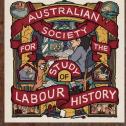# Fighting For Life: Class, Community and Care in Labour History

17th biennial conference of the Australian
Society for the Study of Labour History
22-24 April 2022 in Bendigo, Victoria

Programme and Abstracts (in alphabetical order)

Fighting for Life: Class, Community and Care in Labour History

DAY 1: Friday 22ⁿᵈ April (La Trobe University Campus, Edwards Road, Bendigo)

11am – 12pm	Optional Bendigo City Walking Tour with A/Prof Charles Fahey (resident local historian!). *N.B. Meet at the Bendigo Trades Hall on View Street (Bendigo CBD).*
1pm – 5pm	Registration Desk Open (*Library Gallery, La Trobe University Campus, Edwards Road, Bendigo*)
2 - 3 pm	**Dja Dja Wurrung Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremony (*Library Plaza, La Trobe Bendigo campus*)**
3 – 3.30 pm	Afternoon Tea (*Library Gallery and Plaza, La Trobe Bendigo campus*)
3.30 – 5pm	**Opening Plenary Panel: 'Class, Community and Caring'** (*Library Gallery, La Trobe Bendigo Campus*) CHAIR: Diane Kirkby Speakers: Alison Pennington (Centre for Future Work); Mishel McMahon (Aboriginal Rural Health Coordinator, La Trobe University); Tim Sullivan (Australian Services Union, President Bendigo Trades Hall).
5 - 6.30 pm	**Reception Event. Sponsored by Janey Stone and Interventions Publishing** Launch by Michael Hamel-Green of Bobbie Oliver, *Hell No! We Won't Go! Australian Resisters to National Service and the Vietnam War.* (*La Trobe Library Gallery, La Trobe Bendigo campus*).

DAY 2: Saturday 23 April (Bendigo CBD: La Trobe Art Institute (LAI) and Bendigo Trades Hall, View Street)

N.B. All morning teas, lunches and afternoon teas will be served in the La Trobe Art Institute Courtyard, View Street

8.30 – 9.15 am	Registration (*Bendigo Trades Hall, View Street*)

Australian Society for the Study of Labour History Conference 2022

9.15 – 10.45am	Parallel Session No.1		
	1a. Women's Labour *Venue: La Trobe Art Institute (LAI)*	**1b. Political Ideology and Action** *Venue: Trades Hall Council Chambers*	**1c. Region, Community, Culture** *Venue: Trades Hall Unity Hall*
	Chair: Phillip Deery	**Chair:** Verity Burgmann	**Chair:** Chris Monnox
	Joe Stanley ZOOM: (12.15a.m. GMT) 'women and children in Yorkshire collieries …'	Rhianne Grieve, [ZOOM ACT] 'The intersection of political and medical thought in early British socialism.'	Jennifer Beacham, 'The Great Depression and the Rise of the Ballarat Communist Party'
	Kate Fitch, 'Telling stories: Herstories of 20th C. Australian PR work'	Peter Prince, 'Were they really aliens? South Australia and the *Northern Territory Mining Act 1903'*	Harry Tan, 'Chinese indentured labour in colonial Aust. 1838- …'
	Emma Robertson, 'Transporting Traditions of Gendered Labour: Women Bus Conductors in Interwar Melbourne'	Diane Kirkby, 'Picket lines and colour lines in maritime labour history'	Janey Stone and Lisa Milner, '…the Australasian Book Society'
10.45 – 11.15am	Morning Tea *(La Trobe Art Institute (LAI) - Courtyard)*		
11.15 – 12.45 pm	**PLENARY KEYNOTE (La Trobe Art Institute, View Street):** Chair: Jennifer Jones **Victoria Haskins (University of Newcastle), 'Sickness and Slavery: Aboriginal domestic workers and disease in Australian history'**		
12.45 – 2 pm	Lunch (*LAI*)		
2 – 3.30pm	**Parallel Session No.2**		
	2a. Gendering Work and Workers *Venue: LAI*	**2b. Theory and History** *Venue: Trades Hall Council Chambers*	**2c. Unionism and Work Safety** *Venue: Trades Hall Unity Hall*
	Chair: Lee-Ann Monk	**Chair:** Owen Bennett	**Chair:** Kate Murphy
	MV Shobhana Warrier, ZOOM (8.30a.m.India): 'Gendering the workplace: Women workers …in colonial Tamil Nadu'	Toby Boraman ZOOM (4-5.30pm NZST) Combining Global Labour History with an expanded history-from-below	Alexis Vassiley, 'Unionism and Occupational health and safety in the Pilbara iron ore industry –then and now.'

	Rachael Cottle, 'Underpaid and at risk: the precarious role of women in the Victorian Railways'	John Sebesta, 'Australian 4th Internationalist Archives:…'	Alice Garner and Mary Leahy, 'Fighting for safe work: the role of union education'
	Katie Wood, 'Scrutiny or neglect: two tragedies in Melbourne's female explosives workforce, 1897 and 1923.'	Joshua Black, '…Flags, posters and the misuse of history in contemporary Austn. industrial relations.'	Judy Hughes, 'Anticipating the health costs of technological change'
3.30 – 4pm	Afternoon Tea (*LAI*)		
4 – 5.30 pm	**Parallel Session No.3**		
	Culture and Worker Protest *Venue: LAI*	**Place, Class and Community** *Venue: Trades Hall Council Chambers*	**Workers' Health and Health Workers** *Venue: Trades Hall Unity Hall*
	Chair: Judy Hughes	**Chair:** Bobbie Oliver	**Chair:** Kate Fitch
	Christos Stefanopoulos, ZOOM: (9a.m. EEST) 'The hunger strike as …workers protest in post-war Greece,1950-67'	Chris McConville, 'Experimental city: Urban reform and social class in late colonial Calcutta.'	Lee-Ann Monk, 'Pittance for working patients: Campaigning against patient labour in Victorian mental hospitals'
	Lisa Milner, "Sing while you fight: working-class narratives from white-collar unionists.'	Fiona Gatt, 'Finding labor: the radical shift in identity and politics in late 19thC North Melbourne.'	Dino Concepcion, 'Voices of voice workers…occupational health and safety in offshore call centres.'
	Iain McIntyre, 'Beer strikes: Working –class community boycotts, 1880-1945'		James Watson, 'How asbestos injury was legalised: Class Race and justice in the Dust Diseases Tribunal NSW'
5.30 pm	Pre-Dinner Drinks at Rifle Brigade Hotel, View Street		
7.00 pm	Conference Dinner at Oya's Turkish Kitchen (Attendees should have paid in advance via the conference website)		

DAY 3: Sunday 24 April (Bendigo CBD)

9.00 – 9.30 am	Registration (*Bendigo Trades Hall, View Street*)		
9:30 – 10:30am	**Parallel Session No.4**		
	4a. Class and Worker Activism *Venue: LAI*	**4b. Labour's Political History** *Venue: Trades Hall Council Chambers*	**4c. Looking at Scullin** *Venue: Trades Hall Unity Hall*
	Chair: Dmytro Ostapenko	**Chair:** Alexis Vassiley	**Chair:** Chris McConville
	Cybele Locke, ZOOM (11.30am NZST) 'Making Biography: Bill Andersen, a Communist Working-Class Life 1924-2005'	Verity Burgmann, 'It's Time to End the Turf Wars: Labor versus Greens and Climate Policy Disasters'.	David Lee, 'The Scullin govt. and Austn. Independence'
	Jack Fahey, 'The Varied Experiences of Workers at the Point of Production: General Motors-Holden during World War II'		Anne Beggs-Sunter, 'James Scullin and the agony of Irish independence in 1921.'
10-30 – 11am	Morning Tea (*LAI*)		
11 – 12.30pm	**Parallel Session No. 5**		
	5a. Workers in a Changing Workplace *Venue: LAI*	**5b. Militancy and Community** *Venue: Trades Hall Council Chambers*	
	Chair : Frank Bongiorno	**Chair:** Howard Nathan	
	Bobbie Oliver, 'Kill a worker. Go to jail'. Will WA's new work safety laws make worksites safer?	Vashti Fox, ZOOM (9am WA) 'Hating Hanson in the 1990s'	
	Charles Fahey, 'North Americans come to Sunshine - new ways of managing labour in a full employment labour market, 1958 to 1975.'	Janey Stone, 'The radical Jewish tradition'	
	Gok-Lim Finch (ZOOM WA, 10.30 am.) 'Labour conditions and self-determination on Christmas Island.'	Thomas Levick (ZOOM), 'Investigating the Socio-Cultural Factors influencing Governance of Aboriginal Co-operative Enterprises: Lessons for Self-Determination'	

12.30 – 1.30 pm	Lunch (*LAI*)		
1.30 – 2.30pm	**Parallel Session No. 6**		
	6a. Peak Body Organising *Venue: LAI*	**6b. Labour's Past and Future** *Venue: Trades Hall Council Chambers*	**6c. Chinese History STARTS 1p.m.** *Venue: Golden Dragon Museum*
	Chair: Anne Beggs-Sunter	**Chair:** Julie Kimber	Guided Heritage tour Chinese Museum
	Dmytro Ostapenko, 'The ACTU against French nuclear testing in the Pacific.'	Judith McVey, Contradictory roles and sexism: revising theories of oppression for Australia'	**NB. Register in advance as limited numbers** You can register at the conference helpdesk if you did not register online
	Owen Bennett, 'The ACTU abandons full employment, 1975-1983'	Tim Minchin, 'The Factory of the Future: Historical Continuity and Labour rights at Tesla'	
2.30 – 2.45 pm	Afternoon Tea (*LAI*)		
2.45 – 4.15 pm	**PLENARY (*LAI*):** Chair: Emma Robertson **Katharine McKinnon (Director of the Centre for Sustainable Communities, University of Canberra),** **'Who does the work of labour? Assemblages of care and the collectivity of childbirth'**		
4.15 - 4.30 pm	**ASSLH Prize Giving (*LAI*) – Hosted by Phillip Deery (ASSLH Treasurer)**		
4.30 pm - 7.30 pm	**CLOSING FUNCTION** *Sponsored by NTEU* Drinks and Nibbles at the Rifle Brigade Hotel, View Street, Bendigo		

Jennifer Beacham, Federation University

The Great Depression and the Rise of the Ballarat Communist Party

Session Region, Community, Culture, Saturday 23rd April, 9:15 am

When faced with the economic and political turmoil of the Wall Street crash in 1929 and their own 'Ballarat Boy' James Scullin elected Prime Minister just days before, the Ballarat labour movement was drawn in many directions. Some chose Communism, some flirted with the Langites and some accepted Catholic Bishop Foley's instruction from the pulpit to fight Communism. When Ted Tripp, the first endorsed Communist to stand for Federal Parliament, spoke at a public meeting in 1931, a CPA branch was formed with an Industrial Unit at the Ballarat North Railways Workshop with at least 300 members. Significant leaders, including Ted Rowe (the first Communist elected to federal office in the Australian Society of Engineers), saw the CPA as reflecting their view of the world. Although there was always tension between individual rights and authority, this group remained dominant in the labour movement in Ballarat until the late sixties in shaping industrial and political debate. While the contest between Communism and Christianity often consumed them, unlike in the political wing they maintained a united front on industrial matters. But in the community the ideological conflict was played out in the daily newspaper The Courier, at public meetings, and in community organizations.

Anne Beggs-Sunter, Federation University

James Scullin and the Agony of Irish Independence in 1921.

Session Looking at Scullin ,   Sunday 24th April , 9:30 am

Irish-Australian Catholics had survived a difficult time during World War One, due to the bitter Conscription campaign, and Catholics like Archbishop Mannix who had opposed Conscription were branded by Prime Minister Billy Hughes as disloyal and even traitors. This was compounded by the failure of the British Government to grant Home Rule to Ireland, even though World War One had ostensibly been about guaranteeing self-determination to small nations. This cause was a crucial one for James Scullin, emerging ALP leader, Ballarat Catholic, and editor of the AWU newspaper The Evening Echo. In 1921 Scullin became very emmeshed in public events involved with the emergence of the Self-Determination for Ireland League of Australia, the Irish National Foresters, and efforts to assist two sacked railway workers in Victoria, who had supported unionists standing up for Irish independence in Ireland. Matters came to a head as politicians tried to negotiate an Anglo-Irish agreement that would give a measure of self-determination to Ireland, but at the cost of removing Ulster from the Irish Free State. In the troubled year 1921 Scullin used his voice and his pen to advocate for both working people and for Irish independence.

Owen Bennett, Victoria University

The ACTU abandons full employment, 1975-1983

Session Peak Body Organising, Sunday 24th April, 1:30 pm

This paper provides an overview of the bi-partisan abandonment of full employment in 1975, focusing on the ACTU's response during the 1975-1983 period. This paper finds that, despite the ACTU explicitly demanding a return to full employment throughout this period, key figures on the ACTU executive – chief among them its President Bob Hawke – had privately accepted that Australia's profitability crisis meant that the full employment project was 'no longer operative'. Drawing on ACTU archival material, this paper highlights the ACTU's shifting responses to the unemployment crises and argues that the peak union body's unwillingness to countenance a militant industrial response in support of full employment played a crucial – and often overlooked – role in paving the way for the widespread acceptance of mass unemployment in Australia. The ACTU's capitulation on the question of full employment, it is suggested, represented a deliberate concession to the needs of capital, ultimately paving the way for the Accord and the punitive unemployment policies that have dominated Australian policy-making over subsequent decades. The paper concludes with a brief analysis of the recent revival of the full employment objective within the labour movement and its implications in the post-COVID era.

Joshua Black, Australian National University

"Regulation Getting Out of Control": Flags, Posters, and the Misuse of History in Contemporary Australian Industrial Relations

Session Theory and History, Saturday 23rd April, 2:00 pm

In 2020, as Australia strove to manage the public health and workplace safety implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, the political health of the contemporary worksite was also under significant strain, but for an entirely different reason. In a series of hearings at a Federal courthouse in Melbourne in December 2020, construction company Lendlease and the Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining And Energy Union fought against the Australian Building and Construction Commission in an effort to protect the Australian Constitution's implied right to freedom of political communication. At the heart of this contest was a dispute about whether it was legal for a worker to display the Eureka flag on a federal construction site because of its trade union connotations.

In this paper, I situate that contemporary legal contest within the broader history of Australian national identity formation. I re-examine the different ways in which workers and citizens have politically deployed the Eureka flag and related iconography in civic and industrial spaces. I conclude that the government watchdog has incorporated a fundamental misreading of specific iconography from Australia's political and labour history into the legal frameworks that govern the contemporary industrial workplace.

Toby Boraman, Massey University

Combining Global Labour History with an expanded history-from-below

Session Theory and History, Saturday 23rd April, 2:00pm   (ZOOM)

Global Labour History is a major, if not dominant trend, in labour history today. It aims to overcome 'methodological nationalism' by analysing connections, and discrepancies, between different regions. However it tends to over-emphasise structural developments in its wide-ranging transnational accounts of imperialism and capitalism, and marginalise workers' agency. In contrast, traditional 'history-from-below' emphasises the rank-and-file activity of workers. Yet traditional history-from-below tended to overlook structures, and narrowly focus on the activities of predominantly white, male wage-labourers in high-income countries. This presentation argues that an 'expanded' history-from-below, which includes indigenous, female, migrant and other workers, needs to be combined with Global Labour History. This talk attempts to do so by exploring the international connections and discrepancies surrounding two large disputes in the South Pacific, namely the unrest against the 1968 nil wage order in Aotearoa New Zealand, and the three-month strike -- effectively a general strike -- in Samoa in 1981. Both disputes illustrated the major involvement of indigenous rank-and-file workers in strikes, major regional and global webs of migrations and influence, and in the 1981 case, the transmission of unrest from high-income to low-income countries, and across low-income countries in the South Pacific.

Verity Burgmann, Monash University

It's Time to End the Turf Wars: Labor versus Greens and Climate Policy Disasters

Session Labour's Political History, Sunday 24th April , 9:30 am

The 'primary injustice' of climate change is that those who suffer most have contributed least to the problem. The 'secondary injustice' of climate change is when badly designed mitigation efforts have disproportionate negative effects on working class and poorer people: fossil fuel sector workers denied Just Transition and poorer households paying for market-based 'solutions', such as emissions trading schemes, which do little to reduce emissions and are rorted by corporations with huge cost pass-through to consumers. Such policies therefore also undermine support for climate action. The global network, Trade Unions for Energy Democracy, builds on the Just Transition policies of the international trade union movement to advocate a return to social democratic principles to build a better, greener future. It urges governments to shun market 'solutions' and instead intervene to mandate the phasing out of fossil fuels and provide replacement jobs at least as good as those lost. Climate action does not threaten jobs; it creates them. At the last election, the ALP should have presented plans for huge government investment in, and encouragement of, well-paid, well-unionised renewable energy jobs in areas affected by the necessary phasing out of fossil fuels, such as regional Queensland. Instead, it seemed trapped in the outdated false opposition between jobs and climate action, so it became wedged on the issue, with disastrous consequences.

Dino Vincent Paul Concepcion, La Trobe University

Voices of voice workers on the eve of a global pandemic: occupational health and safety in off-shore call centres (a part of the study by Dino Vincent Paul Concepcion, Anne-Maree Sawyer and Martina Boese, La Trobe University)

Session Workers' Health and Health Workers, Saturday 23rd April, 4:00 pm

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic underscores the range of occupational health and safety issues previously raised by Filipino call centre workers who help customers of business clients from the Global North, including those in Australia and the United States. This paper will present selected findings from a recently completed doctoral thesis, which exposes the confluence of illness-causing conditions and other harms the workers live through daily. These harms include harshly mandated metrics, difficult and overtly racist callers, nocturnal and rotating work-shifts, frequent cancellations of bio-breaks, and features of their workplace such as excessively cold air-conditioning, crowded workstations, poorly maintained office equipment and inefficient software programs. These occupational challenges have driven some workers into coping strategies that potentially damage their wellbeing, while others strive to protect their health. This qualitative research examined the intersections between micro-level health experiences and the political economy of offshore service labour in the Global South. Workers' lay perspectives revealed the interrelated themes of emotional labour, neoliberalism, precarious work, and racism, and offer valuable knowledge to improve health and safety policies in the Philippines and other countries.

Cottle Rachael , La Trobe University

Underpaid and at risk: the precarious role of women in the Victorian Railways

Session Gendering Work and Workers , Saturday 23rd April, 2:00 pm

Women were employed by the Victorian Railways since its formation in 1856. They worked as Station Mistresses, Gatekeepers and Waiting Room Attendants; in administrative roles and in the Refreshment Services Branch; and from World War II, as Porteresses, Ticket Checkers and in workshops. Despite the significant contribution these women made to the Victorian Railways, they have been marginalised in official railway records.

This paper examines the precarious role of women railway workers. Tragically, it is often only through the records of railway accidents and deaths, reported in the newspapers, that we hear the stories of these women. These incidents highlight – sometimes in brutal detail – the fact of women's engagement in the railways. Drawing on digitised newspaper articles sourced from Trove, this paper will examine what we can learn about women's working lives on their railways through the accidents that threatened their lives and their livelihoods.

Jack Fahey, La Trobe University

General Motors-Holden during World War II: The Varied Experiences of Workers at the Point of Production

Session Class and Worker Activism, Sunday 24th April , 9.:30 am

During World War II, General Motors-Holden underwent a dramatic transformation, which saw its operations shift from an organisation that manufactured passenger and commercial car bodies and then assembled and sold the completed article through a nation-wide distribution network, into a major Australian producer of war materiel for the Commonwealth war effort. The industrial labour force exploded as defence contracts became the dominant source of revenue; major re-tooling and industrial expansion were required to service these demands. This steady flow of defence contracts provided workers with a stable income, while national security restrictions provided protection from dismissal. The structure of defence contracts militated against controversial labour management tactics; while the federal government deliberately cultivated historic opportunities for women to enter the workforce in roles previously reserved for men. On the other hand, federal and state legislation offered GMH management concrete mechanisms to wield against workers, while the ideological environment of war-time framed industrial action as unpatriotic and even seditious. Through a combination of government, business and trade union archives, this paper will seek to uncover the varied experiences of Holden workers on the Australian home front. Highlighting this case study seeks to establish the conditions of 'war-time' as a site of contestation, as the demands of a global war allowed workers to challenge existing political, economic and social norms.

Charles Fahey, La Trobe University

North Americans come to Sunshine - new ways of managing labour in a full employment labour market, 1958 to 1975

Session Workers in a Changing Workplace, Sunday 24th April , 11.:00 am

Finch Gok-Lim, University of Western Australia

Labour Conditions and Self-Determination on Christmas Island

Session Workers in a Changing Workplace, Sunday 24th April , 11:00 am (ZOOM)

My 公公 (Maternal Grandfather) was a coolie on the phosphate mine on Christmas Island. His lived experience is so different from mine, a second-generation migrant in Australia, that it seems to belong to a different world. In this paper, I hope to connect our lived experiences through au-toethnography, to understand our shared lives, emotions, and forms of knowledge production. Tracing the formation of the system of indentured labour on Christmas Island, its connections with the broader Indian Ocean region, the intercultural relations between Malay and Chinese workers, I hope to contextualise the actions of labourers for the first seventy years of the island in a way that affords them and their descendant's dignity and understanding. I hope to sketch out a critical relationality that acknowledges the gaps and multiplicity in labour movements throughout the establishment of settler colonial Australia.

Kate Fitch, Monash University

Telling stories: Herstories of twentieth century Australian PR work

Session Women's Labour, Saturday 23rd April , 9:15am

This paper focuses on memoirs written by three women who worked in public relations in Aus-tralia in the twentieth century. Women's past work in public relations, in line with other histories of gendered media labour, is largely invisible (Baker & Lloyd, 2016). In considering women's con-tributions to Australian public relations prior to the 1980s, this paper addresses their exclusion from widely accepted narratives of the field's historical development and considers the broader social context in which they were able to work in public relations. In going beyond the archives of the professional association and the life histories of prominent occupational elites – all men – this paper considers how women's retrospective narratives frame their experiences of public relations work, negotiating career challenges and caring for family members. The focus on women's mem-oirs allows new insights into promotional work in fashion, retail, entertainment and lifestyle sec-tors, often targetting female consumers, and the cross-over with media industries to be devel-oped. The findings point to the implications of making women's work visible and the significance of women's memoirs for a stronger understanding the historical development of public relations.

Vashti Fox, University of Western Australia

Hating Hanson in the 1990s

Session Militancy and Community, Sunday 24th April, 11:00 am (ZOOM)

While a substantial amount of scholarly and popular literature investigates both Pauline Hanson and the Hanson phenomena, very little considers the substantial protest movement provoked by her. Across the country, from rural hamlets to industrial centres, One Nation meetings were besieged by protesters. In some cases, Hanson herself was forced to flee. High school students were also mobilised, in their tens of thousands, in walkouts and protests. Oftentimes these actions were deeply controversial; both in broader society and on the Left. This introduction will consider how and why these protests occurred in the way they did and explore the debates between activists. Such explorations will both fill the substantial lacunae in the literature on Hanson but also deepen and enrich the study of antiracist and antifascist movements in Australia.

Alice Garner et and Mary Leahy , University of Melbourne

Fighting for safe work: the role of union education

Session Unionism and Work Safety, Saturday 23rd April, 2:00 pm

On 8 September 1975, the Australian Trade Union Training Authority (TUTA) was established. TUTA was a world-first, government-funded statutory authority designed to prepare union officials and job representatives to participate more effectively as partners in industry. TUTA's first decade coincided with a period when Australian state governments were enacting new work health and safety laws, which had significant consequences for workplace relationships and responsibilities. TUTA trainers came to play an important role in training unionists to support worker safety and in developing original training materials that were used as models for the manuals created in response to the new legislation.

Drawing on interviews with TUTA trainers and participants between the 1970s and TUTA's closure by John Howard in 1996, this paper explores how OHS training reflected and shaped a fundamental shift in attitudes to workers' safety. It also analyses the ways OHS consultative structures acted as conduits for expressing broader workplace concerns, particularly when other avenues for communication and industrial action had been removed.

Finally, the paper considers the legacy of TUTA's focus on OHS education in the COVID-19 pandemic, with unionists playing a key role in ensuring safe workplaces (including through infection training courses delivered in partnership with universities).

Fiona Gatt, Deakin University

Finding Labor: The radical shift in identity and politics in late nineteenth century North Melbourne

Session Place, Class and Community , Saturday 23rd April , 4:00 pm

During the nineteenth century the area now known as the suburb of North Melbourne was a town, with its own local government and distinct historical development. For much of the second half of the nineteenth century its local member for the Victorian Legislative Assembly was an English-born conservative liberal. Demographically, however, North Melbourne was populated by working-class people. The locality also had the highest percentage of Irish Catholics in the colony. Yet the collective identity of the town portrayed in the local newspaper was one of middle-class aspirations and sensibilities, supporting a respectable working-class cohort. In the last decade of the century, during the depths of the depression years, North Melbourne's public image and political affiliations underwent a radical shift. This was also a crucial period where the foundation for the worker's rights achieved in the early twentieth century were laid in colonial politics. This paper provides the opportunity to investigate a local area where long held power structures were challenged and re-ordered in this period, in a town where those people set to benefit most from regulating working conditions represented a high proportion of residents.

Rhianne Grieve, Australian National University

The Intersection of Political and Medical Thought in Early British Socialism

Session Political Ideology and Action, Saturday 23rd April , 9:15 am (ZOOM)

Charles Hall (1739 – 1825) is a rarely studied contributor to the intellectual development of British socialist thought. A deeply compassionate man, he was a physician who devoted much of his long life to treating the poorest in the West Counties of England. In 1805, Hall published a work of political philosophy titled 'The Effects of Civilisation on the People in European States'. In its preface, he declared that his many decades treating the ailments of the poor made him most suited to write on political subjects. Hall, first and foremost, identified as a physician. Yet, there have been no studies on the influence of medicine on his political thinking.

Educated at the University of Edinburgh between 1763 and 1765, Hall studied under Alexander Monro secundus, William Cullen, and Robert Whytt, all of whom ushered in vitalist approaches to the human body and the processes of disease to the Edinburgh curriculum. This paper will demonstrate that their theories were critical to Hall's contributions to a set of fraught political, economic, and social debates pertaining to population increase, the causes of scarcity, and the division and conditions of labour. In addition, the paper will examine how medicine shaped the dynamics of the model society Hall devised as requisite for human flourishing and happiness; the so-called 'medium state'.

Standing at the meridian of medical and political spheres, Hall possessed a unique lens with which to examine the causes of poverty. By taking Hall at his word, that he wrote from the perspective of a physician, this paper will examine the intersection of medicine and politics in his thinking.

Judy Hughes, La Trobe University

Anticipating the health costs of technological change

Session Unionism and Work Safety, Saturday 23rd April , 2:00 pm

Industrial disputes over the introduction of new technology frequently focus on issues of financial compensation, training and work allocations. Health issues arising from the new technology are not always immediately apparent and can take time to emerge as work practices evolve and are assessed. The 1980 national strike by Australian metropolitan newspaper reporters, artists and photographers over the introduction of computers (Visual Display Terminals or VDTs) is a case in point. These members of the Australian Journalists Association had been seeking compensation for the additional training and expertise required for using the new technology. A decision by a judge of the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission awarding an allowance far less than what the AJA was seeking - triggered industrial action black banning the use of VDTs, the subsequent sacking of 29 journalists and the decision to call a national strike. Subsequently, however, work-related injuries amongst journalists, known as Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) emerged as a key cost to journalists of technological change. Research underway aims to use oral history interviews to gauge to what extent journalists involved in the dispute were concerned about health implications going into the strike and how they view the changes in hindsight.

Diane Kirkby, University of Technology Sydney / La Trobe University

Picket lines and colour lines in maritime labour history'

Session Political Ideology and Action, Saturday 23rd April , 9:15 am

Region and race have been critical factors in shaping the history of maritime unions navigating the globalizing shipping industry. Protests on the Australian coast in the late nineteenth century were identified by Ann Curthoys as the 'racism/defence of jobs and conditions argument.' Over the course of the 20th century the language of racialisation altered but the problem of ship-owners cheapening labour costs through recruitment of unprotected labour, usually from poorer regions of the world, continued to undermine the working conditions of maritime workforces across the lines of colour. When in 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic struck, the vulnerability of this precarious workforce, and 'the historical imbalances in labour conditions at sea' were starkly revealed. With national borders and ports closed around the world, a humanitarian crisis unfolded with as many as 400,000 seafarers trapped on board, kept at sea, virtually imprisoned, and unpaid for months, unable to change over with alternative crews, take shore leave or be repatriated to their home ports.

Australia's maritime unions had been leading activists in formulating opposition to these conditions and demanding seafarers rights but they had also opposed the use of 'coloured' and indentured labour. Conflicting views existed simultaneously, seeking connections across those racial divides in opposition to racial policies while they battled to empower themselves and find strategies of resistance. In doing so they sought allies within an international brotherhood and engaged in actions of solidarity. They were not always successful in their aspirations or reflective on their assumptions of white identity positioning..

David Lee, UNSW Canberra

The Scullin Government and Australian Independence

Session Looking at Scullin, Sunday 24th April , 9:30 am

In 1929 the Australian Labor Party came to power at the federal level for the first time in more than a decade under James Scullin. In 1919 the former Labor Prime Minister and then Nationalist leader, W.M. Hughes, led an Australian delegation to the Peace Conference in Paris. The separate signature of the Dominion of Australia on the treaty meant that the Commonwealth of Australia became a member of the League of Nations and started developing an international personality. In the 1920s Nationalist-Country Party administrations participated in Imperial Conferences that further developed the international status of the Dominions. Scullin's Labor administration was immediately beset by economic problem and had no wish in that context to appoint Australian diplomats and develop an independent foreign policy. The argument of this paper, however, is that the Scullin Government pursued Australian independence in three other ways: by negotiating the passage of the Statute of Westminster through the Imperial Parliament in 1931, by insisting on the right of Dominions to appoint the Governor-General and by pressing for the Commonwealth to be master of its own economic destiny against the strictures of the British Government and Bank of England.

Thomas Levick, University of Newcastle

Investigating the Socio-Cultural Factors influencing Governance of Aboriginal Co-operative Enterprises: Lessons for Self-Determination

Session Militancy and Community, Sunday 24th April, 11:00am (ZOOM)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) Co-operative and Mutual Enterprises (CMEs) comprise a substantial component of Australia's Indigenous economy, employing hundreds of people and providing services to thousands nationally (Minniecon, Kitchen, Fyffe, Hercock, & Faircloth, 2021). Yet, there has persisted a relative gap in the literature on co-operatives and mutuals in Australia for decades. Recently, Australian CME law has undergone reform aimed at establishing a uniform legislative environment across the continent. This will have widespread implications for CME development across sectoral and, more pertinently, racial lines; have the legal changes brought certainty or confidence to (particularly ATSI) CME members? Have they ignored considerable challenges for CMEs, and how will we know? Have they left some out of these discussions?

The aim of this paper is to shed light on the oft-ignored ATSI CME sector, and to document and analyse the sector so as to provide a 'lay of the land' for this complex field. This paper first defines the co-operative and mutual models before documenting the history of the ATSI CME movement. A scoping review was conducted using secondary source material: registry data from State Government CME registries, the Business Council of Co-operatives and Mutuals (BCCM) co-operative and mutual directory, and University of Western Australia's Australian Co-operative and Mutual Enterprise Index (BCCM, n.d; CEMI, 2015). The primary outcome of this research has been the collation of up-to-date data (found in the Appendix) that was used to produce several in-text figures, as well as the accompanying analyses.

Cybèle Locke, Victoria University of Wellington

Making Biography: Bill Andersen, a Communist, Working-Class Life, 1924-2005

Session Class and Worker Activism, Sunday 24th April, 9:30 am   (ZOOM)

This paper explores the process of writing a biography of New Zealand communist, working-class, trade union leader Gordon Harold (Bill) Andersen. It unpacks why I was chosen to write this book and how important it was that communist politics were central to its telling, not just as the bogey wielded by politicians to discredit militant trade unionism, but as a belief system that informed Bill Andersen's peace and anti-racism work, parenting, rugby league coaching, as well as trade union work, across his lifetime. In a context of entrenched communist sectarianism, my position-ality as unaligned left and two generations removed, mattered. In some ways, this biography could be considered the counterpoint to my first book, Workers in the Margins: Union Radicals in Post-War New Zealand; with Bill Andersen, I refocused the lens on the Old Left, Pākehā male union leaders who were challenged by 'workers in the margins'. But the book became more complicated than an 'Old Left' label could possibly contain. Central source material was Bill's unpublished memoir, written in 2004, and a series of oral interviews I conducted with people who had many and varied relationships with Bill. They spoke to me of their lives and what Bill meant to them, capturing the emotions of solidarity-making and solidarity-breaking. Navigating an ethics of respect – informed consent from my oral interviewees for their words published in this book – was a crucial and intricate part of the process. How this book relates to two other trade union biographies – David Grant's biography of Ken Douglas and Rebecca Macfie's very recent biography of Helen Kelly – will also inform this talk.

Sophie Loy-Wilson, University of Sydney

Ghost Economy: Chinese Australian workers shaping Australian Environments

Session Place, Class and Community, Saturday 23rd April, 4:00pm   (ZOOM)

Recent events continue to reinforce the centrality of Chinese Australians to Sino-Australian relations. This paper speak to my larger project which recovers the lives of Chinese Australian workers, revealing the survival strategies they adopted to forge economic power; in order to understand Australian capitalism, we have to understand this migrant economy and how it worked. A deepened understanding of this new, non-elite Chinese Australian history re-centers labour history at the centre of debates over Chinese history and heritage in this country.

Chris McConville, Victoria University

Experimental city: Urban reform and social class in late colonial Calcutta

Session Place, Class and Community , Saturday 23rd April, 4:00 pm

Robert Koch's cholera experiments, sanitarian campaigns around tanks and bustees, the CIT's transurban avenues and a modernising port, radically transformed daily routines for Calcutta's workers. Historians and political scientists typically cite these experiments as props for an exclusionary 'colonising project', ignoring any possibility of class-based reaction.

Reflecting on workers' lived experience along the city's peri-urban riverfront, Dipesh Chakrabarty ingeniously reworked E. P. Thompson's (and Karl Marx's) writings on culture, to comprehend the class relations of jute milling. Despite limits to solidarity amongst these millhands, Chakrabarty insisted that class identities, unpredictable and, we might say, experimental, remained very much alive in Calcutta.

Amongst casualised workers around wharves and streets, a different class-conscious experiment gathered pace. Paradoxically, public health and planning reforms enabled carters and dockers to assert rights absent amongst Chakrabarty's millhands, and denied in accounts of 'the colonising project'. Set within the anonymity that Anindita Ghosh saw on the city's streets, urban reform can illuminate Calcutta's Marxist emergence. Civic rights engendered within these reforms, direct us, by way of sanitation, planning and the port, towards the experimental, unpredictable but nonetheless crucial role of class-conscious workers in Calcutta's recent history.

Iain McIntyre, University of Melbourne/Monash University

Beer Strikes: Working-class community boycotts, 1880-1945

Session Culture and Worker Protest , Saturday 23rd April , 4:00pm

Although named in relation to action Irish tenant farmers took against an English landlord in ostracizing and refusing all work and contact with him in 1880, the tactic of 'boycotting' individuals, businesses and organisations dates back millennia. Mainly associated with individual lifestyle choices and large scale anti-corporate and anti-discrimination campaigns today, boycotts in Australia have more traditionally been localized, community based campaigns focused on industrial disputes and the cost of living.

To explore this aspect of Australian working-class activism I will focus on one specific area of boycott activity, "beer strikes" focused on pubs and other venues from the late nineteenth century to the end of World War 2. Often taking place in small, regional towns these boycotts were generally aimed at enforcing price control regarding alcohol, but were also undertaken to support of bar staff and target publicans for adverse behaviour during strikes. In a handful of cases beer boycotts were linked to broader campaigns, such as that from 1915 onwards to remove the Northern Territory's Chief Administrator John Gilruth and as part of wider disputes over rationing and prices during World War 2. My presentation will provide a brief history of "beer strikes" and consider their rationale, goals and efficacy.

Judith Mcvey, University of Sydney

Contradictory roles and sexism: Revisiting theories of oppression for Australia

Session Theory and History , Sunday 24th April , 1:30pm

In the 1970s the Women's Liberation Movement sought to challenge the causes of sexism in Australia. Activists initially targeted issues like equal pay, abortion rights, accessible child-care, demanding action from the state to achieve reform. They would also demand legislation to stop sexual harassment and introduce equal opportunity for women in industry. Their achievements were ground-breaking, but recent events highlight there is much more to achieve, and for a more diverse community. What were the limitations of their struggle?

Social Reproduction Theory identifies the roots of oppression under capitalism as a ruling class response to the contradictory relationship between women's role in reproductive labour in the family and their labour in workplaces. Intersectionality Theories provide a way of understanding different forms of discrimination and how they co-exist and are experienced.

Capitalism shapes the totality of society, and each local expression of human being experience includes within it the historically produced totality of the social-political-cultural elements of capitalism that provide its 'nature'. To what extent can trade unionism become a multicultural expression of anti-capitalism, uniting workers who are affected by class, 'race', ability, sexuality and sex?"

Lisa Milner

Sing while you fight: working-class narratives from white-collar unionists

Session Culture and Worker Protest, Saturday 23rd April , 4:00pm

In the 1930s and 1940s, union leaders in the USA employed theatre as a tool of organisation, education, propaganda, and entertainment, and a novel form of working-class narrative entered the culture, as unionists translated their own experiences of exploitation and struggle to the stage. Union 'dram groups' didn't just emerge from the factory floor, however: white-collar unions also created theatre, with pharmacists, clerks, shop assistants and soda jerks working together. As the members of the Local 65 union dram group harmonised in their musical production: 'Who cares if the sun don't shine while you're on the picket line? Use that 65 design, and sing while you fight'.

This presentation discusses some musicals devised and presented by New York based white-collar unions in the middle of the twentieth century. The works, often seen by large audiences and winning awards in labour theatre contests, drew on novel combinations of union experience and the appeal of popular culture to make their mark with their audiences. Then and now, theatre has great potential for building solidarity and revitalising unions; reflections on the appeal of these works, with their combination of political message and popular culture, can offer ways of approaching contemporary industrial organisation.

Lisa Milner and Janey Stone

To publish 'books that might not otherwise be published': the Australasian Book Society

Session Region, Community, Culture, Saturday 23rd April , 9:15am

In the post-war period, publication and promotion of Australian literature, particularly works focusing on working-class issues, peace and politics was rare. To counter this, to 'publish manuscripts reflecting the life struggles and militant traditions of our own people', the Australasian Book Society [ABS] was established in 1952 in Melbourne. The ABS published 86 titles, predominantly fiction, until 1978. Supported by the vibrant print culture of the labour movement and the Communist Party of Australia [CPA] along with associated groups such as the Realist Writers, and funded by member subscriptions, the ABS promoted Australian literature to a mainly working class and left-wing audience. Many ABS authors later had significant writing careers, including Dorothy Hewitt and Ralph de Boissière. Frank Hardy self-published Power Without Glory but later received extensive support from the ABS. This presentation traces the origins and activities of the ABS and considers its place in Australian labour and literary history. It reviews the relationship of the ABS with the CPA in the context of the social climate in the 1950s and 60s and considers its legacy.

Tim Minchin, La Trobe University

The Factory of the Future: Historical Continuity and Labour rights at Tesla

Session Labour's Past and Future, Sunday 24th April , 1:30 pm

Literature on Tesla, the electric car company, has been overwhelmingly positive. Largely written by reporters or technology enthusiasts, the focus is on the company's technological innovation – how Tesla is shaking up the auto industry, acting as a 'disrupter of Detroit', and launching an electric car 'revolution'. The company's signature plant in Fremont, California has also been viewed, as CEO Elon Musk puts it, as the 'factory of the future'. This paper changes the focus, looking at the experience of Tesla's workers and showing that there was nothing futuristic about working conditions inside the factory. Like generations of factory workers before them - especially in the auto industry - Tesla workers complained about low wages, high workloads, mandatory overtime, and workplace injuries. Faced with demands for union recognition, Tesla's opposition also followed broader historical patterns. Placing Tesla within the context of labor relations in the auto industry – rather than viewing it as a separate, technology-based start-up – this paper argues that Tesla was the factory of the past as much as the future. Ultimately, the questions that were raised by Tesla's story were familiar ones of worker rights, despite the product being made. Low wages, lack of collective bargaining, and the threat of jobs going overseas had faced millions of American workers - as well as those in many other countries - for decades. In the twenty-first century, they remain key issues.

Lee-Ann Monk, La Trobe University

Pittance for working patients: Campaigning against patient labour in Victorian mental hospitals'

Session Workers' Health and Health Workers, Saturday 23rd April , 4:00pm

In December 1946 the Melbourne Herald published an article condemning the unpaid employment of patients in Victoria's mental hospitals. In it journalist Denis Warner revealed just how reliant the cash-starved hospitals were on patient labour. Patients made beds and cooked meals, worked in the gardens and on the farms, stoked furnaces and laboured in the hospital laundries. Without them, the hospitals simply could not continue to function. Yet for all their work, patients received little or no reward.

Warner was not the first to protest against the exploitation of patient labour. Voluntary organisations dedicated to the welfare of the 'mentally afflicted' had campaigned against it for years, deploying the language of forced labour. W. G. Higgs, president of one such organisation, likened their position to that of 'convicts ... the only difference' that they did 'not go about their work with chains on their legs'. He and others called for reforms which would free working patients from their unending toil.

This paper will explore the public campaign to end the use of unpaid patient labour in the 1930s and 1940s and, by doing so, seek to illuminate the relationship between work and disability, a relationship often neglected in labour history.

Ebony Nilsson & Jayne Persian

A Bloody Migrant Who Thinks He Can Run a Union": The case of Jerzy Bielski, a Migrant Trade Unionist in 1950s Australia

Session Labour's Political History , Saturday 23rd April , 9:30 am ZOOM

The history of migrants' trade union activism in Australia typically begins with the Greek and Italian communities of the 1960s and 70s. The preceding wave of European migrants – the 170,000 'Displaced Persons' (DPs) resettled by the International Refugee Organisation – generally understood to be strongly anti-union, have received less attention. Trade unions did not initially support the DP scheme, concerned about a postwar economic downturn, with Australian Communists among its most vocal critics. But as the DPs settled into their two-year labour contracts, the Australian Workers Union (AWU) saw a recruitment opportunity in this new workforce and sought a migrant organiser, hiring Jerzy Bielski, a young Polish DP.

For the better part of a decade, Bielski worked to 'solve the problem the union had with immigrants', recruiting migrant workers at industrial sites across New South Wales. He met with some success among migrants, but his AWU colleagues were perturbed by his continual advocacy for migrant workers' needs. This paper will examine Bielski's work with the AWU – his relationships with both migrant workers and his 'white' Australian colleagues – and the migrant union he formed subsequently, the 'New Citizens Council'. A pan-European migrant organisation, the Council was part-union, part-settlement advisory service and roundly condemned by the Labor movement as 'union splitting' and 'racist'. Bielski's career offers a unique glimpse of the relationship between migrant workers and trade union leaders during the 1950s and a longer history of union activism by migrants than is often considered.

Bobbie Oliver, University of Western Australia

'Kill a worker. Go to jail'. Will WA's new work safety laws make worksites safer?

Session Workers in a Changing Workplace , Sunday 24th April, 11:00am

On 13 October 2020 a 23-year-old apprentice, Jonnie Hartshorn, was killed when a roof he was working on collapsed on a building site at Curtin University, Perth. Two other workers were seriously injured. The tragedy again highlighted the disastrous record of fatalities in construction. Hartshorn was one of 28 workers who died on construction sites in Australia in 2020. His death occurred while the Opposition majority in the WA Legislative Council was delaying the passage of new Work Health and Safety (WHS) laws aimed at providing greater protection for workers. The employer lobby had strongly opposed the Bill, claiming that existing laws mandated adequate work safety requirements. The Bill was passed a few days later after a massive public demonstration outside of Parliament House. The Work Health and Safety Act 2020 brings WA into line with legislation in all other states except Victoria. Apart from providing greater protection for WA workers, it covers subcontractors and casual workers, increases penalties, and criminalises industrial manslaughter (including the introduction of up to 20 years imprisonment for an individual). The legislation also prohibits insurance cover for WHS penalties. It takes effect later this year. This paper explores the question: 'Will the Act make WA's worksites safer?

Dmytro Ostapenko, La Trobe University

The Australian Council of Trade Unions against French nuclear testing in the Pacific

Session Peak Body Organising, Sunday 24th April , 1:30 pm

On July 2, 1966 French Polynesia's Mururoa atoll was shattered by a nuclear explosion that became first of France 193 nuclear tests in the South Pacific over the next three decades. Public concern over the fallout and other radioactive contaminants spreading across the Pacific prompted Australian unionists to protest. This paper traces the historical trajectory of the campaigns waged by the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU). As the problem of French nuclear testing was international in scope, so was the response of the ACTU. In this respect the action of the ACTU had three major dimensions. First, as the Australian peak labour body, the ACTU took the lead in consolidation opposition to the testing amongst Pacific labour organisations and initiated in the early 1980s the establishment of the Pacific Trade Union Forum – a broad coalition of regional unions. Second, the ACTU used its affiliation to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions to urge the ICFTU as the leading pro-Western labour international to mount a global labour resistance against the actions of the French government. Third, the ACTU aligned with international social movements campaigning together for a nuclear free Pacific. In locating the internationalist history of the ACTU the paper explore its involvement in the Pacific anti-nuclear struggle as a national peak body and a prominent regional player.

Peter Prince

Were they really aliens? South Australia and the Northern Territory Mining Act 1903'

Session Political Ideology and Action, Saturday 23rd April , 9:15 am

In my work on legal belonging in Australia, I am repeatedly drawn back to the statement by Marxist historian E.P. Thompson that 'for many of England's governing elite the rules of law were a nuisance, to be manipulated and bent in what ways they could'. When it came to the fundamental question of who 'belonged' in Australia under imposed British law, the Anglo-Celtic elite found their own legal rules to be a nuisance, threatening their overarching commitment to an equal society only for those already regarded as equal.

The parliamentary debate on South Australia's Northern Territory Mining Act 1903 provides a good example. The Act prohibited 'Asiatic aliens' from working on any new goldfield in the Territory. Lawmakers in the South Australian parliament believed this applied to all non-Europeans. But under a foundational principle of English common law unchanged since Calvin's Case (1608), nationality and alien status had nothing to do with the colour of a person's skin.

Chinese labourers working on the goldfields were recruited from the British colony of Singapore in the mid-1890s and were legally British subjects not 'aliens'. The unlawful application of the South Australian legislation was consistent with John Quick and Robert Garran's 1901 constitutional commentary which wrongly said a federal lawmaking power over 'aliens' would allow the Commonwealth to exclude Chinese settlers, even those with subject status, from working in mines.

The Northern Territory Mining Act was part of a larger story about the failure to follow the rule of law in relation to 'belonging' in Australia, a failure with continuing resonances today - not least in the draconian use of the federal 'aliens power' against those regarded as 'the Other', 'not belonging' or not 'one of us'.

Emma Robertson, La Trobe University

Transporting Traditions of Gendered Labour: Women Bus Conductors in Interwar Melbourne

Session Women's Labour, Saturday 23rd April , 9:15am

In 1924, a group of women workers took to the streets of Melbourne, Australia, wielding a petition to save their employers, two private motorbus companies, from closure. The women garnered media coverage in the local and national press for their conspicuous protest in the urban streetscape. As women bus conductors, in uniform, they were also noted for breaking down male monopolies of transport work. Yet the story of these women is not well remembered in Australia. Instead, the accepted narrative is of women breaking into public transport work only 'for the duration' in wartime, and later, more permanently, as a result of second-wave feminist agitation from the 1970s. This paper will argue that the history of women bus conductresses in interwar Melbourne disrupts the chronology of gendered occupational 'traditions' in the transport industry. These 'traditions', far from being transmitted seamlessly across generations, have been constructed, contested and maintained at particular historical moments beyond the temporary upheaval of wartime work. However, finding evidence of women workers in non-traditional transport work outside the wars continues to pose methodological challenges.

John Sebesta

Australian Fourth Internationalist Archives - Annotated Indexes of Mitchell Library Holdings for Nick Origlass and John Royston Wishart

Session Theory and History , Saturday 23rd April , 2 pm

Trotsky, his collaborators, supporters and successors fought against the degeneration of the Russian Revolution. They struggled to advance and extend the Bolsheviks' revolutionary program. Though not widely known, Trotsky's Australian supporters actively participated in that work. The Origlass and Wishart archival holdings contain substantial material documenting their efforts.

These collections constitute a catalogue of the Australian labour movement covering, for example, the Industrial Groups; the ALP/DLP split; the CPA's evolution from Stalinism to social democracy. Internationally, they intervened into contemporary debates, carried out political defence work and they collected medical supplies for Chinese and East German co-thinkers.

Since the 2019 Conference I have completed annotating the Origlass Index (MLMSS 7093*) and the Wishart-Revolutionary Workers Party Index (MLMSS 1037*). I plan to annotate Origlass' MLMSS 6614* (Mitchell Library) and his industrial files (Noel Butlin Collection).

Origlass ended as a Leichhardt Councillor; Wishart a lawyer for right-wing BLF leaders. Nevertheless, this material is valuable. There is a need to critically study their organisations' origins, evolutions and fates.

Marx noted that ignorance never did anyone any good. Many historical studies have, sometimes wilfully, overlooked or misunderstood Trotskyism. For a new generation of researchers, these systematically annotated indexes provide one means to correct that.

Joe Stanley, University of Cambridge

Ignored, Unrecorded and Invisible'? The Experience of Labour for Women and Children in Yorkshire Collieries 1786-1839

Session Women's Labour, Saturday 23rd April , 9:15am ZOOM

Much has been written about women's work in the eighteenth century but little is known about the experience of labour for women in Yorkshire collieries. Drawing on a range of unexplored sources, such as local newspapers, journals and court records, this paper will fill the void by offering an analysis of the employment of women and their children in the Yorkshire coalfield. This paper will argue that across the 1780s to the 1830s there was a transformation in the family as an economic unit. Women shifted roles from supplementing the household wage to playing an active role in assisting the male breadwinner. In 1780s, women reeled worsted, or linen, to enhance familial incomes. But by the 1830s this work was no longer profitable due to international competition, so women and their dependants moved to the local collieries in increasing numbers to earn a living. This evidence will be used to contest the interpretation of Flynn and Stoker, the 'official' historians of the British coal industry, who argued there was a decline in the number of women and children working in Yorkshire collieries in the early nineteenth century.

Christos Stefanopoulos

The hunger strike as an alternative form and "last resort" of workers' protest in post-war Greece, 1950-1967

Session Culture and Worker Protest, Saturday 23rd April , 4:00pm (ZOOM)

Many fainting spells "appeared after the fourth day of the railway hunger strike inside one of the company's factories. Railway workers "with high morale"" requested the payment of accrued, better terms of health care, even the removal of the manager for his behavior towards employees. After mass fainting from the first 544 workers who participated, the company and the state accepted most of their demands.

Indeed, the hunger strike as a form of workers' protest, had strong social references and feelings of support in the authoritarian environment of Greece at the time under consideration. At the beginning of the period, it was a means of pressure and struggle of the workers suffering from tuberculosis and demanding better living conditions in the sanatoriums, food, benefits for them and their families. The period begins with the end of the civil war (1946-1949) and extends to the imposition of the military dictatorship. Since the authoritarian framework many times did not favor mass labor action, the hunger strike turned into a form of protest. The purpose of the paper, then, is to highlight and analyze hunger strikes as a form of workers' protest in the authoritarian political context of the period 1950-1967.

Janey Stone

The radical Jewish tradition

Session Militancy and Community , Sunday 24th April , 11:00 am

As inspiring events in labour history, the 1936 mass demonstration against fascists in Cable Street in London's east end and the 1943 Warsaw ghetto uprising were just two high points of mass struggles of working-class Jews between the 1870s and World War 2. Prior to World War 1, Russian Jewish socialists organised self defence against pogroms and in New York hundreds of thousands of Jewish workers were the leading force in militant strikes in the needle trades, as well as carrying out boycotts and rent strikes. In London in 1912, Jewish tailors and dockworkers supported each other's strikes. In 1930s Poland, the Jewish Labor Bund led resistance to anti-Semitism and pogroms. During World War 2, contrary to the common view, Jews did not go like lambs to the slaughter. There were uprisings in 50 ghettoes, 23 concentration camps and forced labour camps and Jews fought in over 50 partisan groups.

This presentation discusses a selection of these struggles in global Jewish labour history. They show us how Jewish workers found support from non-Jews and the broader socialist movement in their struggles, while confronting upper class Jews, the traditional community leaders and Zionists.

Harry Tan

The Chinese Indentured Labour and Anti-Chinese Movement in Colonial Australia, 1838-1851

Session Region, Community, Culture, Saturday 23rd April , 9:15 am

If following the footsteps of The First Fleet in 1788, which sent Arthur Phillip and his convicts to Botany Bay, established colonial NSW, then to China for trade, carrying the goods imported from China back to the UK, creating sea voyages between ""Colonial NSW – China - UK""; since then, UK and China became the most important two countries for the development of colonial Australia. Then it brought Chinese to Colonial Australia. "120 Chinese migrants arrived from Amoy under an indenture system to work as shepherds in New South Wales June 1848." - https://myplace.edu.au "As nearly 3000 indentured Chinese labourers were imported into the colony over the period 1847-53", "what was termed nothing less than a covert slave trade", Maxine Darnell, University of New England. Since then, anti-Chinese cheap labour movement started within Colonial of NSW in the late 1840s. Who were the Chinese involved in the early anti-Chinese movement? Why they called "Cheap Chinese Contract labour"? Who were the organisers of the Chinese contract labours to Australia? Who were the beneficiaries of cheap Chinese contract labours to Australia? Why did the anti-Chinese movement not attack these beneficiaries or organisers but focused on Chinese labours? Why did the anti-Chinese movement happen after the 1840s? What were the views from Australian academics? How have they reviewed the relationship between the anti-Chinese movement and China's position in the world? Many Australian academics have researched this period of history but only drawn on colonial Australian information, and this article is trying to examine these academic reviews, and then link the related history from China to provide a better understanding on this research and possibly to provide the answers to the above questions.

Alexis Vassiley, Edith Cowan University

Unionism and occupational health and safety in the Pilbara iron ore industry – then and now

Session Unionism and Work Safety, Saturday 23rd April , 2:00 pm

Occupational health and safety in the Pilbara iron ore industry has been intimately bound up with union strength. In the early days of the industry in the 1960s, as the unions were establishing themselves, safety standards were poor. As union strength increased in the 1970s, workers and their unions improved safety standards, for example through cyclone committees, and the institution of isolation procedures for machinery. After union defeats in the 1980s and 1990s, fast forward to today's largely de-unionised environment in the industry, and safety and health is very concerning. Predominantly fly-in-fly-out (FIFO) workers experience high levels of psychological distress and even suicide. Workers and unions have also raised other serious non-mental-health-related safety concerns frequently. Without unions to enforce safe work practices, production can, and often does, take precedence over safety. This paper will explore the impact of union campaigns for occupational health and safety in the Pilbara iron ore industry and what the loss of union strength has meant.

MV Shobhana Warrier, Kamala Nehru College, University of Delhi

Gendering the workplace: Women workers …in colonial Tamil Nadu

Session Gendering Work and Workers, Saturday 23rd April, 2:00pm (ZOOM)

During the pandemic, social security took centre-stage as an elemental part of state responsibility towards society, especially its precarious segments. Social security emerged from workers' struggles to improve their lot, enlightened responses from the elite, their concrete articulation through legislation, and their transmission across the world through, on the one hand, colonial ideology, and, on the other, the instrumentality of the ILO. This paper traces the emergence of institutional mechanisms to integrate women into the workplace in early 20th century colonial India, specifically, in the parts of the Madras Presidency that today constitute the state of Tamil Nadu, shaped by the pulls and pressures of India's national movement and its democratizing urges, a working-class movement in which women fought to carve out their own space, and colonial policy.

The historical context of women-specific colonial laws matters: the post-World War I emergence of women into public life, suffrage battles and welfare at factories. This helped to legitimise women workers' demand in colonial Tamil Nadu for maternity benefit, feeding rooms and creches for children and equality of pay with men. Unions, though male-dominated, took up women's demands, often under pressure from women's militant protests. Academics, middle-class social reformers and the national movement took up women workers' demands and put their own imprint on the movements of women workers and the working class, being forged against the centripetal forces of religious difference and caste hierarchy.

James Watson, Australian National University

How Asbestos Injury was Legalised: Class, Race, and Justice in the Dust Diseases Tribunal of New South Wales

Session Workers' Health and Health Workers , Saturday 23rd April , 4:00pm

For the last thirty-two years, asbestos compensation claims have been a common sight in Australian courts, with hundreds brought before the Dust Diseases Tribunal of New South Wales each year. But before the Tribunal's creation in 1989, such cases were rare: state and Commonwealth governments had deemed asbestos compensation inappropriate for courtrooms and better served through employer-employee negotiations or a publicly underwritten compensation scheme. Compared to the United States and the United Kingdom, where asbestos injury claims had been common in courtrooms since the 1970s, Australia's position was unique.

Through historicising the creation of the Dust Diseases Tribunal in 1989, this paper looks at how asbestos injury claims eventually entered Australian courtrooms in the 1980s. It traces how the New South Wales government, asbestos firms, and workers viewed the ideas of publicly underwritten and common law compensation for asbestos victims; how the risks and benefits of asbestos were valued in 1970s and 1980s Australia; and the role New South Wales unions played in the creation of a tribunal specifically designed for asbestos compensation. It argues that the disproportionately high burden of asbestos-related diseases on working-class, migrant, and Indigenous Australians had relegated asbestos compensation a minor issue in 1970s and 1980s political discourse, and that the public campaigns and mass strikes of New South Wales unions in the late 1980s were essential in changing attitudes towards asbestos compensation.

Katie Wood, La Trobe University

Scrutiny or neglect: two tragedies in Melbourne's female explosives workforce, 1897 and 1923

Session Gendering Work and Workers, Saturday 23rd April , 2:00pm

Historians such as Claire Williams have identified two distinct peaks in the development of protective legislation for women industrial workers in Australia, in the 1890s and the 1920s. During these two peaks, two strikingly similar fatal "accidents" occurred in Melbourne's small explosives industry. In both 1897 and 1923, three women were killed by explosions whilst making ammunition cartridges.

Before the explosions neither the unions, Labour Department bureaucrats nor the company paid much heed to the workforce, despite their connection with organised working-class communities and high-profile, dangerous work. Barbara Harrison has noted that in the UK, even small female workforces in dangerous industries received considerable public scrutiny. But she also concluded that gendered control and knowledge of machinery created a situation in which women were denied important information about the machines on which they worked.

The timing and similarity of these accidents provide a unique opportunity to examine the historical development of protective legislation for women in Victoria. They also shed light on the way that such efforts at protection interacted with gendered divisions of labour and labour practices within a hazardous industry to produce a dangerous mixture of scrutiny and neglect.