

The Queensland Journal Of Labour History

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Labour History (ISSN: 0023 6942) is an internationally recognised journal published twice a year, in November and May, by the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History of which the Brisbane Labour History Association is the Brisbane branch. Contents, abstracts and prices of back issues are available at the web site www.asslh.org.au. The journal is available in both printed form and via the non-profit publisher JSTOR. The association with JSTOR offers individual subscribers a range of advantages, including online access to the full run of *Labour History* from 1962 on.

Members of the **BLHA** who are not already receiving *Labour History* are encouraged to subscribe. The full rate for individuals is \$70.00; the concession rate for students/unwaged is \$40.00. Rates are kept relatively low as ASSLH is a non-profit organisation. New subscribers to *Labour History* receive the current year's journals and a free back issue of their choice.

The latest issue of *Labour History* (November 2013)

The latest issue – a standard non-thematic - continues the journal's long-established practice of publishing innovative research on the economic, industrial, social, ideological and political dimensions of Australasian labour history. Whilst covering a diversity of topics, themes, spaces and moments in time, the issue's complement of 11 scholarly articles also serves to advance knowledge in the field by breaking new ground, redressing significant areas of neglect or contesting pre-existing understandings and interpretations. What the contents of this issues highlights, above all else, is the resurgence of interest in revisionist interpretations of Labor Party history. In the lead piece, Bradley Bowden offers some powerful insights on Labor's past and present in Queensland. Bowden charts the emergence of 'modern Labor' in Queensland from 1980 on, when control passed from Trades Hall to the Reform Group after intervention by Labor's Federal Executive.

As well as the usual complement of reviews, the issue carries two non-refereed research reports.

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Editorial

Howard Guille, Ross Gwyther and Bob Russell

This issue of the journal once again takes us from the 19th century to the present. It does so when the Australian car industry is being closed, Qantas workers are paying with their jobs for bad management, both Alcoa and Rio are closing aluminium refineries and smelters at Gove and Point Henry and mining has lost its lustre. Anti-worker political forces are rampant in Queensland and the Commonwealth. The waters around the Barrier Reef are to be filled with millions of tonnes of spoil from new coal ports and Mr Abbott says he will not support the creation of any more national parks and that timber workers are “the ultimate conservationists”.

In 2012–13 the Queensland Government shredded the public service. Now with its controls on political spending it is trying to shut up its critics especially the unions. Unions are required to ballot their members before spending more than \$10,000 for a ‘political purpose’. Yet Attorney-General Jarrod Bleijie is making it much easier to keep political donations secret by lifting the disclosure threshold from \$1,000 to \$12,400 and scrapping caps on election spending. It seems to us very much like

making it as hard as possible for unions but as easy as possible for big money.

Other changes to industrial law and practice are even more anti union and anti worker. They include restrictions on entry to work sites, reducing the number of allowable matters in State awards and agreements and, as we go to press, imposing individual contracts on senior medical staff in public hospitals. The industrial changes in Queensland were described by one union officer as “*work choices on steroids*”

The VLAD (Vicious Lawless Association Disestablishment) Act started out against motor cycle gangs but needs to be seen as an attack on freedom of association and the right to work. It is anti civil liberties and allows the Attorney-General to use regulations to define any group as ‘illegal’ and the police to determine whether anyone is an ‘associate’. The ALP opposition voted for the original legislation in November last year but in March this year announced it will press for repeal. As the Queensland Law Society says these laws put at risk the democratic rights of all people and threaten the fundamental principle of the separation of powers.

A spoof advertisement for Australia and Queensland is an apt summary of where we have got to;

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piece of coral as an executive
paperweight.*

*Who needs a car industry or an
airline.*

*Stride across the globe and
pick the low hanging fruit.*

*Australia — open for business
— closed to refugees.*

A common thread connects the various articles in this issue and that is the injustice and repression that Queenslanders have had to combat from before federation down to the present. Peter Cross, Jeff Rickertt, Elisabeth Gondwe, Howard Guille, Lisa Jackson and Humphrey McQueen chronicle various aspects of this history. Jeff Rickertt provides a detailed discussion of our first battle for free speech as part of the campaign for full civil liberties in his discussion of the Australasian Socialist party's struggle for the right to be heard in Brisbane. Given recent moves that place civil liberties under a cloud in Queensland, this article on our first free speech movement could hardly be more timely. We also reprint a speech given by Humphrey McQueen

last year on the history and continuing significance of May Day in Australia. As he says, 'it is our duty to keep the past alive' and that "we are not in for the long haul, but the endless haul"

The three writers from the North Stradbroke Island Historical Museum draw our attention to a less well-known history, the incarceration of the poor, sick and inebriated at the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum on North Stradbroke Island. 2013 marks the 100th anniversary of the remaining building from what was Queensland's workhouse for the poor from 1865–1946. It had 21,000 inmates over its life — the majority who were aged labouring people shipped there from all over the state.

Peter Cross continues our analysis of the turbulent 1960s in Brisbane with a close look at the relationship between Alex Macdonald and the student new left. Peter is an undergraduate Law/Arts student at the University of Queensland. He has a particular interest in Queensland political culture and has worked with the Centre for the Government of Queensland under Danielle Miller and Roger Scott. We welcome this article and would be pleased to have more contributions from a new generation of students.

We continue our series of interviews with current union and political leaders. This issue features an interview with Jen Thomas, the Acting

Secretary of the Services Union. Our interest in this union was sparked by a new activist program that the union is running. Distinct from delegate training, this program adopts a broad notion of activism in the workplace and in the community. While we know that activists created trade unions, the question now is whether unions can successfully create activists.

Finally on free speech and activism, we remember and mark the contribution of Tony Reeves. In his own words ‘You don’t know what it’s like to be a member of the Labor Party till you’ve been expelled at least once — in my case, twice’.

BLHA

President’s Column

Greg Mallory

President’s column February 2014

The Association held its AGM in December. Danielle Miller has stepped down as she has taken a job in Melbourne and Andrew Dallas has stepped down as Treasurer but continues on as an Executive member. I thank them for their work over the years. The AGM voted two new members to the Executive, Emma Thornton and ‘Snowy’ Heilborn. Both have long experience in the trade union movement and ‘Snowy’ has attended virtually every event conducted by the Association since its reformation in 2000. The AGM also heard a report on

selling the journal at various bookshops around Brisbane. This was met with mixed success with some bookshops selling them and others giving them away as these shops could not enter the journal into their computer system.

Ross Gwyther has continued his work on the project *Queensland Comrades Speaks*. This project is funded by the Search Foundation and is based on a series of interviews of labour movement activists who were active in the Communist Party in the 1940s and 1950s. Ross has conducted 15 interviews so far and plans to do another eight during 2014. A web page

has been established as part of the BLHA website and transcripts will be available.

At the Federal level the ASSLH ran the national conference in July in Sydney. Sigrid McCausland attended and has written a report in the September journal.

On a sad note I would like to report on the death of one of our members Tony Reeves. Tony was a colourful character who wrote a number of books on prominent crime figures in Sydney. He was also an active ALP member until his resignation from the party over privatisation. Tony was a former Sydney City Councillor during the Green Ban era of the 1970s and a good friend of Jack Munday.

As President I would like to see the Association be involved in more activity besides our Alex Macdonald Lecture

and October Symposium. We need to get more young people involved in the Association. Perhaps we could have a seminar which explores postgraduate work in the area of labour history or a seminar on trade union work which involves young people.

We already have had some ideas on possible symposium discussions for this year. This year there will be a lot of public discussion on war since it is 100 years since the start of World War 1. Conscription was a big issue then and the role of trade unions and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was significant. It has been suggested that the Association run a symposium on the theme of the trade union movement and war. Another suggestion is a bus tour of Brisbane examining various labour history sites. The Executive will discuss these proposals at its first meeting of the year. I wish the Association and members a productive year.

Activities of our National Organisation - The Australian Society for the Study of Labour History

Nikola Balnave
President, ASSLH

I am very pleased to contribute a few words to the *Queensland Journal of Labour History*, and to provide BLHA members with a brief update on the activities and focus of the Society.

There are currently two main objectives of the Society. The first is to ensure that our primary publication, *Labour History*, maintains its local and international status as a vibrant, progressive and high quality journal. The second is to grow our membership base at the branch and national level.

As subscribers to *Labour History* would attest, the first objective is in good hands under the editorship of John Shields, the editorial working party, and others associated with its production. Each issue of the journal is put together with both passion and professionalism. If the reminiscences of the Brisbane FOCO club published in the November 2013 issue caught your interest, please also look for the research report by Alan Knight on the 1971 Springbok protest in Brisbane which will be included in the November 2014 issue. The May

2014 special issue of the journal holds particular significance. This issue will be devoted to articles by historians in Australia and overseas working on various aspects of the relationship between the Anzac Legend, the labour movement and the working class, and will be produced as a book with the title: *Labour and the Great War: The Australian Working Class and the Making of Anzac*.

In terms of our second objective, the July 2013 Federal Executive meeting endorsed a motion to create an executive committee to review the operations of the Society. This committee was elected at the November Federal Executive meeting and will be seeking input from all branches over the coming year. The review will involve the following:

1. taking an inventory of our resources and relationships;
2. the viability and timing of the national conference
3. the links between the society and like-minded groups such as unions, think-tanks, museums, political parties, progressive organisations,

- progressive faith groups, bookshops and the creation of 'affiliate' bodies;
4. the role, viability of and links between branches; succession planning and attracting young scholars to our society;
 5. as part of a sub-committee review, the future of the journal, *Labour History* (the Editorial Board has formed a working party for this purpose).

In relation to point 2 above, I am very pleased to advise that the Melbourne Branch has put its hand up to organise the 2015 National Labour History Conference. At this point the conference is planned for early in the year, but further details will be circulated in due course.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate and thank members of BLHA for their contribution and commitment to labour history as a field of study, and as a community.

Students!!...Apply for the Eric Fry Labour History Scholarship

The closing date for applications for the \$1,000 Eric Fry Labour History Scholarship has been extended to **31 March 2014**. Honours and postgraduate students are invited to apply for the scholarship which supports research at the Noel Butlin Archives Centre at the Australian National University. The archives holds an unrivalled collection of trade union and business records, as well as the personal papers of labour movement activists. The scholarship is supported by the Canberra Region Branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History and the Research School of Humanities and the Arts at the Australian National University.

Full eligibility criteria, past scholarship holders and how to apply are available at this web address:

<http://archives.anu.edu.au/news-and-events-1/eric-fry-labour-history-scholarship>

Dunwich Asylum Mess Hall is 100

**Elisabeth Gondwe, Howard
Guille and Lisa Jackson**

The centenary of what is now the Dunwich Public Hall was celebrated in 2013 with a series of events organised by the North Stradbroke Island Historical Museum. Since the Hall is the largest remaining part of the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum there are many links between its history and that of Queensland labour and communities.

The current building was opened on 29th October 1913 as the Men's Mess Hall for the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum on North Stradbroke Island. It

seated 400 "single men" and was linked to the Dunwich jetty and the asylum kitchen by horse-drawn tramway. Meals were served in three sittings.

The Asylum operated at Dunwich from 1865–1946 and served the whole of Queensland as a public institution for the poor and destitute. The indigent of Queensland were despatched and confined there. Dunwich also became a lazaret for "white" patients and place of commitment under the Inebriates Institutions Act 1896. These two functions moved to Peel Island, also in Moreton Bay, in 1907 and 1910 respectively.

Benevolent asylums were established in all the Australian colonies in the nineteenth century. In NSW and Victoria they were established as religious charities. In Queensland,



Dunwich Public Hall 2013



however, the state took responsibility and the Queensland Benevolent Asylum Act of 1861 funded hospitals to have 'asylum wards'. In 1865 the Colonial Government proposed that an asylum ward for the sick and poor be established at the new general hospital site at Herston. Under 'public pressure' the colony government decided in 1866 to relocate the asylum on a 'temporary' basis to the Dunwich Quarantine Station. It started with 80–90 inmates, confused funding and a drunk as Director.

The asylum admitted 21, 000 people over its eighty years. From the 1890s to 1946 there were around 1,000 inmates present at any one time with 1,600 in its peak year of 1903. The Asylum had over twenty wards — including a distinct women's section and a separate



ward for 'Asiatics'. By 1930s, it included a police station and lock up, visitor centre, public hall, bakery, kitchen, laundry and ancillary service buildings, ward buildings, tent accommodation and recreational facilities. It was only electrified in 1926 with its own power station using oil generators. It had a dairy herd and piggery.



Waiting for meal 1938

Inmates were predominately though not exclusively old. People could be assigned to the asylum by a hospital, by police order or by their families. It seems that many of the inebriate men were confined by their spouses. Inmates came from across Queensland with a very detailed process of getting them by boat and/or rail from the north and the west to the *Yungaba* immigration depot at Kangaroo Point and then by boat to Dunwich.

Six times as many men as women were inmates. The backgrounds were mainly rural and urban workers with, in the nineteenth century, a considerable number of people who had been transported to the Australian colonies as convicts. There was, though, a sprinkling of middle class people fallen on hard times or drink. One was John Filhelly, Deputy Leader of the ALP under Theodore and one of the founders of the Queensland Rugby League who is listed in the Australian Dictionary of Biography.¹ Another was Johnny Cassim, who was of Indian origin and transported as a convict from Mauritius to become an hotelier and respected citizen of Cleveland.

The Asylum was always inadequately staffed and funded. In current (2013) values Queensland Government funding was \$1,900 per person/per year in 1900 and \$2,900 in 1932. In the twentieth century, inmates who received a Commonwealth old age pension paid part of this to the

Asylum. The operating principle was that able-bodied inmates were meant to perform work and staff the asylum. Unfortunately, apart from some of the inebriates, age prevented most inmates doing a full day's labour. In addition as the Brisbane Courier of 1874 reported

These old gentlemen at Dunwich do not as a rule approve of being asked to work. They meet every request to do so categorically: "*Why should I work ! if so be I could work, why be I sent here ?*"

From the 1880s to 1920s there were rarely more than 20 official staff to 900 to 1,000 inmates. The Asylum needed cheap and permanent labour. It got it from the Quandamooka Aboriginal people of the Island who lived at One Mile outside Dunwich, and who did what Goodall says was "heavy and unpleasant work" from the 1870s.² By the 1920s up to 30 Aboriginal men were in the 'outside gang' which included the dairy and piggery. Some Aboriginal men were in trade, skilled and semi-skilled jobs including carpentry and operating the power station. Around 15 Aboriginal women were employed as cooks, nursing assistants and domestics including in the houses of the senior staff of the Asylum. The Aboriginal workers formed a substantial part of the total work force for the asylum, at times over half, right up to its closure in 1946.

Aboriginal workers were paid in rations but from the 1920s onwards took action to be paid wages. This was successful in 1925. The actions included petitions to the Medical Superintendent and the Home Secretary, representation to the Arbitration Court by the Australian Workers Union and industrial action. However, there were continuing battles about the level of wages and even attempts to put them back on rations.

Knowledge of the successful actions by Aboriginal workers at Dunwich is as little known as the Asylum itself. One of the last medical superintendents described it a *Moreton Bay Shangri-la*; in contrast Goodall says it was a *dumping ground where the rhythms of life beat out to the coming of the boat twice a week and sago pudding on Sundays*.³

Notes

- 1 Betty Crouchley, *Fihelly, John Arthur (1882–1945)*, Australian Dictionary of Biography, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/fihelly-john-arthur-6169>
- 2 Joseph B. Goodall, *Whom Nobody Owns: The Dunwich Benevolent Asylum, An Institutional Biography 1866–1946*, Ph D Thesis, Department of History, University of Queensland, 1992
- 3 *ibid*

Alexander Macdonald and Student-Union Solidarity: 1966–1969

Peter Cross

The political history of Queensland's trade union movement extends far beyond its links to the ALP. Trade unions have repeatedly involved themselves in public debate. This paper will examine the brief period of close co-operation between the Queensland union movement as represented by the Trades and Labour Council Queensland (TLC), and the left-wing student movement of the 1960s. This relationship was fraught with political tension. This paper will analyse the pivotal role Alexander Macdonald played, as TLC Secretary, in overcoming these tensions. It will cover both Macdonald's role in facilitating TLC's industrial action in 1967 in support of student protests, and his more controversial support of the Foco Club. In doing so, I will argue that Macdonald's strong support of worker-student co-operation can be partially explained by his links to the Communist Party of Australia (CPA). However, despite being instrumental in fostering co-operation between the union and student movements, Macdonald was unable to prevent rifts developing towards the end of his life. Following his premature death while in



Extract from Foco's newsletter, typifying the irreverent mixture of radical politics and art which characterised the Club (<http://www.qhatlas.com.au/photograph/foco-newsletters-1968>)

office in 1969, the relationship quickly deteriorated.

Alexander Macdonald's public life was dominated by his involvement with progressive left wing politics, most notably the Communist and trade union movements. Understanding this dual role is crucial to understanding why and how he built an alliance with the student left. Born in Scotland in 1910, he immigrated to Australia in the 1920s.¹ Unable to find work, he drifted towards radical politics and became an active Communist.² By 1936 he had been elected to the Queensland state committee of the

CPA.³ He was simultaneously entering the trade union movement, joining the Ironworkers Union and quickly becoming its Secretary.⁴ By the early 1950s Macdonald had become deeply involved in the TLC. Now known as the QCU, this was a peak union council, affiliated with approximately 40 unions.⁵ It is true that during this period the TLC only covered approximately a third of Queensland unionists due to the fact that the enormous Australian Workers Union was not affiliated with it.⁶ However, it was one of the most influential union bodies due to the influence it wielded within the ALP from 1957 to the late 1980s.⁷

In 1952, Macdonald replaced Communist Mick Healy as Secretary of the TLCQ. In doing so he joined a core of committed Communists on the TLC Executive. This group (which also included Hugh Hamilton, Jack Hanson and Greg Dawson) drew its strength from unions such as the Builders Workers Industrial Union and the maritime unions.⁸ The Communist influence within the TLC Executive was representative of broader Communist influence over unionists, with approximately 15% of union members being controlled by the CPA as of 1969.⁹ Within the TLC Executive, communists such as Macdonald vied for influence with TLC members who were more aligned to the ALP, such as President John (Jack) Egerton.¹⁰ This tension within the Executive would later become important when relations

between Egerton and the student left soured.

Macdonald's time as TLC Secretary was distinguished by three characteristics. The first was the universal respect he enjoyed from his colleagues. "One of the calmest, most patient and good-natured men conceivable", Macdonald excelled at negotiating compromise between the diverse range of views within the TLC Executive.¹¹ As Bob Hawke noted shortly after Macdonald's death, despite his ideological allegiance to Communism he "not once" tried to "ram it down the throats" of his colleagues.¹² This facility for promoting compromise was repeatedly mentioned approvingly in oral recollections of Macdonald's leadership style. Moreover, within both the TLC and CPA, respect for this ability was often coupled to genuine affection for Macdonald. Even the ALP-aligned Egerton displayed intense loyalty to him.¹³ The second characteristic was his conviction that the union movement should be an advocate for progressive political causes. Macdonald founded the TLC's Equal Pay Committee, was a vice-president of the Peace Committee, and was an early "beacon for Aboriginal rights".¹⁴ In pursuing these goals Macdonald was willing to work with forces outside the union movement. As his obituary in the Tribune noted, his life was spent striving "to unite all sections of the labour movement around common progressive issues".¹⁵

This marriage of universal respect and a concern with broader political issues explains why Macdonald entered into an alliance with student activists.

The student left formed independently of any political party or union body during the 1960s. This was a period of intense political activism on university campuses across the globe. Across Australia, university students were becoming politicised by their opposition to conscription and to the Vietnam War.¹⁶ By 1966, groups such as the Vietnam Action Committee had formed at the University of Queensland (UQ). It was out of these anti-war groups that a broader student activism movement (strongly influenced by the American New Left) was able to grow.¹⁷ Students such as Mitch Thompson and Brian Laver, and academics such as Dan O'Neill were inspired to found the Society for Democratic Action (SDA) in April 1966.¹⁸ These activists quickly began large-scale marches against conscription throughout 1967.¹⁹ The Nicklin government responded with bureaucratic suppression via the State Traffic Act and police violence.²⁰ This further outraged student activists. By the end of 1966 the student left had become equally committed to protesting for civil liberties as a natural outgrowth of the anti-war movement. Therefore, the mid-1960s saw the emergence of a highly active student protest movement.



Queensland
Historical
Atlas

There were two reasons young students of the period chose to join groups such as the SDA, rather than working through the ALP, the ALP-affiliated TLC or the CPA. The first was the undeniable class distinction between the children of the middle class, (who could afford a tertiary education before Whitlam's reforms) and the working class members of more established leftist organisations. The second was the disconnect between the Old Left and youth in general. As Jon Piccini has noted, the union's youth programs were extremely poor, being dominated by staid events (such as Miss Union competitions) that held little appeal for members of the 1960s counter-culture.²¹ The CPA's Eureka Youth League, whose "programmatically dogmaticism" had made it "an object of mild derision, at best, in youth circles", was no better.²² This problem was compounded by the fact that many young activists saw both unions and Communists as being too willing to compromise with non-left forces.²³ Even within the union movement, young people often had to struggle against general disinterest in youth issues, which were rarely raised at Trade Union Congress before 1965. For instance, Alan Anderson (a young delegate for the Plumbers' Union) remembers being verbally abused by Egerton when he suggested that the body needed to do more to engage with young workers (revealingly, Macdonald was in contrast highly supportive of young delegates).²⁴ In this environment, it was natural that

young students would choose to form their own organisations rather than work through traditional left channels.

Despite this undeniable distance between young students and trade unionists, from 1966 onwards the two groups began to work together. The student left first attracted real attention from the TLCQ once it focussed its energies on securing civil liberties. For instance, at the 1966 Trade Union Congress it "congratulate[d]... the students and staff of Queensland University who are continually campaigning for civil liberties".²⁵ This was soon followed by industrial action in favour of the SDA's civil rights protest. Indeed, throughout 1967 the SDA would describe the trade unions as being their "most responsive ally".²⁶ For example, the TLC held a four-hour stop work meeting on the 14th of September 1967 in protest at the "shocking" police brutality against students participating in a march six days before.²⁷ As the minutes of the TLC Executive record, "the overall feeling of the Executive was that it was necessary to take some positive steps" in support of student civil liberties.²⁸ This meeting was attended by over 3000 people. Although records of the TLC's internal deliberations are murky on this point, it seems that Macdonald played a major role in persuading the TLC Executive to take this action. Interestingly, Egerton himself initiated this protest, belying his previously derisive attitude towards youth, citing the intermittent

“urging” by affiliated unions to take a firmer stance in favour of students.²⁹ However, Piccini contends there were also “sharp divisions” in some unions about the validity of such a stoppage, indicating that support from a figure as senior as Macdonald would have been critical.³⁰ Anderson describes this decision as a “bold stand” by Macdonald.³¹ It is understandable, therefore, that several members of the SDA (including Laver and Thompson) participated in the 1967 postal strike, and were subsequently arrested for handing out union leaflets.³² This in turn led to another four hour stoppage by the TLC.

These actions can be partly explained by the common aims of the union and student movements. For instance, a number of its more left-wing member unions (notably the Seamen’s Union) had, like the student left, been outspoken critics of Australian involvement in Vietnam since the early 1960s.³³ The TLC was so sympathetic to the anti-war movement that it criticised the federal ACTU for being insufficiently supportive.³⁴ More broadly, the TLC saw an affinity between the student’s civil liberty campaign and their own struggle for industrial liberty.³⁵ For instance, in the special meeting that preceded the September 1967 stop-work meeting, they seem to have been persuaded by Ralph Summy’s appeal that “the struggle for a better life was bound up with the struggle for civil liberties”.³⁶

As Macdonald himself noted in 1968, to the TLC Executive “industrial and civil liberties were inseparable”.³⁷ Likewise, the SDA perceived the union movement’s long struggle for industrial liberties and the right to march to be evidence of its “bona fides” on civil liberties.³⁸ Therefore, over the issue of civil liberties “Old and New Left met, finding a common enemy in the form of Queensland’s repression of protest”.³⁹ Consequently, the perceived nexus between these two struggles offers a powerful explanation for early TLC support for student protests.

Despite these shared goals, it is important not to overestimate the closeness of the union-student relationship. While the TLC was officially keen to see greater student-union cooperation, young unionists and activists both recall continued indifference and suspicion towards groups such as the SDA.⁴⁰ Those involved in the SDA at the time believe that this distance was engendered by its radical politics, which even in a militant union council attracted distrust from “right-wing ALP” types.⁴¹ In the minds of many trade unionists, however laudable the student left’s goals were, they remained “a lot of long-haired no-hopers, probably inundated with drugs”.⁴² A good example of this was Macdonald’s decision at the end of 1967 to hire Brian Laver to work as a research assistant in the Trades Hall.⁴³ In doing so he stepped from supporting student groups to actually allowing

them to work within the TLC. It was precipitated by Laver's involvement in the October 1967 marches, which prompted Communists associated with the TLC (notably Ralph Summy) to suggest he should be employed.⁴⁴ Anderson again characterises the hiring of Laver as a move which forced Macdonald (with the support of Communist sympathetic unions such as the BWIU) to confront more conservative members of the TLC, most notably ALP-aligned members such as Egerton.⁴⁵ While Egerton was not opposed to the aims of the student left, he was unwilling to go as far as Macdonald in allowing a potentially disreputable student leader to work within the walls of Trades Hall. However, notwithstanding these reservations, the TLC and the student left had demonstrated genuine support for one another.

It is therefore important to distinguish the TLC's ideological support for the aims of the student left from the distrust and prejudice many unionists harboured towards students themselves. It is notable that the TLC was able to co-operate so closely with students. It is here that Macdonald's importance becomes more apparent. His decision to employ Laver was a pre-cursor of a much more ambitious student-union initiative: the Foco Club. Conceived by the SDA as a space in which anyone, but particularly young students and young workers, could express themselves politically and

culturally.⁴⁶ It took its name from the Spanish word for "camp", referring to Che Guevara's Cuban training camps.⁴⁷ What was remarkable about Foco, however, was that it operated out of the TLC's premises at Trade Hall, while being jointly run by a combination of student activists, young unionists and the Eureka Youth League. Therefore, it was a three way venture between the student left, the union movement and the Communist movement. This was an unprecedented level of student-union co-operation.⁴⁸ Moreover, it was remarkably successful, attracting regular crowds of 500 people every Sunday night until its closure in June 1969 (Guyatt 1983: 266)⁴⁹. Those who attended were not only exposed to avant-garde culture but also to radical leftist literature and ideas (disseminated most stridently by the student left). As such, Foco can be considered a triumph of student-union co-operation in the cause of promoting political awareness.

Macdonald's vital role in the venture is commonly acknowledged. In Anderson's estimation, "much of the success of Foco can be attributed to Alex".⁵⁰ Macdonald's support took three forms. Firstly, he supported the idea in the TLC Executive, despite the fact that (as Hamilton reflects) it no doubt cost him support amongst the more ALP-aligned members.⁵¹ These members did not want to associate the TLC with either the radical left politics or the moral panic (described below) that suffused Foco. So strong was the

opposition that Macdonald's widow recalls him dispiritedly remarking that "if the [TLC] kick me out I wouldn't be surprised".⁵² Macdonald's immense esteem within the labour movement, coupled with his excellent negotiating abilities, can be seen in the way he convinced his colleagues to accept Foco's use of the Hall. In this regard he was undoubtedly aided by the fact that Egerton and a large number of other TLC officials were unable to attend the meeting at which it was resolved to give Foco the use of the Hall.⁵³ He made use of the Communist faction within the TLC.⁵⁴ As Laver infers, it was Macdonald's CPA links that enabled him to "do a deal" within the ALP to allow the project to proceed.⁵⁵ Macdonald's efforts may very well have been enhanced by the fact that Egerton, who was opposed to student use of the Hall, was frequently overseas during this period.⁵⁶ The Trades Hall was a crucial factor in Foco's success, because the TLC's political prominence meant that Queensland's notoriously violent police were reluctant to raid it.⁵⁷ This was demonstrated by the only Foco meeting held outside the Trades Hall, which was immediately dispersed by police.⁵⁸

Secondly, Macdonald supported Foco by remaining continuously engaged with it, unlike many of his colleagues. Writing a few months after Foco's expulsion from the Trades Hall in June 1969, its former President Alan Anderson noted how few union officials

ever attended.⁵⁹ In contrast, Macdonald visited almost every week.⁶⁰

Finally, Macdonald defended Foco from controversy, in stark contrast to most of his colleagues. The most notable instance of this were the accusations from conservatives that Foco was a front for drug dealers and prostitution. These were levelled by Liberal Party MP Don Cameron in 1968 under Parliamentary privilege. They had an enormous impact on public opinion in socially conservative Queensland, even amongst some older members of the Communist Party.⁶¹ Most damagingly, he alleged that the Club was close to 'the nerve centre of the ALP in Queensland'.⁶² Concern for the reputations of both the union movement and the ALP caused Egerton to publicly criticise Foco in June of 1969.⁶³ In contrast, Macdonald never doubted the fact that the allegations were a "political smear".⁶⁴ Unlike the majority of his colleagues, he not only publicly denied the allegations' validity but personally convinced Police Commissioner Bischoff of their falsity⁶⁵. Consequently, by securing the Trades Hall, providing his ongoing support and publicly defending it, Macdonald was an integral part of Foco's success.

It is necessary to examine the historical context surrounding Macdonald's actions in order to understand them. As mentioned above, he was naturally inclusive when it came to progressive

issues which he felt strongly about⁶⁶. However, this explanation alone seems unsatisfactory in the face of the opposition, which he endured towards the end of his life for his support of student-union relations.⁶⁷ One possible explanation that has not been deeply explored is the influence that Macdonald's allegiance to the CPA had on his support for student-union solidarity. Since 1964, the CPA had undergone a national change in platform under the leadership of Laurie Aarons.⁶⁸ Reversing his party's previous hostility towards the New Left, Aarons declared that "united action with other sections of the community's common objectives" was essential.⁶⁹ By the time of the 1969 CPA State Conference, the youth movement was being praised as "certainly the most spectacular feature of the Australian left movement".⁷⁰ The most important of these objectives was the anti-Vietnam struggle, the influence of which on "solidifying the relationship with radical youth cannot be overstated".⁷¹ It would be presumptuous to conclude that the CPA's national platform was the sole reason for Macdonald supporting close relationships with students. However, it is notable that the most consistent support for close student-union ties came from Communist inclined TLC members. For instance, Hugh Hamilton was singled out as being particularly helpful in establishing Foco.⁷² Indeed, Laver goes so far as to say the CPA "did a deal" with the ALP to allow the partially student run

Foco Club to operate out of the Trades Hall.⁷³ Similarly, it is significant that a major force in establishing Foco was the youth front of the CPA. While it is not tenable to attribute Macdonald's support of student-union initiatives like Foco to his membership of the CPA, it is necessary to acknowledge his CPA allegiance as an important factor.

Despite Macdonald's success in establishing Foco, he was unable to prevent the relationship between the two movements deteriorating. The first major dispute came on Labour Day 1969, when around three hundred student activists joined the union-organised march with the intention of "reintroduce[ing socialist] politics" to the event.⁷⁴ Waving red and black flags and shouting slogans at ALP participants (including Federal Opposition leader Gough Whitlam), these students caused the ALP-aligned TLC considerable embarrassment. In response, Egerton called for the students to be physically thrown out of the march, calling them "a group of scrubby, confused individuals".⁷⁵ Moreover, Laver alleges Egerton "gave an open invitation to the police to deal [with students]".⁷⁶ Conversely, student participants felt that they had been excluded from the march by ALP aligned unionists.⁷⁷

This fracas in turn led to Foco's expulsion from the Trades Hall in June 1969.⁷⁸ Although it was publicly claimed that this was a routine result

of long-planned renovations, Anderson suggests the conservative trade unionists opportunistically used the students' actions to eliminate Foco.⁷⁹ Regardless, Foco collapsed shortly afterwards.⁸⁰ Although Macdonald publicly emphasised the routine nature of the expulsion, Foco organisers saw it as reflecting the low priority the TLC placed on student-union interaction.⁸¹ This division was symptomatic of the shift in the student left from a protest movement to a radical movement, less willing to support the more moderate stance of the ALP-influenced TLC.⁸² Following Macdonald's sudden death in late 1969, the student-union relationship deteriorated further. The breaking point was the Vietnam Moratorium of May 1970. On that occasion, both the CPA and ALP aligned members of the TLC prevented elements of the student left (particularly the Revolutionary Socialist Students Alliance) from voicing active support for the Viet Cong.⁸³ They did so by convincing Hugh Hamilton to alter the speaker's schedule at short notice to delay Laver's address, and then allowing CPA members to physically restrain Laver while ALP Senator George Georges spoke in his stead. This incident demonstrated that the radical politics of the student left had diverged from the political interests of the TLC. From then on, it became increasingly unlikely that the two movements would ever work as closely as they had during Foco.

In conclusion, Alexander Macdonald was a crucial figure in solidifying the alliance between students and workers in the 1960s. Firstly, he capitalised on the shared goals of the two movements to help promote a system of mutual support. Moreover, he went further than many of his colleagues by helping young activists gain the use of Trades Hall for Foco. In doing so he enabled a highly successful joint student-worker endeavour. This comparatively high level of support must be situated within the context of Macdonald's links to the CPA. However, despite his best efforts, not even he could prevent this relationship from buckling under the tensions between the more conservative side of the TLC and radical students.

Notes

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- 4 Interview with Ted Bacon by Cecily Cameron 1984 in Cecily Cameron Papers op cit.
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- 6 Fry, Shield and Elen 2004: 112–114
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- 8 Alistair Davidson 1969 "A Short History of the Communist Party of Australia", 142; Justus M. Van Der Koef 1970 "The Communist Party of Australia Today", *Studies in Comparative Communism*, 70
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- 11 Bacon's Oration 20/8/196 CPA Papers Box 19, 1; Hamilton 2010: 15

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- 13 Ted Bacon Interviewed by Cecily Cameron 1984 in Cecily Cameron Papers op cit
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- 25 Trade Union Congress 1966 Executive Summary in TLC Records UQFL 118 Box 90, 12
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- 28 TLC Minutes from Tuesday 12/9/1967 in TLC Records Box 8 Parcel 29 p. 3
- 29 Egerton, *ibid*
- 30 Jon Piccini 2011 op cit, 21
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- 33 Seamens Journal May 1965 in , 93
- 34 TLC Minutes Tuesday 20/9/1966 in TLC Records Box 8 Parcel 29
- 35 Student Guerilla No 21 "Open Letter from Dissenting Dogs" in Greg Mallory, A Left Compilation
- 36 TLC Minutes Tuesday 12/9/67 in TLC Records Box 8 Parcel 29, p. 2
- 37 Trade Union Congress op cit.
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- 39 Jon Piccini op cit, 22
- 40 Alan Anderson op cit, 11
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- 42 Alan Anderson Interview 2002 in Material Relating to the Foco Club, F3598.
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- 44 Brian Laver Interview with Andrew Stafford op cit
- 45 Brian Laver Interview With Cecily Cameron 1988 in Cecily Cameron Papers op cit.
- 46 Foco Club Ephemera 1968, Opening Night Poster
- 47 Brian Laver Interview With Cecily Cameron op cit
- 48 Communist Party Records in Cecil Cameron Papers UQFL 439 Box 10
- 49 Trade Union Congress 1968 Executive Report in TLC Records UQFL 118, 59
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- 52 Molly Macdonald Interview with Cecily Cameron 1984 in Cecily Cameron Papers op cit.
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May Day, 2013

Speech at Woden Tradies, Canberra Humphrey McQueen

A month ago, Megalo workshop asked me to launch a book celebrating its thirty-three years of poster and print-making. Megalo had been set-up during 1979–80 as part of Jobless Action. At the time, under Fraser, youth unemployment in the ACT was around twenty percent. Megalo produced protest posters and then began to contract for jobs. The book reproduced a selection of posters that were on display at the Megalo printery in Watson. A poster for the 1981 May Day rally in Civic listed me as one of the speakers. So I have been at this for over thirty years. Henry Lawson wrote

I've been union thirty years
And I'm too old to rat.

Well, I reckon, like many of us here, I was union before I was born. But my study of history shows me that no one is ever too old to rat. So what keeps us on the Left track? The answer is comradeship. 'It's the union keeps us strong'. Or in the words of the Eureka Oath, we 'stand truly by each other'.

That's one more reason why I'm grateful for your invitation. We can be sure of keeping honest only for as long

as we are part of the struggle. It's not what we did thirty or more years ago. It's what we're doing together today and what we shall do together the day after tomorrow. A young interviewer asked a Canadian radical on his ninetieth birthday: 'So you've been in for the long haul?' 'No,' he growled back. 'I'm in for the endless haul.'

May Day is not a holiday in the ACT as it is in some parts of the world. However, Australia led the way in the nineteenth century with the first public holiday to honour working people. Those holidays celebrated the Eight-hour day. Engineering workers in Sydney were the first to win 'the boon', late in 1855. The next year in Melbourne, on 21st April, stonemasons got eight-hours. They still had to put in a forty-eight hour week.

Some employers had supported the change. But it wasn't long before the bosses tried to reverse the situation on site. They pushed for piece-rates to get as much value in eight hours as they had out of ten. In 1860, they imported German stonemasons to undercut the Society. No sooner had the Germans learned what was going on than they too stood out for the shorter hours. Yet there are no permanent victories. The Master Builders replaced stone with bricks. Within thirty years, the Stonemasons Society had shrunk to a tenth of its size in 1856.

The contest is intensifying again. Today, we are all time poor. Some workers have high take-home rates of pay. But how much time do they have at home to enjoy it? Eight hours rest and eight hours recreation are as rare in 2013 as the eight-hour day was in 1856.

Australia was the world-beater. We have had our workers' holiday under various titles and on several dates. Here it is Eight-hour day. There it is Labour Day. The day has roamed around the calendar from early March to late October. West Australia provides a perfect example. The unionists in Fremantle-Perth in the 1890s held their march late in October on Proclamation (Invasion) Day. The holiday was moved to first week in May. But it rained so much during May that they shifted the holiday again to early March, where it is now. We could think of these shifts as one more sign of the power of workers to improvise.

We are here on May Day, the 1st May. We shall be at the May Day protest outside parliament on Saturday 4th. Does the date matter? Not usually, but it can. We can find out why the date can matter by asking a different question: what is it about the holiday that matters? The answer is that we secure a day to celebrate our struggles and successes. It matters that we hold onto a day which celebrates the creativity of working people. That holiday is one way to remind everyone that our

labours built this country. And they still do. Without us, 'not a single wheel can turn'.

Sad to say, 'Canberra 100' pays no attention to the workers who are still making the wheels turn here. From the official programme you wouldn't know who built the rail line from Queanbeyan to Civic, the roads, the powerhouse and the dams in 1913. What about those workers? It is not too late for unions and activists to get the local struggles and achievements into the celebrations. For instance, there was a running dispute throughout the second half of 1913 at the Cotter dam. The Prime Minister Cook (a Labor rat) detoured to try to settle it in January 1914.

The date and name of the holiday can matter. They matter now in Queensland. The Tories have moved the date of the holiday from the first Monday in May. In my childhood we lined the streets as union floats and contingents of rank-and-filers were stirred on by brass and pipe bands from workplaces. "Printers' devils" with pitchforks darted in and out of the tens of thousands who lined the streets.

The current hit at working-class traditions is not just about memories. The Tories felt the force of the May Day marches along the coastal cities and mining towns against Workchoices. Only last year, their first round of cuts was met with another surge through

the streets. The boss class knows what it has to do. We need to take their example to heart and hit back.

Again the question: does the date or name matter? I was taught one answer to that puzzle a couple of weeks after I arrived in Canberra in January 1970. I met a French revolutionary, Professor Jean Chesneaux. I asked him how his comrades planned to commemorate the Paris Commune of 1871. He exploded: 'We celebrated the Commune by re-enacting it on the streets in 1968.' In a manner which we might think of as typically French he declared that confining celebrations to anniversaries is like a bad marriage, celebrated only on the anniversary: "It shows that love is dead."

If we apply Chesneaux's rule to the here and now, when was the last 'May Day'? One answer is earlier today when 200 ANU students marched on the ALP MHR for Fraser to insist that he oppose the ALP cuts to tertiary education.

When was the 'May Day' before today? The loud and clear answer is yesterday in Melbourne against Grocon. 12,000 workers defied threat of \$10,000 fines on each of them under the ALP's coercive powers. They defied the abuse of Mass Murdoch and from pollies of all stripes and shades. It is 'disgusting' to politicise killing for profit.

Canberra also celebrated May Day three weeks ago in the win for the

Korean building workers. Not only did they get their back money and improved conditions. The contractor coughed up a \$1,500 gratuity for each of them. That is real existing internationalism. That is the substance, not the rhetoric, of class warfare.

The struggles that make for a May Day are both strategic and tactical. Teachers are now engaged in both. One strategic drive is to end the serial child abuse that is Naplan. Another is to 'give a Gonski'. Meanwhile, the AEU presses for specific improvements. For instance, they are campaigning for classroom assistants on \$20 an hour, kept casual after twenty years and stood down over the breaks without pay.

There will be many, many May Days of struggle to come. Every public servant will face her or his May Day. The recipients of tonight's award for workplace delegates of the year show what can be won. Their counterparts in all the States, whether under ALP or Coalition administrations, already know how much they can lose if they do not educate, agitate and organise.

'May Day!' is also a danger call from pilots about to crash. We have to acknowledge that 'May Day!' is still a danger cry on health and safety. With four deaths here last year the danger cry of 'May Day!' is both painful to recall yet energising. The positive side is that the outcry has got Worksafe active. The ALP has promised an Industrial

Magistrate. Yet workers are safe only if we are active 'on the job'. Support from officials and from the community backs up the determination of rank-and-filers to get home safely.

'May Day!' is a warning to the boss class about more than this or that demand. In Europe, May Day comes at the peak of spring. Spring is rebirth. We can make this May Day the rebirth of the vision for a new social order. May Day nourishes re-birth of socialism. For that goal, we need to battle on every front. We need to combine the industrial, the economic, the political and the cultural.

The CFMEU in the ACT is taking a step in keeping with the Labour History Museum. The Division is sponsoring a competition for a short film on some person or event, past or present, from the working class. Entries will close in the middle of March. A substantial prize will be announced.

I'd like to end with a suggestion for one of those films. James Stephens of the Stonemasons' Society offers a great subject. As an apprentice in England, he fell and injured himself. He joined the Chartists to fight for the vote. In 1839, he was in a demonstration when the soldiery shot and killed twenty of his comrades. He fled to London but was a marked man. He lost jobs as soon as the bosses were informed of his past. He emigrated to become an active unionist in Melbourne. He

led the eight-hour protest march on parliament on 21 April 1856. He declared he would use ‘physical force’ and not just ‘moral suasion’ to win ‘the boon’. Thirty years later, he was all but forgotten. However, workers rallied and collected £500 for his final years.

The story of James Stephens is one more reason why we need a Museum of Labour History and the film competition. Why has there never been a feature film on the eight-hour day and another based on his life? We have only to ask to know why Foxtel has not put millions into that project. Workers know better than to wait for Mass Murdoch to tell the truth.

So it is our duty to keep the past alive. That duty is not to enshrine May Day as a ritual commemoration. May Day is not the peak of spring if it resembles a loveless marriage. May Day stimulates the perpetual passion for social equality. To strive for that vision, we are not in for the long haul, but the endless haul. We must make every day a day of menace to the boss-class. We can make every day a May Day of struggle and success for our class.

“These times of boasted freedom ... ”: the Brisbane Free Speech Fight of 1913–14¹

Jeff Rickertt

It was June 1913 and Gordon Brown and Jim Quinton had just arrived in town. On the face of it, the two dusty travellers were indistinguishable from the many other itinerant workers beating a path to the sub-tropics to escape the southern winter chill. Young, fit and adventurous, Brown and Quinton had carried their swags from Sydney, keen to discover what Queensland had to offer. To their great surprise, they soon discovered it had more than they bargained for. “We reached the Queen City of the Queen State one Thursday, and on Sunday found ourselves in jail,” Brown recalled.²

Being outsiders and poor, it was not unusual for workers on the track to fall victim to the prejudices and suspicions of local police. But this case was unusual. Brown and Quinton were not victims of petty harassment in the usual sense. They had courted trouble. And over the next eight months they would court much more.

As it turned out, there was more to these two adventurers than met the eye. They were members of the Australasian

DISCRIMINATION.



With acknowledgements to The Worker, Brisbane.

BRISBANE UNDER POLICE RULE.

A Police Ukase.

"Sir,—Referring to your application of the 11th. instant, I have the honor to inform you that the Commissioner of Police **Does Not Approve of the Issue of Permits** for the holding of open-air meetings on Sundays on roads within the Metropolitan Traffic District **For Other than Religious Purposes** by accredited representatives of religious bodies.

(Signed)

F. CARROLL,
Superintendent of Traffic."

Brisbane Free Speech Fight IS Cartoon 1913

Socialist Party (ASP), an organisation committed to building a working class movement that would sweep away the wage labour system and replace it with a Co-operative Commonwealth. “Ordinary working plugs”, keen to find employment, most certainly. But they also wanted a revolution, and they saw no reason why Brisbane workers would not want one too. They had come north to spread the socialist message.³

It was never going to be an easy job. Denied access to mass circulation newspapers, even those owned by the unions, Brown, Quinton and their comrades were compelled to rely on street meetings and rallies to put their case and win recruits. But in Queensland, this strategy placed them on a collision course with the conservative Denham government and its unyielding police commissioner William Cahill. Under the traffic regulations one needed a permit from Cahill to gather on the streets and he quickly made it clear there was no chance a group of revolutionary socialists would be issued one. At least not for Sundays. If Brown and Quinton were to find an audience for their socialist proselytizing, defiance of the law was their only option. The cause of socialism and the demand for freedom of expression thus coalesced. The socialists needed freedom of speech to spread their message. Their campaign was, they readily acknowledged, “a fight to enable us to propagate the principles of socialism”.⁴

Paradoxically, denial of this freedom became a convenient propaganda point, a ready-made indictment of the very system they aimed to overthrow.

What subsequently transpired in the streets, courtrooms and lockups of Brisbane in 1913 and 1914 would amount to Brisbane’s first coordinated free speech campaign and the largest and most militant civil liberties struggle in Queensland prior to the late 1960s. Thousands of people would be involved in some way, scores of police would be mobilised, dozens of gaol terms would be served, prison hunger strikes would be waged and one activist would be incarcerated in the Goodna Hospital for the Insane. Yet despite the public attention this campaign garnered at the time and the importance of free speech as an issue (then and now), this series of events, nestled inconveniently between the tumultuous Brisbane general strike of 1912 and the Labor Party’s electoral triumph in 1915, has been largely extruded from the grand narrative of Queensland political history.⁵

The story of the free speech fight also sits uneasily in the official narratives of Australia as a beacon of liberty. How could it be that on the eve of a world war in which, in the name of freedom and democracy, almost 417,000 Australians would enlist to fight, 160,000 sustain injuries and around 60,000 die, civilians in Queensland were being systematically and violently

prevented from exercising one of the most basic of democratic rights: the right to freedom of expression? By any measure, their struggle has much to tell us about the actual, as distinct from the mythical, character of Australian democracy.

This article takes a close look at this struggle. It delves into the social character of the campaign, its popularity amongst Brisbane citizens and the causes of its decline. The article recasts the campaign as an important historical episode. At a time when Queensland progressive politics of a more formal kind were preoccupied with the business of winning parliamentary office, these campaigning socialists were keeping the banner of freedom aloft, reminding the politicians of what politics ought to be about. Specifically, they punctured the fog of repression engulfing the Queensland capital since the 1912 general strike, they introduced radical socialism to a new generation of Brisbane residents, and they enlivened the hitherto staid official discourse on political rights, paving the way for significant democratic concessions after Labor came to power in 1915.

There is much to the story. Strictly speaking, it began before Brown and Quinton even arrived. On 27 May, James Gilligan, an activist with the Wobblies — the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) — applied to Commissioner Cahill for a permit for the IWW to hold street meetings.

The matter was referred to the Superintendent of Traffic, who advised Gilligan to let the matter pass. Such offhand dismissiveness revealed a regime riding high after its crushing defeat of the unions in the Brisbane general strike the year before. Having bludgeoned the labour movement into submission on the streets in January and February 1912, the Denham government had been returned to power in April after a quickfire law and order campaign. Parliament promptly passed an *Industrial Peace Act* with provisions as draconian as any enacted during the war on unionism in the 1890s, while on the streets Cahill's police enforced a ban on Sunday public gatherings other than the turnouts of the Salvation Army.

Into this charged atmosphere stepped the iconoclasts of the IWW and ASP. The ASP applied for a permit to hold a street meeting on Sunday 8 June. Cahill refused. On Sunday 15 June Gilligan joined Brown and Quinton and a small band of revolutionary socialists on the corner of William and Queen Streets. Individual members of the group proceeded to address the passing crowd from a small stool, with the evils of capitalism and the emancipatory potential of an organised and politically conscious working class the main topics for discussion. By the time the first police arrived a crowd of around 150 people had congregated. Arrests ensued; a fresh speaker stepping onto the stool as each previous



Brisbane Free Speech Fight Queen and Edward Sts c1900

orator was dragged away. Five activists — Gilligan, Brown, William Mauden, Robert Jenken and Percy Mandeno — were charged with holding a public meeting without a permit, while Jim Quinton was accused of having created a disturbance, the prosecution alleging he had attempted “to ventilate his opinions, contrary to law, and without a license”. In the magistrates court the following Tuesday Quinton denied causing a disturbance but admitted giving his opinions. He was convicted and fined 5 shillings or 12 hours imprisonment. The other four defendants were similarly convicted and penalised.⁶

The radicals had chosen Sunday deliberately. The police tolerated street meetings on other nights, though only

in less prominent sites like Market Square (present day King George Square). But for street agitators, Sunday afternoon was prime time. Of all the days, Sunday offered the most conducive environment for spreading the message of socialism. It was the only full day most workers enjoyed away from their employment, an important consideration for activists who were themselves working class and who aimed to reach a working class audience. Inner city streets were pedestrian arteries of working class community life, and Sunday was the day this life was at its liveliest. The socialists were determined to make the most of these opportunities. Defying the law on the Sabbath also allowed them to highlight the discrimination at the heart of a permit system that

sanctioned religious evangelicals and banned secular radicals. For their part, the police and the Government, having staked their authority on implementing the ban, evidently felt compelled to enforce it in the face of the socialists' challenge.

Initially, it seems, the ASP preferred to spunk socialism lawfully than wage a confrontational free speech campaign. They applied again for a permit, and sought to meet with Cahill and the Home Secretary, John Appel. F. Carroll, the Police Superintendent of Traffic, wrote to the ASP to inform them that the Commissioner of Police would not approve the issuing of permits to hold open-air meetings on Sundays for other than religious purposes by recognised religious bodies. The Home Secretary's office advised that Appel was "not disposed to take any action in the matter".⁷ The ASP approached the trade unions, asking for support on the streets and in the hallways of political power. A special union meeting was called but only two unions sent delegates. On 21 August, John Fihelly, for the Labor Opposition, asked a question on the matter on the floor of Parliament but offered no rebuttal when Appel used the opportunity to iterate the Government's intransigent attitude:

... the persons referred to are not harassed as alleged; ... applications for permits to hold street meetings are dealt with

strictly on their merits, and are granted or refused as may be considered desirable in the public interests...⁸

With no prospect of a permit, the Brisbane ASP branch met in early September and discussed whether to abandon Sunday street meetings or escalate their defiance. Gordon Brown, by then Brisbane Party secretary, explained the outcome:

Having tried all constitutional means and failed, we have decided on taking up a militant attitude. Next Sunday one of our speakers will take a stand on the corner of Edward and Queen Streets, on a spot occupied earlier on in the evening by the Salvation Army. He will be arrested undoubtedly. The following Sunday we shall be there again with another volunteer. So the fight must go on.⁹

While the ASP considered the campaign their own, they would work closely with the IWW, radicals from the Russian émigré community, and various non-aligned anarchists and socialists. The IWW influence is evident in the tactic of creative civil disobedience culminating in arrest, a ploy pioneered to great effect by the Wobblies in the United States. Although no women are known to have played a direct role in the Brisbane confrontations, another

source of inspiration may have been the militant defiance of the British suffragettes, whose contemporaneous battles with police on the streets of London were covered extensively in the Brisbane press.¹⁰

The first clash following the ASP's decision to continue the campaign occurred on Sunday 7 September. Police and crowds thronged the corner of Edward and Queen Streets as the activists assembled. By the time the first volunteer, Alfred Brown, rose to speak, he was surrounded by up to 200 supporters and spectators. "I come here tonight for the purpose of addressing a socialist meeting," he declared. "The law says it won't allow it but I will try it. We want freedom and we must get it." His oration had barely begun when a young constable moved forward and demanded to see Brown's permit. He replied in the negative and returned to his speech. Arrest came quickly and without resistance.

In court, Brown conducted his own defence. Magistrate Eglinton, duty-bound, he said, to "try...to make the defendant and others keep within the law", recorded a conviction and imposed a fine of £5 or one month in prison.¹¹ Brown chose, as his Party explained, "to take the rest cure at King George's Boggo Road establishment".¹² Henceforth he became known as Boggo Brown to avoid confusing him with Party secretary Gordon Brown,

who would also serve time during the campaign.

Away from the main city streets and the flashpoint of Sunday night the socialists continued to hold public forums unhindered and indeed unprotected by the authorities. Following Boggo Brown's gaoling, the ASP convened a Saturday evening mass meeting in Market Square. On the Friday of the following week, they held a similar protest meeting at Main Road, Woolloongabba. Gordon Brown, the keynote speaker, highlighted the contradiction at the heart of the State's 'liberal' democracy:

Is Queensland as democratic a country as it claims to be? In the British Isles and on the Continent men may come forth into the streets and give out their views, but here in Queensland, where the principle of Government by the people is supposed to be regarded as a sacred right, men are being victimised because they spoke what was in their minds, just because the powers at the head of affairs did not agree with them.¹³

He appealed for help to continue the fight against "police tyranny and Governmental suppression of liberty".¹⁴

With Boggo Brown resting in state custody, the Sunday of 14 September required a fresh volunteer. Another itinerant labourer and ASP member, Percy Mandeno, stepped forward. An experienced activist, Mandeno proved himself that night particularly adept at the art of mobile oratory. He commenced his address in Edward Street, near the Queen Street intersection, and proceeded to walk up and down Edward discoursing on matters of free speech and socialism, occasionally halting his presentation to urge the crowd following him to go home. His arrest sparked loud hooting from the crowd, which had grown to around 500 during the course of his presentation. As he was led along Adelaide Street in the direction of the watchhouse, the crowd followed, continuing their booing and jeering. Mandeno called for a song. Some of his comrades launched into *The Red Flag* and the crowd heartily joined in, singing verse after verse until the prisoner disappeared into the watchhouse.¹⁵

In court Mandeno asserted he was not involved in a public meeting and could not be held responsible for the crowd walking behind him while he vocalised his thoughts. In his summing up, however, he shifted ground, passing quickly over his faux point-of-law defence to concentrate on the substantive political point:

Surely in these times of boasted freedom I can speak on the common highways. I stand for the highest ideals of ethics. These laws have been framed by a certain class; they have not been framed by the working classes, and the man or woman who debars me from expressing my views is conspiring against justice.¹⁶

Mowbray sentenced the peripatetic orator to a fine of £2 or 14 days' imprisonment. Mandeno opted to join Boggo Brown for a reststay.¹⁷

A week after Mandeno's arrest, Albert Jenkins, an engineer resident in South Brisbane, suffered a similar fate after adopting Mandeno's wandering tactics. "It's a lovely night," he began, "a fine night for exercising my lungs." Setting forth along Edward Street, he rambled from Queen to Adelaide Streets and back, at one point admonishing his growing audience: "Don't follow me. Go home. I am going to walk up and down here and talk to myself about socialism and free speech, which is the right of every British subject." His roaming soliloquy continued for 15 minutes before the police cut it short. By the time the constabulary had commenced to escort Jenkins to the watchhouse a crowd of up to 500 people were in tow, spilling into the street and blocking the trams as they joined Jenkins in the chorus of *The Red Flag*. Outside the watchhouse the

prisoner called for three cheers for the revolution and the crowd responded with gusto.

Another spirited court defence followed. Impressed by Jenkins's conduct of the case and by defence testimony that he had been one of Sydney High School's most outstanding scholars, presiding magistrate Mowbray was inclined to be lenient, inviting Jenkins to provide an undertaking to desist from unlawful public speaking. Jenkins declined and a piqued Mowbray escalated hostilities by handing down a sentence of a £3 fine or one month in gaol. When Jenkins informed the court he refused to buy free speech, he, too, was carted off to the "Boggo Road Bastille".¹⁸

Harsher penalties hardened the ASP's resolve and spurred them on to ever more provocative tactics. On 28 September not one but two speakers — George Thompson and John O'Brien — persisted until arrested. Thompson, who later in court described himself as a "sort of half-bred wage slave", "sometimes exploited, sometimes not," chained himself to a veranda post near the intersection of Edward and Queen.¹⁹ On the same night, Gordon Brown climbed a fence of a private sale yard, about six feet from the street, and delivered a short speech.²⁰ On 5 October, 26-year-old cook, Hamilton Rudolph, was detained after a lengthy program of activities which saw him speaking on three separate occasions around the city, the second from a vantage point

high in the branches of a tree in Market Square from which he was persuaded to alight only after one, possibly two, constables, pursued him into the foliage.²¹ This "arboreal rostrum", as it was subsequently dubbed, featured on numerous occasions during the months of campaigning. Later the same night, James Gilligan, Gordon Brown and Percy Mandeno, the latter only recently released from Boggo Road, addressed a street crowd from the veranda of the *Daily Standard* office.²²

On 19 October Hamilton Rudolph affixed himself with a strong chain and two padlocks to a post in Edward Street, from where he delivered a lively diatribe on the parlous state of democracy while an increasingly agitated police contingent worked furiously to cut him loose.²³ Later, Mandeno, Gordon Brown, William Jackson and the Wobbly activist George Reith spoke to an "immense gathering" from the window ledge of the *Daily Standard* office. Reith continued his oration along Adelaide and into George Streets before jumping into a waiting car which delivered him back to Edward Street where he chained himself to a post before the exhausted foot police could arrive.²⁴ In January, Gilligan and Boggo Brown hired a room on the third floor of the exclusive Carlton Club Hotel. After supping on an elegant tea, the two guests retired to the veranda where they commenced a loud conversation on the question of free speech, an exchange loud enough

to be heard by the large crowd listening attentively on the street below.²⁵

As the weeks went by, the crowds grew. From an audience of around 200 in early September, the campaign was soon a weekly routine for thousands: a crowd of 500 on 21 September became 1000 a week later, a thousand soon multiplied. The largest gathering was probably on 5 October when the ASP led a march around the streets, stopping at various junctures for more speeches. This was the occasion of Rudolph's arboreal oration in Market Square. According to an estimate by the *Daily Standard*, by the time Rudolph alighted from his eyrie, the massed citizenry had grown to around 5000 (as a proportion of Brisbane's population, approximately 75,000 in 2013 terms). "Seldom had such a crowd been seen in Queensland, and they carried everything before them," reported the *Standard*. The pro-government *Brisbane Courier* was prepared to concede "a large crowd", which they estimated to be "several hundreds". *The Worker's* account, however, corroborated the *Standard's* estimate:

Several prominent free-speechers ... headed a large crowd through Edward Street and up Queen Street. From there they traversed other thoroughfares, gaining numbers until, finally, some thousands of citizens were in the moving

mass. It was a rare sight for Brisbane on a Sunday evening.²⁶

In late November another crowd estimated at 5000 listened enthusiastically as Jim Quinton spoke for about an hour from a private veranda on the Edward-Queen Street corner.²⁷

How did this tiny band of activists manage to attract such interest? Various reasons can be teased out. As sheer theatrical spectacle, the campaign had few rivals in Brisbane, certainly none that could be witnessed without an admission fee. The creativity and audaciousness of the socialists, their willingness to provoke a confrontation, the opportunity they created to see state officials made into a laughing stock, all played a part in creating compelling entertainment. It was, as Gordon Brown acknowledged, "jolly good fun".²⁸

But one suspects there was more to it than this. The people who thronged the speakers were not content with the voyeuristic pleasure of watching a confrontation between histrionic radicals and the forces of law and order. They became participants, willing to play active support roles. Familiar with the conventions of melodrama, they cheered the speakers and jeered the police. They followed the orators around the streets as speeches were delivered, spilling onto roadways yet disregarding the

disruption their numbers often caused to trams and other traffic. They pushed and jostled to be close to the action. Rather than offer assistance to police fumbling with inadequate tools to cut speakers free from posts and railings, they laughed and offered sarcastic jibes and even cheered when flustered officers hammered their own thumbs. They followed arrested activists to the watchhouse, joining the prisoners in raucous renditions of socialist songs and offering hearty cheers for the revolution. On 5 October the massed citizens enthusiastically formed into a procession which traversed the length and breadth of the city, chanting for free speech. On 19 October the crowd accompanying the police and arrested speaker George Reith descended on a Salvation Army gathering, scattering the Army's literature across the street and overturning their organ.²⁹

These were not passive onlookers, then, but partisans. To find the reason for this partisanship and its mass appeal, we need to go back in time to 2 February 1912 and the Brisbane general strike. On that day Commissioner Cahill left an indelible mark on the memory of working class Brisbane by personally leading at least 2000 police and volunteer 'special' constables on a brutal rampage against workers marching in solidarity with Brisbane tramway employees, sacked for wearing union badges on duty. With rifles, bayonets, swords and truncheons, this "slugging committee

of the capitalist class", as Cahill's men would be dubbed, bashed and trampled their way through two peaceful processions, one a group of union women returning from a protest outside Parliament House. After the initial attacks, violence against unarmed citizens continued sporadically across the inner city and surrounding suburbs throughout the day.³⁰

In the weeks after Baton Friday, as the leaders of organised labour turned their attention to winning parliamentary office and forming stronger unions, grassroots enmity towards Cahill, Denham and Badger (the manager of the Brisbane Tramway) was so pervasive and mercurial it easily overran the familiar grooves of union and electoral activity. Rank and file resistance persisted as sporadic and often clandestine episodes of direct action. As Raymond Evans has noted:

Police records after 2 February reveal another eight attempts by small crowds and individuals to close business premises, more than a score of physical assaults on strikebreakers and 'Specials' and an equal number of sabotage attempts on trams and tramlines using dynamite, gelignite, fog signals, and large rocks.³¹

Whatever the tactical considerations behind these incidents, whatever politics may have guided them, above

all they registered a community defiant but in retreat, driven by a desire to hit back at their enemies but hamstrung by a lack of organisational means. And it is this combination of powerlessness and vengefulness that we see carried across into the street mobilisation of 1913. The same community that supplied and protected the physical force unionists and saboteurs in 1912 also supplied the crowds for the ASP's campaign a little over 18 months later. Although, on the streets and in the labour press, there was public sympathy for the ASP's anti-establishment politics, Brisbane's working class rallied around the speakers not so much because they were socialists or even tribunes for free speech but because they were standing up to Cahill and his hated police force. Perhaps without fully realising it, the ASP had created a weekly carnival of the oppressed where the targets of Cahill's Baton Friday terror could express their pent-up hostility through relatively risk-free public displays of disloyalty. The free speech fight thus exhibited a Janus-like quality. A veneer of audacious theatricality and jolly good fun masked a class confrontation stamped with the raw memories of February 1912.

The establishment sensed this undercurrent at work. The *Brisbane Courier* accused Labour parliamentarians of inflaming tensions by singling out Cahill for attack:

There is never an opportunity lost by certain people to seek revenge upon the Commissioner for his firm and wholly correct action in the restoration of order in the streets of Brisbane in 1912.³²

Anxious not to see this order unravel, the *Courier* urged the authorities to remain firm against "mob rule". "What would the position be," they asked darkly, "if a political meeting, with more or less turbulence, was held at every street corner in the city?"³³

The arrests and convictions continued. By 21 October, eight activists had served or were serving gaol sentences.³⁴ Writing from his cell, Gordon Brown made light of their predicament:

The Boggo Road Branch held their first meeting yesterday... Several resolutions were passed, the principal one being we have sugar and milk with our hominy. It was also agreed that a general strike take place as soon as possible ... We will shortly lose our chief propagandist, John Gray. He is to be discharged tomorrow. Mandeno is chewing a bit of stolen toast as I write. Reith is in the cook-house and is getting fat. Henry is wood-cutting, and Rudolph is painting.³⁵

Behind the black humour, however, a serious struggle continued, even on the inside. George Thompson commenced a hunger strike upon arrival at the prison on 14 October, possibly the first political hunger strike in Australian history. After a week of refusing food, he was force fed by gaol doctor J. Espie Dods who afterwards certified him as mad and, on 22 October, had him transferred to the Goodna Hospital for the Insane. Even here, Thompson refused to be silenced. On 24 March 1914, while still an inmate, he penned a letter to the *International Socialist*, appending some verse, which he hoped could be printed and sold as his contribution to the Free Speech Fund. "I cannot do more at present," he lamented.³⁶ In December 1913, William Rose, another free speech prisoner, also refused to eat, declaring he was following the example of the suffragettes. After 14 days of rejecting normal prison food he was transferred to the gaol hospital where he agreed to eat only because the hospital food was better. In January, his sentence completed but too weak to walk, he was released into the care of his ASP comrades.³⁷

For all the resolve and courage shown by the activists, by December it was evident the campaign was not sustainable in its current form. Mandeno had already accumulated a repeat conviction, and penalties were increasing — in November, the first six-week sentence of the campaign

was handed down after Alfred Rees declared he would return to street speaking as soon as he was free.³⁸ In January, Paul Jordan and Joe Fox were gaoled for two months.³⁹ The socialists had reached an impasse. They were drawing crowds but they had failed to build a mass movement which might have given them a fighting chance of winning their demand.

On the one hand, approaches to the labour movement met with little success. A Citizens Free Speech Committee formed on 9 November took up the cause through union networks but found the unions unresponsive.⁴⁰ A fresh attempt followed a Market Square rally on 18 April 1914, when union officials and Labor leader Dave Bowman spoke of the importance of free speech. Resolutions were passed and another committee was formed. This one called on unions to rally on Sunday 31 May in defiance of Cahill's ban. In the event, not one union was officially represented. Gordon Brown reacted bitterly:

... we can only draw the conclusion that they are so intoxicated with brain destroying parliamentary laborism that their doped state unfits them for consideration of any militant action.⁴¹

Laborism was indeed a large part of the reason for union indifference. But the ASP's sectarianism did not help.

Brown's attack blurred the distinction between paid union officials and the working rank and file: "We are told that the trade unionists are the flower of the labouring class. Guess that flower has withered some, eh?"⁴² Earlier, the *International Socialist* had abused Labor Party supporters as "molluscs".⁴³

On the other hand, the ASP fared little better in converting their street supporters into frontline activists. They consistently stood apart from their audience, substituting themselves and their own daring stunts for mass action. They do not appear to have encouraged the crowds to join in their antics. In any case, even workers who agreed with the free speech demand or shared the ASP's socialism would have been reluctant to volunteer for certain arrest. People with jobs, especially people with families to support, could ill-afford time off to attend weekday court hearings, let alone risk a term of imprisonment. Merely the news of an arrest and court appearance could cost an activist his or her job, while the fines could spell financial disaster. Consequently, the crowds supported the activists but few individuals outside the ASP/IWW circle were prepared to step up to the speaking stool.

The ASP could have changed tactics, perhaps encouraging acts of mass disobedience where the individual risk of arrest was diffused. Instead, they turned on their own constituency. When free speech was denied by

proclamation during the general strike, Boggo Brown noted in December 1913, the workers were horrified. But today, he complained, when socialists go to gaol to win back this right, the workers "are submissive, docile, curiosity-mongers".⁴⁴

Isolated from organised labour and critical of their own supporters, the socialists in the end had only themselves to rely on. As the arrests continued and the duration of gaol terms increased, Gordon Brown published appeals for interstate ASP members to replenish the speaking stocks. Some came but the numbers could never be sufficient. After the rally on 31 May failed to break through to the unions, the campaign faltered. At the rally itself the ASP refused to put forward speakers for arrest. Brown wrote in cynical resignation:

If any speaking had been indulged in it would have come from our boys. The crowd would have cheered, several of us [would have been] juggled, and the heroic unionists would have returned to their yokes and smilingly related (when the boss wasn't watching) how the foolish socialists were again candidates for the Boggo Road division.⁴⁵

By July the ASP's Brisbane branch reports contained no mention of the free speech struggle. By September,

the branch's activities were limited to Saturday night dances and Sunday evening lectures.⁴⁶

All in all, over the course of the campaign at least 21 men had served one or more gaol terms, two had conducted hunger strikes and one had been confined in the Goodna Hospital, where he languished long after the struggle petered out.⁴⁷ Gordon Brown had been summonsed eight times and served many sentences, the longest two months.⁴⁸ These sacrifices, however, were not fruitless. Everyone from sitting magistrates to Ted Theodore, Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party, came to acknowledge publicly that free speech was an important principle and that certain public spaces should be set aside for unvetted political gatherings.⁴⁹

After Labor's electoral victory in May 1915 a renewed push by the socialists for a designated forum area led, on 18 July, to the first legal political street meeting in Brisbane on the Sabbath. With no threat of arrest, some 50 people gathered on the corner of North Quay and Ann Street to hear the ASP hold forth on "war and Christian failure".⁵⁰ Subsequently, the Government set aside an area behind Parliament House, grandiosely named The Domain, for stump speakers. Despite its isolation from the city, this open expanse would play a significant role in the mass mobilisations against conscription during World War One. And at the anti-

war edge of that struggle, some familiar faces were prominent: Percy Mandeno, William Jackson, Jim Quinton and Gordon Brown.

Notes

- 1 Originally written for publication in the *Queensland History Teachers' Association eJournal*, 2014.
- 2 Gordon Brown, *My Descent from Soapbox to Senate*, Cooperative Press, Brisbane, 1953, p. 125.
- 3 *ibid*, p. 128.
- 4 *International Socialist*, 15 November 1913. As the ASP's national newspaper, the *International Socialist* published regular reports on the Brisbane campaign.
- 5 For an exemplar of this narrative arc, see D.J. Murphy, *T.J. Ryan: A Political Biography*, UQP, St Lucia, 1990. Examples of recent histories which overlook the episode include Ross Fitzgerald *et al*, *Made in Queensland: A New History*, UQP, St Lucia, 2009, pp. 82–4, and Frank McBride *et al*, *Brisbane 150 Stories, 1859–2009*, BCC, Brisbane, 2009. A notable exception to this pattern of exclusion is the work of Raymond Evans. See *Loyalty and Disloyalty: Social Conflict on the Queensland Homefront, 1914–18*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1987, p. 18; 'Free Speech Fight, 1913–14' in Raymond Evans and Carole Ferrier (eds), *Radical Brisbane*, The Vulgar Press, Carlton, 2004, pp. 150–55; *A History of Queensland*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 2007, p. 153.
- 6 *Brisbane Courier*, 17 June 1913, p. 3; *International Socialist*, 20 December 1913.
- 7 *International Socialist*, 20 September 1913; Letter from Under Secretary, Home Secretary's Office to M.H. Sampson, Secretary Australasian Socialist Party, Brisbane Branch, 11 July 1913. Queensland State Archives Item ID861615, Letterbook, p. 412.

- 8 *Queensland Parliamentary Debates (Legislative Assembly)*, 21 August 1913, p. 944.
- 9 *International Socialist*, 13 September 1913.
- 10 The *Brisbane Courier* on 29 September 1913 itself suggested this link. One Brisbane woman who did publicly support the campaign was Emma Miller. She spoke on at least two occasions at Market Square rallies.
- 11 *Daily Standard*, 9 September 1913.
- 12 *International Socialist*, 20 September 1913.
- 13 *International Socialist*, 27 September 1913; *Daily Standard*, 22 September 1913.
- 14 *ibid.*
- 15 *Daily Standard*, 16 September 1913; *International Socialist*, 27 September 1913.
- 16 *Daily Standard*, 16 September 1913.
- 17 *ibid.*; *International Socialist*, 27 September 1913.
- 18 *Daily Standard*, 22 September 1913, 25 September 1913; *International Socialist*, 4 October 1913.
- 19 *Daily Standard*, 25 and 29 September 1913; *Brisbane Courier*, 29 September 1913.
- 20 *The Worker*, 9 October 1913.
- 21 *Daily Standard*, 6 October 1913.
- 22 *Daily Standard*, 27 October 1913, 31 October 1913, 6 November 1913.
- 23 *Daily Standard*, 20 October 1913.
- 24 *International Socialist*, 1 and 8 November 1913.
- 25 *International Socialist*, 17 January 1914.
- 26 *Brisbane Courier*, 6 October 1913; *The Worker*, 9 October 1913.
- 27 *International Socialist*, 6 December 1913.
- 28 Brown, *My Descent from Soapbox to Senate*, p. 128.
- 29 *International Socialist*, 8 November 1913.
- 30 *The Worker*, 17 February 1912.
- 31 Raymond Evans, 'Baton Friday, 1912' in Raymond Evans and Carole Ferrier (eds), *Radical Brisbane*, The Vulgar Press, Carlton, 2004, p. 149.
- 32 *Brisbane Courier*, 29 September 1913.
- 33 *ibid.*
- 34 *Queensland Parliamentary Debates (Legislative Assembly)*, 21 October 1913, p. 2046.
- 35 *International Socialist*, 29 November 1913.
- 36 *International Socialist*, 1 November 1913, 11 April 1914. A full account of Thompson's incarceration and the campaign for his release is beyond the scope of this article. After a brief period of freedom in 1915, he spent a further four years in Goodna and Toowoomba mental health facilities.
- 37 *The Daily Standard*, 25 November 1913; *International Socialist*, 10 January 1914.
- 38 *Daily Standard*, 20 November 1913.
- 39 *International Socialist*, 10 January 1914.
- 40 *Daily Standard*, 10 November 1913.
- 41 *International Socialist*, 6 June 1914.
- 42 *ibid.*
- 43 *International Socialist*, 30 May 1914.
- 44 *International Socialist*, 27 December 1913.
- 45 *International Socialist*, 13 June 1914.
- 46 *International Socialist*, 19 September 1913.
- 47 *International Socialist*, 21 February 1914.
- 48 Brown, *My Descent from Soapbox to Senate*, p. 129.
- 49 *The Daily Standard*, 20 November 1913; *Queensland Parliamentary Debates (Legislative Assembly)*, 26 September 1913, p. 1584.
- 50 *International Socialist*, 7 August 1915.

Creating Union Activists: An Interview with Jen Thomas, Acting Queensland Branch Secretary of the Services Union

**Conducted August 19, 2013 by
Bob Russell**

With policy shifts away from full employment Keynesianism during the 1980s and the adoption of neo-liberal paradigms in their stead, labour unions have confronted increasingly unfavourable conditions in which to organise and bargain. Over this 35-year period, we have witnessed dramatic declines in trade union density and a corresponding decline in union strength and influence. Importantly, these have been worldwide trends that have traversed the already industrialised capitalist economies. In some nations, unions have largely proceeded with ‘business as usual’; in others it has been worse than that as witness the stream of concessionary bargaining rounds in the US. In Australia, the labour movement has responded to the challenges of neo-liberalism with the uptake of a number of initiatives, including top-down amalgamations, the movement to enterprise bargaining, greater administrative centralisation in individual unions and the adoption of

organising strategies as advocated by the ACTU.

In this feature interview, we examine a new initiative on the part of the Queensland Branch of The Services Union to foster a new breed of union activist. Jen Thomas coordinated the introduction of the programme in 2012 and its subsequent development. This is an edited and abridged transcript that is part of a larger project that the interviewer is carrying out on the union’s activist program.

What got you thinking about the activist programme?

I’ve been dealing with all the elements relating to delegates’ training and their learning and development for the Branch over at least the last ten years and as we became more of a campaigning and organising union our



Jen Thomas

delegates didn't have the skills needed. We were asking our members not just to campaign within their workplace but also to involve our communities in industry campaigns linked to the provision of direct services to our community members. These have grown over the last five years.

Delegates didn't have the skills to do all this type of work; it really frightened them. While they could be considered activists in their workplaces, when they had to start engaging out in their communities, when they had to go and talk about their work and industries in their community, they couldn't do that in a formalised or structured way.

The ASU always had a fundamental delegates' programme largely for new delegates. At times we did more advanced delegates training, but for something specific like bargaining. Largely it would have been the fundamental type of training that we would do, focusing on how you support someone in the workplace. There was never anything about developing bigger thought processes or concepts of activism. Indeed some of these might not always suit a delegate.

Now, if as a member you were fundamentally more about being an activist, that might mean you don't like doing any of the roles that our training traditionally was around, but you might have been heavily involved in how you wanted to progress your industry, or

how you want to go out there and lobby politicians, or do activities that benefit both your community and your Union. We didn't really have any formalised type of delivery to expand those roles.

How did the activist programme actually get started?

When I became the Assistant Secretary, this was something I particularly wanted to pursue and so with Branch Council endorsement a very reasonable amount of funds was set in the annual budget for 2010/11 to deliver a first pilot programme, which we called, "*The Activist Development Programme for 2012*".

The underlying theory is to have a programme that wasn't just about how you figure out how you represent someone in the workplace, or how you recruit a new member to the Union, or how you had a discussion with your boss. It was about something more: why does the movement exist; why do we want to have healthy communities; why do we want to get involved and become active, and not just in our workplace, more globally. We engaged Lisa Heap¹ as a consultant to start to model the type of framework for such a programme. At that time I didn't know of any other Union that was doing this type of programme, and I still don't. So it's quite unique, and there are not a lot of people out there doing that type of work, but Lisa certainly in her line of work was someone that I knew would

be more progressive in terms of those sorts of ideas.

Was this an initiative of this Branch, or was it a National initiative?

No, it was only a Branch initiative. Certainly it feels a bit like that at the moment. Maybe when Kath² and I became the Branch Secretary and Assistant Branch Secretary we're were trying lots of new things. We're not scared of having a go at trying some different things to see if they succeed or fail, and the key to all of this was we had an action learning framework so we could constantly evaluate the work that we are doing.

Our application for funding from the ACTU through the Delegates Training Fund was successful for the 2013 project. We obtained the maximum a Branch could get, which was \$20,000. This was important because we estimate when you include all the staff behind it, is about \$60,000 to run the programme.

Were you influenced by anything that you might have heard was going on elsewhere?

I think we acknowledged that becoming a campaigning union was a really big step for us; to encourage our largely white collar type of members to actually get into the mode of campaigning. We were particularly looking at the UK Unions. UNISON is a very similar, large type of Union that we have a relationship with and they

have been doing campaigning work for a number of years. There were not that many programmes but their fundamental delegates' programmes — they had quite a lot online — are all actually about campaigning.

What did you hope to accomplish when you set up the programme?

In our Rules we still don't have the term officially of an "Activist". We actually only have a term of a *Shop Steward* or *Delegate*, and I just think that's out-dated now. There's definitely still a role for delegates to play, overwhelmingly, but ultimately my desire was to create a different type of programme and have two types of people. One is about a delegate that is more of the traditional role and there are many of them. They're just happy to support their 10 or 15 people that might be in the particular worksite.

And then we had this other type of person — and again, it might just be on one issue or might be on one campaign, or might be for them permanently in their life — when they want to get active about any issue or a campaign. These are the activists — they need to have a different set of skills and we, as a union, needed to help with getting them trained and involved.

We need both in the Union, because when you just try to engage the delegates who only have the desire to do support work for members, you've got no chance of trying to engage them on

THE SERVICES UNION

BE PART OF A REAL CHANGE

anything bigger. They're not interested and are the wrong type of people for us to be pushing and saying, 'You need to do everything'. There are delegates who are really honest with us as well, and say, 'Just some of those things I'm not interested in doing.' That means you have to have different people, and that means you have to have different

programmes to attract those people to do different work.

It's exactly like industrial and organising — we actually do it in our own staff, we just don't do it in our own structures. They're two different groups of people, and this is all about the "*people people*," — how we actually grow and build and develop.

How did you try to do this?

There were a couple of criteria in setting up the programme. One was that we had organisers actually attached to these activists. The second that applied in the first year of running the programme was that the activists weren't going to be delegates. I had this really clear view then that the two roles should be separate and so no delegate could apply for the role or to do the activist training. That's changed since.

So for the first pilot year there was a clear criterion that you couldn't be a delegate, or a very long term delegate and you didn't have to have fundamental Delegates' training.

The next part was that participants in the activist programme wouldn't be hand-selected; we would seek applications to be a part of the programme and potential candidates had to address selection criteria. That was something we'd never done before and it ended up being quite intense, but just trying to set a couple of new, boundaries around it to see that thinking that this might be a programme that people might have an actual desire and want to kind of fight for this spot, as opposed to kind of how normal Delegates are tapped on the shoulder.

We tried to make it a bit more like tapping the desire. And also in those days our delegates' training was two days. This programme was going to be eight days — significantly different;

it was a six day programme and then a two-day part where participants had to attend the Delegates Conference. Therefore we thought an application was necessary because it was a far more intensive programme. One attraction point was we had guest speakers and introduced the study of a lot more academic frameworks, more global concepts and presentations than what we would ever do in a basic delegates course.

How does the activist programme fit with training and support of the traditional delegates?

The Activist Course started to make us think differently about our delegates. Our Branch Council — which is all made up of delegates — could see our fundamentals' training had to be carried out differently.

We've extended the resources for further training of delegates and now have a permanent trainer by converting one of our organisers to become the trainer. This allowed us to re-develop our fundamental delegates' programme as well; it is more styled down than our activist programme. This has given us a new lease of life and a new real investment in what is my ultimate passion which is building real workplace power.

The main thing we've done is try and deal with the structural part in terms of the formalised training. I think we've still got a long way to go about how

our organisers genuinely support our activists and our delegates, as well as our industrial officers and how we generally do that.

We learn different things every day. One of the biggest changes as well is that we never included an organiser in our delegates' training. They weren't part of the puzzle. We only had them working in isolation, so we were training, say, 20 and 30 delegates at a time and we never hooked them up with those organisers.

That's a really basic omission, isn't it?

Yes, so it was probably one of the key things I wanted in an Activist Programme; more of an intense relationship with our organisers. Operationally on a day to day basis, the ways we were supporting our delegates was still too much on a white collar mode. Changing to an organising and campaigning union means you've got to stop doing everything for the delegates and you have to let them develop. Learning as a union how to support them is a lot harder to do than just going in to fix issues.

We actually have to link organisers to delegates and make sure they are supported. That is where I think from what I've seen that blue collar unions do things very well. The Construction Unions and so on are very effective in terms of real delegate type of work. Their organisers are on the ground with the delegates all the time.

We just haven't got that down pat — and I'd extend that to any white collar union. We just don't have it settled, and I think that's because there's still quite a servicing mentality that the member will just call the office directly. It is a legalistic kind of thing — if I need a service, I expect it to be there, and I will call if I'm in trouble or I need that help.

How do you make the changes?

We're aware the change takes a long time to build. It doesn't happen quickly. The first step to actually making the change is to at least make sure your organisers are connected with delegates and activists. We don't want to just have groups of people being trained but then we don't do anything on the ground to do anything with those skills in a structured way.

There are some serious issues for the union here. We're realising that now, when we have a broader chance to look at what our industrial officers do. The type of work that they do is all about addressing issues and doing it in a very technical way. We need to do quite a bit of learning about how to support delegates to do that kind of work. It requires quite a lot of skill development for those union staff to be able to support delegates.

What was special about the activist training you did in 2012?

We had 40 members or new Delegates apply for consideration, and then I

interviewed every single person, by telephone. We had never done that before. We probably only wanted to get to 12 or 15 over the year, because we didn't know what it was going to be like. Beyond that, I'd got to attach organisers to everyone, so it had to be a smaller group in terms of real development.

We ended up getting 13 that we looked at placing. It took a month because we had 40 applicants, so to interview them all and then short-list them, and then we had to try to apply for their training leave. That was quite a bit of negotiation, because I had never had to ask for eight days off for anyone before. That was one of their first tasks. I made the applicants go back and start talking to their employers about their desire to be a part of this programme and about what benefit it would provide to the employer and their own development.

There was a difference between setting the training up in this way and the usual delegates' training. We wanted people genuinely interested in it and who can see the investment. I was always really clear about it, and we'd break it down even about how much this would cost. It would be four or five grand a pop we were investing in them; we wanted them to know they weren't kind of going into it just with the view that, *'Oh, if I like it, I like it; if I don't, I don't.'*

And they knew they'd have to do a project; the first time we'd ever thought of that. I had seen other unions do that and I thought that's something that we don't do particularly well. I also thought it would help structurally — that is internally to the union, if we had each activist do a project that actually meant the organisers had to engage with them. That is, the organisers would have to check up, they had to give support and ensure that the activists actually got a real chance to try their skills.

So that was really new for us, the concept of a project and for that year they had to present their projects at a Delegates Conference, and they really freaked out about that, so they knew it was serious.

Did you use a programme from elsewhere?

It was mapped out in-house. Largely Lisa had a good concept about the academic type of framework, which I didn't, and because she does quite a bit on human rights, worker rights as human rights, she really brings some more cutting edge material. I was the one who kept saying, *'We've got to have a structure to this,'* because if all we do is talk about theories, it's just going to wash over them. That was the concept of why we had to have a project, how you had to apply the theory. She definitely had the academic leanings and frameworks and I just had more of a vision of what I wanted to see and how we could use them.

What did you learn from the pilot?

We realised in the first year that it was our organisers' support that was the biggest downfall for us. It wasn't our participants, so that was the biggest kind of learning for us. That came out overwhelmingly in the evaluation done by the first group of activists at the end of the pilot. It was the light-bulb moment for us about our organisers; really weren't providing genuine support for the activists.

The support the activists got was people trying to go in and fix their issues. The organisers were involved and were supporting their activists side by side but the practical stuff when they got in the workplace was not about real support. It was more about, 'Oh, well, we can just turn that into an issue and we can fix it'. That was the biggest thing we learned.

We weren't expecting that at all. In fact, what we had discovered was the activists were quite inspirational in terms of having a vision for their Union and their own involvement and what they could do. It's pretty amazing, that you don't get in a Delegates' Programme, because it's two days. You have a longer time with these people, who really did have a better opportunity to develop.

At the end of the pilot we knew the structure of our programme was good, you could see the activists continuing to develop, but the overwhelming thing

for us was that it was necessary to fix the way our organisers operate.

How did you think the issues of organisers through?

The organisers felt it was just another job for them to do on an already busy work schedule. I couldn't understand this as the Co-ordinator of the Programme because a fundamental of a union organiser's job is working with delegates and activists. What we had discovered was we needed to put them through some training again about what it is really required to support someone and actually try to do a skill assessment of, "*do our Organisers actually have some of the skills to support people in a genuine way?*" On some things we could say, "*no, they didn't*" and on others it's that desire to go and be the *White Knight* and fix things.

What we realised as well, from the activists themselves, was that not having the fundamentals of delegate training and not understanding the Union structure made it difficult for those activists. Not knowing the things learnt in fundamental delegates' training slowed them down a little bit as well. From 2013, the activists have to do delegates training first. And for the Organisers we did two different training courses with them in terms of supporting activists. Also there is a weekly work structure for them to meet with the activists in the programme.

We didn't do applications this time, and I think it's one of the sad parts, but going with the new criteria, which is that you have to do Delegates Training first, largely we just look at the Delegates we trained in the past year, so look at the last hundred Delegates that we've trained

Are you hoping that delegates take on some of the workplace functions from officers and staff?

Not even just directly for the members; what we have experienced even in our industrial work is they've had to take on additional roles. Look at our energy industry at the moment — at privatisation and what's occurring there. We've got very senior delegates that have had to go into a very campaigning type of structure, but about industrial matters that relate to very technical elements of their industry.

Now, as far as we're concerned, the best people to put in front of the Prime Minister are our members and our delegates. It's not us the officers. We experienced this through pay equity for our Community sector. We had to explain what community service provision was and had to start explaining their job. They had to do that to Members of Parliament but in doing that you actually have to still draw out those elements of the industrial relations of the technical part of the job and break it down into messages.

How far does this go?

We've had to do that in the last couple of years in two large industries — Power and the Community Sector. We're experiencing it now for four Local Government Councils where we are dealing with de-amalgamation. So when we think of activism the issues are quite wide; our members and organisers at times just think about wanting to get red hot on an industrial matter or a social issue, and just want to go out and do rallies. It's far more complex in terms of the work we want to deliver, because it's all about engagement. So part of activism is still in the workplace about getting people to participate and to understand the issues. This means understanding the work that members do and the industrial environment and then understanding how to actually engage about that.

Recently for privatisation, because we deal with the energy industry, it's also about electricity pricing. Our delegates want to get involved in all of that because they understand their industry brilliantly. We ended up sending a number of our delegates down to Canberra and they got to meet with the Acting Prime Minister, and they engaged about their industry and about the pricing of electricity, about privatisation, and were successful. That's when the Federal Government was looking at a paper about privatisation, and ultimately they decided they'd leave it with the States.

Now for what we call a heavy activist campaign about privatisation, we've designed our whole campaign based not on the worker, it's all based on the consumer. So our message is all about the reliability of the service and about the cost of electricity.

Now, in a Union Office we don't know all of that; we know about the employment market and what relates to that. We're trying to get our member activists to make their industry issues and industry policies out a broader issue for the community. This is really about how you can merge the two worlds of work and the community.

What's a good example of your sense of a campaign?

Privatisation of electricity is a perfect example and that's extended now. We thought it was only going to be about electricity, but now Campbell Newman has extended that into the Railways and the Port Authorities, so it's our entire Government Owned Corporation (GOC) area. So we need activists around that can become the leaders about how privatisation actually impacts on issues for consumers as well for the workplace; these are the type of programmes that are practically driven for us in our workplaces.

At general elections we always campaign on issues that are very specific to our industries while working within the overall ACTU approach. However, the election issues are not

always actually the pressures people experience at home.

What kind of pressures are these?

There are the overall and usual ones that people feel, the actual pressures could be about employment security and also generally about cost of living, though we don't do our campaigns based on that because we've been a bargaining union for so long.

And then members have their local type of pressures. They are always concerned about their community, and not just relating to where they work and what type of service they provide. Some of this is about inclusion for different elements of their communities. Transport and infrastructure appear to be key issues.

And that's largely because our members are the mums and dads, the type of member we have generally are mums and dads and they've got a couple of kids in school. The average age of our members is about 45. They nearly all want job security; even those joining the industries and the union are after more security. This is because they've trying to get a mortgage and this needs work for the next 20 years.

It's kind of all-encompassing, what you can find, too, is when you're doing bargains or there's privatisation or other big things going on, that, people want to be active about issues that they want to influence. Often these are more

local issues because that's probably a big extent of what they feel they can deliver. While we need leaders and to be able to have people engaged in those big types of campaigns we also need to look at where people's activism lies. If they're not engaged in those big issues, wouldn't it be great to have a programme on the issues they want to engage on, that they could have some skills to do that?

You have also talked about activism and participation; what's involved?

Absolutely, we want to be a union that supports participation, and as I said, in terms of the training we do in Basic Delegates, it is still aimed that way, but a skill that person might take out is only about supporting people at certain times in their workplace careers. The activist role would be about how you could engage regularly about whatever issue is occurring at the workplace, or whatever issues are occurring in that community that members are engaged about. It's not just about the workplace.

That what we want to extend the activist concept into. We haven't done perfectly yet. Largely it's still been about our own type of industry issues, but that we could do that is good, because that's what happens at times as well.

It also makes us ready for new issues. Recently in Brisbane we've had a great one, which was when Campbell Newman — it happened really quickly

— but when Newman decided to cut 100 of the bus routes around Brisbane. We just worked with all the unions in terms of engaging our members, because largely they were the people who had to catch the bus in to work, or they'd put their kids on the buses to schools and just got them engaged in just doing some online petitions, because they were the ones really worked up about it

Has the programme met your expectations?

The programme, as I said, made us assess how our organisers work, so that was totally unexpected, and I think brilliant at the same time, that we were willing to evaluate it.

We could see some real failings in terms of the type of work activists ended up doing; it was too basic for what we wanted this programme to achieve, which meant we just needed to get some structures in place. We won't fix it overnight, but we can continue to work on supporting our activists. We really need to work on it in the next five years.

The activists had really good ideas beyond their initial projects, but if the stumbling block is you've got to get Task 1 done all the time, it just takes you longer to get into it.

One of the original activists now works for us as an organiser and we probably wouldn't have drawn her from just a

delegates' type of programme. We have had nearly, I think, 70% of the people who have been to Activist Programmes now take up appointments in our Union structures in terms of the official type of structures, and they've wanted to invest in terms of the actual structure of the Union, not just to say, '*Well, I've done that programme and I'll just continue on with it.*' They've actually made a deeper connection to their Union.

So is it developing a cadre of Union activists?

Yes, and investing, like, they've continued to invest in their Union, which means actually taking on more responsibility, so that's brilliant, because you don't get that out of Basic Delegates Training Courses. Which means it is a more accelerated type of programme, because ultimately that's what you want. You want some new leaders for when, particularly for us, for our delegates that are aging, they're all going to retire soon enough, and we're going to need this new group who actually want to be a part of it, not just continue to be tapped on the shoulder, because we will have that as well. I'm really into the view then in terms of when you're having those debates of that view of what the union should be all about, and that big investment into delegates is required.

So that's, in a really quick turnaround, a year and a half into it, and maybe that's me doing a bit of pushing because

ultimately that's what I wanted to happen because we need to open those opportunities about union structures to those people. So I think that's a really good outcome, that they didn't just walk — some did, but I mean, largely in terms of the programme, you know, if we get 70-odd percent that actually take up the new structures, that's really good. I've had a number of people apply for jobs in terms of when they come up, so they're really into the making of their unions in their workplace and the broader issues have continued on social networks, and really talking the language of the Union.

So for all those things, all I can say is we're on the right track. And I do think it's because it's a different programme and it's a smaller group, and that it's a different type of investment. I think that does have something to do with it. So for all those things I can say it's good, but I'm keen to evaluate at the end of this year as well, and that's a positive thing. I think we'll change things again for next year.

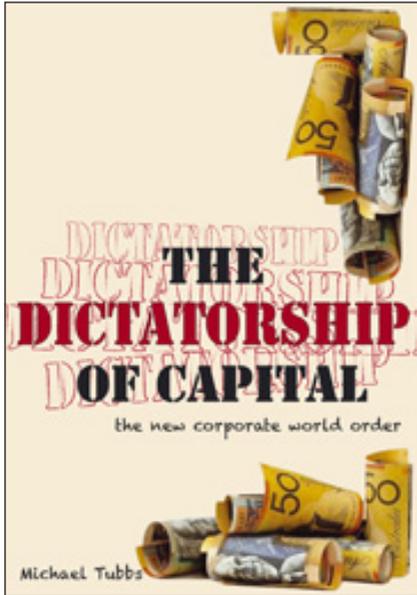
Notes

- 1 Lisa Heap is currently the Executive Director of the Australian Institute of Employment Rights.
- 2 Kath Nelson is the Secretary of the Services Union Queensland Branch. At the time of the interview she was on leave and Jen Thomas who holds the office of Assistant Secretary was filling in as Acting Secretary.

Review of

M. Tubbs, The Dictatorship of Capital: the New Corporate World Order, Salisbury Qld.: Boolarong Press, 2013, 118 pp.

Reviewed by Bob Russell



In this short, self-published book, Michael Tubbs rails against the fraud, corruption and exploitation that is part and parcel of the global capitalist order. Tubbs argues that we are currently experiencing a dual crisis that consists of global financial chaos and global ecological meltdown. The crises are both inter-related and also mutually antagonistic, by which he

means that attempts to resolve the one only make the other worse. Despite some interesting ideas, this is not an academic treatise. If anything, it falls more within the populist, ‘muckraking’ tradition of polemical writing.

The book provides numerous examples of contemporary corporate malfeasance, and unethical behaviours, abetted by complicit political parties (Liberal and Labor) and politicians. So, if the purpose of the book is to remind readers of this state of affairs as part of a broader process of agitation/mobilization then I suppose it has a purpose. However, more knowledgeable readers will find little that is new in the book, given that most of its references are taken from Australia’s daily press.

The author also expresses some views that I can only describe as ‘weird’ or erroneous. For Tubbs much of our current troubles began following the collapse of the USSR, which, if nothing else offered an alternative, although not necessarily more desirable, social system. This is plainly wrong. Neo-liberalism as an alternative and more regressive social paradigm had its origins in the early 1970s — theoretically with the musings of the trilateral commission and more practically with the coup and subsequent introduction of ‘Chicago school economics’ in Chile.

Tubbs also seems to dichotomize capitalism into a benign era of a “human owned personal capitalist economy” and the malignant era of corporate capitalist dictatorship that we now experience. For Tubbs this has come about when legal systems granted companies’ personhood and in the process rendered individual capitalists immune from the deeds of the organisations they controlled (i.e. the doctrine of limited liability). These legal innovations established an environment that was only too conducive to corporate secrecy and conspiracy, which is now continually played out at the expense of public interest in corporate boardrooms. For Tubbs, (a former lawyer) these shifts in law are all important. I, on the other hand, see the changes in legal doctrine as reflecting the laws of capital accumulation that Marx begins to explore in *Capital*. Through accumulation, concentration and centralization small-scale capital either morphs into corporate capital, is smashed on the rocks of capitalist competition, or is acquired by larger capitals through acquisition.

Finally, I find Tubbs’ views on debt to be overly simplistic. For the author all debt is toxic and is symptomatic of crisis. This is to ignore 50 years of Keynesian economic history in which states employed sustainable debt to fund worthy social projects. There are different kinds of debt — state, household, funded/unfunded, debt that

is used for productive investment and debt that is used for pure speculation. A more adequate treatment of the subject would acknowledge these points.

For this reader, the book may provide a degree of ‘eye opening’ or consciousness raising among a newer generation of novices. However, it cannot really be said to unearth any new knowledge about the way our political economy works.

In Memorium



Tony Reeves

*A tribute from his close friend
and comrade Jack Saunders*

Yes indeed, Tony Reeves won't be writing his column today because he is feeling unwell — let me tell you at the outset, award-winning author and journalist Tony Reeves was your classic leftie, a genuine class warrior and penultimate true believer.

Just as Billy Shakespeare foretold in his sonnets, Treeves, as he was lovingly called, shuffled off this mortal coil after

suffering a suspected heart attack while on holiday with his soulmate Kamala Shakti, in Indonesia late last month. After 73 years of unerring inspiration he selfishly and inconsiderately left us to our own devices.

Bugger, I say.

Treeves strove so hard to be a modest and common man but was continually undermined by his uncommon compassion, commitment, larrikinism, humanity and grace.

He defied being pigeon-holed but wouldn't have objected to being variously labelled as a Marxist and a socialist — he would proclaim in a rare deviation from his unwavering atheism “god forbid, call me anything but a rat and class traitor, an ‘effing’ Trotskyist”.

The infant Treeves graced us with his presence in 1940 in Essex in the UK. The Churchillian regime in power at the time obviously recognised his early latent talent and decided to protect their future intellectual elite by hiding him away in bunkers and gas masks far away in the colony of Wales, remote enough it seems to escape the Nazi tsunami heading their way.

Obviously out of clear and present danger Treeves took a distinct liking to his adopted country and quickly mastered the guttural and generously irrigating Welsh dialect.

His later resort to Welsh choirboy impersonations were frightening as well as life-threatening as you dodged the saliva he could spray around, all in the name of singing up his 'native' language..

In 1954 Tony moved to Australia and being the immensely intuitive character that he was, turned his hand successfully to a kaleidoscope of activities so diverse as cultivating roses all the way through to silversmithing, and wait for it, sewing.

But his innate love of life, dedication to truth, unavowed commitment to bolshie leftwing beliefs and love of all things wordy and English led him into journalism.

No formal education, no degrees, but an uncanny love of the language and unadulterated life experience drew him to journalism on the chance he may be able to right the wrongs in his obsessive dislike of perpetrated corruption, deception, duplicity and outright criminal tendencies.

This is what pervaded Treeves' consciousness — a righteous indignation, a hatred of pretentiousness and bumptiousness, an absolute disdain

of the overweening sense of cynicism born of a sense of entitlement that preoccupies so many of us today.

Starting as copyboy on Packer's Telegraph he worked through his grades — not a mean feat as he had no respect for authoritarian and anally-retentive chiefs-of-staff and editors — as most of you will know, they were in abundant supply in those days.

Tony quickly became an investigative journalist of many years standing and dare I say, note. He went on to work at the *Daily Mirror*, the *Sunday Telegraph*, the *Sunday Australian*, the *National Review* and the ABC. More importantly his forensic and multi-dimensional reporting helped bring about the Moffitt Royal Commission into organized crime.

In 1975 Treeves joined his close friend and investigative journalist Barry Ward in trying to unravel the appalling murder of Kings Cross newspaper publisher Juanita Nielsen, in what may have been the crime of the century in NSW.

They were continually rebuffed in their attempts to have the book published or force a commission of inquiry to expose the truth behind this sordid tale of police and political corruption, of betrayal and heinous brutality.

Back to the man. Would you believe Tony was sexually liberated even

before the term was first coined. His investigative reporting as crime roundsman on *the Telegraph* forced the then federal attorney-general, Lionel Murphy, to order the federal police to put a 24/7 bodyguard of two burly federal coppers on his case. Close comrade Murphy was extremely concerned at Tony's key role in the revelations uncovered by the Moffitt Commission into organised crime.

A long session of intense caring and sharing with comrades led the man to abandon all care and launch himself on a naked romp around his block in Victoria Street, East Sydney. Fortunately his beefy bodyguards decided to remain clothed — seems it is hard to conceal weapons in such a state.

A touch of naked rap dancing outside the Kings Cross police station failed to arouse much interest but a similar tactic outside of a nearby brothel didn't go totally unacknowledged. Tony managed to make his presence felt and once inside the establishment imperiously fronted the madam at the reception who looked him up and down and asked — 'oh yeh, and where's ya money honey?'; Devastated the comrade made a tactical retreat.

Tony loved nothing more than a convivial libation with a comrade, a colleague, in fact any unfortunate who could find and bask in this rare oasis of human charm and charity.

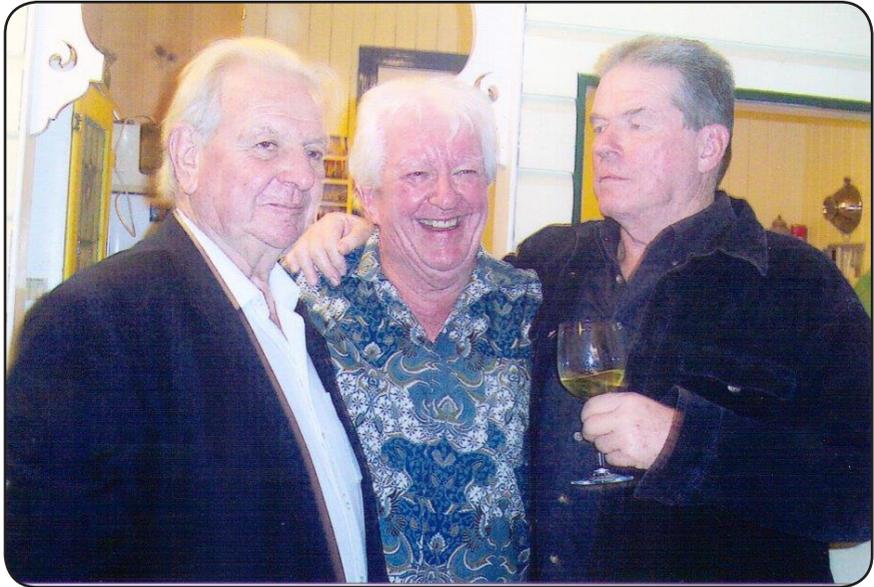
Such was the nature of the beast — and all of us were swept away by his infectious decency and compassion.

Early on Treeves decided the Labor Party was the best vehicle to implement his radical agenda, particularly his fearless advocacy of public housing, public transport and support of the green bans movement.

He took his drive and energy with him when he spent seven years as a councillor on the Sydney City Council from September 1977.

He teamed up with fellow-travellers Robert Tickner and Steve McGoldrick to become a left wildcat ginger group driving Lord Mayor Leo Port and ALP right-wing power broker Doug Sutherland well beyond the point of distraction. The planning committee become their playground and quickly allied themselves with Jack Munday and Joe Owens in the green bans movement.

He fought to preserve Sydney's historic sites from demolition and worked overtime to save inner city suburbs, such as Woollomooloo and the Rocks. He was prepared to talk anytime on urban conservation and his various campaigns saved many inner-urban tenants of low-rental homes from eviction and communities from disruption and dislocation.



Tony Reeves 70th Birthday

Unfortunately in 1975 the federal BLF branch intervened against the NSW branch which seriously disrupted the green bans revolution.

Meanwhile Sutherland's dominant right faction trumped up a case against Treeves and expelled him from the party. Tony loved quoting the notorious mayor of Leichhardt Larry Hand, star of the remarkable warts and all documentary *'Rats in the Ranks'*: "You don't know what it's like to be a member of the Labor Party till you've been expelled at least once — in my case, twice".

In 1992 our comrade decided to spread the light and warmth to Queensland and what a fine moment that turned out

to be. He and his spiritual inspiration Kamala just captivated our previously subdued state — it was as if the messiah had arrived — once again apologies for any terms that would cause discomfort for a devout atheist such as my comrade.

Tony quickly reclaimed his place in the labour movement, rejoined the Labor Party and organised a super-leftie branch. He just as quickly assumed a key position in the socialist left faction of the Queensland branch.

He was so impressed by an observation by a rather left-wing barrister at one of our branch meetings: "I would far prefer to have a small cadre of left-wing comrades in this branch than a thousand

careerist apparatchiks destined to embrace the ministerial leather in some sell-out Labor government”.

In Brisbane Treeves returned to his freelance writing and publishing career. His interest was rekindled in investigating the criminal behaviour and corruption he had witnessed first hand as a young reporter in Sydney. His first book *Mr Big the true story of Lennie McPherson* won the Crime Writers’ Association Ned Kelly Award for true crime. He followed this with *Mr Sin: the Abe Saffron Dossier* and *The Real George Freeman*.

His latest project was to uncover the real culprits behind the Whiskey Au Go Go fire in Brisbane’s Valley in 1973, thereby revealing a web of police and political corruption that inspired the Fitzgerald Inquiry.

These books make compelling reading as the level of corruption is staggering. He was fearless in putting his true crime revelations together, so different from writing fiction as it is fraught with potential legal complications including libel suits, not to mention fears for the writer’s personal safety.

My comrade and I resigned from the Labor Party after Premier Anna Bligh decided to privatise state assets and expel union executives who opposed her government’s despicable actions — needless to say the people of our fair

state have spoken in judgement in the meantime.

Tony is survived by his partner of 30 years, Kamala, his previous wife Tessa who he remembered fondly along with two sons and a daughter scattered around Australia.

Yes he was proud, but strong, a great conversationalist, contrarian, inspiring yet so personable and gentle — this world and his closest friends miss him so dreadfully. Quite frankly we loved the man — it is a bloody empty, desolate place without him. Vale Treeves.

2014 Alex Macdonald Lecture

HOME FRONT WW2: MYTH AND REALITIES

Dr. Rowan Cahill



**5.30pm for 6.00pm
Tuesday 20 May
Level 2 TLC Building
16 Peel St
South Brisbane**

***free admission**

***refreshments available**

Beginning with recent attempts by conservative interests to depict some Australian trade unions as acting in 'treasonous' ways during WW2 aimed at wrecking/sabotaging the war effort, this lecture will variously examine the claims, the use of consensus history as the base for conservative politics, and the myth of the social solidarity of Australian society 1939-1945.

Dr Rowan Cahill has worked as a teacher, freelance writer, agricultural labourer, and for the trade union movement as a journalist, historian, and rank and file activist. An Honorary Fellow with the Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts, University of Wollongong (NSW), he has published extensively in labour movement, radical, and academic publications. His books include The Seamen's Union of Australia, 1872-1972: A History (with Brian Fitzpatrick, 1981), Twentieth Century Australia: Conflict and Consensus (with David Stewart, 1987), A Turbulent Decade: Social Protest Movements and the Labour Movement, 1965-1975 (edited with Beverley Symons, 2005), Radical Sydney (with Terry Irving, 2010).

The Alex Macdonald lecture is an annual event organised by the Brisbane Labour History Association. It commemorates former Qld TLC Secretary Alex Macdonald and the critical role unions have played in the Qld Labour Movement.



**Brisbane
Labour
History
Association**



We would like to thank the Qld Council of Unions for its generous support of BLHA.
For more detail contact: Dr Greg Mallory 0407 692 377.

Notes on Contributors

Jack Saunders.

Jack was a close comrade of Tony Reeves — both journalists and both socialists. They were life-long members of the Socialist Left faction (SL) of the Labor Party until both decided to resign from the party when Bligh moved to privatise a number of public assets including the railways and forestry plantations. They founded and produced the infamous SL paper *Keep Left*, a never-ending irritant of the old guard and AWU factions in the Queensland ALP. As journalists they had a mutual love of all things labour history and religiously attended labour history functions whenever possible

Jeff Rickertt

Jeff is a labour historian, librarian and archivist. His publications range from a history of Australian telephonists and their industrial organisations, to articles on early Queensland unionism and socialist politics. He is a regular contributor to and former co-editor of this journal.

Peter Cross

Peter is an undergraduate Law/Arts student at the University of Queensland. He has a particular interest in Queensland political culture. He has worked with the Centre for the Government of Queensland under Danielle Miller and Roger Scott. He hopes to go on to postgraduate study in the fields of political science and history.

Elisabeth Gondwe, Howard Guille and Lisa Jackson

Elisabeth, Lisa and Howard are undertaking a project on the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum for the North Stradbroke Island Historical Museum with funding from the Commonwealth Government *Your Community Heritage* programme. The project is titled *A mutual isolation — the Dunwich Asylum and the Quandamooka people*. It is about sharing and telling stories of the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum, the Aboriginal community and the Dunwich Public Hall on Minjerribah/Stradbroke Island. Elisabeth and Lisa work at the Museum and Howard is contributing as a museum volunteer.