

RECORDER

Official newsletter of the Melbourne Labour History Society (ISSN 0155-8722)

Issue No. 302—November 2021

IN THIS EDITION:

- Vale Rennis Witham, by David Cragg, p. 1
- Dr Spock Down Under, by Ken Mansell, p. 2
- Review: *Save Our Sons*, by Laura Rovetto, pp. 3-4
- Remembering September 1967, by Philip Mendes, pp.4- 5
- When Lang Felled Labor, by Robert Murray, pp. 5-6
- Review: *Labor People*, by Ross McMullin, p. 7
- Walter Kaufmann, by Malcolm McDonald, p. 8

- Review: *Ric Throssell Against ASIO*, by Rowan Cahill, p. 9
- Dr Evatt, Mr Menzies and ASIO, by Phillip Deery, pp. 10-11
- Review: *Ethel Rosenberg*, by Laurence W Maher, pp. 11-12
- Charlie Chaplin and the FBI, by Phillip Deery, pp. 12-13
- Review: *Folksingers and the Bureau*, by Mark Gregory, pp. 13-14
- Review: *The Nordic Edge*, by Max Ogden, pp. 14-15
- Bob Hawke and foreign interference, by Brian Boyd, pp. 15-16
- Stuart Macintyre, p. 16
- Labour History Melbourne & Federal AGM, and Contacts, p. 16

Vale Rennis Witham

29 February 1948 – 25 October 2021

David Cragg

Members of the ALP, western suburbs and community health activists and the Labour History Society were deeply saddened by the death of Rennis Witham on 25 October. A livewire on many community issues, Rennis was officially the Victorian ALP's History and Heritage Officer and the driving force behind the Branch's Life Members organisation. With her passing, and the death of Life Member patron John Cain in December 2019, the ALP Life Members group will need special care and attention to revive in post-Covid 2022.

Rennis was born in Victoria's western district on 29 February 1948 to Cyril and Lorna Primmer. Cyril was active in local shire and dairy farmer organisations, and later served as an ALP Senator for Victoria, 1971–1985. Rennis was born into Labor activity and was a grassroots organiser in Warrnambool, then Bendigo and finally Williamstown. She was an inaugural board member, CEO and later volunteer of the Seaworks Maritime Precinct based at Nelson Place, Williamstown, and co-founded Preserve Old Williamstown, which helped stop a proposed housing development on Point Gellibrand.

Rennis worked most of her professional life in the health sector, holding positions with Medicare Locals, Western Region Health Centre (WRHC) and Improving and Promoting Community (IPC) Health programs. The WRHC, formerly known as the Trade Union Clinic and Research Center, was a radical concept, pioneered in 1964 by George Seelaf, Moss Cass and Clyde Holding. Rennis was its CEO from 1984 until 1989. She chaired the IPC Health Clinical Governance and Clinical Risk Committee since its inception and only stepped down from the IPC Board in July 2021. She was also a progressive voice within the Victorian Hospitals' Industrial Association, the health employers' group. Her health concerns extended to environmental

protection and anti-pollution prosecutions in Melbourne's West. At the time of her death, Rennis was president of the ALP's health policy committee.

But in 'retirement', Rennis threw herself into Labor history, putting in a fulltime effort based on the 0.2 funded position at Victorian ALP Head Office. She used digital technology to record a vast amount of oral history from ALP members with 50, 60 and even 70 years' continuous membership – as well as pulling together functions for Life Members with 40 years' membership.



She successfully registered the Victorian Labor History Foundation as a charity designed to receive funding and deductible donations for history projects, and drove through to successful completion a valuable compilation of oral history recording 'Safe Houses': the network of refuges for draft resisters in the Vietnam conscription struggle. Before her death, Rennis was planning further projects to record the importance of protest as part of a healthy society. Again, the future of the VLHF will require extra effort in the absence of Rennis.

A foundation member of the Victorian Socialist Left, Rennis was a committed 'lefty' who was happy to work with anyone in a good cause. She was in equal parts funny and exasperated at the blithe ignorance of younger Party members about the struggles and values which motivated comrades in the past, and she was always looking for issues and symbols—especially through her focus on website and online resources—that would appeal and communicate Labor values to the younger generation. A woman of strong values, purposeful commitment and dedicated activism, she was a true champion of the community health sector, the western suburbs and the labour movement. Our sympathies to her two daughters and four grandchildren.

Dr Spock Down Under

Ken Mansell

Covid-19 restrictions prevented planned commemorations of the two 1970 Vietnam Moratoriums, and of the fiftieth anniversary of the third Moratorium this year. The 1971 event culminated on 30 June after lead-up events in April and May. It was highlighted by the visit of American paediatrician Dr Benjamin Spock, already famous as the author of *Baby and Child Care* (1946), an influential work that conservatives believed had propagated 'permissiveness' and conjured the 'sixties' protest generation. Spock's role as an anti-war activist enraged them all the more. In 1968, he and four others were convicted on charges (later overturned) of conspiracy to counsel and abet resistance to the draft. He also sponsored the War Tax Resistance project, was arrested (as one of the 'Boston Five') for signing the anti-war manifesto 'A Call to Resist Illegitimate Authority', and was a featured speaker at the 1969 Moratorium in Washington.



Sam Goldbloom welcoming Dr Spock. Peter Mayoh/The Age.

Spock, 68, arrived in Melbourne on 9 June 1971 and addressed large audiences at the Exhibition Building on 10 June and Moorabbin Town Hall on 13 June. On 14 June, Spock was driven to Geelong for a public meeting at Geelong West Town Hall. For fifty years my 'memory' had been that Clem Parkinson and I, booked as musical support, were Spock's chauffeurs. I have recently been disabused of this fantasy by an authority that assures me Sam Goldbloom would never have entrusted such a living treasure to two strolling minstrels. I do however have a reliable memory of sitting down to a coffee with Spock, a gentle and unassuming man, when the Moratorium party rendezvoused in Ryrrie Street. At the Town Hall I took the microphone and sang unaccompanied the fine anti-imperialist anthem 'The Freedom Come All Ye', the ancient Scots dialect of which is barely comprehensible (as soon became obvious). It went down like a lead balloon with the audience of 400. I was rescued by Clem, with his flat-pick and guitar, singing one of his songs:

Last night I had the weirdest dream I'd never dreamt before, I dreamt our politicians all went off to fight the war/ It seems that they'd decided it was time to join the ranks, to do their bit to help

save face for Nixon and the Yanks/ And as they marched down Swanston Street the crowd just stood and gasped, 'I never thought I'd see the day' an old ex-digger rasped/ 'And have you heard the latest news' I heard a woman cry, 'They're bringing home our conscripts, not another one need die.'

There was Snedden and McManus, even Santa-strewh-maria, with Peacock, Lynch and Andrew Jones all bringing up the rear/ And as they marched down Collins Street to sound of drum and flute, His Eminence Archbishop Knox stepped forth to take salute/ His hands began to tremble as he then with courage true, threw down his crucifix and cried 'Hey boys, I'm coming too'/ 'Left wheel', the sergeant shouted, McManus shook with fright, no matter how he tried he kept veering to the right.

They marched down to Port Melbourne to embark at Station Pier, where some wharfies, somewhat rudely, gave a rather loud Bronx cheer/ McManus got the jitters and he beat a quick retreat, he grabbed a wharfie's bicycle and peddled down the street/ 'I've left behind my toothbrush', he mumbled as he fled, then I awoke and found that I had tumbled out of bed!

Peter Edwards, the official historian of Australia's Vietnam War, has written (*A Nation at War*, 1997) that Dr Spock 'had little impact on the anti-war movement'. Even so, it was not for want of trying, as his hectic schedule demonstrates. After Melbourne and Geelong, Spock addressed audiences in Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Canberra, and Townsville. In Sydney he spoke in the Domain, at Sydney University, and the Lower Sydney Town Hall. In Brisbane he appeared at the University of Queensland and Festival Hall. The highlight of his tour was 30 June, when the Moratorium culminated in nation-wide rallies. Spock addressed an Adelaide University campus 'teach-in' in the morning and the main Adelaide Moratorium rally in Victoria Square at 12.30, after which he boarded a helicopter and flew to Melbourne to address the main rally. Speaking to a crowd variously estimated at 50,000-100,000, Spock's message was that the U.S. was still killing as many as ever in Vietnam.

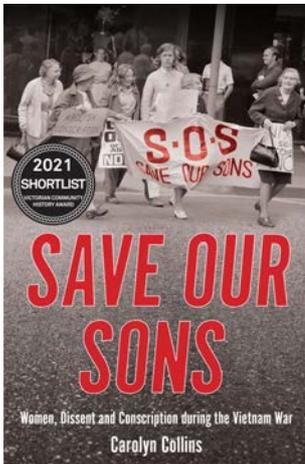
Various forms of civil disobedience characterised the demonstrations held around the nation on 30 June 1971. In Melbourne's City Square, draft resisters Garry Cook, Tony Dalton, Paul Fox, and Michael Hamel-Green all addressed the rally – perhaps the first serious 'underground' action – and challenged the police to arrest them. In Sydney, George Street was blocked for nearly two hours by 20,000 people, many of them sitting down. 7500-8000 people staged a ten-minute sit-down in Brisbane's Queen Street. In Adelaide, where the official trade union movement and the ALP Government had banned the Moratorium, marchers defiantly took over Rundle Street. 6000 marched in Perth. Moratorium publicity had adopted the slogan 'Stop Work to Stop the War'. There were work stoppages, though perhaps not as many as organisers had hoped for. In Melbourne all maritime workers stopped for the day, along with twenty metals shops, several meat works, and eight city building jobs. In Sydney maritime unions closed the port and significant work stoppages occurred in other industries.

Doctor Spock left for New York on 2 July. He stood as Peoples' Party candidate for the U.S. Presidency in 1972, and continued thereafter to champion progressive causes. Spock died, aged 94, in March 1998. R.I.P.

Save Our Sons

Laura Rovetto

Book Review: Carolyn Collins, *Save Our Sons: Women Dissent and Conscription During the Vietnam War* (Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2021). pp. xi+338. \$34.95 paper.



Carolyn Collins offers the first national history of the Australian Save Our Sons (SOS) protest against conscription during the Vietnam War. Initially formed by a group of women in Sydney May 1965, it grew into a nationwide campaign with branches in each state. What began as a lawful and respectable movement evolved into a campaign that involved civil disobedience, militant tactics and even

imprisonment for some of its members, most notably the Fairlea Five. Although the SOS was one of numerous groups which emerged in response to the National Service scheme 1964-1972, Collins argues that the SOS movement represents a continuity with a tradition of female activism in Australia.

Collins' history of the SOS campaign is written from a distance. The book does not assume prior knowledge and the author is not a former activist participant. The motivation for the research was, in part, a shared sense of injustice that SOS members felt in response to the National Service scheme. As a mother Collins felt a similar disquiet that young men of the era, too young to vote, were selected through a lottery system based on their birthdates to fight in a foreign war. Collins was intrigued to learn more about the women who boldly entered a politically complex arena, more often for the first time, to challenge the morality of conscription. For many of its membership it was a baptism by fire. In the context of 1960s Cold War logic, consecutive conservative governments enjoyed popular support for its policy on the Vietnam War. The war's detractors were often derided by the authorities and sections of the community as traitors or their unwitting fellow travellers. Thus, involvement in the SOS came at a personal cost. ASIO intelligence was gathered on some of its members who were regarded, more broadly, as doubly deviant for betraying gender role expectations.

Collins draws on a wide range of sources: official SOS records, reports from the police, intelligence and newspapers, personal correspondence and oral histories. The variety of sources reflects, to some degree, the inherent challenges of researching spontaneous grassroots movements, particularly long after the event. Record-keeping was not commonly prioritised, nor did

its leadership imagine the protest would culminate in an eight-year long campaign.

The author begins by tracing the origins of the nationwide movement and then follows the development and actions of the Melbourne and Sydney groups more closely where its activities were relatively well documented, led by women and enjoyed the strongest support. Although the SOS groups were autonomous, they all adopted the original aim to repeal the National Service Act. At one point at least, the Sydney group had hoped that a truly national movement would emerge, but this never came to fruition given the logistical challenges of such a proposal. Collins' history of the SOS outlines the individual involvement of the participants, the nuanced attitudes driving the campaign, the evolving character of its activism, the different structures of the groups and the somewhat diverse nature of its membership.

The advocacy of maternal rights as the underlying premise of the campaign and the image of the respectable, middle-class housewife were politically powerful tactics adopted, to some extent, deliberately by the SOS. It proved difficult to dismiss the plight of law-abiding women who feared losing their sons and loved ones. Moreover, the SOS image helped to broaden the appeal of the anti-Vietnam War movement, particularly for women, and made public dissent more acceptable. These strategies were well known to the established, activist movement which guided and supported the SOS campaign.

Collins delves beneath the middle-class veneer to reveal a far more diverse membership. SOS was comprised of members across the socioeconomic spectrum and with different experiences. Most were not tertiary educated or employed in paid positions, some were not mothers, or mothers of sons eligible for conscription. It was not exclusively a women's-only movement; however, there was little cultural diversity in the groups. Most of its members were women either born in Australia or with Anglo-Saxon heritage. Some were 'neophytes', while others brought with them a matured political outlook. These different experiences shaped their particular attitudes. Some were only opposed to overseas conscription, but not national service per se. Some opposed all wars, others only the Vietnam War, while among them were members who supported Australia's enemy in the war. According to Collins, the SOS encompassed a wide range of political dispositions which also included pro-Vietnam sympathies and anti-imperialist attitudes.

Contrary to the image of apolitical women, veteran activists – whether from the established peace movement, socialists, or the ALP – either directly or indirectly supported the campaign. Some of the more conspicuous, such as a founding member of the Victorian group and CPA member, Dorothy Gibson, preferred to keep at arm's length, lest she 'taint' the new group with communist association. The seasoned activists' political savvy, experience and established networks with the unions, politics and the media were invaluable to the

SOS, which generally accepted their help and guidance. For instance, the initial tactics of the SOS, such as silent vigils, were reflective of its connection with the established, communist-led peace movement.

Individual SOS groups were shaped as much by the personalities of its leaders as by the age, background and experience of its supporters. In Sydney, where the presence of the Union of Australian Women was strongest, the SOS group was more structured, with a constitution, elections and annual general meetings. Conversely, the Melbourne group had a more organic character. But where it lacked the structure of its Sydney counterpart, it found a strong and comparatively younger leader who was politically aware and had local connections to the 'well-heeled' and arts community, as well as to the well-resourced peace movement.

The book is not without fault. Given its emphasis on particular participants, the extent of the connection between the SOS and the established peace movement has been overlooked in some instances. For example, Nola Barber is referred to as a member of the ALP, but she was also a veteran peace activist and committee member of the Campaign for International Cooperation and Disarmament (CICD). Similarly, Irene Miller is described as a self-proclaimed 'average housewife', but she too was also a long-time supporter of the CICD and its predecessor, the Australian Peace Council. However, these are minor distractions in an otherwise engaging, accessible and thoughtfully researched history.

The foremost strengths of the book are its wide-ranging history of a grass-roots protest movement at an operational level and at the level of the individual participants. It makes visible the contributions made by SOS women to the broader movement that have been largely overlooked. The SOS groups provided a safe and accessible vehicle for women's civic engagement at a time when activism was dominated by men. Crucially, Collins' history restores the place of the SOS in the longer tradition of women's activism in Australia during the 20th century.

Remembering September 1967: Australian Jewish conservatives and socialists clash over the Vietnam War

Philip Mendes

In September 1967, the Jewish community leader (and political conservative) Isi Leibler published an extraordinary letter in *The Australian* attacking three young Jewish anti-Vietnam War campaigners who had raised money for the National Liberation Front (NLF) of South Vietnam known as the Viet Cong (Leibler 1967).

Leibler, who mentioned that he had just returned from a three week visit to Israel, argued that the Palestine Liberation Organisation and the Viet Cong were politically aligned, and that the North Vietnamese Communist government favoured the disappearance of Israel.

Consequently, he accused 20 year old Doug Kirsner (wrongly spelt as Kirschner), 20 year old Bernie Grinberg (wrongly spelt as Greenberg) and 18 year old Albert Langer of 'possessing some kind of a death wish' for supporting the Viet Cong. Kirsner and Grinberg, who were the leaders of the Melbourne University Labour Club, had raised funds only for medical non-military aid, whilst Langer and his Labor Club colleagues at Monash University had raised funds for unlimited purposes.

It is unclear whether it was Leibler or the newspaper's sub-editor who were responsible for the misspelling of names. Regardless, Richard Dixon, the then National President of the Communist Party of Australia who was engaged in a public brawl with Leibler over the extent of official anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union, provocatively accused the Jewish leader of deliberately 'using the methods of Nazi anti-Semites in restoring the anglicised names of Jewish people to their original form'. Ironically, there was in fact another prominent Jewish anti-war activist at this time called Vaughan Greenberg who may not have been known to Leibler (Mendes 1993).

Leibler also attacked Kirsner's father Gordon, who had come to Australia as a teenage refugee from Nazi Germany, for equating the CIB Special Branch detectives, who had unsuccessfully attempted to interview Kirsner regarding the Aid to the NLF campaign, with the Nazi Gestapo. Leibler asserted that there would be many 'Jewish and non-Jewish survivors of Nazi persecution in this country who can only be outraged at such distorted analogies'. He finished his letter by implicitly endorsing demands from conservative members of Parliament that those raising funds for the NLF be charged with treason (Leibler 1967).

Leibler's letter was notable for three reasons. Firstly, he was one of the very few Australian Jews who publicly supported the Vietnam War. The others were mostly assimilated conservative intellectuals such as academics Heinz Arndt and Frank Knopfmacher and *Quadrant* publisher Richard Krygier who had little contact with the mainstream Jewish community. As Rutland's new (2021) biography of Leibler documents, he was a prominent member of conservative groups such as the Australian Association for Cultural Freedom and Peace with Freedom, and closely aligned with conservatives such as the National Civic Council's B.A. Santamaria, Bulletin editor Peter Coleman and Liberal Party MP William Wentworth, who all defended the war.

In contrast, there were hundreds of (and arguably even a few thousand) Jews active in anti-Vietnam War groups at universities in Victoria and NSW, via left-wing Jewish organisations, and in broader activist groups such as the Congress for International Cooperation and Disarmament which included many Jews in its leadership (Mendes 1993). Leibler's missive was almost certainly intended as a message to his conservative allies that those radical Jews were not representative of the Jewish community as a whole. In a March 1990 interview (for my *New Left* book), he described most Jewish radicals as 'clinical in their self-hatred'.

Secondly, Leibler's letter seems on the surface to target the wrong audience. It was unlikely that Jewish progressives engaged in high profile anti-Vietnam activism would view the well-being of the State of Israel as a major political priority. Indeed, Kirsner defined himself at the time as a 'Socialist and Internationalist' with little or no Jewish identity. Although influenced by the pro-Israel sentiments of Sartre and Marcuse, he defended Israel's ongoing existence (Mendes 1993). Not so Langer who would shortly afterwards reveal himself as a committed anti-Zionist advocating Israel's destruction (1969). However, the real target of Leibler's warning about the Viet Cong's alignment with the PLO was almost certainly the broader mass of progressive young Jews who may have been attracted to the anti-Vietnam War movement. Ironically, at least one left-wing Jewish group claimed in contrast to Leibler that the North Vietnamese supported Israel's right to exist (Mittleberg and Wolf 1970).

Finally, Leibler's principal agenda was almost certainly to advance the political interests of the Israeli government. They were not pleased with the high profile engagement of American Jews including many mainstream religious organisations against the Vietnam War given the increasingly close political and military alliance between Israel and America. Indeed, Israeli government representatives were active in attempting to silence that criticism. They also seem to have suggested to Leibler that it would be beneficial for Israel if Australian Jews were not identified as public opponents of the war (Mendes 1993).

Postscript: For the record, I completed interviews with Leibler, Kirsner, Langer and Grinberg for my 1993 *New Left* book. After a long and eventful career as a Jewish community leader and advocate for the rights of Soviet Jews both within Australia and later in Israel, Leibler died at the age of 86 years in April 2021. Langer remains a political iconoclast (Wheatley 2021). Kirsner has reversed some of his views from that period, and in recent decades has been actively involved in Jewish community affairs. Grinberg did not continue involvement in politics post his student activism.

References

- Richard Dixon, 'Letter to Isi Leibler', 5 October 1967.
- Albert Langer, 'Israel this land is my land', *Lot's Wife*, 10 June 1969.
- Isi Leibler, 'Aiding the Viet Cong must be deemed to be treason', *The Australian*, 4 September 1967.
- Philip Mendes, *The New Left, the Jews and the Vietnam War 1965-72*. (Melbourne: Lazare Press, Melbourne, 1993).
- David Mittleberg and John Wolf, 'Palestine and Jewish National Liberation', *Lot's Wife*, 21 July 1970.
- Suzanne D. Rutland, *Lone Voice: The Wars of Isi Leibler* (Melbourne: Hybrid Publishers, 2021).
- Nadia Wheatley, 'Albert Langer' in Meredith Burgmann & Nadia Wheatley (eds.) *Radicals: Remembering the Sixties*. (Sydney: New South Press, 2021), 83-101.

When Lang Felled Labor

Robert Murray

The Labor Party's most miserable election day is now passing from living memory. The date was ninety years ago, 19 December 1931. It was the depth of the Great Depression. Labor had triumphed to office just two years before, winning fourteen seats from its favourite enemy, Stanley Bruce, stately scion of the establishment who had been undermined by Billy Hughes, Labor's defected one-time leader. But the Depression was about to hit. Two years later the new government was ignominiously out and another former Labor stalwart, Joseph Lyons, was leading the new conservative government, helped by another of Labor's favourite enemies, the young Robert Menzies.

The Depression wrecked nearly every government in the world, not just that in Canberra. The greatest disaster was when, in economically ravaged Germany, Hitler's Nazis won office from the failing democratic parties. The Australian government under Prime Minister Jim Scullin tried hard and won some important reforms that have been generally appreciated ever since, such as introducing the legislation that established the ABC; the custom of an Australian rather than British governor-general; and a nationally-based Australia Day instead of states going their own way. Most of the time, however, it seemed that for the Scullin government anything that could go wrong did go wrong. Not only was it the Depression. The poisonous Willis-Bailey feud in NSW Labor infected the government and finally killed it. An alleged financial scandal in Queensland politics took Scullin's Deputy and Treasurer – and only good economic brain – Ted Theodore out of the action for four months and damaged his reputation.

The opposition still controlled the Senate, so while Labor was in office, with all the terrible responsibilities of the slump, it was not really in power. The many new Labor MPs were from borderline seats swinging precariously in the stormy wind; facing almost certain defeat if things continued to go wrong. 1930 was a terrible year for people everywhere, not just in Canberra. Unemployment slumped from less than 10 per cent in 1929, already a proven government wrecker, towards 30 per cent by 1931. (These figures are illustrative and not readily comparable with modern work force statistics.)

Even the few economists of the day, most of whom were young and not experienced, were divided about what to, as modern economists benefitting from hindsight still are. To 1930s conservatives and bank executives, interfering with the financial system, other than by cutting costs, was taboo. Weakening the currency was thought likely to cause ruinous inflation and a collapse in the exchange rate for Australian currency abroad.

Labor, however, called for 'release of credit', the idea being that the then government-owned Commonwealth Bank, which operated as a central bank, could release large sums for public works and restore economic activity. This vague idea crashed because the board that controlled the Bank would not move far without parliamentary approval, which the Senate would not give.

The despair and anguish of the time, in and beyond Canberra, produced many a dramatic event and character. There was memorably fierce and often colourfully insulting oratory, fanaticism, hatreds, conspiracy theories, and politicians changing tune as they struggled for a way out. For Labor the most immediately painful tasks were to cut wages and pensions, through both political and arbitration court action, made inevitable by the pressure to pay public bills and not default on debts.

To simplify greatly, the immediate cause of the Depression was when the Wall Street Crash (in the value of shares and lent money) began just as Scullin took office. It continued for two years, effectively destroying much of the world's money supply, much of which had been invested in the apparently booming American economy. The root cause was the way WWI had distorted the world economy. Australia's particular (but far from unique) problems were that the federal and state governments had already borrowed heavily overseas to prop up the flagging economy of the late 1920s. The price of wool and wheat, then accounting for most of Australia's exports, had fallen drastically and in 1931 the world wheat price was the lowest for 400 years.



'Prime Minister James Scullin addressing a crowd from a back tray of a truck at Coojee, New South Wales, 14 December 1931'. NLA 6266680.

For all these reasons Australia was seriously in debt to overseas banks and finance houses, mostly in London, the world's biggest finance centre. Scullin won approval for some helpful measures such as controlling gold exports and steeply increasing tariffs on imports (later criticised as excessive) but the Senate and Commonwealth Bank stopped some more ambitious proposals from Labor radicals.

One successful project was raising, with much patriotic barnstorming, a 'recovery' loan from the Australian public to fend off bills for overseas loans requiring renewal. The catch was that the salesman for the loan was Joseph Lyons, the acting Treasurer during Theodore's disgrace. Lyons was a ministerial star, former popular Premier of Tasmania, an experienced Treasurer in a conservative state who tended to the 'safe money' side. Lyons clashed often and bitterly with loud, angry caucus radicals, especially when acting Treasurer. Tumult in caucus became so rowdy that debates that were supposed to be confidential echoed in the corridors. He sensationally resigned from cabinet. Further controversies led him and five supporters to eventually leave the ALP and sit as a corner party.

Labor eventually came up with a moderate 'paper money' scheme for the 1931 budget, a fiduciary issue of a set amount and on specific terms, the money to be spent on public works and assistance to the stranded wheat industry. The Senate rejected it, though some bankers were said to be privately sympathetic. Economists disagree about the idea to this day. Scullin was not prepared to risk a double dissolution to defend it. The troubles added tension to the years-old feuding in NSW, which only worsened with attempted mediation. It led a group of NSW members to also leave the caucus and form another cross-bench party. Scullin then lost his reliable majority.

The aggressively authoritarian NSW Premier, Jack Lang, was the effective leader of this left group and there was speculation that he planned to become an economically radical 'strong man' prime minister. Some, not all outside the ALP, thought of Lang as an Australian Mussolini, the flamboyant Italian fascist dictator, though an admiring biographer thought him more an Abraham Lincoln figure.

A Melbourne group headed by Menzies, then a rising star in the conservative organisation, and the rising finance industry star Staniforth Ricketson, persuaded Lyons to merge his group with the Nationalists, as the Liberals were then called, and lead a new United Australia Party dedicated to stable government and finance.

The final blow, however, came from the left when the Lang Labor MPs crossed the floor on an unrelated lesser issue on 25 November 1931. The government fell. Scullin's health was seriously damaged; Theodore and other promising politicians lost seats; and Lyons was a conservative prime minister under the new name until he died suddenly in 1939, to be succeeded by Menzies.

Labor People

Ross McMullin

Book Review: Chris Bowen, *Labor People: The Stories of Six True Believers* (Melbourne: Monash University Press, 2021). pp. +200. \$29.95 paper.

Chris Bowen's latest history book is a multi-biography of six Labor characters he considers under-recognised today. Four were federal ministers: Gregor McGregor, Frank Tudor, John Dedman and Ken Wriedt. Lilian Locke, a pioneering activist, became in 1905 the first female delegate at an ALP federal conference. Gertrude Melville (1884-1959), a Labor devotee throughout her adulthood, was prominent in Sydney municipal politics and the NSW Legislative Council. All are deserving inclusions.

Bowen tells their stories crisply with a consistent structure. For each he provides a brief initial summary of their significance, proceeds to his chronological bio helpfully signposted with sub-headings, and ends with a conclusion reinforcing why they deserve better recognition. He has kept the stories separate and doesn't go out of his way to connect his characters, but those he chose have enabled him to cover in a broad sweep much of Labor's first century. The later bios are longer: McGregor is the first and shortest while Locke, second, is half Dedman's length and much shorter than Melville, who's fifth.

McGregor, Labor's initial Senate leader, is a suitable opener. He was blind yet highly capable and widely esteemed. The Locke story is a gem, a superb model of the revelatory bio that an admirable project like this can illuminate. Bowen highlights her dedicated and effective activism together with her fond connection to a novelist nephew, whose *Careful He Might Hear You* became acclaimed as a film as well as a book.

Bowen praises Tudor for preventing Labor's possible destruction after he became leader in dire circumstances when Billy Hughes led a band of defectors out of caucus in 1916. According to George Pearce, Tudor admitted that conscription was appropriate but his electorate wouldn't wear it; Bowen swiftly dismisses this claim, though perhaps not altogether convincingly.

Dedman, an authentic Labor hero, was at the heart of much that was laudable about the Curtin and Chifley governments. Bowen capably outlines Dedman's influential contributions in a compelling bio that's understandably the book's longest. During Melville's decades of activism in NSW she was, Bowen concludes, 'consistently on the right side of history': against conscription in WWI, against the 'corrupt' 1920s state executive, for federal Labor against the Langites, and against the Groupers/DLP. Her exposure of police brutality after her son almost died in custody is arresting.

To Bowen, Wriedt exemplifies a Labor history truism. 'Every successful reforming government needs' a balance

of big dreamers and down-to-earth providers of 'pragmatic ballast' like Wriedt. He was the Whitlam government's Senate leader who was notoriously not notified of the Dismissal and made crucial parliamentary decisions in ignorance. Debate about alternative scenarios has ensued ever since. Might events have unfolded differently if he had known? Not really, felt Wriedt (whose fury about being uninformed endured), though Bowen has a different view. Wriedt fell out with Whitlam, disliked Hawke and 'reviled' Fraser's government, but regarded no-one with greater contempt than Robin Gray, who was 'the worst, lowest political animal', an 'arrogant' and 'devious' liar.

The intrinsic interest of each story is heightened by Bowen's keenness to emphasise that a situation he's describing was rare or inconceivable today. Examples include a federal leader being challenged for preselection (Tudor); federal conference in effect inviting someone to enter parliament (TJ Ryan); unprecedented government organisation of industry (Dedman); cabinet disunity aired by ministers publishing opposing policy pamphlets (Dedman and Eddie Ward); a fierce public dispute between Labor's leader in the House of Representatives and his Senate equivalent (Whitlam and Wriedt); a federal leader surviving a vote of censure from caucus (Whitlam); and a transfer from federal politics to state parliament involving an immediate ascent to party leader (Wriedt).

There's a welcome index and also a list of endnotes, but they aren't comprehensive. Many direct quotes have no identifying endnote. After reading an interesting quote from Pearce I wondered where he wrote or said it, but was unenlightened. On page 55 Hughes is said to have succeeded Watson as leader (should be Fisher). A football official is referred to as secretary of the 'Geelong ALF Club' in 1949 well before the AFL came into existence. A governor-general and a leading historian are both incorrectly named twice. My book *The Light on the Hill* states that 'public relations techniques were a closed book to him' (Dedman), but this has been reproduced as the purportedly direct quote 'public relations were a closed door to him'; we're all human, but another quotation from a different book has been transcribed inaccurately and attributed to authors who didn't write it.

Few readers, of course, will notice or care about such trifles. But some might be intrigued by the absence of photos either on the cover or inside, a dearth all the more surprising when the aim of this admirable enterprise is to retrieve under-recognised identities from obscurity. Images of Bowen's characters would have sharpened his readers' sense of them (and provided visual corroboration of the author's reference to Wriedt's 'good looks').

At the launch Bowen said he was considering inclusions for a possible second volume. It will be interesting to see who gets a guernsey if this eventuates. Labour history enthusiasts will be hoping it does, as the retrieval of these individuals so little-known today is an extremely worthwhile exercise that Chris Bowen has tackled very impressively.

Walter Kaufmann

Malcolm McDonald

My attention was recently drawn to a review by historian Klaus Neumann of the biography of Frederick Rose who was an anthropologist, Australian public servant and Australian communist. The book, *Red Professor: the Cold War Life of Fred Rose*, details Rose leaving Australia for East Germany where he became a Stasi spy, informing even on members of his own family. Rose is compared with less favour than several other settlers in East Germany from Australia.

One was Walter Kaufmann who was someone with whom I had some acquaintance and knowledge. As a young German Jewish boy living in England, he was rounded up as an alien, and in 1940 was sent to Australia on the infamous prison ship *Dunera*. He eventually became a member of the Communist Party of Australia and a writer. His book, *Voices in the Storm*, dealt with the rise of fascism in Germany and opposition to it. Before getting to know Walter Kaufmann, I remember seeing him from a distance at the communist Eureka Youth League (EYL) Camp in Yarra Junction, Victoria. My first meeting with him was when I boarded the Italian liner *SS Neptunia* in 1955 at Port Melbourne on my way as a representative of the EYL to the 1955 Youth Festival in Warsaw.



Australian Delegation to the 5th World Festival of Youth and students (Warsaw Poland 1955) at Station Pier, Port Melbourne. Back row (L-R) Walter Kaufmann (Vic) Bob Armstrong (NSW) Bill Whitley (NSW); Second row (L-R) Colleen Proctor (NSW) Audrey Petrie (NSW) Lil Diamond (VIC) Dick Diamond (Vic) Bobby Williams (NSW) Janet Henderson (Qld) Valerie Hunter (NSW) Noni Sharp (Vic) (not known) Arthur Halls (NSW); Front row (L-R) Wally Liddel (NSW) Malcolm McDonald (Vic) Paul Johnson (NSW) George Gordon (Vic).

Walter was a representative of the Seamen's Union to the Festival. Our group numbered about 15 people and after a month at sea, the *SS Neptunia* finally arrived in Genoa, Italy, where we left the ship. During the month at sea I had got to know Walter very well. Walter spoke English fluently with a slight accent, he was friendly and not self opinionated. He readily joined in our group's attempts at learning the songs of Dick

Diamond's stage play *Reedy River*. Dick Diamond and his wife Lilian were also part of our group on board the ship. We learned that after spending time in an Australian internment camp, Walter had volunteered to join the Australian Army. He spoke very fondly about his service and the culture of the Australian Army.

Walter, with his wife back in Australia, was a handsome man and I suspected that he had more than just a friendly relationship with at least one particular lady passenger on the *SS Neptunia*. After a few days in Genoa we boarded a train for Warsaw with a two day stop in still war-damaged Vienna. We eventually arrived in Warsaw after crossing the Czechoslovak border into Poland. During the Festival, which was a big cultural and sporting event, I remember Walter took the initiative of telling one of our Polish interpreters – who was a journalist and who, for some reason, Walter didn't like – that Australia was an egalitarian country with an egalitarian army. (This seems to accord with Klaus Neumann's impression that Walter was never to completely assimilate into East German life partly because of his formative Australian experiences.)

Warsaw quickly saw Walter develop a relationship with a beautiful young Polish lady. She visited our accommodation in a school building just before we were to leave the city at the end of the Festival. Walter afterwards chose not to immediately return to Australia, and shortly after went to East Germany where he was to settle. He was quickly followed by his wife, left behind in Australia. The next time I met Walter was when he returned to Australia as a leader of the combined East and West German Olympic team for the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne. I remember having a few drinks with him in a Melbourne pub during which time I learnt that he had secured a position in East Germany as a writer, and enthusiastically described how East Germany spoiled its writers. He also, in a very Australian way, described me to a friend of his who came to the pub that I was an old mate of his. He referred to his wife as having a lot of courage, who knowing he had started a relationship with another woman, had followed him to Europe. He never explained how, or if, his conflicted domestic situation was resolved.

I was reminded of Walter when I read his newspaper comments at the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, when along with his photo, the then older and bearded Walter Kaufmann was reported to have commented that 'a darkness had fallen over the land'. In a 2015 radio interview with Phillip Adams, while visiting Australia for a *Dunera* reunion, the then 91 year old Walter Kaufmann, told how he was able (following the reunification of Germany) to successfully re-establish himself as a writer.

Walter Kaufmann passed away at the age of 97 on 15 April 2021 in Berlin.

Ric Throssell Against ASIO

Rowan Cahill

Book Review: Karen Throssell, *The Crime of Not Knowing Your Crime: Ric Throssell Against ASIO* (Perth: Interventions, 2021). pp. +200. \$34.95 paper

In *The Crime of Not Knowing Your Crime: Ric Throssell Against ASIO*, Karen Throssell presents a personal account of her father's life, primarily as a member of the Australian diplomatic service, and the way his career was prevented from achieving the heights it should have due to unanswerable, unproven, malicious accusations relating to his progressive politics, his loyalty to the Australian nation, and his trustworthiness, shadows originating during the early years of the Cold War, and stymying his thirty-year career as a diplomat.

The accusations were birthed in the US-based decryption of intelligence cables between the Soviet Union and its embassies in Western countries, including Australia, intercepted since 1943. Known as the Venona Project and comprising some 2900 cables, the robust code was cracked in 1948.

A slippery archive, it was declassified in 1995. Deciphered to various degrees, it contains information that conclusively identified some Westerners who engaged in espionage activities on behalf of the Soviet Union, and material that could only be used in an imaginative way to circumstantially identify others.

Ric Throssell was one of the latter against whom a circumstantial case was built, resulting in him being subpoenaed to appear before the 1954-55 Royal Commission on Espionage in Australia. While the Commission's Report exonerated Throssell of any wrongdoing, the smear of being a Soviet spy continued to dog his career and life, resurfacing numerous after his death in mass media reporting and outlets not satisfied with the exoneration. As Karen Throssell explains, it was the longevity of the smear that spurred her to write this book, a creative journey of a decade as she sought a suitable format and form with which to tell the story.

The lengthy and cumbersome title of the book should be the giveaway that this book is a bit more than a simple and straightforward exposition of a case. And it is. For starters, author Throssell is a published poet, so the book blends prose and poetry in her elaboration of her case. Secondly, the book is not a straight forward text with chapter breaks. Rather, Throssell's poems and prose mix with photos, extracts from official documents, artwork, diary extracts, Ric Throssell's own words, and newspaper clippings.

Moreover, the layout and contents have been designed to mimic a security dossier released for public viewing.

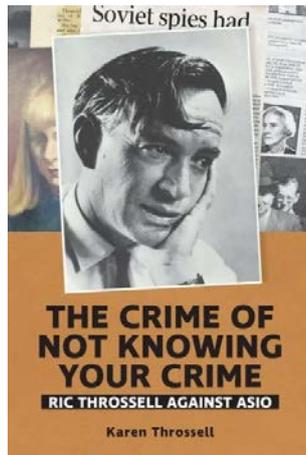
Chapters are headed ITEM, the way dossier extracts are referenced in academic footnotes by scholars of spookdom; there is a lot of white space, redolent of redacted pages common in spook files in the public domain; Ric Throssell's words are set in blacked blocks imitating another common form of redaction, where officialdom has decided that only partial redaction is necessary.

This design concept enables the seamless inclusion of mixed media, again redolent of official spook files which are not straightforward narratives but collections of materials gathered by agents. And as in security dossiers, each turn of the page is a surprise, as there is no knowing what might come next. Conceptually, both the author and publisher have acted boldly and successfully, their design enhancing the text, and giving poet/author Throssell flexibilities she felt creatively at home with beyond the restrictions of a linear narrative exposition.

While the focus of the book is her father and the impact of the smear upon his life and career, Throssell delivers more than an exploration of Cold War politics. Her book is also a memoir about her father, and her mother Dorothy (they married in 1947), their loving relationship ending in 1999 when she died from a brain tumour. Ric followed immediately afterwards by his own hand 'because he knew he couldn't live without her'. This portrait of husband and wife standing together against the travails and legacies of the Cold War is beautifully done.

As author and daughter, Karen Throssell is also an autobiographical presence in the book. The politics that victimised her father, shadowed the lives of her and her siblings too. The book is also a portrait of a family, and present in the telling are Ric's mother Australian author Katharine Susannah Prichard, a significant literary figure, unapologetic leftist, and one of the founding members of the Communist Party of Australia in 1920; and Ric's father, Hugo Throssell, Gallipoli hero and VC winner, later an opponent of war and a socialist, suiciding in 1933. Years later, Ric sold off the VC to bankroll anti-war activities. And the book is also a daughter's powerful statement of claim for her father to have a place in Australian cultural history: his diplomatic career aside, he was also variously an actor, playwright, director, film maker, non-fiction author and novelist.

The book wraps up with a contextual essay by distinguished Cold War and espionage scholar Phillip Deery, immensely useful for those who come to the book without background knowledge about the Cold War in Australia, or intimacy with the wilderness of mirrors that is the world of spooks. Throssell has produced a very political book, but it is also an act of love as she pursues the unremitting shadows that dogged the lives of her family. This pursuit in the hands of a poet, has produced a very moving work.



Dr Evatt, Mr Menzies and ASIO

Phillip Deery

Ten years ago, the National Archives of the UK released thousands of pages contained in thirty-six MI5 files on the Petrov case. One file, concerned with 1954, the year of the Petrovs' defections, caught the attention of the *Australian* newspaper. Under the by-line, 'Spy Chief Told to Boycott Evatt as PM', journalist Peter Wilson reported that Prime Minister Menzies considered that the Petrovs' revelations 'cast such a shadow' over Dr HV Evatt's judgement that (in Menzies's words) 'everything must be done in the national as distinct from political party interest to prevent Evatt becoming prime minister'. The federal election was scheduled for 29 May 1954.

Aside from Menzies' disingenuousness in framing a partisan desire as a national interest concern, the response of the Director-General of ASIO, Brigadier Charles Spry, was more disturbing. Derek Hamblen, the all-important MI5 Security Liaison Officer (SLO) based in ASIO's Melbourne headquarters since 1951, telegrammed MI5 in London: 'Spry strongly supports PM. Until now Spry has been very restrained about prospects of working for Evatt. He states now that in the event of Evatt becoming PM, UK government should seriously consider withholding secrets'. Both Robert Manne, the author of *The Petrov Affair: Politics and Espionage*, and David McKnight, the author of *Australia Spies and their Secrets*, were asked to comment and both expressed, respectively, astonishment and indignation. On the other hand, Des Ball, the co-author of *Breaking the Codes: Australia's KGB Network, 1944-1950*, believed mistrust of Evatt was justified since he was a 'serious threat'; Ball also made the remarkable if utterly ludicrous assertion that Evatt was a Soviet agent.

In the event, despite winning the popular vote (50.07) and gaining five seats, Labor lost the election to the Liberal-Country Party coalition. Another election was held on 22 November 1958. And here we refer again to the MI5 files, into which I've recently delved. Buried in the large file KV2/3474 are two documents (folios 1155a and 1156a) dated 20 November 1958 and 4 December 1958. Once again, Evatt was on the mind of Menzies and Spry.

The first is a cable, 'Top Secret and Personal' from R.H. (Dick) Morton, from the Office of the High Commissioner for the UK in Canberra – a crucial conduit for classified communication between ASIO and MI5 – to Roger Hollis, the Director-General of MI5 (1956-65). Morton informed Hollis that Sir Allen Brown, the permanent Secretary of the Prime Minister's Department (1949-58), on instruction from Menzies, copied complete sets of the Petrov papers from the originals held in the prime minister's office. Two sets were personally handed to the SLO in Australia on 20 November for transmission to MI5 and MI6. A further two sets were to be sent to the FBI and the CIA. Morton was 'warned' by Spry that he would soon receive them and 'went to some pains to explain that this was none of his doing, but purely the action of the Prime Minister'. This

correspondence was two days before the election. That is the context for Morton writing 'This last minute activity indicates that the present Government is making hasty preparations in the event that Evatt is returned to power'. He then commented that Allen Brown had 'been having talks with Charles Spry' and there was 'concern that true copies of these documents are preserved as there is no knowing what Evatt would do if he regained the Premiership [sic]'.

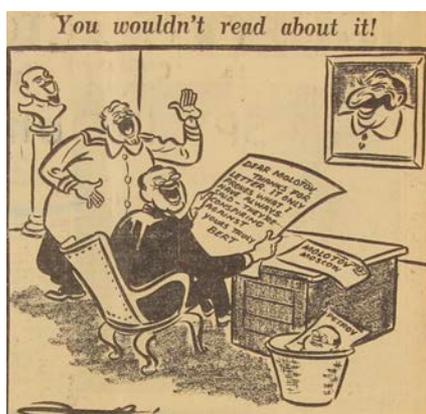
Evatt lost the 1958 election by a clear margin: on a two-party preferred vote the Liberal-Country Party won 54.10% (assisted by DLP preferences) to the Labor Party's 45.90%. Ten days after the election, MTE Clayton in MI5 wrote to an official (name redacted) in MI6. He enclosed nine envelopes containing the full set of Petrov documents. He indicated that Spry specifically requested that both British intelligence services should receive and hold them indefinitely. Clayton echoed Morton's statement that this move was inspired by Menzies' 'last minute fears' that his government may not be returned and 'by doubts regarding the actions of Evatt' should he win. He continued: 'Fortunately, the election result has shown that these precautions were unnecessary, but the papers are forwarded in order to honour our undertaking to Spry'.

It is highly plausible that Menzies (and Spry) were convinced that if he became Prime Minister, Evatt would order the destruction of the Petrov papers. These papers, far more extensive than the documents Petrov filched from the Soviet Embassy when he defected, contain, among many other things, the Petrovs' identifications and descriptions (sometimes very detailed) of hundreds of Soviet intelligence officers and cadres, under diplomatic or other cover, stationed in the UK and several European countries. This information constituted the 'crown jewels' of counter-intelligence. The papers also contained numerous ASIO reports, based on interrogations of the Petrovs up to 1958, of the structures, administrative functions, personnel and organisational changes of the Soviet state security services, as well as the all-important methodology of Soviet cryptanalysis and cipher systems through which ultra-secret cables were transmitted from Moscow to Russian embassies. Many of these reports can now be accessed (and downloaded for free, thanks to Covid) in the KV2 files of the British archives.

But would Evatt really have destroyed this material, so invaluable to Western intelligence? There can, of course, be no conclusive answer. More important is the probability that Menzies and ASIO sincerely believed he would. Their distrust of Evatt and their conviction that he was mentally unstable was confirmed during the period of the Royal Commission on Espionage (1954-55). Before it, he controversially defended two of his staffers who had apparent links to Soviet agents until he was dramatically dismissed by the commissioners; he believed Petrov's defection was a political stunt; and was convinced that the Petrov papers were (to use his words) 'fabricated and spurious'. According to Spry – whom Evatt most likely would have sacked had he won the 1954 election – he 'deliberately endeavoured to undermine the integrity of

ASIO...hoping to destroy its reputation as a whole and the [Royal] Commission itself.

And then, on 19 October 1955, after the Royal Commission had published its report that substantiated Petrov's claims of a Soviet spy ring operating in Evatt's Department of External Affairs in the mid/late 1940s, Evatt committed an astonishing act. He informed parliament that he had written to the Soviet Minister, Vyacheslav Molotov, seeking confirmation that the Petrov documents were forgeries and that Molotov had validated this. A sound recording of Evatt's address was made. It vividly conveys the thunderous uproar that greeted his announcement. Volleys of laughter are punctuated by jeers, whistles and loud boos. Labor members, whom Evatt had not consulted beforehand, shuddered in disbelief. Some held their heads in their hands. Menzies' reply was cruel and effective. He referred to Evatt's 'delusions' and 'obsessions' and questioned his mental state.



Source: *The Herald*, 20 October 1955, p. 4

that produced extreme reactions when under intense pressure. Whatever explains the remarkable Molotov letter, it was enough to persuade Evatt's detractors of his impetuosity and instability. Evatt's purge of the top-secret Petrov papers in 1958 was not a remote hypothesis but, it seemed, a real possibility. Accordingly, they must be safeguarded – hence the otherwise unusual decision by Menzies to send copies to intelligence agencies in Great Britain and the United States for safekeeping. MI5, at least, needed no persuasion. As the National Archives files attest (see in particular KV2/3452), SLO Derek Hamblen had been sending from Australia scores of negative newspaper clippings on Evatt to his MI5 superiors, accompanied by his own highly critical comments, throughout the 1950s.

These MI5 files probably add little to what some *Recorder* readers already may know. But they add further substance and detail to the political ramifications of the Petrov Affair. They reveal the profound hostility and distrust towards Evatt from Menzies and ASIO; underline the toxic political atmosphere engendered by the Royal Commission on Espionage; and point to the lingering but mistaken belief within the labour movement that the Petrov affair was deliberately concocted, a political stunt, by Menzies to derail Evatt's prospect of electoral victory in 1954. What the files do not illuminate, however, is Menzies' adroit exploitation of the communist issue in Evatt's subsequent electoral losses, in 1955 and 1958.

Ethel Rosenberg

Laurence W Maher

Book review: Anne Sebba, *Ethel Rosenberg: A Cold War Tragedy* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2021). pp. 288, \$32.99 paper.

The ongoing, albeit now muted, controversy regarding the Rosenberg case has outlived the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, which was its root cause. On 2 February 1950, the German physicist Klaus Fuchs was arrested in the UK and confessed to spying for the Soviet Union. That led directly to the arrests in the United States of Julius Rosenberg on 17 July 1950, his wife Ethel Rosenberg on 11 August 1950, and one of their alleged co-conspirators, Morton Sobell on 16 August 1950 (in Mexico City). On 29 March 1951 the three were convicted of conspiring between 1944 and 1950 to violate the US Espionage Act 1917. The death sentences passed on the Rosenbergs by US District Court Judge Irving R Kaufmann on 5 April 1951 were carried out at the Sing Sing Penitentiary in New York State on 19 June 1953. Both Presidents Truman and Eisenhower had declined to grant executive clemency.

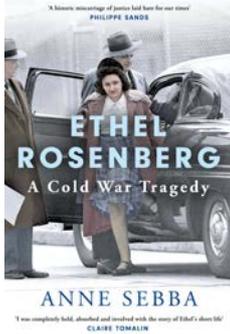
One uniquely poignant and enduring reminder of the horrible cruelty of those death sentences is the depiction in press photographs of the Rosenbergs' two boys, Michael and Robert, being taken to and from the death house to visit their parents by Emanuel H Bloch, who was the Rosenbergs' lead counsel at their trial.

By mid-1953, the anti-communist hysteria of the early years of the domestic Cold War in the US had spread, virus-like, with the onset of the relentless McCarthyite 'witch hunt' phase. Were the Rosenbergs guilty as charged of spying for the Soviet Union, or were they the victims of a monstrous injustice/frame-up? Sobell who, unlike his co-accused, did not give evidence at the trial set out his version of events in his book, *Doing Time* (1974). But Sobell later changed his tune. In 2008, he was reported as having told *The New York Times* that he had been a Soviet spy.

Underlying the controversy were the facts that Ruth Greenglass, her husband David Greenglass (Ethel Rosenberg's brother), and Harry Gold were alleged to be co-conspirators. David Greenglass and Gold pleaded guilty and were sentenced to 15 and 30 years' imprisonment and released in 1960 and 1968, respectively. Ruth Greenglass was not charged. The alleged conspiratorial spy-ring operated across the continental US beginning with David Greenglass, a machinist serving in a US Army signals unit at the 'Manhattan' atomic bomb research project at Los Alamos, New Mexico. He surreptitiously removed documents and, aided by his wife, passed them to the Rosenbergs in New York City who handed them to the courier Harry Gold who passed them to a Soviet espionage agent. The Rosenbergs always denied each and every overt conspiratorial act alleged against them. Scepticism on the US Left about the Rosenbergs'

protestations of innocence had been there since the beginning. In his *American Radical: The Life and Times of I F Stone* (2009), D.D. Guttenplan reminds readers that as long ago as 1956, I.F. Stone advised people agitating for clemency for Sobell, to free his case from the burden of using it to prove the Rosenbergs were the victims of a frame-up. Guttenplan asks 'Who now maintains the innocence of the Rosenbergs?'

To appreciate the full measure of Anne Sebba's book, it is advisable to read it in conjunction with her article in *Time* magazine (9 June 2020) and her interview on the Cold War Conversations podcast (27 June 2021). She has no doubt that Julius Rosenberg was a spy-ring recruiter and financial go-between/paymaster for the Soviet Union. Moreover, Ethel Rosenberg knew and approved of her husband's espionage activities – however, Ethel 'was not a spy. Nor was she a saint'. The book is only peripherally connected with Ethel Rosenberg's Soviet espionage. It expresses the author's fervent belief that the timing and conduct of the prosecution and the overall treatment of Ethel Rosenberg fits into what she labels, 'the #MeToo narrative'. Whatever that abstraction might be taken by readers to indicate, the book is one long speculation about the beliefs, feelings, inclinations, motives and other states of mind of Ethel Rosenberg and numerous other persons.



The book's major deficiencies include the author's misconception of the respective roles of judge and jury in a criminal trial and proof beyond a reasonable doubt at that time in the US, preferring the tendentious presentation of evidence rather than allowing it to speak for itself by setting out question and answer verbatim, the failure to deal

systematically with each of the alleged specific overt conspiratorial acts, and the misconceived criticism of Emanuel Bloch's cross-examination of David Greenglass. The author's bald assertion that Ethel Rosenberg's conviction will forever be tainted because it was obtained by her brother's perjury is tainted by her animosity towards Ethel's brother whom she sneeringly calls a 'lowly machinist', and her misconception of the role of the jury as the fact finder, add to the deficiencies.

Given that Sebba's stated purpose is to demonstrate the force of her novel theory about the discrete injustice inflicted on Ethel Rosenberg, her failure to set out the detailed reasons given by the US Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit on 25 February 1952 for rejecting the Rosenberg/Sobell appeal against conviction (and sentence) is another major omission. What the book alludes to but fails to accomplish, is the need now, more than ever before, to investigate systematically the following question. Knowing that their two small boys would be orphaned what, precisely, was the cause for which Ethel Rosenberg and her husband jointly chose to be martyrs?

Charlie Chaplin and the FBI

Phillip Deery

The 17-18 July 2021 edition of the *Weekend Australian* featured an article by the film critic, David Stratton, on perhaps the greatest entertainer of the twentieth century. Entitled 'Charlie Chaplin: the silent revolutionary', it was prompted by the centenary of Chaplin's first feature-length film, *The Kid*. The article discussed Chaplin's many classic films, such as the anti-Fordist *Modern Times* and the anti-Nazi *The Great Dictator*. Stratton also mentioned Chaplin's leftist political views, and how Chaplin's alleged communist sympathies led to a subpoena to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1947 during its investigation into communists in the film industry that culminated in the Hollywood Ten trials of 1948-50.

But there is much more to the political harassment and persecution of Charlie Chaplin. J. Edgar Hoover first took an interest in the 'little tramp' in 1922, the year after *The Kid* opened. But it was not until World War II that his FBI file, numbered 100-127090, began to thicken. FBI agents noted that he was the main speaker at a CPUSA-backed Artists Front to Win the War in Carnegie Hall on 16 October 1942, which called for a second front. He addressed the crowd as 'comrades' and praised the Soviet Union, then a wartime ally. They also noted that he made contributions to a range of labour movement and Communist Party 'front' organisations, associated with radicals, and expressed contempt for red-baiters and countersubversives. He called for greater social justice at home and tolerance for communists.

With the onset of the Cold War, the political environment changed, but Chaplin did not. He neither retreated from his beliefs nor betrayed his friends. He continued to support left causes, challenge HUAC's citations of contempt against the Hollywood Ten, and defiantly defend individuals under threat of deportation, such as the Australian labour leader Harry Bridges and the Austrian composer Hanns Eisler. His ideas were closely aligned to those of Henry Wallace, a former vice-president whose left-wing Progressive Party Chaplin supported in the 1947 presidential election. He attacked America's unregulated capitalism and sought fundamental reform: 'I don't want the old rugged individualism', Chaplin stated in 1947, 'rugged for a few, ragged for the many'. All this, and more, was sufficient for the FBI, which confused dissent with disloyalty, to regard him as a significant 'fellow traveller' or, worse, a dangerous concealed communist. Hoover repeatedly demanded his field agents produce incriminating reports on Chaplin's political activities and connections, but none – much to Hoover's chagrin – was able to find any evidence of whether Chaplin 'is now or has ever been' a member of the Communist Party or even a contributor to Party funds.

However, the FBI fed information to other sources, a not uncommon practice, in the hope of tarnishing Chaplin's reputation and diminishing his popularity. One source was the well-known Hollywood gossip columnist Hedda

Hopper, who smeared Chaplin with unsubstantiated assertions and called for his deportation. As the McCarthyist atmosphere deepened, more mainstream press outlets and television hosts (like Ed Sullivan) joined the mud-slinging chorus and fuelled the countersubversive attack. Little wonder that Chaplin told reporters: 'These days, if you step off the curb with your left foot, they accuse you of being a Communist'.

Xenophobia became entwined with anticommunism. The fact that British-born Chaplin never took out US citizenship despite living and paying taxes there since 1919 ('I am a citizen of the world', he once proudly declared), fed a growing public perception that he was an 'undesirable alien'. Xenophobia has a long and ugly history in the US but when it fused with political intolerance, as it did in the early Cold War, aliens were designated a threat, both disloyal and subversive. Chaplin's leftist views were linked to his non-citizenship and his lifelong internationalism and he became a leading target. Right-wing, 'patriotic' organisations like the American Legion and the Catholic War Veterans organised campaigns to picket and boycott his motion pictures, pressured television stations from advertising his films and petitioned exhibitors to cancel scheduled screenings. In large measure, these efforts were successful: his last two films made in Hollywood were box office hits in Europe but failed financially in the US.

Meanwhile, the FBI intensified its surveillance. It placed Chaplin on a 'Security Card Index' (which enabled listed 'subversive' individuals to be detained during an emergency), liaised with the Treasury Department, which sought his tax records, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service, which sought his deportation. It was the FBI-INS collaboration that sealed Chaplin's fate. On 17 September 1952, Chaplin and his family boarded the *Queen Elizabeth* bound for Europe to promote his latest film. Two days later the US Attorney General James McGranery, after consultation with Hoover, revoked his re-entry permit to the country. McGranery attacked Chaplin's 'leering, sneering attitude toward a country whose hospitality has enriched him' to which the communist *Daily Worker* responded: 'Now the world's bully threatens the world's clown'. Chaplin did not return to the US until 1972, when he was presented with an Academy Award; he was given a twelve-minute standing ovation, as much in penance as in recognition.

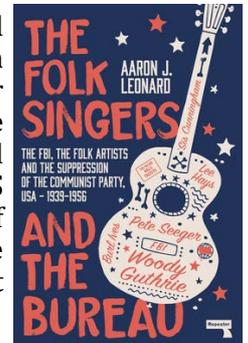
I have written at greater length about the impact of McCarthyism on Chaplin's close friend, a harmonica player who was also exiled from America and, like Chaplin, hounded by the FBI even after relocating to Europe (see 'Larry Adler and the Cold War', *Labour History*, no. 101, November 2011). But this brief note on a better-known entertainer, Charlie Chaplin, hints at the character and consequences of aggressive surveillance and political repression. It is also a reminder that when an individual preaches values that deviate from the dominant political norms, attempts to harass, intimidate or silence by the state invariably follow.

The Folksingers and the Bureau

Mark Gregory

Book review: Aaron J Leonard, *The Folksingers and the Bureau: The FBI, the Folk Artists and the Suppression of the Communist Party, USA 1939-1956* (London: Repeater Books, 2020). pp. 328. US\$16.95 paper.

This is an extensively researched account of how North American folksingers, folklorists and other associated cultural workers became caught in a web of surveillance and bullying by the FBI and the US Federal government as a result of their commitment to social justice and their ties to the Communist Party USA (CPUSA).



For anyone unfamiliar with the period of US history that Leonard covers, 1939-1956, it may come as surprise that individuals who are today regarded as icons of American culture, and in Pete Seeger's case lauded by two US Presidents, were systematically harassed by their state. This harassment included the threat of imprisonment. His investigation demonstrates how and why performing artists, publishers and folklorists such as Seeger, Woody Guthrie, Paul Robeson, Ronnie Gilbert, Alan Lomax, Sis Cunningham, Burl Ives, Josh White and many others were targeted by the FBI through the Bureau's infiltration of organisations such as Peoples Songs as well as the CPUSA itself, and how pressure from the state was directed via legislation such as the Smith Act and HUAC.

The study is structured chronologically, each chapter covering one or two years from 1939 to 1956. Leonard notes how Guthrie, Seeger and others were attracted to the CPUSA following the depression years. They were not alone. During WWII, there was a tolerance towards the CPUSA given the alliance between Soviet Union and US. Figures from the FBI's Table of Party Membership reveal that there were 15,000 communists in the American armed forces and an estimated 80,000 members of the CPUSA. Yet two years after the end of the war, the push to criminalise the Party and anyone involved with it began.

With the onslaught against communists and the party's 'fellow travellers' came an expansion of the FBI's filing process. Leonard has drawn extensively on their files and offers a useful Appendix of FBI files for those named in the research. The files are important even if inaccurate at times. They demonstrate how intrusive and potentially damaging the surveillance into people's private lives was. To be on a file was to be a candidate for the Security Index. To be on the Security Index was to potentially lose your livelihood. To get erased from the Security Index was hugely difficult. For example, Woody Guthrie while dying from Huntington's chorea, was deemed a 'non-threat' by the Bureau yet never erased. Seeger remained on the Security Index until the 1970s – well after Hoover and HUAC ceased to exist.

After summarising the backgrounds of the artists he focuses on, Leonard begins his analysis of the US government's crackdown on the CPUSA and its sympathisers; how the 1939 Hitler-Stalin Pact impacted on the Party and the draconian Alien Registration Act (popularly known as the Smith Act). This Act was used against many left-wing artists including Charlie Chaplin. We see how, as international political alliances changed, so the activities of folksingers changed as the Party moved from its earlier anti-war position. This proved to be a time fraught with contradiction. For example, the Almanac Singers, who had previously recorded an album of anti-war songs in line with the Party's then stance, now began to work closely with the government war effort, singing on television and for service people. Yet the Almanacs are assessed by the FBI as 'a notorious Communist outfit'. Seeger's 2000 page file released in 2015, compiled from when he joined the army in 1943, reveals how widely the FBI canvassed his family and colleagues about his loyalty and how nervous they were about communist sympathies entering the armed forces. Leonard describes how, following WWII and 'fearing Communism's ascendancy', the US focused on initiatives to neutralise the CPUSA. For example, folklorist Alan Lomax is coded as a domestic security subject suggesting that he was a potential detention focus.

The study is replete with telling FBI file quotes. Surveillance notes on Aunt Molly Jackson include statements from her neighbours: 'the neighbour refers to Molly as a very radical person. The neighbour also says that people in the neighbourhood are 'frankly afraid of the subject.' However, there is more rich material than this review can address. Suffice it to say Leonard also covers the impact of informers within the Party whose often inaccurate information had severe consequences for the folk artists under investigation; the ongoing attacks on Paul Robeson; the internal contradictions within the Party that weakened it in the face of the state's onslaught; the 'white chauvinism' period where the Party attempted to deal with its own racism leading to the expulsion of hundreds of members... and more.

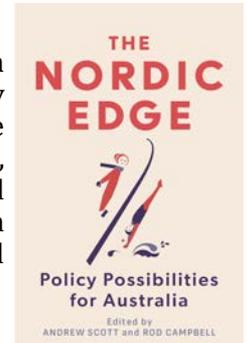
Finally, the author argues that given anti-communism is 'an assumed position' in the US even today, most biographies or profiles of the artists discussed tend to elide their links to the CPUSA thus potentially suggesting that the FBI's attacks make no sense. Yet the harassment they faced arose from their very real connection to the CPUSA (whether members or not). '[W]orking in the critical cultural realm' made them a focus for the Bureau in its efforts to destroy communism in the US. Leonard's argument is that, in fact, without what he terms 'the breathing room' that the artists' association with the CPUSA allowed, 'it is nearly impossible to conceive of the art that was created in that historical moment as having been accomplishable'. It was their common link to the Party that brought these artists together. Leonard's excellent achievement in this research is to reveal how onerous, damaging, exhaustive and indeed exhausting the impact of the range of repressive constraints levelled against the performers was. In conclusion he asks us 'to speculate what these artists might have done had they not been subject to such repression'.

The Nordic Edge

Max Ogden

Book review: Andrew Scott and Rod Campbell (eds), *The Nordic Edge: Policy Possibilities for Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2021). pp. 254. \$32.95 paper.

This book of ten chapters, each comparing a different policy between how it is tackled in the Nordic countries (Iceland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland) and Australia is a must read for those on the Left committed to both short and long term progressive change.



The Australian interest in the Nordic Social Democratic model began in 1977, when Olle and Ruth Hammarström and their young family arrived in Adelaide at the recently established Industrial Democracy Unit, an initiative of Premier Don Dunstan. This resulted from a deal by the Whitlam government's Minister for Labour, Clyde Cameron, to have a long-term exchange between the Swedish and Australian Departments of Labour. Olle was then in the Swedish Department of Labour, later to become the National Secretary of a public sector union, and Ruth was a Human Resources Manager in the second largest Swedish Insurance company, owned by the Swedish unions. They were here for eighteen months, eventually living on the Northern Sydney beaches for most of that time, and so liked Australia they came back a second time for about eighteen months.

A number of us within the unions, academia, and workplace change consultants made friends with them early in their stay, inviting them to speak at various gatherings and trade union courses. This led to ongoing friendships and a significant interest in the Nordic Social Democratic model and lessons that might be learnt. Two results were the 1986 ACTU study of Sweden, Norway, Germany, UK, and 'Australia Reconstructed', which was unanimously endorsed at the ACTU 1987 Congress and which incorporated some of the Nordic lessons.

This book is an excellent contribution to that tradition, but goes into the detail much better than anything before it, raising both practical possibilities which could be used here, as well as examples of where the cultures could be too different to emulate. All the positive lessons, however, are based on how and whether they may or may not fit with the Australian culture and traditions. From reading many of the examples and lessons drawn, most could be adapted to Australia.

The chapter on life and taxes explodes a myth promulgated by Prime Minister Morrison who, when asked for his evidence that high taxes lead to weakened economies, replied that it was Economics 101. By

examining the tax regimes of 183 countries, and more specifically the OECD, this chapter finds that nearly all the countries with higher taxes also happen to have the strongest economies based on several criteria. The five Nordic countries not only have the highest taxes of all, but have the strongest economies based on employment, Human Development Index – Inequality Adjusted, World Happiness Report, and a more even spread of wealth than all other countries. The statistical depth of the study is extraordinary, and very convincing.

In the chapter headed 'Norwegians Would – Sovereign Wealth, Responsible Investment and Climate Leadership', the book explains how Norway has used its mineral resources, particularly North Sea oil, to significantly benefit society, far more than Australia does. The Norwegian government has always owned a majority share, the other owners have been taxed far higher than here, and has used the vast profits to develop what is now the world's largest Sovereign Wealth Fund, with over \$1 trillion invested. The Nordic region has developed a system of Environmental, Social & Governance (ESG), which is expressed via an independent body – the Nordic Bank Investment Management (NBIM); while not directing companies, NBIM regularly examines and publicly pronounces on the ESG investment policies of companies, and has great influence over investment decisions.

The massive Norwegian Sovereign Wealth Fund, originally based on fossil fuel, has been since 2006 divesting itself of non-renewable assets, and using the NBIM/ESG assessments, and excluding large numbers of companies and projects which don't meet strict climate change and other environmental criteria. The writers suggest that Norway is a leading country in the battle against climate change.

All the chapters are of great interest, but two make particularly interesting reading. One is 'Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy', written by former Foreign Minister, Margot Wallström. The third of the four principles guiding Sweden's foreign policy after the Red/Greens alliance came to power in 2014 is to promote the role of women in foreign policy, since more women means more peace. This is a most interesting feature of foreign policy which has not been prominent in Australia, but certainly should be.

The other chapter, 'Boosting Workforce Participation and Wages', highlights the greater participation in the workforce of women, the role of childcare, parental leave where both parents are expected to take time off (and if they don't they lose it), where payments range from 70% to 100% of wages when on parental leave. This chapter also shows that bargaining which usually takes place at the industry level has led to higher wages rises than Australia has achieved over the years until 2020, and that these have been more equitably shared across society than has been our experience of enterprise bargaining.

This is a book which should be read by everyone on the left, not to slavishly copy, but to gain an idea of different ways of thinking, not about the detail, but strategies and principles.

Bob Hawke and foreign influence

Brian Boyd

In a recent edition of the *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Federation University researcher Cameron Coventry published 'The "Eloquence" of Robert J Hawke: United States informer, 1973-79'. His investigation was essentially based on a tranche of de-classified confidential US diplomatic cables from the 1970s. Coventry revealed details of how RJ Hawke, as Australia's top union leader of the period, had a 'secretive relationship with the diplomatic missions of the United States of America' and in essence was an 'informer' on our nation's macro-economic situation, industrial relations laws, union leaders and union activities, wages policy and all political matters, including the inner workings of the Australian Labor Party. Today he would surely have had to register under the current foreign influence transparency scheme!

As Coventry writes, the cables revealed that US diplomats 'noticed a change in union politics under Hawke's leadership, with the ACTU executive having become "significantly more conservative" by 1977 and therefore less militant'. One example of this was Labor's ban on uranium mining, which 'Hawke was reported to have "masterminded" the "erosion" of popular anti-uranium policy by exploiting a "break in union solidarity"'. One secret US cable provided an interesting insight into the US embassy's view of Bob Hawke. It recognised by the late 1970s Hawke was 'the most powerful and articulate figure in the history of the Australian union movement' and had 'successfully played down his academic record', making him more acceptable to 'the blue-collar worker'.

The cables also revealed that once Hawke became Prime Minister in the early 1980s he oversaw significant changes to Australia's intellectual property laws, which was much appreciated by the US. In his autobiography published in 1996, former Federal ALP politician Bill Hayden wrote of Hawke's 'uncritical support for the USA'. Back in 1983 Humphrey McQueen wrote that Hawke's election as ACTU President was endorsed by the US labour attaché (in Australia), whose diplomatic role was concerned with industrial relations. Similarly in his 1994 book, David McKnight wrote about the activities of United States labour attaches, revealing that the position has long been occupied by intelligence officers, with one of their particular tasks to cultivate relationships in the Australian Labor Party and the Democratic Labor Party. Coventry points out that there have been many comprehensive scholarly and biographical accounts of Hawke's life, but very little or no accounting of Bob Hawke's many interactions with US officials over many years. Hawke himself in his 1994 memoir is silent on the issue, as is Blanche d'Alpuget in both editions of the official Hawke biography (1982 and 2019).

In one particular cable, de-classified in July 1973, it is revealed that US diplomats 'lauded' Hawke's ability to

keep militant unions under control and his ability to resolve disputes with what he (Hawke) 'jokingly' called 'my eloquence'. Cameron Coventry's expose received only scant media coverage across the Australian media. The limited circulation newsletter, *Workplace Express*, provided a summary to Australia's small group of industrial relations practitioners.

In his recent autobiography former union official Max Ogden imparted an interesting anecdote when he worked with Hawke at the ACTU. It provides an intriguing insight to the then ACTU President's links with the US Embassy in the 1970s. Ogden writes he was planning to spend a year abroad in 1978 and part of that was to hopefully visit the USA. However, because he was a signed up member of the Communist Party of Australia, he speculated he might have problems getting into the United States. Hawke immediately got onto the US labour attaché telling the US officer—'I don't want any of this bullshit about people not being able to travel because of their politics. Can you make sure he gets in?' After putting down the phone Hawke said to Ogden: 'you'll be right. Have a good trip'. These more open revelations about Bob Hawke's relationship with the US will bring back recollections of 'The Falcon and the Snowman' story to many Australian union activists of the 1970s and 1980s.

In 2010 a stash of leaked US diplomatic cables were released by WikiLeaks and gained a fair amount of publicity around the world. Of special interest in Australia were the cables from the US Embassy in Canberra. Some of those cables referred to the relationship between the US State Department and Bob Hawke. Some cables specifically showed that Bob Hawke conferred regularly with US diplomats in private. One cable indicated that although Hawke's 'personal attitude on foreign policy questions was very close to the United States', he told US diplomats that if the left wing of the trade union movement became more influential he would 'adjust his own rhetoric to the prevailing line'! (ALP Federal MP Mark Arbib was also outed in the cables for regularly visiting the US Embassy, where he revealed the internal workings of his Party.)

Today the Integrity and Security Division of the Federal Attorney-General's Department, oversees the national foreign influence transparency scheme. When originally set up by former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull these laws were supposed to be 'agnostic'. But now, in 2021, right-wing think tanks such as the Australian Security Policy Institute are demanding an end to any even-handed, agnostic approach to foreign influence, believing it unhelpful given the increasing tensions between the two world superpowers, the US and China. These lobbyists make little secret of wanting to now protect the 'influences' and 'interferences' of the powers that already dominate Australian politics – the US and the UK.

Interestingly, when commenting on this recent demand to change the emphasis of the foreign influence laws, their architect, Malcolm Turnbull, suggested that having a 'blacklist' could be difficult to administer and creating a 'white list' would need to take into account 'countries that

generally we would regard as friendly, but are still not above indulging in espionage and meddling'. Regardless, the Australian public deserves to be made aware of all interference operations in Australia – 'white' or 'black'. With the pro-war atmospherics being generated by a bevy of selected 'think tanks' and academics, and given regular coverage by certain journalists embedded within certain media corporations, this basic right to know will have to be fought for. In the meantime, with the recent exposé of the 'informer activities' of one RJ Hawke, in this current conservative climate, he may not have had to register today with the national Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme after all!

Labour History Melbourne AGM

Melbourne Branch, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History AGM

5:00-6:00pm Thursday 2 December (AEDT)

Via Zoom: [https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84242487823?](https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84242487823?pwd=bk1iNUF6eThHZ3hqaFgvSGtEd254QT09)

[pwd=bk1iNUF6eThHZ3hqaFgvSGtEd254QT09](https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84242487823?pwd=bk1iNUF6eThHZ3hqaFgvSGtEd254QT09)

Reports: President, Secretary, Treasurer.
Election of Office Bearers and General Business.
Enquiries to lbyrne@actu.org.au

Australian Society for the Study of Labour History (Federal body) AGM. 4:30-5:30pm (AEDT), Thursday, 9 December 2021. Enquiries to jkimber@swin.edu.au

Stuart Macintyre

As we were going to print, we learnt of the death of Stuart Macintyre, President of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, and dear friend. Stuart was a giant among Australian historians. His many roles across a wide range of fronts were both prolific and pivotal. His contributions to contemporary debates and historical scholarship were immense and will be long-lasting. He will be greatly missed. The next issue of *Recorder* will carry a full obituary.

Labour History Melbourne AGM

President: Peter Love pjlove@me.com

Vice President: David Cragg davidkcragg@hotmail.com

Secretary: Liam Byrne lbyrne@actu.org.au

Treasurer: Phillip Deery phillip.deery@vu.edu.au

Website: <https://labourhistorymelbourne.org>

Recorder is published three times a year. The opinions of the contributors are their own and not necessarily those of the editor or executive of the ASSLH, Melbourne Branch. Send contributions to the editor, Julie Kimber (jkimber@swin.edu.au). *Recorder* is published with the generous help of Ellen and Brian Smiddy, Phillip Deery (*Recorder* bagman), Peter Love, and Susanne Provis.

We respectfully acknowledge the First Nations of Victoria, and their Elders past and present.