

# Recorder

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE MELBOURNE BRANCH OF THE  
AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF LABOUR HISTORY (INC.)

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**General Meeting: Sunday 30 August 1998, 2 pm.**

**To be held at the Plumbers' Union Office, 54 Victoria St., Carlton.**  
(See map on back page for location.)

The speaker will be:

**BOB CORCORAN,**

who will talk about

## **THE CONSTITUTION IN PLAIN WORDS.**

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**ONE DAY CONFERENCE  
ARGUING THE COLD WAR  
Friday 20 November 1998  
Melbourne Trades Hall**

Members who attend Branch meetings regularly will recall authorising the Executive to prepare plans for a conference towards the end of the year on the Cold War generally, with a possible emphasis on the Labor Split of the 1950s. Planning is well under way. We have tentatively booked a room at the Trades Hall for Friday 20 November, have been taking advice widely on who might be invited to present the nine papers and have drawn up a provisional program. It is as follows:

9.00 - 9.30	Registration
9.30 - 9.45	Welcome
9.45 - 10.45	Arguing the Cold War - current questions and debates. [2 papers @ 20 min. each + 10 min. discussion each]
10.45 - 11.15	Morning Tea.
11.15 - 1.15	Fighting the Cold War [4 papers @ 20 min. each + 10 min. discussion each]
1.15 - 2.30	Lunch.
2.30 - 4.00	Reviewing the Cold War [3 papers @ 20 min. each + 10 min. discussion each]
4.00 - 4.30	Plenary Session - discussion.
4.30 ▷	Drinks.

We are looking at the possibility of publishing the papers in some form, either before or after the day of the conference.

It might be wise to pencil the Conference into your diary now. There will be more detailed news in the next issue.

### **A POETICAL QUESTION**

Tom Spencer, a Ferntree Gully reader, has written to ask if anyone can identify a faintly-remembered poem. He asks, 'Thirty or forty years ago I had an old mate in the BWIU named Rolly Farrel. During WWI his resonant voice was much in demand on the Yarra Bank and the Sydney Domain speaking against the Conscription Bills. Rolly was a Wobbly. At Union socials he was fond of reciting a poem which began:

I am insurrection

The last, best born child of war ...

If any of our readers know the rest I would be very grateful to see them. Tom can be contacted on 9758 8604.

We expect that there will be a quicker, more definitive answer to this question than we had on the origin of the nick-name 'Wobblies' for the Industrial Workers of the World.

### **BOOKLIST**

The New International Bookshop, in which the Melbourne Branch declares an interest as a co-op shareholder, has prepared an extensive list of second-hand Australian books, pamphlets and periodicals on the labour movement, socialist politics and other progressive movements. The list includes over 1,300 items, most of which are currently in stock. Readers can contact the Bookshop on 9662 3744 for a copy. Regular 'updates' are provided.

### **NEW EDITION OF *UNDER THE HOOK***

Wendy Lowenstein has written to tell us that, with the support of the Search Foundation, the MUA and the Victorian Trades Hall Council, the Working Titles collective intends to publish a new edition of *Under the Hook*. There is no need to explain the contemporary relevance of the Melbourne waterfront's history to *Recorder* readers. The collective is currently looking for people to back the project with either firm orders for the new edition or a commitment to help underwrite the project to a specific amount of, say, \$50. The Melbourne Branch has taken a decision to be one of the underwriters. If anyone else would like to join us in helping to get a new edition out, they can contact the Working Titles collective at PO Box 33, Hawksburn, 3142 or on 03 9510 8379.

## **BIOGRAPHICAL REGISTER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOUR MOVEMENT**

There is an interesting article on the *Register* in the latest issue of our sister publication from the Sydney Branch, *The Hummer*, by the *Register's* authors, John Shields and Andrew Moore. The project has been under way for a number of years and they have written a progress report. The *Register* is to contain 2,000 entries on people who have made particular contributions to the Australian labour movement up to 1975. It is pleasing to note that they do not intend to repeat the work done in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. The *Register* will simply list the relevant reference in the *ADB* and not attempt to repeat it. The 2,000 entries will range from 50 to 800 words, depending on the individual's significance to the movement. Almost all the research has been done and they have completed writing 800 entries. It is a long and exhausting project but they are making good progress. They intend to publish a two-volume edition as well as a CD ROM version. We will keep you posted.

### **OBITUARY**

#### **JOAN FINGER (GOODWIN)**

**1912-1998**

By Lyn Hovey

Joan Hardiman was born on 8 January 1912, and grew up in relative poverty in Essendon. She was influenced by the strong women in her family. When her mother went back to teaching, she was minded by her grandmother. By the time Joan was four she was reading the Bible to her grandmother whose eyesight for reading was falling. From 1917-18 she went to St Columba's Catholic girls' school, from 1919-22 she went to State School No.483 Raleigh Street Essendon, and between 1923 and 1928 she attended Essendon High School.

The family managed on her father's wage as a Board of Works clerk, and her mother taught up to 30 students in a private school. Before the Depression, in 1920 her father lost his job to make way for soldiers coming back from the war. Joan believed that his being a Catholic and a member of the Clerks' Union had a bearing on him being sacked. In that day and age it was usual to do grade 6, 7 and 8 and having acquired a Merit Certificate, you'd go and get a job. At a time when higher education was almost exclusively for the middle and upper classes, Joan went to Melbourne University, between 1929 and 1932 on a scholarship to do an Arts degree. As a student of literature, she developed a life-long love of poetry. Attracted by views of members of the Labor Party she joined the University Labor Club and met, debated and organised with Ralph Gibson, Charles Silver, Lloyd Edmonds, Brian Fitzpatrick and others. She remembered the Labor Club as a place where men helped with

the supper and women's ideas were listened to. She also came into contact with Alice Stewart and Muriel Heagney who were in an organisation called the Vanguard.

In those days the social life of unmarried girls was quite restricted, it was acceptable to go to the theatre with friends but not to political meetings. Joan remembered turning up at an anti-war meeting of the League Against Imperialism in a full-length blue lace dress because she had told them at home she was going to a show. She joined the Communist Party of Australia in April 1932, which horrified her family when she told them. She wrote for the broadsheet *Working Woman* which was sold at public meetings and outside factories for one penny, and for *Proletariat*, the Melbourne University Labor Club magazine under the name of J. Hunter to protect her family.

Joan was one of the many women involved in the Unemployed Workers' Movement which had active groups mainly in inner working class suburbs. In 1932, after the dole voucher and rent allowance issues had been won, the Government's 'work for the dole' scheme galvanised unemployed people into struggle. The organisation assembled many people wherever evictions were threatened, put pressure on parliamentarians and collected supplies from sympathetic people. In some oral history Joan has described the struggle of an Unemployed Single Men's Group which was housed in Fitzroy after being moved on from the Broadmeadows army camp and then Barkly Street, Brunswick. Their eviction from Fitzroy took the form of a political demonstration. The procession of people carrying furniture, with the intention of putting it on the steps of Parliament House, was stopped by baton-wielding policemen. Joan and other supporters drew people's attention by banging on kerosene tin drums.

In 1934 Joan married Alan Finger. Alan was one of the brilliant students from Melbourne University Medicine that had no chance of getting a metropolitan job in Melbourne because he was a known communist. After short term jobs at Bendigo and the Austin Hospital, Joan and Alan asked the Party where they would be most useful. The reply was Broken Hill, Tasmania or Adelaide and after applying for jobs in all three areas, Adelaide was the first one to respond. Alan became the Medical Registrar at the Adelaide Hospital, and then the polio epidemic led to his employment at the Infectious Diseases Hospital at Northfield, an outer suburb.

In many people the Depression had left a lingering bitterness, an obsession with economic security and widespread social and economic dislocation. During this time Joan was a soldier of the Party - building networks, organising meetings, the hard slog of political activity interspersed with the occasional fiery demonstration such as the beef riots in Adelaide in the early 1930s. Joan, Alan and John, their first son who was born in 1939,

went to Sydney for a year while Alan was studying for his Diploma of Public Health. On the night that the Party was declared illegal in 1940, they were raided at 2.00 a.m. but important women's conference papers and addresses were not taken. When Joan went to attend the crying baby, the important documents went into the nappy pail. As a result of the Party's illegality, Joan made the decision to go underground. May Pennyfather, who had just come back from the Spanish Civil War, looked after the baby. Joan got a new name and address, she limited contact with people who knew her, she changed her appearance and moved often. After a year or so, she went back to Adelaide and emerged from her undercover existence. Her son Bill was born in 1941. She became the secretary of the Political Rights Committee in Adelaide which was more or less the Communist Party. As a result of the united front policy of the CPA, she joined the Labor Party, and sat on some 19 committees. Joan had the honour of being the first woman Party secretary when she became the Secretary of the South Australian State Committee of the Communist Party of Australia.

During the upheaval in many peoples' lives that the war effort created, Joan and Alan separated and Joan went to live in Lithgow. She became the Secretary of the Central Western District Committee of the CPA where she had to confront the problem of how to solve industrial disputes in a satisfactory way for the workers involved, largely the miners, without damaging the war effort. The Party established radio station broadcasts which Joan spoke on regularly. The district Party office was a bookshop near Lithgow railway station from where she maintained day to day contact with the leadership of the miners' union, railwaymen and munitions workers' struggles, thus building strong rank and file organisation. In 1946 she became an organiser for the Sydney District Committee and functioned as an industrial organiser. Back in Lithgow at the time of the 1949 Coal Strike, Joan was involved in broadcasting, writing leaflets to the armed forces who were deployed to produce coal and encouraging the involvement of miners' wives.

In 1948 Joan married Les Goodwin, a comrade who worked in the powerhouse in Lithgow. Joan got work as a ward maid at the local hospital, as the Party had decided that some of its organisers should go into industry to improve the Party's understanding of the feeling of the masses. She became the Shop Steward of the Hospital Employees' Union and delegate to the Trades and Labor Council as well as being the secretary of her local Progress Association. After suffering ill health, Joan came to Melbourne and found work as a teacher in 1962. During the 1970s and '80s in Melbourne, Joan was active in the Union of Australian Women, the Women's Liberation Movement, the Preston and the Education Branches of the CPA, the Victorian Secondary Teachers' Association, the Peace Movement and the New Left Party. In 1982 Joan and Alan Finger remarried, witnessed by their granddaughter Pamela, and journeyed overseas in 1983.

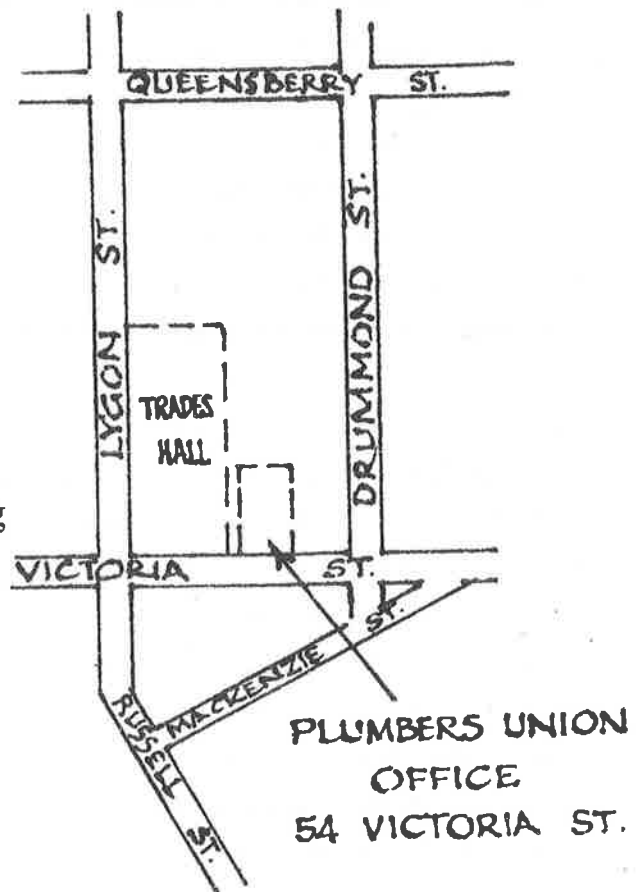
Joan was anxious that history not be re-written in a false light. Melbourne University Archives have a Joan Goodwin file. It includes the script and tapes of oral history conducted by Carmel Shute in 1980, her contribution to the Communists and Labour Movement tapes from 1980, conversations with me in 1991 and the script of *Red Matildas*. *Red Matildas* is a film made by Sharon Connelly and Trevor Graham about the life stories of Joan, May Pennyfather and Audrey Blake. The film was made in the early 1980s at a time when the Women's Peace Movement protests at Pine Gap were in the news. One of its motivations was to highlight actions that women had taken before, for example on the anti-Fascist front, and to convey a message of hope to young people. (When the film makers were trying to get Government funding, they stressed the urgency because their subjects were old and may die. Joan is the first of the *Red Matildas* to die. Sharon is convinced that she has discovered that the elixir of youth is membership of the Communist Party.) The film won numerous prizes and is still being seen by educational audiences around the country.

Joan's ability as an organiser rested on her view that the way forward to revolution was to get people active around their common grievances. Her way was to develop the rank and file and educate the masses, rather than capture key positions, manipulate the leadership of a struggle or perform back room deals, although she could do that too. She would work patiently through the conflicts, antagonisms and differences that existed. She never gave up on people and she nurtured people's sense of their own worth. She wrote and spoke out about injustice in all its forms, class, sex, race, job inequality and the urban environment. Joan could take on board new ideas and supported the flowering of the Women's Movement, both in spirit and financially. She played an active role in the Women's Collective of the Communist Party from which new realisations and practices sprung. She was often the conduit, and the voice of reason, between the passionate stance of the new feminism and the entrenched male ways of seeing the world, always with a view to moving things along. Over the years Joan had developed a cryptic way of speaking, a legacy of the secrecy of the Cold War years and Party illegality. She saw herself as part of a team, as part of a big movement. All in all, she was a woman ahead of her time.

Our 'new' meeting place has become our regular one.

Meetings are held at  
the Plumbers Union Office  
54 Victoria St Carlton  
(alongside the Trades Hall)

Enter by the concrete steps rising  
from the Victoria St footpath.



The meeting room is comfortable and the location in Victoria St is easily reached by public transport. Car parking is not too difficult on Sundays.

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