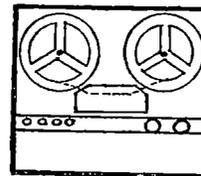


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MELBOURNE BRANCH
AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF LABOUR HISTORY

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EDITORIAL.

FEBRUARY 1969

The next meeting of the Melbourne Group will be held at 61 Hardware Street, Melbourne on Monday 24th February, 1969 at 7.45 p.m. when the Guest Speaker will be Frank Donovan, veteran of the Timber Workers Union also an officer and radical - 'Experiences in a Lifetime of Working Class activity'. Members and friends cordially welcome.

A four volume reprint in facsimile of 'The Poor Mans Guardian' totalling 1980 pages is due in January. The Guardian was a rebel paper of England in the 1830's defying the law imposing a 4d tax on newspapers to handicap the poor man getting the news.

Some 750 men women and children were imprisoned for selling the Guardian and other 'unstamped' papers.

In 1836 the tax was reduced to a 1d - The Guardian had nearly won;

The autobiography of Sir MacFarlan Burnett has appeared and should be of great interest to political students besides the scientist.

The Society are printing a thesis on 'Maurice Blackburn' 1934-1944, by his granddaughter Sue Blackburn. It will be on sale through the Melbourne Group and if adopted by the Canberra Executive Committee will be issued as a free pamphlet. A limited edition only is being printed. Price about 35 cents.

The new Edition of Jauncey's 'Conscription in Australia' has now been published by Macmillans, South Melbourne.

MAURICE BLACKBURN by H. Payne.

Maurice Blackburn was an outstanding personality in the Australian Labor Movement. From his student days until his demise he rendered sincere and unstinted service to the Labor Party and the working class of this country. His being, his mind, his work, was always directed to the socialist objectives.

During his lifetime he was always ready to lend a hand in all fields of effort that would advance a step further the movement to

make life worth living for the people.

As a solicitor he acted for several trade unions and his stress on 'Conciliation' as distinct from 'Arbitration' made his name in the Courts of Law. His pamphlet on 'Arbitration' will be studied for many years to come by both opponents and supporters.

Maurice never refused to take classes at the Labor College nor fail to be at most of the weekend rallies on the platform advocating or supporting or combatting controversial questions of the day.

He was a great reader and had a grip on International problems he was always in advance in the thinking of the Labor Movement. He was a straight goer, he hated fought and exposed corruption when it raised its head. He played politics very cleanly always expounding his Labor Policy. He preferred ice cream to liquor. He was honest and steadfast for socialism and it seemed that every utterance he made was directed towards creating a new order for the working man.

Consistent in his opposition to conscription he was also tenacious in his advocacy of peace. He was a brilliant debater, a forceful speaker and was always well informed on most questions that were being discussed at Labor Conference, Parliament, or in public places.

The Labor movement owes a debt to Maurice Blackburn and sooner or later will give him the credit of being one of the Greatest of our Great men who have made, built and led our thoughts to be vigorous, constructive, and objective in our efforts to establish Socialism.

Maurice Blackburn was a man of the people who fought for their rights and accomplished so much for them, it is fitting, therefore, to recognise his passing just 25 years ago on 31/3/1944.

THE ATTITUDES OF J.V. (VIC) STOUT. by Tom Sheehy.

Vic Stout was an intellectual, he was not very tall, being about five foot six and of medium build with a slightly rounded back. He had a power of physical and mental energy and his firm manner of speech carried a slightly high pitch about it. Nobody who ever approached him with a problem ever recognised him as being anything but a sincere person, but he was, none the less, abrupt and candid in his conversation.

The casual interviewer soon realised that he was speaking to a man with a very broad knowledge and that any statement he made could be relied upon to the last word. He was intolerant towards the go-getter type of unionist whose aim was a cosy official position at the expense of his workmates and was not out for an easy life himself.

The working man and his needs was his only concern whilst the only hope he held for the ordinary person in obtaining a share of the essentials of life was the Australian Labor Party.

He spent well over half a century being actively engaged in the unions' front line of industrial affairs and through this participation gained a strong natural sense of Australian history. But when it was suggested to him that not enough coverage was given to industrial people like himself as far as history was concerned, the reply was cynical, 'My boy' he said sharply 'most political people who have gone down in history, have spent time that could be more usefully employed otherwise in arranging for themselves to be written into the future'.

He did not keep a diary, 'I know I should, but if I was doing that something else would be going to pot, so I don't' he said when the question was put to him.

All this occurred in the early 1950's when he had completed what he called 'a mere quarter of a century' as Secretary to the Trades Hall Council in Victoria.

At first I knew him as a member of the Sandringham Branch of the Australian Labor Party, then after the death of his wife about 1955, he moved to Cheltenham to rent half of a large colonial style single storied house owned by Mrs. Fairlie Taylor in Stanley Avenue, about 200 yards from the railway station.

The house occupied about one sixth of an acre and seemed almost hidden by what appeared to be English Cedar Oaks, tall ferns and a variety of migrant species of plant life. In moving into Cheltenham he transferred to the local branch of the A.L.P. where I was Secretary and from then on we had occasional discussions at his home or in his office at the Trades Hall, but never at the A.L.P. branch meetings because in the whole of the ten years or so that he resided in Cheltenham he did not attend one gathering. This, when one studies his Trades Hall activities, is easy to understand; he did not have the time.

Yet as the Secretary of his Branch I seemed to become more important to him, and it was soon to be understood that he held the political branch office bearer - once he was satisfied that loyalties were sincerely placed - in the highest esteem.

He felt the same way about Labor Members of Parliament once he was sure of their good intentions, but until he was assured within himself he treated them all with a good degree of suspicion. He was always more tolerant towards amateur politicians than he was towards elected Members of Parliament and professional party office holders.

In the A.L.P. Branch we always excepted Vic Stout as far as the rule was concerned which demanded his appearance at a branch meeting in order to take out his ticket. If he was away from home he forwarded twice the amount necessary to pay his subscription and tendered the excess as a donation to branch funds.

If he was at home when contributions fell due he rang or called at my home and we used the occasion to discuss the local branch activities.

He was always interested in branch affairs and depended on me to give him an account of proceedings, yet he was never critical of them; being unable to attend personally he readily accepted the actions taken by the members, but had there been any sign of trouble he would have undoubtedly appeared at the expense of other business.

On the odd occasions when he rang and invited me to call around to his home, we usually discussed things that affected the country as a whole and in 1957 when the 'Argus' suddenly announced one Saturday morning that that edition of the paper would be the last I met him at his front gate. He took me inside and gave his opinions on the sudden close down, some of these could not be printed without the risk of libel action, but they proved most certainly to be true.

The 'Argus' despite its anti-worker reputation of earlier years leaned stronger towards Labor and the worker than any other Melbourne daily, and with the advent of television, Vic Stout saw it as the only voice that could effectively ward off the sway of the new medium in breaking down the resistance of the people as a whole towards exploitation.

The 'Argus' had played a big role only three or four months before its close down in the interest of thousands of defence workers who had been plunged into unemployment just prior to Christmas 1957. 'Who was the Scrouge who put dismissal notices in Xmas pay packets?' the paper asked. Stout was pleased to receive this support as he approached officers of the Department of Supply who were issuing the notices. 'All we can do' he said 'is make it clear that this kind of treatment should not be tolerated'. Then he paused and said 'but that is all, these people are going to buy aeroplanes overseas and nothing will change that'. That is government policy, but we will let the people hear about it and the rest is up to them at the next Federal Election'. He never exaggerated or built up false confidence and he always put it very clearly that it was almost impossible to get the Labor story through to the public.

Being concerned with Australian aviation myself, I asked him who would be the best Federal Parliamentarian to take the matter up. He held no reserves, 'Well, Dr. Evatt is the Leader' he replied; to within a few days he was introducing me to Dr. Evatt, and knowing that he could do no more than ask the government to bring itself before itself, Dr. Evatt indulged in an eight months paper war with the Commonwealth Treasury officers. Vic Stout kept a strict eye on the matter locally whilst I prepared talks to inform listeners to the Labor Hour as to what was happening. Vic Stout had acted quite normally; he placed the best labor public relations outlets available at the defence workers disposal and looking back it is easy to see why campaigns on Labor's behalf rarely got off the ground. As Vic Stout put it 'we are only allowed to talk to our friends; we reassure those who are loyal friends through SKZ, Labor and a few Union papers.

The people who read these enjoy them and appreciate our telling them what is going on, but outside the circles of Trades Hall

supporters we reach no one, except when papers supporting our opponents fall out with their party, then they hold us up as something of a threat until the other side is forgiven and we are again pushed into the background.

Always a man of vision he examined the 'put value back into the pound proposal of the then opposition Menzies party of 1949 when the basic wage was £6/10/-; he said that the plan would see the minimum wage double and the value of the pound deteriorate over the next ten years. Nine years later the basic wage was £13/5/- and it bought less goods than £6/10/- had bought in 1949.

He was reported to the extent of about one to two paragraphs by the odd papers which printed anything on his statement, but most ignored it altogether as they crammed the Liberal Leader's statements about the basic wage remaining at the then existing level while prices fell.

The opposite of course happened, prices rose and the basic wage stood still for periods and Vic Stout again had a word for it, 'the basic wage is on a bicycle and the prices are in a Rolls Royce, they are now both flat out and it is easy to see which is going to win. Soon, to obtain the necessities of life women will have to go to work; children will be dumped at play centres and eventually when both parents are not fully engaged in work it will be considered that there is unemployment in the home.

When he was not weighing up the prospects that lay before the legislation then being passed he was examining the ordinary events of the day for what they were worth and his nightly 'Labor Speaks' talks were entertaining by way of their sound reasoning. Here are some extracts taken from a script broadcast on January 24th, 1958 in connection with Australia Day:-

'The Australian ideals of early 'Bulletin' days, when Henry Lawson, J.F. Archibald, Randolph Bedford and a host of other men, who, fearing no one, said their piece about men and matters, Australia in particular, and the world at large have really gone. An Australian nationalism seemed likely to emerge healthy, vigorous and boldly progressive.'

But whether we grew too fast or not fast enough, a new breed came to life and power. Striped pants and black coats became too plentiful and gave too much dignified tone to the surface of our works.

Too little attention was paid to the needs of the masses and the social distinction became more shown in wage differences than visible differences indicated.

The ruggedness of our early advocates of Australian life departed in favour of the sophisticated, wordly character, reviving personal interests and being completely unconcerned about Australian questions of general interest.

Governments have less consideration for the warm human

requirements of Australian men and women. They have developed a professional hardness and arrogant demeanor to the you's and me's of friendly days when mateship meant something that all citizens reflected. It meant, as Lawson often put it, generosity and sacrifice with never a regret. It could be that two great wars have caused us to grow up and become older than our years.

We trade unionists honor the day; regret the weaknesses that have shown themselves, and hope that ere long the spirit of earlier times will cause the securing of better things in a broader and much more democratic way so that A.N.A. Day can mark, by celebration, a much worthier period in our history'.

These reflected attitudes of Vic Stout were typical as he moved on to become Federal President of the A.L.P. He was philosophical about his election to the key Labor Party post, just as he was when a Melbourne journalist wrote 'has anyone heard of Stout fiddling while the A.L.P. burns?' after claiming that 'when Vic Stout has nothing to do at the Trades Hall it is said that he gets out his violin and plays a tune'.

The fact was that Channel 2 of the A.B.C. television network, upon hearing that he owned a 'Stradivarius' violin, asked him to bring it to the Trades Hall so that they might make a film of his playing. He agreed readily and the film was shown in the evening news bulletin.

I asked him why he raised no objections to the Journalist's comments and he replied 'simply because they only make these remarks to engage us in argument - that journalist is D.L.P. so there would be no point in trying to find time to come back at him'.

The answer was a reasonable one as Vic Stout rarely left home to go to work after 7 a.m. and returned home after 11 p.m. more often than before 7 p.m. His time was completely occupied anyhow.

When he did find time to relax, however, he would play records which he carefully chose from his excellent collection of classical items - he was a great lover of the classics - and would at times play his violin.

The last time he rang and asked me to call in for a talk I found him in a quieter than usual mood; my position in the A.L.P. branch was President and an election of office bearers had just taken place. He asked who had been elected and one by one I rolled them off; Bob Corcoran had moved from the district and Norm MacLennan was the new Secretary. He asked was I satisfied with the new Secretary and when he was informed that Norm was a good Secretary he said quietly 'that's good, that's good'.

Then, being on my way to conduct the branch meeting, I asked why all the speculation was going on about appointing a successor to him when he had put it so clearly that retirement was not in his mind. I was surprised when he was so little interested in the question that he did not bother to answer. Thinking that he might not want to speak on that particular subject I put another political question to him which he also seemed to miss as he walked to the other side of

the room and produced his Stradivarius violin. He handled it gently with all the care of a kindly grandmother gently running her hands over a young baby. 'My boy' - the only name I ever got from him apart from 'comrade' - 'this is something you will never see again', he said plainly 'look at those laminations, the fine Italian workmanship; the skilful finish, real workmanship'.

I had met him in moods of quietitude before but on this night he wanted to be an ordinary person enjoying the company of a visitor in his own living room.

He explained everything about the precious instrument and it was easy to gather that he loved everything about it and did not hold it just because it was rare, but for the skill that went into making it and the unequalled tone it produced which seemed almost as mellow as any musical piece in the world.

Time slipped away and I left for the meeting determined to find out at a later date more about the 'Strad' and how he had managed to acquire it. I arrived at the meeting nearly half an hour late feeling rather foolish as it had always been my practice to impress upon branch members the need for punctuality at meetings.

For the next week I waited for him to ring and fix a date to continue our discussion. It was my lot to be trusted with the official post as Historical Research Officer to the Moorabbin City Council and Vic Stout had emerged as an outstanding resident in that area. But within ten days I read of his death without knowing that he had taken ill in the meantime.

He had worked up until a few days before he died in his 80th year, still almost a slave to himself in his repulsing of what he called 'slavery among workers'.

WHAT WERE THE IMMEDIATE AND ULTIMATE DEMANDS OF THE I.W.W. by H. Payne.

In the ten year span of 1910-1920 the impact of the I.W.W. the industrial workers of the world upon the Trade Union movement in Australia acted like 'a shot in the arm' to stimulate the militant minded workers into courageous activity that had its effect over a much longer period than that envisaged by the participants who had taken the initiative in the formation of the I.W.W.

The concluding paragraph of the preamble of the I.W.W. Constitution was -

'It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism. The army of production must be organised not only for every day struggle with capitalists, but also to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown. By organising industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old'.

Immediate Demands in First Place.
Ultimate Demands in Second Place.

The writers of the I.W.W. preamble took it as a matter of course that the first and primary function of a trade union was to claim a 'demand' for increased wages, a reduction of hours, and an all round improvement in the working conditions of a workers environment wherever he or she was situated, and 'not only to fight for these objectives but also to the ultimate function of the I.W.W. that is 'To build industrial unions which are to serve as organs of production and distribution in a new society'.

The I.W.W. claimed that 'Capitalism and its organs of production and distribution were breaking down in one country after another and was unsatisfactory or not functioning at all.

The I.W.W. instanced Russia, Germany, Austria, as examples of a breakdown of government due to a lack of finance and was thus proving their contention that it was a waste of time for the workers to attack or capture capitalist government.

The I.W.W. also pointed out the United States of America as 'the last important stronghold of capitalism' and quoted breakdowns and suspension of work in great industries as steel production, coal mining, meat packing and railroad transportation were symptoms of a progressive collapse. They stated that 'the organism of world capitalism was dying by inches but had unquestionably several years to live in the U.S.A. and other countries'.

Under the foregoing conditions they stated that the second function of the I.W.W. - 'forming the structure of a new society within the shell of the old' assumed greater importance than the writers of the preamble had dared to hope for and had overshadowed the first function and that the ultimate aim of the I.W.W. should be steadily kept in view'.

The moment we lose sight of this, our final goal, the I.W.W. ship is off its right course and getting in dangerous uncharted waters.

The workers needs can't wait, they said -

'the realisation of this Ultimate programme which must always be kept in mind is at the best several years off'.

'A gigantic establishment as the worlds economic mechanism cannot be revolutionised in a day, in a month, in a year. It cannot be changed by orders from the top 'society' the document said is a structure like a house or a pyramid. It cannot be constructed according to arbitrary plans or dogmas. It has to grow like a plant, or an animal, in accordance with natures laws rather than according to mans' desires'.

The I.W.W. believed that it would be many years before the 'masses' had learned to adjust society in accord with its laws and get the new society in good working order.

The I.W.W. had only been able to reach a part of the people with its message of 'Economic Salvation' through direct action, its propaganda and revolutionary working class songs and its hostility

to the War of 1914-18.

Fascinated by a vision of a new society it was necessary to carry on the 'every day struggle' and come to earth by the protests of an empty stomach. For these reasons they stated 'it is always well for the workers to keep their feet firmly on the ground of mercil ess reality while drawing inspiration and hope from a view behind the curtain which separates us from the future'.

Not for a moment should the workers forget the every day battle with the employers.

'On the vigorous carrying on of that battle rests our hope of ultimate success in our undertaking to abolish wage slavery'.

The article concludes with an appeal to workers everywhere - 'If we shirk the battle and merely engage in social star gazing the New I.W.W. will forever remain a fanciful dream'.

The lesson today is still much the same the two functions of the I.W.W. the immediate demands and the ultimate objective go hand in hand, they supplement each other and are equally necessary in the world of today.

THE FOOLISH FIFTY.

If fifty men did all the work
And gave the price to five,
And let those five make all the rules,
You'd say the fifty men were fools -
Unfit to be alive.

And if you heard complaining cries
From fifty brawny men,
Blaming the five for graft and greed,
Injustice, cruelty - indeed !
What would you call them then?

Not by their own superior force
Do five on fifty live,
But by election and assent
And privilege and government -
Powers that fifty give.

If fifty men are really fools,
And five have all the brains,
The five must rule as now, we find;
But if the fifty have the mind -
Why don't they take the reins?

- Charlotte Perkins Stetson.

Mrs. Gilman.

SYDNEY MONITOR

Editor Edward Smith Hall, March 30th, 1829

We copy the following from the Sydney Gazette - 'We have been favoured by a literary correspondent with the following sketch of the life of William Riddel who was executed for murder at Sydney, 23rd March, 1829.

William Riddel, who was executed this morning for the murder of John Heley, was a native of Roxburghshire, in the south of Scotland. His parents were exemplary for their piety and had given him a plain but religious education; his father having been for many years an Elder of a congregation of Presbyterian Dissenters from the Church of Scotland.....When about 20 years of age, however, he had occasion to attend a fair in the north of England, where his love of reading unfortunately led him to a bookstall kept by a woman, from whom, out of a mere curiosity, he purchased an infidel publication 'Palmer's Principles of Nature' for 13 pence.

being unable to resist the sophistry of this deistical publication and being strongly attracted, moreover, by the seeming boldness of its speculation he was induced to purchase other books of a similar kind and he accordingly procured Paine's 'Age of Reason' and 'Rights of Man' which, with the writings of Volney, Voltaire and other French infidels of the last century he perused with uncommon avidity....

A few years after the (mine) catastrophe at Newcastle his zeal for infidelity and republicanism induced him to go to London, merely to witness the execution of Hustlewood, Ings and other Cato Street conspirators, who were beheaded for high treason.

The prosecution, conviction and subsequent imprisonment of Carlisle, the blaspheme, gave a new stimulus to the anti christian zeal of this unfortunate man. He regarded Carlisle as a man persecuted for conscience sake - a patriot who was suffering for his country and a martyr for the truth - and he accordingly embarked in his cause with the utmost ardor. He organised a club for the purchase and perusal of Carlisle's Republican, became an agent for the sale and dissemination of his pamphlets on both sides of the Scottish border... transported for purchasing 230 sheep at a fair, which it appeared had been stolen. Riddel, however, always maintained that he paid the full price for the sheep.

On his arrival in the Colony he informed the Colonial Secretary when asked of what religion he was, that he was of no religion, a confession which Mr. McLeary observed, he had never heard made by any other prisoner in the Colony.

He persisted in maintaining his innocence of the crime for which he suffered death.

Contributed by Dick Curlewis.

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