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Editorial

Jeff Rickertt

As we go to press the world stands transfixed by the historic achievement of the Egyptian masses. A dictatorship that blighted people's lives and attracted the envy of torturers and tyrants everywhere for 30 years has ended, cut down by a popular uprising which no traditional opposition party has been able to control. A democratic tsunami is scouring the sludge of despotism out of Tunisia and Egypt. Where to next?

The politics of democracy are never straightforward. Ending tyranny in any form requires organisation and courage and resilience. It also calls for a vision of something better, and this is where things usually get complicated. In Egypt the people must decide what replaces dictatorship. Opinions are divided. In Australia, too, resisters of power have episodically united on the streets, only to divide over the fundamental conundrum: If not this, then what?

In this issue of the *Queensland Journal of Labour History*, we feature two articles that speak to two distinctly different historical approaches to this question of vision. Connie Healy's article outlines the history of Soviet

friendship organisations allied to the Communist Party which sought to represent the Stalinist USSR as the progressive alternative to bourgeois Australia. Healy traces the rise of the USSR's popularity in the Depression and WWII, its decline under the pressure of the Cold War and its demise with the fracturing of the Communist movement and the emergence in the 1960s of alternative radical visions.

In a sense, Jon Piccini's article picks up the story from there, examining the rise of the Brisbane student new left and the fraught efforts of student radicals and old-left trade unionists to find some common ground. For a brief historical moment, as Piccini explains, an uneasy good-will prevailed and the unions agreed to provide space at Trades Hall for a Sunday youth club called Foco. But the marriage didn't last. Conflicting personalities and material interests played their part in the breakdown but ultimately the bridge between old and new crumbled under the weight of different political visions.

Post-colonial Australia has warded off the would-be despots but we, along with the world at large, have endured something far more pervasive and, in

its own way, debilitating than political dictatorship: the tyranny of working for a wage. For millions of Australians, freedom ceases when work begins. Productive time is bosses' time. Yet this fundamental unfreedom at the heart of Australia's economic and social life rarely features as a topic of democracy. Indeed, what happens at work is seldom even a topic of labour history, except when it erupts into noticeable industrial conflict. In this issue, we seek to address this neglect by launching a series of articles and interviews about the experience of work and grassroots unionism, beginning with Ted Riethmuller's deftly-rendered account of the people and camaraderie he discovered during his first day as an electrical apprentice. We hope Ted's article will encourage other workers to come forward with their stories. Employed, unemployed or retired, white, grey or blue collar, we are keen to hear from you.

In this issue we pay tribute to two union stalwarts who are no longer with us: Jeff Slowgrove and Aussie Vaughan. We welcome the BLHA's new patron, Bob Anderson, and we tip our hat to BLHA life member, Wally Stubbings. Into this mix, we deal the usual full hand of reports, reviews and notices. As a labour history journal with a progressive bias we are always keen to salute the political, industrial and cultural achievements of workers and the oppressed. We duly dedicate this issue to the people of Egypt whose

bravery and determination over 18 days in January and February changed the course of history.

Happy International Women's Day in this, its centenary year.

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A "WALTER CRANE" CARTOON.

The Cause of Labour is the Hope of the World. A Walter Crane Cartoon. *The Worker* 23 June 1900