

RECORDER

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Serenading Adela - A Street Opera

Peter Love

The performance of this opera at Pentridge on Sunday 7 January 2018, at 6:00 pm, was the culmination of a remarkable community mobilisation. It grew out of a sequence of events organised by the Brunswick Coburg Anti-Conscription Commemoration Committee to mark the centenary of their suburbs' disproportionately effective role in defeating the two plebiscites in 1916 and 1917. There were talks, one of which was given by Labour History executive member Dr Judy Smart on the role of women in opposing the war and conscription, and a conference on the anti-conscription campaigns.

While these traditional commemorative events were happening, a more imaginative idea was building momentum. In early 2016 a small group including the late and legendary feminist Lynn Beaton, the indefatigable organiser Nancy Aitkin and the remarkably talented musical director Jeannie Marsh hit on the idea of developing a street opera to replicate the occasion when a mostly female choir serenaded Adela Pankhurst-Walsh who was serving a sentence in Pentridge on a charge arising from her anti-war and anti-conscription agitation.

While seeking funding from Creative Victoria, Moreland City Council, the CPSU and the Victorian Trades Hall Council, they arranged a workshop where 80 people told stories of war's effect on families from which four were chosen by composer Stephen Taberner to write 'Ghosts Don't Lie'. This haunting, evocative song with Lisa-Marie Parker as lead vocalist, was performed by the Serenading Adela Choir at the Boite Singers' Festival at the Abbotsford Convent in January 2017, at Trades Hall on 11 December and at the front of the Brunswick Town Hall on 20 December. Meanwhile, Jeannie Marsh was writing the opera, comprised of a blend of her own compositions with

music from World War One and traditional socialist songs.

A prodigious amount of work went into organising, producing and rehearsing the show. While the sponsors' funding allowed for the payment of some professional musicians, musical producers and support people, the organising and rehearsing of over 100 singers and musicians was a major challenge. The five groups of performers; small choir, big choir, street band, unruly mob, and Brunswick Secondary College Singers required remarkable co-ordination to blend their respective roles in the opera.



[Photo by Peter Love]

On the evening of 7 January the performance was a little late in starting because demand for seats far exceeded capacity and there was standing room only for many. However, by the end of the performance there were no complaints as the audience was swept along by the sheer dramatic force of the performance.

The opera followed the sequence of events with Adela and fellow activists opposing the war in song as they marched or demonstrated on the streets. After Adela's arrest, the choirs, large and small, played out the serenading scene. The traditional tunes like 'Solidarity Forever', 'The Red Flag' and 'I Didn't Raise My Son to be a Soldier' were linked to the narrative flow with music and songs by Jeannie Marsh. The 'Battle of the Campaign Songs' was both a lively and amusing representation of the debates over conscription. The action then shifted to the wider canvass of the effects of the war, where 'Ghosts Don't Lie' makes the point with elegant poignancy. The performance ended with Jeannie Marsh's 'Remember Adela'. Although some of us also remembered Adela's later, unfortunate political trajectory, the opera was a rousing 'hymn of praise' to the anti-conscription campaigners, especially Adela and the women activists who were so important to the cause and its success.



[Photo by Peter Love]

In a way, the radicalising effect of WWI activism was mirrored by the experience of community mobilisation on the volunteer choristers, many of whom had never performed on stage before. 'Serenading Adela' was an engaging and very enjoyable street opera for the audience, a marvellous theatrical experience for the volunteer singers, and a remarkable achievement for Jeannie Marsh, the producers, organisers and professional singers who led several of the songs. It was a credit to all concerned and it would be a very good thing if it could be performed again to reach an even wider audience.



[Photo by Peter Love]

Low Wage Growth

Brian Smiddy

It amazes me to learn that the heads of the Reserve Bank of Australia and leading writers in the media are concerned about the low wage growth in the Australian economy. This economic phenomena over the course of history is not new. Unless the employers have been pushed by strong industrial action by trade unions, increases in wages have been very small and infrequent. Employers have not been generous in parting with their wealth.

As a former trade union official for over twenty-seven years in the printing and packaging industry, not once during my trade union employment did I learn of an employer voluntarily giving a wage increase to their employees.

The crocodile tears being expressed by some business representatives over the low wage growth is because they now realise that unless workers receive a decent wage, they do not have the ability to buy many of the necessities for daily living.

Profits of many major companies such as banks, electricity and power companies have never been higher, while the growth of wages is now at an all time low. Why do we not have a super profits tax in Australia?

Unless many other major needs of working people are addressed very soon, then the future of working families looks very bleak. Besides an adequate decent wage, some of the other concerns of workers are employment security, housing and rent control.

I have no sympathy for the employing class. Their constant attacks on the rights of trade unions to exist have been going on for years. Now even the right of workers to take strike action has been ruled invalid by the Fair Work Commission. The right to strike is fundamental in a democratic society. I only hope to live long enough to see the Australian Union Movement restored to its former glory.

Recorder to be digitised

The Melbourne Branch decided at the last AGM to digitise back issues of *Recorder*. The Melbourne branch's Vice President, Liam Byrne, will take charge of the digitisation process. We expect to have *Recorder* digitised by the middle of the year.

The State Library of Victoria holds the back copies of *Recorder* from our first issue in July 1964. These can be accessed at SLT 329.9945 R24. We'll keep you posted.

Vale Zelda D'Aprano (1928-2018)

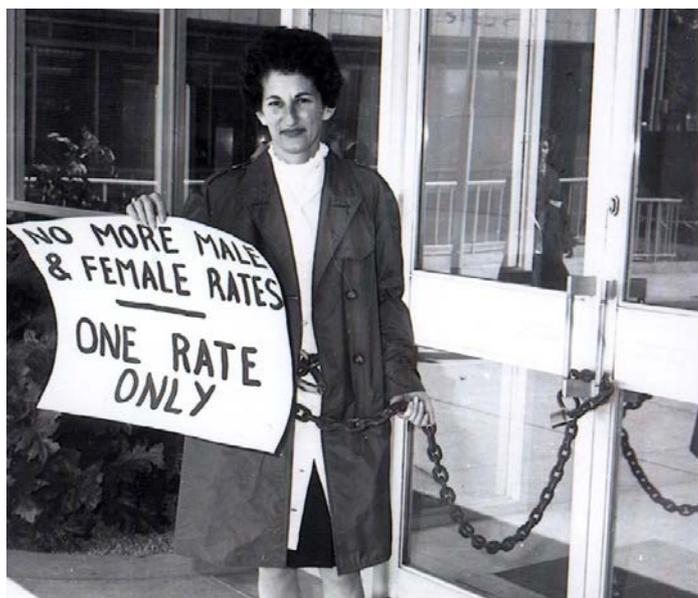
Janey Stone

Zelda D'Aprano, famous for chaining herself to the railings of the Commonwealth Building in Melbourne in 1969 to demand equal pay for women, died on 21 February, aged 90.

Zelda was born into a working class Jewish family in Carlton in 1928. Following her mother's example, she became a member of the Communist Party. Initially, she worked in factories and later for the Meat Industry Union. The meat industry was a test case for the equal pay campaign. She and other unionists were present at the Arbitration Commission ruling that the minimum wage would continue to be set at different rates for men and women. Four male judges decided not to grant 'equal pay for work of equal value' but only 'equal pay for equal work' to the few women who did the same work as men in male-dominated occupations. Female-dominated industries such as nursing missed out, and only about 5 percent of women got equal pay.

'There we were, the poor women, all sitting in Court like a lot of cows in the sale yards, while all the men out front presented arguments as to how much we were worth', Zelda later wrote. 'I felt humiliated, belittled and degraded, not for myself but for all women.'

So on 21 October 1969, Zelda chained herself to the railing, until she was removed by police. 'We decided I would chain myself [there], because the government should set the example. Private industry won't do anything if the government won't.'



Zelda's action occurred against a background of mass mobilisation. In 1968, there was mass action worldwide. In Australia in 1969, strike action defeated the penal powers used against unions for decades. In this context, it is not so surprising that Zelda chose direct action. Ten days later, on 31 October, she was

joined by Alva Geikie and Thelma Solomon. The three women chained themselves across the doors of the Arbitration Court.

The events drew enormous attention to the campaign, and led to Zelda and others establishing a Women's Action Committee (WAC) in early 1970, a group very important in the lead-up to the emergence of the women's liberation movement.

'The type of women's organisation we envisaged was a militant organisation, for we recognised that women were not going to achieve anything unless they were prepared to fight', Zelda wrote. 'We had passed the stage of caring about a 'lady-like' image because women had for too long been polite and lady-like and were still being ignored.' Over the next few years, there were several highly successful WAC protests. In the 'equality ride' on a Melbourne tram in 1970, a group of equal pay campaigners, including Zelda and Bon Hull, refused to pay more than 75 percent of the adult tram fare to protest that working women received 75 percent of male wages.

Zelda never had an easy ride. She was always up front, not afraid of conflict or disagreement, and called a spade a spade. She was a thorn in the side of many people. Recognising the need for a support group during the chaining action, she asked her trade unionist employers at Trades Hall for some women to take an hour off work to be there. They refused. When she wrote a private letter to one of the Communist leaders of the union that employed her, complaining about how he had snubbed her and other women during a social occasion, she was fired. She also attracted the attention of ASIO.

By 1971, the features of the new women's liberation movement were becoming clear. In May, the first trade union-sponsored community consultation on child care was held. In August, the Women's Action Committee sponsored a national conference on Women in the Workforce and Trade Unions. There was also a demonstration against the Miss Teenage Quest.

A pro-abortion demonstration in Melbourne in November, a brave action as the word 'abortion' was almost taboo, attracted 500 people, a significant achievement. But the Melbourne *Herald* buried it in an inside paragraph with 'Dozens of barefoot women took part in an abortion law reform march in the city today'.

Zelda, Thelma, Alva and Bon all enthusiastically joined the women's liberation movement. Their presence, and that of other older women from the Communist Party and the trade unions, including my mother Rose Stone, helped ensure that the movement had a close relationship with and understanding of working women. While we did not always see eye to eye politically, I regard Zelda and this generation of militant women activists as inspiring and admirable. With Zelda's death we are nearing the end of an era. It is very appropriate that Melbourne Trades Hall flew its flag at half mast.

Reprinted from *Red Flag*, <https://redflag.org.au/node/6222>

Vale Alan Patrick Roberts (1925-2017)

Ken Mansell

With the passing of Alan Roberts the Left in Australia has lost one of its most important thinkers. Alan was a committed revolutionary socialist, a fearlessly independent scientific opponent of nuclear energy and nuclear war, and a pioneer of eco-socialism in the era of devastating climate change.



[Alan Roberts speaking at Monash university in 1974]

Alan Roberts was born in 1925 and raised on a war widow's pension in inner-suburban Brisbane. His years at a Catholic school were not happy and he left at fifteen to work in a factory. An avid reader from an early age, Alan's life as a young intellectual began to take shape. His interest in science found expression in the short stories he had published in newspapers and magazines. He happened upon Brisbane's 'Peoples' Bookshop' run by the Communist Party and was converted to socialism by reading George Bernard Shaw. At 19, Alan enlisted in the RAAF and was stationed in New Guinea until war's end. He enrolled at the University of Queensland on a returned serviceman's scholarship and combined his studies with editorship of the student newspaper *Semper Floreat*. Alan joined the Communist Party in Brisbane and in the early fifties worked as a reporter on the *Queensland Guardian*, specialising in issues affecting youth.

Failing in his initial applications for teaching and blacklisted, Alan enrolled at Sydney University where he completed a Physics M.A and taught from 1955 to 1966. One of the many disillusioned Communists in Australia following the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian uprising, Alan became a forthright opponent of Stalinism

and was expelled from the Party in 1958 for 'Trotskyism'. He wrote for the 'New Left' journal *Outlook* (Sydney) and began his sixty-year association with *Arena* (Melbourne). After moving to Melbourne in 1966 to teach at Monash, Alan retained his connection to the Balmain 'Fourth International' grouping, spreading its unorthodox ideas of 'workers control' and 'self-management' through which he interpreted the French revolt of May 1968. To the sixties generation of radical students Alan was an inspirational elder who championed the militant Monash Labor Club, fulminated against the Vietnam War, and challenged arbitrary University authority.

Alan put his store of scientific knowledge at the service of numerous social movements, playing an important public role in campaigns against the nuclear arms race (in CND and PND), French Tests in the Pacific, and the Omega base in Gippsland. Over a period of fifty years, Alan hammered away at the fallacy of safe nuclear power ('the peaceful atom'). He testified at the Ranger Enquiry and helped lay the foundation of the Movement Against Uranium Mining (MAUM). Alan became a major contributor to the science of ecology by demonstrating the link between powerlessness in everyday life and rampant consumerism. He was an authority on the mathematical modelling of ecological problems and solutions.

The death of Alan Roberts on 12 December 2017 of severe pulmonary disease marks the end of an extraordinary life devoted to the labour movement and the Left. We will miss him.



[Alan marching against uranium mining in 1979. Tom Uren and Cliff Dolan (ACTU president) are to his left. Source: Hall Greenland's <https://watermelongreenland.wordpress.com>]

Vale Ken Inglis (1929-2017)

Frank Bongiorno

Emeritus Professor Ken Inglis, who died on 1 December 2017, was a member of that impressive group of Australian historians who emerged from the history department at the University of Melbourne in the years immediately following the Second World War. He was arguably the greatest of them. The Melbourne School, as it became known, is often seen as the creation of the leadership of Max Crawford, who succeeded Ernest Scott as professor in 1937, but it was equally the product of a city and its reform-minded intellectual culture.

Ken appreciated the worth of this culture, as well as the accomplishments of the Melbourne School, but he also held himself a few paces apart from it. As Robert Menzies said of himself, Ken was 'not born to the purple'. He once told me that as an academic, he had been fortunate enough to live the kind of life that his father would have liked for himself: that of a scholar. Stan Inglis was a timber merchant whose business had faltered during the Depression, and the family moved from Heidelberg to more humble circumstances in Preston. Unlike several of those who made their mark as historians in his generation, Ken was a product of the state system, matriculating from Melbourne High School after becoming dux of Northcote High in 1944. His involvement in the Student Christian Movement also set him apart from many of the radicals studying at the university in the late 1940s.

Ken's first ambition was to become a journalist, but he was discouraged by a newspaper editor who warned of the likely difficulties of finding a job in that profession at a time when so many returned servicemen would be looking to re-establish themselves. I was amused when I learned recently from Peter Browne, at 'A Laconic Colloquium' held in Ken's honour, that Ken had been inspired in his desire to become a journalist by reading Isobel Ann Shead's *Sandy*, the story of a boy who becomes a reporter. This was also my father's favourite book as a child – he would have been half a dozen years older than Ken – and I had also enjoyed it, briefly contemplating that I might follow in Sandy's footsteps. Perhaps the book has been more successful at producing historians than journalists.

But in many ways, Ken was both. Alongside all those history books and scholarly articles, he produced a distinguished body of journalism, most famously in Tom Fitzgerald's *Nation*. Among his earliest books is his much-admired study, *The Stuart Case*. His interest in the fate of Max Stuart arose from his journalism while working as a young historian at the University of Adelaide. Ken was heavily involved in the successful campaign to save Stuart, an Aboriginal circus worker accused of raping and murdering a young girl, from the gallows. But Ken's commitment as a public intellectual – and one who wrote on a wide range of issues – did not seem to detract at all from his work as a scholar and

teacher. Indeed, his historical writing, while observing all the academic conventions, had about it a liveliness commonly associated with the high-quality journalism that Ken so enjoyed in magazines such as the *New Yorker*.

Ken's books cover an extraordinary range but as a scholar, Ken will probably be recalled most often in Australia as a ground-breaking historian of the Anzac Legend, and both nationally and internationally as the author of *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape* (1998). This monumental and much-honoured book crowned decades of research and reflection on what the historical study of war memorials could tell us about the society that had built them. As Ken explained at the beginning of that book his curiosity about the subject went back to his childhood, but there was also in this engagement a concern with the place of religiosity in modern societies that also found expression in his early scholarly work at Oxford on the Churches and the working class in Victorian England, and his later journalistic contributions. We can now recognise Ken's famous 1965 *Meanjin* article on 'The Anzac Tradition' as the foundation on which a whole field of Australian research – including his own – would be built. And when considered alongside the work of his great friend and colleague Bill Gammage, we can also discern a much broader cultural influence that would recast how Australians understood their relationship to the Great War and its legacies. But to focus on Ken's scholarly work in this way fails to do his career justice, since so much of his activity was concerned with creating opportunities for others, such as through the multi-volume Bicentennial project *Australians: A Historical Library*.

I last saw Ken at his home in Melbourne in late September last year, just a few weeks before his death. A Richmond supporter, he was much looking forward to the grand final about to be held, the first his Tigers had contested for 35 years (and they won!). Personally, I am not alone in owing Ken a great debt. With the late Barry Smith, he was a conscientious and supportive PhD supervisor who taught me much about the writing craft. He was also a model for anyone interested in having an impact beyond the academy, in the wider world of ideas, and he encouraged me to think in terms of how I could contribute to public debate. He was an advocate of his students' wares, too – helping me, as he had others, to get my first book published. I was deeply touched when, in his wheelchair, he attended an event at Reading's Bookshop in Melbourne to mark the publication of a book of mine. He was a wise, kind and generous man, who will be remembered not only for his great achievements as a scholar, but for the rare personal qualities that made him an inspiration to so many. 'An absolute champion', an economist of my (and Ken's) acquaintance told me a few months before Ken's death. I can only agree.

[This is an abridged version of that first published in *Biographical Footnotes*, no. 18 (2018) (newsletter of the National Centre of Biography). The full version can be read here: <http://history.cass.anu.edu.au/centres/ncb/publications/biographical-footnotes-18>]

Traces of Gramsci in Turin

Andrew Moore

Of all the eminent intellectuals connected to the northern Italian city of Torino (Turin) perhaps Antonio Gramsci is the most illustrious. Born in Sardinia, Gramsci moved to Turin in 1911 to study at the university. Later he thrived there as a socialist intellectual and activist. In 1919 he was part of a group that established the weekly newspaper, *L'Ordine Nuovo* (*The New Order*) and started workers' councils that were to be the building blocks of a workers' run state. Imprisoned by Mussolini, Gramsci's enduring status as a socialist intellectual, of course, lies with the notion of 'hegemony'. Developed in his *Prison Notebooks*, this was the means by which the ruling class maintains its ascendancy through ideas not simply by force or the threat of force. After ten years of imprisonment Gramsci's health was destroyed. He died in 1937.

For all his prominence as an activist and theoretician, Gramsci's memory has an uncertain presence in Turin. Even the museum of (anti-fascist) resistance ignores him. Nonetheless, the Istituto Gramsci Torino (Gramsci Institute) based in Turin continues to fly the flag. Apart from maintaining a large archive and library, it organises exhibitions and events. (Though to mono-lingual Australians these may be a little inaccessible: <http://www.gramscitorino.it>) There is also an excellent pizza restaurant in the centre of the city, indeed in Via Gramsci, named after him. That said there are many Via Gramscis across Italy including one in Mussolini's home town, Predappio. No doubt the modern-day fascists who gather there to honour the memory of Il Duce at particular times throughout the year, such as the anniversary of the March on Rome, are less than impressed about that.



[The Hotel. Photo Andrew Moore]

Casa Gramsci, where Gramsci rented an apartment between 1913 and 1922 on Piazza Carlina in the centre of Turin, also has a contested contemporary resonance. In 2014 at that site, NH Hotels, an

upmarket Spanish hotel chain, proposed to name their beautifully renovated four-five star hotel after Gramsci. In the nineteenth century the building had been a charitable hostel. The proposal enraged many Italian intellectuals who found the prospect of Gramsci's name being used to promote a luxury hotel for the bourgeoisie irksome. One, art historian Tomaso Montanari, argued that this was like calling an investment bank in Bethlehem 'Jesus Ltd' or dedicating a shooting range in Delhi to Mahatma Gandhi. In Montanari's view it was 'amazing' to associate the name of someone who wrote 'there cannot be perfect and complete political equality without economic equality' with a powerful symbol of luxury and inequality.

At the time the cadres of the Gramsci Institute in Turin were less hard-minded on the issue. The Institute's director, Sergio Scamuzzi, argued that apart from generating many jobs – an outcome of which Gramsci clearly would have approved – naming the hotel after Gramsci was an unparalleled chance to raise his profile both in Turin and across the world.

The upshot of the controversy was that hotel was named more prosaically. It is now the NH Collection Torino Piazza Carlina. The Gramsci Institute and the hotel management, however, continue to enjoy cordial relations. Together they manage a small foundation that promotes Gramscian studies. The Gramsci Institute uses a small space at the rear of the hotel, at the corner of Via San Massimo and Via Maria Vittoria, for exhibitions and other events.

A plaque at the front adjoining Piazza Carlina and the hotel web site acknowledge Gramsci and the hotel's connections to him appropriately. So should staying at the hotel be regarded as an act of ideological calumny? This depends, perhaps, on whether one regards Gramsci's connection, eighty years after his death, with a luxury hotel as part of the rich tapestry of life or reprehensible decadence? After all, if you are a superannuated antipodean visitor to Turin you have to stay somewhere. Why not stay in a hotel that recognises its revolutionary past!

Turin itself is a superb place to visit. Despite heavy bombing in World War Two, it has all the texture and charm of many major Italian cities with few of the aggravations mass tourism has visited upon other places like Venice and Florence. Appropriately, given the city's one time significance to the Italian car industry, (the 'T' in Fiat stands for Torino), it has an extraordinary car museum that is unusually attentive to the wider cultural and social significance of the automobile. Nearby is the old Fiat factory at Lingotto, now a massive shopping mall. Its famous roof-top test track, used in many films, is accessible via an adjoining art gallery. Turin is a foodie's paradise and over the road in Lingotto is the Eataly supermarket and restaurant complex where the global Slow Food movement began. The national film museum, a short walk from the Torino Piazza Carlina, may well be the best in Europe.



[The Plaque at the Hotel. Photo: Andrew Moore]

Best of all, book culture continues to thrive in Turin. Apart from many excellent bookshops, there are kilometres of street-side booksellers plying their trade at the weekends along major thoroughfares like Via Roma, as well as thousands of customers.



[One of Turin's many bookstores. Photo: Andrew Moore]

Antonio Gramsci's legacy is in good shape in Italy. His works are still in print: a stylish Penguin-classic style series is widely available. Apart from the group in Turin, a Gramsci Institute in Rome also promotes the study of Gramsci's work. Another in Sardinia runs a museum in Ghilarza in Gramsci's former family home and organises a summer school. Given the growing significance of cultural tourism – and in Italy this can involve more than *Duomo* fetishism – the ability to learn first hand about the nation's labour history is welcome.

Paying homage to the 'Tree of Knowledge'

Brian Boyd

A recent visit to Queensland provided an opportunity to pass through Barcaldine and salute the famous 'Tree of Knowledge'. The 'Tree' is a key symbol of Australia's industrial and political past, especially pertaining to the 1891 shearers' strike. Barcaldine was the central location of one of our most bitter union versus employer/government colonial confrontations. Over a century and a quarter later it was great to see numerous vehicles belonging to holidaying 'grey nomads' lined up in the street in front of its centre of town location. Many travellers make the effort to pay their respects to the original but now chemically fossilised great 'Tree', where thousands of shearers had once assembled and pledged solidarity. An offshoot from the original 'Tree' is now growing well at the nearby Workers Heritage Centre.



[Grey nomads line up to pay their respects at Barcaldine]

Back in 2006 the 'Tree of Knowledge' was poisoned by vandals using 40 litres of glyphosate. The Queensland ALP government and union movement stepped in to



preserve the tree trunk and main branch structure. An attractive new housing was also constructed around it. The ALP also posted a \$10,000 reward for the arrest of the perpetrators of the 'vengeful vandalism'. At the same time, when the writer was Secretary of the Victorian Trades Hall Council, he offered an extra personal reward of \$5,000 as well. Colonial Australia saw two main insurrections, involving arms, between white settlers and government backed forces: the Eureka Stockade of 1854 and the Great Shearers' Strike of 1891. Both events had major impacts on Australia's national development.

Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

Rowan Cahill

A review of Michael Quinlan, *The Origins of Worker Mobilisation: Australia 1788-1850* (Routledge: NY and Oxon, 2018).

In the tradition of E.P. Thompson, redolent of the work of Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, Michael Quinlan's *The Origins of Worker Mobilisation: Australia 1788-1850* is magisterial and exhaustive. 'Magisterial' because it is game-changing in regard to understanding Australian history. 'Exhaustive' because its sources are rich and inclusive, and the trawling and interrogation of these deep and thorough.

Origins is the sort of historical research/writing the modern university is structured, either by design or as collateral damage, to variously frustrate or prevent. Quinlan has worked three decades on this book. It is 'slow' history, as opposed to the fast-food production of scholarship demanded by the academy, and the quick-change processes involved in the competition for research grants. An older scholar, Quinlan's roots are in a time before the straps and buckles of the neoliberal straightjacket were fastened, and like Houdini he has managed to shrug free.

In a nutshell, Quinlan establishes the existence in Australia of a hitherto hidden and rich history of industrial action by working people during the period 1788 to 1850. The body of evidence he assembles radically challenges the long held perception by conservative and radical scholars that significant worker mobilisation was unique to the period after 1850 as the colonies variously shook free from their convict pasts and moved towards self-government.

In Quinlan's hands the achievement in Australia of most of Chartism's democratic demands well ahead of the Britain of their origination, and Australia's world-leading social progress trajectory in the latter half of the nineteenth century, are not post-1850 specific as traditionally accepted, but built on the shoulders of a rich and vigorous history of working class agitation, dissent and mobilisation during the first half of the nineteenth century. Post-Quinlan, we now have a whole nineteenth century of class politics, dissidence, contestation, mobilisation, rather than a quietist century that dissenting and democratically came to life following the post-1850 discovery of gold and the end of the convict system.

Quinlan begins by regarding the Australian colonial administration as a 'state' positioned in two inter-related projects: British imperialism, and the development of capitalism. Geographical factors determined that the lifeline for each was the sea, the whole project linked globally to trade, to movements of people and capital, and involving intensive labour, unfree (convict) and free.

Proceeding in an 'industrial relations' (IR) manner, Quinlan examines the huge, complex, and diverse raft of governing labour laws and regulations that developed to further these projects, the common factor that they protected and privileged employers and capital while disadvantaging labour, often severely and punitively so. Quinlan demonstrates how this labour/legal regime was variously contested, challenged, at times ameliorated, by working people, unfree and free, male and female, European and non-European, across all industries and occupations prior to 1850.

Other scholars have variously been here before, notably Terry Irving whose *Southern Tree of Liberty* (2006) demonstrated significant political mobilisation by workers in the 1840s. Quinlan acknowledges intellectual debts and the shoulders on whom he stands. But his unique and monumental contribution is the documentation of worker resistance, dissent, contestation, and organisation from 1788 through to 1850. This is why his research took so long, the bulk of his data only gathered via the systematic and consecutive deep reading of the colonial press, along with official and personal records of all kinds.

Included in this was a wealth of ships' logbooks, enabling the recreation from 'below' of merchant ship voyages of all kinds, and the rich history prior to 1850 of resistance by maritime workers in the context of Australian colonial jurisdictions against conditions and legislation more barbaric and punitive than those experienced by land-bound labour. Prior to 1850 the merchant marine and whaling contributed more industrial action proportional to the size of its workforce than that of the shore-based workforce.

Overall, across industries and occupations, Quinlan's work ends many historical silences, and gives life and voice to the names, events, places, sites and the geographies of resistance. The overwhelming bulk of this data has been 'unknown' since first documented in colonial times.

Quinlan began his research manually, and was later assisted by computer technology. Via the National Library's Trove digitisation of the colonial press and the employment of a diversity of search terms, his trawling of the past went very deep. The result was a data base of some 6,426 industrial actions during the period. Quinlan says this number is probably 60-70% of what probably existed, and will expand as more records turn up, and as the interrogation of existing records matures. In tandem with computer technology, the data base enabled the generation of thirty-nine tables and figures that bolster Quinlan's account, providing a perspective of Australian colonial IR prior to 1850 never previously available.

Central to Quinlan's data collection is what he classifies as industrial action and mobilisation. He is not on the lookout for the sort of mass actions associated with the second half of the 19th century and trade unionism. In his approach, a strike is the withdrawal of labour by two or more people, and this includes tactics like absconding,

desertion, and other forms of action. Because of legal restraints/constraint, and the punitive disciplining of labour, significant planning most likely went into the smallest of actions to prevent discovery in the planning and to limit punitive fallout.

A key employer/state tactic of the time was to punish ringleaders in order to intimidate others. When officially reported, industrial unrest thus appeared to be limited to a few, masking its extent. As Quinlan explains, even the smallest of industrial actions was, in all probability, the work of a larger collective, and this has to be understood in relation to the legal regime of the time and the organisational/employment system in which the action occurred.

Quinlan sees much in common with today's world of work and the period he examines. He writes with the radical certainty that those who are oppressed can only redress their grievances by making those who rule uneasy, with even the smallest actions contributing to this unease. All of which, collectively and eventually, makes a difference. Overall, Quinlan's book is testament to the possibilities and persistence of dissent and rebellion, despite draconian and oppressive hegemonies that would have it otherwise – yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

The Civil War in the United States

Barry York

A review of Andrew Zimmerman (ed.) *The Civil War in the United States: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels* (International Publishers: New York, 2nd edition, 2016).

This collection of writings by Marx and Engels about the American Civil War was originally published in 1937 by Dr H. M. Morais. Dr Morais lost his college teaching job as a result. It's good that in 2016 it can be published as a second edition without any job losses. Zimmerman, a professor of history in Washington DC, provides very useful introductory contextualisation to each section. These are helpful for those of us who need reminding of the significance of the various places, battles, politicians and military figures. There are nine parts in all, from Marx and Engels on slavery and abolition before the civil war through to 'Slavery and the Civil War in Capital'.

Marx and Engels certainly knew their stuff. Considering they wrote from England, their knowledge of American geography and topography is astonishing. It's remarkable to read the extent of their detailed knowledge of the unfolding struggle against the 'oligarchy of 300,000 slave holders'. They drew on wide sources of information, including correspondence with German communists who had fled to the United States following the defeat of the 1848 European revolutions and who took up arms for the Union. But they also read the American newspapers, including the *New York Tribune*. And Engels even communicated with a Confederate major. This is how it should be, of course.

'No investigation, no right to speak'. They did not see it through the lens of dogma, or force the events into some formula or ideological schema. Their letters and other writings reveal a materialist dialectical approach, an understanding that things unfolded as they did, influenced by human thought and motored by action, but not as one might wish they should. Revolutions are innovative and experimental, devising their own strategies and defining their own nature.

We must keep in mind that the American Civil War was for Marx and Engels an equivalent of 'Vietnam' (for those of us politicised in the 1960s). It was the big issue – 'the most momentous thing happening in the world today' – especially for internationalists who see no distinction between 'them' and 'us'. The US struggle against slavery was also a source of inspiration following the dispiriting rise of Bonapartism in Europe.

It was also inspiring for Marx and Engels to witness the great support by the English working classes for the Union forces, at a time when the British ruling class was sympathetic to the Confederacy. I was surprised by the extent of Engels' military knowledge. He sure loved guns. Marx, by contrast, comes across as more adept at political and economic analysis. Engels emerges as less optimistic than Marx. But for Marx there was no doubt of Union victory. In a letter to his uncle (yes, he had one), Marx knew that the North had 'a last card up its sleeve in the shape of a slave revolution'.

Marx and Engels were great pro-war 'hawks'. Not for them the ineffective non-violent tactics of naval blockades. They supported and welcomed military invasion of the South. The edited selection of writings reveal how Marx and Engels saw through the false argument that the emerging war was not about slavery but rather tariffs.

And they contended with the 'ultra-leftists' who were highly critical of Lincoln. It took 18 months before Lincoln issued the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation in September 1862, but Marx and Engels recognised him as a strategic thinker who was creating conditions to take his class, the working class, with him against the pre-industrial slave owners. Lincoln was their 'Ho Chi Minh'. Marx's letter to Lincoln on behalf of the International Workingmen's Association in 1864 can be read here: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/iwma/documents/1864/lincoln-letter.htm>

Revolutions do not always succeed, they can fail, but they can push things forward. When one fails, you have another. Marx and Engels were very disappointed by Andrew Johnson's presidency, following Lincoln's assassination. He restored plantations to ex-slave owners and reversed the planned land reform program. Slavery was abolished but racial and class hierarchies kept in place. It took another century, marked by Jim Crow segregation and lynchings, before the next leap forward in 1965 with the Civil Rights Act. The faint-hearted should be warned that Marx and Engels sometimes used the 'N' word. They used it infrequently and (usually) ironically.

A new history of the AWU

Geoffrey Robinson

A review of Nick Dyrenfurth, *A Powerful Influence on Australian Affairs: A new history of the AWU* (Melbourne University Press: Melbourne, 2017).

Do we need another history of the Australian Workers' Union (AWU)? In 1986 there was John Merritt's pioneering analysis of the union's early years and in 1996 Mark Hearn & Harry Knowles' survey history up to 1994. I was sceptical when I received this book but I was convinced by the time I finished it that it made a worthwhile contribution to Australian labour history.

Trade union history is difficult, even more so for the AWU. The union has covered an exceptional range of occupations, with a vast geographic spread and has a long history of internal conflict. AWU officialdom has also been an integral component of the Labor Party, both at the level of organisation and in government. There is also a challenge for trade union histories of defining their audience: is it union members, activists and union office bearers, those on the left generally or readers of history? The popular format for union histories is usually to combine a description of the labour process with a narrative of internal politics and some empathic descriptions of rank-and-file activists.

Where union histories tend to fall short is in providing a description of what unions actually do. What is the daily work of organisers and industrial officers? How is industrial negotiation handled? This deficiency is shared by Dyrenfurth's book. Where he is particularly strong is on the ethos and values of the union, the cultural labourism that it incarnated. The downside of this is that union ideology is neglected: right-wing labourism was more than an ethos: it involved beliefs about how the economy worked. Wayne Swan sits within this tradition and its influence currently grows within the contemporary Labor right in challenging the legacy of Paul Keating's social market liberalism. Dyrenfurth is a distinguished representative of the current Labor right and the book is in part a labour of love. His focus is to defend the union against its critics from the 'hard right' and 'far left'.

Dyrenfurth's narrative of the union's formation seeks to balance its romantic traditions with the realities of frequent worker indifference and division. It is a clear and lively narrative. My major criticism would be that it fails to engage with the work of John Merritt and Ray Markey. They emphasise the extent to which 1) arbitration and engagement with the state was central to the AWU's viability (Merritt) and 2) that the early AWU drew on a populist base that was not particularly working class (Markey).

Their work was an implicit response to the romantic school of union history represented by the narratives of W. G. Spence but also to the radical left, with their belief in the inherent radicalism of the working class. Despite frequent

ballot-rigging and abuse of power the labourist right has retained a largely unchallenged dominance of the AWU. Neo-liberals and Marxists disdain this tradition.

Dyrenfurth describes at length the union's involvement with the Labor Party, but I would have liked more on what it actually did. There are many interesting asides: for example, that the pastoral industry award frequently functioned as a minimum basis for negotiations between workers and employers. Who conducted these negotiations? Did the union seek to manage this process?

The narrative of the union's politics is very much focused on the struggles within the leadership, but there is a perceptive description of the shift from a collective model of leadership towards a much more authoritarian style from the 1930s. It would be interesting to consider further why the first generation of leaders largely failed to pass their skills onto their successors.

A major driver of the AWU's growth was amalgamations. Two of these mergers receive extensive treatment: the 1913-14 merger with the Queensland-based Amalgamated Workers' Association and the 1993 merger with the Federation of Industrial Manufacturing and Engineering Employees. Dyrenfurth provides a clear analysis of the chaotic outcomes of the later merger and correctly highlights the role of Bill Shorten as union secretary from 1998 in rebuilding the union's fortunes and stabilising its position. He is obviously deeply sympathetic and supportive of Shorten but is also willing to make criticism when he considers it appropriate.

This is a commissioned history and obliged to cover the entire history of the union but some areas, that Dyrenfurth passes over, seem particularly interesting. The ability of the AWU to negotiate mergers contradicts the scholarly orthodoxy that industrial arbitration encouraged the persistence of small unions. I would have liked more on the rise of the left within the union in the later Accord period and why it failed to mount a successful challenge to the labourist right, even at a time when the institutional foundations of labourism were being swept away.

For a long period, the AWU received a fairly critical treatment from left-inclined labour historians. From the 1990s as the crisis of social democracy impacted on all factions of the labour movement, the AWU and labourism have received a more sympathetic treatment. If there is a future for Australian unionism, the history of the AWU offers many lessons. Corruption and oligarchy is part of the story but so also was the ability to organise a wide range of workers, many of whom were conservative, across a vast number of workplaces and to creatively employ political engagement for this purpose.

The modern Australian economy more resembles that of the early twentieth century than that of the post-war manufacturing epoch (which preoccupies contemporary left populists such as Dennis Glover). The AWU is not just labour's past.

From The Deserts Profits Come

Drew Cottle

Review of Braden Ellem, *The Pilbara: From The Deserts Profits Come* (UWA Publishing: Crawley, Western Australia, 2017).

Braden Ellem has written a critical labour history of open cut mining in the Pilbara in Australia's north west. His focus is on the recent history of the mining of iron ore in this remote desert region. Geography and geology are central to this mining history. The Pilbara contains the richest bodies of iron ore in the world – land sacred to its Indigenous peoples from whom it was stolen, first by white pastoralists, and later, beginning in the 1960s, corporate mining companies. Ellem explains mining in the Pilbara was of a new type in Australia. It was reliant on an export market in Japan and later South Korea and now China, the investment of international capital and an inexperienced workforce prepared to live and labour in an isolated location bereft of basic social and economic amenities.

Ellem suggests that the remoteness, harsh working and living conditions of the mines, and rawness of the newly created mining towns, created a militant collectivism and determination in the mine workers that seemed to ensure their domination of the workplace. Through industrial struggle these bodies of workers at the major mines achieved massive wage increases, considerable improvement in social amenities at work and in the mining towns. Neither the mine owners, managers nor trade union officials in Perth or at the national level could control their volatility, decisions to strike or appease what were seen as impossible demands, such as air-conditioning, fresh water and other facilities either in the mining towns or on the work sites. They were never 'prophets from the desert' of a new kind of unionism, as Ellem had hoped. The measure of their social advances was always dependent on the compliance of mining capital. In the period of the mid-1960s and into the 1970s, with the establishment of the mining operations and their associated logistics, the mining corporations could and needed to accede to these proletarian demands. These demands and advances never threatened the ultimate power of mining capital on the 'frontier of control'.

After the Hawke Labor government's establishment of the Prices and Incomes Accord between corporate capital and organised labour in 1983, with its nebulous promise of a 'Social Wage', the mining companies in the Pilbara embarked on an industrial strategy which would fundamentally change the nature of work and the composition of the workforce in the mine sites. When Peko-Wallsend, a holding company, took control of the Robe River mine, the workers were locked out. Charles Copeman, the Peko chief executive, ignored existing work practices, refused negotiations with unions and decided who would work at the mine, and the pay and conditions of workers. The Robe River example emboldened management at the other Pilbara mines. All that had been

won on the industrial frontier by the militancy of the Pilbara mine workers was eroded or disappeared. The unions representing the mineworkers found no restitution of their existing conditions in the industrial commissions of the State. Management in the Pilbara mines would exercise its prerogative in the emerging era of neoliberalism.

The turning point in this class struggle in the Pilbara was the Hamersley Iron company's 1979 victory over its workforce after a ten week strike which had broad union support. As Ellem emphasises, iron ore mining in the Pilbara was fully integrated into a global supply chain by the 1980s. If there was a downturn in demand for iron ore in its export market in Japan, South Korea and increasingly China, mining capital's investment would suffer. Profitability of the Pilbara mines became the overriding axiom of mining capital. Mine management implemented an effective policy of de-unionisation in the Pilbara. From being a region of union militancy, the Pilbara was transformed during the long mining boom of the 1990s until 2010, into a place of industrial quiescence. Few of the mines' workforce were union members, and company built- mining towns experienced a rapid de-population as a mobile Fly-In, Fly-Out workforce on individual work contracts replaced resident mine workers and their families. Driverless ore hauliers operated remotely by computer programmers in Perth transformed and intensified the transportation process, dispensing with the problems of wages, leave, go-slows or strikes. Driverless trains with their two hundred car ore cargo, from mine site to the export loading dock have been introduced or are planned, in the Pilbara. Operation of these automated trains would also occur outside the Pilbara. The culmination of a fully automated work process for mining capital would be driverless digging and crushing machinery operated remotely. If Ellem cannot contemplate the possibility of a mining worksite where human labour is absent, will global mining corporations?

The 'spatial fixity' of the geographical location of the Pilbara mines had not prevented mining corporations overcoming the labour problem at the point of extraction. The workforce was numerically reduced, devoid of a strong union presence (5% of Pilbara mineworkers are unionists), and 'de-territorialized' through technological innovation by mining capital. Beginning in the mid-1980s, the mining process in the Pilbara was entirely integrated into the circuits of globalised capital. Ellem's narrative in part documents this contemporary phenomenon in capital history.

Dennis Kevans' poem, 'Rivers of Gold' is apposite when examining Ellem's history of iron ore mining. The militant workers as 'prophets' was always a chimera. The profits from the Pilbara fuelled the mining boom, enriched the comprador rentiers Gina Rinehart and Andrew Forrest, removed a Labor Prime Minister and a mining tax, 'remade' its mining work force and condemned its Indigenous people to deeper marginality and poverty. The Pilbara's profits remain dependent upon the logic of capital accumulation. If there is a lessening of demand for its iron ore, no matter the increase in its supply, those profits too will disappear in the desert.

Spain in Our Hearts

John Tully

Review of Adam Hochschild, *Spain in Our Hearts: Americans in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016). 438 pp. Hardback.

The title of Adam Hochschild's marvellous book on the Spanish Civil War is taken from Albert Camus's requiem for that doomed struggle: 'Men of my generation have had Spain in our hearts ... It was there that they learned ... that one can be right and yet be beaten, that force can vanquish spirit, and there are times when courage is not rewarded.'

Hochschild's sympathies are wholeheartedly with the Republic, but he does not gloss over the less savoury details, including the persecution of anti-Stalinists by Stalin's henchmen. Despite this, he is in no doubt that the wrong side won, for the consequences for the Spanish people were the 36 years of Franco's vile dictatorship.

Much has been written about the war. The best histories—those of Paul Preston, for example—are superbly written and researched. The best memoirs—including George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*—are as relevant as the day they were written. Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is an unforgettable novel of the war. Yet Hochschild manages to convey fresh insights in a book that is both passionate and clear-sighted.

Although the book focuses on the contribution of Americans to the Republican war effort, it nevertheless shines a bright light on aspects of the war that are generally forgotten. Even at the time, for instance, the foreign press contingent were utterly unaware of the fact of the immense social revolution that was unfolding across the country—a revolution, moreover, that was impelled from below by the oppressed workers and peasants of Spain themselves.

Spain in Our Hearts is a serious historical work but it is no dry-as-dust academic tome. Hochschild has a novelist's ability to make the events he describes live for the reader. He vividly evokes the sorrows and sufferings of the American volunteers of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, who were used as shock troops against the fascists: over 3,000 went to Spain and some 681 died there.

He has an eye for telling detail: the lonely grave of an American volunteer secretly maintained by villagers during the long years of dictatorship; the fascists dancing in the blood of murdered Republics while the local bishop looked on; the fascist officer who ordered his men to shoot a captured Republican deserter through a mouthful of fried eggs.

It is almost as if we are standing with the International Brigades on the barricades of the University City on the outskirts of Madrid, the battle cry of *¡No Pasaran* echoing

across the gulf of the years. Together with the Lincolns, we re-live the desperate retreat across the Ebro River—the last battle they fought before their repatriation from Spain in 1938.

I teared up at Hochschild's account of the Lincolns' final march past in Barcelona before 300,000 cheering people, and at his account of their triumphant return to the city many decades later as octogenarian honorary citizens of Spain.

We feel, too, fierce anger at the farce of 'non-intervention' which allowed Hitler and Mussolini to send thousands of tanks and aircraft, plus whole armies of 'volunteers' to aid Franco, while at the same time starving the Republic of the weapons it desperately needed to defend itself.

Worse still was the supply of oil and petrol, rubber, trucks, and other essential commodities on credit to the fascists by American corporations, prominent among them Texaco. Hochschild describes, too, how Texaco executives actually 'fingered' Republican oil tankers for destruction by Mussolini's submarines.

There can be no doubt that 'force vanquished spirit'; that the Republic was smashed in a grossly unequal struggle; but the courage of the vanquished still inspires us. The book concludes with the words of a Lincoln's niece, who visited the scene of his death at Brunete 75 years earlier:

'I told him that his coming to Spain with the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, his willingness to give everything he had believing it could make the world more fair, more free—that this volunteering, hopeful spirit was a source of profound inspiration.'

And so it is. Franco's bestial dictatorship is dead, but the struggle the Lincolns gave their lives for is not over—as the Spanish would say, *la lucha continúa*, the struggle continues—for a better world.

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*An important review of a new book on Moss Cass will be published in the July issue

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