The Queensland Journal of Labour History

The Brisbane Labour History Association

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Front Cover Photo:
First female telephonists in Queensland, after commencing at the Brisbane Central Exchange on 5 June 1899.
(NAA: Image J2879, QTH159)

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SUBSCRIBE TO *LABOUR HISTORY* — THE NATIONAL JOURNAL OF THE ASSLH

Labour History (ISSN: 0023 6942) is an internationally recognised journal and part of the prestigious History Co-operative of the University of Illinois. It is published twice a year, in November and May, by the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History of which the Brisbane Labour History Association is the Brisbane branch. Contents, abstracts and prices of back issues are available at the web site **www.asslh.org.au** or on application to - m.walters@econ.usyd.edu.au

Members of the **BLHA** who are not already receiving *Labour History* are encouraged to subscribe. The full rate for individuals is $60.00; concession rate for students/unwaged is $40.00. Rates are kept relatively low as ASSLH is a non-profit organisation. New subscribers to *Labour History* receive the current year's journals and a free back issue of their choice.

Labour History November 2009 featured six articles in a special issue devoted to anti-union employer strategies; also an article by Brad Bowden looking into an example of employer support for union formation in Brisbane 1857-90; the Cairns Aborigines and Torres Strait Islander Advancement League (by Sue Taffe); the Australian Left's support for the creation of the State of Israel, 1947-48; and a further article reassessing the 1919 Melbourne waterfront strike. Conference reports, book reviews etc filled out the remainder of the 272-page volume. The May 2010 journal includes papers giving an historical analysis of the relationship of social democratic parties and business, and the November 2010 will publish articles based on papers presented at the recent **Red Green and In-between** conference held by the Brisbane Labour History Association.

The support of the journal by individual subscribers makes it possible for *Labour History* to continue to promote and publish labour history research in Australia and beyond. Please send for the *Guidelines* if you are interested in contributing to the journal. You can subscribe from the secure website – **www.asslh.org.au**; or by faxing your credit card details to (02) 9371 4729; or by posting a cheque made out to Labour History or credit card details to: **Labour History, Institute Building H03, University of Sydney   NSW 2006**

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Editorial

Jeff Rickertt

As John Howard prepares to assume the leadership of world cricket, *The Queensland Journal of Labour History* continues to put runs on the board, achieving with this issue what Howard the cricket tragic never could: double figures. On the occasion of our 10th edition, we raise our bat to the many contributors and BLHA stalwarts who made this milestone possible.

Labour history is a broad field, encompassing all facets of working class experience, the economic and social relations which underscore that experience, and the industrial, political and cultural achievements of working people. This issue of the journal captures some of this diversity, while also highlighting the link between past and present. With tensions currently rising between unions and the ALP at both state and federal level, Danielle Miller offers a timely article on the relationship between Labor leaders and the Labor Party, using Queensland premiers Ryan and Gair as case studies. Readers can decide for themselves which of these giants of Queensland labour history represents the closest parallel to our current premier.

Moving to the industrial sphere, my article on the early unionising of Australia's telephonists draws attention to the particular difficulties confronting workers in service industries and Government employment. Long before the rise of call centres, these pioneers of telephony overcame bullying, sweatshop conditions and management use of sexism as a divide and rule strategy, to form a national union which was able to win significant and lasting improvements in working conditions.

If telephonists' employment relations often turned on the issue of gender, the story of Aboriginal labour in Queensland exposes some of the most vicious racism imaginable. Ros Kidd's article lays bare the decades of abuse, exploitation and theft perpetrated against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers, often by the very authorities that were charged with responsibility for their welfare. The resulting deprivation continues to this day, for as Kidd reminds us, successive governments, including the current incumbents, have refused to repay what is lawfully owed.

In this issue we review two books, as well as the *Flames of Discontent*

segment at the Woodford Folk Festival and the recent Red Green Conference, convened jointly by the BLHA and Griffith University to examine how the labour movement can and should respond to the global climate emergency. We honour two tireless activists for peace and justice: Connie Healy and Joan Shears. And we say farewell to two comrades who died recently: Mt Isa's most famous Wobbly, Pat Mackie, and socialist and acclaimed folk singer-songwriter, Alistair Hulett.

News of the loss of two other comrades arrived as this issue went into production. Jeannie O'Connor, communist, poet, matriarch and stalwart of the Seamen's Union of Australia Women's Committee, died in February. We are also deeply saddened by the death of Ross Laurie. A longstanding member and supporter of the BLHA, Ross was a gifted historian and teacher and a partisan of many progressive causes over the decades.

On a personal note, this is my first issue as journal co-editor with Dale Jacobsen. The journal is one of the BLHA's most important contributions to the study of labour history and I look forward to working with Dale and the BLHA community to build on what has been achieved already.

BLHA President's Column
Greg Mallory

As I write this column full preparation is underway for the 'Red, Green and In-between conference'. I would like to thank the red-green committee (of which I am a member), Janis Bailey, Dale Jacobsen and Ross Gwyther, for all their hard work in organising what is shaping up to be a major event. I would also like to thank the sponsors and speakers and presenters. A report of the conference is included in this issue..

AGM and BLHA Executive

A new Executive was elected at our AGM in December. We have a number of new members, a blend of youth

and experience. Congratulations to the new members, John Spreckley, Avalon Kent, Doug Devonshire, Jeff Rickertt and Danielle Miller. Bob Reed continues in the position of Vice-President and Jason Stein now holds positions of Secretary and Treasurer. I would like to thank Dale Jacobsen for her work as Secretary over the years. Dale will stay on as journal editor.

Events

The BLHA *Flames of Discontent* event at the Woodford Folk Festival, the launching of the Don Henderson CD, was a great occurrence with the 'cream' of the Woodford musicians performing. Plans are already underway for another major exciting event at Woodford next year. The Alex Macdonald Memorial lecture will be held in June and the Executive is considering a number of speakers. It is also envisaged that a number of our members will present their research work at an afternoon seminar later in the year.

Federal Matters

At the AGM of the ASSLH, held in November in Sydney, I was elected to an Executive position. Previously I held the position of Brisbane Branch representative. Julie Kimber from Melbourne was elected to an Executive position as well and this is the first time non-Sydney members have been elected to these positions. I am also to continue on as Federal Branch Liaison

Officer and I have taken responsibility for organising a Constitutional Committee to review Federal and all branch constitutions. I have asked Bob Reed to be a member of this committee. Jason Stein will take on the role of Brisbane Branch representative on the Federal Executive.

Thanks Again

I once again wish to thank members who have given great support to the BLHA over the years. I would in particular like to thank 'Uncle' Bob Anderson, 'Snowy' Heilbron and George Britten, who have hardly missed a BLHA event since 2000.

* * *

In Memoriam

Pat Mackie
1914-2009

Pat Mackie died on 14 November 2009 in a Sydney nursing home. He was aged 95. Pat is remembered for his role in the Mt Isa dispute of 1964-65, but had a life-long involvement with the union movement as a rank and file militant in numerous places around the world.

Pat was born in New Zealand on 14 October 1914. His father was Australian. Pat went to sea very early in his life, mainly because he wanted to get to America. However, from 1934 to 1949, the many difficulties he encountered along the way took him to numerous places: back to New Zealand, Australia, Panama, Tahiti, Hamburg, London, Antwerp, Mexico, Vancouver, Montreal and New York. During these times he not only threw himself into intense union activity, but married, fell in love a number of times and wrestled professionally. One of Pat's most notable achievements was, in 1946, to be the Captain of Picket Captains on the New York waterfront during a lengthy strike. The pickets encountered police on horses trained to rear up at them and the police viciously swung batons at the picketers. Armed gangsters were paid to go to the picket line to start fights. The unionists threw marbles under the legs of the poor horses in order to counter these gruesome charges and the picketers held their own against the thugs and gangsters.

In many parts of the world Pat had various differences with the police which led him to spend time in jail on numerous occasions. His final year in North America was spent in a number of Montreal prisons on charges indirectly

related to his union activities. Pat was deported to New Zealand but in 1949 ended up in Sydney. He heard there was money to be made from mining at Mt Isa and he decided to work his way up from Sydney. He stopped off in Brisbane and worked as a painter for a few weeks after obtaining the job through the union based at the Brisbane Trades Hall. An incident with the Brisbane police triggered his early departure to Bundaberg. In Bundaberg he observed police pushing around and arresting an Aboriginal man. When he followed the police to their station to complain to the sergeant of the brutality handed out to the Aborigine, he was threatened with arrest. Pat claims that it was the most brutal act towards a fellow human being that he had ever encountered despite himself having been the subject of arrest from a number of the world's police forces. This is an interesting observation of racism in Queensland in the post-war years.

Pat arrived in Mt Isa in 1950 and worked for Mount Isa Mines (MIM) but was soon labelled a trouble-maker and decided to go out of the town and mine independently. He did this for over 10 years and despite having various ups and downs was able to make a reasonable living. His dream was to save up enough money to build a Tahiti Ketch, a small boat that would take him sailing around the world. Pat would often visit Mt Isa to pick up supplies and became a local identity. Another interesting aspect to this period of Pat's life was his name

actually becoming Pat Mackie. He was originally a Murphy, became Eugene Markey, Pat Markey and eventually Pat Mackie. The reasons for all these changes are too involved to go in to here, but a lot had to do with mis-spelling of his names on pay slips, and the way he entered a number of countries.

Pat was re-employed by MIM in 1961 and became embroiled in the bitter dispute in 1964. Pat became a house-hold name in Australia for his involvement in this dispute. It was a fiercely bitter battle, starting off with a dispute over working conditions, ie the state of the showers, and escalating into wage demands. Pat was not only 'sacked' from his employer MIM, but also from his own union, the AWU. However, he had the support of the 4000 workers and the community, and the dispute lasted nine months. He was attacked in Parliament (State and Federal) and attempts were made to deport him. The Queensland State Government instituted a 'state of emergency' which seriously attacked civil liberties in Mt Isa. Pat had to be smuggled back into the town after one of his 'southern tours'. Pat went on various speaking tours to southern cities and towns and was escorted around Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane by wharfies and members of the ALP Left, including Jim Cairns. He also had involvement with Clyde Cameron and the Council for Membership Control (CMC) of the AWU, being involved in setting up a branch in Mt Isa. The dispute was settled in April 1965 and

the workers made some considerable gains, but Mackie and 44 other miners were never to be re-employed. Mackie left Mt Isa in April. In his book, *Mount Isa: Story of a Dispute*, he describes the resolution as 'a triumph of the human spirit'.

Elizabeth Vassilieff, in the Preface to the book, *Many Ships to Mt Isa*, gives an excellent description of Pat Mackie's attributes.

> He sees his own needs very simply, voices them fearlessly and becomes a phenomenally effective workers' spokesman and trade union organiser, a power to be reckoned with in the industrial world. His strength lies in his formidable combination of his magnetic personality with high abilities in three functions of leadership: in clearly analysing the workers situations; in democratising their organization; and in brilliant powers of oratory, enabling him to unite the rank and file and fire them with unshakeable loyalty. He becomes the object of punishing hostility from all the forces of the establishment, union bureaucrats as well as employers, who feel their interests threatened by his existence

Pat was a unionist who was not frightened to use 'direct action' tactics in disputes. As Pat says when discussing some of the tactics used in disputes in New York, which included pouring excess soap into washing machines in a laundry where cheap labour was employed, so that the next morning the whole building was covered in soap suds:

> I had to live and work there, especially on the east coast and New York, to grasp the fierce reality of the class struggle and to know how ruthless the employers are, constantly on the attack against workers' conditions and wages, and the need for the never-ending day to day fight with no holds barred, for workers to maintain what standards they achieve.

Pat was a member of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW, the Wobblies) and it is evident that his style of union activism and organistion was in line with the wobbly tradition. He was a unionist first and foremost. He worked with communists; at one stage nearly joined the Canadian party. He maintained a position against forces that tried to eradicate communists from the union movement. However, when confronted as to his ideological position, he would clearly define himself as a wobbly, working tirelessly to improve the working and living conditions of the rank and file.

Pat was well known for his distinctive red cap and in 2007 a Queensland musical celebrated his achievements and was called *Red Cap*.

Greg Mallory

Alistair Hulett – Scottish Singer and Socialist

Alistair Hulett performing at Woodford Folk Festival, 2008. Photo Doug Eaton

In 2008, the BLHA proudly welcomed Alistair Hulett to the *Flames of Discontent* concert at Woodford Folk Festival. As one of the defining voices in Scottish folk music with a sense of social awareness, we knew he would do us proud.

Alistair has been involved in folk music from the mid-sixties, and considered himself a Socialist in the Marxist tradition, believing that the way forward in society was for the producers to take control of the means of production – for the Working Class to take political and economic power.

He truly was the voice of the people, and will be sadly missed. He passed away on 28 January after a brief battle with cancer.

A moving tribute by his friend Dave Rovics can be viewed at: http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2010/rovics290110.html

Dale Lorna Jacobsen

Two Fine Women Honoured

It is with delight that the Brisbane Labour History Association acknowledges the dedication and life-long commitment of two of our members.

Joan Shears – AOM

Although politics, to use Joan's words, were not a constant topic of conversation around the breakfast table, both her parents were in the Labor Party and she imbued their values as a child. During the war she met an Englishman, Bryan Shears, and in 1946 sailed to the UK to join him. They married in 1947 and returned to Australia as Ten Pound Poms in 1949. They already had a babe-in-arms and in due course had six more children.

This large family meant that domesticity took up any spare time. However, in 1976, when the older children had left home, they were able to go on a working holiday to Western Australia. Her experiences there radicalised her. In caravan parks she saw poverty and impoverishment and the condition of marginalised people, many of them Aborigines, living in camps and old car bodies. One such camp in a gully close to Perth had been burnt out by a bushfire and many people were left homeless. A conversation with an old Aboriginal man gave her insight into the lives of the dispossessed for the first time.

When she returned to Brisbane there were protests in the streets against nuclear power and for rights for Aborigines. Joan joined this movement and ever since has been active in peace and social justice issues, sometimes in a leadership role. This commitment has taken up most of her energies and she wryly comments on the fact that their dining table cannot be used for meals because it's invariably covered with material connected to some worthwhile cause.

Joan's many friends in the progressive movement experienced great satisfaction when she was awarded the AOM in the 2010 Australia Day Honours List, 'For service to the promotion of peace, nuclear disarmament and social justice issues.'

Joan is very keen to acknowledge the contribution of others and welcomes the award because it will bring awareness of Peace issues to a wider public.

RedReunion

Connie Healy – BLHA Life Member

BLHA President, Greg Mallory, presents Life Membership certificate to Connie Healy

When asked for information regarding the detail of her achievements, Connie Healy said: 'I'm afraid I can't think of anything much that I've done, but it seems to have taken up a whole lifetime; apart from having kids, doing the washing up etc.' That sums up Connie Healy: with a totally modest attitude towards what we all recognise as her activism, leadership and scholarship in spheres of politics, labour, and social movement activism.

Life membership of the BLHA is awarded to those who have made a contribution to one or more of the following: activism; the creation and dissemination of ideas in the labour movement and/or associated social movements; the study and preservation of labour history. Connie fulfils each of these criteria 'in spades', as they say.

Connie has been a part of the making of labour history in this state through her long involvement with organisations such as the Communist Party of Australia, the Eureka Youth League in South Brisbane during the 1940s, and the Queensland Peace Council. She has worked for various unions – most notably the Waterside Workers Federation, leaving a secure job at a bank to take up a role more aligned with her political and social justice sympathies. In gender terms, Connie is a path-breaker, working full time for most of her life, demonstrating that women should be equal in an equal world.

In 2000, Connie published *Defiance: Political Theatre in Brisbane 1930-1962*, based on her MA thesis. This book came out of Connie's own personal history of activism, so was truly a history from within, underpinned by careful scholarship. Connie has written extensively about historical events and people she has known. Three articles have appeared in this journal: *Recollections of the 'Black Armada' in Brisbane* (#2, March 2006); *Eva's Story* (#8 March 2009); and *The Chinese Presence in Queensland* (#9, September 2009). Connie also wrote five contributions to *Radical Brisbane: an unruly history,* published in 2004, and two entries for the supplement to *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

Connie has been an active member of the BLHA from its early days in the 1980s, holding the position of Treasurer and, for many years, as a member of the executive. She has donated her papers, *'Connie Healy Collection'*, to the Fryer Library to preserve that material and allow researchers, writers and scholars access to it.

Janis Bailey

Party Servants, Autonomous Operators or Somewhere in Between: A Study of Queensland Labor Leaders and Party Control

By Danielle Miller

The Australian Labor Party (ALP) was created, as Dean Jaensch put it, 'to be the instrument of the trade union movement', and in keeping with this the party developed strategies to limit the power of the parliamentary wing and its leadership.[1] As one Australian Workers' Union (AWU) official stated in 1921, Labor parliamentarians were just 'paid servants of the party.'[2] Yet even a cursory examination of Labor's history suggests the story of power relations within the ALP is complex. In recent decades the party has undergone significant changes which have seen the parliamentary wing greatly increase its authority. It is debatable, moreover, that Labor politicians, especially Labor leaders, were ever mere servants of the extra-parliamentary party.

The ALP emerged prior to Federation and each state branch had 'its own structure, rules, norms and dynamics', which influenced the way Labor operated in that particular environment. Each branch therefore deserves to be examined separately.[3] This paper will focus on the Queensland branch; specifically, the premierships of Thomas Joseph Ryan (1915-19) and Vincent Clair Gair (1952-57) will be used to explore the power available to Labor leaders in the party's first 70 years.[4] The impact of individual leadership styles will also be assessed. In the cases of Ryan and Gair, leadership style had a significant effect on internal party relations. After examining their premierships it can be argued that while leaders of this era had, at the very least, to pay lip-service to party structures, and party harmony was reliant on their adherence to policy on issues of great significance to the party, a leader could still exercise considerable influence.

T.J. Ryan

Thomas Joseph Ryan (photo courtesy John Oxley Library)

T.J. Ryan was a leader greatly respected by his contemporaries and one who

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continues to be held in high regard by the party he led.[5] Part of his success was undoubtedly due to his willingness to show respect for the party's power structures. Yet a close examination of his premiership suggests Ryan was an astute leader who recognised that while there were certain matters in which following the party was crucial, there were other areas where he could exert his own authority.

In the early years of Ryan's leadership there were doubts regarding this worldly barrister's working-class credentials and whether he would seek to dominate the party. Shortly after Ryan's election, the Blackall newspaper, the *Western Champion*, predicted that Ryan would not long be a Labor parliamentarian, and following Ryan's rise to the leadership the *Worker* published an article urging vigilance to ensure the party did not become subsumed by such a strong personality.[6] However, these concerns soon faded as Ryan quickly illustrated his drive to legislate in favour of Labor concerns and his respect, perhaps feigned, for the party's power structures.

Ryan was aware of the importance of not being seen as a domineering leader and adopted a consensus approach to the leadership. His approach was evident in the fact that he often remained quiet in meetings of the Parliamentary Labor Party (PLP) (a feat difficult to imagine in the modern party room) and took care to maintain healthy relationships with the executive and union movement.[7] [8] The government also introduced an array of reforms desired by the party, from state enterprises to a system of arbitration and conciliation.[9]

It would be wrong, however, to view Ryan as a mere cipher. His quiet persuasiveness was evident from the beginning of his premiership. The selection of cabinet and assignment of portfolios can be quite a fraught activity; 1915 was no exception. When Labor was selecting the first cabinet of the Ryan government there was substantial opposition to the allocation of one of the few positions to the upper house, yet Ryan and his moderate supporters were convinced that Labor needed a minister in the Legislative Council. The Premier's view eventually won through.[10] His view also prevailed in the debate regarding the Agent-Generalship appointment. When challenged over these arrangements, Ryan made sure to provide a strong argument and to organise the numbers to defeat caucus opposition.[11]

Labor's quest to abolish the Legislative Council provides another example of Ryan as savvy politician. The demise of the Council had long been amongst the party's top priorities and the number of bills either lost or mutilated in the Council only increased the impetus for the Ryan government to implement this plank of the platform.[12] While the party was united it its overall purpose there was strong disagreement within caucus

over whether Labor should attempt to inundate the Council or hold a referendum.[13] Ryan favoured increasing the number of Labor members to gain the support necessary to abolish the Council through legislative means.[14] In the end, however, a majority of caucus members preferred holding a referendum on the issue, and Ryan acquiesced. The referendum turned out to be a disaster, the poor wording and the decision to hold the vote on the same day as the federal election and local-option polls undoubtedly contributing to its defeat. The party executive had warned the government of flaws in their plan, but was ignored.[15] Justin Harding contends that Ryan proceeded with the referendum to appease those in the party who supported this approach while 'covertly' continuing to move ahead with stacking the upper house with Labor nominees.[16] Harding goes on to argue Ryan's approach can also be seen as an attempt to restore his authority over the PLP:

> the Premier was determined to use the issue as a showdown with the CPE [Central Political Executive]. The PLP's pig-headed refusal to even consider the Executive's objections to the referendum lends weight to this contention, especially considering that Ryan lost the Presidency of the party by one vote to Billy Demaine the year before. Ryan's defeat was generally regarded as an attempt by the

organisation to assert control over the PLP.[17]

This incident reveals Ryan's understanding of the party and the fact that while he paid lip-service to being the party's servant he was not always willing to follow directions wholeheartedly.

The issue of conscription was one debate that had the potential to split Ryan from the party. Instead, it revealed his understanding of the party and the importance of following its lead when facing potentially divisive issues. The debate arose when Labor Prime Minister, William (Billy) Hughes, proposed the introduction of conscription, arguing that it was the best way to prosecute the war. The policy raised a number of concerns for the party and came to be strongly opposed by much of it, including the Queensland branch.[18]

While the lack of personal papers makes it difficult to assess accurately Ryan's views towards conscription, there is evidence that he was not entirely convinced by the 'no' campaigners. The Under-Secretary of the Home Secretary's Department, W.J. Gall, argued that Ryan and Labor colleagues Hunter, Huxham, Hardacre and Coyne all supported the introduction of conscription.[19] Gall's view is supported by the language Ryan employed in the early stage of the conflict. The *Sydney Sun* reports that he spoke often of the

need for 'reinforcements', as well as the importance of 'standing by the mother country.'[20] Historians, however, generally take the view that he could see both sides of the debate.[21] Regardless of his personal views, the strength of the extra-parliamentary position meant that he had to conform to the consensus opinion in order to avoid splitting the party.[22] Such an understanding was crucial for the success of a leader of this era and it was an approach that paid dividends, considering his was the only Labor government to survive the conscription split.[23]

The premiership of T.J. Ryan is a clear case of the need to take into account the personality and personal standing of the leader as a factor that has an impact on internal party power relations. While the support the Labor government received from non-labour sections of the populace, such as small farmers, and the decline of union militancy, contributed to the authority available to the PLP and its leader, the impact of Ryan's personal approach should not be underestimated.[24] The Premier worked hard to gain the party's trust and only then was he able to exert some personal influence. Even so, his authority was tempered by the need to show respect for the party's 'technical supremacy'.[25] It must also be remembered that Ryan shared the party's general philosophy. Had he tried to introduce policies radically opposed to party thought, it is probable he would have met substantial opposition. Essentially, the case of

T.J. Ryan reveals that humility was a required ingredient for the success of parliamentary leaders in this era. With humility a leader could exert personal influence, albeit it in a limited way.

V.C. Gair

Vincent Clair Gair (photo courtesy John Oxley Library)

While Ryan's premiership provides a clear case of successful parliamentary leadership, Gair provides an example from the opposite end of the spectrum. In contrast to the popular Ryan, Gair attracted a great deal of censure from within his own party and was eventually expelled over his refusal to follow the directions of the organisation. The Gair premiership highlights the strength of the party organisation in this period and reinforces the notion that leaders

had to demonstrate respect for party power structures in order to maintain harmony and their position.

This era must be seen in the context of the Cold War. International ideological conflict was echoed in the ALP with both communists and the anti-communist 'groupers', associated with the Catholic Social Studies Movement, looking to expand their spheres of influence within the union movement. The Premier's position became increasingly problematic after the federal leader denounced the groups and the powerful AWU began to distance itself from them.[26]

While Gair had little sympathy for those on the left wing of the party and was undoubtedly committed to the anti-communist cause, he was not close to the powerful AWU either. His ties to the Movement and eventual split with the party must be seen in this wider context and can be interpreted as an attempt to challenge the considerable authority wielded by the AWU.[27] Fitzgerald and Thornton suggest that just as Gair was unwilling to be the servant of the party it is equally unlikely he would have been willing to act as a servant of the Movement; rather, they hypothesise, the Premier believed that an alliance between grouper unions and those in the rank-and-file associated with the Movement would be capable of dominating the party and this would obviate the need for him to accommodate the party's traditional power-brokers in the unions.[28] His decision not to seek closer links with the extra-parliamentary party would prove to be an enormous tactical error.

While the early part of Gair's premiership was relatively peaceful, for the most part it was characterised by underlying tensions between the PLP and the extra-parliamentary organisation. From 1952 the relationship between the government and the Trades and Labor Council (TLC) began to sour, with the Premier and his ministers refusing to meet with TLC deputation on several occasions.[29] He also continued to distance himself from the AWU.[30] Together these moves served to further alienate the industrial wing and heighten tensions within the party.

In the build-up to Gair's expulsion a number of points of conflict emerged between the Premier and the extra-parliamentary organisation, led by Queensland Central Executive and AWU leaders Jack Schmella and Joe Bukowski, as well as Jack Egerton from the TLC. Such disputes ranged from pay increases for politicians, the Government's approach to dealing with petrol companies, and even the hiring practices of the University of Queensland.[31] These small skirmishes contributed to the overall feelings of animosity between the two camps.

The tensions within the party were heightened at the onset of the 1956

shearers' strike, during which the Gair government took the position that pay disputes should be solved in the courts and refused to intervene on behalf of the shearers.[32] The situation worsened when Gair introduced a state of emergency and collaborated with the anti-Labor federal government, bringing in troops to ship the wool south for sale.[33] The government's actions further alienated the AWU and brought the TLC and AWU into an alliance that would come to haunt Gair in his final days as Queensland's premier.[34]

Simmering in the background was the ongoing dispute surrounding the extension of annual leave entitlements from two to three weeks. This conflict began with major unions and the party executive pushing for the extra week's leave, and the Premier firmly rejecting the claim. Gair was not against introducing legislation in favour of extra leave, but he strongly resented being directed by the QCE or the larger Labor-in-Politics convention to bring in the changes within a certain time period and argued the government could not afford the measure.[35] The issue reached boiling point at the 1956 convention. The Premier was called on to implement the proposal, but he remained unmoved and argued that it was unconstitutional for the organisation to direct the government on the timing of the introduction of legislation, a position that party leaders flatly rejected.[36] In response to

Gair, Jack Egerton proclaimed: 'The Premier can have his Constitution, and the Premier can have his Premiership, and we will not presume to direct the Government. But we will presume – and only because it is forced upon us – to direct the Parliamentary representatives of the Australian Labor Party.'[37] After the convention, pressure continued to be exerted on Gair to implement the measure, yet he maintained his position.[38] This incident was characteristic of Gair's approach to dealing with the union movement and party organisation generally. It also showcases Gair's unwillingness to even pay lip-service to the notion that parliamentary leaders are meant to act as the party's delegates.

In due course a number of charges were brought against the Premier and on 25 April 1957 the QCE expelled him. Gair's expulsion was the result of a number of factors, not least significant the personality clashes between the key party players of the time. The Queensland branch of the ALP in the 1950s was populated with big personalities and acrimonious relationships. The enmity between the Premier and the AWU's Joe Bukowski dated back to their youth, where Bukowski was known for bullying weaker boys, such as Gair, a history that undoubtedly fuelled their adulthood disputes.[39] Indeed, Gair, Bukowski and Egerton, exhibited similar domineering characteristics, making personal animosity almost

an unavoidable element of the power struggle.[40] What is most important, though, are not the specific reasons for Gair's expulsion, but the fact the party could expel a premier who had gained office with a substantial majority.

Despite Gair's electoral success, the organisation was still willing and able to topple him when they perceived he was not serving their interests. The expulsion of Premier Gair is a prime example of the danger that ALP premiers then faced when they attempted to defy the organisation, thus proving the J.A. McCallum quip: 'A labour leader may stoop to conquer, but, none the less, stooping, not conquering, appears to be his characteristic position.'[41] The Gair premiership serves as a clear example of the strength of the extra-parliamentary organisation of the ALP in this era.

Conclusion

Ryan rose to prominence at a time when the idea of the leader as a delegate of the party was still very much in vogue and Ryan understood his designated role and worked more or less harmoniously with the organisation. In the post-Ryan decades when Labor largely dominated the political arena, the PLP was able to gain greater leeway over the legislative agenda. As long as the leaders retained reasonably close links to the major party power-brokers, premiers could get away with domineering behaviour, as Forgan Smith's premiership testified.

Gair came unstuck when he alienated both the AWU and the TLC. It is not far-fetched to speculate that if Gair had been of a different temperament the split might not have occurred. But Gair was an entirely different character to Ryan.[42] Gair's premiership clearly illustrates that in this era, when party heavyweights clashed with the leader, even if that leader had the backing of much of the PLP, the premier would not come out on top.

Notes

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2 Jack Lang, *I Remember*, Invincible Press, Sydney, 1956, p.24.

3 Scott Bennett, *Affairs of State: Politics in the Australian States and Territories*, Allen and Unwin, North Sydney, 1992, p.3.

4 For instance see: Ian Marsh (ed.), *Political Parties in Transition?*, The Federation Press, Sydney, 2006. Dean Jaensch, *The Hawke-Keating Hijack: The ALP in Transition*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1989. Ian Ward and Randal G. Stewart, *Politics One, 3rd ed.,* Palgrave Macmillan, South Yarra, 2006, pp.134-172.

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8   D.J. Murphy, 'Queensland', in *Labor in Politics: The State Labor Parties in Australia*, D.J. Murphy (ed.), University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1975a, p.205.

9   Shawn Sherlock, '"Good-bye the State's Progress": State Enterprise and Labor's Plan for a North Queensland Steel Industry, 1915-20', *Labor History*, No. 90, 2006, p.62. Nolan, p.142. It should be noted that since Nolan wrote his memoirs the legislation has been changed.

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12 *Argus*, 25 November 1915. Murphy, 2003a, pp.81 & 83.

13 Murphy, 2003a, p.83.

14 Ross Fitzgerald, '*Red Ted': The Life of E.G. Theodore*, University of Queensland Press, **S**t Lucia, 1994, p.71.

15 Justin Harding, 'Ideology or Expediency? The Abolition of the Queensland Legislative Council 1915-22', *Labour History*, Vol. 79, 2000, p.166.

16 Ibid., p.168.

17 Ibid., p.166.

18 Australian Labor Party (Queensland Branch), 'Official Record of the Eighth Labor-in-Politics Convention, 1916', in Fryer Library, University of Queensland, UQFL129, Papers of D.J. Murphy. There was a concern that conscription would target the working class. A fear also existed that militant unionists could be singled out (*Brisbane Courier,* 28 Oct 1916. Blackburn, Maurice. 193-. *The Conscription Referendum of 1916*, Ruskin Press, Melbourne, p.12). The debate also raised questions about Australia's obligation to the British Empire, a pertinent question for those Laborites of Irish Catholic background, particularly in view of the British government's harsh response to the Easter Rebellion of 1916.

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21 W. Ross Johnston and D.J. Murphy 'Ryan, Thomas Joseph (1876-1921)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography,* Online Edition, Australian National University, Canberra, 2006, URL: <http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A110509b.htm?hilite=Ryan%3BT%3BJ>, Consulted 3 June 2008. Fitzgerald, p.78.

22 Murphy 1975b, p.189.

23 Brian McKinlay, *The ALP: A Short History of the Australian Labor Party*, Heinemann Publishers Australia, Richmond Victoria, 1981, p.46.

24 Birrell, p.iii.

25 Murphy, 1975b, p.357.

26 In the wake of Ryan's transfer to the federal arena the AWU grew in authority, becoming the largest union in Queensland. For further information see Murphy 1975b, pp.127-228.

27 *Queensland Parliamentary Debates***,** 22 Oct 1959, p.846.

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34 *The Worker*, 1 October 1956, 8 October 1956.

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36 Australian Labor Party (Queensland Branch). 'Official Record of the Twenty-second Labor-in-Politics Convention', *The Worker*, Brisbane, 1956, pp.75, 76-105.

37 Cited in Lack, 1962, p.446.

38 Frank Mines, G*air*, The Arrow Press, Canberra, 1975, pp.69-70. *The* C*ourier Mail,* 28 March 1957.

39 Anne McMurchy, 'Pastoral Strike, 1956', in *The Big Strikes, Queensland 1889-1965*, D.J. Murphy (ed.), University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1983, p.257.

40 Murphy, 1980, p.497.

41 Cited in Aaron Widavsky, 'Party Discipline Under Federalism: Implications of the Australian Experience', in *Comparative Political Parties: Selected Readings,* Andrew J. Milnor (ed.), Thomas Y. Crowell Company, New York, 1969, pp.200-201.

42 This is a view that Denis Murphy, one of the most prolific scholars of the Queensland branch, also puts forward. See Murphy, 1980, p.497.

* * *Qui dolor magnis renis quia plit, omnimusam, sin cus sit il millanderi rae non nistius rehenimus aut vendem faccatures rempos maionsequos estempe llacepudi que ea dem ipitatur rest perepro beaquibus dem fugiaes pa doluptatius sundit volori am eatet as repelen diostia doluptur? Qui ratusdant modia sitinus di blaut ellam quatint excestem ut eat.

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Who Paid for the Lucky Country?

By Dr Ros Kidd

One of this nation's enduring myths is that the Australian economy was built on the sheep's back, that Australia's wonderful rural wealth during the late 19th and much of the 20th century made us the lucky country we are today. We hear little about the huge nameless army of unpaid and underpaid Aboriginal labour upon which this wealth depended; generations of workers who even now are rarely acknowledged. I believe this is because official files that chart the critical value of the Aboriginal labour force reveal also the entrenched and shameful exploitation of work and wages by the governments that controlled Aboriginal employment into the early 1970s.

Around the turn of the 20th century each state government, and the Commonwealth government in the Northern Territory from 1911 to 1978, carefully crafted laws controlling Aboriginal lives and labour. It is clear from official files that Aboriginal workers have been a massive and vital component of Queensland's economic development. Legislation from 1897 to impose a complex network of surveillance and control effectively designated almost half the state's Aboriginal population as wards of the state. Until 1968 in rural areas and until 1979 on government settlements,

Aboriginal legislation over-rode the whole raft of industrial protections enjoyed by every other Australian worker. In operating this 'protection' regime into the early 1970s, the government incurred a range of legal obligations. Those relating to controlled employment included a duty to secure safe workplaces and a duty to negotiate a rate of pay reflecting the worker's best interests. In its role as banker for Aboriginal wards, the government held a duty to safeguard all wages and savings, and a duty to fully protect the integrity of all Trust accounts. Attention to official records reveals how successive Queensland governments failed to execute these legal obligations.

The Conscripted Workforce

By the mid 1880s over 1000 Aborigines were already in permanent work in Queensland, predominately in rural areas where white labour was scarce. Payment was generally scant food and shelter, but many were given adulterated liquor or opium dregs (a legal drug until 1905), addiction to which secured compliant workers and access to their wives and children. Until the late 1890s there were no employment protections for any Queensland workers, excepting the dubious security offered by *Masters and Servants* laws, under which breaches by workers were criminal offences, while breaches by employers were a civil matter usually adjudicated

by local police magistrates or justices of the peace, members of the employer's social cohort. Absconding workers could be arrested and returned to work out their contracted time, although this provision was regarded as ineffective against Aboriginal workers.

The 1897 *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act* was introduced to impose a framework of controls over all aspects of inter-racial relations. Rather than strengthening or replacing existing laws to eradicate abuses, the 1897 Act and 1901 Amendment Act encompassed only the *Aboriginal* half of the equation. These laws prohibited Aboriginal access to liquor and opium, set aside reserved areas for Aboriginal use and confinement, and initiated a network of police 'protectors' to oversee Aboriginal interests. Any person of Aboriginal parentage, excepting 'half-caste' males over 16 years of age living separately from Aborigines, could be declared a ward of state and exiled to a reserve, losing rights and responsibilities regarding movement, marriage, children, education, employment and finances. Under this legal framework, which persisted into the early 1970s, Aboriginal lives were hostage to official decree.

Control of Aboriginal employment was a major component of the government's protection regime. Operating as employment broker for all Aboriginal labour through its agents, the police protectors, the government controlled where workers were sent, what work they were hired to do, provision of food and shelter, their wage rate and their access to any of this wage in cash. In theory work contracts were twelve-month 'agreements' but in practice people who refused such relocations were routinely removed to government settlements. If employers refused to accommodate wives and families, these dependants were sent to the reserves, further fracturing families and communities.

The government deployed its captive labour pool to meet the needs of its rapidly expanding rural economy, especially in areas where white labour was scarce due to harsh conditions and poor pay. An 1899 government survey listed over 2000 permanent workers south of Rockhampton. By 1907 there were more than 3000 contracted Aboriginal workers across the state. By 1920 the figure was nudging 4000 government-controlled workers in the pastoral industry alone, rising to 4500 in the early 1930s and 5000 in the mid 1960s. Only after 1972 were Aboriginal workers free to choose their employment.

Workplace Conditions and Wage Rates

How well did the government's 'protection' regime safeguard the interests of these thousands of conscripted workers? Initially there

were no limits on how many hours were worked, how hard the labour, how bad the treatment, provision of food and living quarters. Official files show that from the earliest days the government knew abuses occurred. Yet minimum conditions were not introduced until 1919 and even then there were no inspections to enforce them, despite constant evidence of assaults and abuses. In 1921 the chief protector admitted shelter for many Aboriginal workers was 'worse than they would provide for their pet horse, motor-car or prize cattle.'[1] In 1936 on one station families were forced to live in the open with no protection from the rain or cold winds; in the 1940s it was reported most employers in the Gulf area thought 'anything is good enough for a nigger.'[2]

Only in 1956, after the system had run for nearly 60 years, did the government instruct industrial inspectors to include Aboriginal employees in their tours of rural areas. Even then, as the records show, abuses continued; in 1959 one group of stock workers were housed in an open shed without any bedding, light or table and paid only tobacco and matches each week for their work.[3] Other files record sexual assaults, wet living quarters, rough handling, beatings with chains, lack of water and cooking facilities, toilet pans emptied near sleeping sheds, and widespread hookworm and ill health, especially among children. Meanwhile, under this employment regime, Aboriginal

workers who absconded because of physical or sexual abuses, scandalous conditions, overwork, lack of food, or perhaps to seek better pay or visit their families, were pursued by police and forcibly returned. White workers, in contrast, could choose to work for their own benefit.

While young men were more likely to be retained on the settlements as unpaid labour, young girls 'between school and marriageable age' were routinely dispatched to remote locations as domestics, some being rostered out year after year with only a week's break between. Many were subject to physical and sexual abuse. Children under 12 were also contracted to external employment, although after 1919 this needed endorsement by the chief protector. As late as 1957 the director of Native Affairs admitted child labour was still prevalent in rural Queensland.[4] Observing that many children suffered broken limbs through their work, he suggested 'undersized and weedy' children should not be put to hard labour, adding: 'We try to look on these people as human beings.'

Not only did the government fail to safeguard the work environments of its conscripted workforce, it also breached its duty of care for workers by selling them cheaply to its key constituency, the pastoral industry. From 1901 the government set a minimum monthly wage of about $46 (today) for workers in the sea trades and half that for those

on the mainland, around one-eighth the white rate. Regulations in 1904 listed wage rates for children under 12 years, amounting to $5.80 a week. By 1907 over 3000 pastoral workers averaged about around three per cent the white rate.[5] In 1919 the government lobbied to exclude Aboriginal workers from the Station Hands Award, striking a deal with the pastoral industry to freeze Aboriginal wages at 66 per cent the white rate.[6] This discount belied a raft of testimonials over many years confirming many employers considered Aboriginal workers to be equally or better skilled than their white colleagues. Workers were responsible for maintaining their families on this fractional wage; failure to do so triggered removal to a reserve.

Records show the government frequently failed to demand even the 66 per cent, despite continuing confirmation from surveys that Aboriginal workers were often superior horsemen and knew the country better than their white counterparts. It was frequently said that many stations would not survive without the Aboriginal workforce, effectively gifted to them at bargain-basement wages. Unstated, although obvious from different records, was the additional benefit of a vast pool of captive man- (and woman) power for whom leaving abusive employment triggered police pursuit and capture.

In the 1920s and 1930s, when white rural labour was described as 'often useless' and Aboriginal labour 'indispensable', Aboriginal workers were sold at around 40 per cent the award rate. Rates for the 4500 workers fell to only 31 per cent in 1949 and stood at 59 per cent in 1956, when a departmental survey confirmed the pastoral industry was entirely dependent on Aboriginal workers, particularly in remote areas where white stockmen were rare. The inspector said the entrenched mentality was to pay 'as little as possible for Aboriginal workers', while 'white men of markedly less ability and industry receive higher wages and better living conditions than Aboriginals who are better workmen.'[7] By the mid 1960s the 5000 Aboriginal workers were paid only 70 per cent the award rate. In defiance of the equal pay judgement of 1966, workers under state control were termed 'trainees' and still sold at a discount, although most had decades of skill and experience.[8] Only after 1972 were Aboriginal pastoral workers free from conscripted employment. For the first time elderly family members and wives who had been compelled to work for free on the stations could refuse such exploitation.

Wages, Savings and Trust Accounts

The government ran its contract-labour system for 70 years. It gave employers the right to pay into workers' hands between 30-80 per cent of wages. Decade after decade protectors and

auditors warned the government that workers were not getting this 'pocket money', yet the system continued. An internal inquiry in 1932 found it could be 'reasonably assumed' that workers were cheated of this payment.[9] In 1943 protectors described the pocket money system as a farce and a direct profit to employers; in 1956 they said it was useless, futile and out of control, with workers 'entirely at the mercy' of employers who simply doctored the books. Yet the government rejected auditors' calls for external inspectors as 'too costly.' In the mid 1960s there was still no departmental control over the payment of pocket money.[10]

Aboriginal cooks at Forest Home Station, Queensland, 1908. Courtesy Fryer Library, UQ, UQFL79, Box 4.

From 1901 the government assumed the right, through its network of police protectors, to retain or sell Aboriginal property, to take direct control of wages and to restrict withdrawals by account holders. A trust account, the Aboriginals Protection of Property Account, was opened in Cooktown the following year, absorbing wages of any employees who were said to have deserted or died, and disbursing funds to remaining relatives, or 'for the use of Aborigines generally.' Over several decades the distribution to families in any one year was around one third the levies into this Account. In contrast, the equivalent of almost $460,000 in 1921 and $450,000 in 1931 was used for settlement development and to subsidise consolidated revenue.[11]

Workers could only access their money on request to the protector, who frequently refused. Fraud on controlled savings by both employers and protectors was so common that a system of thumbprints was introduced in 1904 to endorse withdrawals. Official control over women's wages began around 1905 following the practice of several protectors, including the superintendent at Yarrabah, who already took direct receipt of all wages, leaving only a fraction as pocket money during the contract period. When John Bleakley took over as chief protector in 1914 he expanded the compulsorily contracted workforce, increased minimum wages, and demanded every worker's wage be paid direct to local protectors. The 30 per cent increase brought to 5000 the savings accounts under government control, holding almost $3.5 million. By 1919 the government controlled over 6000 accounts holding over $6 million, to which workers were frequently denied access.[12]

In 1921 thumbprints were re-introduced to counteract continuing police fraud on Aboriginal accounts. An internal inquiry in 1922 revealed there was no official supervision of the 8000 rural savings accounts. Police practices were so unreliable the inquiry report urged workers be allowed to appeal dealings on their savings, a recommendation the government dismissed out of hand.[13] This inquiry also exposed misappropriation by the government from the Aboriginals Protection of Property Account and from a second Trust fund, the Aboriginal Provident Fund, which was started in 1919 through further levies on Aboriginal wages of five per cent from single wages and two and a half per cent from married wages. In theory this was an insurance fund for times of sickness or unemployment, but in practice the bulk of these Trust monies was diverted for capital expansion and maintenance expenses on missions and settlements, as well as for departmental costs. Of £2517 (almost $124,000) taken from workers' wages in 1922, a year of extreme drought and hardship, less than eight and a half per cent was released to relieve family suffering.

The 1932 public service inquiry uncovered continuing negligence and misappropriation, and concluded that government refusal to allow account holders to vet dealings on their savings meant 'the opportunity for fraud existed to a greater extent than with any other Governmental accounts.'[14] Pilfering on the Aboriginal savings accounts under government control was found to be 'frequent', and the department admitted – after 35 years of management – there were no real controls over the 95 country police charged with protecting the interests of these wards of state. In order to 'minimise fraud by members of the Police Force who are Protectors', it was decided to manage all accounts from Brisbane, except for a small residue.[15] But this did not benefit Aboriginal workers. Because of the £258,596 (almost $15 million) of private Aboriginal savings in its control, the government promptly diverted £200,000 ($11.572 million) – over 75 per cent – to generate an investment bonus for consolidated revenue. This replicated a profitable, but unauthorised, policy initiated in the early 1920s of investing the 'idle portion' of the Property Account and the Provident Fund. Savings bank interest of two and a half per cent was now also appropriated by the department, a step that was subsequently noted as 'not in accordance with Regulations.'[16] Account holders, meanwhile, continued to live – and die – in poverty, without ready access to this financial return for their labour.

During the depression years of 1929-1932 the government introduced a further tax of five per cent on Aboriginal savings, and withdrew £91,000 (over $5 million) from the Trust funds, money that was never repaid. In 1941, when another inquiry

again detailed the ongoing negligence and unauthorised financial dealings, the government forced the chief protector to resign to avoid charges of incompetence.[17] The Aboriginal Welfare Fund was set up the following year, legitimating the retention of bank interest and investment revenue, and the taxes on savings. It blunted criticism of misappropriation by blurring the expenditure fields of Aboriginal requirements and departmental expenses, declaring that outlays could be made 'providing for the benefits to Aboriginals generally.' This Fund was frozen in 1993 after decades of disputed dealings.

From the mid 1950s the government offered massive amounts of private savings to regional hospitals for development projects, declaring they were 'surplus to requirements' of account holders, an obscene suggestion given the entrenched appalling poverty. Poverty which, it should be remembered, was used to define *Aboriginal* failure of enterprise and management, triggering removal and confinement on reserves. It was not until 1968 that workers were given bank books showing a balance for their savings. Many found to their horror they held pitiful credit despite decades of conscripted work and financial privation. Those who queried head office were told that the records were too inconclusive to calculate the accuracy of their accounts. Only from the early 1970s could people control their own accounts.

Conclusion

It is clear that the prime motivator for the government-run Aboriginal labour market was the needs of rural industries – the supply of as many men and women as required *for a price that the market claimed it could bear*. Records confirm that the pastoral industry in Queensland would not have survived without the thousands of men, women and children forcibly contracted at cheap rates from the turn of last century. This conscripted labour was, as the head of the Queensland department boasted in 1948, 'a valuable asset' to both the industry and the State.[18] Although there was no legal duty to pay full wages prior to 1968 when equal pay was introduced nationally, Queensland had a stated policy from 1919 to pay pastoral workers 66 per cent the white rate. Examination of the records for every year between 1931-1961 confirms that the government did not demand even this discounted amount for this critically valued workforce. The wage portion supposedly paid direct to workers as pocket money was so poorly supervised that it was condemned regularly in every decade and into the mid 1960s. The pastoral workforce numbered between 3000 and 5000 people in the 50 years to 1968. The government knew that potentially an average of 50 per cent of their wages may never have been paid.

The remainder of wages went directly to police protectors where audits and inquiries frequently revealed it was prey to fraud and negligent defaults.

Surviving records show unarguably that the government presided over a system it knew was blighted by frauds and failures to protect Aboriginal wages, savings and Trust funds. Official negligence resulted in massive financial losses to pastoral workers whose labour, wages and savings were controlled by the State for a 70-year period. Legislative and administrative control of Aboriginal lives, employment and finances from the turn of last century carried with it a legal duty to protect and enhance the best interests of the designated dependants. Queensland's Labor administrations since 2002 have sought to avoid accountability by offering affected workers a maximum $7000 payment conditional on a signed indemnity, an indemnity the government well knows will not represent informed consent in the absence of records of all financial dealings on a claimant's account.

Even in the 21st century, it seems, the Queensland government continues to profit from the vast army of Aboriginal workers whose labour has been critical to its rural prosperity.

Notes

1   *Annual Report of the Aboriginals Department for 1921.*
2   2 June 1941, Queensland State Archives (QSA) SRS 505-1 1D/2.
3   26 November 1959, QSA 505-1 1E/25.
4   23 January 1957, QSA TR1227:258.
5   Harvester Award 1907 was 42/- a week. Aboriginal payment 1901 was 5/- a month.
6   22 November 1943, QSA SRS 505-1 Box 196.
7   22 October 1956, QSA SRS 505-1 Box 16.
8   28 May 1965, QSA SRS 505-1 1A/29.
9   9 November 1932, QSA A/58856.
10 11 October 1965, QSA SRS 505-1 1B/69.
11 23 October 1924 QSA A/69449, 6 November 1935, QSA A/70627.
12 *Annual Reports*, 1914 and 1919.
13 15 February 1923, QSA A/69452.
14 9 November 1932, QSA A/58856.
15 15 March 1933, QSA A/58856.
16 19 March 1931, QSA A/58856.
17 29 July 1941, 12 August 1941, QSA A/4291.
18 *Annual Report*, 1948.

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'For general protection we came together': the Unionisation of Australia's Telephonists, 1901-1919

By Jeff Rickertt

Telephony emerged in what Humphrey McQueen has labelled Globalisation Mark III, a third wave of colonialism precipitated by the rise of the modern nation states from around 1860.[1] Eric Hobsbawm has called it an 'age of empire', an era of global capitalist development characterised by 'an increasingly dense web of economic transactions, communications and movements of goods, money and people linking the developed countries with each other and with the undeveloped world.'[2] As always with empire building effective communication systems were essential. What was new about Mark III was the emergence of dedicated communications technologies which enabled messages to be transmitted independently from the transportation of people and goods. Through the cable networks of telegraphy and then telephony, communications was transformed from a function of travel to an industry in its own right.

The development of the switchboard was crucial to telephony's success. Telephone services existed in Australia before the switchboard but it was the switchboard that created a network and

made it an industry. Under licence to the Victorian government, the Melbourne Telephone Company opened Australia's first telephone exchange in September 1880 with a switchboard installed in the stock exchange building in Collins Street, just over two years after the world's first exchange began operating in Connecticut, USA. Brisbane followed quickly but unlike Melbourne its exchange opened under state control. In October 1880 five Queensland government offices were linked by the exchange located in the GPO in Queen Street, other offices followed as the lines were laid, and the existing private telephone operators such as brewers Quinlan, Gray and Co were soon induced to subscribe.[3] By 1887 every Australian colony operated at least one telephone exchange.

The new technology gave rise to a new labour force. In telephone exchanges around Australia, young men and women began to be recruited to serve as telephone 'attendants', also known as operators or telephonists. These young workers were mostly inexperienced in the ways of unionism and they entered an industry devoid of any traditions of resistance or mutual aid, where managerial prerogative was paramount and the opportunities for organising or even fraternising were negligible. As one official instruction decreed:

> Operators on duty are required to face the switchboard at all times, and the attention of each operator

must be concentrated upon her own work. The operators must not indulge in conversations with each other when on duty, neither must they engage in conversation with subscribers or with operators at distant offices apart from what may be necessary for the transaction of the exchange business.[4]

For the workers it was an intolerable situation but a difficult one to overcome. Despite occasional public outbursts of resistance during the 1880s and 90s, Australia's telephone exchange operators began the 20th century without a union to call their own. By the outbreak of World War I, however, Sydney telephonists had produced two, and by the end of 1914 telephone staff in Melbourne had formed the nucleus of a national association. Over the next five years union activists successfully built a national organisation, secured an arbitration Award, sank deep roots into the workforce, and mounted campaigns with enough disruptive impact to attract press attention and management condemnation. This article provides an account of this remarkable but little known episode of early 20th century unionising.

Telephony under PMG: A Regime of Class Pressure

By the time an Australian nation was created in 1901, bringing together into one body the separate colonial Postal and Telegraph departments, around 33,000 offices and homes across the country were equipped with a telephone.[5] By 1911, the number had reached 100,000.[6]

While this expansion signalled the burgeoning commercial and public interest in the new technology, it gave no indication of the true health of the vast new Postmaster General's (PMG) Department. For a decade governments and PMG central management struggled unsuccessfully to mould an integrated and efficient bureaucracy out of the different structures, technologies, development priorities and management philosophies and practices inherited from the colonial departments. The difficulties were magnified by the resistance of many senior managers at state level, resentful of their loss of power in the federation and defensive of their fiefdoms, and by tight expenditure discipline exercised by Treasury.

In 1908 the Deakin Government relented to pressure from the Labor Party to appoint a Royal Commission into the Department. The inquiry found an organisation in disarray. Financial losses, Treasury parsimony and the moribund state of the administration meant the Department was not keeping up with developments in technology and the rising demand for services. Managers and workers alike testified strongly that much of the equipment in the telephone exchanges, especially in the large centres, was obsolete and

unable to meet the demands placed on it.

The exchange workers bore the brunt of this crisis. Expanding workloads in city exchanges combined with long hours of duty without breaks in poorly ventilated rooms caused serious physical and mental strain on telephonists. Manager Blackstone opined that 'telephone attendants should not handle more than four or five calls per minute,' yet conceded, 'in Sydney the girls are sometimes handling twelve and thirteen calls per minute.'[7] Lillias McLeod, telephone attendant at the Sydney GPO, provided a more vivid account of the situation:

> Some one has termed the work of the telephone attendants as 'sweating' – it is even worse than that; it is white slavery. It cannot be called sweating. It is physical exhaustion.[8]

This situation was managed by a regime of tight control, evident in three ways. Administrators went to great lengths to create a uniform supervisory structure across the country. In small country centres, the chain of command was revised in 1906 specifically to impose greater discipline on operators. From 1909 the Department adopted a national policy of promoting attendants into supervisory roles, thereby creating a cadre of supervisors well-versed in the tricks of the trade. With access to clerical and higher public service positions denied them, many single women spent years in these jobs, building careers as experts in keeping watch over Australia's army of telephonists.

Control was also imposed through breaking the labour process into discrete parts governed by an array of detailed regulations. In 1901 instructions and rules were introduced to cover most work practices, representing one of the earliest examples in Australia of 'scientific management', a movement initiated in the 1890s by American engineer Frederick W Taylor. The rise of Taylor's ideas in Australia is normally dated from the 1910s but there were definitely aspects of Taylorism in the practice in telephone exchanges of breaking down tasks into constituent elements which were then measured by the clock and codified as instructions and time standards to maximise efficiency. Telephonists' bodies were even measured to ascertain the optimal balance between reach and dexterity. In 1905 PMG's Chief Electrical Engineer John Hesketh returned from a tour of the United States and Europe where he had investigated the latest developments in telephony and telegraphy. His recommendations showed the influence of scientific management theory:

I. All calls should be answered within an average of five seconds.
II. Connexion should be completed with the called subscriber –

If connected to the same exchange – in 30 seconds

If connected to another exchange joined by junction lines – in 35 seconds

If connected to another exchange by toll lines, periods varying with the traffic over such lines.

III. On the conversation being concluded, and the proper signal given, it should be possible to call the exchange again in 10 seconds.[9]
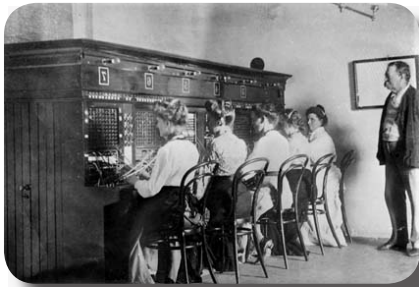
Telephonists under scrutiny, 1890. (NAA: Image J2879. QTH666)

On the strength of such formulas, a revised set of operating instructions was introduced in 1906, and in 1909 telephonists were issued with a list of standardised replies, leaving them with little opportunity for exercising any discretion on the job, even in their interaction with subscribers, as the customers were then known.[10] Set responses, much later known as standard phrases, were to become a feature of operating work for the rest of the industry's history and a forerunner of the automated and voice recognition technology of today.

Finally, the close supervision and the rules of the job were brought together in a punitive regime that provided line managers and their superiors with a schedule of penalties to wield against anyone found infringing the regulations. It was the severity and pettiness of this form of discipline that most inspired a sense of injustice in the exchange room. 'There have been times,' complained Lillias McLeod, 'when it has appeared that the administration of the exchange aimed at detecting the attendants in faults rather than in assisting them to give the best possible service.'[11] The attendants singled out the use of the disciplinary Departmental Regulation 40 as a particular bone of contention. Its provisions for laying charges against staff and fining them were used widely and often vindictively. Even displaying one's humanity could result in a fine, as Edith Jones discovered to her cost. Jones claimed to hold a world record for answering 780 calls in an hour, yet early in her career she too was fined. 'My chief offence was talking and smiling,' she recalled in 1909.[12]

First Unions

The pressure on telephonists eventually triggered a collective response. In 1903 male telephonists from branch exchanges in Sydney founded the New South Wales Telephone Exchange Association (NSWTEA), the first known union of Australian telephonists. The exact circumstances

of its formation are unknown but its representatives' evidence to the 1910 Royal Commission indicates membership was open to male attendants, monitors and supervisors. In those years there were more men than women working on exchanges in metropolitan Sydney. Of the 500 attendants, 286 were men.[13] By 1908 the union boasted 221 members including 40-50 from the country districts.[14]

The decision of the NSWTEA to close its books to women left female telephonists in Sydney with no alternative to forming a union of their own. On 22 April 1907 they launched the Women Telephone Attendants' Association (WTAA) in order that, according to Lillias McLeod, 'the girls as a body could fight the injustice inflicted upon them by an officer who has since been removed to another state.'[15] This officer's name was Mr Monaghan and he was said to have gloated, 'Now we have Regulation 40, we will put the fear of God into your hearts.' According to McLeod, 'He did more than that, he put the fear of man into our hearts as well.'[16] Monaghan's practice of luring telephonists into breaches of the regulations and then fining or in some cases dismissing them galvanised support for a collective response and his transfer to Melbourne was celebrated as the Association's first victory.[17] As McLeod demurely put it, 'He found that the girls in Sydney had obtained their weapon of defence, and,

perhaps, he thought the better course was to retire.'[18]

In a particularly lively exchange at the Royal Commission, McLeod outlined what unionism meant to her and her comrades: 'For general protection we came together, as we believe union is strength'. 'Has it proved so?' she was asked. 'It has,' was the reply, 'That officer [Monaghan] said we would rue the day we formed an Association, but that day has yet to come.'[19] By this stage, the Association had 160 members and its President, Mildred List, was confident the 40 or so non-members 'intended to join.'[20]

Before the 1910 Royal Commission both the men's and women's Associations were at pains to appear united. Lillias McLeod argued that female monitors were more severe than their male counterparts, adding that her Association had no grievance towards monitors: 'Our only trouble is that we are overworked.'[21] For his part the President of the NSWTEA, William Fitzpatrick, emphatically endorsed the Royal Commission evidence from the women's union and condemned the impact of Regulation 40 on all attendants.[22] Both found common ground in their complaints about obsolete equipment, staff shortages, poor amenities and Departmental hostility towards unionism. Yet the potential for union amalgamation, consolidation and growth was never realised. Despite their promising start,

neither union grew beyond its New South Wales origins and both had disappeared by 1914.

A National Union

The organisational, technological and financial crises revealed by the 1910 Royal Commission did not abate, however, despite initiatives to unify and upgrade the service. When the first complete balance sheet and profit and loss accounts for the Department were produced in 1912-13, they revealed a total departmental deficit of £407,102 and a loss for the telephone branch of £221,758.[23] The problem continued into the war years. The telephone branch did not record a profit until 1916-17, and even then it was touch and go, the surplus amounting to a mere £17,234.[24]

Under the direction of Electrical Engineer Hesketh, the flat rate system of telephone charges was gradually replaced with a measured rate system designed to bolster revenue. Superficially this amounted to a shift from Treasury subsidies to a user-pay regime. But in practice the move to reduce a subsidised service by shifting costs to the subscriber entailed intensifying the exploitation of switchboard operators who now had to record more details of each call. This occurred in conjunction with a more generalised intensification of work often described in the most benign of bureaucratic language. 'Every effort is being made to promote efficiency,

and thereby reduce expenditure,' declared PMG Secretary Oxenham in 1913. Telephonists reported a marked increase in workloads and levels of responsibility and skills. When Justice Powers of the Arbitration Court inspected telephone exchanges in 1917, he concluded 'that during the busy hours at the Central telephone Exchanges, no other officers in the Public Service are made to work at the same pace, or under the same pressure as the telephonists.' [25]

The drive to maximise the Department's return on its investment in labour spurred Hesketh to embark upon a new investigation of the merits of automatic telephone switching equipment. His 1912 report emphasised the role of automation in minimising labour costs and maximising control over the labour process:

> The question of staff has a very important bearing in arriving at a decision as to adopting an automatic switching mechanism. In this regard, not only the cost, but also the difficulty of discipline and the difficulty of obtaining an adequately trained staff immediately the necessity arises must be taken into consideration.[26]

Trials of the first public automatic telephone exchange began in Geelong on 6 July 1912. By 1924 the Department boasted 20 automatic and three semi-automatic exchanges, servicing nearly

20 per cent of the total subscribers connected.[27]

Governments and the Public Service Commissioner also helped hold down expenditure on labour by pegging wages. Despite rises in the cost of living, the maximum wage for telephonists in 1917 languished at the rate set in 1908, and the 1917 minimum wage was still at its 1911 level.[28] Commenting on the furore generated by staff evidence to the 1910 Royal Commission, Prime Minister Deakin remarked: 'Nowhere have we had such a large body of public servants as discontented with their present lot and future prospects.'[29]

The Fisher Labor Government which came to power in April 1910 responded to the unrest by passing the *Arbitration (Public Service) Act 1911*, for the first time allowing public service associations to submit claims to the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration for the determination of awards, thereby countering the power of the Public Service Commissioner to set the wages and conditions of public servants. Although initially opposed by some associations which feared the impact of industrial arbitration on their more genteel modes of operation, the new act contributed to a period of growth and consolidation of public service unionism. By the outbreak of World War I, 10 unions had registered and four had decided to apply.[30]

The intensifying pressure inside telephone exchanges and the wider public service encouraged a new surge of organising amongst telephone exchange workers, culminating in 1914 with the creation of Australia's first national telephonists' union. Details of its early history are sketchy as the first minute books appear not to have survived. A short history in typescript held by the CEPU claims the founding meeting was held at the Ribiras Hotel in Bourke Street, Melbourne.[31] The dates on surviving membership application forms completed by the founding members suggest the inaugural meeting was held shortly before September 1914.[32] It was registered in Melbourne on 14 November as the General Division Telephone Traffic Officers' Association and then renamed the Commonwealth General Division Telephone Officers' Association on 6 January 1915.[33] It was usually known as the Commonwealth Telephone Officers' Association (CTOA), even before it officially adopted the shorter title in 1924.[34]

The CTOA's rules gave it coverage of all classifications of telephone exchange workers – operators, monitors and supervisors, men and women. It soon became a genuinely national union, with branches in West Australia, South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland, although in an era without mass air transportation distance ensured the federal structures would be dominated by Melbourne where

the PMG Department's headquarters was located and remained even after Canberra became the national capital. Melbourne's preeminent role was formalised at the Association's first conference in June 1916, when, in the shadow of the union's first Award hearing, delegates from Victoria and interstate resolved that the Victorian Branch Committee should become the Executive Committee and its officers be given full power to act in the interests of all State branches.[35]

Although the CTOA covered both sexes, it may have had its genesis in the earlier Victorian Women Public Servants' Association (VWPSA), founded by Vida Goldstein and others in August 1901. According to an account of telephone exchange unionism published in *The Woman Voter*, the VWPSA eventually became a purely commonwealth public service organisation 'which ultimately developed into the Commonwealth General Division Telephone Officers' Association.'[36] Though this claim of a direct connection between the two organisations has not been corroborated, it is entirely plausible.[37] Even if one organisation was not formally transformed into the other, it is likely that the CTOA attracted many of the best telephone exchange unionists active in the VWPSA. If not the formal successor, it was a logical next step and natural home for a generation of unionists who had cut their teeth on the equal pay and suffrage struggles of first wave feminism.

Life on the boards, Central Telephone Exchange, Brisbane, 1906. (NAA: Image J2879, QTH30)

A National Award

The CTOA's first plaint to the Commonwealth Arbitration Court, filed in an interim format on 12 May 1916, dominated Association affairs for over 12 months.[38] The union's wage claim ranged from a 115 per cent pay increase for first year telephonists, to a 47 per cent increase for those with eight years of service.[39] The claim was intended partly to address the failure of Treasury and the Public Service Commissioner to maintain real wages against the cost of living, calculated to have risen 32.9 per cent between 1904 and 1914. But the union also aimed to rectify what the union's advocate, Frank McCart, argued was unfair treatment in comparison with the treatment of clerical and professional officers. It was a work-value claim,

calculated against the salaries paid to officers in other divisions of the service for a similar class of work, and against salaries paid by cable companies, insurance companies and banks.[40]

Despite the strength of their case, the telephonists' pay claim ultimately foundered on the sexist assumptions of the basic wage principles enunciated in the 1907 Harvester Award. On 22 June 1917 Justice Powers handed down his decision:

> In deciding upon the salaries to be paid – as most of the employees are over 21 years of age – the first thing to be decided is whether the work is man's work or woman's work. This is necessary for two reasons:
>
> 1. Because the Court does not fix any lower rate for a woman's wage than for a man's, if the work done is man's work; but if the work done is recognised as woman's work the wages fixed are those determined by the Court as fair, on the evidence submitted, for the class of work in question.
> 2. Because if the work is man's work, the minimum wage to be fixed for an adult is a wage sufficient to keep a man, his wife, and a family of three children in reasonable comfort. If it is woman's work, a wage sufficient to keep a single woman in reasonable comfort.[41]

Thus the fiction was maintained that women were never family breadwinners while men invariably were, even though many women attendants and supervisors supported families, while most of their male counterparts did not. Despite the empirical evidence, Powers declared telephony women's work and set pay rates accordingly. Over 50 years would pass before this discrimination would formally end.

After wages, the union's most important claims related to hours and breaks. The CTOA requested an ordinary day that would not exceed six hours, regardless of the size of the telephone exchange or the differences in workloads between localities and times of the day. Consistent with this argument, the union also claimed that no-one should work more than three hours without a break.

Ironically, on these issues Powers' sexism could have worked to the telephonists' benefit. 'I think it is advisable,' he declared, 'to allow breaks because girls, generally speaking, cannot continue to stand the strain.' In general he accepted the evidence of excessive, prolonged pressure as a problem. 'I do not think any reasonable man could complain of delay in obtaining a reply to his particular inquiry if he saw the telephonists under the strain of answering 240 calls in addition to his own, in the space of one hour during the busy hours.'[42] His sympathy, however, was not translated

into satisfactory concessions. He saw no way to fix shorter or uniform hours, although he appealed to the Department to limit the hours to six in the Central Exchanges 'as soon as it is proved to be practicable at a reasonable cost.'[43] Predictably, management and the Public Service Commissioner subsequently found 'no sufficient warrant' for such an alteration.[44] Powers' only concession on breaks was to allow telephonists in the Central City Exchanges a break after three and a half hours or two and a half hours if they were standing continuously.[45]

Fighting On

After the ruling, workloads and work intensity remained the principal causes of discontent. On 5 November 1919, against the background of the federal parliamentary election in which the maladministration of the Commonwealth Public Service was an issue, about 200 Sydney telephonists held a mass meeting over the failure of the Department to increase staff numbers to a level commensurate with the expansion of services. Many similar grievances had been heard before in royal commissions and plaint hearings but this was an unprecedented public airing of dissatisfaction. The chairperson of the meeting explained she 'thought it was time that the public knew what the telephone girls had to put up with.' She herself had answered 369 calls in an hour during that day although regulations stipulated an acceptable hourly workload of 187 calls. The meeting unanimously resolved 'that the members of this union from to-morrow, and until our grievances are redressed, abide by the regulations to the letter.'[46]

The next morning the work-to-rule commenced from 7am in the Sydney central exchange and from 9am in the suburbs. The press reported difficulties in raising the city exchange, the union reported its members were working at 'a comfortable rate.' Postmaster General William Webster publicly attacked the action, describing the workers as 'a small and unreasonable section of the services.' In a pitch aimed both at winning public support and undermining the workers' unity by appealing to the principle of loyal service, he argued 'the people who pay will be penalised in a manner which I do not think the majority of the officers would support.' His general tone, however, was defensive. He revealed that under pressure from the union he had ordered the provision of extra staff and facilities be expedited. He insisted that in light of post-war difficulties they should be prepared to 'suffer [him] a little longer.'[47]

The union executive was quick to rebuke Webster for his comments:

> Now we are asked to bear with the department a little longer. We have two strenuous and weary years of hard work waiting, killing ourselves, and penalising the

general public. We consider that at this stage we are quite justified in taking the action we have. Mr Webster says our grievances are political. We do not live in a political world; his world is quite a different one to ours.

Our PMG asks us to consider the people who employ us. We desire to ask, Is the consideration to come from our side alone? We consider that we are giving the people who employ us every consideration, and instead of so much talk it would be better to see our PMG carrying out the duties appertaining to his high office during his stay in Sydney by assisting the telephonists to give an honest and efficient service.[48]

Melbourne telephonists expressed support for the executive's sentiments by implementing their own work-to-rule on 9 November.[49]

Despite its success, the 1919 campaign marked the end of an era. Decades would pass before a Postmaster General would again have cause to criticise the industrial behaviour of the Department's telephonists. This decline in combativeness mirrored the general retreat of Australian working-class militancy after the historic peak of 1917. But there were also specific factors in play. As a union operating on a national stage and within the framework of arbitration, the CTOA was drawn inexorably into creating an apparatus and a mode of activity which muted the power and the passion of the workplace. Management did its best to encourage this process by adopting co-optive measures modelled on American company unionism. The centrepiece of its strategy was the Postal Institutes, created, according to Postmaster General Webster, to improve the character and work of the staff and to make the work of supervision more effective and less irksome.[50]

Union activism, meanwhile, became a specialised function of those with expertise in industrial advocacy, establishing a tradition of commitment and self-sacrifice by the few rather than self-activity by the many as a hallmark of the union's industrial behaviour. Such was the spirit of dedication to leadership, it was not unusual for office bearers to serve decades. The first federal president, the indomitable Jane Roddy, served as either president or federal secretary for 33 years, long enough to witness the rise of Kathleen Hester to federal secretary in 1942, a position she held until 1965. The earlier WTAA tradition of looking to the rank and file as the agent of change disappeared for over 60 years. When it eventually resurfaced in the1970s it would herald a spectacular revival of unionism in Australia's telephone exchanges, with the Queensland branch playing a particularly combative role. A new generation of telephonists, few of whom had ever heard of Lillias McLeod, discovered for themselves that a fighting union could be a powerful weapon of defence.

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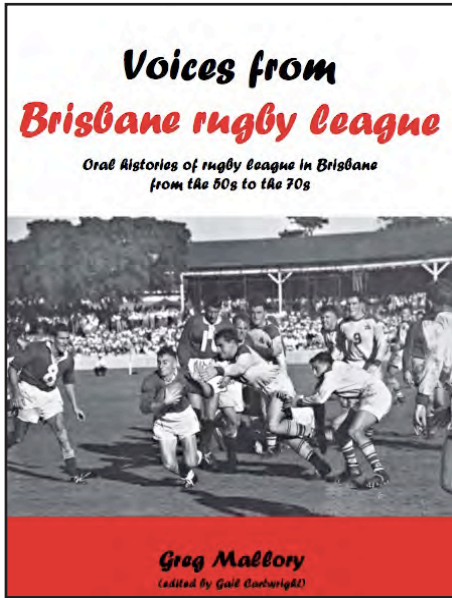
Review of

Voices from Brisbane rugby league: Oral histories of rugby league in Brisbane from the 50s to the 70s.

By Greg Mallory
(edited by Gail Cartwright)

Greg Mallory, Annerley, Qld ©2009

Boolarong Press 2009

$40, paperback, 202 pp.

ISBN 9780975770412

Greg Mallory, and his editor, Gail Cartwright, are to be congratulated for adding to the Australian archive of oral history collections. Like all such works, this oral history of rugby league in Brisbane captures the mood of a time and place that even the great narrative historians have difficulty in conveying. The collection of subjective memories (its minor errors of recollection notwithstanding) gathers in one voice to paint a vivid picture of a sport, its culture and the society by which it is hosted. It makes a powerful statement about the decline – demise might be too strong a word – of this culture, about the dismantling of something that Raymond Williams would have called a 'structure of feeling'.

Voices from Brisbane Rugby League is a set of interviews with 12 prominent figures from Queensland Rugby League – 10 players, the referee Henry Albert and the commentator George 'Mr Football' Lovejoy. Most were conducted in 2001, though three are more recent. Each interview is presented around a flexible template of themes: where it all started; on playing first grade; on the Bulimba Cup; on the state of Brisbane rugby league; on the state of the modern game; on life after football; and others. This is a useful device because it allows for cross-referencing between respondents – to see where they agreed or disagreed. It also sets up a pattern of expectation in the reader. In the final chapters of the book I was looking forward to what

Fonda Metassa or Des Morris, for example, had to say on the modern game.

Despite the book's subtitle, the period under discussion is a little wider than three decades, running from the late 1940s to the emergence of the Brisbane Broncos in the late 1980s. Mallory has also included much useful and interesting accompanying material: a veritable front row of introductory pieces from Tony Collins (one of the best football historians of any code), Warren Boland and the author, who gives his own personal history of his immersion in rugby league culture. The book is concluded with two short informational chapters and an index.

Perhaps the central message of the book, one on which all those interviewed seemed to have a view, is the massive changes the respondents have observed during their lives in rugby league, especially the decline of club football in Brisbane. The respondents are not excessively nostalgic and some adopt a fatalistic perspective. Most come across as hard ('but fair') men who have a pretty pragmatic view of things. They regret what has occurred and they are angry about what has happened to club rugby league in Brisbane. Some are even willing to apportion blame, as Norm Pope does with the Broncos. Des Morris and others see the local media as bearing some responsibility, though he is among the few who can envisage a positive future. Marty Scanlan says:

'I think Brisbane rugby league is down at the lowest that it could possibly go, not that I attend any of the games.' It is a comment that tells of a culture alienated from its own foundations and it echoes through the book.

Another theme that emerges is the assumed relative 'softness' and poorer quality of the contemporary game. A predictable and dominating nostalgia for the lung-busting defence of the unlimited-tackle rule, 'the biff' and Norm Pope's stiff-arm tackling speaks of an era prior to the interchange rule, the 'interference' of the judiciary and the attempts to make the game less violent. Even Pedro Gallagher, who applauds the banning of the 'stiff arm tackle and the spear tackle', believes that the game is not as good because the changes over recent years have 'eliminated a lot of the great skills of rugby league, and what rugby league was about.' Norm Pope speaks fondly of the kicking duel. 'The crowds loved it,' he claims. It is hard to imagine Billy Slater and Darren Lockyer engaging in the same practice in today's possession-dominated game. It is even harder to imagine what contemporary crowds would make of it.

Where this book shines most however is around its edges. There are some wonderful moments where the unpredictable is narrated. The recollections of nasty crowd violence – particularly in Ipswich – were surprising and show that attacks on

referees and players are not restricted to soccer and/or 'migrant' cultures. Marty Scanlan's moment of tragedy humanises the game deeply – though there is an almost bathetic quality to its expression:

> Everything pointed to it being a great year for me and then it turned sour. We played Easts in that grand final, and Jeff Fyfe kicked a field goal and they beat us by a point. My mother had a heart attack and collapsed and died in the grandstand about five minutes before the end of the game. We were very disappointed to be beaten by a field goal, but it was even worse coming off to Dr Tom Dooley telling me that Mum had died in the grandstand.

The interview with Aboriginal player Lionel Morgan is a gem. His discussion of racism and its prevalence comes out of the blue and adds a new dimension to the book. The eccentricities of referee Albert and commentator Lovejoy are wonderful to read because they too expand the reader's perception of the game.

If there is a point of criticism it relates to this idea of the edges of the collection. Rugby league is an expression of working class culture with close links to the labour movement, a game with clear political dimensions and affiliations. Yet very little of this is manifested in the book. While that is determined by the individuals interviewed rather than Mallory's own conception of the field, it does suggest that a further set of interviewees – fans, volunteers, politicians – might have added even greater insight to the collection.

Nonetheless I loved reading this book. Like a time capsule, it returned me to another time and place. Now long-exiled in Melbourne, I was brought with a bump back to the North Queensland of my youth, when the Foley Shield thrived, Wally Lewis played for Valleys (indeed, Valleys still existed!), the Brisbane Rugby League competition was a dominant force, and the game's parochial refrain, 'The Greatest Game of All', was the mantra through which a whole culture seemed to assert itself. In the end the vital point is that this book is not merely about rugby league; it's about Queensland rugby league. Perhaps even more than this it is, as Tony Collins intimates in his Foreword, about a certain kind of person: the 'Queenslander'.

Ian Syson
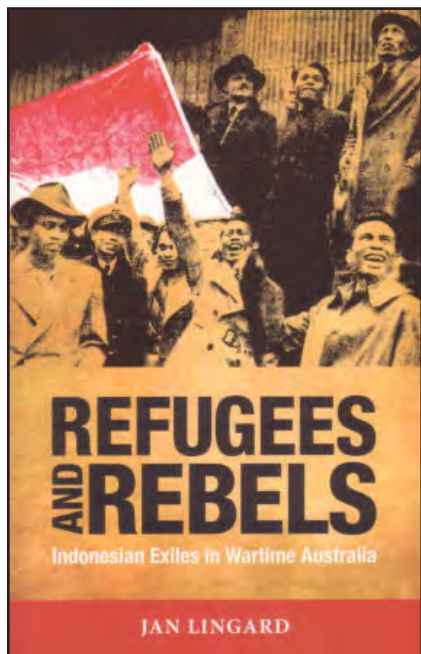
Review of

Refugees and Rebels: Indonesian Exiles in Wartime Australia

By Jan Lingard

Australian Scholarly Publishing 2008

$39.95, paperback, 312 pp.

ISBN 9781740971638

Jan Lingard's *Refugees and Rebels: Indonesian Exiles in Wartime Australia* is a humane, informative and readable book. The book describes the experiences of 5000 Indonesians living, working and engaging in political struggle in both cities and country towns in Australia between 1942 and 1947.

Lingard's book analyses events which have been largely erased from the collective memory of Australian working people or, where that has proved awkward, tamed to remove their radical edge. This book is an important step in recovering that memory. It comes more than two decades after the work by the Communist Party of Australia journalist, Rupert Lockwood, who wrote *Black Armada*. Lockwood chronicled one aspect of the experiences and struggle of Indonesians in Australia in the 1945-47 period — their involvement in the work bans in Australian ports on Dutch ships that were to head north to help the Dutch army recolonise Indonesia after the defeat of the Japanese occupation.

Lingard's research and writing expand the Lockwood picture of Australian solidarity with the Indonesian independence struggle. Lockwood wrote mainly from his direct experience and the materials he had at hand in the port unions and at the offices of the *Tribune,* the newspaper of the Communist Party, which was a participant in joint activities with some of the Indonesians in Australia during this time. Lingard's book takes us through the experiences of the 'black armada', and into the hostels and labour camps where many Indonesian

merchant sailors, evacuated employees of the Dutch colonial state as well as its prisoners, lived and worked. She provides a series of short biographical sketches of many of the Indonesians and Australians involved, along with a more detailed narrative of the most active and interesting figures.

As she points out clearly, the presence of these 5000 Indonesian men and women (although the women were a minority) was an acute anomaly in what, in the 1940s, was still very much the White Australia of 'Advance Australia Fair'. Furthermore, most of these 'javos', as they were sometimes called (although by no means were they all from Java), were highly rebellious; a reflection of their hatred of national oppression and exploitation at the hands of the Dutch colonialists. Those who had been in the terrible Boven Digul Dutch-run prison camp in western Papua were union militants, nationalist activists or communists. Merchant sailors and other employees who were drafted into militarised labour camps were often no less rebellious. Eventually, almost all became involved in, as Lingard puts it, carrying out the Indonesian revolution on Australian soil. The book also documents Australian and Dutch government policies, showing the consistent deep colonial attitudes and policies of the Dutch and the contradictory policies of Australia, caught between a strong liberal-democratic sentiment in the working class and the interests of the Australian

state in cooperating with a fellow white imperialist power.

The material Lingard provides on the conflict between the Dutch and Australian ruling classes, sharpened by the Indonesian independence movement, is from released internal documents of the Australian federal bureaucracy. The material highlights the different nature of racism in Australia and the Netherlands. Dutch racist attitudes stemmed from three centuries of justification of colonial rule over the Indonesian archipelago. It is amazing to realise that after five years of Nazi occupation, the post-war Dutch liberal-democratic government promised amnesty to Dutch Nazis if they volunteered to wage a war to reimpose Dutch colonial rule over Indonesia.

Australian racism towards Asians stemmed from Australian working-class resistance to the importation of Asian labour, something that significant parts of the Australian capitalist class supported. Lingard's documentation shows how the crude racism of Dutch officials alienated individual Australian officials dealing with the Indonesian refugees, pushing them to be more sympathetic to the Indonesian cause. This cannot be a complete explanation for the Labor government's support for Indonesian independence after 1947. Other factors — such as US support for independence and, under US pressure, the moves by the right

wing of the Indonesian elite and its army to forcibly disarm the Indonesian left, jail and execute leftist leaders and brutally smash a left rebellion — were important. However, without the support for Indonesian independence within the Australian trade unions, which Lingard shows, the dynamic towards government support for Indonesia might not have eventuated.

Lingard comments in her conclusion that it was a fortuitous circumstance that there was a Labor government in Australia during these years and not one headed by Robert Menzies, the leader of the coalition of conservative parties. She points out that Menzies, along with most of the Australian press, consistently supported Dutch colonial interests on almost every issue and opposed every concession made by the Labor government to Indonesia and its supporters in Australia. It was important that the Labor Party was in government, not because of any innate tendency of the ALP leaders to support Indonesia, but because the Labor leadership in parliament — especially before the 1980s — was still susceptible to pressures from its base in trade union officialdom.

Lingard's point is important not only as an assessment of where the major capitalist parties stood on the issue but also in explaining how the memory of this inspiring struggle was erased during Menzies' 17 years in government (1949-66). During this time, the Australian government adopted a hostile attitude to Indonesia, supplying arms to rightist military rebels against the Indonesian government in the 1960s and waging a propaganda, diplomatic and military opposition to the anti-imperialist policies of President Sukarno. It is not surprising that solidarity with the Indonesian militants of the 1940s was encouraged to disappear.

Now, occasionally, the belated Australian government support in the UN for Indonesian independence after 1946 will get a mention in official speeches about Australia-Indonesia relations. But the struggles of the Indonesian seafarers' union and the Indonesian independence committees and the protests of Indonesian workers against imprisonment and economic mistreatment, and the solidarity and friendship of many Australians, should be a part of the collective memory of the Australian working people. This book is an important contribution to recovering that memory.

**Max Lane**

Closing Panel Summary

In reflecting on a stimulating day, conference participants seemed agreed that by 2010 it has become politically urgent to advance dialogue between the organised *labour movement* represented by trade unions and the more diverse *environmental movement*. Panelists drawn from both movements stressed that their organisations should not be seen as intrinsically antagonistic despite divergent interests and (historical) differences in political organisation and practices. For this rapporteur, five themes stood out across the excellent paper sessions and panel discussions.

1. There was widespread agreement about the importance of *communication* in breaking down a 'red-green' divide, for example the pitting of jobs and economy against environment and sustainability. Communication requires commitment to genuine dialogue, involving listening as well as engagement. Several papers stressed the importance of *history* in informing contemporary dialogue including stories of workplace struggles over wages, health and safety, as well as about

activism over protection of both 'built' and 'natural' environments. Successful actions over wages and safety on building sites were a crucial prelude to the successful Green Bans developed by the NSW BLF in the early 1970s.

2. *Social inclusion* has become central to debates over environmental sustainability, for example over human-induced climate change. While many speakers claimed global warming as the most important issue facing humanity in the 21st century, others argued poverty remained an overriding issue especially at global scale. Ecological sustainability will not be achieved without substantial reductions in the (widening) gap between rich and poor countries in average daily living standards and in both social inequality and social exclusion within countries. Doubtless, the costs of unsustainable economic development and climate change will have greatest impacts on the least well-off. Inclusion involves diverse groups of people feeling they are included in, rather than marginalised from, sustainable

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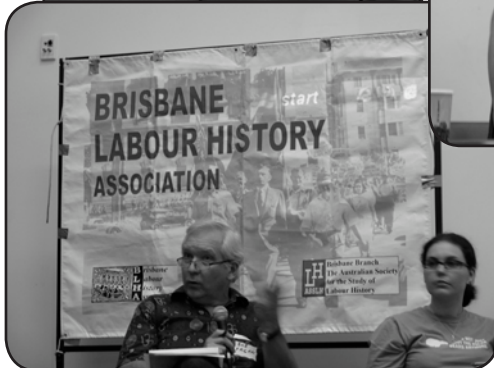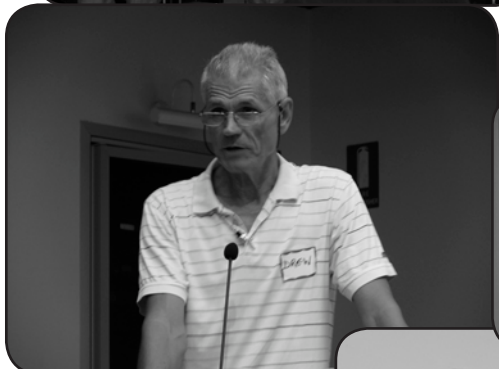
Photos:
RedReunion
Dale Jacobsen

solutions to impacts of global warming and unsustainable energy systems – solutions must seem relevant to their everyday lives.

3. The re-writing of history also motivates and informs political opposition to things like social inclusion and environmental sustainability. Despite the demise of *Work Choices*, business lobbies and federal opposition politicians are publicly revisiting attacks on wages and working conditions as a so-called imperative of economic globalisation. Similarly, the recent upsurge in scepticism towards climate change science has involved powerful stories circulated by right wing politicians, some academic 'think tanks' (mostly of neoliberal economists), journalists and media shock-jocks who have quickly taken up prominent positions as climate change sceptics, often based on apparently zero understanding of climate science, or at least advocate 'business as usual' while Australia waits to see if other rich countries will do anything. Trade unions and environmental organisations need to marshal their knowledge and organisational skills to combat such campaigns and maintain political pressure on state and federal governments over professed environmental and social inclusion agendas.

4. Many papers, and the panel discussions, emphasised the importance of breaking down 'binary thinking'. Indeed, 'Red and Green' is a binary often used to pit social against environmental justice. This arises partly from perceptions that environmental movements involve mostly middle-class issues and interests while, by contrast, the labour movement represents workers excluded from such 'green' politics. Compelling evidence was presented at the conference, however, about the often false binary between 'workers' and 'environmentalists', for example, in historical struggles in the early 20th century around preserving urban parks and passive recreation areas in which both local Indigenous and working class people were involved.

5. Sydney's Green Bans era in the 1970s demonstrated how local resident action (not always middle class) was strengthened by harnessing organisational and industrial experience of a trade union to achieve environmental outcomes. Yet direct actions since the turn of the 21st century, including struggles to achieve sustainable futures in the face of 'globalisation' – combining red and green – have involved trade unionists drawing on organisational experience and diverse knowledge of community and environmental action groups. Perhaps there lies the 21st century's 'red, green and in-between'?

Bob Fagan

I like singing new songs to small audiences, remembering that if fifty people don't like a song, there is a fifty to one chance that the idea is not getting over; rather than that they are not getting it. If an idea doesn't get across to fifty people at the Sydney Folk Club there is no way it will get across to a thousand people at a concert, or ten thousand on radio.

Truly, I like singing to people who want to hear me; it makes everything just so much easier. Apart from that, if an audience is alien it doesn't hear anyway. It just tunes out. Singing to them is wasted time. Perhaps this can be interpreted as preaching to the converted. I am not sure if it can or can't, because I am not sure that I understand the phrase.

Who are these converted? What are they converted to? Who are you? Who am I? Do these converted know that? Does anyone have nothing to say to Hiroshima day's three thousand doctors, cartoonists, lawyers, journalists, clergymen, communists, ALP unionists, Liberal Reform industrialists, Bankstown matrons and King's Cross junkies? Sweetheart, if you've got nothing to say to them, you've got nothing to say to anyone.

('From Where Have All The Surfboards Come?', Don Henderson, Australian Tradition, June 1968)

The 2009 *Flames of Discontent* Concert at Woodford Folk Festival was planned as a tribute to the work of Don Henderson. The line up of singers, musicians and songwriters included Bernard Carney, Liz Frencham, Martin Pearson, John Thompson, Nicole Murray, Jeannie Lewis, Noel Gardner, John Schumann, Hugh McDonald, Tommy Leonard, Alex and Annette Hood. The concert MC was writer and broadcaster Sandy McCutcheon. Annette Hood's *Flames of Discontent* banner formed the backdrop behind the stage. Singers like Alex Hood and Jeannie Lewis had Don Henderson songs in their repertory for close to half a century. Tommy Leonard, who has recorded more of Don's songs than anyone other than Don himself, first heard Don's songs in Brisbane in the mid 1990s. Alex Hood, pioneer of the folk revival and a member of the original 1950s' Bushwhackers Band, recorded Don's songs as early as 1962 as part of the Sydney folk group, Daw Hood and Henderson. There were also those who were new enough to Don's songs that they had to learn them for the concert, a deliberate choice by Festival

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Photos: Doug Eaton,
Mark Gregory,
Trad & Now

director Bill Hauritz, as the aim of concert was to introduce Don's songs to those who'd not heard them before. Another connected aim of the concert was to launch the freshly minted double CD 'The Songs of Don Henderson', a collection of 40 of Don's songs curated and produced by Sally Henderson and Mark Gregory. To ensure the concert ran on schedule, Dale Lorna Jacobsen produced the detailed and informative script and organised the entrances of the musicians.

Sandy McCutcheon opened the concert with the words:

> Tonight, we bring the Flames of Discontent full circle in a Tribute to one of Australia's most influential songwriters, Don Henderson.

> In 1990, Don – "Hendo" to his mates – presented a workshop on the Union Stage at the Maleny Festival: to stoke the Flames of Discontent so people would not forget what they are fighting for. The magnificent hand-sewn silk backdrop behind us was created by Annette Hood for that concert, and it is with pride and great joy that we display it here tonight, at an event where it belongs. This concert is sponsored by the Brisbane Labour History Association in recognition of the rich tradition of workers bringing songs to the people.

Bernard Carney, accompanied by Liz Frencham, began the singing with a powerful version of *Legend* and the concert was underway. The audience was clearly enthralled from then on with a swag of Don's songs, sung in a rich variety of styles, including: 'In My Time', 'Westgate Bridge Disaster', 'The Kids Will Grow', 'Isa', 'Albion Street', 'The Basic Wage Dream', 'It's On!', 'Time to Fight Again' and 'What Makes the Grass Grow?' Like all good concerts the time simply flew.

The audience snapped up 50 of the new CDs as they left the Concert Stage tent and some 20 more were sold at the Woodford Folk Festival Shop. The CD was well and truly launched.

The double CD 'The Songs of Don Henderson' was released by Shoestring Records. It is available from record shops and online sources. The Don Henderson Project is established under the auspices of the Queensland Folk Federation.

The Don Henderson Project is funded through sponsorship from individuals, union branches, labour councils, folk festivals, folk clubs, civil rights organisations, the Brisbane Labour History Association and the Queensland Folk Federation. Many singers donated their recordings of Don's songs to the project.

For more information visit the project website at http://donhenderson.com.au/

Mark Gregory

CONTRIBUTORS

Jeff Rickertt is a labour historian and librarian. He was a contributor and assistant editor to the Radical Brisbane project and his most recent publication is a history of Australian telephonists and their trade union, the ATPOA. Jeff is a committee member of the BLHA.

Greg Mallory is an Adjunct Lecturer in the Department of Employment Relations at Griffith University. His book, *Uncharted Waters: Social Responsibility in Australian Trade Unions*, was published in 2005. He has co-authored *The Coalminers of Queensland, Vol 2: The Pete Thomas Essays* with Pete Thomas, published in December 2007. Greg's book, *Voices from Brisbane rugby league: Oral histories of rugby league in Brisbane from the 50s to the 70s*, was published in September 2009. He is also working on conference papers and a book on leadership and its relationship with rank and file activism in left-wing trade unions. He is currently researching and writing the history of the ETU (Queensland). Greg is President of the BLHA.

Danielle Miller is completing a PhD (*ALP Premiers: Delegates of the Party, Autonomous Actors or Somewhere in Between?*) in the School of Political Science and International Studies at the University of Queensland. Other research interests include: Australian politics, political parties and campaigning and political leadership. Danielle is a committee member of the BLHA.

Ros Kidd was awarded a doctorate in Humanities by Griffith University in 1994. Her PhD thesis, based on unprecedented access to government files, investigated how Queensland governments controlled Aboriginal lives between 1840 and 1988. A freelance consultant historian, Ros Kidd has published four books: *The Way We Civilise*; *Black Lives, Government Lies*; *Trustees on Trial* and *Hard Labour, Stolen Wages*. She provided submissions to the Cape York Justice Study, the Stolen Children Inquiry, the Forde Inquiry into abuse of children in state institutions, and the Senate Inquiry into Stolen Wages nationally. Currently Dr Kidd provides historical research reports for Native Title claimants, and works with

Aboriginal people in pursuit of justice from the government for illegally underpaid wages and lost savings.

Ian Syson is a senior lecturer in literary studies and professional writing at Victoria University. He grew up in Mount Isa and studied at the University of Queensland, completing his PhD on working class literature in 1993. He is writing a history of soccer in Australia.

Max Lane is a writer and lecturer on Indonesian politics, history and literature and Southeast Asian affairs. He published *Unfinished Nation: Indonesia before and after Suharto* (in English and Indonesian) in 2008, and has translated the works of Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Indonesia's most important writer and W.S. Rendra, its most important dramatist. He has presented public lectures at various universities in the States as well as Europe and Australia. He received competitive fellowships at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore (1987); National University of Singapore (2008/2009); the Asia Research Centre, Murdoch University (2004) and the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies in Copenhagen (2010).

Mark Gregory is a folklorist, musician and producer. His interest in industrial song began in the 1960s while compiling *Songs of our Times* at University of Sydney. During the 1970s, he was a member of the radical British documentary film workshop Cinema Action in London. He has an MA Music (Research) from Macquarie University which was published in 2007 as *Sixty Years of Australian Union Songs*.

Bob Fagan is Emeritus Professor, Department of Environment and Geography, Macquarie University. He has spent 35 years teaching and researching impacts of global economic and environmental change on Australian cities and regions and is currently working on urban food security. He has also performed folk music throughout Australia, the UK and Ireland with The Fagans.

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Noticeboard

At the AGM of the BLHA held on 5 December 2009, the following were elected onto the executive.

President	Greg Mallory
Vice-president	Bob Reed
Secretary & Treasurer	Jason Stein
Assistant-secretary	Doug Devonshire
Committee members	Jeff Rickertt Danielle Miller Avalon Kent John Spreckley
Patron	Hughie Williams

Globalisation and Labour in the Pacific: Re-evaluating the 1890 Maritime Strike

Symposium invitation

Organised by the Auckland Labour History Group and the Labour History Project
In association with the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History and
the New Zealand Work & Labour Market Institute

AUT University, Auckland City, Thursday 4 November 2010

Auckland Labour History Group

Labour History Project
"AN INJURY TO ONE IS A CONCERN TO ALL"

ASSLH
Australian Society for the Study of Labour History

AUT **NZ WORK+LABOUR MARKET INSTITUTE**

The 1890 Maritime Strike, one of the largest ever in Australia, also involved New Zealand and Fijian workers, and its impact reverberated throughout the Pacific Rim because of the global structure of capital and labour in the maritime industry. British, European and American employers, politicians and academics took an interest in the dispute, part of a strike wave sweeping Europe, North America and Australasia in 1889-94.

On 16 August 1890 members of the Mercantile Marine Officers' Association of Australasia went on strike over longstanding pay and conditions claims, complicated by employers' objection to their affiliation with the Melbourne Trades Hall Council. Industrial action quickly spread to seamen, wharf labourers, then gas stockers, miners and shearers, involving over 60,000 workers throughout Australia. The Union Steam Ship Company's dominance of trans-Tasman shipping saw the dispute spread to New Zealand and wharf labourers in Fiji.

The dispute became a struggle over freedom of association. Fear gripped middle class hearts and colonial governments deployed troops, artillery and special constables in Sydney, Melbourne, Newcastle and other ports. In Melbourne military volunteers were exhorted by Colonel Tom Price to *"Fire low and lay them out"*.

The eventual defeat of the strike in November 1890 was the turning point that led unions to form the Australian Labor Party and adopt a policy for compulsory state arbitration. The New South Wales Labour Defence Committee stated that *"the time has come when trade unionists must use the parliamentary machine that in the past has used them"*. In New Zealand the strike was a key issue in the December 1890 general election, which led to the formation of the Liberal government and ultimately to state arbitration legislation in 1894.

Call for papers Due date for abstracts: 1 June 2010 to Ann Williamson at nzwalmi@aut.ac.nz
Papers are invited on the 1890 strike, its broader political and historical impact, the nature of Pacific Rim connections in the labour market and between labour organisations, lessons for contemporary labour relations in the maritime industry in the Pacific, and the impact of globalisation generally in Pacific Rim labour relations.

Refereed papers may be selected for publication in the *NZ Journal of Employment Relations* and/or for publication in a special book which will be published to mark the anniversary.

Attendance All welcome. Fee: $40.   Information subject to change.

SOLIDARITY

The Brisbane Labour History Association

The Brisbane Labour History Association was formed in 1990 to encourage and promote the study, teaching, research and publication of labour history and the preservation of labour archives. There are no limits on the study of labour history and the diverse membership reflects many different areas of concern.

The BLHA is the Brisbane branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History. The Association organises seminars, lectures, meetings, conferences and publications on themes of labour history. Membership is open to all individuals and organisations who subscribe to the Association's objectives.

Editorial Policy

The Queensland Journal of Labour History is a journal of labour and social history with a particular emphasis on Queensland history. The history of labour, the classic social movement, is central to our concerns, as are the histories of newer social movements. This journal is committed to the view that history has a social purpose. It publishes articles which, in Ian Turner's words, engage our sympathies, affect present circumstances and suggest answers to present problems. In the words of the Association's slogan, 'The Past is Always with Us'. Material published herein does not necessarily reflect the views of the Association or the Editors. The Journal's Editorial Board is the Committee of the BLHA, chaired by the President.

Notes for Contributors

The *Journal* is published in March and September. Articles of up to 4000 words may be accepted; shorter contributions are encouraged. First person accounts of labour history are particularly welcome. Reports on exhibitions, seminars and research projects are sought, as are book reviews and photo essays. Obtain a copy of the Editorial Guidelines before submission.

Contributions should be made in hard copy to the Society's post office box and (if possible) digital format via email, to the Secretary's email address (see inside front cover). Hard copies should be typed, double-spaced, on single-sided A4 bond paper, with a margin of at least 3 cm. Please number the pages. Two (2) copies of each manuscript are required. Please ensure all contact details are given, including phone numbers and an email address.

Please advise if you have ideas for graphics (photographs, maps, drawings, cartoons, etc) that might accompany your article if accepted for publication.

The Queensland Journal Of Labour History

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Jeff Rickertt

OBITUARIES   *   BOOK REVIEWS   *   NOTICEBOARD

Brisbane Labour History Association