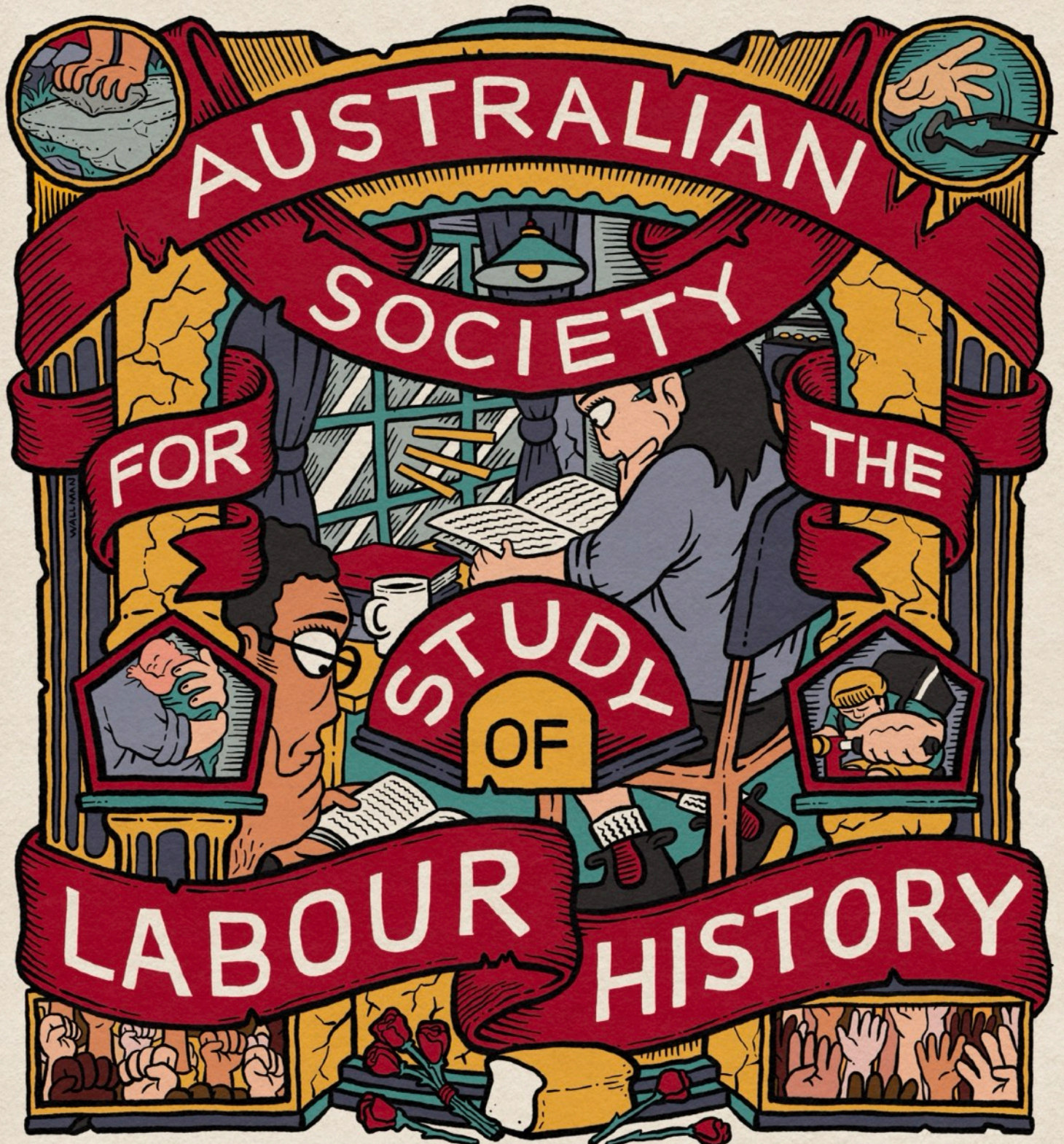


# RADICAL CURRENTS | LABOUR HISTORIES







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ISSUE NO. 1

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# RADICAL CURRENTS, LABOUR HISTORIES

On the 60th anniversary of the formation of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History we launch a new national magazine, *Radical Currents, Labour Histories*. The aim of the magazine is to bring labour and social history out of the narrow confines of academia and to share some of the rich and diverse histories being recorded across Australia and New Zealand in the journal, *Labour History*, and in the many branches of the Society.

While the ways that we write about labour and social history have changed over the past 60 years, the centrality of the lives of ordinary people remains at the heart of this research. Labour history stands as both witness to, and participant in, the struggles people have faced, in and out of work. It is a field of study that unapologetically engages with class relations, intersectionality, and the changing dynamics and power imbalances in our societies. It does so with both a theoretical and practical orientation, a deliberately active historical engagement with deep links into labour movements and activist organisations.

In this issue we highlight some of the research published in the May 2021 edition of *Labour History*, including articles on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land rights in Australia, anti-racism work in New Zealand trade unions, the work of the Victorian Coalition against Poverty and Unemployment, among others.

Each provides us with a unique glimpse into the ways that people organised for change, some around principles of solidarity, others, as in the case of the establishment of engineering as a profession, around self interest. Each in its own ways is instructive of the diverse ways people have adapted, fought, or folded and each has much to tell us about our own engagements with late capitalism.

Also included here are some of the many and varied stories being produced by the branches of the Society, and they highlight the dynamism and particularities of the states. Most importantly they tell us of the work and dedication of countless people who, like Dorothea Brooke, ensure ‘the growing good of the world’.

We are grateful to have received a small grant from the Victorian government’s Melbourne Convention Bureau, which supports in part the hosting of our 17th biennial national conference, *Fighting For Life: Class, Community and Care in Labour History* and covers the cost of printing the first issue of this magazine. We are also grateful to the Victorian Division of the NTEU for its sponsorship of the conference drinks.

Finally, we dedicate this first issue to Stuart Macintyre, who died in November 2021. Stuart was President of the Society, and one of Australia’s foremost historians. His contributions to the Society and to the wider history community were immense. It is fitting therefore that we lead with Frank Bongiorno’s tribute to Stuart at the March 2022 launch of his final book, *The Party: the Communist Party of Australia from heyday to reckoning*.

In memory of Stuart Macintyre

FRANK BONGIORNO

# LAUNCHING *THE PARTY*

Stuart Macintyre, *The Party: The Communist Party of Australia from heyday to reckoning* (Melbourne: Allen and Unwin, 2022). pp. xii-498. \$49.99 Cloth.

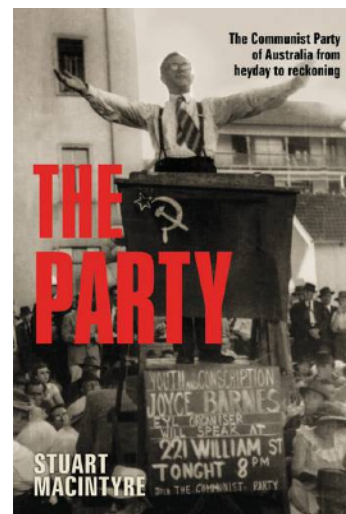
I begin by paying my respects to the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation on whose country we meet tonight.

I recall Stuart Macintyre explaining to me the purpose of the history of the Communist Party of Australia in one of the earliest conversations I had with him. It would have been early 1990, in Canberra. He wanted to explain to readers – he had in mind younger readers especially, who had little or no experience or knowledge of communism – what it had been all about. In other words, he was thinking as a teacher, as he so often did. At this stage, the Berlin Wall had been breached, but the Soviet Union limped on and so did the Communist Party of Australia. But Stuart was under no illusion. He understood that he was dealing with a phenomenon that already had a beginning, a middle and an end.

When the first volume appeared in 1998 as *The Reds: From Origins to Illegality*, we gained a stronger sense of what Stuart was doing. He had written a social history, as well as a political and industrial one. The book had a strong ethnographic, almost anthropological, aspect: Stuart wanted to convey what it meant to be a communist, what that experience was like for those who belonged to the Party or were involved in its auxiliary organisations. Why, for instance, had intelligent, idealistic men and women been willing to subject themselves to a discipline that was unknown in democratic societies anywhere outside of the Party itself, and perhaps the odd religious order? Stuart told readers that he, too, had been a young communist. But he had joined the Party in the early 1970s, at a time when its demands on members were much less pressing than they had been in earlier decades. Most of his time as a member had been while he was a student in Cambridge. When he returned to live in Australia, he joined the left of the Australian Labor Party. That was by no means an uncommon journey.

None of this should suggest that Stuart's engagement with communism was superficial or fleeting. His Party membership might only have covered a few years, but his intellectual and emotional engagement extended across most of his adult life. It was there in his earliest books on British labour history, *Little Moscows* and *A Proletarian Science* and his first on Australia, *Militant: The Life and Times of Paddy Troy*, the legendary Western Australian union leader. It was there in the middle with *The Reds*. And it was there at the end, in *The Party*.

At a recent conference at the University of Melbourne in honour and memory of Stuart convened by Joy Damousi and Sean Scalmer, one of the issues discussed was whether *The Party* was a tragedy, an idea developed by Ann Curthoys. I remain undecided on that one. In one sense, the very scope of this book dictated that *The Party* would be a tragedy. It begins during the Party's period of illegality in 1940-42, followed by the peak of its vibrancy,





popularity and influence between 1942 and 1945. It then extends through the Cold War from the late 1940s into the era of anti-communist mobilisation and repression of the 1950s, exploring the fallout of the death of Stalin in 1953, Khrushchev's secret speech and the Soviet invasion of Hungary, both in 1956, the fragmentation in the 1960s provoked by the Sino-Soviet split, and ending in 1970 with Australian communism about to divide further in the wake of the invasion of Czechoslovakia – ex-members massively outnumbering those who remained, its old warriors dying off, its dreams in ruins. How could this not be tragedy?

By the early 1970s, Australian communism had in some ways returned to where Stuart began his story in *The Reds*. In the earlier book he had shown that, in the 1920s, the Communist Party of Australia was just one among several small parties to the left of the ALP. The imprimatur of Moscow and the Third International mattered, and the hopes inspired by 1917 were alive. But Stuart's work – in both *The Reds* and *The Party* – showed that it was not really until the 1930s and 1940s that the Communist Party emerged as the only serious alternative to the Labor Party for members of the working class and others working for a socialist Australia.



Stuart Macintyre: Family photograph

It was a part of Stuart's endeavour in *The Party* to explain the nature of this relationship between Labor and Communist parties. The communists clearly posed no electoral challenge of any great significance. As is well known, the Party only ever had one official communist candidate elected to an Australian parliament, Fred Paterson, who won a northern Queensland seat in that state's Legislative Assembly in 1944. Communists sometimes polled strongly in port and mining constituencies during the war, but their election candidates often lost their deposits.

The strength of the Party, as Stuart shows, lay elsewhere. It lay especially in the unions, several of them large and powerful. Some union officials are attractive figures in the nation's industrial history, with Jim Healy of the Waterside Workers' Federation most obviously falling into this category and, in Stuart's view, the most impressive of them. Others, such as Ernie Thornton of the Ironworkers and E.V. Elliott of the Seamen's Union, are harder to warm to. Stuart underlines the limitations even of the authority these men exercised. Communist officials usually shared power with non-communists. The work of communist union leaders, moreover, frequently went unappreciated among the Party leadership, which harboured unrealistic notions of what could be achieved in the industrial sphere. Clashes between the Party and union leaders were frequent. The Communist Party leadership over-reached in the coal strike of 1949, imagining that the Party could use the Miners' Federation's industrial campaign to reveal the bankruptcy of the Labor Party. Instead, several communist union leaders spent time in prison under the government's anti-strike legislation.

All that was in the future during the war itself, when communist union leaders enjoyed a warm relationship with senior figures in the Labor government such as the Treasurer, Ben Chifley. It is notable that Stuart devotes well over half this book to a single decade, the 1940s, on top of his treatment of the early war years in *The Reds*. Perhaps a third of *The Party* deals with the war itself. It is worth pausing over the amount of space Stuart gives the war, especially in the context of the question of whether he is writing tragedy.

Stuart clearly – and uncontroversially, I think – regarded the war as the party's 'heyday'. He said so in the subtitle to *The Party*. My reading is that he saw the experience of the party in

wartime and immediately afterwards as exposing both the possibilities, and the limitations, of communist politics in Australia. It was a kind of political laboratory. He does not romanticise those possibilities, and he recognises the exceptional character of the wartime context, but he uses the years between 1941 and 1946 to dramatise most that was best, and worst, about the Party. By early 1945 the Communist Party had about 22,000 members, and it was well represented in the leadership of several key unions, notably the Miners, Waterside Workers, Seamen and Ironworkers. This industrial strength in vital industries that gave the communists their greatest clout, but many of the party's wartime recruits were of the progressive middle class, and included artists, writers, students and scientists. Women came to occupy positions of significance and responsibility although not the most senior ranks. The Party provided for its cadres almost a self-contained intellectual, cultural and social life and was also a vehicle for patriotism and idealism, at a time when its stocks benefited from the Red Army's heroic defence of the Soviet Union against the Germans.



Marx House (National Archives of Australia, A705 171/94/413)

From 1944 a party member in Sydney could visit splendid Marx House in George Street, or a Melbourne comrade might drop into Australia-Soviet House in Flinders Lane. In either place, they might visit the bookshop, eat at the canteen, or listen to a lecture from a party bigwig. A member might attend a performance of the New Theatre, such as at its Melbourne headquarters at 92 Flinders Street, or an exhibition of socialist art by Noel Counihan and Yosl Bergner. They would likely read a party newspaper such as the national *Tribune*, or one of the state papers such as the *Guardian*. They might be expected to spend some time selling party publications in a street or park, in a house-to-house canvass, or at a factory gate. Even with history on their side, they believed in the power and importance of the word, whether printed or spoken. Those especially serious about their Marxism-Leninism in the party's theoretical monthly, *Communist Review*, or they might attend the Marx Schools set up in Sydney and Melbourne, or classes held in party offices in the other cities. The Party's Eureka Youth League had some 5,000 members at its peak.

Here, Stuart was sensitive to the possibilities of Australian communism, indeed the wider potential for radical political change in this country. Still, he was also all too aware of Australian communism's frailties and evasions, and the price paid for them. The Party's period of wartime illegality had been remarkable for the government's light touch in most parts of Australia, but the ban had nevertheless stimulated the taste of some in the party for a culture of secrecy and a conspiratorial outlook. That perspective was further reinforced via penetration by security and informers, as Phillip Deery has shown vividly in his new book, *Spies and Sparrows*. The Party's democratic centralism bred authoritarianism and its rigid discipline demanded more of members than most could give; or Stuart clearly felt, they should have been asked to give. The Party's uncritical attitude to the Soviet Union and devotion to Stalin set it up for the disorientation and disillusionment that would follow Khrushchev's secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress.

There are some vivid sketches – covering appearance, mannerism and personality – of key communist figures – J.B. Miles, Lance Sharkey, Jack and Audrey Blake and Ted Hill. While they lacked neither fervour nor determination, it is impossible from Stuart's account to see the men leading the Party mid-century as master tacticians and leaders of a revolutionary

vanguard ever likely to liberate the working class and forge a socialist society. Indeed, Stuart makes it clear throughout that the Communist Party was an inadequate instrument for the radical transformation of Australian society. Even by the standards of the times, its mid-century leadership often seemed narrow and limited, shaped by so many of the prejudices and limitations of the men of their generation also found in other walks of life and beyond the working class – such as a sexist outlook. There is incongruence between the high hopes invested by many communists in the Party and the outlook of these leading men.

Stuart offers them all the respect that is their due from any serious historian. He also offers a gentle admiration, affection and warmth to those many Party members he regarded as selfless and decent, even while refusing to overlook their flaws and errors. Stuart resists any separation of communism as a cause from the men and women who professed it. We do an injustice to them, and we fail to understand the ways they changed this country, unless we consider people and cause together.

Stuart did not slide over the theoretical debates that occurred within the Party, and he brings what might otherwise be rather arcane theoretical argument to life through the play of personality, power and ideas. He was also sensitive to the array of political interests, causes and commitments that emerged out of Australian communism, especially as it entered a new post-1968 pro-New Left phase under the leadership of figures such as Laurie Aarons and Bernie Taft: Aboriginal rights, anti-Vietnam War, the peace movement, Women's Liberation and environmentalism, to name only some of them. Stuart hints at these developments – for instance, he explores the party's long-standing commitment to Aboriginal rights – but his story in *The Party* is really of a communism embedded in Australia's industrial, pastoral and agricultural economy of the middle decades of the century, a society riven by class and still marked by significant social and economic deprivation. That world was growing harder to discern by the 1960s and early 1970s, even as new patterns of conflict emerged, along with a growing awareness of previously neglected forms and sites of oppression, suffering and want.



Frank Bongiorno at the launch.  
Photo by Carmel Shute.

I thank the Search Foundation and the Melbourne Labour History Society for organising this evening's launch, and for their support of the project. I also thank Elizabeth Weiss and Allen and Unwin: they have turned out a beautiful book. I again offer my condolences to all of Stuart's family, friends and colleagues but especially here, Martha, Mary and Jessie. Families live with big projects such as this for years even as they have their own busy lives to live, Martha Macintyre's as a distinguished anthropologist. Finally, I pay tribute to Stuart Macintyre's achievement in *The Party*. He completed the book with great fortitude and courage. *The Party* is also an awe-inspiring exercise in intellectual discipline by a great historian, achieving a remarkable balance of shrewd judgment, and moral and political vision. His passing was a premature conclusion to a rich, abundant life as a historian, intellectual and activist who, with Henry Lawson, also modestly nurtured 'the hope of something better'. I have much pleasure in declaring *The Party: The Communist Party of Australia from heyday to reckoning*, launched.

Frank Bongiorno is Professor of History at the Australian National University. *The Party* was launched at Victorian Trades Hall, Solidarity Hall, 16 March 2022.



# Labor, the External Affairs Power and Aboriginal Rights

In 1900 the Australian Constitution gave the Commonwealth Parliament not a ‘treaty power’ but a vague power over ‘external affairs’. Its precise meaning remained elusive for most of the twentieth century. But from the 1930s, Labor politicians, beginning with H. V. Evatt, Attorney-General and Minister for External Affairs in the Curtin and Chifley governments in the 1940s, saw the potential of the ‘external affairs’ power. They envisaged extending Commonwealth power by legislating international agreements concluded by federal governments throughout Australia. In the 1950s and 1960s, non-Labor governments rejected the idea of using the ‘external affairs’ power to legislate in areas which were the responsibility of the states, but the Federal Labor Party continued in the Evatt tradition. After coming to office in 1972, the Whitlam Labor government used the external affairs power to pass the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*, the first significant human rights legislation in the country. This in turn had a profound effect on the law of the land in the country by making the second Mabo case granting Indigenous people their land rights possible.

In 1967 the Australian people voted overwhelmingly for the Commonwealth to have a ‘racess power’, i.e. ‘power to legislate for the people of any race for whom it is deemed necessary to make special laws’. The Gorton and McMahon governments considered advice that they should pass legislation forbidding discrimination against Indigenous people. Their legal advisers, however, advised that the new ‘racess power’ for particular races would not be sufficient to underpin legislation to forbid discrimination between all races. The Holt Liberal-Country Party government had signed the International Convention on the Elimination for Racial Discrimination (CERD) on 13 October 1966. But the Commonwealth was unable, between 1966 and 1972, to ratify the convention because of disagreement with the states, some of which continued to discriminate against Indigenous populations.

The Whitlam Labor government, elected in 1972, took a much more urgent approach than had coalition governments to signing and ratifying human rights treaties and passing legislation to improve the lives of Aboriginal people. Whitlam set up the first independent Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs and increased federal appropriations in such areas as health, education and housing. He also took active steps to ratify the CERD by encouraging the state of Queensland to remove its discriminatory legislation. Frustrated with Queensland’s lack of action, Whitlam and his Attorney-General, Lionel Murphy, decided in 1973 to use the external affairs power as the basis for its Racial Discrimination Bill knowing with certainty that states would challenge the legislation in the High Court. On Murphy’s reasoning, the Commonwealth would be able to legislate important obligations incurred by Australia under international conventions by national legislation applicable throughout all of Australia subject only to any relevant constitutional prohibition. This reasoning aligned with Evatt’s views of the Constitution, but it was by rejected by many lawyers and politicians.

On 31 October 1975 the *Racial Discrimination Act* passed both houses of Parliament. It purported to bind the states and was also drafted to override any state legislation that may have been inconsistent with the aims of the CERD. With it, Australia's first substantial human rights legislation came into effect. Several years later, in 1982, the legislation was tested in the High Court. The case concerned the attempt of an Aboriginal man, John Koowarta, to purchase a grazing property in Queensland on behalf of a group whom he represented. The Queensland Minister for Lands refused to permit the sale of the land because state policy was against permitting Aboriginal groups from purchasing large areas of freehold or leasehold land. Koowarta argued that the Bjelke-Petersen government's actions were discriminatory, while the state argued that the *Racial Discrimination Act* was unconstitutional. The High Court, now with Murphy sitting on the bench, was split over Koowarta's challenge to the Bjelke-Petersen government, but eventually decided in Koowarta's favour. It ruled that the races power did not justify the legislation but that the Act could be upheld by the 'external affairs' power insofar as the legislation was giving effect to an international convention, signed and ratified by the Commonwealth Parliament. The High Court thus confirmed that the Commonwealth Parliament could enact national human rights laws binding on the states.



John Koowarta. Image: Law Council of Australia

When the Hawke Labor government came to power in 1983, the Australian Labor Party's Platform included a commitment to securing national land rights for Aboriginal people throughout Australia. The ALP's ambition was to build on land rights established in the Northern Territory in 1976. The project to establish uniform land rights legislation was, however, frustrated by opposition from the Western Australian Labor government.

Nevertheless, Indigenous Australians did obtain a different kind of land rights in the early 1990s through the High Court's Mabo judgement. This did not involve the grant of interests under Commonwealth or state legislation but rather recognition under the common law of the pre-existing rights and interests of Indigenous people in relation to land and waters.

Labor's prior use of the external affairs power to pass the *Racial Discrimination Act* was essential to Indigenous Australians winning recognition of native title rights to land and water. Indeed, but for the *Racial Discrimination Act*, the native title revolution would not have taken place. When Eddie Mabo in the early 1980s sought to prove native title rights for Murray Islanders in the Torres Strait, the Queensland government moved retrospectively to quash any native title rights that might exist by passing the *Queensland Coast Islands Declaratory Act*. Mabo's lawyers were able to argue successfully that the *Coast Island Act* was invalid because it was inconsistent with the *Racial Discrimination Act*. In 1988 a majority of the High Court agreed and Eddie Mabo's lawyers were thus enabled to proceed to argue the large case for native title. On 3 June 1992 the court rejected the legal doctrine that Australia was *terra nullius* (land belonging to no one) at the time of European settlement. It also held that the common law recognised a form of native title where Indigenous people had maintained their connection with the land and where the title had not been extinguished by acts of imperial, colonial, state, territory or Commonwealth governments.

David Lee is Associate Professor in History at the University of New South Wales. This piece is drawn from David's article in *Labour History*, No. 1, 2021.

# Engineers and Social Engineering: Professional/Trade Unions and Social Mobility

In the twentieth century, engineering work in Australia was complicated by its nineteenth century roots. The term 'engineering' was used to describe some working-class occupations, but also other very senior, even managerial, jobs. The slippage was not just about the word. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, engineering professionalised, instating a long hierarchy. There were very elite, often capitalist, men at the top – the profession boasted such leaders as South Australian Premier Sir Henry Ayers and US President Herbert Hoover. There was a marked continuity with engineers further down the hierarchy, however. It was only later that the profession sought a hard distinction between 'trade' and 'professional' engineers.

This long 'ladder' was reflected in hands-on work (as opposed to managerial, design or planning work), the workshops in which most engineers trained, and sometimes even the societies to which they belonged. In this sense, engineering was initially more egalitarian than most professions. This enabled what engineering leaders called 'practical men' to move into fields of engineering with higher pay and status. Early in the twentieth century some fields of engineering used this long ladder to good effect. Mining engineers, for example, structured lower levels of training into their professional associations, which helped draw innovation from practice into planning.

Similarly, for decades the Institution of Engineers, Australia tolerated several flexible pathways into the profession. Trade engineers, such as motor mechanics, were able to articulate their practical education into professional work. Certain leaders, including George Julius, denigrated the profession's 'workshop culture', particularly in education, but the long ladder persisted into the post-war period.

In the 1950s, a professional union was established. In a work value case held between 1957–1960, with a verdict delivered in 1961, the Institution of Engineers used their associated union to push for a closer link with the 'learned professions'. In the *Professional Engineers' Case* the Australian Professional Engineers Association argued for the social and economic value of educated engineering work in order to secure the high margin above the basic wage. The margin they sought suggested that engineering should have a similar status – and thus pay rate – to law and medicine. The union brought in expert witnesses with qualifications in both engineering and medicine, who maintained that the engineering work they performed was more difficult than either of those better-paid professions, largely due to the mathematics involved.

The purpose of this line of argument was threefold. Firstly, unless engineers were granted the pay of those elite professionals, the union warned, law and medicine would pilfer all the



good talent. Secondly, positioning engineers at a lower status failed to acknowledge the considerable value that the engineering profession long maintained it added to society, believing, as they did, that engineers had literally built civilisation. Thirdly, evidence that engineering studies were harder than law or medicine suggested that it was intrinsically unfair that engineers earned less.

These arguments presented the union with some difficulties, since they also wanted technical college graduates holding Diplomas to be recognised as professionals. Lawyers for employers found comparisons of engineering to medicine relatively acceptable, but found comparisons to their own profession galling. In their responses, they pointed to the working-class end of the profession, those with technical college Diplomas completed as part of an apprenticeship. These engineers, unlike medical and legal practitioners, had not even matriculated from high school. More than a few university-educated engineers shared their sentiment. In the end, the union successfully argued that Diplomates were just one step below university-graduated engineers and, after one year of service, they should be considered (and paid) the same.

To prevent a repercussive effect of wage inflation across the professions, the Association asked the Arbitration Court to 'sever out the engineer for individual treatment, setting aside the historical yardstick approach which, in the Association's view, had resulted in the just salary movement being withheld because of repercussive effects.' This is to say, the professional engineers were prepared – indeed enthusiastic – to leave other workers behind in the pursuit of legal confirmation of their elevated status, which was soon recognised by increased salaries.

By contrast, the *Professional Engineers' Case* worked against the interests of working-class engineers. This was because the professional engineers believed that their status and thus remuneration depended on their association with law and medicine and their disassociation from working-class 'trade' engineers. Trade engineers, such as motor mechanics, were now denied access to the increasing status of the engineering profession.

Motor mechanics especially found that their careers were now limited. They could go on to run their own repair shop, or even become technical advisors, but their knowledge and skills were no longer acknowledged as transferrable into related fields like aeronautical engineering. An increasing specialisation in engineering work augmented the new barriers that mechanics faced, though their initial construction was by professional engineers seeking to exclude them.

In the process of unionising then, professional engineers in Australia were articulating a relationship that put them in conflict with both the employer class and the working class. The *Professional Engineers' Case* opened the way to improvements for journalists, social workers and university academics. This was not part of the plan, although it is perhaps significant that these were all middle-class employees. Unionisation for professionals did not necessarily engender solidarity with the working class on the basis of class conflict collectively focused upwards. Moreover, middle-class professionals were not only middle-class because they believed themselves to be so. Rather, middle-class consciousness was a relationship of conflict with employers, but also against the working class.

Dr Hannah Forsyth is a Senior Lecturer in History at the Australian Catholic University. Michael P.R. Pearson completed his PhD in History at ACU and now works as a researcher for Infrastructure Victoria. This piece is drawn their article in *Labour History*, No. 1, 2021.

# ‘Our Side of the Story’: Tales of the Labor Government, 2007–13

Australian politicians have produced dozens of political memoirs over the past three decades. The absolute peak of that literary flood occurred between 2014 and 2018 with the publication of memoirs from senior members of the Rudd–Gillard Labor Government.

Why do these books exist? Beyond personal score-settling, what are the forces that prompt the authors and their collaborators to wield the pen? I examined the production of eight books: Bob Carr’s *Diary* (2014); Greg Combet’s *The Fights of My Life* (2014); Wayne Swan’s *The Good Fight* (2014); Julia Gillard’s *My Story* (2014); Peter Garrett’s *Big Blue Sky* (2015); Craig Emerson’s *The Boy From Baradine* (2018); and Kevin Rudd’s two-volume political autobiography, *Not For the Faint-hearted* (2017) and *The PM Years* (2018). I studied these volumes in their political and media context and conducted research interviews with a number of the authors and publishers.

Collectively, these books were a reaction against the hostile and embittered environment in which the Australian Labor Party (ALP) governed during 2007–2013. The ministers seized the opportunities afforded by a publishing industry that welcomed their stories and illuminated the challenges that they faced in the political landscape of the early twenty-first century. Immediately following the Global Financial Crisis and the political controversies that came with it, the ALP was branded by its opponents as the purveyor of ‘a great big new tax on everything’ in the form of a price on carbon. The government’s difficulties with asylum seeker policy were criticised as ‘the greatest policy failure in a generation.’ The government’s own leadership ‘drama’ helped to alienate the public. Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation papers baldly told voters to ‘KICK THIS MOB OUT’ at the 2013 election. Against that backdrop, a cohort of very young and well-educated ALP ministers found themselves out of office and ready to confront their negative reputations in print.

Defeat gave the politicians and the publishers the freedom to produce memoirs. Combet explained that ‘when you’re in politics, [autobiography is] generally taken as a declaration of intent that you want the top job’, hence the tendency to wait until defeat. Many publishers considered the political memoir ‘likely to pay its own way’. Conservative prime minister John Howard set a record-breaking precedent with his autobiography *Lazarus Rising* (2010). Having left office, former Cabinet ministers knew that media providers were keen to publish their stories.

In the wake of 2013, a key motivation was to reframe the mainstream media’s coverage of Labor’s years in power. Rudd described Murdoch as ‘a far-right ideologue who has written and re-written Australian, British and American politics’. He accused both the Murdoch press and the ABC of turning the asylum seeker issue into ‘a mainstream political problem’ for the Coalition to exploit. Garrett described the Canberra Press Gallery journalists as ‘hacks’. Swan pointed to the Utegate Affair of 2009, in which the Coalition accused him and

Rudd of corruption, as evidence of a concerted campaign against the government. 'What I was seeking to do as part of a government whose motives and policies were continuously misrepresented in most of the popular press,' he explained to me, 'was to give my record and account of what happened and why.' Gillard highlighted the masculine world of the media, pointing out that political news is 'overwhelmingly brought to you by men'. For her, the political memoir was an opportunity to challenge the gender bias of the mainstream media.

Following Labor's defeat, a coterie of commentators and journalists consistently described the Howard years as 'good years for Australia', a 'golden age', and its leader a 'by-word for stability'. Labor ministers recognised that a public onset of Howard nostalgia would further imperil their own public standing. In response, they used their memoirs to reframe the popular narratives about the Howard Government. Combet argued in his memoir that Australians should 'never forget what the Howard Liberal Government did' in the Waterfront Dispute 1998, and celebrated Labor's *Fair Work Act 2009* for saving Australia from Howard's *WorkChoices* laws. Rudd challenged Howard's integrity on foreign policy matters, especially the Iraq War 2003: 'It's high time he was challenged'. Combet explained that Labor ministers 'want to prosecute our case, and put our side of the story. John Howard's good at putting his, we want to put ours forward too'.



In their efforts to change public opinion, Labor's storytellers used their 'insider' status to perform as educators, teachers and informers. In *My Story*, Gillard set out to defend her government's administrative record by explaining the details of the Cabinet process. The Abbott Opposition labelled hers as a 'bad government' of 'broken promises', and accused her of lying to the public about carbon pricing. Rebutting these accusations, Gillard sought to clear her name by explaining the economic differences between a cap-and-trade scheme and a carbon tax: 'a carbon tax is not a market-based mechanism. The government, not the market, fixes the amount paid

per tonne'. Further, she explained that her carbon price was the product of a Multi-Party Committee on Climate Change, and that Cabinet committees are 'the preserve of governments'. The educative impulse in *My Story* was intended to deepen the public's understanding of the Cabinet system, and to restore the author's personal credibility on questions of carbon pricing.

Bob Carr used his foreign minister diaries to help explain how foreign policymaking works, but also hoped to secure a personal legacy. He explained: 'I...thought there's a legitimate



interest in the idea that people should know how government works. You've got an educative role.' This went hand in hand with leaving a legacy for people to read about: 'I wanted to give an account of my initiatives [...] so they wouldn't be lost.'

Craig Emerson wanted to use his book to 'pull back the curtains' and show that 'behind all these titles and positions and images are just ordinary people.' He revealed a lot about his own challenging upbringing, 'to say to young people, "look at that! This guy came from that background"... that was the whole point of the empowerment or the encouragement of kids from disadvantaged areas'. Emerson used these emotive revelations to craft an image of the archetypal Labor politician, ascending from ordinary or underprivileged circumstances to represent the interests of the disadvantaged.

The ministers also hoped to show that the leadership distractions of 2010–13 were not *their* fault. Many blamed Rudd for his own initial demise. Swan and Garrett both described his 'micromanagement'; Gillard and Combet wrote about slow or avoided decision-making; almost all of them were critical of Rudd's 'shambolic' Cabinet processes. Further, most of them blamed Rudd for destabilising the government after 2010. At a writer's event in Melbourne, Garrett said that 'for me, the real killer is [Rudd's] stalking of Julia Gillard ... he was prepared effectively to undermine the government which he'd once led'.

Rudd, of course, rejected these narratives and advanced an alternate story. By his account, Gillard 'worked actively and secretly with the faceless men during the first six months of 2010 to achieve her ambitions'. Gillard's own prime ministership was a 'roiling chaos' for which he was unfairly held responsible. In all cases, Rudd, Gillard or the 'faceless men' were responsible for this aspect of the ALP's collapse in government.

In writing up their stories, these politicians tried to protect existing friendships. Combet said of Gillard: 'I would not want to be at odds with her over the recollection of a particular event'. Gillard told me that both Swan and Combet shared their manuscripts, and that she 'was asked for [her] general views'. Swan confirmed that he had 'some brief engagement' with Combet, and 'certainly would have discussed some of the stuff' with Gillard. Though some authors were more open about their collaborative processes than others, it is overwhelmingly clear that these particular authors wrote their books in a manner that was intended not only to protect ALP interests, but also to protect personal friendship networks as well; networks from which Rudd was conspicuously absent.

The turbulent politics of the Rudd–Gillard years culminated in a literary explosion. These politicians felt unfairly maligned by the media and misrepresented by their political opponents. They worried that they would occupy an unhappy place in Australian political history unless they took action to write that history themselves. In doing so, these politicians performed a series of counter-framing manoeuvres, portraying the media as misleading, inadequate and biased, and emphasising the negative policy legacies of the preceding administration. Further, they used their status as political insiders in order to inform their readers about Cabinet government, and in doing so to redefine political issues such as the carbon tax, and indeed to reframe themselves as ordinary people called upon by the electorate to do extraordinary things. Of course, Labor's leadership dramas also helped propel these books into existence, and the friendships between these authors helped to condition the stories they told.

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# Campaigning for a fairer distribution of wealth, income and power: The story of the Victorian Coalition against Poverty and Unemployment (CAPU), 1980-1991

Australia has had high levels of unemployment since the mid-1970s. The Victorian Coalition against Poverty and Unemployment (CAPU) was an activist group established in the last years of Malcolm Fraser's Coalition government. CAPU was a non-sectarian body which attempted to resist the neo-liberal consensus, and engage in research, education, publicity and a range of public activities to effect political change. Based on an alliance of trade unions, churches, community groups and the unemployed, CAPU was influenced by conventional Marxist critiques of the welfare state and was highly critical of both the professional social welfare sector and the Australian Labor Party. It also worked cooperatively on specific campaigns with key community welfare groups such as the Victorian Council of Social Service and the Brotherhood of St Laurence. CAPU was not an anti-welfare organisation, but rather acted as the radical arm of the welfare lobby seeking to shame governments into operationalising in practice their declared social justice principles.

Key CAPU objectives included a right to a job, a living wage, and properly funded welfare, education and health services. CAPU did not seek formal recognition by, or access to, government. Rather, its political strategy was to build an alliance of welfare groups, trade unions and the poor and unemployed that would organise community pressure particularly at the local level to persuade governments to introduce social and economic reforms.

At the end of its first year of operations, CAPU was able to list over 30 member organisations. About half were trade unions, whilst others included ethnic community groups, social welfare services, student groups, unemployed and pensioner groups, a radical Left organisation, and the Social Justice Division of the Uniting Church. Other leading contacts for CAPU in its early years were the Commonwealth Labor Party MP Andrew Theophanous (Socialist Left faction), community welfare activist Andrew Burbidge, and the community development academics Sue Kenny and Harry Van Moorst who remained involved throughout the history of CAPU. Later key activists included Gail Price, and future Greens Member of the Victorian Legislative Council, Colleen Hartland.

CAPU regarded the development of local action groups as a key campaign strategy. They argued that 'it is here where people can be involved on a street to street basis, working right in the area where they live, or can establish discussion groups at their workplace'. Later, a women's group was formed to highlight the widespread and often hidden nature of female

poverty and unemployment. Additionally a schools group was formed to unite students, teachers and parents in opposing poverty and unemployment. The schools group were responsible for publishing a book of children's drawings and writings on poverty and unemployment.

CAPU's key political priority was urging government action to relieve poverty and unemployment. Their agenda went well beyond merely 'asking for greater handouts...and the necessity of giving immediate assistance to those in need'. Rather, CAPU campaigned for a fairer share of wealth that would provide jobs for all, and lift the large number of disadvantaged Australians above the poverty line. More specifically, CAPU pursued four key policy aims: to lift taxation on the wealthy to fund an increase in unemployment payments; to create socially useful employment; to fund public housing and emergency accommodation; and to restore full employment at a living wage.

CAPU pursued two major strategies for redistributing income. One was their advocacy for a fairer and more progressive taxation system advancing the interests of low-income earners and the unemployed via their annual People's Budget campaigns and reports. The People's Budgets were based on consultations with multiple community groups and significant numbers of individuals living in poverty. A second policy strategy involved advocacy for all income support payments to be increased to 120 per cent above the poverty line. In particular, CAPU organised a Children and Poverty campaign which linked with the broader campaign by community welfare groups for government action on child poverty. The campaign 'aimed at raising awareness about the fact that 800,000 children are forced to live in poverty. We believe this is intolerable in a country with the wealth possessed by Australia. A redistribution of that wealth to ensure that no-one need live below the poverty line, and to give all young people a decent start in life, is a major long-term aim of the campaign'.



Commons Social Change Library: 'People gather for a demonstration organised by the Campaign Against Poverty and Unemployment prior to the occupation of the Melbourne Club on November 12 1982. Courtesy of Jeff and Jill Sparrow.'

CAPU undertook a number of activities to promote its objectives including designing posters, leafletting Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) offices, placing articles and advertisements in newspapers, organising talks to schools, hosting weekly radio programs on community radio stations 3CR and 3RRR, writing to local government councillors, and hosting a program on the City Square screen. It also held a number of public forums and demonstrations, the most notable of which was the public rally organised in November 1982. The stated aim of the rally was to 'stop the city' and the lead slogan was 'make the rich pay'.

The rally gained major support in both Melbourne and country areas, attracted almost 7,000 people and was Australia's 'largest rally against poverty and unemployment ... since the 1930s depression'. A small number of demonstrators went beyond the planned route, and launched an invasion of the establishment Melbourne Club, throwing bricks and bottles and engaging in other minor incidents of violence. Four demonstrators were arrested and charged with unlawful entry, criminal damage and riot but were later found not guilty. Comparing the struggles of the

unemployed in the 1930s and 1980s, and identifying potential lessons from the 1930s for current political responses, the following year CAPU organised a series of seminars.

In its early years, CAPU seems to have maintained a cooperative relationship with sections of the Labor Party as reflected in the Victorian ALP's endorsement of the November 1982 public rally. CAPU initially welcomed the election of the federal ALP Government in March 1983, expecting that their promised reforms were likely to give the unemployed and poor 'a better deal'. However, CAPU quickly became disenchanted with the Labor Government's commitment to small government, and its refusal to substantially increase expenditure on social programs and payments. CAPU were equally critical of the Liberal-National Party opposition, suggesting in 1984 that they would only promote greater exploitation of unemployed young people. According to CAPU, both major parties 'have again sold out the unemployed and the poor'. Subsequently, CAPU offered two alternative options. One was implicit support for proposals to establish a new progressive political movement to the left of Labor. The second option was the 'don't vote' campaign which CAPU pursued in the July 1987 federal election.

CAPU adopted a mixed approach to relations with mainstream welfare provider and advocacy groups such as the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the Victorian Council of Social Service. Some of their statements were highly critical of the ideology of the welfare state and associated professional welfare workers and groups. For example, the 1984 People's Budget report argued in favour of justice and rights, and dismissed welfare as processes of 'charity, patronisation and degradation' that served to 'de-politicise the issues of unemployment and inequality'. In practice, CAPU often worked in cooperative partnership with the welfare bodies. Their collaboration included joint work on the People's Budget campaign, the Children's Poverty campaign, action to defend youth wages, and advocacy to improve the efficacy of job creation schemes. Additionally, CAPU actively engaged with service user groups representing the unemployed and old age pensioners such as the Unemployed Workers' Union, Work for Today, and the Combined Pensioners Association.

CAPU ceased to exist in 1992. Local unemployed groups had fallen away, and funding cuts and tiredness gradually wore out its declining number of committed activists who were unable to maintain the formal infrastructure necessary for ongoing activities. CAPU's universalistic approach to mobilising low income groups ceased to attract support from the highly diverse group of individuals who were divided by age and gender, geography, identity, and ethnic or cultural background and language. The increasing domination of neoliberal ideas within both major political parties and the wider community limited CAPU's influence and indeed that of all left-wing alternatives to free market capitalism.

This organisation arguably represented the only serious local attempt in the period to form what could be called a 'coherent political movement' focused on politicising community concerns about poverty and disadvantage associated with high unemployment and increased inequality. For little more than a decade, CAPU had a core group of activists, provided an opportunity for the voice of low income earners to be heard in policy debates, and was able to provide an ongoing structure for protest activity around poverty and unemployment. Today there are few organised forums available for income support recipients, human service workers, union activists and others who wish to publicise the injustices of the welfare system, and canvass more radical alternatives than those proposed by mainstream welfare advocacy groups.

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# **‘The New Zealand Northern Drivers’ Union: Trade Union Anti-Racism Work, 1960-1980’**

In 1946, 22-year-old seafarer Bill Andersen returned from war a committed communist with a hatred for racism. Andersen’s anti-racism arose from witnessing the treatment of colonised Arab dockworkers in ports like Aden. In Auckland, Andersen was nurtured by strong friendships with older maritime trade union communist leaders who set an example of united front communism – building democratic, industrially militant cultures inside the New Zealand Seamen’s Union and the Waterside Workers’ Union.

However, militant trade unionism became increasingly difficult in the Cold War. Communists were removed from trade union office and Waterside Workers’ Unions were disestablished altogether after a massive dispute in 1951. Andersen was blacklisted from seafaring, freezing work and then waterfront work. He and 200 other ex-waterside workers became truck, bus, ambulance, taxi, or construction vehicle drivers. They joined the Northern Drivers’ Union, representing workers in Northland, Auckland, Waikato and Bay of Plenty regions. With their support, Andersen was elected a union organiser in 1954 and secretary in 1956. True to his communist philosophy, he set about democratising the Union and spreading anti-racism. ‘An injury to one is an injury to all’ was extended to injuries caused by the injustices of racism and Māori land alienation.

The number of Drivers’ Union delegates grew across the 1950s and Māori drivers were active amongst them. As Māori moved from rural tribal homelands to cities in post-war New Zealand, they not only remade urban workplaces, they remade trade unions as well. They clustered together on particular worksites where collective ways of ‘being Māori...informed the practices and values’ of the workplace. For example, a tribal elder would become the delegate and help younger Māori drivers ‘organise their social lives as well as their working lives.’ In this way, Māori increasingly became involved in union affairs.

Māori drivers made their predominantly Pākehā union officials aware of incidents of racial discrimination in the workforce and officials organised to gain their reinstatement. Drivers also supported the Citizens All Black Tour Association ‘No Māoris, No Tour’ campaign, signing the petition opposing racial discrimination in the selection of an All Blacks rugby team to tour South Africa in 1960. That year press reports of peaceful demonstrators in Sharpeville being shot by South African police sparked anti-apartheid protests around the world. In the Drivers’ Union newspaper *Wheels*, Andersen reported: ‘shootings, beatings and mass punishments of coloured South African workers have motivated a strong protest from this union.’ He went on to say: ‘The Northern Drivers’ Union is firmly opposed to the colour bar’ and he connected this to local issues. ‘We recognise that New Zealand is not completely

free of guilt.' The Union urged the Government to oppose apartheid. The FoL called on the government to cancel the 1960 tour, and the Seamen's Union stopped work for 24 hours to protest the massacre. Despite unusually large demonstrations for the time, the tour went ahead.

At the 1960 Drivers' Delegate Convention in Auckland, delegates unanimously agreed to the Union executive's proposed 'stand against racial discrimination wherever it may raise its ugly head.' Andersen reported: 'racial discrimination has the effect of dividing the working people and ... we should be united, irrespective of colour, religion or political beliefs.' Northern Drivers' Union members recognised that a colour bar existed 'to some extent in New Zealand and it must be vigorously stamped out, root and branch.' This policy made the Northern Drivers an explicitly anti-racist union.

The Northern Drivers also supported the work of Citizens' Association for Racial Equality (CARE), formed in 1964 to focus on race relations in South Africa and racism experienced by Māori and Pacific Island migrants to Auckland city. In the face of widespread opposition, the planned 1967 All Blacks tour of South Africa was cancelled. However, the South African Prime Minister John Vorster adapted the rules so Māori and Pacific Island players could be included in the All Blacks touring team as 'honorary whites' in 1970. In response, CARE hosted Dennis Brutus, president of the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee, who argued the tour would demonstrate New Zealand's approval of apartheid laws.

Northern Drivers executive member Wally Foster, a Māori South Auckland Council driver, found Brutus a persuasive speaker, and said they should oppose the tour. The Union's policy had always condemned racial discrimination and prejudice 'for the reason that Pakehas, Maoris, Islanders and others work side by side, engage at times in conflict with employers side by side, and go home at night to live in their communities side by side.' Foster emphasised their common experiences. Every worker faced similar problems of 'housing, making the wage packet spin out, feeding the family and sending children to school' which would not be solved if they allowed arguments over race or religion to cause divisions between them.

However, there was also support for the 1970 tour amongst the drivers. Some argued against dragging politics into sport; or said the All Blacks mixed-race team could set South Africans a good example; and others pointed out Māori sometimes played separately from Pākehā internationally, also a form of discrimination. Others asked 'why should we care?' as rugby league supporters. The Northern Drivers executive did not gain support for their policy of opposition and the 1970 Tour went ahead with one Samoan and two Māori players selected for the All Blacks team as 'honorary whites'.

Two years later the Northern Drivers executive took further action when they sponsored the visit of John Gaetsewe, Representative of the South African Congress of Trade Unions. He spoke at union stopwork meetings about how the apartheid system impacted South African workers designated 'black' or 'coloured'. As the 1973 proposed Springbok tour was discussed, again members remained divided in their views. This time, the Labour government cancelled the Tour.

The Northern Drivers' Union had more success when they invited Ngā Tamatoa leader Hana Jackson to address an Auckland stopwork meeting. Māori protest group Ngā Tamatoa had emerged in inner-city Auckland in 1970, influenced by local racism and transnational Black Power movements. She explained to union members Ngā Tamatoa efforts to save the Māori language and publicise the broken promises of the Treaty of Waitangi. After a lively debate,

the meeting resolved to donate funds to assist Ngā Tamatoa with their work. Articles about Ngā Tamatoa campaigns were published in the Northern Drivers' newspaper and support was generated from drivers for the Māori land march, protesting Māori land alienation in 1975.

In 1976, the new National government, led by Robert Muldoon, announced that 24 hectares at Bastion Point, on the Auckland waterfront would be subdivided, sold off, and 'redeveloped as a pricey retirement village'. This land was part of a block declared inalienable by Ngāti Whātua chief Apihai Te Kawau in 1840, but the Crown and consecutive governments had acquired it piecemeal by dubious practices anyway, until by 1950 only the village was left for tangata whenua to live. 'Things came to a head in 1951 when, on the pretext of protecting their health, the Crown evicted the remaining families and relocated them to homes on nearby streets'. Ngāti Whātua homes and meeting house were burned to the ground.

Eruini (Eddie) Hawke was a Ngāti Whātua wharfie who had stood loyal to the Waterside Workers' Union during the 1951 dispute; that year he lost his job, his union, and his marae. His son Joe was the spokesperson of the Ōrākei Māori Committee Action Group who decided to occupy Bastion Point in early January 1977. The Hawkes knew Andersen, by then president of the Auckland Trades Council, from wharf work and his assistance in forming a Ngāti Whātua rugby league team. Before the occupation, an Ōrākei Māori Action Committee delegation went to the Auckland Trades Council and won a motion of support for a Green Ban on Bastion Point. The Council committed to a policy that no subdivision or redevelopment work would be carried out at the Point by trade union members. Truck driver Syd Keepa, remembered 'Muldoon wanted to build rich people's houses on there' which was why he and others 'who were a bit iffy on Māori rights' got involved. The Auckland Trades Council sold it to the membership as a class issue, about poor people against rich people, not a land rights issue and consequently had success in getting the Green Ban imposed.

This changed during the occupation. Conversations inside trade unions became focused on Māori land rights and the history of colonisation. For example, Andersen explained to members: 'The Pakehas who have stolen (legally on some occasions) Māori land were not drivers, storemen, labourers or carpenters. It was ...the rich Pakehas or their agents. Many of our Union members and other Union members are amongst those who have been or are being robbed.' He described 'The great Māori Land March and the Bastion Point struggle' as being 'the first real roll back in this long and infamous period of injustice against the Māori peoples.'

The Bastion Point occupation lasted seventeen months. On 25 May 1978, 'seven hundred police and army personnel invaded Bastion Point. The military cordoned the land by human ring of police officers. They removed two hundred and twenty-two people and charged them with wilful trespass.' But the Green Ban stayed in place and a successful treaty claim would see Bastion Point restored to Ngāti Whātua in 1991.

Northern Drivers' Union race relations policy reflected shifting attitudes to the Māori land rights movement. In 1977 members agreed to 'opposition to all forms of racial discrimination at home and abroad.' By 1978, policy was expanded to: '(a) equality of all races and harmonious relations between all workers for mutual progress (b) Greater involvement of Polynesian members in various positions in the Union (c) Full support for justice for the Maori people for land rights (d) Opposition to all forms of apartheid in any area.'

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# Thomas Carlyle and the Australasian Labour Movement

Born in the lowlands of Scotland to a working-class family, Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881) renounced the Calvinist faith of his parents, subsequently coming under the influence of the German Idealists and the Saint-Simonians, a group of early French socialists. In his principal works, Carlyle preached forth the immanence of the divine in man, the infinite significance of duty, and the nobility of work, while condemning the injustices of *laissez-faire* and calling for an ‘Organisation of Labour’ that would guarantee work, subsistence, and dignity to the working classes.

Even the most cursory perusal of the Australasian labour press reveals that Carlyle was held in extremely high regard. For example, during the early 1890s, William Arthur Holman, the leading orator of the Australian Socialist League and subsequently a prominent Labor politician, referred to Carlyle as ‘the great master,’ praising him for having ‘written three of the finest books that had ever been penned by man.’ In 1900, the economics class of the Victorian Socialist League undertook a ‘close study of Carlyle’s *Past and Present*,’ while in 1903, one Queensland newspaper noted that ‘the spirit which animates and inspires the Labor Party’ was that of ‘Carlyle and Ruskin.’ During the 1920s, Peter Fraser, a native Scot and future Labour Prime Minister of New Zealand, variously referred to Carlyle as ‘one of the greatest philosophers, and even prophets, that ever lived,’ ‘a great writer who was also a great Scotsman,’ and ‘one of the greatest thinkers, philosophers, and writers who ever lived.’



Thomas Carlyle by Sir John Everett Millais. 1877. Portrait Picture Library. National Portrait Gallery.

As recent scholarship has emphasised, the Australasian labour movement contained a strong strain of ethical socialism, and Carlyle occupied a prominent position within this discourse. This was particularly clear in the case of Thomas Tunnecliffe, the founder of the *Tocsin* newspaper and the chief theorist of the Victorian Labour Federation. In a pamphlet



entitled *Socialism: Its Aims and Objects* (1891), Tunnecliffe appealed to his readers in highly idealistic terms, invoking Carlyle's *Past and Present* (1843) as an authority. He wrote:

We appeal to all who are discontented, to you who love high ideals, to you who believe in eternal truth and justice, to assist by every possible means the coming of the new order.... Let us not lose heart or waver at any obstacle, but in the words of Thomas Carlyle, let us declare, 'That we for our share do purpose, in a full view of the enormous difficulty, to endeavour while life is in us, and to die endeavouring, till our object is attained, or we have all died and ended.'

In 1914, the *NZ Truth* called for unity in the Labour movement, writing: 'Let the assembled delegates... lay to heart the exhortation of grand old Tom Carlyle: "God knows the task will be hard, but no noble task was ever easy. This task may wear away your lives, and the lives of your sons, and your grandsons; but for what purpose were lives given us?"'

Carlyle's most important contribution to the Australasian labour movement, however, were his writings regarding the dignity and nobility of work. Particularly popular was the following section of *Sartor Resartus* (1833-4), in which Carlyle had written:

Two men I honour, and no third. First, the toilworn craftsman who with earth-made implement laboriously conquers the Earth, and makes her man's... A second man I honour, and still more highly; Him who is seen toiling for the spiritually indispensable; not daily bread, but the bread of Life... These two, in all their degrees, I honour: all else is chaff and dust, which let the wind blow whither it listeth.

This passage was reprinted in the *Westralian Worker*, the official organ of the Western Australian labour movement, in 1904, as well as in the *Collie Miner* in 1911 and the *Maoriland Worker* in 1919.

Carlyle's writings also supplied ideas and language through which to protest against the injustices of *laissez-faire*. In *Past and Present*, Carlyle had condemned the absurdity of crises of over-production and the mass unemployment that attended them. He exclaimed satirically:

But what will reflective readers say of a Governing Class, such as ours, addressing its Workers with an indictment of 'Overproduction!' ... 'Ye miscellaneous, ignoble manufacturing individuals, ye have produced too much! ... Millions of shirts, and empty pairs of breeches, hang there in judgment against you. We accuse you of over-producing: you are criminally guilty of producing shirts, breeches, hats, shoes and commodities, in a frightful overabundance. And now there is a glut, and your operatives cannot be fed!'

In 1920, the *Maoriland Worker* reproduced this passage at length, adding: 'Capitalism and its hacks have absolutely no reply to the conclusions of *Past and Present* on this point.'

Australasian labour activists also drew sustenance from the chapter of *Chartism* (1839) in which Carlyle had declared: 'A man willing to work, and unable to find work, is perhaps the saddest sight that Fortune's inequality exhibits under this sun.' During the 1920s, these words were used repeatedly by the Scottish-born Labour MP for Wellington Central, Peter Fraser, in moving a succession of Unemployed Workers Bills. According to Fraser, although 'many things have improved since Carlyle's day,' the 'disgrace' of forced unemployment remained.

Carlyle's dissatisfaction with *laissez-faire* led him to declare epigrammatically in *Past and Present*: 'This that they call "Organising of Labour" is, if well understood, the Problem of the whole Future, for all who will in future pretend to govern men.' In 1913, Jack McCullough, a radical socialist and one of the leading trade unionists in New Zealand, told his audience:

I believe firmly with Thomas Carlyle that 'This that they call the organising of Labour is, if well understood, the problem of the whole future for all who will in future pretend to govern men.' To secure this, is the work that lies immediately before us... Let each of us declare, and swear if necessary, that the most essential thing to be done in New Zealand during this year 1913 is to secure unity of action. If we do this individually and unitedly, then only will we have done our duty; and hastened the prophecy of that old seer, Thomas Carlyle.


In 1914, the *Australian Worker* referred to the recent experience of a majority Labor government, declaring: 'Had someone told Carlyle that the Organization of Labor would CAPTURE THE GOVERNMENT OF A WHOLE CONTINENT, and rule a territory as vast as the conquests of Alexander, the stern old sage would probably have overwhelmed him with sardonic laughter.'

Over a period of several decades, then, thinkers and activists of all persuasions found in Carlyle a valuable source of ideas, language, rhetoric, and cultural authority, particularly with regard to the ethical and moral basis of the labour cause, the nobility and dignity of labour, the injustices of *laissez-faire*, and the need for an organisation of labour. In this sense, Carlyle was just as crucial an influence upon the Australasian labour movement as he was upon the British I.L.P.

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# **‘But Separate How Can we Live?’: David Martin’s *The Shepherd and the Hunter***

The play *The Shepherd and the Hunter* written by David Martin in 1946 addresses complex issues around Zionism, anti-imperialism and racism. The play is an excellent example of the links between left-wing theatre movements in London and in Australia, as it was first produced by the Unity Theatre in London in 1946 and then by the New Theatre in Sydney in 1947. David Martin had an international life that brought him face-to-face with fascism, imperialism, anti-colonial movements and transnational communist politics in a variety of situations. He was born into a Jewish family in Hungary, and grew up and was educated in Germany. He joined the Communist League of Youth when he was 17 and handed out leaflets under the noses of the Brownshirts. He left Germany in 1934, living variously in Holland, back in Hungary and in Palestine. He volunteered in the Spanish Civil War, then spent time in both London and India before arriving in Australia in 1949. *The Shepherd and the Hunter* reflected Martin’s time in Palestine and his somewhat fraught relationship with Zionism and left-wing political movements there.

The play is a politically complicated and somewhat confused work, one that Martin described as ‘a call for Jewish-Arab friendship,’ though this is not always obvious from the text. The main characters are: Jakov Koenig, a member of the right-wing Jewish terrorist group the Irgun; Jakov’s wife Malke, a recent arrival and Holocaust survivor; Shura Kutzman, the de facto leader of the right wing Zionist terrorist cell; and his father Berl Kutzman, an orange grower. Jakov is blackmailed by the British to become an informant on his cousin-in-law, Shura Kutzman, and the rest of the group. The play reflected a number of themes of contemporary concern for the Jewish left and a wider audience about how to grapple with the political consequences of the Holocaust and the choices available to Jews in the pre-state Jewish settlement in Palestine.

Jakov is portrayed as a broken man who used to have dreams of a bettered humanity but now says ‘we have been betrayed too often...hope has become a delusion more deadly than hopelessness.’ In a similar vein Shura, the hard man leader, is said by another character to be trying to be ‘as cruel as history.’ Martin’s depiction of Shura paints a romantic portrait of a hard and determined resistance leader whilst also condemning his extreme right wing Zionist political ideology. This is clearest in the scene where Shura interrupts a moment between Malke and Leila, a local Arab Palestinian woman. Shura tries to prevent their friendship and yells at Leila, calling her ‘vermin.’ Shura says, ‘our hearts have been open too long. For hundreds of years they were open for sorrow and persecution. It is time to close our hearts and answer bullet with bullet, blood with blood, terror with terror.’

In the play Martin is suggesting that it is not only the extremist right wing that is in the wrong but that Zionism as a whole has led to conflict and dispossession in Palestine. We know from Martin’s other texts, written contemporaneously, that the dialogue given to the foreman character in his critique of separate Arab and Jewish plantations, for instance, accorded with Martin’s own politics. This line of criticism is also voiced by Malke, Jakov’s

newly arrived wife, who is sceptical of Shura's over-the-top masculinist posturing. She also questions Berl's recitation of the zero-sum separatist Zionist dogma of 'Hebrew Labour': 'Every Arab keeps a Jew out. Every Jew saves another Jew.' She asks, '[b]ut separate, how can we live? Such a small country and each by himself?'

The political priorities of the play broadly reflect the international Jewish left and the international Communist movement's then current views on the Palestine situation, which were heavily determined by the foreign policy imperatives of the Soviet Union. While being disdainful of Zionism, they were supportive of the Jewish settlement in Palestine and their battle for independence from the British. The struggle was framed within internationalist anti-imperialist terms. In *The Shepherd and the Hunter* this is most obvious in the opening scene where the British soldiers compare the Arabs to the Indians and the Jews to the Irish. However this anti-imperialist message is somewhat lost in the closing scenes where the British commander appears as a wise figure of dramatic reconciliation.

It seems that some of the play's more subtle politics was lost in its two productions. This was also to do with faults in the script, particularly its ending in the somewhat overwrought death of the anti-hero-cum-hero Shura. *The Shepherd and the Hunter's* internal confusions were the cause of much angst, both in London and Sydney. In London there were troubles about the politics of the play, even though it ended up making a healthy income for the Unity Theatre. David Martin notes that the producer, Ted Willis, who was himself a prominent left-wing playwright, wanted to re-write whole scenes. Martin could only prevent this by threatening to leaflet the audience on the first night with handbills proclaiming that the play they were about to see was not his. Martin was successful, but he still had issues with the British Communist Party (CPGB), which was worried that the play could be seen as too Zionist, without a clear positive message.

Prior to the Soviet Union's announcement of support for the establishment of a Jewish state in May 1947, the CPGB's line on Palestine was inconsistent and heavily contested by Jewish and non-Jewish members. East End party branch meetings, as well as the *Daily Worker*, criticised the play for being pro-Zionist, and Irgun supporters visited the theatre during the play's run. *The Times* however described it, somewhat cautiously, as a play which, while 'set against the tragic background of Palestine,' was 'no more political than Sean O'Casey's plays.' Martin wrote, in response to a British *Daily Worker* review, that 'my play is anything but Zionist,' accusing the reviewer of libelling both himself and the Unity Theatre cast. The controversy was made all the hotter when, just a couple of weeks after the play's run at Unity, Irgun terrorists blew up the British military headquarters at the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, killing 91 people. In Sydney, the play was directed by Jock Levy, who also starred as Shura. The New Theatre had its own reservations about Martin's play; the program included the note that 'the value of the work, however, would have been enhanced had the author indicated a way out of the conflict to a peaceful and constructive future.'

*The Shepherd and the Hunter* was an incredibly politically fraught play. Its ambiguities and contradictions meant its production could take very different turns. It represents a rare instance of a sophisticated (if confused) theatrical treatment of the politics around Israel/Palestine in the late 1940s; and how these issues were refracted through the international Communist movement, its cultural infrastructure, and the transnational Jewish left.

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# Erasing the Past, or a Future of Layered Memories? Tokoroa, New Zealand

Whether mining, forestry, meat works or railways, the mainstay of Post-WWII industry and employment policy was small town New Zealand. Many of these may not be ‘single industry’ in the sense of the ‘company town’ found in the United Kingdom or North America, but the major employers in these towns dominated economic activity and growth for the best part of forty years. Indeed, for many of us, these were the communities we grew up in, and where our parents worked, and where our friends and families lived. These towns are often seen as a relic of an outdated industrial past, of a working era before global value chains, knowledge work and industry 4.0.

When we look deeper, the organising of communities around work is not a relic of the past, but a pattern that follows cycles of industrial development. In Australasia, the development was seen during early mining booms, and later during post-WWII Keynesian industry-employment policy; in New Zealand we saw the development of Mill towns such as Kawerau and Tokoroa. Since the 1980s, across these countries we have seen the move from manufacturing to service and knowledge-based roles, which has led to a downsizing of traditional industries, and for many of these towns, a period of decline. However, we should not take this decline as an indication that this practice has stopped, as during this same period, we saw industry towns and cities emerge, including the development of economic zones in China, professional service clusters in India, and around new technologies, such as the concentration of technological ventures in Silicon Valley. While previous work has often focused on the historical aspect of these communities, the pattern of organising community life around work, oftentimes in conjunction with state policy, is an ongoing phenomenon.

In our research on Tokoroa, what struck us was the way in which the development of the local industry, and in fact the founding industrialist himself, shaped not only the memories of the town, but also ongoing understandings of what it means to live and work in the town. We could see that these influences – the early Indigenous land use, the development of industry, and the ‘founding father’ were overlaid with more recent events of the downsizing of the industry and decline in population. It was as though, rather than each more recent event erasing the past, the inscription of the past seemed to underlay and influence current events. The first layer of inscriptions, for example, included the importance of the location to local Indigenous settlements, who did not live on the land, but for whom the land was the central hunting and meeting ground between hapu (sub-tribe). Other elements of the early inscription included a small farming community which subsequently dwindled after the volcanic land was found lacking in cobalt essential for animal health. Reshaping the landscape, by planting the Central North Island Forests as part of employment policies during the Great Depression, cemented the area as a centre for the future forestry industry.

The development of this area into a pulp and paper mill town was again driven by Government employment policy, this time targeting return servicemen following WWII. Seeing the potential, an industrialist originally from Scotland, David Henry, purchased a large tract of land and promptly

applied for New Zealand's first pulp and paper license. Henry went about planning the Mill and designing a true company town that aligned with the approach taken in industrial Britain. Thus, the town was built on company land and financed initially with company and private philanthropic funds. This makes Tokoroa one of the only true examples of a 'company town' in New Zealand, whose development had very little funding from the New Zealand government.

Henry's approach to developing the town and company reflected his upbringing and personal values. For example, Henry named the Mill after a pulp paper plant near Edinburgh where he worked as a young man, and his approach to welfare reflected his strong Presbyterian background. Moreover, his strong commitment to internationalisation shaped his fundraising efforts to establish the Mill. Although Henry passed away in 1963, just 9 years after the opening of the mill, we found that these aspects of Henry have an enduring influence to the present day. One participant, who arrived in the town after Henry's death, commented:

Sir David Henry, the founder of New Zealand Forest Products, a Scotsman... [he] had the foresight to see he could turn those trees into paper and wood, and so he went around the world raising money and founded New Zealand Forest Products, and then that, he chose the site, and then continued onto to build the mill... and then, at the same time built the town as well.

The philanthropic ethos extended beyond Henry, with another commenting 'the company here had the same attitude to its staff, it didn't matter who they were...Philanthropic to the extent that my biggest asset is my men, and women in the staff, I'll look after them, to hell with everybody else'. The story of Kinleith and Tokoroa does not end with David Henry, however. The past 30 years has seen the company sold to international interests, the downsizing of the mill and its workforce, and a subsequent decline in the town's population; a common story for single industry towns throughout the world. Interestingly, although this period of change and decline has persisted over a much longer period than the initial development of the town, the narrative of David Henry and by extension New Zealand Forest Products, remains strong amongst residents, including those only recently settled in the area. It seems that the enduring presence of the industrial 'father' has served to retain an illusion of industrial family, community and stability. This helps us to understand that history is not erased by more recent events, but rather the layering of past and present contributes to how we understand the world around us.

Our research reminds us that communities of work, such as single industry towns, are an example of a locality where the organisational realm merges with the fabric of individual and community life. Moreover, these towns have experienced significant change through the process of increased globalisation and changes to work. These towns serve not only as an important part of our social fabric, and for many of us, our personal identity (albeit a distant memory for some), but also serve as a reminder that businesses do not operate in isolation, they are part of a wider industrial, political and societal context. These examples should lead us to consider the longer-term impacts of our business decisions on those communities we are located within, prompting us to move beyond the traditional short-term metrics guiding our decision-making. We need to move to consider how our business actions are shaping communities, landscapes, whanau history. Moreover, by placing the experience of those whose lives we are shaping front and centre in our decisions, we are drawn to reflect on how the impacts of global changes to organisation and work are not only unevenly experienced but are significant and permanent.

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# ASIO and the Labour History Society: An Incident in 1964

Here we reproduce Terry's Dinner Address given at the Eighth Australian Labour History Conference, Brisbane, 4 October 2003. It was subsequently reprinted in the Sydney Branch publication, *The Hummer*.

People sometimes ask me whether I think labour history has a future. When I was very young – this is surprisingly relevant – we had a family friend called Gus. He wore a green star as a badge in his lapel. Because most of the badges in my family were red, this was intriguing. Gus, my mother told me, was an Esperantist. To my childish mind this was a satisfactory explanation for wearing a green badge, since I then understood that Gus grew asparagus. Not that we grew asparagus; we were far too busy letter-boxing, but I had an aunt in the far west of New South Wales who hand-watered exotic vegetables, including asparagus, with a broken cup and a bucket. Later I discovered that Esperanto was an international second language, developed in the late nineteenth century.

For the past fifteen years, walking to University from Redfern station, I have often recalled this childish confusion as I pass the Esperanto Domo, the headquarters on Lawson Street of the dwindling band of Sydney Esperantists. It is their habit to pin up on the paling fence of their domo a handmade poster about the attractions of Esperanto, and the most recent one never fails to divert my thoughts into a pleasing melancholia as I trudge along, thinking of labour history. On an A4 sheet, the bubble-jet colours already fading, are the words: 'Facts About Esperanto. Every month one or two CDs of Esperanto music are produced in the world.' So you see, I really have no doubts about the future of labour history. If the Esperantists can survive, so can we.

What I want to talk about tonight is a principal reason for our survival, and at the same time a threat to our existence: I mean, labour history's unavoidable political situation. Most of you will know my preoccupation with this theme. Not many, however, will know of the political struggles over historical ideas that accompanied the birth of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History (ASSLH), or the attention that the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) paid to the Society, and how a disruptive incident in 1964 was resolved when the protagonists, seemingly on opposite sides in the Cold War, agreed to a liberal intellectual practice for the Society.

Like all successful organisations we have our foundational myth, and ours runs true to type by glossing over the contentious elements in our beginnings. In our myth the founding fathers are academics, they are left-wing, but moving away from the control and dogmatics of the Communist party, they are influenced to form the ASSLH by the British example, and they reach out to non-academic labour historians to involve them in the Society. There is a brief moment of contention, but it is caused by one member who has personal differences with others on the Executive.

As I came into the Society at this time I know that there are truthful elements in this myth. I remember attending the public meeting in 1961, a few months after the formation of the Society, where Eric Fry and Bob Gollan addressed a meeting of academics and trade unionists during White Collar Festival Week in Sydney. As a post-graduate student, from a Communist family, I had both professional and political motives for getting involved in the Sydney branch. But the professional was paramount: I published my first academic article in *Labour History* two years later. Therefore, when a brief article appeared in 1964 in *The Bulletin* about a purported Communist take-over of the ASSLH I was predisposed to dismiss it as a Cold War beat-up.

I thought nothing more about this article until recently, when I began to research the development of historical awareness in the labour movement. I soon discovered that the Society's foundational myth was skewed strongly in the direction of the academic contribution, and that it was far too benign. I also recalled that I had witnessed an exchange between Miriam Dixson and Alan Martin that was part of the conflictual and heated climate in which the Society was born. It occurred at the ANZAAS Conference in Sydney in 1962. Alan Martin gave a paper on what he called 'the whig view of Australian history', by which he meant labour history. He likened labour history to a body of British historical writing in which events are placed in a story of ever-widening political freedom, under the wise leadership of the great 'whig' statesmen. In the Australian version, labour historians unfolded the history of our social and political democracy in a similar way, as a story of progress led by the labour movement. In his paper, Martin gave labour historians a severe trouncing for their romanticism, bias, and parochialism. The lecture room, which contained many labour historians, was tense. There were several comments, but it was the courage of Miriam Dixon's intervention that I remember. In an agitated voice she responded to the confrontational character of the event by insisting on the validity of our field of study. In a room dominated by the middle-aged male professoriate here was a young, articulate woman defending labour history. Clearly, there was something like a war going on, and it had gender as well as political fronts.

In fact, only a few months earlier Peter Coleman had published a book in which he set out the war-aims of a new generation of conservative intellectuals. One of those aims was to conduct what Coleman described as 'the counter-revolution in Australian historiography.' Under attack was the tradition of committed radical history, exemplified by Gordon Childe, Bert Evatt, and Brian Fitzpatrick, a tradition then receiving reinforcement, as Coleman pointed out, from within the universities in the work of Russel Ward and Robin Gollan. Coleman's manifesto was the culmination of a trend that had been gathering force for almost a decade, since Manning Clark had mocked the romanticism of radical historians in 1955. Then Hartley Grattan, in the second issue of *Quadrant*, the Congress for Cultural Freedom journal secretly funded by the CIA, deplored the dominance of economic determinism in Australian history, singling out the work of Fitzpatrick as the root of this evil. By a remarkable co-incidence, in the same year the unfortunate Fitzpatrick's work was set up for demolition at a conference of historians at the ANU. In the next two years books by J.D. Pringle, Colin Clark, and R. M. Crawford, continued this attack on a supposed dominance of the radical tradition in Australian historiography.

All this is well known to any student of Australian historiography, and no doubt many of us today would agree that there were defects in the work of the first generation of labour historians that laid them open to some of this criticism. But what we often forget is the usually unspoken political function of intellectual argument, and the mobilisation of political resources on both sides of this debate about labour history in the fifties and sixties.



Thus, while Bob Gollan and Eric Fry were taking the first steps to organise the labour history society, Coleman was organising contributors for the new conservative manifesto. A few months earlier, a debate in the Commonwealth parliament revealed ASIO's role in the decision by the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor of the University of New South Wales to prevent the appointment of Russel Ward to a lectureship in history. I should have realised that the resources of the security service would be deployed against the society when I read the 1964 item on the society in *The Bulletin*. How else could the writer have discussed the membership in such detail, naming as members Labor's federal leader, Arthur Calwell, and NSW Premier, Jack Renshaw, as well as B.A. Santamaria? Using information given to me by David McKnight I have been able to confirm this.

ASIO received a report on the ASSLH a few months after its first Annual General Meeting in 1962. A year later the same informant, having diligently kept a record of what happened in the Sydney branch during 1963 – politically suggestive utterances, attendance, the lot – sent a long report to ASIO. Curiously, some of its details could not have been discovered simply by attending the branch's meetings. Obscure middle names, addresses, membership of the Communist party or ALP: these are not usually announced when labour historians gather for discussion. And there was a third report, in February 1964, which delivered to ASIO a full list of subscribers to the journal, *Labour History*, and details of the executive, corresponding committee, and State memberships. So, if there was a Sydney mole, there was a Canberra one too, with access to the files kept by the society's Federal Executive.

I have often wondered about the identity of the Sydney mole, because according to his report I was there, at those Sydney branch meetings in 1963. The logical person to finger was Fred Wells, whom the whisperers on the Left already identified as an ASIO spy. Wells had been a coming man in the Seamen's Union, and a prominent Communist militant since 1945, until in 1960 he began writing well-informed articles on the party for *The Bulletin* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*. When I met him at the Sydney branch meetings he was in his mid-forties, but one could easily imagine him, in the nineteen-forties and fifties in the thick of Communist street demonstrations (he was arrested in three of them), a dark-complexioned nuggety man, proud of his strength and his intelligence. Officers of the security organisation have since confirmed to David McKnight that Wells *was* reporting to a case officer by 1963. Yet, although Wells would be a key player in the disruption of the society in 1964, I doubt that he wrote the ASIO report on the branch. It showed for one thing that he attended only three of the meetings, and it always referred to Wells in the third person. Incidentally, Wells published in *Labour History* a useful and dispassionate account of his part in a Communist street demonstration, 'The King Street Riot', and he was, according to Bede Nairn's tribute to him, an energetic secretary of the branch in 1963-64.

I believe the ASIO informant was Jack Clowes. When Bob Carr met Clowes, 'a little old man with a briefcase and a battered hat', it was at a Catholic Club in Sydney. Carr was introduced to him probably by John Ducker, and if so it was Ducker who described Clowes as 'an amiable old ASIO man'. (Just like Le Carre's honourable schoolboy, really.) Formidable, would have been a more apt description, for since the early fifties, Clowes' 'incredible card index system', and his ASIO connection, had enabled the Catholic Right to retain control of key unions and the Labor Council. By 1971, Ducker had installed Clowes, recently retired, in the library of the Labor Council. What makes me believe that Clowes wrote the report on the Sydney branch? Firstly, its language reveals it as the work of an ASIO officer, accustomed to the organisation's information needs and mental habits. Before he retired Clowes was certainly an ASIO officer. Secondly, the details about industrial and political individuals are fuller than for students and academics. As Carr pointed out, Clowes' specialism at ASIO was trade union personnel.

Thirdly, when Marilyn Dodkin interviewed Barry Unsworth he defended Clowes against Left-wing fantasists (he was thinking of David McKnight) by saying: 'Clowes was a Labor historian. He belonged to the Labor History Association.' Now, I don't remember Clowes at Sydney branch meetings; I never met him or had him pointed out to me. But I was a young post-graduate; I knew very few of the people who attended the branch meetings. Clowes could certainly have been there, an unremarkable old man, with a battered hat and a briefcase, taking notes down the back. So the fact that Unsworth remembers him as a labour historian, although there is no record of Clowes making any contribution in that role, clinches it for me.

Incidentally, Unsworth's remark meant that he also was taking an interest in the political role of the Sydney labour history branch. This was to be expected, given that the Sydney branch attracted a handful of the Communist party's leading publicists. I remember journalists Bill Wood, Len Fox, and Rupert Lockwood at early meetings, as well as Jack Blake, a dissident communist by then, and Roger Coates who had guided the CP's work among students before he became a school teacher. It also meant that when the first crisis in the Society arrived in the following year, those who created it could justify their actions by claiming they were exposing a Communist plan to take over the Society.

For five months, February to June 1964, the work of the Society was disrupted. The Executive in Canberra was dysfunctional, and production of issue 6 of *Labour History* behind schedule. In Sydney, Labor Premier Jack Renshaw had heard the rumours about a Red takeover and telephoned Bede Nairn. But was there a Communist plan that needed exposure? The idea of course was incongruous, given the recent history of the relationship between Left intellectuals and the Communist party. It was no secret that the Society had been set up by academics, some formerly, and others who were presently, in the Communist party. But why had they had gone out of their way to include non-Communists in the running of the Society? What the promoters of the 'Communist plot' scenario did not understand was the crisis among Communist intellectuals that followed the publication of Khrushchev's secret 1956 speech attacking Stalin. Denying the authenticity of the speech, the Australian party's Stalinist leadership had resisted the demand for open discussion and sharing of knowledge in the party. There followed an exodus of intellectuals from the CPA, and with it the discrediting of the intellectual role that Communists had adopted under Stalinism, that of the militant communist intellectual. In recoil from that role, the defecting intellectuals dedicated themselves to liberal intellectual values. The formation of the Labour History Society was part of the emergence of a New Left in which labour intellectuals, many of them in the expanding Universities, would have a more independent and critical relationship with the organisations of the labour movement.

Finally, what is the point of talking about this Communist plot that never was? Firstly, it is reassuring, and diverting, to recall the incompetence and the failures of intelligence that characterised anti-communism. How could anyone believe that if Eric Fry enthusiastically introduced Jim Hagan (a long-time member of the Labor Party) as a potential volunteer worker for the Canberra Executive that this was evidence of a Communist plot – even if Eric also recommended Roger Coates as a Sydney member of the Corresponding Society in the same letter? Yet this introduction of Hagan, and his subsequent election as Vice-President at the next AGM, after it altered the Constitution to allow the election of two Vice-Presidents, were the central allegations of those who were disrupting the Society. Luckily, their counter-conspiracy soon fell apart. They challenged the validity of the AGM, and of the constitutional change, but a legal opinion found that neither Jim Hagan's election nor the general meeting were invalid. They published their allegations in an issue of *The Crucible*, published by the ANU Labor Club, but subsequently the Labor Club disowned the issue and condemned its

‘character sniping and unethical journalism’. They hoped that Sam Merrifield and Bede Nairn, prominent non-Communist historians, would come out publicly against ‘the Communists’, but both very definitely told the disruptors that they were wrong.

Secondly, it is interesting to speculate about how the counter-conspiracy worked. Eric Fry, in one of his letters at the time explained the disruption as the product of the coalescence of personal differences in Canberra and political differences in Sydney. If so, it had to be more than co-incidental. The sequence of events is crucial here. Eric’s reference to ‘personal differences’ related to the Society’s Secretary/Treasurer, and co-editor of the first five issues of *Labour History*, Bruce Shields. He had carried a large share of the Society’s organising load and had been complaining about it since 1962. He thought ‘the academics’ were not taking their fair share (he was an archivist). In his grumbles, however, there was no hint of anti-Communism until 1964, and even then not till after the notorious AGM. Suddenly, in May, Shields began to call the Executive ‘Communist-dominated’ and to refer to an influx of Communists at the last Sydney branch meeting. He then travelled to Sydney to spread the rumour that the Society has been taken over by the Reds. Back in Canberra he worked with Bob Harney to produce the article in *The Crucible*. But how did he make these connections? The chief disruptor in Sydney was Fred Wells, whose budding career as an ASIO informant we have already noted, and it must have been ASIO that provided Harney and Shields with the *Crucible*’s material about the Communist party. Now that we know the extent of ASIO’s interest in the Society it is difficult not to conclude that it was the security organisation that coordinated the disruption.

Thirdly, although the disruption was set to collapse under the weight of its own incompetence, the efforts of the Society’s founders to head off the disruptors enormously strengthened the Society. Indeed, the Society has survived since this incident because, as a result of those efforts, it is now based on what the relationship between labour intellectual body and the labour movement ought to be. Eric Fry took a trip to Melbourne at the end of May for informal discussions with Merrifield and others. Almost immediately afterwards he went to Sydney, where together with the rest of the Canberra Executive he held a meeting with Bede Nairn (who was Chairman of the Sydney branch) and Fred Wells, the branch Secretary. But Shields would not attend, preferring to stay in Canberra to assist in the production of *The Crucible*. This was a big mistake. At the meeting it was agreed that the participants would dedicate themselves to preventing any form of political or ideological domination of the Society. As a result Wells found himself ‘neutralised’, to use Bob Gollan’s word, and agreed to write a piece for *The Bulletin* rejecting the allegations in *The Crucible*. And that was what I missed when I read Wells’s *Bulletin* article. To be sure, nine-tenths of it was about the alleged Communist take-over, but what I overlooked was the reference to the Sydney meeting of the Executive with Nairn and Wells, and the statement that, even before *The Crucible* was printed and distributed, the matter had been ‘discussed, acted upon and eliminated.’ So Fred Wells kept his side of the bargain.

Isolated in Canberra, Shields lasted a few more weeks before resigning at the end of June. John Merritt filled his place on the Executive, and a new stage in the history of the Society began.

Terry Irving is a radical historian, author and educator. He was one of the founders of the Free University in Sydney in the late 1960s, an activist in the movement to democratise universities in the 1970s, a prominent New Left contributor to the writing of Australian history in the 1980s, and the editor of *Labour History: A Journal of Labour and Social History* in the 1990s. References for this article can be viewed at <https://www.labourhistory.org.au/hummer/vol-4-no-1/asio/>

ROD NOBLE

# From an Island in a River: Remembering Vera Deacon

Vera Deacon was born in Mayfield, Newcastle, NSW in July 1926. She grew up during the 1930s economic depression as part of a large family who made their home on islands in the Hunter River. Her father was out of work for long periods and living on the islands provided an opportunity to survive by fishing and growing food. It was a tough life. To attend school, Vera had to row a small dinghy across the river, in fine or stormy weather, ground it on the mainland, make her way some distance to the school and return by the same means at the end of the day.



May Day 1945. CPA contingent with Vera Deacon on the float. Author supplied.

Across the river from their house were the BHP Steelworks: the source of life for tens of thousands, but also the source of exploitation and pollution. Vera's inner strength and politics sprang from these experiences and World War II, as well as from all those people from the struggle street of life that she met and joined with in struggle. Their stories and fighting spirit, combined with her own life experiences, set Vera on a clear path from which



no amount of harassment and threats from authorities could deter her. Nothing was going to be too difficult after what she had already faced.

During WWII, when she was just 18 years old, Vera became Secretary of the TAFE Students' Association in Newcastle. In 1944 she joined the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) in that city and married the then Newcastle CPA secretary, Stan Deacon. She was proud of her membership of the CPA, saying that it was there that she met some of the best people you could ever hope to meet. Her commitment to changing society for the better attracted the attention of the secret police (ASIO) and led to her being spied on over many decades.

In April 1948 at 21 years old, she was noted by ASIO as a member of the New Housewives' Association, campaigning for price control on essential foods in the post-war period of scarcity. Later that year it was reported that she was a candidate for the CPA in North Ward in the Newcastle Council election. At one point, an agent had clearly been outside her home at night, because they reported the 'crime' that 'Mrs Vera Deacon had been up late at night - typing'. Vera was later able to confirm that this 'subversive' activity was in fact typing the minutes of a Parents' and Citizens' meeting.

The family moved to Sydney at the end of 1948, and in 1949 it was reported that she addressed a CPA meeting in the Sydney Domain, and wrote an article in the CPA newspaper *Tribune* advocating free medical care. In August 1950, at 24 years old, Vera was arrested at a protest against Sydney City Council, which had refused to allow the then Democratic Rights Committee to have use of a room to hold a peace meeting in the Town Hall. The meeting was to call for the banning of the atomic bomb.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, in Sydney, Vera was very active, speaking in the Domain and writing numerous articles for the *Tribune* newspaper, including the marvellous 'The Men Who Make the Steel' (1956). She joined the Realist Writers' Group in 1954 and won a Mary Gilmore Literary Competition medal in 1957. She became National Secretary of the Realist Writers in 1960. She also became a committee member of the Australasian Book Society which had been formed in 1952.

In December 1967, Vera, at 41 years old, was declared a security risk to all Australian Commonwealth Departments and Instrumentalities. It seems ASIO was worried that she was working for the Postmaster General's Office (PMG), while being active and prominent in the CPA. It is worth noting that Vera attained this status 16 years after the failed attempt by the Liberal party to ban the CPA via a referendum; the attempt backfired and made the CPA the only Australian political party to be legalised by referendum. This fact makes ASIO's continual harassment of Vera, her husband, and her family, over many decades, an even more shameful undertaking.

Despite this, Vera did not waiver at any point in her life in her resolve to organise and advocate to dismantle the system she identified as the problem and replace it with a socialist one. Her resolve was tested many times and never failed. Secret police operations against left wing activists were bad enough, but the harassment was extended to the activist's family as well. In 1970, Vera and Stan's 18-year-old daughter applied for a job in the public service. She was secretly vetted by ASIO and the Public Service Board and was confined to a low-level job, specifically because her parents were active Communists.

When Vera's father died in 1973, the secret police produced a report detailing her close family including those living and those then deceased. They also noted the ASIO file

number of the Minister of Religion conducting the burial, the Reverend W. H Childs. Given these life experiences, it was no surprise that, on first meeting Vera in 1994, I knew at once that she was someone to learn from. It was obvious that she had a broad understanding of world affairs and a well-integrated philosophical perspective that enabled her to analyse world events quickly; she was a woman of wisdom and humanity. Vera was happy to talk about a single issue, but she was not a single-issue person; rather, she always considered how an issue fitted into a broader strategy. She was about people working together collectively to change society and the world for the better. Not just to survive, but to enjoy life.



Vera Deacon.  
Photo in possession of the author.

Vera stayed in the CPA until 1991 when it dissolved into the Search Foundation, which she then joined. Her husband Stan died in 1993, and in 1997 she returned to live in Newcastle. There she joined the Progressive Labour Party and became active in the Hunter Broad Left, from which she received an Outstanding Service Award in 2014. Left-wing politics were clearly central to her life, and she saw an historical necessity for socialism. It was no accident that she supported regional history via the Regional History Fund at the University of Newcastle that was named after her. She was also an activist for the environment, often planting trees on Kooragang Island. It all stemmed from her political perspective and her concern for the earth we live on. Popular recognition came late in her life: she was awarded an honorary degree by the University of Newcastle, was granted the Keys to the City of Newcastle, and received an Order of Australia Medal from the Commonwealth Government.

Another aspect of Vera's life was her love of music, and in particular she loved Newcastle's union choir, the Newcastle People's Chorus. She first heard the song 'Weevils in the Flour' when the Chorus sang it in Sydney in 1995. She loved it, as the song (the lyrics of which had first been written as a poem by her friend and comrade Dorothy Hewett) was about her own life on the islands in the Hunter River. One stanza summed up her background:

'In those humpies by the river, we lived on dole and stew,  
While just across the water, those greedy smokestacks grew,  
And the hunger of the many filled the bellies of the few.'

Vera became an ardent follower of the People's Chorus performances and attended many Chorus parties where those present were privileged to hear her stories and, of course, the latest political analysis. Sadly, Vera died in May 2021 at the age of 94. She was an example to us all, as a political activist, an advocate for those not so well off, and for those in need of support. All those who knew Vera Deacon considered themselves lucky to have such an inspirational person in their lives.

An electrician by trade, Rod Noble worked at the Newcastle steelworks and for 15 years as Newcastle Trades Hall Council Research Officer before becoming an academic at the University of Newcastle in 1990. He was a founding member of the Newcastle People's Chorus and is currently editor of *Australian Socialist*. Rod was a friend and comrade of Vera's for more than 25 years. This article first appeared in the Sydney branch publication, *The Hummer* vol. 15 no. 2. Full references can be found at <https://www.labourhistory.org.au/hummer/>

# Writing and Walking the History of Early Women's Suffrage in Brisbane

Earlier generations of suffragettes and suffragists failed us—or so it was assumed by many second-wave feminist historians—because the patriarchy continued despite their battles and their victories. They failed to liberate us, and they failed, too, to address issues of race. For my generation of ‘brazen hussies’ who took to the streets and stopped Australian involvement in the Vietnam war, or so it seemed to us, our tactics were a better way for women to create social change. Yet a very different story about first wave feminism can be told when we tell it from inside history, standing on the shoulders of our foremothers.

In some Australian states, living memory about the suffrage movement is strong, and the stories came through our black and white and multicultural grandmothers on how the vote was won. This is perhaps especially so in South Australia, with its important early legacies. In Queensland, where the situation was more divided and class-bound, and the white women's achievements comparatively greater—even world-shaking—the silence from the past is deafening. Few people realise that Australia was the first nation in the world where (white) women could stand and vote for parliament. Most appear to assume the campaign for the women's vote paralleled the suffragette campaigns in Britain.

Through historical research and locating our history in the actual locations, our feminist heritage sites, we can pose—and answer—questions about where to find evidence about who our Queensland women were, and what were their strategies. Where is the evidence for militant tactics and direct action? Did they hold processions of multitudes of white-frocked women flying green, lavender, and purple banners and march, led by the wives of premiers and prime ministers, as in London? Where did they hold mass demonstrations of thousands of women, on which police violence was unleashed? Where were rocks thrown, shop windows smashed, letterboxes burnt out? Which empty houses of the upper crust were fire-bombed?

What about the prison records of arrests and incarcerations and of the ensuing forced feeding of hunger strikers? Are there records of the Queensland women who, like their sisters in Britain, were released from this brutal custody when near death and then re-arrested upon their recovery? Where can we see the names of the women who padlocked themselves to parliamentary barricades or grills or even bars? How many male chauvinists were exposed by the suffragettes and how did they do it? Did these women dance in the streets to an anthem, just as today women do the anti-rapist dance that Chilean women created?

The Queensland story suffers from a lack of memoirs, biographies, tracts, records of meetings, oral interviews, newspapers, journals and all the usual historical records. Even when such resources have been preserved, they tend to relate to the more conservative arm of the first wave of the women's movement in Queensland. And when there are few records, even worse can be the historical assumptions that Queensland women were relatively

passive, lacking in passion or politics, because of high marriage rates. We could also bemoan the lack of funding that would facilitate the needed research and publishing of women's history. But wait; let us look at what evidence we *do* have.

Leading into the suffrage centenary in 2005, Carole Ferrier and I hoped that one way we could look into the past was to set up a walking tour of suffrage sites. This proved to be a success. A corner was lifted on Herstory, and the field began to open. From Trades Hall up beyond Market Square (King George Square) to Parliament House was a regular walking route for a suffragist deputation or a procession, and it turned out to be a good route for our history walking tour.

Processions were popular activities in the 19th century for all Queenslanders for many occasions. They were varied and colourful. But separate women's processions? These were unheard of when the suffrage movement kicked off. After all, the Women's Day march, globally, was not started until just before World War I. But what about separate women's sections as part of some other processions? That was very possible, and for events in the early 20th century there is ample photographic evidence of it happening.

There exists, for example, two famous 1912 general strike photographs of white-garbed women from the tailoress' union lining up in illegal procession to march on Parliament House. Every Queensland woman needs to know these photographs, which were digitised by the State Library of Queensland and are sometimes displayed in the National Museum Australia.



Women marching in a strike procession in Brisbane in 1912. John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland. Neg 59436



Clothing girls forming into line, 1912 General strike John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland. Neg 69068

And we know that this 1912 illegal procession of women walked through the police barricades, walked past the marshals, walked through thousands of armed men. We need a researcher for the painstaking work of checking the police records for permissions requested to hold public demonstrations, public meetings in Market Square or some other likely place; or to search the police records for arrests of women or of warnings issued against public nuisance or disruption.

On Black Friday 1912, the police took off their gloves and attacked the women on their return from Parliament House. Where was our photographer then? Perhaps other images exist? It was in this melee that Emma Miller, called the 'Mother of Labour', showed she was not contained by any doctrine of 'maternalism' (as southern historians are wont to describe early feminists). Seeing she was in danger



from a police pincer movement, Emma's son dashed into the crowd to 'rescue' his mother, but we know in the end it was he who left while she stayed put, hatpin in hand. Working backwards, these two rare surviving photographs of militant Queensland women in 1912 can give us some idea of their younger selves, when they won the vote in 1905 after decades of struggle.

Leading into 1900, these same women, with Emma Miller in the lead, radical suffragists in Queensland were tightly organised, defiant, courageous, and eminently capable of mounting mass deputations and mass processions. Evidence and images of the early part of the fight for women's suffrage from the 1880s through to the turn of the century are scant. There were social barriers against women being seen, named, and photographed in the public space.

Women across Queensland, in Brisbane and in regional centres, did take up the public space when they first started campaigning with suffrage petitions in 1894. They were harassed when they set up tables on street corners, often on Friday evenings. There was no automatic place for women-centred issues in the labour processions. On one occasion, the women's union wanted to hire a vehicle for a display showing the exploitation of a tailor's outworker juxtaposed to a fashionable dame; they had to work hard to get permission from the wider labour movement. Pam Young (1991) outlines how the women were put in taxi cabs rather than walk until the early 1900s.

In the colonies, white women had a legitimate right to petition. A petition campaign in New Zealand was key to winning the vote for women there in 1893, and petitions were subsequently begun by women in Australia, radical women, socialist women, labour women, conservative women, professional women, and Christian women. In 1894, they collected signatures for their monster petitions on the street corners, and door to door throughout Queensland. In Brisbane, three different suffrage organisations were formed: for labour women, the Women's Equal Franchise Association; for socialists and professional women, the Women's Franchise League, and for middle-class women, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union had a Suffrage Department. The labour women making up the Women's Equal Franchise Associations (WEFA) were not middle-class, and WEFA had to pay the bus fares of the volunteers who travelled out to the suburbs to door-knock with their petitions. And a close study of the petitions will show the response from door to door: they collected over ten thousand signatures, although fewer people signed the WEFA suffrage petition than signed the 1890 petition against the appalling working conditions of the new colony of Queensland, or the petition to recall the draconian *Contagious Diseases Act*, a remnant from the days of the foundational penal colony.

How many suffrage door-knockers were there? Let's speculate there were about eighty of these committed, dedicated women, exhausted after six weeks of collecting signatures. We know forty of them put on their white dresses, tied up the petition in blue ribbons and followed it to parliament on the 6th September 1894. The leaders of the Women's Equal Franchise Association knew when to table it: at the second reading of the electoral reform bill that would cover their demands and would be supported by a speech by Labor Party leader, Thomas Glassy. It was known that the vote would be close, but our forty women would have expected success, as all the politicians had been canvassed and questioned. There were signs everywhere in the upstairs visitor's gallery in the parliament telling the women that they must remain seated. An 'awe inspiring audience above' is how one journalist referred to them. But how could they stay seated at the dismissive and offensive nonsense that came from the politicians speaking against the bill? These men not only opposed the franchise, but they also claimed women did not even want the vote.

Mostly, the press remained silent on the petition campaign—even the *Worker*. Unfortunately, we know we cannot trust the conservative male reporter, whose account we do have, to give us clear evidence. Instead, he presents drama, high emotion, and divisiveness between women. One young lady, according to our reporter, would have climbed over the balcony and attacked one of the particularly scathing politicians if she could have done so from such great heights without breaking a limb. Who was it? Possibly it was young Florence Collings, sister of Joe Silver Collings, a feisty socialist and writer. Or it may have been Sarah Ann Bailey, an especially courageous, clear-thinking union woman who married the following year and died, presumably of childbirth, the next. We know exactly who the politician was that provoked this wrath, and what he said of course—it is all carefully recorded in *Hansard*. And we still might want to shut him up, so we won't repeat his verbiage here. He gas-bagged and filibustered until there was no further time allowed for the private member's bill that session.

After the 'failure' of its petitions in the House, WEFA reinvented itself, becoming highly organised and purposeful, dignified, courting no bad press, and allowing men into its organisation (albeit without voting rights). It promoted and supported the lobbying and canvassing of any of the politicians who supported one-woman-one-vote. These were mostly members of the emerging Labor Party, but also the Liberals. Some of these politicians were related to, or in intimate relationships with, WEFA activists. These women were not like our women liberationists of the 1970s; most were senior women positioned throughout the community. Remember, almost all women could read and write, due to the state's compulsory school attendance. Possibly, some younger feisty young women stood up to the elder labour leaders. Florence Collings moved to West Australia where she wrote a socialist feminist column. The membership all learnt, and practised, how to hold and work together in public meetings, speak to the chair, move an amendment, and dispute a resolution.

The suffragists were 'trenchant, but not transgressive' across Australia, claims historian Claire Wright. 'They sought to raise consciousness, but never Cain.' Well, maybe, maybe not. As the cry for the women's vote reverberated in public meetings across regional centres, labour women were often successful in taking leadership of the newly established organisations and setting the agenda for 'one vote one person'. When they had the numbers in the Lower House but Queensland's upper house rejected the bill, they were well capable of holding a mass public indignation meeting and indeed of 'raising Cain'. Emma Miller moved the resolution:

We, the women of Brisbane in meeting assembled, desire to enter our protest in the strongest possible manner against the action of a majority of members of the Legislative Council, which has resulted in a rejection by that Chamber of the Franchise Bill, and we call upon Premier Morgan and his following in Parliament to brook no delay from the irresponsible nominees Upper House, as it is high time that the stain was removed from the fair name of Queensland of having for so long penalised her women by denying them their just political rights. On the following day they marched with a deputation to the premier with their resolutions. Disciplined leadership of a mass movement seems to have been the successful strategy.

The biographies of the movement's leaders, largely unknown—May Jordan McConnell, Charlotte and Eleanor Trundle, Catherine Hughes, Leontine Cooper, Lizzie Adler, Agnes Williams, Katie, Florence and Mary Ann Collings, Margaret Ogg, Helen Huxham and more—will hopefully one day be written. But when we walk the historical locations and trek through space and landscape, it is easier to remember all our foremothers as they joined together politically. We can read a different story through the palimpsests of the city below its layers of 'development' as we seek out feminist labour heritage sites and awaken the sleeping energies of Meanjin.

Genealogies of birth, death and marriages and biographies can restrict our notions of human possibilities, limit our understandings of history. But when we walk, we walk together. And when we understand the disciplined strategies of the leadership of the suffrage movement, and their very careful and wary response to the press, avoiding public conflict between different women's groups or any scandalous catfight for the media to run with, we can retrieve a different account than that left to us by newspaper journalists. The best advice from expert heritage walkers to newcomers is to keep the walk simple, limit the number of stops to five or six, and find places that are relatively quiet and away from the city hubbub.

The ornate facade of the building at the site of Brisbane's first town hall, high above the commercial shop fronts, is all that is left as a reminder of a significant public meeting, chaired by the mayor, inspired by his wife, which led to the 1890 Act ensuring women did not lose all property rights, including their children, upon getting married. We only have pictures of the Trades Hall, where the key suffragist organisation, the Women's Equal Franchise Association, held its meetings. Presumably no upper-class ladies ever crossed its doorstep. But from that site it is very easy walking distance to an important hub of dissent and discussion, the School of Arts, where Leontine Cooper, the feminist socialist, had a desk before setting up an office in Ann Street just along from it. She produced Queensland's suffrage paper, all editions now lost, but surely with accounts of how they 'raised Cain'.

Before my last guided walk, I did a quick run-through and was confronted with the depressing sight of the iconic School of Arts building in a state of neglect by the Brisbane City Council and aggressively sandwiched between the new high-rises. The first time we did the walk in 2005, we had arranged to go inside. An Indigenous organisation was using the ground floor, with a gallery in the magnificent library room. This year, I had to peer through dirty windows. At least the gate was unlocked, and I imagined that, at best, we could stand in the front garden. But when the walking group arrived, it became obvious it was our space to reclaim, and that the veranda would not collapse if we went up. The Brisbane Labour History Association has decided, therefore, that we need to lobby the Brisbane City Council to find the funding to maintain this wonderful precinct. It might be disappointing for walkers to find at the site of the Centennial Hall, in Adelaide Street, between Albert and Edward Streets, that so little sense remains of this place where important mass public meetings were held. It had seating for seven hundred people and was right in the centre of town. This was long before the existing town hall was built, but our statutes of Emma Miller and Charles Lilley with the ghost of Sarah Ann Lilley stand nearby.

Broadway Arcade has also disappeared. It was frequented by William Lane, and his American wife Ann who, even while criticising Leontine Cooper's theories on the separate nature of women's oppression, encouraged and drew her out from behind her pseudonym at least for three years in the *Boomerang*, with her groundbreaking signed essays on 'Women's Rights', 'Women's Work' and 'Women's Unions'. That newspaper survives in digitised form for researchers to view. As we walk and then gather at speakers' corner outside the fence surrounding the old Parliamentary buildings—where women never sat in the now-abolished state Senate, and where later generations have demonstrated—we can start to sense the longevity of women's struggle. Participants in the walks invariably have questions. They contribute with expertise that goes beyond one historian's experience. Sometimes a naive question forces us to re-examine anomalies. If labour women led the movement, why was it that the first woman elected to parliament in Queensland was a conservative? If labour women led the campaign to vote and sit, why did it take until 1974 for the first Labor woman to be elected to the Senate of the Federal Parliament?

Also, in these discussions complex questions arising from academic debates can be aired, regarding ‘whiteness’, and the inclusion of women as citizens in the nation as a way to alleviate deep seated racial anxieties. We know that both sexes were complicit in the deeply embedded structural racism of this country, where capital relies on appropriating the country and resources of Indigenous custodians, as well as exploiting the labour of workers. These questions also arose at the original suffrage meetings. The women debated about whether to include Indigenous people and people of colour in their campaigns for voting rights. Premier Charles Lilley’s error, in moving an amendment to include women in the vote in 1870, backfired badly when he was not in power the next year and the Tory conservatives explicitly excluded Indigenous, Asian, and Polynesian people. It took nearly one hundred years to undo the laws, while we still face the effects of that century of damage.

As we complete the walk from the old Trades Hall site to the Parliament, the walk that our foremothers did on many occasions—in deputations and with resolutions from the ‘public indignation meetings’, or to watch their petitions being tabled—we start to realise the world-leading achievements of the women’s movement in Queensland and the labour women’s leadership in the call for ‘one woman one vote’ and ‘one adult one vote’. Another layer of research will uncover the men who walked alongside.

Leontine Cooper had warned that linking women’s suffrage with the call for electoral equality for non-propertied men would delay the women’s vote in Queensland, and perhaps it did. She had called for a vote for women on the same current terms for men, meaning that only propertied men and propertied women could vote. But Queensland avoided the situation in West Australia where the vote was granted in 1899 with a property qualification, and in Britain after World War I. Cooper warned that the men of the labour movement would not fight for the women, and she was probably right in part, especially when the Women’s Equal Franchise Association dissolved in 1905 after the vote for women was won and the property qualification and plural vote abolished. Australian men during World War I were prepared to fight to protect women and children, but not fight for women as equals. When women won the right to stand themselves for election in both houses of the Queensland parliament in 1915, (the second state in Australia to grant this), there was talk of nominating three women to the Senate: Emma Miller, Ellen Hewitt and Isabella Skirving, all women who, like Helen Huxham, believed not only that the war was women’s affair, but so too were all realms of international, national, state, and domestic affairs. Imagine if these three women had become our first Queensland women politicians!

We no longer load feminists with the responsibility to liberate all women. We now recognise that feminism is for everyone. An understanding of the power relations of gender is an essential ingredient in all struggles for justice and equality. Contemporary generations of young women (and men) are underemployed, and poorly protected in the workplace from sexual predation in an era of increasing sexualisation of bodies. They are exposed to increasing class polarisation. The battle for women’s suffrage is a story of both women and men, when properly told and walked—moving through tangible sites and producing knowledge—that provides a powerful perspective for activists today.

Deborah Jordan is a Research Fellow (adj) in History at Monash University. Her most recent book *Loving Words: Love Letters between Vance and Nettie Palmer 1909-1914* was published in 2018. This article was first published in the *The Queensland Journal Of Labour History*, No. 32, Autumn/Winter 2021. Full references for this article can be found there.

## Comrade Jim

I was overseas when Alan got married to Pauline. This was back in January 1967. It was a pity because I missed one of the social occasions of the year – for the Brisbane leftwing community at least. Many years later we were talking about it. ‘I suppose Alan, the reception was held in the Waterside Workers Hall?’ ‘No, that wasn’t available so we were going to have it in the Communist Party hall in St Paul’s Terrace. But a few days before it was petrol bombed so we couldn’t use it.’

‘That sort of thing happened a lot in those days.’ I said, thinking back to a time in April 1972. I was attending a meeting in those premises when a bomb went off down stairs. It blew out the windows and filled the place with smoke. A couple of fascists had placed a few sticks of geli, lit the fuse and pissed off. Gary John Mangan stood trial but he got off of course. The common belief was that Mangan laid it on the line to the government, that if brought to trial he would tell what finance and other help they got from the police. Mangan claimed the case was fixed by Special Branch. When I told this he said, ‘That’s how the story goes but it can never be proved because the Special Branch files were destroyed in 1989.’

‘Convenient.’ I said, ‘So where did you have the reception?’ ‘Fraser Conserdyne booked the BLF hall in Ann St. There were about a hundred people there. Our friends, Pauline’s family, and of course a lot of Party well-wishers.’ ‘And a least one or two spies for ASIO and the Special Branch.’ ‘Of course, you couldn’t keep them away. They would have been like flies around a honey pot. Who they were we didn’t know or care. Surveillance was a fact of life and nobody worried about it. Jim Eustace was there.’

I had seen photos taken at the reception. They showed a happy convivial occasion. Apart from Alan’s friends in the Eureka Youth League there were a number of older comrades because they were proud of Alan. Just after arriving in Brisbane he found himself on the State Executive of the Communist Party – and the state executive of the Plumbers Union. If only there were more like him in the Party. One of the photos was of Alan and Pauline chatting with Jim. It was a picture devoid of any suggestion of treachery or malice. Jim looked like an ordinary young man, fair with short hair and a beard. The beard was the only feature that distinguished him – as though if he shaved it off he would disappear into thin air.

Beards weren’t popular amongst radical youth at that time like it was in the early sixties. That’s when I went overseas. I knew some of the Eureka Youth League members. They were mostly children of communists and knew from personal experience what it was to be outcasts and outsiders. Perhaps that is why they affected a sceptical attitude to the society at large and duffel coats and beards were popular. The beatniks made outsiders, not so much respectable, but accepted. When I returned to Australia in ’67 the youth revolt was in full swing, the whole youth scene had changed. But Jim Eustace somehow did not fit in.

On a later occasion, many years later, Alan showed me a copy of an ASIO report, once secret of course. It read like an account of some family gathering reported in the local suburban newspaper. As a document it was much like typewriter documents of the period but without



mistakes. Yet it had sinister aura about it. The grammar was correct: under the heading of Attendance the reader was informed that, 'About 100 persons attended the function amongst whom were the following:' Amongst whom! Such pedantic language used for such a scabrous purpose somehow offended me, as if using it for such a purpose demeaned our language. Not all attendees' name were there but of those that were, their names were in full and they were accompanied by their ASIO file number. Jim's name was there: James Eustace QPF.11036.

'I knew Jim Eustace,' I said to Alan. 'I met him some time after the wedding. He was in my Communist Party branch. He was a quiet reserved sort of bloke, didn't have much to say for himself. He seemed painfully shy and people felt sorry for him. Charlie Gifford asked me to visit him and engage with him.' So I told Alan of how I went to his humble little flat in Albion. It was part of an enclosed veranda of an old Queenslander. He seemed nonplussed to see me but he invited me in and offered me a cup of tea. He had the insides of a radio dismantled on the kitchen table. He said that fixing radios was his hobby. I congratulated him on being clever enough to do that sort of thing but he didn't respond to my flattery.

I am not a good conversationalist but I can usually get a dialogue going by asking about the other person's life. But this didn't work. He seemed to be a man without a past, without a family, without ambition. When I tried to talk politics I chose as a topic the dispute between the USSR and China. This was a favourite topic of conversation between communists at that time but he didn't seem to have any clues. The conversation was one sided and it kept petering out into silence. I gave up.

'Yes, poor old Jim,' Alan said. 'You know the story?', 'No, tell me.' I had heard gossip but I looked forward to hearing what Alan knew. 'Well there was something funny about Jim. He was always asking stupid questions.' 'Like what?' 'As an example, 'How many of us are there?'. Because everything was open and above board he would know the answer to that anyway. So why ask me? Questions like that which had no bearing on anything we were doing.'

'Suspicious.' 'That's right. So I went and visited Sonny Miles. I said, 'Sonny, we've got this bloke in the League who's always asking stupid bloody questions. I reckon he must be a plant of some kind.' I asked Sonny what I should do.'

'What did he reckon?' 'He said, 'don't worry about it Mate. Just give him plenty of work to do. Doing paste-ups, selling the paper – that sort of thing. Put the bite on him all the time. People like that are really useful.'

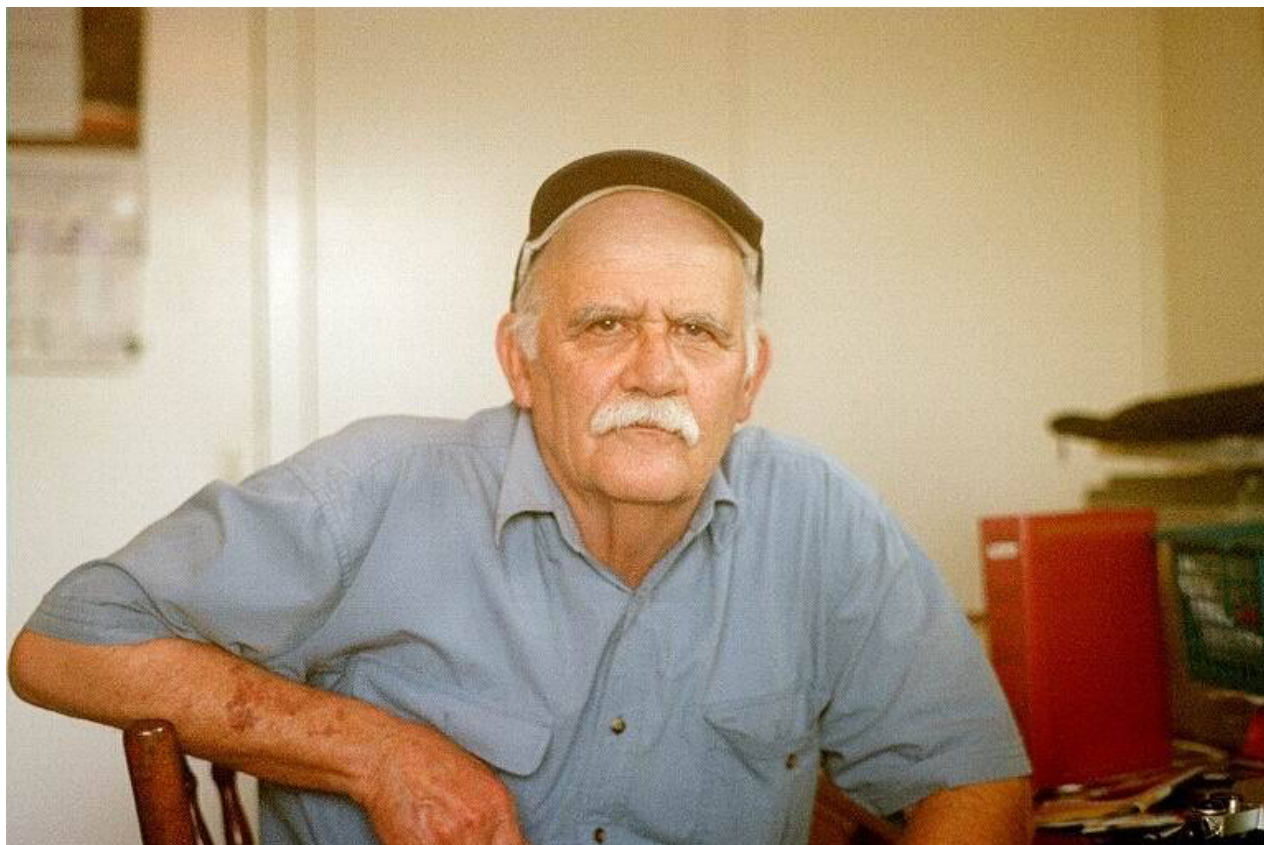
'So, no worries?' I asked. 'No, but he was always hanging about our place. Of course everyone else did too. I don't know how Pauline put up with it. But Jim always seemed to be there. As if he adopted us as his family. Because he always tried to be congenial – in his own dopey way – and helpful I found it hard to piss him off. Like a dog without a home that comes in off the street and you know it would be heartless to kick him out.'

'But that situation could not continue?' 'That's right. But one day he came up to me and said, 'Alan, There's something I have to tell you.' I sensed that what he had to tell me was important so I was all ears.' 'Alan,' he said, 'Since I've joined the EYL I've come to realise what nice decent people you are.' 'That's nice Jim, and...?'

'I've been a spy all this time. I'm very sorry. I can't say anything else except you'll never see me again.' Alan and I thought about this for a while. 'That's a good story Alan, I suppose no one ever did see him again.' 'No, and I often wonder what happened to him. And I wonder if

he really was an undercover plant for ASIO or Special Branch.’ ‘I know what you mean Alan,’ I said. ‘You would expect that an agent would have more finesse than what he had. Perhaps he was living in a kind of fantasy world and it was all in his imagination. Jim Eustace, intrepid undercover operative – that sort of thing.’

‘A Walter Mitty character? I’ve often wondered about that. But the point is we never saw him again. Pauline was pleased about that.’



Ted Riethmuller

Ross Gwyther: Ted Riethmuller was born in Kingaroy. The year was 1939 and so he was an observer of the tumultuous events that shaped the second part of the 20th Century. He served his time as an electrician in Bundaberg and Brisbane. During his apprenticeship he joined the ETU and became interested in politics. In the early sixties, like many other young Australians he travelled to the UK and it was there that the class nature of society could not be ignored and it hastened his move to the left. Although the radicalism of his youth was tempered by age and experience and until his passing in 2019, he always embraced the ideals of universal peace, fraternity and the emancipation of the down trodden.

His interest in social history and labour history came with a strong belief that the experiences of the common people deserve to be documented. In particular he wanted to see the struggles and sacrifices of activists of the past acknowledged, honoured and their successes and failures learned from. He was always optimistic about the future but agreed that such hope is hard to justify. In his retirement, Ted wrote a collection of *Workplace Sketches* as an exercise in autobiography and a contribution to social and workplace history - and he encouraged others to do the same. The Brisbane Labour History Association has published a number of these sketches in our biannual journal, and are working together with Ted's son Max to publish all of this work in a single volume later this year. This piece will be published in the next edition of the *Queensland Journal of Labour History*.

# Solidarity and union strength in the COVID era

*The Perth Branch's 2020 Harold Peden Memorial Lecture was presented in November 2020 and this text is an edited version of the full lecture.*

## *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 government 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.

Carolyn Smith is the Aged Care director and WA State Secretary of United Workers Union. This lecture was originally printed in *The Western Worker*, Issue No. 10, 2021.

# LAUNCH SPEECH: *SPIES & SPARROWS*

*Launch Speech, Readings, Carlton, 8 March 2022*

I begin by paying my respects to the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation on whose country we meet tonight.

We're privileged to have Phillip Deery's *Spies and Sparrows: ASIO and the Cold War* for several reasons. In the first place, it's the work of Australia's leading cold war historian. Phillip's knowledge of the primary sources, of the historical scholarship, of the key personalities, living and dead, is incomparable. His own contribution to our understanding of Australia's cold war has been formidable: through a vast body of published scholarship, through memorable performances at conferences, through his teaching and supervision, and, increasingly in recent years, through his book reviewing in the weekend papers and his voice on the airwaves.



He is also, quintessentially, a post-cold war historian. While Phillip has been working on aspects of the cold war much of his career, going back to his ground-breaking research in the coal strike of 1949, his approach to cold war history had been shaped by the rich documentary record that has become available internationally since the 1980s. The availability of the Venona decrypts from the mid-1990s is perhaps the best known of these breakthroughs, allowing historians themselves to decode a past that had previously been more resistant to their attentions. Then there are ASIO files, especially the famous – or infamous – Series 6119. Even a cursory glance at the endnotes of *Spies and Sparrows* reveals multi-archival, multi-national research of a kind that has become possible, although by no means easy, with the end of the cold war itself.

There is more to it than that: Phillip is a global cold war historian. His previous book, the splendid *Red Apple*, was on Communism and McCarthyism in New York.<sup>1</sup> His latest is on Australia, but at every point I was conscious, as a reader, of being told about an Australian aspect of a large and important global story. Global histories of the cold war usually have little to say about Australia, as I discovered while teaching with Odd Arne Westad's book on that subject.<sup>2</sup> But Phillip has an outstanding international reputation as a cold war historian, as well as a superb grasp of the Australian story. We are in expert hands as he guides us through both the global and the local aspects of the subject.

Phillip is also a marvellous storyteller. Those of us who know Phillip, know this well already. Many more are discovering his gifts in the media, and in *Spies and Sparrows*. Whether he's telling us a joke over a drink – and you can see him in action telling me one in a photo on Facebook at the moment of the punchline – or narrating the tragedy of lives blighted and careers damaged by ASIO's war on domestic subversion, we hang on Phillip's every word.

Phillip is also a humane historian. It is perhaps unsurprising that he is so attracted to biography as a way of exploring cold war history because his fundamental interest is that of a social historian: how did the cold war shape the lives of ordinary people? He did this movingly in *Red Apple*. He has done it again here, and superbly again. In *Spies and Sparrows*, he tells his story through eight lives. There are, of course, many other lives in the book – familiar names such as Chifley, Menzies and Spry, among others. But his eight are well chosen.

There is Tom Kaiser, the brilliant young scientist who paid a heavy price for his decision to join a protest outside Australia House in London against the Chifley Government's strikebreaking during the coal strike: Kaiser lost his job with CSIRO. Phillip is brilliant in explaining the intersection of the world of high politics, diplomacy and intelligence with the lives of people such as Kaiser. In this case, Kaiser's misfortune was that his protest came at a time when the Chifley Labor Government was seeking a reversal of an embargo that the United States had imposed on passing intelligence to Australia because of concerns about the security of institutions such as CSIRO. In the end, Kaiser paid a smaller price than many for his entanglement in the paranoia of the cold war. He would go on to a highly successful career as a physicist at the University of Sheffield. Britain's gain was Australia's loss.

I need to be careful in not giving away too much of Phillip's story: at the launch of a murder mystery, no one wants to be told that the butler did it or, as Malcolm Turnbull put it recently, 'It was Colonel Mustard in the library with a smartphone'. Some of you will have read Phillip on the infamous William 'Diver' Dobson, or possibly heard him talk about this remarkable tale on the radio. But I can say this much: Dobson doesn't conform to my image of a typical member of the ALP's anti-communist Industrial Groups of the 1940s and 1950s; rather, he seems more like some of our better-known conmen or tricksters, such as John Friedrich, of 1980s National Safety Council of Victoria fame, or Peter Foster with his slimming tea and other scams too numerous to mention, or any number of State Liberal MPs in Victoria. One of my favourite moments in this book, however, was when Dobson managed to gain an appointment teaching industrial relations in the economics department at Melbourne University in the early 1980s. To be fair, as a veteran of the industrial struggles of the cold war, he might these days qualify to be appointed a 'Professor of Practice'.

Dr Paul James's 'crime', in May 1950, was to have seconded a motion objecting to the Communist Party Dissolution Act and asking the ACTU to consider a 24-hour stoppage at a meeting of the Hospital Employees' Federation in Trades Hall. He therefore had to be sacked from the Heidelberg Repat. He also had his home raided by ASIO officers looking for evidence of Communist Party membership, and his briefcase stolen by ASIO during a Peace Conference. If you want a hint of what an Australian police state might have looked like had the Coalition government got its way in 1950-51 over the banning of the Communist Party, read Phillip's chapter on Paul James. It is in James's story that we can most clearly see that the target of the Menzies Government and its spies was not so much subversion as political dissent.

We also have the stories of two remarkable women. There is Anne Neill, an Adelaide widow, but also an ASIO sparrow infiltrated into the Communist Party branch in South Australia. Comrade Anne begins chapter 4 making pickles and marmalades for the Party and ends it an anti-Semite in the orbit of Eric Butler's rancid League of Rights. In the meantime, she was a valuable asset to ASIO, passing on bucket-loads of information to them about the Adelaide comrades. They also thought the world of her, until they began to ask questions about how a poor widow was able to pay her own way to a World Peace Congress meeting in Moscow,

described by Phillip as her ‘crowning success’ as an ASIO agent. No doubt we can thank Anne for the absence of any revolutionary outbreak in Tom Playford’s South Australia which, it should be recalled, Australia’s delegate to the conference of the Second International in Stuttgart back in 1907 said would indeed be the place where world revolution was destined to begin. Lenin was there that day.

Phillip then moves on to Evdokia Petrov. She has long been part of the story of the Petrov defection, but most commonly as the woman who lost her shoe. She figures as media image. She figures as wife. Phillip shows that she was an important operative in her own right, possibly with more potential for western intelligence as a defector than her husband Vladimir, whose drunken escapades Phillip narrates in a rollicking black comedy. But Phillip also reveals the domestic misery and personal tragedy behind the public history of the Petrov affair. ‘A



Frank Bongiorno launching *Spies and Sparrows*. Photo by Phillip Gao.

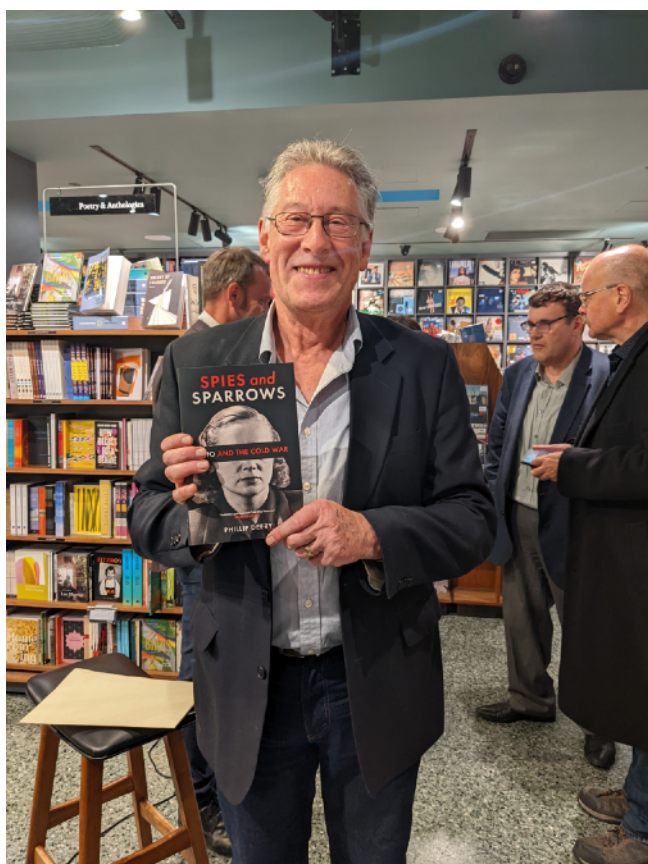
Strindbergian gloom prevails’, one spy’s report declared of the Petrov home in 1957. Could this be a deft, witty, apposite literary reference by an ASIO officer, you might wonder? No, of course not: it was an MI5 security liaison officer’s report. The Petrovs never felt safe from the hand of the KGB assassin, but Phillip’s analysis of the psychological costs of defection is as subtle as his handling of the experiences of the ASIO plants who appear in other chapters.

In the chapter on British serviceman Michael Brown, Phillip is in his element in examining the intersection of personal biography and high politics: in this instance, Australia’s interest in acquiring nuclear weapons is jeopardised by Brown’s sale of top-secret documents about the missile tests at Woomera. With Demetrius Anastassiou, we meet a Greek immigrant whom ASIO wanted to prevent from returning to Australia after attending the Berlin Youth Festival. The country’s customs and immigration system was too inefficient actually to prevent his return, so the government was then faced with the problem of how to deport him. ASIO was all for kicking Anastassiou out, Immigration was opposed. The government eventually decided that migrants should not be deported in this way, evidence, perhaps, of a residual liberalism in an age of repression. That liberalism has been well and truly eradicated from our own age of repression.

The final chapter, on Maximilian Wechsler, tells the tangled story of a Czech refugee whom ASIO would use to infiltrate several left-wing organisations during the Whitlam era, a period in which its own activities came under an unprecedented scrutiny. Again, I don’t want to give anything much away, as the chapter contains a remarkable story of a descent into the bizarre and baroque. Perhaps the image that best sums up our man is of his doing an interview on the television program, *A Current Affair*, in March 1975 with his semi-automatic rifle lying at his side. This was the man whom the Liberal Party’s deputy leader in the Senate, Ivor Greenwood, considered would be a useful ally in undermining the security credentials of the Whitlam Government. It was quite a time, the 1970s.



Phillip writes with empathy, compassion and understanding, not only of those with whom readers might identify and sympathise but with others whose lives were shadowed by their own deception and betrayal. He is sensitive to the psychological gains and losses involved in passing oneself off as a communist while being an ASIO plant. None of this can have been easy as historical writing: several of the people who figure here will command the admiration of very few of us, yet Phillip always takes them seriously and treats them respectfully as historical actors. Manning Clark would have called this ‘the eye of pity’ which, he believed, we owed to all of those we encounter in our work as historians – even Robespierre, he thought, as hard as that was.



Phillip Deery at the launch of *Spies and Sparrows*.  
Photo by Sarah Valle.

Phillip might not call it such, but he, too, has ‘the eye of pity’. He also has a sense of humour. There are plenty of laughs along the way, but the pervasive sense is of futility, even of tragedy. ASIO generated a large, self-perpetuating bureaucracy that confused dissent with subversion and political commitment with espionage, and treated as a threat to social order a party that was, throughout the cold war, in terminal decline and prone to fragmentation. It began countering espionage but soon degenerated into a kind of police force invigilating those deemed disloyal because of their political beliefs. That image with which the book begins, of Phil Geri, a Bendigo hospitality orderly, still spying on a local branch of the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) in the 1980s, after 23 years of working as an ASIO mole, is a study in pointlessness. His assignment with the Maoists had only come after the Communist Party branch in Bendigo had dwindled to three members and his surveillance there was no longer felt to be needed.

It was the Stalinist USSR or even McCarthyist America, but the costs – to the trust that democracy needs to thrive, and to the individuals whose lives become entangled in ASIO’s net – were far from negligible. Phillip is skilled in capturing the past’s otherness but he also writes with an eye on the present. The power of the security services in Australia has grown massively in recent years and poses a menace to individual rights, as it did in the cold war, even if it is no longer so obviously the instrument of one side of politics – as it became in the Menzies era. Phillip, then, has produced the very best kind of history: one that discloses dark and difficult aspects of our past while speaking to the pressing dilemmas of our present. I have much pleasure in declaring *Spies and Sparrows: ASIO and the Cold War* duly launched.

Frank Bongiorno is Professor of History at the Australian National University.

Phillip Deery, *Spies and Sparrows: ASIO and the Cold War* (Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 2022).

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF WEL IN SA

Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL SA) formed in South Australia in July 1972 when the late Dr Deborah McCulloch AM, a feminist and member of Adelaide Women's Liberation, held a meeting of 13 like-minded women at her home in Adelaide. In their determination to achieve greater equality for women, this independent, non-partisan women's lobby group had a double purpose: to make elected and aspiring parliamentary representatives aware of the views and needs of women voters, and to inform women voters of political candidates' attitudes to women's issues.

Their initial strategy was to survey all political candidates for the 1972 Federal Election. In order to ascertain and publicise their views on key issues affecting women's lives, 14 questions were prepared about fertility control, child day-care, abortion, equal pay, education, and on the status of women generally. The announcement of a public meeting to launch this campaign gained wide media publicity. A focus on the daily lives and concerns of women from all walks of life immediately appealed to women who saw no real representation of themselves and their interests in the powerful decision-making sectors of society. By late September, membership had grown to over 100.

WEL SA members sent out their brief questionnaire to the political candidates in August 1972, and 50% replied. Small WEL groups were immediately set up in the North-East, Southern and Hills suburbs and trained to campaign and lobby political candidates and parties in Federal Electorates over the following 5 months. They conducted in-depth question-answer interviews designed by a professional psychologist member. Further publicity in the major Adelaide newspapers about the preliminary results of the interviews (and refusals) attracted large numbers of women, so membership soared, peaking at 1,000. Two weeks before the election, results of the survey interviews were published in *The Advertiser* in an election form guide that rated individual candidates according to their answers to the questions, and the slogan: 'Think WEL Before You Vote!' was adopted. It is unsurprising that Anne Levy AO, as the ALP candidate for Boothby, was one of those rated 'most recommended'. She subsequently became the first female President of the SA Legislative Council and Life Member of WEL SA.

A monthly newsletter was produced, and teams met to discuss lobbying tactics. Action Groups formed to lobby State and Local Governments about women's right to work and equal pay. A few older women who had been activists in education and union circles, mentored other members in making submissions on policy issues, organising meetings and conferences, writing letters and media releases, addressing public meetings, and speaking on radio and TV. WEL's submissions were accurate and well argued, so they formed the basis for subsequent State Departmental writing of legislation. Hundreds of individual letters were written about sexism in many aspects of education, as well as discriminatory practices in industry and government. The experience of being able to shape the political agenda had an immense, positive impact on members' lives. They felt an excitement never experienced before, of working together for their own and other women's benefit. It should be remembered that this was a time when all the voluntary work was done by hand, on typewriters, use of 'phone trees', manually folding and posting newsletters, notices and invitations, and hundreds of face-to-face meetings! Archived records of the dedication, determination, and commitment of those early WEL SA members is impressive, almost exhausting, to read and think about!

1975 was the United Nations International Year for Women, leading to the United Nations Decade for Women. This provided many opportunities for lobbying and submissions to Federal, State and Local Governments. In their advocacy for women, WEL SA members played a significant role, successfully lobbying for the appointment of a Women's Adviser to the Premier in November 1975. Deborah McCulloch was appointed by Premier Don Dunstan in May 1976 with the brief 'to eliminate sexism in the SA public service.' This led to a focus on major structural, cultural, and systemic change in employment and education, and ongoing Government funding support of key community-based services for women, such as Women's Emergency Shelters, and the Rape Crisis Centre. WEL SA successfully advocated for the establishment of the Women's Information Switchboard, later named the Women's information Service, and for other community-based services such as the Working Women's Centre, Women's Community Health Centres, and the Women's Studies Resource Centre. The North-East group successfully lobbied Premier Don Dunstan to establish the St. Peters Women's Centre, now known as the Women's Community Centre.

In 1976, the Premier introduced the *SA Sex Discrimination Act* – the first anti-discrimination legislation in Australia. This provided an opportunity for significant legislative and structural changes, including equal opportunity being a key factor in interview panels for promotions and appointments. He appointed a Sex Discrimination Commissioner, and four years later, Women's Advisers were appointed in a number of Government Departments. WEL SA continued to lobby, research, publicise, conduct campaigns, and participate in public debates. Action groups held workshops, ran seminars, and focussed on a vast and expanding array of sexism and discrimination in society – far too many to list here. WEL SA organised a WEL National Conference, networked with other organisations, collaborated with several State Conferences, and in June 1979 became legally incorporated. Women MPs and other women leaders were invited to speak at monthly general meetings. This two-way process of listening, learning, discussion, and feedback was very effective: at one stage, all but one of the women MPs in State Parliament were members of WEL SA.

During the following years, WEL SA set up an office and continued to make submissions on many other legislative and policy reforms, including the age of consent, the needs of women on welfare (particularly Aboriginal women), teaching of English to migrant women, divorce and abortion law reform, rape within marriage, prostitution, domestic violence, sexual harassment, environmental and consumer issues, peace, and women's election to Parliament. In 1986 WEL SA's Right-To-Choose Group held a phone-in survey. The results were a major contribution to a Working Party Inquiry into abortion services, and after a six- year campaign, the Pregnancy Advisory Centre was finally established. Women of diverse political persuasions uniting together in non-partisan campaign were so powerful and effective, that one awe-struck male MP was heard to say 'Gee, you women are solid on this!' WEL SA also initiated the planning for the year-long celebrations of the 1994 Centenary of Women's Suffrage in South Australia, being officially represented on its Steering Committee and on the inaugural Women's Advisory Council to the Minister for Women.

The recent 'Me Too!' Movement, and the recent successful campaign to remove abortion from the South Australian Crimes Act, have seen a revitalisation of WEL SA. Almost 50 years since its inception, WEL SA is maintaining its commitment to change social attitudes and practices that discriminate against women. WEL SA aims to influence and shape the political agenda for the upcoming State and Federal Elections, so that the best outcomes for women and gender diverse people affected by women's issues can be achieved.

Marilyn Rolls is a longstanding member of WEL in South Australia. This article first appeared in the South Australian branch's publication, *LABOUR HISTORY NEWS*, Summer 2021/22.



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**It's time to vote this  
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# ABOUT THE SOCIETY

The Australian Society for the Study of Labour History is a non-profit organisation, founded in 1961 to study 'the working class situation ... and social history in the fullest sense'. The Society aims to encourage teaching and research in labour history, and the preservation of the records of working people and the labour movement. It desires to make history a vital part of popular consciousness and a matter for reflection and debate.

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The Australian Society for the Study of Labour History is able to continue its work to promote, preserve and produce labour, political, and working class history because of the generous sponsorship of our Society by individuals and organisations. If you would like and are able to support the work that we do, please consider joining the Society. Join via one of the branches above, or join the Federal Society here: <https://www.joinit.org/o/australian-society-for-the-study-of-labour-history/>

The ASSLH is hosting a seminar series to celebrate its 60th anniversary. Find out about this series and the other activities of our branches at <https://www.labourhistory.org.au/events/>