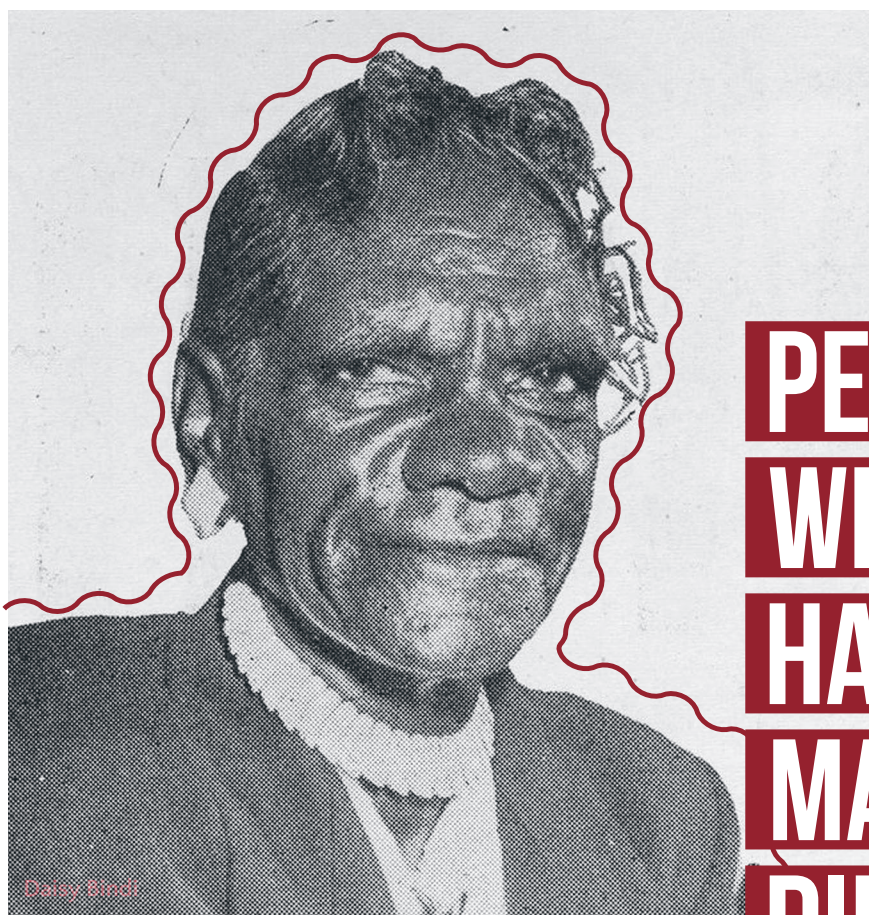


THE WESTERN WORKER

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JOURNAL OF THE PERTH BRANCH OF THE AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF LABOUR HISTORY



**PEOPLE
WHO
HAVE
MADE A
DIFFERENCE**

Western Australia's radical
activists, 1929-2021

OUR GRATEFUL THANKS TO SENATOR LOUISE PRATT FOR ENSURING THE
PRINTING OF THIS ISSUE OF THE WESTERN WORKER.

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Greetings from President, Bobbie Oliver

Report 2021

Who would have thought when the pandemic first broke upon the world in early 2020 that we would still be battling COVID-19 lockdowns and border closures two-thirds of the way through 2021? We have also been challenged by the ill health of some of our committee members. This has meant, among other changes, efforts to make meetings more accessible by zoom.

Executive Committee: The 2021 committee elected at our 2020 AGM was: Bobbie Oliver (President) Keith Peckham (Vice President); Vashti Fox (Secretary); Stella Files (Treasurer); Lenore Layman (journal editor); Charlie Fox, Alexis Vassiley, Pat Gandini, Ron Knox and Hope Smith. Ron Knox retired as Secretary after many years in that role, although he remains on the committee and continues his research on the printing industry.

Activities: The annual Harold Peden lecture in November was delivered by Carolyn Smith, Secretary of United Workers Union. In an excellent talk, she told us what life has been like for health and care workers during the pandemic, and spoke of new strategies that the union has adopted to communicate with members. It was encouraging to hear that membership numbers have increased in this difficult time. The text of her talk is published in this issue of *Western Worker*.

In April 2021, some of our members participated in the Marxism 2021 conference, where Alexis Vassiley and Vashti Fox presented papers. On 1 August, we held a successful seminar to commemorate the 85th anniversary of the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, with about 35 people attending. Charlie Fox, Riley Buchanan, Vashti Fox and Paul Riley gave presentations.

Projects: Perth branch had two research projects in 2020/21. One was collaborating with CPA centenary committees both nationally and locally. Branch members contributed to the national publication *Comrades* and also spoke at a seminar in Perth on 1 November on aspects of CPA history. Ron Knox reported a successful result for the *Gnowangerup Star* project, with the local council taking responsibility for the refurbishment of the building and the *in situ* machinery. We continue to support the AMWU in the aim of re-establishing a heritage centre on the Midland Workshops site. And we continue to publish an annual edition of our journal. At the 2021 AGM, we are launching the 10th issue of the *Western Worker*.

Thanks. As always, the branch is grateful for our sponsor organisations — the AMWU, where we hold meetings and store archives; the CSA and Unions WA for hosting our annual Harold Peden lecture; the CFMEU for hosting our AGM 2020 and the Spanish Civil War seminar; Unions WA who provide our postal box and assistance with mail-outs; and Senator Louise Pratt's office for printing *Western Worker*.

I thank all committee members for their contributions to the Society. In particular I acknowledge Lenore Layman's work as journal editor over the past decade, and the contribution of our retiring Vice President, Keith Peckham.

ASSLH
(Perth Branch)
COMMITTEE



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Bobbie Oliver

VICE-PRESIDENT
Keith Peckham

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TREASURER
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85 YEARS SINCE THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

An afternoon of celebration, discussion and debate

1 August 2021

Commemorating the 85th anniversary of the beginning of the Spanish Civil War was the brainchild of Branch Secretary, Vashti Fox.

The Spanish Civil War began on 17 July 1936, with a revolt by Fascist military officers against the Leftist Popular Front government in Spain and was fought between Republicans supporting the government and the rebel forces led by General Franco. Franco's forces were ultimately victorious in 1939, having received substantial military assistance from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, whereas Stalin's support of the Republicans was ambivalent.

We held the seminar on Sunday afternoon, 1 August, in the May Holman Room at Perth Trades Hall. About 35 people attended, despite the wet, cold weather.

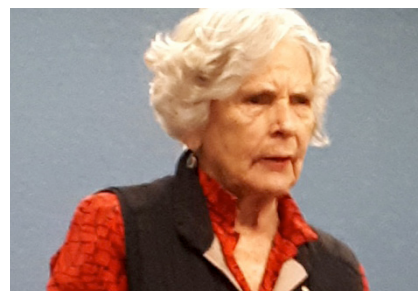
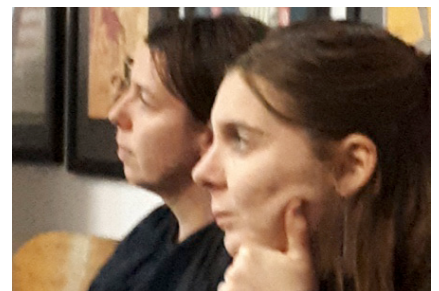
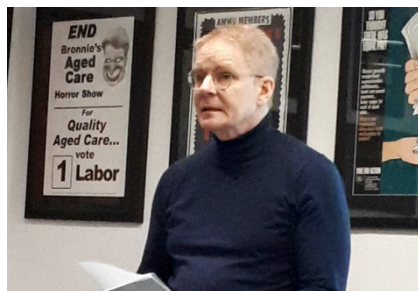
The programme was divided into three sections. In the first section, Charlie Fox gave us an overview of the causes and events, followed by Riley Buchanan's paper on the bombing of Guernica and Picasso's painting of this event. Then a discussion period followed in which members of the audience could make comments and ask questions of the speakers.

After a break for afternoon tea, we heard Vashti Fox's paper on Australian connections to the Spanish Civil War and Paul Riley's paper which focussed on Western Australia. Both spoke of Australians who joined the

International Brigades as volunteers to fight and of the funds raised for the Republican cause. Many of the volunteers had little, if any, military training, facing highly-trained Nazi forces that were using the war as a practice run before the more serious business of World War II. A second discussion period followed.

The afternoon concluded with a selection of Spanish Civil War songs by the Lunettes, which the audience enjoyed along with a glass of wine.

Thanks to Vashti Fox and Alexis Vassiley for organising the seminar, the presenters for their informative papers, the CFMEU for their generous support in providing an excellent venue for the seminar, and to everyone who assisted with providing food and drinks, and technological support.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Riley Buchanan speaking on Guernica: the event and painting; Paul Riley speaking on Western Australia and the Spanish Civil War; Vashti Fox and Riley Buchanan; posters; Hazel Butorac speaking in the discussion; John Cowdell and Vivienne Dayman



PEOPLE WHO HAVE MADE A DIFFERENCE

May Macfarlane – a Red Matilda

John (Rivo) and Pat Gandini

May Pennefather, born Ethel May MacFarlane, in North Perth on 21 January 1909, was the second of five children; it was a close family. May's early family history is intertwined with that of European settlement in Western Australia. Her mother's family arrived in Fremantle from England in April 1842 – sixteen years after European settlement in Albany and thirteen after the Colony of Western Australia was officially established. They became free settlers in the Toodyay region, establishing one of the first farms, which they called 'Salt Cottage', salt being important in Romany culture; they were of Gypsy ancestry. While riding in the Dundas district south of Kalgoorlie

May's grandfather, Lawrence Sinclair, discovered that his horse hadn't actually thrown a shoe but had kicked a gold nugget – 'Norseman' was the name of that horse. Lawrence Sinclair received the Norseman Reward for his find.

May left school early, working a variety of jobs, including chambermaid, kitchen hand and waitress, before starting training as a nurse at Royal Perth Hospital, aged 21. She had always wanted to be a nurse and, as a teenager, her father presented her with a Red Cross Cloth Badge that went with her when she went to Spain in 1936 to work as a nurse for the Republican government in the years of the Spanish Civil War. She kept the badge all her life.

Whilst still training as a midwife at Crown Street Women's Hospital in Sydney, May was frequently called upon to deliver babies in the slums of inner Sydney. She was shocked at the appalling

conditions and the lack of women's understanding of contraception. After completing midwifery training in 1934–35, May went to Lidcombe State Hospital. Work at Crown Street had meant nine months, seven days a week of training and no pay, but Lidcombe was a shocking place.

Later May worked as a matron in a bush hospital in Western Australia where she had to fight to ensure that Aboriginal patients received the same standard of care as other Australians. Her vocation as a nurse became dominant in her life, reflected so much of her humane attitudes of care and consideration for other people.

Not surprisingly, in the 1930s May became interested in progressive politics and developments occurring in both Europe and Australia. One such event that influenced her politics was the visit to Australia of Egon Kisch in 1934.

Kisch, a prominent Czech anti-fascist, was a delegate to the All-Australian Congress Against War and Fascism. The Australian government, at the behest of the Nazi-German Embassy, unsuccessfully attempted to stop Kisch from conducting a speaking tour of Australia.

In 1931 Spain became a Republic and the next few years were tumultuous with several changes of government. The 1936 election of a Popular Front Republican Government resulted in reactionaries and army rebels, led by General Franco, with military help from Germany and Italy, attacking the government.

In October 1936 May and three nurses arrived in Spain with the help of the Australian Spanish Relief Committee. Many international organisations sent help to the Spanish people – workers, pacifists, humanitarians, anti-fascists – many travelling illegally after being imprisoned in their own countries for political reasons. In the early days of the war the Soviet Union supplied motorised equipment which was later hampered by the Non-Intervention Agreement that many countries, including Britain, had imposed on the Spanish people, causing great hardship. The Australian government followed the British and made it as difficult as possible for those Aussies volunteers to reach Spain. So it was left to the sixty odd Aussie volunteers in Spain to redeem Australia's honour. At least 16 of them were killed.

May worked at a hospital at Colmenar on the Jarama Front. Early in February 1937 the fighting started and casualties were heavy. Wounded filled the wards; they sat on stairs, many on stretchers

out in the yard and medics operated all day and most nights for several weeks. Norman Bethune, a Canadian surgeon, organised blood transfusion services to all front hospitals from Madrid.

As fighting quietened, a service was held at a cemetery where several long trenches had been dug. In May's estimation they were filled with about 300 people who had died and were buried there in the first few weeks of fighting. During April and May as the front was quiet, daily outpatient clinics were held to take medical and surgical care of the villagers; and a ward for women and children was established.

In Spain May fell in love with an International Brigade doctor from Austria. The Brigade comprised volunteers from a host of countries, fighting or working for the Republic. Unfortunately both May and the doctor had to return to their respective countries just before the outbreak of World War II. The Spanish Civil War was a training ground for the armed forces of Nazi Germany and fascist Italy that went on to create slaughter and mayhem around the world.

May returned to Australia early in 1939 after the defeat of the Republican government by the rebels. With Una Wilson, one of the other nurses, they conducted extensive speaking tours, including public meetings, radio broadcasts and civic receptions. These events were not only an opportunity to warn of the impending danger from fascism, but were also used to raise money for the thousands of Spanish refugees who had been driven into camps in southern France. However, the word 'fascist' was not allowed in a particular ABC broadcast in Perth,

because of Australia's friendly relations with Nazi Germany, even in early 1939.

On 24 April 1945 May married Neil Pennefather, an ex-serviceman who had fought against fascism in the World War II. They adopted a baby girl and a year later had a daughter.

The Soviet Union presented May with a 'Medal for Peace'. In 1984 she received an International Brigade Commemoration Medal. A year later the documentary 'Red Matildas' won the Erwin Radio Award for best Australian Film. The film, by Sharon Connolly and Trevor Graham, featured the Spanish experiences of May and the two other nurses. On the 50th anniversary of the Spanish Civil War May received a medal from Barcelona.

Reading

L. Edmonds, (ed., A. Inglis), *Letters From Spain*, George Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1985.

A. Inglis, *Australians in the Spanish Civil War*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1987. NSW University Press, Kensington, 1988.

Tom Edwards – working class martyr

Bobbie Oliver

Anyone who visits King’s Square in Fremantle will notice a small memorial, standing to the right at the front of St John’s Church and opposite the statue of John Curtin outside the Fremantle Town Hall. The inscription reads:

This Memorial Fountain was erected to the memory of Comrade Tom Edwards, working class martyr, who sacrificed his life on the Fremantle Wharf on Sunday, May 4, 1919. ‘Greater love hath no man...’

Who was Tom Edwards and what is the story behind the memorial?

Thomas Charles (Tom) Edwards was born in Lockwood, Victoria in 1878, to Henry Edwards and Mary Edwards (née

Fletcher). When he married Sarah Jane Phillips (born 1882) at Bendigo in 1901, Tom gave his occupation as ‘striker’ – a worker who sets off explosions in the mines. It was a dangerous job that consisted of drilling a hole in stope walls, packing in explosives with a wooden bar and setting the fuse alight. The warning cry of ‘Fire in the Hole’ alerted other miners to run to a safe distance before the explosion.

The Edwards family came to Western Australia in 1910, initially settling in Boulder, where in November they buried their 19-month-old son, Charles Ernest. The circumstances of the Edwards family’s move from the goldfields to Fremantle are unknown. By December 1917, Tom and Sarah Jane had three daughters and were living at 14 Howard Street, Fremantle. Tom was working as a lumper (or wharfie) on the Fremantle Wharf. With fellow members of the Fremantle Lumpers Union, he was forced to sign the infamous conditions

imposed upon waterside workers by the federal government, when it established ‘loyalist’ unions after the General Strike. These conditions included three pick-up times a day instead of the previous two; a requirement to work alongside so-called ‘National Volunteers’ (members of the scab National Waterside Workers Union) who were given preference, and to work under foremen who were not union members.

In April 1919, when the *Dimboola* arrived from Melbourne, with victims of the deadly flu pandemic on board, the Lumpers refused to unload the ship until the statutory seven-day quarantine period was completed. But the Chamber of Commerce put pressure on the government to unload the ship before the seven days were up.

A riot – which came to be known as ‘Bloody Sunday’ – erupted on Victoria Quay on Sunday 4 May 1919 between Lumpers’ Union members and police.

On that morning, the Premier, Hal Colebatch, travelled down the river with the boatload of scab labourers, to erect barricades around the *Dimboola* and prevent the lumpers disrupting the unloading. Lumpers rushed to the wharf to be met by mounted and foot police.

A crowd of over 1,000 people gathered at the wharf. The police were unable to prevent the lumpers surging back onto the wharf and throwing missiles. The police were ordered to fix bayonets. One of the lumpers, a man named Brown, was injured by a police bayonet while attempting to stop the scabs erecting the barricades. Police also attacked and injured Lumpers' President, William Renton. Tom Edwards went to assist Renton, was also hit on the head and knocked to the ground. He suffered a fractured skull and died from his injuries three days later.

Hundreds of mourners lined the route of Tom Edwards' funeral from Fremantle Trades Hall to the cemetery. Federal and State Labor Members of Parliament marched in a procession estimated to number 5,000 people. At 3pm on Friday 9 May, when the funeral cortege reached the graveside, industry throughout the State stopped for three minutes' silence and flags flew at half-mast.

Sarah Jane and her three daughters, Emily, Hazel and Thelma, moved to a shop and residence purchased by the Tom Edwards Trust, a fund raised by the ALP and the union movement in WA and elsewhere. Some funds came from the sale of *The Fremantle Wharf Crisis of 1919*, published and printed by the *Westralian Worker*, under the editorship of John Curtin. Sarah Jane remarried in 1936 but, when she died in 1964, she was buried alongside her first husband.

The WA labour movement has often remembered Tom Edwards' legendary act of heroism and his name has been invoked during times of resistance and struggle, including the 1998 War on the Wharves.

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Bobbie Oliver, *War and Peace in Western Australia. The social and political impact of the Great War, 1914–1926*, UWA Press, 1995.

<http://www.mcb.wa.gov.au/our-cemeteries/fremantle-cemetery/heritage-walk-trail/5-thomas-edwards-sarah-jane-kent> (accessed 16 April 2019).

Mumaring/Daisy Bindi – forgotten woman rebel of the Pilbara



Sandra Bloodworth

There is a hidden women's history of the historic Pilbara strike of 1946. The most common narrative is of male Aboriginal leaders organising their mob to survive in camps by hunting and shallow mining. You sometimes get a glimpse of women collecting pearl shell for money. But it's clear that women played a key role as strikers and as family members in setting up and maintaining camps where people could survive together. Communist Party writer Katherine Prichard wrote an account of one of these women.

She is Mumaring of the Nyangumarda people, known as Daisy Bindi, born about 1904 on a cattle station near Jigalong Aboriginal Reserve in northwest Western Australia. As a child,

she learned household skills and appears to have received no formal education. But she did become an accomplished horsewoman. Living and working on a number of pastoral stations, apart from the day-to-day humiliations meted out by her bosses, she both saw and suffered indignities inflicted by the police, who regularly raided Aboriginal camps.

She became a fluent and lively speaker. And in 1945 Daisy organised a meeting to convey the call sent out for a strike. She was so prominent organising for the strike that police threatened to remove her from the district. She demanded and received wages from her white employer at Roy Hill station and saved up to hire a truck with which to collect local workers when the strike began on May Day 1946.

In spite of intimidation by both police and the government to prevent the strike, 500 men, women and children

walked off the stations south of Nullagine and made their way to Port Hedland. At Nullagine, Daisy talked her way through a police confrontation where she claimed that she had never heard of McLeod, and, with as many as 96 others, made her way via Marble Bar to Canning Camp on the Shaw River.

Daisy remained an activist after the strike in the Pindan Pty Ltd cooperative settlement, Port Hedland, set up by the strikers. Three years before her death in 1962, while in Perth to have an artificial leg fitted after an accident, she attended meetings of CPA women and their supporters. Mumaring's role in the incredible Pilbara strike is a reminder that wherever there is a struggle for freedom, there you will find rebel women.

Western Worker thanks [Red Flag](#) and Sandra Bloodworth for permitting this re-publication.

Ernest Antony – working class poet

Rowan Cahill

In 1916 Ernest Antony (1894–1960) left home in Western Australia, beginning a lifetime of nomadic work. During these decades he wrote himself in, and out, of Australian literary history. He was born in 1894 on a dairy farm in Yea in rural Victoria, the family later relocating to Western Australia where his father found work in road building and farming. The Australian roots of the family went back to the gold rush era of the 1850s, and a Portuguese immigrant Joseph Antoni, and his Irish wife Julia (née Farrell). Sometime in the 1890s the family anglicised their name to Antony.

Aged 13, Ernest left school. A family memory has him winning a school prize for poetry a year or so earlier. Work on the land followed and he began to assemble the skills that would see him through life. Years later, his younger brother Harry recalled that, for Ernest, ‘a pair of blades, shears, shovel, axe, and a team of horses were his tools of trade’.

Prior to 1916, he worked in Fremantle lumping wheat. What happened to him here politically is informed guesswork, but his later literary work indicates he was significantly influenced by the literature of the militant working class

and anti-war Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), especially its rich culture of poetry and songs. Having established itself in WA in 1914, the IWW poured organising resources into the State. The Fremantle IWW Local (No.5) was established in 1915 and, in light of Antony’s future poetry, it is reasonable to assume he was influenced. Political surveillance of anti-war activists and organisations intensified in WA as World War 1 proceeded. Fit young men like Ernest who did not volunteer for military service were prime targets for the robustly nasty community culture of suspicion and antagonism that developed, particularly during the time of the conscription referendums beginning in 1916.

Whatever his reason(s), Ernest headed north. By 1917 he was in Wyndham and Darwin along with younger brothers Bob and Harry. Ernest helped build meatworks in both places. Brother Bob stayed in Darwin and helped organise the North Australian Workers Union, formed in 1928, where he held Ticket No. 1. Ernest continued his itinerant working life, making his way across northern Australia to the eastern states, gaining a reputation for militancy in the process.

During his working life he variously prospected for tin and gold, cut sugar

cane, drove mule and camel trains, worked on waterfronts, cut timber, navvied on railroads, lumped wheat, gardened, and raised greyhounds. His longest employment seems to have been in the timber bridge and wharf construction industry, work that sustained him during World War II. From 1944 until retirement due to ill-health in 1952, he was President of the Bridge and Wharf Carpenters’ Union (NSW). He died on the pension in Gunnedah (NSW) in 1960.

It was a nomadic working life that did not generate a significant paper trail, apart from the poems Antony contributed to the extensive labour movement press of the time. He was one of numerous working-class poets in these publications who produced a rich and vibrant body of verse. In the 1930s the paper trail places him in Glebe, NSW, part of nascent Trotskyist politics, and in 1935 part of a breakaway group that saw entrism into the Labor Party as the way forward. As brother Harry wrote about Ernest’s nomadism in an undated letter after Ernest’s death: ‘Men who did not see eye to eye with the good, kind, worthy master were frequently on the move in order to eat, and he was of that rebellious order. The swag and parts unknown was [sic] often his only address’.

By 1930 Antony had enough poems either published or ready for publication to warrant a book. With the assistance of leading communist intellectual and propagandist Esmonde Higgins (1897–1960), he went ahead, and the Communist Party printery in Sydney produced a collection of 33 of his poems. Titled *The Hungry Mile and Other Poems*, the collection is strongly anti-war, anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, and anti-organised religion. The poems indicate that Antony was a well-read person, evidencing influences as diverse as the IWW literary canon, Jonathan Swift, Henry Lawson, Marx, C J Dennis, Banjo Paterson, Bernard O’Dowd. While there is a technical roughness about the poems, this is negated by Antony’s social justice passion, his uses of satire and bitter irony, his cheeky rebelliousness, and his hard-won reflections on working life.

The book’s title and the lead poem ‘The Hungry Mile’ refers to the mile of waterfront between Circular Quay and Darling Harbour, Sydney. Now home to upmarket accommodations, expensive eateries, tourist attractions and high-roller gambling, in the 19th and for much of 20th centuries it was a waterfront industrial site of wharves, warehouses, working class homes, pubs, affordable eateries, and transient accommodations. It was an industrial area along which maritime workers, land-based and seagoing, tramped the length and breadth in search of work in all weathers, their employment controlled by the despised ‘bull system’ until that system ended during World War II. This demeaning method of labour hire produced victimisation by employers, favouritism, and corruption, and pitted worker against worker, which in turn encouraged bullying and violence. For generations of

maritime workers and their families, this geopolitical space became known as The Hungry Mile.

While Antony’s poem about this site conveys some of the hardships associated with the area, he has in his sights the rapacious and exploitative system that produced it, and the inequalities of ‘masters’ and ‘slaves’. For him, the site is symbolic of capitalism, and he looks forward to a future time of revolution when workers/slaves will rise and overthrow the system:

*But every stroke of that grim lash that
sears the soul of men*

*With interest due from years gone by,
shall be paid back again*

*To those who drive these wretched
slaves to build the golden pile.*

*And blood shall blot the memory out
– of Sydney’s hungry mile.*

*The day will come, aye, come it must,
when these same slaves shall rise,*

*And through the revolution’s smoke,
ascending to the skies,*

*The master’s face shall show the fear
he hides behind his smile,*

*Of these his slaves, who on that day
shall storm the hungry mile.*

The poem is a neat and dramatic piece of political writing. Easy to memorise, it became a popular performance piece, and was orally transmitted far and wide beyond its print-base. Over the years it became iconic, separated from its author, and gained instead the attribution to ‘Anonymous’. Some people romantically

assumed it was the product of a lefty folk tradition.

In a significant booklet history of maritime unionism published by the Waterside Workers Federation in Sydney in 1957, Antony’s poem was reprinted, minus attribution. One of Ernest’s brothers had had enough, and wrote to the union providing details about the poem and its author. The union’s journal, the *Maritime Worker*, later published biographical details of the poet and restored him to his poem.

But elsewhere, and as late as 2001, the ‘Anonymous’ attribution was attached to published versions of the poem. In 2008 the Maritime Union of Australia had another go at correcting the record, publishing a new edition of Antony’s 1930 book with a scholarly Introduction and explanatory notes by Rowan Cahill. Hopefully the matter is now at rest and Ernest Antony is back again with his poem, and a place in Australian working-class history.

References

The republished edition of Antony’s poems with an Introduction and Notes by Rowan Cahill is Ernest Antony, *The Hungry Mile and Other Poems*, Maritime Union of Australia, Sydney, 2008.

For an account of Antony’s life and work, see Rowan Cahill, “‘Of the Things I Know I Sing’: The ‘Lost’ Working Class Poet Ernest Antony (1894–1960)’ in Bobbie Oliver (ed.), *Labour History in the New Century*, Black Swan Press, Perth, 2009, pp. 41–49. A small collection of Antony’s literary papers is in the State Library of NSW at MLMSS 1749.

Bertie Lake – in charge of the tea (chai wallah)

John (Rivo) and Pat Gandini

Bertie Frederick Lake was born in England on 25 March 1890 and died in Perth on 17 June 1976 at the age of 86. As a boy he attended a socialist Sunday School in Watford, Hertfordshire and remembered buying *The Clarion* newspaper from a boy selling them outside the railway yards. *The Clarion*, founded in 1891, focused on British political affairs and, whilst it espoused socialist and humanitarian issues, it supported World War I. As a young man Bertie joined the British army. It happened as a joke when he and some mates, as a dare, went to the recruiting office on the spur of the moment but came back as fully signed-up recruits.

Bertie served first in India, an experience which helped him and many Englishmen see the real purpose of imperialism. He often reminisced about his time there, and his call of 'cha wallah' at teatimes in

the Communist Party offices in Perth was eagerly awaited by those members hard at work.

During the First World War he saw active service in the Persian Gulf and this sparked his interest in the Arab peoples and their affairs, especially the question of oil. He remained a keen student of these matters all his life. Bertie's experiences removed any illusions about the glory of war and he had many stories to tell of the lice and dirt, heat and horror of it all, and how some young British soldiers were executed for desertion.

For over fifty years Bertie was one of the ordinary people of the Australian labour movement who helped write its history. He arrived in Australia in 1922 and took up farming. He, and many others, got into financial difficulties with the banks in the Depression and, despite his tenacious, near superhuman efforts, living on a diet of boiled wheat, he was finally forced off his farm in 1936. His stubborn streak showed how strongly he felt about the inequities of the times and he would not accept any settlement on his property. Over 30 years later, he still

refused the small sum that would have finalised the issue. In Bertie's eyes to have accepted this would put the seal of approval on the robbery which the banks perpetuated on him and so many others.

In the following years he became involved in the struggle of the unemployed workers in Perth. Although the worst of the worldwide depression was over, serious unemployment continued in WA until 1939 and was finally solved only by the outbreak of World War II. Struggles for food and the bare necessities of life were fought with bitterness and anger in the numerous sustenance camps that existed throughout the State and often erupted on the streets of Perth. Late in the 1930s, Bertie finally became the Secretary of the Council Against Unemployment. This organisation did a great deal to lift the morale of the unemployed and their families, both through providing social amenities and in the struggles to improve their conditions. A statewide congress of this organisation was held at Easter 1938, attended by over 70 delegates from workplaces, ration depots, local committees and several trade unions.

Bertie Lake's work in the unemployed movement is now part of the recorded history of the labour movement in Western Australia in the book *The First Furrow*, written by Joan Williams, one of his long-time comrades. Bertie was also active in the Movement against War and Fascism in the 1930s and it was in this period that he joined the Communist Party. He remained an active member until his death.

Bertie did full-time work for the Party for long periods for no payment, existing on his pension and, when he did receive a small wage, most of it found its way back into Party funds as donations. His personal needs were very simple – an old record player on which he listened to his favourite music, usually Gilbert and Sullivan or something similar. He would sing the songs from these operas, half to himself, as he worked away at some task around the office, often with his own words about some contemporary issue. Bertie was a keen photographer, and an amateur sketcher and painter. His photographs and slides were distributed among comrades who had taken part in some event or other. Bertie rode a bicycle around the streets of Perth into his old age and, when that was no longer possible, he enjoyed walking everywhere he could.

He could turn his hand to most tasks, though not at making or writing speeches. He was one of the Party's most active workers, selling *Tribune*, distributing leaflets and other publications, organising meetings, and collecting signatures on petitions. One thing you could be sure of, no matter who else didn't turn up to a planned event, Bertie would be there. For so many years he was the mainstay of the Party's Sunday rallies on the Perth

Esplanade – humping the platform down there and then selling *Tribune* to the crowd.

Bertie's arm must have turned the handle of duplicating machines thousands of times, sometimes late into the night, after everyone had gone home, just to get the job ready – printed, sorted and stacked in bundles. He also had the task of painting the lettering on the banners – he was the best at it – so there were hours bent over calico patiently marking out and filling in the letters. He had trouble with his back and suffered with arthritis in his hands, but somehow the banners were always ready on time.

Bertie was seriously ill a number of times in his later years but never a complaint from him. Late in his life, in December 1975, in one of Australia's most important Federal elections, Bertie, aged 85, was out on the polling booths distributing 'How to Vote' cards, along with others young enough to be his great grandchildren. He married once and, although he had no children, he had an affection for them, with unlimited patience. Many times he'd look after and entertain children of all ages who had come into the office with busy parents who were involved in some meeting or other activity.

Ordinary people – believers like Bernie – make history; and the great reforming, radical and revolutionary movements throughout time bear witness to this truth.

Mamie Swanton – ‘the little tailoress’



Bobbie Oliver

Mary Hynes ‘Mamie’ Swanton was born in Melbourne on 22 June 1861, to Irish immigrant parents James and Sarah Marie Swanton. Although raised in the Roman Catholic faith, she later abandoned Christian belief and became a committed atheist. Swanton trained as a tailoress. She was small in stature, and the only known portrait of her, from 1927 when she was in her sixties, depicts a woman with a round face, short bobbed hair and pince-nez.

Swanton moved to Perth c1889, where she formed and became foundation president of the Perth Tailoresses Union in 1900. The tailoresses were

among the first women workers in Western Australia to be unionised, with a goldfields union formed in 1899. Swanton remained president of the Perth union until the Tailoresses amalgamated with the Tailors’ Union in 1905. In 1907 Swanton was elected first woman president of the Tailors’ and Tailoresses’ Union. She was a delegate to the coastal Trades and Labour Council. Swanton was also a suffragette and a foundation member of the Karrakatta Club.

From an early age, Swanton devoted her life to bettering the conditions of exploited female and child workers in her own and other trades, and became known affectionately as ‘the little tailoress’. She soon found that exploitation of workers (known as ‘sweating’) was as widespread in WA as elsewhere. As a result of her persistent

lobbying, the State parliament finally appointed a select committee in 1905 to enquire into the practice of sweating in WA industries. The committee visited 34 factories and seven shops in Perth and Fremantle and interviewed 29 witnesses, before concluding that ‘sweating ... does not exist to the alarming extent that was commonly believed’. The committee’s report stated that allegations of ‘sweating’ often arose from a ‘misconception’ that women were forced to undertake piecework in their homes in order to support themselves or their families. The report claimed that most women worked in order to supplement ‘the already sufficient incomes of their breadwinners’ and ‘to supply themselves with luxury or refinement’. Apart from being a comfortable fiction often applied to female employees as a justification for paying them half the male rate, this

assertion indicates a belief that exploiting a worker who 'didn't need to work' was not exploitation at all.

Swanton must have been bitterly disappointed by the committee's findings, but she battled on. In 1907 she achieved a partial victory when the Arbitration Court granted an award with a standard wage and improved working conditions, including allowing some workers to sit on stools rather than stand. Swanton also campaigned for equal pay for women; better working conditions for nurses; State legislation to protect abandoned children; and for widow's pensions and a State maternity hospital. The State government did not commit to establishing King Edward Memorial Hospital until 1910 – and then only after pressure from several women's groups.

Although supported by Jean Beadle and other activists, Swanton's efforts to achieve equal pay for women were often undermined by the labour press. The *Westralian Worker* claimed that women should be paid less because of their 'inferior physical strength'. Women should be at home raising families, rather than in factories doing 'men's work'. Her activism may also have contributed to periods of unemployment. In 1913, unable to find work in her trade in Perth, she moved to the eastern goldfields to housekeep for her brother in Kalgoorlie, but she was back in Perth by 1920.

Swanton remained in Perth until 1933, taking part in activities of the Australian Natives Association and writing frequently to the newspapers on a range of causes. After stirring up a controversy when she advocated cremation, she left the west, visiting Britain and the USA before settling in Sydney for the rest of her life. She maintained connections

with friends in Perth, confessing to 'being lonely for my kindred spirits in the West where my heart is'. She died on 25 November 1940 and was buried in the Catholic section of Rookwood Cemetery, despite her stated aversion to religion.

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Jack Stevens – martyr to the anti-fascist cause

Charlie Fox

John Ernest (Jack) Stevens was born in England in 1895. Just 19 when World War I began he enlisted in the British Army and fought in the war. It's possible that the war turned Jack into both a Communist and an opponent of war, or these may have come about after he migrated to Australia, probably in the 1920s. In any event, single and 35 years old, he became a member of the Sydney branch of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) and in 1930 the Party sent him to the northern coalfields to organise among the coal miners, especially the 'class conscious' returned soldiers amongst them, during the lockout and strike of that year. These were tense and violent times. Police, who camped out at mine sites to protect scab labour, had shot and killed one miner and wounded dozens. As weeks of hunger and desperation passed, the strikers' commitment waned and, losing heart, they finally accepted defeat. It was into this atmosphere that Jack appeared.

Arriving in Cessnock, the northern coalfield town, and described by the local newspapers as a 'stranger in town', Jack was soon identified as a communist. He had moved from Glebe Point in Sydney to Kurri then to Cessnock in the pattern of itinerant Communist organisers.

Arrested in March 1930 for using 'profane language' – he had allegedly called Jesus Christ 'that old joker' at a Communist Party meeting in Cessnock – he told the court he was pointing to the way capitalism used religion to defend itself and the way political parties used Jesus to justify their wars. He also criticised the war the churches were waging against the Soviet Union. He was fined £1 with seven days' default.

Jack's work impressed the leaders of the Party back in Sydney, so in late 1930 they sent him to Perth to bring order and discipline to what seems to have been a somewhat chaotic Perth branch. So, in January 1931, Jack arrived with an introduction to the guiding light of WA communism, the novelist, Katharine Susannah Prichard (KSP). In Perth Jack would have found that, while unemployment was high, Sydney's social tensions, caused by the rise of the radical unemployed, communism and the

extreme right and the ascension to power of Jack Lang, were not so apparent. A conservative government ran WA, while the Labor Party was moderate and constitutionalist. Unemployed men were sent to the country to get them out of the city, although there was an active organisation in Perth which pulled large numbers of men into demonstrations and meetings.

KSP described the Jack that arrived: 'Shabby and hungry, he struggled against tremendous difficulty in the work he had undertaken'. He found accommodation in a boarding house in North Perth where he slept on a verandah. As the Party's sole organiser, he supported himself by keeping a share of membership dues and the profits from the sale of pamphlets.

Jack was a dedicated communist. He told a magistrate during one court case that he 'was not in a profession or trade. I'm not prostituting myself. I'm not selling my body or brain' and that the work he was doing in Perth was what he had always wanted to do; it was his life's ambition. Bill Mountjoy, who was sent from Sydney late in 1931 to take over from him as Party secretary,

described him as 'quiet and efficient'. KSP later described him as 'simple and straightforward, honest and earnest ... with an unswerving devotion to the working class'. KSP was very fond of Jack, even describing him to one magistrate as Christ-like. Jack was also well educated in Marxist-Leninism, as a couple of magistrates learned when he tried to explain Communist doctrine to them.

So, Jack began organising. He spoke at small meetings and study classes (one entitled 'Australia's Part in the World Revolution') and gave revolutionary speeches on Perth's Esplanade. Mountjoy later described how the party was composed of 'enthusiastic single unemployed, having but little knowledge of real communist work and lacking ... discipline'. Jack must have spent a great deal of time with them, organising, taking part in their activities and guiding them into Marxism-Leninism. Mountjoy also praised the spadework Jack did preparing for the Party's provisional District Council. Yet there were arguments, as Mountjoy affirmed later, when he referred to 'sharp disagreements (which) were expressed'.

Jack himself summarised the situation in an article in the branch newspaper, *Workers Voice*, in September 1932. He accused some past and present members of laziness, adventurism and rank and file-ism and urged their expulsion. But he pointed out that the Party had since stabilised with a growing membership, and a new District committee. Fraternal bodies, the Militant Minority Movement and Friends of the Soviet Union, had been set up, study classes instituted and small victories won. He was optimistic about the future.

Some early WA communists didn't appreciate Jack coming across from Sydney and taking over. When asked by the prosecuting policeman in a court case following the Treasury Building riot in March 1931 (the riot between unemployed workers and police on the corner of St Georges Terrace and Barrack St) whether he was a leader of the Communist Party, the young firebrand, 21-year-old Syd Foxley, replied 'there are no leaders in the communist movement'. When asked 'Oh, what about Mr Stevens?' he replied, 'he is an organiser, that is not necessarily a leader'. Much later, in an interview in the 1970s Syd was scathing about Jack. Why? Local parochialism, the feeling that local activists didn't need eastern states telling them what to do, could be the answer. They may have felt that they had already done the hard yards in setting up the Party and wanted the credit. But winners write history in the CPA as everywhere else and the first leaders of the unemployed, re-named opportunists and adventurers, even 'terrorist types', were ejected from the Party. Foxley was expelled in mid 1932.

Jack also had to deal with the heavy hand of the Police Department, for the cops were intent on crushing the Party. He was at the centre of action in the Treasury Riot. Threatened by the cops (We'll fix you, you ----', one cop said to him) and arrested on a charge of disorderly behavior, he was one of 11 men who went before the police magistrate. With another activist he got 21 days for disorderly conduct, to be served in the foreboding Fremantle Prison. The cops had more in store for Jack. In July, after the trial, they raided his residence, ransacked it, took off with newspapers and other documents and arrested him again. This time he was

charged with vagrancy and a second more serious charge of being a person of evil fame. The list of his alleged crimes was long: he was an organiser of the Communist Party; had been in the company of thieves and convicted persons; had addressed crowds on the Esplanade, advocated violence; was organising a strike and revolution, and was involved in the Treasury riot.

Jack would happily have confessed to all of these, after putting his own spin on them of course. But he angrily denied the final charge, that he was in possession of a 'formula for starting fires'. This charge smells of a frame-up, as police believed that arson was a tactic of the revolutionary Industrial Workers of the World during World War I, but it was never a communist strategy. On the evil fame charge, Jack was found guilty and bound over to keep the peace for six months, in default six weeks. (Syd Foxley, who was charged with the same offence, said they both took the six weeks). He was then charged with vagrancy and with having no visible means of support and, despite showing that he had a regular income, the magistrate gave him 14 days. Prison was very hard in those days. KSP visited him and thought he was distressed that he wasn't allowed to shave.

After being released Jack adopted a low profile because he was now a police target, but he was still active. He worked on *Red Star*, the branch newspaper, which was set up in April 1932. Mountjoy described the job: 'I prepared the material, Katherine Throssell [KSP], the sub-editing, a friendly typist cut the stencils and Jack was the machinist'. Jack was also described in the paper as the publisher, but this was a legal requirement for

newspapers then, so it's likely to have been a title to abide by the law. But he did more. He spoke at meetings, including one on the Esplanade, setting up the Movement Against War in 1932. He wrote occasionally for the paper too. In March 1933, for instance, he attacked the leadership of the Waterside Workers Federation for 'sabotaging' the rank and file's attempt to establish a single pick-up.

Late in 1933, Jack left Perth and returned to Sydney. While there he received a small inheritance. He left Australia sometime afterwards and returned to England, where he joined the St Pancras branch of the British Communist Party. He was popular there. He was described as 'one of the leading and best liked young communists of St Pancras, always in the fore of anti-fascist activity'. But it wasn't to be a time for domestic activism, because Spain was about to slide into civil war. In mid 1936 an army rebellion in Morocco has turned into a full-scale war between the forces of the democratically elected Republican government and its leftist supporters against an unholy alliance of army, church and aristocracy.

The Communist Party had now abandoned its opposition to war and Jack wanted to fight the Fascists, doubtless thinking that here was a climactic battle between Communism and Fascism, civilization and barbarism, good and evil, so he volunteered to join the republican forces' International Brigade. The few available records show that Jack made his way to Spain in December 1936, then to Catalonia where the institutions of republican government and military were located. He would then have joined the British forces in the 15th Battalion, before journeying to the front lines.

Jack may have fought first at Jarama and/or Lopera, but in June or July he was sent to the Brunete front just west of Madrid where, on 6 July 1937, republican troops attacked the fascist forces that had seized the town six months earlier. The twin aims were to break the fascist siege of Madrid and to draw other fascist forces away from the north of the country. It was, say some historians, the largest military engagement of the war. But the battle was short. Aided by German and Italian air power, by 26 July the fascists retook Brunete and the battle was lost. And Jack was killed. He was shot in the stomach while taking part in attacking the village of Villanueva de la Canada, near Brunete. Jack's comrades buried him just outside the village, a martyr to the anti-fascist cause.



Elizabeth Clapham – feminist and local government trailblazer

Lenore Layman

Early 20th century women like Elizabeth Clapham thrust their way into public life, insisting on speaking and acting on their own account, as independent citizens. They struggled to tear down the many barriers to public equality with men — in politics and the public service, in professions and workplaces, and in cultural and community life. Elizabeth Clapham was a trailblazer, the first woman elected to a municipal office in Western Australia and only the second in Australia. Her success in winning a seat on the Cottesloe Municipal Council in November 1920 predated the 1921 election of Edith Cowan as the first woman member of the WA parliament and the 1943 election of Senator Dorothy Tangney and Enid Lyons as the first women members of the Commonwealth parliament. Female ratepayers had been given the vote in WA municipal councils in 1896 but not until 1919 were women entitled to stand

as councillors. Elizabeth Clapham took the first opportunity available to her and carved a path for other women to follow.

Originally from England, Elizabeth arrived in Western Australia with her husband John in 1912. They had no children. She was a feminist who quickly became active in the women's movement in Perth, by 1916 a committee member of the Women's Service Guild and strong supporter of its leader Bessie Rischbieth. The Guilds' goal was profound social reform to enable women to control their own lives — their property, their children and their own person. Legal inequalities and exclusions that disadvantaged women abounded in early-20th century society. First wave feminists were determined to make women equal citizens before the law and therefore in both public and private spheres. Elizabeth Clapham was a fighter for gender equality.

Her first public position, taken on in 1916, was as secretary of the Citizens' Vigilance Committee, a community organisation set up to monitor the enforcement of the amended WA Health Act that targeted venereal disease. This

was contentious wartime legislation because similar prior British legislation had disproportionately targeted women for compulsory medical examination, clinically demonstrating the notorious 'double standard' against which feminists like Elizabeth Clapham railed. Rather, 'a single code of morality' for men and women was needed. From a 21st century perspective some of these crusades might seem prudish or moralistic; for instance, also in 1916, she joined a committee to found a 'National Women's Movement for the Six O'Clock Closing of Liquor Bars'. On the other hand, some protests in which she was involved provided early warnings of ongoing social crises. In May 1916 she was part of a large deputation to government led by the Women's Service Guilds seeking to end lenient sentences for child sex offenders by moving these offences from misdemeanours to crimes, increasing the length of minimum sentences, and utilising indeterminate sentences. The central role of 'motherhood' in society was another of the Guilds' core beliefs she shared, and she worked to improve the welfare of children through the Children's Protection Society and the Child Welfare Bureau.

Elizabeth was a Labor Party stalwart, primarily as a member of the Labor Women's Organisation where she worked to fund and support a Woman Organiser in order to encourage trade union formation in areas of women's work. Not surprisingly therefore she stepped forward in January 1920 to become honorary secretary of the new, small Metropolitan Laundry Employees Union as it struggled to survive in competition with large laundries run by religious bodies using unpaid female labour. Her husband, tailor John W Clapham, took over this secretaryship in September of the same year and combined it with his work as secretary of the South West Clothing Trades Union. He was active on the Metropolitan District Council of the ALP until his death in 1926 and Elizabeth also remained active in Labor Women's affairs. She put her name forward for ALP endorsement for the seat of Perth in the 1922 federal elections but was unsuccessful in securing it.

Elizabeth and her husband lived in Cottesloe, and she entered municipal politics through the North Cottesloe Progress Association representing a relatively new and somewhat neglected ward. In January 1920 she began a successful petition protesting the unsatisfactory manner in which Council rate valuations were determined, which resulted in a special Council meeting to discuss the issue. The lively meeting also protested that, as rates rose, the Council typist's salary was being reduced. The meeting was widely reported and Elizabeth Clapham became more widely known. She campaigned well. One interjector demanded to know why women needed to contest public office. Surely, he suggested, a wife could tell her husband her views so that her

husband could represent them at public meetings. She replied that it certainly would be possible 'if every lady had a husband and, more remarkable still, had a husband who could remember what his wife told him!' She seemed to enjoy her public engagements and this confidence contributed to her successes.

With the support of the North Cottesloe Progress Association and the Women's Service Guilds she was elected North Ward Councillor at the November 1920 election, winning 144 votes to her opponent's 105. Her term on Council (1920-23) proved successful. She was a committed and busy Councillor, 'always well informed and speaking to the point'. She supported financial assistance to the Children's Hospital, protested the Commissioner of Public Health's decision to appoint a joint health inspector for Cottesloe and Claremont, and attended conscientiously to all the local issues of footpaths, sanitation and public health that arose. Not surprisingly she supported the Council's electrical trades employees in their struggle for a 44-hour week. Despite a successful term and praise from fellow Councillors, she decided not to re-nominate for another term.

While a Councillor, Elizabeth had continued her active membership of the Women's Service Guilds and had become a vice-president of the State organisation. In 1923 she was a delegate to the International Alliance for Equal Citizenship and Woman Suffrage Congress in Rome and afterwards visited the League of Nations headquarters and International Labour Office (ILO) in Geneva. These experiences transformed her priorities and she returned to Perth determined to allocate her time differently — she decided to

work towards 'a better world order' by studying and campaigning to 'expose all those forces that make for war, whether political, industrial, international, and to put all her energies into social and industrial questions'. The Rome congress and her subsequent Geneva visits had broadened her outlook, making it more international although the subject of her core concern — the impaired lives of women and children — remained constant.

She spoke her mind in the public sphere and was quite prepared to argue even with fellow Laborites and feminists. On her return from Europe in 1923 she took issue with the opinion of the *Westralian Worker*, Labor's official weekly, that the ILO was ineffective. Surely, she argued, it was better 'to educate the workers... rather than to abuse what may become an efficient piece of machinery'. Furthermore, she pointed out to an audience of Labor women, better working conditions have in the past generally been conceded to those 'able to make their claim most forcibly heard'. However universal peace had to be based on social justice for all; therefore the ILO's focus on improving the working conditions of women and children promised to realise 'many of the aspirations of the women's movement' and deserved to be supported by women of all countries and classes. Alongside these industrial reforms, she strongly advocated for motherhood (or child) endowment as an international principle and at a level that constituted 'a living wage'.

Much of her time after her return to Perth in 1923 was devoted to establishing and chairing the Women's Service Guilds' League of Nations Study Circle where a monthly program of talks informed women on the work of the League. The

ideal of a peaceful world depended on greater education on world politics and the education of women in this regard was crucial. These studies pulled her into the political sphere but at the same time she embedded herself more firmly in the industrial world of women's paid work by gaining appointment as a factory inspector in November 1926 after the death of her husband. This employment strengthened her commitment to protective workplace legislation for women and girls, such as limitations on working hours and prohibitions on night work. She wrote passionately against the arguments of those feminists who insisted that all special legislative and regulatory provisions based on sex should be scrapped in order for society to realise full 'sex equality'. Elizabeth Clapham described her position as the 'humanitarian' one — to protect 'the most helpless and downtrodden in the labour market'. This was a keenly felt division in feminist thought in these decades and Elizabeth Clapham was certain of where she stood. She argued that the professional feminist women who made such arguments for industrial equality had no experience or understanding of what the working lives of factory women entailed. As a factory inspector with experience of the day-to-day conditions of women's and girls' factory work, even in a State as little industrialised as Western Australia, her position is unsurprising.

Elizabeth became WA's second 'inspectress of factories', appointed in 1926 because girls' and women's employment was increasing and one female inspector could not handle the workload of annual inspections of the State's many small factories and shops where these women worked. The two inspectors focused on clothing and

textile factories where approximately 65 per cent of all female factory workers were employed, inspecting the lighting, ventilation, sanitation, provision of adequate seating, drinking water, wages books, number of employees to work space, and the state of the lunch rooms. In shops where approximately 10,000 girls and women worked they closely checked registrations and closing hours. This detailed work of enforcement of hard-won legislative and regulatory protections made women's factory and shop work more humane, improving workers' lives. Elizabeth's employment as inspector ended in 1930 when the inspectorate was re-structured as part of government austerity measures resulting from depression conditions.

In June 1931 she decided to return to England where she remained for the rest of her life. Her reasons for moving to London are unclear but it seems that she did not return to Perth until after her death at the age of 80 in April 1947 when her body was returned for burial beside her husband in Karrakatta Cemetery. In the 1930s in London Elizabeth continued her international activism chiefly through her work with the British Commonwealth League, which she saw as an opportunity to link women from around the world — from India to Australia to Britain — in bonds of friendship and understanding. Her goals in the 1930s were ambitious — to preserve world peace and create a world where all women and children could live better lives in conditions of social and industrial equality. She must have been devastated by depression suffering, followed by the collapse of peace and the horrors of World War II.

Elizabeth Clapham was one of many first wave feminists who combined a

realistic awareness of the disabilities and injustices faced by early-20th century women with a far grander and more idealistic vision of a fair and peaceful world. She devoted her time and skills to both spheres and, together with fellow activists, she certainly made a difference to the lives of Western Australian women and children. Her vision of a world of equality, social justice and peace is still to be realised.

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Joan Broomhall – pioneer's backbone

Rivo and Pat Gandini

In 1926, at the age of thirteen, she came to Australia with her parents Elizabeth and John Lister. Elizabeth and John were progressive thinkers with leftwing views. In Lancashire they had been foundation members of the Independent Labour Party and, as young people, had attended the quaintly named Socialist Sunday Schools. Mother Elizabeth had a history of progressive activity and, perhaps, this became a beacon for Joan on her own journey to political awakening. The suffragettes were a significant force in the struggle for women's emancipation and Elizabeth had taken part in that movement in England and was later involved in International Women's Day in Perth.

In Perth Elizabeth became secretary of the Spanish Relief Committee, assisting Spanish workers, peasants and intellectuals in their fight against fascism during the Spanish Civil War in the late

1930s. People of all persuasions around the world believed the fight in Spain was a fight against fascism and that Spain was the training field for what was to come. Young men and women joined the fight as part of the International Brigades and many gave their lives. In 1938, as chairperson of the first International Women's Day held in Perth, Elizabeth spoke of Dolores Ibarruri, known as *La Pasionaria* (the Passionflower) – very appropriately as she was one of the leaders of the Spanish Republic. In later years Joan carried on that tradition as chairperson of the International Women's Day celebrations in Perth.

The war in Spain as well as the outbreak of World War II influenced Joan to join the Communist Party in 1941. As a member of a CPA delegation Joan visited the USSR in 1967 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the 1917 revolution. In an earlier period she had worked as the Secretary of the WA Branch of the Australian Russian Society with an office at 7 Howard Street in the city.

Joan took a keen interest in Australian culture and how to project it through art. After the war she became involved

with the New Theatre, a group that not only produced progressive plays, but also fought to preserve Australian culture. Over many years she both acted in such plays as 'Five Poor Families' and 'The Circling Dove' and performed many other supporting tasks for the New Theatre productions. Sadly, New Theatre folded in 1956.

Joan and her husband, Bush, lived at 4 View Street, Maylands, and it became one of the organising centres for Communist Party activity. The Eureka Youth League was given the job of distributing 'How to Vote' cards during the 1951 Referendum to ban the Communist Party and 4 View Street was the headquarters for all the polling booths in the Maylands area.

Joan played a pivotal role in the *Portnoy's Complaint* censorship case in 1970. Despite the fact that the book, written by American author, Phillip Roth, was witty and well written in the best tradition of American Jewish humour and contained much social comment, it was banned in parts of Australia, including WA, on the grounds that it was obscene. Pioneer Bookshop and the Communist Party in

WA decided to fight the ban and Joan, as the manager of Pioneer Bookshop, played a vital part in the campaign. Thousands of copies of the book were sold – compared to the few dozen of most titles that the Bookshop handled. Members, supporters and friends helped sell them in factories, workshops, country centres, at the university and in hotels, and supplies of the book were hidden in homes. The Bookshop was packed with customers, most copies being sold before the police arrived. The *Daily News* quoted Joan as saying: ‘I think censorship of books for adults is an insult’; and then again, ‘When a thing needs to be done, it just needs to be done. I have never broken the law before and I know that I am doing so now, but this is a law that needs to be broken if it is going to be changed’.

Fortunately, for Joan, the Bookshop and the CPA, the West Australian censorship law was copied from the British law under which Penguin books had successfully fought the *Lady Chatterley* case. The prosecution agreed that Joan, as Manager of Pioneer Bookshop, would be the test case and that the rest of those charged would win or lose depending on that outcome. Communist and lawyer, Lloyd Davies, acted for the defence and Ian Viner, later to hold several ministries in Malcolm Fraser’s governments, for the prosecution. Joan did not deny selling the book and the prosecution produced only one witness who had bought the book over the counter from Joan. The defence had 17 witnesses, including some of WA’s best-known literary figures, a number of whom did not support the Communist Party. Lloyd argued the case on the basis that the book had literary merit and, therefore, was exempted from the general censorship provisions – as the law provided.

Portnoy’s Complaint is one of the most disgusting books I have ever read’, said the Magistrate in his summing up and hearts sank – but then he added that the defence had proved its case that the book had literary merit and, therefore, the charge against Joan was dismissed. Celebration followed.

Joan’s job of Manager of Pioneer Bookshop was boring as well as arduous because there were rarely a great number of customers. However, she hardly ever missed a day and she did the job on a very meagre salary. She and Bertie Lake, the caretaker and bookshop worker, carried a heavy responsibility as they were often the first faces of the Communist Party with whom people came in contact; for much of her time communists did not enjoy a great deal of popularity. It is noteworthy that there was little criticism of the way in which she carried out that very public and important role.

Communists’ hopes for a better world may have taken a battering but Joan and so many thousands carried the struggle forward on many important fronts. Joan died in 1996.

Michael Kingston Healy – working for strong unions

Peter Healy

Mick Healy was born in Fremantle on 8 May 1908 to Irish-born James Joseph Healy and Australian-born Rose Ann Healy (née Stokes) of Irish parents. Mick was the third youngest of seven brothers and a sister. Father, James Healy, was a Fremantle Councillor with two men's outfitting and tailoring businesses in Fremantle and Perth. In 1911 he took his family to Ireland to meet their relatives. Shortly after arriving in Dublin he needed to return to Australia, leaving his wife and his relatives with the care of their eight children, all under twelve. James would not see his family again until they returned to Australia seventeen years later.

Due to the family's reduced situation in Ireland and their frequent moving, Mick and his siblings attended charity schools

rather than the Christian Brothers. During this time, Mick became an altar boy. After leaving school he secured an apprenticeship in electrical fitting with Brookes Thomas, Builders' Providers of Dublin.

Mick witnessed the troubled times in Dublin, having memories of British troops marching past their lodgings at Blackrock en-route to put down the 1916 Easter Uprising. Too young to fight with his elder brothers against the 'Black and Tans', he helped prepare the guns for the insurgents. Mick's elder brothers – Jim, Terry and Ray – were decorated for their service with the Irish Volunteers in the struggle for Irish independence. On the 1 November 1920 young Mick (12) and Kevin (11) were at their mother's side in the crowd of protesters outside Mountjoy Gaol when the British hanged 18-year-old Kevin Barry, the young patriot of Irish rebel songs.

There were many reasons why the family remained in Ireland for seventeen years; some were political – a national strike in 1912-16, the outbreak of World War I in 1914, and civil war in Ireland in

1922. So, whilst Australian-born, Mick definitely had a very Irish upbringing. The year 1928 saw the rest of the family return to Perth without Patrick, the eldest, who had joined the Irish army.

With the depression work became scarce, and Mick turned his hand to whatever was available – window cleaning, door-to-door sales and shop assistance with Atkins (later Atkins Carlyle). He, like many others, couldn't always find work in the city so he and Kevin were forced to 'go bush' in search of a 'feed'. For a time, he camped under the Onslow jetty beachcombing, living on the fish he caught or earning a few 'bob' by repairing watches and clocks. They joined shearing teams as shed hands in the Murchison, Gascoyne and Kimberley regions, with Mick often turning his hand to cooking whenever the cook 'got cranky'. The October 1930 Shearers' Strike in the Nor' West became the Healy boys' introduction to labour politics, the strike resulting in the jailing of sixteen shearers. Being members of the Australian Workers' Union and having a strong sense of social justice they played a supportive role to the sixteen when they appeared before the

Carnarvon Magistrate, charged with taking part in an illegal strike.

Between 1934 and 1935 Mick worked as a mines electrician on the goldfields, taking a leading role in the fight for better wages and safety conditions, and joining the Electrical Trades Union in 1936. He met Paddy Troy and both agreed that strong industrial unions were the vehicle to advance working people's wages and living conditions. In 1937, following an unsuccessful application for an electrician's job in South Africa, Mick secured a position with E G (Red Ted) Theodore on Fiji's Emperor Gold Mine. He had lasting memories of the Fijian people and their values, and often likened them to the Irish. Between 1938 and 1940 he again worked in the goldfields and was elected secretary of the Murchison District Council of the Australian Labor Party.

Mick's sister Eileen, a nurse at Royal Perth Hospital, had introduced him to Bridie (Gilly) Gilsenen. Gilly, an Irish girl, had migrated in 1924. In 1937 Mick and Gilly were married in Melbourne and had a son, Peter, in 1940.

In 1942, Mick gave talks on 6WN regarding the value of union shop committees as a reforming influence in industry, receiving congratulatory letters from the Amalgamated Engineering Union as well as W D Johnson MLA. In 1945 Mick was appointed an organiser for the AEU and was on the delegation which met with Bert Hawke, State Minister for Works, to discuss legislation regarding the general distribution of electric power in WA. The subsequent establishment of the State Electric Commission was, in no small part, due to the union's involvement. As an official he played an important part in the

establishment of Perth No. 6 Electrical Branch and the licensing of electrical workers between 1947 and 1949.

Around 1950 Mick joined the Public Works Department as an electrical tradesman on the construction of Royal Perth Hospital and during this time he was promoted to leading hand with more than 20 men in his charge. These men were from many ethnic backgrounds and he prided himself for being able to build an harmonious team. Mick advocated for proper apprenticeship training and took an active part in the successful campaign to establish paid daytime technical training for them. That entitlement became the standard across all trades. It was at this time he became involved in the successful transfer of Rivo Gandini's electrical apprenticeship to the PWD. He was seconded to the Main Roads Department in 1954 to install the first traffic lights in Perth. From that time he was promoted to the position of Electrical Supervisor with the PWD.

In the 1950s Mick, with other progressives (including Joan Broomhall, the Wignalls, the Davis, and Graham Alcorn), became involved in promoting Australian culture through live theatre and the establishment of the New Theatre. He was cast in numerous plays and possibly remains best remembered for his part as the lagerphone player in the Bush Band in the Australian musical 'Reedy River'. Songs like 'Click Go the Shears', 'The Drovers Dream' and 'My Old Black Billy' became synonymous with Mick at his many social gatherings where he would sing, whistle and play his lagerphone. He was a great promoter of Australian culture via music and loved to entertain others with his musical talents. A highlight of Mick's musical

career was in 1964, when he and his son Peter were members of a Bush Band which, 'for the first time', as he put it, played Australian bush music to a young women's ballet concert at His Majesty's Theatre in Perth.

Following Gilly's tragic death in July 1964, Mick took up lawn bowls, which provided the social companionship he had lost. Always an advocate for the rights of people Mick pressed successfully for the amalgamation of the North Perth Ladies Bowling Club with the men's club. In 1972 he became club president and remained an active player and a national umpire until poor health forced him to retire in 1986. He married his second wife, Ethel, in 1967; after she died in 1986 Mick lived alone until he entered an aged person's hostel in 1992. He died three years later aged 87.

Monty Miller – life and times

Nick Everett

Montague (Monty) Miller led an extraordinary life. At age eighteen he took part in the Eureka Stockade, and, at age eighty-five, was imprisoned in Sydney's Long Bay gaol for spreading anti-conscription propaganda. Miller was a charismatic and persuasive orator, who argued the case for socialism from the Yarra bank to the Perth Esplanade. Born in Tasmania, in 1832, Miller spent his first sixty years in the colony of Victoria. However, his arrival in the West, in the mid-1890s, marked the beginning of a remarkable contribution to the then embryonic West Australian labour movement.

Two youthful experiences made Miller a radical. The first was his indenture as an apprentice to a Ballarat carpenter, at the age of ten. With the onset of the 1840s depression, construction came to a halt and Miller's 'slave master' laid off his tradesmen. When Miller protested that he was unable to learn his trade,

he received a lashing with a 'two inch scaffold rope with a double knot at one end and a soulless savage at the other'. 'I had paid my first penalty for exercising the right of free speech', Miller recalls. 'It was a prophetic herald and a forerunner of what awaited me'. (Williams, *Eureka and Beyond*, p. 4.)

The second was Miller's involvement the Eureka Stockade, where he became acquainted with English chartists, Irish rebels, and European revolutionaries. In 1854, when Ballarat miners famously pledged their loyalty to the Southern Cross in protest of a punitive 30-shilling a month licence fee, Melbourne's newly established colonial authority responded with fierce brutality. Aged just 22, Miller was seriously injured, his left leg hit by a musket ball, his left hand pierced by a mounted constable's sabre and his temple fractured by a rifle butt. Yet the miners' revolt ultimately proved a victory. Governor Hotham was forced to revoke martial law, Melbourne juries refused to convict the rebels and the licence fee was subsequently abolished.

In 1862, Miller married a carpenter's daughter in Ballarat. In 1869, they

moved together to Melbourne, where they raised four children. Miller became a Carpenters Union delegate to Melbourne Trades Hall. Melbourne's stonemasons had led the world in winning the 8-hour day, taking advantage of a shortage of skilled tradesmen. However, Miller was critical of craft unionism, which attempted to restrict entry into the building unions from unskilled and non-white labour. Instead, he advocated industrial unionism.

In the early 1890s, a growing labour movement faced a series of defeats at the hands of an intransigent employer class. The 1890 maritime strike, the 1891 Queensland shearers strike, and the 1892 Broken Hill miners' strike were each violently suppressed. Picket lines were broken by troops and strike leaders gaoled. These defeats gave momentum to the formation of the Labor Party, which soon held seats in the colonies' parliaments. However, Labor's platform was moderate, advocating not the overthrow but the civilising of capitalism. The three pillars of Labor policy – tariff protection, compulsory arbitration and immigration restriction

(White Australia Policy) – were soon legislated by the federated Australian Commonwealth.

Miller had no illusions about the parliamentary road to socialism; he looked instead to the working class to change society. During the 1890 maritime strike, Miller helped organise a Melbourne Trades Hall mass solidarity meeting. The Victorian government mobilised hundreds of mounted police to intimidate striking workers. Lieutenant-Colonel Tom Price famously told his men, 'If the order is given to fire... fire low and lay them out so that the duty will not have to be performed again'. (Chris Clark, 'Price, Thomas Caradoc, 1842–1911', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, 1988).

In the mid-1890s, Miller moved West with his family and, in February 1897, joined the building workers' strike, the largest strike the colony had yet seen. At the time, Western Australia's trade unions were almost exclusively craft unions and were denied legal recognition. The Carpenters' Union demanded a 12 shilling an hour wage, while the Builders Labourers demanded 10 shillings. However, they called only on their members receiving less than these amounts to stop work, leaving their ranks divided.

Under the threat of labour being imported from the eastern colonies to break the strike, and Perth Trades and Labor Council's refusal to give it support, the strike soon collapsed. Miller argued for its continuation, but the back-to-work motion of the Carpenters Union president George Foster Pearce won the floor. Pearce embodied the conservative politics of a new breed of Labor parliamentary careerists.

Though a founding member of the Perth Trades and Labour Council, the building workers' strike was the only strike he ever led. A strong advocate for industrial arbitration, Pearce was elected a Labor Senator on the eve of federation. In office, Pearce served as Minister for Defence in four federal Labor governments and joined prime minister Billy Hughes in campaigning for two conscription referenda in 1916 and 1917.

Miller took a different road. In 1901 he founded the Social Democratic Association with the objective of establishing 'an industrial Commonwealth founded on the collective ownership of land and capital and on direct popular control of legislation and administration'. (Fry, 'Australia Worker Monty Miller' in Fry, *Rebels and Radicals*, p.188.) However, it was his leading role in the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) that won him notoriety.

The IWW, formed in the USA in 1905, advocated workers organise in One Big Union to fight for the overthrow of capitalism. The 'Wobblies', as they were popularly known, shared Marx's analysis that society was increasingly breaking apart into two hostile camps: the bourgeoisie and proletariat. However, a majority current in the American IWW eschewed political action in favour of syndicalism: an exclusive focus on trade union action. It was the latter current that gained influence in Australia. In a 1913 article in the *International Socialist*, Miller castigated the Labor Party for having 'utterly failed to give any measure of benefit to the workers'. There is 'no instance where any social or industrial uplifting as a step to permanent benefit has (been) won by political methods', he insisted. (Miller, *International Socialist*, 20

Dec 1913; cited in Williams, *Eureka and Beyond*, p.55.)

On the eve of World War I, Miller helped establish IWW clubs in Perth, Fremantle and Kalgoorlie. While syndicalism had broad appeal in the Australian labour movement, it was the IWW's internationalism and strident opposition to the Great War that propelled it into notoriety and direct conflict with the state. In 1914, when Labor federal leader Fisher pledged the last man and the last shilling for King and Empire, the IWW stood firm against a war for the spoils of empire. A 1915 IWW poster proclaimed:

Let those who own Australia do the fighting – Put the wealthiest in the front ranks; the middle class next; follow these with politicians, lawyers, sky pilots and judges. Answer the declaration of war with the call for a General Strike. (Cited in Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism*, p. 183.)

Tom Barker, editor of the IWW paper *Direct Action*, was gaoled for this 'treasonous' act. This did nothing to suppress workers' appetite for the irreverent and pithy commentary that filled the pages of *Direct Action*. By late 1915, the paper had a weekly circulation of 8,000 copies.

In 1916 and 1917 the IWW spearheaded two successful anti-conscription campaigns, its leaders spruiking their case from soapboxes and in the pages of *Direct Action*. As news of casualties mounted, and unemployed were press-ganged into military service, nationalist jingoism gave way to increasing opposition to the war.

Miller's nemesis Pearce played an important role in the suppression of the IWW. In 1915, it was Pearce who oversaw amendments to the *War Precautions Act*, prohibiting the publication of any 'statement likely to prejudice the recruiting, training, discipline, or administration of any of His Majesty's Forces'. (Gray, 'Protest Law and the First World War'). In September 1916, twelve leaders of the IWW were charged with treason for allegedly conspiring to burn down Sydney warehouses. Arrests in Perth and Broken Hill soon followed. While Miller was on trial, his Sydney comrades were convicted and sentenced to between five and fifteen years of imprisonment.

Amid a media scare campaign, Miller faced no prospect of a fair trial. Yet he made use of the opportunity to expose the charade. In a three-hour speech, Miller defended the IWW's commitment to class struggle, strikes and industrial sabotage. Miller and his comrades were found guilty of conspiracy, but Miller was granted clemency on account of his age. Never one to let the law curtail his activism, Miller commenced a national speaking tour, addressing crowds in Adelaide and Broken Hill, and an audience of striking workers in Sydney's domain. After police arrested him yet again, Miller declared he would be a member of the now illegal IWW until his dying breath. The judge imposed a six-month sentence in Long Bay Gaol, which was subsequently revoked on condition he return to Western Australia.

The IWW was now all but broken; one hundred of its members arrested and gaoled. Miller's convictions deprived him of an age pension, yet funds raised

by Broken Hill miners enabled him to embark a final speaking tour across the country, a hero of the labour movement.

In November 1920, Miller died at his daughter's home surrounded by friends, including Katharine Susannah Prichard, a member of the newly-formed Communist Party of Australia. In her forward to Miller's *Labor's Road to Freedom*, Prichard pays tribute to her beloved comrade:

In the dark days ahead, the thought of Monty Miller – his life of loyal and valiant sacrifice – will be like a light to urge and inspire those of us who have known his friendship and who hope to serve with the workers for the overthrow of the capitalist system.

Further reading

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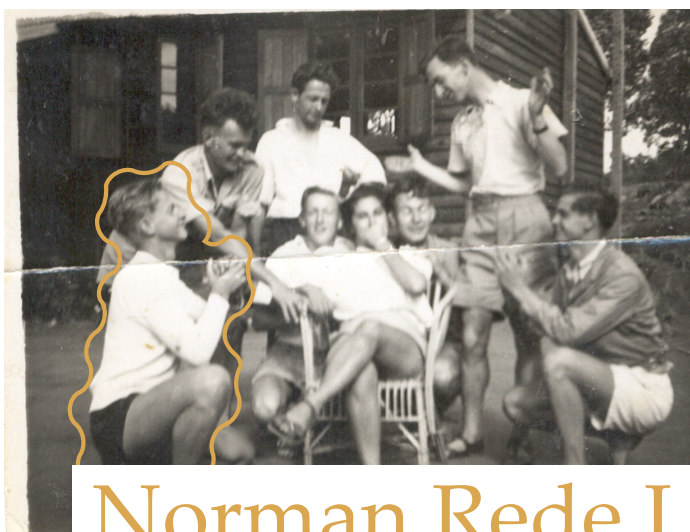
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Norman Rede Lacey — true believer and lifelong activist

Rivo Gandini

I first met Norm Lacey in 1948 when we were both at the threshold of adulthood – 21 years of age as it was in those days. Over many subsequent years we campaigned as members of the Eureka Youth League and the Communist Party of Australia for adulthood to be recognised at eighteen years of age, one of our slogans being, 'If you are old enough at eighteen to fight for your country then surely you are old enough to vote'.

Norm exercised his first vote in the 1949 Federal Election when the conservative parties under Menzies swept the Labor Party from office. Socialist hopes for the progressive ideas that came out of the war and immediate post-war years were also being swept away. The vote for communists and other left-wingers was down markedly and that election began 23 years during which Australian politics shifted to the right, as, for much of this time, the system of private enterprise – capitalism in our terms – enjoyed boom conditions. Unfortunately, we communists were, in general, blind to that fact.

For the next few years into the early 1950s Norm worked hard in the Eureka Youth League, along with many other young people, and we

were supremely confident that we could change the world, and quickly. Whilst these times were exhilarating and enjoyable, they were also hard, with the intensification of the cold war. Norm and I liked to reminisce about those days – maybe we see things in our older years through the rose-tinted glasses of nostalgia – but we wouldn't have missed them for anything. We spent a lot of time together in relaxation and social activity as well as politics. We moved around on motorbikes and motor scooters. We moved mountains with them, almost literally.

Dono Wignall, friend and political comrade, recalled of that time:

Norm was always a solid citizen, a very responsible youth who was one of our natural leaders.

Of striking physical appearance and bearing he projected moral and physical strength and was looked up to by the young people of the Eureka Youth League. I remember that he was the only one of the young men who could single-handed pack up and carry the folded marquee which was our central meeting hall at all gatherings on our regular camps. On one of our Easter Camps held in the hills, we had to carry all our gear across a flowing rock-strewn stream. Norm carried the marquee on his back with ease. It was Norm who directed operations when we erected and dismantled the huge three-pole marquee. It was he who taught us how to light the Tilley pressure lamps and set up and dismantle the camp gear. Norm had a great willingness to serve the needs of young working people. The camps were the only cheap form of holiday that many young factory workers could afford.

It was the wont of the Communist Party to have its young cadres work in heavy industries to become 'one of the proletariat' – so Norm became a coalminer in Collie – part of the working class leadership of the socialist revolution to come. Norm also worked in the Midland Railway Workshops as a blacksmith's striker for the same reason – until he was sacked for distributing communist leaflets on the job.

Later we worked very closely when we were both full-time organisers with the Communist Party in Perth. For much of this period Norm had the responsibility for the Fremantle area, including the waterfront, where he won respect among many of the workers there. He

also was respected by comrades in other parts of Australia – including Kevin Healy in Sydney.

Norm was a shy person but this did not prevent him from playing a leading role in many areas of the labour movement. As a leading communist activist in WA he had to face constant demands for public speaking, giving reports at meetings and generally as a spokesperson for the Party. These demands were very heavy, given the unpopularity of the Party during the worst of the cold war. Norm was not a good communicator in the 'public' sense but was much better with individuals. From an early age he developed an understanding of the deeper feelings that play an important part in the people's make-up and this empathy was developed much further when he later trained as a psychiatric nurse.

Members of the Communist Party of Australia in the 1950s and 1960s were, in the main, Stalinists – at least most of those who stayed as members for any length of time certainly were. However, it could be said that some were more Stalinist than others. Norm, myself and many others believed that what we called Stalinism was necessary for the advance to a socialist society. It would be untrue to suggest that he waged any consistent struggle against Stalinism before the communist movement worldwide turned its face against those undemocratic tactics. However, I believe it can be said that the flip side of Norm's shyness was his capacity to work with people, to understand the vital need for democratic processes both within the Party and in society in general. There were times when he and I clashed quite sharply on that point.

Whilst analysing just what went wrong in the world communist movement, it is fairly obvious that one factor was the turning of what was a vibrant, critical and progressive theory into a sterile dogma that approached religious incantations. In the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries this dogma and its effects hid the truth on such matters as ethnic and religious differences and racist attitudes amongst the population. These were always officially described as being solved for all time – demonstrating that the most dangerous lies are those we tell to ourselves. This all-pervading dogma was closely linked to the cults around individual leaders that were developed to an unbelievable degree.

In 1951 Norm and over a hundred other young Australians attended the Third World Youth Festival in East Berlin. On his return he told us that the huge crowds of young people from many countries who had come together for a Festival of Peace and Friendship often broke into chants of 'Stalin, Stalin, Stalin'. These cults hid the steadily developing corruption and, most tragically of all, led to the deaths of millions of innocent men and women, including many devoted communists. And it was not just in the Soviet Union and China that such cults developed – there were a few little ones floating around in the Communist Party of Australia also.

There are some comrades who worked together with Norm, through the years in the communist movement, who today have expressed the view that we wasted our time, indeed wasted our lives, especially in the light of what has happened in those countries we had regarded as having established the new and just society. I think the following

can be said today – maybe as food for thought.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s the communists, as part of a much broader movement, conducted a petition campaign to ban the bomb. Even though this campaign was branded as communist-inspired in Australia, hundreds of thousands of signatures were collected in our country. Was that a waste?

An important feature in the Communist Party's work in Australia, from the time when Norm and I joined, were the campaigns for full Aboriginal rights and against apartheid in South Africa. The communists were some of the first, and at that time some of the very few, among white Australians to fight for Aboriginal rights. As a teenager I remember being impressed by the material on these two subjects in the WA Communist weekly, *The Workers' Star*. In view of the victory of the people of South Africa and the significant developments in the struggles of the Aboriginal people, was our internationalist and anti-racist work a waste of time?

Similar observations can be made about women's rights, the Vietnam War and conscription. Then, of course, there was the role of the communists in contributing to the building of the Australian trade union movement as one of the strongest in the world.

In the years immediately following the Second World War tuberculosis was still a serious threat in Australia. Communist doctors initiated the successful campaign to introduce compulsory x-rays, which contributed to the checking of this terrible disease.

We lived our politics all the time – socialism and the struggles of people the world over were our greatest interests in life. For better or for worse that was a fact – it undoubtedly drove our partners, children and others to distraction at times. Norm believed in a socialist future when sharing and caring would be a universal way of life. His inspiration came from his beliefs that caused him to share the lot of working people rather than seek personal advancement. He was a true believer who never wavered.

This is an edited version of Rivo Gandini's tribute to his friend on the occasion of Norm's funeral in 1995.

Fred Wayman — fighter for workers' rights

Fred Wayman was born in 1911. His father came to Australia before World War I and worked in the Water Supply Department. After the war Fred's family took up a farm in the outer Fremantle suburb of Spearwood but, on the eve of the Great Depression, probably when he was 20 or 21, they left the farm and Fred left his family to work on unemployment relief works set up by the Mitchell State government. These were at Myalup on the Harvey River. He probably also worked on other relief works, again set up by the Mitchell government, building infrastructure in John Forrest National Park. Later still he worked on relief works in the wheatbelt, set up by Phillip Collier's Labor government, on jobs that were covered by an industrial award. His last relief job was at the Samson Brook irrigation scheme near Waroona.

Fred cut his teeth as a union organiser on these jobs, but it was a visit to the unemployed camp on the Canning River near Como that turned him into a radical, first an anarchist, then a Communist, and he remained in the Communist Party until the 1960s. He was an active member in the Fremantle branch, in 1939 standing for a seat on the local North Fremantle Council but he lost. He was, in 1939 at least, on the Communist Party's State Executive.

From the late 1930s he worked on the wharves at Fremantle harbour and in several casual labouring jobs around Mosman Park. In 1940 he was elected to the committee of the Coastal Dock, River and Harbour Workers' Union, but enlisted in the army in World War II. He then returned to a job as a lineman on the railways near Merredin, employment

he was sent to by the Communist Party, presumably to help organise for the Party. Probably in the late 1950s he returned to the wharves. There he became secretary to two Waterside Workers' Federation (WA branch) strike committees, before becoming secretary of the WA branch itself.

Fred married Rose, probably in the late 1930s. They had seven children, but sadly two sons died young. Fred died in 2000 at the age of 89, Rose a year later. At his death the Maritime Union honoured him as a 'tireless advocate for workers' rights' and his Party comrades Vic and Joan Williams described him as 'fearless, compassionate, understanding, incorruptible'.

Charlie Fox

An extensive interview with Fred Wayman was conducted by John Clements in June 1984 and here are some early excerpts (slightly edited) describing life in the relief workers' camps during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Fred Wayman

As I grew up, the depression came and we left our farm at Spearwood. I went into the unemployed camps; there was nothing else to do. The main one that I was concerned with was the digging of the Harvey River, diverting the river which used to flow through all the Harvey-Wokalup area directly to the ocean. It also was to provide some later irrigation for parts of that area. In this place there were 3,000 men concentrated in a camp at Myalup which was the first settlement out of Harvey, and about three miles further on there was another camp called Stonehouse where there were about 1,200 men. In these camps the men were paid 25 shillings and tuppence a week, and had to keep themselves. They were provided with a tent for which they had to pay a shilling a week tent-hire and, apart from that, the only other expense we paid was a penny a week for some sort of hospitals-doctors coverage. Probably it was a doctor's benefit; I know it was a health benefit of some sort.

In these camps the conditions were absolutely atrocious. The tents were put up in long straight lines in military precision, and the men cooked their dinners in between the rows of tents. There were two tents back to back and the rows were about a chain apart. At the end of these tents were toilets, which were simply a row of deep trenches dug in the ground, and in front of the trenches was a series of forked sticks which had poles laid across them. They formed a resting place while people went to the toilet, while they sat down and did their business. But so well planned was Stonehouse camp that the toilets

were put down at that end of the camp where the entrance was from the city, or town. Because of the conditions that existed in these camps, the media would come and report all the garish incidents that occurred there; they'd report on the so-called atrocities and the vile living conditions there, and there were many groups of do-gooders and ordinary spectators who came out to the camp in cars, and in coming they'd pass these toilets. Of course, inevitably, because the men only worked two days in a week and had the rest of the week off, they'd see a whole row of bare backsides on these tracks as they came into the camp.

Many of them used to come on payday, because on payday there was perhaps the greatest casino that ever existed in both camps. There was two-up, dice, and all manner of card games, too numerous to mention. The two-up rings were well supported by the Perth bookmakers. They would come down and lay and set the ring over the whole weekend. It would start on the Friday night, or afternoon, and it would nearly always go right through till Sunday night. I've seen myself, many a time, chaps lose all their money; they'd go back and get possessions, a banjo or a bike, a suit of clothing anything they had, they'd bet against money in this ring.....

The workplaces were very bad. The river was dug with picks and shovels; it was only the lowest levels of the rock that were blasted with dynamite and gunpowder. That whole river was dug by men with picks and shovels and they wheeled all the dirt out with wheelbarrows over the banks. The banks can still be seen over the edges of the Harvey River now. There are some huge sandhills there, several hundred feet high, and these were cut down in ledges

by men with wheelbarrows and planks. The dunes going into the sea were cut down in ledges of about ten feet, and they shifted the hill literally about a dozen times, from one side to the other until they finally got down to a level that made the riverbed.

There was not much industrial trouble in these areas, but later on I went back to Perth and I got tangled up again with a lot of strife with the unemployed. Conditions around the dole centres were very bad.... The Mitchell government set up two camps in the hills, Hovea and Stoneville. These camps were given the work of building the National Park.... The men were paid a shilling a week and their food.... These camps simply went out of existence later by the substitution of the sustenance scheme which provided seven shillings a week per individual. That was to provide many camps right throughout the State, which built new roads, made railway diversions, in which the conditions were much the same, especially on the railways....

The men were left to their own resources to put up their tents. The majority of the people were not experienced, and because in many instances a family would not have adequate accommodation after the husband left, they would accompany the husband out into the bush. They would arrive at a place, and there would be a husband and wife and a few young kiddies out in the bush in some miserable conditions until they finally got time to put up their tent. That time would be before 8 in the morning or after 5 at night. In winter time with the sun setting early and rising late this meant that most of the people had to wait till the weekend, and virtually lived in the bush before they got their camp fixed up....

At one camp out of Merredin I was appointed union delegate. I stayed on that job and I fixed up nearly everything that was [wrong] about the place... Well, eventually I got taken away from the bush and was sent under the engineer's eye, but that didn't improve me any. I got a whole lot of things fixed up there. Later on I came down to Perth...

I did get a job down in the southwest at Samson Brook... It's an irrigation dam at the back of Waroona. When I got there on an open truck at night it was as cold as blazes. When you reached the top of the camp, which was built on a steep hillside, you could smell the place; it was putrid. We got down to the camp; we were going to be issued with our tents if we didn't have one and, of the 21 men on the truck, I was the only that got off. I was well known as a militant in the bush at this time and I got my gear off the truck and all these blokes said, 'What's wrong with you, you so and so?' and they abused me. They said, 'We didn't think you'd ever crawl enough to work in a place like this!' I just told them straight that the place could be cleaned up and that I was going to stop there till it was cleaned up.

I got into a tent all right and fortunately there was a bed in it made for me; somebody else had vacated it. Next morning I got out and the place exemplified the smell that came from it. It was filthy with rubbish, a putrid place. With the steep hillside and the rain coming down the hillside, it messed it up. The morale of the men at the same time was as low as the dirt.

The job was split into a big gravel pit, where the dam wall was being built. It was an earth wall, and it had a core of pug. This pug was gotten from another

source in the hills and mainly carted by contractors... It was taken down to form the core of the wall to stop the yabbies, the young marron, going through it. To consolidate the clay pug, each man on the wall, and there might have been a couple of hundred of them, was issued with a block of wood which had an iron bar put through as a handle. The thing was used to pound the mud, all day long, and that was your job from 8 in the morning till 5 at night — just standing in this wet pug pounding it so as to form a solid wall. Your boots and legs would be wet through from the moisture you were ramming out of it. That was just a monotonous job that was done for months there. No wonder the men had gotten that browned off they didn't give a darn what happened in the place.

I immediately stated to organise the camp. I called on the committee to have a meeting, and at that meeting I attacked the committee for not seeing that the award conditions were carried out. I also attacked the bosses for allowing such conditions to prevail, and of course the upshot of it was that Fred got elected rep again. We had the committee there and we immediately started cleaning up. We got rubbish bins put in, gutters built; I got better working conditions in the pit. As a matter of fact the working conditions improved that much in the pit that production went down a bit and so they decided to get horses in. They had horses walking up and down to pug it. Just as effective too, as far as I could see but they didn't have the brains to think of it beforehand. Men were quite cheap enough.

I had a whole lot of tents condemned because they were mouldy; they were absolutely green with mould all through them and the stench was awful. And I

was striving my hardest to get the camp shifted. I called a Reference Board from the Industrial Court to go down there. I had 29 demands for the Board to consider, and on the morning that the Board was to arrive, the union organiser sent a telegram to me saying that I had to represent the union before the Board. I'd never been before an industrial court or board and I had about half an hour to prepare the case.

So I attacked the Board on all the issues. On the safety issue in the gravel pits they were adamant and refused to alter it, and when my arguments were starting to run a bit thin, someone rushed in with the news that there had been a fall of earth in the gravel pit and a fellow was buried. Needless to say, the Court changed its mind very rapidly. Out of the 29 items on the agenda that I put before the Board, I won 28 of them. The next item was shifting the camp altogether. Everyone knew it was bad but I couldn't shift the health authorities.

Then there was a chap very ill down in the camp... with symptoms of meningitis... The next day they shifted the camp. The tents were laid out in short rows. There was a rubbish bin at the end of every row. They built a huge drying room, a huge recreation room, and a huge shower and washing room for the men. And in this big drying room we could take our wet clothes at night, hang them on the racks with fires going and that would dry our clothes overnight enabling us to have dry clothes in the morning. Prior to that, that job had run for nearly 18 months and they'd never even had dry clothes to go to work with.

The new camp would be a model anywhere. It was beautifully clean, and men were appointed to keep the lines clean. That was directly as a result of industrial action...

HAROLD PEDEN LECTURE 2020



Carolyn Smith

**State Secretary, United
Workers Union**

Perth Labour History Society was delighted to invite Carolyn Smith, Aged Care director and WA State Secretary of United Workers Union, to deliver our 2020 Harold Peden Memorial Lecture. The talk was presented in November 2020 and this text is an edited version of the full lecture.

Solidarity and union strength in the COVID era

Personal thanks

There are three people I thank and occasionally blame for where I find myself today. The first is an old boilermaker called Alex Glasgow, a shop steward at the Kewdale Workshops who persuaded me to step up as a shop steward; the second is Keith Peckham who persuaded me when he saw me coming to meetings and offered me my first job at the AMWU; and Simone McGurk who was an organiser. I modelled myself on her. I now work for the United Workers Union. We are an amalgamation of the old Storemen and Packers, and the United Voice (LHMU/Missos), and we cover a wide range of members in more than 45 industries.

Change the Rules/ Change the Union

I want to talk about some of the organising we're doing around the gig economy, much of it digital organising. COVID has forced us to do things we had been thinking about for a long time and knew we should be doing. I'll start with the 'Change the Rules' campaign, an incredibly important campaign. As unions and unionists we should not accept that we have to operate under laws that make it so difficult for workers to win. We have to continue with it; we have to look at what we did last time and work out how we can continue to get that message across.

However there is another discussion for us alongside changing the rules. Enterprise bargaining has slowly killed the movement. It might have worked for certain industries. It can work if you've got a mass of workers all employed by the one employer in a particular part of the economy — manufacturing, the public sector — that works but it doesn't work in smaller fragmented workplaces or workplaces like construction. There you see laws getting tougher and tougher, and employers changing employment relationships. So, the days of stopping the concrete pour because the one builder employed everybody are over; layers of contracting and subcontracting have now undermined everybody. So 'change the rules' yes, but we always knew the rules didn't work for our industries and in many industries for women. We also must have a debate about 'change the union'. What are we doing that doesn't work in this world that we find ourselves in, particularly with the types of employment that we now see?

Workers and workplaces today

We need to change the way we operate as a union and start with gig economy that is the apex of exploitation of terrible treatment to the point that workers aren't even allowed to consider themselves workers. So we've got to do something different to organise gig workers. As well hospitality workers need decent jobs, respect and a pay that they can live on. How do you organise thousands of workers who work in small, unrelated businesses and all they have in common is the job they do, not necessarily the employer? We've got to do something for gig workers and we've got to do something for hospital workers and homecare workers. Homecare workers don't have a place of employment. They get their job from their phone, work two hours here, have two hours break, work two hours there. We cannot organise them with a group of people in Hyundais driving around visiting workers.

With disability group homes we've got big employers but actually every workplace probably has one or two people on roster at a time, if you've got five people with disabilities and a couple of workers. There's hundreds of people working in residential aged care facilities but at any one time there's may be twenty of them on shift and they all have different breaks. So, you sit in the lunchroom to catch them for fifteen minutes. They come in tired, cranky; it's a hard job. So, we've got to do something else rather than just visit and have a union meeting.

Casinos are the biggest private sector employer in the State. The dealers are on fifteen-minute breaks every hour and they're on different breaks every time so they are never with the same group of people. How do you sit down and have an important union conversation with someone who's got fifteen minutes to get off the floor, go to the toilet, grab something to eat, say hello to their workmates, and get back on the floor again? It doesn't work. As well, manufacturing union organisers say — we walk into a lunchroom now and everyone's there and it's a half-an-hour break but most people are watching Netflix on their mobile phones. There are things we need to do in all of these places but we have to change how we're doing it. We started to think about what we call 'new organising'.

New Organising – new tools

New organising is old organising — it's not some new different thing. It's about finding the issues that matter to workers and dealing with them, developing leaders, identifying activists, building union power through recruiting new members, and then taking action together using that power. There's nothing different between new and old organising except that we use different tools. So, we organise online and use digital tools and different models of building power.

I will use an example. Average Australians spend five and a half hours a day online so, when we talk about organising people in the community, that's a really big community and that's a really important place to connect with people. 87% of Australians have a smartphone. When we first started this idea of digital organising one of the things people said to us is —it's a class issue, it's an age issue; not everyone's got an email address, not everyone's got a computer. But actually, our members who are the working class of Australia now — the aged care workers, the farm workers — every one of them has got a phone. That's what they live and die on. They might not have a computer but they've got a smartphone. They might be paying as you go on the data but they've got it. 25% of all people who visit an internet page start on Facebook and click through.

New organising uses digital and online tools in a standard way. I will talk about COVID and aged care because it's what I know best and because we became completely digital for seven or eight months and we not only did that, but we grew, prospered and recruited members, we developed leaders and we campaigned. When COVID hit, the United Workers Union decided that we weren't leaving the workplace. We represented essential workers; we were going to be in the workplace. If our members had to go to work every day in a hospital, school, logistics warehouse for Coles or Woolies, our union reps were going to stand side by side with them, providing them with the information and the support they needed.

Peer-to-peer texting

State governments health directives meant people couldn't visit aged-care facilities, so we were outside of the workplace at a time when our members were scared, confused, worried. We used peer-to-peer texting — I can sit at my computer and send a hundred texts at once and use our membership database. A member gets a text from

me saying 'Hi, it's Carolyn from the union. Times are rough and scary with COVID; how are things going in your workplace?' Peer-to-peer texting was the first thing we did for mass outreach to our members, saying — 'How are you going? What's happening? Is there a plan in your workplace? Do you know what PPE you should be getting? Are you getting it? Is there only one dispenser of hand sanitiser in your entire aged care facility?' That's how we started to talk to our members.

Mass meetings online

We started having mass meetings with our members as a union at the first peak of COVID. We had the biggest union mass meeting online that's ever happened in Australia with thousands of workers online. As a union in aged care we did a safety mass meeting. People logged on. We had a speaker from infection control in the WA Health Department. Members asked him questions. People could put questions in the chat; they could talk to us and that was really valuable. We had about 600 members from around Australia on that zoom meeting — getting information, talking to us. We used it in the Royal Commission into aged care. The Royal Commission was particularly interested in issues around COVID, so we had a zoom about that. We didn't cover New South Wales and Victoria, and I really feel for my HSU comrades who dealt with the kind of the crazy situation in aged care in those States; but when we did have outbreaks in our States, we'd call a zoom meeting the next day. One of the things I learned was that it didn't have to be polished, it didn't have to be pretty. You just get on there and talk to people from the safety of zoom.

Aged Care Safety Network

We set a closed Facebook group called the Aged Care Safety Network and we had union delegates on the network. As well we had a group of leaders, not officials, on there. We make comments but it is run by a group of leaders. They make sure questions are answered. If people haven't said anything for a while they'll pop up and put a question. The group morphed quickly from being only about safety to being our way of connecting with members, and members, more importantly, connecting with each other. We've got over 2000 people on it. Every time we found someone who wanted to be a leader we'd put them on the group. We talked constantly about what was going on, what happens next, what we do next, how do we do that. The officials would answer legal questions.

Online Petitions and Recruiting

We've done online petitions. Petitions are good things to do but we also did them to reach out to people, to find new people who weren't in the union, to have something for our activists to do. We built lists and found lists from old petitions of aged care workers. So, we would find people who shared that petition who put it up on their Facebook page. That's someone who wants to be active in the campaign. We would reach out to them with a text and say, 'Hey, we saw you shared that. Do you want to share it some more? Where do you work? Is there a union rep in your workplace? Do you want to be the union rep in your workplace?'

We also talked to people who weren't union members who'd signed that petition or maybe had signed a petition three years ago and we'd never followed them up because we're too busy getting in our Hyundais and driving out to workplaces. We signed up huge numbers of new members. We'd text them and say: 'Hey, you want to join the union? Shall I talk to you about that? Are you around now? When's a good time to ring you?' We had six or seven people in that team. When we're back in the office they'd be there, each of them with their little earphones clicked in saying 'Hey, how are you going? Let's talk about these issues'.

A national union

We now hold Australia-wide leaders' meetings for our campaign. We talked when we first amalgamated as a union and moved from the old idea of having nation states and branches in each State of building a truly national union and a national campaign. We thought 'How are we going to do that?' We now have what we call our warriors meeting; we have a zoom meeting on a Saturday afternoon and we have 50 or 60 of our leaders on that.

We did a lot of surveys and we were doing work with the Royal Commission. We put in a submission about the impact of COVID in aged care and we had huge response to them. However, it's like the petitions – Good, participate, that's great. If you share it, you're an activist and we're going after you. If you're a non-member and you've signed we're going and talk to you. We did a lot with Facebook ads and Google ads. Facebook has this amazing facility – we can give them a data set of what our members in aged care look like, and generally they are older, white, working class women and younger women of colour from the Philippines, Africa and the subcontinent, and Facebook ads pop up in front of people. It's really great for union organising and similar with Google. You pop into Google safety and aged care; you pop into Google aged care award rates, you pop into Google COVID PPE aged care. If you do, we are going to find you and we're going to talk to you online.

That is what we've been doing for six or seven months. I should have put this in context. These really are new tools in an existing campaign we've been running for a couple of years and we see it as a 10-year campaign to change residential aged care — to get better staffing levels ratios, a decent wage, a decent job, so people don't have to work two or three jobs. We saw this 12 months as a time to stand with our members in a really scary time; but also in our campaign we were looking for leaders, building strength, getting people used to being active, getting people used to working together. That's how we did it online. Our aim was to build industry power.

This is our moment

We've got a big year in 2021 — the Royal Commission report comes out and we've been talking to aged care workers about this. It is the time to change, to educate. There will never be a better time; this is our moment. We're going to have the moral authority of the Royal Commission; we're going to have a federal election. Because of COVID and the deferred bargaining that we're going to do, we will have over 50 of the industry coming up for bargaining in July 2021. So, watch this space! Even though we haven't got the laws to industry bargain, we're going to industry bargain. It's something we needed to learn to do if we're going to run a campaign like this. We have an existing union presence; it's not a strong union presence in aged care, it's not a high-density workplace, but it has got a history and a tradition of unionism.

The hospitality industry

What do we do in areas that are totally non-union and we want to organise them? The hospitality industry is a good example. Combining powerful online tools and Netflix style memberships activism with the Fair Plate website [<https://fairplate.org.au>] so patrons can see which bosses were on the level, we helped to make it a national issue for the public and cut some big names down to size. We fought back for thousands of young workers to ensure that no worker is left behind. This is where we are now, here at this painful moment in history, but it's also an opportunity to rebuild a better hospitality industry where workers are safe and respected, where dodgy bosses are held to account, and we have jobs we can count on. In this campaign we've had record numbers of new members.

Unions are about building decent jobs where people get fair pay and respect, so let's start at ground zero before you start to build and what does that mean in hospitality? In hospitality it seems as though there's nowhere else to go — you leave a job and there's another job, you leave a job and there's another job, and they're all the same. How do you fix that? The old way would be to prosecute the employer for wage theft and by the time you finish they've closed down that company and started another one, and that means workers would have to pay massive union fees because it's a very expensive model. So how do we do it? One of the things we decided on was this fair plate website and public exposure.

The fair plate website

Sunshine is the best disinfectant. Hospitality lives on its people, its chefs and restaurant managers. They live on their public image. So, the fair plate website lets people rate their boss. Employers hate it but it gives bouquets as well as brick bats. We have hospitality venues that get consistently good reviews and they're accredited fair plate venues, but then we have places that have consistently get bad reviews, especially from workers who have been significantly underpaid. So, we worked with those workers and we got them to the point that they were prepared to speak out in the media. We went to *A Current Affair* and we had a petition online. We had 5000 people sign the petition demanding justice. You have to create the sound and movement and the pressure on someone like *A Current Affair* to put that story up. It took about three months for us to get that story up. Our message was amplified as we hoped. There were news stories about how terrible we were, but that amplified the message.

Doing things differently in the 21st century

Probably five years ago I remember sitting at a national executive of United Voice and people were talking about a digital union and what that might mean. People tried things and they failed, and they tried things and they worked, and they got to where we are today. One of the comments people made when we first started talking about this matter was — If we started unions in 2020 they probably wouldn't look anything like they look like now. We are a beast of our history, so what would the union look like if we started today? That blew my mind. What are you saying? What do you mean? This gives you a sense of what was happening.

How do you do union business in a different way? How do you put pressure on employers? It's not by going out on strike, which was and is a very important union activity; it's not by prosecuting them; it's not by visiting lunchrooms and telling the boss off. How do we do that in our sector? How do workers join together take collective action and win change? How do you pressure the boss in a totally different way to what we've done before?

I think there's a whole lot of lessons there for us about how we organise gig workers and we know the first challenge with gig workers is to challenge this lie that they're not employees and they're not workers; that they somehow woke up one day and decided to set up a small business that involved a bicycle and an insulated backpack. However, if we're going to organise those industries? Every worker can be organised; every worker has common issues. It's working out how we get them together as a collective, how we build leadership, and then how they exert pressure on what we know as their employer.

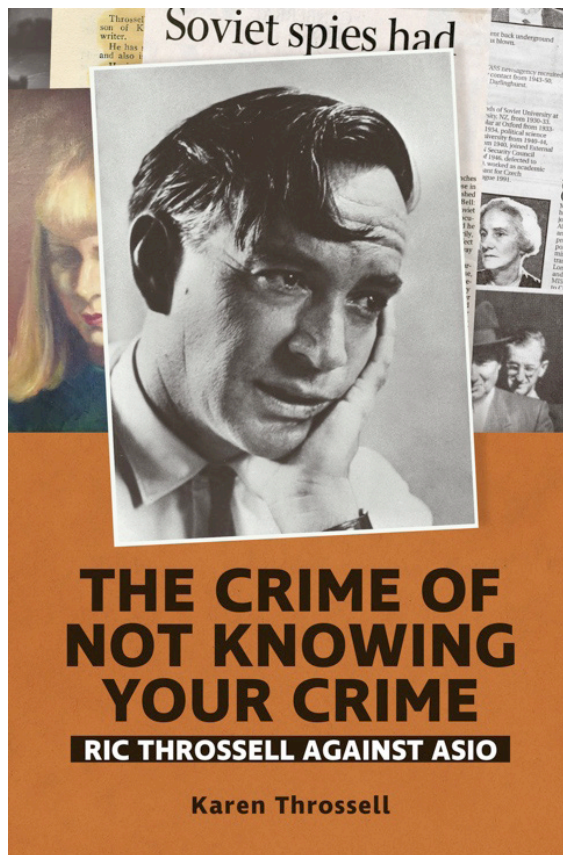
*Our thanks to Phil O'Donoghue,
Media Officer Unions WA, for the
copy of Carolyn's talk.*

AN INTERESTING NEW BOOK

Karen Throssell

Interventions,
Melbourne, 2021.

This book is in publication at Interventions press. We are delighted to bring you some excerpts that will certainly entice you to consider purchase.



The Crime of Not Knowing Your Crime

Ric Throssell against ASIO

My grandmother was one of Australia's greatest novelists, my grandfather won the Victoria Cross for gallantry and my father was hounded all his life as a spy. This is a three generational story. It's about my life; it's about my father, Ric; it's about my grandparents, the writer Katharine Susannah Prichard and the war hero Hugo Throssell. It's a study of the psychology of spies and those who obsess about them, a narrative of guilt and innocence told through poetry, prose and historical documents. It's a tale from another time – but one with obvious relevance, given how regularly governments rely on fear and scapegoating today. Let me tell you what was done to my family.

AN INTERESTING NEW BOOK

Two excerpts from the book

My Fairy Godmother (for KSP)

She made me a set of Cinderella dolls
although she said she couldn't sew. Cinderella,
her two sisters, who weren't all that ugly
and the Fairy Godmother.

Such love sewn into their whimsical faces
and into each strand of fine woollen hair.
A Prince Charming too, but he's long disappeared,
if he ever really was there.

I loved her, and I don't ever remember wondering
where the gauzy dress and the wings were.
Maybe I just always knew that godmothers
were more likely to be witches.

The doting gran and the wild bohemian
who wore trousers and smoked
when it was definitely Not Done.
the stern ideologue with a photo of Stalin.

She definitely wasn't your typical gran
Spent her time writing
and changing the world
until the only child of her only child

As I line them up now
faces faded, arms missing, very little hair,
except for our godmother who had none at all
just her red hat.

As big as your hand, they had long velvet skirts
soft silky velvet, the real sort
with brocade bodices, lawn petticoats
and tiny lace knickers.

Best of all was the Fairy Godmother.
She wore a short black skirt, revealing
long black legs, a great big smile,
and a red pointed hat.

This small collection sums my gran up.
They are her hard and soft –
the soft velvet and the strong message,
the deep thought behind all she did.

Lived alone in the hills,
entertained Russian sailors,
had a pet magpie
who sang for his steak.

arrived and was showered with love
and politics .and told proudly
that her gran was called
'the Red Witch of the West.'

I see for the first time, that under her skirt
there's no lawn or lace
but bright red knickers.
Like a message in a bottle.

My Fairy Godmother

Katharine is basically self-educated. In a world where families (including hers) could only afford to educate the boys, to keep pace with her friends who went to university, she:

borrowed all the books they were reading from the public library: bought the penny classics and the second-hand editions of the great works of literature and philosophy and went on to devour the masterpieces of the French and German languages.

My grandmother becomes a journalist, like her father before her. In 1908, she travels to London to cover the Franco–British Exhibition for *The Herald*. This is almost unheard of for a woman at this time.

This is to be the beginning of her practical political education.

Katharine is already a very compassionate person; while living with wealthy relatives on their grand estate in the country, she is shocked and subsequently radicalised when they turn away starving men begging at the gate.

She decides then to move out and live ‘like the real people.’ Katharine is saddened, horrified, then angry about the huge inequalities she finds in London. From there, she begins reading all she can about theories on how to make society more just – finally deciding that Karl Marx and his ‘scientific socialism’ is the answer.

Once converted, my grandmother becomes a dedicated and unswerving founding member, party worker, public speaker and pamphleteer for the Australian Communist Party. Like most Marxists at the time, she believed that the essential battle was about class to fight for disparate groups within that division (e.g. women, Aboriginal people, people with disabilities) was to fracture the cause. A society of equals means equality of the sexes. Everyone would benefit, come the revolution!

But Katharine is no mere ideologue. She lives her beliefs. I am brought up with the dictum that she teaches my father: ‘*From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs*’. On the tiny earnings from her war widow’s pension and her writing, she is generous to a fault. If a friend admires something of hers, she immediately gives it to them. If her wily granddaughter asks for a ‘bride doll,’ she finds some way to get one for her. She once spends an entire royalty cheque on a pair of teeth for the old bloke who occasionally helps in her garden. And it is mainly gifts that are bought for her that she gives away. She rarely, if ever, buys anything for herself.

I am very hurt when she gives away the little red Finnish teapot that I saved up and bought for her. I tell her that people usually only admire things to be polite. It doesn’t mean they actually want to have them.

She disapproves of television, seeing it as a great time waster. There are never enough hours to read all the great books, if you ever have spare time for such indulgences. Most of her life is divided between Party work and writing. She has great discipline, rising early each morning and going down to her shack in the bush to write for about six hours a day.

My grandmother adores her little family, writing to Dad and, later, to me every week, and giving us a wonderful welcome whenever we are able to make the long trek by car across the Nullarbor. She is always delighted when we arrive, doing a little dance of joy at the gate when she finally sees our trusty Hillman bumping up the dirt track. She always makes us each a pot of our own special jam: cape gooseberry for Mum, strawberry for me, and fig for Dad.

In her autobiography, *Child of the Hurricane*, Katharine describes one of the most momentous years of her life, 1933:

My sister, who was making a trip abroad, begged me to join her and be her guide in Paris. She sent the fare and Jim (Hugo) insisted that I should take advantage of it to meet my English and American publishers in London, and perhaps go on to the Soviet Union. 'I'll never forgive you; he said, 'if you don't try to see what's happening there. We must know whether what we've been told is true.'

So Katharine visits Russia, but while she is there, her beloved husband Jim, desperate and worn down by the Depression, kills himself. She is on a London bus, just before leaving for home, when she sees a billboard screaming AUSSIE VC SUICIDES.

When Katharine dies in 1966, she bequeaths her Russian royalties to me. I can only claim them by collecting them on Russian soil. In my early twenties, as part of the obligatory Aussie OS trek, I visit Moscow to collect my roubles and to see for myself.

The man and his mother

Dad was famously very close to his mother – so close that, according to ASIO, you couldn't distinguish them.

The whole family would trek over the Nullarbor to see her, putting the car on the train at Kalgoorlie. As a student, I flew over by myself every year till her death, once becoming her 'secretary' and typing responses to her fan mail on the little Olivetti she gave me, which I still have.

They wrote to one another every week, and Dad visited by himself at least once a year – more often as she got older and plane travel more accessible.

For Dad, their regular communication was never a duty. They adored one another, though not uncritically; they debated many issues quite fiercely. Apparently, child rearing was one. Like many others at the time, my parents were seduced by the stern regimes of the Kiwi child-rearing 'expert,' Sir Frederic Truby King. He believed in discipline and detachment – strictly ten minutes a day for 'cuddles.' Katharine, who was more of a Dr Spock style of grandmother (the more cuddles the better), was horrified and attempted to subvert the regime. Without her intervention, who knows how I would have turned out.

Dad and Katharine were always discussing literature, social issues and politics, but they both had a deep respect for each other's different views, knowing that they each had their own way of fighting for the underdog and living a meaningful life.

There were times when we had disagreed, but never with the kind of disillusionment that could destroy respect and love between those more deeply devoted to the encompassing ideals of the communist revolution than I was. I was disturbed to see 'Uncle Joe – the wise and understanding leader of the Soviet people' whom Katharine had described to me as a boy, transformed into Generalissimo Stalin, the infallible military genius of the USSR, whose every retreat was a cunningly planned stratagem and each victory a personal triumph, his austere olive drab tunic changed into a General's uniform heavy with braided epaulettes adorned with all of the honours and medals of the Soviet State, praise to his name and title the obligatory preamble to every official announcement. What had happened to equality and brotherhood I asked?

When I first started studying politics at university and announced to Katharine that I didn't like this idea of the collective – *I was an individualist* – she listened attentively to my half-baked views and then spoke a bit about individuals within the collective. Never once did I feel that she was belittling my views or preaching. It was quite unusual for someone with her strength of conviction.

And with Dad and his 'little mum,' there was also that protective element. He was of that generation, and there she was, defiantly alone in the fire-prone Perth hills. Though she always resisted, Dad was forever thinking of ways to make her life easier – a much-loved record player; a new fridge; and, after a fight, a modern hot water service to replace the old chip heater.

Katharine died of a stroke at 86, when Dad was on his way to visit her. He arrived to find an ambulance in the driveway instead of her waiting at the gate. He never got to say goodbye. While he wore his heart on his sleeve in many ways, he was of the stoic, stiff-upper-lip school when it came to grieving. After the funeral, where the coffin was draped in a red flag, and the conservative Throssell clan were handed the words of *The Internationale* to sing, he buried his heartache. He rarely spoke of her death. He kept his grief tucked tightly inside, but it pulled long lines onto his face and hollowed his eyes for years.

Authors

Karen Throssell

Karen Throssell is an award-winning writer and poet, with five poetry collections and a book of creative non-fiction *The Pursuit Of Happiness* (1988). She has also published in journals and anthologies including *Overland*, *Westerly*, *Meanjin*, *Quadrant*, *Hecate* and *Artstreams*. Karen was shortlisted for the 2017 Book of the Year Award – Poetry

(Society of Australian Women Writers) and an earlier version of *The Crime of not knowing your Crime* was shortlisted in 2017 for the Dorothy Hewett award for works of creative non-fiction. Her work reflects her commitment to radical politics, literature and feminism.

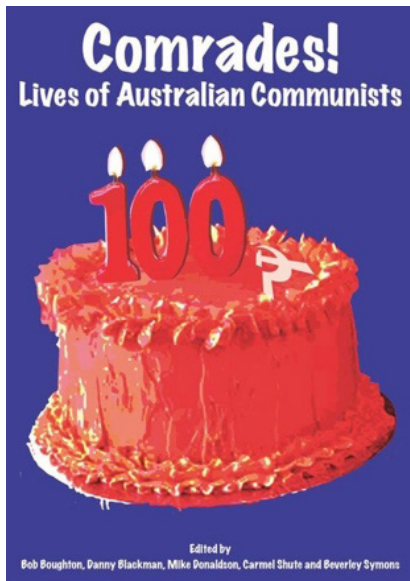
Phil Deery

Phillip Deery is a Cold War historian. His books include *Red Apple: Communism and McCarthyism in Cold War New York* (2014), *The Age of McCarthyism: A Brief History with Documents* (2017) and *Sparrows and Spies: ASIO and the Cold War in Australia, 1949–1975* (2022). He is an Emeritus Professor of History at Victoria University.

BOOK REPORTS AND REVIEWS

Comrades! Lives of Australian Communists

Carmel Shute reports on the launch and the book; excerpt from *The Recorder*, 229, 2020.



Bob Boughton, Danny Blackman, Mike Donaldson, Carmel Shute & Beverley Symonds (eds)

SEARCH Foundation
in association with the
ASSLH, Sydney, 2020.

The CPA may have dissolved itself in 1991 but the comrades still know how to party. The centenary of the foundation of the Communist Party of Australia has been the cause of much celebration, a lot of political analysis and surprisingly little regret. Not even the pandemic could dent the enthusiasm of former members, fellow travellers and a young generation of activists to mark the occasion in style with a book, launch, conference and Red Film Festival.

SEARCH Foundation members and supporters committed to a series of projects which involved people from all around the country, and indeed some internationally, in thousands of hours of volunteer time, working on events and publications.

Comrades! Lives of Australian communists, a collection of 100 short biographical essays, was launched on 30 October 2020 – a hundred years to the day – by the SEARCH Foundation and the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History.

Lead editor, Dr Bob Boughton, said that when work started on the book, ‘we hoped for 15 biographies but ended up with over 150. A hundred are included in the book – half are women. The remaining 50 or so biographies are featuring on the SEARCH Foundation website. The book provides a unique glimpse into what motivated generations of women and men from all walks of life to embrace the cause of revolution over the 71 years of the CPA’s existence.’

‘*Comrades!* is not a “lives of the saints”,’ Dr Boughton stresses. ‘Nor is the focus on the institutional history of the CPA, its leaders or its “line”. The book is not intended to eulogise the “giants” of the Australian communist movement, who are for the most part dealt with in more formal histories.’

‘Rather, we have tried to honour the memory of some of the many thousands of “ordinary” communists, who worked throughout their lives in their workplaces and localities to help build movements and promote progressive change’, he said.

Dr Boughton said that the CPA had a remarkable story to tell despite its membership never reaching more than 23,000 – which it did at the end of World War II. ‘The CPA was the first party to oppose the White Australia policy, to stand up against fascism, and to fight for Aboriginal rights. It was also the first communist party in the world to condemn the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. CPA members in the building industry imposed the world’s first Green Bans. Members helped build hundreds of social movement organisations through which people fought to have their say in the future. Their books, plays, films, art and songs helped create a uniquely Australian culture’. ‘From the mid-1960s, the CPA rejected repressive, authoritarian models of socialism and committed itself to a democratic and participatory vision of social change.’ Dr Boughton said that a long-running joke is that ex-CPA members made up Australia’s largest political party.

‘The intended audience for *Comrades!* is contemporary activists, many of whom know little of the history of the CPA and its role in these movements, as well as students of labour and socialist history’, he said. The struggle continues...

BOOK REPORTS AND REVIEWS

Comrades! Lives of Australian Communists

Alexis Vassiley review of *Western Australia's comrades — Phyl Harnett, Paddy Troy, Joan Williams, Rivo Gandini, Don McLeod* — in *Comrades! Lives of Australian Communists*.

Included in *Comrades!* are five short biographies of WA Communists. Paddy Troy and Don McLeod are quite well known; Phyl Harnett, Joan (Justina) Williams and Rivo Gandini less so.

Phyl Harnett was an actor, and director, living in WA from 1931 to 1943, and active in the Party on and off for 20 years. She joined while a key figure in Perth's Workers' Art Guild, which took the Perth theatre scene by storm. The Guild produced technically sophisticated and politically daring, anti-war, anti-fascist, feminist and social realist plays, which Harnett acted in and directed. She later organised new theatre groups in the eastern states, and acted on television. In one role, she was a barmaid who refused to serve scabs.

Hazel Butorac provides the perspective of the daughter of famous communist **Paddy Troy**, long-time maritime union leader. Troy joined the CPA during the Great Depression in 1934, defecting from the ALP. In 1937, he was sacked from a job goldmining – a worker was killed on the job and he called the Industrial Inspectorate. This is a stark reminder of the battle unionists have had to fight again and again over safety. Troy was jailed for three months with hard labour for distributing banned communist material during World War II. Butorac draws out the harassment and victimisation suffered by leading communists and their families during this era.

Joan (Justina) Williams was a journalist and writer active in the CPA from 1939-1971, and later in the hard-Stalinist Socialist Party of Australia. Bobbie Oliver provides a brief account of Williams' early life, and radicalisation. The CPA's period of illegality during World War II provides for some fascinating anecdotes, such as Williams typing stencils in a typewriter kept buried in the back yard, in order to get out the banned party paper. There are scores more of such anecdotes in Williams' autobiography *Anger and Love* – a personal favourite is her being turfed out of an Industrial Commission hearing by a right-wing Commissioner, protesting that, as a member of the Australian Journalists Association, she objected. Williams was also a long-time activist for women's rights and peace.

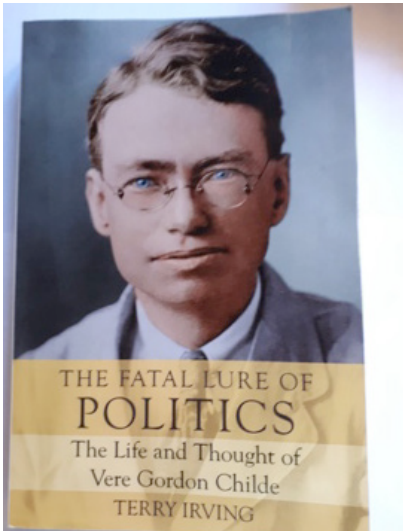
Don McLeod was a CPA member only briefly, from 1945-1947. This coincided with the start of the historic Pilbara strike of Aboriginal pastoral workers. The only party at that time which supported basic rights and equality for Aboriginal people, their support and that of the labour movement more broadly was highly significant. McLeod was a central figure in the strike, alongside Aboriginal leaders Clancy McKenna and Dooley Bin Bin and, like them, was jailed for his efforts. The strike went for three years, from 1946-1949, but most never went back to work. McLeod lived with strike veterans in remote northwest WA for the rest of his life.

Rivo Gandini was a Party member from 1946 to 1983, spending many years as a party organiser, as well as a shop steward and later official for the Electrical Trades' Union. Gandini campaigned against apartheid, was an early supporter of gay rights and was active in the campaign to stop the Old Swan Brewery in 1989 among many other issues over a long political career. He was also a President of the Perth branch of Labour History in the 1990s.

BOOK REPORTS AND REVIEWS

The Fatal Lure of Politics. The life and thought of Vere Gordon Childe

Bobbie Oliver reviewer



Terry Irving

Monash University
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+ xxiv pp, pbk, pdf and
epub.

Before reading Terry Irving's biography, I knew only three things about Vere Gordon Childe: he wrote *How Labour Governs*, described as a searing criticism of the Australian Labor Party; he abandoned Australian history and politics for a career in archaeology on the opposite side of the world; and he died mysteriously from a fall in the Blue Mountains. Irving's biography depicts a complex and private man, whom colleagues remembered as 'friendly and comradely' without revealing his private feelings. He kept others at a distance. They knew of no partner, no regular companions, no intimates' (p. 281). Conversely, his friend Rajani Palme Dutt, with whom he shared 'digs' for a term at Oxford wrote that 'living with Childe's pleasant and constant companionship' made it 'the best term I have ever had' (p. 65).

Gordon Childe – he was never known as Vere – was born in Sydney in 1892 to the Revd Stephen Childe and his second wife Harriet, who died in 1910, when Childe was in his last year at high school. Irving discovered little about family relations and their influence upon Childe's life, except that he maintained a correspondence with his much older half sisters who 'doted upon him' during his childhood. Irving suggests that his mother's death may precipitated Childe's 'walk away from religion' (p. 12).

Childe graduated from Sydney University in 1914 with First Class Honours in Latin, Greek and Philosophy, the University Medal for Classics and a travelling scholarship to Oxford University. He had also made a lifelong friend in Herbert Vere Evatt. He arrived in Britain at the beginning of World War I and Irving comments that Childe

had no idea that it would turn his thinking upside down. Three years later, when he left Oxford to return to Australia, his religious and political ideas had changed forever, his activism had developed a sharp anti-authoritarian edge, and MI5 had categorised him as "a very dangerous person" (p. 46).

By 1917, Childe was a confirmed pacifist. He loathed the war's senseless slaughter and feared that he might be conscripted if he remained in Britain after completing his studies. None of these changes of perspective came easily. Irving portrays Childe as 'an impressionable young colonial' finding himself at the centre of the empire and 'encountering jingoism at every turn'. 'He wanted to fit in and the pressure to do so was impossible to ignore' (p. 48). With an independence of mind that had already seen him 'def[y]ing' the conventions of his class' by supporting striking workers in Sydney, however, Childe mixed with radicals at Oxford, although never joining the Communist Party, as did Palme Dutt and other friends. His outspoken views against the war attracted the attention of the authorities. Despite his brilliance, his college authorities aimed to 'get him back to Australia' as soon as possible, although admitting that it could mean 'the ruin of very promising career' (p. 69) – which it almost was.

Childe's academic future was blocked in Australia, too, when military Intelligence passed his anti-war views to the authorities at Sydney University. While subsisting on temporary tutorships, work as a clerk, and a brief, unhappy stint as a schoolteacher,

BOOK REPORTS AND REVIEWS

The Fatal Lure of Politics. The life and thought of Vere Gordon Childe

Childe joined the Labor Party and soon developed a reputation as a Labor intellectual. NSW Labor leader John Storey appointed Childe as his secretary, a position that continued when Storey became the premier in March 1920, causing controversy in the Premier's Department. Storey refused to accept an appointee who had worked for the former Premier, Labor 'rat' William Holman. Childe made powerful enemies in the public service, which contributed to his sacking when the Labor government of Storey's successor, James Dooley, fell in 1921. By then, Childe was back in England, employed as a government advisor on trade opportunities, and writing *How Labour Governs*, which was published in 1923. He had become disillusioned with the Labor Party, writing that 'all Labour organisations in Australia' ultimately became 'just a gigantic apparatus for the glorification of a few bosses' (p. 223). Although topical and well-received in Britain, the book had mixed reviews in Australia, where some were offended by Childe's radical views and criticisms of the ALP (pp. 236-47).

Childe returned to the world of European pre-history, publishing his first major archaeological work *The Dawn of European Civilisation* in 1925. Largely on the reputation of this book, he became Librarian at the Royal Anthropological Institute in London. In 1927, he was appointed Professor of Archaeology at Edinburgh University, where he remained for 19 years, becoming recognised as an 'one of the most distinguished scholars and public intellectuals of the first half of the twentieth century' (p. ix). He lectured for two terms each year and spent the third undertaking archaeological digs – at 20 sites in 19 years – and wrote prolifically. Between 1928 and 1939, he published four new books and revised *The Dawn of European Civilisation*, as well as producing numerous articles. He lived a comfortable, bourgeois life but kept contact with communist friends (pp. 271-6).

Childe was in the USA when World War II began and tried unsuccessfully to gain a position at Harvard. On the boat returning to Britain, he learned of the Non-Aggression Pact between Hitler and Stalin, and became so depressed that he thought of throwing himself overboard. Later, in Scotland, he told a friend that if the Nazis invaded he would jump into a canal and drown himself (p. 296). In light of these statements, his choice of death in 1957 is less surprising. Evidently, he had considered suicide earlier in life before being confronted by the prospect of a lonely, unhealthy old age.

Irving discusses the historical, social and political contexts of Childe's life, his ideas and the content of his books in fine detail but, as the story progresses, the man becomes less visible. Childe achieved his greatest academic success while at Edinburgh. Yet Irving devotes only a small portion of the book to this period of his life. Childe remained single, prompting questions about his sexuality. Irving cites Jack Lindsay describing Childe as 'withdrawn, with no apparent sexual responses to either man or woman' (p. 354). He did have women friends, including Mary Alice Evatt, and his relationships with Evatt, Palme Dutt and other men indicate that he could be a good and steadfast companion.

BOOK REPORTS AND REVIEWS

The Fatal Lure of Politics. The life and thought of Vere Gordon Childe

There remain many questions about Childe's life. He emerges from this study as a deeply wounded man, who knew that the rejections he received in early life were politically based. Consequently, one suspects that when he finally found a niche at Edinburgh University, he was driven to prove himself. Once retired, it seems that the emptiness of his life overwhelmed him. Returning to his homeland in 1957, in the midst of the Menzies years, he was disillusioned with what Australia had become. Even being granted recognition with an Honorary Doctorate from Sydney University could not ease his dislike of his country. Childe opined that, 'Australia today is far from a socialist society'; worse, he realised that he had 'lost faith in all my old ideals'. He compared Australian unfavourably to European society, and hated the climate, yet hated 'even more the fogs and snows of a British winter'. Finally, he concluded, 'Life ends best when one is happy and strong' (p. 371). On 19 October 1957, Childe threw himself off a cliff at Govett's Leap in the Blue Mountains.

Writing a biography of a person who died over half a century ago is often a difficult task, especially when there are no personal papers and few (if any) relatives, friends or colleagues alive to help fill in gaps. A private person such as Childe must have been doubly difficult. Irving's work therefore is commendable. It is very thorough on the 'thought' of Vere Gordon Childe, but less enlightening about his 'life'.

