LABOUR HISTORY NEWS Winter 2022

Labour History Society (South Australia)

Contents:

President's report

Doug Melvin, President Labour History Society (SA Branch)

This will be my last President's Report for *Labour History News*, the LHSSA Newsletter, as I will be standing down after four wonderful and fulfilling years as President of the Labour History Society (SA) - which since 2018 has operated as a State-based branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History. Over the last 18 months we have moved towards panel presentations at general meetings, while co-sponsoring meetings with like-minded organisations. This has resulted in some excellent speakers and a rise in attendance, with more than 70 at the Vietnam Moratorium 50-year celebration with joint sponsors IPAN and also at a later panel discussion on the Accord with the Unions, more than 80 at the SA launch release of Stuart McIntyre's book *The Party* (with the Search Foundation) and an attendance of around 155 at the recent Tandanya event (in partnership with Graham F Smith Peace Foundation) with lively discussion around issues raised in Dean Ashenden's book *Telling Tanner's Story*.

Nothing could have been achieved without a strong branch executive and the engagement of our membership and supporters. While the executive changes after each AGM, four members have been continuous through-out my Presidency: Sue Marks, David Faber, Kevin Kaeding and Ralph Clarke. I would like to thank them for their outstanding support they have provided to me, especially in the first years of my being elected President. Hopefully the incoming Executive will continue maintaining open dialogue with members and supporters of this branch - as well as with like-minded organisations - to continue to grow the branch's membership and attendance at general meetings. Many thanks for the tremendous support that I have received through the four years of my Presidency.

You will note that this edition of Labour History News focusses on two important issues: firstly. the celebration of 150 years of the Maritime Union of Australia, recognising the importance of the achievements of the MUA for its members and for Australia as a whole; the second focus is in several articles exploring how the destruction of Aboriginal society was the price of the colonial settlement of Australia – and how this injustice can be addressed.

The Maritime Union of Australia: 150 Years of Organising, Uniting and Fighting for a Better Life

On 19 August 1872, hundreds of waterside workers met in the Port Adelaide Town Hall to form the **Port Adelaide Working Men's Association.** Workers were fed up with waiting around to be selected for a job and working hard to stay poor (as William Quinn "*No man could support himself and his family on such a sum*). The prospect of uniting and operating collectively to change that ugly reality was what motivated them. Demands included payment for a minimum number of hours and set rates for particular work; they also resolved not to work with non-unionists, and a Benevolent Fund covering sickness, injury and death was set up. The WMA won their first battles, and their banner, *Pro Bono Omnibus: For the Good of All,* was hung at meetings and carried on marches.

Meanwhile, in September 1872, seafarers gathered in Port Adelaide to form the **Seamen's Union of South Australia** and agreed on minimum employment standards. In 1872 seafarers' wages were poor, shipboard accommodation was frequently wet and cramped, employment contracts might not be honoured, and medical treatment on land required a hospital order from the ship's captain or chandler. By 1877 the fledgling union included coastal seamen and firemen working all South Australian ports.

Both organisations expanded their organisation and influence in the early 20th century. **The Waterside Workers Federation** (WWF) was launched in 1902, enabling Australia-wide co-operation and access to federal award making,. The **Port Adelaide Working Men's Association** affiliated as a branch of the WWF in 1914. By 1915, unions in all South Australian ports had joined, and the first national award for waterside workers was won in 1914 - a first for casual workers.

Meanwhile, shipping routes had encouraged the national organisation of seafarers around Australia and by 1906, the **Federated Seamen's Union of Australasia**, with federal officials and state branches, had formed. Commonwealth industrial legislation enabling legally enforceable wages and conditions for members of registered federal unions also prompted nation-wide organisation. The FSUA won the first national Industrial Award for seamen in 1911. It included an 8 hour day, wage increases, and monthly rather than voyage-end payment of wages. A broad outlook, backed by considerable muscle, characterised both unions from the start. Union action affected interstate trade - imports and exports - ships could be banned in support of other workers and even international struggles. During the First World War the WWF opposed conscription; Prime Minister Billy Hughes - the founding president of the WWF - supported conscription and was subsequently expelled from the union for his breach of policy.

In 1926 the Waterside Workers Hall construction in Nile Street Port Adelaide was completed and the hall became the centre of community activity for union members and their families. However the decade 1928-38 saw the Great Depression, and was characterised by strikes and defeats for the unions. In the bitter WWF strike of 1928, barricades and barbed wire divided the community, bayonets were fixed and guns drawn, and baton-wielding police and armed 'specials' (volunteer constables) attacked wharf pickets and people trying to stop scabs from entering Port Adelaide by train. Pitched battles were fought between thousands of unionists and supporters, and scabs and their protectors, culminating in the 1932 killing in Port Adelaide of WWF member Ernest Harrison (on the afternoon of his funeral shops and hotels closed and 3,000 walked behind the hearse to Cheltenham Cemetery; the cortege was over a mile long). The strike failed, with disastrous results for the WWF and Port Adelaide community. WWF members were denied work. Destitution was rife. In April 1931 the *Advertiser* reported: *"…on every hand from Rosewater to Ethelton, from Alberton to Largs Bay. Cadaverous faces, toeless boots, and clothing patched to an incredible extent are the common scenes."*

And it wasn't until 1936 that maritime industries and the unions began to revive. Both unions were active in supporting the war against fascism and while great sacrifices were made - 1 in 8 Australian seafarers died, and wharfies were killed in the WWII Japanese bombing of Darwin. However, industrial gains were also achieved – a war bonus was won for seafarers as was a pension scheme for those incapacitated, captured or killed, by the end of 1941 seafarers worked a standard 44-hour week, and February 1942 saw the end of shipowner-run pickups with the creation a single union pick up for all seafarers. The Curtin Labor Government established a Stevedoring Industry Commission with WWF representation through Jim Healy as the elected General Secretary. This led to new rotary gang arrangements giving waterside workers more say over work allocation. Companies could no longer just pick and choose. Work and earnings were distributed more equitably. Stable gangs strengthened union cohesion.

The post war boom years saw the election of the Chifley Labor Government and social reforms including unemployment and sickness benefits and pensions, and strikes erupted over lagging wages and conditions. The WWF campaigned for a 40-hour week, sick pay as enjoyed by other industries, an award for permanents, and improved amenities and workplace safety: in 1946 the union won freezer clothing, annual leave and attendance pay in 1947, and a cut in bag and packaging weights. In 1948 the Federation reduced the threat of non-union labour by absorbing the Permanent & Casuals Union. The SUA also made important gains following WWII: meals on ships vastly improved, and in January 1948 the 40-hour week - 'a unique precedent in maritime history' - was secured. For the first time seafarers had the same standard hours as shore workers.

War's end also saw worldwide challenges to colonialism - independence movements grew and old empires crumbled. War experience and international shipping fostered SUA concern for workers wherever they were and Australian seafarers acted to support independence and anti-racism struggles across the globe. The SUA took an active part in the development of international worker organisation - it supported peace in the face of Cold War animosity between East and West and it opposed atomic tests in Australia and the Pacific.

The industrial and political climate changed with the Cold War of the 1950s. The conservative, anti-union Menzies Government targeted militant and communist-led unions like the WWF: it threatened the removal of 'declared' union leaders, while industrial disputes and solidarity actions incurred gaol sentences and fines. But the WWF was not cowed, it stood by workers' right to strike and be democratically represented in their union, and Peace resolutions

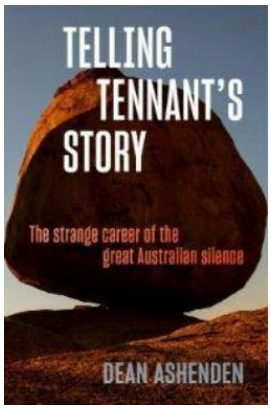
were passed in the face of Cold War rhetoric. The Federation supported numerous progressive causes: justice for First Nations Peoples, independence struggles in the Asia Pacific region, and the nationalisation of Australian shipping and stevedoring. Meanwhile in 1954 & 1956 the WWF ran huge, innovative campaigns, with women partners of (then only) male members involved. Saturation campaigning included cultural activities, mass leafletting, newspaper and radio appearances, and factory and street meetings. Breakthroughs were made in paid sick and annual leave, margins and attendance pay.

The SUA was attacked in anti-communist campaigns, with its leadership and industrial actions targeted. The union spent energy and resources warding these off. Seafarers faced further challenges with technological change – road transport, rail standardisation and air freight. A fight to retain Australian ships and crews began with fleet modernisation from 1954. The SUA responded with a program to meet changes head on. New technology and job losses were to be matched by 'social progress' - in wages, leave, accommodation, superannuation and retirement, health and vocational training. It planned for its future and the ongoing protection of maritime workers. In 1989, with industrial change and shrinking membership, the SUA voted to amalgamate with the Waterside Workers Federation. And in 1993 the Maritime Union of Australia was formed. The relatively new MUA was severely tested by the Corrigan/ Reith/ Howard conspiracy to destroy the union through the mass sacking of the Patrick workforce in 1998. The union's success in defeating the employer (actively backed by the Howard Government) was achieved through leadership, and widespread and active solidarity and support both domestically and internationally.

United maritime workers continue to fight and struggle to defend and win jobs, for better wages, conditions and societal structures. We continue to punch above our weight and taken on giants, from multinationals to state and federal governments. Every single achievement of this Union is owed to the rank-and-file men and women, past and present. Our history is long and proud, and one to be celebrated by all who share our values.

A Conversation about Truth Telling: Tennant's Story and the Uluru Statement from the Heart — **Adrian Graves**

An extraordinary event co-hosted by the Labour History Society (SA) and the Graham F Smith Peace Foundation at Tandanya on 19 June was attended by more than 150 people. The meeting was prompted by the publication of Dean Ashenden's new book, *Telling Tenant's Story* (published by Black Inc.), which argued for a wider conversation about Truth Telling as called for by the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*.



Dean Ashenden - academic, political adviser, journalist and author. Returning after fifty years to the frontier town where he lived as a boy, Dean finds Tennant Creek transformed, but its silence about the past still mostly intact. Provoked by a half-hidden account, he sets out to understand how the story of 'relations between two racial groups within a single field of life' has been told and not told, in this town and across the nation.

After Doug Melvin, President of the Labour History Society South Australia, formally opened the event Kaurna elder Katrina Power gave a stirring Welcome To Country. John Hill, former SA Labor Minister (and Independent Assessor of the Stolen Generations Reparation Scheme) chaired the discussion that followed. Dean Ashenden spoke about his book *Telling Tennant's Story*, while Kyam Maher, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and Nancia Guivara, CEO of Tandanya, introduced the broader issues of the Voice, Treaty and Truth Telling. Leonie Ebert and Adrian Graves (members of both the Foundation and the Labour History Society), summed up the imperative of the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* and the politics of the proposed referendum. (*Dr Jared Thomas, Research Fellow, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Material Culture and Art in the SA Museum was unfortunately unable to join the panel of speakers; a notice about the forthcoming TV broadcast of Jared's documentary film Close to the Bone appears after this article*)

The complex, lamentable story of Aboriginal and settler relations in the Northern Territory's Tennant Creek is at the core of *Tennant's Story*. Named in 1860 by the explorer J.M. Stuart, the town started as an important node of the overland telegraph, later becoming a bustling mining town, a service centre for the vast surrounding pastoral industry, as well as a transport hub for camel trains, two highways, and the railway. The land around and beyond Tennant Creek is the ancestral home of the Warumungu, Kayteye, Anmatyerre, Alyawarre and Walpiri peoples.

Tennant's Story is typical of white Australia's conquest story in two important respects. Firstly, the displacement of first nation people from their ancient lands and their consequent subjugation, was violent and sustained. The Australian frontier wars – whether military or police actions, or the private sorties of settlers, so well documented by historians, Henry Reynolds, Lyndall Ryan, Tony Roberts, Noel Loos, and many others – were integral to the conquest of the Warumungu and the other nations around Tenant Creek. However, the conquest was not always so overt, as when settlers pressed Aboriginal people into exploitative labour service, stole their children and imposed state and un-official oppression. As elsewhere, the original nations of Tennant creek actively resisted their colonisation; as warriors, through many variants of defiance (including as workers), and ultimately in seeking legal and administrative redress, claiming their rights to the ownership of their land.

The second aspect of Tennant's story is that the horrors of colonisation were sparsely documented or even acknowledged – if spoken, only in hushed undertones in pubs or other gatherings. There was a culture of denial of the town's frontier history – a common feature of our national origin myths. Witness also the hysterical outrage in the 'culture wars', in which a heavy brigade of apologists, comprising a small clutch of academics, the Murdoch media, Pauline Hanson and, not least, Prime Minister John Howard, accused the truth tellers of frontier conflict, such as Reynolds and others, of pursuing 'black armband history'. Ashenden related the complexity, nuance, and the contradictions of this aspect of *Tennant's Story*, on both sides – the settler community, and First Nations accounts.

In response to the author's introduction to *Tennant's Story*, **Kyam Maher**, a proud Aboriginal man of Tasmanian birth but raised in Mount Gambier and with strong connections to the APY lands of South Australia, spoke to his government's ambition to introduce a Voice to the South Australian Parliament along with a treaty and a truth telling process. Reflecting themes in the Uluru Statement, the Government sees this as an essential step towards reconciliation between the wider community, and our first nations people but also as a mechanism to assure that Aboriginal people gained a voice heard by the Parliament in the matters touching their rights and their lives.

Nancia Guivarra, speaking movingly of her personal experiences as a Meriam (Magaram clan), Wuthathi and Bindal Juru woman, underlined the pervasive ignorance in Australia of the stark truths of colonisation, knowledge of the ancient lives of first nations people and their enduring impact on the land and culture. She illustrated this with the simple example of the inspiring the design of the Sydney Opera house. Many Australians believe that Jørn Utzon framed his architectural masterpiece to reflect the sails of boats on Sydney Harbour. In fact, the building sits on land called Tubowgule, where the Gadigal people of the Eora nation feasted, sung, danced, and told stories for many generations. Tubowgule comprised rocky shoals and mud flats rich in oysters, mussels, fish, possums, wallabies, kangaroos, and many edible plants. Fusing ancient with modernist influences, Utzon's design of the opera house in fact represents the shape of oyster or mussel shells, middens of which form the base of the iconic building.

Following these presentations, audience members addressed a wide range of questions to the speakers, seeking further elaborations or explanations. Other contributors gave confronting first-hand accounts of their struggles against racism and other discriminations, challenges in the administration of public policy in Aboriginal child protection and the risks of a new generation of children taken from their families.

Leonie Ebert then spoke of the Foundation's historic commitment to reconciliation and justice for First Nations Australians. The Kaurna sculptural memorial, newly relocated to the entrance to Adelaide's Festival Theatre, was a major project of the Foundation. She emphasised that *Tennant's Story* reminded us that the Uluru Statement from the Heart, the principles of which the Albanese Government will put to a referendum, was a meaningful act of reconciliation, which required the strongest support of the activist community and citizens to realize. Finally, **Adrian Graves** spoke about the historic significance of the Uluru Statement, which was co-designed, drafted, exhaustively consulted, and endorsed in May 2017 by the First Nations people. He spoke of its dignity, poetry, and its plea for reconciliation based on three principles; the enshrinement in the Australian Constitution of an Indigenous Voice to Parliament, the establishment of a Makarrata Commission to negotiate a Treaty and a process of Truth Telling.

CLOSE TO THE BONE
Reckless Eye Productions (2022)

Producers/Directors/Writers:
Malcolm McKinnon & Jared Thomas (SA)

Premiering on ABC TV's *COMPASS* program, 31 July 2022

In September 1852, in South Australia's Flinders Ranges, the body of 16-year-old shepherd James Brown was found, mutilated and castrated. The next day, a reprisal party of 17 men pursued a flock of stolen sheep and killed a disputed number of First Nations people. Almost 170 years later, descendants of James Brown's family return to the Flinders Ranges and reach out to people from some of the Aboriginal groups that share memories from the traumatic early period of European invasion.

What happens when stories of violence and conquest on Australia's colonial frontier are more than just a historical abstraction, with powerful and personal meanings for families and individuals on both sides of the inter-cultural frontier? How do memories of colonial violence still resonate powerfully today, especially within the lives of many First Nations people? And can the scars of past atrocities be reconciled and healed through the act of truth telling?

Close to the Bone is a practical exercise in 'truth and reconciliation', engaging with culturally and politically challenging material in an effort to forge shared understandings. The film reveals diverse understandings of historic events, while seeking to resolve a shared path forward. In doing so, the film is informed by Charlie Perkins' immortal words of: '*We know we cannot live in the past, but the past lives in us.'*

What next for a referendum on an Indigenous Voice to Parliament? Adrian Graves

Australian referendums are not assured of success. They require both a majority vote of the Australian people and all states to vote in its favour. There will be vehement opposition to the referendum proposals. Already referred to here is the branding by John Howard of critical accounts of Australia's conquest as 'black armband history'. That campaign killed off a burgeoning impetus for reconciliation, evident then in many reconciliation committees in towns and suburbs around Australia. In October 2017, The Liberal National Party, under Malcolm Turnbull, rejected the principles of the Makarrata based on a deliberate misreading of the Statement. When asked during the election if he would support the Referendum, Scott Morrison said, 'Why would I?'. The Party's new leader, Peter Dutton, boycotted the Australian Parliament's 2007 apology to the Stolen Generation. Dutton now says that the opposition's support for the Referendum is conditional on its wording. This was the mechanism employed by John Howard to ensure the failure of the Australian Republic referendum. But it plays also to his Trumpian strong man image, which opens the door to culture wars and division at the centre of its politics. If the Murdoch media remains consistent with its past, it will oppose the referendum through its signature, heady, mix of fear mongering, hyperbole, and fake news. Other media and right-wing or nationalist parties, the Nationals, One Nation, Katter's Australia Party, the Palmer United Party, and some independents will broadcast the 'No' chorus to susceptible constituencies. Who knows what position large capital will take on this referendum, mining, fossil fuels, pastoral interests, even the water lobby? Alas, even the support of the Green's Party is unclear, as sections of it do not endorse the logic and processes proposed in the Makarrata Statement.

So how should those of us who believe that reconciliation assure the resounding success of the Referendum? The most important principle is that the road to the referendum needs to be led by First Nations Australians. For the rest of us, the first step is to read the Uluru Statement from the Heart, which is published in this edition of the newsletter, but is readily available on-line. Study the arguments to support the Statement and the referendum. Engage family, friends, your social circles, your political parties in discussions about the Statement and encourage them to advocate, when the time comes, for a Yes Vote. And be an activist, give your time or any other spare resources to the campaign which lies ahead of us. This referendum offers Australians the extremely rare opportunity to remake our foundation story. The Voice to Parliament will offer real, lasting, and practical change for Aboriginal and Torres Straits people. It will be a healing, unifying and just milestone for all Australians.

Memories, Moments & Meanings

Truth-telling starts not with truth but with memory. Memory throws light on the unseen demons that lurk in unsuspected shadows. It overcomes victimhood, affirms resistance, resets our models of experience and gives form to cultural and political identities. It creates collective solidarity. Why, then, have we all so readily forgotten about the Aboriginal Tent Embassy that was established in Adelaide in July 1972?

A book on this important event was self-published in 2014: *The 1972 Adelaide Aboriginal Tent Embassy*, compiled by Sr Michele Madigan of the Sisters of St Joseph, who has a history of assisting Aboriginal communities in South Australia. The book includes photographs, reports from newspapers, archival documents from the Adelaide City Council and interviews with Aboriginal persons connected with the event. It rescued the Embassy from historical obscurity and was a welcome reminder of an important episode in SA's history and race relations, and of new ways of continuing Aboriginal struggles for social recognition and land rights. It is now a fitting tribute for this, the 50th anniversary year of the event.

The events surrounding the initial Canberra Embassy, from 26 January to July 1972, are familiar to most Australians, white and black. What is less known is that three other cities had similar movements. One was Perth where, at 2 am on 17 June, 15 Aborigines erected a blue 'Consulate' tent, first in King's Park, then on the Parliament House lawns, to draw attention to the dire state of Aboriginal housing. It lasted barely two months: the 'Consulate' was bulldozed by the conservative government on 15 August.[1] Another was in London where, on 12 July, a group of Australians tried to erect an Aboriginal 'humpy' in front of Australia House in solidarity with the Canberra's Tent Embassy and to promote Aboriginal rights in the UK. They faced robust opposition by British police.[2]

And there was Adelaide. The city was no stranger to Aboriginal activism. Its Aboriginal Women's Council included fervent militants like Ruby Hammond. It had been the site where the Aboriginal flag was first raised, in July 1971. On 19 January 1972 it had seen a protest march supported by the radical Redfern group and trade unions with the aim of getting 'a better deal for Aborigines.' Indeed, the leader of Adelaide's Embassy, Colin 'Black Mac' McDonald (b.1943, probably at Hermannsberg in the NT, but raised in SA), was influenced by the ideas of the Redfern Group of activists regarding, notes Madigan, 'self-determination', 'land rights' and 'the methods of direct confrontation'. Madigan's interviewees describe him as a 'determined, 'extraordinary fellow' and 'a born diplomat', who 'lived dispossession […] not as a victim but as a person who was free' and able to see 'the good things in all people'. He combined political astuteness with personal warmth. It is not difficult to see why he became the Ambassador. [3]

Ambassador Colin 'Black Mac' McDonald at the Tent Embassy, Adelaide (courtesy *Advertiser*, 14/7/1972)

Unlike Perth's Tent Embassy, Adelaide's was erected in broad daylight when four Aborigines, Colin McDonald, Lenny Campbell, Gilbert Hunter and Alan Campbell erected three draughty tents in Brougham Gardens, on the eastern side of King William Road opposite the Federation villa at 58 Brougham Place. The site was not accidental since the area was a sacred site to the Kaurna people; but it was also a strategically astute location alongside the busy road connecting Adelaide's CBD to the well-to-do residential district of North Adelaide. They flew the Aboriginal flag from the first day and a sign boldly declared their aims: 'We Demand Land & Social Rights For Our People.' So began a three-month saga rarely remembered and even less celebrated.[4]

[1] *Canberra Times*, 17/6/72, 10; *Tribune*, 20/6/72, 11 and 25/7/72, 7; *Advertiser*, 16/8/72, 9.
[2] *Advertiser*, 15/7/72, 3.
[3] Madigan, 14-15; *Southern Cross*, 14/7/72, 2. On McDonald, see Madigan, 59-66.
[4] Madigan, 11; *Advertiser,* 14/7/72, 1; *Southern Cross*, 14/7/72, 2.

The Embassy soon asserted itself on the Adelaide political landscape. The 1972 NAIDOC march that took place the following day with a thousand marchers chanting 'More Black Rights!' departed, significantly, from the Embassy site. When PM McMahon was at the Adelaide Town Hall, on 25 July, he was met by an argumentative crowd of Embassy Aborigines who refused to be placated by his frantic hand-shaking, patronising references ('my people', he called them) and crass observations ('My, you're a healthy one!', he said to one Aborigine) while engineering a publicity photo with a young Aboriginal woman.

Over the following weeks it organised itself as best it could. Students, local residents and the passing curious gave advice and praise, and the occasional rebuke. Many homeless in the area seeking shelter, white and black, found hospitality and companionship in Embassy tents. On 3 September the Embassy ran an art exhibition for Aboriginal artists, with the proceeds going towards 'the establishment of a holiday home for children.' All this activity meant that some 30 people were at the Embassy at any one time so discipline had to be established, living facilities arranged, sleeping provisions organised. Benevolent supports gave assistance, with Lincoln College providing bathroom facilities and Flinders and Adelaide universities donating a large tent for the kitchen. But there were opponents as well: some Councillors searched for by-laws to close the Embassy down and hostile locals complained of 'drunken carousals', bongo drums and 'unhygienic habits', even though police investigations found no reason for action.

Newspaper and television journalists were often anxious to find fault or belittle the Embassy's significance, but Ambassador McDonald remained steadfast in asserting it value and declaring that 'It is not a failure.' Moreover, he would add, any faults of the Embassy's staff and its residents were ephemeral trifles compared to the two centuries of colonial oppression and bloodshed![5] The Embassy's success was in its very presence, and in the confidence of its staff and the enthusiasm of its supporters.

The Embassy came to an end when David Wassa, a self-styled 'true Aboriginal' from the bush, burned down the kitchen tent on 3 October citing the 'shame' the 'city Aboriginals' had brought on the Aboriginal community. The Embassy and its Ambassador remained for another week but the experiment was plainly over. It was demolished on 10 October by members of the Aboriginal Women's Council of SA while McDonald, clearly resigned and in a plaintive mood, played 'Home Sweet Home' and 'The Last Rose of Summer' on his mouth-organ.[6]

Settler societies like Australia have yet to deal with Indigenous demands for decolonisation, and this is reflected in the Embassy's story. In both black and white communities, some saw it as a symbol of protest against racism while to others it represented a denigration of Australian institutions by professional agitators. McDonald's stated aims in setting up the Embassy were 'to make people aware that we native Australians don't own any land in Australia, and that horses, cattle and sheep have more and rights than us'; it certainly did that; but inevitably it divided, and still divides, the Aboriginal community. The president of the Aboriginal Women's Council, Aunty Gladys Elphick, claimed that some Aborigines 'disapproved of it and were shamed by it.' But, interviewed by Madigan in 2014, the Ngarrindjeri Elder Laura Winslow remembered the 'Tent Embassy people at North Adelaide' as 'Ground Breakers!' because 'They set the stage for political awareness. They were the original radicals – and from off the streets!' Ruby Hammond, one of the nine Aborigines in the delegation to China in October 1972 organised by the Australia-China Friendship Society, firmly believed, says her biographer, that 'Aborigines would be nowhere without visible, audible protest,' and considered the Embassy 'a dramatically successful statement' that told (white) Australians 'they had reduced the original inhabitants to squatters in their own land [and] foreigners in their own country.'[7]

The Embassy also had a broader historical significance: it redrew the post-colonial landscape. It rejected geographical segregation. It recaptured white urban spaces. It questioned the administrative domination and repressive controls that accompany colonisation. Most of all it was a rare and early public exercise in truth-telling through recaptured memories of 'the white man's injustice […] over 200 years'.[8] The Adelaide City Council has a brief reference to the Embassy on a sign in Brougham Gardens. This is not enough. There should be a permanent monument erected in recognition of the event as a belated but necessary tribute to SA's Aboriginal activists for post-colonial restitution, collective land rights and personal dignity.

[5] Madigan, 14-15, 27-35, 39, 43, 51; *Advertiser*, 14/7/72, 1; *Sunday Mail*, 16/7/72, 1, 3.
[6] Madigan, 54-56; *Advertiser*, 10/10/72, 3.
[7] Madigan, 55-56; Advertiser, 30/10/72.
[8] Madigan, 51. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Blackwell, 1974/1991).

“Not calling a massacre a massacre is ridiculous” - a model of truth-telling at Myall Creek

The Guardian 3 May 2022 *Steve Dow*

Some teachers aren’t comfortable talking about Australia’s violent frontier wars. Victims’ descendants say it’s time to step up. ‘We have a responsibility to talk about it’: descendants of victims and perpetrators of the Myall Creek massacre meet annually at the site

Each year, high school teacher and artist Adele Chapman-Burgess takes her year eight class to the Myall Creek memorial in north-east New South Wales. It was here, in June 1838, that at least 28 Wirrayaraay people were killed in a massacre by white stockmen, their bodies later piled up and burned. The students are “blown away when they see the memorial”, she says, which includes a walking trail and a large stone with a brass plaque, on which a vandal at one point scratched out the word “murdered”. The Myall Creek murders set a judicial precedent: seven stockmen were convicted of the deaths and hanged six months later, although one free settler among the perpetrators evaded capture, living comfortably in plain sight for the rest of his life. A further four defendants walked free, after an Aboriginal eyewitness mysteriously disappeared. The massacres that claimed thousands of Aboriginal men, women and children’s lives across Australia between 1788 and 1930 continue to be mapped by the University of Newcastle and Guardian Australia, but largely went unpunished at the time. The killing times: a massacre map of Australia's frontier wars

Speakers at a truth-telling panel on the Myall Creek massacre, hosted by the Arts and Cultural Exchange at Parramatta on May 30 2022, criticised an “ignorance” among many Australians about our frontier history, calling for more education of teachers and students, as well as greater Indigenous self-determination of the terms on which historical truths can be told. Panellist Chapman-Burgess, a Ngarrabul/Gamilaraay/ Yuwaalaray/Kooma woman – and a descendant of the same language group as the Wirrayaraay – called on universities to “step up” by expanding their “tokenistic” Aboriginal histories modules so that teachers can “feel comfortable talking about Aboriginal history, culture and telling the truth”. Adele Chapman-Burgess said universities aren’t adequately training teachers to talk about Australia’s violent past.

Chapman-Burgess is a member of the national committee of the friends of Myall Creek, which includes descendants of the massacre’s perpetrators, victims and survivors. Each June they meet at the site in reconciliation, to light commemorative candles and acknowledge intergenerational trauma. Keith Munro is co-chair of the committee. He said having descendants of both sides come together each of the past 22 years sets an example for effective reconciliation. “It’s not just our history, it’s also your history. As 10th generation Australians, there is no separation, there is no us and them.”

The panel on May 30 spoke of the continuing denial that massacres took place in Australia, and the pressure to use euphemisms in the education system. Chapman-Burgess said her school executive has fielded phone calls of objection (she doesn’t say from whom) asking her to avoid the word “massacre” on student permission slips to attend the memorial. “Sorry, no,” she tells them, adding that her school backs her up. A Dharug panel member, Lesley Woodhouse, told the meeting: “What we are seeing in schools is kids are parroting their parents, and parents have views that are based on no education about this … Give kids the opportunity to listen, to hear another side of the story,” she said. “We don’t have to keep telling them the same lie. This not calling a massacre a massacre is ridiculous.”

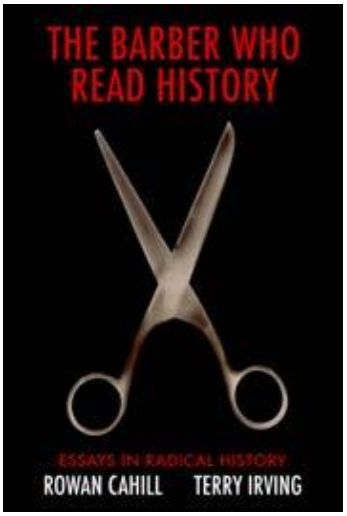
There are plans to add an educational and memorial keeping place for artefacts at Myall Creek, provided funding can be secured. This might mean a permanent home for a 30-panel Myall Creek gathering cloak made by community artists on possum skins, which tells song line stories around water, originally created for a 2018 exhibition and currently on display at Sydney’s National Art School as part of Sydney Biennale.

Another panellist, Dharug man Chris Tobin, noted that despite the plethora of cenotaphs and statues for Australians fighting overseas, there was until recent times "nothing" for Aboriginal people "who fought to defend their own country". This fact propelled a reconciliation group, of which Tobin was a part, to approach the St John of God hospital to erect a memorial at a massacre site at Richmond Hill, where a battle took place in 1795 between Dharug people and the NSW Corps. "Don't wait for the government," he said. "Bugger waiting for the government." Memorials are "more meaningful" when put together by Aboriginal groups in consultation with community, said Dharug panellist Julie Bakari Webb. "That's our traditional right under lore and business," she said. "That's not the place of government or councils or anyone else to be able to tell us how to memorialise."

In 2017, the Uluru Statement from the Heart was released, which called for a constitutionally enshrined First Nations voice to parliament and a Makarrata commission *to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history*. "Governments have really struggled since the day dot to establish a genuine relationship with Aboriginal people," said Keith Munro. "The ignorance in regard to our frontier history can also be echoed in the ignorance a lot of Australians have to just simple things, like how Aboriginal funding actually works. [Most funding for Aboriginal programs] gets chewed up in administrative costs."

Whichever political party forms federal government after the 21 May election, Myall Creek committee member Kelvin Brown said it must be Indigenous people, not governments, that set the terms of reference for truth-telling. "There are stories out there that will never be known … we will never know the true amount of those atrocities," he said, but emphasised there were more stories waiting to be uncovered, which should be reported to massacre investigators. "Right across this nation, one end to the other, top and down, left and right, there were massacres everywhere," he said. "We all have a responsibility to talk about it … as a nation … discuss it, remember it, record it."

BOOK REVIEWS



The Barber Who Read History: Essays in Radical History.
Rowan Cahill and Terry Irving, Bull Ant Press, St Peters: 2021.

From The Recorder #303 March 2022

I am one of those odd individuals who have never grasped the apparent discrepancy between 'weeds' and 'plants'; between such things as cartooning and 'art'; or even, I must admit, between friends and lovers. I have always been one of those curious 'betwixt and between' people: a researcher and writer who has attempted the unenviable task of having one foot in the door of the

So, thirdly, such writers know that history is not inert or frozen in time like some geological tundra but rather alive, organic and perpetual – and thus they try to inspire and enjoin others to resist and rebel within their present circumstances. As Cahill and Irving conclude: 'Because the radical past was always being made anew, their work is pregnant with possibilities, alerting their readers ... for action in their own relations'.

Fourthly, radical history work is an act of deep reflection about both past and present. Therefore 'it is not enough to tell stories; the stories must be shaped by theory, sharpened by the historian's passion and seasoned with unresolved political questions'. Fifth and finally, in attempting to reach and inspire the widest audience, radical historians aspire

to meet a certain democratisation of form and stylistic appeal, placing 'a high value on clarity of expression, avoiding like the plague the over-theoretical language of academic in-groups and their self-aggrandizing citations of trendy thinkers'. (pp. 2-4)

In tracing through this listing of cultural and social requirements with my own historical motivations and output in mind, I can see immediately why I like this collection so much. It defines who I am – at least as an evolving 'text' – for, in a range of writings since the 1960s, covering class, racial, ethnic, gendered and generational themes from convict/frontier times into the uncertain present, I can put my hand over my heart and claim to have attempted all of these things.

Furthermore, these chapters also clarify for me why universities have progressively become such unfriendly, restrictive and quasi-abusive places for the kind of work that radical historians attempt to do. They are now, as clearly delineated here, institutions where 'the role of academic scholar as "researcher" and "thinker" becomes that of vassal labourer, reliant on the multi-national billion dollar publishing empires for employment and career advancement'. (p.18) In such places, Cahill and Irving observe, 'while the word collegiality is thrown around with abandon, in fact caution, timidity and fear are toxic'. (p.4)

Negotiating my way through such detail, as these authors embellish their claims of institutional degradation over at least the last three decades, has made me personally reconsider my usual dismal careerist ruminations about why I did not advance as fast or as far as I would have preferred. Rather, it becomes more of a wonderment to me in this reading as to how I even held on to institutional preferment for so long in such a fraught and increasingly distraught world of 'academic precarity'. (p.27) And it explains how relieved and happy I felt in the end to walk away with intellectual intentions and integrity somehow still intact.

Finally, near the close of the book, the authors – perhaps placing communal concerns always above individual emphases – at last introduce themselves personally and academic ivory tower while keeping the other planted firmly on the noisy, disorderly street. This balancing act can be quite a stretch – an exercise in somewhat taxing acrobatics. For decades, my career trajectory was distinctly academic while my private existence was personally working class: my institutional colleagues remotely and respectably 'intellectual'; my close friendships, proletarian, rough-hewn and real.

Terry Irving and Rowan Cahill, the authors of *The Barber Who Read History*

For radical historians such as myself, ever attempting to plot affinities between the gutter and the stars, therefore, Rowan Cahill and Terry Irving's *The Barber Who Read History* happily presents itself as both guide-book and vindication. One rapidly learns, across the scatter of loosely-linked interpretive essays and shorter thought-grabs, reviews and personal revelations, that one is not really alone in falling between the cracks in the academic edifice or in standing at the outskirts of intellectual preferment, ducking and dodging the approved institutional etiquette and rules under the cock-eyed gaze of one's peers.

There are, instead, actually quite a substantial and even admirable raggle-tag band of us misfits, stretching back through time into the world of the ephemeral pamphlet, left-wing journalistic columns and the cobbled-together, larger productions of the back-room printing press. Inside the covers of this eccentrically self-aware volume, one soon encounters the balm of a welcoming berth.

For, very soon into these pages, one finds the plotted definition of what a radical historian surely is – or should, at least, aspire to be: that is, first, a researcher and writer who investigates 'disempowered people' of whatever kind

who field the blows of their oppressors and often fight back 'by attacking coercive authority and by socializing power' in dramatic or mundane instances of agency and resistance. Secondly, such historians drop the pretense of 'objectivity', so often employed as a veneer for status-quo support; and instead – while maintaining strict empirical accuracy – write with social purpose and partisan commitment to what are, in reality, on-going struggles.

professionally in detailed revelations of their class and family origins, as well as their twin growths as integrated scholars and activists. Once again, this reader is diverted by moments of amazement at similarities with his own life trajectory: for instance, Irving's working class, coal mining, communal origins among progressive autodidacts who valued books above wealth, and their socialist/communist affiliations; Cahill's youthful odyssey 'ranging far and wide in the bush, stealing fruit from orchards, swimming in the creeks and waterholes, camping in caves': accurate replications of my own childhood experiences. (pp. 183-85, 197)

And, eventually, all engaging in radical activism against various phases of warfare, conscription, exploitation and oppression that, as we went along, sharpened the historical itch and nerve to know what really happened here before we were born. Then, increasingly, how we all somehow learned to 'pass' (p. 185) and cling on precariously to the coat-tails of the academy in order to propound our dissident ideas. No wonder then that I have devoured this crusading little volume with all the relish of warm acknowledgment and acute identification.

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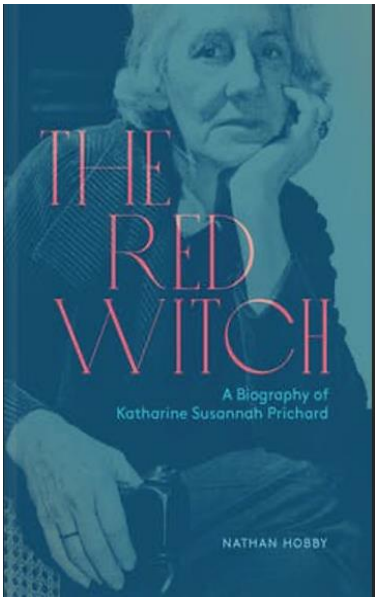

The Red Witch: A Biography of Katharine Susannah Prichard – Nathan Hobby (Miegunyah Press).

Nathan Hobby's The Red Witch: A Biography of Katharine Susannah Prichard takes on the challenging task of sorting out the complicated details of Prichard's life as a child, sibling, governess, teacher, friend, lover, wife, mother, aunt, grandmother, traveller, celebrity, journalist, poet, novelist, short-story writer, social activist, public speaker and communist.

'The Red Witch': how communist writer, intellectual and activist Katharine Susannah Prichard helped shape Australia

Prichard spent critical years as a wife and widow writing fiction in her Western Australian home, but the image of her as an isolated writer captures only a small fraction of an otherwise crowded and committed public life. It is remarkable that we have had no full-scale independent biography of Prichard to this date. There has been nothing since the work of her son Ric Throssell, who edited two volumes of his mother's writing and published a biography, Wild Weeds and Windflowers: The Life and Letters of Katharine Susannah Prichard (1975). So The Red Witch is timely. It will prompt what we might call "recalibrations" of Prichard's life – adjustments to how we imagine the life and the combined literary and political careers – even if it is unlikely to produce any major reassessment of her standing as a writer or, for that matter, a political activist. It can be read alongside works by figures such as Carole Ferrier and Drusilla Modjeska, and later literary scholars, who have been rediscovering the role of Australian women as novelists, journalists and critics in the interwar and postwar decades.

Prichard is a key figure in Australian literary history, a key figure in Australia's intellectual history, and a key figure in Australia's left-wing political history. These are challenging dimensions to summon and sustain in a single narrative, not least a biography that is centrally concerned with the details of its subject's family and friendships, her aspirations and fears, her domestic presence, her colleagues and comrades, and her sexual life. Hobby manages the shifting focus of these concerns clearly, in such a way that there is no simple separation of public and private spheres. Friends and

collaborators were continually struck by Prichard's thoughtfulness and sensitivity in the public domain. But there are also few moments of private or intimate life that are free from the tensions and obligations of public, political or intellectual involvement. Prichard was controversial as a communist activist, for those inclined to discover such controversy, but her friendships and family ties were seldom bound to political allegiance in any narrow way. They were more often defined by the intensity and commitment of the friendship she asked for and offered. Her letters share the passionate language of her fiction and some of its seductiveness, but also its toughness and directness.

The Red Witch is not written for "scholars", Hobby explains, despite Prichard's ongoing interest for literary critics and historians. It has been written for a general readership drawn to the peculiar pleasures of biography: the true drama of a life, the glimpses of a lost but familiar world, the recoverable details of the past. Hobby aims to show a "lived life". The biography is largely successful in this aim.

Prichard's father, a committed journalist and editor, was an arch-conservative. He was religious, later depressed, and eventually suicidal. The early portraits of him in Fiji with his family at the time of Prichard's birth remain entangled in much of the story beyond his life, despite the "outrageous" distance Prichard travelled from her father's aspirations. Prichard's early religious entanglements were in dialogue with her father. So were her later departures towards the causes of labour, women's rights and socialism. Her initiative and originality emerged early in her taking on the tasks of governess, teacher, part-time student, and then journalist. These qualities were evident, too, in her early writing and involvement in local drama societies. Early contacts became lifelong friendships. She remained on close terms with Hilda Bull (later Hilda Esson), Nettie Palmer, and Christian Jollie Smith – three women who also had remarkable careers.

In May 1906, with Prichard aged 22, the first episode of her series "A City Girl in Central Australia" appeared in New Idea. Soon after, she met her "Preux Chevalier", W.T. Reay, a married newspaper editor and politician, who, the evidence suggests, became her lover, his presence "coinciding" with her stays in London, Paris and Australian cities. Prichard remained a great traveller. Hobby also underscores the significance of Melbourne in Prichard's maturation as a writer and in shaping her complicated political engagements. Her family connections and her activities in journalism and literary circles led to influential contacts, from Alfred Deakin to the academic and essayist Walter Murdoch, the poet Bernard O'Dowd and, later, Miles Franklin.

Prichard's politics developed over the same period, through the whole range of socialist philosophies. She embraced pro-suffragist, rationalist and materialist positions, with what Prichard herself later called "idealistic naivety". The Great War confirmed her left-wing politics. She voted no in the second (not the first) referendum on conscription. Her commitment to peace was cemented in place at this stage, not least because of her brother's death in France. The Russian Revolution would reinforce the directions her politics were taking, although its effect was largely delayed until the 1920s. Prichard was famously a founding member of the Communist Party of Australia in 1920, but her full political engagement did not materialise until the 1930s and 1940s. Prichard's political activity in this period, and right through to the 1960s, is extraordinary. She participated in a wide range of social groups, left-wing and women's associations, the Movement Against War and Fascism, the Writers' League, the Australian Peace Council, and many more. Her support of communism and the Soviet Union remained firm from the 1920s on. In her utopian book The Real Russia (1935), she displays an extraordinary passion and, in her own way, a modernist desire for change.

Prichard's career as a novelist began in London, where she wrote *Windlestraws*, a "forgettable light romance" (albeit with an intriguing plot) that was not published until 1916, and her first published book The Pioneers (1915), which won Hodder & Stoughton's prize for novels from "colonial and Indian authors". The Pioneers has recently attracted new critical interest for its romantic investments, but also for its complicated portrayal of the Australian bush, its relative "quietness", and its structure and characterisation. Prichard's potential significance for literature, and Australian literature in particular, was noted in reviews at the time.

Hobby identifies Prichard's major creative period as extending from the novel *Black Opal* (1921) through to *Haxby's Circus* (1930), a period that incorporates what remains her most read work, Coonardoo (1929), plus major short stories and drama. *Intimate Strangers*, published in 1937 after numerous delays and revisions, just misses out in this listing, but its stories of sexual desire and violence and its psychological entanglements remain confronting. What comes across throughout much of The Red Witch, right through to Prichard's death, and alongside her sensuous identifications with nature, region and character, is the "unglamorous" dimension of the life of a working writer (with the adjective understood in its fullest sense). The biography records this sense of her, evident from early existing

notebooks through to her goldfields trilogy – *The Roaring Nineties* (1946), *Golden Miles* (1948), and *Winged Seeds* (1950) – and her last novel *Subtle Flame* (1967), published just two years before her death. It also reminds us that Prichard's short stories and plays – and her poetry – are much less known than her novels. Hobby covers the recent controversies surrounding Aboriginal representation in Coonardoo, but asserts the novel's ongoing power. The goldfields trilogy has also attracted recent criticism. The trilogy's take on historical scale and its persistent concern with key Aboriginal characters has been re-evaulated. Miles Franklin, it's interesting to see, was one of the first to emphasise the central role of both women and Aboriginal peoples in Prichard's fiction.

Prichard's life was marked by the suicide of those closest to her (her father and then her husband, Hugo Throssell) and - beyond her marriage - by threats of sexual violence or rape. Personal life often exposed the tensions between fidelity, desire and intimate relations. These later elements reappear directly or indirectly in her fiction, making it edgier and more powerful than the work of many of her contemporaries. It is more powerful, too, than any simple celebration of rural or regional Australia, for the two dimensions can be closely linked. There is little in Prichard's fiction that sits comfortably with more mainstream investments in the Australian bush.

Prichard's marriage to Hugo is, of course, central to the story, although it is placed here in the context of other romances, before and after. If a slow starter, Prichard was not addicted to celibacy, though close relationships seem more important to her than sex itself. Hobby emphasises tensions and differences within Prichard's marriage. Difficult marriages are analysed, sharply, if sometimes comically, in Prichard's writing. But she kept returning to the marriage throughout the rest of her career, investing in the bonds of love and intimacy it represented. Her absence overseas when Hugo committed suicide no doubt burnt the story deeply into her sense of self and community. Nathan Hobby offers a full account of Prichard's private and public lives, but – if I can read now as a literary scholar rather than a general reader – The Red Witch presents only limited interpretations of Prichard's fiction. It considers how and why her writing mattered in the past and again today, and the way the distinctive qualities of her literary work are often reproduced in her letters and other writings, but such readings are often present only in a sentence or two.

Similarly, The Red Witch offers only "notes towards" a sense of Prichard's engagement in the intellectual history that her politics and literary aspirations demanded. Her extensive reading of Marx and other political literature is noted, but little of the intellectual or political imperatives of such reading at such a time is explored. Despite disagreeing with the Communist Party's recent criticism of the Soviet Union, Prichard paid up her membership three days before her death in October 1969. Events such as the Spanish Civil War and Soviet communism itself are sometimes presented as being very remote from readers' understanding. (The book's referencing system asks a good deal from readers too!)

The Red Witch joins a cluster of recent publications about Australian women authors from the interwar and post-war decades. This year has given us Georgina Arnott's edited Judith Wright: Selected Writings and Ann-Marie Priest's My Tongue Is My Own: A Life of Gwen Harwood. Last year saw Eleanor Hogan's Into the Loneliness, her account of the "unholy alliance" between Ernestine Hill and Daisy Bates. Previous years saw new work on Miles Franklin, Nettie Palmer, Henry Handel Richardson, Zora Cross, Dymphna Cusack and Aileen Palmer. There was also Arnott's biographical take on Judith Wright, The Unknown Judith Wright (2016), and further back Susan Sheridan's Nine Lives: Postwar Women Writers Making Their Mark (2011). This cluster of titles suggests that we now have a rich archive of stories and studies of these writers' lives and their personal and intellectual networks. And yet my impression at the moment is that the institutional structures and support for such a grouping are disappearing rather than emerging, despite the enthusiasm we see for contemporary Australian fiction in our festivals, bookstores, reading groups, and among new postgraduates. Let's hope The Red Witch attracts new readers, for much of it will be news to many.

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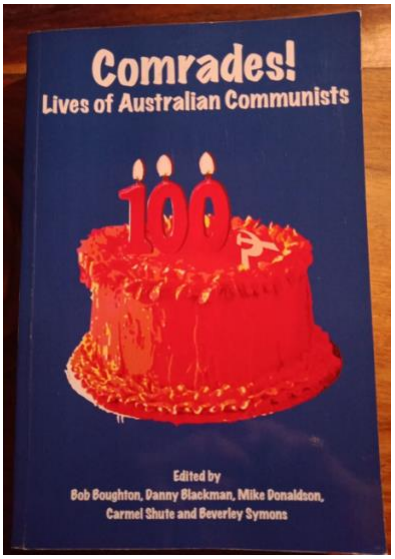

Comrades! Lives of Australian Communists, edited by Bob Boughton et al, SEARCH Foundation in association with ASSLH, Sydney, 2020, 435 pp., AUD$30 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-876300-00-5

The Communist Party of Australia (CPA) existed from 1920 to 1991 and was the largest party to the left of the Australian Labor Party. Forged in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, it was the purveyor of worldwide socialist revolution in its early years, Marxism-Leninism from the 1930s to the 1960s, and a proto-Eurocommunism from the late 1960s onwards. The CPA had only one MP, Fred Paterson in Queensland between 1944 and 1950, but its political and social influence spread far beyond the electoral stage. The party commanded significant influence in the trade unions, and its members were involved in nearly every social movement of the 20th century, including movements surrounding Aboriginal rights, women's liberation, anti-fascism, green bans, peace and nuclear disarmament. The party also drew in many artists, writers and cultural figures over the years, even if the official communist movement emanating from Moscow often had more prescriptive views on art and literature.

The changing nature of the Communist Party over its 70 years and the various people who joined it is the topic of a new book produced by the SEARCH Foundation (established by former CPA members after its dissolution in 1991), Comrades. The book was produced to celebrate the 100th anniversary since the founding of the CPA in 1920 and features the biographies of 100 members from the 1920s to the 1970s (with another 50 listed on the SEARCH Foundation website). Each biography includes a short vignette of the life of a Communist Party member, discussing their role in the party and their contribution to political, cultural and social life in Australia (and elsewhere).

The introduction to the book by the editors states that they sought to look beyond the leadership of the party over the years and towards the lesser-known members. Party members who had existing published biographies or autobiographies were primarily excluded in favour of exploring the life histories of other party members who had not received the same level of attention by scholars so far. The editors have also emphasised that they wanted to represent the diverse membership of the party over the last seven decades, including an equal number of biographies of men and women in the party, at least one representative from each state and territory, and members who had been involved in various social movements.

The 1930s and 1940s dominate the book, when the party experienced growth in the after- math of the Great Depression, the fear of global fascism, and the Second World War. The biographies of members who joined in these decades show how the crises of the interwar period and the alternative presented by the Soviet Union attracted many to the Communist Party, inspired to create a better world. But this expansion came with persecution and surveillance by the authorities, with the security services keeping a close eye on them and pressure placed particularly upon employers not to hire or promote known communists. These practices continued in the 1950s, and the biographies show the ways in which the anti-communist hysteria of the Cold War had an impact upon members, but also opened up new campaigns, such as movements for peace and nuclear disarmament.

The biographies included in Comrades bring out the humanity of those who joined the Communist Party and their endeavours in many fields, but something that is often over- looked in the book is the relationship between communists in Australia and the Soviet Union, especially during the Stalin years. There are some references of dissent to the often uncritical support for the Soviet Union in this period, but beyond political tourism, the book rarely mentions the USSR in much detail. Therefore, the crisis of 1956, which led to many members leaving the party, and its

lasting impact upon the communist movement in Australia, is also under-explored in the book. There are some tantalising mentions of the splits with the pro-China Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) in the mid-1960s and the Socialist Party of Australia in the early 1970s (after the CPA officially denounced the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968), but in the main, the biographies are of members who stuck with the "official" CPA.

Comrades reveals that the membership of the Communist Party of Australia was varied and changed over the course of its existence from the 1920s to the 1980s. The book provides insight into why people, particularly in their youth, chose to join the CPA (a decision that often attracted much controversy) and why people decided to stay in the party, as well as why some people chose to leave. The contributors to this book are, to use a well-worn phrase, a veritable "who's who" of Australian labour history, and they bring a range of perspectives to the political campaigns and struggles that CPA members were involved in across the century. As we pass more than 100 years of communist activism in Australia, the book serves as a reminder that radical left, trade union and liberational politics have been constants in this country's history.

Evan Smith (Flinders University)

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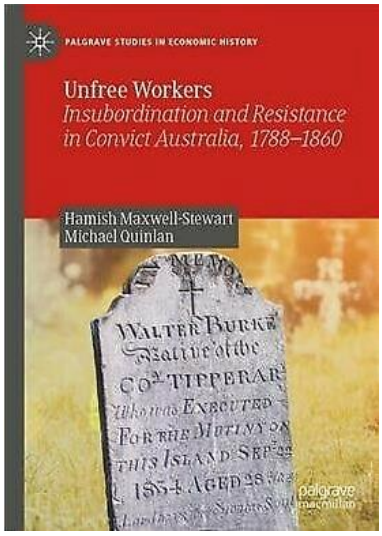

***Unfree Workers: Insubordination and Resistance in Convict Australia, 1788-1860*, Hamish Maxwell-Stuart and Michael Quinlan Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore, 2022**

Unfree Workers is an important new book which challenges current views about the history of the Australian convict system. Its publication marks a third wave in the recent literature, following in the wake of its acclaimed predecessors, *The Fatal Shore*, (1987), and *Convict Workers: Reinterpreting Australia's Past,* (1988) [9].

Robert Hughes' history of convict transportation became an international bestseller. Not at all bad for a distinguished art critic famous for the *Shock of the New*. The literati loved the book, Thomas Keneally raved about it in a famous *New York Times* review, and its sales soared. Even now, the book is so famous that it has its own Wikipedia page and features regularly in popular media, such as in the recent Netflix TV series, *Marvel's The Punisher*.

In his vividly descriptive narrative history, Hughes echoed the work of earlier historians, A. G. L. Shaw, and L.L. Robson, broadly referencing similar sources, and highlighting the relentless cruelty of the system and the depravity of convicts: the men were callous brutes, the women, whores - all were the dregs of society. The book showed that convicts and convictism were a stain on Australian history. Paradoxically, the success of the book raised the profile of Australia's convict era, opening it up to an international readership, and shifting it from a quaint if embarrassing episode in our history to the mainstream of popular interest and scholarly debate.

The publication of *Convict Workers* in the following year, 1988, vigorously challenged many of the precepts of *The Fatal Shore.* The creation of academic historians, mostly then from the economic history department at the University of New South Wales, *Convict Workers*, was based upon exhaustive new research, including econometric analysis. Some of its innovative conclusions included:

[9] Robert Hughes, The Fatal Shore (London: Collins Harville, 1987); Stephen Nicholas (ed), *Convict Workers: Reinterpreting Australia's pas*t (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

- State and private employers in New South Wales recognised the convicts' previous occupations and employed a large proportion of them in the same occupations they had held at home.
- The women convicts, although often classified as prostitutes, in fact brought a range of occupational skills equally as important for the economic development of Australia as those of the male convicts.
- Once settled in Australia, the convicts consumed a diet, and experienced housing, superior to that received by free men and women at home.
- The organisation of their work was not very different from that in Britain and Ireland and, while cruel treatment existed, the likelihood of numerous floggings during their term of sentence is shown to be a myth.
- *Convict workers* is a study in comparative history, noting the resemblances and the contrasts with indentured labour, slavery, and punitive communities elsewhere.
- By illuminating the important, diverse contribution of convict workers to Australia's economic and social development, it has generated a fresh historical understanding of Australia's early history.

Convict Workers was an important book because it was analytical, explanatory, and in the process, disruptive of popular myths about convicts and convictism. It provided serious hypotheses for subsequent scholars to challenge, and consequently inspired burgeoning research on convicts. It also became an important textbook for the teaching of Australian history and the training of research students. Which brings me to the third major milestone in the literature on Australia's convict history, Maxwell-Stuart's and Quinlan's, *Unfree Workers.* In some respects, this important book is a natural successor to *Convict Workers.* It is an eminently readable work of stunning scholarship by two of our leading scholars of convicts and labour history. It too, seeks to explain distinctive aspects of convictism through the analysis of rich data, predominantly, the outstanding databases associated now with Digital History Tasmania[10], amongst many other sources. The book also challenges important givens in the literature, joining with *Convict Workers* to scotch the 'convict stain'. But it extends our understanding of convictism and the Australian foundation story, in at least two new and important ways.

Maxwell-Stuart and Quinlan, comprehensively document the range and nuance of convict resistance and how that/it shaped both workplace relations and institutions in colonial Australia; and they establish that convicts played a key role both in the development of capitalism in Australia and were integral to the massive and irreversible process of globalisation in the nineteenth century.

In relation to resistance, the book painstakingly and convincingly documents shipboard worker resistance: mutinies, the issuing of demands and threats, negotiating deals, through wage and incentive bargaining, bargaining for access, time and rations, forming combinations and sharing employment intelligence and other information, go slows, strikes and effort bargaining, refusing to work and collective insubordination, absenteeism, absconding and escape, destruction of property, assaults, theft for compensation, bush ranging, piracy and revolt. This feature of the book is hugely important because it not only richly documents convict agency and resistance, it also effectively recalibrates the origins of the organised labour movement in Australia to the 1850s and much earlier. Standing on the shoulders of the work of the Women's Convict Research Centre in Hobart, a book which pays tribute to the integral, inventive, determined, and effective resistance of women convicts in Australia.

Unfree Labour also revises the notion of convictism as a primitive precursor to being an active contributor to the development of capitalism in Australia. Part I of the book, challenges the notion that '**unfree'** labour precluded the processes of worker mobilisation and (to use an out of fashion concept) the development of their consciousness as workers, a defining characteristic of capitalism. It thus also locates Australia, from the onset of the convict system, in the wider story of globalising capitalism. An admirably disruptive work of scholarly history, *Unfree Labour*, is also an accessible source for curious Australians wishing to understand the role that convict men, women and children contributed the origins of modern Australia. The downside of the book is its expense, at around $150, but it is available much cheaper in electronic form and hopefully, also from your local library. It's truly worth the read.

Adrian Graves

[10] It is fitting that the research for this book, is based upon a vast digital database formed by the work of hundreds of citizen 'transcribers' across Australia, who, under careful supervision and quality control converted world heritage convict and other public records from paper to digital records. The largest of these databases was formed through Digital History Tasmania, under the leadership of Professor Hamish Maxwell-Stuart, formerly of the University of Tasmania, now of the University of New England. The digital records generated by the Convict Women's Research Centre, Hobart, under the leadership of Professor Lucy Frost, Professor Emeritus of the University of Tasmania, also made this book possible.

OBITUARIES

Martin O'Malley, Comrade and Friend (died on April 29, 2022)

Martin O'Malley, former State secretary of the CFMEU and President of SA Unions, died on April 29, 2022. Speakers at his funeral, held in Adelaide, included his daughter Lisa's fiancé Ben; former CFMEU organiser, now working for the United Workers Union, Darren Roberts; Kuku Yalangi man John Hartley; and friend and comrade from Chrysler Rank and File days, as well as the BLF and CFMEU, Allen Harris.

*The following eulogy was written by **Michael Williss** and read on behalf of the CPA (M-L).*

I'd like to something about the politics of this man whose life we are celebrating today. They are politics which Martin lived by, and which guided him in his union work and in his personal life. I am speaking on behalf of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) about our member, a leading state and national comrade.

Martin was a Communist; that he became a Communist probably surprised no-one more than Martin himself. Educated at a Catholic school at a time when that Church was obsessively anti-Communist, Martin was definitely influenced by those views. However, he was also conscious of the division of society into classes, and that he was of the working class.

As a worker at Chryslers, his class consciousness led him to a group of like-minded workers who hated the pressures they were under to produce cars, and resented the failure of their sell-out union, the Vehicle Builders Union, to support them. One day, it was suggested to him that he ought to have a word with a leading militant, Will Heidt, about setting up a rank and file group to fight the bosses. "Nah," he said, "I'm not talking to him - they say he's a Communist".

Well, talk they did, and friends they became, and both of them outstanding leaders of the Chrysler Rank and File, the influence of which soon challenged that of the VBU. As the intensity of the struggle grew, so did Martin's eventual embrace of the politics he had initially distanced himself from. He saw that militancy by itself was not enough, and that workers needed a party to the left of the ALP, a party unequivocally for the working class, not one that would be compromised by the object of trying to reform capitalism through parliamentary means. He joined our Party.

On October 17, 1975 police were called to Chrysler after 2000 angry workers demanded the reinstatement of Will Heidt, who had been sacked. Workers closed in around Will and prevented the police from taking him off the grounds. Later that day, as Will and Martin entered a local pub, they were both set on by police and arrested. Martin regarded that as probably as valuable a lesson in the nature of the state under capitalism as anything he later read by Marx or Lenin. In July 1977, Chrysler, aided and abetted by the VBU and using a name list of workers supplied by them, sacked 700 workers and effectively smashed the Rank and File organisation.

However, stamping out the flames of struggle at Chrysler only served to spread the sparks to other areas. In Martin's case, he went into construction and eventually became an organiser with the Builders Labourers Federation which was led at that time by another great comrade, Ron Owens. Like Ron, who spent time in jail for his union work, Martin was unafraid of where militancy might lead, and epitomized the BLF slogan, "Dare to Struggle, Dare to Win".

Martin thought deeply about social issues. Workers are often resistant to reading (and writing): schools that have failed to develop them as readers leave them feeling inadequate and ashamed; one of the legacies of schooling is that

reading never seemed relevant - it was tedious and a waste of time. Martin knew that workers' leaders need to develop theoretical understanding of the way capitalism works and of the way socialism can be achieved. So, he read. A lot. One day I said he was in danger of becoming an intellectual. Martin paused, then said, quietly and seriously, "There's no worker who can't become an intellectual. You've just got to be disciplined in your approach to thinking about things. And you've got to read. I think I became *intellectual* when I first understood Marx's theory of surplus value. You can never go back to just fighting for a 'fair day's pay for a fair day's work' once you understand the nature of exploitation."

Martin was a warm, compassionate and welcoming person, who never put airs on himself or stooped to lecturing people about his beliefs. If you were disrupting working class organisation and unity, he'd let you know about it straight away. Apart from that, he genuinely welcomed talking with and learning from others, regardless of whether they belonged to some other organisation or not. The proof of that pudding was the relationship he developed with Benny Carslake when it became apparent that the BLF would have to amalgamate with its arch-rival in the building industry, the BWIU. The CFMEU owes its origins in this state to that relationship and to them placing the desire for unity above the recriminations of the past.

Martin himself sometimes wrote for our Party, often under a pseudonym, because we try not to identify too many of our people to surveillance by the authorities. Martin wrote about his great passion for First Peoples and the justice of their demands. Martin and John Hartley, a Kuku Yalanji man, were both arrested and jailed when the union supported the Ngarrindjeri women at the Hindmarsh Bridge dispute. Later they both organised for SA union leaders to visit the APY lands, and the CFMEU assisted in the construction of a community building at the NT community of Ampilawatja. In an article he wrote for us on May 7, 2020 about the colonial invasion of Country, Martin said:

> *Laws were drawn up, the country carved up, the First Peoples sliced up, their languages, traditions and cultures ripped up and their basic way of life, stuffed up, all based on the original lie, Terra Nullius. The lies continued developing, expanding from generation to generation. All-encompassing, all powerful, promoted at every opportunity, undermining the basic values encompassing the First Peoples culture, traditions and life.*

He called on us to "show respect to the First Peoples, accept without equivocation their original ownership of this land," and said we should "celebrate the world's oldest continuous culture of tens of thousands of years instead of celebrating their subjugation".

Martin had worked in an industry where workers can be, and are being, killed and maimed in the relentless search for profits. He had worked with BLF organiser and SA Unions representative Jack Watkins on asbestosis, and saw in silicosis yet another insidious workplace disease that was killing workers. On March 4, 2019, he posed the question:

> *Why are workers still dying? Governments and their agencies, combined with employers' responsible for workers safety, have once again failed to protect workers from the oldest industrial disease known to humans. In the most technologically advanced era ever, why are workers still placed in this danger? The drive for greater profit, unfettered competition, survival at all and any cost, greed, lack of appropriate government oversight, reduction of "red tape", corruption, deliberately dumbing down of workers' safety knowledge, interwoven with unfettered technological advances owned and controlled by the few, all equate to the one cause, Capitalism.*

Martin's adult life was spent in the fight against capitalism, and its exploitation of, and harm done to, the people. He didn't do it blindly, but thoughtfully, guided in his practical activities by the theoretical teachings of Marxism-Leninism. The young worker who wanted nothing to do with Communism, embraced it and became the courageous, generous, open-hearted, laughing and engaging person that we all knew and loved. To his family, and particularly Sandra, the love of his life, and to Lisa, his carer, protector and guardian angel, we offer our sincerest condolences. To his friends and comrades – let's keep his light shining and his inspiration enriching us.

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Stephen Darley Activist
Died 15th April, aged 66

Stephen Darley passed away on 15th April 2022 - a great loss to his family, friends and comrades and the organisations which he served with such commitment. Stephen is described as a man of towering intellect, encyclopaedic memory, a gifted speaker, a dear friend of generous spirit and a staunch comrade.

Stephen Darley migrated to Australia with his family from the north of Ireland in 1976, initially to New Zealand and then permanently to Australia in 1978. He was proud of and true to his working class Irish heritage. He didn't abandon his working class roots. He fought against economic exploitation, inequality and imperialist wars.

He passionately believed that an informed and mobilised grass-roots people's mass movement is decisive in changing the world for a better place for people and the environment. He lectured at the University of Adelaide after gaining his Bachelor of Arts and subsequently his Masters in Environmental Studies. He was an executive member of the People for Nuclear Disarmament in the 1980's as well as a member of the Australian Independence Movement in the early 1980's.

He was an active member of "No War", which spearheaded opposition to the Iraq War in Adelaide in 2003, and one of key organisers of the 13 February *No War on Iraq* rally in Adelaide. In 2008 Stephen with others established the South Australian branch of *Spirit of Eureka*. In 2014 he joined the Independent and Peaceful Australia Network and helped to convene the South Australian branch of IPAN. He subsequently joined the coordinating committee of IPAN as a SA representative, making immense contributions to that committee and its work until his passing.

For many years he has maintained a regular radio program on a Community Radio Station, Radio Adelaide, stimulating public discussion on issues of peace, Australian independence, and social justice. He was also an activist with LIFE (a living income for everyone). In 2021-22 he was one of the founding members of the national Australian Anti-AUKUS Coalition and was one of the key members on the Interim Working Group. Stephen's dedication to peace and justice, his work in IPAN and many years in the anti-war movement, his wisdom and knowledge, will be missed by many.

This tribute was written by Bevan Ramsden (IPAN-NSW) and Derek Burke on behalf of the national coordinating committee of IPAN. A longer version of this obituary appeared in John Menadue's Pearls and Irritations May 4, 2022

Irene Gloria Leighton (1925 – 2002)

Photos from the Bowden Archives & Industrial Modernity Gallery Encounter Studio 2022

In this issue of the LHSSA News we celebrate the life of Irene Leighton, a local activist who made a difference. Born in the mid 1920s, Irene came from a family who fought against social injustice. During the Great Depression in the early 1930s, her father, a wharfie and IWW member, chaired the protest meeting at the Waterside Workers Hall over `Susso' ration reductions which led to the famous Beef March and police attack. Her mother was secretary of the International Women's Day for 25 years. Irene married and had three daughters, and when widowed some years later moved to a one-bedroom cottage next to her brother in Bowden.

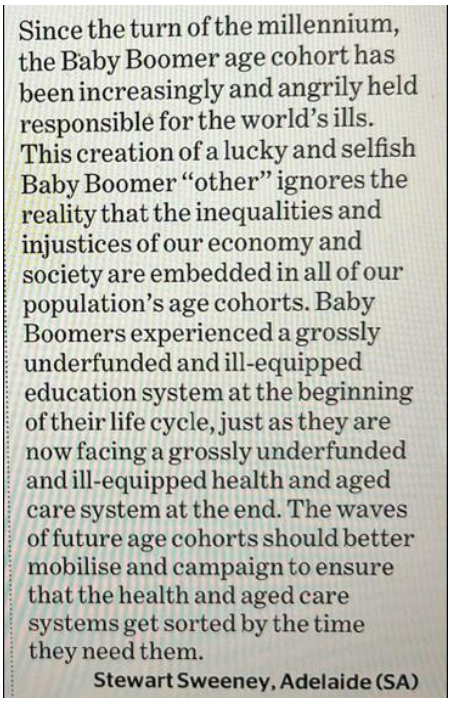
When alerted by a University student leaflet to a SA government plan to build a freeway through the Bowden area (the 1968 MATS plan) Irene worked with others to set up the Hindmarsh Residents Association in 1980 to fight against this development and save Bowden and Brompton for community housing. Peter Chataway (onetime chair of the Association) says "She was very supportive - she was always there".

"Tiny" Irene Leighton was a bundle of energy on community issues. She started a 'tent city' with a caravan in the middle of Port Road in protest against a proposed Remand Centre in the area. She also helped found the Hindmarsh Housing Cooperative which started in 1983 with the six row cottages where she lived, and went on to become an Alderman on the Hindmarsh Council.
In 2014 Irene was awarded an OAM "for service to the communities of Bowden and Brompton" Irene died aged 97 after a full and active life.

Sue Marks

Molly Brannigan, a fellow activist and feminist, and a regular attender at the general meetings of the LHSSA Society also died recently. Her obituary will appear in our next Newsletter.

Before you go….


Since the turn of the millennium, the Baby Boomer age cohort has been increasingly and angrily held responsible for the world's ills. This creation of a lucky and selfish Baby Boomer "other" ignores the reality that the inequalities and injustices of our economy and society are embedded in all of our population's age cohorts. Baby Boomers experienced a grossly underfunded and ill-equipped education system at the beginning of their life cycle, just as they are now facing a grossly underfunded and ill-equipped health and aged care system at the end. The waves of future age cohorts should better mobilise and campaign to ensure that the health and aged care systems get sorted by the time they need them.

Stewart Sweeney, Adelaide (SA)

Letter from the Front

Stewart Sweeney (LHSSA member) Letter to the Editor *THE AGE,* June 30

What a great day July 7 was! (Brian's Blog)

Yes, it was good to see the UK's most disgraced PM forced to resign his office - although not yet actually forced out the door. While it is quite proper to view politics as a branch of theatre - they both deploy illusion to structure and direct us, for purposes high and low, through the principal quandaries that constitute every life - the stage should never be given over to the clowns for longer than is necessary to amuse us or tickle the national imagination.

This seems to have dawned on the British Tories with all the speed that one would expect of them if we may judge by the nature and quality of the policies and means they have adopted in the past decade. But now having woken from their sleep, it would be brave and foolish of the Tories should they leave him free to play with the country, its fortunes and future, for a month or two while they fight over whether to become meaner or remain no meaner than before.

But it wasn't Boris's downfall that had me cheering and jumping out of my chair. It was Labor's (at last) closing off the most shameful prosecution that I can recall or imagine: the Liberals' years-long hounding of distinguished lawyer Bernard Collaery. It was persecution masquerading as prosecution. The Coalition used every dirty trick in the legal black book to string out Collaery's ordeal and to ensure that legal secrecy provisions intended for other purposes were used to worsen his experience and raise his expenses. (The Attorney-General who sustained the case was that child-of-privilege who broke down, weeping on the TV News, when he was accused of long-ago crimes treating his denial as conclusive and claiming he should not have to face a court. One law for the rich and another for the principled, it seems.)

Collaery was in the dock again and again for his part in defending the principled unveiling by another man of the truth about the Howard Government's Watergate moment, its bugging of the infant Timor L'Este government's premises to gather information that would be used to rob an impoverished newborn country of the resource-wealth that properly should have been the means of lifting its people into a better and more secure life.
The Australian Minister directly involved in the bugging was the perpetually puffed-up Alexander Downer who left politics and subsequently became a paid consultant to the Woodside Petroleum Company, which was to have been the chief commercial beneficiary of the Australian espionage. Nothing fishy there, eh?

Will the Australian public now be able to hear a full and accurate accounting of the dirty conduct of the self-proclaimed nation builder Downer and perhaps also the Liberals' go-to Grand Old Man, John Howard? Would you think it possible that Downer's authorisation of the illegal bugging could have occurred with Howard's approval? Such criminal activities - they are seen as such under international law - especially when they are so relatively recent and so at odds with the reputations claimed by the men involved, should never be forgotten or allowed to remain in the shadows while time passes. So things can only get better, can't they?

Brian Abbey, LHSSA member

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CLASS

(In memoriam, the Hockey/Abbott Horror Budget Day 2015)

A woman issues
from a very
good, serviced
city address,
appropriately
dressed against
the buffeting
winter wind,
like me not
homeless
and in rags.

'It's there,
like life'
I agree
Ludwig,
in front of
our noses
every day, Joe,
hidden, Tony,
in plain view.

David Faber
(LHSSA member)