

Review of

***Voices from Brisbane
rugby league: Oral
histories of rugby league
in Brisbane from the 50s
to the 70s.***

**By Greg Mallory
(edited by Gail Cartwright)**

Greg Mallory, Annerley, Qld ©2009

Boolarong Press 2009

\$40, paperback, 202 pp.

ISBN 9780975770412

Greg Mallory, and his editor, Gail Cartwright, are to be congratulated for adding to the Australian archive of oral history collections. Like all such works, this oral history of rugby league in Brisbane captures the mood of a time and place that even the great narrative historians have difficulty in conveying. The collection of subjective memories (its minor errors of recollection notwithstanding) gathers in one voice to paint a vivid picture of a sport, its culture and the society by which it is hosted. It makes a powerful statement about the decline – demise might be too strong a word – of this culture, about the dismantling of something that Raymond Williams would have called a ‘structure of feeling’.

Voices from Brisbane Rugby League is a set of interviews with 12 prominent figures from Queensland Rugby League – 10 players, the referee Henry Albert and the commentator George ‘Mr Football’ Lovejoy. Most were conducted in 2001, though three are more recent. Each interview is presented around a flexible template of themes: where it all started; on playing first grade; on the Bulimba Cup; on the state of Brisbane rugby league; on the state of the modern game; on life after football; and others. This is a useful device because it allows for cross-referencing between respondents – to see where they agreed or disagreed. It also sets up a pattern of expectation in the reader. In the final chapters of the book I was looking forward to what

Fonda Metassa or Des Morris, for example, had to say on the modern game.

Despite the book's subtitle, the period under discussion is a little wider than three decades, running from the late 1940s to the emergence of the Brisbane Broncos in the late 1980s. Mallory has also included much useful and interesting accompanying material: a veritable front row of introductory pieces from Tony Collins (one of the best football historians of any code), Warren Boland and the author, who gives his own personal history of his immersion in rugby league culture. The book is concluded with two short informational chapters and an index.

Perhaps the central message of the book, one on which all those interviewed seemed to have a view, is the massive changes the respondents have observed during their lives in rugby league, especially the decline of club football in Brisbane. The respondents are not excessively nostalgic and some adopt a fatalistic perspective. Most come across as hard ('but fair') men who have a pretty pragmatic view of things. They regret what has occurred and they are angry about what has happened to club rugby league in Brisbane. Some are even willing to apportion blame, as Norm Pope does with the Broncos. Des Morris and others see the local media as bearing some responsibility, though he is among the few who can envisage a positive future. Marty Scanlan says:

'I think Brisbane rugby league is down at the lowest that it could possibly go, not that I attend any of the games.' It is a comment that tells of a culture alienated from its own foundations and it echoes through the book.

Another theme that emerges is the assumed relative 'softness' and poorer quality of the contemporary game. A predictable and dominating nostalgia for the lung-busting defence of the unlimited-tackle rule, 'the biff' and Norm Pope's stiff-arm tackling speaks of an era prior to the interchange rule, the 'interference' of the judiciary and the attempts to make the game less violent. Even Pedro Gallagher, who applauds the banning of the 'stiff arm tackle and the spear tackle', believes that the game is not as good because the changes over recent years have 'eliminated a lot of the great skills of rugby league, and what rugby league was about.' Norm Pope speaks fondly of the kicking duel. 'The crowds loved it,' he claims. It is hard to imagine Billy Slater and Darren Lockyer engaging in the same practice in today's possession-dominated game. It is even harder to imagine what contemporary crowds would make of it.

Where this book shines most however is around its edges. There are some wonderful moments where the unpredictable is narrated. The recollections of nasty crowd violence – particularly in Ipswich – were surprising and show that attacks on

referees and players are not restricted to soccer and/or 'migrant' cultures. Marty Scanlan's moment of tragedy humanises the game deeply – though there is an almost bathetic quality to its expression:

Everything pointed to it being a great year for me and then it turned sour. We played Easts in that grand final, and Jeff Fyfe kicked a field goal and they beat us by a point. My mother had a heart attack and collapsed and died in the grandstand about five minutes before the end of the game. We were very disappointed to be beaten by a field goal, but it was even worse coming off to Dr Tom Dooley telling me that Mum had died in the grandstand.

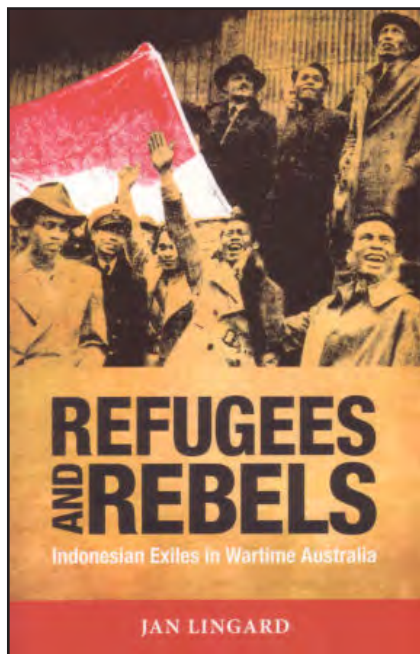
The interview with Aboriginal player Lionel Morgan is a gem. His discussion of racism and its prevalence comes out of the blue and adds a new dimension to the book. The eccentricities of referee Albert and commentator Lovejoy are wonderful to read because they too expand the reader's perception of the game.

If there is a point of criticism it relates to this idea of the edges of the collection. Rugby league is an expression of working class culture with close links to the labour movement, a game with clear political dimensions and affiliations. Yet very little of this is manifested in the book. While that is determined by the individuals interviewed rather

than Mallory's own conception of the field, it does suggest that a further set of interviewees – fans, volunteers, politicians – might have added even greater insight to the collection.

Nonetheless I loved reading this book. Like a time capsule, it returned me to another time and place. Now long-exiled in Melbourne, I was brought with a bump back to the North Queensland of my youth, when the Foley Shield thrived, Wally Lewis played for Valleys (indeed, Valleys still existed!), the Brisbane Rugby League competition was a dominant force, and the game's parochial refrain, 'The Greatest Game of All', was the mantra through which a whole culture seemed to assert itself. In the end the vital point is that this book is not merely about rugby league; it's about Queensland rugby league. Perhaps even more than this it is, as Tony Collins intimates in his Foreword, about a certain kind of person: the 'Queenslander'.

Ian Syson



Review of

***Refugees and Rebels:
Indonesian Exiles in
Wartime Australia***

By Jan Lingard

Australian Scholarly Publishing 2008

\$39.95, paperback, 312 pp.

ISBN 9781740971638

Jan Lingard's *Refugees and Rebels: Indonesian Exiles in Wartime Australia* is a humane, informative and readable book. The book describes the experiences of 5000 Indonesians

living, working and engaging in political struggle in both cities and country towns in Australia between 1942 and 1947.

Lingard's book analyses events which have been largely erased from the collective memory of Australian working people or, where that has proved awkward, tamed to remove their radical edge. This book is an important step in recovering that memory. It comes more than two decades after the work by the Communist Party of Australia journalist, Rupert Lockwood, who wrote *Black Armada*. Lockwood chronicled one aspect of the experiences and struggle of Indonesians in Australia in the 1945-47 period — their involvement in the work bans in Australian ports on Dutch ships that were to head north to help the Dutch army recolonise Indonesia after the defeat of the Japanese occupation.

Lingard's research and writing expand the Lockwood picture of Australian solidarity with the Indonesian independence struggle. Lockwood wrote mainly from his direct experience and the materials he had at hand in the port unions and at the offices of the *Tribune*, the newspaper of the Communist Party, which was a participant in joint activities with some of the Indonesians in Australia during this time. Lingard's book takes us through the experiences of the 'black armada', and into the hostels and labour camps where many Indonesian

merchant sailors, evacuated employees of the Dutch colonial state as well as its prisoners, lived and worked. She provides a series of short biographical sketches of many of the Indonesians and Australians involved, along with a more detailed narrative of the most active and interesting figures.

As she points out clearly, the presence of these 5000 Indonesian men and women (although the women were a minority) was an acute anomaly in what, in the 1940s, was still very much the White Australia of 'Advance Australia Fair'. Furthermore, most of these 'javos', as they were sometimes called (although by no means were they all from Java), were highly rebellious; a reflection of their hatred of national oppression and exploitation at the hands of the Dutch colonialists. Those who had been in the terrible Boven Digul Dutch-run prison camp in western Papua were union militants, nationalist activists or communists. Merchant sailors and other employees who were drafted into militarised labour camps were often no less rebellious. Eventually, almost all became involved in, as Lingard puts it, carrying out the Indonesian revolution on Australian soil. The book also documents Australian and Dutch government policies, showing the consistent deep colonial attitudes and policies of the Dutch and the contradictory policies of Australia, caught between a strong liberal-democratic sentiment in the working class and the interests of the Australian

state in cooperating with a fellow white imperialist power.

The material Lingard provides on the conflict between the Dutch and Australian ruling classes, sharpened by the Indonesian independence movement, is from released internal documents of the Australian federal bureaucracy. The material highlights the different nature of racism in Australia and the Netherlands. Dutch racist attitudes stemmed from three centuries of justification of colonial rule over the Indonesian archipelago. It is amazing to realise that after five years of Nazi occupation, the post-war Dutch liberal-democratic government promised amnesty to Dutch Nazis if they volunteered to wage a war to reimpose Dutch colonial rule over Indonesia.

Australian racism towards Asians stemmed from Australian working-class resistance to the importation of Asian labour, something that significant parts of the Australian capitalist class supported. Lingard's documentation shows how the crude racism of Dutch officials alienated individual Australian officials dealing with the Indonesian refugees, pushing them to be more sympathetic to the Indonesian cause. This cannot be a complete explanation for the Labor government's support for Indonesian independence after 1947. Other factors — such as US support for independence and, under US pressure, the moves by the right

wing of the Indonesian elite and its army to forcibly disarm the Indonesian left, jail and execute leftist leaders and brutally smash a left rebellion — were important. However, without the support for Indonesian independence within the Australian trade unions, which Lingard shows, the dynamic towards government support for Indonesia might not have eventuated.

Lingard comments in her conclusion that it was a fortuitous circumstance that there was a Labor government in Australia during these years and not one headed by Robert Menzies, the leader of the coalition of conservative parties. She points out that Menzies, along with most of the Australian press, consistently supported Dutch colonial interests on almost every issue and opposed every concession made by the Labor government to Indonesia and its supporters in Australia. It was important that the Labor Party was in government, not because of any innate tendency of the ALP leaders to support Indonesia, but because the Labor leadership in parliament — especially before the 1980s — was still susceptible to pressures from its base in trade union officialdom.

Lingard's point is important not only as an assessment of where the major capitalist parties stood on the issue but also in explaining how the memory of this inspiring struggle was erased during Menzies' 17 years in government (1949-66). During this time, the Australian

government adopted a hostile attitude to Indonesia, supplying arms to rightist military rebels against the Indonesian government in the 1960s and waging a propaganda, diplomatic and military opposition to the anti-imperialist policies of President Sukarno. It is not surprising that solidarity with the Indonesian militants of the 1940s was encouraged to disappear.

Now, occasionally, the belated Australian government support in the UN for Indonesian independence after 1946 will get a mention in official speeches about Australia-Indonesia relations. But the struggles of the Indonesian seafarers' union and the Indonesian independence committees and the protests of Indonesian workers against imprisonment and economic mistreatment, and the solidarity and friendship of many Australians, should be a part of the collective memory of the Australian working people. This book is an important contribution to recovering that memory.

Max Lane

Review

Red, Green and In-between: Reviewing Labour and the Environment in Historical Context

Closing Panel Summary

In reflecting on a stimulating day, conference participants seemed agreed that by 2010 it has become politically urgent to advance dialogue between the organised *labour movement* represented by trade unions and the more diverse *environmental movement*. Panelists drawn from both movements stressed that their organisations should not be seen as intrinsically antagonistic despite divergent interests and (historical) differences in political organisation and practices. For this rapporteur, five themes stood out across the excellent paper sessions and panel discussions.

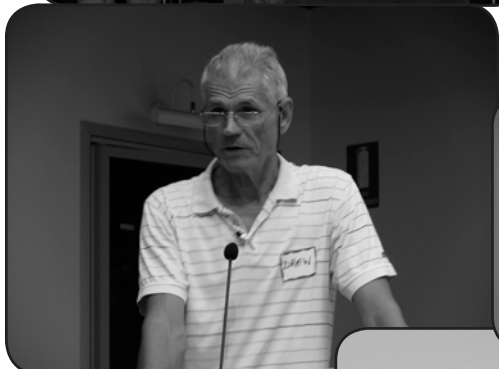
1. There was widespread agreement about the importance of *communication* in breaking down a 'red-green' divide, for example the pitting of jobs and economy against environment and sustainability. Communication requires commitment to genuine dialogue, involving listening as well as engagement. Several papers stressed the importance of *history* in informing contemporary dialogue including stories of workplace struggles over wages, health and safety, as well as about

activism over protection of both 'built' and 'natural' environments. Successful actions over wages and safety on building sites were a crucial prelude to the successful Green Bans developed by the NSW BLF in the early 1970s.

2. *Social inclusion* has become central to debates over environmental sustainability, for example over human-induced climate change. While many speakers claimed global warming as the most important issue facing humanity in the 21st century, others argued poverty remained an overriding issue especially at global scale. Ecological sustainability will not be achieved without substantial reductions in the (widening) gap between rich and poor countries in average daily living standards and in both social inequality and social exclusion within countries. Doubtless, the costs of unsustainable economic development and climate change will have greatest impacts on the least well-off. Inclusion involves diverse groups of people feeling they are included in, rather than marginalised from, sustainable

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Photos:
RedReunion
Dale Jacobsen



solutions to impacts of global warming and unsustainable energy systems – solutions must seem relevant to their everyday lives.

3. The re-writing of history also motivates and informs political opposition to things like social inclusion and environmental sustainability. Despite the demise of *Work Choices*, business lobbies and federal opposition politicians are publicly revisiting attacks on wages and working conditions as a so-called imperative of economic globalisation. Similarly, the recent upsurge in scepticism towards climate change science has involved powerful stories circulated by right wing politicians, some academic ‘think tanks’ (mostly of neoliberal economists), journalists and media shock-jocks who have quickly taken up prominent positions as climate change sceptics, often based on apparently zero understanding of climate science, or at least advocate ‘business as usual’ while Australia waits to see if other rich countries will do anything. Trade unions and environmental organisations need to marshal their knowledge and organisational skills to combat such campaigns and maintain political pressure on state and federal governments over professed environmental and social inclusion agendas.
4. Many papers, and the panel discussions, emphasised the importance of breaking down

‘binary thinking’. Indeed, ‘Red and Green’ is a binary often used to pit social against environmental justice. This arises partly from perceptions that environmental movements involve mostly middle-class issues and interests while, by contrast, the labour movement represents workers excluded from such ‘green’ politics. Compelling evidence was presented at the conference, however, about the often false binary between ‘workers’ and ‘environmentalists’, for example, in historical struggles in the early 20th century around preserving urban parks and passive recreation areas in which both local Indigenous and working class people were involved.

5. Sydney’s Green Bans era in the 1970s demonstrated how local resident action (not always middle class) was strengthened by harnessing organisational and industrial experience of a trade union to achieve environmental outcomes. Yet direct actions since the turn of the 21st century, including struggles to achieve sustainable futures in the face of ‘globalisation’ – combining red and green – have involved trade unionists drawing on organisational experience and diverse knowledge of community and environmental action groups. Perhaps there lies the 21st century’s ‘red, green and in-between’?

Bob Fagan

Review
Flames of Discontent Concert at Woodford Folk Festival –
The Don Henderson Tribute

I like singing new songs to small audiences, remembering that if fifty people don't like a song, there is a fifty to one chance that the idea is not getting over; rather than that they are not getting it. If an idea doesn't get across to fifty people at the Sydney Folk Club there is no way it will get across to a thousand people at a concert, or ten thousand on radio.

Truly, I like singing to people who want to hear me; it makes everything just so much easier. Apart from that, if an audience is alien it doesn't hear anyway. It just tunes out. Singing to them is wasted time. Perhaps this can be interpreted as preaching to the converted. I am not sure if it can or can't, because I am not sure that I understand the phrase.

Who are these converted? What are they converted to? Who are you? Who am I? Do these converted know that? Does anyone have nothing to say to Hiroshima day's three thousand doctors, cartoonists, lawyers, journalists, clergymen, communists, ALP unionists, Liberal Reform industrialists, Bankstown matrons and King's Cross junkies? Sweetheart, if you've got nothing to say to them, you've got nothing to say to anyone.

(‘From Where Have All The Surfboards Come?’, Don Henderson, Australian Tradition, June 1968)

The 2009 *Flames of Discontent* Concert at Woodford Folk Festival was planned as a tribute to the work of Don Henderson. The line up of singers, musicians and songwriters included Bernard Carney, Liz Frencham, Martin Pearson, John Thompson, Nicole Murray, Jeannie Lewis, Noel Gardner, John Schumann, Hugh McDonald, Tommy Leonard, Alex and Annette Hood. The concert MC was writer and broadcaster Sandy McCutcheon. Annette Hood's *Flames of Discontent* banner formed the backdrop behind the stage. Singers like Alex Hood and Jeannie Lewis had Don Henderson songs in their repertory for close to half a century. Tommy Leonard, who has recorded more of Don's songs than anyone other than Don himself, first heard Don's songs in Brisbane in the mid 1990s. Alex Hood, pioneer of the folk revival and a member of the original 1950s' Bushwhackers Band, recorded Don's songs as early as 1962 as part of the Sydney folk group, Daw Hood and Henderson. There were also those who were new enough to Don's songs that they had to learn them for the concert, a deliberate choice by Festival

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Photos: Doug Eaton,
Mark Gregory,
Trad & Now



director Bill Hauritz, as the aim of concert was to introduce Don's songs to those who'd not heard them before. Another connected aim of the concert was to launch the freshly minted double CD 'The Songs of Don Henderson', a collection of 40 of Don's songs curated and produced by Sally Henderson and Mark Gregory. To ensure the concert ran on schedule, Dale Lorna Jacobsen produced the detailed and informative script and organised the entrances of the musicians.

Sandy McCutcheon opened the concert with the words:

Tonight, we bring the Flames of Discontent full circle in a Tribute to one of Australia's most influential songwriters, Don Henderson.

In 1990, Don – "Hendo" to his mates – presented a workshop on the Union Stage at the Maleny Festival: to stoke the Flames of Discontent so people would not forget what they are fighting for. The magnificent hand-sewn silk backdrop behind us was created by Annette Hood for that concert, and it is with pride and great joy that we display it here tonight, at an event where it belongs. This concert is sponsored by the Brisbane Labour History Association in recognition of the rich tradition of workers bringing songs to the people.

Bernard Carney, accompanied by Liz Frencham, began the singing with a powerful version of *Legend* and the concert was underway. The audience

was clearly enthralled from then on with a swag of Don's songs, sung in a rich variety of styles, including: 'In My Time', 'Westgate Bridge Disaster', 'The Kids Will Grow', 'Isa', 'Albion Street', 'The Basic Wage Dream', 'It's On!', 'Time to Fight Again' and 'What Makes the Grass Grow?' Like all good concerts the time simply flew.

The audience snapped up 50 of the new CDs as they left the Concert Stage tent and some 20 more were sold at the Woodford Folk Festival Shop. The CD was well and truly launched.

The double CD 'The Songs of Don Henderson' was released by Shoestring Records. It is available from record shops and online sources. The Don Henderson Project is established under the auspices of the Queensland Folk Federation.

The Don Henderson Project is funded through sponsorship from individuals, union branches, labour councils, folk festivals, folk clubs, civil rights organisations, the Brisbane Labour History Association and the Queensland Folk Federation. Many singers donated their recordings of Don's songs to the project.

For more information visit the project website at <http://donhenderson.com.au/>

Mark Gregory

CONTRIBUTORS

Jeff Rickertt is a labour historian and librarian. He was a contributor and assistant editor to the Radical Brisbane project and his most recent publication is a history of Australian telephonists and their trade union, the ATPOA. Jeff is a committee member of the BLHA.

Greg Mallory is an Adjunct Lecturer in the Department of Employment Relations at Griffith University. His book, *Uncharted Waters: Social Responsibility in Australian Trade Unions*, was published in 2005. He has co-authored *The Coalminers of Queensland, Vol 2: The Pete Thomas Essays* with Pete Thomas, published in December 2007. Greg's book, *Voices from Brisbane rugby league: Oral histories of rugby league in Brisbane from the 50s to the 70s*, was published in September 2009. He is also working on conference papers and a book on leadership and its relationship with rank and file activism in left-wing trade unions. He is currently researching and writing the history of the ETU (Queensland). Greg is President of the BLHA.

Danielle Miller is completing a PhD (*ALP Premiers: Delegates of the Party, Autonomous Actors or Somewhere in Between?*) in the School of Political Science and International Studies at the University of Queensland. Other research interests include: Australian politics, political parties and campaigning and political leadership. Danielle is a committee member of the BLHA.

Ros Kidd was awarded a doctorate in Humanities by Griffith University in 1994. Her PhD thesis, based on unprecedented access to government files, investigated how Queensland governments controlled Aboriginal lives between 1840 and 1988. A freelance consultant historian, Ros Kidd has published four books: *The Way We Civilise*; *Black Lives, Government Lies*; *Trustees on Trial and Hard Labour*; *Stolen Wages*. She provided submissions to the Cape York Justice Study, the Stolen Children Inquiry, the Forde Inquiry into abuse of children in state institutions, and the Senate Inquiry into Stolen Wages nationally. Currently Dr Kidd provides historical research reports for Native Title claimants, and works with

Aboriginal people in pursuit of justice from the government for illegally underpaid wages and lost savings.

Ian Syson is a senior lecturer in literary studies and professional writing at Victoria University. He grew up in Mount Isa and studied at the University of Queensland, completing his PhD on working class literature in 1993. He is writing a history of soccer in Australia.

Max Lane is a writer and lecturer on Indonesian politics, history and literature and Southeast Asian affairs. He published *Unfinished Nation: Indonesia before and after Suharto* (in English and Indonesian) in 2008, and has translated the works of Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Indonesia's most important writer and W.S. Rendra, its most important dramatist. He has presented public lectures at various universities in the States as well as Europe and Australia. He received competitive fellowships at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore (1987); National University of Singapore (2008/2009); the Asia Research Centre, Murdoch University (2004) and the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies in Copenhagen (2010).

Mark Gregory is a folklorist, musician and producer. His interest in industrial song began in the 1960s while compiling *Songs of our Times* at University of Sydney. During the 1970s, he was a member of the radical British documentary film workshop Cinema Action in London. He has an MA Music (Research) from Macquarie University which was published in 2007 as *Sixty Years of Australian Union Songs*.

Bob Fagan is Emeritus Professor, Department of Environment and Geography, Macquarie University. He has spent 35 years teaching and researching impacts of global economic and environmental change on Australian cities and regions and is currently working on urban food security. He has also performed folk music throughout Australia, the UK and Ireland with The Fagans.

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Noticeboard

At the AGM of the BLHA held on 5 December 2009, the following were elected onto the executive.

President	Greg Mallory
Vice-president	Bob Reed
Secretary & Treasurer	Jason Stein
Assistant-secretary	Doug Devonshire
Committee members	Jeff Rickertt Danielle Miller Avalon Kent John Spreckley
Patron	Hughie Williams

Globalisation and Labour in the Pacific: Re-evaluating the 1890 Maritime Strike

Symposium invitation

Organised by the Auckland Labour History Group and the Labour History Project
In association with the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History and
the New Zealand Work & Labour Market Institute

AUT University, Auckland City, Thursday 4 November 2010



Labour History Project

AN INJURY TO ONE IS A CONCERN TO ALL



The 1890 Maritime Strike, one of the largest ever in Australia, also involved New Zealand and Fijian workers, and its impact reverberated throughout the Pacific Rim because of the global structure of capital and labour in the maritime industry. British, European and American employers, politicians and academics took an interest in the dispute, part of a strike wave sweeping Europe, North America and Australasia in 1889-94.

On 16 August 1890 members of the Mercantile Marine Officers' Association of Australasia went on strike over longstanding pay and conditions claims, complicated by employers' objection to their affiliation with the Melbourne Trades Hall Council. Industrial action quickly spread to seamen, wharf labourers, then gas stockers, miners and shearers, involving over 60,000 workers throughout Australia. The Union Steam Ship Company's dominance of trans-Tasman shipping saw the dispute spread to New Zealand and wharf labourers in Fiji.

The dispute became a struggle over freedom of association. Fear gripped middle class hearts and colonial governments deployed troops, artillery and special constables in Sydney, Melbourne, Newcastle and other ports. In Melbourne military volunteers were exhorted by Colonel Tom Price to "*Fire low and lay them out*".

The eventual defeat of the strike in November 1890 was the turning point that led unions to form the Australian Labor Party and adopt a policy for compulsory state arbitration. The New South Wales Labour Defence Committee stated that "*the time has come when trade unionists must use the parliamentary machine that in the past has used them*". In New Zealand the strike was a key issue in the December 1890 general election, which led to the formation of the Liberal government and ultimately to state arbitration legislation in 1894.

Call for papers Due date for abstracts: 1 June 2010 to Ann Williamson at nzwalmi@aut.ac.nz

Papers are invited on the 1890 strike, its broader political and historical impact, the nature of Pacific Rim connections in the labour market and between labour organisations, lessons for contemporary labour relations in the maritime industry in the Pacific, and the impact of globalisation generally in Pacific Rim labour relations.

Referred papers may be selected for publication in the *NZ Journal of Employment Relations* and/or for publication in a special book which will be published to mark the anniversary.

Attendance All welcome. Fee: \$40.

Information subject to change.

