The Australian IWW was not just abstractly but empirically anti-political.

The strength of the IWW in the USA and Canada stemmed from discontent with the weak, conservative, craft-based and ineffective nature of existing forms of trade unionism and not from disillusion with parliamentary politics, which had not been seriously tried. In Australia, by contrast, it was the precarious nature of the political labour movement that explains the appeal of the Chicago IWW to militant workers in this period. The Australian IWW was able to recruit from amongst the most disaffected Labor voters, because it expressed and reinforced the strong feelings of resentment felt by many militant workers towards their elected representatives, resentment that increased as politicians became more and more influential within the labour movement. So the Australian IWW, operating in a country with a comparatively democratic franchise and compulsory electoral registration, was more expressly and truly anti-political, a stance informed by the experience then unique to Australia of the inability of Labor governments to unmake capitalist social conditions.

The social position of their supporters

In all four countries, miners, transport and construction workers were an important component in the IWW membership base. Another common element was the migratory rural worker: in railway construction, lumber, wood and various sorts of agriculture; in Australasia also those in the pastoral industries of sheep and cattle grazing. McCormack observes such similarities across North America: ‘the IWW in western Canada organized the same constituency as that of western American Wobblies, unskilled, itinerant workers—loggers, harvesters, longshoremen, construction workers.’

Despite these commonalities between North American and Australasian Wobblies, the economic, political and social position of the itinerant worker was significantly different in the two realms. In stressing the hobo characteristics of the Wobblies, North American accounts have in mind a social aberration, whether romanticised or pathologised; or rationalized, as in Richard Rajala’s argument that Wobbly mobility should be understood as a reasonable response to the vagaries of the labour market.  

David Schulze refers to the relatively large group of unskilled, migrant, and largely immigrant workers in early twentieth-century North America, employed in seasonal, labour-intensive industries, who were largely ignored by craft unions and too transient to be easy converts to Socialist parliamentarianism. ‘The

17 Direct Action, 1 May 1914, p. 2; 16 Sept. 1916, p. 1.
social and economic marginalisation of this segment of the working class was particularly well-suited to IWW radicalism …”21 He attests, too, to the divisions within the Canadian working class, between the more respectable, urban, craft-oriented sections and those to whom the IWW appealed: the ‘rough labour element’.22 He argues further that, although IWW radicalism was a mobilizing force, ‘it could not overcome this constituency’s objective weaknesses’; their political force was only equal to their threat to public order, given their social and economic marginality.23

Mark Leier’s study of the Vancouver Free Speech Fights of 1909 and 1912 draws a similar picture of a segmented labour movement, with the IWW speaking for those whom the city authorities and ‘the respectable labour leaders’ of the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council both saw as ‘undesirables’.24 McCormack also notes the distance between Canadian Wobblies and the mainstream labour movement:

By the very nature of its tactics and doctrine, the IWW was isolated from workers organized by the American Federation of Labour (AFL) and the Trades and Labour Congress (TLC). This condition was substantially reinforced by the nature of the Wobblies’ constituency; unskilled, unorganised and un-British, the itinerants never constituted a part of the labour movement.

For example, the Winnipeg Trades Council was unaware of the existence of the north-end IWW Local of 400 Ukrainians and Poles.25 Within the Australian labour movement, by contrast, the itinerant ‘bush’ worker was more revered than reviled. Far from being neglected by Australian unionism as their equivalents were by the American Federation of Labor, itinerant workers were amongst its strongest participants and were especially active in the new unions formed late in the nineteenth century. Unlike the American and Canadian hobo, largely ignored by institutionalised labour, the ‘nomad’ was respected within the Australian labour movement: witness Lawson’s poem about the itinerant worker whose body was identified by his union card.

Encapsulated in the labour pantheon, the nomad was honoured also in the wider society, as Russel Ward famously argued in The Australian Legend in 1958: the mores of the nomadic rural proletariat worked upwards and outwards until they became the principal ingredient of a national mystique: loyalty to one’s mates; antagonism towards authority; and contempt for middle-class virtues such as sobriety, industry, formal education and religious observance. The relatively higher standing of itinerant workers in Australia reflected the difference between Australian and American economic structures: Australia was primarily an extractive and large-scale grazing economy absolutely dependent on the labour of migratory workers; the USA was a more industrialized economy in which transient workers played a vital but far smaller role.

Because of the significant position of the itinerant worker in Australian society at this time, the antipodean Wobblies have even been cited by P. J. Rushton as representatives of the national character, ‘part of a larger legend’, because they not only recruited many of their members from amongst the nomadic rural proletariat but manifested many of the attitudes and values of the national character based on this mythologised worker.26 The Australian IWW was a quintessentially Australian organisation; unlike its American progenitor and its Canadian counterpart, it was in tune with stereotypical national characteristics. Australian Wobblies thus blended easily against the background of labour movement and national types. They were able to play on accepted themes dear to the national character. The inventive genius of Wobbly argot easily absorbed local cultural mores. In particular, the capacity of the antipodean Wobblies to mount their critique of Laborism was facilitated by the greater standing within their societies of the footloose worker.

**Relations with existing trade union structures**

Given this degree of alienation of North American Wobblies from the mainstream labour movements, the IWW Locals in the USA and Canada considered that ‘boring from within’ the established trade unions was largely futile. North American Wobblies therefore created new unions in competition with the existing unions, a tactic known as ‘dual unionism’. The Australasian IWW Locals, by contrast, had little choice but to ‘bore from within.’ Dual unionism remained a long-term aspiration, but not an immediate tactic; so they bored from within with propaganda about the need in due course for building from without.

This significant departure from North American IWW practice was an adaptation to Australasian

circumstances. Figures indicate that in 1916 union density was 47.5 per cent in Australia and only 12.2 per cent in the USA. By 1913 New Zealand was the third most unionised country in the world. The Australasian IWWs were operating in an environment where the labour movement was extremely well-organised by international standards. New unions of semi-skilled and unskilled workers had developed in both Australia and New Zealand, and it was these new unions that became the backbone of the labour movement in these countries, working cooperatively with the older craft unions but in many ways outflanking them as the locus of power within these much less stratified labour movements.

The Australasian IWWs were not, like the North American, aiming to organize workers neglected by trade unionism; they were hoping, rather, to change the basis on which all workers were organized. Thus most Wobblies were members, also, of established trade unions. Within these unions in both Australia and New Zealand, Wobbly activists criticised craftism and sectionalism, and in particular the emergence of a trade union bureaucracy, especially when it was numerous and better remunerated than the workers it serviced. They nonetheless worked productively within these unions, their most critical instincts tempered by their recognition that the tactic of boring from within could only succeed if relations with other unions were reasonable. It is interesting that, in private IWW correspondence seized by police, Wobbles advised each other not to alienate craft unionists. Tom Barker expressly warned the miners establishing the Tottenham Local in 1915 not to ‘antagonise the crafties’, for ‘they are the material we have to work upon, and therefore every care should be taken to keep their good will’. A security file on the IWW noted that ‘there has been a growing movement on the part of the I.W.W. men to join Unions so that the principles of their organization might be more widely promulgated’.

It was indeed by such means that Wobbly ideas spread within the Australian labour movement. Military intelligence regretted that IWW theories had ‘struck deep into the militant unions’. New South Wales Labor Premier Holman regretted ‘the secret but steadily growing influence of the Industrial Workers of the World over union organisations’. Jimmy Seamer, a mining industry unionist of the time, recalled: ‘You met Wobblies wherever you went ... All militants followed the Wobblies ... They had a foot in everywhere’. Wobby support subsisted in unstructured, informal and ground-level networks of militancy within mainstream trade unions, which enhanced the influence, effectiveness and resilience of the IWW. In New Zealand the IWW operated as a left grouping within the New Zealand Federation of Labour, known as the Red Fed. This was not a narrow craft-conscious federation but a militant one based on less skilled workers, especially miners, shearsers, construction workers, general labourers, waterside workers, who were becoming increasingly critical of arbitration and faith in parliamentary action; and which achieved considerable success in winning improved conditions and rates of pay. The argument within the Federation was whether or not the entire Federation should be remodelled on the lines of the IWW: should all unions in each industry surrender their local autonomy and become one centralised national industrial union, ultimately allowing for the formation of One Big Union throughout the entire country—the ultimate purpose of the IWW.

The main issue within the Red Fed was arbitration. Because the New Zealand Labour Party was less precocious, the IWW there was less able than in Australia to focus on the duplicity of Labour politicians, but it could home in on the perceived shortcomings of arbitration from a militant working-class perspective. The Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act of 1894 was the foundation of the Lib-Lab alliance and a new system of industrial relations: the establishment of a court of three (a neutral judge and one elected by unions of workers and other by unions of employers) armed with power to bring down legally binding awards. A similar regime was established in Australia, but not until 1904 and the system was more entrenched in New Zealand. Militant workers were tired of the delays and felt they could get even better results through collective bargaining. Within the Red Fed the IWW pushed for industrial action outside of the arbitration system, to ‘toss every agreement to Hell’. According to Erik Olssen, this argument was particularly pushed in New Zealand after 1911 when certain North American Wobbles arrived. Foremost among these was John Benjamin King, who worked his way to Auckland as a stoker, 27 Greg Patmore, ‘Australian Labor Historiography: The Influence of the USA,’ Labor History, 37, 4, Fall 1996, pp. 521-2.
29 Detective Moore’s Report re History and Proceedings of the IWW, SANSW7/5588.
31 IWW, Statement giving a brief outline of the activities of the above organization in Australia, Australian Archives, ACT Branch, CRS A56 Item W26/148 P. H.B.
34 Interview by Verity Burgmann with Jimmy Seamer, Wollongong, 29 August 1985.
36 Ibid., p. 130.
37 Ibid., p. 108.
perhaps, muses Olssen, to see for himself the country with the famous labour laws, for the success of such legislation was a contentious issue in the American debate about political action. Just as Australian Wobblies condemned political action on the basis of experience, the New Zealand IWW decided on the evidence before it that the country’s Arbitration Act was the ‘last refuge of capitalism’.

The effects of the Australasian IWW Locals’ decisions to make a political virtue out of industrial necessity were significant. In relegating dual unionism to the realm of long-term aspiration and boring from within in the meantime, Wobblies down under secured considerable protection. They did not experience the same degree of violent employer resistance encountered by their fellow workers across the Pacific in forming an embryonic dual union structure. The notorious brutalities inflicted on American Wobblies were not experienced by Wobblies in Australasia, where industrial relations were conducted with a comparative gentleness, disdaining use of gun and lynchings, resorting merely to dismissals, blacklisting, police interference with strikes and the occasional arrest. Australasian employers could not easily isolate and physically intimidate Wobblies, because they worked under the cover of a strong trade union movement that, in Australia, had the added respectability of sponsoring one of the two parties of government. Where American Wobblies were confronted physically by employers and their thugs, Australasian Wobblies were simply hemmed in by the trade union movement itself.

The significance of anti-war campaigning
The IWW in New Zealand reached its zenith between 1911 and 1913 then largely self-destructed with the disappearance of significant Wobblly leaders to Australia, such as King in 1912 and Barker in 1914. In Canada, too, by the beginning of the War the IWW was on the decline, its membership falling and its locals disintegrating. This collapse had resulted from employer opposition, earlier instances of government repression and economic depression, especially the ending of the railway building boom, which produced the dispersion of the construction workers. In both these countries, the IWW was already too weak to be affected greatly by the issue of militarism; and IWW responses to the Great War made little impact on society. This was not the case in the USA and Australia. In the USA, the IWW was internally riven over the question of the war. Most American Wobblies believed there was a serious danger that anti-war activity would distract from organisation at the point of production and invite government repression. This position encouraged American IWW reticence on the war and withdrawal of anti-war pamphlets it had initially produced. Overall, as Melvyn Dubofsky states, the American IWW ‘did nothing directly to interfere with the American war effort.’

By contrast, in Australia, no organisation opposed the outbreak of the Great War as promptly and vociferously as the IWW. The front page of Direct Action for 10 August 1914 declared:


On 22 August Tom Barker urged: ‘LET THOSE WHO OWN AUSTRALIA DO THE FIGHTING. Put the wealthiest in the front ranks; the middle class next; follow these with politicians, lawyers, sky pilots and judges. Answer the declaration of war with the call for a GENERAL STRIKE.’

The Australian IWW was aware of the arguments that had motivated American IWW quietude on the issue of the war and was alert to the possible dangers of anti-war mobilisation. Yet, unlike its American progenitor, it threw itself wholeheartedly into campaigning against the war and Australian involvement. In so doing, it increased rather than diminished its opportunities to organize at the point of production, because its anti-war activity won it many supporters amongst workers inclined to be critical of the senseless slaughter. The threat of conscription in particular gave the IWW its greatest opportunity to have its voice heard. It expanded rapidly in this period. ‘Great crowds used to come to our anti-conscription meetings,’ Tom Barker recalls, ‘up to a sixth of the population of Sydney gathering around and trying to

38 Ibid., p. 128.
39 Ibid., p. 163
40 For details of Australian IWW involvement in industrial disputes, see Burgmann, Revolutionary Industrial Unionism, pp. 159-80.
41 Olssen, The Red Feds, p. 211.
Just as the IWW became established in the patriotic mind as the source of disloyal infection, so also was it confirmed in the radical working-class mind as the centre of anti-militarist resistance. As the labour movement divided over the issue of the war and Australia’s involvement in it, ultimately tearing itself apart over the question of conscription in 1916-1917, the role of the IWW in encouraging this regrouping into left/anti-conscription and right/pro-conscription forces, was crucial. By November 1916 Labor Prime Minister Hughes was complaining that the IWW was ‘largely responsible for the present attitude of organised labour, industrially and politically, towards the war.’52 Three-quarters of the Labor politicians in federal parliament indicated they would refuse to pass a Conscription Act. For this Prime Minister Hughes blamed the IWWs, ‘foul parasites’ who had ‘attached themselves to the vitals of labour.’48 He appealed to ‘organised labour’ to cast out from its midst those who dominated the anti-conscription wing of the movement: ‘Extremists—I.W.W. men, Revolutionary socialists, Syndicalists, ‘red-raggers’ ... who seek to use labour for their own purposes.’49 Hughes’ desire to beat back all IWW influence from within the labour movement sealed the fate of those he blamed for fomenting opposition to him and his kind from within that movement.

The manner of persecution

As the American experience suggests, the Australian IWW would have been suppressed regardless of its position on the war, so its stricter adherence to the IWW’s internationalist principles was not the principal cause of its undoing. The Australian IWW was persecuted not because it opposed the war, nor because it constituted a serious threat to the established order, but because it provided a focal point of far-left opposition within the labour movement, and an expanding one, to the right-wing of that movement. According to a contemporary observer, the right of the labour movement resented the IWW for its ‘determination to make workers believe their representatives in Parliament are all unmitigated scoundrels’.

Given the near disintegration of the IWW Locals in Canada and New Zealand by 1914, there was little need for wartime governments in these countries to engage in concerted repression of the IWW. This was not the case in the United States and Australia, but there were fundamental differences in the manner of their destruction.

In the USA it was employer-sponsored lynch mobs that inflicted the most serious damage upon American Wobblies, backed up by extreme measures against ‘criminal syndicalism’ enacted in twenty states and two territories between 1917 and 1920.51 In Australia, the repression of the IWW was engineered by the right-wing of the labour movement—in government—to prevent the formation of revolutionary industrial unions that would seize control of the labour movement, if not of the means of production. Labor governments at federal and state level utilized the paraphernalia of patriotism, casting the IWW as an enemy agent, to contest the radical economic and social ideas espoused by the IWW that were becoming increasingly influential within the labour movement. So, while the Australian IWW did not endure the privatised retribution inflicted upon their American fellow workers—the beatings, the lynchings, the intimidation and torturings by individual loyalists—the state-sponsored suppression of the Australian IWW, which occurred in advance of American criminal syndicalism legislation, was sufficiently draconian to achieve the eradication of the IWW as a viable organisation.

This was assisted by the framing of twelve Wobblies and their trial late in 1916 for treason-felony: plotting arson on Sydney business premises. With public hysteria aroused by this case, the Hughes National Labor government enacted the Unlawful Associations Act, passed on 19 December 1916, under which any member of the IWW could be imprisoned.52 In the next few months, 103 Wobblies were imprisoned, usually for terms of six months with hard labour, and many more were sacked from their jobs. Twelve foreign-born Wobblies were deported; at the same time, United States authorities were shipping some American Wobblies to Australia.53 The ships passed each other in the Pacific.

46 Eric Fry (ed.), Tom Barker and the IWW, ASSLH, Canberra, 1965, p. 27.
48 Quoted in Direct Action, 22 Jan. 1916, p. 4.
The final irony was that the labour movement, whose more right-wing political representatives had suppressed the IWW, was also responsible for releasing the Twelve, testimony to the degree to which the strategy of boring from within had enabled Wobblies to become accepted as a legitimate part of the wider labour movement. The agitation on their behalf was so strong that the movement to release them spread outward from the Wobblies themselves to embrace all manner of labour organisations: trade unions; labour and trades hall councils and regional industrial councils; left-wing parties; and even sections of the Labor Party. Union after union committed itself in support of the release campaign and to industrial action if necessary. The Twelve were released in stages by a New South Wales Labor Premier during 1920 and 1921, bowing to the strength of the mainstream trade union campaign to defend those whom they saw as their most militant but also their own. Labor News boasted moreover that the liberated men owed their freedom to the fact that Labor was in power. It is unlikely that any of the Twelve, in departing Long Bay Gaol, were cursing ‘crafties’ or singing ‘Polly, We Can’t Use You Dear’.

Though the Australasian and Canadian IWWs were direct transplants from their country of origin and remained recognizable as such, they adapted to local circumstances. The extent to which they flourished and the ways in which they did so in these different settings depended on distinctive attributes developed in intelligent response to the environments in which they operated. Had these IWW outposts been obliged to toe a Chicago line, their local impacts would have been less remarkable. As we remember 100 years of revolutionary industrial unionism in Australia, it is worth noting this contrast with the Communist movement that succeeded it and to celebrate the significance of the IWW’s commitment to freedom of working-class manoeuvre.

---


Rupert Lockwood abroad, 1935-38: genesis of a Cold War journalist

Rowan Cahill*

Rupert Lockwood (1908-1997) was one of Australia’s best known Cold War communists; ‘highly intelligent, articulate and gutsy’ as a journalist, he was also an orator, pamphleteer, lecturer, broadcaster, commentator, and highly regarded amongst rank and file Australian communists. According to the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation agent Dr. Michael Bialoguski, in Sydney communist circles it was sufficient to say “but Rupert Lockwood said so’ (to) settle an argument beyond doubt”.2

Lockwood’s name is inextricably linked to the Royal Commission into Espionage in Australia (1954-55) as a high profile witness, author of Exhibit (Document) J. Historically this document, and therefore Lockwood, figures in the ALP Split of 1954-57 because it resulted in drawing Labor Party leader, Dr. H. V. Evatt, before the Commission as legal counsel for members of his staff referred to in the document. Evatt’s Commission appearance was ‘one of the last straws that finally broke Labor unity’.3 From 1952 until retirement in 1985 Lockwood was primarily either associate editor or editor of the *Maritime Worker*, the national journal of the Waterside Workers’ Federation (WWF), and part of a communist team with ‘impressive talents’ that headed up the federal office of that union on the frontline of the Cold War in Australia, the waterfront.4 However, it should be noted that Lockwood’s employment with the WWF was such that it allowed time for other journalistic and authorial work, including Communist Party of Australia (CPA) assignments.5

In the context of Australian Cold War history, Lockwood is more than a footnote, and warrants biographical exploration. As a ‘communist journalist’, the way he is often described in Cold War related literature6, it is instructive to look at what this description does not convey in his case, what it overlooks or dismisses, arguably carrying with it the suggestion of ‘otherness’, of being ideological in a way that journalists working for capitalist media outlets were/are not, and therefore perhaps somehow limited, inferior, tainted, less credible, not a real journalist.

Lockwood was a member of the CPA for about thirty years; his career as a reporter, journalist and writer spanned over sixty years, more if you count his childhood experiences, which is when he was introduced to the world of newspapers and journalism. An active member of the Australian Journalists’ Association (AJA), he was one of three journalists responsible for drafting the AJA’s Code of Ethics in 1942 (adopted nationally in 1944).7 Further, the bulk of Lockwood’s career as a journalist was either with non-communist publications, including the Melbourne Herald and the ABC Weekly, or the labour movement press, primarily the journal of the Waterside Workers’ Federation, the *Maritime Worker*. Lockwood’s close journalistic link with the CPA newspaper *Tribune*, which he was associated with when he wrote Document J (1953), amounted to a period of about twenty, not continuous, years. In a sense, to simply pigeonhole Lockwood as a ‘communist journalist’, whatever that is intended to convey, misrepresents Lockwood by ignoring at least half of his professional life, and glosses over the talents and experiences he brought to the service of the Australian Left and to the labour movement, and what he did in the service of both.

American writer, and former member of the American Communist Party, Howard Fast, observed in his 1988 novel about the McCarthy era, *The Pledge*: ‘No one is constructed instantly—in terms of mind and outlook—any more than one is changed instantly. The making and the changing are part of a process.’8 So it was with Lockwood, who joined the CPA in late 1939, during his early thirties. But there was a decisive period before this, between 1935 and 1938, which led to Lockwood’s commitment to the Left. By looking at this period in his life, the nature of his journalistic skills and talents are evident, giving an idea of the experiences and talents the term ‘communist journalist’ does not convey. Before that, some understanding of Lockwood’s life and career prior to 1935 is relevant because it was the building block of his future career in journalism.

---

4 Tom Sheridan, *Australia’s Own Cold War: The Waterfront Under Menzies*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 2006, p. 100. Sheridan lists this team, including Lockwood, as Jim Healy (General Secretary), Ted Roach (Assistant General Secretary), Norm Docker (Industrial Officer).
5 For example, at least two of Lockwood’s major (historical) works were researched and/or written whilst employed by the WWF: *Black Armada*, Australasian Book Society, Sydney South, 1975; *War on the Waterfront: Menzies, Japan and the Pig-Iron Dispute*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1987.
Rupert Ernest Lockwood was born on 10 March 1908 in Natimuk, a small town in Western Victoria’s Wimmera region. His father, Alfred Wright Lockwood (1867-1956), was proprietor of the personal, cantankerous, combative, *West Wimmera Mail* (525 subscribers); his mother Alice, nee Francis (born 1873), was a product of Melbourne’s Presbyterian Ladies College - musician, temperance campaigner, and former school teacher. The family cottage was named Caxton; the 4 page weekly *West Wimmera Mail* was produced on a hand operated press until 1937. Childhood for the Lockwood children (4 children to Alfred and Alice; 3 children to Alfred and Ida Lockwood – nee Klowss, following the death of Alice from cancer in 1913) took place in the context of the newspaper, where they functioned as unpaid printing labourers. By the age of 10 they could set type and operate the foot-pedal job-printing machine; by the age of 14 Rupert was reporting local news. The newspaper environment of the household formed a potent training ground; four of the Lockwood children forged adult careers in Australian journalism and letters.¹⁰

Rupert’s education variously took place at the Natimuk State School, informally in the town’s Mechanics’ Institute where he read widely; and from February 1924 to May 1926 at Melbourne’s elite Wesley College, a school with the tradition and expectation that its graduates would take prominent and leading roles in society in adult life¹¹. Following Wesley it was back to Natimuk, and the *Mail*, reporting small-town life. Eventually, Depression strains on family finances, Rupert’s own restlessness for broader horizons aroused by his Melbourne school experiences, and the social contacts of his elder brother Lionel (later Surgeon Rear-Admiral Lockwood, Medical Director-General, Royal Australian Navy, 1955-64), helped him secure a cadet journalist’s job on Keith Murdoch’s Melbourne *Herald* in 1930.

The Melbourne *Herald* of the 1930s was, as Don Watson has described, ‘a hotchpotch of almost incredible banality, and intelligent, often liberal, social and political comment’. Its young journalists were among ‘the best of their generation’. Murdoch had assembled ‘virtually the cream of Australia’s journalists’; in spite of the owner, the culture of personal discourse was ‘a general left-of-centre liberal consensus’.¹² By the outbreak of war in 1939, there was a ‘very, very strong Communist Party Branch in the *Herald* Office’.¹³

Starting as a second-year cadet, because of his Natimuk journalistic background, Lockwood accelerated through the four-year cadet system. By 1933 he had bargained his way from a D grade reporter to a B plus grading and was serving his first term as a Canberra galleryman.¹⁴ Close friendships developed at the *Herald* with John Fisher¹⁵ (son of former Labor Prime Minister Andrew Fisher: later worked abroad with Egon Kisch; became prominently active in the Spanish Republican cause; covered World War 2 from Moscow) and with Douglas Wilkie (son of theatre pioneers Allan Wilkie and Fredswyde Hunter-Watts; during World War 2, Wilkie distinguished himself as a principled war correspondent on the India-Burma battlefronts)¹⁶. Melbourne’s bohemian intelligentsia’s hotel, restaurant and cafe life became part of Lockwood’s environment and he associated with rationalist Bill Cooke, and leftists like Brian Fitzpatrick, Guido Baracchi, Noel Counihan, and Judah Waten.

A stint as the *Herald*’s ‘unemployment roundsman’ helped radicalise his political sensitivities, as did the dramatic 1934 lecture tour by Egon Kisch, the anti-fascist journalist and author. The tour and attendant political controversy made lasting impressions on many who were, or who became, part of the anti-fascist cause of the 1930s. Not only the tour had impact, but on some, Kisch’s approach to journalism, which went beyond observing and reporting; the journalist was a citizen of the world, was present in the story, engaged with the topic being written about, and in a sense helped make history. While journalism was a craft, it was also exciting, about purpose, commitment, and engagement; this was an approach to journalism that would variously be taken up by Lockwood, Fisher, and by a young door-to-door seller of

---


¹⁰ Aside from Rupert, Douglas (born 1918) became a national award winning journalist and distinguished author of 13 books; Frank (born 1919) and Allan (born 1922) took over the *Mail* following Alfred’s retirement (aged 83) in 1950 and, with modernisation and expansion, turned it into the largest circulation tri-weekly newspaper in Australia as the *Wimmera Mail Times*.


household appliances, future journalist Wilfred Burchett, who was influenced by Kisch when he heard him speak in Sydney’s Domain. Lockwood and Fisher provided Kisch with some of the Australian historical detail that later appeared in his book Australian Landfall. 17

Amongst Melbourne’s younger journalists there was an adventurous restlessness, heightened by news of the exploits from those who ‘got away’, 18 confident in the knowledge their Australian training stood them in good stead abroad. A number of them would leave Australia during the mid-to-late thirties. The tumult of the outside world beckoned, along with the allure of international acclaim. 19 As Hugh Thomas has noted, the 1930s were the great age of the foreign correspondent. 20 Lockwood sailed from Australia in March 1935, bound for Singapore. His restlessness was in part due to the unsettling, exciting impact of meeting with Kisch, the departure of Fisher who left for Europe with Kisch earlier in 1935 (later helping translate the 1937 English edition of Australian Landfall from German), and reports from Wilkie who had preceded them in 1934 when he headed for Europe via Asia.

In Asia Lockwood worked a variety of jobs, often simultaneously - for the Singapore Free Press, the Straits Times, Reuters, the Australian Newspaper Service, Australian Associated Press, and contributed by-lined feature articles to the Thursday and Saturday magazine sections of the Melbourne Herald. He visited the Netherlands East Indies (NEI), Siam, French Indo China, and Japan. His report on the Tokyo military mutiny (February 1936) for Reuters was a world scoop, and he was rewarded with a flattering tribute in the Reuters’ in-house bulletin and a five-guinea bonus. He believed the report brought him to the notice of the Kempeitai (Japan’s secret police), and that whilst in Japan his room was searched; he felt under threat. In July 1940 his Reuters host in Tokyo, James Melville Cox, was arrested as a spy and died during a Tokyo police interrogation; suicide was alleged. 21 During the 1930s Reuters’ work was often an uneasy tightrope walk between securing news and trying to avoid giving offence. 22 But it was not all work: Lockwood enjoyed himself in Asia; he enjoyed his travel opportunities, and social aspects of colonial life in Singapore, what he termed in later life ‘the sweet colonial life’. 23

His time in Asia had a twofold effect on Lockwood. First, his Reuters’ scoop sparked an ‘acute interest in the tangle and treachery of Japanese Imperial politics and the violence of military ambition’; 24 in Singapore he became aware of the way British military strategy in the Far East was underpinned by a racist underestimation of Japan’s military prowess. 25 This interest and awareness are evident in two of his articles published during 1939 in The Austral-Asiatic Bulletin (a two-monthly review published by the Australian Institute of International Affairs) about Japanese militarism and expansion in Asia. According to Lockwood, Japan’s expansion was rooted in its quest for natural resources and markets, which was helped by what he regarded as Australia’s policy ‘of appeasement, based on supposed commercial needs rather than morality’. Critical of the “Atlantic outlook” of the Australian press, geo-politically aware of the military vulnerability of Singapore, Lockwood considered war with Japan a future possibility, in the event of which no one could depend on Britain for security. Rather, hope lay with the Chinese communists, their resistance to Japan, bolstered by increased aid from Russia, and with the slim possibility of some form of social revolution developing in Japan. 26

Indeed Japanese militarism, its relationship with Japan’s industrial economy, the certainty that war between Australia and Japan was inevitable, became major concerns of Lockwood from 1939 onwards as a journalist and activist. Information he gathered as a journalist during the early years of World War 2, convinced him of the reality of the Brisbane Line strategy, and that an invasion of Australia by Japan would be accommodated by sections of the Australian ruling class. These convictions, arguably overtime becoming obsessive, ultimately formed a significant part of Document J. 27


18 The term is used by Alan Moorehead, A Late Education: Episodes in a Life, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1970, p. 31. Moorehead was a young Herald journalist during the early 1930s.


23 ‘Biography’, p. 4.


25 ibid., p. 16.


A critical anti-colonial awareness, implicit in his analysis of Singapore, was the second legacy of Lockwood’s stint in Asia. Travelling in the NEI, Indo-China, Siam, China, he saw ‘the sufferings of the people’ which ‘helped to mould one’s views’. Articles he published in 1939 in the ABC Weekly demonstrate political awareness of independence movements in both the NEI and India, forecast the eventual success of the independence movement in India and associate with that the decline of Britain as a world power, and assert that the war will actually advance Asian independence movements. Fascism and Japanese militarism aside, there is a basic underlying tension in the world and threat to peace with a significant part of the world’s peoples ‘only able to win bread by making the weapons for their own destruction’. Supporting the liberation of colonial peoples became an important theme in Lockwood’s future political life.

Lockwood headed for London, arriving in time for the Wallis Simpson scandal. To reach there, he made his way to the China-Soviet border, witnessed and was alarmed by Japanese militarism in action, and was harassed by Japanese soldiery. Travelling through Russia he was impressed by what he saw, like many idealists of his generation; the sense of progress, the lack of destitution and degradation. But it was not enough to blind him to the prison trains he saw, the treatment of dissidents, Soviet censorship, and he told his Herald readers that the methods of Stalinist repression were similar to ‘the methods of the Czars and the Grand Dukes’.

Reaching London via Moscow and Berlin, Lockwood joined the Australian Newspaper Service, a feature agency servicing the Herald, amongst other Australian newspapers. He also contributed anonymously to Claud Cockburn’s left news sheet The Week and to the communist Daily Worker. The major feature of his London stay, however, was being credentialed to report on the Spanish Civil War. For Herald readers the realities of the war from the Republican side during 1937 were mainly provided by three by-lines—those of Ernest Hemingway, Arthur Koestler, and Rupert Lockwood.

For Lockwood, the Spanish Civil War marked what in retrospect he saw as his point of commitment. He experienced being under fire, and under aerial and naval bombardment; he was deeply disturbed by rows of ‘mangled, gutted’ child corpses in the morgue during the siege of Madrid, an experience which aroused within him intense anti-fascist feeling; he was impressed by the Spanish communists who ‘have shown more intelligence and reason than any other political party’. Thought and action moved closer together: in Madrid he broadcast over the Republican short-wave radio station EAQ, and he rated this involvement as his ‘first important commitment to Leftwing causes’.

A meeting of significance in Madrid was with Austrian socialist Ilsa Kulcsar, assistant to, and later wife of, writer, broadcaster, Arturo Barea, head of the Republic’s censorship office. It was Ilsa who involved Lockwood in the propagandist work of EAQ, and interested him personally in the plight of Europe’s refugees fleeing fascism, an interest he actively followed up when he eventually returned to Melbourne. The political impact of the war in Spain, and of besieged Madrid, on Lockwood, was not unique, but common to many journalists who reported from the Republican side. According to Antony Beevor,

Many became resolute, and often uncritical, champions of the Republic after experiencing the siege of Madrid…. The ideals of the anti-fascist cause anaesthetized many of them to aspects of the war that proved uncomfortable. It was a difficult atmosphere in which to retain objectivity.

What made the experience significant in Lockwood’s case was it marked the acceleration and intensification of a leftist political trajectory. Recalled by Murdoch in 1938 Lockwood returned to Melbourne, believing he had been earmarked for career advancement. He came home via North America, giving pro-Republican interviews in Canada; about 1,000 Canadians volunteers fought for the Spanish Republic. The Lockwood who returned had changed, and was not the same person who had left Australia in 1935. He had travelled around the world through 34 countries; professionally he had emerged from the anonymity of Herald

30 Rupert Lockwood, ‘War’s Background’, ABC Weekly, 2 December 1939, p. 16.
32 Lockwood, War on the Waterfront, p. 22.
33 Rupert Lockwood, ‘They Die for Ideals but not for Spain’, Herald, 5 August 1937, p. 35.
journalism with a by-line; he had engaged successfully internationally as a journalist; he had developed a preference for journalism that blended observation/recording with comment. All reasons for feeling very much self-assured, more confident than he had been in 1935. And he had changed politically.

When he had left Melbourne, Lockwood’s politics were ‘already a little bit on the way’ to being a committed leftist, according to friends he had been ‘politically liberal minded’ and ‘socialist inclined’. The description fits others of his generation and work environment. Fellow Herald journalist Alan Moorehead, who left for London during 1936 (almost aged twenty-six), generally described his colleagues: ‘Nearly all of us were left wing, and glowed with hate for Mussolini and the up and coming Hitler’. According to Moorehead, the attitude of these young Melbourne journalists to being ‘a journalist’ was:

they opt out of normal life because they choose to write about it, and so they regard themselves as an esoteric group set apart from the rest of society. Among themselves they talk almost entirely about news and newspapers in much the same way as actors talk only of the theatre and of themselves.

Commenting about himself in 1936, in London, finding it difficult to remain neutral about the war in Spain and to sideline his Republican sympathies, Moorehead describes a chrysalis of spirit associated with his journalism, but having a general relevance, the journalist only as ‘observer’ and ‘recorder’:

Like most nomads I hovered in the half-world of only partial commitment to religion, to causes, to women and to places, and thus, by definition, to life itself. This is not the stuff out of which you can make either traitors or heroes; it simply leaves you with sensations of frustration and of shallow guilt, which to avoid, you keep moving on.

For Lockwood, Kisch and his tour had challenged this view of journalism, and its practice. Abroad, politics and journalism meshed in Lockwood’s life, and the sort of journalistic chrysalis Moorehead described was shed. As for Moorehead, he got to Spain in 1937 as a correspondent based in Gibraltar for the London Daily Express; ‘flying visits’ is the way he described his various assignments, Spain and its war remaining a ‘forbidden exhilaration’. In these words Moorehead captured his sense of regret, of being outside, apart from, what seemed to him at the time to be an intense, profoundly important, historical moment.

Back with the Herald, Lockwood reported from the federal parliamentary press gallery. His personal life reflected his new commitment. He joined the Australian Labor Party, had pre-selection aspirations, involved himself in the work of the Victorian International Refugee Emergency Council, formed in 1938 to assist the migration of European refugees to Australia and their process of adaptation, and the Australian Council for Civil Liberties (ACCL) where he served on the Executive Committee. In Australia it was a time of rising and organized anti-semitism, of increasing tensions and conflict between police and anti-fascist demonstrators, and concern amongst civil libertarians that in the event of war with Germany, civil liberties would be curtailed in the name of national security. The ACCL, guided by historian and former Herald journalist Brian Fitzpatrick, supported by Lockwood, directed its attentions to these matters.

There were well publicized court appearances by Lockwood, identified in print as a Herald journalist, acting as a civil liberties observer/witness on behalf of people arrested at anti-fascist demonstrations. At the end of 1938, with the Port Kembla (NSW) ‘Pig-Iron Dispute’ dramatically centre stage nationally, Lockwood toasted guest Attorney General Robert Menzies at a Canberra press gallery dinner. Menzies was responsible for invoking the anti-strike Transport Workers’ Act in an attempt to break the ban by Port Kembla workers on a shipment of pig iron to Japan; the wharfies argued that loading the material was tantamount to sending war supplies to Japan and its undeclared war on China, which they resolutely opposed. Lockwood infuriated Menzies and some of the journalists present by criticising his role in the dispute, proposing that Menzies ‘had long realised the Chinese suffered a shortage of iron in their diet’. Arguments broke out between journalists, Lockwood was struck, there were scuffles, and some blood was spilt.

This toast, together with what Lockwood believed was a complaint from Menzies to Herald management, and fallout from Lockwood’s civil liberties work, resulted in him being assigned during

39 Tim Bowden ABC radio interview with Rupert Lockwood, broadcast, 16 September 1973, transcript, p. 6.
41 Alan Moorehead, op. cit., p. 30.
42 ibid.
43 ibid., p. 54.
44 ibid., pp. 95-98.
45 Rupert Lockwood, ‘Return’, p. 1: photocopy of five-page unpublished ms briefly dealing with aspects of Lockwood’s career when he resumed journalism in Melbourne, 1938; in possession of the author.
46 Tim Bowden ABC radio interview with Rupert Lockwood, broadcast 13 July 1975, transcript, p. 9.
47 Watson, Brian Fitzpatrick, pp. 89,92-93,96.
48 Herald, 8 July 1938.
49 Lockwood, War on the Waterfront, p. 25; McKnight, Australia’s Spies, p. 66.
1939 to lesser journalistic tasks not commensurate with his status and experience. At the *Herald* this was known as ‘the treatment’, a demeaning process of reining in and cutting down journalists who strayed too far and independently from management’s vision of political-professional journalistic behaviour. In 1936 journalist Noel Monks, for example, fresh from reporting the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, had been assigned junior tasks; he responded by booking a return passage to Fleet Street.50

Despite ‘the treatment’ Lockwood continued his civil liberties work, contributed to public debate about Japanese militarism and expansion in Asia, and sought employment elsewhere. A lifeline came in the form of an offer from former *Herald* editor Sid Deamer to join him in Sydney as foreign editor and feature writer on the *ABC Weekly*, a new publication headed up by Deamer (the first issue, 2 December 1939). Lockwood accepted the job. But before he quit Melbourne, the day Australia declared war on Germany, he joined the Australian Communist Party (CPA). Two *Herald* colleagues signed his nomination form. He kept his membership secret during the time the party was illegal and underground, 1940–1942, and took a high profile role in the left-wing State Labor Party in New South Wales which the banned CPA ‘made considerable use of’.51

So far as Australia’s security authorities were concerned, Lockwood was not perceived as a threat until after 1939. When he acted as guarantor for a family of refugees from Nazism, a July 1939 security review noted his assets (including a small parcel of *Herald* shares), employment and wage, and declared him ‘a first class type of guarantor’.52 By June 1940, however, he was a ‘suspected communist’ and under Commonwealth Investigation Branch (CIB) surveillance; in February 1941, Military Intelligence (MI) became interested and established what it termed ‘a special watch on him’.53

Lockwood’s decision to join the CPA, he explained in later life, was no spur of the moment decision. It climaxed an evolutionary process in which his experiences overseas, particularly in Spain, and the anti-fascist role of the CPA during the 1930s, were key factors.54 To this Euro-centred view of his path to communism, his Asian experiences and their legacies must be added, and his belief that resistance by communists was what stood between Japanese militarism and the future. In his 1942 book *Guerilla Paths to Freedom*, Lockwood brought Europe and Asia together, detailing ways Australians could conduct guerilla warfare against ‘Powerful Axis forces (that) may soon invade Australia’. He drew upon his experiences in Spain, and from what he understood about contemporaneous guerilla struggles in Russia, Yugoslavia, and China.55

Australia’s intelligence instrumentalities eventually homed in on Lockwood’s overseas sojourn. According to a 1941 CIB report, it was Lockwood’s travel experiences and his journalistic reputation that elevated him above ‘the usual labour enthusiast’ and made him someone ‘to be reckoned with’, even if ‘some of his oratory is over the heads of the audience’.56 In April 1940 an anonymous informant provided background material on Lockwood to MI, according to which Lockwood had been in Asia in 1931 and had ‘got into trouble with either Navy or Army--not certain which’.57 A false report, since in 1931 Lockwood was a cadet journalist in Melbourne, pretty well fresh from the Wimmera. But it helped set a sinister dimension to the ‘Rupert Lockwood’ character his watchers were developing in their dossiers, the ‘communist journalist’ of the 1950s, and sheeted what was ‘troubling’ about him to his 1935–1938 experiences and activities.58

The intelligence gatherers were correct. Lockwood was a person ‘to be reckoned with’, and his experiences overseas during 1935–1938 were significant. The period had changed him personally, professionally and politically; his engagement with it, illustrates what is missing from the term ‘communist journalist’ when applied to him – a resourceful journalist of considerable talent and nous, educated, intelligent, arguably amongst the best of his generation, well travelled; a person significantly affected politically by what he had witnessed during the period, and who was no longer willing to watch from the sidelines.


52 AA: CRS A6119/1, Item 40,folios 1-2.

53 ibid.,folios 13-16


56 AA CRS A6119/1, Item 40,folios 6-7.

57 Ibid.,folio 28.

Dr Evatt and the Petrov Affair: a reassessment in the light of new evidence

Frank Cain*

There is agreement among Australian historians that the Petrov Affair and its ramifications can be seen as the most important event in the history of the Australian Federal Labor Party, if not in the history of the labour movement, in the twentieth century. Dr Evatt attended the ensuing Royal Commission on Espionage to defend two of his personal staff named in Petrov’s papers, but it led to a reaction against him in the federal parliamentary caucus which contributed to the 1955 split in the ALP followed by the start of a decline in his political career. Much of the material behind the Petrov Affair has remained secret and Evatt’s involvement thereby remained clouded. But the release of the Venona papers in 1996 by the National Security Agency of the US government has provided historians with a greatly enlarged picture of the extensive intelligence operation conducted by the Americans between 1943 and 1949 in Australia and elsewhere. H.V. Evatt oversaw the intelligence agencies in Australia in his role as Attorney General from 1941 to 1949 during which time he gained insights to that secret American decoding operation known as Venona. The release of those American papers now helps us to see more clearly how that operation is linked to the evolution of the Petrov Affair.

The Petrov Affair burst on to the Australian political landscape on 3 April 1954 when Vladimir Petrov defected to ASIO carrying Soviet intelligence documents in return for a $10,000 in cash and Australian nationality. He defected on the eve of general elections for the House of Representatives to be held on 29 May 1954 which pundits at that time said could be won by an Evatt-led Labor government. The Menzies government responded immediately by establishing a Royal Commission on Espionage (RCE) to investigate those people named in the Petrov’s documents. Menzies selected judges from three state Supreme Courts, specially recruited for their anti-Labor predilections, and the first hearing of the RCE was conducted on 17 May in some haste in the theatrical surroundings of the Canberra’s Albert Hall. It is now apparent that planning for the RCE had begun some months previously after the government had settled on what documents Petrov promised to produce and the cash reward to be paid. The model adopted by the government for handling this affair was taken from the successful Canadian Royal Commission that was established in 1945. Several Canadians had been identified in papers produced by a Soviet defector in Ottawa, Igor Gouzenko, who like Petrov had also been an embassy coding clerk. Those named were arrested and put before the Commission where confessions were tricked out of them on false promises after which they were prosecuted and jailed under the Official Secrets Act of 1939. Against the background of a possible Soviet spy ring being exposed, the Menzies-led government was returned with 69 seats to Labor’s 52. Labor was consoled by winning 50 per cent of the national votes to 47 per cent for the government.

The Venona Operation: A Brief Introduction

Between 1943 and 1948 the American military decoding organisation was able to break into the Soviet diplomatic and military communications system during which they collected traffic between the Soviet’s Canberra embassy and Moscow. This intercepted material was decoded in 1947 revealing that British documents sent to the Australian Foreign Office (then the External Affairs Department) had been passed to the Soviet embassy and transmitted to Moscow. The Americans informed the British, and MI5 informed the Australian ministry including Evatt then the Foreign Minister. Lengthy negotiations, to be analysed in greater detail below, were conducted between London, Washington and Canberra resulting in the new institution of ASIO being established in Dr Evatt’s Attorney-Generals’ Department. Its first operation was to track down those eleven people named in Venona as having leaked documents from Foreign Affairs including a typist in Evatt’s electoral office who had no access to his diplomatic or legal correspondence. Evatt was kept informed of the investigation even while travelling overseas. By December 1949 when the Labor government had lost office, Evatt had a clear picture of the Venona operations and those named in it. The new Menzies-led government was intent on pursuing and prosecuting these people, but lacked access to the American’s highly secret documentation for the evidence. However, the names of those eleven people identified as possible leakers plus others appeared in the Petrov papers thereby providing the opportunity to the government to have them summoned to give an account of themselves before the RCE.

The RCE sat infrequently during May and June 1954, but in August it announced that it would summon two of Evatt’s personal staff, Allan Dalziel and Albert Grundeman, whose names appeared in one of the documents produced by Petrov, identified as Document J. The two named did not appear in Venona, but Evatt perceived that the RCE would use the names of the staffers appearing in Document J as the

---

means for discrediting Evatt himself. This explains why Evatt bearing the full status of the Leader of the Labor Party and parliamentary opposition leader, appeared before the RCE on 16 August on the excuse of defending his two staff. Evatt’s long experience in heading intelligence agencies and his knowledge of Venona, together with information passed to him from the officers he had known from his recent intelligence days, all informed Evatt’s actions. Unaware that Evatt was operating from a comprehensive knowledge of the Venona operation, Evatt’s actions were described by commentators as intemperate, reckless and imprudent. But those involved in the conduct of the RCE were aware, as was Evatt himself, that his oath of office prevented him from revealing the details of this highly secret American operation and that he would seriously damage the American/Australian intelligence relationship if he divulged any detail of it. The primary aim of Evatt was to present the conundrum to the RCE and to ASIO that he knew that they knew that he knew of the intelligence ramifications of the Affair. The RCE officials outmanoeuvred Evatt from occupying the public stage for too long by allowing him to be engaged in pursuing the trivial detail of Document J about whether it was written by Rupert Lockwood or possibly by ASIO agents. And in this matter the Commissioners kept interrupting him to ensure that he did not stray from focussing on the detail of his two staff therein named. But events took on a more serious tone when Evatt decided to summon two important players in the Affair for examination, Ron Richards, the senior ASIO agent, and Dr Michael Bialoguski, a medical doctor and part-time ASIO agent who together arranged Petrov’s defection. As the means for countering this move and with Evatt accusing the Petrovs in the weekend press of being no more than paid informers, the Commissioners refused to have him appear before them and he was dismissed on 7 September 1954. Prime Minister Menzies had closely followed the RCE proceedings and witnessing Evatt probing into the role of ASIO officials such as Richards, he hired his legal friend and leading Sydney lawyer, Garfield Barwick, to attend the hearings to defend ASIO and its staff before the Commission.3

The RCE produced its final report on 14 September 1955 which was debated in parliament on 19 October 1955. Evatt caused embarrassment to himself when mentioning that he had communicated with his friend V.M. Molotov, the Soviet Foreign Minister, on the Affair.4 Molotov left the reply to the Foreign Ministry’s Press Department so that Evatt’s intention of drawing the Soviets to give their account, since the Americans would reveal their side of events, was nullified.5 He was attacked in his own party for appearing before the RCE particularly by right-wing Catholic members of the federal caucus who perceived the event as another pro-communist folly of their leader. They then moved to unseat him although they lost the vote by fifty-four to twenty-eight. The split in the party evolved into a firm division that was confirmed at the special Hobart Conference in February 1955. Among the other events at this important meeting was the announcement by Arthur Calwell, Deputy leader, that the Petrov Affair was to blame for the party’s troubles.6 Later in that year these disgruntled Catholic members split from the Labor Party to form their own Democratic Labor Party that took sufficient votes away from Labor as to exclude it from office for another eighteen years.

In retrospect, Document J was not the best document to use in his argument that it had been fabricated by the government in order to frame innocent people under the excuse that it had been written by an active communist. The Moscow Letters which were a collection of seventy-one letters allegedly received by Petrov ordering him to perform a series of spying instructions of an extreme and unusual nature would have been better fodder for Evatt to use in challenging the authenticity of these alleged espionage documents. However ASIO had wisely held these back from examination by the RCE for some months and Evatt had little option other than challenging the falsity of Document J.

Dr Evatt’s Involvement in the Venona Affair

The brief account given above of Evatt’s involvement in the Venona matters requires a fuller explanation for the important insights it provides for an understanding of Australia’s role in the post-war intelligence gathering that involved it in friction with the United States and the United Kingdom. The US army deciphering experts developed an expertise in decoding the communications of the Japanese military which was known as a book code system. A similar system was used by the Russians, that is, a code book containing frequently used expressions which had a five figure code allotted to each phrase. But before transmitting those figures another set of figures drawn from one-time pad was added to them so that if the code book was captured the message would remain unbreakable. The US experts found that many one-time pads had been duplicated in a printing error in Moscow and many of the phrases could be recovered by stripping off the now known random number. Details of the revelations about the Australians passing information obtained from British documents to the Soviet embassy in Canberra were thereby obtained by the American military officials.

3 Garfield Barwick, Reflections and Recollections, Federal Press, Sydney, p. 120.
4 CPD, 19 October 1955, p. 325.
5 Evatt to Molotov, 10 February 1955; Illyich to Evatt, 9 April 1955, Evatt Papers, Flinders University.
The National Security Agency inherited the papers from the US army and released many of them in 1996. The Venona historian reports that 4,050 messages to and from Canberra were collected and sent to the USA for analysis and these related to trade matters, KGB administration and military intelligence topics. There were 218 messages relating to Australia released by the NSA in 1996. The US experts found a cable indicating that there had been a leakage of material from Australia’s Foreign Office to the Soviet embassy in 1947 relating to a British document of no great official status that was sent for Australian comment. It is not unlikely that the Americans were able to rely on the Australian army’s intelligence and signals section to collect the Soviet cables from the post office and to assist interpret the Australian traffic. This could explain why the US army, when seeking to warn the Australian government of the leakage, did not directly approach Prime Minister Chifley because of the Australian army’s secret involvement in the matter. The US army broached the matter with the British government instead. This is why Prime Minister Chifley first learned of the deciphering when the Director-General of MI5, Sir Percy Sillitoe, flew to Canberra on 7 February 1948 to report to him with limited information about the deciphering. He misleadingly told Chifley that the information had been obtained from a spy in the Soviet camp; perhaps that is what the Americans had told him. A file number and the names of eleven Australians were mentioned and an immediate investigation was conducted in Canberra, but no leakages could be established and, as Chifley reported to Prime Minister Attlee with whom he communicated on this matter, further inquiries would have to await more information being released by Sillitoe. Some time later the Labor government arrived at the estimation that the Venona operation represented a long and secret operation that had been conducted by their wartime ally behind its back. This insight was to be confirmed with the public release of some of those Australian intercepts in 1996.

Evatt was immediately involved in Sillitoe’s secret news as Foreign Minister (he was also Attorney General) because three of the people named, Ian Milner, Jim Hill and Ric Throssell, worked in the Foreign Ministry. The fourth was a woman working in his electoral office, but not involved in handling official material. The Canberra inquiry indicated that the relevant files could be accounted for and that the people named were still in their jobs in the Foreign Ministry except Milner who had left to work for the United Nations in New York and the woman who had resigned from her position to get married. The information was a small fragment of information in an early Cold War setting although it was to be blown up by the Americans into a series of incidents, as will be shown, that accused Labor of risking the national security of Australia and put the spotlight on Evatt and his independent Australian foreign policy. Jim Hill immediately came under suspicion because his brother, Ted Hill, was an active member of the Communist Party of Australia. Chifley and Evatt and Dr Burton decided to send Jim Hill to London where he could be more closely examined through observation and interrogation by the expert in such matters, Jim Skardon of MI5. Between January and July 1950, Skardon interrogated him, but could not elicit any damaging information and Hill was returned to Australia.

The extended problem for the Labor government was that other agencies in the US took advantage of the Australian Venona revelations to pursue their own agendas within the US administration. At that time the British were seeking to obtain range-measuring equipment from the Americans for use on the proposed Woomera rocket range in South Australia. The request was discussed by a defence committee in the Pentagon on 17 February 1954, but the US navy representative seemed to have learned of the Venona affair through a contact with Rear Admiral R.H. Hillenkoetter, the Director of Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and on passing that information to the committee the British request was refused. The Pentagon officials went further in May 1948 after learning of the Venona episode and declared a ban on the transmission of all classified information to Australia. The British were alarmed at this development because it raised the possibility that this anti-allied mood in America (then confined to Australia), driven particularly by the US navy, might affect the British intentions of seeking an enlarged sharing of technology exchanges with the Americans. The Menzies-led opposition learned of the Pentagon ban on Australia through their contacts in London, and although it was considered to be of the highest secrecy level, they used information of the embargo against the Labor government at the 1949 general elections.

Although the Venona operation was designed as an anti-Soviet intelligence operation it gradually took on the characteristics of an anti-Australian and anti-Evatt operation. This shift seemed to be in reaction to events in Australia, particularly the independent foreign policy that was being conducted by Evatt and his

---

7 For the Australian material see Fifth Venona Release, Volume 3 of 7, National Security Agency, Fort George G. Meade, Maryland, October 1996.
8 Information kindly provided by Cecil Phillips, 19 November 1998.
9 Due to many changes in the name of Soviet intelligence, its final name, KGB, is used in this paper.
11 Chifley to Attlee, item 33/1, A669/1, NAA.
12 Then known as the Department of External Affairs.
youthful Department Secretary, Dr John Burton. The State Department was concerned at this Australian nationalist policy and its ambassador in Australia, Myron Cowen, who owed his position to being a leading fundraiser in New York State for President Truman, conducted a firm campaign against Evatt, whom he deeply disliked, and the Australian Foreign Ministry. Cowen’s strong stance was reflected in the reports that his defence attachés sent back to Washington that described the Chifley government as being infested by left radicals and that the local Communist Party exerted strong influence over the government and Australian public life. The newly established CIA prepared a booklet labelled, Communist Influence in Australia, using these misleading attaché accounts sent to the Pentagon. After recognising that news about the Australian Venona leaks were circulating in the more senior spheres in Washington, Chifley and Evatt made attempts to understand its ramifications within the administration. The Secretary of Defense, J.V Forrestal, was the most appropriate minister to communicate with on this matter. On 3 September 1948, J.A. Armstrong, Minister for Supply and Development, was visiting Washington and he used friends of Australia with connections to the administration to arrange a meeting with Forrestal only to be told that he was reported to have had no first hand information on the topic. On 12 November 1948, Evatt was in France attending a meeting at which Forrestal was present. Knowing that he would obtain no positive answer, but wishing to have him acknowledge that the ban had American origins, he told Forrestal that he was embarrassed by the fact that communications of some apparent security breaches ‘had not been directly made to the Australian government, but had been communicated by the British’. He added the news about the British assistance to develop a new security body and added optimistically that the matter was now ‘a dead issue’. Evatt’s comments indicate that he knew about the origins of the Venona material and could have identified those aspects of it, particularly that relating to named individuals, when they appeared in the Petrov papers.

The most significant ramification of the Venona operation both for the Labor government and for Evatt was the decision of the inner ministry to establish the equivalent of an MI5 counter espionage body. Following the decision of the Evatt-appointed Pinner Committee after the end of World War II about the need for maintaining an intelligence body, Evatt retained the pre-war Investigation Branch-style of institution that functioned like a civilian police force with no predilection to pursuing left-wing institutions or people. The recommendation for a new counter espionage institution emerged from discussions between Prime Ministers Attlee and Chifley as the means for demonstrating to the Americans that an effective institution had been established in Australia and as a measure for protecting what technology the Americans might be prepared to bestow on the British and which might be passed to the Australians. Attlee arranged to have an MI5 expert sent to Australia to oversee the establishment of such a body and also to conduct investigations into the fragments of the Venona material that Sillitoe had released to Chifley. As the means for preventing ASIO from becoming an anti-left institution, Evatt had a Supreme Court judge, Mr Justice G.S. Reed, appointed as its first Director-General and for it to be retained in the Attorney General’s Department. Reed was an old friend of Labor and had conducted inquiries for the Labor government that met suitable conclusions. Evatt placed his full confidence in Reed by remarking later that ‘to all intents and purposes the Director-General of Security is free from ministerial direction’ in order to maintain maximum internal security. Evatt firmly supported the establishment of ASIO and he gave a commitment to Dean Acheson, US Secretary of State, and to President Truman in April 1949 that the move would have his fullest support. Chifley announced the establishment of ASIO in March 1949.

Chifley and Evatt wanted to placate the concern in America over the impact of the Venona information about Australia and to win back American favour before the general elections set for December 1949. They were unaware that US officialdom had no intention of meeting the Australian government’s expectations in this matter. However, in discussion between Attlee and Truman it was agreed that the Secretary of the Defence Department, Sir Fred Shedden, should visit Washington on his way to London in April 1949 to discuss with the administration the measures introduced by the government to repair the Venona-identified damage. Shedden set sail with material on how the new ASIO was functioning, but Cowen flew back to Washington ahead of Shedden to counter his presentation. Dr Evatt was there for meetings of the UN and although he saw Cowen’s visit as a bad omen, he was able to provide Shedden with insights to the Truman administration. In particular he advised Shedden that Cowen exercised stronger influence in the White House than did the new Secretary of Defense, Louis Johnson. This was confirmed in Shedden’s discussions with the head of the British Military Mission to Washington, General Sir William Morgan. The case put by the Pentagon and Cowen for the continuation of the embargo prevailed. They declared that ASIO was too new to be an acceptable counter espionage body, but their refusal was more likely to have

---

14 For his attack on Evatt see cable, Cowen to State, 15 March 1949, RG 330, NARA.
15 USN Attaché’s Report, 6 August 1948, FBI Archives, file no. 64-200-303-47.
16 Copy in Harry S. Truman Library, Papers of Harry S. Truman, Independence, MO, USA.
17 Forrestal Papers, Princeton University Library, p. 2465.
18 CPD, 23 September 1949, p. 347.
19 Letter 14 May 1949, Item Box 1795, A5954, NAA.
20 Notes on private discussions, April 1949, box 1795, A5954, NAA.
been conditioned by the knowledge from their informed Australian contacts that the Labor government was likely to be replaced in December by Liberal-Party-led government under R.G. Menzies.

Meanwhile, Justice Reed established the new ASIO body and had the limited Venona material investigated under the code name of the ‘Case’. ASIO was to have a staff of 150 and Reed commenced appointing them from June 1949. He promoted R.F.B Wake, who had been Deputy Director of the Investigation Service in Brisbane and who remained in contact with Dr Evatt, to become Director in Sydney. B. Tuck was to become Director in Canberra and H.C. Wright in Melbourne. Wake assisted the two MI5 officers, Roger Hollis and Courtney Young to probe the Venona issue and by July, Reed reported to Evatt that the spy-master had been tentatively identified. By December 1949 when Labor moved to the opposition benches, Evatt had become so familiar with the many aspects of the Venona affair, even though it was considered to be a matter of high secrecy, that he could recognise aspects of it when it emerged in an altered form as part of the Petrov papers five years later.

Menzies to power and the ‘Nest of Traitors’

One of the principle aims of the Menzies government was to ban the Communist Party, expose the Venona eleven and prosecute them. Over 63 Australians were named in the papers including the eleven from Venona. To this end Menzies abandoned Evatt’s concept of a legally accountable role for ASIO by having Justice Reed replaced by the military intelligence figure, Colonel Spry, then Director of Military Intelligence. The Venona eleven were placed under special surveillance. Evatt’s secretary, Allan Dalziel, was followed by ASIO agents during his working day in Evatt’s Sydney office and his telephone was tapped. Other people close to Evatt such as Wake were similarly harassed and Spry had Wake’s contract signed by Reed terminated. The government’s intentions became clearer on 27 May 1952 when the Liberal Party’s Foreign Minister, R.G. Casey, announced in parliament that a ‘nest of traitors’ had existed in the Foreign office when Dr Evatt and Dr Burton had been in charge, but that nest was soon to be uncovered. Dr Evatt seemed to have maintained contact with some of the intelligence officers, either in the Investigation Branch or ASIO, and knew of the Casey-inspired surveillance. Evatt recalled in his parliamentary address that, ‘It seems certain that evidence was being collected and collated having in mind the probability, or certainty, of his [Petrov’s] defection. I repeat that vital statement, that this indicates that twelve months before the actual defection evidence was being prepared to deal with the situation’. It was evident to the Menzies government that the US administration would refuse to allow even the very limited material from its highly secret Venona operation to be used to prosecute people in far distant Australia and the government would have to find a way of circumventing that restriction. Luckily the means for that goal soon came to hand. ASIO had been discussing with the Soviet embassy official, Vladimir Petrov, the possibility of his defecting and bringing papers from the KGB safe that would incriminate Australians in the spying plot. Petrov did not defect until April 1954, but the dossiers on the ‘traitors’ and others had been prepared in anticipation during the course of the early 1950s.

Enter Vladimir Petrov

Dr Evatt became leader of the federal ALP in June 1951 on the death of J.B. Chifley and while it marked the end of Evatt’s direct involvement with intelligence matters, after he shed the shadow attorney generalship, he kept in touch with the many intelligence operatives whom he knew from his years overseeing intelligence matters. This would have included his legal friend, Colonel W.B. Simpson, whom Evatt had selected to take command of the wartime Security Service assisted by another legal friend, S.C. Taylor, in 1942. Evatt insisted that this Service be in his Department with the remark that ‘it is important to impress the civil rather than the military stamp upon the proposed organization, owing to the necessity for public confidence in the reasonable protection of civil rights and liberty’. His more recent friends would have included Major E.E. Longfield Lloyd whom he appointed as head of the post war Investigation Branch with the new name of Commonwealth Investigation Service, as mentioned above, and his other legal friend, Justice Reed, who headed ASIO. It is unlikely that he knew about the ASIO operation involving the recruitment of Petrov because Colonel Spry’s appointments were drawn from the military. ASIO had monitored Petrov since he had disembarked in Sydney Harbour in February 1951 to work in the Soviet embassy, and it had its part-time agent, Dr Bialoguski befriended him and lead him to defect. Petrov was actually a coding clerk, but he had himself accepted as a KGB Colonel in charge of a local spy ring although the improbability of this was emphasised by his lack of English and his not having been

21 Reed to Wake, 16 March 1948, Item 2216, A6119, NAA.
22 Reed to Evatt, Box 1795 [1] A5954, NAA.
23 Observations re Dalziel, 10 February 1950, Item 851, A6119, NAA.
24 For the connection between Evatt and Wake see V.R. Wake, No Ribbons or Medals, Jacobyte Books, Adelaide, 2003, ch. 16.
26 CPD, 19 October 1955, p. 1714.
27 File 15/403/199, MP 729/6, NAA.
trained in a Soviet spy school. He frequently travelled from Canberra to Sydney to stay with Bialoguski with whom he drank, gambled and engaged prostitutes. Later he commenced sly-grog selling by buying Scotch whisky from the wholesalers on the embassy duty-free account and selling it to bars and hotels in Kings Cross. The clandestine business prospered and the embassy car and driver had to be brought in to handle the increasing volume. The question arises of the real status of Petrov. The Soviet embassy was accustomed to dispatch back to Moscow officers who transgressed, but Petrov remained untouched by such discipline. Was he a Soviet double agent feeding Soviet disinformation to ASIO and transmitting ASIO disinformation to the Soviets all via Bialoguski? The question must remain unanswered until ASIO releases the numerous reports of Bialoguski’s handlers. ASIO saw him as the means to obtain access to Soviet coding techniques and to information about the Australians mentioned in Venona. ASIO offered Petrov a chicken farm in the Blue Mountains for defecting, but he eventually settled for the $10,000, Australian nationality and the long-term protection of the ‘D notice’ in the local media.

Dr Evatt and the Royal Commission

ASIO’s conduct of the RCE was kept highly secret and managed from a special section under Ron Richards, ASIO’s Deputy Director, and Victor Windeyer, counsel assisting the Commission. ASIO maintained control of the RCE’s programme through its holding of the main witnesses, the Petrovs, in its safe house where they could be rehearsed in the evidence to be presented at the following hearings. In addition it held the numerous files already mentioned as having been compiled over the years about the Venona-named people and others with Russian or communist connections. The Petrov documents consisted of three groups. The first was named ‘document J’ and contained potted histories of Australian events that reflected badly on leading Australian political figures; the second group was named ‘the Moscow letters’ that is seventy-one letters sent from Moscow in 1952 which were alleged instructions to Petrov about how to control his spy ring and those Australians whom he should enrol in it. The third was ‘document G’ which had allegedly been stored for some time in the KGB safe and turned out to have the eleven Venona names plus others who might provide information, some of whom had code names. Evatt argued in his 1955 speech that document G was a fabrication based on the Venona documents. He remarked that how ‘late in March, 1954, just on the eve of Petrov’s defection, an envelope which had been sealed for three years in the embassy, according to Petrov, was opened by him’. The contents, Evatt stated when emphasising how document G had suspicious origins, consisted of a list of names that ‘were in accord with some of the circumstances suggested merely by way of suspicion in 1948, [meaning the limited Venona information] and with the additional information obtained by security during 1953, twelve months before the defection. That is quite a remarkable series of coincidences’.

Conclusion

Dr Evatt’s leaping into the midst of the Royal Commission on the excuse of defending the names of two of his staff has been attacked by many writers as being the height of self-indulgence and utter foolishness. Some Catholic members of the federal caucus, already disenchanted with Evatt’s foreign polices and his support for civil liberties, made it their excuse for splitting the ALP and switching preferences to keep Labor out of office for decades. However, with the release of the Venona documents by the US government in 1996, we can see that Evatt had insights to their contents from 1948. And US archival evidence demonstrates how Evatt had first-hand knowledge of how the Venona-detected leak from the Australian Foreign Office was exploited by the Pentagon, the State Department and the CIA as a measure for denying technical information to the Australian and British governments and their post-war re-armament programmes.

When Evatt saw that the Venona-detected leak was to be revived in conjunction with the Petrov Affair by the Menzies government in order to discredit the Labor Party, Evatt was justified in joining the fray. He did it in the knowledge that the government and the Commissioners were well aware of his lengthy background in intelligence matters and that he had been kept informed by tip-offs from friends still working in intelligence. All those involved in the RCE were aware that Evatt would not breach his oath of office nor would he damage US/Australian intelligence relations by exposing his knowledge about Venona. The Commissioners were guarded in permitting him to examine Document J knowing that he could not be denied having his day in court. He made little progress in exposing the origins of the document J, but the Commissioners made no progress in identifying who were the spies in the Foreign Office. Their report was released in September 1955, but it could recommend no prosecutions because the incriminating evidence was contained in the Venona material and the US intelligence officials would refuse to allow it to be used for such a purpose. The last word came from the Melbourne press who declared in a damming comment that the entire RCE was no more than a colossal waste of taxpayers’ money.

28 CPD, 19 October 1955, p. 1721
Labor people – 1930s to 1960s

Robert Corcoran

‘The shared experience of working people’ was emphasised in the call for papers for the 2007 conference and prompted me to prepare this one. It is about the ideas and attitudes of rank-and-file ALP members and supporters whom I knew during the politically turbulent decades in the middle of the 20th century, beginning with the Great Depression. As a group, they were as important to the party as those who became famous.

In those years the majority of active Labor people took a lively interest in policies and political ideology as well as electioneering. They were willing to do the humdrum tasks and, with good reason, they believed they could influence the party.

As at any other time, Labor people were the product of their environment and therefore this paper will also deal with the economic and social circumstances that surrounded them. These included the Depression; wars and their consequences; rigid class distinctions; and a wide spectrum of political theories.

Introduction

We all know that there are lots of books and studies dealing with famous Labor identities and political events. Obviously, they are essential if we are to understand Labor history. But they don’t tell us much about rank-and-file party members and supporters. For example, we would not expect to find anything in the books about the three ‘Teds’ of the Dandenong ALP in the 1950s, although they were locally well-known. One was an electricity-lineman, Ted Cashmore, who talked politics endlessly and prodded his workmates into giving active support to the Labor Party. Next was Ted Smith, who drove his old 1920s Chevvy many miles, ferrying campaign delegates to meetings; and then the gentle giant Ted Carpenter, (appropriately a timber worker) who persuaded family and friends to join with him in working for the ALP. Dedication to Labor was not restricted to men. There were also countless Jeans and Joans and Jessicas who seldom came to meetings, but gave unrecorded lifetimes of effort to the Labor cause.

In those years, the comment, ‘I’m Labor’, and a few words about recent political events were often heard when strangers started chatting, maybe in a queue, or waiting in the barber shop. What spurred these Labor supporters to be interested in politics? Did they have any influence on policy and tactics?

This paper will tackle such questions, from the 1930s to the 1960s. There will be little mention of trade unions and that should not be seen as underestimating their importance, but the focus here will be on the political wing of the Labour movement, especially in Victoria. Why have I chosen to concentrate on that period in the middle of the last century? Because ALP members and branches were different then, and comparisons with present circumstances may be useful. Those decades were important and tragic times in Australian history and the events and their impact on workers and their families will soon be lost to living memory.

The impact of the ‘Great Depression’

In the 1920s a complete ward (actually a wide balcony) at the Melbourne Children’s Hospital was devoted to boys with spinal tuberculosis. It damaged and distorted their backbones and stopped them from walking. I happened to be one of them. The treatment was major surgery, followed by four or five years stretched out straight on an iron frame, facing the ceiling. After some months in hospital, I was brought home and continued to live that way, day and night, on a long invalid pram. You may wonder what this has to do with political history, so I hasten to explain how it led to an early introduction to politics. It was during the worst years of the Great Depression of the 1930s, and a stream of dejected men knocked on our back door, close to where I was lying on the pram. They began by pretending to be selling small items like bootlaces, but it soon became obvious, even to a young child that, in fact, they were simply begging. I remember feeling sorry for them and wondered aloud to my mother why she didn’t help (although she did sometimes offer a cup of tea). She explained that they were unemployed workers, but she had no money to spare because my father had also lost his job and was getting no more than a day’s work now and then.

A little later, there was another lesson; this time directly about politics. Still a child on the invalid pram, an electoral roll had somehow become mixed in with a few other items left for me to read. I found it a strange book. So Mother told me about elections and how she had used it while scrutineering. (The election would have been the one in 1929 when the Prime Minister, Stanley Bruce, lost government and

---

1 This form of tuberculosis, then frequently referred to as ‘Spinal TB’, was caused by infected cow’s milk and was common before pasteurisation of milk became widespread.
his own seat, over his bid to destroy the arbitration system).\footnote{2} In political jargon, my mother had been a ‘scrutineer at the voting’. She was typical of many who have actively worked for the ALP over the years, without being formal members of the party. Sadly, the reverse has since become commonplace.

‘Are you getting any work?’

The bad times continued through the 1930s. Unemployment was widespread and at chance meetings in the street, a typical greeting to my father would not be a comment on the weather but, ‘Hello Joe, are you getting any work? At school, the depression was a normal part of life and most of us were dressed in an assortment of patched or ragged hand-me-downs, too big or too tight. The children in good clothes were the odd ones out. Boys chanted a ditty about ‘Sussos’ (officially ‘sustenance workers’) who lived in camps away from home. To quote one line of it, ‘We live in a tent and pay no rent; we’re on the Susso now’. The Great Ocean Road, Como Park in South Yarra and large pine plantations in the Ovens Valley near Bright were the products of their labour – using picks, shovels and wheelbarrows. School leavers had little chance of getting a job and the depression distorted normal standards of conduct. Our family lived in Hampton, now a highly esteemed Melbourne suburb, but then mainly working-class, with many unemployed. During the depression, palings from back fences gradually disappeared – prised off to make fuel for a ‘one fire stove’ or a brief fire on a cold night.

These random sketches of life during the depression are intended to show the effects on ordinary families. Through to the 1960s, people who experienced those bad years still made up a substantial proportion of Labor Party supporters. Their memories of the depression remained; and so did their intensity over politics.

Class distinction and discontent

‘The upper class’, ‘the middle class’ and ‘the working class’ were the terms used in the 1930s and class distinction was a fact of life. Few children from workers’ families stayed at school beyond thirteen years of age (Merit Certificate) and it was taken for granted that only the sons of the well-off (and a lesser number of their daughters) had much chance of going to university.\footnote{3}

In England, and in other so-called ‘older’ countries, rigid class systems may have been widely accepted, but the unfairness irritated most Australians, and widespread unemployment intensified resentment. So it is not surprising that workers had feelings of antagonism towards bosses, big companies and ‘capitalists’. The depression and unemployment also intensified religious bigotry and racial intolerance because it was suspected that religion affected chances of getting a job, and that immigrants accepted lower rates of pay.

Most workers regarded employers as the enemy, and hostility towards them was the same whether they managed commercial companies or government bodies. Criticism would be aimed equally at Essington Lewis, General Manager of BHP and at the manager of the Wonthaggi State Coal Mine.\footnote{4} This was often unfair because many employers, especially those running small businesses, were also hard hit by the depression. Others certainly deserved blame. For instance, a building tradesman (my father) told me of ‘the boss’ walking back and forth below the scaffolding, jingling a few coins in his pocket and growling: ‘It’s here if you want it!’ – a continuing threat of the sack.

Economics and stagnation

Economics is not a major theme of this paper, but it cannot be separated from the depression of the 1930s. Pre-Keynesian theory still ruled and orthodox economists of the time asserted that, in a depression, government spending must be slashed; workers sacked; and drastic pay cuts imposed on those who still kept a job. At that time, Australia was an economic slave of Great Britain and Sir Otto Niemeyer, of the Bank of England, visited Australia and ordered reduced government spending, and pay cuts. Australia submitted to the demands – and the country stagnated. In contrast, President Roosevelt introduced the ‘New Deal’ in the USA, with massive government spending that gave work to many of the unemployed and built up infrastructure – with lasting benefits.\footnote{5}

The depression reinforced Australian workers’ antagonism towards capitalism and that word was often

\footnote{2} Spat-wearing Bruce had the reputation of being a snob and ‘more English than the English’. See Ross McMullin, The Light on the Hill, p. 130. Nevertheless Bruce did stand up for Australian rights on occasions, and he may have been pushed into his anti-arbitration policy of 1929 by more hard-line conservatives.

\footnote{3} The Whitlam government achieved a breakthrough by abolishing university fees. It was a major step towards equality of opportunity and making ability the main criterion for entrance to universities. Thirty years later, this principle is being discarded.

\footnote{4} A few years later, old-time Laborites had to come to terms with the good relationship that developed between Essington Lewis and Ben Chifley when they cooperated, with mutual respect, under difficult wartime circumstances. See L.F. Crisp, Ben Chifley, Longmans, Green and Co. 1961, passim.

\footnote{5} A notable and successful example is the famous hydro-electric scheme constructed by the Tennessee Valley Authority, created by Roosevelt. See Richard Parker, John Kenneth Galbraith, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2005, p. 128.
intoned with heavy stress on the first syllable, and a frown. The term became so unpopular that the forerunners of those we now call ‘spin doctors’ got to work. ‘Capitalism’ became ‘Private Enterprise’; then ‘Free Enterprise’, and later still, ‘the Free Market’. Now that huge corporations and their managers possess such great power, John Kenneth Galbraith has aptly named the current system ‘Corporatism’. 6

Socialism and other ‘isms’

Between the two world wars, most rank-and-file Labor supporters were unfazed by the rise of communism. They felt its policies were simply an exaggerated form of Labor’s aims and were curious about the new political creed. For example, my own parents were interested to find out what Australian communists were saying and in 1935 they took me with them to a lecture by Dr O’Day in the Friendly Societies Hall at Brighton. He was a well-known communist and I was struck by his colourful language when criticising the then Prime Minister, Robert Menzies. 7

A degree of sympathy for communists lingered with some ALP people for a long time. Years later, as a branch secretary, I felt obliged to suggest to a fellow-ALP member that if he chose to deliver ‘Comm’ leaflets into letterboxes as well as Labor ones, he should push them in separately – instead of them being folded together. Religion and politics have long been intertwined in Australia, and in the years between the wars, many Labor supporters were Catholics. They were told that communism was ‘the enemy of the Church’ and, during the Spanish civil war, some Catholics, but not all, tended to support fascist Franco rather than the leftist government. But, for most Labor people, Spain was a long way off and they were more concerned over unemployment and Australian politics.

However, Labor Party policy-makers and tacticians were more nervous, and believed the ALP needed to present policies clearly different from communism. At the 1921 Federal conference the ‘Blackburn interpretation’ was adopted as the ALP’s moderate policy on socialism. Before then, with the founding of the Commonwealth Bank, and with later programs and projects, a degree of socialism was put into practice by Labor governments in Australia, and even by conservative ones – before the reversal to more extreme conservative attitudes. 8

ALP members of yesteryear

Getting back to the ordinary members of the Labor Party, what were they like, 60-odd years ago? Men greatly outnumbered women. Few women came to branch meetings, but they did express their views elsewhere and supported the ALP in many ways. Female Members of Parliament were almost unknown, but there were some notable exceptions, one being Doris Blackburn, widow of the famous Maurice. Branch members – and Labor MPs – came from a range of backgrounds and occupations but, in most ALP branches, there was a greater proportion of manual workers than in later years. Many of them were excellent at meetings – genuine and out-spoken, with ideas based on real life experience. Many had little formal education and it was interesting that occasionally one or other would correctly use an uncommon word to give a precise meaning, but sometimes such a word would be mispronounced. It showed their interest in serious reading or study, despite minimal school education. Their names are unrecorded and their importance is underestimated, but they were a major force in politics, active in promoting Labor wherever they went, especially at work. We would now call them ‘conversation leaders’. They actively countered the distortions and bias of the daily papers, referred to disdainfully as ‘the anti-Labor press.’

In those long-gone years, various influences and aims combined to maintain a strong and healthy membership of the ALP and branches took positive action to attract new members. Since then, memories of the depression have inevitably diminished with time, but other factors have been changed deliberately and have weakened the party. We now come to one of them – membership fees.

In the 1950s the annual subscription was 3 shillings (30 cents). Allowing for inflation, the equivalent would now be about $8 – a fraction of the current membership fee. In those years the modest cost was not a deterrent to joining and this helped to make organised drives for membership successful. For example, in one afternoon in the early 1950s, half-a-dozen ‘door-knockers’ followed up ‘letterboxing’, done a week earlier, and enlisted about forty new members in a new area on the outskirts of Dandenong – and a separate branch was promptly established. It was not ‘stacking’ but the enlistment of genuine Labor supporters.

6 Galbraith wrote many books in his long life. Among the last were The Good Society (1996) and The Economics of Innocent Fraud (2004). In the latter he suggests ‘Corporatism’ as a fitting name for the new power structure.

7 Dr. Gerald O’Day was a medical doctor who became a communist after seeing the misery of unemployed people coming to St Vincents Hospital, Melbourne. He was dismissed from his position at the hospital because of his politics.


8 Examples include the Liberal ‘three airlines’ policy under Menzies that maintained the government airline, TAA, and the takeover of private gas companies by Victorian Liberal Premier, Henry Bolte in the 1960s. In contrast, the Commonwealth Bank was sold by an ALP government – an action that shocked many Labor people.
**Members at branch meetings**

How did members feel about ALP branch meetings in those years? How did branches operate? And what was the atmosphere at meetings? Most ALP members looked forward to branch meetings as an interesting night out. Meetings were well-attended and members saw them as an opportunity to meet and talk with their comrades – and have their say on current politics. The term ‘comrade’ was still officially used by the ALP and by some branch members, although others avoided it, thinking it had a tinge of communism. Famous Labor personality, Pat Kennelly, who was vigorously opposed to both ‘Comms’ and the Movement people, chose to call almost everybody, ‘Brother’.

Members came to meetings confident that their political ideas and comments would be taken seriously. If they could convince their fellow-members of their point of view at the local meeting, then a letter would be sent to Central Executive, and maybe on to party leaders. Replies were prompt and came in good time to be discussed at the next branch meeting. The conduct of meetings was more orderly than in later years. It was the age of interest in debating and public speaking and the rules of meeting procedure were well known and respected. Lengthy interjections and ‘across the room’ arguments were not tolerated. This formality at meetings did not restrict discussion but helped everyone to better understand the subjects being discussed, without distractions.

**ALP branch activities**

Local branches played an important role at elections – and in between. They actively sought new members without thought of factions. They accepted responsibility for promoting Labor in their allotted areas and were respected as significant community bodies. Reports of activities were published in local papers. Branches had a continuing interest in Labor policy and current political events, and responded to topical matters as they arose. Branches were more numerous in relation to population than now, and each suburban branch had a clearly defined area which was small enough to be manageable. Branches were active and reliable. For example, as a campaign organiser for parliamentary elections in the 1950s I simply needed to ask the secretary of each branch to give an up-to-date number of letterboxes; then deliver the election material to the branch secretary. Similarly, each branch did the job of manning its own polling places on election day, and scrutineering afterwards.

Public meetings were a normal part of electioneering and there would be anything up to 4 or 5 of them in a Federal electorate. They were an opportunity to hear policies and meet well known Labor identities, as well as the local candidate – and gain publicity in the local papers. Branch members would turn up in good numbers. And they also went to Liberal meetings – to heckle and ask difficult questions.

When State Conferences were approaching, local branch members took up their right to propose motions. They were debated at branch meetings and, if approved, they were submitted to the conference. Ordinary branch members had good reason to feel that they could exert an influence. Of course the system was not perfect. State conferences included persuasion and bargaining in the corridors, and there was some manipulation of union block votes. Nevertheless, conference debates were real, with speakers trying to convince undecided delegates. Many of them were independent and made up their own minds after hearing the debate. Delegates knew that their opinions and decisions mattered and were willing to give up their Easter holidays to attend.

**ALP members – staunch or ‘stacked’?**

In the early 1950s many ALP members were beginning to feel uneasy about the state of the party. Ted Cashmore, a Labor stalwart mentioned earlier, put it into words: ‘There’s something funny going on, but I can’t put my finger on it’. He had sensed the growing manipulation of selection ballots and conferences. His remark led to the decision of the Dandenong branch to formally ask the Central Executive for information about the Movement. The branch was threatened with being disbanded if it continued to raise questions about the Movement.

---

9 Letters from the ALP State Secretary began, ‘Dear Comrade,’ and closed with ‘Yours fraternally’.
10 Kennelly, with his trademark stammer, once warned the present author about the vindictiveness of the Movement people. ‘Waa..Waa..Watch yourself, Brother; they outcomm the comms in their bar..bar..barbarity’.
11 In Victoria, the Central Executive was roughly equivalent to the Administrative Committee of later years. It functioned effectively from Room 2 of the Trades Hall, with a modest staff of Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Country Organiser and two typists. Letters from branches were treated seriously and promptly answered.
12 To counter the union ‘block votes’, delegates would sometimes choose the Saturday afternoon to propose controversial motions, when some union delegates were likely to be elsewhere, rather than in the conference hall.
13 This remark from Ted Cashmore prodded the present author into publicly identifying and describing the Movement to a meeting of the Dandenong branch in 1951. See Proceedings of the Sixth National Conference of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, p. 215. The branch president, Ted Smith, was informed verbally by Frank McManus that the branch would be disbanded if it continued to raise questions about the Movement.
members. It happened that I was in a good position to see what was happening. In the 1950s I held several unpaid positions in the ALP – branch secretary, conference delegate, selection ballot returning officer and campaign manager for Federal and for State elections. Without having any aim to uncover secrets I became aware of activities behind the scenes, such as highly organised attempts to rort ballots for conference delegates and parliamentary candidates.

‘Branch-stacking’ was also happening, but not in a big way. The Santamaria Movement paid more attention to trade unions that controlled blocks of votes at conferences than to local ALP branches. At that time the members ‘stacked’ by the Movement were usually sympathetic towards Labor but would not have joined of their own accord. Some helped in election campaigns but many of them ‘went missing’ during the referendum to ban the Communist Party in 1951. This puzzled the genuine members. On the positive side, there was still a large, dedicated base of ‘grass roots’ members, always ready to contribute time and effort. Most of them were unaware of the serious problems beneath the surface. Others were unwilling to ‘rock the boat’.

A succession of undercover influences

This was not the first time that the ALP suffered corrupt, undercover influence, but ordinary members, despite suspicions, seldom had enough hard evidence to complain or, perhaps, the will to take on the powerful and possibly menacing forces involved.

A famous, or infamous, case was that of John Wren, who, surprisingly, was a confidant of Catholic Archbishop Mannix. Wren had been a boot factory worker as a young man and always purported to be sympathetic towards Labor, but his business interests (some of them shady) took top place. For his own purposes he engineered the Victorian ALP’s surprising support for a Country Party government in the 1930s, led by Albert Dunstan – a Premier with some of the less-desirable characteristics of the later Premier-by-accident, Henry Bolte.

Wren was followed by B.A. Santamaria, another Mannix favourite, in the 1940s. When the threat posed by the Movement was finally recognised and exposed by Dr Evatt, it was already too late to avoid electoral damage. In fact, it was only just in time to save the ALP from being taken over by Santamaria. The background to the Split was misrepresented and poorly understood at the time when it mattered, but has since been clarified by good historians – and distorted by others.

Some opponents of the Movement had their own faction and, after the Split, this group, the Trade Union Defence Committee, gained a dominating position within the Victorian ALP. Its members had been badly treated in the years before the Split and were resolved to keep power exclusively in their own hands. This was modified by the second federal intervention in 1970 but the influence of ordinary members was not effectively restored. Two major factions grew in strength and became rivals, or enemies. Nevertheless, they cooperated to the degree necessary to keep power and reduce rank-and-file influence – similar to the way that leaders of corporations – while competing to some extent – are taking over from democratic government.

Compared to the spirit, activity and numbers of genuine ALP members of half-a-century ago, there has been a decline in recent decades. Many Labor people have become dejected, believing that their ideas and opinions are no longer valued and that faction leaders rule the roost. Nevertheless, many have hung on, working for the election of Labor governments and pressing for greater appreciation of ordinary ALP members and supporters. Perhaps, like Ben Chifley asserted in his last speech, despite knowing all its faults, their feeling for the Labor movement over-rides other considerations.

14 The most reliable and comprehensive study is Bruce Duncan’s Crusade or Conspiracy? (Sydney, UNSW Press, 2001). The 24-page ‘Conclusion’ is a calm and candid summary. The book’s wide-ranging bibliography will lead the reader to many other works – and opinions – on the subject.
15 At that time, trade union members living in the electorate were permitted to vote in ALP selection ballots. This provided an opportunity for the Movement people to round up and ferry Catholic unionists to the polling place to vote for the Movement-approved candidate.
16 Santamaria already had the ‘numbers’ at the 1954 Federal Conference but only just. So he chose to wait for 1955, expecting, with good reason, to have an overwhelming majority by then. This would indeed have happened if Evatt had not exposed the Movement in October 1954, and the following ‘intervention’ by the Federal Executive.
17 Distorted perceptions of the Movement and the Split are widespread, even among Labor people. This problem is discussed in the present author’s paper, ‘The flawed history of the Movement and the Labor Split’, in Phil Griffiths and Rosemary Webb (eds), work/organisation/struggle: papers from the seventh national labour history conference, Canberra, 2001, p. 253.
18 The group became known as the TUDC or Trade Union Defence Committee and is regarded as the forerunner of the Socialist Left faction.
19 During the 1960s a small group of Labor people, called by some ‘the McGarvie mob’ and later the ‘Participants’ pressed for reform in Victoria during the heavy-handed one-faction control. This led to the Federal intervention of 1970. Their efforts helped to clear the way for Whitlam’s victory in 1972.
Conclusion

Labor Party people of two or three generations ago were greatly influenced by the Great Depression of the 1930s. It brought home to them the importance of politics and spurred many to be active within the ALP. They were the strength of the party and confident that they could influence its policies and tactics. They were enthusiastic and promoted the cause of Labor in their daily lives. Despite the loyalty and good intentions of these old-time Labor people, too few of them realized that secretive groups could be a serious danger to the democratic spirit and practice of the party. The Santamaria Movement was allowed to grow and others soon copied its techniques of manipulation. The influence and the power possessed by ‘grass roots’ Labor Party members of sixty years ago have been sadly diminished.
Asian Airlines: An Early Australian Cold War Mystery

Drew Cottle and Angela Keys*

Asian Airlines was an enterprise that emerged during the struggle for Indonesian independence from Dutch colonial rule. The airline was the inspiration of Australian businessmen, Kenneth Frederick Wong and Clarence Hart Campbell. Wong and Campbell viewed their company as a means of supporting Indonesia’s independence movement. When Holland violated its truce with the Indonesian republicans and, aided by the British military and Ambonese mercenaries, Dutch forces carried out the first of their Police Actions, 20,000 Indonesians were killed.¹ Thousands more were displaced and Indonesia was deprived of oil areas and vital rice supplies. Following the Dutch Police Action, Campbell and Wong conceived the idea of an Australian-based airline that would fetch and carry cargo to the Indonesian republicans. Asian Airlines, however, had only a brief existence. Its operations were obstructed by Australian intelligence and marred by controversy.

The background to the failed Asian Airlines is the emerging independence struggle in Indonesia and Malaya. Such fractures and openings in the old imperial system were overlain by the exigencies of the Cold War. In the aftermath of the first Dutch Police Action, Indonesian communists in March 1948 formed the People’s Democratic Front, based in Madiun, central Java. They urged national leaders Hatta and Sukarno to break off negotiations with the Dutch and unilaterally establish a people’s republic through armed struggle. The response of the Indonesian nationalist leadership was swift and severe. The Indonesian communist resistance was destroyed at Madiun and its leaders, many of whom were instrumental in initiating the boycott of Dutch shipping in Australia and had been political prisoners in the Netherlands East Indies and Australia, were killed or imprisoned.² Following the Madiun incident, the Indonesian independence leadership, free of their communist rivals, were able in time to conclude an agreement with the Dutch in partial fulfilment of their independence goal. With the effective eradication of the PKI, the United States was willing to sponsor Indonesian independence. By threatening to withhold economic aid drawn from the Marshall Plan, the United States was able to rebuff Dutch ambitions of recreating its Netherlands East Indies empire.³

Two of the leading figures of Asian Airlines, Clarence Hart Campbell and Kenneth Frederick Wong, were communist internationalists before they were businessmen. ‘Clarrie’ or ‘Steve’ Campbell, a confidant of the Australian Prime Minister Ben Chifley; Gallipoli Cove survivor; ALP organiser; iron worker; industrial chemist; alleged Comintern courier; secret member of the Communist Party of Australia’s central committee; and bitumen producer, was at the forefront of the industrial struggle to prevent Dutch-controlled ships sailing from Australian ports in their imperial quest to retake Indonesia.⁴ Campbell had been the honorary secretary of the Indian Seamen’s Union in Australia, whose members, even as stateless aliens, defied Dutch guns and Australian laws in their refusal to work as sailors under a Dutch flag of war. Without this continuing Indian resolve, the longstanding boycott of Dutch shipping, and perhaps even Indonesian independence, may have been in jeopardy. It was believed that Campbell’s efforts to support the Indian seamen’s mass refusal and desertion of Dutch ships maintained the wavering Australian boycott after many of the Indonesian seamen were repatriated to republican-held Indonesia.⁵

The Australian Labor government assisted the Dutch military effort to re-conquer Indonesia through the supply and provisioning of food and supposed ‘non-military’ equipment.⁶ Nevertheless, Prime Minister Chifley seemed to believe that the Dutch would fail to secure Indonesia.⁷ Following the Japanese invasion, occupation, defeat, and the emergence of an armed Indonesian independence movement, to the chagrin of both the Hague and Whitehall, Australian troops were not sent to assist the Dutch military campaign of renewed empire.⁸ During the ceasefire between the Dutch occupying forces and the Indonesian nationalists,
Clarrie Campbell travelled from Singapore to the Indonesian nationalist headquarters in Jogjakarta where he delivered a speech over Independence Radio. In the speech, which was beamed back to Australia, Campbell urged the forging of trade links between the embryonic Indonesian republic and Australia. According to his surviving papers, Campbell had been appointed the Indonesian trade representative in Australia by the Indonesian republican government.9

The Australia-Indonesia Trading Company was established in Australia when Campbell returned to Sydney. It was rumoured that the trading company, of which Campbell was managing director, would secure a monopoly of the Indonesian trade if the Indonesian republicans gained complete control of Indonesia. Campbell addressed a Sydney meeting of the Commercial Traders Association in October 1947 where samples of tea, cutlery, rubber, kapok, pepper, cinnamon, and other items from republican Indonesia were displayed. Campbell stated that Indonesia required 100,000,000 pounds worth of goods including machine tools, agricultural implements, and food stuffs. He claimed that the Australian government was favourably disposed to trading with Indonesia. Charged with the responsibility of promoting trade between Australia and the emerging nation of Indonesia, Campbell sought the means or a vehicle by which this trade relationship could occur.10

Campbell’s association with the Indian seamen in the boycott of Dutch shipping as well as his organising abilities for the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) led him into a political and commercial operation with Fred Wong. An Australian-born Chinese, Wong was president of the Chinese Youth League, treasurer of the Chinese Seamen’s Union, and one of the six members of the ‘Direct branch, Chinese’ of the CPA. In the first days of the boycott of Dutch shipping, Chinese seamen walked off ships throughout Australian ports in solidarity with their Indonesian brethren in the cause of Indonesian independence.11

Wong helped to organise rallies and demonstrations in support of Indonesian independence from Dutch imperialism. The Chinese Youth League, with support from the Chinese community, provided food and accommodation for Indonesian seamen and other Indonesians who were victimised by the Dutch authorities in Australia. The Chinese Seamen’s Union and the Chinese Youth League during this period also raised funds and aid for the Chinese communist forces in the Chinese civil war which broke out soon after the Japanese surrendered unconditionally in September 1945.12

Australian intelligence files described Wong as the most active communist among Australia’s Chinese community.13 A Leichhardt green grocer, Wong’s patriotism, commitment to anti-fascism and international solidarity had been forged in the Port Kembla Pig Iron Strike of 1938-39. During that strike, he organised truckloads of fruit and vegetables donated by Chinese shopkeepers and market gardeners to be delivered to striking workers and their families when they refused to load pig iron onto the tramp steamer Dalfram. The pig iron was destined for the armories of Kobe where it would be forged into bullets and bombs to kill Chinese in Japan’s undeclared invasion of coastal China.14

In 1942, when stranded Chinese seamen refused to crew foreign ships in Australian ports because of their appalling wages and working and living conditions, Wong and other leading members of the Chinese Youth League, with the assistance of the Seamen’s Union of Australia and the Waterside Workers’ Federation, founded an Australian chapter of the Chinese Seamen’s Union. This local chapter was unofficially recognised by the Australian Labor government.15 In the formation of the Chinese Youth League and the Chinese Seamen’s Union, Wong attempted to build a form of international proletarian solidarity within Australia. Throughout the war years the Chinese Youth League organised concerts and operatic performances by Chinese seamen, musicians, singers and dancers to raise funds and subscriptions for war widows and orphans in China, victory loans, and the Doctor Norman Bethune Hospital in Red Yenan.16

In the immediate post-war period, as militant Chinese seamen and members of the Chinese community

---

9 Goodall, ‘Port Politics, Race and Change’, p. 32. Goodall, however, states that Campbell became more deeply committed to the Indonesian cause when the Chifley government appointed him as the Acting Trade Commissioner to the still un-recongnised government of the Indonesian Republic in December 1946. On Campbell’s Indonesian appointment, see NAA, 6119, 1051, Volume 1.
10 NAA, 6119, 1051, Volume 1; Asian Airlines. Questioned by Mr Harrison, MP, NAA, A432, 1948/676.
13 See ‘Employee Organisations – Australian Chinese Seamen’s Union of Australia’, NAA, A6122; Asian Airlines, NAA, A432, 80/48/676.
15 Cottle, ‘Forgotten foreign militants’.
16 Ibid.
supported Indonesian independence and Chinese war refugees, the Chifley Labor government sought to repatriate forcibly all Chinese who were not citizens or did not hold long-term residency in Australia.17 Wong and the Chinese Youth League were in the forefront of this struggle against the exclusion of their compatriots from white Australia, whose collective efforts to end Japanese militarism in the Pacific were forgotten.18

Wong and Campbell’s commitment to the liberation of Indonesia and possibly British Malaya was realised in their expectation of creating an independent air freight service between Australia and two Asian nations-in-the-making. Asian Airlines was seen by both as the means to achieve this end. The commercial origins of Asian Airlines are obscure and complicated. In December 1945, a Sydney entrepreneur, O.K. Kennedy, discussed the issue of trade between Australia and the Far East with E.V. Burgoyne, an ex-AIF officer and the Australian agent of a Hong Kong trading company. Kennedy told Burgoyne he proposed to buy Catalina aircraft from the RAAF disposals at Rathmines and convert them into air freight carriers.19

Kennedy advertised in the *Sydney Morning Herald* for ex-RAAF pilots, engineers, and radio operators to work in an overseas air freight service. G.C. Brickwood, J.O. Diggins, V.M. Trevitt, E.V. MacDonald-Brookes and J.R. Garemyn responded to Kennedy’s offer, giving him 300 pounds each to purchase the Catalinas.20 Kennedy continued to ask the ex-servicemen for money. He finally admitted to Burgoyne that he never purchased the aircraft but merely held options over them. The Disposals Commission pressed Kennedy to complete the sale, but he abandoned the venture. In June 1947, Burgoyne spoke with Jack Wells, a leading communist party member, about the options on the aircraft. Wells introduced Burgoyne to Campbell, who agreed to buy the aircraft, with Burgoyne dependent upon the capital Campbell contributed. Campbell purchased the aircraft on option in Kennedy’s name. On 29 July 1947, Campbell registered the partnership under the *Business Names Act* as ‘Asian Airlines’. Dissatisfied with the lack of progress, lack of capital, and Campbell’s waywardness, Burgoyne withdrew from the company.21

By January 1948, Campbell converted the airline into a public company registered as ‘Asian Airlines Pty Ltd’, with a share capital of 25,000 pounds. Campbell was the Managing Director of Asian Airlines, and the company’s office was in a Haymarket building rented to the Chinese Seamen’s Union and the Chinese Youth League. The partners of the new company were Campbell, Fred Wong, Lewis Wong, W.J. Lee and the remaining ex-servicemen. Lewis Wong was the secretary of the Chinese Seamen’s Union and a communist, while W.J. Lee was the barrister of the Chinese Seamen’s Union. Fred Wong and Clarrie Campbell were the company’s majority shareholders, while Chinese gardeners, restaurant proprietors, and merchants held small numbers of shares.22

Although a manufacturer of bitumen, supplier of lubricants and oils to the NSW railways, and a nominal part-owner of Marx House, the Sydney headquarters of the Communist Party of Australia, Campbell by himself was unable to raise the capital for the purchase of these sea-planes. Although the precise circumstances are unknown, Campbell’s associations and commitments drew him to Wong. Through their deep involvement in the support of Asian independence from European imperialism, they formed Asian Airlines. Wong, as the treasurer of the Chinese Seamen’s Union, was rumoured never to have held bank accounts in the name of that organisation.23 Never faulted for embezzlement or corruption, Wong was scrupulous in his dealings with the financial affairs and welfare of Chinese seamen. Whether the 25,000 pounds raised to form the company came from Campbell, the Chinese Seamen’s Union or sympathisers in the Communist Party or the Chinese community is unknown. The intelligence files simply list the shareholders of Asian Airlines and their number of shares.24

Campbell rather than Wong was responsible for purchasing eight of the aircraft and securing a licence to operate an air-freight service from Australia to Southeast Asia. The repair and conversion of the planes was left to inexperienced ex-servicemen who held minority stakes in the company.25 It would seem that Wong was simply the key financial vector for the airline. The brief existence of Asian Airlines occurred

17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
20 Harrison, the Acting Liberal Opposition Leader, stated in parliament that he was told by a security officer that Brickwood, Diggins, and Garemyn were members of the Communist Party who had no experience in aircraft maintenance. *CPD*, 18 February 1948 – 18 June 1948, Volume 196, p. 778.
21 Asian Airlines, NAA, A432, 80/48/676.
22 Ibid.
25 The Minister for Civil Aviation, A.S. Drakeford, in response to a question from H.B.S. Gullett about Asian Airlines stated that the ex-servicemen working for the company were engaged in ‘a rehabilitation venture’. *CPD*, 1 September 1948 – 10 December 1948, Volume 200, p. 942.
in the period after the first Dutch Police Action in Indonesia and Sukarno’s defeat of the Indonesian communist resistance at Mediun. It was during this period that the boycott of Dutch shipping in Australia waned. The Indonesian republic appeared to be on the verge of collapse as the Dutch blockade tightened. Anti-communist forces inside the Australian Labor Party and Australian trade unions were demanding an end to the boycott. Food and medical supplies from Australia carried by Dutch shipping helped to consolidate the Dutch presence in the archipelago. Asian Airlines was created not primarily as a profitable business undertaking, but as a way of building the economic viability of the infant Indonesian republic through a tenuous trade link which would attempt to break the Dutch cordon sanitaire. Campbell believed, however, that Asian Airlines was viable. Such a belief was based on political commitment rather than business acumen. Asian Airlines’ viability was never tested as the company was scuttled by government fiat and public controversy, fuelled by intelligence interference within Australia. Among the shareholders, only Campbell and, to a far lesser extent, Wong, were active in the operations of the airline. From the time it was listed as a public company, Asian Airlines faced insurmountable difficulties.

Asian Airlines was depicted in the press as a communist front organisation that would aid the rebels in Indonesia and British Malaya. The Federal Labor Attorney-General, Doctor H.V. Evatt, believed the story of ‘the communist trading company to be an elaborate hoax’. For Campbell, Asian Airlines would offer the possibility of breaking the Dutch blockade, ending the Indonesian republic’s isolation and hastening trade between Australia and an independent Indonesia. It was accused of being a potential trafficker in drugs, specifically opium. Campbell’s involvement in Asian Airlines was seen to be deeply suspicious. His friendship and associations with Chifley, Eddie Ward, and the boycotters, were all depicted as bordering on the criminal. Australian, American and Dutch intelligence, active throughout the boycott of Dutch shipping in Australia, provided information to the press which condemned Asian Airlines. The company’s operations manager for a mere three months, ex-RAAF wing commander, V.B. Littlejohn, OBE, believed Asian Airlines’ activities were ‘highly unorthodox, if not illegal’. Littlejohn stated that C.H. Campbell intended to supply army radios and radar equipment to the ‘Indonesian republicans who were fighting Dutch imperialism’. Campbell allegedly told Littlejohn he could ‘obtain what was required without much difficulty’. Campbell believed ferrying military equipment to Indonesia by air remained the difficulty.

Campbell had visited Malaya at the same time as L.L. Sharkey, the Australian communist leader, and had later entered Indonesia illegally. He toured the country and broadcast over Jogjakarta radio that Australia must stand firm in its boycott of Dutch shipping so that Indonesia could win its independence. Campbell claimed in conversation with Littlejohn that he had arranged for Lake Bota near Jogjakarta to be excavated for the landing of flying boats. Campbell explained to Littlejohn that he would be given a permit to fly to Indonesia and Malaya ‘because I know enough about a certain Minister of the Crown and some of the others too, to get anything I want out of them when I want it.’ V.M. Trevitt, an ex-RAAF pilot and shareholding employee of the company, stated that Campbell twice suggested that he should fly a Catalina to Singapore and make a bogus forced landing at Lake Bota to deliver medical equipment to the Indonesians. After talking to Littlejohn, Trevitt refused. Subsequent to the first Dutch Police Action against the Indonesian republic, the Australian boycott of Dutch shipping was attacked by the Liberal Opposition and Australian importers and exporters as both a communist plot and a brake on Australian trade. It was seen as a threat to the Australian Labor Party by right-wing unions and anti-communist forces. The boycott supposedly demonstrated that communists were dictating Australian foreign policy, as well as supporting Asian rebels in Indonesia and Malaya.

Members of Asian Airlines’ ground crew finally left because the company’s finances were largely non-existent, as well as pressure from the security services. The civilian air authorities in Canberra and Singapore refused to permit the airline to make flights between Australia, Indonesia and British Malaya, effectively making the company unviable. Pilots could not be recruited. The aircraft could not be made flight-worthy as cargo carriers because of a lack of funds and spare parts. Because of the furore of the


28 See Jack Lang’s attack on Campbell and Asian Airlines and, by implication, Prime Minister Chifley under parliamentary privilege. CPD, 1 September 1948 – 10 December 1948, Volume 200, p. 561.


30 Asian Airlines, NAA, A432, 80/48/676.
Labour Traditions

communist connections to Asian Airlines, Campbell was a marked man and his relationship with Chifley was severed by the Prime Minister. The other principal investor, Wong, was largely preoccupied with the course of the civil war in China. He still supported the boycott, although it was faltering, and was concerned about the repatriation of war-time Chinese refugees from Australia, many of whom were militant Chinese seamen. Instead of purchasing eight Catalinas from the Disposal Commission, only three were actually acquired and moored at the RAAF depot at Lake Boga, Victoria.31

In early August 1948, Campbell was in Singapore attempting to convince civil aviation officials of his plan to start an Australian air freight service covering the Far East from a base in Singapore. At the same time, Wong travelled to Lake Boga to inspect the aeroplanes the company had purchased. Wong was assisting a recently hired Asian Airlines employee, ex-RAAF flight engineer, Frederick Taylor, in repairing the tail of one of the Catalinas. They were carrying out these repairs in a metal dingy when it capsized and both Taylor and Wong fell into the lake. Taylor swam three metres to one of the Catalina’s open portholes. He assumed that Wong was behind him. Wong disappeared into the water; Taylor tried to rescue him but failed to find him. Wong’s body was later recovered by a local fisherman and the coronial inquiry into the circumstances of Wong’s death concluded that he accidentally drowned.32 Wong’s accidental death was never raised in the federal parliament or the press even though he was the leading shareholder in an alleged communist front company. The Chinese community in Sydney, among which Wong was respected as a political activist, was silent about the circumstances of Wong’s death because of the forced evacuation of Chinese war-time refugees and the fear of government repression. The war-time unity within the Australian nation was vanishing with the onset of the Cold War.33

Asian Airlines effectively died when Fred Wong drowned. The books of the company have apparently been lost to history. After Wong’s death, Campbell moved to live permanently in Singapore where his bitumen business built roads on the Malayan mainland during the Emergency.34 Whatever his former beliefs and aspirations, he became a wealthy Australian expatriate in Kuala Lumpur during the Cold War.35 While Indonesian independence was eventually won, Asian Airlines became a lost and forgotten episode in the Australian Cold War. Wong’s drowning and Campbell’s retreat to Malaya represented both Asian Airlines’ finality and futility in attempting to operate a business that was even a minor affront to global capitalism in the emerging Cold War.

31 Ibid.
32 Ibid. According to a security report on Wong’s death, ‘no RAAF personnel are or were stationed at the Lake Boga depot at the time of the fatality’. Asian Airlines Questioned by Mr Harrison, MP, NAA, A432, 1948/676.
34 The vilification of Campbell by Australian security continued. An unnamed security officer in 1955 described Campbell as an ‘unsavoury character’ who ‘had been gravely suspected of engaging in opium smuggling and escaped prosecution only by giving away his confederates’. South East Asia – Activities of Clarence Hart Campbell, NAA, A1838, 381/2/3. In contrast, the veteran Australian Communist, Edgar Ross, believed that, ‘Clarrie (Campbell) later opened up his business as a manufacturer of a bitumenised surface for roads in Malaya at the height of the civil war (sic). While selling his product to the Government he tipped off the Communist guerrillas, information he had gleaned on the movements of its troops, etc…’, Edgar Ross, ‘An autobiographical sketch’, http://www.cpa.org.au/special/ross_biog.doc, accessed 11/02/07.
ASIO and the Communist Party: New Light on an Old Tradition

Phillip Deery*

Archival records concerning ASIO undercover operations are rare. Consequently the literature on ASIO’s infiltration of the Left is almost non-existent. This paper uses, for the first time, recently released ASIO files on one of its own agents. It thereby attempts to contribute to our understanding of undercover operations by the security services within the Australian labour movement. It will concentrate only on this agent’s infiltration of his first ‘target’, the Communist Party of Australia. The paper will also provide an insight into the manner in which intelligence was collected and into the largely unknown operational culture of ASIO in the early 1970s.

At one point in Melissa Reeves’ play, ‘The Spook’, performed at Melbourne’s Malthouse Theatre in 2007, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) controller, Alex, commented on the work of his organisation: ‘It’s so fucking necessary it’s frightening. We could tip either way’.1 This was in 1965 when the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) was a shrunken shadow of its former self. However, Alex’s comment to his young operative illuminates ASIO’s continuing concerns about the threat of communism to national security. It also points to its readiness to employ agents to infiltrate organisations on the Left. The fictional ‘spook’ in this play, Martin Porter, was drawn from the actual experiences of Phil Geri, a Bendigo hospital orderly who was recruited by ASIO at the age of nineteen. He was a Catholic, a member of the Citizens Military Force and highly patriotic. ‘I didn’t know what ASIO was. I was keen on the CMF and thought it was another arm of the army’.2 In 1963 he joined the Bendigo branch of the CPA, which was ‘very small, mainly elderly people who met in private homes and talked about the workers’ cause’. He soon became a delegate to the state conference of the CPA. This enabled him to memorise faces and match them to the hundreds of photographs taken surreptitiously by ASIO: ‘Everyone in the vicinity was photographed. Car licence plates were taken; they did the job well. But it was a hard time for me because the debriefing went on for hours, sometimes days, and I would just get sick of it’. Yet Geri’s distaste was temporary, since he remained an agent for twenty-three years. After the membership of the Bendigo branch dwindled to three, ASIO re-deployed him to infiltrate the apparently more dangerous and certainly more secretive Maoist-aligned Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist). His coup was procuring and passing on inner-party documents circulated at the CPA (M-L) national conference. But such ‘successes’ carried a personal price:

It was a very lonely time. My whole life changed. I had played a lot of sport and enjoyed the army, but now I was regarded as a radical left-winger. Bendigo people just didn’t know what had happened to me. It was extremely difficult to live with, and still is… Sometimes I thought of giving it away.

Finally, it was ASIO, not Geri himself, who terminated his services. His seventh case officer, ‘Pat’, met him in Bendigo’s Shamrock Hotel, produced a letter of thanks from ASIO’s director-general, and drove away, along with ‘a bit of my past’.

The subject of this paper, another ASIO undercover agent, underwent similar experiences. He was also young, zealous, naïve, successful – in terms of relatively high-level penetration – and redeployed, like Geri, from the CPA to a seemingly more insidious communist organisation. However, his disillusionment was quicker: he worked for ASIO for two years not two decades. The profound strength of will it took to maintain a double life, with all its dissembling and mendacity, proved too much for this less resilient other ‘spook’. The reason he gave to his case officer for his resignation was ‘nervousness and deteriorating health arising from his role’.3 Notwithstanding Geri coming in from the cold, the literature on ASIO’s infiltration of the Left is, apart from McKnight,4 non-existent. Indeed, the most illuminating study emanates from New Zealand where George Fraser was recruited by the Special Branch and worked undercover within the Communist Party of New Zealand for nine years.5 This paper, therefore, attempts to contribute to our

---

2 Peter Ellingsen, ‘The Agony and the Loneliness of an ASIO Spy’, The Age, 29 April 1991. The quotes that immediately follow are taken from this source. An application for access to Geri’s ASIO files is currently under consideration by ASIO.
4 David McKnight, Australia’s Spies and their Secrets (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1994) chs. 16-19.
5 George Fraser, Seeing Red. Undercover in 1950s New Zealand (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1995). We must also rely on New Zealand for an insight into the equivalent of ASIO, the Security Intelligence Service; see C.H. Bennetts, Spy: A former SIS officer unmasks New Zealand’s sensational Cold War spy affair (Auckland: Random House, 2006). My thanks to Kerry Taylor for this reference.
On 31 December 1974, an ASIO field officer sent the following intelligence to his Assistant Director-General: ‘Jamie DOUGHNEY to travel to New Zealand for 10 days for Young Socialist Conference. He will depart on 8.1.75’. Normally, such an operational report would be unremarkable: there are thousands of them in the hundreds of individual case files on left wing activists compiled by ASIO during the Cold War. To protect its sources, the names of ASIO agents are removed from files released to the public. What makes this report distinctive, if not unique, is that the identity of the agent who transmitted this intelligence to the ASIO field officer can now be revealed. Even more remarkable, given ASIO does not make available files on its own agents, was the following unprecedented action: in the second half of 2006, ten files, requested by the writer, on one of its paid agents – Maximilian Wechsler – were released. This paper uses, for the first time, those files to reconstruct the *modus operandi* of both ASIO and its agent. It will focus only on the first ‘target’, the Communist Party of Australia; its longer and more successful penetration of the Socialist Workers’ League (SWL) is beyond the limited scope of this paper. The paper also seeks to provide an insight into the manner in which intelligence was collected and into the largely unknown operational culture of ASIO in the early 1970s. It will suggest its readiness to accept a ‘walk-in’ represented a failure in case management by the organisation.

Maximilian Wechsler was born in Plzeň (Pilsen), Czechoslovakia, on 15 May 1950. He left school at the age of fifteen, when he trained as a fitter at the Skoda machine works at the V.I. Lenin plant in Plzeň. According to his own testimony in a subsequent interview, Wechsler participated in the Czech resistance to the Soviet invasion in 1968. The following year he informed his parents (Herman, a purchaser of car parts at Skoda, and Reine, a crane driver) that he intended to defect. On 15 May 1969 he travelled by train with a youth group under the auspices of the Czechoslovakian Tourist Bureau from Prague to Vienna, ostensibly to visit the city and return three days later. On 18 May he sought political asylum at the Vienna police station and, soon after, applied through the Migration Office in the Australian embassy in Vienna to emigrate to Australia. It was then that Wechsler’s first contact with the ASIO was made. In several Australian embassies in Western Europe, ASIO liaised closely with the Migration Office to screen applicants and it was, in fact, an ASIO officer who interviewed Wechsler. He commented that Wechsler was ‘a clear, straightforward young man. Average intelligence. Quite good in general’. This, plus his previous membership of the Czechoslovakian Young Communist League (from 1965 to 1969) and the fact that he was single, passed his medical examination, had an aunt who lived in Australia (in Inkerman Street, St Kilda), and that he would seek employment in ‘a similar trade’, meant that on 29 May 1969 his application was approved.

He departed from Austria on 4 July and arrived in Australia on 7 July. He gained employment as a fitter in various Melbourne factories before shifting to Brisbane, in March 1970, where he worked intermittently for eighteen months. On 22 December 1971, he was granted citizenship and on Australia Day, 26 January 1972, he was naturalised. ASIO later learnt that for six weeks in September-October 1971 he was an inmate of the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Hospital in Taringa, Queensland, suffering from ‘an anxiety complex’ and ‘neurosis’. There, he met and married on 1 November 1971 a nurse, Mary Alexander (who throughout 1972 was to be convicted on thirteen charges of forgery, uttering and stealing, apparently linked to her penchant for unsuccessful betting on horses). Wechsler and his wife moved from Brisbane to Melbourne in October 1972.

In November 1972 Wechsler contacted ASIO and offered his services. The interviewing case officer reported favourably: Wechsler ‘impresses as a sincere and dedicated young man with an intense desire

---

7 Wechsler became a full-time activist for the SWL, was elected to its State Executive and became its Minute Secretary, Forum Director and Melbourne representative for Pathfinder Press. The quantity of intelligence he provided was voluminous. His penetration of the SWL is, in part, the subject of my ‘Double Agent Down Under: Australian Security and the Infiltration of the Left’, *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 22, No. 3, June 2007, pp. 346-66. This article was written prior to the release of the ASIO files on which this paper is based.  
9 In April 1973 Wechsler was informed, via a letter from his parents, that he had been sentenced to eighteen months imprisonment for leaving Czechoslovakia illegally.  
10 Interview with a retired senior ASIO officer, 10 June 2005. He requested that his identity remain confidential. Every reference in several files to this interview has been blacked out. See, for example, ‘Case History – Maximilian Wechsler’, Appendix “A”, p. 2, NAA A6119, 3883. This document, stamped ‘secret’, was a twenty three page report requested by ‘Scorpion’, the Director-General, and written by a Mr Wiggins over a seven week period in April-May 1975.  
11 The above details are drawn from Wechsler’s immigration file, NAA A2559, 1969/154/13.  
13 Telex, police report, Brisbane, to ASIO, 13 September 1973, NAA A6119, 3879. See also footnote 30.
to do something about combating communism’. He assessed Wechsler as ‘excellent “Q” potential’ and recommended penetration of the Socialist Party of Australia (SPA).14 The other contender, the CPA (M-L), was – notwithstanding Geri’s subsequent success – virtually impervious to penetration: there were no membership lists, formal meetings were rarely held, it was conspiratorially-organised with a highly-developed cell structure, and the intensely secretive Hill was obsessive about security.15 According to its leader, E.F. Hill, prospective members were ‘thoroughly scrutinised…And I mean thoroughly scrutinised’.16

As we shall see, such thorough scrutiny was not practised by the CPA. The Victorian Regional Director believed it unwise for Wechsler to attempt penetration of the SPA given its support for the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia. Instead, he considered Wechsler was more suited to a role within the CPA, which publicly opposed Soviet actions, and could be ‘conned’ into believing that Wechsler was a ‘youthful Dubcek supporter’ in 1968 who dissented against the Soviet occupation of his country and fled from the ‘harsh Stalinist regime’ in 1969.17 Approval was sought ‘to proceed with this recruitment’.18 However, the Director-General, Peter Barbour, was opposed: he maintained that ‘a walk-in such as this should be treated with the greatest reserve [and] we know virtually nothing about him’. He was also concerned that Wechsler’s personal history may colour his judgements; that his background would be ‘unattractive to CPA as well as SPA’; and that ‘to join the CPA just 3½ years after having fled the Communist regime is incongruous to say the least’. He recommended that recruitment of agent Wechsler be not approved.19

Whether due to Barbour’s position or because of ASIO’s preoccupation throughout December with the usurping of past custom and practice by the new Attorney-General, Lionel Murphy – including the issue of security clearances for incoming Labor Ministers20 – Wechsler received no response from ASIO. On 17 January, he phoned again and on the following evening a case officer visited him at his Brunswick home to assess his suitability for a covert role. He reported: ‘I was most impressed with WECHSLER and have no doubt that he could successfully carry out a role to penetrate the C.P. A.’ He felt Wechsler would ‘be amenable to control’ and that having met him was convinced that he could become a ‘useful Agent’ for ASIO.21 On the basis of this assessment, the Regional Director then contacted HQ, which responded with ‘O.K. to proceed in view of case submitted’.22 Wechsler signed ASIO’s Declaration of Secrecy, stamped ‘top secret’, on 21 February 1973.23 His role as an undercover agent was about to begin.

The ease with which Wechsler joined the CPA is underscored by its speed. On 21 February he contacted a communist state organiser in the Australian Metal Workers’ Union (AMWU), Alan Ritter.24 Ritter and J.A. Brown interviewed Wechsler for ‘some hours’ regarding his escape from Czechoslovakia and his communist sympathies. He persuaded them of his bona fides since he was taken to the CPA headquarters where he was introduced to Bernie Taft, the Victorian State Secretary, whom he also convinced. Taft proposed that Wechsler could assist with the translation of Russian documents (Wechsler spoke Russian, Hungarian and Polish), lecture on Marxist theory, sell Tribune on weekends, and join the Communist Party’s AMWU fraction. He then nominated Wechsler (seconded by Ritter) for membership of the Party; Wechsler paid a joining fee and was shown through the Party offices with the invitation to visit at any time.25 All this occurred on the same day. In this instance, at least, the Socialist Labor League’s judgement that ‘it is easy to pick a police spy’ since all agents were ‘druggos, drunks or criminals’ was not applicable.26

Wechsler’s principal ‘Agent Master’, to use ASIO vernacular, was ‘John’ – possibly John Mace, known to the Committee for the Abolition of Political Police to be ‘involved in the more open type of legwork’.

16 However one chink in the security-conscious CPA (M-L) was revealed in a heavily censored file containing an interview with an ‘overly co-operative’ member or former member of the CPA (M-L) at ASIO’s Melbourne headquarters on 26 June 1974. See five page ‘restricted’ report sent by Regional Director, Victoria, to Headquarters, 27 March 1975; p. 9, reprinted in Joan Coxsedge, *ASIO and the Communist Party* (Melbourne: Committee for the Abolition of Political Police, 1982) p. 132.
He was delighted by his agent’s ‘amazing progress’. He believed that Wechsler had the potential ‘to go exceedingly far’ and that his goal of the ‘deepest possible penetration’ of the CPA would be realised. Although the Victorian Regional Director wondered whether the Communist Party was pushing Wechsler to test him and ‘establish his bona fides’, the previously circumspect Assistant Director-General acknowledged that Wechsler made ‘a very good beginning’. ASIO approved initial payment of $10 per month and $16 for special expenses; this would later increase to $45 per month in June 1973 and finally to the significant weekly sum of $90 plus expenses in November 1974. Money was deposited directly into a State Savings Bank account, No. 105453; ASIO retained the passbook. Wechsler also received abundant non-monetary assistance from ASIO. This ranged from driving him to various appointments, visiting him in hospital, expediting delayed payments of sickness benefits (including direct intervention on Wechsler’s behalf to the Department of Social Security), expressing constant praise, gratitude and reassurance, finding him accommodation when evicted and arranging the storage of his furniture. While altruism might explain such munificence, it far more likely pointed to the extent to which ASIO controlled, or at least managed, the everyday, prosaic aspects of an agent’s life when that agent’s ‘intelligence dividend’ was high. On average, Wechsler met his case officer three times per week, although in early 1975 under a new case officer this increased to every week day. The dependence of agent upon controller is suggested by Wechsler at one point expressing ‘his sincere appreciation for the guidance and assistance given to him by Case Officer’ and on another occasion thanking his case officer for their ‘teamwork’ which he claimed contributed significantly to his success as an agent.

Wechsler quickly immersed himself in a range of activities on behalf of the CPA. He attended AMWU branch and CP fraction meetings, a reception for the leader of the Italian Communist Party, a 50th Anniversary Tribune dinner at Collingwood Town Hall (at which, during his speech, Bernie Taft publicly complimented Wechsler for his efforts and dedication), an ALP meeting at St Kilda Town Hall (where he sold the Australian Left Review), and visited the homes of Ida Walker and Max Ogden. He was also given two cameras by Taft with a view to Wechsler becoming a photographer for Tribune. ASIO hastily arranged a photographic training course for Wechsler who then used the Russian-made camera to photograph communist delegates to a AMWU study session at Mt Macedon. The film was processed by ASIO two days later. Because of a work-related back injury, Wechsler obtained a full-time cleaning job at the Communist Party headquarters that provided him, as his case officer noted, with ‘an excellent position for further penetration’. ASIO continued to be pleased with ‘Bosch’ (Wechsler’s cover name) and his credibility rating was upgraded to B.2, or high-grade intelligence. Reports referred to his ‘wonderful job’, his ‘accelerated success’, and his ‘meteoric rise’ within the CPA.

Indeed, so rapid was his progress that concerns were raised. His case officer reported that Wechsler had ‘moved too fast to control in normal terms’, while the Assistant Director-General raised the possibility that Wechsler was a ‘push-in’ to ASIO – in other words, a plant – for adverse publicity purposes. This was rejected by the Victorian Office, which reiterated its positive judgement of Wechsler as ‘a likeable little fellow who is proud of his Australian citizenship and simply wishes to assist the A.S.I.O.’. Especially appealing was the fact that Wechsler had gained the confidence of both Taft and John Sendy (Victorian Labour Traditions)

28 Regional Director, Victoria, to Headquarters, 28 March 1973, NAA A6119, 3876.
29 ORS No. 2/73, 28 February 1973; handwritten note, correspondence, Regional Director to Assistant Director-General, 23 February 1973, NAA A6119, 3877.
30 Telex, Headquarters to Victorian Office, 17 April 1973, NAA A6119, 3876; ‘Agent Finance Statement’ [undated], NAA A6119, 3882; Minute Paper, Operational Security Officer to Director-General, p. 6, 6 May 1975, NAA, A6119, 3884. He was also loaned $300 by ASIO to purchase a motorbike in June 1973 (‘to improve his agent role’ but which he sold for $200 ‘in a fit of desperation’ due to his wife’s frequent visits to the TAB) and given a ‘holiday bonus’ of $100 to cover living expenses in Tasmania during Christmas 1973. A copy of Wechsler’s passbook, commencing with a deposit of $440 on 25 March 1974 and ending with a withdrawal of $1460 on 22 January 1975, can be found in NAA A6119, 3883.
31 There was also defacto counselling, especially after Wechsler’s wife left him. This parallels Geri’s comment that case officers ‘were like priests, and speaking to them was like attending a confession’, Age, 29 April 1991. 32 Phrase used by Assistant Director-General, 16 September 1973, NAA A6119, 3881. However, patience was occasionally stretched. Wechsler’s constant requests for reimbursement of expenses caused the Assistant Director-General to remark: ‘This file is becoming cluttered up with the financial dealings with [Wechsler]. I thought that when the last request was made, this would be the end’. Handwritten note on Inward Message to Headquarters, 3 May 1974, NAA A6119, 3880.
33 Outward Message, Headquarters to Victoria, 23 January 1975, NAA A6119, 3878.
34 ORS Nos. 5/73, 53/73, 5/74, 13 May 1974; 122/74, 11 July 1974, NAA A6119, 3881.
35 ORS Nos. 44/73, 29 June 1973, NAA A6119, 3878; 45/73, 3 July 1973, NAA A6119, 3879.
36 ORS No. 5/73, 26 March 1973, NAA A6119, 3876.
37 His case officer gave even more glowing assessments of the quality of Wechsler’s intelligence reports throughout 1974 when deep penetration of the SWL was achieved. See, for example, the recommendation to employ Wechsler on a full time basis: Supervisor Agent Operations to Regional Director, Victoria, 5 July 1974, NAA A6119, 3881.
38 ORS No. 4/73, 15 March 1973, NAA A6119, 3876.
39 Telex, Headquarters to Victorian Office, 29 March 1973; Regional Director, Victoria, to Headquarters, 2 April 1973, NAA A6119, 3876.
Branch president, whose phone Wechsler regularly answered); they ‘value his work’ and ‘seem to trust him without question’.\textsuperscript{40} Consequently, he was fast becoming an invaluable insider: Taft, Sendy, Davies and Walker were all ‘taking a keen interest’ in his career with the Party (with Taft in particular ‘pushing Agent as fast as he can into the industrial side of the C.P.A.’\textsuperscript{41}) and all attended a party in his Brunswick home to celebrate the birth of his daughter.\textsuperscript{42}

In April 1973, the status of Wechsler as both an agent and a communist was further enhanced after he appeared on national television in prime time. He spoke on ‘A Current Affair’ about the difficulties faced by Czechs who migrated to Australia after the events of 1968-69, demonstrated by the recent tragic case of a Czech woman who threw her two children from the sixth floor of her Collingwood Housing Commission flat and who then followed them to her own death. Taft, Sendy and the editor of \textit{Tribune}, Dave Davies, were apparently ‘most enthusiastic’ with Wechsler’s initiative, the latter commissioning him to write an article for the paper.\textsuperscript{43} His dedication as a \textit{Tribune} seller similarly attracted attention. As the Party’s Victorian Branch \textit{Newsletter} commented: ‘A new member, Max, a migrant to this country, has energetically taken up selling on the city streets and at public meetings. In about six weeks he has sold some 260 papers… How about more comrades joining the sales drive?’\textsuperscript{44} While Wechsler was being applauded as a role model by his ‘target’, he was at the same time providing abundant intelligence to his case officer. It ranged from briefings on AMWU fraction meetings, the protest movement against US bases in Australia (especially the Omega station in Gippsland) and the planned demonstration against the Signals Intelligence Unit at Albert Park barracks, travel arrangements of a visiting Italian communist, Giuliano Pajetta, reports on the CPA State Committee Conference (to which Wechsler was admitted as an observer\textsuperscript{8}), the names and addresses of donors to the CPA’s ‘fighting fund’ and subscribers to \textit{Australian Left Review}, the identities of all secretaries of CPA branches in the metropolitan area, a list of financial members of the Victorian Branch of the CPA and much of its financial and banking arrangements, details of the electoral campaign of a CPA candidate, George Zangalis, and additional profiles of Party leaders. He also, according Bernie Taft (whose telephone conversation was taped and transcribed), helped recruit a new member, Peter Noonan.\textsuperscript{46} It was not surprising that, with Easter approaching, ‘Agent said he was looking forward to a bit of a rest’.\textsuperscript{47}

Because Wechsler was receiving a generous regular income plus expenses from ASIO,\textsuperscript{48} there was concern that his small ‘official’ weekly wage of $18 from his cleaning job at the Party offices (that freed up far more time for undercover work than as a fitter and turner) could, through unexplained finance, raise issues of security. Thus, he was ‘strictly instructed’ by his case officer to inform Taft and Sendy that his wife had complained about the lack of money being received and ‘insist’ that he needed extra income. Sendy promised to increase his weekly wage subject to ratification by the next State Committee meeting and gave Wechsler $10 from his own pocket. Wechsler was briefed to ‘Keep at SENDY re lack of finances’.\textsuperscript{49} Later, when Wechsler had infiltrated the SWL, the same concern was raised: ‘[Wechsler] must not only behave in the accepted [SWL] manner, but his finances must also be able to withstand their scrutiny’.\textsuperscript{50} Avoiding suspicion, fear of exposure or the danger of being compromised constantly punctuated ASIO briefings. The following remarks were indicative of the difficulties of running agents: ‘we must stress the need for security – it is out of character for an agent operating in this type of organisation to use a taxi’; ‘Security of this agent is of paramount importance’; ‘Be careful with notes. Don’t become involved in discussion about yourself’; ‘Agent was again briefed on the need for continued security in meetings, telephone calls and taking of documents’; ‘the need to be ever alert and security conscious was

\begin{footnotes}
\item[40] Not surprisingly, there is no reference to Wechsler in Sendy or Taft’s published memoirs.
\item[41] ORS No. 3/73, 2 March 1973; Regional Director to Headquarters, 28 March 1973, NAA A6119, 3876.
\item[42] ORS No. 35/73, 24 April 1973; No. 38/73, 12 June 1973, NAA A6119, 3878. Wechsler’s daughter was born on 12 June 1973; two weeks later his wife temporarily left him; three months later she left permanently returning with baby to her parents’ home in Tasmania. His case officer was instructed to ‘be careful not to ignore his family…’. ORS No. 47/73, 10 July 1973, NAA A6119, 3879. On the other hand, ASIO was pleased with this development: ‘Certainly, agent without a wife is in a much better position to work for A.S.I.O.’ ORS No. 7/73, 6 January 1974, p. 3, NAA A6119, 3880.
\item[43] ORS No. 10/73, 3 April 1973, NAA A6119, 3876. See also \textit{Tribune}, 24-30 April 1973 (‘Death fall tragedy’). Davies now remembers Wechsler as someone ‘over-eager’ to prove himself. He also thought him ‘eccentric’. Conversation with Dave Davies, 8 June 2005.
\item[44] Copy of \textit{Newsletter} (undated) in ASIO file, NAA A6119, 3876. Previously he had sold the paper alongside Taft (‘who appears to be taking a special interest in Agent’) and sold fifteen copies in ninety minutes, which, according to Taft, was ‘something of a record’. ORS No. 4/73, 3 March 1973, NAA A6119, 3876.
\item[45] According to Wechsler, Taft ‘strongly supported’ his attendance at State Committee meetings. ORS No. 16/73, 16 April 1973, NAA A6119, 3878.
\item[47] ORS No. 19/73, 18 April 1973, NAA A6119, 3878.
\item[48] Interestingly, an ASIO officer noted, when ‘strongly’ recommending an expense claim by the ‘extremely hard working’ Wechsler, that ‘Agents in other States who are SWL members receive far in excess of what this agent receives’. Inward message, Victoria to Headquarters, 15 February 1974, NAA A6119, 3880. Emphasis added.
\item[49] ORS No. 8-9/73, 30 March 1973, NAA A6119, 3878.
\item[50] ORS No. 107/74, 12 June 1974, p. 2, NAA A6119, 3881.
\end{footnotes}
emphasised’; and ‘providing [Wechsler’s] answers are the same as he had previously given, we should be safe’.51

But ASIO was not ‘safe’. Not only did Wechsler resign, he also went public, and publicity was ASIO’s bête noir.52 His final undercover activity was at a SWL executive meeting on 16 February 1975. Ironically, his presence was recorded by another ASIO agent unaware, presumably of Wechsler’s role.53 By then, the prolific Wechsler had supplied ASIO with an astonishing number of reports - 702 in total.54 On 19 February, he met a journalist from the Sunday Observer, which had the largest newspaper weekly circulation in Victoria. The journalist, Chris Forsyth, verified Wechsler’s credentials by personally telephoning ASIO on its silent number (not the usual recognised agent number) and then listened to Wechsler’s conversation on an extension line.55 Wechsler identified himself using his cover name, ‘Bosch’, and was connected to ‘John’, his original ASIO contact; the transcript of their conversation was reproduced in the Sunday Observer on 23 February. Wechsler then negotiated to sell his story for $2000.56 The next day, 20 February, Wechsler rendezvoused with his original case officer accompanied by his superior (Supervisor Agent Operations), whom Wechsler was reluctant to meet, and handed over his letter of resignation.57 The three spent two hours talking in a Southern Cross Hotel room, specially rented by ASIO for briefings. He was twice reminded of the secrecy document he had signed. Whereas the case officer felt ‘Wechsler genuinely had had enough’ and ‘will not expose A.S.I.O.’, the more senior supervisor found Wechsler ‘mentally unstable and…demonstrated signs of megalomania’.58 His subsequent activities and behaviour (which are not within the purview of this paper) confirmed the second assessment. There had been innumerable prior warning signals, ranging from the Assistant Director-General’s note in 1973 that ‘Agent appears irresponsible and my immediate reaction is to doubt his reliability…Consider…stopping further involvement’,59 to the Brunswick Criminal Investigation Branch considering him a ‘nut’,60 to an informant’s assessment in 1974 that he was ‘psychologically disturbed’.61 However, with the steady flow of high quality intelligence, such ominous signs were ignored by the Victorian office. According to a former senior ASIO officer, who requested anonymity, when Wechsler’s story hit the press ASIO immediately ‘went into damage control’. He was sent from Sydney to ‘sort out’ the ‘mess’ from the Wechsler case. He stated that there was ‘a bit of a witch-hunt’ but those who sat in judgement had also been involved in the Wechsler operation from the outset.62

ASIO’s ‘damage control’ involved the Director-General telexing all ASIO branches to take ‘special precautions’ when contacting and briefing its agents and to counteract all attempts by target organisations to ‘identify our agents as a result of the [Wechsler] exposure’.63 It also involved dissociation from Wechsler. The federal Attorney-General’s representative in the Senate, Jim McClelland, asserted that Wechsler was ‘never’ a paid ASIO employee. ‘My information is – and this comes from ASIO, if Senator Greenwood wants to know – that Mr Wechsler was a casual informant, paid casually and not taken seriously.’ Moreover, according to McClelland ‘ASIO regarded him as an unbalanced character’ and reiterated that the intelligence he supplied was treated warily.64 If ASIO were McClelland’s source (via the Attorney-General’s Department) every assertion he made was wrong.65 Also false was McClelland’s
statement, again using ASIO ‘information’, that Wechsler was then incarcerated in ‘a mental institution’ in Queensland.\footnote{Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, vol. S. 63, 21 April 1975, pp. 1178. Senator Ivor Greenwood, former Attorney-General in the McMahon Government and then technically in charge of ASIO, commented: ‘I have the gravest suspicions that someone within ASIO is setting out to denigrate Wechsler by feeding this information to the Crown by refusing Evatt’s request to subpoena ASIO documents concerning Wechsler on the grounds that the SWL constituted a ‘security risk’. However the jury unanimously upheld defamation against the Sunday Observer and awarded the Doughney $15,000. By this stage Newton was bankrupt and living in the United States and the journalist responsible for the Wechsler story, Chris Forsyth, was ordered to pay the $15,000 owing.\footnote{Sunday Observer, 26 October 1975, p. 10.}'} In fact, at that moment, as his travel documents later proved, Wechsler was on a train travelling from Kuala Lumpur to Bangkok.\footnote{Tribune, 4 March 1975, p. 12.} The other victim of Wechsler’s mendacity, the Communist Party, also distanced itself and disparaged this ‘strange’ and ‘bizarre’ individual whom it had so assiduously cultivated.\footnote{The Bulletin, 22 November 1975, p. 29. Greenwood’s association with Wechsler and his attempts to exploit Wechsler’s exposé to attack the Whitlam Government are outlined in Deery, ‘Double Agent Down Under: Australian Security and the Infiltration of the Left’.} In 1975, Taft disingenuously denied Wechsler ever received a weekly wage from the Party, thought Wechsler was ‘too silly’ to be an ASIO agent, but ‘I suspected [him]… yes’.\footnote{73} However, the central point remains that, due to its obsessive fear of communism, ASIO’s recruitment of Wechsler constituted a serious error in judgement. Its vetting procedures and its organisational culture were clearly at odds with Barbour’s caution that ‘walk-ins’ should be treated with ‘the greatest reserve’\footnote{Barnett, Tale of the Scorpion (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 11-12, 23 and ch.7 for some of the changes to recruitment and targets after 1976.} was not heeded. ASIO itself admitted as much. In a report submitted to the Director-General, the Operational Security Officer wrote:

there was a failure to … interview [Wechsler] in depth and to carry out comprehensive checks. In a case such as this it would have been desirable for the initial interviews to have probed deeply into background matters in order to compile a life history for cross checking and record purposes. A full check of the official records available to A.S.I.O. would have brought to attention the medical history of WECHSLER and the police record of his wife in Queensland, … [two lines blacked out]. With the full information available there would have been strong reasons not to recruit WECHSLER as an agent.\footnote{Memo, Director-General to Regional Director, Victoria, 15 December 1972, NAA A6119, 3877. 71 Minute Paper, Operational Security Officer to Director-General, p. 7, 6 May 1975, NAA, A6119, 3884. For example, it was not until 5 March 1975 that ASIO’s Queensland office reported that Wechsler’s Queensland Immigration file contained a minute from the Superintendent of the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Hospital, Dr Paul Hopkins, was being treated at the hospital, which dealt with psychiatric conditions. ‘Checking – Maxmilian Wechsler, Appendix “B”’. p. 2, NAA, A6119, 3883. 72 See Harvey Barnett, Tale of the Scorpion (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 11-12, 23 and ch.7 for some of the changes to recruitment and targets after 1976. 73 Interview with Jamie Doughney 10 June 2005. ASIO also discovered that, on 21 October 1968 (prior to leaving Czechoslovakia), Wechsler had been diagnosed as suffering from Menier’s disease, which can cause ‘unusual psychological behaviour’. Encrypted Outward Cable [July 1975; precise date blacked out], NAA A6119, 3884. 74 Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, vol. S. 68, 27 April 1976, p. 1319. 75 Interview with retired ASIO officer, Melbourne, 9 June 2005.}
the Australian Embassy, he was also an agent provocateur. He established a connection with the Ananda Marga sect and was responsible for the arrest in Bangkok in 1978 of Ananda Marga members who were sold explosives by Wechsler. The three Ananda Marga – two Australians and one American – were charged with conspiring to blow up the Indian Embassy. They were enticed to implicate Australian sect members (Tim Anderson, Paul Alister and Ross Dunn) in the deadly explosion outside Sydney’s Hilton hotel in February 1978. In return, their charges would be dropped. They maintained their innocence, claimed the explosives were planted on them, but had their passports confiscated by Australian immigration officials in Bangkok, and spent the next six months in a Thai prison. When the case came to court it became clear they were ‘set-up’ and after a face-saving guilty plea, they were freed.76 Wechsler continued living in Bangkok in relative obscurity until 2002. That year, on 22 August, Wechsler reported the theft of four million baht in cash and three Rolex watches from his home near Sukhumvit road, Bangkok. He was described by the *Bangkok Post* as a ‘businessman’. A smiling, chubby and almost avuncular looking Wechsler was pictured sitting with a senior police officer during a press conference in front of the recovered cash.77

Then, as before, Wechsler’s pockets had large holes. According to ASIO after Wechsler’s resignation, ‘he was constantly in financial difficulties and money he obtained was irresponsibly squandered. Immediately following his expose in the Melbourne newspaper, he was staying at the Casino in Hobart as the guest of the newspaper. He attracted a great deal of attention through his lavish entertainment and gambling’.78 Yet unlike many other double agents, such as Aldrich Ames, financial remuneration was not his main motive for undercover work. Whilst he certainly had ‘delusions of grandeur’,79 from all accounts he was also a lonely individual, lacking in self-esteem, unsure of himself and ‘always trying to impress’.80 Working for two masters, ASIO and the Communist Party, gave him a psychological sense of self-importance and self-fulfilment as well as enabling him to compartmentalise his life and partition truth from lies. Imposture may have given him purpose. Deception certainly energised him. Perhaps he was also motivated, as his case officer believed, by a genuine distaste for communism after his experiences in Czechoslovakia. At his final meeting with ASIO, on 21 February 1975, and after he had formally resigned, he stated: ‘I am going to destroy the SWL’. Excessive hubris aside, his actions in subsequent months confirmed the seriousness of this desire.81

Finally, we may find a clue to Wechsler’s behaviour in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* where characters from the ‘real’ world pass between it and a secret world inhabited by characters who are different from what they seem. According to a recent study of Alger Hiss that borrows this idea, undercover agents engage in looking-glass wars. In passing back and forth between the ‘overt “ordinary” world and the covert secret world’ they need illusions or ‘images in the glass’ as they make the passage and attempt to understand their adversary. It is a looking-glass war because a secret portion of the agent’s life – the portion concealed behind the looking glass, which ‘reflects the likeness … but that likeness is partially an illusion’ – is constantly threatened with exposure.82 For Wechsler the looking glass refracted and distorted the image of both himself and of his ‘targets’ in the secret world. Yet this is not always the case. For the more self-aware Phil Geri, who choked back tears during his interview, there was no looking glass. Instead, ‘I would look at the CPA members in their 60s and 70s, and think: “What are you doing here, Phil, talking a load of crap? There is no real security information coming out”’.83 The blunt comment of Geri’s theatrically reconstructed case officer, Alex, cited at the beginning of this paper, was therefore quixotic, an imagined threat – another misshapen image in the glass.

---

76 *Documents on the Cameron Conspiracy Case and the Hilton Bombing* (Brisbane: C.A.D.A. [Campaign for the Acquittal of Alister, Dunn and Anderson], 1985) np.
78 Encrypted Outward Cable [July 1975], p. 2, NAA A6119, 3884.
79 Interview with retired ASIO officer, Melbourne, 9 June 2005.
80 Interview with Mary Merkenich (former SWL State Executive member), 6 June 2005; *Nation Review*, 21 March-27 March 1975, p. 593.
Mal Colston: The worst rat of the lot?

Jacqueline Dickenson*

Rats occupy a prominent place in the folklore of the Australian Labor Party. Joe Cook, Billy Hughes, Joseph Lyons—the list of traitors to the labour cause is long and ignominious. In recent years a name has been added to this list, that of the Queensland ALP Senator Malcolm Colston. Some argue that Colston is the worst of the lot in the history of Labor rats because, unlike the others whose betrayals stemmed from allegiances to higher causes, Colston was, quite simply, greedy. Others believe that all Labor rats are, to varying degrees, the victims of duchessing or seduction by the high life. This paper explores the circumstances of Colston’s betrayal, finding that, although exceptionally vulnerable to duchessing, he was a product of changing attitudes to the role of the parliamentarian. His story supports the view that rattings occur in specific historical contexts and for varying reasons. These differences are ironed out in hindsight, as the individual rattings become part of the tradition of the Labor rat for contemporary, organisational purposes. In time, the worst of the lot is likely to become just another Labor rat.

The Labor rat is an enduring phenomenon in the mythology of the Australian Labor Party (ALP). Rats appear to betray the party for a variety of reasons but they all have at least one thing in common: once their story has entered Labor folklore they tend to remain unforgiven. The subject of this paper, the late Queensland Senator Dr Malcolm Colston (1938-2003) is no exception to this; ten years on from his betrayal of the party the mere mention of Colston’s name is enough to provoke a surprisingly bitter level of invective from senior ALP figures.1

At the time of his betrayal in 1996, the political commentator Gerard Henderson had no compunction in adding Colston’s name to the list of Labor rats. In Henderson’s view, however, Colston was a special case. Observing that most of those on his list had a cause, real or imagined, which led them to break with their ALP past, Henderson argued that Colston had no such commitment to a higher cause—for example, patriotism or religious conviction—to explain his betrayal.2 He was, quite simply, greedy, and his venality made him worse than the other rats; for some he remains the worst of the lot.3 Others demur. They believe that all Labor rats, including Colston, are victims of duchessing, even those whose ratting is usually put down to a higher motivation, for example religion for the DLPers or patriotism for Billy Hughes.4 The Victorian ALP Senator Kim Carr believes that from the moment labour representatives enter parliament a range of temptations can begin to compromise their commitment to the labour cause. He asks the pertinent and perhaps unanswerable question ‘How does a social democratic politician reconcile with the forces that uphold the status quo?’ The taking of bribes is the crudest form of compromise but there are more insidious entanglements waiting to trap the naive and unsuspecting representative, and to challenge their political integrity. The representative is introduced to important and powerful people, who then use flattery to try to draw the ingénue into the web, perhaps telling them how intelligent they are and that their talents are wasted on the backbench.5 Most resist but those who capitulate—the Holmans and the Colstons—take their place in the pantheon of rats.6

This paper explores the circumstances of Colston’s betrayal, asking: What motivated him? What effects did his betrayal have on the ALP, the federal parliament and Australian politics in general? Was he the worst of the lot, or just another victim of the ‘inevitable’ corrupting influence of political life? Underlying these questions are others more fundamental to the enduring nature of the Labor rat. What purpose, if any, does the idea of the Labor rat serve in Australian political life? Why do rats endure?

Born in 1938, Mal Colston’s political ambitions emerged at an early age, influenced by his father and by the family’s financial struggles. He joined the ALP at the age of 19, and held a variety of branch positions before nominating unsuccessfully for Senate selection at 23. After teaching in several primary schools, he

3 Phone interview with Paul Daley, 5 July 2006.
4 Duchessing is an Australian colloquial term that means to treat in an obsequious fashion in order to improve one’s social or political standing.
5 Interview with Senator Kim Carr, 25 July 2006.
6 Phone interview with Kim Carr, 30 March 2007.
completed a doctorate in educational psychology at the University of Queensland. He tried twice more to enter the Senate, and wrote a book based on his experiences, entitled, ironically as it would turn out, _The Odd One Out_. Colston was finally elected to the Senate in the double dissolution election at the end of 1975. He had come to prominence earlier in the year when the Queensland Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen refused to give him a vacant Senate seat to which he was entitled. An ALP senator, Bert Milliner, had died, and political convention demanded that a person from the same party should fill the vacant position. The ALP proposed Colston but Bjelke-Petersen, wishing to smash the federal Labor government, put in his own candidate, a nonentity named Albert (Pat) Field, amidst claims that Colston had been the chief suspect in an arson attack at a school where he was teaching in 1962, an allegation that was never proven.7 Outraged at Bjelke-Petersen’s behaviour, the ALP raised Colston to the top of its Queensland list, ensuring his election later in the year. In the words of ALP Senator Kim Carr, it was a profound irony that Colston—‘the agent of crass political betrayal’ in 1996—should have been the victim of similar behaviour two decades earlier.8

Over the next twenty years, Colston chaired the occasional committee, contributing little in the Senate besides some constitutional reforms, and becoming increasingly resentful about his failure to progress. When Kim Carr entered the Senate in 1993, he found Colston to be ‘personally embittered’, and the experience of meeting him served as a sharp reminder to the new senator to stay true to his labour roots. Colston confided to Carr that he wished he had gone further: he was clearly frustrated that he had not attained front-bench status, or made his mark in some other way. Colston also advised the new senator on how he might make the most of the financial benefits offered by a Senate seat.9 Colston’s interest in his financial remuneration was well known: he had a reputation for being tight-fisted and for trying to feather his nest, and a number of his staff had fallen out with him over the issue. In 1985 his rorting came to the notice of the ALP when his wife complained that he had given airline tickets issued in her name and paid for by the Commonwealth to another woman.10 Despite receiving advice to take the matter to the Australian Federal Police, the party decided not to act, and continued to tolerate Colston’s rorting of the system, preferring to hang onto his Senate seat. His venality did impact on his career, however. When he approached John Faulkner, the leader of the ALP in the Senate and Minister for Territories, asking to be appointed as Administrator of Norfolk Island, Faulkner refused. Faulkner had heard about Colston’s rorting, and felt he had not earned the appointment.11 Nevertheless, the ALP was prepared to live with Colston’s indiscretions until the winter of 1996 when they finally made the party vulnerable to its enemies.

The newly-elected Howard government had a raft of legislative changes it wanted to pass through the Senate, including workplace ‘reforms’, the part-privatisation of Telstra, changes in cross-media ownership rules and wide-scale cuts to government programs. On Monday 19 August more than 20,000 unionists from around Australia descended on Canberra to protest against the government’s Workplace Relations Bill. On the morning of the following day, Budget Day, Tuesday 20 August, Mal Colston resigned from the ALP, stating in his letter of resignation that he would respect his traditional Labor background while recognising that the recently elected Howard Government had a mandate ‘to implement certain measures’.12 Later that day, after he had been elected to the position of Deputy President of the Senate and Chairman of Committees with the support of the Howard government, Colston noted that some observers might be asking where his loyalties now lay in the chamber. ‘My loyalties’, he answered, ‘will not be directed to any particular party or group of parties. Rather, my loyalties will be directed to the Senate and to you, Madame President’.13

Until that morning, Colston’s loyalty had barely been questioned. He was an ALP man: a member of the party for 38 years and a Queensland senator for the past 21 of those years. When ALP leader Kim Beazley heard of the senator’s resignation, he was dumbfounded: no one had suspected Colston was so unhappy. Some people knew that he was frustrated by his lack of advancement in parliament: he had made no effort to hide it. He was particularly bitter about the ALP’s failure to nominate him for the post of Deputy President of the Senate; the party had preferred to nominate the New South Wales Senator Sue West. Realising that he might become a problem in the future, Beazley gave Colston the chair of an extra committee worth $8000 a year just two months before his resignation.14 The move to appease him had clearly failed.

The ALP underestimated the extent of Colston’s ambition; although some members suspected his duplicity, no one did anything about it until he betrayed them.15 When he resigned from the party, there

---

7 _Herald Sun_, 26 August 2003.
8 Interview with Senator Kim Carr, 25 July 2006.
9 Ibid.
13 Senate Hansard, Tuesday 20 August 1996.
15 Senator Brian Harradine claimed to have warned the ALP one month before Colston’s defection, Senate
was general surprise at how closely he had been working with the government. Everyone knew that he was friendly with the Independent Senator Brian Harradine (himself a Labor rat of many years standing) but no one seemed to be aware of his meetings with Coalition Senator Susan Knowles. Paul Daley, the Sunday Age’s correspondent in the Canberra press gallery, was present in Beazley’s office when the ALP leader heard of Colston’s resignation and was immediately suspicious. Events in the Senate later that day showed that Daley’s suspicions were justified. Proposed by Senator Knowles, who argued that he had clearly demonstrated his capacity for the task when he was the incumbent of the same position in 1990, Colston was elected to the position of the Deputy Presidency of the Senate with the support of the Coalition senators, himself, Brian Harradine, and the West Australian Greens senator, Dee Margetts. The election guaranteed that Colston would receive a pay rise of $16,024, the use of a government car and an additional staff member. By accepting the Deputy Presidency, Colston ratted on the Labor caucus. In the Australian parliamentary system there is no requirement for office holders to remove themselves from the party. Chairs, therefore, are part of the party: they are selected by caucus and are expected to represent the views of caucus. The Opposition was furious. In the Senate, John Faulkner announced that the Labor Party held very strong views about the circumstances surrounding Senator Colston’s election, and that he did not intend demeaning the chamber or the occasion by expressing them. The day after his resignation, a ‘shadow minister’ saw Colston behind the wheel of a new model Fairlane: ‘Here was the bastard right in front of me in his brand new shiny car. I couldn’t believe he had collected it so quickly. I had seen Judas and his 30 pieces of silver. It made me feel ill.’

In Carr’s view this was a new kind of ratting—systematic, long-term corruption was unknown to the ALP before Colston. Moreover, for Carr, Colston’s treachery was firmly of its time. Most Australians would have been satisfied with, even proud, of Colston’s achievements in parliament: he had served the public for thirty years and, clearly no fool, he understood the arcane workings of the Senate better than most. Colston, however, felt that he had let his family down by not achieving more in parliament. Instead of looking for more ways of contributing, he under-estimated his abilities, viewing his career as a failure—an assessment that came from his distorted view of success. For Carr, this was a manifestation of the internalisation by the ALP of its enemy’s (the Coalition’s) analysis of success, as both parties pursued neo-liberal economic ‘reform’, during the 1980s and 1990s, and as parliamentary culture became increasingly commercialised. A commentator at the time of his betrayal identified how Colston fitted into the commercialisation of democracy: ‘the time-serving nonentity who last week became deputy president...is wonderfully poised to stick his snout in the trough. Every bit of salary is not just money now but, as every Federal politician knows, much more money later in retirement’. When Daley spoke to Colston just before his rorting was exposed, he found him to be remorseless and in complete denial.

Over the next days and weeks, Colston’s resignation attracted unprecedented attention in the press. Beazley was forced to deny reports that Faulkner had sought legal advice about a possible breach of the Crimes Act (because Colston had resigned from the ALP to take a promotion), and insisted that the party would not seek a police investigation into Colston’s actions. Beazley also defended his failure to address Colston’s disenchantment after failing to receive the party’s endorsement for the deputy presidency, stating that his peers had judged Colston ‘as not having the ability to do that particular job’. The Government’s Senate leader, Robert Hill, admitted that he had spoken to Colston before his defection about the state of politics in Australia, but denied that the government had done a deal with Colston in exchange for the

---

16 Daley won a Walkley award for his work in exposing Colston’s travel rorts.
19 Phone interview with Senator Kim Carr, 30 March 2007.
20 Ibid.
21 The rorting was allegedly a family business: Colston was suspected of using the Parliamentary Library staff to prepare research papers for his sons to submit towards their university courses, Senate Hansard, Wednesday 19 March 1997, p. 1919. His son Douglas was also implicated in the misuse of travel allowance, and both sons, Douglas and David Colston were assiduous in their father’s defence, Senate Hansard, 24 March 1997, p. 2240.
22 It is difficult to establish whether his colleagues shared his negative assessment of his talents and achievements before his rorting of the 1980s, and if they did, whether this influenced the way he viewed his career. His loss of reputation took place over at least fifteen years, during which his colleagues’ assessments of him were, no doubt, complex and varied, shifting many times. It should also be noted that the most abusive language against him emerged, not surprisingly, after his betrayal.
deputy presidency. Hill claimed that the Labor Party was in disarray over the resignation. Beazley countered by saying that Colston had done ‘magnificently well out of Labor and should have been content with his position in the party’.

Colston soon demonstrated that he was not entirely the Coalition’s toady by refusing to support the proposed Workplace Relations Bill, which would, amongst other things prevent secondary boycotts. According to Tim Pallas, ACTU assistant secretary, Colston said that his dead father would come back and haunt him if he voted for the Bill. In a letter to the Minister of Industrial Relations Peter Reith, however, he left the way open for ‘any briefing you or your offices may be able to provide on future relevant occasions’.

The vote for the partial privatisation of Telstra in December 1996 prompted the ALP to act against Colston. When he voted with the government, which allowed the sale of this—in the Labor view—irreplaceable national asset to go ahead, Colston had gone too far: some still suspect that the government might have paid him for his vote. In what some perceived as an unlikely alliance, Senators Faulkner, Ray and Carr became determined to expose Colston’s greed, to embarrass him, and to force him to resign. Someone remembered the papers relating to Colston’s earlier misdemeanours in the mid-1980s, and these were retrieved, not without difficulty, from an attic in Queensland. During the summer of 1997, Senators Carr and Ray constructed the case against Colston, leaking details of their investigation to the press. In mid-February a nervous Kim Beazley failed to support their investigation when questioned about it by the media. The allegations against Colston were referred to the Department of the Senate for investigation, and by early March it emerged that there was a case to answer for travel expenses that the senator had claimed in 1994 and 1995. The ALP senators launched their parliamentary attack in the first week of the autumn sitting. Senator Faulkner led the attack, calling for Colston to be withdrawn from the ANU Council and from the Parliamentary Retiring Allowances Trust. Colston countered by moving that the details of all travelling allowances paid to current and former senators between 1 January 1992 and 3 March 1997 should be tabled in the Senate. By mid March further examples of his travel rorting had emerged. Colston had ‘mistakenly’ claimed for 43 nights of accommodation in Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney, when he was in fact at home in Brisbane. He was also alleged to have rorted the Comcar service and to have misused his parliamentary entitlements, including postage. Colston called for an examination of all senators’ travel claims then admitted that he had found irregularities in his own claims. His former office manager, Christine Smith took the blame for the mistakes, and Colston repaid the money.

John Howard abandoned Colston in early April, referring irregularities in Colston’s travel claims to the Australian Federal Police, and asking him to step down from the deputy presidency. The opposition called for a Senate inquiry into whether Colston had made a false statement to the Senate when he denied that he had rorted his travel allowances but the government opposed such an inquiry, arguing that it was unnecessary given the police investigation. Colston resolutely refused to step down, and, as he continued to draw his salary, public anger grew. By mid-April Colston had been admitted to hospital with the flu; Christine Smith had abandoned him, contradicting his statement in defence of his travel allowance claims, and claiming that she had worked with Colston and his son and media agent Douglas to fabricate the story in which she accepted the blame for the errors in the travel claims, which had led to Senator Colston improperly claiming some $7,000 in travelling allowances. Robert Hill remained confident that Colston would resign, and continued to block a Senate inquiry, which could have made Colston liable to a maximum penalty of six months in prison, arguing that the need for such an inquiry had been overridden by the police investigation. The Australian newspaper considered this to be ‘a poor political reading’ of the issue, judging that: ‘The Government does not have to compromise its commitment to the presumption of innocence or due process to begin the task of rebuilding public trust.’ There was little doubt that the reputation of the Senate was suffering over the affair. Writing in the Age, Paddy McGuinness asserted that the affair highlighted the general disrepute in which parliaments in Australia were presently held. Colston resigned from the position of the deputy presidency on 6 May 1997 at the suggestion of the President of the Senate but he remained a senator.

27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
30 Ibid
32 Daley, ‘To trap the rat’, p. 18.
33 Senate Hansard, 3 March 1997.
34 Senate Hansard, 18 March 1997.
35 Senate Hansard, 24 March 1997; Daley, ‘To Trap the Rat’, p. 18.
36 Australian, 16 April 1997; Mike Seccombe, ‘Liberals ‘see no point’ in Senate Colston inquiry’, Sydney Morning Herald, p. 3; Daley, ‘To trap the rat’; Niki Savva, ‘Colston Inquiry urged in 1983’, Age, 21 April 1997, p. 3.
37 Ibid.
38 Age, 16 April 1997.
39 Senate Hansard, 6 May 1997, pp. 2643 and 2659.
In July 1998 the government proposed a Bill for the full privatisation of Telstra. It had been wooing both Senators Harradine and Colston, despite previously refusing the latter’s vote. During the debate, Robert Ray drew attention to the government’s hypocrisy over Colston’s vote, and reminded everyone of the magnitude of his defection. He told the House that if the legislation was allowed to pass, the senators might hear a noise coming from Queensland: ‘It will be Senator Colston’s father turning in his grave knowing that his son has stabbed the Labor Party in the back, a Labor Party that his father loved. Like father, like son? Never!’

On 10 July Colston disappeared from the Senate, apparently due to ill health. It emerged later that day that he had in fact flown to Brisbane to meet with John Howard to discuss his vote on the Telstra Bill. The following day John Faulkner led the attack against him in the Senate, using parliamentary privilege to sum up how the ALP felt about him:

I want to speak about someone who is venal. I want to speak about someone who is unscrupulous. I want to speak about someone who is mercenary. I want to speak about someone who is contemptible and despicable. I want to speak about someone who is the most useless and abominable representative the federal parliament has ever seen. That person is a person who last night skulked into this chamber, slimed into the chamber quite slowly to collect his TA cheque. That individual is Senator Malcolm Colston. I want to talk about him…

Colston himself spoke, registering his disquiet about the effects of the full sale of Telstra on his Queensland electorate. He subsequently voted against the Bill and with the ALP. The Bill was defeated and two-thirds of Telstra remained in public ownership.

Colston retired from the Senate at the end of his term in June 1999. The fraud charges against him for travel rorting were dropped in 2001 due to his terminal illness, which rendered him unfit to stand trial. In 2002 the Sydney Morning Herald claimed that, despite suffering cancer of the bile duct, Colston had been seen at the local shopping centre, had been travelling to Canberra regularly to visit one of his sons at taxpayers’ expense, and was director of a business that operated out of the family home in Brisbane.

Mal Colston died in August 2003. The ABC’s AM program contrasted the description offered by the senator’s friend, Brian Harradine (‘Mal Colston was a thoughtful, well informed and considerate man’) with Robert Ray’s notorious threat from 1997 (‘Anyone who rats on the Labor Party will get exactly what this quising Quasimodo from Queensland got’). The segment emphasised the impact the Colston affair had had on public perceptions of parliamentarians and their perks, calling Colston ‘the poster boy for public scepticism about the privileges Australia provides its Federal politicians’. When asked what Colston’s legacy to politics might be, historian Ross Fitzgerald replied: ‘he wasn’t important enough to leave a legacy’. Nevertheless, Colston’s betrayal did affect a number of institutions, organisations and individuals in significant ways.

It changed the way that parliamentarians’ travel expenses were handled. Most politicians became more careful about what they were claiming. There was now much less flexibility; a higher level of bureaucracy emerged to check that the politicians were not persistently rorting the system. For some, the increased scrutiny simply made it harder to do their job because of the amount of time it took to fill out the forms. For others the consequences were devastating: ALP Senator Nick Sherry attempted suicide when his travel claims were questioned. Moreover, though the Coalition government might have thought at first that it had emerged rather well from the episode, having achieved the part-sale of Telstra in December 1996, eventually it would be embarrassed by the repercussions of its underhand activities in duchessing Senator Colston. The affair is seen by some as the first hint of corruption and dishonesty in Howard’s government, and the first public demonstration that John Howard would stop at nothing to push through his agenda for ‘reform’. The episode reinforced the view that the government was poor at administration and that any claims of honesty it made were invalid. The ironic tag ‘Honest John’ gained further resonance.

As for the ALP, the episode had multiple and varied impacts. Some consider the effects on the party...
(and the country) to have been catastrophic in that it led to the loss of Telstra, an important government asset.\textsuperscript{51} In addition, the affair appears to have fuelled support for Pauline Hanson's racist and divisive One Nation political party, which then had a significant impact on the Labor vote, effectively allowing Howard to steal Labor's core constituency and keep the ALP out of office for more than a decade.\textsuperscript{52} At the time, the newspapers attracted a number of letters from the public that supported this analysis.\textsuperscript{53} The main players agree, though, that the ratting had a positive effect on the ALP, if only for a short time. It showed that the party had the capacity to fight together against a common enemy; that it was bigger than any rat.\textsuperscript{54} The Right's Robert Ray and the Left's Kim Carr worked closely together over time to bring Colston down, which served to reinforce solidarity. To quote Paul Daley: 'It was extraordinary that they were able to work so well together on this...Colston made them work together.'\textsuperscript{55} Carr interprets his alliance with Ray a little differently, preferring to emphasise the elements that unite Labor representatives with strong and varying factional allegiances.\textsuperscript{56}

Today, the mention of Colston's name prompts remarkably consistent responses: only occasionally is there any divergence from Faulkner's colourful assessment. Daley recalls Colston as a 'lazy fat slob' but also remembers feeling a little sorry for him, a little concerned for his emotional well being as he weathered repeated attacks from the ALP.\textsuperscript{57} Given the subsequent suicide attempt of Nick Sherry, Daley was probably right to be concerned. Kim Carr admits to being able to see the pathos in the situation: that, as Colston betrayed the ALP and the country, he also betrayed himself and everything he had stood for in his long parliamentary career.\textsuperscript{58} Overall though, the consensus from the ALP is that Colston deserved everything he got. By allowing the government to take control of Telstra and to reshape social policy in Australia, he had betrayed both the country and the ALP, the party who had put him into power.\textsuperscript{59}

**Conclusion**

Was Mal Colston the worst of the lot? One way of reading his betrayal is to see it as just another example of the paradox that faces all elected representatives of labour: that, charged with changing the status quo, they must try to do so from within existing parliamentary institutions. Although exceptionally vulnerable to duchessing—raised himself in straitened circumstances, he was overly concerned with providing financial stability for his own family—Colston was not the first victim of the process and he is unlikely to be the last: William Holman is an Australian example of a politician duchessed by the trappings of power, and Ramsey MacDonald, Philip Snowden, and John Burns are well known British examples of the same process.\textsuperscript{60}

But such a reading will not suffice. Though all Labor representatives are under some degree of pressure to succumb to the temptations laid before them, most do not do so. Moreover, to perceive all rattings as essentially the same is to gloss over the very specific historical contexts in which they occur. Carr's understanding of Colston's betrayal as representative of its time is, in my view, more useful and acutely perceptive. Colston might have been unusually greedy but the prevailing parliamentary culture—increasingly commercialised, pragmatic and cynical—encouraged the ALP to turn a blind eye to, or sometimes even satisfy, that greed for as long as it suited them. When it no longer suited them, the senator found it necessary to rat.

The passage of time irons out many of the contextual differences between rattings, and rats become, in hindsight, a homogenous group: the 'Other' to those members who remained or remain loyal. The stories of these rats become part of the Labor 'tradition' for specific, and contemporary, organisational purposes, offering explanations for failure or unthinkable loss: Colston's betrayal helps to explain the failure of ten long and dispiriting years in opposition and the devastating loss of Telstra through privatisation. Moreover, these stories re-emerge occasionally to warn those who might themselves be contemplating 'the well-timed rat', and to help build and maintain solidarity.\textsuperscript{61} In short, though they might occur in different contexts and for different reasons, rattings are always useful in hindsight, and in that sense they can be seen to form part of a tradition. As for Mal Colston, it is highly likely that, in time, 'the worst of the lot' will become just another Labor rat.

\textsuperscript{51} Interview with Senator Kim Carr, 25 July 2006.
\textsuperscript{54} Phone interview with Senator John Faulkner, 20 July 2006; interview with Senator Kim Carr, 25 July 2006.
\textsuperscript{55} Phone interview with Paul Daley, 5 July 2006.
\textsuperscript{56} Interview with Senator Kim Carr, 25 July 2006.
\textsuperscript{57} Phone interview with Paul Daley, 5 July 2006.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
Raging against the Machine: Unions and technological change in Australia 1978-1996

Tony Duras*

This paper investigates the interaction between trade unions and technological change in Australia in the period 1978 to 1996. The principle aim of the paper is to explore the ways trade unions have responded to the adoption of technology in Australian workplaces. It does so by examining the interplay between unions, employers and governments over the use of new technology in the later part of the twentieth century and the wider legislative framework that has codified such interplay. In particular the paper considers the extent to which notions of management prerogative have prevented unions and workers from having a voice in the development and utilisation of technology in Australian workplaces.

Introduction

Technological change is amongst the most significant forms of change at the workplace level. The selection, introduction and adoption of new technology has historically effected types of employment, levels of skill, rates of pay, hours worked, union density, numbers of employees and the types of work carried out in a particular workplace. Given the scope of its impact upon the nature of work and work organisation, technological change could be regarded as a key issue for trade unions, as representatives and advocates of working people. The nature and effect of technological change has elicited an array of responses from trade unions that vary from outright opposition to uncritical acceptance and active promotion. The choice of responses available to trade unions has been determined in part by employers, governments and the legal system. The notion that selection and implementation of new technology is a management prerogative has been central in restricting the range of options available to unions and workers. Marsh and Evans define managerial prerogative as the assertion of exclusive managerial rights and functions free from union or employee influence where as Yerbury and Karlsson note that in Australia managerial prerogative is limited by the power of industrial tribunals.1

Sorge and Streek have noted that technological change or ‘technical change’ has traditionally been regarded as something external to and independent of industrial relations.2 They argue that trade unions have contributed to this situation through their willingness to limit themselves to negotiating wages and conditions and only dealing with questions of technology when it impacts upon these core concerns.3 In order to contest the notion of technology as a management prerogative and pursue their ‘core concerns’, Australian unions have focussed their efforts on guaranteeing that in the event of technological change, workers and their unions are notified and kept informed of the new technology to be used and the likely effects of this new technology. The right to actively and genuinely participate in the selection and adoption of new technology, a right unions in Scandinavia have enjoyed for almost 30 years has been something Australian unions could aspire to but not effectively pursue. The period under consideration, 1978 to 1996, is book-ended by the Telecom dispute over telephone exchange technology in 1978 and the enactment of the Workplace Relations Act in 1996. In order to appreciate the importance of the Telecom dispute we need to consider the preceding thirty years of the post war period.

Post-war period, 1945-1977

In studies of technological change in Canada and Western Europe, several authors noted an absence of union resistance to the high level of technological change that occurred in the 30 years that followed the Second World War. This they attributed to the period being one of economic growth and higher living standards for workers through out the industrialised world, Australia included.4 A number of Australian authors have argued that in this period of high employment and a buoyant economy, Australian unions had little interest in intervening over the question of technological change, as workers made redundant by the introduction of labour saving technology were generally reabsorbed into the workforce.5

3 Ibid.
5 Stephen Deery, ‘Trade Unions, Technological Change and Redundancy Protection in Australia’, Journal
A notable exception to the apparent disinterest of unions in the effects of technological change prior to the late 1970s, was the Waterside Workers Federation’s (WWF) involvement in an agreement covering the introduction of containerisation to the Australian waterfront in the mid-1960s. The shift from the manual loading of ships to crane loaded containers greatly reduced the need for stevedoring labour. The introduction of containerisation on Australian waterfront ultimately led to a halving of the waterfront workforce in the space of a decade. The number of stevedores went from 20,000 in 1967 to approximately 10,000 in 1977.6 Taking from the experiences of stevedoring unions in North America, the leadership of the WWF recognised that containerisation was inevitable and that an agreement covering the introduction of the new technology was necessary in order to secure the best outcome for Australian waterside workers.7

In 1965, in pursuit of a series of demands, which included job security for waterside workers, a pension scheme and a mechanisation fund, WWF members embarked on a campaign of intensified industrial action.8 In a three-month period between July and September 1965 some 561,000 hours were lost through unauthorised fortnightly stoppages. In response the Federal Government convened the National Stevedoring Industry Conference, composed of the Federation, Stevedoring employers, the ACTU and itself in October 1965.9 After eighteen months of negotiations the parties reached an agreement which provided for decasualisation of waterfront employment and improved redundancy payments in return for the union’s complete acceptance of the new technology. By taking the initiative on the question of containerisation combined with the militancy and strategic location in the Australian economy of its members, the WWF was able to challenge management prerogative in relation to the introduction of new technology and secure greater job security and redundancy entitlements for its members.

1978-1983

The mid to late 1970s saw the introduction of labour saving technologies most notably in the form of computerisation in a range of manufacturing and clerical industries. There was also a sharp rise in the level of unemployment in Australia from 4.5% in 1975 to 6% in 1979. These developments had two effects. Firstly, it prompted fears of mass unemployment on the scale of the Great depression. In 1978 The Australian predicted that new technology would replace so many workers that by 1984 there would be an unemployment level of 31%.10 In Britain in the same year the Guardian newspaper declared ‘Technology could put 5M out of work’.11 The second, and for our purposes more significant effect of this extensive technological change was that it forced trade unions to rethink their attitudes to the introduction of new technology and its impact upon the workforce.

Fear about the effects of new technology were highlighted by a series of major industrial disputes in a series of industries that occurred during the later half of the 1970s. The most notable of these was the 1978 telephone exchange technology dispute between Telecom and the Australian Telecommunications Employees Association (ATEA), the union representing skilled technicians employed in Telecom. The dispute’s significance came from manner in which the ATEA challenged management prerogative in relation to the selection and application of new technology. In 1977 Telecom sought to introduce the ARE 11 computer controlled exchanges into the telephone network and announced that in order to maintain the ‘integrity’ of new technology it was necessary to centralise the maintenance functions in ‘Exchange Maintenance Centres’ (EMCs). The ATEA did not oppose the introduction of ARE 11 technology, rather it was opposed to the centralisation and specialisation of maintenance staff. The ATEA’s response to Telecom’s proposal was to put forward an alternative proposal in the form of decentralised ‘Exchange Support Centres’ (ESC), which used the ARE 11 technology but spread technical staff throughout the network thereby maintaining their career opportunities, skill levels and job satisfaction. Telecom rejected this proposal and a four-week national strike of technicians resulted in 1978.

The matter then went before the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission. The arbiter’s solution to the 1978 Telecom dispute was as ingenious as the dispute itself. The matter went before Mary Gaudron

9 Deery ‘The Impact of the National Stevedoring Industry Conference’, p. 207.
who proposed a simultaneous trial of the ESC and EMC systems on the basis of six criteria: efficiency of operation, standard of service achieved, maintenance of technical standards and retention of expertise, job satisfaction, career opportunities and the public interest. Both parties accepted this solution. The eighteen-month trials concluded in June 1980 and were then evaluated by two independent experts: Professor Antoni Karbowiak chosen by Telecom and Peter Robson by the ATEA. In his evaluation Robson found that ESC system was superior to the EMC system on all criteria. The reports of the findings were then to be given to the Commission, which would make a decision. In the end Telecom chose a three-tiered system of maintenance in preference to EMC and ESC. The dispute and the trial of the two systems challenged the technological determinism of Telecom management and established the notion that unions possessed the knowledge and competence to take part in processes surrounding changes to technology and work organisation. The superiority of the ATEA developed system of maintenance demonstrated that there was no inherent requirement in the ARE 11 technology that necessitated the centralisation of Telecom’s exchange maintenance systems.

The dispute at Telecom and wider concerns over the effects new technology was having on the employment and conditions of Australian workers placed technological change firmly on the union movement’s agenda. The result was the adoption and amendment of a technological change policy at each biennial ACTU conference from 1975 to 1983. The main focus of the technological change policy revolved around notification of proposed change and union involvement in the selection of appropriate technology that maximised the benefits for workers and the community and minimised the social costs of such technology. The policy called on governments to create legislation which would require employers to prepare ‘Technological Impact Statements’. Such statements would outline the objectives of the technological change, any alternatives, the effect on the workplace and on the overall levels of unemployment and the costs to the community and employees of any redundancies stemming from the change. The technological change policy also promoted the establishment of a ‘tripartite committee with adequate full-time facilities’ and called for increased severance payments for works made redundant as the result of technological change. The policy advocated that unions challenge management prerogative in relation to the introduction of new technology through either award prescription, legislation or agreement that placed obligations on employers to consult and negotiate on ‘various issues arising from technological change’.

In line with the ACTU’s technological change policy, a number of unions had by the early 1980s negotiated agreements with employers dealing with the introduction of new technology. In this area the ATEA maintained its role as a pacesetter with a comprehensive technology agreement that included information sharing. The 1980 agreement on ‘Consideration of the Introduction of Technological Change’ involving Telecom, the ATEA and the other telecommunication and clerical unions, came out of the 1978 dispute discussed earlier. The document provided for information sharing from the contemplative stage and joint consideration of any proposed changes in technology, prior to any decision to adopt such changes. Telecom was to provide unions with an economic analysis of the proposed changes indicating the full range of costs and benefits derived from the new technology. Assessment of the proposed changes was to take account of its effects on employment levels, the level of service to customers, availability of qualified staff, job satisfaction for Telecom workers as well as including standard technical and monetary considerations. The timetable for the introduction of the new technology was also the subject of joint consideration. The agreement was silent on the question of job loss as a result of technological change however it committed the company to adopt policies, which would lead to ‘the creation of additional productive and economic jobs within Telecom and associated Australian industries’. While the agreement did not give unions the right to determine the technology purchased it formalised the right of unions to act as the voice of employees in the process. The agreement challenged notions of management prerogative in that Telecom was required to share information, consider the full effects of technological change on Telecom employees and consult over the process of its introduction. As the assistant Federal Secretary of the ATEA noted,

In the past, prior to 1978, management had the view that in a range of areas connected with the introduction of new technology it had the sole prerogative to decide how issues were determined...We now have a sharing of information from the contemplative stage. The information to be provided to employees through their unions is quite extensive and management now longer regards issues such as the organisation of work as its prerogative.

---

13 John Mathews, Technology, Trade Unions and the Labour Process, Melbourne, Department of Humanities, Deakin University, 1985, p. 45.
14 Lansbury and Davis, Technology, work and industrial relations, p. 238.
The ACTU’s technological change policy and the technology agreements negotiated by a number of unions were a reaction to the unwillingness of many employers to either consult or share information with employees and their unions. National surveys revealed the degree of employer resistance to sharing information or consulting with unions and workers over new technology. In 1979 a national survey investigated the consultative processes in 165 companies that had undergone technological change in the five years between 1974 and 1979. It found that in 27% of cases of technological change no information was provided and in 46% of cases information was provided but employee’s opinions were not sought.\textsuperscript{17} In only 9% of cases of technological change had there been a joint decision making process. A 1980 study by the Australian Bureau of Statistics revealed that of twelve hundred companies reported as having introduced new technology between 1976 and 1979, only 5% of respondents stated that they had consulted with their employees and unions prior to introducing new technology.\textsuperscript{18}

The unwillingness of employers to inform and consult with workers and unions over new technology was compounded by the absence of a wider legislative framework that would compel employers to provide information about proposed technological change or create a basic entitlement for workers made redundant as a consequence of major changes in technology. Australian workplaces were governed by national and state based industrial relations legislation. Prior to the Victorian Liberal Government’s abolition of state based common law awards and referral of its industrial relations powers to the Federal Government in March 1993, all states had their own industrial relations legislation and industrial tribunals. However until 1983, the only states that had legislated on the issue of redundancy resulting from automation or technological change were New South Wales and South Australia. In New South Wales, state tribunals, upon union request, could insert into state based awards or agreements clauses that provided for three months notice to employees made redundant through technological changes. There was no automatic entitlement and by 1980 only 20% of New South Wales State awards, covering 30-35\% of the workforce, contained the notification provision.\textsuperscript{19}

At the federal level, the restricted jurisdiction of the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission provisions and the wider unwillingness of the commission and High Court to infringe upon management prerogative meant that provisions relating to redundancy and notification of technological change were largely absent. Under section 51 (xxxv) of the Constitution, the Federal government has the power to conciliate and arbitrate in order to prevent and settle industrial disputes ‘extending beyond the limits of one state’. Under this constitutional authority and by way of the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Act, the Federal parliament had established the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration and vested it with the authority to deal with disputes over ‘industrial matters’ defined as those “pertaining to the relations between employers and employees”\textsuperscript{20}. However the Court, latter renamed Commission, had traditionally been reluctant to circumscribe managerial prerogative in relation to technological change. Henry Bourne Higgins, second president of the Court and the person responsible for the Harvester decision, encapsulated such sentiments in 1915 when he wrote:

\begin{quote}
The Court leaves every employer free to carry on the business on his own system, so long as he does not perpetuate industrial trouble or endanger industrial peace; free to choose his employees on their merits and according to his exigencies; free to make use of new machines, of improved methods…free to put the utmost pressure on anything and everything except human life.\textsuperscript{21}
\end{quote}

Besides traditional authority weighing in favour of managerial prerogative, Higgins’ roles as a member of the bodies that wrote the Constitution and a founding judge of the Conciliation and Arbitration and Court reinforced doubts about whether the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission could legitimately hear and rule on issues such as technological change or redundancy. In several important decisions the High Court had on appeal ruled that particular matters such as technological change did not directly relate to ‘relations between employers and employees’ and therefore lay beyond the Commission’s jurisdiction.

\textbf{1984-1988 Codification and Cooperation}

The notion that technological change was the exclusive province of management to the exclusion of industrial tribunals and trade unions was fundamentally challenged by the decision that came out of the ACTU’s test case on job security that the ACTU. The Termination, Redundancy and Change Decision

\textsuperscript{19} Deery, ‘Trade Unions, Technological Change and Redundancy Protection in Australia’, p. 159.
\textsuperscript{21} Henry Bourne Higgins, \textit{A New Province for Law & Order: being a review by its late president for fourteen years, of the Australian Court of Conciliation and Arbitration}, Sydney, Workers’ Educational Association of N.S.W, 1922, p. 13.
1984 established requirements covering the fairness of termination, redundancies and consultation with unions and workers in relation to major changes in a company’s structure, production methods or technology used. Where an employer had decided to make changes that would have a significant effect on employees, they were required to consult with the employees affected and their unions on the introduction and effect of such changes and measures to minimise or avoid any adverse effects of such changes. The decision established a process of consultation in relation to redundancy as well as setting minimum standards of severance pay. Clauses dealing with redundancy and notification of change were subsequently incorporated into most federal awards. The termination change and redundancy decision was significant because it created a system of employee and union entitlements to notification and consultation in the event of technological change.

The union movement’s legal challenge to management prerogative in relation to technological change was further strengthened by the High Court’s decision in the Federated Clerks Union versus the Victorian Employers’ Federation Case (1984). In its decision the High Court ruled that the Victorian Arbitration Commission had the authority to insert a clause concerning consultation in relation to technological change into the state based Commercial Clerks Award. The clause in the Commercial Clerks Award required that when an employer ‘instructs, commissions or commences an investigation of the feasibility of technological change’ they were to notify the Federated Clerks Union and any employees whose employment would be materially affected by such changes and inform them of ‘the principal objectives of the investigation’. The employer was to consult with the union in relation to the technological changes being investigated and furnish it with sufficient technical information as to allow the union to evaluate the likely effect of such technology on employment in that enterprise. In the event that the employer decided to implement the technological changes, the union and employees concerned were to be notified and informed of the likely effects on employment. They were also to be informed of any alternative proposals that might reduce or eliminate the material effects of such technological change. The High Court’s decision was that a matter previously regarded as falling under the “management of an enterprise” could now be considered within the scope of the various state and Federal arbitration commissions.

In comparison to the termination change and redundancy decision, the technological change clause in the Victorian Commercial Clerks Award provided for a more extensive consultation process especially in relation to the point at which employees and unions were to be informed of technological changes and the amount and type of information provided. However there were fundamental limitations to the impact of both decisions. Neither decision fundamentally challenged the ability of employers to select and introduce new technology. Nor was there any provision in either decision enabling employees or their unions to veto the changes proposed by the management. Only when management had made a definite decision to make the significant change did the termination, change and redundancy decision require it to notify the affected employees and their unions. While employers were expected to give ‘prompt consideration’ to matters raised by workers and unions in relation to the changes, there was little scope for active union involvement in the process. Nor did the technological change clause in the Clerks Award facilitate any union participation in the decision making process in relation to the introduction of new technology or the type of technology selected. In both decisions, unions were assigned ostensibly reactive roles in that their participation in the process of technological change was restricted to the effects of the changes in technology rather than participating in the process itself.

While the termination, change and redundancy decision was a substantial legal victory for the union movement on the issues of notification of workplace technological change, its impact was reinforced by changes in government policy on technological change brought about by the election of the Hawke government in 1983. The Fraser Government had responded to the 1978 Telecom Dispute by establishing the Committee of Inquiry into Technological Change in Australia later known as the Myers’ Committee in December 1978. The three person committee chaired by Professor Rupert Myers involved Bill Mansfield, Federal Secretary of the ATEA. The committee’s terms of reference were to ‘examine, report and make recommendations on the process of technological change in Australian industry in order to maximise economic, social and other benefits and minimise any possible adverse consequences’. Delivering its report in April 1980, the Committee recommended that the Federal Government run a test case on notification requirements in the event of technological change as well as a compensation scheme for workers made redundant through such change. While broadly welcoming the Myers Committee’s report with its thirty recommendations, the Fraser Government rejected the notification and compensation proposals. Taking up key recommendations of the Myers Committee, the ALP opposition supported the establishment of the right for employees to be informed and consulted of intended technological change and the right to fair redundancy protection. Accordingly, the Hawke Government supported the ACTU’s job security test

22 Deery et al., ‘Redundancy and Public Policy in Australia’, p. 168.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
case. In addition, the 1983 Prices and Incomes Accord between the ALP and ACTU contained training and occupational health and safety provisions to deal with the effects of technological change. It also established industry level sectoral councils and the employer-union Economic Planning Advisory Council (EPAC) that was intended to advise government on planning procedures and policy.

In the 1970s and 1980s ideas about workplace decision making or industrial democracy overlapped with ideas of notification and union involvement with technological change. Both concepts challenged the ability of managers to arbitrarily make decisions on the organisation of work. There was also a shared emphasis on the notion that workers and unions should have an increased influence in decision making within a workplace. Given the marked unwillingness of employers to consult with employees and unions over technological change, employer organisations did not embrace industrial democracy and instead advocated the concept of employee participation which avoided a direct challenge to management prerogative and sought to foster a greater sense of employee identification with the aims of an organisation.

### 1988-1996: Post – Fordism or Post – Accordism

In spite of the gulf that existed between ideas of industrial democracy held by unions and the concept of employee participation advocated by employers, there was sufficient common ground for the ACTU and CAI to issue a joint statement on Participative Practices in April 1988. The statement included a section on ‘Communication and Information Sharing’ which reaffirmed the parties’ commitment to the Guidelines for Information Sharing. The statement reaffirmed the parties’ commitment to employers sharing information with their employees and acknowledged that new technology and new work practises could provide for more interesting and skilled work, but that the new technology should only be introduced to improve productivity rather than eliminate jobs development.  

Quite separately there was renewed emphasis on the need for workplace consultation from the Federal Government although the emphasis was on financial incentive through ‘best practice’ grants program designed to promote ‘world’s best practice’ enterprises rather than legislative compulsion compelling employers to share information with their employees or to consult with them or their unions over workplace change.

The joint ACTU and CAI statement reflected the apparent progress achieved by the union movement around the issue of technological change. Many of the goals of the ACTU technological change policy had been achieved through the termination, change and redundancy decision. Union involvement in the Accord and the various tripartite bodies appeared to give unions’ greater influence over public policy relating technological change. Given that consultation and information sharing were central tenets of the ACTU’s policy, the apparent commitment of government and employers to such concepts could be read as something of a victory. As part of the tripartite process unions were expected to cooperate with employers in relation to workplace modernisation and rationalisation and to facilitate the introduction and application of new technology. Conversely such cooperation allowed unions to negotiate arrangements which minimised or protected workers from the effects of such technological change. It might also be argued that a number of unionists had come to share the view that technological change and adoption of new forms of work organisation were prerequisites for Australia’s economic prosperity and central to the nation’s international competitiveness. The ACTU policy on training and skill development adopted at the 1989 Congress noted that new technology and the need for ‘world class enterprises’ meant that significant change in work organisation, training and skill development were required.

Beyond the notion of international competitiveness, a number of figures within the union movement had come to see technological change as means of freeing workers from the regimentation of Taylorist work organisation. Reflecting their own experiences as well as the influence of writers such as Harry Braverman, many unionists hoped that the new technology and ‘post-Fordist’ forms of work organisation would create jobs that were higher skilled, better paid, less monotonous and more participatory. Laurie Carmichael, then ACTU assistant secretary, summed up such sentiments when he declared:

> The new technology makes possible a different kind of workforce, comprising fewer and fewer human robots, with multi-skilling replacing the infinite division of labour in order to handle efficiently and service real robots and highly automated multi-staged machines, processes and administration. A more highly skilled workforce is required, with a greater sophistication and inter-activeness of functions and work processes.

In spite of the apparent consensus amongst the ACTU, the peak employer bodies and the Federal Government on the benefits of cooperation and information sharing, such practices were occurring in a minority of workplaces. The 1991 Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey involving 2004 workplaces


with twenty or more employees found that 34\% of workplaces had experienced the introduction of new technology in the two years preceding the survey.\textsuperscript{27} However it also noted that management in 47\% of surveyed workplaces had never consulted with unions over the introduction of new technology.\textsuperscript{28}

The late 1980s and first half of the 1990s saw a shift from centralised wage fixation to enterprise-based bargaining. Employer bodies, most notably the Business Council of Australia, argued that enterprise bargaining would promote mutual trust and interest between employers and employees in an enterprise as well as increasing productivity. The ACTU regarded enterprise bargaining as a way of giving workers a greater voice in workplace decision making. In the 1988 National Wage Case Decision, the Industrial Relations Commission established a structural efficiency principle which encouraged decentralised bargaining to improve efficiency in return for better paying, more fulfilling and varied working conditions. Subsequent National Wage Case Decisions in April and October 1991 linked wage increases to enterprise based ‘consultative mechanisms and procedures’.\textsuperscript{29}

This shift to enterprise bargaining was strengthened by the 1993 Industrial Relations Reform Act which amongst other things provided for non-union enterprise agreements between an employer and a group of employees. The amendments included a requirement that for an agreement to be approved by the Industrial Relations Commission ‘reasonable steps’ had to be taken to consult with affected employees and inform them of the various aspects of the agreement and the effect of the agreement being approved during the course of negotiations. Further reforms to the Industrial Relations Act in 1994 required enterprise agreements to establish a ‘process for the parties to consult each other about matters involving changes to the organisation or performance of work in any place of work to which the agreement relates’ for certification to take place. This included technological change. By 1995 60\% of workers covered by Federal Awards were under enterprise agreements.\textsuperscript{30}

1996 – Back to the Future

In March 1996, the Liberal-National Coalition was elected to office. Within several months of taking office the Howard Government introduced its industrial relations legislation, the Workplace Relations Act, to the parliament. With the support of the Australian Democrats, the Workplace Relations Act passed through the Senate and became law. The Act allows for individual contracts known as Australian Workplace Agreements and removed the need for consultative mechanisms during the life of collective agreements.

A key aspect of the legislation was a process of award simplification that restricted the number of matters that could be included in Federal awards to twenty so-called ‘allowable award matters’. The Termination, Change and Redundancy provisions in most Federal awards requiring an employer notify and consult with affected employees and their unions in the event of significant workplace change are a non-allowable matter and have been removed. Under section 89A of the Act, the jurisdiction of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission is restricted to ‘industrial disputes’ related to these twenty allowable matters and as a consequence the Commission cannot deal directly with the introduction new technology as a matter. So-called non-allowable matters can be included in certified agreements, however it seems that having been freed from an award based requirement to consult with unions over technological change, there has been a reluctance to include it in enterprise agreements. A survey in 2001 found that of the enterprise agreements certified in the federal system since 1997, only 10\% contained provisions requiring employers to consult with trade unions in the event of workplace change.\textsuperscript{31}

In effect the Workplace Relations Act has negated the consultative aspects of the 1984 Termination, Change and Redundancy decision and in the process taken the legal situation surrounding notification and consultation over technological change back to where it was in 1978.

Conclusions

Some months after she had developed an inventive solution to the 1978 Telecom dispute, Mary Gaudron addressed a conference of the Australian College of Education on the ‘Changing World of Work’. In her address, Gaudron dealt with the hostility of Australian unions to technological change. She attributed much of this hostility to the unwillingness of employers to give unions advance warning of technological change or to involve them in the selection and adoption of new technology. She said:

\begin{itemize}
  \item Ibid., p. 134.
  \item Davis and Lansbury, \textit{Managing Together}, p. 17.
\end{itemize}
Even when employees have gained information in advance of the introduction of new technology, their requests for involvement in the decision-making process have been met with the response either of managerial prerogative or of higher engineering and/or technological knowledge. This too has contributed to the suspicion and opposition of trade unions and unionists to the introduction of new technology.\textsuperscript{32}

It could be argued that in the period 1978 to 1996 Australian unions on the whole adopted a reactive role in relation to adoption and implementation of new technology at the workplace level. Unions have assumed a role akin to that of fire fighters, becoming involved in the process of technological change when the alarm bells ring. In large part this reflects the options offered by the other actors in the industrial relations system. Employers have resisted greater union and employee involvement in the selection and implementation of new technology on the basis of management prerogative. Industrial tribunals have been restricted by law and custom in their right to regulate such a prerogative. And governments have steadfastly avoided legislating for greater workplace decision making. Unions must also bear some responsibility for this situation. Where unions like the WWF and ATEA have taken the initiative they have ensured a greater ‘voice’ for their members and themselves in the adoption and utilisation of new technology. A process that has proved cyclical in the eighteen years under consideration.

Unions as the Nation: The Israeli and Australian Labour Movements

Tim Dymond*

Insisting that labour rights transcend national rights is hardly a stretch for unionists. What to actually do about non-national workers inside national labour markets is a different matter. This paper uses the examples of the Australian and Israeli labour movements to argue that nation building and national identity formation are historically central labour movement projects. Because the labour movement has sought to use the state to achieve its goals, it has needed to defend the state’s boundaries. Thus ‘labour citizenship’ has been tightly wound into national citizenship. In a world of increasingly transnational labour markets however, unions need to break out from their ‘nation-centrism’ and look for opportunities to develop a transnational perspective on labour citizenship.

The Israeli and Australian examples are not offered up to bewail about how much better history could have been ‘if only’ they had adopted a less nationalist version of labour citizenship. Both movements have considerable achievements to their credit that have indisputably benefited their members. Nevertheless they demonstrate that nationalism is hard wired into the union idea once you decide that solidarity for practical reasons has its limits.

In a recent article for the *Southern California Law Review*, Jennifer Gordon links the forms of nation state citizenship with the ‘labour citizenship’ workers gain from being union members:

> From the perspective of workers, labor citizenship refers to the status of membership in a workers organisation, and to the act of participation in the decision making processes of that organisation with the goal of improving wages, working conditions, and the dignity of work. As these three things come together, they may forge a fourth component, identity, as participants come to identify with their organisation and their fellow ‘labor citizens,’ and stand in solidarity with them.¹

There are striking parallels in the status gained through both labour citizenship in a union, and nation-state citizenship.

> You gain the status of labor citizenship if you become part of a union, just as you gain national citizenship by being admitted to membership in a country. In the union setting, that status entitles members to a package of rights exclusively available to insiders and binds them to a set of responsibilities that outsiders do not bear, as nation-state citizenship does.²

Like nations, unions are concerned with establishing boundaries. Gordon’s article is a response to the experience of the US labour movement in trying to reconcile the labour rights of illegal workers with the labour standards of their existing members. Her concept can also be applied to historical examples of labour movements as nationalist movements. Both Israel and Australia are distinct among (geographically non-specific) Western nations because of the significance of trade union movements in the creation of their nation states and national identities.

The classic nationalist movements of Europe had been led by nation building elites keen to break down old feudal, monarchical and ecclesiastical hierarchies (e.g. the Italian unification movement championed by Giuseppe Garibaldi in 1860-1). They usually pre-dated the ‘trade union’ organisational form as we might recognise it today. Nevertheless theories of nationalism connect to theories of labourism through their emphasis on identity and solidarity. Tom Nairn proposed that the nation is a defence against capitalist social atomisation by an inter-class community, a defence that seeks an independent road to capitalist modernity.³ Benedict Anderson described nations as imagined communities: ‘Imagined’ because, while most nationals never meet each other, they still have an image of their own communion; ‘communities’ because, regardless of internal inequalities and exploitation, the nation is always conceived of as a deep horizontal comradeship. ⁴ Nationalism through a labour movement is solidarity expressed through a concrete source of identity: work.

There would be few nations as apparently dissimilar as Israel and Australia. The former is regularly a centre of world crisis, and the latter is barely noticed north of its home continent. One has had to struggle for survival; the other has had no real military threats since World War II. Closer examination reveals similarities: both are ‘European’ nations in Asia – Israel in the Middle East, Australia in the South East.

² Ibid., pp. 9-10. Gordon uses the American ‘labor’ spelling. I will retain it when directly quoting her. I will use the ‘labour’ spelling for the movement, and when referring to the Israeli Labour party. For the Australian party I will use ‘Labor’.
Both are settler societies – with foundation myths of heroic pioneers battling against the odds to build the nation. Both faced ‘odds’ which included indigenous populations forcibly evicted to make way for the settlers. Both can claim a formal link to the British Empire. Israel, situated in the territory of the former British mandate of Palestine, is eligible to join Australia in the once British Commonwealth of Nations. Both draw their conceptions of nations and nationalism from nineteenth century Europe.

Australian nationalism conceived of itself as a ‘Young Tree Green’ that could become a new Britannia in the Pacific – with a hardy population of white skinned pioneers. Actual Britannia, despite ruling the waves, was the ‘Old Dead Tree’ that needed reinvigoration. The ‘missing’ original verse of Advance Australia Fair makes the ‘young and free’ nation the direct heir to the time past ‘when gallant Cook from Albion sailed’. The founders of Israel who were inspired by Theodor Herzl’s political Zionist project believed that having a Jewish nation would ‘normalise’ the Jewish people. They would no longer be the soft, vulnerable city dwellers of Central Europe, confined by a legacy of discrimination, culture and economic trajectory to a narrow range of urban occupations. In the Land of Israel they would be the robust tillers of the soil. They would redeem, and be redeemed by, the land. According to Ze’ev Sternhell a loathing of the Diaspora was fundamental to Zionism, and the founders of Israel viewed its way of life with contempt. The Zionist project was not just as a way of finding a homeland for the oppressed Jews of Central and Eastern Europe. It was also a solution for Jews in the emancipated nations of Western Europe where (on the face of it) culturally assimilated Jewry seemed to do quite well. One of the great centres of such assimilation was Vienna, where the Hungarian born Jewish journalist Theodor Herzl observed the triumph of political anti-Semitism in municipal politics. Formerly a German nationalist, Herzl now concluded that assimilation would fail, concluding that only a restored state offered a solution to Jewish troubles.

Both Australia and Israel acquired citizens in 1947 and 1948 under ‘labour’ governments. Israel made a grand ‘declaration of independence’; Australia needed to fix an administrative anomaly created by Canada legislating to create citizens, while Australians remained British subjects. Who was or could become a citizen was restricted – Israel to Jews, Australia to persons of British and Irish heritage.

At the 2006 Congress of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) announced a scheme called ‘UnionsAustralia’. Concerned that confusion over which union to join was putting off people from joining any union at all in their workplaces, UnionsAustralia would be a one-stop-shop where someone could join a union through the ACTU directly. After six months the peak body would refer their membership to the correct union for their workplace or industry. The scheme is actually similar to the system the Israeli labour movement has operated for many decades. The General Federation of Labour, or Histadrut, is the peak body that was also the first Jewish labour organisation in Palestine. All wage earners are eligible to be Histadrut members, and the first step to joining a union is to join the Histadrut. It predates the state itself as a key institution in building up the Palestinian Yishuv (literally ‘settlement’ the pre-state name for Palestine’s Jewish community), and is intimately bound up with the Zionist project.

The rapid rise to prominence of the Australian labour movement, both industrially and politically, has been well documented. There were major early successes like the establishment of the eight-hour day principle, the survival of and recovery from epic confrontations with employers such as the Great Shearers Strike of the 1890s. The world’s first ‘labour’ government was the Dawson Ministry of the Queensland Colonial Parliament, and by the second decade of Federation the Australian Labor Party had formed a national government. To accommodate (and tame) the demands of the labour movement within the new Commonwealth, White Australia would keep out cheap foreign workers, and tariff protection would bolster local employment. In ‘a nation for a continent, and a continent for a nation’, the white working class would become a continental labour aristocracy. Australia was for many years one of the most highly unionised first world countries. In 1909 union leader and Labor politician William Guthrie Spence (1846-1926) described the labour movement as “an almost dominant factor in the political life of the community”.

Not as unionised, however, is Israel. In a speech to the Russian branch of the Poale Zion (Workers of Zion) party in 1917, the Zionist Marxist leader Ber Borochov (1881-1917) proclaimed that in the

8 www.actu.asn.au
Yishuv the ‘Jewish working class is not as yet large; it nevertheless plays prominent role.’\textsuperscript{12} The Histadrut (established 1920) as a key social institution not only predates the establishment of Israel; it also predates the formation of a capitalist economy in Palestine. In Europe capitalism had created the working class that formed trade unions. By contrast the Histadrut had brought a European style labour movement to the feudal economy of old Palestine – run by ‘notables’ and hereditary land owners, and thereby brought capitalism in the form of business enterprises and land purchases. Thus it functioned as an employer and as a proto-state pre-1947. The main political parties of early Israel were various shades of Socialist Zionism, and Israel’s governments were all ‘labour’ until 1977. The Histadrut included from almost the beginning of its existence the majority of the (Jewish) workforce in its membership. The Histadrut, as a major owner of land and business within the Yishuv, was a supplier of work. A Histadrut membership card was worth having because you might not gain access to employment and social services without it.\textsuperscript{13}

Australia’s Labor Party has never been as politically successful as Israel’s Labour parties. The Australian movement’s peak body, the ACTU (established 1927), has also only gradually taken on a co-ordinating role within the movement acceptable to its constituent unions. The Histadrut, however, has been from the beginning a ‘state within a state’, operating provident funds, unemployment funds, banks, health services, construction companies, welfare funds, kibbutzim, theatres, schools, factories and pension funds exclusively for its members. Those members needed to be contributing to the advancement of the Jewish community in Palestine, an ideology labelled ‘constructivism’.\textsuperscript{14}

The closest the Australian labour movement has come to being a business owner has may have come from the Israeli example. The President of the ACTU in the 1970s, Bob Hawke, was and is a strong admirer of Israel – particularly for the centrality of the labour movement to its national life. His attempts to set up ACTU business partnership, such as the ACTU-TNT joint venture, specifically followed Histadrut advice. He also proposed that the ACTU do business with a Histadrut owned construction company.\textsuperscript{15}

The strongest similarities between the Israeli and Australian examples derive from their contributions to nationalism and national identity. While both paid lip service to working class internationalism (though rejecting communism as an impractical and/or alien ideology) their practices both reflected exclusionist, if not outright chauvinistic outlooks. In recent years there have been attempts by writers such as Keith Windschuttle to argue that the White Australia Policy was not really racist. There has also been controversy over former US President Jimmy Carter’s using the term ‘apartheid’ to describe Israeli policies.\textsuperscript{16} When examining the history of Australia and Israel’s policies to promote and protect the interests of Hebrew Europeans and Anglo Celts it is reasonable to compare the practical effects of those policies. In the case of Australia and Israel the labour movement extended ‘settler capitalism’. Not because they were ‘bourgeoisified’ or stricken with ‘false consciousness’, but because as collective movements they were an effective means of ensuring the benefits of settlement were shared as widely as possible among the settlers, and that out-groups were clearly excluded: Arabs, Asians etc. When discussing the concepts of religion, nation and race the usual cautions about unstable meanings should apply. Certainly for Jews there were debates about whether they constituted a ‘race’, while the notion of a white race was commonly accepted for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However in practice the exclusionary outcomes were similar. In both Israel and Australia unions exhorted employers to hire only Hebrew and White labour respectively.

Borochov and Spence are two significant figures for the early Israeli and Australian labour movements whose views are interesting to compare. On the surface are quite dissimilar. Most obviously concerning how long they actually lived in their nations. Borochov spent most of his career in Russia, Europe and the USA, although his remains are interred in Kibbutz Kinneret in the Jordan Valley. Spence emigrated from Scotland to Victoria at age five. Borochov was a more politically radical figure than Spence: he founded the Russian Poale Zion as a revolutionary Marxist party with a Zionist minimum programme. Spence was a trade union organiser whom, while not afraid of ‘direct action’ had essentially modest political aims as reflected in the conservatism of his most lasting achievement: the Australian Workers Union (AWU). In Palestine the Poale Zion party leadership included the founder of the Histadrut and later the State of Israel itself, David Ben-Gurion. The Yishuv Poale Zion organisation split into a ‘Right’ party that became the mainstream Israeli Labour party Mapai, and a ‘Left’ party whose members founded the Israeli Communist party as well as Zionist Left parties like Meretz. Spence ended his Labor career in the split over conscription, joining Billy Hughes to become an MP for the Nationalist party. Borochov’s

\textsuperscript{12} Borochov, Ber, ‘Eretz Yisrael in our Program and Tactics’ (1917). \textit{Ber Borochov Internet Archive}, \url{http://www.angelfire.com/12/borochov/eretz.html} [accessed 28/05/2007], para.15.
last political pronouncements suggest (at least according to the Right Poale Zion) that he was starting to prioritise nationalism. Moshe Cohen quotes him as arguing ‘[w]hen we say “Jewish Nation” we know that it has existed even before the class division in modern society.’  

Spence was not a theoretician like Borochov, and Borochov was not a crude racist like Spence. Borochov denied that Zionism was guilty of ‘the odious crime of wishing to oppress and expel the Arabs from Palestine’, and predicted that ‘[n]ormal relations between the Jews and the Arabs will and must prevail.’ 18 Spence argued that the ‘Anti-Socialist’ (‘invariably the most unpatriotic person to be found’) desired coloured labour because he was ‘a born tyrant, and as the white Australian will not stand his tyranny he must have a nigger to order about.’ 19 Nevertheless in his major theoretical work ‘The National Question and the Class Struggle’ (1905), Borochov referred to ‘the policy of the Australian government as regards immigrants.’ ‘It is’, he wrote, ‘quite clear that these restrictions on immigration are not instituted in the interests of capital but rather in the interests of the workers.’ 20

Borochov described the significance of the national question for the Jewish proletariat’s development of class-consciousness in materialist terms. The class struggle, he argued:

> can only take place where the worker toils; in other words, where he has succeeded in occupying a definite workplace. The weaker his status at that position, the less ground he has for a systematic struggle.

As the class struggle could only occur in a workplace, that workplace needed a national territory. 21 What would distinguish Jewish immigration to Palestine from previous ‘wanderings’ would be that formerly Jews ‘had to adapt themselves to the needs of the native population; their primary function was to satisfy the native consumers’ needs’.

> With the migration into Palestine the situation will change radically. The welfare and functions of Jewish immigrants in Palestine will depend not on the native population but on the foreign market.

The Jewish proletariat in Palestine would avoid the usual ‘one-sided dependence of the Jews on the native population’ which led to ‘national oppression and persecutions’. It would now be able to wage a class struggle against a national bourgeoisie – the inevitable and necessary step towards socialism. 22

The White Australia agenda also had a ‘positive’ aspect – building a nation for the white working man to prove that he could master the harsh environment of Australia. Spence believed the exclusion of non-whites offered ‘a chance for the development of the Australian continent of a great nation of the white race.’ 23

> The [Labor] party stands for racial purity and racial efficiency – industrially, mentally, morally and intellectually. It asks the people to set up a high ideal of national character, and hence it stands strongly against any admixture with the white race. True patriotism should be racial. True self-government means the government of Self – the preservation of Self from trespassing on the rights of others. No class-ruled people can ever be a self-governing people. 24

Starting from different directions, Borochov and Spence reached similar conclusions. Workers needed an ethnically specific national space within which to pursue their ultimate aspirations. This could not occur while dwelling in a nation that did not ‘belong’ to them, i.e. while other peoples inhabited and worked in those lands. In such a situation there was a constant danger from dependency on the labour of others, and vulnerability to class rule that could not be properly resisted.

> The Histadrut was clear from early on that it was primarily concerned with the Jewish working class – both creating it and sustaining it. Palestinian rural workers suffered when the feudal landlords sold land to Jews and Jewish workers replaced them as a matter of policy. The Histadrut believed the welfare

---

18 Borochov (1917), paras.17-9.
19 Spence, p. 437.
21 Ibid., paras.32-3.
23 Spence, p. 377.
24 Ibid., p. 587.
of Jewish workers was inextricably bound up with the creation of a Jewish state. Australian labour self-
identity was also bound up with the need to protect the white working class from competition with,
but also contamination from, foreign labour that was Chinese or South Sea Islander. Aboriginal people
barely seemed part of the same economy as white workers (despite being a vital labour force for the
cattle industry). Except for radical fringes like the communists, the Australian labour movement was
uninterested in their plight – and reinforced it by advocating a White Australia policy that required internal
enforcement of reserve living and tolerated the non-payment of wages.25

Racist sentiments could co-exist in the Australian labour press with a strident anti-Imperialism that
condemned Britain’s exploitation of India and war against the Boers in South Africa. A capitalist Britain
could not be trusted not to sell out its white brothers. Australia’s dependency on the British Empire
was resented, and yet the resentment often stemmed from Britain being insufficiently committed to
Australia, such as when the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was signed in 1902 to Australian consternation.26
Labour Zionism, considering itself part of the international socialist movement, was also committed to
an anti-Imperialist outlook that supported the independence of India. The Labour Zionists made great
efforts to gain the support of Gandhi for the Jewish National Home. Strategically, however, Ben-Gurion
and other leaders recognised that the Yishuv depended on the British mandate for its survival, and the
main resentment of the British derived from their insufficient commitment to carrying out the Balfour
Declaration.27 For the White Australia the ‘old tree’ and the imperialist were the same: Britain. For the
Yishuv the ‘old tree’ was the Diaspora, and the imperialist was Britain. Nationalism in both Australia and
Israel may have emphasised self-reliance, but that self-reliance needed the space created by great and
powerful allies. Both the Australian and Israeli movements bluntly and directly pushed for great powers,
first Britain, then the USA, to protect their states. In both cases these approaches recognised of the real
situation for settler societies precariously placed among enemies.

On an ideological level as, it can readily be seen that both labour movements had ‘masculinist’ pre-
occupations, to accompany the emphasis on self-reliance. Luke Trainor describes the nationalism of this
period as deeply ‘masculinist’, and Zionist writers such as Max Nordau exhorted Jews to ‘revive an
old tradition’, leaving the ghettos to ‘once again become deep-chested, taut-limbed, steely eyed men.”28
Russell Ward’s The Australian Legend famously described the ‘typical Australian’ as ‘a practical man,
rough and ready in his manners.”29 Australia was the place where the British race could more readily prove
its mettle that in Britain itself. Ward quotes Samuel Sidney as observing ‘[t]he timber of Australia is so
different from that of Europe that English workmen are very helpless, until instructed by bush hands.”30
White Australia was proof that the White race, contrary to certain commonly held perceptions, was not
‘unsuited’ to certain parts of the world. Australia demonstrated that the white race had a distinct frontier
role, not just a cosseted place in the metropole. Zionist thinkers (and pioneers settlers) like Aaron David
Gordon believed something even more fundamental was wrong with Diaspora Jewish existence. Even
without anti-Semitism, the overwhelmingly urban and bourgeois existence of European Jews, according
to Gordon and others, was unnatural. Because their labour was not tilling the soil and producing goods
and services, they were spiritually impoverished compared to other peoples. Jews were concentrated in
the abstracted occupations of modern, rationalist society. They acquired a true homeland – a space which
they could cultivate and redeem as their own, and thus redeem themselves from a spiritually deadening,
cosmopolitan deracination. Only concrete, physical labour to build a Jewish state would do it. Thus
‘Labour Zionism’ had a double meaning. The labour movement of workers in the land of Israel was about
venerating the act of labour as redemptive and transformative in its own right. The Jewish working class
would redeem the nation. The binary contrasts of these ideas were: rugged against soft; tough against
yielding. The nation would acquire ‘manly’ virtues that had been lost in lives of domesticated urban
softness.31

Both movements’ social and political aims were in practice limited, emphasising the practical, concrete
and pragmatic in their socialisms. In Israel Mapai under Ben-Gurion’s leadership became an anti-Marxist,
centrst party despite its Borochovian roots. Its policies prioritised establishing and defending the Jewish
state. Despite rhetorical flourishes (Golda Meir’s ‘promise of ‘socialism in our time’ during her premiership
in the 1970s) and sponsorship of the Kibbutz movement (which only ever embraced a small minority of
Israelis) no plan to break with the capitalist economic system was ever proposed. In Australia at the
beginning of the twentieth century, Alfred Metin called the governing ideology of Australia ‘socialism

---

27 Segev, p. 435.
30 Ibid., p. 9.
31 Sternhell, p. 47
without doctrine’, and radical journalist William Lane described socialism as about ‘being mates’. This was not to say that there were no places for political and intellectual contestation in the movements: Socialist Zionism still included Marxist and anarcho-syndicalist currents within Palestine; and Australian unionists debated reform and revolution. However it was the pragmatic nationalists who led the way.

Theoretically people can imagine a community bound by work and rights, that holds differences in national status to be less important. In practice, it is very easy for unions to step into restrictionist nationalism: ‘our jobs for our people’ is a sentiment underlying many a campaign against foreign workers. The Australian and Israeli movements at times were simply unable to see the outside groups as workers at all. Their examples demonstrate how unions are often trapped within a nation state framework because they demand regulation from the nation state. Therefore they become defacto enforcers of boundaries against other workers. Such international labour organisations that exist are ‘peak’ bodies rather than grassroots ones.

Transnational labour citizenship is advocated by Jennifer Gordon as an approach for the US labour movement to cope with the contradictions of a ‘undocumented’ non-citizen workforce that it is increasingly unrealistic to keep out. In the first instance transnational labour citizenship would be a new immigration status, which would entitle a holder to work in more than one country. Such an arrangement would require an agreement between governments, while its day to day operation would require non-government transnational labour organisations, unions not bound to one nation state, but present in both the sending and receiving ends of the transnational labour market. It would operate as a public/private collaboration aimed at fostering genuine labour citizenship not only among migrants as a group, but among all workers in the area across the boundaries of nationality, race and immigration status.32

The Farm Labor Organising Committee (FLOC), based in both the US Midwest and Monterrey Mexico has already operated such a bi-national organising strategy since 2004. Contact is maintained with guest workers on both sides of the border. Not only are they involved in collective bargaining where the guest workers are employed; when the workers return home to Mexico they hold house meetings to discuss their concerns and union strategies. They also arrange regional gatherings for members to get to know each other across villages, receive training on contract enforcement, and to elect local representatives.33

Proposals such as Gordon’s directly challenge the boundary setting and exclusionary approaches of Australian and Israeli unions. Both labour movements, for understandable historical reasons, are tied to their nation states even when they are politically at odds with their governments. Neither movement however, will be able to rely on keeping out the non-citizen as a means of maintaining and defending labour standards. Israel’s Histadrut needs to deal with Palestinian workers whether it wants to or not, and Australian unions will find that the ‘guest worker’ issue will not go away with changes in visa legislation. Labour movements will not have a future that defends the privileges of ‘insiders’ against ‘outsiders’. What they can do, says Gordon, is ‘reject the idea that labor citizenship is a fortress, and see it instead as a pool of water fed by a spring, defined and indeed kept alive by a constant flow of new workers.’34

32 Gordon, pp. 55-61.
33 Ibid., pp. 66-8.
34 Ibid., p. 78.
‘No more fit for use than a wax-work image would be for a gas-stoker’: ‘Scabs’ and the cultural politics of late Nineteenth-Century Australian labourism

Nick Dyrenfurth*  

This paper considers the origins, purpose and effect of labourist discourse surrounding the workplace ‘scab’ during the context of the 1890s. I argue that the labourist demonisation of scabbing was a masculinist trope which sought to appeal towards and shape Australian working-class identity. During this period the taken-for-granted figure of the ‘scab’ and wider labour discourse took on the appearance of anti-intellectualism. Yet scabbing was an important counterpart to labourist mateship; populist and accessible ideas of more abstract visions of solidarity, collectivism and mutuality. It should, given the labour’s defeats in the major strikes and erratic parliamentary achievements, be understood as part of the broader cultural politics and intellectual traditions of Australian labourism.

Intellectual Anti-Intellectualism: ‘Scabs’ and the Cultural Milieu of 1890s Labourism

Writing in the Sydney Worker during the bitter Shearers’ Strike of 1894, Henry Lawson declared:  

It is a great pity that the word “scab” ever dirtied the pages of a workman’s newspaper. It is a filthy term in its present meaning – objectionable every way you look at it. It should never be used by one man in reference to another, no matter how bad the other may be … It does no good - you can’t convert a man by using that word behind his back … It is a low, filthy, evil-working, ignorant, cowardly, and brutal term, and belongs to the slang of the brainless, apish larrikins and drunken prostitutes of the city press …. Let us talk straight in plain English, and not weaken our arguments with silly sounds that mean nothing.1

Lawson’s terse reproach of the peculiar antipodean deployment (given its rural relation to scabby, flyblown sheep) of the late nineteenth-century workplace ‘scab’ is interesting on a number of levels. As Graeme Davison has notably described, the Bulletin and writers such as Lawson were refracting an imagined set of national values or character onto an idyllic Australian bush setting, counterpoising this with the allegedly corrupting effects of modernist city life. Lawson self-consciously sought to distance labour discourse from the ‘slang’ of ‘larrikins and drunken prostitutes of the city press’. Lawson’s claim evinces the recurrent dovetailing of labourite critiques of capitalism and wider modernist anxieties. Such public men were also expressing a masculinist politics: Lawson, much like fellow propagandist, William Lane, was principally concerned with the (supra-class) relations between men.2

Most relevant to my present concerns is Lawson’s denunciation of the appellation ‘scab’. Here Lawson is joined in somewhat strange literary comradeship with the same Humphrey McQueen who labeled him a ‘fascist’: ‘scab is such a filthy word that it should never be applied to another human being’. Lawson’s criticism is odd on another more fundamental level. For Lawson was the poet of choice for bush unions such as the powerful Australian Worker’s Union. He was widely regarded as a labourite very much ‘in touch’ with the bush-worker’s concerns; he even worked as a shearer (of apparently high quality) during the season of 1892-3.3 On this matter however Lawson appears to be out of touch with the direction of political language – what he derides as ‘cant’ – and the rationale for its deployment. For the insult ‘scab’, a seemingly anti-intellectual dialect, had taken on a cultural life of its own; overwhelmingly defensive, yet an established and significant – if now taken-for-granted - feature of the cultural politics of Australian labourism.

The scab overwhelmingly arose in a period of intense social and political unrest, as early 1890s Australia was gripped by a succession of bitter strikes. The presence of large numbers of white strike-breakers in, for instance, the 1890 Maritime Strike and 1891 and 1894 Shearers’ Strikes clearly threatened the ideals and practical aims of the labour movement, and impelled a response from both labourite rank-and-file and intellectuals. Not only were scabs practically targeted during disputations, but they came to form part of the wider cultural project of Australian labourites. Lawson’s ‘silly sound’, like other masculine

1 Henry Lawson, ‘The Cant and Dirt of Labor Literature’, Worker (Sydney), 8 October 1894.
tropes such as ‘mateship’, had rapidly arisen ostensibly to express, but more importantly, formed part of a cultural politics which sought to shape the social and political identities of Australian workers.\textsuperscript{4} Utilising this methodology, in this article I want to contextualise and explore the politico-cultural meaning of the Australian ‘scab’ – treating it as an important counter-identity employed by both workers and labour intellectuals during the 1890s and beyond. As Verity Burgmann has argued, during the 1890s many, if not most laborites, ranged under the motto ‘Socialism in Our Time’. Yet, while socialism in various forms became more popular amongst the labour intelligentsia of the late 1880s, its often abstract and complicated teachings meant less to ordinary Australians. It had to be re-crafted into an accessible language; hence the oft use of reductionist iconography and populist meanings, and explained within an Australian context.

In this light Australia labour intellectuals eclectically relied upon populist socialism such as the utopian fiction of American writer Edward Bellamy’s \textit{Looking Backwards}, Laurence Gronlund’s \textit{Co-operative Commonwealth} and fellow-traveller but single-taxer Henry George. Moreover ‘class’ did not make some triumphal and entirely natural entrance onto the social or political stage during or after the so-called Great Strikes of the early 1890s. Herein the formation of worker identity (and collective trust) depended as much upon the persona of counter-identities like the scab as on positive characters such as mateship.\textsuperscript{5}

Labour discourse then took on the appearance of anti-intellectualism and antipodean derivativeness – anti-intellectual in that it reduces more complex ideas about human actions and social relations to a simplistic, reductionist caricature of individual ill-behaviour - a trend which later writers would claim for the nation writ large. However, as Sean Scalmer notes, labour intellectuals spoke contextualised and consciously reflective languages to appeal towards and shape socio-political (often classed) identities. Such legitimating and reflexive discourses were also essential to the making of what Leach terms a ‘positive’ working class identity. Scabbing and the figure of the scab was an important counterpart to labourist mateship - a populist version of more abstract visions of solidarity, collectivism and mutuality - practically assisting those proselytizing for socialism/labourism. Icons such as ‘the scab’ constituted an allegoric behavioural exemplar. In William Lane’s famous summation of socialism as being ‘mates’ there was a clear converse: ‘The scab, the blackleg, is not a Socialist’.\textsuperscript{6} In the pages of the \textit{Worker} and Lane’s \textit{Hummer} the unionist ‘mate’ was repeatedly celebrated whilst the scab was reviled and ostracised: unionists were defined as much by their mateship, as against the non-mate, the scab.

Despite their prominence in early labour literature scabs have generally escaped sustained academic attention. Scabs have been traditionally seen as faceless men in larger narratives\textsuperscript{7} – drawn upon to evoke the anti-intellectualism and exclusionary, sometimes violent tendencies of the early labour movement. This is not without some justification. In 1909 William Guthrie Spence’s \textit{Australia’s Awakening} illustrated the way in which scabs were ‘converted’ by unionists (this of course dovetailed with the practice of ‘scabby’ sheep treated by being ‘dipped’):

> Some of the Unionists were great believers in immersion as a cure for “scab.” One experienced organizer said he had only known one case which required more than one dip … He tried moral suasion without avail, and finally he dropped the “scab” from the bridge into the cold water. The poor fellow came out still loyal to his desire to oblige the employer, so he was again pushed in. He came out the second time still a hardened sinner, and after some further parley was again dipped under the cold water. He repented this time, and came out a convert to Unionism and a monument to the efficacy of cold water in judicious quantities properly applied.\textsuperscript{8}

In the opinion of the editors of the 1973 collection, \textit{Strikes}, ‘it is a pity that the strike-breakers have remained so anonymous in our articles’. This historiographical note has not however been pursued, despite the existence of parallel works including Jacqueline Dickenson’s comparative study of British and Australian radical languages of betrayal, ‘Chasing the Rat’. In his chapter in the celebratory ALP history \textit{True Believers} John Iremonger suggestively argued that the political ‘Rat’ was the ‘first cousin’ of the ‘Scab’. Perhaps most specifically Bruce Scates, in his consideration of the 1890 Maritime Strike, has shown how the ‘scab’ was proclaimed through rituals of manhood which both subordinated and excluded. However we are generally bereft of a substantial study which places the scab in the context of the labour movement’s wider discourses and contextual specificities. Given the context of labour’s

\textsuperscript{4} Nick Dyrenfurth, ‘Rethinking Labor Tradition: Synthesising Discourse and Experience’, \textit{Labour History}, May 2006, pp. 177-200 and Dyrenfurth and Quartly, ‘Fat vs. the People’.

\textsuperscript{5} Verity Burgmann, \textit{In Our Time: Socialism and the Rise of Labor 1885-1905}, Sydney, 1985, p. 95; Dyrenfurth and Quartly, ‘Fat vs. the People’.


disastrous defeats during the 1890s strikes and erratic parliamentary achievements, the discourse of scabbing was an important part of the cultural politics of labourism. As should be clear, I am not interested in rescuing the faceless scab from what Thompson famously described as the ‘enormous condescension of posterity’; it is precisely the anonymity and derogatory nature of this counter-identity which stirs my historiographical interest. For the scab must be placed and understood in the context of labour’s counter-hegemonic practices: the struggle to ‘build up’ the industrial and political unity of the working class.9

‘The Scab’: Context, Purpose, Effect

The term ‘scab’, while ostensibly Australian slang, was actually borrowed from popular English and American sources. In pre-industrial sixteenth-century England, a scab was a populist term of abuse for a despicable or filthy person, derived from medical terminology, but reworked into an expression of moral or spiritual malady. The radical and class connotations of the scab seem to have appeared in the late eighteenth-century, arising as we might expect with processes of early industrialisation. The modern scab functioned as the immoral (and individuated) cause of the increasing disputation between capital and labour. As the editorial of Bonner & Middleton’s Bristol Journal proclaimed after the settling of a dispute in 1777: ‘To the Public … We have the Pleasure to inform them, that Matters have been amicably settled … The Conflict would not have been so sharp had there not been so many dirty scabs: no Doubt but timely Notice will be taken of them …’ An explicitly working-class usage drew upon its popular and moral meanings. By 1806 the scab had taken on its conventional meaning of strikebreaker, which dovetailed with hostility to those persons who refused to join a trade union. Its most simple industrial meaning and purpose was to ostracise the (male) worker who would perform, or employ another to perform, the job of a striking worker: inclusion by the threat of exclusion. Across the Anglo world, the scab was taken to mean the same thing as the perhaps more sanitised ‘blackleg’. The public ostracising of the ‘dirty’ scab conflated both physical and mental states of unfitness, with an underlying sense of unmanliness. The industrial and class disloyalty of the scab overtook, but never fully replaced such (moral and masculinist) meanings. An unidentified trade unionist asked in 1792: ‘What is a scab? He is to his trade what a traitor is to his country… He first sells the journeymen, and is himself afterwards sold in his turn by the masters, till at last he is despised by both and deserted by all’. The scab played a somewhat ironic ‘positive’ role within intellectual and worker affirmations of masculine pride, self worth and fraternal solidarity. American workers declared during the 1888 Burlington strike that they would never have ‘scabbed a day in their lives’. Others publicly declared ‘I won’t scab any man’s job’.10 Such discourses were increasingly loaded with an explicitly classed language of masculinity. The American author, Jack London, evoked several, particularly biblical meanings in his famous 1903 essay ‘The scab’:

After God had finished a rattlesnake, the toad, and the vampire, He had some awful substance left with which He made a scab … The scab sells his birthright, his country, his wife, his children, and his fellow man for an unfulfilled promise from his employer … a scab is a traitor to his God, to his country, to his family, and to his class.11

Not unsurprisingly an Australian usage emerged during the first flushes of intense industrial unrest: scab idiom first appeared during the late 1880s, but was most fully developed during the 1890s. The Queensland shearsers drew on its sense as a disease found in sheep, to disparage strike-breakers employed by the pastoralists during the Shearers’ strikes. According to one Hummer scribe in 1891, a scab was ‘the strongest and worst-smelling breed of skunks I ever scented’. The location of scab in the language of the essentially industrial British and American unions sits interestingly alongside the very rural connotations of scabby Australian sheep. It is a reminder that New Unionism in Australia had a much larger rural component (and a more significant bush iconography) than elsewhere. Of course there quickly emerged multiple meanings – those who left the early Australian Labor Party were somewhat later also termed scabs (or more commonly ‘rats’). Scabs, it was argued, came from established line of traitors and villains. The Shearers’ Record thought ‘What the working men have to contend against are the Judases in their own ranks, those scabs and blacklegs whose contemptible spirits can allow them to step in undersell their fellow labourers’.12


12 ‘Scabs’, in Graeme Davison, John Hirst and Stuart Macintyre (eds), Oxford companion to Australian history,
The emergence of the scab, I suggest, had other racially derived and perhaps socio-psychological bases. Worker identity could not exist autonomously of a defined Other; ostensibly lacking in respectability and manly honour. Previous to the 1890s a race based consciousness of workers subordinated the Chinese or Asiatic (mainly Kanaka) Other. Such workers were accused of undermining the racial and sexual solidarity of white women as well as undercutting white men’s wages. Yet, owing to the cross-class movement against Chinese immigration, which resulted in their practical exclusion, the Chinese, while still referred to and feared, were not practically engaged in the struggles of the 1890s. During the 1891 strike the Queensland pastoralists association specifically issued a statement calling on its members not to employ them. Chinese immigration was virtually eliminated by the State before the White Australia policy of 1901. Between 1888 and 1901, Australia’s Chinese population fell from about 50 000 to about 32 000. The treacherous white scab surfaced, in many respects, to fill this race void: as many labourites came to realise that industrial disputation would continue beyond the racial-industrial threat of the Chinese. I am not suggesting that worker’s racism somehow disappeared or was neatly replaced by an antagonism to the scab. As Banjo Paterson’s 1892 poem ‘A Bushman’s Song’ describes:

I asked a cove for shearin’ once along the Marthaguy:
“We shear non-union here,” says he. “I call it scab,” says I.
I looked along the shearin’ floor before I turned to go -
There were eight or ten dashed Chinamen a-shearin’ in a row.

Nevertheless, constructions of white mateship and wider worker identity were just that: defined not as much by the mateship of the unionists as by the invocation of the Other, or constitutive (and logically pejorative) counter-identity or enemy. Congruent with this logic the vehemence directed at scabs itself may be understood as projecting or perhaps mediating male worker’s own fears of being industrially marginalised and degraded by capitalism. Racialist worker consciousness intersected with gender anxieties.

The scab had an unmistakably gendered meaning and women were rarely termed scabs. The blackleg remained - the Australian Workman forcefully titled its 25 September 1890 editorial ‘Blacklegs – Beware!’ – but he possessed none of the scab’s rhetorical cruelty. Using the scab was an attempt to use dominant and emotive symbols of masculine consciousness. If working men did not typically understand their identity as class based (solidarity) then such supra-class meanings could, it was hoped, be drawn upon for the labour cause. The label of unmanliness it seems was itself utilised to induce ‘manly’ union and class loyalty. Spence, in his celebratory history of New Unionism thought the scab (for a man), ‘the lowest term of reproach’. Beyond such rhetoric, being a ‘scab’ had practical effects and penalties. Scabs were named in some union journals. And as Spence suggested in his allusions to the sanctity of bush life, ‘experience has taught that the man who sells himself to the employer at a time of strike is a man of weak character if not worse. At many a country ball the girls have refused to dance with them, the barmaids have refused them a drink, and the waitresses a meal’. In a similar vein unionist George Hadlow scorned the manhood of scabs imported from Adelaide during the 1891 Shearers’ strike: ‘they will be taught that although they

The scab also served to define collective decency. As the early 1890s strikes gripped Australia, both employers and unionists appealed to conceptions of the collective good, most often grounded in the expression of individual masculine respectability. Whilst employers and conservative social commentators were (re)developing a theory of moral virtue based on individual deference to the law (and more often than not Protestantism), labourites were enunciating a similar version, though based squarely on the individual’s relations to the collectivity. To be collectively minded was, in the minds of leading labourites, itself an act of good individual moral character. Looking back on this period, Spence juxtaposed the union and non-union man:

In my thirty years’ experience and association with many thousands of men I have never known an anti-unionist who was any good. If I was an employer I would not have him near my workshop. The non-unionist—the “scab”—is only a trifle better ... Unionism has


13 Hearn, ‘Mates and Strangers’, p. 29
16 Spence, Australia’s Awakening; Hearn, ‘Mates and Strangers’, p. 21; Shearer’s and General Labourer’s Record, 15 July 1891.
a markedly beneficial effect on character. It inculcates brotherhood. It gives the right to one member of the union to speak to another if he thinks that he is doing or contemplating a wrong act. The effect of discipline is seen at its best, and its effect is to make men better citizens, better husbands, and better fathers.\textsuperscript{17}

Scabbing, then, was a practical counter-hegemonic discourse of masculinity positioned against employer and press terminology of ‘free’ and ‘independent’ labourers. (Such references of course were terms used to describe earlier convict servants.) Shipowners during the 1890 Maritime Strike placed a ban on references to blacklegs and scabs in all communications with unions. This formed part of a wider conservative reaction to the new-found and allegedly illegitimate claims of labour. Conservative newspapers were increasingly speaking of an upturned false consciousness, whereby in the ‘happy Australian colonies our working classes – the most fortunate, the best paid, and the most prosperous body of workers in the world [are being] summoned by their leaders to take part in a ruinous war against society …’ But this modernist colonial collectivity was, by the 1890s, a far more abstract, uncertain and thus malleable subject. In this context the shadowy and faceless figure of the scab might be seen as symbolic of the up-rooting of ordinary people’s lives and the removal of many of the certainties of face-to-face community. Anxieties of modernity were often played out or mediated in accusations of the scab’s immoral or degraded behaviour. Above all the scab’s actions were immoral, particularly when the State began to act ‘legally’ (or illegally) on behalf of the employers during strikes. The \textit{Australian Workman} considered, “For a blackleg to take a striker’s billet is moral robbery even though it may be legally honest … And as moral laws should override all laws that are not moral strikers are quite justified in using physical as well as moral strength in preventing men from stealing their billets.”\textsuperscript{18}

Contrarily male, often racialised honour lay at the heart of labourite counter-discourse, as Spence infamously boasted: ‘Unionists have starved rather than accept work under other conditions … [they] have gone without for a year – remaining penniless, but independent, and proud that they had not degraded themselves … Rough and unpolished many of them may be; but manly, true and white’. Following such logic if capitalism did, indeed, degrade the white male wage-earner, in the idiom of writers such as Spence, a residual ‘manly’ honour could be salvaged. In 1891 the Manifesto of the Queensland Shearers’ Union summed up this defensive, consolatory masculinist logic as the employers’ industrial strength threatened to practically shatter the solidarity of the unionists:

\begin{quote}
Let us fight this fight in Queensland so that we shall never look back to it with regret. Let us so act that whatever is said afterwards it will at least be said that Queensland unionists were men … If you blackleg, the very companies that engage you will in their hearts despise you; they will treat you like dogs and kick you out, in spite of all their promises, when they have used you. No man respects a blackleg, not even himself.\footnote{19}
\end{quote}

Workers responded boisterously to such imagery in acts both material and rhetorical. When the steamer \textit{Rodney} attempted to bring scabs ashore during the 1891 Shearer’s Strike, unionists commandeered the boat and marched the scabs to a nearby camp. Three years later, when the \textit{Rodney} attempted the same, it was infamously burnt to the ground. In 1900, the unionist J. Byrne wrote to the \textit{Worker} describing how ‘Last week two of the famous Barratta scabs came over to start but the men refused to be classed with such creatures …’ In almost all of its representations the scab appears dichotomously to the positive identity given to union workers or ‘mates’, as William Lane’s earlier summation of socialism evinced. When ‘Old Hank’ penned ‘An Essay on Scabs’ for the \textit{Hummer} in 1892, he set the degraded scab against the ‘all-round man’:

\begin{quote}
Scabs are also known as “rats”, “blacklegs”, “white-wings” and other names …. They are all the same breed though … descend[ed] from Meanness, by Ignorance out of Funk, Money-Grubb[ing], by Selfishness out of Hypocrite. Their employers don’t think much of them, but they have lately renamed them “free” labourers, just to amuse them and insult the Unionists … Any decent Unionist who calls a scab a “free” labourer ought to get six months for perjury … if you want an all-round man, he is no more fit for use than a wax-work image would be for a gas-stoker.\footnote{20}
\end{quote}

In contrast to such acts of manly degradation was placed the language of classed (and racially) derived masculine independence. This individuated subjectivity was however constructed within a collective

\textsuperscript{17} Spence, \textit{Australia’s Awakening}.  
\textsuperscript{18} Stuart Svensen, \textit{The shearer’s war: the story of the 1891 shearer’s strike}, St Lucia, 1989, pp. 84, 114; \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 23 March 1891; \textit{Australian Workman}, 15 November 1890.  
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Worker}, 20 October 1900; \textit{Hummer}, c.1892.
identity and purpose. As the Silver Age posited in regards to the 1892 Broken Hill Strikers, ‘… the unionists would be less than men, they would be unworthy of the race from which the majority of our workers have sprung, if they tamely submitted to allow the work of years to be destroyed, if they remained supine while at one fell swoop all the advantages so dearly won were to be confiscated’.21 Thus the typical bush worker was being constructed in new contingent terms, to counter the popular stereotypes of capitalist press and employers.

In labourite propaganda it was the scabs and non-unionists who were intemperate boozers, larrikins and unfit ruffians. As Bongiorno comments: ‘In the culture of colonial unionism, [often] the ideal man was not the nomadic bushman of the Australian Legend, but the respectable breadwinner who showed self-restraint in the interests of his family and his own future prospects’. Scabs and scabbing then were a part of a resurgent trope of ‘moral economy’, which was at once critiquing and being replaced by the discourse and reality of political economy during the late nineteenth-century. If workers were not being portrayed as ‘mates’, then ‘staunch’ ‘men’ or ‘unionists’ were equally effective. According to Spence ‘the great majority of the ‘scabs’ were notorious criminals, well known to the police. Many of them were bullies and larrikins who in dark city lanes “dealt it out,” as they termed it, to weak old men’. On the other hand, claimed Spence, ‘good staunch men had no chance whatever of work, and were therefore penniless. They saw the work taken from them by the scum of society from the cities’. In part these rhetorical movements also represented the growing strength of temperance advocates such as William Lane within the labour movement. In the Worker Lane urged[d] unionists to debar all who in any way drink to excess from positions of trust and responsibility.”22 A regular correspondent to the Hummer, ‘Sewing Girl’ illustrated the debilitating and degrading class effects of drink upon individual workers and the labour cause in general. Intemperance, it seems, lead to scabbing:

I suppose a Capitalist or squatter consumes as much drink in a month as a working man would in the whole twelve. But then the monied man has the means of counteracting the effects of the drink poison … There is no excuse for a worker drinking … the drink curse is an evil and an obstruction to the Cause … an habitual drunkard, becomes degraded … sink[ing] to a cursing, crawling hound. This is the opportunity for the greedy employer, who lowers that man’s wages, and from a free and independent worker the unfortunate drunkard falls to a detestable blackleg and crawling cur.23

As ‘Sewing Girl’s’ claim examples, the scab was widely constructed and accepted as the opposite of the manly, proud and independent worker imagined as the prototype unionist. The exclusionary and implicitly violent language of scabbing was not however universally accepted, as Lawson’s earlier counsel suggests. Indeed his intervention prompted a series of debates in the Worker which reflected critically upon the counter-intuitive nature of abusing scabs. More than alienating non-unionists it was likely, in the words of ‘Coyal’ ‘to lead people who were friendly inclined to think the toilers and moilers a very bad lot … We want neither cant, rant, nor snivel, both in speech and action’. Despite such debates neither workers nor leaders challenged the dominant labourite discursive tactic of inclusion by threat of exclusion; identity constructed by an antagonism to the pejorative other. Even the socialist publication the People and the Collectivist devoted its pages to essays such as ‘The Making of Scabs’ that, though focusing on ‘economic causes’, focused primarily on the scab’s unmanliness and subsequent degradation.24 Appealing to men’s more familiar social identity, the language of scabbing had rapidly acquired its own legitimacy within the discourse of labourism. The internalized scab enemy came to constitute a powerful counter identity, but also represented the increasing defensiveness of labour rhetoric in the light of the heavy defeats it experienced in the major strikes.

It is not so much that the scab was the ‘wrong’ enemy per se, but that greater villains abounded. Most obviously the scab was a reductionist idea that obscured a more rigorous analysis of capitalist society and worker exploitation. For instance an 1896 shearing dispute in NSW was explained to Tasmanian readers as ‘Blacklegs versus Shearers: Success to the Union’. Herein lies the great (though not entirely unexpected) contradiction at the heart of labour’s demonic iconising of the scab - though the boundaries of scabbing were never entirely clear. The scab is at once all-powerful in undermining the solidarity of the union, though he is simultaneously tainted by weakness of self, unmanliness and utter corruption by the capitalist. An 1890 Worker editorial is a classic example:

---

Unorganised labour broke the strike, and not only unorganised labour but unskilled labour. Men who in ordinary times would have been considered unfit by shipowners, unions and shipping office, have manned the companies' fleets and been winked at by the law; raw lads have worked on the wharves and drunken boozers have been at a premium; there has been nobody whom Capitalism would not have used in its determination to break the Organisation of Labour.25

Though the Worker identified the attacks of ‘capitalism’ upon ‘labour’, such analysis was arguably drowned out by the allusions to scab (and more significantly ‘unskilled’) labour. Likewise scabs regularly appeared as enemies in a wider populist conspiracy which laborites were narrating. The poem ‘How We Beat the PU’ (Pastoralists Union), written by ‘the Tug’, neatly expresses this theory in regards the conspiratorial ‘Money Power’ of the banks:

So shoulder to shoulder, and firmer and bolder,
As each day made bolder our fight with the banks.
We gained our sheds surely — the ‘scabs’ shaped out poorly,
And ‘White Wings’ were daily won into our ranks.

This pre-occupation with the individual depravity of the scab had unfortunate effects. It was the scab, in conjunction with enemies such as the greedy capitalist Fat Man, rather than an economic system which cut down the workers’ wages and solidarity. It was rare, but probably more accurate for writers such as ‘Spartacus’ in his ‘Beware Fat Man’ to describe how ‘The fat man sits on the rail rejoicing when he sees scabs and unionists in the field fighting for existence. He laughs loudly when they maltreat each other. But take care, my stout gentleman, least a gleam of intelligence reveals your hateful form in its true shape …’.26

Despite these caveats the scab emerged in a very real historical context; often enough as the counterpart to discourses of mateship. Such masculinist tropes must be understood as part of the cultural politics of unions and workers, which sought, in Mark Hearn’s words, to ‘construct an agreed social order in the context of hard economic times, and governments and employers who refused to recognise their legitimate grievances’. As the counterweight to mateship the scab compelled uniformity – a defensive subjectivity which fostered an inward looking culture of unionism. When Spence announced that ‘Unionism came to the Australian bushman as a religion … bringing salvation from years of tyranny. It had in it that feeling of mateship which he understood already, and which always characterised the action of one “white man” to another’, he likewise suggested ‘Unionism extended the idea, so a man’s character was gauged by whether he stood true to Union rules or “scabbed” it on his fellows. The man who never went back on the Union is honoured to-day as no other is honoured or respected. The man who fell once may be forgiven, but he is not fully trusted’.27 If mateship was a vision of collective inclusion, trust and brotherhood, scabbing was a salutary lesson and dystopic warning of manly degradation and exclusion.

Importantly, Labor was conscious of transporting such rhetoric and industrial emotion into the political arena. The political act of ‘ratting’ and the cultural importation of the caucus pledge of solidarity is perhaps the most striking example, bound up within the political labour movement’s invention of a tradition of electoral trust and solidarity. For instance in 1890, when the Labour Electoral League appealed to the electors of West Sydney it conflated social and political identity in speaking of ‘us and them’: ‘We … ask you to choose between us and the other candidates, who are, to a man, either directly or directly representatives of the Employers’ Union … Our cause is yours. Be true to us and you must be true to yourselves.’28 That Labor survived the industrial and political crises of the 1890s is in many ways a testament to the broad culture of labourism – of which the discourse of scabbing was an important, if problematic element. The scab formed part of a broader cultural project which sought to appeals towards, mobilize and ultimately politicise the Australian working class. In the context of the 1890s strikes the unity of the nascent working class, or more accurately, ‘the People’ was held together through various discourses; some positive, like mateship, others like its counterpart the scab, a negativist construction or warning of social exclusion. Indeed the scab is far more prominent in the writings of 1890s labourites than ideals such as mateship – overwhelmingly reflecting the defensive nature of the movement during this decade. Whilst the scab possessed various obfuscatory and reductionist tendencies, its very prominence in labourite language illustrates the complex tools by which labour intellectuals sought to explain and critique the turbulent Australian society of the 1890s.

25 Clipper, 10 October 1896; Worker, 1 November 1890.
26 Cited in Hearn, ‘Mates and Strangers’, p. 22; Worker, c1894.
27 Hearn, ‘Mates and Strangers’, p. 19; Spence, Australia’s Awakening.
Aristocrats of labour or pioneers of unionism? Traditions of printing unionism in New Zealand: 1860-1913

Peter Franks

This paper discusses some of the conflicting traditions of trade unionism among printers in New Zealand. The men who founded the printing unions in New Zealand in the 1860s and 1870s brought with them traditions of elitism, job organisation, mutual self help and pride in their craft that had developed over centuries in Britain. They established craft unions that stood aloof from NZ's major industrial disputes and excluded women and untrained boys from the trade. Yet these aristocrats of labour were also pioneers of unionism in New Zealand, helping to establish unions in several industries. They were successful in dealing with major technological change in the early 1900s and established strong unions based on organisation at the workplace that outlived the arbitration system.

Traditions of the craft

‘Gentlemen were called round the stone by the Father’. This was how the Clerk of the Compositors Chapel of the Government Printing Office in Wellington reported special meetings of the chapel, which were held in the workplace around the correcting stone.1 The chapel was formed on 10 June 1865 and its minutes and correspondence are the earliest records of trade unionism in the New Zealand printing industry. The immigrant workers who formed the first printers’ unions in New Zealand brought with them from Britain traditions of their craft that dated back some four hundred years. They also brought a form of trade unionism that was deeply rooted in those traditions.

There were five main characteristics of trade unionism in the nineteenth century British printing industry. First, the unions were based on the chapels, associations of journeymen printers in the workplace which came into existence in the late fifteenth century. Second, union membership was confined to journeymen, workers who had successfully completed a seven years’ apprenticeship at their craft. Third, while the unions were established to bargain collectively with their employers, one of their main concerns was to protect members’ livelihoods by controlling entry to the craft. Minimising or eliminating competition from unskilled or semi-skilled labour was often more important than negotiating wages and conditions. Fourth, although the early history of the British unions includes a number of attempts by the state and employers to destroy them, the unions always sought good relations with employers.2 Fifth, the unions played an important welfare role by paying modest benefits to members who were in distress, sick or out of work. These benefits had their origins in the tramping system under which unemployed craftsmen were sent off to tramp the country looking for work.3

The early unions were exclusive, conservative and strongly independent. In the mid nineteenth century, union members in Britain made up no more than one-fifth or one-sixth of the workers in every trade4 and were the aristocrats of labour, although they suffered wage cuts, bad conditions and unemployment especially during trade depressions.5 They consciously saw themselves as an elite group. Gary Marks observes in a comparative study of printing unions in Germany, Britain and the United States that the term ‘aristocracy of labour’, used with derision by socialists like Lenin, ‘was actually a self-designation of printers themselves and crops up in their literature as early as the 1840s.’6

Rats and tramps

The first New Zealand printers’ unions were formed in the 1860s but were short lived. They were revived in the early 1870s and a NZ Typographical Association was formed in 1881.7 The records of the Government Printing Office Chapel give an insight into the early years of unionism in the trade. Membership of the chapel was restricted to journeymen printers; the oldest apprentice could also be admitted by a two-thirds vote. Subscriptions were one shilling a month and new members paid an entrance fee of 2s 6d. Attendance at meetings was compulsory. There were fines for non-attendance, bad work practices,

---

7 Peter Franks, op. cit., pp. 25-32.
swearing, obscenity, quarrelling and fighting.\textsuperscript{8} Chapel members were not just concerned about their own conditions. In October 1866 they worked closely with the chapel of the Wellington Independent during a dispute between workers and management at the New Zealand Advertiser. They used three tactics which had long been used by British printing unions during industrial conflicts. First, the Advertiser was declared an ‘unfair’ office and was ‘closed’ to the trade. This meant that journeymen were not allowed to work there until the office was declared ‘open’. Second, workers who had gone on strike at the Advertiser were given money (on condition that they did not return for six months) so they could look for jobs outside Wellington. Third, a circular was ‘issued by the trade of Wellington’ listing the ‘rats’ who had worked at the Advertiser during the strike.\textsuperscript{9}

This evidence that the Government Printing Office chapel assisted men to seek work elsewhere is one indication that there was a tramping system among New Zealand printers in the nineteenth century. In his reminiscences, published in early 1960s, Eric Wakelin, a long-time printing union member, recalled that itinerant compositors had worked for his father who ran a printing office in Blenheim in the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{10} Advertising the names of ‘rats’ throughout New Zealand and Australia was a very effective weapon. In June 1871, when the owner of the West Coast Times sacked some of his workers and replaced them with boys, the 12 local printers voted to close the paper ‘to all fair journeymen printers’ and to circularise the trade with the names of five men who had ‘accepted and got to work with boy-labour …’ This was done through the newly-established Australasian Typographical Journal, based in Melbourne.\textsuperscript{11}

The ‘great evil’ of boy labour

The typographical unions were not militant. Although they always sought good relations with employers, they were not passive. From the 1870s to the 1890s the typographical unions fought a number of battles in defence of union conditions. These were not only against wage cuts but also against the employment of large numbers of unskilled boys in the printing industry. The most notable battle was the Otago Daily Times strike in 1886 which lasted for several months before the union had to admit defeat.\textsuperscript{12}

In their fight against unemployment, the typographical unions placed the greatest emphasis on the ‘great evil’ of boy labour.\textsuperscript{13} An analysis of boy labour in the printing industry in the late nineteenth century by Michael Biggs challenges historians who have argued that the employment of ‘exploited’ boys and girls disadvantaged men in the labour market.\textsuperscript{14} He found no evidence that boy labour led to reduced wages for men and argued that the real problem for the typographical unions was that the employment of boys threatened their bargaining power.\textsuperscript{15} In his evidence before the Royal Commission on Sweating in 1890, William McGirr, president of the Wellington typographical society, hinted that unemployment among printers could be solved if all boys were dismissed. Biggs comments: ‘When the Chairman asked “what would be done with those boys and girls if men only were employed”, McGirr did not reply. In fact the Society had no sympathy at all for boys.’\textsuperscript{16}

Excluding women from the trade

The typographical union’s denunciations of boy labour were often coupled with complaints about the employment of girls as compositors. The two problems were hardly on the same scale. There were only a handful of women compositors. Most were employed by the Auckland Evening Star; the union claimed it employed 40 to 50 girls.\textsuperscript{17} The typographical unions took little direct action against the employment of women until 1890, when the issue was at the heart of a major dispute between the Canterbury Typographical Association and Whitcombe & Tombs, a leading printing firm and stationery manufacturer in Christchurch.

The dispute began in late 1889 when the union asked the firm to agree to its rule limiting the proportion of boys to men. George Whitcombe, the managing director, refused to recognise the typographical union and the newly-formed bookbinders’ society and told his journeymen they could either leave their unions or leave their jobs.\textsuperscript{18} The unions used the hearings of the Sweating Commission in 1890, and the help of

\textsuperscript{8} Government Printing Office Chapel Minute Book 1865-1868, BR.
\textsuperscript{9} Chapel Minutes, 18 October and 3 November 1866 and 29 January, 2 March, 1 June and 8 July 1867, BR.
\textsuperscript{10} Imprint, November/December 1962.
\textsuperscript{11} Australasian Typographical Journal, Vol. 1, No. 9, July 1871, Vol. 1, No. 10, August 1871.
\textsuperscript{12} Franks, op. cit., pp. 33-37.
\textsuperscript{13} Typo, 30 August 1890.
\textsuperscript{14} Michael Biggs, The Wellington Typographical Society and Boy Labour in the late 1880s, unpublished essay, History Department, Victoria University of Wellington, n.d.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 9.
\textsuperscript{16} Biggs, op. cit., p. 5.
\textsuperscript{17} Minutes of the Wellington Branch, NZ Typographical Association, 21 September 1889, Report of the Sweating Commission, Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives (AJHR), H-5, 1890, p. 62.
\textsuperscript{18} Report of the Sweating Commission, op. cit., p. 42, p. 44 and p. 46.
the Canterbury trades and labour council, to put pressure on the firm.\textsuperscript{19} This dispute coincided with an upsurge of trade unionism in New Zealand in the late 1880s and the formation, by seamen, watersiders and miners, of the Maritime Council of New Zealand.\textsuperscript{20} After Whitcombe & Tombs continued to resist pressure to employ members of the typographical union, the Maritime Council declared a general boycott of the firm’s publications and goods.\textsuperscript{21}

Whitcombe & Tombs denied that it was anti-union; ‘the real grievance is our employment of half-a-dozen women … we are quite willing to pay in the future as we have in the past, a fair wage for a fair day’s work, be it to man, woman, girl, or boy, and not less than union scale.’\textsuperscript{22} The firm’s claims that it paid equal rates were disingenuous. In his evidence to the Sweating Commission, George Whitcombe said the firm had employed ‘a large number of boys and girls in order to successfully compete with foreign labour …’\textsuperscript{23} Although the boycott failed to make the firm back down, the Canterbury, Otago and Wellington typographical unions all recorded their ‘heartly thanks’ for the Maritime Council’s leadership. However, as Michael Biggs says of the Wellington union, ‘the printers’ every move towards unity over the past three years had been prompted by the opportunity to realise their old aim: the exclusion of girls and the restriction of boys.’\textsuperscript{24}

After the election of the Liberal Government in 1890, the typographical unions looked for political support to stop women becoming printers. They tried, with limited success, to get a clause included in the Factories Act restricting the employment of women as compositors. In a petition to Parliament, women compositors at the Auckland Star pointed out that some of them had worked at the trade for 15 years and that if the bill was passed, ‘we shall be cruelly deprived of our means of subsistence and prevented from following a light and healthy business which is in every respect suitable for women.’\textsuperscript{25}

The arbitration system proved to be a much more effective weapon against female labour. In 1900 the Auckland typographical union went to the Arbitration Court with a claim for £2 15s a week for all qualified compositors, men and women. Women were employed in several Auckland printing offices, including two newspapers, the NZ Observer and Free Lance and the Sporting Review. The Observer protested that the union’s claim would ‘fix an impossible wage for female labour, knowing well that so sure as this wage was fixed the females in the trade would be turned out of their employment.’\textsuperscript{26} The nine women compositors at the Observer and the two at the Sporting Review formed the Auckland Female Type-setters Union.\textsuperscript{27} The court accepted the typographical union’s argument that male and female compositors should be paid the same but wrote into the award an exception for members of the Auckland Female Type-setters Union (who were named in the second schedule to the award). They could be employed ‘at solid type-setting only’ at £1 10s a week for a journeywoman.\textsuperscript{28} In 1901, 120 women were employed as compositors, 15% of the total. Ten years later their numbers had fallen to 80 or 7% of compositors.\textsuperscript{29} When it went out of existence in 1910, the Auckland Female Type-setters Union had only four members.\textsuperscript{30} Until the late 1950s, there were scarcely any women employed to set type.\textsuperscript{31}

\textbf{The 1890 Maritime Strike}

The typographical unions’ willingness to put the interests of the labour movement ahead of their craft interests was tested in the 1890 Maritime Strike, the first major confrontation between unions and employers in Australia and New Zealand. Four days after the Maritime Council called a general strike, a special meeting of the Wellington typographical union was held, attended by nearly 100 members. It voted to levy members 2s 6d a week in support of the strikers and cheers were given for the Maritime Council.\textsuperscript{32}

Two days later another special meeting of the union was held, with nearly every member present. The

\textsuperscript{19} Typo, 26 April 1890.
\textsuperscript{21} Typo, 31 May 1890, 26 July 1890, 30 August 1890.
\textsuperscript{22} Typo, 30 August 1890.
\textsuperscript{23} Report of the Sweating Commission, op. cit., p. 46.
\textsuperscript{25} Petition to the Honourable Speaker and members of the House of Representatives in Parliament assembled, August 1890, 94-106-42/07, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.
\textsuperscript{26} NZ Observer and Free Lance, 16 June 1900.
\textsuperscript{27} The Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act 1900, Return showing the number of members in each industrial union registered under, AJHR H-11A, 1900. NZ Observer and Free Lance, 28 April 1900.
\textsuperscript{28} Department of Labour, Awards, Recommendations, Agreements, etc. made under the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act (Books of Awards, hereafter BA), Volume 1 (1894-1900), p. 68.
\textsuperscript{29} Results of a Census of the Colony of New Zealand taken for the night of 1\textsuperscript{st} April 1896, Government Printer, Wellington, 1897. Results of a Census of the Colony of New Zealand taken for the night of 31\textsuperscript{st} March 1901, Government Printer, Wellington, 1902.
\textsuperscript{31} Franks, op. cit., pp. 60, 148-150.
\textsuperscript{32} Minutes of the Wellington Branch, NZ Typographical Association, 30 August 1890, BR.
issue was the Wellington Trades and Labour Council’s decision that its affiliates should refuse to work with or assist the Union Company. The typographical union had been asked to refuse to set up Union Company advertisements. However the meeting unanimously resolved ‘… it is not desirable that we should interfere with the newspaper proprietors of Wellington in the matter of advertising and printing.’ Debate about the strike raged within the union over the next three months. The conservative faction won a narrow majority in favour of stopping the strike levy, although after the strike ended the union voted for a further levy to help workers who had lost their jobs.34

Despite its vacillation, the Wellington typographical union contributed £121 to the Wellington strike fund, one-fifth of the total and more than any other union in the city. The Canterbury, Auckland and Otago typographical unions also levied their members and contributed similar amounts.35 The Wellington debates over the Maritime Strike illustrated the typographical unions’ conservatism and unwillingness to jeopardise their craft interests. As Michael Biggs points out, boycotting Union Company advertisements would have resulted in a strike on the three Wellington daily papers. These papers all accepted the union’s rules and the leading daily, the Evening Post had long worked in harmony with the union.36

Pioneers of unionism

The election of the Liberal Government in 1890 was an important turning point for the labour movement in New Zealand. The new government’s labour legislation, particularly the introduction of the conciliation and arbitration system, provided a platform for the revival of unionism. Many of the new unions of 1889-1890 had collapsed after the defeat of the Maritime Strike.37 Before the arbitration system, most unions struggled for survival; well established unions like the typographers were in the minority. Despite the conservatism of the typographical unions, a number of their leaders were prominent in unionising the unorganised, establishing trades and labour councils and working for a workers’ party independent of the Liberals. These men were not full-time officials; they combined their many union activities with full-time jobs as printers.

Ebenezer Sandford was president of the Canterbury trades and labour council. He became one of the first ‘Labour’ members of parliament when he was elected as one of the MPs for Christchurch City in a by-election in 1891 as a supporter of the Liberal Government.38 Andrew Walker was a delegate to the first NZ Trades and Labour Congress in 1885 and was president of the Otago trades and labour council. He was later Labour MP for Dunedin North. William Jennings (Auckland) and John Rigg (Wellington) were presidents of both their local trades councils and tailoresses unions. The Liberal government appointed them to the Legislative Council.39

David Fisher was a central figure in the upsurge of unionism in 1889-1890. As president of the Wellington trades and labour council, he helped establish a number of unions, including wharf labourers, carriers, tailoresses and woolen mills workers, and he was a member of the Sweating Commission.40 In the early twentieth century, Tom Paul, the president of the Otago Typographical Union, was one of the driving forces in the movement to form an independent Labour Party. He was president of the Otago trades and labour council and of several unions, including the tailoresses. An able journalist, he was one of NZ’s first labour historians.41 The Liberals also appointed him to the Legislative Council. He played a central role in the formation of the NZ Labour Party in 1916.

The threat of machines

From the time Gutenberg invented movable type in the fifteenth century, typesetting had been done by hand. After several failures by other inventors, Ottmar Mergenthaler, an American, succeeded in inventing mechanised typesetting. His Linotype machine was first used by the New York Tribune in 1886 and was introduced to Britain three years later.42

The New Zealand printing unions knew well in advance that linotypes were coming. They also knew

---

33 Ibid., 1 September 1890.
34 Ibid., 18 November 1890.
38 G. H. Schofield, A Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1940, Volume 1, p. 274.
40 DNZB, op. cit., pp. 145-146.
that the implications were grim. The issue was first discussed at a national conference in 1894 and in 1895 there were reports of job losses in Australia. The unions obtained information from printing unions in Britain and the United States, including the agreements that were negotiated for linotype operators. The first linotypes arrived in newspaper offices in Auckland, Christchurch and Dunedin in late 1897. The unions met nationally and drew up a wage scale for linotypes. However, the first negotiated agreement – between the local newspapers and the Christchurch union – was well below the union scale and there were large job losses. In October 1898 there was a national conference between the unions and most newspaper proprietors to negotiate wages and conditions. No agreement was reached but shortly afterwards, a 42-hour week and a weekly wage of £3 was negotiated in Christchurch and adopted in Wellington and Dunedin.

Although they had been successful in reducing hours of work for linotype operators, the unions were preoccupied by unemployment. The Wellington union described 1898 as ‘the most disastrous [year] which has yet been chronicled in connection with the trade in the city.’ In April 1899, the union said that between 100 and 150 newspaper compositors had been thrown out of work by linotype machines. In the introduction to his department’s 1899 annual report, Edward Tregear, the Secretary of Labour, said ‘… for the young, there is written above the door of the compositor’s room, “All hope abandon ye who enter here”’. The unions did not abandon hope. They followed a three-part strategy. The first was to assist unemployed members, the second was to secure linotype work for journeymen compositors and the third was to negotiate improved wages and conditions for working the machines. Despite large job losses, the unions were not aggressive or bitter towards the employers and were concerned to continue to work harmoniously with the newspaper proprietors. The typographical unions paid out a record amount in unemployed allowances as a result of the introduction of linotype machines. The Wellington union paid £291 to unemployed compositors over a four-year period.

The initial linotype agreements lasted one year and negotiations resumed in 1900. The Wellington typographical union took its case to the Arbitration Court. The Wellington newspapers were represented by George Fenwick, managing director of the Otago Daily Times and the dominant figure in the newspaper industry. Fenwick argued that there was no real need for compositors to work linotype machines: ‘[A]n ordinarily intelligent man, provided that he is not too old and that he has a fair education, is quite as capable of becoming as efficient an operator of a linotype machine as a compositor.’ Furthermore, there was ‘… no reason why the working of these machines should not be learned by young women …’. Andrew Walker told the court that information from overseas typographical unions showed that ‘wherever persons other than compositors had been employed on the machines they had failed’ and that ‘typists, females included, had been among the failures.’ This argument was supported by the employers’ witnesses, including the overseers of the New Zealand Times and the Evening Post. Even Fenwick conceded, when called as a witness by the union, that he knew of no cases where skilled linotype operators had not formerly been compositors.

The other argument was over wages. By the time the Wellington union got to the Arbitration Court, the court had awarded Auckland linotype operators a weekly wage of £3. The court rejected the Wellington union’s arguments and imposed the same wage in Wellington. There was a lot of irony about this. As discussed earlier, the Auckland Union went to the Arbitration Court to stop the employment of women as typesetters. In March 1901, the Otago Daily Times and Dunedin Evening Star negotiated an industrial agreement with the Otago union setting wages at £3 6s a week for day operators and £3 12s for night operators. This agreement was soon adopted elsewhere.

The introduction of linotype machines was the biggest crisis in the first fifty years of the typographical
unions’ history. Initially there was a big drop in employment. The number of male compositors fell by 24% between 1896 and 1901. However, by 1906 the number of compositors and linotype operators was only 31 fewer than in 1896.\textsuperscript{57} Membership of the typographical unions increased from 505 in 1899 to 556 in 1902.\textsuperscript{58}

While the employers were successful in holding down wages in the initial negotiations and award settlements, the typographical unions achieved their most important objective, securing linotype work for journeymen compositors. The arbitration system played an important part in locking in this gain because the first awards restricted employment on linotypes to journeymen compositors and young men apprenticed as compositors, limited the number of apprentices and effectively excluded women. However the arbitration system was not the reason the typographical unions gained control of work on linotype machines. They succeeded because of the strength of their organisation and their ability to negotiate terms with the employers. They were also successful because the newspaper proprietors were sympathetic to journeymen compositors’ claims for linotype work.

**Printers and the Great Strike of 1913**

In October 1913 New Zealand was engulfed by the ‘Great Strike’, a confrontation between labour and capital that was much larger than the Maritime Strike. Local strikes at the Huntly mines and on the Wellington waterfront became a showdown between the employers, backed by the conservative government, and the United Federation of Labour (UFL).\textsuperscript{59} The Wellington typographical union’s reaction to the strike is an intriguing cameo of the stubborn independence of printers and their solidarity with other workers. The union was very conservative. It had walked out of the Wellington Trades and Labour Council in 1903 and it refused to attend the labour unity conferences in 1913. When the Wellington union celebrated its jubilee in July 1912, its president, George Barker, said the union had ‘always avoided anything approaching “Red Revolution”’.\textsuperscript{60}

On 8 November 1913, 159 members of the union attended a special meeting to consider the latest developments in the strike. The employers had rejected the UFL’s proposals for a settlement and made it a precondition that the Waterside Workers Union’s delegates agree to bring their union back under the arbitration act. The union voted to support the right of the waterside workers union to control its own affairs within the law, donate £100 to the watersiders’ relief fund to assist the strikers’ families and call on the Government to withdraw the specials and legislate to ensure a fair settlement of the strike. An amendment to increase the donation to £200 was lost by only four votes. 85% of the union’s members took part in a ballot on the £100 contribution and voted by 218 to 67 to approve it.\textsuperscript{61} A further special meeting was held on 15 November to consider the UFL’s call for a general strike. There was a fierce debate about whether the union should reject the appeal out of hand or whether it should leave its options open in case members were asked to typeset material that would be printed on paper unloaded by strike breakers. The conservative view prevailed but only narrowly.\textsuperscript{62}

On 20 November, the union received advice from its lawyer that the contribution to the watersiders’ relief fund was probably illegal. It accepted his advice that the union should test the issue in the Supreme Court. The main issue was whether the arbitration act limited the activities of registered unions to the industries in which their members worked. If so, the typographical union could not give money to the watersiders, even though one of the objects of the union’s rules was ‘to assist other workers in difficulties.’ On 12 December, Sir Robert Stout, the Chief Justice, gave the court’s judgment, ruling that the typographical union was ‘not a general benevolent society’, that the activities of registered unions were limited to their own industries and that printers could not help striking watersiders. The court’s decision was a major blow to the strike which ended a week later. It might be thought that this was the end of the matter. However the typographical union decided simply to ignore the court. A special meeting on 13 December instructed the union’s trustees to immediately sign the cheque for £100 and resolved that union members would be asked to sign a guarantee indemnifying the trustees against any legal proceedings or monetary loss.\textsuperscript{63} By the end of December, members had guaranteed £117.\textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{57} Results of a Census of the Colony of New Zealand taken for the night of 12\textsuperscript{th} April 1896, Government Printer, Wellington, 1897. Results of a Census of the Colony of New Zealand taken for the night of 31\textsuperscript{st} March 1901, Government Printer, Wellington, 1902. Results of a Census of the Colony of New Zealand taken for the night of 29\textsuperscript{th} April 1906, Government Printer, Wellington, 1907.

\textsuperscript{58} Appendices to the Journals of the Legislative Council, 1899. AJHR H-11A, 1902.


\textsuperscript{60} Franks, op. cit., pp. 63-67.

\textsuperscript{61} WTU, Minutes of Special Meeting, 8 November 1913, BR.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 15 November 1913, BR.

\textsuperscript{63} WTU, Report to and minutes of Special Meeting, 13 December 1913, BR.

\textsuperscript{64} WTU, Report and Balance Sheet for the Half-year ending 31 December 1913, BR.
Conclusion
The nineteenth century NZ printing unions were small organisations with only a handful of members in most workplaces. At a time of minimal legislative support for unions, they not only survived but prospered. One of their greatest strengths was the traditions of unionism which they brought from Britain. These traditions gave them pride in their craft, a determination to limit entry to it and solidarity with each other. They strove for good relations with employers but they were not passive. Hard-fought disputes between the 1860s and the 1890s gave them the fortitude to cope with technological change and to maintain control of their trade.

The typographical unions’ central focus was on protecting their own craft and they worked hard to exclude ‘outsiders’. But they did not stand aloof from other workers. They helped to unionise the unorganised and form trades and labour councils. Ray Markey has argued that urban craft unionists played a significant part in the formation of ‘new’ unions in Australia.\(^65\) Printers’ activists in New Zealand played a similar role. The typographical unions disapproved of militant unionism and revolutionary socialism but assisted other unions during strikes. They gave significant financial support in both the 1890 and 1913 strikes. During these disputes, the typographical unions were divided and the conservative faction had only a small majority. The typographers were both aristocrats of labour and pioneers of unionism. More than that, they sat ambiguously between ‘old’ and ‘new’ unionism. Their spirit was summed up by Jim Roberts, leader of the Alliance of Labour and the waterside workers, during the 1935 Wellington printers’ strike. He described Colin Campbell, the father of the Whitcombe & Tombs Chapel and a member of the strike committee in the following terms: ‘When your deputation called on the Alliance of Labour, I was struck by that craft unionist who chewed tobacco. I will bet he is one of the old type of trade unionist who would eat grass on the roadside before he would scab’.\(^66\)

---

\(^66\) *Imprint*, August 1938.
From Harvest to Work Choices

Ian Harriss and Bill Robbins*

This paper argues that the theoretical and contractual basis of employment at the Sunshine Harvester Factory in 1907 were very similar to those which motivate and guide the Work Choices Act 2005. Both view employment as private and rely on individual bargaining without concern with the equity of power between parties. This paper provides a detailed insight into wage fixing in the Harvester plant by using the evidence provided by George McKay, brother of H. V. McKay, in the transcript of the Harvester case.

Introduction

The Work Choices Act is not new, it is post modern; it borrows from the past, reinvents the old and repackages with new hype and linguistic vigour. This paper argues that the philosophic underpinning of Work Choices and its invocation of economic theory are not original; the values and objectives of free market relations upon which it is based are firmly and even crudely located in nineteenth century political economy. The practice of industrial relations which it promises is neither new nor original. Placing the emphasis on the intimate bargaining between employer and individual employee is a thing of the past; and nowhere is this more vivid than in the industrial relations which prevailed in 1907 at the Sunshine Harvester Agricultural Implement Company owned by H. V. McKay and managed by his brother George McKay. In the landmark industrial relations case of the Harvester Living Wage, George McKay gave Justice Higgins a vivid, articulate and detailed account of how workers were paid. In his words, workers were paid 'according to the value of the work they can do'.

There were no complex relativities or comparisons, no legal minimums; it was a simple and highly flexible system for setting wages. We argue that the rhetoric and values underpinning the justification of Work Choices go to the simple calculations and interactions apparent in George McKay’s detailed account of his approach to the setting of wage rates. As in 1907 there are no compulsory or formal processes of negotiation and interaction between employers and employees under Work Choices. While government spokesmen have argued the inherent value in the 'simple and flexible' negotiations between employer and employee there are no prescriptions as to how these negotiations will actually unfold. While the Office of the Employment Advocate is meant to scrutinise the content of Australian Workplace Agreements in relation to minimums there is no requirement to establish meaningful interaction between the parties beyond a vague prohibition of coercion. This is because Work Choices regards interaction between employer and employee as private. Indeed, even the outcomes of individual bargaining are largely private and hidden from public scrutiny. Privacy, incidentally, was a strong feature of the payment of wages at the Harvester plant in 1907. Work Choices, like George McKay before it, regards labour simply as a factor of production, a commodity in the process of manufacturing.

In contrast, the most enduring challenge to employers like McKay of the Harvester case and judgement was the contextualisation of labour as a social activity and male workers as living human identities with even quite specific familial responsibilities. Work Choices, in its reassertion of work as a purely economic transaction, now challenges and attempts to reverse Harvester.

Theoretical Context and Argument

The Harvester decision stands at a fork in the road on the path to modernity. Higgins was not merely considering the matters before him as one specific case among many. As the transcripts show, Higgins saw the Harvester case as one from which he would extract principles capable of being extended to other cases and applied with some degree of uniformity and consistency. It is not surprising that Higgins saw the case in such terms, because the arguments put on behalf of the employer presupposed a trajectory towards modernity entirely at odds with the trajectory implied by Parliament in the Excise and Tariff Act. The issues at stake were not just abstract and intellectual: they also involved matters of power and process.

Considered from this perspective, the English tradition was clearly important. That tradition, however,
was shaped by class. In terms of workplace relations, English law was based on the idea of a common law contract. Once the relationship was conceived in this manner, the doctrine of privity of contract came into play. English law, then, saw contracts as agreements between equal and autonomous parties. It is important, however, to understand in what sense parties were held to be equal. What this concept really meant was that the law would apply equally to all. This idea was crucial to the development of the Rule of Law. The law, then, did not concern itself with the reality of whether or not parties actually did have anything approximating equality of bargaining power. There are more than shades of this logic embedded within Work Choices. Once a formal ‘agreement’ was reached, the common law would only set aside such a contract in fairly extreme circumstances: a party would have to prove a singular act of duress, which effectively amounted to a direct threat to the person in order to induce agreement. It was irrelevant that a party was effectively compelled to agree to terms of a contract because of economic factors or simply an inferior bargaining position. Social or contextual circumstances that would clearly have a bearing on the decision-making capacity of a particular party were excluded from consideration. Here, as in the doctrine of privity of contract itself, the law only addressed the rights and obligations flowing between the parties themselves. Contextual matters were viewed as parameters that any rational party would factor into the bargaining process. Above all else, employment was a private act and not a social act.

From the 1870s, and especially since the publication of Alfred Marshall’s Principles of Economics in the 1890s, the private nature of employment relationship was given new vigour. Within this framework labour was merely a factor of production that was subject, like all other inputs and commodities, to the impersonal forces of supply and demand. Supply and demand, moreover, were structured according to the rational calculation of all individual market participants of their own opportunity cost profile.

It was these two principles – the doctrine of privity of contract and management’s prerogative to exercise its rational economic judgement of each factor’s worth – that informed the testimony of George McKay in the Harvester case. According to the principles of the marginalist revolution in economics, the concept of ‘fair and reasonable’ wages did not arise. What was rational, in the sense of being derived from an estimate of marginal productivity, was fair. How could it be otherwise when the model promised an outcome for the entire economy that was allocatively efficient? Each individual was presumed to be rational, and the overall social outcome was merely the secondary and derivative aggregation of each individual participant’s rationally calculated equilibrium. There was an inbuilt systemic tendency towards social equilibrium, but this systemic tendency was based on precisely the kind of calculations that McKay repeatedly invoked from the witness stand during the protracted duration of his testimony. George McKay insisted that he, and he alone, was in a position to determine what amounted to appropriate — and by implication fair and reasonable — wages. His invocation of managerial prerogative, however, stood in opposition to the requirement laid down by Parliament in the Excise and Tariff Act that he pay wages that were ‘fair and reasonable’ as determined by an independent Court. It was the judgement of Higgins, driven by his concern for the total lives of the workers and for general social well-being that was to displace the prerogative of McKay. In his search for the meaning of ‘fair and reasonable’, Higgins would look to factors beyond the production process: he would look to patterns of consumption evident in the life of families, and he would balance this against the general cost of living. The stage was set not just for a legal and political struggle, but also for a discursive struggle; the struggle over ideas and values. At stake was the kind of modernity that would come to characterise Australia’s emergence as a nation in the twentieth century. Work Choices however represents a return to the privity of contract and managerial prerogative.

George McKay and Industrial Relations at the Harvester Plant

A key aspect of the Harvester case was the evidence provided by George McKay, Factory Superintendent, in examination, cross examination and re-examination. Although the case involved 49 witnesses none provided the detail of wages and wage fixing and labour classification as that offered by George McKay. He was in the witness box for 5 of the 19 days of the hearing and his testimony made up 170 of the 647 pages of transcript. In explaining the manner in which wage bargains were struck for individual workers or for distinct classifications of workers McKay asserted his right to observe and judge. In his evidence the power of the employer, the unregulated and private nature of individual bargaining, is laid bare. The Sunshine Harvester Company avoided where it could any regulation of its employment relations and even went so far as to relocate from Ballarat to Sunshine in order to evade the determinations of a Wages Board. This was a company that regarded the privity of the employment relationship sacrosanct. There were few minimum standards the company had to abide by while there was no prescription as to how negotiations over the employment contract might unfold. In this unregulated labour market the employer and employee were free to ‘work out the workplace arrangements that [might] best suit them’ and McKay is at no pains to disguise how this was done.

9 Transcript, pp. 58; 132-133.
10 Andrews Work Choices, 2006 p. 11.
Wages at the Sunshine plant were set simply and flexibly. The method of settlement simply involved McKay telling workers what their wage rate would be. This was calculated through his observations. In setting wages George McKay stated bluntly, ‘I rely on my own judgement’. This judgement was not transparent but was capricious as the following illustrates:

Sutch: I come now to carpenters…. [There is] One at 9/6. What is he?

McKay: Carpenter – an ordinary carpenter.

Sutch: Nothing special about him?

McKay: He is rather nice looking.

Sutch: There are 19 others. Are they as nice looking too at 9/- a day?

McKay: According to the average rate.

Sutch: How is [it] they only get 9/- a day if they are as good looking as the man who gets 9/6?

McKay: We do not go by the looks, we go by the work. We consider the man at 9/6 better than the men to whom we pay 9/-. In another example Sutch identifies a worker paid 8/6 per day and asks: ‘What is the matter with him?’ In reply McKay states simply that his ‘capacity is not as great as the 9/- men’. This difference was not due his being an improver, or elderly or slow and infirm but was simply due to the fact that in McKay’s opinion ‘He is a man not so much skilled as the others and doing simpler work’. This is indeed the commodification of individual worth.

Wages were set by McKay on the basis of degree of skill, the value of the work, the character of the work (whether it was easy or hard) and the capacities of individual men. McKay asserted that he liked ‘to pay him [a worker] what he is worth’ and was unashamed in saying; ‘In fixing wages I have endeavoured to get labour at the cheapest price I honestly could’. Of course, as Frank Duffy, the main union advocate, pointed out this was no basis for fairness. Cheap wages, however honestly set, may not necessarily be fair and reasonable. Indeed, Duffy went on to argue that the cheap wages paid at Sunshine should be increased if the tariff protection were awarded as part of a share in windfall profits. Higgins rejected this argument.

Another way in which the Sunshine Harvester Company was able to justify wage differentials was through a highly complex system of classifying workers. In this factory the skilled tradesmen were divided into journeymen and improvers, the less skilled into helpers, assistants and strikers and the apprentices into bound and unbound. The unskilled were generally referred to as labourers. There are a number of vague definitions of these classes of workers given in the transcript as the union advocates and even Higgins endeavoured to clarify the underlying principles in such fine differentials. In the case of the skilled tradesmen, journeymen were those at the peak of their skill while improvers were men who had recently finished their trade but were less experienced. This, however, was a loose definition for there were often men of mature ages who were still classified as improvers. This concerned Higgins and led the unions to argue that this was simply a convenient way in which to lower the wages of tradesmen. There were even more problems with the terms helpers, assistants and strikers. In addition to the apprentices there were also ‘boys’ employed as unskilled juniors whose work and wages varied considerably. McKay even went so far as to say ‘a man was an animal and a boy was an animal but a boy was not a man’. Here the language, used amusingly, nevertheless conveys an unfortunate but perhaps implicit regard for labour.

A further measure of difference between workers was the actual nature of the tasks upon which individual workers were employed. In this way a difference between skilled workers of the same trade or unskilled labourers employed at similar or even the same activities could be made. Was the work easy or hard, was it light or heavy, was it repetitious or did it require judgement or dexterity? McKay had again a vast
lexicon of ways of threading differences between workers. McKay was able to argue a difference in the nature of the work of individual workers could be graded according to size of the saws they used, the size of the engines they supervised and even the weight of the hammers they wielded. These distinctions were also vital in negating any suggestion that wages at the Sunshine plant should be compared to those paid at other agriculture implement, woodworking or engineering enterprises. The work at McKay’s was unique; it was simplified, standardised, templated, repetitious and could, as often as not, be done by boys. In fact, in some cases the machines the men minded were almost more capable than the men who operated them.

The significance of this dismissive view toward labour is that the labour market and going rates for tradesmen, improvers or labourers could be ignored. So too could the so-called union rates. McKay refused to recognise them even when he was sometimes paying them. In the setting of wages George McKay was trying to quarantine the Sunshine plant from the broader labour or industry market. His was truly an enterprise specific approach to wage fixing. In his view, wages could only be set at the workplace level, they could only be set in reference to individual worker characteristics and capabilities and the only person able to see this level of detail, who could appreciate the value of worker effort, who had mechanisms for measuring such worth and who was in a position to compare the effort of one human being over that of another was the manager. Implicit in the McKay perspective is the notion that only management had the capacity and the power and therefore right to set wages.

Finally, it is also more than apparent that the McKay case was not comfortable with or interested in the issue of cost of living calculations. At first William Schutt, the employer advocate, prevaricated over requests by Higgins to address the issue of cost of living, later he tried to ignore the significance of this evidence. Even when he cross examined witnesses giving evidence about their costs of living he focused on wage rates, union rates and Wages Board determinations; anything but the detail of the cost of daily life. He did not contest any of the cost of living evidence brought to the hearing. This was not an unreasonable strategy. The unions were also ambivalent toward producing this type of evidence. Initially the unions argued for a share of profits and explicitly rejected the notion of a living wage. Cost of living evidence was canvassed and insisted upon by Higgins. The employer reluctance to address cost of living, however, has a deeper significance. The employer argument against cost of living was essentially that a consideration of this changed the nature of the employment relationship. Acknowledging cost of living as a basis of wage setting meant the employer would have to view the employment relationship not simply as an economic factor of production but as also having a broader social dimension. McKay’s advocate did not go any where near such an admission because this would force the employer to extend his responsibility. In terms of the McKay argument it would have been impossible to employ men at the ‘cheapest’ rates if wage fixing needed to take social need into account.

Work Choices and Individual Bargaining

Ostensibly the purpose of Work Choices is to put power back into the hands of the ‘employer and employee’. Implicit in this is a desire to take power away from trade unions and the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC); institutions which stand outside the employment relationship but which try to control it. In introducing the Work Choices Bill, Kevin Andrews asked ‘what’s wrong with ordinary Australians being able to enter into agreements with their employees and having the flexibility to do that?’ In asserting the right of individuals to bargain reflects two basic assumptions; firstly that there is equity between the parties in the employment relationship to negotiate and, secondly that there is equity in a wide range of non-standardised and diverse wages outcomes and employment relationships. Both are based on the awkward logic of the privity of contract. The notion that individuals should have the right ‘to negotiate their own working arrangements at the workplace level’ certainly sounds ‘simple’ but is it likely to produce fair outcomes? The problem is Work Choices does not concern itself with the reality of the distribution of power in an employment relationship. The Act is predicated on the assumption that all parties have the same degree of influence in the relationship, the same skills, the same clarity of purpose. Indeed it is based on the assumption that a real employee will negotiate with a real employer and not a corporate organisation.

23 Transcript, pp. 79-82; 90-92; 95.
24 Transcript, p. 35.
25 Transcript, p. 217.
26 Transcript, pp. 609; 613.
27 Transcript, pp. 49; 256; 490.
28 Transcript, p. 517.
29 Transcript, pp. 501-517.
30 Transcript, pp. 2-9; 333.
31 Transcript, pp. 193; 213; 593; 624.
The selling of this as reality was based on assurances of protections of basic wages and conditions, that these reforms were modern and the award system rigid, and that the nation needed flexibility in its workplace relations to grow.\(^{35}\) Indeed flexibility was one of the most vague but oft repeated mantras of this reform; flexibility was a two-way street in that it would provide benefits to both employers and employees at the same time.\(^{36}\) Flexibility was in itself fair because it allowed diversity of outcome. Andrews even went so far as to argue ‘Australians should be trusted to have the maturity to reach their own mutually beneficial working arrangements.’\(^{37}\) To question the fairness of the process and outcomes established by Work Choices was to question the very capacity and judgement of working Australians. More importantly, the AIRC system’s powers of conciliation and arbitration could also be dismissed as interventionist and unnecessary rather than as an attempt to impose complex concerns about equity. For this reason, although fragments of AIRC processes continue to exist under Work Choices, these are so truncated as to be almost un-useable.\(^ {38}\) In their place Work Choices has created a new raft of complex and strangely unreal processes of private mediation, conciliation and even arbitration.\(^ {39}\) But the matter of choice remains; the use of these dispute resolution processes must be ‘agreed’ by the parties and in this way the processes themselves are potential issues of conflict. In addition the new Act also encourages the use of civil courts to resolve disputes between employers and employees\(^ {40}\) although the timeliness and cost of such an avenue must surely make this unlikely.

In a sense Work Choices has returned the fixation of the terms and conditions of employment to individuals in terms of the content of agreements and in terms of process. In practice neither the content nor the processes of individual bargaining have turned out to be uniformly positive for employees.\(^ {41}\) Work Choices may make possible real interactions between some employees and employers but it is more likely to re-introduce the prerogatives so plainly enjoyed by George McKay. Work Choices has created the danger that employers will not feel the need to negotiate with their employees any more than McKay felt he had to.

**Conclusion**

Even though the Work Choices Act did not create individual bargaining it allows and encourages this on a scale unprecedented since before 1907. Such bargaining is based on a highly limited and specific sense of fairness; employment is simply a contractual transaction for which each individual is equally responsible. However, in the selling of Work Choices there is no admission of the reality of power in bargaining that George McKay made so very apparent in his testimony. Under Work Choices the fiction of individual bargaining goes so far as to ignore the reality that, for a growing number of workers, bargaining will be with organisations possessing expertise, experience and resources in the art of negotiation and dispute settlement. More alarming is the fact that the Work Choices Act increases inequity but hides this behind the semiotic façade of words like choice, flexibility and simplicity as though these were neutral or were terms of natural fairness. On the other hand, when George McKay boasted that ‘I rely on my own judgement’ in the setting of wages he was not pretending there were any niceties like equity of bargaining or indeed any negotiations at all.\(^ {42}\) McKay had no pretence of anything nobler than economic self interest.

We argue the reality of the bargaining that is preferred by Work Choices is akin to that which was apparent in the Sunshine Harvester plant in 1907. In this factory wages were highly individualised through the complex classification and categorisation of every worker. Individual bargaining allows diversity. In addition, there is no evidence of any meaningful interaction between the employer and employee in settling those wages. The wages of individuals were set by the employer. Work Choices makes the mistake of claiming an emphasis on individual workplace relations will be fair without creating any imperative to fairness. Instead, Work Choices will empower another generation of George McKays and will remove the procedures and the protections begun by Higgins in his landmark Harvester judgment a century ago.

---

39 Work Choices, S 696; Division 2 of Part 13.
40 Work Choices, S 693.
42 Transcript, p. 199.
Bert Creman and the Birth of ‘The Movement’

Stephen Holt

B.A. Santamaria’s political importance easily predated the Cold War years. The breakthrough happened earlier, during World War II. ‘The Movement’ – Santamaria’s feared political organisation – did not exist in 1939 but he was ready by 1945 to lead an Australia-wide political crusade. Santamaria went far in the war years. But his was not a solo ascent. Had powerful friends not fostered him he would have found it much harder to get off the ground. In examining these crucial few years the focus needs to shift away from Santamaria himself. The spotlight instead needs to be on the factional warlord - then as now a stock figure in Australian politics – who mentored the young Santamaria. This vital nurturing role was performed in the early 1940s by Herbert Michael Creman, the deputy parliamentary leader of the Victorian ALP.

In examining the young Santamaria’s political debut all roads lead to Bert Creman. He did not have a long career – Creman was only in his forties when he died in 1945 – and he never attained national prominence. And yet, though not living long enough ever to know it, he made an enduring contribution to the history of his party and to Australian politics at large. The Movement began life as his creature.

Santamaria never hid his gratitude to Creman. He praised him as ‘a man of remarkable political gifts and moral qualities of the highest order’. He benefited immensely from the high level support that he received in the early 1940s. Theirs was no casual wartime dalliance. Creman inserted Santamaria so tightly into the party’s interstices that it was impossible for anyone in the years ahead – as Labor found to its cost when it split over his influence in the 1950s – ever to painlessly extricate him.

Creman was destined to be a factional insider. Born in Richmond in 1900, he came from a Catholic family that was prominent in local Labor politics. In 1925-26 his mother acted as mayoress when her brother served as mayor. Elected to the Richmond City Council in 1926, Bert was mayor in 1928-29. In the 1929 state election he won the seat of Dandenong. Defeated in 1932, he returned to the Legislative Assembly in 1934 at a by-election for the seat of Clifton Hill when Maurice Blackburn, the seat’s previous Labor occupant, moved to the federal seat of Bourke. Blackburn’s predecessor in the seat was Frank Anstey whose role as Labor’s left-wing conscience Blackburn inherited.

Creman’s emergence as a force in Victorian politics came at a significant time in the evolution of the state ALP. In the mid-1930s it was taking on an ever more pronounced right-wing hue. The Abyssinian crisis and then, even more emphatically, the Spanish Civil War was responsible for this development. Many traditional Catholic Laborites, a vital constituency in the party since the Conscription controversy of 1916-17, felt uneasy when the Communist Party, in the name of anti-fascist unity, sought a more intimate relationship with the ALP. The party in Victoria, as determined by majorities on the state executive and at the state conference, rejected all overtures from such a godless source.

The attitude in the Victorian ALP appalled Creman’s Clifton Hill predecessor Maurice Blackburn. The state executive explicitly banned ALP members from campaigning with communists in united front organisations but Blackburn ignored this decision and actively supported the Victorian Council of the Movement Against War and Fascism. Creman, in contrast to Blackburn, had no problem at all with the Victorian ALP’s hostility to united front activities. He was elected to the state executive in 1936 where, along with Arthur Calwell, he upheld the state branch’s right-wing stance. In the following year he became deputy leader of the state parliamentary party. He was, the Australian Dictionary of Biography assures us, ‘a fluent speaker, a cool and logical debater, and a hard worker’.

The young Bob Santamaria was also making his mark in Melbourne at this time although as yet he had no practical association with events in the Victorian ALP. In March 1937 Creman attended the Melbourne University debate on the Spanish Civil War in which Santamaria featured so dramatically. In 1938 Santamaria became Assistant Secretary of the Australian National Secretariat for Catholic Action. Catholic Action was an organised channel for lay Catholic sentiment which had no remit to engage in political intrigue.

Maurice Blackburn continued to irk the dominant group in the Victorian ALP. It had outlawed the united front but a worrying level of dissent against the decision was evident in the party. Blackburn attracted support from militants in unions affiliated to the ALP and from local ALP branch members as well. In the lead up to the 1937 federal election militants (later referred to by Santamaria as ‘the Progressive Movement’) controlled the Bourke and other federal electorate campaign committees and, to the displeasure of the Victorian executive, kept these committees going after the election campaign was over. It hit back in 1939 when the annual conference banned the party’s Metropolitan Council as ‘an institution of the Popular Front’.

The state executive could count on winning the big votes at the state conference but it could not relax its guard because it knew that left-wing delegates were always on the look out for an opportunity to

---

stage a coup or at least inflict embarrassment. Its control over the state conference remained much too precarious for its liking. At the 1940 annual conference the left-winger Don McSween lost by only 15 votes when he challenged Pat Kennelly for his position as the branch’s Organising Secretary.

The survival strategy of the state executive was mapped out by a ‘brains trust’ of Labor Party and Trades Hall insiders comprising Bert Cremean, Arthur Calwell, Pat Kennelly, Fred Riley and Dinny Lovegrove. This was a disparate group which was united mainly by a desire to keep the opponents of the state executive at bay. Lovegrove was a former Communist Party member, Riley was an old friend of John Curtin’s who was moving to the right while Pat Kennelly was a complete pragmatist. Cremean’s connection with Calwell was closer: his brother Jack became Calwell’s private secretary.

The people being targeted by the inner group were, it must be emphasised, an equally disparate bunch. Opposition to the policies and practices of the state executive brought together trade union militants, the Communist Party and fellow travellers, rebellious local ALP branches and old-style socialists and radicals such as Maurice Blackburn. Sectarianism was another powerful generator of anti-executive sentiment at this time; the left-wing historian Brian Fitzpatrick was not unique in resenting ‘Catholic-Tammany dominance’ in the Victorian ALP.

So the opposition that it encountered was a variegated beast but it was in the interests of the Victorian state executive for all these subtle differences to be overlooked. All of its opponents, from Blackburn and the Progressive Movement down, needed to be branded as agents of Moscow in order to deprive them of support in the ALP. This strategy, to be effective, required the employment of a not too precise political lexicon. The term ‘communist’ as deployed by the state executive did not refer solely or even principally to signed up members of the Communist Party; it basically was intended to discredit Labor Party members who could be presumed to be against the state executive because they were active in front organisations and militant unions.

In the wake of the near defeat at the 1940 state conference Cremean began to consider that Bob Santamaria could help him achieve this end. Impressed by the young man’s fervour and energy, he looked to him to lead a organised body of Catholics whose fear of communism was now to be given a directly political focus. Catholic Action treated communism as a heresy but was not involved in a political campaign directed against its influence. Cremean wanted to prise Santamaria’s organising abilities out from this straitjacket. Against a background of infighting in the ALP he persuaded Santamaria that communism was ‘much more than a generalised or ideological challenge, and that the events with which we should be concerned were much closer to home than Spain.’

Cremean, unlike Santamaria, was a practised hand in inner city Labor politics. Branch stacking was ‘rife’ in his electorate. More importantly, he knew that factional power in the ALP depending on having allies in the affiliated unions. Cremean, Santamaria learnt, saw ‘practical organisation within the trade union movement’ as providing the best basis for ‘a kind of Catholic crusade against Communism.’ His ‘primary aim’ was ‘to rescue the position of the non-Communists in the Labor Party and in the unions’.

In July 1940 a by-election in Coburg further embarrassed the executive. Local ALP members were not impressed when, in choosing a candidate, the state executive ruled out a rank and file preselection; Coburg Laborites revolted and supported Charles Mutton who won the by-election as an independent on non-Labor preferences. The inner group was bent on revenge though this took time to organise. Mutton’s success in Coburg demanded, tit for tat, that Blackburn lose preselection for his seat of Bourke which encompassed rebellious Coburg. This was the great task set for 1941.

The June 1941 ALP state conference saw another spirited factional tussle for Pat Kennelly’s position. A few days later Russia’s entry into the war transformed the broader political situation. The USSR suddenly was Australia’s ally in the war against Germany. In this congenial climate the Australia-Soviet Friendship League emerged from the shadows to become Melbourne’s premier front organisation. It expanded its activities, publishing pamphlets and arranging meetings. Maurice Blackburn was a leading supporter though he was never a member.

A hostile response soon was forthcoming. On 14 August the press flagged the possibility that the state executive, due to meet on the following day, would ban members from speaking at ASFL meetings. Disciplinary action was being contemplated. ‘Resentment was expressed at a statement by Mr Blackburn, MP, that he had decided what action he would take if again asked to speak at league meetings, irrespective of what action ALP might take’. The day that this press report appeared happened to be Bob Santamaria’s twenty-sixth birthday. He invited Cremean and two other like minded souls - Stan Keon and Frank Hannan – to his family home in Brunswick for a celebration. Keon was a future state and federal member of parliament while Santamaria later described Frank Hannan as a ‘numbers man’ from Coburg. Unless this

3 A good source for Maurice Blackburn’s Coburg is Carolyn Rasmussen, ‘Challenging the Centre - the Coburg ALP branch in the 1930s’, Labour History, 1988, pp. 47-63.
4 Argus, 14 August, 1941, p. 5.
5 Bruce Duncan, Crusade or conspiracy Catholics and the anti-Communist struggle in Australia, Sydney, UNSW Press, p. 98.
...
could report further progress. The Movement, he told Mannix, had purged at least 20 ALP branches in Victoria and had been responsible for ‘favourable change’ in 13 unions in Victoria and in New South Wales as well (the spectre of communism did not stop at the Victorian border). Mutually beneficial collaboration with officers of the Victorian Trades Hall Council also had been established. Vic Stout, the Trades Hall Secretary, needed all the support he could get. Previously he had had a bare majority in the council.

The historian Kate White has described the Victorian ALP’s Easter 1944 state conference as the ‘showdown’ between the Victorian executive and its opponents. The conference was held only a week or so after the death, on 31 March, of Maurice Blackburn. What followed would not have pleased him. There were 300 or so delegates present and, it seems, some 70 of them came from The Movement. Just before it met the Conference Convening Committee, belatedly realising that it was losing support because its role as a ‘breakaway’ organisation infringed the sacred principle of Labor unity, disbanded but this action failed to soften Cremean and his allies. They had a highly disciplined body of supporters at hand and so could afford to be obdurate. Delegates upheld a decision which banned 40 anti-executive members from attending the conference. This resolute show of strength killed off the wartime threat from the left in the Victorian ALP.

An inexorable law of politics now kicked in. The Victorian executive’s triumph over the left was so marked that the victors could afford to start quarrelling among themselves. In the winter of 1944 a difference of opinion led to a severing of relations between Calwell and Santamaria. Pat Kennelly, once his job as party secretary ceased to be subject to an annual election, also was ready to drift away. Victory did not issue in a reign of peace. Cremean’s opponents drew little immediate consolation from the cracks in the façade. They knew that he was still a formidable factional warlord. The flack continued. Brian Fitzpatrick, after he was excluded from the party, alleged that a ‘Dunstan-Wren-Cremean’ axis ran wartime Victoria.

Cremean was not fated to grow old in intra-party warfare. In May 1945 he died in hospital after what was supposed to be a routine operation. His unexpected death came a good ten years before Labor’s great split of the 1950s. He never had to witness the consequences of his decision to summon up Santamaria’s zeal against the Victorian state executive’s wartime opponents. The usual knockabout circus involving branch stacking, preselection stoushes, dodgy slush funds and showdowns at the annual party conference took on a dangerous intensity once it was conducted in the name of an ideological crusade.

It is idle to speculate as to whether or not the ALP would have better managed or controlled the escalating tension in the ensuing years had Cremean still been around. His absence, and not his presence, was what counted now. There was, in 1945, a void to fill. Following Cremean’s death, Santamaria suddenly was in a position where he no longer had a powerful factional mentor to defer to. His own standing as a political force was enhanced. He knew that he could withstand the hostility emanating from Calwell because he could rely on the resources of the Movement which already had shown that it was willing and able to take on an ever bigger role.

Its ambit was not limited. Bert Cremean had a highly specific purpose in mind when he first authorised the Movement. It was set up to combat the disparate forces who, for a miscellany of reasons, were resisting or opposing the wartime Victorian state executive. Only a minority of these anti-executive elements belonged to or were sustained by the Communist Party but nevertheless the Movement presented itself as an ‘anti-communist’ outfit and was accepted as such by friend and foe alike. This meant that Santamaria could in all consistency reach out in the years after 1945, when the Cold War set in, to any area in Australia where a fear of communism was being felt.

---

9 Ross Fitzgerald with the assistance of Adam Carr and William J. Dealy, The Pope’s battalions: Santamaria, Catholicism and the Labor split, St. Lucia, Qld, University of Queensland Press, 2003, p. 60.
12 Don Watson, Brian Fitzpatrick, a radical life, Sydney, Hale & Iremonger, 1979, p. 162.
Was There an Alternative to Liberal Representative Government in 1856?

Terry Irving

‘To revolutionise Australia’ – that was how Edward John Hawksley in early 1854 described the strategy of the radicals in New South Wales. He was the editor of The People’s Advocate, which he founded in 1848, but his political involvement in the colony stretched back at least to 1839, when as a recently arrived immigrant he had written a letter to the Catholic radical paper, The Australasian Chronicle, arguing that the only way to achieve a democratic legislative assembly would be to form a working-class political organisation. Earlier, probably during the surge of working-class militancy after the Reform Act, he is reported to have had a connection with radical journalism in Nottingham. So Hawksley ought to have known what he was talking about. Yet, believing as most of us do in the foundational liberalism of our political culture, we find it very difficult to take seriously his description of radical strategy. In this paper I suggest that we should, and that Hawksley’s kind of democratic radicalism expressed a major political current in the lead up to parliamentary government.¹

Of course, by revolution Hawksley did not mean a bloody uprising or a coup d’état. What he had in mind was the achievement of popular rule by the combination of agitation, education, and electoral campaigning that had been typical of democratic political forces in Britain and other places since the late eighteenth century. In New South Wales it had been developing since 1833, although for the succeeding ten years, when there was no elected institution of governance, the emphasis had to be on agitation and education, and this was a significant fact for the development of democratic practice in the colony, as we shall see.

For over a century and a half we have lived politically as citizens of a liberal, representative state, and we have grown accustomed to thinking of that system of government as equivalent to democracy. We have also become resigned to the political distance that separates what we want from what our representatives want.

However, if we are to understand what Hawksley and his fellow radicals meant by democracy we have to recognise that they were not so resigned. We have to recover the uneasy feelings that liberal representation inspired in them, and the various ways that they sought to allay that uneasiness. Their solution was to engage with practices aimed at ensuring that social power was not removed from the sphere of popular determination. Those of us experienced in pressure groups and social movements will be familiar with these practices: they included public deliberation, accountability, delegation, frequent elections, rotation of offices, and so on. Further, they sought through agitation and education to create a political culture of democracy, called by Hawksley ‘the irrepressible force of common sentiment’.² Together, these practices and this democratic culture would, they hoped, lay the basis for a representative system based on popular sovereignty and equality among citizens.

That they had reason to be uneasy about representation was manifest in the derogatory and rejectionist statements about democracy made by their opponents. Wentworth notoriously said, when introducing his bill for the New South Wales constitution in 1853, that ‘he had no wish to sow the seeds of a future revolution’.³ James Macarthur, in a heated exchange with the radicals at a public meeting told the audience that:

They had to decide whether they would have the rights of Britons or that vile and bastard democracy which had led to so many evil results in different parts of the world [hisses and groans]. Would they stand up for their rights as Britons or follow those abstract rights by which the cannibals of New Zealand twenty years ago and the savages of these wilds would be admitted to a share of government? [several voices cried: ‘we’re not savages’].⁴

And the Sydney Herald came clean about the class interest at the base of this hatred of democracy when it said that ‘the labouring people’ were not entitled to have a say in how the wealth of the colony should be spent.⁵ In making these statements, conservatives were not being particularly outrageous; they were doing no more than expressing the political philosophy behind the development of government as a system of representative institutions. Since the English, French and American revolutions, ‘representative government [to its supporters] was not one kind of democracy; it was an essentially different and furthermore preferable form of government’ – one that would prevent the poor, the labouring classes,

¹ The argument is based on my book, The Southern Tree of Liberty – The Democratic Movement in New South Wales before 1856, Annandale, Federation Press, 2006. In this paper I provide references only for direct quotations. People’s Advocate, 22 April 1854.
² People’s Advocate, 8 December 1849.
³ ACV Melbourne, William Charles Wentworth, Brisbane, 1934, p. 81.
⁴ Australasian Chronicle, 1 March 1842.
⁵ Australasian Chronicle, 18 October 1839 (reporting the Herald).
having equal citizenship rights with them. It helps to understand the strength of popular democracy in the colony to recall the political conditions that gave rise to it. Let us look first at the period from the early 1830s to the early 1840s when the institutions of public life – an independent press, public meetings, and voluntary organisations – assumed substantial form, and when the movement for self-government emerged. The critical factor here was the entire absence of any representative element in government, including municipal government. This meant that for ten formative years of colonial public life, the creation of public opinion and the rallying of public support was unaffected by elections. Speeches were made, articles written, organisations set up, signatures gathered on petitions, and delegations sent to the authorities both in Sydney and in Westminster, but nobody ever came before the public to declare that they should represent them in government. Similarly, the idea of representation was simply absent from public discourse. The fact that the British constitution embraced representation, and that the 1832 Reform Act had renovated parliamentary government in the mother country, had no discernible effect of public life at this time in New South Wales, where a struggle developed instead to ensure that the deliberations of public meetings dealing with such issues as immigration, land policy, and the law of master and servant were conducted transparently and inclusively. From 1835 until the early 1840s the Australian Patriotic Association, often mistakenly equated with the voice of the colony on the question of self-government, was bitterly divided because the wealthy controlling clique deserted these principles of public life as it met increasing opposition from ‘the trades union party’.

Did this situation change when a partly elected Legislative Council began to meet in June 1843? Obviously in one respect it did. The legislature, because it was formally constituted for the purpose, now outranked the public meeting as the legitimate forum for deliberation. Moreover, elections were alternative occasions for mobilisation, feeding into a process that elevated prominent citizens and contributed to social difference, instead of integrating the people, as common agitation aimed to do. But in another respect the situation did not change. The Constitution Act of 1842, according to JD Lang’s Colonial Observer, resulted in ‘the Bastard-Parliament of New South Wales’. It was not legitimate, at least not to democrats. WA Duncan in his paper, The Weekly Register came to the view that it was useless to consider reforming such a constitution; it should be suspended entirely. The trades union paper, The Guardian, rallied against a system that allowed the working man to be ‘legislated for by a class entirely antagonistic to his interests and claims’. So, irrespective of its record of class-legislation (that is, laws favouring the pastoralist ruling class), the Legislative Council’s very constitution gave representation a bad name. The majority of people could not vote, an even greater majority could not be elected, and the seats were distributed so as to disadvantage everybody’s interests except those of the pastoralists.

So the 1830s and the 1840s, as well as the early 1850s (the latter being the few years that historians like to concentrate on) were the crucible in which popular and representative traditions of public life were fused to create a democratic movement. To this movement and its impact we turn now, focusing, firstly, on the tradition of public agitation by the trades delegates, secondly, on the model of democratic public life created by the radical intellectuals, ‘the public meeting men’, and thirdly on the linkages between mass activity and representation in this period.

We discuss firstly the emergence of an alternative public among working-men. In this period, working-class politics had four notable characteristics: it had substance, durability, political aims, and organisation. Before the recent work by Michael Quinlan and his colleagues, the evidence about working-class employment-related activity was negligible. We now know that before 1850 there were 560 cases of collective activity by workers, mostly in the 1830s and 40s, and that there were 102 attempts to form trades societies. The latter usually lasted for just a few years – or less – before they had to be re-established, with the result that there was only a handful functioning in any one year. In Sydney, from 1840, the evidence suggests ten or twelve. The building trades were the most successful, and the stonemasons seem to have contributed most of the activists. Press accounts of society events suggest forty or so active members in a typical society, and, recalling the flux of colonial life, there must have been a large turn-over of members. The total membership in Sydney is only occasionally glimpsed; 350 turned up on a cold and rainy night in 1854 to set up a working-class newspaper, but when the societies combined to call public meetings many thousands attended. If there were 300 to 400 active members in Sydney in 1846, that figure would have been about ten per cent of the city’s tradesmen, and my guess is that apart from the hiccup of the gold rushes this was the proportion throughout the 1840s and early 50s. If so, it was comparable to the situation in the United States at that time, and not much worse than present-day coverage by unions of workers in private employment.

7 Sydney Gazette, 26 November 1835.
8 Colonial Observer, 21 December 1842.
9 Guardian, 20 July 1844.
10 Sydney Gazette, 21 July 1838.
Despite the unstable existence of the trades societies and the turn-over of membership there was a surprising degree of continuity among their leaders. More than a dozen tradesmen can be traced from the early 1840s to the early 1850s speaking at public meetings or participating in radical organisations. They were among the ‘delegates of the trades’, the term given to the group who met together from time to time to consider their common problems as workers and to organise public meetings. This was an enduring tradition. We know they met in 1833, in the early 1840s, in 1846 and 1849, and in 1854 when workers were returning to Sydney from the gold fields. Moreover, the activity of the delegates of the trades was as much directed towards the public as it was towards the labour market. They were impelled to action usually by government plans to lower wages or by government neglect of the unemployed. On one memorable occasion they fiercely opposed a new master and servant act, which they correctly interpreted as an attempt to gag them. The fact that the government was prepared to go that far indicated the growing political muscle of the trades societies, and there came the moment when they felt the need for a permanent organisation that would consolidate the trades and reach out to the middle classes. So was born in 1843 the Mutual Protection Association, which in terms of the development of democratic politics in Australia was much more important than the New South Wales Pastoralists Association. It published its own weekly newspaper, which took its place in a line of radical and working-class journalism, stretching from 1838 to 1858. There was never a week when a politicised worker could not buy one, sometimes two, papers advocating his interests.

I have emphasised the substantial, continuing, political and organised activity of the trades societies in public life in order to show that the democratic movement before 1856 had a particular social composition – that support for democracy was not assembled randomly from individuals with a simple affinity to it. By the same token, the democracy that they affirmed in their organisations and proposed for the state was not simply a set of ideas, but a model of acting democratically. It was the radical intellectuals – ‘the friends of the people’ – who articulated its principles and embedded it in the alternative public of the working men. Johann Lhotsky, Richard Hipkiss, WA Duncan, James McEachern, Henry Macdermott, Richard Driver, Edward Hawksley – these were the most notable radicals – took the idea of the public meeting and used it to promote the practice of democracy in public. This is the second aspect of my argument.

This democratic practice, constantly defended from 1835 in the writings and speeches of the ‘public meeting men’, had three main characteristics. First, the radicals fought for deliberation in public, that is, in properly advertised and conducted public meetings. This would break with the custom of taking decisions behind closed doors, in suspicious ‘hole and corner meetings’, or in a legislative chamber from which the public felt remote. Public meetings at this time were very numerous and well-attended, rivalling the official legislature as the main forum for political debate. The violence of street politics (in the 1840s there were 14 street riots, in which three men died, 14 directed occasions of political tumult, and six spontaneous incidents of actual or potential violence in political settings) added a menacing dynamic to politics which the radicals both feared and exploited. Second, if certain members of the audience were authorised to take further action, they were to be regarded as delegates, with a responsibility to report back to another meeting. Delegation, not representation, was the radical idea of governance. Third, when the inevitable disagreements arose over policies they were to be settled by conciliation and compromise, in public, not by class legislation favouring the pastoral and urban business oligarchy. Taken together, these principles promoted an active engagement by working-class citizens with politics; they restricted elite manoeuvrings, and opened the door to popular sovereignty.

This democratic model of politics made perfect sense before a representative element was added to the authoritarian government of the colony in the early 1840s, and even subsequently it enabled unenfranchised colonists to exert pressure on Macquarie Street and Westminster. Moreover, it could be adapted to representative government, or rather, representative government could be adapted to it. This adaptation, the third aspect of my argument, was the most important contribution of the radicals and trades societies: a democratic practice of representation, one that is only visible when the Legislative Councillors and the middle-class liberals are not the sole occupants of the public stage.

The challenge of representation for the radicals began in 1842, when the first elections were held in Sydney for the city’s municipal council. The conservative press, unwittingly revealing the nature of this challenge, ridiculed the ‘usefulness of public meetings’, and welcomed representation as a way to move beyond ‘the public of large and promiscuous assemblies’. But then there was an unexpected development. The election campaign, which came after three years of intense democratic agitation via public meetings, allowed the trades delegates and radical intellectuals to re-organise their agitational expertise geographically. From that moment, the city’s six wards became the focus of political mobilisation. Moreover, much to the surprise of the colonial Tories and the Governor, the colony’s first election was a victory for the tradesmen and shopkeepers of the city, the voters electing ‘practical men’ and ‘public meeting men’ in preference to ‘gentlemen’. From that moment too radicals accepted the

12 Australasian Chronicle, 7 June 1842.
13 Australian, 19 September 1842; Sydney Morning Herald, 17 September 1842.
idea that representation could be made to work for them. They decided that election campaigns would be another avenue to create ‘the people’ through political action, and believed that the popular will thus revealed could drive the process of representation. This understanding crystallised between 1848 and 1855 when, in seven of the eight elections to choose representatives for the seat of Sydney, the radicals selected and brought out the vote for the successful candidates.

In the meantime, there were other important innovations in the democratic approach to representation. Almost fifty years before the Labor parties began endorsing candidates, the working men of Sydney in 1843 adopted a program for the city council elections, invited candidates to answer questions at meetings where their adherence to the program could be measured, and endorsed those whose answers were satisfactory. The body in charge of this process, the Mutual Protection Association (MPA), boasted that every one of the candidates it endorsed was returned, and that six of the Councillors were members of the Association. This procedure was foreshadowed in its Prospectus, which made clear that it was organised to intervene in the public sphere on behalf of the working classes, and to find allies among the small producers and manufacturers.

The MPA fell apart in 1845 but three years later, at the next general elections for the Legislative Council, the same political forces returned to try to defeat Wentworth for the seat of Sydney. This was when the ‘free election’ model, famously associated with Henry Parkes, was formulated, but it clearly built on the MPA’s intervention and the earlier radical successes in the municipal elections. By ‘free election’ the radicals meant that the election would not be polluted by the candidate spending his money to buy votes, and consequently that the vote would be mobilised in terms of principles not connections and influence. It also meant that the election committee would take the initiative in seeking out the candidate on this basis — in effect a form of endorsement. So it was that the radicals in 1848 sought out Robert Lowe, who agreed to stand, and successfully got him elected, albeit behind Wentworth. Parkes called this victory ‘the birthday of Australian democracy’. In radical circles what was understood to have been achieved on this occasion was a ward-based campaign that mobilised working men through an intensive series of meetings in local pubs, that was ‘free’ from the influence of the candidate or other ‘notables’, and that therefore allowed them to imagine a government in which accountability to the people was achieved through linking the process of representation to the expression of the popular will in public meetings and organisations.

All this happened before the era of political parties and before the insertion of issues into election campaigns by social movements. Candidates, especially in the agricultural and pastoral electorates, were powerful men who expected the voters to trust them because of their wealth, their status, or their religion. But trust, according to Hawksley, was a term meant to limit the franchise, to preclude the accountability of representatives, and to legitimise the idea that representatives had to come from a superior class. Against these essentially aristocratic ideas the democratic ideology proclaimed by the radicals offered voting as a right of all men, candidates who would be delegates reporting to their electorates, an alliance between the caucus of progressives in the parliament and the organisations of the people, and candidates who had experience in those organisations.

So, was there an alternative to liberal representative government in 1856? In 1855, Hawksley wrote in The People’s Advocate that ‘what is called the radical party … is really the only liberal and progressive party.’ The ‘other’ liberals, the businessmen and professionals who had led the anti-transportation movement and campaigned for an anti-democratic constitution in 1853, had no public political life to match the democratic political movement created by twenty years of radical agitation and organisation among the working men of the colony. So, as the election of 1856 approached, when radical intellectuals and politicised working men stepped forth to mobilise the people in the campaign, to seek out suitable candidates, and to run the campaign as a defence of radical principles, they were offering to revolutionise the ruling practice of politics at that time, the liberal model of representation, in which elections mobilised individuals, and the formation of the people, the articulation of a public interest, was left to the elected representatives. There was, of course, no chance of the radicals forming an alternative government, but, to their credit, they had placed land reform and democratic reform of the constitution on the agenda of the new parliament.

14 The Elector, published by the radical committee, is the best source for the ‘free election’ model.
15 Parkes in People’s Advocate, 10 February 1849.
16 People’s Advocate, 24 February 1855.
Politics, Pragmatism, and the Platform: The ALP and federal industrial relations powers

Tommy Khoshaba and Michael Lyons*

The High Court challenge to the constitutional validity of the Howard government’s ‘Work Choices’ legislation implies a counter intuitive endorsement of both the theory and practice of federalism by the Australian Labor Party (ALP). By examining the relationship between the ALP and the federal parliament’s industrial relations law making powers the paper argues the (failed) litigation of the State ALP governments was consistent with the party’s century old tradition to expand federal powers to advance the interests of the labour movement and workers generally. While parallels between the Howard government and past ALP efforts to expand federal industrial relations powers can be identified, these similarities are merely superficial as expanded federal powers are only a means to achieving ALP industrial relations policy and not an end in themselves.

The Australian Labor Party (ALP) has, either in government or opposition, sponsored and/or supported eight attempts to widen the industrial relations legislative powers of the federal parliament (see Table 1). Of these attempts only the 1946 referendum attracted majority national support, but failed to be carried because it lacked majorities in three States. Craven argues the federal parliament’s conciliation and arbitration law making power, section 51 (35) of the Australian Constitution, ‘has proved grossly insufficient to meet ambitions of the Commonwealth’ and the defeat of repeated attempts to alter the Constitution by referendum to give the federal parliament additional powers ‘in respect of industrial relations’ has ‘persuaded the Commonwealth that pursuing its aims by democratic referendum is futile’. The use of the corporations power of the Constitution, section 51 (20), by the Howard government to expand its regulation of industrial relations has been endorsed by the High Court of Australia as a valid exercise of Commonwealth law making powers. This outcome, Craven argues, means that the concept of ‘federalism’ no longer enjoys ‘the enthusiastic support of neither major political party’ in Australia.1

This paper examines the attitude of the ALP towards the federal (Commonwealth) parliament’s industrial relations powers. For most of the twentieth century the party’s policy called for an expansion of federal powers so that its industrial relations policies could be implemented. These efforts were, on each attempt, thwarted by a combination of electoral hostility, party disunity, and opportunistic politics of the non-ALP parties. Electoral hostility towards a centralisation of powers – to the determent of the States – can be interpreted as a community endorsement of the federal structure of the Constitution. Party disunity can be interpreted as an illustration of ALP pragmatism: when in government federally the concept of centralised law making powers is enthusiastically endorsed, but when in government at the State level the enthusiasm wanes.2 The tactics of the non-ALP parties can similarly be interpreted as pragmatism.3

The analysis suggests, however, that the ALP’s attitude towards the Constitution was, and remains, more complex than simple political pragmatism. This complexity is clearly shown when non-ALP governments seek to expand federal industrial relations powers: in the abstract they should be embraced by the party but distrust of how the powers would be used augers for caution, if not direct opposition. While the history of the ALP’s attitude towards an expansion of federal powers has evolved to rely more on flexible interpretation of the existing law making powers, rather than constitutional alterations via referenda, it remains to be seen how the High Court’s 2006 almost limitless interpretation of the corporations power conforms with this evolutionary process with the advent of a future ALP federal government.


2 See respectively, Victoria v Commonwealth (1996) 187 CLR 414, and Joint Governments (2005) Submission to the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee Inquiry into the Workplace Relations Amendment (Work Choices) Bill 2005 on behalf of the Governments of New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia, Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory, and the Northern Territory, 9 November.

The ALP and ‘unification’

The first Federal Parliamentary Labor Party (FPLP) caucus understood they were the elected representatives of the labour movement ‘bound in a common purpose to advance the interests of workers’. Frazer suggests that as early as 1908 the FPLP was of the view that the party’s industrial relations policy could only be achieved with expanded federal powers. Soon after World War I the party’s federal policy platform explicitly adopted a ‘unificationist’ plank which called for ‘Unlimited legislative powers in Australian affairs to be vested in the Commonwealth parliament’. While this policy was an assault of the federalist Constitution of 1901, it can also be seen as a response to the opposition to the implementation of ALP policies from undemocratically appointed, or property franchised, upper houses of State parliaments. The ALP’s ‘unification’ policy was not universally endorsed by party members. John Curtin, for example, thought the ALP should abandon the policy of unification because of a potential negative impact on voters in the ‘smaller’ States. This plank in the party platform was removed in 1979, but ‘resonances’ remained until the 1990s.

The ALP government’s 1911 referendum sought to enlarge the legislative powers of the federal parliament in accordance with the FPLP platform. Non-ALP opposition to the 1911 referendum was mostly based on the threat expanded Commonwealth powers would have on the federal balance of the Constitution. Alfred Deakin, for instance, suggested the ‘federal principle’ would be ‘vitiating once and for all’, and the South Australian premier said it was an attempt to ‘ringbark the Federal [sic] system of government’. The 1911 proposals were not, according to federal Attorney-General Hughes, an attempt to impose ‘unification’ to the detriment of the States, but rather an exercise in democratic principles: ‘When we have got the power you can tell us how you want us to use it’. Despite this, the ALP government in New South Wales (NSW) campaigned against the proposals partly because it was believed (with some justification according to Hearn) the referendum proposals exceeded the ALP’s federal policy platform, and partly because the powers sought would diminish NSW as a sovereign entity. The defeat of the referendum was attributed to a low voter turnout, non-Labor opposition, and perceptible disunity in the ALP. The tactic of combining all the constitutional alteration proposals in the one single question was also partly responsible because to reject one proposal meant a rejection of all the proposals. Nevertheless, Prime Minister Fisher informed the FPLP in December 1911 it was the government’s intention to ‘submit the Referenda proposals again’ in the next session of parliament. Arguably, resubmitting the defeated 1911 proposals to coincide with the 1913 federal election, but this time as separate questions, contributed to the defeat of the Fisher government, as reluctance to endorse any proposal would induce a reluctance to endorse the return of the Fisher government.

In 1919 the Hughes Nationalist Party government resubmitted essentially the same proposals that had been defeated in the ALP’s 1911 and 1913 referenda, albeit the powers on this occasion were only of a ‘temporary’ character. This placed the ALP in something of a quandary: how could they oppose a referendum that sought to largely the same expansion of federal powers for which they had advocated when in government, and also advanced the party’s unification policy? A special federal conference, nonetheless, resolved to contest the Hughes government’s referendum for the reason that it was a ‘sham and delusion’ because of the temporary nature of the law making powers. The Coalition government’s 1926 referendum proposals divided the FPLP as some caucus members considered a centralisation of Commonwealth power to be consistent with the ALP platform, and not all that dissimilar to the ALP’s proposals of 1911 and 1913. Other caucus members, however, considered the Bruce

5 Frazer, A. (2001) ‘Parliament and the industrial power; Faculty of Law Papers, University of Wollongong, p. 11.
10 Hearn (2005), pp. 87.8-9.
15 Ibid., p. 120.
government’s proposals to be a direct attack on ‘Trades Unionism’, and thus in opposition to the party’s objectives. Due to this division within the party, the ALP federal executive resolved – influenced by the NSW Lang government – that the party had no official position regarding the referendum proposals and thus allowed party members to campaign as they wished.

The antecedent to the Curtin government’s 1944 ‘fourteen powers’ referendum was the 1942 constitutional convention, where an expansion of federal power was considered necessary as a war time measure. The federal Attorney-General, Dr H.V. Evatt, had portrayed the Constitution as a remnant of the ‘horse-and-buggy age of social organisation’, though he was not a unconditional unificationist. When on the High Court bench in the 1930s he sided with the States in constitutional cases more often than with the Commonwealth (perhaps disappointing the ALP who appointed him) largely for reasons of ‘legislative efficacy’ rather than any theoretical ‘States rights’ perspective. At the 1942 convention the six State premiers, Evatt and the deputy leader of the federal opposition agreed on the text of legislation for which each State parliament would pass before the end of January 1943 in order to refer ‘fourteen powers’ to the federal parliament for a period of five years under section 51 (37) of the Constitution. All the State delegates at the 1942 convention agreed to sponsor the proposed bill through their respective parliaments. However, by the federal elections of August 1943 the federal opposition urged the States to renegot on the 1942 agreement. Consequently, legislation for the ‘fourteen powers’ referendum was introduced into federal parliament in February 1944 and passed by both Houses. The defeat of the 1944 referendum is not at all surprising as the same tactical error of 1911, grouping all the proposals into a single question, was repeated.

The 1946 attempt by the Chifley government was mostly a resubmission of the 1944 proposal but offered as separate questions, including the Constitution Alteration (Industrial Employment) Act 1946. In hindsight, the official publicity for the ‘Yes’ case had a remarkably similar tone to debates regarding the Howard government’s ‘Work Choices’ legislation: Australia has developed industrially as a nation and most of its industries cross State boundaries; the Commonwealth’s existing powers to regulate industrial employment are limited to conciliation and arbitration for the prevention and settlement of interstate industrial disputes. This illogical division, and limitations, leads to confusion, uncertainty and delays; and the system has prevented the Commonwealth from promoting better industrial relations, wages and working conditions. However, the suggestion as to how this new federal law making power would be used distinguishes the 1946 proposal from the Howard government’s argument for a ‘national’ industrial relations system: ‘the existing conciliation and arbitration power and the Arbitration Court will be retained and the activities of the court can be extended’. Likewise, the official ‘No’ case had a remarkably similar tone to the 2005/6 debates: the proposal is a result of pressure applied to the government...to bring an end to the existing arbitration system; this proposal seeks to give Canberra complete control over wages and conditions by abolishing the existing system of independent and impartial conciliation and arbitration which has delivered great benefits to trade unions and employers alike; and industrial justice is best achieved through the existing impartial process, rather than by politicians making arbitrary decisions. The mistake of 1911 and 1944 was not repeated, resulting in the social services proposal being carried, and the industrial relations proposal only being narrowly defeated.

Whitlam, evolution and working within the Constitution

In 1953 the newly elected ALP member of the House of Representatives E.G. Whitlam looked forward to

Whitlam, evolution and working within the Constitution

In 1953 the newly elected ALP member of the House of Representatives E.G. Whitlam looked forward to

the Commonwealth assuming responsibility for traditional State areas of activity in line with the party’s unification policy: ‘At best federation is a compromise, a temporary stage in our political evolution…We do not advocate centralization, we advocate unification.’ Four years later the title of Whitlam’s 1957 Chifley Memorial Lecture explicitly demonstrated why the ALP pursued the policy of unification: The Constitution versus Labor.25 It was Whitlam’s view that the Constitution (and High Court interpretations of it) was a barrier to the fulfilment of ALP policy.26 Nevertheless, the impracticalities of the unification policy were appreciated by Whitlam once FPLP leader, as he was pivotal in modifying the unification policy in the platform at the 1971 ALP National Conference in Launceston.27 The then unification policy stating the party would seek to ‘clothe the Commonwealth Parliament with unlimited powers’ was replaced with a more realistic policy of seeking to grant the federal parliament with ‘such powers as necessary’ to achieve the party’s platform.28

In light of the revised ALP policy the Whitlam government’s 1973 referendum seems perplexing. The 1973 prices and incomes proposals were neither contained in the party platform nor mentioned in Whitlam’s 1972 campaign policy speech, and nor in the governor-general’s speech opening the new parliament. Kelly argues that the prices and incomes referendum was ‘a failed Caucus initiative, which damaged the government, forced Whitlam into a series of political contortions and strained ties with the ACTU’.29 The failure of the 1973 proposals did not diminish the ALP’s desire for a centralisation of federal government activities because of the lack of ‘dramatic new powers’, as the Whitlam government made ‘full use of those [powers] already available’. Whitlam himself has noted that his government’s ‘program of reform [was] fully capable of achievement within the Constitution’ and no part of the program ‘was ever invalidated by the High Court’.30 For example, Whitlam saw no obstacle in the Constitution preventing the federal government from coordinating, planning and financing health and education programs on a national basis.31

Constitutional alterations were first discussed by the FPLP in September 1973. The initial motion, which had been approved by Cabinet, was concerned with ‘machinery of government’ (e.g. the Commonwealth referring powers to the States), however a caucus amendment ‘giving the Commonwealth Parliament the necessary powers to control prices’ was carried by a vote of 42 for, and 38 against.32 At a FPLP meeting on the next day Prime Minister Whitlam moved ‘that at the next sitting of the House of Representatives, we give Notice of a Bill for the Australian Parliament to control prices’, and this motion was carried on voices. A constitutional alteration for power over wages or incomes only became an issue for the caucus when Democratic Labor Party senators indicted that they would only grant passage to the prices referendum legislation if it also contained a question concerning powers over incomes.33 Whitlam informed the caucus on 19 September that it might be necessary to ‘widen the terms of the Referendum ‘to include wages and other forms of income’. Immediately after the Prime Minister’s report to the FPLP it was moved that the caucus reject any question for a referendum on prices and incomes. Amendments were moved to this motion to include a referendum question on power over incomes, but this proposal was narrowly defeated by a vote of 42 for, and 45 against. At a FPLP meeting a week later it was moved “that the Party introduce a Bill to alter the Constitution so far to enable the Australian Parliament to make laws with respect to ‘Incomes’ [sic]”. Significantly, an amendment was proposed ‘that the Parliamentary Party confer with representative organisations through the CLAC [Commonwealth Labour Advisory Committee] in connection with the referendum’. The amendment was lost, while the original motion was carried with a vote of 57 for, and 25 against.

Without the support of the union movement on the incomes power question, Whitlam acknowledged the limited chance of the referendum being carried.34 According to the president of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), Bob Hawke, the incomes question was unlikely to be passed because ‘People are frightened to give a Government control over wages when this power could easily lead to a wage freeze’.

31 Walsh (1997).
32 FPLP (Federal Parliamentary Labor Party) 1973, Caucus Minutes, Box 14 (Books 1 and 2), MS 6852, National Library of Australia.
34 Sydney Morning Herald, 19 September 1973, Union attitudes, p. 11.
particularly by a non-ALP federal government. Not all trade unions, however, were opposed to the incomes power question. The national secretary of Australia's largest union, the Shop Assistant's Union, was of the view that the power was needed to have control over dividends, rents, profits and professional fees. He questioned the reason why the ACTU and some unions were involved in the 'referendum argument', and suggested the stance of the ACTU was forcing unions into an 'unholy alliance' with the federal opposition parties. Bob Hawke's opposition to the incomes power question was not restricted to his involvement in the union movement. At the July 1973 ALP National Conference he had been elected national president of the party. At the ALP National Executive meeting in October he proposed an unsuccessful resolution requesting 'the party to oppose the Australian Government’s referendum seeking power to control wages'. Instead the National Executive narrowly carried the resolution proposed by Whitlam and federal Attorney-General Murphy, by 10 votes to 7, endorsing the incomes question specifically stating 'that the Government would not impose a wage freeze or displace the Arbitration Commission's role in fixing wages'. Whitlam confessed that there was 'some embarrassment' due to the 'No' campaign of the unions, and even suggested the two referendum questions had been 'sabotaged' by some unions devoting more resources to defeating the incomes power question than supporting the prices power question. The ACTU Federal Executive formally endorsed a campaign against the incomes power question on 16 October because it was 'beyond ACTU policy', while it approved support for a 'Yes' vote to the prices power question. Hawke conceded that the union movement's two-faced 'yes/no' strategy and the discrepancy with the ALP's official endorsement of both questions could result in public confusion, but laid the blame for the confusion with the failure of the FPLP to consult with unions initially. This public confusion was not helped by the decision of the ALP's national campaign committee not to fund a 'Yes' campaign for either question, instead placing funding priority on the upcoming 1974 half Senate election. Consequently, the only publicity campaign on behalf on the federal government was prime ministerial television and radio appearances.

In short, the proposed federal parliament power over prices and incomes was justified as a means to control inflation. While the government and Whitlam in particular were vague in nominating exactly how the powers would be used, some specific details were announced. The Whitlam government would use the powers to legislate for women to receive equal pay for work of equal value consistent with International Labour Organization Convention 100, authorise 'tribunals' to regulate the incomes of professionals not covered by the federal arbitration system, legislate for periodic wage increases to retain their real value, and expand the authority of the Prices Justification Tribunal. The failure of either question to gain majority electoral support, or indeed be carried in any State, was partly due to the almost comical differences between the union movement and the federal government, and the tepid support from Whitlam's ALP colleagues. According to the Sydney Morning Herald the referendum's failure was also partly due to the unwillingness of Australians to give any more power to a centralist government or any future federal government.

The ALP and Work Choices

The current ALP national platform (2004) is silent on the matter of enhanced Commonwealth law making powers and its industrial relations policy recognises the role of State industrial relations systems. Moreover, the platform recognises the historic difficulties in amending the Constitution by referenda unless there is 'broad support across the political spectrum' and concedes the role of the High Court is to interpret the Constitution flexibly so that it meets the 'needs of the day' rather than 'relying on any expression of original intent made at the time of Federation'. Given the history of ALP efforts to expand the federal parliament’s law making capacity in industrial relations matters it might be expected that the party would welcome any attempt to expand the coverage and effect of federal industrial relations

36 Wells, F. ‘Shop union backs poll on incomes’, Sydney Morning Herald, 4 October 1973, p. 3.
41 Sydney Morning Herald 6 November 1973, Referenda: low-key ALP, p. 3.
42 Whitlam, E.G., 1973) "The case for 'YES'", The Age, 5 December, (Whitlam Institute, University of Western Sydney); Radio talkback transcript Perth 7 December 1973, Prime Minister Whitlam, (Whitlam Institute, University of Western Sydney); Perth Club speech 7 December 1973, Prime Minister Whitlam, (Whitlam Institute, University of Western Sydney).
44 Sydney Morning Herald, 10 December 1973, No, no; politics…and the economy, p. 6.
laws. But on the other hand opposition from ALP State governments to a widening of federal powers at the expense of State industrial relations systems has historical continuity. To that end the Howard government’s *Workplace Relations Amendment (Work Choices) Act* 2005 has parallels to the Bruce government’s 1926 proposal. For instance, in 1926 the ‘dual’ system of federal and State workplace regulation was perceived to be a problem because of ‘overlapping and conflicting awards’. As the States had ‘consistently refused’ to yield their industrial relations law making powers to the Commonwealth, an expansion of federal power was justified due to the growth in national or interstate industries and to overcome the limitations of the arbitration power revealed by High Court decisions. Nevertheless, State ALP governments, branches and parliamentarians were suspicious of the proposal’s capacity to weaken the improvements in employment conditions and worker’s rights achieved with State legislation and industrial awards. And as the proposal directly challenged States rights and federalists attitudes, it also incited opposition from non-ALP groupings. Likewise, the Howard government’s 2005 Act is seen even by members of the Liberal Party to be an attack on federalism.

The constitutional validity of the 2005 Act was challenged in the High Court by five ALP State governments: New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia. The Queensland government argued, *inter alia*, ‘the people of Australia have repeatedly, at referendums, rejected attempts by governments of the Commonwealth to broaden the scope of the corporations power and to confer upon the Commonwealth Parliament a general industrial relations power [and] rejection by that sovereign force [the people of Australia] of proposals to add heads of power to section 51 of the Constitution is a powerful aid in construing the Constitution’. In dismissing the Queensland argument, the majority judgment held the failure of successive referenda to alter sections 51(20) and 51(35) ‘provides no assistance in the resolution of the present matters’. The dissenting judgments were not so dismissive of the importance of referenda results. Justice Kirby, for instance, remarked ‘If amendments that are agreed to are relevant to the meaning of the Constitution, those that have been repeatedly rejected should not be so lightly cast aside as irrelevant’. Justice Callinin also suggested the ‘history of the referenda cannot be ignored’ because this would ‘subvert democratic federalism’ found in the ‘structure and text of the Constitution’. Furthermore, Callinin J noted the parallels between the 1926 referendum and the 2005 Act in that the justifications for both were based on the need to more effectively manage the national economy and ‘the future happiness and prosperity of the Australian people were at risk’ if the Commonwealth could not exercise its policy. Moreover, the response of Prime Minister Howard to the failed challenged has historical parallels to the Whitlam government. The day after the High Court had endorsed the constitutional validity of the 2005 Act Howard was specifically asked ‘if you have so much faith in the Australian people why didn’t you go to a referendum?’. His response, ‘we didn’t have a referendum because we didn’t need one, we enacted a law which we believed was constitutional’, was not all dissimilar to Whitlam’s comments that centralised policy reform is ‘fully capable of achievement within the Constitution’. The High Court’s circuitous approval of unification should be welcomed by the ALP for it now allows the party to implement its policies with national coverage when it next gains federal government and thus circumvent non-ALP State governments.

Table 1: Federal industrial relations powers, Constitutional alteration proposals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Proposal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>Do you approve of the proposed law for the alteration of the Constitution entitled Constitution Alteration (Legislative Powers) 1910?</td>
<td>Act sought to extend the Commonwealth parliament’s powers over, inter alia, labour and employment. All of the proposed changes were contained within one question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>Do you approve of the proposed law for the alteration of the Constitution entitled Constitution Alteration (Industrial Matters) 1912?</td>
<td>Act sought to extend the Commonwealth parliament’s power to make laws with respect to industrial matters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Do you approve of the proposed law for the alteration of the Constitution entitled Constitution Alteration (Legislative Powers) 1919?</td>
<td>Act sought to give the Commonwealth parliament a temporary extension of its legislative powers, inter alia, in regard to industrial matters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>Do you approve of the proposed law for the alteration of the Constitution entitled Constitution Alteration (Industry and Commerce) 1926?</td>
<td>Act sought to, inter alia, give the Commonwealth parliament power to make laws with respect to trade unions and employer associations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>Do you approve of the proposed law for the alteration of the Constitution entitled Constitution Alteration (Post-War Reconstruction and Democratic Rights) 1944?</td>
<td>The ‘Fourteen Powers’ Act, or ‘Fourteen Points’ referendum, sought to give the Commonwealth parliament power, for a period of five years, to legislate with respect to, inter alia, many of the matters on which powers to legislate had been sought in 1911. All of these proposed alterations were put to voters in the form of one question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>Do you approve of the proposed law for the alteration of the Constitution entitled Constitution Alteration (Industrial Employment) 1946?</td>
<td>Act sought to give the Commonwealth parliament power to make laws with respect to the terms and conditions of industrial employment (but not so as to authorise any form of industrial conscription).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>Do you approve of the proposed law for the alteration of the Constitution entitled An Act to alter the Constitution so as to enable the Australian Parliament to control prices?</td>
<td>Constitution Alteration (Prices) Act 1973 sought to give the Commonwealth parliament power to make laws with respect to prices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>Do you approve of the proposed law for the alteration of the Constitution entitled An Act to alter the Constitution so as to enable the Australian Parliament to make laws with respect to incomes?</td>
<td>Constitution Alteration (Incomes) Act 1973 sought to give the Commonwealth parliament power to make laws with respect to incomes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * proposal of non-ALP government.

Conclusion

For the last 100 years the ALP has pursued something of a contradictory, and at times schizophrenic, approach to industrial relations and the Constitution. When in government federally the party has sought to expand the reach of the Commonwealth parliament’s industrial relations laws. During the twentieth century this approach was consistent with the party’s unification platform, and thus repeatedly sought expansion of federal law making powers via constitutional alteration referenda. While this philosophy was generally adhered to by the majority of the party it was not always embraced by State branches and parliamentarians, particularly when the ALP held State government. This schizophrenia can be explained by political pragmatism: federal ALP parliamentarians aspired to expand their policy making influence; and State parliamentarians desired to protect their existing policy making influence. The divisions within the party over the non-ALP federal government referendum proposals of 1919 and 1926 clearly show how the unificationist philosophy could be moderated by pragmatic considerations.

In analysing the relationship between the ALP and the Constitution it should be appreciated that
expanded federal powers was, and remain, not necessarily an end in itself but merely a means to an end. The intended outcome of a plenary industrial relations power of the federal parliament was to implement policies that advanced the interests of the labour movement and workers generally. So when expanded federal powers had the potential to harm these interests, such as the referendum proposals of non-ALP federal governments, opposition from the party and its members can be more easily understood. Expanded federal powers allow for the implementation of ALP industrial relations policies that overcome the undesirable policies of non-ALP State governments and/or hostility from State upper houses. In this context the challenge by ALP State governments to the Howard government’s ‘Work Choices’ legislation can be seen as part of an historic continuity, and not as some later-day conversion to the concept of federalism. It is the specifics of the industrial relations system itself, and the rights it confers on working people, rather than the jurisdiction or the constitutional means used to achieve the system which is the primary issue of concern to the party and the labour movement. Consequently, the ALP’s opposition to the Howard governments’ ‘new workplace relations system’, from both the FPLP and State governments, can be traced to the origins of the party as a national political organisation.

Communists, Conservatives and Continuity: The Democratic Labor Party and its Legacy

Michael Lyons*

The split in the Australian Labor Party (ALP) of the mid-1950s had long lasting consequences for both the political and industrial wings of the labour movement. In electoral terms the creation of the Democratic Labor Party (DLP), and the DLP’s second preference strategy in particular, had adverse consequences for the ALP. This paper re-examines the DLP both as a political party and as a social movement. The paper argues that as a party the DLP was a failure largely due to its narrow focus on anti-communist defence and foreign policies. But as a social movement it was far more successful and its legacy is still evident in 2007, and can be found in the non-labourist social conservatism of the Howard government.

The foreign and defence policies of the Democratic Labor Party (DLP) had a notable influence on Australian politics in the 1960s. Initially, this influence was not predicted, for as one Liberal Party member of federal parliament commented in 1963, the DLP was ‘an enigma’ and ‘it is probable that it will decline in significance’. Analysing the DLP is not without difficulty, for according to Rawson ‘What ever one’s political prejudices, hopes, fears, theories and expectations, one will find something in the history of the DLP to confirm them and something else to refute them’. The analysis is also complicated by the DLP’s relationship with the B.A. Santamaria dominated ‘Movement’ organisation. To a large degree the DLP and the Movement acted like conjoined twins, thus making the identification of separate DLP policies problematic. In order to overcome this problem, only policies and statements that can be directly attributed to the DLP, principally parliamentary debates and the party’s national journal, are referred to. The analysis shows that the DLP’s overwhelming focus on foreign and defence policies played a large part in its failure as a political party, for their strident anti-communism was by the early 1970s incompatible with mainstream community opinion. Yet, if the DLP phenomenon is examined, not as a political party, but as a social movement an alternative conclusion is possible. Continuity with the DLP’s social conservatism can be found in the right wing of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and some trade unions. However, the non-labourism element of the DLP’s social conservatism — social conservatives with no affinity towards trade unions — has found a comfortable home in the Liberal Party.

The catalyst for the formation this breakaway ‘anti-communist’ labour party was the March 1955 federal conference of the ALP in Hobart, with its foreign policy resolutions being prominent. Several months before the Hobart conference the leader of the federal parliamentary ALP, Dr H. V. Evatt, publicly alleged ‘a small minority group’ of ALP members ‘located particularly in the State of Victoria’ of being ‘increasingly disloyal to the Labour Movement’, who were ‘directed from outside the Labour Movement’ using the ‘Melbourne News Weekly…as their organ’. This ‘outside’ influence was the (then) Catholic Social Studies Movement, and by 1957 the National Civic Council (NCC), or more simply ‘the Movement’. Duffy suggested the relationship between the DLP and the NCC was similar to the relationship between the ALP and the trade union movement, in that they shared many personnel and policies. Indeed, Reynolds suggested ‘most if not all NCC members belong to the DLP’. A former DLP senator, Jack Kane, even suggested something akin to a ‘holding company’ existed, consisting of the federal parliamentary and party organisation leader of the DLP and the national president, vice president and secretary of the NCC. The dominant influence in ‘the Movement’ was its national president Bartholomew Augustine Michael Santamaria.3 Santamaria was never a member of the ALP, nor – surprisingly – the DLP. Santamaria described the NCC as ‘a political organisation, but not a political party’. Nevertheless, Santamaria’s influence on the DLP was an issue of concern for party members. In 1959, for example, one former ALP


federal member of parliament who sacrificed a career with the ALP because of ‘outside’ domination of the party – in this instance the Communist Party – stated at the DLP Victorian state conference ‘if Mr Santamaria gets control of this party I am certainly going to get out of it’, and the assistant Victorian state secretary resigned his position because of the ‘Santamaria element in the party’. This influence was more than a mere fiction; as one DLP member noted, the party ‘draws its stimulus from an outside body headed by Mr Santamaria. This party has got Mr Santamaria’s foreign policy for a start’.4

According to Santamaria, the DLP leadership was ‘desperately engaged in maintaining its organizational and financial framework’, which left the NCC the role of the party’s ‘think-tank’ with the DLP accepting ‘90%’ of the NCC ‘product’. Yet in 1984 Santamaria conceded the NCC ‘sustained the DLP for two full decades, until the Whitlam period. Thereafter, the DLP effort could be sustained no longer, at least with any possibility of achieving the original objective’. What the objective(s) was or were complex, and at times contradictory: opposing ‘Communists’; opposing those that helped communists; opposing those who helped ‘destroy’ the ALP Industrial Group organisation; and opposing even anti-communists who controlled trade unions with methods ‘no less corrupt than those of some of the Communists’. An example of the fourth objective can be seen in the 1966 attempt by DLP/NCC members from Victoria to gain control of the New South Wales (NSW) branch of the (then) Federated Clerks’ Union, with a NSW branch official describing the attempt as a simple ‘power grab’ and an effort to covert the NSW branch into an ‘NCC organisation’.6 In 1969 an internal DLP document clarified the objectives of the party: ‘To create a public awareness of the communist threat to Australia and to win support for policies essential to our survival as a free and independent nation; To erect a road block of DLP votes across the ALP’s path and so deny it the fruits of office; [and] To wage a war of attrition against the ALP and so compel it to break its communist connections and again become the acceptable alternative Australian Government it once was, or to force it to make way for a Party fulfilling this requirement’.7

DLP foreign and defence policies

According to Santamaria the DLP ‘had its own raison d’être, its own policy…and objectives distinct from those of the NCC’, yet the party’s strategy of attrition to eradicate left wing or ‘pro-Communist’ influences from the ALP and policies on foreign affairs and defence were ‘similar to those of the NCC’. The emphasis the DLP placed on foreign and defence policy was, according the Sydney Morning Herald, unmatched by other parties including the Coalition. The prominence given to foreign and defence policy by the party, over social and domestic policies, was based on the conviction that other policies ‘were not worth the paper they are written on unless Australia [has] adequate defences and [is] guided by a realistic foreign policy’. However, in the period between 1956 and 1960 neither of the DLP’s two senators, G.R Cole and F.V.P. McManus, made any notable contribution to the debates on international affairs in the Senate.8 The only noteworthy contribution made by the DLP parliamentary leader, Cole, was at the party’s 1958 federal election campaign launch where he attacked the ALP’s foreign policy for having ‘tried to drive a wedge forged in Moscow between Australia and the British’.9 In short, the DLP adopted something of a reactionary attitude to international affairs in the last five years of the 1950s, by supporting the status quo that had existed at the time of ALP/DLP split in 1955.

The Laos ‘crisis’ of 1960-1961 focused the DLP’s attention towards the Menzies government’s defence alliance, or ‘great and powerful friends’, policy. The SEATO (South East Asia Treaty Organisation) initiated Laotian settlement was criticised by both Cole and McManus, with SEATO being described by Cole as ‘a tissue paper tiger’. In order to protect Australia from the threat of a communist Asia – described by Cole as ‘a pistol with the barrel pointing to Australia’ – the party and its senators supported the establishment of the United States’ naval communications facility at North-West Cape, and even suggested that there ‘should be nuclear zones – not nuclear-free zones – in Australia’. Two years later the DLP defence policy specifically called for Australia to develop ‘its own nuclear deterrent’ to counter the

---


5 Santamaria, B.A. (1992) personal correspondence with the author, 1 September.


9 Sydney Morning Herald, 22 October 1958, p. 4.
Peoples’ Republic of China’s (PRC), or ‘Red China’, nuclear capacity. Not unexpectedly, Senator Cole welcomed the Menzies government’s commitment of combat troops to South Vietnam in 1965, though the party questioned if the troop commitment would ensure military assistance from the United States and therefore called for an increase in Australia’s own defence capability to be ‘like Israel to deter attack’. In sum, the DLP’s policies during the 1960s were inspired by its anti-communist dogma. The ALP’s ‘pro-communist’ stance and the Coalition’s pragmatism meant neither could be trusted with the defence of Australia, as shown when Senator Cole poetically expressed the anti-communist virtues of the DLP:11

I would hate a sunburned country, where Commos fly the planes,
Nikita Khrushchev’s conquests, a land of grief and pain,
Liquidations by the thousands, indoctrinations by the score,
If you have realized it already, I hope it strikes you more,
Core of my heart, my country, farewell to the fair and free,
With the raids from Moscow coming, your answer is the DLP,
The foolish ones who protest to keep us nuclear free,
Will be the first to run for cover when Nikita troops we see,
Yes, I love a sunburned country, not under commo rule,
But never do I wish to attend an indoctrination school.

While the criticism of ALP policy is consistent with the party’s objectives, the DLP’s criticism of the Coalition government’s policies was a significant aspect of the prominence given to foreign affairs and defence. The Coalition’s defence policy of reliance on collective security alliances, such as SEATO and ANZUS, resulted in an undeveloped defence capability and provided little incentive to examine Australia’s defence needs. The DLP considered the defence alliance policy of the Coalition to be ‘a short cut to [national] suicide’, the Menzies government’s defence expenditure to be ‘stodgy’, and repeatedly remarked that the Coalition’s defence budgets were derisory. Overall, the DLP regarded Prime Minister Menzies’ performance in defence and security matters as inadequate. The DLP senators even disapproved of the government’s conduct of the Vietnam war. The Gorton government’s policies were criticised in 1968 for leading towards the ‘Evatt-Calwell-Cairns polices of isolation and national weakness’, and the new DLP parliamentary leader, Senator V. Gair, claimed in 1969 Gorton’s policies were ‘indistinguishable from that propounded by Dr Cairns and the leaders of the left wing of the Australian Labor Party’. Indeed, all the Coalition government’s defence policies were viewed disapprovingly: ‘The DLP believes that the Gorton defence policy is just as inadequate for Australia’s needs as was Sir Robert Menzies’ and Mr Holt’s policies’. The Gorton government’s foreign policies were, according to the DLP, equally inadequate. And the policies of the McMahon government fared no better than its Coalition predecessors in attracting criticism from the DLP.12

The DLP’s condemnation of the Coalition governments was not limited to foreign and defence policy, for it was fervently opposed to trade with the PRC. The opposition to trade with the PRC was based on the conviction that Australian goods, particularly wheat and wool, would be used for military purposes, and it was de facto recognition of the communist regime. In addition to the conviction that Australian wheat and wool was being used to feed and clothe the PRC military, a more simple reason for the trade opposition was welcomed by the Menzies government’s commitment of combat troops to South Vietnam in 1965, though the party questioned if the troop commitment would ensure military assistance from the United States and therefore called for an increase in Australia’s own defence capability to be ‘like Israel to deter attack’. In sum, the DLP’s policies during the 1960s were inspired by its anti-communist dogma. The ALP’s ‘pro-communist’ stance and the Coalition’s pragmatism meant neither could be trusted with the defence of Australia, as shown when Senator Cole poetically expressed the anti-communist virtues of the DLP:11

Political party or social movement?
About 80 per cent of DLP second preference votes went to the Coalition parties. This disciplined second preference tactic was the underpinning of the strategy of attrition to deny the ALP government until it was

---

'forced into an agreement with the DLP to re-create one anti-Marxist Labor Party’. In the light of the DLP’s electoral strategy (i.e. it was largely a ‘spoiler’ or ‘veto’ party), together with the public denouncements of the Coalition’s and ALP’s foreign and defence policies during the 1960s, it is worth asking the question was the DLP actually a political party? What constitutes a political party and what constitutes a social movement – and any difference between the two – is not straightforward. Schumpeter, for instance, defines a political party as ‘a group of people who propose to act in concert in the competitive struggle for political power’. Tilly suggests a party is simply a ‘tamed’ social movement, and a social movement has a unifying value system. Arendt suggests the difference between the two is the ‘absoluteness’ in beliefs of social movements in contrast to more moderate beliefs of parties. In other words, social movements have a ‘definitive ideology’. A generalised characteristic of social movements is their negativity towards the established political institutions and practices and tend to articulate more about what they are against rather than possible strategies for policy change.14

Social movements are more than a collective ideology or value system; they are also engaged in political conflict. The ideology a social movement advocates, as opposed to what they oppose – such as ‘anti-communism’ in the case of the DLP, can attract community endorsement if the ideology only requires a re-prioritising of political issues rather than radical adjustments. A ‘functionalist’ understanding of social movements views them as ‘short-term responses to social change that are likely to dissipate as new equilibria develop’, largely due to their single-issue ideological value system. Support for a movement’s ideology can also be dissipated by the call for the community to make ‘sacrifices’ in order for the movement’s objective to be achieved.15 There is a danger for social movements if they become involved directly in electoral party politics, as the failure to gain representation of their candidates can lead to opponents arguing the values of the movement have little traction with the community. However, an electoral system based on proportional representation, such as the Australian Senate, makes it easier for a single-issue ‘party’ to gain representation in parliament. Political representation does not automatically transform a ‘movement’ into a ‘party’, particularly in Australia for as Jupp notes compulsory voting makes it difficult to assess the extent to which the movement has mobilised community support.16

With the possible exception of the DLP’s engagement in competitive party politics, it is argued here the party demonstrated the characteristics the literature visits on social movements. Moreover, there is one further aspect of social movement activity that may act to tip the scales and firmly place the DLP into the category of a social movement because it was the main tactic of the DLP: the threat to withdraw its followers’ ‘support from the existing power structure…and support some alternative’. The fact that the party was involved in electoral politics, and put forward candidates at federal and State elections, does not exclude it from the domain of being a social movement rather than a political party in the traditional sense as its objective was not to become a ‘third party’ and seek to gain government. Its objective was to convert the ALP into a party of ‘Labor men who will have no truck with Communism’. To be sure, if it was a political party it was nothing more than a ‘responsive’ party, by which it only responded to the policies of the two mainstream ‘expressive’ or ‘spectrum’ parties. If the DLP is best understood as a social movement and not a party, it was a movement of the ‘moral crusade’ type and attracted support from people who were convinced that the ‘crusade’ against communism and ‘pro-communists’ was not given sufficient priority by the two major parties. This crusade would have appeal for both traditional Labor voters and conservatives who saw domestic and international communism as a threat.17


A failed party?

Despite opportunities to end the schism with the ALP the DLP never realistically pursued these opportunities. In the early 1960s a reconciliation offer was declined by the DLP, in the mid 1960s Santamaria was put forward as the party’s emissary – who had stated previously ‘many DLP sympathisers today wonder whether it is worth worrying about the ALP at all’, and in the late 1960s the party hesitated.18 Notwithstanding the DLP’s criticism of the policies of the Gorton government, the option of changing the party’s second preference strategy was not considered, as Senator Gair informed the ALP in the Senate: ‘One thing is for certain. You will never get them. You have no chance in the world of getting them’. Overall, the DLP senators supported the Coalition government when voting in the Senate despite holding the balance of power from 1967.19 This support for the Coalition, according to Miller made the DLP ‘largely redundant’ in parliamentary terms. To that end, Mayer, writing in the mid-1960s, remarked that if the threat of international communism was as great as the DLP claimed it to be, then why did it not use is parliamentary and electoral leverage to ‘reform’ the Coalition to the same extent that it did with the ALP? In answering this question Reynolds suggests punishing the ALP was the overriding factor in shaping DLP conduct. The defeat of the Gorton government’s minister for foreign affairs, G. Freeth, in the Western Australian seat of Forrest at the 1969 federal election has been – at least indirectly – attributed to the DLP,20 even though Forrest was not one of the seats ‘targeted’ by the DLP. This contention, however, fails to appreciate the strong electoral performance of the ALP in WA generally, were its primary vote increased from 42.81 per cent in 1966 to 50.04 per cent in 1969, and the decline of both Liberal Party and DLP votes. Indeed, Howson’s quotidian reflections attributed Freeth’s defeat solely to the ALP. 21 It was ironic that the DLP was totally reliant on the ALP for it to achieve its primary objective. The party could criticise the ALP and deny it government with its second preference strategy, but it could do nothing to reform the ALP or its policies. The party never offered any real incentive to those ALP members of parliament who held analogous anti-communist opinions (e.g. Beazley, Fraser, Benson etc – see CPD from 1966) to bring the ALP’s policy into conformity with the DLP’s by directing the party’s second preferences to such ALP candidates. The election of the ALP Whitlam government in 1972 essentially disestablished the DLP as a party, as Kane reflected the 1972 result was ‘disastrous’ for the DLP and its strategy of denying an ‘unreformed’ ALP government had ‘collapsed’.22

Moreover, the party had an unrealistic conception of its electoral support. As Table 1 shows, in every House of Representatives election from 1958 its proportion of the national vote progressively declined. Despite the party reaching the peak of parliamentary representation with five senators in 1970, it was clearly in decline. The party was under the delusion that its Senate vote was the true indicator of its popular support; the result of Senate election votes being reliant on the transfer of surplus votes from the major parties notwithstanding. The DLP’s core vote consisted of ‘lower-middle-class’ voters on moderate incomes and to some degree upwardly mobile educated voters – with half of its electoral support concentrated in Victoria, a constituency that did not naturally conform with the support base of the ALP or the Liberal Party. The party’s Senate vote, in contrast, was partly based on protest voters from the Coalition who could vote DLP without directly challenging the Coalition government. The party’s 1970 Senate election result was, therefore, very much ‘ephemeral’.23


The DLP’s heavy emphasis on foreign and defence policy had, by the 1970s, become increasingly irrelevant, and an anti-communist mantra was increasingly ‘out of touch’. The Nixon administration’s Guam doctrine, and the admission of the PRC to the United Nations, had effectively ‘de-authorised’ the DLP’s foreign policy principles. By the 1972 federal election even the party itself had recognised this as it opted to focus its campaign on the traditional conservative issues of ‘law and order’ and ‘permissiveness’. The progressive demise of the DLP as a party can be traced to its principal objective. It was not a party that represented specific sectional interests and sought to deliver benefits for that sectional interest (state aid to non-government schools might be the sole exception). Generally, voters will support a party if they believe its priorities are consistent with their own, an ‘ideological proximity’ in other words, and not necessarily due to specific policies. The partially alienated segment of the electorate that voted DLP as an expression of an anti-communist ideology could just as easily drift back to the ALP as it modified its policies under Whitlam’s leadership and as the domestic and international communist threat receded, or drift to the Coalition. That is, once the partial alienation abated there was no necessity to vote DLP. The fact that the party was not designed for, nor sought, to be part of the government restricted its longer term appeal as it could not implement its policies. The reluctance to be a contender for governmental power meant it could not realise its policies, resulting in disillusionment from party supporters. Moreover, the high priority the DLP gave to defence policy – ‘you could never spend enough on defence’ – may have been more of a disadvantage to the party rather than an advantage. The party’s policies called for, over time, an ‘Israel-like’ defence capability, more troop commitments to south-east Asia, universal national service, an Australian nuclear deterrent, and an indigenous military aircraft production industry. As Griffin has noted, these policies paid no regard to the limits of public finance.

Henderson has argued the ‘DLP helped to destroy itself’ – in a real sense it was its own worst enemy’. By the late 1960s and early 1970s its polices became more strident and fanciful; the leasing of British military and naval equipment and personnel for example, and even questioned the value of the US alliance. This outcome is not all that surprising, for as Wilkinson notes: ‘...the more any protest group, organisation or campaign appears to be under pressure, or in danger of collapse, the more it hankers for the reassurance of its rhetoric...They are, of course, simply whistling in the dark, and what they are afraid of is that if they were to stop whistling nothing would be heard of them.’ For the party to achieve its objectives it was dependant on others: the ALP to expunge its ‘pro-communist’ influence and the Coalition for its foreign and defence policies. Arguably, the DLP ‘session’ from the ALP allowed for more, and not less, left wing influence in the party. And the Coalition could largely take the DLP’s second preference support for granted; for if the party was to maintain its raison d’etre it ‘had nowhere else to go but to support the Liberals’. It was, therefore, not necessarily the case that the DLP stopped ‘whistling in the dark’, but rather others stopping listening to them. In short, the DLP as a party failed because it was, to paraphrase Menzies, a little man waving a big stick who lost his balance because of its ideologically inspired polices. The reason for the failure of the DLP was expressed more bluntly by Henderson: ‘You cannot build a party on hate’.


Table 1: DLP votes, federal elections, 1958-1972 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>House of Representatives</th>
<th>Senate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A failed movement?

While the DLP as a political party was a failure, the DLP as a ‘movement’ was more of a success. According to Costar and Strangio, the DLP senators were ‘men of traditional laborist [sic] values’ who shared many anti-communist views with the right wing of the ALP, and especially the NSW branch, including ‘aggressive’ foreign and defence policies. Further, Sanatamaria has conceded that even in the late 1960s two thirds of DLP voters were ‘Labor people’ who could easily return to the ALP fold. The drift back to the ALP after the election of Whitlam government in 1972 has been summarised by Reynolds: 29

While the DLP had been able to carve out a constituency and a role in the Senate… and had managed to keep Labor from office federally and in two states, when the electorate became polarised in the tumultuous politics of the 1970s the DLP was swept away… The DLP had become a prisoner of its past. By 1974 it was no longer needed by Santamaria for the anticommunist crusade — such as it was by then — and, more importantly for the DLP, the majority of Australian Roman Catholics never wanted the party in the first place and shed no tears at its demise. There was not even an Irish wake.

So the ‘laborist’ elements of the DLP’s support base could shift back to the ALP, and the more conservative elements – particularly those without any affinity with trade unionism – could find a comfortable home in the Liberal Party. There is considerable evidence that the legacy of the DLP is the social conservatism of the Liberal Party, and perhaps the Coalition parties generally, and not the ongoing social conservatism and Catholic philosophy of the right wing of the ALP. The establishment of the ‘Lyons Forum’ by John Howard in the early 1990s as a social conservative faction in the federal Coalition is an obvious example of this continuity.30 The labourism of the DLP would not be comfortable in the Liberal Party as illustrated by comments by a former DLP Victorian vice president: ‘The DLP senators would have vehemently opposed both lots of the Howard Government’s industrial relations legislation as attacks on the union movement’. However, the decline of trade union density in Australia over the last few decades has suggested a decline of ‘laborist’ identification by Australian voters, as shown in Figure 1.31

![Figure 1. ALP identification and union membership among voters](image)

(source: Meagher and Wilson, 2006)

---

Prominent members of the Liberal Party have been influenced by the philosophy of the DLP, including leaders of the party. According to Santamaria, Menzies told him the DLP was ‘the kind of party I founded’ or ‘I thought I founded’, and Menzies admitted voting DLP and not for the Liberal Party in his retirement. Malcolm Fraser, when minister for defence in the Gorton government, had closer relationships with the DLP senators than his Liberal colleagues and his appointment as minister was warmly embraced by the DLP. In 1975 Fraser consulted with Santamaria about the merits of deferring the Whitlam government’s budget legislation in the Senate. Both Fraser and John Howard attended the NCC’s ‘fortieth anniversary’ celebrations in 1981. When in opposition in the mid-1980s Howard, first as deputy leader and then as leader of the federal Liberal Party, appointed a former NCC employee with non-labourist views as his chief of staff. As prime minister Howard granted Santamaria a state funeral that cost tax payers $25,497.90. Notable attendees at the funeral were former federal and State leaders of the Liberal Party – including John Howard, five Howard government ministers, and eight federal Coalition parliamentarians. At the time of Santamaria’s passing, many Howard government members praised his contribution to Australian political and social life, with comments such as ‘The baton of Bob Santamaria must be passed on. The fight must continue’, ‘I and so many others attended today’s funeral to pay respects to our hero’, and ‘he built a bridge enabling Catholics to break out of the Labor political ghetto that they had been locked into for too long’. These comments are not all that surprising for as late as 2006 John Howard expressed sympathy with the philosophies of the DLP:

I’ve always had something of a respect for the DLP. I thought what they did all those years ago in standing up for good principle inside the labour movement, more broadly defined, was impressive. And whilst, I guess, on economic policy I wouldn’t have agreed with some of the views of the DLP [their] social policies are very close to mine…We have to be honest if we reflect on the history of politics in Victoria that if it hadn’t been for the DLP, Bob Menzies probably would’ve lost office in 1961, so we ought to be mindful of the history and the contribution that the party made to keeping the Labor Party out of office all of those years and I don’t think we should forget that.

In sum, the evidence suggests that as a social movement the DLP was not a failure, as the recent remarks of the Federal Minister for Health acknowledged: ‘the Democratic Labor Party is alive and well, after all, and living inside the Howard Government’.

---

Cold war continuities

Between November 1945 and March 1946, two officers of the Australian Department of External Affairs (DEA), Ian Frank George Milner and James Frederick Hill, were among a group of Australian civilian and military officials who handled copies of a top secret document entitled ‘Security in the Western Mediterranean and Eastern Atlantic’ and a related document which the United Kingdom government had supplied to Sir Frederick Shedden, the Secretary of the Australian Department of Defence, in September 1945. By mid-March 1946, the contents of both documents had, it seems, been transmitted to Moscow by the Embassy of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in Canberra.

Here commences a pivotal episode in twentieth century Australian history: the defection in April 1954 of Vladimir Mikhailovich Petrov, who, under cover of being Third Secretary and Consul, was the chief resident of the then Russian security and intelligence service, the MVD, at the Soviet Embassy. The events of 1945-1946 and 1954 were directly connected by the inability of the victorious wartime powers to agree on a plan for European reconstruction, the emergence of the Cold War as the dominant geo-political fact of the post-war era, and the controversial struggle against the threat (real and imagined) of Soviet espionage and communist subversion in Australia.

One of Petrov’s post-defection claims – that ‘between 1945 and 1948 there was a very serious [espionage] situation in Australia in the [DEA]’ – was not a revelation to the coalition Liberal-Country Party government led by Robert Gordon Menzies. If credible, it corroborated what the Australian Labor Party (ALP) government led by Joseph Benedict Chifley had been told in early 1948 soon after Anglo-US cryptanalysts had successfully commenced decoding intercepted Soviet diplomatic cables – the so-called Venona decrypts.

Concerned that the apparent leakage of information in Canberra would adversely affect its relations with Washington, the UK government promptly despatched Sir Percy Sillitoe, the Director General of its internal security agency, MI5, to Canberra for discussions with Chifley about the resulting investigation (labelled ‘The Case’) and generally about the effectiveness of Australian internal security arrangements. With the Cold War worsening and anti-communism dominating political debate, Australia-US relations were ruptured in June 1948 (and Australia-UK relations consequently deteriorated) when Washington suspended the flow of classified military information to Australia. Milner, who had resigned from the DEA in 1947 to work for the United Nations, and Hill, who remained a DEA officer, were the prime suspects chiefly because of their close contacts with the Australian Communist Party (CPA). The so-called ‘spy master’ was identified as Walter Seddon Clayton, a CPA official. There was, however, an enduring obstacle to the vigorous investigation of The Case, namely, the prime necessity to conceal from the Soviets the fact that their intercepted diplomatic traffic had been decoded.

If, so far as the ALP was concerned, the ‘Petrov Affair’ could fairly be called a political tragedy, then Herbert Vere Evatt, Chifley’s Minister for External Affairs and Attorney-General, and successor as Leader of the Opposition after Chifley’s death in June 1951, was the central tragedian. Evatt and his stewardship of the DEA in the evolving Cold War years provided a personal constant in the chain of events which culminated in Australia’s notorious espionage drama.

Evatt’s determination to pursue an independent Australian foreign policy emphasising the peaceful

---

^ With thanks to George Winterton and Phillip Deery for comments on draft versions of the paper. The opinions and any errors are the author’s alone.

1 Public Records Office, UK (PRO), CAB79/34/8, PHP(45)6(0), 19 May 1945: NAA A5954/1, Item 848/1.
2 ‘Security in India and the Indian Ocean’, PRO CAB79/34/8, PHP(45)15(0);
3 F.O. Chilton, Reports, 27 February 1948 and 1 March 1948, NAA A5954/1, Box 848/1. Brigadier Chilton compiled a list of 31 names (not including Hill’s). It would be fair to say that, with one exception, the possibility that any of the other individuals would, consciously or unconsciously, have dealt improperly with either of the two top secret UK Government documents would have been unthinkable at the time and, presumably, still is. The one possible exception was the Defence Department (and later DEA) officer, George Williamson Legge, who later had dealings with Vladimir Petrov in Canberra, whose brother John Williamson Legge, was involved with the CPA, and who gave evidence to the Royal Commission on Espionage and was exonerated.
5 Ministerstvo Vnutrennykh Del.
7 The so-called Venona decrypts: n. 4 above.
8 NAA A5954/1, Boxes 168, 847, 848, 1677, 1795.
resolution of international disputes under the aegis of the UN, his pragmatic attitude to Soviet foreign policy, a stance which infuriated US and UK (and Soviet) officialdom, the installation of the 32-year old John Wear Burton as Secretary of the DEA in March 1947, the ensuing conflict between Burton and Shedden and their departments over foreign policy and internal security, and the security establishment’s anxiety about what it perceived to be Evatt and Burton’s reluctance to face up to communist penetration and subversion combined to strain relations between Canberra, London and Washington beyond endurance. In early 1948, Chifley stated that his government was going to fight Australian communism in the open, a commitment most convincingly manifested in the unequivocal crushing of the communist-inspired national coal strike in mid-1949, and the Commonwealth Investigation Service-led raid on the Marx House, the CPA headquarters in Sydney, on 8 July 1949. Calling communism an alien and destructive pest, Opposition leader Menzies promised the Australian people that he would outlaw it.

Chifley sent Shedden to Washington and London in early 1949 on a prolonged one-man diplomatic salvage mission, but Shedden’s meticulous presentations of the Chifley government’s comprehensive, albeit pragmatic, record of anti-communist exertions failed to have the US embargo lifted. Unrelenting pressure by Westminster and Washington had culminated in the establishment of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) in March 1949. However, in a substantive departure from the MI5 model, Chifley (guided by Evatt) installed a judge, Mr Justice Geoffrey Sandford Reed of the Supreme Court of South Australia as the inaugural director general. The creation of ASIO occurred without any detailed parliamentary scrutiny, with almost no public commentary, and with Chifley’s operating directive to Mr Justice Reed being kept secret for more than 20 years. More than half a century later, the limited surviving archival record remains subject to national security-related exemption from public access in part attributable to the unwillingness of the UK government to permit public scrutiny of MI5’s role in the birth of its antipodean offspring.

Due mostly to Evatt’s courtroom and other public advocacy, Menzies’ promised programmatic assault on Australian communism following the conservative coalition’s decisive election victory on 10 December 1949 was not a success. It produced a failed attempt to proscribe the CPA, and ensuing failed attempts to amend the Australian Constitution to confer express power on the Commonwealth Parliament to proscribe the CPA, and to have the States refer the necessary legislative power to the Commonwealth. It was otherwise with the new government’s covert assault on Australian communism. In July 1950, Menzies reverted to the original MI5 model. Henceforth, ASIO was to be run in a disciplined military way following the appointment of the Director of Military Intelligence, Colonel Charles Chambers Fowell Spry, a committed anti-communist, to succeed the judge. Menzies revised the directive given to Mr Justice Reed and Spry’s revised directive was also a closely guarded secret for more than 20 years.

The restoration of the flow of classified US military information in 1950, the signature of the ANZUS Treaty and the arrival of R G Casey as Minister for External Affairs, were indicators of the shift in Australian foreign policy ushered in following Evatt’s departure. From time to time, most notably in Casey’s ‘Nest of Traitors’ speech in the House of Representatives in 1952, there was a hint that Evatt’s ministerial record would be cast in an unfavourable light.

---

10 Parli Deb (House of Reps), 7 April 1948, 612, 613.
11 National Emergency (Coal Strike) Act 1949: R v Taylor; ex p Federated Ironworkers Association of Australia (1949) 79 CLR 333; NAA, A432, Item 1949/816; SP1714/1, Item N54743; C1070, Item N1965/4731.
13 Shedden was a meticulous record-keeper. His 1949 trip is extensively documented (though in places selectively so); see especially NAA A5954/1, Boxes 847, 848, 1677, 1795.
14 NAA A7452/1, Item A48; Mr Justice Reed, Memorandum Regarding the Australian Security Service, 1 June 1949, NAA A5954/1, Box 1795; Shedden, Historical Note on the Establishment of a Security Organisation, February 1950, NAA A5954/1, Box 847/3; Outline of the Foundation and Organization of ASIO, 30 June 1950, NAA A6122/30, Items 1627, 1428; Letter, Bailey to Owen, 7 March 1955, NAA A6201/1, Item 453.
15 Directive, Chifley to Reed, 16 March 1949: NAA, A5954, Box 847/3; The Argus, 3 March 1949. During 1949, Chifley and Evatt made short references in the House of Representatives to the role of the new security organization: see, for example, Parl Deb (House of Reps), 954, 3 March 1949, 1258, 10 March 1949, 1258 (Chifley stressing that he would not discuss in detail in the House the proposed activities of ASIO). To this retrospective observer, there seems to be every reason to believe (as inherently likely) Evatt’s assertion in the post-Petrov defection times that Mr Justice Reed had helped draft the 1949 ASIO directive: Evatt, Press Release, 26 October 1954, NAA A6227/1.
16 By way of example, Mr Justice Reed’s Memorandum (n 14 above) is still subject to excisions.
18 Constitution Alteration (Powers to Deal with Communists and Communism) 1951; Parl Deb (House of Reps), 5 July 1951, 1073.
19 Proceedings of the Conference of Commonwealth and State Ministers, Canberra, 18 June 1951 (Canberra, 1951).
20 For a sample, see Spry, Memorandum Re the Communist Party of Australia, 8 February 1952, NAA M1509/1, Item 6; Spry, Letters to Menzies, 21 March 1951, 5 October 1954, 13 January 1956, NAA A1209/56, Item 72/10048.
21 Directive, Menzies to Spry, 6 July 1950: NAA, M1509/1, Box 2/1 and Item 37.
The Petrovs in Australia

Vladimir Petrov and his wife, Evdokia (an MVD cypher clerk), arrived in Canberra in 1951 the year in which the Menzies government was re-elected. Petrov soon became a promising target of the continuing ASIO investigation of ‘The Case’ because of his taste for la dolce vita and his overall indiscipline which attracted his superiors’ displeasure.22

By July 1953, ASIO had sounded out Petrov on whether he was prepared to defect.23 Coincidentally, in return for promised immunity from prosecution, ASIO had secured a confession from Frances Bernie, a former CPA member who had worked as a stenographer in Evatt’s Sydney office in 1944-1946, that at that time she had passed government documents to Clayton.24 By September 1953, Menzies knew from Spry’s reports of the ongoing investigation of ‘The Case’ about the roles allegedly played by Milner, Hill, Bernie and Clayton (and others), about ongoing surveillance of them, about secret government documents that had been found in the execution of a search warrant at the home of Clayton’s CPA successor in mid-1953, about suspicious close contacts between serving DEA officers and Petrov (whom Spry identified by name to Menzies more than once), and about a possible defection.25

A cold war defection

On the evening of Tuesday, 13 April 1954 – with Evatt absent from Canberra and a federal election six weeks away26 – Menzies told the House of Representatives that Petrov had recently applied for and been granted political asylum and had supplied information about Soviet espionage in Australia.27 The next day Evatt telephoned Spry who was in Canberra and asked to see him regarding the Petrov affair. Spry told Evatt that, in keeping with a direction which Menzies had given him, he was not empowered to speak to Evatt and that Evatt should communicate his queries directly to Menzies.28 One of Evatt’s later specific charges (denied by Menzies) was that, in the handling of the defection announcement, Menzies (and Spry for that matter) had shabbily contravened the convention requiring consultation on security matters with the Leader of the Opposition which Evatt said had been a feature of the Mr Justice Reed’s stewardship of ASIO during the last stages of the Chifley Government.

Also on 14 April 1954, the last sitting day before the federal election, the ALP supported the expedited passage of legislation establishing the Royal Commission on Espionage (RCE),29 but even at that stage there were clear signs that Evatt’s suspicious cast of mind was beginning to get the better of him. Angry that Menzies had omitted to forewarn him of the defection announcement30 and before he had the slightest inkling of what Petrov’s claims were or how he had come to defect, Evatt soon formed a belief, never to be shaken, that Menzies had concealed the truth of the defection from him and the Australian people and that the defection was a finely calibrated politico-commercial transaction designed to injure him and the ALP.

That Menzies’ decision to announce the defection and establish the RCE before the election was, to some degree, a conscious exploitation of a windfall political and electoral advantage. This is borne out by the fact that he turned for assistance to a man who loathed Evatt, Menzies’ friend and former mentor at the Victorian Bar the Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia, Sir Owen Dixon. Menzies informed the House of Representatives that he had asked Dixon to be a sole Royal Commissioner.31 But Dixon’s involvement has passed almost unnoticed. Dixon’s biographer has missed his subject’s detailed contemporaneous account of his active anti-Evatt inspired (and improper) participation in the inception of the RCE.32
Rather than simply declining Menzies’ request that he act as Royal Commissioner, Dixon, a long-time political confidant of Menzies, Shedden, US diplomats and others ill-disposed to Evatt, felt impelled to travel to Canberra on 17 April 1954 to help Menzies choose the three Royal Commissioners and counsel assisting the Commission. Dixon’s willingness to engage in secret political scheming against Evatt was motivated by his apprehension (an apprehension which Dixon also attributed to the Royal Commissioners) that Evatt was poised to become Prime Minister and might attempt to frustrate the RCE.

The Petrovs’ allegations

At its inaugural public sitting in Canberra on 17 May 1954, the RCE was told by W J V Windeyer QC, senior counsel assisting it, that Petrov had handed to ASIO a collection of Russian and English language documents claiming to have removed them from the Soviet Embassy. Of these, the two English language documents soon dominated the RCE.

Document H, three pages of anonymous gossip concerning members of the Parliament House press gallery, was shown to have been composed and typed for the Soviet Embassy in 1951 by Fergan O’ Sullivan a newspaper journalist. In hiring O’Sullivan as his press secretary in April 1953, Evatt unwittingly took a step along the path of political self-destruction. The much longer English language item, Document J, was also an anonymous compilation of gossip, much of it scurrilous. Had Document J not referred explicitly to Evatt and to O’Sullivan and two other Evatt staffers, Albert Grundeman and Alan Dalziel, the course of the RCE and Australian Cold War history may well have been radically different. Had Evatt not succumbed to a paranoid fixation with the provenance of Document J, his downward personal trajectory may have been less meteoric. Fifty years after the event, few would quarrel with the RCE’s finding - not dependent on the Petrovs’ evidence - that Document J was composed and typed by the communist journalist, Rupert Lockwood, in the Soviet Embassy in Canberra in May 1953.

On the second day of the RCE hearing, Windeyer, in an enduring alliteration, referred to Document J as ‘a farrago of facts, falsities and filth’. Withholding the names of Australians mentioned in Petrov’s documents, Windeyer stressed that Petrov’s credibility was central to the RCE’s task, that its obligation was to conduct the inquiry in a judicial manner in public hearings, that the evidence would establish that Australian communism was a fanatic menace, that ASIO had curbed Soviet espionage, and that the Commonwealth had nothing to hide.

The Leader of the Opposition is undone

Devastated by the re-election of the Menzies Government on 29 May 1954, Evatt became convinced that he had been robbed of victory by what he labelled the villainy of the Petrov defection. Six days later, an event occurred which conclusively established the truth of one of the Petrovs’ claims about the documents. O’Sullivan admitted to Evatt that he had authored Document H (an admission he repeated on oath at the RCE) and was sacked. O’Sullivan was named as a source in Document J and it emerged from his RCE evidence that when Document J was being typed, he had met Lockwood in Canberra,
together with Grundeman, who was also one of Lockwood’s named sources as was Dalziel.

Evatt’s inability or unwillingness to heed the fact that the authenticity of Document H made any uninformed attack on the provenance of Document J perilous in the extreme was a sure sign that his judgment, both personal and professional, was impaired. What were the facts? There was nothing in either Document H or Document J for which Evatt was answerable; he was not implicated in the production of either document; his sacking of the hopelessly compromised O’Sullivan was beyond criticism; Grundeman and Dalziel would each deny on oath being a source for Document J;46 and Document J had been publicly discredited by Windeyer at the inaugural RCE sitting.

If that was not enough to alert even a novice lawyer to tread carefully, Lockwood’s repeated prevarications undermined his own credibility. In mid-June 1954, Lockwood published a pamphlet entitled What is in Document J?47 identifying himself as the author of a similar document, but when he was called as a witness and was shown and read Document J in the witness box, he refused to answer any questions concerning it or its authorship.48 It is little wonder that in its interim report the RCE (October 1954) found that Lockwood was not a witness of truth.49

After the election, the RCE began receiving evidence and the Petrovs were in the witness box on and off for months and were cross-examined at length. The public revelation that Petrov had been paid £5,000 by ASIO and had been enticed by Michael Bialoguski, a Russian-born Polish émigré doctor and contract secret agent masquerading as a pro-communist,50 reinforced Evatt’s paranoia.

On 12 August, Evatt publicly likened what he called ‘the Petrov-Menzies Letters case’ to the burning of the Reichstag that had ushered in Hitler’s regime in 1933.51 That night in the parliament, and not for the last time, Menzies employed language imputing that Evatt was beset by a clinical mental disorder. When Evatt responded and complained that he did not hear about the O’Sullivan matter until the day before he dismissed O’Sullivan, the ever alert Menzies twice contented himself with the in terrorem interjection, ‘Be careful’.52 Evatt seems to have entirely forgotten that in August 1953 Spry himself had spoken to Evatt about ASIO’s interest in O’Sullivan’s53 (and Dalziel’s) alleged communist connections.54 In scoffing at the suggestion that the date of Petrov’s defection was selected chiefly in order to maximise the government’s re-election prospects, Menzies stated falsely that he first heard of Petrov’s name in early April 1954, a claim he repeated. Yet the archival evidence makes plain that, on at least three occasions, Spry reported in writing to Menzies about events involving Petrov.56

The Prime Minister’s unexplained false assertions about the timing of forewarnings of ASIO’s interest in Petrov and a possible defection do not, of course, amount to evidence of the plot which soon came to dominate Evatt’s thinking, but it suggests that Menzies was acting in a very calculated way – and was trifling with the truth – in dealing with Evatt’s heated responses to the defection and the 1954 election.57 Given that Evatt was such an easy target for Menzies, it would be naïve in the extreme to deny that Menzies exploited the prevailing Cold War anti-communist fears to maximum advantage following the defection. Time and time again, Menzies mocked Evatt’s professed concern for justice and, adopting the guilt by association rhetorical device of the time, accused Evatt of siding with and advocating the communist line.58 And the more Evatt sprayed his ‘villainous conspiracy’ allegations about, the more he set himself up for a catastrophic dénouement.

Further proof that Evatt’s personal and professional judgment had deserted him was supplied when he appeared before the RCE on 16 August 1954 and obtained leave to appear as counsel, ostensibly to protect the interests of Dalziel and Grundeman, but chiefly to voice concern about his alleged involuntary personal involvement in the unfolding Petrov story.59 The Royal Commissioners were immediately alive to what any experienced advocate should have realised, namely, that Evatt was skating on thin ice – he had an obvious conflict of personal and professional interest.

In the ensuing spectacle, Evatt levelled charges of blackmail, forgery, uttering, fabrication, fraud and conspiracy. The Royal Commissioners persevered with Evatt longer than was to be expected in normal circumstances: what else were they to do?

46 Telegram, Evatt to RCE, 15 July 1954, NAA A6201, Item 81.
47 RCE, TR 61; NAA A6201, Item 144.
48 RCE, TR 210, 213.
49 RCE Interim Report, para 47.
50 RCE, Report, para 75-81.
51 Parl Debs (House of Reps), 12 August 1954, 247, 282.
52 Parl Debs (House of Reps), 12 August 1954, 285.
54 Menzies said that Spry had seen Evatt repeatedly: Parl Debs (House of Reps), 1 September 1954, 868.
56 Menzies revised the date to February 1954.
57 Robert Manne has ridiculed this suggestion: see his exchange with the author, Quadrant, March 1994, 54-63.
58 For one example – Menzies responding to one of Evatt’s staunchest Petrovian supporters, E H Ward – see Parl Debs (House of Reps), 11 September 1954, 865-867.
59 RCE, TR 379.
The culmination of Evatt’s confrontational approach to the RCE was his fantastic allegation that Document J had been fabricated by the Petrovs in part by blackmailing O’Sullivan into falsely inserting his own name and the names of Grundeman and Dalziel as sources of gossip so as to enable the Petrovs to have the document published on the eve of the 1954 election. That allegation only has to be stated for it to become crystal clear that Evatt’s grip on reality – at least in matters Petrovian – had become tragically impaired.

The inevitable occurred. Exasperated by Evatt’s conduct in and outside the RCE, on 7 September 1954 the commissioners withdrew Evatt’s leave to appear as counsel. Undeterred by this unprecedented public humiliation of him as a former Justice of the High Court of Australia, Evatt later unsuccessfully sought leave to appear for himself. Evatt’s response to the damning RCE interim report was to publish a statement simultaneously denouncing the commissioners for perpetrating a miscarriage of justice unprecedented in the annals of Australian or British justice and applauding them for approving his sacking of O’Sullivan.

If Chief Justice Dixon is to be believed, there was a poignant element in Evatt’s Petrov imbroglio deriving from the child-like component of his psyche. It now emerges that despite being gripped by deep suspicions, Evatt reposed a specific trust in Dixon with whom he had had close dealings for more than two decades. Four days before the RCE withdrew his leave to appear as counsel, in a chance street encounter with Dixon in Sydney, Evatt trustingly told Dixon that he wished Dixon was handling the RCE! This was the same Chief Justice of the High Court who soon after confided to his friend, Viscount Simonds, ‘All that ultimately matters is the decreased probability of [Evatt] ever becoming Prime Minister’. Evatt seems not to have imagined that his former judicial colleague had stooped to political scheming against him in the establishment of the RCE.

One reason why Menzies did not need to concoct the Petrovian plot of Byzantine complexity essayed by Evatt was Petrov’s fear, before defecting, that if he returned to the Soviet Union he would be swept up in the murderous purge of members of the faction of Soviet security Chief Lavrenti Beria which followed the death of Joseph Stalin in March 1953. Among additional reasons why Menzies could simply allow events to unfold were his advance knowledge of ‘The Case’, of Petrov’s allegations, of Spry’s concerns about Evatt’s connections with Australian communism, and his own acute awareness of Evatt’s psychological fragility.

Underlying all this was the unresolved fundamental struggle within the Australian labour movement about communism. For more than a decade, Evatt’s pragmatism had clashed with the right wing’s anti-communist ideology. In the two years after his triumphs of 1951 in curbing Menzies’ anti-communist enthusiasms, Evatt, ever the opportunist, had courted the right wing including the Catholic Action forces of Bartholomew Augustine Santamaria whose disciplined anti-communist crusade was directed from outside the party. Evatt’s conduct in the RCE helped provoke a right wing challenge to his leadership. The simmering sectarian antipathies burst forth on 5 October 1954 when Evatt publicly attacked Victorian factional elements whose organ he alleged was Santamaria’s News-Weekly. In less than six months, the anti-communist forces loyal to Santamaria had been excised and the federal ALP was destined to remain in opposition until 1972.

The espionage trail

With the Document J diversion completed, the RCE turned its attention to allegations of Soviet espionage in Australia. It took evidence in camera from Burton and others about the 1948 investigation of ‘The Case’ and events leading to the establishment of ASIO, and spent several months conducting public hearings in relation to events and persons named in the Petrov documents. Hill and Clayton denied complicity

60 RCE, TR 672, 681-685.
61 RCE, TR 727-732. Evatt’s inability to distinguish between his role and responsibilities as counsel appearing before the RCE and his approach to his tasks as Leader of the Opposition was exemplified in his treatment of the RCE in public statements.
62 RCE, TR 16 September 1954, 915-920.
63 RCE, Interim Report para 59; Parl Debs (House of Reps), 26 October 1954, 2289; NAA A6277, Item 1.
64 Evatt, Press Release, 26 October 1954, NAA A6227/1.
65 Dixon Diary, 3 September 1954. Dixon’s biographer notes that Dixon recorded that he thought Evatt’s exclusion by the Royal Commissioners was unwise, Dixon Diary, 7 September 1954: Philip Ayres, Owen Dixon (2003), 245 (fn 57).
66 Letter, Dixon to Simonds, 26 October 1954, Swinton Collection, 6/2, Churchill College, Cambridge; Maher, op cit, n 32.
67 RCE, TR, 17.
68 Curiously, Santamaria’s recently published correspondence reveals almost nothing about his dealings with Evatt or his reactions to the Petrov affair; see Patrick Morgan (ed), B.A Santamaria - Your Most Obedient Servant: Selected Letters 1938-1996, Melbourne, MUP, 2007, 104.
69 In camera evidence, 18, 22 October, 1, 2 November 1954, NAA A6213.
70 RCE, TR 2057.
71 RCE, TR 2472.
in espionage, but they were not cross-examined about the secret decrypted Soviet cables. It remained unthinkable that either man could be confronted (even in an in camera hearing) with what the Venona decrypts were said to reveal about their alleged complicity in the transmission of secret UK/Australian Government documents to Moscow.

Tabled in the House of Representatives on 14 September 1955, the RCE report accepted the Petrovs as witnesses of truth thus vindicating the charge that the DEA had been penetrated. The fact that there were no criminal prosecutions mattered little since the RCE had effectively endorsed ASIO’s investigation of The Case, its covert anti-communist activities, and its (and the government’s) handling of the Petrovs’ defection.72

Sadly, Evatt’s capacity for naïveté and self-deception reached a new peak on 19 October 1955 when, as a part of his detailed response to the RCE Report, Evatt told the House of Representatives that he had written to the Soviet Foreign Minister, V M Molotov, and that Molotov had denounced the Petrov documents and allegations as concoctions.73 In his riposte in parliament a week later, Menzies flayed Evatt mercilessly.74 The post-split ALP was defeated at the election held on 10 December 1955.

A parting comment on the aftermath—the national security state ascendant

Apart from providing a stage for propelling Evatt’s self-inflicted downfall, the RCE, in effect, approved the covert campaign of surveillance of the CPA and its adherents (real and imagined) which Spry had developed.

As the surviving ASIO archive continues to be declassified and publicly released, the case becomes clearer that despite the 1951 referendum result, ASIO’s policy was that communism was an impermissible form of political dissent. Large amounts of public money were lavished on spying on communists (and suspected communists), ALP members, trade union officials and members, parliamentarians, university and other teachers, peace organisations and peace activists, ‘radicals’, ‘left wingers’, and miscellaneous individuals and organisations thought to be ‘subversives’. Information, including that which was scandalously inaccurate, was collected and kept about tens of thousands of citizens where there was no justification for such surveillance. In its unrelenting anti-communist crusade, ASIO found willing partners in the state police special branches which had been long spying on ‘radicals’, ‘left wingers’, and ‘subversives’.75

The Petrov affair poisoned the relationship between ASIO and the ALP and Evatt’s conspiracy theory became a left wing article of faith.76 Incensed by Evatt’s attacks, which included likened ASIO under his stewardship to the Gestapo,77 Spry persuaded Menzies to effect administrative and legislative change to secure ASIO’s position in its anti-communist crusade.78 By the early 1980s, however, as documented by State and Commonwealth inquiries, the concerns which Chifley and Evatt had entertained in 1948-1949 and later about the need to guard against the inevitable tendency of the national security apparatus to operate in an anti-democratic way were largely vindicated and the Parliament was forced to intervene to impose a system of accountability on ASIO. The debate about that system is a continuing one.79

More than half a century after Evatt’s Petrovian dénouement, the concerns about the role of an unaccountable national security establishment for a free and open society which Evatt is believed to have voiced in 1948-1949 and which he harped on from 1954 onwards are shown to have been well-founded.

73 Parl Debs (House of Reps), 19 October 1955, 1694.
74 Parl Debs (House of Reps), 25 October 1955, 1858.
77 Evatt, Press Release, 26 October 1954, NAA A6227/1.
78 Australian Security Intelligence Organization Act 1956 (Cth); Telecommunications (Interception) Act 1960 (Cth); Crimes Act 1960 (Cth).
79 Since the terrorist atrocities perpetrated in the United States on 11 September 2001, the Commonwealth Parliament has enacted a large amount of national security-related legislation. For an argument that elements of this recent lawmaking is at odds with the rule of law, see L. W. Maher, ‘Modernising the Crime of Sedition’, Labour History; No 90, May 2006, 201-209.
Can unions be an indispensable force for productive performance?

Max Ogden

The paper argues that unions have not only consistently missed a key element for organising workers but also an important element of the current campaign against Work Choices. The critical missing issue is that of employee alienation: the way workers are treated at work, how their workplaces are often wasteful and inefficient, and how they have often to put up with chaotic and incompetent managers. Further, that in ignoring this issue and concentrating almost exclusively on fairness, while it is certainly the central issue, they leave the claims of the Howard Government that Work Choices will deliver better productivity unchallenged.

The paper argues that there is widespread evidence showing that union workplaces and collective bargaining can be more productive than non-union workplaces, but more importantly union members, if not most employees, want to work in productive workplaces. It argues that the approach by unions in Australia and internationally in the last thirty years of co-operating with employers, or pursuing ‘quality of working life’, ‘worker participation’, ‘industrial democracy’, ‘worker voice’ etc., has been flawed because the starting point has not been improving the performance of the workplace. It demonstrates that what interests and mobilises union members and employees is their frustration with management, waste and inefficiencies. With this as the starting point, issues of workplace democracy and worker empowerment puts workplace power on the agenda in a concrete and not theoretical or amorphous way. The paper argues that this should be pursued through unions having their own independent principles and strategic plans for both workplaces and industry, which are incorporated into the traditional bargaining and industrial relations processes. Arguably, when done in this manner industrial democracy is less likely to be sidelined by the employers through spurious worker participation schemes. Finally, it suggests that unless unions take up productivity and worker alienation concerns, alongside traditional fairness and rights issues, they won’t have a very big future.

The ACTU has led a very fine campaign against WorkChoices and is winning the public debate. However in the long term if the union movement is to regain and increase membership and play a critical role in Australian workplaces and society, it needs to add another important dimension to its strategy: unions need to become an important and publicly recognised force for improved productivity, sustainability, skills and jobs.

Union membership is down to 24% density overall and only 17% in the private sector, (some suggest it is lower), although there has been a small upturn during the last couple of years. This is one of the most dramatic falls of any country in the OECD, as it has come off a comparatively high base of over 60% in about thirty years. A significant proportion of this loss happened before the Howard government came to power. Polling and research suggests that 40% of unionists voted for Howard at the last election. This is not a good record.

Following a strategy of transforming unions into a force for improved productivity will be very difficult, and the problems should not be underestimated in the current political and cultural climate. In the long run, only the union movement is responsible for its own success or failure, as no one else will do the job for it, although an ALP government would be of great assistance. Electing an ALP government must be the highest priority in 2007, because it is committed to far better industrial relations legislation. However the union movement not only in these very difficult circumstances, must always implement its own independent strategy, and not simply rely on the re-election of the ALP. This strategy suggests that the important and growing alliance of progressive forces who see the union movement as critical to their own democratic rights actively seek out and engage those employers who have an interest in maintaining a constructive relationship with their unions.

Are Howard’s Laws More Productive?

The arguments used by the Howard Government for its IR laws are that more jobs will be created, and productivity will improve. In fact we know that this will not happen. When New Zealand had similar but less extreme laws from 1991-99, the ‘Employments Contract Act’, it dropped from third in the OECD for productivity improvement to twenty fourth. During that period Australia still had a collective approach to industrial relations, and had a much better productivity record. And if any jobs are created by the new laws (which is very doubtful), they will be at the low end.

The union movement is correctly concentrating on the unfairness of the laws and the need for the restoration of democratic union rights. However the unions also need to present themselves as an important
component of improved business performance, through vigorous bargaining about management issues within enterprise and industry agreements.

**The Critical Role of the Labour Process**

The process by which a product or service is created is still the key to the creation of profit/surplus. Adam Smith in the late 18th century was the first to focus on how productivity could be greatly enhanced by breaking down the production process into very small components, so that instead of one person making a whole product, many workers would each do a very small part and pass it on to the next person, thus producing vastly more product with lesser skills at significantly lower costs.

During the 19th century, Babbage, often referred to as the father of computing, and particularly Frederick Taylor, developed these ideas further, with Taylor drawing up his code of Scientific Management which divided tasks to the absolute minimum so that low skilled people could be employed on the creation of complex products. This laid the ground for the low cost, high volume, mass production techniques exploited by Henry Ford, and all subsequent production of consumer goods, as well as clerical work. To this day, even in so-called knowledge industries, the influence of Taylor can still be seen as his system was not only about cheaper production but about management exerting maximum control over the labour process.

Marx got to the essence of how a labour process controlled exclusively by the employer was not only the source of surplus value, but also the source of the deep alienation experienced by most employees. This is not only about the fact that the employee has no ownership of the product/service he or she produces, but also about the frustration of dealing with debilitating work processes at the bottom of a hierarchical structure. With very little room for using one’s intelligence and innovative abilities, and with the proliferation of tyrannical management systems (which are now exacerbated by the Work Choices legislation), is it any wonder that many workers are frustrated?

The limitation of most union movements over the last century and a half has been that they have dealt with the symptoms of exploitation and alienation through improved wages and conditions but rarely by taking on extremely bad management systems. This is not to suggest that the former achievements have not been significant, but they have rarely tackled the underlying problem of alienation. Marx recognised this limitation of unions fairly early. But because the labour movement in its left formations leapt to the conclusion that only a change to social ownership could deal with this fundamental problem, this limitation was never fully recognised by the movement itself.

**Social Ownership Has Not Changed the Labour Process**

We learnt the hard way that social ownership as it was practiced in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe had little or no impact on alienation or productivity and was often worse, especially when Taylorism was embraced in a militarised form. The wide experience of government ownership and public service employment in the western world also demonstrated that this form of ownership and employment had little impact on the alienation and often poor health of employees. In fact huge bureaucracies, created by the infinite division of labour, often made it worse. No matter what the form of ownership, for the worker, the fundamental problem of debilitating work systems and hierarchical structures remains.

I know from my experience as a fitter, shop steward, union official of nearly thirty years, numerous seminars and discussions with members and activists, as well as a great deal of reading and international experience, that there is a deep well of resentment about this. There is therefore enormous potential support for the union movement if they develop a strategy to bring workers’ alienation into the open and make it an integral element of the bargaining process.

This approach should not be mistaken for the kind of ‘quality of working life’ or ‘job satisfaction’ strategies practiced by many employers and human resource managers over the last thirty years. Such initiatives usually end up creating more cynicism as they are superficial and designed to leave all the processes and management in control. Unions require a strategy that goes much deeper.

**Worker Voice?**

Nor is it about the amorphous concept of ‘worker voice’ which we now hear so much about. If ‘worker voice’ means starting with some form of consultative process such as joint consultative committees, forget it. Experiences from the 1990s, demonstrates that the starting point for workers is to have the authority and skills to improve their local work systems. These systems are the immediate source of their frustrations, the ones they know most about and how to improve. Once this process is under way, then consultative mechanisms dealing with the broader, systemic issues have real meaning, provided they deal with practical issues and make real decisions which are carried out.

Eventually consultative mechanisms, implemented in a step by step process, start dealing with sophisticated issues such as business strategy, investment in the workplace etc. If worker voice means this, then it can have a future: the critical issue is the process of how it develops, and that the starting points be real and practical.
The trailblazing Scandinavian unions, governments and employers, which pursued quality of working life strategies in the eighties, still often missed the point that dealing with inefficiencies is really what gets workers interested in change. In a recent discussion, a Norwegian colleague with very long experience of such work agreed with that view.

**Employees Dislike Inefficient Workplaces**

When workers set out for work each day they probably subconsciously hold the following goals in mind:

- Get home in one piece.
- Do something worthwhile for the community, and be recognised for it.
- Do something interesting and challenging.
- Produce a worthwhile product or service.
- Do the work effectively and efficiently. (Effective means that a result is achieved; efficient means that it is achieved with minimum input and waste.)
- In the process, learn something, improve skills and have the possibility of going on to more skilled work.
- Work in a congenial atmosphere where friends are made.
- Be reasonably rewarded.

What gets employees enthusiastic to improve and change work systems, is not a superficial quality of working life project or win/win, (not that they can’t be helpful), but doing something about the inefficiency and waste which they experience every day. Most workers don’t like working in wasteful and inefficient workplaces, particularly when they can usually see how things could be made much better, but are never asked. This goes for white, blue collar and knowledge workers, as most businesses are nowhere near as productive as they could be. Once employees have the freedom to make improvements – which inevitably means working differently e.g. in teams, more decision making, less demarcation, new skills and responsibilities, etc. – that’s when they experience more challenging and interesting work. In other words, we don’t develop quality of working life as an end in itself, but as a beneficial side-effect of making the workplace more productive. When this happens quality of working life takes on a new meaning, and employees once started won’t give that up without a fight.

**Managing is too important to be left only to managers.**

In a large New Zealand dairy company a union-initiated management improvement system called TRACC has been running for several years with the goal of improving productive performance. The union in question supported TRACC or as it is known in that company Manufacturing Excellence (ME), because it is a genuine process for business improvement. It begins at the shopfloor, where virtually from day one employees are trained to understand the concepts underpinning productivity (such as the importance of teamwork and leading and managing change) as well as being trained in the technical aspects of productivity measurement and methodologies. Entry-level employees increasingly take responsibility for saving time and waste, controlling quality, innovating new processes and even products from material previously wasted. As a result, there is a change in the role of middle managers; they have a coaching role that makes them more visible and accountable as part of the work team. The employees become more skilled with important responsibilities, and they like it.

About 12 months ago the company indicated that taken together four of their plants had savings over five years of $100 million, much of it resulting from reduced down time and increased product coming through to the market, from the same inputs. There was no loss of jobs in the areas where ME was operating, but as a result of increased efficiency and productivity, and higher quality in certain product lines, this put pressure on other parts of the organisation, e.g. logistics and sales operations, to respond.

On top of their bargained wage increase the employees received a bonus for this improvement. Management after a recent international study tour announced that they intended to keep working constructively with their unions because they found in their study that workplaces with such a constructive relationship were more productive. The company at the executive level now understands the importance of working with the unions instead of attempting to bypass them as some middle managers were encouraging. Another NZ manufacturing plant which had never made a profit was turned around using the same system and resulted in the employees receiving $6,000 each in bonuses, again with no lost jobs.

In 2006 at a national discussion of shop stewards involved with the dairy ME example, a number of those present agreed with a comment to the effect that, ‘there would be a riot in my plant if either the union or management were to withdraw ME, we would never again co-operate to improve performance’. In a survey conducted by Michael Law of Waikato University among the union members about ME, there
were generally positive responses about the impact on their jobs, while also indicating weaknesses and criticisms. However in response to the question ‘In general do you agree that unions should be involved in promoting High Performance Work Systems such as ME?’ 70.7 per cent agreed or strongly agreed. This alone suggests that it is a crucial element for a union strategy of relevance.

In David Peetz’s 2006 book, Brave New Workplace, he quotes from a study within a large Australian bank which examined ‘dual commitment’ i.e. union members having both a commitment to their union and the performance of the company. The authors concluded:

The findings of this study are quite clear. Bank branch performance was clearly higher when employees displayed loyalty to their union, were satisfied with its performance and believed that the industrial relations climate between the two parties was trustful and co-operative. A collective work orientation was also associated with better performance outcomes.

It is not surprising to hear that this company continues to work constructively with their unions, and is not interested in the WorkChoices legislation. A recent study via a survey of unionist’s view of participation done by Michelle Brown and Christina Cregan of Melbourne University, came up with a similar finding i.e. if employers are looking for support for change and contribution to performance, then union members are more likely to respond because they are more likely to want to be involved as they are joiners.

**Collective Bargaining/Unions & Productivity**

There has been a fair amount of research about the links between unions/collective bargaining and productivity, some of which has been conducted by, *inter alia*, Peetz, the World Bank and Black and Lynch who have produced a number of papers since 1996 examining union presence and productivity. In general the conclusions suggest that there is little evidence that unions/collective bargaining *per se* is an impediment to business performance. Even research commissioned by the Business Council of Australia designed to show that individual contracts and less union intervention will improve productivity, could not prove the point.

What came through in the World Bank study published in 2003, of 1000 peer reviewed papers examining collective bargaining, is that it is more equitable (which is to be expected), and that on balance it probably assists productivity. The Lynch and Black studies show that where a management is introducing a process for improving performance e.g. TRACC, and the employees are unionised, the improvement will be significantly better than when they are not unionised. They also show that unionised workplaces are more likely to have a more efficient introduction to new technology, and are more likely to have training programs and be more skilled. This is not saying that all unionised workplaces are more efficient than non-union workplaces. Black and Lynch show that where a management has no effective plans for change such as for example introducing a TRACC process or are incompetent, and the place is unionised, the likelihood is that productive will fall.

The responsibility for improved performance rests with management, but if they are competent and visionary they will realise that a unionised workforce has considerable potential, and some employers, especially a few larger ones, acknowledge this and work constructively with their unions. Unfortunately the leaders of most Australian employer organisations – many of whom have never managed anything - are ideologically driven to deny the considerable amount of research demonstrating the positive role unions can play.

If unions have a potential positive effect even as passive participants, then if they were to pro-actively bargain and take the initiative about business performance, mobilising the knowledge and commitment of their shop stewards, officials and members, the impact of unions should be much greater. By setting out to make themselves indispensable to the success of the business, and take their strategy beyond bargaining about traditional wages and conditions, unions can not only earn the support of their existing membership but also recruit new members.

A very important lesson from recent New Zealand experiences and from examples of collaboration between employers and unions in Australia in the 1990s, is that the unions must have their own clear and independent strategy for bargaining about workplace and industry performance. Without that not only will the process not lead to improved performance, but the unions and their members will lose out.

**Boxing and Dancing**

This is not simply a process of partnership, but of arms length bargaining – similar to the familiar process of bargaining over wages and conditions. However the unions must have their own set of objectives, for example their own principals for better work systems, for consultative mechanisms, high skills, better OH&S, job security, stronger union organisation and more members etc. If the bargaining with the employer does not match the union principals, then the union should not agree.

We constantly hear that trust is needed to achieve significant workplace change and business
improvement, but that is putting the cart before the horse. Trust only emerges when there are genuine negotiations and proper implementation of the negotiated agreement. This rarely happened in Australia in the nineties so very little changed except that which the employer had decided was in their best interest. In retrospect the lack of a clear union strategy undermined the union’s role and tended to make many members cynical about the exercise.

The process is best described in a recent book from Europe, *Strategic Unionism and Partnership*, as one of ‘Boxing and Dancing’. That is, unions continue to bargain with employers as always. At times they ‘dance’ (cooperate with employers to improve business performance), and at other times they will box (take industrial action) in the traditional way when necessary to protect and advance their interests. The important point about boxing and dancing is that boxing is recognised as a legitimate element of employer/union relationships and it will occur from time to time, but that should not stand in the way of resuming the dancing mode. In a quote from the book attributed to the President of the Swedish Metal Workers Union:

> Sometimes it’s a dance, sometimes its boxing. We also have a referee when we box in the form of the [agreement] rules. We have also talked about how big the ring should be, how many rounds there should be, and what one should hit and shouldn’t hit. Although both boxing and dancing existed previously, their nature had changed … ‘If you take the old dance floor – we both boxed and danced. But one danced sometimes after one boxed, in order that boxing matches weren’t too long … now its about 90% dancing and 10% boxing. With three year deals there are very short boxing matches … But it’s bloody important that we don’t stop boxing … we wouldn’t get any legitimacy for the Industry Agreement if it wasn’t clear that we can also take industrial action.’

**New Zealand Unions Seek New Directions**

Arising from the experience of TRACC in the dairy industry and other businesses, the New Zealand union movement through its Council of Trade Unions (NZCTU) is currently developing strategies to give the unions’ role in improving business performance a higher profile, under the rubric ‘Unions and High Performance Work Systems’ (HPWS). In partnership with the NZ Government and with support from some employers, the NZCTU is currently taking about 1,000 shop stewards through training to help them understand productivity and HPWS, and begin to equip them to bargain at the enterprise about business performance. The early reports of the training suggest that the participants are not only very interested in productivity, but want to do something about it when they return to their workplace. The seminars are also attracting non-union participants. A couple of unions are preparing material for use by officials and shop stewards which sets out union principals for workplace change, steps for consulting their members, identifying impediments to efficiency, and how they might bargain about these.

The union movement is developing its own agenda for business improvement and not simply relying on the employer. Unfortunately, but to be expected, when returning to their work with renewed interests and insights as to how their workplace operates, the shop stewards are finding their managers reluctant to engage them in discussions about how their business could operate better. This suggests that a more traditional industrial campaign of education, mass meetings, and industrial pressure is required to force management to discuss these issues, in the same way unions handle all other campaigns. It also demonstrates that it is more important for management to retain full control rather then improve their performance.

**Occupational Health and Safety**

Another very important reason for unions to intervene in the management-designed labour process is occupational health. An extract from an article by Peter Botsman in *Australian Prospect* from 2005, referring to the work of Michael Marmot, sums it up well:

> Organisations that make you sick have always existed, but the mass pathology associated with work and organisation is a new discovery. In a twenty five year long research project that began with a study of health and longevity among Whitehall public servants, Michael Marmot found that autonomy, security, the amount of control that people have over their lives, and above all, place in the organisation hierarchy, are critical factors in the prevalence of ill health.

Marmot’s original study in 2002 found, contrary to expectations, that ‘it was not the case that people in high stress jobs had a higher risk of heart attack, rather it went exactly the other way: people at the bottom of the hierarchy had a higher risk of heart attacks’. In extending his original findings Marmot found that...
the lower the place in the public servant hierarchy, the higher the risk of all major causes of death. The Whitehall study (1999) found that amongst male British civil servants, all in stable employment, none in poverty, there was nonetheless a gradient of mortality. ‘Each grade in the civil service has higher mortality than the one above it’.

In his further examinations of the public health implications of this work, Marmot finds that across all western countries a similar gradient of ill health occurs. In the US for example, people in the lowest income category had 3.9 times the risk of dying than people in the highest income category. Marmot argues that ‘The work environment, particularly the lack of control over the work environment, was an important predictor of coronary heart disease. These findings were replicated in a variety of different national settings. The data was so robust that Marmot concluded: ‘Where do we find the health gradient? Pretty well everywhere’. This understanding of the health impact of the way work is organised is not usually obvious (we normally look for the obvious causes of accidents or disease). But it provides a further compelling argument for unions to intervene in the way work is organised and managed. The medical profession should be trained and required to examine the working system and conditions their patients operate in, as if Marmot is correct, such knowledge will go a long way in explaining some illnesses.

Union ambivalence about playing a productivity role

Unfortunately many unions and especially a lot of union officials are ambivalent about the union impact on business performance. There are those who argue the class struggle theory and say that it is not the unions’ job to help the employer run their business because there is a fundamental conflict between employees and employers. Even if there is such a conflict however, their members don’t necessarily see it that way, and would appreciate the opportunity to play a significant role in improving performance.

In numerous seminars in which I have been involved where these issues were discussed, the shop stewards rarely saw inefficiencies as a class or systemic issue, but the cause was incompetence of their particular management, and that management down the road at another workplace would have to be better. This even led to discussions where the participants argued that no place could have a management as bad as their particular one. On one occasion in a shop stewards seminar in the USA, the participants argued that US managers had to be the worst in the world!

It is important that union training in Australia should include sessions/material for union officials especially, but also shop stewards to understand key elements of what makes businesses more productive. This will equip them even in today’s very difficult climate, with some knowledge and skills to bargain with management when companies get into difficulties due to poor management, so that they don’t only bargain about redundancy pay, but can talk in some detail about how the business might become efficient enough to maintain most if not all the jobs which would otherwise be lost.

Traditional Class Struggle?

Nowadays there has to be a serious question mark over class struggle as the basis for mobilising workers, as there is little sign of it among workers. In Australia at the moment there is a vicious class attack by most employers, particularly employer organisations and the Federal Government on workers, especially the lower paid, but there is little evidence that this is being reciprocated by a class response from workers. It is estimated that 40% of unionists voted for the Howard Government at the last election (2004) which hardly suggests an understanding of class struggle. Class struggle assumes there are two classes in combat and that is currently not the case, nor has it been in Australia for at least a couple of generations. We must not mistake the very good campaign conducted by the unions in opposition to the WorkChoices legislation as class struggle, as it is only mobilising a small percentage of workers, despite the polls continuing to show strong public opposition to the IR laws.

There are still union officials and activists who take an uncompromising approach that all employers are the enemy. A laudable attitude if the rest of their members agreed with them, but the overwhelming majority of them don’t see it that way. Most workers do not see themselves as working class or as participants in a class struggle, nor do they hate their employers, even when at times it would be well justified, and only a very small percentage have ever experienced industrial action. In other words, although the ruling class is attacking workers as possibly never before since Federation, there is no subjective recognition of this fact from the overwhelming majority of workers, and to have a class struggle it would seem necessary for that to be the case.

The book by Prof. Walter Korpi, The Democratic Class Struggle in the mid-1980s, raised a lot of interesting thoughts about class struggle in the era of globalisation. Korpi argued that modern class struggle now had to have the strengthening of workplace democracy at its core, and that traditional militant action did not necessarily indicate a higher level of class/political consciousness nor sustained gains. He pointed out that while countries such as Italy, USA, and Australia had far more strike activity than Sweden, in terms of sustained gains in wages, working conditions, and particularly welfare provisions for
protecting the unemployed and the less well off, the Swedes had done much better. While the Swedish labour movement had much less strike activity, its threat of industrial action had been far more important than its actual use. This is because over the years when push came to shove the Swedish union movement has been able to deliver. For example it called the most widespread general strike ever in any country, in the early eighties, which leaves a long memory, so when they threaten action, the employers and governments know very well it can be delivered.

Korpi argued that class struggle should be manifested in democratising the workplace through what he termed ‘power resources’. Each time workers/their union increase their power vis à vis the employer/industry (e.g. by establishing a union presence and organisation, potential for industrial action both as threats and carried out, rights to a major say in occupational health and safety, consultative mechanisms such as works councils, access to information or participation in company decisions, new work systems which increase worker prerogatives, increased skills, bargaining for improved business performance, etc.), they improve their power resources. Each power resource achieved provides the springboard for the next.

This does not suggest that it is a linear process with no setbacks. Clearly in the Australia of 2007 a number of power resources have been lost and will need to be fought for again with a view to them being sustained in any economic or political climate. However the idea of building on each gain as a logical step to the next, helps to provide a longer term and clearer labour movement strategy, and also to see class struggle in another way, better suited to the modern, globalised world.

**Contingent Workers and the Role of Workplace Change**

A difficult problem for many union movements is the increased numbers of contingent workers, especially in Australia where they are said to make up at least 25 per cent of all employees. Organising people with a portfolio of jobs is a challenge requiring new methods, some of which are already in place. The strategy suggested here of tackling management about high performance work and management systems could be very helpful in engaging this hard-to-reach sector of the workforce.

One important feature of high performance work systems is that once a company moves down a road demanding sophisticated work and management systems, higher skills, and greater employee responsibility, then that company also requires a stable workforce. The constant chopping and changing of a temporary workforce is at odds with a modern high performance work system, which requires skilled, committed, flexible employees with an ever deeper knowledge of their workplace. Therefore unions by pursuing a strategy of high performance and tackling management about their inefficiencies, can also begin to demonstrate that short term, low cost employment policies undermine their business performance.

**Community Unionism is not an answer in itself**

As unions worldwide experience decline, there is a tendency to look for quick and simple solutions. One of these is so-called community unionism, i.e. involving local communities in identifying common goals and joining in organising drives. This is not to suggest that community support and working with communities is not important, or that unions don’t need their critical support at times. However we need to understand that unions are uniquely about work, the workplace and industry, and that is their priority and starting point, and any strategy for renewal and growth must keep that front and centre.

To be effective, links with the community and other coalitions must be based on the concrete interest of the union members, and not some amorphous idea of common interest. For example in the early nineties the food processing unions through the ACTU developed a comprehensive union workplace and industry strategy with the objective of making the industry globally competitive through new work systems, higher skills, better management, new government initiatives, etc. This logically led to a constructive dialogue with the farmers through the National Farmers’ Federation (prior to the Howard Government) because both parties realised that there was mutual benefit in such a high quality industry. It also led to constructive relations with the Australian Consumers Association around the issues of healthy and good quality food and proper labelling. The unions had useful discussions with the Australian Conservation Foundation around the issue of how the union strategy for a high quality food processing industry should also contribute less waste and environmental damage. Finally it was also the basis for a constructive dialogue with the large food processing companies, who felt obliged to discuss a comprehensive, and strategic plan for their industry coming from the unusual source of their unions.

The point about this example is that the unions engaged the wider community and especially strategic allies, not in some abstract way, but based on the logical relationship of how these allies and community groups could work together to improve the workplace and industry, to the benefit of consumers and the wider society.

**Superannuation and Investment Funds**

There is an irony in the current attack on unions and wages by employers given that a significant percentage
of the investment funds which fuel their businesses is actually made up of workers’ superannuation contributions. Attempts are slowly being made both in Australia and internationally to influence boards of trustees, and particularly employer representatives to understand the kinds of investment and management systems which will not only provide better business performance, but have a greater likelihood of sustaining the business over a longer period. However it is a long and difficult process.

Institutional funds have traditionally been very reluctant to intervene at the board, or even the annual general meeting, preferring to leave the business strategy and day to day management to the so called experts. Recently we have witnessed some increased institutional investor activism regarding corporate governance, board and CEO remuneration, and internationally in a couple of cases to influence companies to treat their employees and local communities better, with some small success.

The most offensive investors are the private equity funds, described by one writer as the ‘barbarians at the gate’, whose purpose is to take a successful company into private ownership, squeeze every possible dollar out of it through sackings, speed ups, slashing of wages and conditions, breaking up the company, and then selling off the pieces at a short term profit, often destroying the business in the process. This is precisely what was intended with Qantas but fortunately the barbarians failed. One writer in the business pages had already warned the unions of a possible attack on their wages and conditions if the bid succeeded.

Part of the tragedy is that institutional investors such as some industry superannuation funds are likely to be involved. If the union movement is to embrace a strategy which involves them as an integral element of wealth creation and value adding, it will be very important that it is a holistic strategy, which includes a planned and systematic approach to institutional investors, especially industry superannuation funds. It will be critical to have them understand what kind of management delivers the best results, and that the unions will be playing a constructive role. It is imperative that if the suggested strategy is to succeed, unions establish some legitimate influence with investment decisions using their member’s money, otherwise the best changes at the workplace level will be easily destroyed by decisions taken in investment board rooms.

**A national climate for constructive engagement?**

Having raised some thoughts about a more constructive engagement between the union movement and employers, we need to explore whether and how that might be possible. The right climate certainly doesn’t exist in Australia at the moment, but it needs to be thought about, and some discussions take place right now.

International experience suggests that such constructive engagement is far more achievable when government and labour laws provide an encouraging climate for it. The traditional culture in Scandinavia for example has meant that even when social democratic governments have been defeated such as in Sweden recently, the culture of constructive engagement is strong enough to withstand such change, with some different tactics and with greater difficulty. The same goes for much of Western Europe. Interestingly the same can be said about some states in the USA where despite vicious attacks on the union movement at the Federal level, a number of states with more progressive governors have been important in facilitating constructive engagement between unions and employers.

In Ireland there has been a tri-partite agreement between the government, employers, unions, and now involving many other signatories, negotiated every three years since 1987 which has been the key to the spectacular improvement in Ireland’s economy and living standards, and provides the culture for constructive engagement between the social partners, as they are widely known in Europe. Since 1999 the NZ Labor Government has provided a far better climate for constructive engagement, but it hasn’t happened without a lot of effort, as the unions have had to work through new strategies, especially arising from the attacks on them in the nineties by the National Government and the Business Roundtable. While the unions have survived despite losing about 60% of their membership and are now slowly growing, they are only slowly clawing back the 33% drop in wages among the lower paid which resulted from those attacks. Learning from those lessons they are positioning themselves to play an important role in the productivity of New Zealand’s economy – and virtually forcing employer organisations to take notice of them and reluctantly engage in dialogue about a high-road economy.

**Can This Happen in Australia?**

While we have just about the worst of all climates under the current IR laws, every opportunity needs to be pursued for constructive dialogue with the better employers to discuss a range of issues, but especially that of a high road economy. Some things are going well such as the National Manufacturing Forum – which is about pursuing a high road economy – initiated by all Labor states with the ACTU playing a major role along with some employers. This initiative needs to inform a more comprehensive strategy so that it is only the beginning of a much wider dialogue.

The union movement needs to grab every opportunity to engage employers in a constructive dialogue
about the future productivity of our economy, with the long term objective of maybe a more substantial agreement when we have a government that will commit to such objectives. In other words we need to be putting that in place as much as we can right now, and not hold our breath until a Labor Government is next elected. Every employer who is prepared to engage constructively with their union/s despite the new IR laws (and often despite significant pressure from the Howard Government to reject their unions), should also be engaged in a wider dialogue about the future of Australia. Constructive engagement seems in most countries to be superior in delivering more productive outcomes and living standards, and the kind of productive and equitable society the union movement is committed to.

**Summing Up**

- The union movement through the ACTU is conducting an excellent campaign against the Howard IR laws focusing on fairness and union and workplace rights.
- A further element needs to be added to the campaign to challenge the claim that WorkChoices will lead to higher productivity – that of positioning the unions as an important force for a high road economy, and better productive performance through High Performance Work Systems.
- To do this the unions must have their own independent strategy for productive improvement.
- The strategy of pursuing High Performance Work Systems adds another component in organising especially with contingent workers.
- Unions need to pay more attention to the micro labour process of the way work is performed.
- Employees/Union members are interested in, and prepared to work towards improving productive performance to deal with the inefficient and frustrating management systems they work within, as the first step to more interesting and higher skilled work which logically follows in order to be successful.
- Workplace change must be a bargaining process and not some amorphous partnership where the employer holds most of the cards.
- Union training must include some segments/materials to equip officials and shop stewards with an understanding of the key elements of what makes businesses productive.
- Traditional class struggle theories need to be modified to be seen as democratising the workplace and increasing workers’ power in their place of work and industry.
- Unions need to position themselves as an indispensable element of a business’s success.
- The process can be defined as Boxing and Dancing where traditional industrial action is used where necessary, as well as constructive dialogue about company performance, and not one or the other.
- Community unionism is unlikely to be very helpful to rebuilding the union movement unless it is closely linked to union objectives for work, the workplace, and industry, which is the unique role of a union.
- The strategy must be holistic in that there are many components, and the role of investment funds especially the industry superannuation funds over time will need to be brought into the loop to play a progressive role.
- The whole union movement needs right now to develop and grab every opportunity to engage the better employers in constructive dialogue about a more productive and equitable Australia, with a view to a more comprehensive agreement leading up to or during the rule of a Labor Government.

I would like to thank Dave Davies, Dave Feickert, and Greg Pettiona for their helpful comments.
Industrial apprenticeships – another dying Labour tradition?

Bobbie Oliver*

Despite extensive changes occurring in the latter half of the twentieth century, the persistence of apprenticeship in Australia stands in stark contrast to its virtual disappearance in some other industrial capitalist countries, such as the United States of America. It has been argued that the apprenticeship system in Australia arose out of late nineteenth century craft union demands that an indentured apprenticeship be a compulsory requirement for the attainment of skilled worker status and pay. Consequently, the apprenticeship system is a strong labour tradition, which, along with compulsory arbitration and trade union membership, undergirded the skilled labour system throughout the twentieth century.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the traditional system of five-year apprenticeships for boys entering a skilled trade underwent vast changes, including shortening the overall period of indentures, increasing the proportion of theoretical training, opening the trades to female applicants and, ultimately, introducing a range of short-term traineeships. This paper presents an overview of these changes, and examines their impact in relation to two Western Australian workplaces: the Midland Government Railway Workshops and the East Perth Power Station. The paper poses the question whether the trade apprenticeship has become another threatened labour tradition, and if so, what are the ramifications? Is a system of apprenticeship that benefits the worker, the employee and society by creating a skilled workforce, now regarded as a luxury for which neither government nor private enterprise is prepared to foot the bill? Is it, indeed, yet another labour tradition that has succumbed to the hostile attacks of non-sympathetic governments?

In Australia, if a literature survey recently undertaken by the author is indicative, apprentices and their training tend to be the province of contemporary government reports and industrial relations scholars, rather than historians. Yet, as John Shields has pointed out, despite its decline in the latter twentieth century, ‘the persistence of apprenticeship in Australia stands in stark contrast to its virtual disappearance in some other industrial capitalist countries, most notably the United States’. Furthermore, as Shields and others have indicated, the revival of the apprenticeship system in Australia arose out of craft union demands at the end of the nineteenth century that an indentured apprenticeship be a compulsory requirement for the attainment of skilled worker status and pay. Consequently, the apprenticeship system has been a strong labour tradition, which, along with compulsory arbitration and trade union membership, undergirded the skilled labour system in Australia throughout the twentieth century. As such, it is also a significant aspect of labour history.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the traditional system of five-year apprenticeships for boys entering a skilled trade underwent considerable change, including shortening the overall period of indentures, increasing the proportion of theoretical training, opening the trades to female applicants and, ultimately, introducing a range of short-term training schemes. This paper presents an overview of the initial development of, and subsequent changes to, the apprenticeship system in Western Australia, with reference to two Western Australian workplaces: the Midland Government Railway Workshops and the East Perth Power Station. The paper poses the question whether the trade apprenticeship has become another threatened labour tradition, and if so, what are the ramifications? Is a system of apprenticeship that benefits the worker, the employee and society by creating a skilled workforce, now regarded as a luxury for which neither government nor private enterprise is prepared to foot the bill? Is it, indeed, yet another labour tradition that has succumbed to the hostile attacks of non-sympathetic governments?

A history of apprenticeship training in Western Australia

In Western Australia, apprenticeship training dates from the turn of the nineteenth century. Perth’s first technical school was established in 1900, and offered ‘voluntary classes for trade apprentices and others possessing an ‘occupational’ qualification.’ From 1908, the Railways Department arranged for all trade apprentices in its employ to attend special classes of two hours per week during working time, but it was not until 1925 that State Parliament amended the Arbitration and Conciliation Act to require employers to meet the cost of any technical instruction of their apprentices that occurred within ‘ordinary working hours.’ The Western Australian Act of 1925 gave the Arbitration Court the powers to determine: the method of indenture, terms and conditions of apprenticeship, the syllabus and methods of instruction

---

3 Memorandum, ‘Technical Education of Apprentices in WA’. p 1, in Education Department records, SROWA Accession No. AN45/1, 1497, file 75/1926 ‘Committee of Apprentices’.
and examination of apprentices. When there were sufficient numbers, the Education Department was to provide day classes for apprentices; smaller numbers were to be catered for in evening classes. The Amendment also determined the length and frequency of classes, and that they would consist of ‘two hours workshop training and two hours of mathematics, [technical] drawing, trade and science’.4

By 1937, a handful of trades (electrical and mechanical fitting, carpentry and joinery, blacksmithing, boilermaking, sheet metal working and plumbing) were served by an Advisory Committee on Technical College trade classes, whose role was to recommend a syllabus of instruction and the appointment of instructors.5 These Advisory Committees functioned until the 1970s, when they became known as Industrial Training Advisory Boards, and were re-located in the Industrial Training Division of the Department of Labour and Industry.6

The apprentices’ on-the-job training was determined by conditions set out in the Apprentices Syllabus of Training. As an example, the 1940 syllabus for the Western Australian Government Railways [WAGR] set out the requirements for every blacksmithing apprentice in each year of his training, as follows:

First year: Shall be capable of driving steam hammer and striking for a blacksmith. Shall be capable of simple forging and plain welding of iron and steel.

Second Year: To be capable of more advanced work including hose pipe clips, buffer washers, small knees, brake block keys, eye bolts and anvil tools for personal use …[and so on, until]

Fifth Year: Shall be capable of satisfactory carrying out all general repair and manufacture blacksmithing required for locomotives. Capable of taking out quantities of materials required. Understand the use of templates and competent to work to a drawing.7

Consequently, all aspects of an apprentice’s training, from his learning on the factory floor to the input of his Technical Education syllabus, was strongly influenced and overseen by the industry involved and governed by conditions determined in the Arbitration Court. It was not until 1950, however, that the Technical College syllabus was brought into line with the practical work taught on the factory floor. Prior to this time, some apprentices, including some trained by the State Electricity Commission of WA (SECWA) at the East Perth Power Station and elsewhere, were placed in the difficult situation of having to learn at the Tech. in first year the theory of skills that the employer would not teach them until second year.8

In 1952, the first National Enquiry into Apprenticeships, headed by Mr Justice Wright, recommended shortening apprenticeships from five (or in some cases six) years to four years and extending opportunities for off-the-job training courses. The new system placed increased value on learning theory in Technical and Further Education (TAFE) classes. There was a new emphasis on attaining some type of national standard in training. The Australian Apprentices Advisory Committee, whose membership was made up to Commonwealth and State training authorities, formed in 1957 to meet the increased demand for involving ‘outside’ bodies in apprentice training. An aim of the re-structuring was to make apprenticeships more attractive to young men who had completed the final year at high school, and this appears to have succeeded. In 1954, there were between 65 000 and 70 000 apprentices in Australia; by the late 1960s, the number had increased to 100 000.9

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, three further significant changes resulted from the achievement of a national standard, the entry of females in traditionally male-only trades, and the creation of a range of traineeships, short apprenticeships and other means of obtaining a trade qualification. The 1970s saw the introduction and expansion of the National Apprentice Assistance Scheme; the replacement of the Apprentices Advisory Board with the Commonwealth and State/Territories Apprenticeships Committee to develop a national strategy, and the inauguration of Youth traineeships providing a wider range of training opportunities, and encouraging young women to enter apprenticeships in traditionally male-dominated areas. Despite these initiatives, there remained much that apparently needed changing in the

4 Memorandum, ‘Technical Education of Apprentices in WA’, p 1,
5 Superintendent for Technical Education from Industrial Registrar, Arbitration Court, 13 October 1939, in Arbitration Court files, SROWA AN 195/2, Accession No. 1101, File No. 139/1942 ‘Technical College trades classes for Apprentices Advisory Committee appointed with connection with …’;
6 Western Power files, Staff Administration – Apprentices. Industrial Training Divisions (Department of Labour and Industry), Industrial Training Advisory Boards.
7 Court of Arbitration (Western Australia), Apprentices Syllabus of Training, Western Australian Government Railways (Awards Nos. 5, 6, 7, 13, and 19 of 1937), Perth, 1940, p. 3. (SROWA Accession No. 1239, item Box 16/1920).
8 Minutes of the Apprenticeship Advisory Committee, Engineering Trades, dated 13 June 1950, in Arbitration Court records, SROWA Accession No. AN195/2. File 49/1042, ‘Engineering Trades – Award 35/1936 minutes’.
structure of apprenticeship training. In a paper delivered at an Australian College of Education conference in Albany (WA) in August 1984, Michael Cross, Executive Director of WA Department of Education and Training, used the results of a survey of employers, educationalists and others involved in training to strongly criticise the existing apprenticeship system, which he branded as ‘an anachronistic hangover from the Medieval guild system’; ‘inefficient’ as it was based on time serving (rather than competencies achieved); ‘inflexible, slow to change, not keeping pace with technical change’, and therefore – perhaps most damningly of all – that the apprenticeship system was not a reliable source of skilled people. The system was discriminatory in that it excluded females; moreover, the creation of trade elites, through the system of apprenticeship training, was one of the major impediments to restructuring the Australian labour market and removing the demarcation ‘problems’ that were a feature of the occupational structure.10 These criticisms had been also made by Dr Norman Dufty in a 1983 report into industrial relations at Westrail.11 Certainly these criticisms were not groundless. The issues behind them, along with the raising of the school leaving age and the increase in opportunities in other forms of work, had contributed to the fall off in the number of young people taking up indentures.12 The paper, however, revealed an ideological basis that has become all too familiar in the past decade – an economic rationalist perspective that seeks to break down skills and skill differentials in order to tailor workers to a particular workplace rather than fully skill them for their trade, of which more later.

With regard to the aim of creating a national standard of training, in 1995, the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) was established as an integrated national system incorporating all educational and training qualifications from senior secondary school to university. This system offered four levels of certificate, followed by a diploma and an advanced diploma. In 2000, over 275,000 apprentices were training for AQF qualifications, of whom 75 per cent trained to Certificate III level. The AQF scheme included 6000 school students in 2000,13 in a return to the practice of recruiting apprentices before they had completed their formal schooling.

The second major change was that, while the apprenticeship system traditionally focussed exclusively upon trade certificate or equivalent qualifications, by the late twentieth century it had been extended to cover all levels of vocational qualifications. While apprenticeships, at the turn of the twentieth century, ranged from a few months to more than three years duration, figures for 2000 showed that 44 per cent of trainees chose the longer apprenticeships, and this percentage was increasing.14 This trend might not continue, however, if employees were expected to bear the greater portion of their training expenses. This issue will be considered in the concluding section of the paper.

With regard to the recruitment of females into the trades, an Australia-wide study, undertaken in 1987, found that 129,000 apprentices (or 11 per cent) were female; however, when hairdressers were excluded only 3,600 (or 0.3 per cent) were female. Changes to the apprenticeship system in Australia, especially since the 1980s, have resulted in a wide variety of training schemes being made available to young women as well as men in a range of trades and occupations. In 2000, 31 per cent of apprentices were female – thus showing significant growth in a little over a decade.

Although the number of apprenticeships being undertaken in Australia is higher than ever before, major structural differences to the system mean that it is impossible to compare modern training with that of yesteryear in any meaningful way, apart from the end of product, that is, the extent to which these schemes are able to fulfil the demand for fully trained, skilled labour. What is immediately evident is that the traditional, male-dominated, blue collar work culture, where status was determined by the practice of a skilled trade, inherited from the British industrial system in the nineteenth century, has largely been replaced by a broader, more inclusive and less class-based system of vocational training. Whether this is a more efficient method of producing fully trained and skilled trades people is a matter for continuing debate.15 These changes, it could be argued, form part of the dismantling of trade union power that was a feature of Australian industrial relations for much of the twentieth century.

How were changes to the apprenticeship training system manifested in the workplace?

What some of these changes actually meant will be examined in the context of two work places in Western Australia: the Government Railway Workshops at Midland and the East Perth Power Station. The Midland Workshops, sited in an outer suburb of the State capital, Perth, exemplify the extent and complexity of

---

10 Report by Michael Cross, Executive Director, State Department of Education and Training, dated 12 August 1984, in SROWA Cons 4014, AN251, file 7333/84, Box 613, p. 9.
13 NCVER: ‘Australian apprenticeships: Research at a glance’.
14 Ibid.
15 See, for example, Smits and Stromback, The Economics of the Apprenticeship System, ch. 5, ‘The Future of the Apprenticeship System’.
the occupational changes occurring in Australian skilled trades in the period 1945 to 1994, and workers’ responses to these changes. For over two thirds of their 90-year existence, the Workshops produced and maintained steam locomotives and rolling stock, with the largest number of workers employed during the 1950s. As it was a closed shop, unions played a significant role in the culture. The Workshops was designed to be a production line for the building and repair of steam locomotives. During the course of an apprenticeship, boys worked their way through the entire processes of their trade and graduated from their indentures fully skilled in their chosen trade, while possessing a working knowledge of related trades. The tradesmen were all trained in the same way in this extremely conservative workplace, where the emphasis was on the amount of time served in apprenticeship and the relationship between tradesman (master) and apprentice.

In contrast to the large numbers of apprentices and variety of trades at the Midland Railway Workshops, the East Perth Power Station (later part of SECWA), which was opened in 1916 to provide Perth’s electricity, trained very small numbers in a handful of trades – electrical and mechanical fitters, boilermakers and instrument makers. Yet the same comment was made about the rigour of their training. As at Midland, the apprentices were fully trained in their own trades, and aspects of other trades with which they would work, as well as being given work experience off site. One worker recalled working in other power sub-stations and workshops in the metropolitan area. By the time he had completed his apprenticeship in 1960, he had experience of working at Belmont workshops, ‘all the sub-stations in the metropolitan area’, and had even spent some time at Northam (a country town). Among the more memorable projects, he recalled wiring up the ‘original lights’ on the Narrows Bridge over the Swan River, and along the Kwinana Freeway from the Narrows to Canning Bridge. The mix of theoretical and practical work was much the same, with Power Station apprentices travelling to Technical College off site one day per fortnight, while the Midland boys attended classes one half-day per week at the Midland Railway Institute on the Workshops site. By the 1970s, however, SECWA apprentices, including those trained at the East Perth Power Station, were more likely to receive their allotted 720 hours of technical school attendance under a block release system, whereby both metropolitan and country-based apprentices undertook a block of seven weeks’ study in each of their first two years and three and a half weeks in their third year. This block release system does not appear to have been used at the Workshops, but this was probably because they had a Tech. on site and apprentices were all trained at Midland; they merely undertook (by this time voluntary) country placements to increase their experience. In 1984, the proportion of Tech. College training was increased to 840 hours, but by this time the East Perth Power Station had closed and any remaining apprentices were directed to other parts of the SECWA.

At the Midland Workshops, however, the benefits accrued from a greater emphasis on ‘book learning’, both prior to and during the apprenticeship, took the form of higher wages and shortened training periods, although the Workshops management was slow to adjust to the new Regulations. Despite the appointment of trade examiners as early as 1963 to stage the change from five to four-year apprenticeships, the WAGR applied to the Arbitration Court only in 1974 to bring the conditions of apprenticeships into line with other industries, as expressed in the 1972 Regulations. In June 1974, the maximum term for all WAGR apprenticeships was finally cut from five to four years. Apprentices starting in 1972 applied to the Arbitration Court only in 1974 to have their terms reduced.

The three decades from 1950 to 1980 had seen massive changes both in the technology of the workplace – at the Midland Workshops, for example, diesels replaced steam locomotives; wooden carriages were superseded by aluminium; tradesmen had to learn to use new materials such as fibreglass – and in the makeup of the ‘blue collar’ workforce. New technologies made industry so much less labour intensive, and as a result the intakes of trade apprentices in many factories were greatly reduced. While SECWA apprentice numbers rose slowly to around 150 in the mid 1970s, the Midland Workshops experience more accurately paralleled what was happening to ‘blue collar’ trades in general. The previously-mentioned 1984 paper by Michael Cross revealed extensive changes in the Australian labour market. In the decade

16 Interview with N. Dragicevich, conducted by Sharleen Olsen, 26 April 1902, for the Midland Workshops Oral History Project.
17 See, for example, B. Oliver, “‘Transforming labour’ at the Westrail Workshops, Midland WA, 1940s to 1990s”, in B. Bowden & J. Kellett, eds, Transforming Labour: Work, Workers, Struggle and Change. Proceedings of the Eighth National Labour History Conference, Brisbane, 3-5 October 2003, pp. 247-52, in particular, pp. 249-50, which highlights the similarities in training blacksmiths in the early 1950s and in the mid 1970s.
18 In 1976, the total number of the SECWA apprentices (of which those at East Perth Power Station constituted only a small portion) was 153, which compared with approximately 157 apprentices at the Midland Workshops in 1976, but just over a decade earlier (in 1963) the Workshops had 345 apprentices (figures drawn from WAGR Annual Reports). SECWA figures from Apprentice Review of 1976, Internal Memo from Education Officer to Manager of Personnel, SECWA, File 16/35/7 Staff Administration – Apprentices – Industrial Training Divisions, in Western Power Archives, used with permission.
19 Barry Goldman, interviewed by Denise Pringle, 4 October 2006, interview transcript, p. 6.
20 File 16/35/7 Staff Administration – Apprentices – Industrial Training Division, in Western Power Archives.
21 Minute A.E. Williams, Secretary of Railways to CME, et.al, 24 June 1974, in Ibid.
from 1973 to 1983, according to Cross, the manufacturing trades had decreased from 23.9 per cent to 18.1 per cent of the workforce, while the blue collar occupations overall had dropped 5 per cent to represent 48 per cent of all employees. In comparison, professional and ‘para professional’ groups had risen by 40 per cent and represented 7.3 per cent of the total workforce.22

Cross’ research indicated a decline both in blue collar occupations and in young people taking up indentures. These trends were reflected in declining numbers of tradesmen and apprentices at the Midland Workshops. According to statistics published in WAGR Annual Reports, the Workshops employed 3059 wages staff in 1957, including 398 apprentices. A decade later (1967), Workshops waged staff had been reduced to 2246, including 220 apprentices, although, by 1980, this number had increased to approximately 240. The entire staff, meanwhile, declined from 2034 in 1971 to 949 in 1989, with the figure in 1993, the year before closure, being recorded as 565. As discussed elsewhere,23 the Midland Workshops were closed as a direct result of government policies that favoured privatisation of industry and transport. The move away from government-owned large public facilities was Australia-wide and affected other government railway workshops including Eveleigh, Ipswich and Launceston. How the closure of these public sector industries and the taking up of their work by the private sector affected apprenticeship training is the subject of the final part of this paper.

Apprenticeship training – an unaffordable luxury?

Two studies undertaken in the latter 1990s undertook to answer questions about the cost of training apprentices and the effectiveness of the new methods of assessment. In the former study, Dockery et al undertook 59 case studies of Australian firms employing apprentices. Predictably, they found that, while many employers demonstrated ‘altruistic motives’24 in accepting and training apprentices, thereby incurring a considerable expense to the firm, the outlay on training could be considerably less in larger firms where ‘economies of scale’ operated, or where an apprentice was trained in work of a ‘lower skill content or less variety’ or there was a lower level of supervision.25 These findings are corroborated by John Mossenton, an official with the AMWU, who told the author of this paper that only the largest private firms can offer an apprenticeship training of the scope provided by the Midland Railway Workshops, SECWA and other large public companies, which also have been dismantled and privatised.26 Mossenton believes that few private companies have the incentive to train apprentices, and those who do so prefer to offer training in a narrow range of skills, suited only to their own business, rather than the breadth of knowledge that was acquired in the apprenticeships offered by the Railway Workshops. Consequently, graduates of these training schemes have fewer skills and limited opportunities of obtaining employment other industries.27

Dockery et al also considered the matter of incentive, asking, ‘Why do profit maximising firms continue to provide apprenticeship training? What other benefits do they receive from investing in apprenticeship training and how are these accrued by the firm?’ They were unable to answer this question satisfactorily, but they did suggest that in the future, firms might not be so willing to foot the training bill and might instead ‘push for the public to bear more of the costs of apprenticeship training’.28 They also observed that the positive findings of the study regarding the willingness of employers to pay and train apprentices, the lack of support for any reduction in apprentices’ wages, and, in particular, the apparently altruistic motives of employers who trained apprentices and did not retain them in the firm were to some extent biased by the absence of any business which did not train apprentices.29

In the future, the cost of training may become the responsibility of the trainee, in much the same way that a university student bears a portion of the cost of his or her university education. If this were taken to the opposite extreme of a ‘full-fee paying’ scenario, perhaps we would see a return to the pre-twentieth

---

22 Report by Michael Cross, Executive Director, State Department of Education and Training, dated 12 August 1984, in SROWA Cons 4014, AN251, file 7333/84, Box 613.
23 See, in particular, Elliott, ‘Derailed’: the closure of the Midland Workshops’ in Bertola and Oliver, The Workshops, pp. 235-258.
25 Ibid., p. 265.
28 Ibid., p. 270.
29 Ibid., p. 269.
century system whereby an apprentice’s parents paid for his or her indentures. At least two possible outcomes might be envisaged. Firstly, we might see a return of the type of worker who was known as an ‘improver’ in late nineteenth and early twentieth century factories – either an apprentice who had completed his or her indentures yet was regarded as not being fully qualified (and hence were not paid skilled wages) until they had gained further experience in the trade, or a person who had ‘picked up’ the trade without formal training. In their recent study of the Harvester Judgement, John Lack and Charles Fahey have demonstrated how ‘improvers’ were often employed in less skilled work, such as making farm implements. Some of these workers were men aged in the 30s and 40s, who continued to be denied a full wage. An even less positive outcome might be a return to the conditions of the industrial revolution where ‘factories employed large numbers of young people who did not receive any structured form of training’.

Indeed, to return to Shields’ point, quoted at the beginning of this paper, this is the situation that prevails in the United States of America, especially among female, Hispanic and African American, lower skilled workers. The processes of ‘homogenisation’ and ‘segmentation’ resulted in a narrowing of the difference in wage rates for skilled and unskilled workers, the introduction of new collective bargaining structures negotiated with compliant craft unions and a process of breaking down of the skills of workers, so that any training related essentially to the processes in one company, and resulted in poor employment prospects elsewhere. In the light of this scenario, the attack on apprenticeships launched by Cross in 1984, discussed earlier, takes on a particularly ominous tone – in particular, the assertion that apprenticeships undergirded the ‘problem’ of skill demarcation – meaning, the difficulty in breaking down distinctions among the skilled trades.

At the conclusion of their study, Dockery, et al. commended the proposed New Apprenticeship System (NAS) as it was designed to reduce the cost burden to employers and introduce ‘greater flexibility’ into the training structure. In 1999, however, Roger May’s doctoral thesis found a number of problems with the ways in which apprentices’ competencies were assessed by the new training schemes. May examined the New Apprenticeship Training and Assessment System (NATAS) and the Module system operating in Western Australia. He concluded that there were discrepancies in both schemes between ‘broad competency standards’ offered in TAFE courses and the ‘specific standards of individual organisations’ and that this variation caused confusion. It was a perception of some managers, at least, that the problem arose partly from the conflicting aims of education and industry. ‘Industry was concerned with the rapid acquisition of skills and knowledge where time equated with money… [whilst] the education culture was [to impart] a broad knowledge base to the student where time involved was less critical’.

May advocated the need for greater consultation between the education provider and the individual employer, and in particular, adequate training for shop floor assessors who were expected to test the competencies of apprentices to a national standard.

A 2001 study by Ceazary Kapuscinski defined apprenticeships as a (normally) four-year, structured form of indentured training, whereby apprentices are taught according to a pre-determined format or plan, are subject to monitoring by their employer, and upon completion become qualified tradespersons in a recognised trade. Traineeships, on the other hand, ‘are specialised contracts of training …[lasting about] 12 months’. They ‘combine work and formal training in a mix dependent on [the] trainee’s educational attainment and trade competence and allow employers to train people according to current industry requirements so that upon completion trainees receive recognised qualifications’. According to Kapuscinski, major aspects of the changes in the Australian training system in the decade 1986-97 included the considerable increase in young people commencing traineeships, to a point where they exceeded apprenticeships for the first time in firm-based training. In that period, the percentage of trainees had risen from less than one per cent to 46 per cent of ‘total firm-based trainee stocks’. This appears slightly contradictory to the previously-mentioned trend of trainees preferring longer apprenticeships.

Perhaps, however, the distinction in the type of training given is more significant. These findings,

---

36 Ibid., pp. 252 ff.
38 Ibid., p. 7.
coupled with others from the National Vocational Education and Training Research and Evaluation Program (NCVER) indicating that, between 2001 and 2005, ‘the total [number of] hours of employer-sponsored training has fallen … by 15 per cent for permanent and 27 per cent for casual employees’\(^{39}\) suggest that there have been no significant shifts away from a trend of ‘broad general theoretical training’ coupled with shortened, specific and limited skills training on the individual factory floor, and a decreased employer contribution to the overall cost. Mossenton’s gloomy prognosis, quoted above, appears to confirm this. Indeed, the sterile and short-sighted economic rationalist ideology that undergirds concepts of ‘global competitiveness’ shows no sign of being reversed, and it would appear that the trades apprenticeship, designed to produce fully skilled trades people with high employment prospects – rather than so many limited-skill workers with limited functions and employment prospects – will soon be a thing of the past.

The culture of long working hours

Mikael Ottosson and Calle Johan Rosengren

The present article focuses on an often neglected, though no less important, part of modern working life – namely its symbolic side. Thus, it is our ambition to look upon work as a phenomenon that represents something else. The reason for this choice of perspective originates in a reflection Julia Brannen makes in *Time and Society* concerning the length of the working day in relation to the individual’s freedom to decide over it.

Paradoxically, it seems that the more autonomy employees are given over organising their time in work seems to mean that they are spending longer and longer at work or working.

In a historical perspective, one of the main conflicts between organised capital and organised labour has concerned the length of the working day. As time is the fundamental mediator between employer and employee in a capitalistic context, the conflicts around working time can be seen as an inevitable part of working life. The first legislated restrictions on working time in Sweden can be traced back to 1920. A gradual decline in the number of hours worked can thereafter be seen during the remaining part of the 20th century up until 1973, when the 40-hour work week was fully implemented.

As fewer hours were being put into work, the more important it became that these hours were spent in an efficient way. This meant that work became organised in a way that enabled employers to overview and control how the workers spent their time in the workplace. Specific regulations ensured that the worker would be present and ready when the bell rang after breaks. If the worker was not present, he ran the risk of having his salary reduced or, worse, getting fired.

**Culture and discipline**

Irrespective of how we position ourselves in the debate on whether or not we have left the industrial society behind us, we can state that both the way in which working time is organised and its symbolic expressions have changed. The factory whistles no longer sound, working schedules are becoming increasingly individualised and, if we listen to Julia Brannen, the outer control over working hours has been replaced by an inner control. This phenomenon has also been noticed by other scholars. In connection with this dramatic turn in the motivation to work, Brödner and Forslin use the concept ‘self-managed intensity’. In their article ‘The New Boundaries of Work’, the authors state, ‘the more freedom people have in work the harder they have to free themselves from work’. Using Norbert Elias’ terms, this shift from an outer control to an inner control could be seen as part of a greater transformation process that Western civilization has been undergoing during modern times.

[...] we see clearly how the compulsion arising directly from the threat of weapons and physical force has gradually diminished, and how those forms of dependency which lead to the regulation of the affects in the form of self-control, have gradually increased.

At the same time as people in modern society have come to increase their control over their emotions, control over their work has been internalized – a process that must be seen as highly profitable for capitalists, as it has partly rendered supervision of the worker obsolete. As Max Weber already noted: the person who considers his work as a natural part of his life is both more reliant and cheaper than the one who needs to be forced.

In order to comprehend why people tend to work long hours in the absence of external restrictions, we will consider other forms of control than that taking form in external force: a more subtle form of control.
control aimed at the employee’s soul.\textsuperscript{10} The very thought of regulating employees by manipulating culture became popular with Peters and Waterman’s \textit{In Search of Excellence}, which was released in the early 1980s.\textsuperscript{11} This new form of control – the management of emotions – can also be viewed in Elias’ extended context, which comprises the whole society.

In a number of societies there are attempts to establish a social regulation and management of the emotions far stronger and more conscious than the standard prevalent hitherto, a pattern of moulding that imposes renunciations and transformation of drives in individuals with vast consequences for human life which are scarcely foreseeable as yet.\textsuperscript{12}

From Wilmott’s and Elias’ points of view, culture is seen as something that can be manipulated to achieve certain goals – rendering explicit regulations and direct surveillance obsolete. Hence, working life development could be seen as a shift from external and visible constraint to internal and invisible constraint, the latter constraint being administrated by the individuals themselves. In describing this process, Michel Foucault expressed that the less visible the coercion, ‘the closer it comes to the limit of immateriality, the more lasting, the deeper are its consequences’.\textsuperscript{13}

It can also be argued that the strategy of manipulating culture and creating loyalty ties between the employer and employee has been present ever since the beginning of capitalistic production. Profoundly inspired by the British social historical school, Swedish researchers have carried out several studies on the industrial or new paternalism that evolved at the turn of the twentieth century. The results consistently indicate that factory owners made efforts to create a sense of loyalty towards the company among the workers.\textsuperscript{14}

Economists Mats Alvesson and Hugh Willmott argue that companies manipulate corporate culture such that long working hours come to symbolize commitment and loyalty towards not just the company, but also towards colleagues. This manipulation can take the form of appealing to certain values or group affiliations.\textsuperscript{15} In their article ‘Identity regulation as organizational control: Producing the appropriate individual’, an example is given of a company that expresses masculine norms by implying that an employee who complains about a high workload is a pampered lady. In doing so, by so markedly emphasising a masculinity ideal, the company ensured that workers would endure a higher workload than otherwise. In such a culture, it can be expected that long working hours represent ‘being a real man’.\textsuperscript{16}

In a similar way, Sara Rutherford points to a strong masculinity ideal in her study on ‘the long hours culture’ among British white-collar workers. In the following quotation from one of her respondents, the masculine culture is made explicit.

\[
\text{[...]} \text{there was an element of macho competition over the number of hours worked. 'We had to do a presentation with only one week's notice recently and one chap worked 115 hours that week.' Said a senior director, with a certain amount of pride in his voice.}
\]

Besides the obvious reference to a not only masculine, but even macho culture, the quotation also contains a clue as to how this kind of culture grows – namely through moralizing tales. Moreover, it also highlights the competitive aspects of long working hours. This is also evident in the following quotation: ‘We unofficially kept a league table of the people who worked the longest. The group that won were here until four in the morning.’\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{Long working hours as way to constitute identity}

Culture, however, is not a one-way street. It works in both directions in that it is constituted by human interaction, but at the same time a precondition for any form of interaction. Here, identity is seen as expressed – through various acts and symbols – in relation to culturally grounded norms and values.\textsuperscript{18} Thus, working hours become a way of constructing belonging and identity. If a voluntarily long day symbolizes devotion to, responsibility for and fulfilment of one’s duty towards the organisation, then working time becomes a marker of personal identity. The individual describes him- or herself as desirable

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[12] Elias, 2000, p. 158.
\item[18] Rutherford, 2001, p. 266.
\item[19] Ottosson, 1999, pp. 61ff.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
through fulfilment of the norms and expectations he or she identifies as embedded in the organisation. Given this view of long working hours as an expression of culture and identity, it follows that one and the same norm serves as a standard for several different actions. The phenomenon ‘long working hours’ can be an expression of different things.

This research perspective on long working hours – not mainly as a result of workload, but foremost as a symbolic act aimed at marking personal identity and belonging – is mostly uncharted territory. Despite this we have found some inspiring starting points in the work of two scholars: Evitar Zerubavel, who makes a comprehensive outline of how time is treated in the 20th century in his work *Hidden Rhythms*, and Sara Rutherford, who discusses working time as a resource for patriarchal closure in working life. This, she argues, is why high-ranking leaders work long days. As time is something that men, who do not have the main responsibility for household and children, have more of, it becomes a way of keeping women out. Thus, although Zerubavel and Rutherford have both discussed the symbolic side of working hours, they have primarily done so at the macro level.

In a large, complex organisation such as this it is easy to be invisible – only their presence at early-morning meetings and late at night marks out a manager from a non-manager.\(^{20}\)

If working hours are regarded as part of an identity-creating activity, readiness and willingness to work long hours could be seen as a way for the individual to mark his or her class. It is the dependent workers who follow detailed schedules and who arrive at and leave the workplace at the same time every day. In contrast to common workers, directors and white-collar workers are ‘free’ to work long and irregular hours. In line with Sara Rutherford, Evitar Zerubavel argues for an interpretation based on the assumption that long working hours are a way of marking one’s status.

It should be noted that, given the markedly distinct temporal profile of the professional commitments associated with high social status, high-ranking officials very often arrive at work ‘early’ and leave ‘late’ for the purely symbolic purpose of displaying their high status!\(^{21}\)

According to Zerubavel, a pattern of behaviour characterised by early arrivals to and late departures from work symbolizes a person’s social status as (seemingly) being devoted and loyal to the company and its goals.

In trying to explain the occurrence of long working hours, working life researcher, Marika Hansson, brings up the notion that the tendency towards longer working hours among white-collar workers depends on the labour process and distribution of work. As work and the products of work have become more abstract, long working hours have come to represent a concrete measure of individual effort.\(^{22}\) Using some expressions from Peter Englund’s definition of symbols, working hours could, in an alienated context, be ‘a concrete picture of something abstract’.\(^{23}\)

As stated above, many, or a growing number of people in the working force today seek longer rather than shorter working hours, despite the fact that they are in many respects freer to regulate their own work hours. From a historical perspective, this state of affairs must be seen as both remarkable and paradoxical. Whereas people in the past struggled for more free time, people of today ‘voluntarily’ let work colonize their hard-won freedom. Tasks that can be performed in six or eight hours expand and take ten, twelve hours or sometimes even longer time. One of Sara Rutherford’s informants expresses this process in the following way:

\[
\text{I can do this job in fewer hours. But it will be seen as not giving the commitment. Being visible is a way of drawing attention to yourself. You are noticed more by being here at 10 at night than by consistently producing a good product.}\]

The quotation above shows a notable contradiction between actual working hours and the hours needed to perform the tasks at hand. One reasonable interpretation is that the term working hours is more symbolic in nature and less related to the time required to manage the actual workload. The worker does not perform his duty at an optimal rate, but at a rate that allows him to stay longer at work, not with the objective of earning more money, but of having an excuse to stay at work in order to be seen, to show that he is devoted. The one who is the last to leave in the evening is the most visible, most devoted, most enthusiastic and the one who most strongly identifies himself with the company.

---


Conclusion

According to a Marxist tradition, we can state that the market, in the sense of the conflict between labour and capital, has served as the engine in a process leading to more control and supervision of the worker. When the traditional workers do not control the means of production, they are forced to sell their labour. The worker performs his duties because he must, and therefore an external force is necessary to ensure that the work will get done. This requires an apparatus of bureaucracy to monitor the quantity as well as quality of the performed labour. The question that has been raised in the present article is what has happened to the external force. Has external force, the whip, been replaced by company cultures based on self-supervising identities, a self-discipline culture? The article took its starting point in the remarkable circumstance that some persons tend to have longer working hours, despite the fact that they are free to regulate their working hours themselves. Unregulated working hours, no overtime pay and a working situation based on a willingness to take work tasks home are part of the reality a growing proportion of the workforce is experiencing. Here, this development has been discussed with regard to the notion that norms or the culture of labour has been internalized. We would like to consider this development as part of larger processes, changes in capitalism as well as a more essential Western civilization process.

It is fairly easy to raise objections to our reasoning. One obvious objection is that this notion of ‘unbounded working’ is a marginal phenomenon: almost every working person, just like before, has to work according to strict schedules. We find this objection highly pertinent. According to several studies of the Swedish labour market, only about four per cent of workplaces can be categorised as flexible. Thus, instead of a reality, the flexible labour market must be seen as a rhetorical construct. An additional objection is that the phenomenon presented here is not supported by any empirical evidence. We do not really know whether the kind of white-collar workers discussed in the article tend to work longer hours. Nevertheless, we believe that working long hours must be considered as a symbolic act. Despite the (liberal) shimmer of freedom connected to the right to work as long as you wish, long working hours are the manifestation of a constraint that has been internalized.

Public finance and income redistribution in interwar Australia: towards a class analysis

Geoff Robinson*

In this paper I focus on a neglected aspect of Australian political history, the extent to which Australian governments actually redistributed income. The German sociologist Rudolf Goldscheid argued that ‘the budget is the skeleton of the state stripped of all misleading ideologies’.1 In Australia a party that claimed to represent lower income earners, the Labor Party, was a major political force, but did Labor actually make a difference to the distribution of income across social classes, or did Labor’s rhetoric of equity merely serve to incorporate workers into the capitalist system? A quantitative approach to the political history of labour may enable us to escape both nostalgia for old labourism (which the Howard years have encouraged) and a simple and undifferentiated rejection of labourism as a reformist agent of social integration.

This paper incorporates some material from a 2005 paper that examined overall expenditure patterns and taxation patterns across the states and Commonwealth from 1910 to 1940 but it goes beyond the aggregate approach of this paper to consider the extent which the varying patterns of taxation and public expenditure across Australia impacted on different social classes during the 1930s.2 It is very much a preliminary analysis based on existing compilations of taxation statistics. It is a static analysis and does not consider if nominally redistributive taxation and expenditure patterns might be rendered ineffective by consequent interstate migration.3

Sources

This paper is largely based on four sources; a database of commonwealth and state social expenditure prepared by Andrew Podger in 1975; information on tax rates and levels in the 1930s reports of the Commonwealth Grants Commission (CGC); the 1933 census; and a series of compilations of state and federal fiscal statistics prepared by Alan Barnard in 1985-86. These publications have been relied on for the comparison of taxation levels.6 Barnard and Podger relied largely on the reports of the CGC and the Finance Bulletins of the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics. I have checked some apparently anomalous figures in Barnard and Podger against these sources and have found them to be correct. One particular problem is the distinction between current and capital expenditure, roughly that financed by taxation and that financed by loans. The analysis in this paper is restricted to current expenditure.

Class and public finance

Since the 1980s little academic attention has been given to the history of Australian fiscal policy in Australia. Until then we could very broadly summarise the historiography of the topic as a shift from a view that regarded party politics as significant in the determination of fiscal policy towards one that emphasised broader economic and ideological determinants. Until the late 1950s commentators identified Labor as the party of initiative in social policy due to its reformist ideology and low-income base. From the 1950s this came under attack from two flanks. Henry Mayer argued that the thesis of Labor’s progressivism was not a simple and undifferentiated rejection of labourism as a reformist agent of social integration.

5 Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30 June 1933, Government Printer, Canberra, 1936. My thanks are due to the Deakin University Library for permitting this item to be borrowed on very-long term loan.
6 The papers were produced as Australian National University Source Papers in Economic History: Preliminary Statistics of N.S.W. Government Finances, 1850-1982 (No. 8, December 1985); State and Local Government Finances in Queensland, 1859-1982 (No. 9, December 1985); Tasmanian Government Finances, 1953 to 1982: A Statistical Survey (No. 14, December 1986); Finances of Western Australian Governments, 1851-1982 (No. 16, December 1986); The South Australian Budgetary Record 1850-1982 (No. 10, December 1985); Victoria’s Fisc, State and Local: Preliminary Statistics (No. 15, December 1986).
based on any comparative analysis of the divergent performance of Labor and conservative governments. From the late 1950s Noel Butlin and his colleagues developed a model of the Australian political economy that challenged the initiative/resistance model. The rise of the welfare state and the decline of public loan-financed infrastructure were seen as an Australian example of global patterns of modernisation. Butlin’s later work was more influenced by public choice theory but continued to downplay the role of party politics.

Another argument came from those who emphasised the influence of policy paradigms that overlapped conventional political divisions. Francis Castles’ influential model of the wage-earners welfare state focused on the distinctiveness of Australia compared to other countries, he described Australia (and New Zealand) as a ‘wage-earners’ welfare’ state that sought to ensure full employment by tariffs and fair income by wage regulation. The result was a lagged development of the Australian welfare state. This model distinguished social democracy from labourism. Social democracy was identified as redistribution via taxation and direct government payments, whereas labourism was defined as redistribution by economic regulation, in particular tariffs, arbitration and loan-financed public infrastructure construction (which boosted employment and wages for unskilled workers). Labourism was seen as focusing on the rights and conditions of male wage earner, social democracy was seen as directed towards a broader constituency of the disadvantaged, including those outside the paid workforce, such as women and children. Feminist critics incorporated the Castles thesis in their critique of labour masculinism. They tended to attribute social policy advances to the cross-party tradition of social liberalism.

Methods of class analysis

Academic discussion of class in Australia has displayed a tension between a model that opposes a middle class to a working class, defined in terms of occupation, and a Marxist model that identifies the class position of individuals by their relation to the means of production.

My approach seeks to combine these two approaches. I identify the following class groups: employers; Own Account or self-employed workers (‘own account’ was the census terminology); manual workers (designated ‘workers’); non-manual workers (designated ‘employees’); and pensioners.

A theoretical justification for the separation of manual and non-manual workers could be found in an analytical Marxist approach that would point to their different possession of educational and organisational assets or a poststructuralist position that would stress the multiple determinants, cultural and ideological as well as economic of class identity. A majority of the Australian population were wage and salary earners and their dependants. It is clear, however that most white-collar workers did not identify with the working class. Their levels of union membership and Labor voting were far below that of manual workers. If we treat all wage and salary earners as a group then this means that we are passing up the opportunity to analyse redistribution between employees and workers. In this analysis we are also taking a different approach from a traditionalist Marxist approach in that we are considering capitalists as the recipients of class income rather than as bearers of the logic of capital.

Quantifying class

In this analysis I have simply accepted the census numbers for employees, own account workers and pensioners. The task of estimating the numbers in the categories of worker and employee is much more difficult. A major problem is that the only breakdown of the census of respondents by occupation included many employers and own account workers as well as recipients of wages and salaries. For this paper I have defined workers as wage and salary recipients (including the unemployed formerly employed in these categories) in the census industry categories of Fishing & Trapping, Agricultural, Pastoral & Dairying, Own Account or self-employed workers (‘own account’ was the census terminology); manual workers (designated ‘workers’); non-manual workers (designated ‘employees’); and pensioners.

A theoretical justification for the separation of manual and non-manual workers could be found in an analytical Marxist approach that would point to their different possession of educational and organisational assets or a poststructuralist position that would stress the multiple determinants, cultural and ideological as well as economic of class identity. A majority of the Australian population were wage and salary earners and their dependants. It is clear, however that most white-collar workers did not identify with the working class. Their levels of union membership and Labor voting were far below that of manual workers. If we treat all wage and salary earners as a group then this means that we are passing up the opportunity to analyse redistribution between employees and workers. In this analysis we are also taking a different approach from a traditionalist Marxist approach in that we are considering capitalists as the recipients of class income rather than as bearers of the logic of capital.

Mining, Industrial, Transport & Communication, Personal & Domestic Service and Entertainment, Sport and Recreation. Employees I define as those wage and salary earners in the remaining industrial groups of Commerce & Finance and Public Administration & Professional. The industrial divisions do not precisely correspond to the manual/non-manual division but the anomalies largely cancel out. Those respondents in the ‘No industry’ category, principally unemployed school-leavers have been proportionally allocated across these categories. Most of the unemployed were recorded in their original Industrial sectors and I have simply included them in their appropriate group. Those census respondents who were not allocated to an industry were overwhelmingly ‘dependants’, mostly married women and children not in the workforce. Feminist critics have accurately observed that a substantial number of women classified as ‘dependants’ were actually unpaid helpers in family businesses or even engaged in significant economic activities of their own, such as taking in lodgers. A research project I am currently engaged in will develop more accurate estimates of class comparison but in this paper I have simply allocated all dependents proportionately across the categories of employers, own account, workers and employees.

The variation in the portion of employers from state to state is largely driven by the size of the agriculture sector, as farmers were the largest group of employers. Queensland was the most working-class state, with the big man’s frontier of the pastoral industry. NSW was close behind but its working class contained a larger portion of industrial and mining workers hence the more radical character of NSW Labor. The relatively low representation of workers and the high number of employees in Victoria sheds light on the question of Victoria’s alleged political conservatism.

The extent to which Labor was politically successful in different states did not simply reflect the weight of the working-class in the electorate. The fact that Labor held office less often in NSW than Queensland is evidence of this. These results can be compared to an earlier, more detailed analysis of the class composition of the NSW electorate in 1933. This analysis attempted a more precise matching of occupational groups to the categories of workers and employees, in particular the inclusion of shop assistants as workers, and took account of family structures in the allocation of dependents. This found about 53% of the electorate to be working class. This bolsters the general reliability of the estimates in Table 1, particularly as workers’ representation in the electorate was reduced because many more under 21 than for employees.

Patterns of public expenditure

From 1910 to 1940 per capita levels current of Australian social expenditure in 1911 prices rose 208% substantially more than Butlin’s estimate for GDP growth in 1911-39 of 48%. The introduction of aged pensions, the maternity bonus and repatriation services saw the Commonwealth take a leading position in overall social expenditure, in particular cash payments to individuals, but the states remained dominant in the delivery of in-kind services, particularly education and health and NSW from 1927 introduced widows’ pensions and child endowment.

The story of social expenditure at the state level is largely one of NSW innovation associated with Jack Lang’s first government and Victorian parsimony. A major difficulty in the comparison of the states is that of unemployment relief. Once the immediate fiscal crisis of the early 1930s was past governments reduced direct unemployment relief (paid from recurrent expenditure) in favour of relief works financed by loan expenditure which largely substituted for the public works programs of the 1920s, which had paid award wages. An accurate determination of how generous governments were towards the unemployed would require a careful comparison of public works expenditure from the 1920s to the 1930s. Unemployment relief expenditure was sometimes arbitrarily shifted between loan and capital accounts. A comparison of state expenditure, both loan and revenue, per unemployed person, reveals more about the greater success of some states in returning to the loan market, but in the early 1930s when states were largely shut out of the loan market NSW was the most generous in unemployment relief.

There are three notable periods of upheaval, first the post-war inflationary boom that increased wage costs (then maintained at this higher level by industrial arbitration) combined with the influenza epidemic, and then the emergence of NSW as a social policy leader in the late 1920s followed by the upheavals of the Depression.

13 D. Deacon, Managing Gender: The State, the New Middle-Class and Women Workers 1830-1930, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1989.
18 Barnard, Australian Government Finances, p. 42.
Allocating social expenditure by classes

Redistribution by the tax/transfer system depends on three factors; the progressivity of the taxation system; the distribution of government cash payments; and the absolute level of government in-kind and cash payments. When pre-tax and transfer incomes are unevenly distributed then equal per capital social expenditure benefits will have redistributive impact.

A functionalist Marxist might argue that state human services expenditure does not benefit its recipients as it merely serves to sustain class relations. The extent to which public education operated as a form of class streaming might support this, on the other side of the ideological fence a public choice theorist might argue that public expenditure was the tool of special interests and acted as form of redistribution from workers to employees. Public sector wages were higher in NSW due to a shorter working week and union-friendly reforms to the state arbitration system. Conservative governments did not entirely reverse workers' gains from Labor governments. In 1933-34 the CGC found that average male public service clerical wages in NSW were about 20% higher than the all states average. However in this paper I have assumed that public expenditure on health and education is a real benefit to citizens. I have allocated expenditure on the following basis. First, pensions and repARATION. With the exception of NSW widows pensions these were overwhelmingly a Commonwealth responsibility. This expenditure is simply allocated per capita among the census category of Pensioners as identified in the census. Unemployment relief is excluded. Second, in-kind government services, which are nearly all health and education. Most of this expenditure is by state governments but there were small federal programs. The latter I have simply divided between the states in the ratio of their population. In this period government cash payments were largely restricted to pensioners, compared to the present this made the task of redistribution among social classes more difficult, but with an uneven distribution of income even equal in-kind receipts from government services made an impact. To estimate the impact of in-kind services we must first estimate the total income received by each social class.

The 1933 census asked respondents to place their annual income within one of seven ranges. For most of their ranges I have assumed that all respondents received the midpoint of the income range, but have followed Ian MacLean and Sue Richardson’s estimates of average income levels in the lowest bracket and their estimate, produced from national income statistics, that the average income in the open-ended bracket above £260 above a year was £656. This enables us to estimate income levels for employers, own account and wage and salary earners for each state. Unfortunately the income levels for wage and salary earners by industry groups are only available at the national level. The national totals show clear income discrepancy between workers and employees. The high-income levels for females in the fishing and trapping, mining and forestry groups are for a tiny handful of white-collar administrative staff and government regulatory staff in these areas.

I have assumed that across each state the incomes of wage and salary earners by industry group are the same ratio as nationally and then adjusted their absolute levels so as to match the overall levels for wage and salary earners recorded in each state. From this it is possible to estimate the total levels of income received by each class in each state and the proportion of total income received by each class. The resultant estimates highlight the fact that workers received the largest share of overall income and that employees received more than employers. The varying levels of income received by employers and own account workers are predominantly driven by the size of the agricultural sector, but there are signs of Victorian exceptionalism apparent in the relative income shares of workers and employees. From our knowledge of the total incomes received by each class it is then possible to estimate the extent to which social expenditure increased class incomes. Because we have assumed that social expenditure has an equal per capita benefit than it has a similar impact on different social classes but a greater proportional benefit to workers because their income is lower.

Class and taxation

The low level of government cash payments meant that most of the redistributive burden was borne by the tax system. The most substantive exposition of Labor taxation policy came from Queensland railways minister James Larcombe in a 1927 pamphlet. He defended the principle of ‘ability to pay’ and argued that in practice this meant steeply progressive tax rates and exclusion of as many wage earners as possible from income tax. The policies of the first generation of Labor governments were consistent with this approach: they increased thresholds, especially for heads of families and introduced steeply graded tax schedules. These Labor governments faced conservative Legislative Councils, but the Councils were generally reluctant to challenge Labor governments on taxation policy, governments could

---

19 CGC, Second Report, p. 149.
always spend and force conservative acquiescence in tax increases to balance the budget. Fear of Council obstruction may have made Labor governments reluctant to put more radical options on the table, but overall public finance was probably an area of more legislative autonomy for Labor governments. The low levels of taxation and expenditure in Victoria where Labor only rarely formed government supports this hypothesis. It is difficult to establish any clear connection between Labor governments and levels of taxation, although Victoria and Queensland tended to be at opposite ends of the spectrum.

However Commonwealth grants meant that the smaller states did not have to rely on taxation alone. In 1940 7.7% of South Australia total revenue, 17.5% of Western Australian total revenue and 17.4% of Tasmanian total revenue was made up of Commonwealth grants. Commonwealth grants generally contributed towards an equalisation of the resources available to state governments. The rationalisation of Commonwealth grants that followed on the creation of the Grants Commission encouraged convergence between the states. From the early 1930s state taxation levels and the total of taxation and Commonwealth grants (which represented the total of state fiscal resources) converged notably.

The absence of significant cash payments to distinct groups apart from pensioners limited the redistributive potential of public expenditure. Dramatic increases in social expenditure, as in NSW, had to be financed. NSW Labor and conservative governments increased taxation despite complaints from unions and business groups. Rob Watts in his analysis of federal Labor’s fiscal record in the 1940s suggests that the practical requirements of fiscal policy trumped Labor’s rhetorical commitment to taxation equity.

In the early 1930s the collapse in economic activity and the costs of unemployment relief forced governments to extend the tax net. This fiscal crisis ended Labor’s effort to exempt workers from taxation. A federal Labor government that introduced a national sales tax in 1931 despite the party’s theoretical hostility to indirect taxation. In the early 1930s all states increased income taxes or established special unemployment relief taxes that drew most wage earners into the income tax net for the first time and which employed methods of deduction at source. Divergences still persisted in the treatment of higher-income earners with Queensland imposing the highest rates at the top of the spectrum. However the ultra-rich are a small minority and very high tax rates on them will not raise much revenue. Such taxes are a form of populist political symbolism. One contemporary commentator suggested that the even distribution of wealth in Australia meant that Labor governments had to be cautious on taxation. The discrepancies between income reported in the census and that declared to taxation commissioners, varying tax rates across the states, the wide variety of income tax deductions and the fact that most state level income tax was actually paid by companies make any comprehensive estimate of the taxation liabilities on different social classes an arduous task. In this paper I can only report on a first instalment of this project. Table 5 is based on an application of the tax rates described in the 1934 CGC report to the average class incomes per head estimated from the 1933 census. There are discrepancies between income reported in taxation statistics and the census. As a result, at this stage, I would place more value in a comparison of the values in the table rather than their absolute values, but it does suggest that NSW’s high expenditure meant higher taxation on workers than Victoria’s parsimony.

A next stage of the analysis will be to estimate the incidence of company taxation and to combine the estimates of the class impact of taxation derived from the census and CGC reports with the state taxation statistics.

**Conclusion**

By the late 1930s there were clear divergences in the levels of social expenditure between the states but the low levels of cash payments meant that the redistributive impact of social expenditure was limited. Higher expenditure meant a broader casting of the tax net rather than a concerted attack on capital, but it could be argued that within a capitalist economy Labor governments showed a realistic appreciation of the limits on taxation policy.

Constructing a tradition of women’s labour: Representing women’s work at the Brisbane Exhibition

Joanne Scott*

Not all ‘labour’ traditions are created, perpetuated or controlled by the labour movement and its members. Across 130 years, the National Agricultural and Industrial Association of Queensland (NAIAQ) has established and maintained traditions relating to the display of the results of men’s, women’s and children’s work through the annual Brisbane Exhibition. First held in 1876, this metropolitan show is one of the oldest annual events in post-contact Queensland society. Each year, it presents the outputs of the state’s rural and urban industries for the education and entertainment of the thousands of visitors who enter the showgrounds. And each year, it variously reflects, endorses and promotes particular versions of Queensland society and its economy. While precisely assessing the impact of exhibition displays on their audiences is a task fraught with difficulty, it is appropriate to acknowledge the Exhibition as one of the sites which has mirrored and contributed to Queenslanders’ definitions of and understandings of their society and its values. Its presentation of economic activity, then, is one of the many influences that has informed, mirrored and shaped local appreciations of who performs or should perform particular types of work and the value accorded such labour.

This paper begins to unpack the presentation of work at the Exhibition through an analysis of how women’s labour was displayed at the show during the first four decades of the twentieth century, from the creation in 1900 of the Women’s Industries section to 1941; the following year the Exhibition was cancelled due to wartime exigencies and a comprehensive annual event was not reinstated until 1945. It adopts a broad definition of work that crosses class boundaries and includes unpaid labour and small-scale income-generation within the home, voluntary work, and participation in the formal economy. Nevertheless, this study also recognises the importance of a class-based analysis of the Exhibition, its organisers and its priorities. The display of the outputs of women’s work both within and beyond the specific domain of Women’s Industries suggests that the Brisbane Exhibition embraced the racial and gendered hierarchies of Queensland society, and adopted an increasingly rigid division of non-Indigenous men’s versus women’s spheres of activity. It located men within the public domain of the formal economy and positioned women primarily as current or future wives and mothers engaged in unpaid work within the domestic realm. The likelihood of women’s participation in the formal economy being acknowledged and valued at the Exhibition was further reduced by the NAIAQ’s practice of showcasing the outputs of the Queensland economy within a framework that, with occasional exceptions, effectively ignored the role of employees in the production of those outputs.

A non-labour institution and its annual show

Established in 1875, the National Agricultural and Industrial Association of Queensland sought to ‘promote the development of the agricultural, pastoral, and industrial resources of the colony’. The primary mechanism for achieving this aim was an annual exhibition in Brisbane ‘for the display of horses, cattle, sheep, and other livestock; wool, agricultural produce of all kinds and machinery, together with such other objects of manufacture, produce, or the arts, as may be deemed desirable’. In 1876, the inaugural show was hailed as the most significant event in Queensland since the colony’s separation from New South Wales. Across the period of this study, the Exhibition was the single largest event in Queensland. It celebrated the ideal of progress, with a focus on the economy, but was sufficiently inclusive to encompass social, educational and cultural progress. The Exhibition was fundamentally a showcase for the achievements of a British-derived colonial society, and it usually ignored the unpalatable processes that underpinned that society, such as the expropriation of land from Indigenous people.

The Association’s first Council, under the presidency of Governor William Cairns, consisted of leading members of colonial society, including major employers such as William Pettigrew, whose saw milling and associated operations, including a private railway and a shipping line, extended from Brisbane to Maryborough. Almost two-thirds of the thirty-five members were pastoralists and merchants. Other individuals on the inaugural Council included Brisbane Grammar School’s headmaster, the general manager of the Queensland National Bank, and the editor of the Brisbane Courier and the Queenslander newspapers. Several members were or became parliamentarians, including grazier Arthur Hunter Palmer, later Queensland’s Colonial Secretary, grazier Joshua Bell, merchants George Grimes and George Harris, and lawyers Charles Mein and William Hemmant.

---
1 National Agricultural and Industrial Association of Queensland (NAIAQ), Constitution, 1875.
2 NAIAQ, Constitution, 1875.
3 For example, Queensland Times, 24 August 1876, p. 3.
4 NAIAQ, minutes of first general meeting, 13 August 1875, John Oxley Library OM.AB/1/1.
Evaluating the Council members’ roles in Queensland through the contrasting approaches of historians Ronald Lawson and Bill Thorpe, emphasises the elite nature of the governing body of the National Agricultural and Industrial Association. While the Council’s membership extended geographically beyond Lawson’s focus on the ‘status hierarchy’ in colonial Brisbane, it nevertheless had considerable overlap with his list of ‘the highest positions’ in the capital city, which were occupied by ‘leading merchants, financiers, professionals, a few large manufacturers, and some wealthy graziers’. Applying Thorpe’s analysis of social structure, in which he identifies five classes or groupings within colonial Queensland, and situates Council members within the colonial ruling class and the managerial/professional grouping, the two most powerful sectors of society within Queensland. It is possible to identify individuals on the NAIAQ’s first Council whose early class position was probably best defined as lower-middle class, but who achieved upward mobility, such as auctioneer James Dickson, one of the NAIAQ’s first Vice-Presidents. Dickson later became Premier of Queensland. In summary, the Council was dominated by members of the ruling class and influential members of the middle class. By 1941, the endpoint for this study, the Council still derived its membership primarily from these two sectors of society. The President of the Association was pastoralist, E.J. Shaw, and the members included Jim Heading, an important cattle and pig stud breeder, who became a Country Party politician and government minister; Philip Symes whose commercial ventures included a major grocery business and the Queensland Cement and Lime Company; and pastoralist James Wilson who was an executive member of the United Graziers’ Association for almost three decades.

No woman achieved membership of the NAIAQ’s Council until the 1990s. A small number of ruling and middle class women were able to exert some influence on the organisation of the Exhibition through their roles as jurors, judges and stewards in a limited range of exhibit classes, specifically those associated with women’s and girls’ work. Female jurors were appointed as early as 1878, when they assessed the entries in lace, fancy and plain work, millinery, ladies’ underclothing, and girls’ schoolwork. In 1913, Mrs Arvier, the wife of the Council’s Secretary, became a steward for the ‘One Woman’s Work’ competition, which promoted the achievements of farmers’ wives. Ultimate authority, however, rested with the NAIAQ’s Council which determined the categories of items for the Exhibition’s catalogue and approved the inclusion of other displays and events at the show. Given the Exhibition’s emphasis on economic progress and its reliance on objects and competitions to illustrate that progress, much of the content of the Exhibition derived from the labour of working-class men and women. However, as will be explored later in this paper, that labour was often rendered largely invisible.

The Women’s Industries Section 1900-1940

Women had participated as competitors at the show from 1876. In that first year, they provided entries for the horse section, poultry, farm and dairy produce, horticulture, fine arts, furniture and other objects for the use of dwellings, clothing and other objects of personal wear, and fresh and preserved food. Additionally, one-third of the entries in the schoolwork section came from girls. Across the remainder of the nineteenth century, women constituted a minority of exhibitors and were entirely or almost absent from many of the Exhibition categories most directly linked to the colony’s wealth. They were numerically dominant in a small number of classes, such as embroidery and homemade jam, and were well represented in decorative and fine arts categories. Across the period of this study, it is possible to identify occasional examples of individual women entering ‘mainstream’ categories of the Exhibition that celebrated major sectors of the economy such as pastoralism, but this paper concentrates on those sections of the show where women competitors and women’s work were prominent.

In 1900, the Brisbane Exhibition introduced a Women’s Industry section. Surviving records are frustratingly silent on the impetus for this decision, but the inclusion of a comparable section at Queensland’s 1897 International Exhibition was one factor, with the local show adopting the four classes of exhibits for women’s work which were included in the 1897 event: needlework and knitting; mechanical works; decorative works and furnishings; and paintings, drawing and engraving. Perhaps the decision also reflected a level of uneasiness, particularly among Queensland’s middle and ruling class men, over first wave feminism and the expansion of white women’s legal, political and economic rights, and a

---

5 Ronald Lawson, Brisbane in the 1890s, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1973, p. xxxi.
6 Bill Thorpe, Colonial Queensland, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1996, p. 144 discusses Dickson’s class position. For Thorpe’s definition of the colonial ruling class and managerial/professional class see pp. 148-50.
7 In 1936 the title of Women’s Industries was changed to the Needlework, Knitting and Cookery section and the regulation specifying female competitors only was omitted. Based on an examination of the Catalogues from 1936 to 1940, there are just two instances where there may have been a male competitor. For the purposes of this paper, therefore, and taking into account that men had entered Women’s Industries in 1902, I regard the Needlework, Knitting and Cookery section as the Women’s Industries section under another name. No explanation for the change of name or the omission of the regulation has been found.
8 This paragraph is based on NAIAQ, Catalogues, 1876-99. The Exhibition categories most closely linked to the colony’s wealth included cattle, sheep, wool, sugar, and machinery.
consequent desire to reinforce gendered divisions. The introduction of the Women’s Industries section coincided with the introduction of such hyper-masculine competitions as wood chopping. The Exhibition was endorsing a stricter separation of women’s and men’s spheres. There were just 44 entries in Women’s Industries in 1900, but the new section largely, although not entirely, segregated female competitors from the mixed competitions in fine arts, furniture and clothing where they had previously been located.9 This analysis, however, ignores those commentators who identified the NAIAQ’s decision as proof that women’s labour was valued.10

The Women’s Industries section did accord women’s work, or at least particular aspects of that work, a degree of recognition and approval. Through its explicitly gendered title, it highlighted the presence of women as competitors at the Exhibition and confirmed that the results of women’s work had a legitimate place at the show, alongside the displays which foregrounded the outputs of Queensland’s pastoral, mining, forestry, agricultural and secondary industries. All of these sectors had a majority of male employees; the masculinity rates for the pastoral, mining, forestry and agricultural workforces exceeded 96 per cent.11 At the same time, the Women’s Industries section segregated the outputs of women’s work and encouraged audiences to accept narrow definitions of what constituted (valued) women’s work. It seems likely that visitors to the Exhibition distinguished between women’s work and productive, economically relevant labour, with the results of the latter on display in those sections of the Exhibition that concentrated on primary and secondary industries. Women’s Industries was the only section of the Exhibition catalogue to highlight gender within its title; it was rare for the titles of individual classes within the primary and secondary industries’ sections to allude to the exhibitors’ gender.12 One newspaper applauded the creation of a separate women’s section on the grounds that women’s ‘original talent and latent energies … would otherwise have been submerged had they been brought into competition with men’, a claim that ignored women’s previous successes in mixed competition at the show.13

The Women’s Industries section primarily, although not exclusively, valued white women’s work as housewives. There are no examples of regulations for the Women’s Industries or any other sections of the Exhibition that specified the racial or ethnic identity of competitors, but in the period under examination, the Exhibition was a celebration of white society. When objects created by Indigenous Queenslanders became a significant feature of the show in the 1910s, they were confined within a designated Aboriginal Court; the rationale for that Court included the promotion of the achievements of state government and reserve and mission officials.14 Within Women’s Industries, only certain elements of white women’s domestic labour were represented. While it is possible to argue that the choice of elements partly reflected the value accorded different aspects of domestic labour, the choice was primarily determined by the practical necessity of which objects could be successfully and easily displayed during Exhibition week. Thus common and time-consuming aspects of women’s household duties such as routine childcare and cleaning were not featured at the show, because those activities did not produce items suitable for display across a period of a week. Similarly, highly perishable items, such as hot, home-cooked meals, could not be exhibited.

From its modest beginning in 1900, the Women’s Industries section expanded in terms of its number of classes and competitors. By 1910, there were 71 classes and 275 entries; in 1939 there were 103 classes and 555 entries. While some classes were withdrawn and others added, the Women’s Industries’ main emphasis was on needlework. In 1933, for example, 69 of the 97 classes were for needlework and they attracted 70 per cent of the total entries.15 The competition categories encompassed practical items, such as hand-knitted socks; highly decorative items, such as duchess sets and pillow shams; and items that combined decorative and useful dimensions, such as hand embroidered petticoat slips, children’s dresses and infants’ outfits.16 Across the years, the needlework classes tended to demonstrate increasingly

9 That segregation was not initially absolute. In 1902, the first year in which the NAIAQ introduced a significant number of cash prizes for Women’s Industries, with thirteen awards of 5s. each, a few men also entered this section, targeting classes for decorative work and furnishings, painting, and fancy articles for house decorations. The following year, ‘special regulations’ were introduced, restricting Women’s Industries to female exhibitors. NAIAQ, Catalogue, 1902, pp. 140-44 and 1903, p. 162.
10 Brisbane Courier, 10 August 1900, p. 7.
12 The main exception was the One Woman’s Work competition. Classes within the schoolwork section which, like Women’s Industries, essentially fell outside primary and secondary industries, often specified gendered distinctions.
13 Brisbane Courier, 10 August 1900, p. 7.
14 A variety of motives underpinned the establishment and maintenance of the Aboriginal Court during the 1910s, including awareness of the opportunity it provided the State as a broker of Aboriginal employment to publicise the usefulness of Aboriginal labour. Each year, however, there was a particular emphasis on the achievements of the reserve and mission system and its officials.
16 These classes are taken from NAIAQ, Schedule of Prizes, 1933.
fine distinctions between items; whereas ‘pillow shams’ was a single class from 1902 to 1904, by 1905 it had been divided into four separate classes for Hardanger, crochet, drawn thread, and ‘any other work’ pillow shams.17 The emergence of these distinctions placed Women’s Industries on a par with the other Exhibition sections which also subscribed to the principle of small differences among entries requiring separate classes for competition. Again as occurred in other parts of the show, the introduction of some classes reflected the intervention of commercial interests via sponsorship of prizes. In 1902 the Singer Manufacturing Company promoted its wares by offering prizes of 10s.6d. for art embroidery and drawn thread work ‘executed by Exhibitor on Sewing machine’.18 Cookery became a significant category in Women’s Industries from 1913 with competitions for home preserves, bottled fruits, pickles, home cookery and sweets. Arts and crafts other than needlework were also fairly common features within Women’s Industries, including, for example, raffia work, pottery, wood carving and poker work.

Although the Women’s Industries section primarily celebrated women’s unpaid domestic labour, in its early years there was some acknowledgment of self-employed women as well as a recognition of small scale income generation by women through informal economic activity. Until 1907, the Exhibition catalogues, which listed the names of competitors in each class, included prices against those items in Women’s Industries that were for sale. In 1901, half of the entries had prices attached to them, ranging from a modest five shillings to a breathtaking £50 for an exhibit of ‘Limerick, Old Irish Point, Honiton and Point Lace’.19 Information on competitors derived from the catalogues, although scant, suggests that the women who offered their entries for sale included individuals who were small business owners; individuals who would have defined themselves as wives and mothers but who earned some money through home-based activities such as sewing; and individuals, including some employees, who regarded the Exhibition as a ‘one-off’ opportunity to enjoy a small boost to their income. Some business owners used the section to publicise their wares. Miss E.J. Dewing, for example, a professional needleworker in Brisbane, was a regular entrant in the early 1900s, sending a glass case of her art needlework as a non-competitive display. In 1902, all of the items in the ladies’ and children’s garment category were by Madam Pappriil of the Corset Company, based in central Brisbane.

In 1907, the practice of including prices against Women’s Industries items ended. By then, a series of regulations had been introduced that virtually severed any connection between women and commerce within the framework of Women’s Industries at the Exhibition. Entries were restricted to women who were amateurs ‘unless otherwise specified’, with a further requirement that ‘all work must have been the work of the exhibitor’. The ‘unless otherwise specified’ option was rarely invoked. There was also an explicit prohibition on ‘factory made goods’.20 The Women’s Industries section of the Exhibition now valued only the outputs of women’s unpaid labour in their domestic roles, not women’s contributions as employees, self-employed workers and employers to the Queensland economy.

The degree of value accorded unpaid domestic labour by the only section of the Exhibition devoted solely to women’s work may also be questioned. The prizes available to competitors, whether offered by the NAIAQ itself or private sponsors, were modest by Brisbane Exhibition standards, although it should be noted that the entry fees were usually also at the lower end of the Exhibition scale. Neither of these factors is surprising, given the emphasis on women’s unpaid work and the culturally sanctioned view that women were or should be the dependents of men. With the exception of occasional age-specific classes for girls, married women typically constituted a majority of entrants in Women’s Industries.21 Across the first forty years of the twentieth century, the standard first prizes for classes in this section increased from five to ten shillings, but there was considerable variation within individual categories. A first prize of ten shillings was the equivalent of about one-quarter of the female weekly basic wage in Brisbane.22 In 1921, while most of the needlework classes had an entry fee of 1s.6d. and offered first prizes of ten shillings, most of the home cookery classes offered prizes of between 1s.6d. and 5s. Certain Women’s Industries competitions demanded higher entry fees but promised rewards of up to one guinea, prompting questions about who could afford to enter.25 One of the most valuable prizes in the period under investigation

17 Hardanger is a variety of ornamental needlework with a square or diamond shaped pattern.
19 NAIAQ, Catalogue, 1901, p. 155.
20 NAIAQ, Catalogue, 1904, p. 183 and 1905, p. 232. Professionals were invited to compete in at least one lacework class. Surviving records, which detail only those classes that attracted entries, suggest that there was more than one class open to professionals but that those classes did not attract any entries; the nature of the classes is therefore unknown.
21 Additionally, married women were more likely than single women to enter multiple classes. In 1933, Mrs Dwyer of Toowoomba was the most prolific competitor, entering 23 classes. (In most years women were allowed to submit only one entry per class). NAIAQ, Catalogue, 1933, pp. 430-34. The analysis of marital status is based on the use of Mrs and Miss against competitors’ names, but there may have been examples of mature-aged, respected, single women being accorded the title of Mrs.
22 The state weekly basic wage for women in Brisbane varied between £1/19/- and £2/5/- during the interwar years, with the lowest rate introduced in July 1931 and the highest in August 1939.
23 Members of the NAIAQ enjoyed free entry or reduced entry fees for Exhibition classes. The cost of
was offered by the Barry and Roberts department store in 1939. Competitors were invited to make an afternoon frock from material costing not more than ten shillings for the chance to win ten guineas. The money available to the Women’s Industries section was a tiny proportion of the total prize pool for the Exhibition of £12,000 in 1939. As a comparison, prizes in other sections of the Exhibition that year included first prizes of fifty guineas for the Best Hereford Bull; £50 for the sheep shearing competition; a gold medal, an axe and £21 for the Queensland Champion Wood-Chopping Contest; and £60 for the handicap trot. The state weekly basic wage for Brisbane men in 1939 was between £4/1/- and £4/4/-.

**Beyond the Women’s Industries Section**

While Women’s Industries offered the most obvious and ongoing display of the outputs of women’s work, the Exhibition also drew particular attention to female labour and its outcomes through its One Woman’s Work competition in the 1910s, displays and events relating to women’s domestic and voluntary work during the First and Second World Wars, and the presence from the 1890s onwards of exhibits relating to technical colleges. This last category was the main forum to acknowledge white women’s contributions as employees. Additionally, the Aboriginal Court drew attention to Indigenous women and emphasised their employment as domestic servants. The arrangement of separate sections at the Exhibition for the Aboriginal Court and Women’s Industries reflected the primacy of Queensland’s racial hierarchy over its gendered hierarchy during this era. Indigenous women belonged in the Aboriginal Court, not in Women’s Industries. Visitors to the show could also identify entries by women in a range of other sections, particularly fine arts, which, with its requirement of amateur status, pointed to leisure rather than work.

Although it existed for only three years, the One Woman’s Work competition is notable for its celebration of women within the yeoman ideal of family-owned and operated farms. According to one newspaper, ‘this exhibit spoke better than could anything else of the worth of the Australian woman’. The competition was aligned with the District Exhibits section, which promoted Queensland’s rural economy and was one of the most prestigious parts of the show. In its highly detailed regulations, the main District Exhibits competition directly acknowledged women’s and children’s work only in relation to domestic and school-based activities. One Woman’s Work, which offered prize money of £50, similarly focused on domestic roles, ignoring women’s active contribution to income generation on farms. The competition required that ‘All exhibits … be the property of and grown or made by one woman only’; points were awarded for examples of fine arts, photography, needlework including darning and mending, preserved foods, baked goods, soap and candles, produce from the kitchen garden, and ‘labour and time saving appliances’. The reality of female owners of grazing properties, farms, market gardens and apiaries in Queensland was ignored by the District Exhibits section and One Woman’s Work which identified women only as homemakers and assumed that the ‘real’ work was undertaken and controlled by men.

During World Wars I and II, the Exhibition highlighted women’s unpaid contributions as wives and as voluntary workers on the homefront. During World War I, the Exhibition included a Red Cross Workers section. After the show, all items from this section were donated to the Australian Red Cross and the Soldiers’ Comforts Fund. The classes included socks, mittens, knee and balaclava caps, vests, scarves, flannelette pyjamas and shirts. Similar arrangements were made during World War II. In 1941 Women’s Industries was replaced by Women’s War Work and War-time Cookery. The War Work consisted of inter-branch displays by the Queensland divisions of the Australian Red Cross and Australian Comforts Fund, with total prizes of £150. Apart from two classes for preserved fruits, both apparently prompted by the offer of prizes from organisations which promoted that product, the War-time Cookery competition offered trophies and a cash prize pool of £50 for a single class, ‘Housewife’s War-time Cookery Display’. Reminiscent of the One Woman’s Work competition of the 1910s, the class required that ‘Exhibits in this class must be the property of and be entirely cooked or prepared by ONE WOMAN only’. Competitors could achieve a maximum of 290 points for 31 items, including preserved fruits, candied citrus peel, steamed pudding and three varieties of scones. The competition noted the impact of war through the inclusion of a ‘wartime loaf (cooked in billy can)’, ‘Evacuee Bread - Damper (baked in ashes)’, a sponge

---

25 Given NAIAQ regulations and what was then socially acceptable in Queensland, of these competitions, only the Best Hereford Bull class would have accepted entries by women; in fact, no women contributed entries to this class.
26 Queensland Year Book, 1940, p. 270.
27 *The Week*, 23 August 1913, p. 10.
29 While very much a minority, there were female employers and self-employed operators in agriculture and pastoralism across the period under examination. According to *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia*, 1933, vol. 2, pp. 1330-31, 1350-51, for example, women constituted 5.75 per cent of business owners in the state’s agricultural, pastoral and dairying industries.
sandwich made without butter, and a ‘Soldier’s Overseas Parcel’ containing a fruitcake and shortbread.\textsuperscript{30}

The Exhibition recognised that women’s contributions during wartime could extend beyond the domestic realm and traditional voluntary work such as knitting socks for the troops. The 1941 program of events featured men’s and women’s war-related service. Women took centre stage in the Women’s National Corps March, with members of the Voluntary Aid Detachment, Women’s Reserve Emergency Naval Service, Women’s National Emergency Legion and Youth Movement, Women’s Aviation and Motor Unit, Women’s Air Training Corps, Women’s Auxiliary Queensland Air Cadet Corps, and the Women’s Auxiliary Transport Service. Women, including nurses, participated in a Civil Defence exercise that was conducted in the main ring.

With occasional exceptions, such as the participation of nurses in the Civil Defence exercise, the Exhibition rarely acknowledged women’s role as employees apart from the technical school displays, which emphasised training that would lead to employment and thus offered an incomplete snapshot of men’s versus women’s job options ranging from the male dominated fields of engineering and science to the female dominated areas of dressmaking and millinery. With its inclusion of commercial and business training, the technical education displays encompassed the service sector of the economy and the importance of office work for women seeking paid employment.\textsuperscript{31}

Women’s roles as employees were relatively invisible at the show, although they represented about 20 per cent of the Queensland workforce and were numerically dominant in a small range of industries.\textsuperscript{32} In part, the lack of visibility of female employees at the Exhibition reflected the horizontal gender-based segregation of the Queensland economy combined with the NAIAQ’s emphasis on products that could be easily exhibited at the show. Approximately 40 per cent of female employees worked in the field of ‘personal and domestic service’, and significant numbers of women were also employed as office workers, shop assistants and teachers. With the partial exception of the technical education displays, the Exhibition appeared to have difficulty in devising means of representing the service sector.\textsuperscript{33} That difficulty, however, does not provide an adequate explanation. The Association’s greatest commitment was to Queensland’s primary industries, particularly pastoralism and agriculture, and, to a more moderate degree, secondary industries; the service sector was not of particular interest. The industries that the Exhibition most valued were those industries that, within the state’s horizontally-segregated economy, were numerically dominated by male business owners and employees.\textsuperscript{34} In addition to this bias, however, it is important to note that the Association’s emphasis on raw materials, technology and the items that were produced from those materials and technology, tended to minimise the visibility of the labour of Indigenous and non-Indigenous men, women and children whose work underpinned the production of items at the Exhibition. Aboriginal labour, for example, would have contributed to some of the rural outputs which enjoyed pride of place at the show. Focusing on outputs avoided particular attention being accorded the milieu of their production, including the working conditions of employees.\textsuperscript{35} Ownership of the items on display that represented the primary and secondary sectors of the formal economy rested with employers and individuals who were self-employed. The process of rendering work invisible was not limited to those parts of the show devoted to the formal economy. The labour of female domestic servants, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, doubtless freed the time of some ruling and middle class women from home duties, allowing those women to create items to enter in Women’s Industries and other sections of the show.

\textit{Conclusion}

The National Agricultural and Industrial Association of Queensland offers an example of some of the ways in which an organisation that sits well outside the labour movement and the working class can initiate and maintain traditions that are of relevance to the labour movement and labour historians. Through its annual show, the NAIAQ influenced ideas about the economy, about women’s versus men’s work, and about the relative importance of different sectors of society. Across the first four decades of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, visitors to the Brisbane Exhibition were presented with a vision of Queensland that prioritised primary and secondary industries, and celebrated the achievements of the ruling and middle classes while ignoring the extent to which employees contributed to the production of the objects at the show. The values upheld by the Exhibition, its focus on outputs that could be easily displayed, and the gender segregation that characterised Queensland society and its economy largely restricted the display

\textsuperscript{30} This paragraph is based on NAIAQ, \textit{Catalogues}, 1917, pp. 338-40; 1940, p. 382 and 1941, pp. 371-74.
\textsuperscript{31} See for example NAIAQ, \textit{Catalogue}, 1907, Section XIX Technical Schools, pp. 231-38.
\textsuperscript{33} While the schoolwork category could be regarded as demonstrating the results of teaching, a field in which women were well-represented, the focus was on the students’ achievements rather than the teaching process.
\textsuperscript{34} In the interwar period, women constituted about ten per cent of business owners (including one-person businesses) and were numerically dominant in a small number of fields, such as dressmaking.
of non-Indigenous women’s work to examples of unpaid labour within the home. The Women’s Industries section and the One Woman’s Work competition provided forums in which selected elements of women’s domestic labour were celebrated, but they simultaneously segregated women’s work from the displays of mainstream economic activity at the show. Although particular aspects of Women’s Industries, such as the fine distinctions between different classes of competition, placed it on a par with other sections of the show, the usually modest prizes within Women’s Industries suggest that it had a relatively low status within the hierarchy of show categories. During wartime, recognition of women’s labour was extended to include homefront contributions. With the exception of the Aboriginal Court, which presented Aboriginal women as domestic servants, and the technical schools’ exhibits, which offered a glimpse of employment opportunities for non-Indigenous women, the opportunities for Exhibition audiences to identify examples of women’s involvement in the formal economy were highly constrained.
The Gippsland Trades and Labour Council and industrial agency in the Latrobe Valley, Victoria

Kathryn Steel*^ 

Peak trade union bodies in the form of regional trades and labour councils have been of increasing interest in the industrial relations literature in Australia. Ellem and Shields’ (2004) theoretical framework for the analysis of this form of mobilisation provides a structure for conceptualising these bodies, which are in Australia the lowest level of peak union organisation. This paper considers the application of one part of this framework to the Gippsland Trades and Labour Council (GTLC), based in the Latrobe Valley, Victoria, during the 1980s when the GTLC was arguably coming to its peak influence. This organisation’s involvement in industrial relations illustrates local employment structures as a factor in the particular relationships which regional trades and labour councils develop.

Introduction

The Gippsland Trades and Labour Council (GTLC) is a regional peak union body in the industrialised region of the Latrobe Valley, Victoria. Its fortunes have risen and fallen along with the State Electricity Commission of Victoria (SECV) the state-owned monopoly with responsibility for electricity generation and distribution, and for decades the dominant regional employer.

Peak union bodies can be defined as ‘permanent inter-union organisations directed at furthering defined or assumed common interests or objectives by means of jointly determined strategies’. Such peak union bodies offer a means for unions to look beyond the individual – to forgo parochialism and isolationism in order to work with others to make ‘common cause’.

Such bodies, in the form of state and regional labour councils, have played significant roles in fostering and sustaining the development of Australian trade unionism, and there has been participation in and critical support for them by unions. The question of why unions choose to affiliate with a regional Trades and Labour Council (RTLC) opens a debate not only on the benefits of ‘power to’ resulting from ‘power over’ within such a context, but also on the rationale behind the formation of such bodies and their role/s. The theoretical framework proposed by Ellem and Shields, building on Briggs, recognises both the actual and the potential variety of roles of peak bodies, as agents of mobilisation, exchange and regulation.

The role of the GTLC in the industrial arena with the SECV as the major employer for the region has been intertwined across the three modes of agency – mobilisation, exchange and regulation, with its influence almost seamlessly crossing the loose boundaries between them in regard to the SECV workforce. Any discussion of the role and activities of the GTLC cannot be explained without understanding the relationships which existed between the unions and the SECV, and the industrial history of the Latrobe Valley, which was centred around the SECV.

With this in mind, this paper first briefly discusses the theoretical framework of Ellem and Shields, then describes the background to the industrial relations within the Latrobe Valley and the SECV, the major parameters of the physical space within which the GTLC operated. This is followed by an account of the role of the GTLC in industrial agency during the 1980s with the SECV. The conclusion examines the operations of the GTLC at this time within the particular environment existing in the Latrobe Valley.

Theoretical framework

The formation and role of peak union bodies have been postulated to be the result of such factors as the determining influence of the state, the role of far-sighted union leaders, and the rational mediation of existing sectional interests, resulting in the ‘rational pursuit by workers, unions and their leaders of an unproblematic common cause’.

^ My thanks to Darryn Snell, Meredith Fletcher, Myles Strous, Jan Carter and the Thursday Writing Group for their helpful comments and suggestions on earlier drafts.
4 Ellem and Shields, ‘Beyond the ‘will to unity’: theorising peak union organising and agency’.
Briggs, however, proposes that the formation of peak bodies lies more with the unique capacity of a union federation to act as an agent of mobilisation, exchange and collective goods/service provision. Thus a peak body’s power results from ‘its ability to mediate and reconfigure the relations of autonomy and dependence which exist within the union movement and between trade unions and other social forces’. The benefits to an individual affiliate must be seen to outweigh the potential disadvantage of ceding what may be significant autonomy, in mobilisation and exchange in particular, for some unions.

Ellem and Shields have built on this framework and produced a model for peak union agency that describes three possible types of agency (mobilisation, exchange and regulation), which can each manifest itself in three modes (industrial, political and social). The matrix which the model produces is useful in the analysis and categorisation of the actual and possible range of activities and roles for peak bodies, thus enabling a better understanding of such peak union bodies’ existence, diversity and impact.

Local peak bodies may be more influential at the local level at a given point in time than state or national peak bodies, because of the locally specific nature of the labour market. This may be particularly true in areas where specific employers or industries dominate, because union rules may ‘shape the spatial extent of local or regional labor markets’ and foster place consciousness. For regional or local peak bodies, broad community consent and support for their legitimacy is particularly necessary. These bodies have greater scope for, and relevance of, interaction with the community in general.

A peak union council’s powers as an agent of mobilisation, exchange and regulation are interdependent. Capacity and legitimacy to act as an agent of mobilisation gives perceived authority to act as an agent of exchange; conversely, recognition and thus legitimacy in exchange relations reinforces capacity and ability to act as an agent of mobilisation. Strength as an agent of mobilisation and exchange similarly reflects on the opportunities to influence regulation.

However, the formation, survival and effectiveness of a peak body rely on creating and maintaining a power balance within the organisation so that the legitimacy of ‘power over’ is based on the acceptance of ‘power for’. This negotiated compromise will be specific to each peak body and is dependant on a particular combination of historical and geographical factors. This is demonstrated in the relationships which the GTLC developed in the Latrobe Valley and with the SECV in particular.

The Ellem and Shields framework produces a matrix which analyses and categorises the possible roles and activities which may be undertaken by peak bodies. It provides a useful and logical means of examining the ways in which particular peak union bodies have operated within various timeframes, and for linking the factors which may be behind these activities. It serves also to prompt consideration of the possibilities for change. A limitation of the model is the need to understand and locate peak council behaviour within a particular local context.

While the GTLC has operated across the three types of agency, and within all three modes proposed by the Ellem and Shields framework, this paper will be restricted to a discussion of its activities within industrial mobilisation and exchange as they related specifically to the principal Latrobe Valley employer, the SECV, during the 1980s.

The Latrobe Valley and the SECV

The Latrobe Valley is a diverse area about 150 km east of Melbourne, part of a region rich in natural resources. The best known is the extensive brown coal deposits which provide the raw material for the majority of Victoria’s electricity generation. While the first power stations were built at the Yallourn site from the 1920s, the establishment of newer and larger power stations in the post war years established the Latrobe Valley as a new industrial region.

During the early years of the SECV, the Latrobe Valley and in particular Yallourn as the SECV’s model township, acted as a bounded and undisturbed area which shaped the industrial landscape that was to remain in place in future decades. Workers constructed a particular identity for themselves as they attempted to adjust to a relationship with an employer which dominated the region and this was reflected in the development of workplace industrial relations.

The SECV became a paternalistic and welfarist employer of a large and mainly migrant workforce, providing its own training and internal career paths. Its policies on employment organisation and practice,
reproduction of the labour force and community planning and development reflected centralised and institutionalised labour relations. These were imposed on its workforce both in the workplace and in its model township, Yallourn, in an effort to achieve unity through social structure.\textsuperscript{14} The power generating activities of the SECV, a state-owned monopoly which was tied to its Latrobe Valley location because of the raw product which was central to its core business, were critical to the State of Victoria. The concentration of power generating assets increased the bargaining power of the Latrobe Valley workers and unions, who were able to use pressure at the local level helped by strong workplace organisation, as well as the centralised arbitration system, to achieve high rates of pay and allowances as well as shorter working hours and a range of restrictive recruitment and manning practices. These factors, combined with allegations of low productivity and ongoing demarcation disputes, perpetuated the image of the Latrobe Valley as an area high in industrial conflict,\textsuperscript{15} with the unions described as ‘powerful, militant and somewhat intransigent’.\textsuperscript{16} This image has persisted, although not in accord with the reality,\textsuperscript{17} in no small part due to the media, since ‘a strike involving the power industry, generation or construction, has a high public and political profile; and this must be seen as part of the backdrop to industrial relations in the region’.\textsuperscript{18}

The dominance of the SECV in local employment was demonstrated by its having over seven times more employees than the next largest employer in the region. This impacted on the structure of employment in the Latrobe Valley, which was considered to be unique, having a dominance of public sector employment, and a work environment which specialised in electricity generation and construction.\textsuperscript{19}

The level of worker solidarity in the Latrobe Valley was high, with well organised workforce which had developed a reputation for collective strength and militancy, both within the power industry and in the community at large. The SECV was a union stronghold for both white- and blue-collar unions, with union density in the SECV estimated at over 95 percent and obtained via a \textit{de facto} closed shop arrangement covering both manual employees and a majority of the non-manual workforce.\textsuperscript{20} A principal means by which the relevant trade unions associated and communicated with each other was via the regional peak union council, the Gippsland Trades and Labour Council (GTLC), whose role can only be understood within the particular industrial context and relations of the Latrobe Valley.

\textbf{The Gippsland Trades and Labour Council}

The Gippsland Trades and Labour Council (GTLC) has a long involvement in the Latrobe Valley community, and its greatest area of influence and action has been within the industrial mode of operation. While the GTLC has operated across the range of employers in the Latrobe Valley, its activities were focused on interaction with unions operating in the SECV, which became a centre for industrial activity due to the size, complexity and union strength of its workforce.

The Gippsland Trades and Labour Council (GTLC) was established as the Yallourn Trades and Labour Council (Y TLC) in 1932. Originally established to deal with union matters in the SECV’s Yallourn works area, the geographic coverage of the YTLC expanded as the SECV moved out of Yallourn and into other locations in the Latrobe Valley. This prompted a change of name in 1947 to the Central Gippsland (and


still later to just Gippsland) Trades and Labour Council. Until the end of the 1960s the GTLC was mainly a forum for SECV maintenance workers unions, but during the late 1970s and 1980s it reinvented itself with a stronger central organisation and commenced coordinating inter-union industrial action.²¹

By the end of 1985, sixteen of the twenty unions then operating in the SECV were affiliated, and an SECV subcommittee provided a focus and coordinating role for union organisation and activity within the SECV. Overall union density in the SECV was over 95 per cent and union membership was also high within the other large employers in the Latrobe Valley, with the strength of the unions in the Latrobe Valley reflected by six of them having offices in the Latrobe Valley, five with full time local organisers. With the broader affiliation of the largest and most powerful unions represented in the Latrobe Valley, the GTLC was able to negotiate for all its affiliates with regional employing bodies on over-award and cross industry issues, as well as being an important forum for developing regional negotiating strategy and aiding communication. The power of the GTLC peaked from 1987 to the early 1990s, by which time 46 unions were affiliated, providing a broad and representative basis for inter-union activity.²²

The following account is limited to the activities of the GTLC in industrial agency and exchange vis-à-vis the SECV. The period being discussed is the later 1980s, when the GTLC was arguably at the peak of its influence, and when the SECV was still the largest employer in the Latrobe Valley.

**GTLC as agent of industrial mobilisation and industrial exchange**

The GTLC was in the enviable position of being able to coordinate a significant part of union activity in the region, with its influence particularly strong within the SECV at this time, encouraging and supporting the strong role of shop stewards and workplace organisation in place in the blue collar unions, a situation which was not typical in Australian industry at that time.²³

The SECV was a multi-site employer that needed to deal with a multitude of unions and issues on each site, and there were benefits to the SECV from this relationship. While roles within unions were clearly defined by past custom and practice, the mediation of industrial mobilisation and exchange by the GTLC enabled the SECV to organise, control and bring some discipline to union behaviour; effectively the SECV ‘shared control to regain and maintain control’.²⁴ It was also easier to resolve industrial issues before they became major concerns, thus giving an added benefit to the SECV. The GTLC also benefited by having its Secretary and President financially supported by the SECV until 1994 as part of this ‘sharing of control’.²⁵

The relationship between mobilisation and exchange became so intertwined that at its peak the GTLC appeared to gain agency in its own right from the relationship with the SECV and its ability to use ‘power for’ and ‘power over’ in both exchange and mobilisation. The activities of the GTLC in industrial mobilisation and exchange were heavily interdependent. Involvement in significant areas of inter-union bargaining advanced the strength of the unions within the SECV, and ensured that processes were strictly adhered to for the benefit of their members within the SECV. The SECV also benefited by the introduction of common and consistent procedures which could then act to reduce inter-union conflict.

The involvement of the GTLC in negotiations for a common set of conditions for all SECV employees demonstrates the interplay between mobilisation and exchange with the SECV. The move to a common award started in 1977 with the serving by the GTLC of a log of claims which incorporated a proposal for a common award for all SECV maintenance workers. A lack of progress on this log eventually led to the eleven-week strike from August that year, during which the Victorian premier declared a state of emergency and extensive power restrictions were imposed for over four weeks.²⁶ This ambit claim was broadened in later years to include a proposal for a single award to cover all employees in the Victorian power industry. The eventual approach agreed on with the SECV involved working towards a set of common conditions to be inserted into the relevant awards, which would consolidate conditions of employment in the industry, and rationalise existing customs and practice. After SECV unions decided not to incorporate wage rates in the document, negotiations continued on a common conditions only basis. By June 1988, the five SECV

²¹ Benson, *Unions at the workplace: shop steward leadership and ideology*, p. 98.
²⁴ Pullin and Haidar, ‘Industrial restructuring and labour collectivity in the Latrobe region’.
²⁵ Ibid.; Pullin and Haidar, ‘Industrial restructuring and labour collectivity in the Latrobe region’.
²⁶ Circular from S.E.C. Shop Stewards Committee (Latrobe Valley), September 1983, Box F12, File Common conditions, GTLC Archive (hereafter GTLC); John William Benson and Dennis James Goff, ‘The 1977 Latrobe Valley SECV maintenance workers’ strike’, *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 21, no. 2, June 1979, pp. 217-228.
awards that contained conditions of employment were ready to go to the Commission for ratification. A second example of the use of a combination of mobilisation and exchange was in the negotiation during 1985 and 1986 with the VTHC of the Contract/Day Labour Agreement. The origins of the agreement lay with a longstanding policy of the GTLC that work carried out by SECV day labour should continue to be carried out by these workers, since the use of contractors for ongoing maintenance work was a major area of conflict in the power stations. Prior to the negotiation of the agreement, discussion over works proposed to be let to contract was undertaken on the basis of meetings between the GTLC, the SECV and representatives from relevant unions. The process aimed to balance the preferences of management with those of the unions in the amount of contract work let, to maintain employment levels within the SECV.

The contract labour agreement formalised in July 1986, provided for the introduction and implementation of agreed processes for the allocation of work for operation, service, maintenance and construction, other than major works. This ensured the maintenance of a united front by unions and the frustrating of management attempts to introduce change concerning the amount of work to be let out under contract.

The unions continued to be concerned about the process however, and in November 1991 it was agreed by the SECV that these contract/day labour procedures would be inserted into relevant awards. When this had not happened by April 1992, SECV maintenance workers went on strike. Support during the strike by other SECV unions in the Latrobe Valley and at other SECV sites meant that after only a few days, the status of power generating plant was such that restrictions seemed likely. The SECV agreed that it would make application to the Industrial Relations Commission to have the 1986 agreement inserted into SECV awards thus resolving the dispute.

The exchange relationship between the GTLC and the SECV was necessarily influenced by the relationship between the SECV and the state government. This was manifested by an expectation of the use of formal reference to the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission and the control exercised by the Office of Industrial Relations Coordination (OIRC) on state instrumentalities. These provided significant constraints on the role of the GTLC in industrial exchange with the SECV as employer during the 1970s. The serving of a log of claims directly to SECV Latrobe Valley management, prior to the lengthy maintenance workers strike in 1977 has been seen as an attempt to circumvent or weaken the control of the OIRC in relation to determination of wages and conditions of employment and return bargaining to the SECV as employer.

It was only after the lengthy 1977 maintenance workers strike that some limited decentralisation of industrial relations activity to the local level within the SECV occurred. This started with the use of the working party concept, a changed approach to demarcation issues, and the development at the local level of industrial relations policies which allowed ‘negotiation within limits’.

The process of industrial relations change was hastened by the eight-month long Loy Yang dispute in 1980, and assisted by the growing influence in the SECV of more progressive managers, the increasing militancy of key unions such as the FEDFA, the change in leadership of the OIRC, and the increasing public scrutiny of SECV activities. However, the role of the GTLC in exchange with the SECV had still been significant, when over 20 unions had to be coordinated and to act in unison in order to be able to shut down the power stations. This organisation and administration was a strength of the GTLC, and a threat which involved intra-union organisation was no idle boast.

Until the late 1980s, unions were ‘incorporated’ within the SECV organisational framework. There were meetings to negotiate new awards or variations, with standing committees on a range of matters of interest and relevance to unions, and the formation of new committees and working parties as required.

27 Benson, Unions at the workplace: shop steward leadership and ideology, pp. 8-9.; Position paper, Power industry approach: common conditions of employment, 11 July 1986, Box 9, GTLC; SECV to VTHC, 27 April 1987, Box F12, File Common conditions, GTLC; SECV to Mr Justice A. Boulton, Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission, 3 June 1988, Box 5, File Common conditions (SECV), GTLC.
28 Central Gippsland Trades and Labour Council, Policy in regard to contract work within the State Electricity Commission, Latrobe Valley Region, 11th January 1968, Box F12, file Contract agreement, GTLC.
29 SECV, Contract labour: composite agreement with the VTHC and SECV unions for the introduction and implementation of agreed processes in relation to the allocation of work to contract, July 1986, Box F12, file Contract agreement, GTLC ; Pullin and Haidar, ‘Industrial restructuring and labour collectivity in the Latrobe region’.
30 Gippsland Trades and Labour Council, flyer April 1992, Box 13, GTLC; Latrobe Valley Express, 10 April 1992, p. 1 ; Australian Workers’ Union memo re SECV strike, 8th April 1992, Box 13, GTLC; Latrobe Valley Express, 10 April 1992, pages 1,19; SECV to VTHC, 9 April 1992, Box 13, GTLC.
31 Benson and Hince, ‘Understanding regional industrial relations systems’; Benson and Goff, ‘The 1977 Latrobe Valley SECV maintenance workers’ strike’; ; Benson and Hince, ‘Understanding regional industrial relations systems’.
32 Benson and Hince, ‘Understanding regional industrial relations systems’.
33 John Benson, Kevin Hince and Gerard Griffin, Industrial relations policy: a case study of organisational change, Schools of Business and Social Sciences, Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education, Churchill, 1983, p. 18..
34 Pullin and Haidar, ‘Industrial restructuring and labour collectivity in the Latrobe region’.
Over time, these working parties moved from involvement in minor organisational matters to significant issues such as asbestos use and the introduction of a shorter working week.\textsuperscript{35}

The negotiations during 1980 over the introduction of a 37\textfrac{1}{2} hour week were the first significant experience of the changed attitude by the government. The campaign for a shorter working week in Victorian industry was not new, but in 1980 SECV unions determined to negotiate directly with the SECV for a reduction in hours. The SECV agreed to negotiate under certain conditions, including no industrial action during negotiations, ratification of any agreement by the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission, and that any agreement was not to be used as a basis for flow-on agreements in other state instrumentalities or departments. The negotiations proceeded, despite the threat of industrial action, and the shorter working week arrangement was implemented on 1 January 1981. Thus the ongoing efforts by the GTLC to have a greater role in direct negotiation with the SECV appeared to be paying off, especially when in 1982 the SECV was given government approval to negotiate with unions a further reduction to a 36-hour working week.\textsuperscript{36}

Participation by the GTLC in the SECV decision-making structures at the policy level ensured knowledge of and input to strategic directions and their implementation. For example the SECV Advisory Committee was established in 1984 as a bi-monthly forum for SECV senior management and union representatives to meet in order ‘to discuss impending issues of interest in the SEC’s business, industrial and engineering activities’ with opportunities to provide input into corporate policies, practices and initiatives.\textsuperscript{37} Likewise, the SECV Activities Review commenced in early 1987 to assist in identifying the core business of the SECV, and to ‘assess opportunities for cost containment or additional investment of resources and the viability of support service options’\textsuperscript{38} in order for the SECV to achieve corporate objectives. This joint management/union exercise at grassroots level, to find ways to improve management and work practices, resulted in more effective consultation between management, employees and unions/associations.\textsuperscript{39}

The GTLC was also represented on the joint SECV/union study which met between 1987 and 1989 to examine options for the reduction of operations and maintenance costs at Loy Yang A power station and the Loy Yang Open Cut. The study was prompted by the inquiry into future power station construction by the Natural Resources and Environment Committee, as well as by expected competition from a proposed black coal power station in southern New South Wales. The focus was on the details and implementation of a change program at the Loy Yang A operations in order to improve the competitiveness and viability of brown coal plant. Recommendations were made for significant changes to SECV management, including operation as a business unit, reorganisation of work groups, introduction of skills enhancement, and movement towards joint decision making, but not all were acceptable to the unions affected.\textsuperscript{40}

To operate most effectively as an agent of mobilisation and exchange, it was important that the GTLC be recognised by the VTHC as a valid group to represent trade unions in the Latrobe Valley. Relations between the two bodies were not always cordial and there was a perception, particularly by unions associated with the left, that the VTHC was not committed to advancing affiliate interest through direct action. Despite the expectation that shop committees were subordinate to both the ACTU and its state branches, there were instances where the actions of SECV shop committees were seen as a struggle for power between the VTHC and the rank and file.\textsuperscript{41}

Such struggles served to confirm the view of the Latrobe Valley unions that their state executives had no awareness of or interest in the issues that they saw as important. Similarly, local unionists were not confident in the ability of the VTHC to represent them effectively and to understand issues from a Latrobe Valley perspective. Historically, formal union bodies below the state level have not been considered as central to the overall purpose of the union movement. As a result, the GTLC became the organisation of preference for the sanctioning of industrial action in the Latrobe Valley, and by 1967 it had claimed autonomous control of this function.\textsuperscript{42}


\textsuperscript{37} SEVC, Advisory Committee summary, received 18.3.1987, Box 29, GTLC.

\textsuperscript{38} State Electricity Commission of Victoria, \textit{Annual report 1984-1985}, State Electricity Commission of Victoria, Melbourne, 1985, p. 11.


\textsuperscript{42} Benson and Hince, ‘Understanding regional industrial relations systems’; Janis Bailey, ‘Mobilisation up North: Queensland regional labour councils in tough times’, \textit{Labour & Industry}, 2007, forthcoming; D.H. Plowman,
The GTLC was a powerful force in the Latrobe Valley during the 1980s for coordinating multi-union mobilisation and exchange within the SECV. The advantages of this worked to favour both the unions and the SECV. The latter benefited from having a single organisation to negotiate with on the large range of issues which affected its extensive and diverse workforce; the unions and the GTLC benefited because weaker unions were able to take advantage of the industrial muscle of the more powerful unions operating within the SECV, while the stronger unions gained from a unified approach involving the participation and cooperation of other relevant unions in any agreed bargaining position and resulting industrial action.

The involvement of the GTLC in the SECV’s operations was a result of the collective strength of the GTLC and its affiliated unions being used for a united front, which benefited both the GTLC and the SECV. This strength was based on the affiliation of the major SECV unions and their ability to restrict power supplies in the event that the failure of the exchange process required recourse to mobilisation. This was assisted by the delegation to the GTLC of coordination of mobilising activity by these unions, and the power that this gave the GTLC in its exchange relationship with the SECV during this period.

**Conclusion**

The outstanding and possibly unique feature of the area in which the GTLC operated was the existence of a single dominant employer, the SECV, which was a state-owned monopoly responsible for producing and distributing electricity for the State of Victoria.

This resulted in a set of relationships involving the SECV, the unions, employees and the community, which developed over the seventy-year period in which the SECV operated in the Latrobe Valley. The particular industrial structure which evolved included the strength of the SECV employees, the structure of the local union movement which gave greater weight to local stewards over state union officials, and the prominence given in the Melbourne-based news media to any threat to electricity disruption. The social cohesion within the Latrobe Valley encouraged unions to be active in matters which affected both living standards and the wider quality of life. These specific regional influences including the shared ideology of the regional community influenced responses and thus outcomes in industrial relations matters.

These factors, together with the awareness of local unions which used the bargaining power this set of circumstances gave them, and the almost closed shop operating within the SECV, combined to give unions significant strength. This strength was delegated to the GTLC together with the authority to negotiate with the SECV on their behalf in multi-union issues.

Once the SECV ceased to exist in the mid 1990s, the impact on the community was enormous. The shock over the corporatisation and privatisation overwhelmed the strong sense of community and divided the unions, which protected their own interests during this period. The effect of the loss of a monopoly state-owned operation with long ties to the local area, which had an ongoing and fixed place in the local consciousness, and its replacement by a number of mostly foreign-owned private corporations in the business of keeping their shareholders satisfied, had not been foreseen.

By the end of the 1990s, as a result of the significant industrial restructuring occurring throughout the Latrobe Valley, the GTLC had declined from a body with significant involvement in both the power industry and general Latrobe Valley industrial relations into an organisation which ‘is a shadow of its former self’. The union amalgamation process encouraged by the ACTU reduced the number of unions in local industries, including the new generating companies. The opportunities available to coordinate activity across multiple unions as agent of mobilisation, exchange and regulation seemed to have disappeared, and the GTLC appeared to be on the brink of disappearing like the SECV.

However, these structural changes to the industrial and economic environment in which unions operate are those which face the union movement elsewhere and are not unique to the Latrobe Valley. They require a change to the way that trade unions operate in order to stay relevant to workers. The GTLC cannot afford to rely on its past achievements, but must recognise the changes to the nature and composition of work in the Latrobe Valley and develop a response to meet the needs of workers in the ‘new’ economy.

The Ellem and Shields model provides a framework for better understanding the roles which may be undertaken by peak union councils. However, while the framework comments on the role of local structures and their importance for peak union councils operating at the regional or local level, it cannot fully articulate the strength of the relationships which existed in the Latrobe Valley. The combination of the dominance of the particular state-owned employer, together with the strength of the unions, resulted in an interdependence and interaction across the industrial modes of mobilisation and exchange which was

---

2 Pullin and Hince, ‘Understanding regional industrial relations systems’.
greater than one might have expected to be the case. Also, because of the nature of the industry as a high profile utility in which restrictions to output were immediately noticed, the reactions of the government, the media and the public provided another layer of complexity to the relationships which developed. This also affected the nature of the industrial mobilisation and exchange by the unions involved and thus of the GTLC. The changed context of the industrial environment in the Latrobe Valley since the breakup of the SECV has affected the ways in which the GTLC and the unions are able to mobilise and to participate in exchange relationships in the power industry.

The Ellem and Shields framework provides a useful means of analysing and understanding the roles and activities of local peak union bodies, but there is also a need to recognise the historical peculiarities of a particular region and/or industry. In the case of the GTLC, these relate to its specific lengthy history of association with the SECV. Thus in summary, the role, activities and power of the GTLC during the 1980s can only be explained within a context which recognises the particular industrial situation existing in the Latrobe Valley at that time, and which together with the particular industrial history and development of the region resulted in a particular response from the unions.

47 Ellem and Shields, ‘Beyond the “will to unity”’. 
The 1977 State Electricity Commission of Victoria maintenance workers strike

Kathryn Steel

For eleven weeks in 1977, over 2,000 maintenance workers employed by the State Electricity Commission of Victoria (SECV) went on strike. Electricity restrictions imposed during the final month of the strike affected most of the Victorian public. While the strike was well publicised in the media, it has received little attention in the academic literature. The importance of the strike for the local region and the union movement is outlined and the reasons for the lack of academic interest are speculated on.

Background

The strike in 1977 of the maintenance workers employed in the Latrobe Valley by the State Electricity Commission of Victoria (SECV) was an event which had ongoing effects, for not only the SECV and the unions involved, but also for inter-union relations within the Latrobe Valley. Despite the importance of the strike and the attention that it generated in the popular press at the time, it has received little attention in the academic literature.

There have been many high profile Australian strikes, such as the South East Queensland Electricity Board (SEQEB) strike of 1985 and the 1997/98 Melbourne Port waterfront dispute, which both have a much more significant body of academic literature attached to them. Is this because of the high-profile strategy used by the Queensland government in the former, and the provocative actions of Patrick Stevedores with the support of the federal government in the latter? The 1977 SECV maintenance workers strike has not attracted this interest, despite marking the first time that a ‘state of emergency’ was declared by the Victorian state government, and being extensively reported in the popular press (as is usually the case with lengthy or violent strikes). One exception to this is the description of the strike by Benson and Goff.¹

The particular relationships which existed between the government, the SECV, the unions and the community demonstrate the importance of providing the context within which the strike must be viewed. The purpose of this paper is to note the significance of this strike for the region and for the union movement, and to speculate on why there has been a lack of academic interest in this lengthy industrial dispute. This paper will also briefly describe the strike, a complex event which went back and forth to the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission (the Commission), and whose course was largely controlled by the strikers rather than by shop stewards or union officials.

The SECV and the Latrobe Valley

The Latrobe Valley is about 150 km to the east of Melbourne, part of a region rich in natural resources. The best known of these is the extensive brown coal deposits which provide the raw material for the majority of Victoria’s electricity generation. The first power stations were built at the Yallourn site from the 1920s, but the establishment of newer and larger power stations in the surrounding area in the post war years established the Latrobe Valley as a new industrial region.² During the early years of the SECV, the Latrobe Valley and in particular Yallourn as the SECV’s model township, acted as a bounded and undisturbed area which shaped the industrial landscape that was to remain in place in future decades. Workers constructed a particular identity for themselves as they attempted to adjust to a relationship with an employer who dominated the region. This was reflected in the organisations and institutions that were constructed by the working community, and influenced the development of workplace industrial relations.³

The SECV became a paternalistic and welfarist employer of a large and mainly migrant workforce, providing its own training and internal career paths. Its policies on employment organisation and practice, reproduction of the labour force and community planning and development reflected centralised and institutionalised labour relations. These were imposed on its workforce both in the workplace and in its model township, Yallourn, in an effort to achieve unity through social structure.⁴

⁴ Peter Fairbrother and Jonathan Testi, ‘The advent of multinational ownership of the Victorian electricity generating plants: questions for labour’, in Peter Fairbrother, Michael Paddon and Julian Teicher (eds),
The concentration of power generating assets increased the bargaining power of the Latrobe Valley workers and unions, which were able to use pressure locally helped by strong workplace organisation, as well as the centralised arbitration system, to achieve high rates of pay and allowances, shorter working hours and restrictive recruitment and Manning practices. These costs were passed on to consumers by the SECV, although as a monopolistic public utility it was primarily concerned with meeting supply goals, rather than making a profit. These factors, combined with allegations of low productivity and ongoing demarcation disputes, perpetuated the image of the Latrobe Valley as an area high in industrial conflict, with the unions described as ‘powerful, militant and somewhat intransient’. This image has persisted, despite not according with the reality, in no small part due to the media, since ‘a strike involving the power industry, generation or construction, has a high public and political profile; and this must be seen as part of the backdrop to industrial relations in the region’.

The strike

Over a period of eleven weeks in 1977, between 9 August and 25 October, 2,300 maintenance workers at the SECV in Yallourn went on strike. While eleven unions at the site were directly involved, by the end of the strike over 500,000 workers had been stood down. Electricity restrictions affected the entire state of Victoria, and included restrictions on the use of television, radio and public transport.

The origins of the strike occurred with a mass meeting of SECV workers on 18 March 1977 which endorsed the log of claims served later that month on the SECV by the Secretary of the Central Gippsland Trades and Labour Council (CGTLC). These claims were made on behalf of all the manual unions with members employed by the SECV in the Latrobe region, and were to form the basis of an award to cover the whole power industry, smoothing out conditions which applied to different awards and providing comparable wage relativities. Because of the refusal of the SECV to discuss the claims, the Amalgamated Metal Workers and Shipwrights Union (AMWSU) and the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) placed overtime and availability bans on all maintenance work from mid-June.

The effect of these bans over the following eight weeks was to reduce the operational capacity of essential equipment. In early August, the SECV arranged for contract staff to repair two vehicles, and for the rerostering of boiler shop staff to enable repair of a damaged boiler. These actions breached existing consultative arrangements, and were viewed by unions as part of a strategy to bring matters to a head.

On 9 August, a mass meeting of maintenance workers voted, initially, for a one-week strike. On 12 August, the ETU applied to the Commission to vary the appendix to the Metal Trades Award, thus overcoming the objection of the SECV that the log of claims did not officially exist. The delay in scheduling a hearing of the claim resulted in the strike being made indefinite on 16 August, with the striking maintenance workers deciding not to return to work until after the hearing. An initial hearing of the claim held on 23 August seemed more concerned with matters of procedure rather than any move to address the application, not what the unions had expected. The matter see-sawed between the Commission and the workers with the men rejecting proposals that a return to work would enable discussion of, and thus a decision on, the log of claims. Ongoing delays by the SECV in responding to the claims led to a series of mass meetings which confirmed the decision to stay out on strike.

By 23 September, the shop stewards had tentatively negotiated with the SECV for a return to work, but a mass meeting of members on 26 September rejected the stewards’ proposal. At this time, the SECV...
imposed state-wide power restrictions starting from midnight on 27 September, and lasting until the 26 October, the day after the strikers returned to work. The state government became openly involved, with Premier Hamer, the State Liberal government leader, asking the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and the Victorian Trade Halls Council (VTHC) to intervene. For the first time a state of emergency was declared and the Essential Services Act invoked, although further action by the State government was postponed until after a full bench hearing by the Commission.12

The three main points coming out of the full bench hearing judgment on 7 October were that granting a claim for a wage increase before a return to work would contravene the principles of wage determination; that the principles of wage indexation were to be retained in the national interest; and that a return to work should accompany acceptance of existing offers by the SECV. This decision did nothing to eliminate the issue of anomalies between internal SECV wage rates and those of contractors on SECV works. The ACTU proposed an anomalies conference on SECV wage relativities, and on 12 October, the strikers voted to return to work to allow this hearing to go ahead. However, the tribunal’s decision on 18 October, which dismissed the workers’ claims for a wage increase, prompted a return to the strike after a mass meeting on the same day.13

The SECV threatened dismissal of the strikers and attempted to advertise for replacement labour. It was at this point that the dispute needed wider union mobilisation, both from within the SECV and from outside the Latrobe Valley, in order to press the strikers claims. Although there was a significant flow of donations in cash and kind for the Distress Fund, there was a perceived lack of sympathy for the strikers from the VTHC and the ACTU.14

The ACTU recommended a return to arbitration on the basis of a work-value case, although this proposal raised concerns among some of the shop stewards, as well as the Women’s Assistance Committee, who felt that such a hearing would not advance the original log of claims. However, the shop stewards committee as a group was prepared to accept this recommendation, with an expectation that a speedy interim decision would be handed down. The striking workers reluctantly accepted a recommendation to return to work on 25 October to allow the case to proceed. This effectively ended the strike, although this was far from the result anticipated by the workers at the beginning of the dispute.15 The President of the Commission, Sir John Moore, referred the dispute to Commissioner Mansini to investigate the alleged relativity problems and the overall wage structure for SECV maintenance employees.16

The process was not as quick as the stewards had expected, with the work value case decision not being handed down until 21 March 1978. Increases awarded varied between $1.60 and $5.50 per week, for workers with two or more years’ experience, but applied only to workers on the Metal Trades Award 1952 SECV classifications. Thus some of the eleven unions involved in the strike gained nothing from the result of the work value case. Some of the non-wage claims were accepted and implemented by the SECV, and related to variations to sick leave, traveling and underground expenses, incidental allowances and footwear. The application for a common award for all maintenance employees was dismissed, although local unions and the CGTLC continued to press for a single SECV industrial award for the maintenance unions. These negotiations continued through to 1988, when variations to the SECV awards, which contained conditions of employment, went to the Commission for ratification.17

**Context and questions**

The two questions being considered are the factors which make this strike significant, and the reasons for the overlooking of this strike in the academic literature. The factors which characterise this strike may be grouped in terms of timing, length and the particular industrial relationship which existed between the SECV and the other players. The lack of interest in the academic literature may relate to the long and low key buildup to a strike decision, the apparent lack of desire for aggressive action on the part of the state government, and the more dramatic effects of later strikes such as SEQEB and the Melbourne Ports disputes. It is also suggested that the course of the dispute does not fit easily within a traditional industrial relations framework, but may benefit from an analysis which takes more account of social processes

---

17 Print D6279; (1978) 202 CAR 312; SECV to Mr Justice A. Boulton, Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission, 3 June 1988, Box 5, File Common conditions (SECV), GTLC Archive.
Characteristics of the strike

The timing of the strike is important in examining the issues of why it occurred and why it lasted as long as it did. The Latrobe Valley location is significant, given the industrial relations history of the area and the ways in which the SECV and the unions interacted. While the coordination by the CGTLC of the unions involved in maintenance enabled a unified approach to the issues which were the basis of this strike, there were also other unions operating in the SECV whose lack of involvement in the strike meant that it did not have the broad and early effect that could have been the case had there been wider union involvement. The most significant of these other unions were the Municipal Officers’ Association (MOA) and the Federated Firemen and Engine Drivers’ Association (FEDFA). Involvement of these unions at an earlier stage of the strike was a critical element which had been overlooked.18

The lack of direct support from the MOA and the FEDFA, whose members continued to work during the dispute, affected both the length and the impact of the strike. Electricity restrictions were not imposed until almost the end of September, reflecting the fact that it takes some time for lack of maintenance of equipment and machinery to be felt in the electricity industry. Had key sections of the power industry such as the power station operators been involved from the start, the impact would have been felt almost immediately and perhaps the outcome may have been different. This splitting of power workers had a lasting effect on the industrial relations climate of the Latrobe Valley, a relatively small and tightly knit community where many people were employed by the SECV. The effect was significant and long-lasting, resulting in a bitterness and distrust between local unions which has not faded from union consciousness today.19

While the general pattern of strikes in Australia has been for short strikes of between one to two working days, during the 1970s longer strikes became more important and in 1977 the proportion of working days lost in strikes of 20 days or more contributed over a quarter of all working days lost because of strikes that year. More than 975,000 hours of lost time occurred within the SECV because of the strike, nearly all the total for the SECV for that financial year. Although the lost-time figure for 1977 was the lowest in Australia since 1969, this did not take into account the massive unemployment and disruption to Victorian industry caused by the SECV maintenance workers strike, nor did it give any indication of the regional impact of this industrial dispute.20

The length of this dispute may be related to the specific issue – the push for a common award for maintenance workers employed by the SECV. The initial log of claims served by the unions was seen as a way of establishing and maintaining relativities within and between classifications and of ensuring that all maintenance workers were employed under the same terms and conditions. This was an issue that could not be resolved by the SECV acting alone at that time, as the flow on effects would have been significant. Indeed the Victorian Office of Industrial Relations Coordination (OIRC) had been established to avoid this very problem within state government enterprises, and the inability to negotiate directly with the SECV was a source of frustration to SECV unions.

For the SECV, the constraints of the OIRC effectively prevented direct negotiation with unions on issues that could be seen as affecting other state instrumentalities. It was only after the 1977 maintenance workers dispute that some limited decentralisation of industrial relations activity to the local level occurred, with the use of the working party concept, a changed approach to demarcation issues, and the development at the local level of industrial relations policies which allowed ‘negotiation within limits’.21 The result was greater independence in bargaining over terms and conditions of employment in the SECV.

Crouch has suggested that disputes over control issues are more bitterly fought than those which concern mainly financial goals. While the central issues of the 1977 dispute were publicly seen as involving wages and conditions it has been suggested that in fact the control issue over the respective roles of the Commission, the OIRC and the SECV was central to the serving of the initial log of claims or grievance. The nature of the collectively expressed grievance impacts on the unfolding of a strike and is thus relevant when examining why this dispute lasted for as long as it did.22 Mackey has suggested that

References

21 Benson and Hince, ‘Understanding regional industrial relations systems’.
lengthy strikes comprise a different type of industrial action, although she notes a lack of literature on such disputes. They may by definition be viewed as more difficult to resolve, returning to the question posed earlier about the nature of the grievance which resulted in such a lengthy worker mobilisation. Thus a more detailed analysis of the 1977 dispute may assist to provide information to fill this significant gap in the literature.  

Employers also mobilise in response to strike action and the longer the strike, the greater the opportunities available to employers. In the case under discussion, while the SECV was the employer, the strike was also viewed by the state government as an opportunity for action against the unions involved; the ACTU and the VTHC were also involved in this mobilisation against the strikers and their unions. Long strikes such as the 1977 dispute thus provide an opportunity to examine this counter-mobilisation effect in greater detail.

Another relationship that was important in this dispute was that between the CGTLC, the VTHC, and the local shop stewards. There had been a distinct lack of trust in the VTHC and the way in which industrial disputes within the SECV and the Latrobe Valley were handled. The local feeling, particularly within the more militant unions, was that the VTHC did not have the interests of local unionists at heart. The proportion of unionists affected by Latrobe Valley issues was seen by state officials to be relatively small in the overall scheme of state union strategy and decision-making. There is no doubt that the Latrobe Valley unions felt alienated by this attitude, and by the expectation that shop committees be subordinate to both the ACTU and its state branches. The result was an increase in the perceived importance and role of the local regional trades and labour council, the CGTLC, which assumed the role historically held by the VTHC Disputes Committee. The GTLC became the organisation of preference for the sanctioning of industrial action in the Latrobe Valley, and by 1967 it had claimed autonomous control of this function.

**Lack of academic interest**

The 1977 dispute began as a relatively low key event. By comparison with more recent lengthy and public disputes, the maintenance workers dispute progressed slowly and without media attention for some time, with five months between the initial serving of a log of claims and the first strike action. Initially, only those Latrobe Valley workers who went on strike were affected. The rest of the SECV power industry workers, both in the Valley and elsewhere in the state continued with the status quo, and the effect on the general populace of the State of Victoria was minimal until power restrictions were imposed. The quick return to normal supply at the end of the strike demonstrated the lack of long-term impact of the strike on generation and distribution of electricity supplies, which were able to be resumed with little delay once maintenance recommenced.

The effect of government intervention in the dispute in Victoria may also be contrasted with that of the Queensland government in the SEQEB dispute of 1985, and the federal government in the Melbourne Ports dispute of 1997/1998, although all three governments may have been working toward a common aim of breaking the power of the unions involved in the respective disputes. Premier Hamer had a history of playing things ‘cool’ in power industry disputes, a tactic which seemed to have had some success in resolving previous disputes. In the 1977 instance, an application to deregister four of the strikers’ unions was made after the strike was resumed on the 18 October following the decision from the anomalies hearing, but later Hamer was said to have professed sympathy for the strikers.

While the Victorian state government declared a state of emergency, no direct action was taken under the emergency powers. It has been suggested that any use of the options open to Hamer via the declaration of the Essential Services Act, or deregistration of the unions, would be defied by the strikers thus inflaming the situation. This relatively low key response is in marked contrast to the actions of the Queensland state government in 1985. The National Party in Queensland had traditionally viewed the trade union movement as an impediment to business profitability. The Queensland electricity industry had a significantly worse industrial record than its counterparts in Victoria and New South Wales, and than Queensland industry generally, which was exacerbated by the confrontational attitude of the Queensland government to the power unions.

---

Benson and Hince, ‘Understanding regional industrial relations systems’.  
Mackay, The unfolding of long strikes, p. 23.  
The major issue behind the SEQEB dispute was the move to greater use of contract labour within the industry. An indefinite strike by ETU members began on 6 February 1985. A state of emergency was declared under the State Transport Act, and all striking ETU members were directed on 8 February to return to work or risk dismissal. By 11 February 1,000 ETU employees of SEQEB had been dismissed and the vacant positions were advertised in the media. While power restrictions were in force for ten days, full power was restored on 21 February without any of the strikers’ demands having been met, and nor were the dismissed workers reinstated.

In the waterfront dispute, the Australian federal (Coalition) government played an active role. Provisions within the Workplace Relations Act 1996 were designed to prevent militant and well organised unions such as the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) from using traditional bargaining methods. Government personnel apparently formulated and implemented policy to remove or reduce the MUA’s role as primary bargaining agent for waterfront labour. The government also played an active role in the public relations of the dispute, which aimed to provide legitimacy for the employer by arguing that the MUA cared nothing for the community.

The government saw itself as helping the private sector to rid itself of economically inefficient work practices and expected support from middle Australia in this venture. However, the support of the community swung instead to the MUA and resulted in the formation and maintenance of community pickets. Despite the support of the federal government for the employer in this dispute, the result was a clear win for the MUA, and exactly one month after the mass lockout began on 7 April 1998, the unionists started to return to work.

Another factor which may explain the lack of academic interest in the 1977 maintenance workers dispute was that it was also a multi-union strike which demonstrated a significant example of workplace input to local industrial relations. The latter underscores the exceptional nature of industrial relations in the Latrobe Valley at the time, where a strong workplace organisation was well established, not commonplace in the centralised industrial relations structure then in place in Australia. This resulted in a complex and possibly unique set of relationships between the SECV, the unions, employees and the local community, with the role of the SECV, the single largest employer in the local area, an important factor. This level of workplace organisation does not fit well with any analysis based on a traditional systems – based theory of industrial relations and of strikes. Such an analysis focuses on the role of collective actors, that is institutions such as the Arbitration Commission and the state, the employer and the trade unions, and on their interactions, rather than on the social processes involved including the roles, motives and concerns of the participants in dispute.

Conclusion

The 1977 SECV maintenance workers strike was a significant event both for the Latrobe Valley and for the union movement although it has been overlooked in academic literature. It is timely to document the complexity of the issues which arose from it and which may be applicable in the current industrial relations climate which places so much emphasis on workplace-based organisation.

This paper has summarised the context within which the strike occurred and some of the questions which it raises. Clearly more research is needed to fully understand why the strike occurred, what events took place, and how the unions involved were able to sustain mobilisation for such a lengthy period. This work is being carried out by the author through a project to analyse the 1977 strike within the theoretical framework of Kelly’s Mobilization Theory. It is hoped that the result will make a contribution to the literature on lengthy strikes in Australia as well as providing an assessment of the usefulness of this relatively recent framework in the examination of historical industrial relations events.

29 Blackmur, ‘Industrial conflict in the public sector’.
30 Treuren, ‘The government, the state and industrial relations’.
33 Kelly, Rethinking industrial relations: mobilization, collectivism and long waves.
How was labour divided? Working class politics in the 1940s

Jonathan Strauss*^  

A model used in Australian labour historiography, which suggests a division of labour between political and industrial labour movements, respectively institutionalised in the ALP and the unions, presumes the ALP is the political leader of the movement. But, even before the ‘third party’ experiences of the last two decades, this leadership was challenged from within the working class, most sharply towards the end of and just after World War II. This paper discusses the basis and extent of that challenge, in particular in the electoral arena. It also considers the policy restraints on this challenge and the implications of this for politics within the working class.

In the years towards the end of World War II and immediately after, many workers in Australia became more class conscious. One aspect of labour movement activity related to this was a strike wave, but the close attention previously given to industrial disputes and union leadership battles in the period is alone insufficient to study the politics of these years in the working class: what, for example, workers read, what parties they joined and participated in, and how they voted – which receives particular attention here – also all changed during this period.

Tom Sheridan’s Division of Labour is the major study available of the labour movement in the years immediately after the war and an invaluable contribution to any discussion of politics in the working class at the time. It is the basis for the description of the strike wave in this paper. Sheridan’s analysis is limited, however. He attributed the strike wave to a conflict between a workforce that was spontaneously aggressive in its drive for improvements in wages, hours and other working conditions, and the Australian Labor Party (ALP) government headed by Chifley, which resisted that drive. He also associated the successes of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) in the period solely with the industrial labour movement: its (very significant) ‘influence among unionists held up and rose slightly during the first two post-war years’, because, he argued, the party’s talents and energy supported the period’s militancy.1

The limits of Sheridan’s analysis are imposed by his model of a labour movement divided into industrial and political wings. Union activity is political to the extent it is exercised within or otherwise oriented to influencing the ALP. The political activity of the working class is placed in an overall framework in which the ALP is the point of reference, including even that of workers in other political organisations. The ALP is thereby made the necessary political leader of the class, in line with the common understanding that between the end of the first decade after federation until the 1980s at least, a fundamentally two-party system - of the ALP and non-ALP parties – existed in Australian politics. Once a broader working-class radicalism is involved, however, the possibility of a challenge to the two-party from within the working class is posed and the model is undermined. Of particular interest, then, is the activity of and support for the Communist Party of Australia, since that party appealed in various ways to radicalising workers, despite its Stalinism.2

According to Sheridan, however, the view of the CPA leadership about the party’s political influence in the working class in the post-war strike wave moved from a realistic understanding that it had little to the ‘almost total delusion’ of leadership claims. Its left turn from 1947, in which it sharply attacked the ALP and asserted the CPA as the leadership of the working class through, for example, what Tom O’Lincoln describes as ‘aggressively independent election campaigns’,3 accelerated this movement, Sheridan said.

[^I would like to thank Doug Hunt and an anonymous referee for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper. Responsibility for the paper remains mine.
2 V.Gordon Childe’s How Labour Governs: A Study of Workers’ Representation in Australia, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1964, is the most important antecedent of the division of labour model. Sheridan presents one example of the model’s general problem: it doesn’t acknowledge that working class industrial militancy and ALP politics are not always distinct with regard to their political character. On the one hand, workers’ militancy can find a place among class-collaborationist opportunism in the politics of the working class, eliminating the division of the labour movement with regard to opposition to capitalism. But militancy can also develop a relationship with a working class outlook that is hegemonic and antagonistic to capital - the revolutionary trend in the class’ politics – which the ALP has not shown it can accommodate. A more general discussion of the model is beyond the scope of this paper.
3 Tom O’Lincoln, Into the Mainstream: The Decline of Australian Communism, Stained Wattle Press, Sydney, 1985, pp. 59-60.]
He cited as an example of this movement — that is, as unrealistic - a remark of the CPA assistant general secretary, Richard Dixon, at the party’s March 1946 Political Committee meeting. Dixon said there was a ‘separation of very considerable sections of the workers from the Labor Party, and very considerable doubts in the minds of workers about the Labor Party’.4

A number of developments suggest Sheridan’s assessment of working class politics must, however, be qualified. Between 1945 and 1947 ALP Industrial Groups were initiated in New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria to intervene in the union movement (in Western Australia, the union peak council was inside the ALP’s structures: an attempt by 15 unions to form an independent labour council were successfully resisted). This attempt by the ALP to establish avowed control of the unions was unique.

According to Sean Scalmer, the Industrial Groups were the response of the party’s parliamentarians to what they perceived to be a novel threat to them from the union movement. Their leadership in the formation of the Groups followed their tendency to act against the labour theory of democracy, which involved the labour movement entering politics through providing information to the ALP and controlling its parliamentarians. Scalmer argued the ALP parliamentarians’ response had become necessary when in government they opposed workers’ desires expressed through ALP structures such as its conferences. The party could not, as it had before, unify labour’s political interests. Driven by the war effort, it overlooked the views of unionists and party members, and ignored newly emerging political forces. So, according to Scalmer, women and intellectuals became important political constituencies for the CPA. Thus the CPA became a political alternative to the ALP. 5 This was despite the generally conciliatory approach of the CPA towards the ALP before the left turn. It had supported the Chifley government’s re-election. It was against the ALP’s disaffiliation of and refusal to affiliate some CPA-led union branches – at least eight in Queensland and the ARU in Victoria – which had, for example, supported the election campaigns of non-ALP pro-worker candidates.6

For politics in the working class, however, the character and course of the strike wave and the relationship of this to CPA policy was still more important. The strike wave extended throughout the country, including into the normally industrially quiescent South Australia and Tasmania. It involved many workers who were either unorganised, only recently organised, or not traditionally militant or effectively organised, including those suffering from racial and gender oppression. These included: Aboriginal workers in Darwin and the Pilbara, women (clothing workers, tram conductors and waitresses, for example), bakers, BHP iron and steelworkers and some operative staff, postal workers, pastoral workers, and tobacco workers. In the strike wave, industrial and political activity also connected, through the demands of some workers’ actions and other agitation, but especially in the question of party organisation within the working class.

Thus, the strike wave of the 1940s approached a mass strike more than any other in Australian history. This is not contradicted by: its relatively prolonged character; nor the defeats or compromises workers took or made in some disputes, since these occur in any strike wave. As Ken Buckley and Ted Wheelwright put it, the period ‘offered a matchless opportunity for working class advance’. However, that they pose this only in terms of reducing exploitation of workers, and argue the ALP federal and state governments held workers back from this, should be noted.7 The strike wave had its ‘prehistory’. The level of industrial action rose from 1943 onwards. Women workers, coalminers and waterside workers were among those most active.

The CPA, in its effort to be the ‘leading war party’, related all industrial questions to efforts to increase production. It therefore supported strikes only in defence of fundamental issues or to forestall unorganised outbreaks. Otherwise, it opposed them even to the extent of organising scabs and expelling workers from their unions. This cost it support, most spectacularly among the Balmain ironworkers, who struck to

4 Sheridan, Division of Labour, ch. 10.
6 Gollan, Revolutionaries and Reformists, p. 179; Sheridan, Division of Labour, pp. 116, 187 233-34.
defend the position of a Trotskyist job delegate against their union’s federal leadership. 8

At the end of 1945 and the beginning of 1946, strikes countered employer aggression against wartime gains such as union recognition, job control and the employment of militants. The two major strikes of this period centred on BHP’s steelworks and on meatworks in Queensland. Other strikes, such as among powerhouse workers and of footwear workers, who opposed the sacking of communists at the Enoch Taylors factories in Sydney, were also significant instances of militancy. The CPA supported these reactive struggles, although with reservations about unbridled militancy. Its policy until the 1946 federal election was to restrain industrial action.

After the September 1946 federal election the strike wave surged again. The metalworkers campaign, in which the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) played the leading role, was fully resolved only in June 1947. At this time the CPA, along with other militants, supported industrial struggles that expressed workers’ expectations of the ALP government.

Some important post-war demands, such as the 40-hour week and an end to the pegging of marginal payments for skills, were largely won in this upsurge of struggle. Of course, the militants still suffered frustrations: for example, Ted Rowe, a communist AEU leader, admitted drawing the union’s members who weren’t already activists into strike committees was difficult; among the rest, he said, the craft tradition that understood militant action as simply depriving the employers of their skilled labour was strong. However, the AEU had refused to accept a proposed resolution to the metalwork dispute that favoured its members over the non-craft members of the Federated Ironworkers’ Association.

The strike wave therefore began to decline from the middle of 1947, coinciding with the CPA’s left turn. The major industrial disputes of 1948 and 1949, in Victoria, the Queensland railways and the coalmines, resulted from further delays or difficulties in the implementation of or exclusions from the gains now won elsewhere, or from opposition to legislation or courts which sought to restrict industrial action.9

The relationship of the strike wave to CPA policy during these years contradicts Sheridan’s argument about clashes between the party leadership and its leading trade unionists. He argued this was because the latter’s views were moderated by the influence of the overall union membership and the primacy of union militancy as a political orientation among the ranks of CPA members.10 However, for much of the period under discussion – from 1943 to 1946 – working class action was often more militant than that supported by CPA officials in the party and the unions alike. Even after the left turn there were still instances of industrial militancy which aligned with the CPA leadership’s outlook, such as the reaction in Victoria to essential services legislation and the pressure of the coalminers for action in support of their claims.11

Thus, the support for the CPA among workers in the mid-1940s cannot be explained simply as a close alignment of it with industrial militancy, although the occurrence during the strike wave upsurge in 1946-47 might help explain a brief consolidation of party membership that followed. The CPA, instead, combined several features that appealed to radicalising parts of the working class. It had a tradition of militancy. It continued to encourage workplace organisation – and, for example, as late as June 1949, 5000 NSW railway workers rallied under shop committee leadership to the CPA’s platform at the Domain in Sydney. It appears, too, to have maintained a radical image, even when it encouraged class collaboration and proposed unity with the ALP during the war or after the war acted as a ginger group to the ALP focusing its criticism on the latter’s right wing. Its assertion of the hegemonic outlook that, in Craig Johnston’s words, ‘the working class had the opportunity to seize the leadership of the anti-fascist war’,12 and its dominance of working class party organisation outside the ALP may have played a part in this.13

On the basis of this appeal the CPA became a significant threat to the ALP political hegemony in the working class.14 The CPA challenge to the ALP for the leadership of working class industrial organisations and movement was an important part of this, because of the significance of this sphere in the day-to-day

---


9 Bradon Ellem, ‘Hell for Leather’: Industrial Relations and Politics in the Boot Trades, 1945-1955’, Labour & Industry, Vol. 7, no. 1, June 1996, pp. 130-31; Gollan, Revolutionaries and Reformists, p. 180; Tom Sheridan, ‘The 1945 Steel Strike: Trade Unions, the New Order and Mr Chifley’, Labour History, no. 42, May 1982; Sheridan, Division of Labour, chs 6-7, 9, 11-12. The rhythm of the strike wave described here does not show up in the statistics for days lost in industrial disputes in calendar years because the various phases of the strike wave ran across these.


11 O’Lincoln, Into the Mainstream, p. 68; Sheridan, Division of Labour, pp. 196-208.


political activity of the class. However, the influence the CPA gained there did not necessarily express support for the broader outlook of the party, especially since only a few unions, chiefly the Waterside Workers Federation and the Seamen’s Union, frequently engaged in industrial action for political demands.\textsuperscript{15} With regard to its overall policy, party recruitment and membership retention, its presentation of electoral candidates and its newspaper distribution all more directly gauged support, although in different ways: the first of these substantially measured those willing to actively propagate the views of the CPA, the second marked the limits of the success of its appeal and the third indicated to what extent the party was gaining a hearing.

CPA membership peaked at an estimated 23,000 in 1944. However, even when it fell to 16,280 in 1945 and 13,450 in 1946, it still approached one-quarter of the ALP’s individual membership. The ALP’s membership also included union affiliations, of course. However, the political activity of CPA members would generally have been more than that of ALP members from branches or affiliates.\textsuperscript{16}

A number of factors complicate an analysis of the CPA electoral results.\textsuperscript{17} One such factor is that competing ‘Labor’ trends with electoral clout existed. Their significance as expressions of a breaking up of ALP influence and of a radicalisation in the politics in the working class is varied and not immediately clear. Lang Labor in NSW was anti-communist and won several state seats. The State Labor Party, also in NSW, was associated with the Communist Party: the proportions of its support from Communist and Labor voters are unclear. There were also independent Labor candidates, sometimes backed by dissident ALP branches, who often received large votes and were elected to the Queensland parliament and at the state and federal levels from the Coburg area in Melbourne. However, while these unofficial Labor parliamentarians and branches collaborated with Communist front organisations, none was consistently radical, although Tom Aikens, from the expelled Hermit Park ALP branch in Townsville, worked with the sole Communist MP, Fred Paterson, and opposed the state ALP government’s emergency legislation in 1948.\textsuperscript{18}

Another unusual feature of the times was the breakdown of the urban-oriented conservative party organisation, previously the United Australia Party, and the rebuilding of this as the Liberal Party. As a result, many electorates were contested solely by ALP and CPA candidates, or otherwise only with other Labor candidates. In this circumstance anti-Communist and other conservative voters may have supported an ALP or other Labor candidate to oppose the CPA candidate, but some ALP supporters, not fearing an ALP loss, might equally have voted for the CPA candidate to press the ALP to carry out a more radical policy.

Finally, the CPA ran candidates for relatively few lower house seats and not at all in the Senate, even though its membership was most likely capable of carrying out a much broader campaign. Thus, its electoral support across the country was not directly tested. The seats it did stand for in an election were often quite varied, especially in federal elections, and seem to have failed to include many in which it was likely to have gained greater votes - from some coal districts and parts of northern Queensland, and some factory and port suburbs- than others in which it did stand. Moreover, only in a few cases did it put up a candidate for the same electorate in one election after another.\textsuperscript{19}

In the 1943 federal elections, CPA candidates ran in 17 of the 74 electorates and averaged about eight per cent of the vote in these. In the 1946 elections, they ran in 14 seats and averaged a little more than seven per cent of the vote. When compared with the results of the 1934, 1949 and 1951, when more lower house candidates and Senate tickets were run, with the average voting results for the former lower by at least one-third, and the latter gaining more than two per cent of the vote each time, the 1943 and 1946 results suggest a national CPA vote of up to five per cent was possible at these times. This is not an insignificant ‘third party’ vote – it compares well with many since the 1980s - but it is still only a small proportion of the votes of all workers.

In federal and state polls, however, signs of a situation similar to that in the coalmining community of Cessnock, as described by Robin Gollan – ‘a political community removed one step to the left of the rest of Australia [where] the politics are almost exclusively working class: the Labor Party is the conservative and the Communist the radical party’\textsuperscript{20} - can be observed. If the seats where 70 per cent or more of the vote went to CPA and any Labor candidates are considered, then in elections held between 1943 and 1945,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} See Sondra Silverman, ‘Australian Political Strikes’, \textit{Labour History}, no. 11, November 1966, p. 39.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Davidson, The Communist Party, p. 120; Gollan, Revolutionaries and Reformists, p. 130; Andrew Scott, \textit{Fading Loyalties: The Australian Labor Party and the Working Class}, Pluto Press, Sydney, 1991, p. 29.
\item \textsuperscript{17} The following analysis is based on election results as presented by Colin A. Hughes and B. D. Graham in: \textit{A Handbook of Australian Government and Politics 1890-1964}, ANU Press, Canberra, 1968; Voting for the Australian House of Representatives, 1901-1964, ANU Press, Canberra, 1974; Voting for the New South Wales Legislative Assembly, 1890-1964, ANU, Canberra, 1975; Voting for the Queensland Legislative Assembly, 1890-1964, ANU, Canberra, 1974; Voting for the South Australian, Western Australian and Tasmanian Lower Houses, 1890-1964, ANU, Canberra, 1976; Voting for the Victorian Legislative Assembly, 1890-1964, ANU, Canberra, 1975.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Ross Fitzgerald, \textit{A History of Queensland: From 1915 to the 1980s}, pp. 97, 131; Carolyn Rasmussen, ‘Challenging the Centre – the Coburg ALP branch in the 1930s’, \textit{Labour History}, no. 54, May 1988, pp. 49-51, 61-63.
\end{itemize}
at least one-quarter of the combined vote for those candidates was for the CPA in half these electorates. Overall, for these seats the CPA vote averaged more than 20 per cent. But in similar electorates in 1946 and 1947, except for those in coalmining districts, some North Queensland seats and Adelaide’s port, the CPA vote had diminished towards relative insignificance, and its average vote had dropped to 15% or less (see Table 1). However, the fall in CPA electoral support seems to have accelerated through 1946 into 1947. In the sole election held in 1945, in November in Victoria, the CPA vote across a number of inner-city seats was still more than 20 per cent (see Table 2).

The range of falls in CPA votes between the federal elections of 1943 and 1946 where it had candidates in the same seat each time was also less that for the various state electorates in 1947 where the CPA had a candidate in the previous election (see Table 3), although this may reflect a peak of support in 1944.

Table 1: CPA vote of all CPA and Labor votes, when latter 70% or more in electorate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Electorates (election) 1943-1945</th>
<th>Electorates (election) 1946-1947</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bowen (Qld 1944)</td>
<td>Bowen (Qld 1947)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbert (Qld 1944)</td>
<td>Herbert (Qld 1947)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port Melbourne (Vic 1943)</td>
<td>Bulli (NSW 1947)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williamstown (Vic 1945)</td>
<td>Port Adelaide (SA 1947)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kennedy (Qld 1944)</td>
<td>Hartley (NSW 1947)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Tableland (Qld 1944)</td>
<td>Cessnock (NSW 1947)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balmain (NSW 1944)</td>
<td>Kurri Kurri (NSW 1947)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richmond (Vic 1943)</td>
<td>Hindmarsh (fed. 1946)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulli (NSW 1944)</td>
<td>Stuart (SA 1947)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collingwood (Vic 1943)</td>
<td>Hindmarsh (SA 1947)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clifton Hill (Vic 1943)</td>
<td>West Sydney (fed. 1946)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlton (Vic 1943)</td>
<td>King (NSW 1947)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakemba (NSW 1944)</td>
<td>Newcastle (fed. 1946)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richmond (Vic 1945)</td>
<td>Paddington (NSW 1947)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port Melbourne (Vic 1945)</td>
<td>Phillip (NSW 1947)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waratah (NSW 1944)</td>
<td>Yarra (fed. 1946)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlton (Vic 1945)</td>
<td>Cook (fed. 1946)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clifton Hill (Vic 1945)</td>
<td>Newtown (NSW 1947)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballarat (Vic 1943)</td>
<td>Redfern (NSW 1947)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarra (fed. 1943)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcastle (fed. 1943)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne (fed. 1943)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalgoorlie (fed. 1943)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalley (fed. 1943)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Mean per electorate | 26% | Mean per electorate | 15% |
| CPA vote across all above | 22% | CPA vote across all above | 12% |

Table 2: CPA votes in the 1943 and 1945 Victorian elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1943 election</th>
<th>1945 election</th>
<th>1943 election</th>
<th>1945 election</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Electorates fought in both</td>
<td>Of all CPA and Labor votes</td>
<td>Of all CPA and Labor votes</td>
<td>Of all CPA and Labor votes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>elections)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlton</td>
<td>22% 22%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clifton Hill</td>
<td>19% 26%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port Melbourne</td>
<td>39% 39%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richmond</td>
<td>32% 32%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballarat</td>
<td>12% 17%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Other electorates)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collingwood</td>
<td>25% 31%</td>
<td>Williamstown</td>
<td>27% 35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Footscray</td>
<td>19% 33%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prahran</td>
<td>13% 25%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Yarra</td>
<td>11% 30%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Mean per electorate | 21% | Mean per electorate | 19% |
| Across all | 21% | CPA vote across all above | 20% |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: CPA vote of all CPA and Labor votes, when latter 70% or more in electorate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mean per electorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPA vote across all above</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Change in CPA vote between elections in 1943-1945 and 1946-1947 where candidates in consecutive elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election Compared With</th>
<th>Vote Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adelaide (fed)</td>
<td>+3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kooyong (fed)</td>
<td>-23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcastle (fed)</td>
<td>-37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarra (fed)</td>
<td>-43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perth (fed)</td>
<td>-48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbert (fed)</td>
<td>-55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1947 election compared with 1944 election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election Compared With</th>
<th>Vote Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bowen (Qld)</td>
<td>-11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulli (NSW)</td>
<td>-35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adelaide (SA)</td>
<td>-43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbert (Qld)</td>
<td>-50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Tableland (Qld)</td>
<td>-50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kennedy (Qld)</td>
<td>-50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balmain (NSW)</td>
<td>-68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakemba (NSW)</td>
<td>-69%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1947 election compared with 1945 election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election Compared With</th>
<th>Vote Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Port Melbourne (Vic)</td>
<td>-74%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A similar timing in the fall of support for the CPA is suggested by the fate of the campaign to lift sales of its Sydney-based newspaper *Tribune*. After the end of the war an increase in sales of 10,000 was projected. At first partial successes were reported, but by October 1946 the newspaper reported ‘a steady decline over the last few months’ in its circulation.21

Thus, a defence against the charge that CPA left turn was mistaken - for example, the one mounted by Tom O’Lincoln, which argued that instead, ‘a pattern of manipulative and bureaucratic behaviour … was an important reason’ for the defeats the CPA suffered during and after the 1949 coal strike22 - seems rather by-the-by. Regardless of the party’s views or long-prevalent Stalinism, such defeats were likely because the political radicalisation in the working class that developed towards the end of World War II began to decline from 1946. This decline reached significant proportions in 1947.

The rise and fall of the working class radicalisation at the end of World War II also puts the course and results of the strike wave in a new light. Strike waves are often understood to create the conditions for rising working class political consciousness.23 Yet in this case, the wave of radicalisation preceded that of industrial action. By the time of the 1946-47 industrial upsurge, however, capital could more readily make concessions to workplace-related demands to the extent that these were no longer seen as encouraging a working-class challenge to the rule of capital. This development was reinforced by some others. First, the mass of the working class experienced an ever-extending period, from the end of the war, of relative economic stability and low unemployment. In Queensland and in the coal industry – sites of major 1948-49 strikes - this was less true than in most other parts of the country and in other industries. For most workers, however, such an experience would have increasingly contradicted concerns about the return of economic depression. Second, some groups of workers who might have played a positive role in the political radicalisation of the working class did not do so. The outstanding example in this regard is that of the Broken Hill miners, who in the past had been a leading militant and radical section of the class. They were in the midst of a decade and a half of growing employment within a labour market protected by local employment requirement and spiralling contract and lead bonus earnings, did not take part in the strike wave and their shop committees tended to decline from 1946 onwards, partly because of a pay deal that withdrew union sponsorship of them.24 Third, after 1947, the ALP’s industrial intervention was significant. In the coal strike, according to Sheridan, the key to the majority of rank-and-file coalminers losing confidence that they could win was the decision of NSW land transport unions, led by the ARU branch, to move stockpiled coal, and the AWU’s threat to work open cut mines. Both of these unions were under ALP leadership. More broadly, the mobilisation of the ALP Industrial Groups was now routing the

21 *Tribune*, especially 22/10/46.
23 See, for example: Kelly, *Trade Unions and Socialist Politics*, ch. 5.
previously relatively successful Communist interventions in the ACTU and, also, in some unions and regional labour movement organisations. Participation in union bodies could fall rapidly with Grouper success – for example, in the Boot Trade Employees’ Federation. From 1949 many shop committees, where the CPA had played a leading role in the development of union workplace organisation for up to two decades, were weakened when they lost official support.25

For some time before the middle of 1947, however, the character of the strike wave, the relative weight of political leaderships in the union movement and initial concerns about post-war economic instability had combined to create more favourable conditions for the working class radicalism that found an organisational expression through the CPA. The party’s left turn, so much discussed, does not appear to have been nearly as important as the party’s policy before it and how this might have slowed the growth of the party’s influence. Sheridan’s conclusion noted:

The government’s labour policy was explicitly based on the assumption that there should be no major redistribution of income from profit to wages. In the years when price control was effective, such a redistribution was exactly what most unionists implicitly expected as their due in the postwar world. From almost any point of view, of course, this expectation would appear to demonstrate the political naivety and lack of understanding of the contemporary ALP among Australian unionists. The Chifley government’s plans simply did not encompass so daring a notion. The unions’ failure to identify and clearly publicise this fact was compounded by the moderates’ increasing distaste for direct action…

The task Sheridan suggested for the unions was, however, one not for workers’ industrial organisation but their political organisation, which would have been the CPA. Moreover, such an approach was thought of: for example, Jack Blake, the party’s Victorian state secretary, proposed the CPA pursue united action campaigns more vigorously, while withdrawing support for the government and engaging in a ‘consistent campaign of enlightenment’ about reformism and the ALP. This was rejected by the CPA leadership. Therefore, the CPA continued to lack the orientation to rank and file agitation of seeking to conduct the class struggle on the political plane, which had helped bring about its earlier achievements in the coalfields, maritime communities and parts of northern Queensland, and so failed to consolidate more broadly the creation of communities where the politics was almost entirely divided between conservative and radical working class outlooks.26

A model of the Australian labour movement which divides it into industrial and political wings in the institutionalised form of unions and the ALP distorts our understanding of it. Recognition of the movement’s historical political domination by the ALP is needed. In the middle of the 1940s, however, working-class political radicalism, principally expressed through the CPA, was at the point of beginning to challenge for hegemony in the class. This suggests the fundamental framework for understanding politics in the working class should be a consideration of its division between opportunist and revolutionary trends and of the social bases of these trends.


26 O’Lincoln, Into the Mainstream, pp. 57-58; Sheridan, Division of Labour, pp. 233-234. On the earlier approach of the CPA, see, for example, Jeff Rickertt, ‘Workers of All Countries Unite! North Queensland Sugar Workers, 1927-1935’, in Carole Ferrier and Rebecca Pelan (eds), The Point of Change: Marxism/Australia/History/Theory, Australian Studies Centre, Brisbane, 1998, p. 103.
Australian Working Class Political History: Towards a Reassessment

Jonathan Strauss

Historical argument about the nature of politics in the Australian working class appears to have resulted in exhaustion and contemporary silence. This paper will, in summary form, consider the relevance to the issue of Australia as a site of the accumulation of the surplus profits of monopolising capitals from the latter half of the 19th century onwards; the historical development of a system of graduated concessions in the conditions of the class struggle from capital to various strata of the working class; and the domination of politics in the working class by the concerns of the strata of the working class relatively privileged by that system, and opposition to this.

The Australian nation has been a capitalist social formation for at least 150 years. During that time, the workers’ movement has gained experience, been relatively well-organised and been able to consider the idea of its class rule as the aim for its action. Yet throughout that time most of its working class has not sought to overthrow that class order and make itself the ruling class.

Terry Irving discussed this situation in Labour History in the middle of the 1990s. His intervention proclaims the authenticity of parliamentary socialism and outlined its actuality after 1920 in a ‘consolidated … peculiar political identity for the working class’ which blended institutionalised working class mobilisation through unions and passive workers’ support for the ALP. Irving thereby reinforced the long-standing model of a labour movement divided into industrial and political wings. This, as an explanation for a situation that might otherwise be considered contradictory, is empiricist – thus it has been and it could not have been otherwise, or, at least, not fundamentally so. As historiographical motivation, his articles suggest little significant change has happened for three-quarters of a century: unsurprisingly, contemporary argument about the history of politics in the Australian working class tends towards silence.

A historical materialist response, however, must explain why the class has not become a revolutionary force in the more or less straightforward manner that the theory once suggested was possible. Moreover, the historical agency of the members of the class should be maintained in arguments about their politics. That is denied when, in the discussion of politics in the Australian working class, forces alien to the class are cited. Examples of this refer to the domination of the working-class movement by a bureaucracy in the leadership of its organisations, or the prevalence of a non-proletarian ideology.

The theory of the labour aristocracy seeks to explain opportunism, which is the sacrificing of the working class’ fundamental interests to some workers’ temporary interests and the collaboration of those workers with the capitalist class. The theory argues opportunism has a materially sustained social basis. This basis is the historical formation of a relatively privileged stratum of the working class. The theory claims monopolising capital’s superprofits – that is, profits gained through long-term advantages in labour productivity by these blocs of capital, at the cost of non-monopolising capitals and petty producers – can through crises sustain, at least in part, capital’s concessions of better conditions of struggle to some sections of the working class. These sections of workers are the labour aristocracy.

In a capitalist social formation, workers striving to improve their conditions, and capitalists and the state sometimes making concessions to bring workers’ fights to an end before these become struggles against capital, are both unavoidable. Sustained concessions by capital to certain workers, however, constitute a social relationship through which the potential of these workers’ struggle to provide the starting point of their development of a political class consciousness turns towards its opposite. The experience of the workers who gain reforms is that they can be won and kept under capitalist rule. A tendency among these workers that seeks to tie their fortunes to those of ‘their’ capitalists can emerge.

Some writers in the historical materialist tradition, starting with Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, and also other commentators on the workers’ movement, started to discuss the existence of labour aristocracies in the working classes of the wealthiest nations and their importance as a social basis within the working class for opportunism a century and a half ago with regard to England, and in the 20th century with regard to the advanced capitalist countries generally. Yet Australian labour historiography has generally denied the stratum’s significance.


This is partly the result of the acceptance of a view that the Australian social formation has been dependent upon and dominated by other capitalist nations, firstly England and then the US. In fact, it emerged as a separate capitalist social formation with an independent state during the 19th century. Moreover, at that time and thereafter, through the 20th century, superprofits were accumulated in Australia through the capitalisation and consequent high labour productivity of its primary industries. On this basis, the Australian social formation became a junior partner – no vassal - of such major powers internationally. Thus, it also obtained its own regional sphere of influence and interest.

The wealth of the Australian social formation is unlikely to have left its working class untouched. With regard to this, two social bases sustained materially by distinct features of the class’ lived experiences – capital’s drive to increase the rate of exploitation of the workers and its capacity to sustain concessions from its superprofits – exist for political trends in the working class, the definitive forms of which are opportunist and revolutionary working-class politics. The working class as a whole cannot have a shared experience and common interests if there are counterposed trends in the politics of the class. Yet, as Frank Bongiorno has noted, most labour historians have assumed such experience and interests were the foundation of the Labor Party.3

The assumption is problematic. This is indicated by the limits of the relationship between the mobilisations of the working class and the development of the ALP. Fundamentally, the assumption is overturned by the link of those limits to the creation and stabilisation of a contradiction between the party’s outlook and the historic antagonism of the working class to capitalism. To argue the effects of Australia as a wealthy nation have been relatively even felt throughout the whole of the country’s working class – for example, through a generalised racism – is to ignore the significant gradations among workers in the concessions made to them with regard to the conditions of the class struggle.4 Only some concessions have been made to broader sections of the class: only to a certain extent do these workers in general gain from the division between richer and poorer nations.

Concessions tend to be concentrated on those workers who already occupy socially strategic positions as capital’s most likely allies and opponents. In the Australian social formation, this has meant white craftsmen, who are not oppressed by society’s gender and race relations and whose occupations are relatively free from competition from the reserve army of labour, have generally formed the core of the labour aristocracy as ‘skilled workers’. The stratum, however, does not consist exclusively of such workers, nor do their characteristics determine composition of the stratum. Instead, all other stratifications of the class are ramified by the emergence of a stratum of the working class that has better conditions for entering the class struggle.

While differences in the conditions of different strata of the working class would suggest the possibility of antagonism among them, the labour aristocracy’s concessions mean it tends to include the more stably organised workers. Thus, it can emerge as the ‘natural’ voice of the working class. As well, concessions the labour aristocracy has together with other strata of the working class, or which other strata would like, can become a possible conduit for labour aristocratic influence upon the rest of the class.

When, on the other hand, the labour aristocracy has been discussed as a stratum within the Australian working class, it has been commonly associated with the occupational exclusiveness, better living standards and ostensibly higher social status of skilled workers or others who have had similar characteristics. This can then be presented as a phenomenon of the past or one that is passing away. Such characteristics are only symptomatic features, however, of a system of concessions which at a particular moment constitutes a labour aristocracy and its relations to the capitalist class and the broader working class. A particular system of concessions may be replaced by another in the course of the class struggle, and the characteristics of the labour aristocracy change accordingly. Throughout such developments, however, a system of concessions and with it a labour aristocracy continue to exist.

The combinations of concessions which establish a labour aristocracy have varied greatly among countries. They have also varied through time in each country. In Australia, capitalist concessions that restricted the supply of labour-power have been significant. Outstanding among these, at least for its political impact, were racist immigration laws. However, entry into one occupation after another has also been legally or socially restricted according to a worker’s gender, and also the age or other characteristics of a worker.

Credential requirements have also been important restriction on the workers available for a job. How this has operated has often varied over time: for example, the need to serve an apprenticeship to enter many trades has at times declined, but it was reinforced in the first decades of the twentieth century and, again, after the Second World War, at the same time as a major immigration program was started.

The labour movement has frequently encouraged government measures which were supposed to

4 For an example of this argument, see Martin Thomas, ‘Australian labour history and Marxism’, in Carole Ferrier and Rebecca Pelan (eds), The Point of Change: Marxism/Australia/History/Theory, Australian Studies Centre, Brisbane, 1998, pp. 31-35.
expand the demand for various types of labour-power. When this has aligned the movement with the interests and perspectives of sections of capital and their politicians, tariffs for industry protection, production bounties and local purchasing preference have become prominent in governments’ policy. Also, public works programs as a response to rising unemployment were followed by Keynesian policies of public expenditure that were ostensibly counter-cyclical. Occasionally, state enterprises and promotion of investment plans have also had a part to play.

The reductions in standard hours that have occurred – to a 48-hour week early last century, 44 hours in the 1920s, 40 hours in the 1940s and 35 to 38 hours in the 1970s and 1980s – eventually would have contributed to increased employment, beside immediately increasing wages when overtime was paid penalties. Tenure and seniority (‘first on, last off’) provisions would also tend to stabilise employment, as well as reducing the potential for employer discrimination in firings. Overall, relative employment stability is a key characteristic of the labour aristocracy.

Workers’ collective organisation has also been given recognition not only legally, but in practice. This was implied when employers have accepted unions’ unilateral regulation of wages and working conditions, which might be effected, for example, by a union’s declaration of its rules. It was explicit in instances of collective bargaining between unions and employers.

The development of compulsory arbitration added state-mediated recognition. But because of its attempts to restrict workers’ actions, the significance of this as a concession was chiefly confined to more weakly organised groups of workers and the rarer occasions when not only union registration, but preference to a union’s members in employment and an organisational monopoly for that union, were granted. The more significant outcome of the arbitration system, in terms of capital’s concessions to labour and its aristocratic stratum, may, in fact, have been the effect of its decision-making criteria on the social determination of the body of commodities making up the value of labour-power. The 1907 Harvester judgement declared the basic wage for standard hours should provide a male worker and his family with a life of ‘frugal comfort’, although the wage level it established emphasised the frugal. The same judgement also began to define what would be considered skilled labour in a way which, reduced the differentiation among a set of workers contrasted to labourers, and to set margins to be paid for such skilled labour on top of the basic wage.

Through the next decade and a half further decisions consolidated workers’ needs as the acknowledged basis of arbitration’s awards. Employer profitability was denied as a criterion for setting wages. Pay loadings were set for intermittent employment. The application of these criteria across The various state arbitration jurisdictions eventually accepted these criteria. Cost of living adjustments to the basic wage were introduced following deflation that restored its initial real value as well as the value of margins from skill. In the 1920s and 1930s aspects of these decisions were challenged, but with little ongoing result: for example, the basic wage was cut at the start of the Great Depression, but restored after a few years. In the 1940s the labour movement overcame the pegging of pay margins which was introduced during wartime and eventually won increases in the real value of the basic wage.

In this way, what Francis Castles called the ‘wage-earners’ welfare state’ was established. Notably, the activity of the majority of the labour movement has been chiefly concerned with maintaining the relative position of better-off workers. Thus, it reinforced the earlier claims of such workers to ‘respectability’. Secondly, it has taken up the position of adult male workers in general. The rights of other workers – indigenous people, women and the young – and attempts to introduce universal social provision to meet some of the needs of workers have generally run a poor second in this framework.

Australian labour historiography is largely unable to discuss the gradations of concession to sections of the working class because, while it has published substantial aggregate material about the circumstances of workers’ employment, it lacks broad comparative studies of the different working conditions and living standards of sections of workers. Moreover, such differences may interact with others among workers in their capacity to exercise their formal democratic rights – the workers’ possession of which has been a premise for the economic and industrial concessions to them. For example, the skewing of individual membership of the ALP towards better-off workers may perhaps be something more than differences of gender and race, between men and women and between white Anglophones and those of indigenous and non-English speaking background, in political participation.

Among the key challenges posed by the perspective presented here is a reconsideration of the significance of industrial militancy and workers’ political radicalisation and their relationship. In general, the former has been understood to be the basis of the latter: when this is discussed, the division of labour model – with the industrial wing now militant – is used again. In fact, as Tom O’Lincoln admitted with regard to the 1950s, ‘the urgency and the appeal of radical politics in the eyes of many workers’ can

6 See the opening part of my paper, ‘How was labour divided? Working class politics in the 1940s’.
be less ‘while militant trade unionism around economic issues still offered tangible rewards’\textsuperscript{7} – that is, necessarily within a broad framework of class collaboration. The relationship may even be the reverse of what has previously been suggested: arguably, the peaks of workers’ industrial action have been preceded by workers’ radicalisation. Moreover, whether or not any or all of Australia’s strike waves and largest strikes constitute ‘mass strikes’ should be questioned.

The relationship of the theory of the labour aristocracy to Gramscian concepts of hegemony needs to be considered. Among the latter, the reformulation of ‘civil society’ was thoroughly novel in Marxist political theory. However, in a capitalist social formation civil society is a site of bourgeois domination.\textsuperscript{8} Hence, for the movement of the working class to pursue an aim of its class rule, its struggle can’t be constricted within civil society. It must work to overcome politically its incorporation into civil society.

Finally, with regard to the 1980s and 1990s in Australia – which is the period my postgraduate research is concerned with – the sources of superprofits, the system of concessions of capital to labour and the development of a labour aristocracy which follows appears to have entered a period of heightened flux. Many of the old verities of the relationship between capital and labour have been overturned. The fundamental limits of the ‘Australian settlement’ may in fact be in the powerlessness of capital to continue to rule in the old ways.


Reviewing the 1937 Spanish Civil War debate at the University of Melbourne 70 years on

Fay Woodhouse*

The celebrated Spanish Civil War debate at the University of Melbourne took place on 22 March 1937, now seventy years ago. The debate is illustrative of the passions unleashed by an event that had little immediate relevance to Australians. The fact that the antagonists, who each saw themselves as joined in the conflict half a world away, debated a contentious political issue on the University grounds is of major significance. To set the scene for this debate, this paper introduces the Campion Society (the radical right) and the activities of the Communists (the strident left) as political forces at the University of Melbourne during the 1930s.

‘The Spanish Government is the Ruin of Spain’

The proposition ‘That the Spanish Government is the Ruin of Spain’ was the subject of the University Debating Society’s first meeting for 1937. It was a widely advertised public debate that attracted a large audience. The debating team for the affirmative were members of the Campion Society. Arts/Law student, B A Santamaria made his debut as a political activist at this debate. Nettie Palmer, writer, literary critic and member of the Spanish Relief Committee, led the opposing team. Biographers of these individuals saw their involvement in the debate as a significant event in Australian history.

The evening of 22 March was hot. A large audience crowded into the stuffy and airless Public Lecture Theatre (PLT) in the Arts Building. The University’s Vice-Chancellor, Dr Raymond Priestley, though aware of the contentious nature of the debate, did not attend. Many of the details of what took place vary according to the sympathies of the teller, and some details have been subsumed into conflicting sets of mythologies. All written and oral accounts of the debate confirm that the PLT was crowded. Newspaper reports tell us that people were crammed in the aisles, jammed in at the doors and corridors. Some were reported to have climbed into the skylights and ventilators on the roof and were looking in. Though the size of the audience varies according to the paper it was reported in, possibly 1,000 people came to hear the debate though the PLT had seating for around four hundred. Some were students and many of the remainder were believed to be members of the Catholic Young Men’s Society. This fact remained one of the most problematic aspects of the meeting. The affirmative side therefore ‘had many more potential barrackers than their opponents’. However, as at a football match, the crowd included supporters of both sides plus many who just enjoyed the game.¹

The spectacle in the PLT was beyond anything the audience might have anticipated. Three Campion Society members argued the affirmative side. They were Kevin Kelly, a public servant, Stanley Ingwersen, a Campion Society member and, as mentioned, B A Santamaria. They entered the PLT with all the fervour of the Catholic crusaders they imitated. Speaking against the proposition, Nettie Palmer, recently returned from Spain and member of the Spanish Relief Committee, and Jack Legge, a science student (the only student on the platform) and member of the Labour Club and the Communist Party, both ‘spoke with the voice of reason’. The third speaker, Dr Gerry O’Day, was a Communist and ex-Catholic debater who enjoyed the challenge of debating with the ‘fierce young Campions’ whose technique and fervor he knew so well. Palmer noted in her diary that night: ‘Debate university. Evening. Hottish day: hotter evening.’ The heat rose as the debate proceeded.²

Once the debate began, every speaker was jeered and interrupted. Some men climbed onto the roof of the Theatre and stamped so loudly that the speakers could not be heard. The meeting ended in chaos when it was reported Ingwersen cried ‘Viva Christo Rey’ or ‘Long Live Christ the King!’ the cry of the Catholic crusaders, to a cheering audience. It was reported fighting broke out in the corridors, and fire hoses were turned on sections of the audience. Manning Clark in his memoirs recalled entering the PLT with all the fervour of the Theatre (PLT) in the Arts Building. The University’s Vice-Chancellor, Dr Raymond Priestley, though aware of the contentious nature of the debate, did not attend. Many of the details of what took place vary according to the sympathies of the teller, and some details have been subsumed into conflicting sets of mythologies. All written and oral accounts of the debate confirm that the PLT was crowded. Newspaper reports tell us that people were crammed in the aisles, jammed in at the doors and corridors. Some were reported to have climbed into the skylights and ventilators on the roof and were looking in. Though the size of the audience varies according to the paper it was reported in, possibly 1,000 people came to hear the debate though the PLT had seating for around four hundred. Some were students and many of the remainder were believed to be members of the Catholic Young Men’s Society. This fact remained one of the most problematic aspects of the meeting. The affirmative side therefore ‘had many more potential barrackers than their opponents’. However, as at a football match, the crowd included supporters of both sides plus many who just enjoyed the game.¹

The heat rose as the debate proceeded.²

¹ Thornton-Smith, ‘The Young Santamaria and His Mentors’, in Paul Ormonde (ed.), Santamaria: The Politics of Fear, pp. 59-61; ‘About 1,000 persons, half students and half non-University people …’, Argus, 23 March 1937, p. 9; ‘more than a thousand students and visitors …’, Age, 23 March 1927, p. 11; ‘estimated to number 1,500 people’, Catholic Worker, 3 April 1937, p. 1; Jack Legge, ‘The PLT was full – there were about seven hundred there …’, in Wendy Lowenstein, Weevils in the Flour, p. 196; Argus, Age, 23 March 1937; Amirah Inglis, Australians in the Spanish Civil War, p. 97; Argus, 23 March 1937, p. 9; Age, 23 March 1937, p. 11; Inglis, pp. 97-8, p. 98.
³ Manning Clark, The Quest for Grace, pp. 44-5; Marjorie Tipping quoted in Inglis, pp. 98-99.
Newspaper accounts of the debate highlighted the tension at the outset of the meeting and the chaos that ensued. The *Argus* reported that the debate "was conducted in a disturbed atmosphere" while the *Age* recorded that 'Feeling ran high from the beginning, and Mr. Santamaria, who opened the debate, was interrupted by many hecklers'. It also noted that 'the great majority of the meeting was in sympathy with the affirmative team'. Or, as historian of the University, Dick Selleck puts it, this was a coded way of saying that the meeting had been stacked. On Wednesday, 24 March, the *Argus* was critical of the students 'undignified proceedings ... when the Spanish imbroglio was publicly debated'. This article highlighted the Chancellor, Sir James Barrett's anxiety over the right to express political views at the University. The Catholic press claimed victory for the Church with the *Catholic Worker*’s headline, ‘Melbourne University Resounds with Historic Cry’. Meanwhile, the Communist Party newspaper, the *Workers Voice*, did not directly report on the incident but kept the issue alive by continuing to publish correspondence between Les Donald, State Secretary of the Communist Party, Kelly and Ingwersen.4

Student rags had long been part of student life, yet serious political engagement at the University had, until 1936, been embraced largely by the political left, such as the Labour Club, the Communist Party and the Council Against War and Fascism. While the Liberal Club had existed since the 1920s, and Public Questions Society even earlier, the left had been the only truly organised political force. In a student population of around 3,000 at the most 10% of students were actively involved in politics. However, from 1936, the presence within the University grounds of an articulate and powerful political movement of the right began to transform the campus. The new political agitators were members of the Campion Society, a secret Catholic society of mainly University men formed in 1931, and whose membership was known only to one another.5

**The Campion Society and the Spanish Civil War**

The Campions were a unique Society: sanctioned by the Archbishop of Melbourne, Dr Daniel Mannix, they aimed to promote the theoretical framework for Catholic Action. Membership of the Society enabled laymen to publicly express and publish their opinions on social and doctrinal matters.6 Contrary to papal direction and Catholic Action’s avowed non-political aims, the Campion Society’s determination to discuss and promote Catholic Action soon became highly political. To fight their crusade against Communism, they adopted the same tactics as their opponents, and engaged in propaganda wars through newspaper articles, published pamphlets, spoke at meetings and stacked meetings with their own supporters. Aware of the power of the written word, in 1936 the Campion Society launched a new Catholic newspaper, the *Catholic Worker*, from which to proclaim that the Church was calling all Catholics to ‘a new Crusade’ and ‘holy war’. It was sold at the University as well as at the Church door and was an immediate success.7

The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936 intensified the turbulent political climate of Europe and greatly magnified Australian Catholic fears that the Communist menace would spread across Europe and toward Australia. These fears were articulated by members of the Campion Society, both at

---

5 Inspired by the oratory on Catholic Action given by a charismatic English Jesuit, Father C. C. Martindale, a society was formed and later named after the English Jesuit martyr, Edmund Campion (1540-81). Martindale had addressed students at the University of Melbourne during his visit in 1928; Jory, ‘The Campion Society’, pp. 13-26; Geoffroy Browne, ‘A Catholic Young Man’, p. 2, Carla Jennings, ‘Serving the Community: A Biography of two Primary Teachers in Rural Victoria 1922-1970’, pp. 84-104; ‘The Campion Society Constitution’, Pre-July 1933, Heffey and Bulter Papers, MUA.
6 During the early 1930s a series of encyclicals directed the behaviour of the faithful, and ranged from issues such as contraception and abortion to children’s education. Two encyclicals issued in 1931 were particularly significant in influencing Catholic intellectual activity, *Quadragesimo Anno* (On Reconstructing the Social Order) and *Non abbiamo bisogno* (Concerning Catholic Action). Both were in response to the devastation of World War I and the Great Depression. *Quadragesimo Anno* redefined Catholic Action against the twin ogres of ‘blighted capitalism and the godless materialism of Socialism’, and went beyond mere condemnation of these evils. It urged the gathering and training of auxiliary soldiers of the Church. Geoff Browne, ‘A Catholic Young Man’, pp. 3-4.
7 The Melbourne Campion Society was said to be strongly influenced by the work of two prominent English lay writers, G K Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc and the works of the French Catholic writers, Maritain, Mauriac and Bernanos. Colin Thornton-Smith challenges the claim that Santamaria and the Campions were reading these works. As of 1931 most of the major works of these three Frenchmen were yet to be written. Colin Thornton-Smith, ‘The Young Santamaria and His Mentors’, in Paul Ormonde (ed.), *Santamaria: The Politics of Fear*, pp. 59-61. See Browne, p. 3. The Melbourne *Catholic Worker*, was based on the American paper of the same name. B A Santamaria is generally identified as the primary force behind the paper and claims that role for himself in his memoirs. Whether, as it is claimed by some, ‘They took Santamaria on reluctantly’, Santamaria worked on the paper for twelve months. Marjorie Tipping (née McCredie) met E W (Bill) Tipping in her first year of University. He was a Catholic and deeply involved with the Campion Society and the establishment of the *Catholic Worker*. Bill Tipping was an aspiring journalist, and enjoyed writing for the *Catholic Worker* as well as the Melbourne *Sun* newspaper for which he was University Correspondent in 1936. Marjorie Tipping diaries and Interview with Marjorie Tipping, 2 December 2000; *Catholic Worker*, 3 April 1936, p. 4; Diane Mackay, ‘The Catholic Worker’s Attitude to Communism – the emergence of “an alternative voice”’, BA (Hons) Thesis, p. 14; Bruce Duncan, *Crusade or Conspiracy?*, p. 19.
the University and in its external activities. The themes of Catholic martyrdom in the anti-Communist cause characterised most reports of the Spanish Civil War in the Catholic press whose allegiance was largely anti-Communist and pro-Franco. The Catholic Worker’s articles were strongly coloured by its religious identification, especially in the early period of the Spanish Civil War when Santamaria strongly influenced the content of the paper.

Responses from the Left at the University – Prelude to the Debate
During the mid-1930s the Communist Party of Australia was moving from a policy of ‘Class Against Class’, with its vehement opposition to social as well as capitalist democracy, to one of a united front of all on the left. The consequent changes in strategy are reflected in the activities of the Labour Club. In the early 1930s some members of the Club had been prominent communists who antagonised other students by their confrontational style. These students were, according to Don Watson, ‘imitators of the proletariat’. However, by 1936, the Communist members of the Labour Club were avoiding strident denunciation of their fellow students as dupes of capitalism, and instead appealing to them to join the defence of peace and freedom. The Labour Club joined forces with the University Peace Group (formed in March 1936) and the Student Christian Movement as a counterpoint to Catholic activism. This alliance also suggests that the Labour Club was achieving some success in its efforts to create a united front.

On 5 March 1937 the Spanish Relief Committee advertised in the Age appealing for funds. So incensed were Campion Society members Stanley Ingwersen and Kevin Kelly by the appeal that they wrote a Letter to the Editor against the fundraising efforts. Les Donald, the State Secretary of the Communist Party, replied to their letter. He complained the Communist Party had been singled out, and challenged them to debate the proposition that ‘the Spanish government has the support of the people of Spain and is fighting for world democracy’ and to let the public decide the issue.

In the columns of the Age, Ingwersen accepted the challenge to debate the proposition in April and specified that it should be held at the Town Hall. It is unclear why they did this, as they had previously agreed to debate the topic on their own territory at the University at the Debating Society’s first meeting the following week, 22 March. The Campions, it seems, suspected the meeting would be stacked by the University’s Labour Club and so arranged for busloads of members of the Catholic Young Men’s Society to fill the lecture theatre. So successful was their tactic that the debate was moved to the larger PLT in the Arts Building. This strategy is illustrative of the Campion Society practising Catholic action.

Aftermath of the Debate
The Spanish Civil War debate at the University of Melbourne had a profound impact on the University community. The Chancellor, Sir James Barrett, Vice-Chancellor, Dr Raymond Priestley, Council, staff and students were all shocked by the strength of feeling and violence exhibited by the debaters and members of the audience on 22 March. It brought to a head the simmering hostilities long felt by the left and the right at the University and its long-term impact is evident as the event is still discussed today in terms of the radicalisation of students at the University. Dr Raymond Priestley had become the University’s first salaried Vice-Chancellor in February 1935. From the outset he had expounded the theory that ‘any institution connected with young people, if it is to be healthy, must have a strong and vigorous left wing’. In Priestley’s view, political thought and political activity among the student body ought to be encouraged and not repressed. Priestley was aware that the debate was going to take place but was not too concerned. In his diary he noted: ‘I suppose the Catholic Protection Society and the Reds have been marshalling their forces’, but concluded ‘I can do nothing but give them a chance to show their mettle and hope for the best’.

The debate was widely reported in the Melbourne press and student newspaper, Farrago and this caused concern for Priestley. Following the debate, Priestley spoke to the Student Representative Council and cautioned them against the increasing intolerance shown by both sides and asked the students to protect the good name of the University. He stressed that the scurrilous behaviour exhibited at the 22 March meeting would do the University no good. The message hit home. In the following weeks, contributors to Farrago were more restrained in their views. One outcome of the debate appeared to be a release of tension in the University.

The disruption and intolerance of views on the Spanish Civil War was taken up in a letter published

8 Catholic Worker, September 1936; Macintyre, The Reds, pp. 224-5; The Labour Club’s imitation of the proletariat was reflected in the naming of their magazine Proletariat when they established it in 1932. Proletariat ceased publication in 1935, Watson, ‘Anti-Communism in the Thirties’, pp. 17-9; Farrago, 6 March 1936, p. 1.
9 Age, 5 March 1937; Age, 10 March 1937.
10 Jory, ‘The Campion Society’, p. 84; Workers Voice, 7 April 1937.
12 Priestley Diaries, 26 April 1937, quoted in The Diary of a Vice-Chancellor, p. 321.
in *Farrago* by three academic staff, Herbert Burton and W.B. Reddaway from the Faculty of Commerce and W.K. Williams. They censured the Debating Society for its arrangements of the Spanish debate and pointed out that, though it was a University activity, only one University undergraduate student had spoken when the debate was thrown open to the house. The writers advised that it was necessary to choose ‘balanced’ speakers on each side, ‘instead of which the most violent protagonists of both causes were asked to speak.’ This letter brought a long and very personal response from Santamaria. Burton replied in the following edition and apologised for calling Santamaria ‘unbalanced’. The editors of *Farrago* subsequently announced in April that correspondence on the subject of the Spanish Civil War was now closed.13

The Chancellor, Sir James Barrett, was incensed by debate. Two days after the 22 March meeting, he telephoned Priestley and ‘demanded a report’ – he was ‘wrought up’ by the article in the *Argus* concerning ‘The University’s Dignity’. Priestley informed Barrett that he had dealt with the consequences of the debate to his satisfaction and intended to present a report on it to the next Council meeting. At this meeting he had also intended to inform Council that he was not prepared to continue indefinitely under his present conditions. Though the Chancellor’s role was non-executive, a point Priestley felt Barrett had difficulty grasping, Barrett’s demands and insistence on becoming involved in the day to day running of the University were untenable for Priestley. Barrett’s phone call and demand for a report were ‘the last straw’ to Priestley. The pressure of the few days following the debate prompted Priestley to confide to his diary:

> There is no room here for a Vice-Chancellor between the Chancellor and the Registrar unless he is prepared to be a man of straw. And I am not. So Bert can act with the knowledge that I should accept any reasonable post at home where I can at the same time keep my self-respect and avoid a stroke. 14

The nature of the debate, the strong emotions associated with the Spanish Civil War, and the presence in the PLT of large numbers of outsiders were all gravely disturbing to some members of Council. Additionally, the issue of freedom of speech for both staff and students loomed before Council. Freedom of discussion and the right to express political views were principles the Council, especially from the time of the First World War, had never accepted.

The responses to the debate by Council members, staff and students brought these issues into stark contrast for Priestley who was probably more distressed by the regard in which the State government and the Melbourne community held the University. The University had been starved of funds since the early 1920s. After his arrival in 1935, despite his best efforts, Priestley was unable to convince the government to increase its annual grant to enable it to return to the financing level of the 1920s. By 1937 he felt that if the Government could not accede to the University’s request he must reserve the right ‘to take any job offer that comes my way’. Despite his frequent appeals, the Dunstan government refused to increase the grant to the University for the 1937-38 financial year.15 Lack of funding, together with the breakdown in his relationship with Barrett as a result of the crisis of the Spanish Civil War debate, Priestley felt he could no longer maintain his position, and he resigned as Vice-Chancellor of the University in August 1937.

**In Retrospect**

Participants, observers, commentators and sympathisers from both sides of the political fence have written about this debate. Perhaps the most authoritative study of the debate is Amirah Inglis’s *Australians in the Spanish Civil War* in which Inglis’s nuanced view of the left and the right was that ‘On the subject of Spain, debates were both sport and crusade.’ On the issue of academic freedom and open debate, Stuart Macintyre and Simon Marginson correctly note that the debate revealed the divergent attitudes of the lay Chancellor and the newly arrived academic Vice-Chancellor toward open and public discussion on campus.

Patrick Morgan, editor of the recently published collection of B A Santamaria’s letters, highlights the event in Santamaria’s university career; the debate effectively launched his career as a political activist. Morgan reminds the reader, too, that the memorial booklet at his funeral ends with the phrase, *Viva Cristo Rey!*, made famous in the Spanish Civil War debate, and which he sees as ‘a final defiant affirmation that his beliefs hadn’t changed one iota from the days of the Spanish Civil War six decades before [his death]’. Santamaria’s work with the Australian Secretariat of Catholic Action and the other secret Catholic organisation, the ‘Movement’, and the influence he had on the Labour Party and the ‘Split’ have all been the subject of scrutiny and considerable analysis. They generally conclude his power and influence were great. His presence on the Australian political stage from 1937 must, I believe, be characterised, in terms of the explosive effect his crusades had on Union and Labor politics, as passionate and powerful. In

**Notes**

14 Priestley Diaries, 24 March 1937, quoted in *The Diary of a Vice-Chancellor*, p. 298.
terms of Catholicism and anti-Communism, Catholic historian, Colin Jory, saw the 1937 debate as an ideological watershed while Patrick O’Farrell, historian of the Catholic Church in Australia, argues that not only did the Spanish Civil War bring ‘frontal conflict between Catholicism and communism’, but that it dominated, almost exclusively, ‘the social thinking and apostolic energies of Australian Catholicism for the next twenty years’.  

Conclusion

The formal, structured and very public Spanish Civil War debate marked a new phase in the history of the University, and brought significant changes to the University and its students during the late 1930s. Of major importance was the fact that the antagonists debated a highly political issue within the University grounds. The liberal views of the Vice-Chancellor, Raymond Priestley, encouraged students to engage in political debate. A shift was occurring so that the older idea of the University as a remote place of learning, ‘a place apart’, was under challenge. The University, which was known at the time and regarded by many of its students as ‘the Shop’, was becoming much more than that. With the expression of passionate views by the Catholic anti-Communist right-wing crusaders and the equally volatile supporters of the left, Selleck argues that the University ‘lost all resemblance to ‘the Shop’ and became a theatre in which the great battles of the age were being fought, not fairly, but with intellect, passion and excitement’. In the context of student political engagement at the University of Melbourne, Selleck articulates the most accurate assessment of the event.

Previously sheltered from the worldly concerns of the larger society, the University could no longer remain ‘a place apart’; it had become a site of contestation – a public place of social and political engagement. One of Priestley’s legacies to the University was to steer the University, its Council and students through a difficult period of transition. Though it would still be seen for decades to come as ‘the Shop’, and by others as an elite, separate and cloistered institution, from this point in 1937 it began to take on a third function – that of the political conscience of society.


ABSTRACTS

Losing the lessons of the past
Yossi Berger

During the two weeks of the Beaconsfield rescue, the reality of work was continuing elsewhere, and workplace incidents claimed the lives of ten workers in Tasmania, Victoria, South Australian and New South Wales. We knew there would be an inquiry into the Beaconsfield disaster - could anything have been done differently? What would the OHS lessons be? We’ve seen many such inquiries before, from the one following 1998’s Longford gas plant catastrophe to the one into the 1986 Challenger disaster, which killed seven astronauts. But what has been learnt from them? The AWU commissioned Dr Beris Penrose, an historian with knowledge of OHS failures, to analyse 285 recommendations from eleven Australian and international inquiries into OHS disasters. What types of recommendations are favoured, are they relevant and practical, and do they make a difference at work? Can historians help us from losing the lessons of the past?

The Union Defence Campaign
Brian Boyd

A watershed event for the Australian trade union movement was the October 2004 federal election when the Howard government won control of the Senate. Even though Howard said nothing on industrial relations before the election (running instead on interest rates), he wasted little time in preparing the most draconian industrial relations laws in Australia’s history. The first cab off the rank was the anti-building unions’ legislation, then came the general sweeping attack on unions and organised workers via the contemptibly named WorkChoices legislation.

What the union movement did in response to this deserves full analysis. Between October 2004 and the upcoming federal election due in the latter half of 2007, the union movement set down a six point strategy: mass mobilisations across the country; to improve dialogue with the federal ALP; TV Ads on industrial relations laws (a multi-million dollar expenditure); a marginal seats campaign (involving 20 paid, full time co-coordinators recruited from the trade union movement); the development of a comprehensive, updated industrial relations policy; and to work with State ALP governments to highlight excesses of WorkChoices.

These three years were an intense, tense time for trade unions. Fractions and differences were always below the surface. Maintaining a focus on getting rid of Howard at all costs was a struggle in itself. The national struggle was reflected differently State by State, Territory by Territory, but overall it has held together: the union movement agreed its key job was to keep industrial relations at the forefront in the political domain. This presentation will discuss this campaign, highlighting that the alternative, of allowing Howard’s industrial relations vision to survive in any substantial way into the future, will, forever, change the pivotal role unions have played in Australia’s development.

Which side are you on? Women versus the steel giants in Canada and Australia: songs of struggle, stories of sectarianism and solidarity
Diana Covell

My PhD research concerns organised efforts by groups of women in Australia and Canada in the late 1970s and early 1980s to secure jobs in the steel industry. I am attempting a comparative study of the Wollongong (New South Wales) ‘Jobs for Women Campaign’ (1980-1991) which became Australia’s first successful class action leading to reform of employment practices and industrial legislation, and the Hamilton (Ontario) ‘Women Back Into STELCO Campaign’ (1979-1981). The Canadian women called their action the Women Back into STELCO Campaign to signify their efforts to reclaim jobs for women in the largest steelworks in the country that had been lost since World War II.

In keeping with the conference theme of ‘labour traditions’, this paper discusses some examples of the work of communists and socialists in the steel industry, and the role of sectarianism, seniority, solidarity and songs in relation to the two campaigns and women’s experiences in the Port Kembla and Hamilton steelworks, drawing on recent oral history interviews with other participants.
Margaret Creagh and Peter Riley

Melbourne IWW members shall sing rebel songs and encourage those who do not flee the room to join in rebel chorus.

Who was Miss E. Mulcahy? an argument for biographical research
Wendy Dick

An energetic trade union organiser and political activist in the interests of women and Labour in the period 1909 to 1913, Ellen Mulcahy has received some attention in Australian historical writing. But, to date, there has been no study made of her life and family background.

This paper presents an argument for pursuing biographical and family history research in order to enrich our understanding of early 20th century leaders in feminist and Labour movements. Miss Ellen Mulcahy was the eldest sibling in a closely-knit family of Irish working class origin. Before engaging in a period of vigorous union and political endeavour, she had completed a thirty-year career as a school teacher. An investigation of both her family background and her teaching career provides the researcher with a context in which to locate her work as a political activist and perhaps supplies some clues as to the links between the two apparently separate segments of her life.

From Robe River to Work Choices
Bradon Ellem

The union power that was built at Robe River in Western Australia’s Pilbara region drew on, among other things, traditions of rank and file and local independence. In many respects, the momentous industrial struggles at the Robe worksites and towns through 1986 and 1987 marked the end of that kind of tradition. What emerged was the making of a new anti-union set of traditions that would culminate in the Work Choices legislation of 2006. The paper begins by observing that for all its often remarked importance, the dispute has attracted little scholarly attention: there are few accounts of it at all; in most of those that we do have, the workers themselves, their families and communities are left out; there is little to explain what most agree is a vital issue – the rise of local union power before 1986; and there is nothing at all on the war of attrition between management and labour that ran from the end of the 1987 strike to the introduction of individual Workplace Agreements (WPAs) in 1993. This paper begins to reassess the Robe River lockout and strike. It seeks to explain the nature of managerial prerogative at Robe, the employer’s hostility to arbitration, and the connections to subsequent state and national industrial relations policies. It also argues that divisions within and between unions against the backdrop of ‘Accord politics’ were vital in shaping not only the dispute but subsequent union strategy beyond the Pilbara.

Art in Working Life
Paddy Garrity

The roles of trade unions in society, as George Seelaf once reminded me, are broad and extend far beyond the factory gates. Its potential as vehicles for improving the quality of workers’ lives through art, education, and culture is vast. This paper discusses the powerful possibilities of art in working life. Whether it be a band or a choir; a piece of music or a song; straight theatre or a street performance; painting class or art and craft exhibition; poster, mural or banner painting; leadlight, silk screen or knitting class; a creative writing class or workers’ festivals, art creates a community and an identity. For unions seeking broad community support, art holds within it a key to improving the quality of life for workers, breaking down barriers and helping to forge strong solid networks.
‘I’m a printer’...but what does that mean? The social impacts of technological change within the newspaper industry
Paula Geldens and Jessica Tatham-Thompson

Serving essential social and political functions, the newspaper industry has offered a reliable career path for centuries. Significant technological advances, however, have seen the trade change substantially: printers have observed the dissolution of allied trades, including compositing, and have experienced ongoing deskilling of their own craft. Notably, most accounts of development and change within the industry focus at the organisational level, amongst these Boyce, Curran, and Wingate’s (1978) edited collection which takes stock of 300 years of newspapers in England, Cockburn’s (1983) analysis of the deskilling of compositors in England, and Marjoribanks’ (2000) account of the responses to technological developments within News Corporation in England, the United States and Australia. Each of these accounts fails, however, to account fully for the experiences of print workers. Two notable works that have explicitly explored the experiences on the print room floor are Cannon’s (1967) study in Britain with the now defunct compositor workforce, and Lipset, Trow and Coleman’s (1956) study in the US. The current research seeks to explore the impacts of technological change on the ways in which the printing workforce undertake their duties, derive and manage occupational identities and the consequences of these identifications. With data collection ongoing, this presentation will address emergent trends in relation to ‘what it means’ to be a printer in 2007.

Michael Savage
Gerard Hill

Michael Savage was born near Benalla in March 1872. His Irish parents were farmers. He was the youngest of their eight children. As a young man he lost his job during the 1890s depression and ‘humped his bluey’ through the Riverina, became involved in the union movement and, after moving back to northern Victoria was converted to socialism by Tom Mann. After an unsuccessful outing as a Labor candidate at the 1907 election, he moved to New Zealand where he immersed himself in the labour movement, serving as both union official and a leading figure in Auckland political labour. During the First World War he opposed conscription, advocated a Trans-Tasman One Big Union in the Red Dawn of 1919 and won the Auckland West parliamentary seat in the same year, retaining it until his death in 1940. After more than a decade as Deputy Leader to Harry Holland he led the New Zealand Labour to its first victory in 1935, serving as Prime Minister until his death in March 1940. Deeply loved by many working class people, he was remembered as a great Labour leader and humanitarian by a generation of New Zealanders, although his reputation has been neglected in recent years. This paper looks at Michael Savage and several other Australians who have made a substantial contribution to the New Zealand labour movement.

‘Prison before Slavery!’ Ship’s Desertion and Incarceration as Industrial Tactics on the Australian Waterfront, 1890s to 1930s.
Paul Jones

Charges of ship’s desertion and the imprisonment of seafarers, sanctioned by maritime law featured in each of major industrial disputes on the Australian waterfront, from the 1890s to the Second World War. Indeed, these drastic measures were adopted by unionists and employer groups alike. Drawing on shipboard records and popular accounts, this paper revisits the key maritime disputes to explain the complex interweaving of Australia’s evolving industrial laws and the enduring authority of British-imperial and customary maritime law in the day-to-day work lives of seafarers. The paper clarifies the importance of this distinctive institutional context to the successes and failures of Australia’s most peripatetic industrialists.
'They Came to Australia With the World's Largest Shovel!': The SUA's Campaign Against Utah
Diane Kirkby

In 1977 the Seamen’s Union of Australia took on the multinational Utah Development Corporation over the employment of Australian seafarers. The SUA’s action to defend Australian workers exposed the very generous tax concessions that allowed Utah to take enormous profits out of Australia. Utah retaliated with legal injunctions against SUA officials and the dispute widened to the mining unions and beyond. In an apparently unprecedented action the Federal government joined with Utah as a party to the legal proceedings. This was the first case to be brought under the new s.45D of the Trade Practices Act, introduced by then Minister for Industrial Relations, John Howard. The SUA lost in court but continued the campaign. After more than four years of being picketed by the SUA, Utah finally negotiated a settlement and Australian seafarers were employed in shipping Australian coal overseas.

The SUA dispute with Utah in many ways anticipated the Patrick’s dispute of 1998. Seagoing and waterfront unions have a long history of militancy that has made them targets for industrial relations reforms and punitive sanctions. This paper argues that the significance of the SUA campaign against Utah was consistent with the SUA’s militancy and disciplined position on other industrial matters but should be located in the context of the wider national Australian campaign against the incursion of multinational corporations into Australia.

Trade Unions and Beyond: A Comparative Biographical Study of the Leadership of Harry Bridges, Ted Roach and Jack Mundey.
Harry Knowles and Greg Mallory

Harry Bridges, Ted Roach and Jack Mundey were three prominent twentieth century trade union leaders who had a considerable impact, both industrially and politically, within their respective union organisations and later as leaders of broader social movements during their respective incumbencies. Whilst all three were Australian, Bridges practised his leadership as the influential head of a US labour union whereas Roach and Mundey were each leaders of two of the key Australian left wing unions: respectively the Waterside Workers’ Federation (WWF) and NSW Builder’s Labourers’ Federation (NSW BLF). Employing a comparative biographical case study approach, this paper evaluates the significance of their leadership and influence in the industrial and political wing of their respective labour movements and in particular examines ‘critical junctures’ in their leadership. For Bridges this involved his role in the 1934 San Francisco waterfront strike and in the subsequent formation of the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen’s Union (ILWU) in 1937; for Roach his role in the 1938 Pig-iron dispute in Port Kembla; and for Mundey his role in the movement to save historic buildings and communities in Sydney, which became internationally known as Green Bans. The paper also explores how their influence and reputation as leaders might have contributed to the impact they had in the formation and development of broader social movements which emerged during their times.

Variations on an Antipodean Theme? The Labo(u)r Party in Australia and New Zealand Compared
Ray Markey

The political trajectory and class basis of the New Zealand Labour Party (NZLP) and the Australian Labor Party (ALP) share many similarities, especially in terms of their ideology, support base and electoral performance. In their early years a considerable degree of cross fertilisation occurred between the parties and the broader labour movements from which they sprang. This was notable in terms of the Australian influence in the early NZLP leadership, and the policy influence on Australia from New Zealand regarding arbitration and the old age pension, which is infrequently acknowledged in Australia. In such ways, both the Australian and New Zealand labour movements contributed significantly to the early image of their countries as international social laboratories, although in both cases labour relied on liberals to implement key legislation. At a State level in Australia, in Victoria and Tasmania, the connections with New Zealand Labour were greatest, particularly in the influence of Lib-Labism. Subsequently, the NZLP and ALP have enjoyed similar electoral records at a national level and followed broadly similar policies. In recent decades both parties also have played key roles in the deregulation of their respective economies.

The similarities and closeness of the two parties is not surprising, particularly in the early formative years of the twentieth century. Labour travelled regularly between New Zealand and Australia, and indeed within the Pacific Rim, to and from the west coast of the USA and South Africa. Ideas also travelled
backwards and forwards around the Pacific Rim. The Australian and New Zealand colonies at the turn of the nineteenth century formed part of a group not often distinguished as socially or culturally distinct. Auckland remains closer to Sydney than Perth. However, there were always important divergences between the parties. The ALP was established and enjoyed government significantly earlier than the NZLP. In the centralist New Zealand system the NZLP did not experience the constraints and opportunities created by the federal state structure in Australia, although the early dismantling of an upper house potentially created more reform opportunities in New Zealand. The NZLP never attracted the small farmer support that was important for the ALP. Most importantly, the NZLP was unable to embrace the ‘White Australia’ that was so important to the ALP because of the status of Maori as ‘honorary whites’ in New Zealand, even though both parties shared racial antagonism to other non-Europeans. Over time the parties drew apart, building closer links with more distant political cousins and looking further afield for political models and inspiration. Each of the parties also had different relationships with the British Labour Party. This paper surveys the parameters of the shared experience of the two parties though examining their political and social environments, their support bases and their ideology and policy.

Historical Patterns of Participation and Safety: BHP at Port Kembla, 1935-1996
Ray Markey and Greg Patmore

From the 1970s Australian jurisdictions legislated for non-union joint employee/employer occupational health and safety committees in the workplace. However, much earlier efforts to introduce employee participation in OHS occurred in key large enterprises, notably BHP steel. With its origins in the safety-first movement in the US steel industry, BHP’s safety strategy included committees representing management and workers to discuss safety issues. They began in the Newcastle steelworks in 1924 and extended to Port Kembla following BHP’s 1935 acquisition of Australian Iron and Steel. Despite original plans for election of employee representatives, workers in a particular department served on the committees on a rotating basis. Their ambit also included welfarism and productivity. By the 1970s the committees had largely become a forum for showing films and presenting lectures. The large immigrant workforce also placed strains on the committees with the need for translators. By 1976 the management focus shifted away from the committees towards an emphasis on symbols rather than language as the means of communicating safety principles. Simultaneously, union safety disputes with unions grew. The NSW Occupational Health and Safety Act 1983, with its mandatory requirement for safety committees revived the joint committees, in a wider environment of greater management/union cooperation and extensive employee voice opportunities through Joint Consultative Committees. From the mid 1990s, however, employee voice was supplanted by production oriented direct participation in teams, a top down Du Pont approach and disillusionment with committees on the part of management and employee representatives. Over the period 1935-2005, the variation in the nature and effectiveness of safety committees was clearly linked with shifts in industrial relations strategy more generally. Occupational health and safety was clearly an industrial relations issue despite management attempts to maintain a separation between the two.

Labour and the nuclear option
Sigrid McCausland

The responses of political and industrial labour to the possibility of a nuclear future for Australia have been divided. Unionists and rank and file Australian Labor Party (ALP) members have protested passionately against the export and mining of uranium, while the ALP nationally has adopted shifting positions on nuclear issues during the last sixty years. In government, voices supporting resource development have generally overcome those speaking for the environment. Conflicting views on jobs and energy choices have also marked the recurring debates on uranium and nuclear power. This paper looks at the history of labour and anti-nuclear protest in Australia, focusing on the late 1970s and 1980s, the height of the popular movement against the export of uranium. This movement drew much of its strength from the participation of labour activists opposed to the pro-nuclear policies of the Fraser Government. It concludes by arguing that this tradition is one that should be remembered in 2007 as we face the threat of the nuclear ‘option’ favoured by the current Government.
Popcorn, Pickets, Cellphones and Brass-bands: Organising Young Workers in the Cinema Industry 2003-2006
Grace Millar

The New Zealand union movement was severely weakened by the 1991 Employment Contracts Act and union density has halved over the last 15 years. The service and retail sectors, where many workers get their first jobs, often have no union traditions. Young workers are less likely to be members of unions than older workers and are often portrayed as being apathetic and uninterested in unions. Movie theatres were one of the many service-based workplaces that were deunionised in the period after 1991. In April 2002 Reading Cinemas opened a new movie theatre in Wellington. In December 2003, when Unite union first visited Reading Cinemas, workers were paid at the New Zealand minimum wage rates of $8.50 for over 18 year olds and $6.80 for under 18 year olds. Over the next few months 95 per cent of Reading workers joined the union, and a year later these workers took industrial action, voted unanimously for a strike, and won a collective agreement. At Reading Cinemas the young workers were neither apathetic nor disinterested. This paper will discuss the implications of young worker enthusiasm for unions. It will also consider what labour traditions were useful in organising this highly casualised workplace, what traditions did were less useful, and what new ways of organising were needed.

Sydney’s ‘Power without Glory’: the Fitzpatrick-Browne affair as an event in labour politics during the Cold War
Andrew Moore

The gaoling by Commonwealth Parliament of two individuals, Ray Fitzpatrick and Frank Browne, for contempt of parliament in 1955 is a celebrated event in Australian constitutional, political and legal history. Yet it is imperfectly understood, perhaps partly because of the prevailing assumption that the gaolings stemmed from no more than a bilateral enthusiasm to punish Browne. The right-wing journalist edited a weekly smear sheet, Things I Hear, that had repeatedly attacked and embarrassed politicians on both sides of the house. According to Frank Green in Servant of the House, Prime Minister Menzies and Deputy Opposition Leader Arthur Calwell, in particular, saw the opportunity to settle old scores, using an alleged act of contempt as a pretext for depriving two individuals of their liberty. Seen in this light, Ray Fitzpatrick’s gaoling was no more than collateral damage.

As Harry Evans has suggested, this interpretation has its limitations. In this paper it will be argued that the case was the Sydney counterpart of the equally notorious Melbourne-based criminal defamation trial that surrounded communist author, Frank Hardy’s Power without Glory. In common with the Hardy case, the Fitzpatrick-Browne affair was strongly connected to Labor politics and the particular jealousies and rivalries this milieu created. Like John Wren in Power without Glory, Fitzpatrick was a solid Labor man, and the mainstay of the local Bankstown machine that supported former premier, J.T. Lang, the so called ‘Big Fella’ whose prominence in the New South Wales Australian Labor Party continued well beyond the dismissal and election defeat of his controversial government in 1932.

The historiography of Labor politics during the Cold War concentrates strongly on the Santamaria inspired split of 1954-55. This paper revisits the split of 1931, arguing that it had a surprising ongoing relevance to New South Wales Labor politics more than twenty years later.

Labour Traditions: Is the Your Rights At Work campaign challenging our labour traditions?
Jeannie Rea

When the ACTU National Executive met after the last federal election, the usually verbose union leaders were unusually circumspect as they were still reeling from the election result. Whilst not many thought Latham could get Labor over the line, the huge decline in Labor votes and the catastrophic Senate loss had not been predicted. There was now no impediment to Howard and Costello achieving their long held ambition of legislatively crippling the unions and stripping away the hard fought and long held rights of Australian workers. It was time to do things differently, and the traditional men and women of the union movement were about to be dragged into 21st century social marketing and professional communications. It was not easy for union leaders to admit that they did not already know everything there was to know about waging and winning a campaign, and to then actually listen to communication professionals complete with phone polls and focus groups and internet sites.

The outcome was YOUR RIGHTS AT WORK, a meticulously conceived, researched, tested,
implemented, evaluated and staged campaign, using professionally-made paid television and radio advertisements, web sites, merchandising, direct mail, and slick media work. It has required a huge commitment of resources including levying union members to pay for the advertisements, convincing all levels of all unions to take the YRAW message into every aspect of their work, to build upon relationships with community and religious leaders, to nurture relationships with (some) employers and support community led, union supporting groups in local areas. This had to include the grass roots campaigning of leafleting at the train station, huge rallies featuring stand up comedians broadcast around the country into RSL and Leagues clubs, to the clever TV adverts that really did catch the government by surprise. The goal of the campaign is to persuade voters to kick out the Liberal-National coalition government in the 2007 election. Along the way the campaign has necessarily focussed upon the WorkChoices legislation and the consequences of its implementation, as the responsibility of the ACTU was to what it could to ameliorate the full horror of the legislation for workers rights and union organisation.

The union leaders had realised that they did not necessarily know what the voters or even their own members thought, how they got their information, and what persuades them to a particular view. The sad realisation that lots of union members, in an era of historically low and declining union membership, actually voted for the Howard Government probably drove many a union leader to accept that they needed help in getting their messages across, even to their own members.

This campaign has been hailed as a far cry from the traditional union and labour movement campaign - a departure from labour traditions. There are critics, but also many who have been won over to this new campaigning style, maybe because they see it is effective, or maybe because they too have been drawn in by the slick sophistication? (This campaign does have many of the hallmarks of a social marketing campaign, which is sometimes called cause related marketing and uses commercial marketing techniques to place and push the product.) But is this campaign really so different from those of the past, or is it just indicative of, and in keeping with, the times? What is traditional and what is different? And, most importantly, what is effective? Are we losing some core messages, as we adopt those which ‘focus grouped’ most successfully? What is at the core of the campaign – the locally organised groups holding shopping centre stalls; the picket lines outside the companies which couldn’t wait to use WorkChoices against their workers; the white, orange and black, shirts personalised with one’s own union logo; the union leaders speaking out on the world stage and then at the local shopping centre; those adverts that got the government on the back foot?

Professional communication specialists have steadily become more influential in unions, as in other community and social movement organisations over the past fifteen years. Many unions employ professionals in these roles for internal and external communication and campaigns. Indeed, the new media techniques and technologies are increasingly used in internal union election campaigns. There is a generational change in union leadership and officials.

The MUA campaign nearly ten years ago could be seen as the first big campaign to employ some of the communications specialist advice and techniques – but it was also very much a traditional campaign and the first seen by many younger supporters. Holding 24 picket lines, confrontations with scabs and cops, angry male, blue collar workers were all part of the old way of doing things, whilst this time there was also smart work going on in the courts, and also in communications units of the unions. However, MUA HERE TO STAY was not a focus-tested slogan– it was a battle cry. You were challenged to demonstrate which side you were on. It could be argued that there is big difference with the inclusive your rights at work – worth fighting and voting for, a slogan that invites common cause in clear self-interest. In ten years there have been dramatic changes in the Australian political landscape. To what extent are we reflecting these in the ways we are campaigning?

After this year’s federal election, the analysis of the YRAW campaign will be done and it will be judged on the basis of the election outcome. It is useful (and interesting) to consider it at this time without the wisdom of hindsight. In this session, I will discuss the YRAW campaign in the context of the tradition of union campaigns against governments. The objective is to interrogate, from an historical perspective, the proposition that the YRAW campaign is different, and to assess the short and long term ramifications.

Late Communism and late social democracy: Indian Communism today
Geoff Robinson

India remains one of the most significant outposts of parliamentary communism almost twenty years after the revolutions of 1989 swept away European communism. This paper situates Indian communism in the context of competing models of post-communist and late social democratic political practice in Europe. It then examines the relation between the economic development practice of Indian communists in government and Marxist ideology. It poses the question of whether the contemporary Indian exploitation of Marxism as a rationale for globalised capitalist industrialisation is as much (and no more) a ‘betrayal’
of Marxism than its previous employment as a rationale for Stalinist developmentalism. Perhaps the Mensheviks were right after all?

The Sofinsky Affair: Anti-communism in New Zealand
Lisa Sacksen

In January 1980 the New Zealand Government expelled a Russian journalist, Dr Seigei Zimin and the Russian Ambassador, Mr V. N. Sofinsky. This came to be known as the ‘Sofinsky Affair’. Sofinsky was expelled because the New Zealand Prime Minister, Robert Muldoon, stated that he had evidence that the Soviet Union through Sofinsky was funding the pro-Soviet communist party, the Socialist Unity Party. This was the culmination of several years of government vilification of the Socialist Unity Party, and Prime Ministerial attacks on journalists, church leaders and Labour members of parliament. This paper seeks to place the Sofinsky Affair in an historical context and compare Muldoon’s anti-communism with that of Robert Menzies. It forms part of a broader study I am undertaking for my MA thesis on communist organisations in New Zealand from the 1960s to the 1990s.

An Australian labour tradition of interest in Scandinavia
Andrew Scott

The *Australia Reconstructed* report published precisely two decades ago (in July 1987) is the most substantial and best-known output of the Australian labour movement’s interest in Scandinavia. However, there has been a longer-term tradition in Australia of interest in the approaches and achievements of Nordic trade unions. This paper draws on records held in the Labour Movement Archive and Library in Stockholm, extensive papers of the Swedish and Australian metalworkers’ unions to which the author has been given access, and interviews with key participants in Stockholm, Oslo and different parts of Australia, to piece together the events and relationships which helped prepare the pathway to *Australia Reconstructed*. In particular, this paper examines the interest in Swedish and Norwegian industrial democracy and work design initiatives shown by a number of important Australian trade unionists and academics from the 1970s, the way in which this interest spread to encompass more senior and influential labour movement leaders in the 1980s, and the resulting international network, which continues today. The paper assesses the ebbs and flows of the Australian labour movement’s interest in Scandinavia, the political character of this interest, what the international links have achieved and not achieved, and – in the light of this history – whether and how a renewed interest in Scandinavia by Australian trade unionists and the Australian Labor Party might now be warranted to help deal with current industrial and political challenges.

Intimidation, solidarity and the 1998 waterfront dispute
Chris Sheil

A major advantage that the Maritime Union of Australia enjoyed over the government and the employer in the 1998 waterfront dispute was that it had no need to intimidate its members to maintain their solidarity. The contrast with the opposing forces could not have been starker in this respect, for the authorities were plagued by spies, leaking public servants and defecting scabs.

This paper canvasses the forms of intimidation used on the employer’s side of the conflict, in the effort to maintain non-union solidarity. Arguably, the history supplies a glimpse backward in time. E. P Thompson has suggested that ‘solidarity, dedication and intimidation’ comprised the ‘moral culture’ of early 19th century unionism, referring to the oath taking, secrecy and sanctions against betrayal during the ‘heroic days of illegality’. Eric Hobsbawm has explained that coercion and intimidation ‘were vital in the early stages of trade unionism, when the immorality of blacklegging had not yet become part of the ethical code of organised labour’.

In 1998, the shoe was on the other foot. As a mature foundation of the trade union movement, solidarity was fully internalized among waterfront workers, whereas intimidation was an integral feature of the offensive by the authorities, in these perhaps their own ‘heroic days of illegality’. The conclusion raises the more general question of whether this case should be considered *sui generis*, or whether it can be suggested that some degree of intimidation is a typical condition of the non-union workplace.
Lessons from the 2006 Beaconsfield Mine Rescue

Bill Shorten

On ANZAC Day 2006, three miners were buried by a rock fall in the Beaconsfield gold mine. After the discovery that Larry Knight had been killed, rescue workers laboured tirelessly to get their mates Todd Russell and Brant Webb out alive. If Australia could bottle the sentiment and attitude of those weeks, we would be better for it. Politics was put to the side. Union and mine management united to do what needed to be done. We need to take the goodwill which symbolized the Beaconsfield rescue and use it daily - let's not wait for another disaster to realise we're all on the same side.

Respect not Relief: Feminism, Guild Socialism and the Guild Hall Commune in Melbourne 1917

Judith Smart

This paper examines the response of the Women’s Political Association and Peace Army to the strike of the Wharf Labourers in Melbourne in 1917, first of all against food shortages and the rise in the cost of living and then in support of the great strike against the introduction of the ‘card system’ in the NSW railways. Critical of the paternalism of middle-class philanthropy and charity, and of the demoralising effects of relief even when provided from within the labour movement, this organised feminist movement evolved a new model of support for the men, women and children left destitute as a result of industrial and political action in the interests of economic and social justice. Though their efforts shared many of the features of traditional relief committee work, their conceptualisation of their relationship with the strikers and their families was self-consciously critical of that model. Preferring to characterise their actions as facilitating self-help and self-respect, they renamed their headquarters the Guild Hall Commune and hoped it would stand both as an example of ‘how a strike should be conducted’, and as ‘a monument to the irresistible force of justice and unity’.

This paper focuses on what it was that inspired the organisers to see their actions as different from the other relief committees supporting strikers and their families at this time. To begin with, it discusses the ideological context in which the WPA’s sense of the social and political purpose of their support for the strikers developed. In particular it stresses the variety of socialist and other radical ideals on which they were able to draw, often in a fairly catholic way, before the Bolshevik Revolution imposed new and rigid polarisations on socialist thinking and allegiance. In this context I wish to test a suspicion that the ideas of Guild Socialism were of particular significance to the new social order for which these women aspired, and that the focus on self-help, self-respect, quality of work, community and the ‘spiritual nature of the problem of social reorganisation’ had special resonance for the leaders of this feminist organisation. The commune’s work was soon overtaken by other crises—most notably the second conscription referendum—but it is an episode that deserves analysis as an alternative construction of traditional female relief and auxiliary work.

Guido Baracchi and Marxist continuity

Jeff Sparrow

Stalinism and its legacy poses a tremendous and ongoing problem for the socialist project, especially since, throughout most of the twentieth century, the Soviet ideologues and their apologists asserted – indeed, enforced – a historical narrative emphasising an unbroken political and theoretical continuity between Stalin (and his heirs) and the classical Marxist tradition. One strategy amongst anti-Stalinist activists and historians has been to identity an alternative tradition manifesting a different version of historical continuity. In this project, the biographies of exemplary political leaders – most notably, Leon Trotsky – provide an important area of contestation.

The paper looks the lives of three dissident Marxists who became politically active in the pre-Bolshevik era, were impacted by Stalinism and became, eventually, anti-Stalinist Marxists of one form or another. It examines the case of the American socialist James P. Cannon, whose progression through the Socialist Party, the Industrial Workers of the World, the Communist Party of America and then the Socialist Workers Party was often identified (by Cannon and others) as exemplifying an anti-Stalinist continuity in its strongest form. The paper contrasts Cannon’s career first with the more idiosyncratic careers of the French-Russian writer and activist Victor Serge and the Australian communist intellectual Guido Baracchi, to both critique the traditional Trotskyist account of Cannon’s biography and to make an
argument for a different understanding of Marxist continuity.

**Berry, Berryism and the early Victorian Labor Party**  
Paul Strangio

The existing historiography on the Victorian Labor Party has consistently attributed its chequered early progress to the local trade union movement’s enthrallment to the Victorian colonial liberal protectionist tradition. However, less attention has been given to the watershed influence that Graham Berry’s radical democratic ministries of 1877-81 and its supporting extra-parliamentary organisation, the National Reform and Protection League, had in imbuing the labour movement with an enduring sense of political fidelity to liberalism (or a version of liberalism). Indeed, it is striking that during the first decade of the Labor Party’s existence and continuing at least until the middle of the first decade of the Commonwealth that some within the party laid claim to it being the rightful heir to Berryism and regarded its political project as the fulfilment of the unfinished business of Berryism. This paper explores the shadow that Berry and Berryism cast over the early Victorian Labor Party and seeks to explain why that shadow was so long. In doing so, it also affords a better understanding of the nature of the liberalism to which the early Victorian Labor Party was indebted and which it sought to re-invigorate.

**‘New Zealand’s Road to Socialism? the CPNZ and the New Zealand Political Tradition’**  
Kerry Taylor

In 1955 the Communist Party of New Zealand (CPNZ) published a new programme under the title *New Zealand’s Road to Socialism*. The document analysed recent events and projected a vision of New Zealand’s future, in which it suggested a ‘People’s Alliance’ would propel the country ‘Forward to People’s Power and a Socialist New Zealand’. As part of the case for socialism in *New Zealand’s Road* the CPNZ also provided an account of New Zealand’s past. This paper explores the ways in which the New Zealand communist party deployed history in an attempt built a progressive political movement. How did the CPNZ seek to position itself within the local political culture and political history? Did positions changed over time? Where did the CPNZ see itself fitting in the New Zealand political tradition.

**‘What Can Women Do?’: Female Political Activism on the Ballarat Diggings in the mid-1850s**  
Clare Wright

This paper challenges the conventional historical wisdom that women’s political activism in Australia emerged with the middle-class suffrage and temperance campaigns of the late nineteenth-century. By documenting the prominent role of women in the popular protest movements on the early Ballarat goldfields, culminating in the Eureka Stockade and its political aftermath, this paper argues that women advocated, facilitated and identified with the potent collectivist morality that underpinned the struggle for democratic rights in colonial Australia. Theirs was not a politics of respectability, but rather one that drew on the gold rush zeitgeist of freedom and autonomy. While for some women, non-representative forms of democracy were enough, others were sufficiently steeled by the inverted power structures of the era to demand more inclusive rights for their sex.
**FILMS**

*Indonesia Calling* was described in *Tribune* as ‘the first film in Australian labour history’. It re-creates the acts of solidarity on the Sydney waterfront and in the harbour by Indonesian, Australian, Indian and Chinese seamen and waterside workers in support of Indonesian independence; and against Dutch military efforts to re-impose colonial imperialism after World War II. All Dutch shipping became a ‘Black Armada’ in Australia as Rupert Lockwood noted. The film was ‘directed’ by the Dutchman, Joris Ivens, whose earlier documentaries captured the struggles of Belgian miners, Republican Spain against Francoism and the Chinese resistance to Japanese militarism. In making the film, Ivens, who had been appointed the colonial film commissioner for Indonesia, effectively betrayed the imperialist design Holland had cast for post-war Indonesia. In Sydney to prepare for the making of Dutch colonial propaganda films, Ivens was inspired by the display of proletarian international solidarity on the waterfront and aboard ships for an independent Indonesia. Using borrowed equipment and footage donated by returning diggers Ivens, with other committed supporters of Indonesian independence, collectively made a film that the Dutch and American governments and the Menzies-led Opposition wanted banned. (Source: Drew Cottle)

*The Archive Project* explores a foundational moment in Australian independent film through an examination of Melbourne’s Realist film movement and the cultural Cold War of the late 1940s and early 1950s. The Melbourne Realists were ‘activist’ filmmakers supporting labour movement, housing and peace campaigns. They introduced Australian audiences to world cinema at a time when cinema screens were dominated by the US and UK film industries. Their work was crucial to the emergence of Film Festivals in Melbourne and Sydney. A compilation of their works, their ideals, their deeds and their battles with the Stalinist left and the forces of the repressive state is woven together from a wide variety of archival sources and formats into a timely commentary on the challenges faced by an independent voice in dark times. (Source: ABC program notes)
About the contributors

Verity Archer completed a PhD at the ANU in 2006. Her doctoral thesis is titled ‘In search of the Australian dole bludger: constructing discourses of welfare, 1974–83’. Her current research interests include ‘Third Way’ welfare discourses and the language of social justice in Australia.

Nikola Balnave is a Senior Lecturer in Employment Relations at the University of Western Sydney. She is investigating (with Greg Patmore) a history of Rochdale co-operatives. In 2006, she was elected secretary of the federal Australian Society for the Study of Labour History.

Anne Beggs Sunter lectures in Australian History and Heritage at the University of Ballarat. She has taken a special interest in Victorian colonial history and in particular the political, social and cultural implications of the Eureka Stockade.

Peta Ellen Belic is a Master of Philosophy (Research) student at the University of Newcastle. Her honours thesis was titled ‘No Village So Where are the People: Finding and Understanding a Coal Mining Community in the Turbulent 1980s’. In 1996 Peta won the Alex Dowling Prize for Labour History 2006. Email: peta.belic@studentmail.newcastle.edu.au

Yossi Berger holds a PhD from La Trobe university and a BSc(Hons) from Monash university. He is a state registered psychologist and has worked for unions for the past 18 years, first as a research officer for the ACTU/VTHC OHS Unit and later for the Australian Workers’ Union where he now heads their national OHS Unit. Whilst involved in many riveting OHS-related committees the bulk of his work is inspecting workplaces around Australia in many industry sectors. It’s this activity that makes him very popular with employers.

Robert Bollard is a postgraduate student at Victoria University. He is currently completing a PhD on the Great Strike of 1917. His email address is robert.bolland@research.vu.edu.au.

Brian Boyd is Secretary of the Victoria Trades Hall Council.

Verity Burgmann is Professor in Political Science at the University of Melbourne. Her publications include Power, Profit and Protest; Unions and the Environment; Green Bans, Red Union; Revolutionary Industrial Unionism; Power and Protest, ‘In Our Time’: Socialism and the Rise of Labor and the four-volume co-edited A People’s History of Australia. To Andrew Bolt’s annoyance, she and two other ‘old-time Marxists’ have established a website of primary source documents of the history of Australian radicalism at www.reasoninrevolt.net.au as a useful resource to help spread ‘left-wing poison’.

Rowan Cahill has worked as a teacher, historian, journalist, and recently finished a three-year stint as an agricultural labourer.

Frank Cain teaches Australian History at the University of New South Wales in Canberra and his research interests are in Labour History, Economic History, Intelligence History and Cold War History. His two most recent books are Jack Lang and the Great Depression (Melbourne, 2005) and Economic Statecraft: European Reactions to the US Trade Embargo (London, 2007).

John Cain was Premier of Victoria for three terms from 1982 to 1990 and is currently a professorial associate in the Centre for Public Policy at the University of Melbourne and a regular political commentator. He remains active in the affairs of the Victorian branch of the Australian Labor Party. In 2006 he was appointed to the presidency of the Library Board of Victoria.

Phil Cleary taught history in Melbourne’s western suburbs from 1976 until 1989. In 1992 he won the seat of Wills in a by-election. He won it again at the federal election in 1993 before losing it in 1996 after an electoral redistribution. He was written extensively on the criminal justice system and politics, and is the author of three books. He has been a regular contributor to The Age and Herald Sun newspapers and has contributed to Overland. He currently manages communications for the Electrical Trades Union.

Robert Corcoran was ‘a child of the Depression’. He joined the Labor Party as a teenager more than sixty years ago and has remained active in support of the ALP ever since – despite painful awareness of recurrent internal party problems. Since retiring from work as a civil engineer, he has devoted much of his time to political research and writing. He is the author of Australian political dictionaries and has...
presented papers at previous National Conferences of the ASSLH.

**Drew Cottle** is a senior lecturer in Politics at the University of Western Sydney. He has an abiding interest in capital history, and has published books on the Brisbane Line, and the experience of Sydney’s wealthy in the Great Depression. His research and writing embraces international political economy, Asian studies, political ecology and labour history.

**Diana Covell** helped to organise the Wollongong Jobs for Women Campaign from 1980-91, working for several of those years as a labourer and crane chaser in the Port Kembla steelworks and as an elected union delegate. She then attended university, graduating with BA Honours in Communications from the University of Technology, Sydney in 1996. She has worked in advocacy, policy, dispute-resolution and community development roles mainly in the non-government community sector and is now a fulltime PhD (History) candidate at the University of Sydney.

**Margaret Creagh** is a member of the IWW.

**Wally Curran** has long been a significant player in the labour movement. After working as a labourer at various jobs during the late 1940s and ‘50s, he was elected Assistant Secretary of the Australasian Meat Industry Employees’ Union in 1958, and from 1973 until his retirement in 1997, was Secretary of the Union. In that job he made a difference to the lives of his union comrades and their families: including workers’ health services; a founder of their superannuation fund and an enthusiastically effective organiser of community arts ‘Youth’ projects as well as serving on major arts boards, such as the Australia Council and the Melbourne International Arts Festival. His contribution to the labour movement and the Arts was acknowledged with an AOM in 1997 and a Centenary Medal in 2001. Over his working life, Wally has been a member of the Communist Party and now the Labor Party.

**Phillip Deery** is Professor of history at Victoria University, Melbourne. He has written extensively on the early Cold War. Recent publications have focused on the Cold War odyssey of an American liberal intellectual (*Cold War History* 6:2, 2006), Britain’s ‘Asian Cold War’ in Malaya (*Journal of Cold War Studies* 9:1, 2007), and on Australian security service activities (*Intelligence and National Security* 22:3, 2007). Email: phillip.deery@vu.edu.au

**Mark Derby** is a Wellington historical researcher, and the secretary of New Zealand’s Trade union History Project. He contributed to the book *Revolution - the 1913 Great Strike in NZ* (edited by Melanie Nolan), and in November 2006 organised the first seminar on New Zealand’s role in the Spanish Civil War. He is now editing a book based on the seminar presentations.

**Wendy Dick** is a PhD student in the School of History, University of Melbourne.

**Jackie Dickenson** is an ARC Postdoctoral Fellow in the School of Historical Studies at the University of Melbourne. Her postdoctoral project is a historical study of political accountability in Australia.

**Tony Duras** is currently undertaking a PhD on ‘Globalisation, Technology and Unions in Australia’ at Deakin University, Melbourne and is employed as industrial officer with the Community and Public Sector Union, State Public Sector Federation Group, Victorian Branch. His research interests include trade unions, networked computers, the Internet, globalisation, industrial democracy, workplace surveillance and labour internationalism.

**Tim Dymond** completed a PhD thesis on the political and intellectual history of the ‘new class’ concept at the University of Western Australia. A chapter based on his work has appeared in *Us and Them: Anti-elitism in Australia*. He has previously completed a dissertation on ‘Zionism in the Perth Jewish Community to 1950’. Currently a Field Organiser for the Community and Public Sector Union, he has also lived and worked on Kibbutz Baram in northern Israel. The views expressed by Tim Dymond represent his personal perspective only and are not those of the CPSU.

**Nick Dyrenfurth** is a lecturer and doctoral candidate in the School of Historical Studies at Monash University. His doctoral thesis is entitled ‘Heroes and Villains: the Cultural Politics of Australian Labor’ and explores the cultural politics of the early Australian labour movement. He has published in journals such as the *Australian Journal of Political Science, Australian Journal of Politics and History, Australian Studies, Labour History, Overland* and *Arena*. His most recent article, ‘Fat Man v. the People’ (with Professor Marian Quartly), is an analysis of Australian labour cartooning and appeared in the May edition of *Labour History*. 
Bradon Ellem is an associate professor in Work and Organisational Studies at the University of Sydney. He has published books and articles on unionism in the clothing trades, the labour split, peak unionism and regional industrial relations. His major research interests now are geographies of work, union strategy, industrial relations policy and Pilbara unionism. Bradon is an associate editor of Labour History and co-editor of the Journal of Industrial Relations.

John Faulkner is the National President of the Australian Labor Party. He entered the Senate in 1989 and was leader of the Opposition in the Senate from 1996 to 2004.

Peter Franks was a trade union official for over 20 years. He now works as an industrial mediator. He has published numerous articles on NZ labour history. His history of the New Zealand printing trades unions, Print and Politics, was published in 2001.

Paddy Garrity started his working life as a seaman. When, in the mid 1970s, Paddy became Secretary of the Hobart Unemployed Workers Union he organised art and printing classes, bands, a street theatre group and various other publications. Since then, he has been at the forefront of the arts in working life. He has been variously, an Arts and Education officer with the Painters and Dockers; involved for many years in the Labour Day/Moomba celebrations; a board member of the Footscray Community Arts Centre; organised concerts (including a Union welcome to Nelson Mandela); and in the last decade, established and ran, with Jim Rimmer and others, Union Promotions, that turned Trades Hall into a cultural and social centre. Paddy was awarded the Australia Council Ros Bower award in 1991 for his work in cultural democracy in Australia.

Paula Geldens is a lecturer in Sociology at Swinburne University of Technology and member of the Australian Centre for Emerging Technologies and Society (ACETS) based at Swinburne. Her research interests focus on the intersections between identity, place, youth and technology. Having worked as an inserter and a publisher for 7 years with a regional newspaper, and married to a printer of 14 years, Paula has had a keen interest in exploring and mapping the shifts within this industry.

Ian Harriss is employed in the School of Business at the Charles Sturt University campus in Albury/Wodonga. With Bill Robbins, he has been researching the Harvester case for a number of years and they have published several articles on this topic. Ian has published in the area of emotional intelligence. Email: iharriss@csu.edu.au

Gerard Hill was born in Wellington, New Zealand, and after leaving school worked for a couple of seasons in the freezing industry. Before going to sea he was involved in the maritime industry for 25 years as, variously, steward, cook, and chief steward. Gerard was elected to the national executive of the Federated Cooks and Stewards Union and the New Zealand Seafarers Union from 1984 to 2000. He currently serves on the scholarship fund of the Seafarers Union. An active recorder of history and related activities, Gerard and his partner now run a boutique hotel in Ponsonby, Auckland.

John Hirst is an emeritus scholar at La Trobe University. As one of Australia’s leading historians, he has written extensively on Australian social and political history, democracy and civic culture.

Stephen Holt is a freelance Canberra historian.

John Hughes is a film freelance Canberra historian.

Terry Irving was for many years the editor of Labour History and is widely recognised for his pathbreaking work on class in Australian history. Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Sydney. Email: thirving@optushome.com.au

Paul Jones is an honorary associate of the School of History at the University of Melbourne who has worked at five Melbourne-based universities and at three abroad. A former ARC Postdoctoral Fellow, he has an avid interest in maritime labour, 1850s to 1980s. His research and writing interests extend to China, Australia and Japan, and the historical relationships between them.

Dave Kerin was an activist during the Vietnam War. Radicalised by this process he entered the building industry in the 1970s where he was involved with early Green Ban initiatives in Victoria and New South Wales. Dave has remained an activist, campaigning for the union movement, the environment and peace. He is the co-ordinator of Union Solidarity, and is involved with the Manufacturing Co-operative, a venture
that aims to create avenues for manufacturing green technology in Australia owned and controlled by workers.

**Angela Keys** is a PhD candidate with the Centre for Rural Social Research at Charles Sturt University. She has co-authored articles for the *Journal of Australian Political Economy*, *Labour History*, *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography*, the *Journal of Chinese Australia*, *Sporting Traditions*, *Z Magazine*, and co-wrote a chapter on the political economy of Tonga in *The Eye of the Cyclone: Governance and Stability in the Pacific* (2006). Her most recent publication is a co-authored chapter on eviction struggles in Sydney during the Great Depression in *Outrageous! Moral Panics in Australia* (2007).

**Tommy Khoshaba** is a legal consultant and a part-time teacher and researcher with the School of Management at the University of Western Sydney.

**Diane Kirkby** is Reader in History at La Trobe University where she teaches Australian and US history. She has many publications in labour history particularly on the work of barmaids and is currently completing a history of the SUA.

**Harry Knowles** lectures in the Discipline of Work and Organisational Studies in the Faculty of Economics and Business at the University of Sydney. He is co-author (with Mark Hearn) of *One Big Union: A History of the Australian Workers Union 1886-1994* (1996) and has a particular interest in labour biography and trade union leadership. Harry became an associate editor of the journal *Labour History* during 2006.

**Michael Lyons** works in the Employment Relations Group, School of Management, at the University of Western Sydney.

**Sigrid McCausland** is an archivist and labour historian. She was University Archivist at ANU from 1998 until 2005 and feels fortunate to have been part of the successful battle to save Australia’s most extensive collection of labour archives there some years ago. Her paid employment these days is as Education Officer for the Australian Society of Archivists. Her research interests centre on opposition to nuclear power and uranium mining in Australia, which was the subject of her PhD thesis.

**Laurence Maher** is a graduate of the law schools of the University of Melbourne and ANU. A practising lawyer in Melbourne for over 30 years, he taught at the University of Melbourne law school from 1989 to 1994. He has published widely on aspects of Australian Cold War legal history.

**Greg Mallory** is a tutor and adjunct lecturer in the Department of Industrial Relations, Griffith University and President of the Brisbane Labour History Association. He is also a member of the Federal Executive of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History. His book *Uncharted Waters: Social Responsibility in Australian Trade Unions* was launched in 2005. He is currently working on a history of the Queensland Coal Miners’ Union for the Mining and Energy Queensland Division of the CFMEU. He is also a sports historian and is currently working on a history of Rugby League competition in Brisbane. He was awarded the Tom Brock Scholarship in 2001 for his rugby league studies.

**Ray Markey** is Professor of Employment Relations at Auckland University of Technology. His main research interests are in employee participation, regional employment relations, comparative employment relations and labour history. He is author of *The Life and Times of the Labor Council of NSW 1871-1991* (1994) and *The Making of the Labor Party in NSW, 1880-1900* (1988).

**Grace Millar** was the union organiser at Reading Cinemas from 2003-2006. She completed her MA in history in 2003, which examined the women’s liberation movement in New Zealand. She is no longer working for Unite, and is planning to begin her PhD.

**Andrew Moore** is an associate professor of history at the University of Western Sydney and is currently researching the Fitzpatrick-Browne privilege case. With the support of an ARC Discovery Grant he is also researching the social composition of inter-war fascism in Australia.

**Max Ogden** retired in 2004, after having established and worked in the ‘Foundation for Sustainable Economic Development’ within the Department of Management, University of Melbourne. He remains involved with the Foundation’s current ARC funded research project: ‘Work & Social Cohesion Under Globalisation’. His long credentials in the union movement include roles as a tradesperson, shop steward, union activist; Victorian AMWU Education Officer; AMWU National Officer with responsibility for
workplace change and industrial democracy; and as an ACTU Industrial Officer.

Bobbie Oliver is senior lecturer in Social Sciences at Curtin University. From 2000-2004, she was first-named Chief Investigator of the ARC-funded Midland Railway Workshops History Project, which collected interviews and documentary materials from past employees. Dr Oliver is co-editor (with Dr Patrick Bertola) of The Workshops: A History of the Midland Government Railway Workshops (2006), in which she has written on apprenticeship training, and she is also the author of several published papers on aspects of the Workshops.

Michele O’Neil is the Victorian State Secretary and National Assistant Secretary of the Textile Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia (TCFUA). She has organised and campaigned with workers in the textile, clothing and footwear industry for 18 years and has held a variety of union positions in her own union and in the broader movement. She has been active in many union and community campaigns in Australia and internationally aimed at improving workers’ rights including ending the exploitation of home-based workers.

Mikael Ottosson is a senior lecturer and researcher at the School of IMER, Malmö University, Sweden. His main research field is social and labour history. He has a PhD in history and wrote his thesis (1999) on the change of culture and group identities among the glass workers in a local Swedish community, 1820 to 1880. His wide-ranging research topics include the Swedish volunteer militia 1860-1880; the consolidation of Sweden during the nineteenth century; the media picture of the labour movement and different aspects on working time. His current research focuses upon the ‘lazy-bones’ history and the conceptual history of human work.

Greg Patmore is chair of Work and Organisational Studies and director of the Business and Labour History Group at the University of Sydney. He is editor of Labour History. He is currently working on an ARC funded project with Ray Markey on the history of non-union forms of union representation in Australia, a history of Rochdale co-operatives (with Nikola Balnave) and a history of Citigroup in Australia (with John Shields and Harry Knowles).

Robert Ray was elected to the Senate for Victoria in 1980 and a delegate to the ALP National Executive 1983-98. He has held several ministerial appointments, including Minister for Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs (1988-90) and Minister for Defence (1990-96).

Jeannie Rea researches in labour history, and teaches at Victoria University, Melbourne, in Public Advocacy and Action, and also in Public Relations. She was once a union communication officer, formerly a member of the ACTU Executive and currently a member of the national executive of the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU). Contact: jeannie.rea@vu.edu.au

Peter Riley is a member of the IWW.

Bill Robbins is employed in the School of Business at the Charles Sturt University campus in Albury/Wodonga. Together with Ian Harriss, he has been researching the Harvester case for a number of years and they have published several articles on this topic. Bill is also active in researching the management of colonial convict. Email: wrobbins@csu.edu.au

Geoff Robinson is lecturer in Australian Studies and Politics at Deakin University’s Warrnambool campus. His book When the Labor Party Dreams; class conflict, politics and policy in New South Wales 1930-32 is to be published in late 2007. Before taking up his position at Deakin he worked in higher education policy development and research management. His website is http://geoffrobinson.info.

Calle Rosengren is a PhD student in Working Life Science at Kristianstad University, Sweden. His area of research is temporal aspects of work and organisation. His research focuses upon how time was treated as a resource in working life debates during the twentieth century. The main materials in his study are the protocols of the Swedish national working time committees, 1918, 1963 and 2001.

Lisa Sacksen completed her first degree with majors in English and History at Victoria University, Wellington, in the early 1980s. With her family, she moved to the United Kingdom where in the late 1990s she began work on a BA in archaeology at Birkbeck College, University of London. Unfortunately the family moved back to New Zealand before Lisa could complete this. Hungry for stratigraphy, she took a number of geology courses before enrolling in History Honours. Her thesis, ‘Dr Theodore Grant Gray
and the Mental Defectives Amendment Act 1928’, examined the effects of eugenics on New Zealand’s mental health policy. Lisa is currently researching an MA thesis entitled ‘Expressions of Resistance: Communist Organisations in New Zealand from the 1960s to the 1990s’.


**Joanne Scott** is an associate professor at the University of the Sunshine Coast. She has published in the fields of Australian and Queensland history, labour history, gender and race relations, oral history, popular culture, urban studies and higher education. She is co-author of *The Engine Room of Government* and *A Class of Its Own*. Joanne is a former visiting professor of Australian Studies at the University of Tokyo. She is a member of the Australian Historical Association’s Executive, the Council of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland and the Queensland working group for the Australian Dictionary of Biography.

**Chris Shell** is the president of the Evatt Foundation. His books have been published by Allen & Unwin, Pluto Press and UNSW Press, and he was a columnist for the *Australian Financial Review* from 2001 to 2003. A long-time cabinet official under many Labor and Coalition governments and the author of many public policies, since 2002 he has been based in the School of History at UNSW. Chris also holds adjunct appointments with the University of Sydney and Boston University and is a member of the Australian Society of Authors.

**Jeff Sparrow** is the editor of *Overland* magazine, the co-author of *Radical Melbourne: A Secret History* and *Radical Melbourne 2: The Enemy Within* and the author of *Communism: A Love Story*.

**Bill Shorten** is National Secretary of the Australian Workers’ Union (AWU), Australia’s oldest continuous union, which represents 125,000 workers from industries as diverse as oil and gas, fruit picking, manufacturing and horse racing. In 1994, he joined the Victorian Branch of the AWU as an organiser, and was elected Secretary of the Branch in 1998. In 2001, he was elected AWU National Secretary. He is President of the Victorian Branch of the ALP and a member of the ALP National Executive, Mr Shorten also serves on the ACTU Executive and is a director of AustralianSuper, the Victorian Funds Management Corporation and the Victorian Jockeys’ Association. He holds an Arts and a Law degree as well as an MBA. In March 2006, he was pre-selected as the Labor candidate for the federal seat of Maribyrnong, Victoria.

**Judith Smart** is a principal fellow at the University of Melbourne and an adjunct professor at RMIT University. She has published on Australian women’s organisations in the first half of the 20th Century, as well as on women and political protest, women and religion, venereal diseases, labour youth organisation, the impact of war, the Miss Australia beauty contest and the Billy Graham crusade in Australia in 1959. Current projects include a study of Melbourne during World War I, stressing its role as the national capital, and (with Professor Marian Quartly) a history of the National Council of Women of Australia. She is a past editor of *Australian Historical Studies* and present editor of the *Victorian Historical Journal*.

**Kathryn Steel** is a postgraduate student in the Faculty of Arts, Monash University with an interest in regional trades and labour councils.


**Jonathan Strauss** is a postgraduate student at James Cook University in Cairns. His research topic is The Accord and Working Class Consciousness, under which he is considering politics in the working class during the years of the Hawke and Keating governments. He has been a workplace delegate in the CPSU and a branch committee member in the NTEU, and has recently published a series of articles in the journal *Links*.

**Jessica Tatham-Thompson** is a research assistant working with Dr Paula Geldens on their study of
printers. Her recent research activities have included a project at Monash University exploring teenage mothers’ perception of pregnancy.

Kerry Taylor is a senior lecturer in History at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand. He works mostly on the history of the radical political movement in New Zealand, especially the Communist Party of New Zealand, of which he is writing a history. He is co-editor of *Culture and the Labour Movement: Essays on New Zealand Labour History* (1991, with John Martin) and *On the Left: Essays on Socialism in New Zealand* (2002, with Pat Moloney). He is a member of the Editorial Board of *Labour History*.

The **Victorian Trade Union Choir** was formed in Melbourne in 1990 as part of a revival of trade union choirs throughout Australia. Traditionally, songs have played a vital role in progressive social movements worldwide, and they are maintaining and developing this tradition in Victoria. The choir is a group of union members who come together to sing and provide a musical voice to the union message. The aims of the choir include encouraging trade union membership and the promotion and celebration of the philosophy of the trade union movement and social justice through song. URL: http://home.vicnet.net.au/~vtuc/

Jess Walsh is Assistant Secretary of the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union (LHMU) in Victoria, heading up the Property Services Division, organising cleaners and security guards. She is responsible for the Clean Start Campaign which is an international industry-wide campaign to organise cleaners.

Paul Williams is a PhD history student at the University of Ballarat. He is also an executive member of the Eureka Stockade Memorial Association, and has published a history of the Shearers’ Union.

Fay Woodhouse is an historian, researcher and writer with experience in the university, public and private sectors. She has a strong background in Australian history with experience writing local and shire histories, institutional histories, Victorian heritage and biography. Her PhD thesis was a study of student political engagement at the University of Melbourne, 1930-39. Current research interests include the history of early Melbourne, 19th and 20th century Australian social and political history, the physical and built environment and Australian culture. She is an Honorary Research Fellow in the Department of Historical Studies, University of Melbourne.

Clare Wright is an historian and author who has worked in politics, academia and the media. She holds a PhD in Australian Studies from the University of Melbourne and an MA in Public History from Monash University. Her PhD thesis won the inaugural Geoffrey Serle award for the best postgraduate contribution to Australian history and is the subject of her debut book, *Beyond the Ladies Lounge: Australia’s Female Publicans* (Melbourne University Press, 2003). Clare is a regular Opinion writer the *Age*, is a frequent contributor to ABC Radio and a regular member of The Brains Trust on ABC TV’s *The Einstein Factor*. Clare is currently an Australian Research Council Postdoctoral Fellow at La Trobe University. She is researching a book that retells the Eureka Stockade story from a female perspective. This research allowed Clare to make a major contribution to the official ‘Eureka 150’ commemorations in 2004 and her work has been cited in Victorian and ACT Parliaments.