

The Queensland Journal of Labour History

*No. 11
September 2010*



The Brisbane Labour History Association



President: Dr. Greg Mallory
(tel 0407 692 377)

Secretary: Jason Stein
ph: 0413 133 587
email: jstein@btqld.org.au

EDITORS: Dale Lorna Jacobsen & Jeff Rickertt

Design and Layout and Production:
Dale Jacobsen & Beverley Jeppesen

Printed by Uniprint, Griffith University

Subscribing to The Queensland Journal of Labour History

Subscription to the Journal is included in membership of the Brisbane Labour History Association, which is currently:

Individual: Waged \$20 Unwaged \$10 **Organisation:** \$50
A year's membership extends from 1st July to 30th June.

To join, contact:

The Secretary
Brisbane Labour History Association
PO Box 5299
West End QLD 4101

Contact details for Editor of next issue obtainable from President or Secretary.
See inside back cover for *Editorial Policy* and *Notes for Contributors*.

Front Cover Photo:

Queensland contingent of the Australian Builders Labourers' Federation circa 1960.
Photo Noel Butlin Archives Centre at the ANU.

The Queensland Journal Of Labour History

No. 11, September 2010
ISSN 1832-9926

Contents

EDITORIAL	Jeff Rickertt	1
BLHA President's Column	Greg Mallory & Bob Reed	3
IN MEMORIAM		
Jeannie O'Connor	Bob Carnegie	5
Bob Walker	Graeme Walker	7
ARTICLES		
Organising the Revolution by Ballot: Queensland's State Socialists, 1889–1905	Jeff Rickertt	9
A Century of the Queensland BLF	Humphrey McQueen	24
Cornering the Conditions: Queensland White Collar Civil Servants, 1859–1864	Tony Gough	32
BOOK REVIEWS		
<i>Work and Strife in Paradise: The History of Labour Relations in Queensland 1859–2009</i>	Janis Bailey	42
<i>Radical Sydney: Places, Portraits and Unruly Episodes</i>	Janis Bailey	45
<i>The Best Hated Man in Australia: the Life and Death of Percy Brookfield, 1876–1921</i>	Brian Stevenson	48
<i>Leftside</i>	Ian Syson	51
EVENTS REVIEWED		
2010 Alex Macdonald Memorial Lecture	Jeff Rickertt	54
CONTRIBUTORS		56
NOTICEBOARD		58

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



Labour History (ISSN: 0023 6942) is an internationally recognised journal 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. With the demise of the History Co-operative, the Journal has linked up with the non-profit publisher JSTOR. There will be a number of advantages for individual subscribers, including online access to the full run of *Labour History* from 1962 on.

Members of the **BLHA** who are not already receiving *Labour History* are encouraged to subscribe. The full rate for individuals is \$60.00; the 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 2010 will feature a special section devoted to the cross-fertilisation of labour and environmental history. Edited by Janis Bailey and entitled 'Greening Labour History', this section will include articles from the **Red Green and In-between** conference held earlier this year by the Brisbane Labour History Association. The topics range from environmental campaigns for the Georges River (Sydney) and Mt Lesueur (Western Australia) to the creation of a living museum at Mangere (New Zealand). There will also be a number of articles outside this section, research notes, a personal memoir concerning ASSLH's first three years, and a series of tributes to Jeff Shaw. In May 2011, the 100th issue of *Labour History* will be published. To celebrate, this special issue will provide valuable overviews of a wide range of topics such as industrial labour, voluntary labour, convicts, labour and politics, gender and work, the politics of consumption, and anti-labour history.

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**

Enquiries: Tel: 02 9351 3786 Fax: 02 9351 4729
Email: labourhistory@econ.usyd.edu.au

Editorial

Jeff Rickertt

Throughout the history of the workers' movement, few battles and debates have been settled permanently; most have ended in a temporary and partial victory to one side or the other, only to re-emerge at a later date in a different form. So long as workers confront the pressure of capital, this situation won't change. Each new generation will be compelled to refight the struggles of the past.

In this issue of *The Queensland Journal of Labour History* we show just how linked the past and present can be. As we go to press, the Queensland Builders Labourers' Federation is celebrating 100 years of existence. To commemorate this remarkable milestone we feature an overview of the union's history by Humphrey McQueen, author of *Framework of Flesh*, an account of the BLF's long fight for health and safety. Unions of construction industry labourers have existed since at least the boom years of the 1870s, but the BLF as we know it dates from 1910, when a new organisation of builders labourers emerged out of the industrial defeats and economic chaos of the 1890s, and combined with interstate unions to form a national federation.

One hundred years later, much has changed in building and construction, but, as McQueen points out, the industry's class relations are essentially the same: employers still call the shots and the imperative is still profit, while the state, through such bodies as the Australian Building and Construction Commission, still does its bit to keep workers in line. On the job and through their union, construction workers continue to rely on each other to keep themselves safe and to win better wages and conditions.

The ABCC is, of course, a creature of the Howard years kept alive by the Federal Labor government, despite promises made before the 2007 election. Parliamentary Labor's adherence to many of the worst aspects of the Coalition's legacy reminds us that the age-old debate over how organised labour should respond politically to the employing class has never left us. In my article on the history of state socialism in Queensland from 1889 to 1905, I discuss the ideas and activities of some of the socialists who helped found the Queensland branch of the ALP, believing that a political party of the working class should not only represent workers but should offer

them more than piecemeal reforms. Their hopes were dashed quite early, though in those years they did at least achieve a consensus on the Labor side that public ownership was a good thing. As Labor member for South Brisbane, Harry Turley, put it in 1896:

No politician in Queensland today would advocate the selling of our railways to a syndicate. If it is right and beneficial for the State to build a line and run an engine on it, why should it be wrong and injurious for the State to build that engine or to mine for the coal it consumes?

From a different perspective entirely, Tony Gough's article on 19th century civil servants points out that working for the state was not all beer and skittles either. State employees of the 1860s had their grievances too, and, like the tradesmen of that era, they discovered that a bit of collective pressure went a long way in securing what they felt was their due. They, too, learnt the lesson that a gain won was rarely won forever. To hang on to improvements, pressure had to be maintained. The struggle was continuous and, as the BLs have demonstrated, tenacity and longevity were important.

In this issue we pay tribute to two working-class militants who were both tenacious and durable: Bob Walker and Jeannie O'Connor. Though they trod different political paths, both were tireless fighters for their class

and uncompromising in their criticism of the capitalist version of democracy. We offer a bumper review section this issue, with reviews of three important new books of labour history and a collection of poetry by Brisbane socialist, peace activist and retired meatworker, Jim Sharp. We actually intended to review a fifth book, Tom Keneally's *The People's Train*, a novel based on the story of Brisbane's Red Russian community, but the publisher apparently pulled the book from sale due to poor early reviews. Thus inspired by the thought that the written word really can change the course of human affairs, I conclude in quiet hope with a prophetic verse from Jim Sharp's marvellous collection:

a raging movement will herald that day
cleaving the top end of town
asunder
and all talking shops will tremble
and all dynasties will come crashing
down.

* * * *

.....
• 'Politics is the gentle
• art of getting votes
• from the poor and
• campaign funds from
• the rich, by promising
• to protect each from
• the other.'
•
• ~ Oscar Ameringer
•
.....

BLHA

President's Column

Greg Mallory & Bob Reed

Second annual Alex McDonald Memorial Lecture

On 20 May 2010, BLHA presented the second annual Alex McDonald Memorial Lecture at the TLC Building. The speaker on that occasion was Dr Ros Kidd, whose topic was "*One of the Great Scandals of Australia's History: Aboriginal Labour in 20th Century Queensland*".

The lecture was an erudite and captivating distillation of certain elements of Ros' academic work over the past 15 years or so dealing with the immoral and unrelenting misappropriation of the wages of Aboriginal labour by a succession of Queensland Governments from the late 1890s. The depth of detail presented by Ros was truly impressive and underlined in emphatic fashion a shameful and unremedied aspect of Queensland labour history. Anyone wishing to learn more should get a copy of her book, *Trustees on Trial*.

The lecture was extremely well attended and BLHA expresses its deepest gratitude to Ros for taking the time to advance the education of those present. It was fitting that the lecture be held at the QCU's headquarters as QCU is currently funding test litigation to recover moneys owing to Yarrabah man, Uncle Conrad Yeatman, who was present on the evening (courtesy of the QCU) and who spoke passionately about his own history as an Aboriginal worker and the stolen wages issue generally.

Our thanks to the QCU and to BLHA committee members who worked hard to make the evening a success, particularly Jeff Rickertt, Avalon Kent and John Spreckley.

BLHA membership

BLHA financial membership has grown to 60 individual and 16 institutional members. It is gratifying to see that a number of Unions have now come on board. Secretary Jason Stein deserves great credit for his efficient

administration of the membership lists and the necessary liaison with the federal body, ASSLH.

Upcoming BLHA events

The remainder of 2010 promises further BLHA delicacies. With the dust of the federal election settled, a symposium, Labour in Politics...Past and Present, was planned for 2 October 2010. A full report will be included in the March 2011 journal.

The AGM is to be conducted on 4 December 2010 at 2.00pm, with the venue to be notified in due course.

BLHA will again be involved in the Woodford Folk Festival in late December. The details of our sponsorship and role in presenting an event are still being worked out with the Festival organisers and members will learn of this as the details unfold, but it promises to be something special. Dale Jacobsen will again be heavily involved.

In the even more distant future, planning is now well underway for the ASSLH National Conference to be conducted in Canberra in 2011. Further information, including dates for papers, will be provided to members later in the year.

Thanks to all the contributors to this edition of the Journal and to the BLHA Executive for their sterling work.

* * * *



In Memoriam

Jeannie O'Connor 1920–2010 **A working-class gem who** **never lost her shine**



Jeannie O'Connor. Photo courtesy Fryer Library.

On Saturday 13 February over 100 people came together to farewell and celebrate the life of one of Queensland's most remarkable working-class women, Jeannie O'Connor.

Jeannie was many things to many people: a loving mum to her five children and cherished grandmother to her grandchildren; a working-class activist committed to changing society for the betterment of her class; a supporter and indeed fighter for the rights of Indigenous people; a fiery advocate of a united, independent Ireland; a poet who wrote of the struggles of every-day people.

Jeannie grew up on a small farm on the banks of the Maroochy River where, even as a young child, she was greatly disturbed by the treatment of Aboriginal people. She carried this sense of outrage throughout her life. In her 1944 poem, 'The Ghost of Marutchi', she recreated the landscape of her childhood as a place of loss and mourning:

T'is the ghost of Marutchi that
Flits o'er the land
And the salt of his sadness is
lost in the sand.
Here, his people were hunters
for centuries past
Here, the lore of his Tribe was
both moulded, and cast.

In 1940 Jeannie joined the Communist Party of Australia whilst it was operating underground; a not insignificant decision for a young woman of that time. Later, after the ban on the Party was lifted, she became heavily involved in the ‘Sheepskins for Russia’ campaign, aimed at assisting the Red Army in its life-and-death struggle against Hitler’s Wehrmacht.

After the war Jeannie became active in the progressive sections of the trade union movement, immersing herself in the struggles of the working class. In fact, for the next 50 years, wherever Queensland workers were fighting for a better deal or against oppressive State and Federal governments, Jeannie would invariably be there. During the 1948 Queensland rail strike she was famously photographed doing battle with a couple of Queensland’s ‘finest’, while nearby the great working



A familiar photo, but notice the small woman holding a white fan in the middle of the action. Photo: Courtesy John Oxley Library and *The Courier-Mail*

people’s champion, Fred Paterson, was being bludgeoned to the ground. Fifty years later, during the MUA’s watershed battle with Patrick’s, Jeannie would often visit camps Unity and Solidarity, encouraging MUA members and supporters to hold the line against Howard, Reith and Corrigan.



Jean O’Connor in 1994 at the unveiling of the Australian National Maritime Museum memorial to merchant seamen lost in World War II

Jeannie O’Connor had a special affection for members of the Seamen’s Union of Australia and was an active member and leader of the Women’s Committee for over 40 years. The Committee performed important welfare work for seafarers and their families, but it was in the area of political activism that they truly shone. From campaigning for Indigenous rights to actively participating in the anti-war and anti-nuclear movements, the Women’s Committee in Queensland carved for themselves a unique place in Australian working-class history. One of the Committee’s last acts was to

fund a memorial to merchant seamen lost on vessels sunk during World War II. It was a fitting tribute to Jeannie's own role in the SUA that she was given the honour of unveiling the plaque at the Australian Maritime Museum in Sydney.

Jeannie O'Connor dedicated her life to her family and the socialist cause. She did an amazing job at both. A working-class gem who never lost her shine, Jeannie touched the lives of many. As in life, so too in death, the last word goes to her:

With glory and honour our people
will rise

United in action we'll
strengthen our ties,
We'll go forward together, black
and white, hand in hand

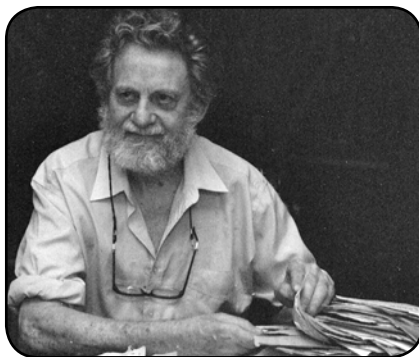
For the future is ours in this
Great Southern Land.

Bob Carnegie

*'The death of an old
person is like the
burning of a library'*

~ Alex Haley

Robert (Bob) Francis Walker, 1924–2010



Bob Walker. Photo courtesy Ted Riethmuller

Robert (Bob) Walker was born at Hopetown, Victoria, on the 11th October 1924. He grew up in Blackburn, in Melbourne, and was trained as a Fitter and Turner. When he married his wife Betty he built their house with his own hands. He was blacklisted in Victoria for his workplace union activities. His friends were not only fellow workers, but also well-educated European immigrants, and he found himself in 1960s' Melbourne immersed in a hotbed of political ideas. His blacklisting was an important reason for his move to Queensland in 1968, although the grind of cold early-morning train commutes to the 'satanic mills' in the city also played a role.

In Brisbane, he became more involved in political activism as an advocate of the right of workers to have a say

in running their workplace. In the Evans Deakin Shipyard in Kangaroo Point, being one of the ‘ringleaders’ in various disputes, he was ostracized and put under all kinds of pressure by the management. It took real courage to keep going. Ironically, as hated as he was by the shipyard bosses, he was asked to manufacture a critical pin to hold the Robert Miller in its berth — the ship that had previously been dislodged from its moorings during the 1974 Brisbane floods. They trusted him, as a person and as a metal worker (in truth, he often came under more criticism from his fellow workers, who were more interested in getting more ‘overtime’ than changing the world).

Later he became a member of the Brisbane Workers’ Self-Management Group. Now he saw himself as an anarchist. Bob was interested in practical progress towards freedom and equality. Possibly inevitably, as a person imbued with such idealism, he became disillusioned with the in-fighting and strategic disagreements within the political activist movements he was involved in. Nonetheless he held his beliefs all of his life, and retained contact with the Libertarian Workers group in Melbourne, a peace group, the Brisbane Disarmament Group, and an environmental group, the ‘Men-of-the-Trees’.

He retired at 54 and began in earnest doing what he really loved, working with wood. His house (and those of

friends) is replete with beautifully crafted wooden furniture. During the last 15 years he built musical instruments (guitars, mandolins, mandolas, dulcimers, and a harp), which are beautiful both to look at and in their sonority and playability. His craftman’s philosophy represents the complete antithesis of the cheap plastic throw-away consumerist society in which we now live.

He left a big mark on the world in many ways. He was scrupulously honest with people, probably overly sensitive to some extent, and overly modest. Bob didn’t believe that any human being should be put on a pedestal above anybody else for any reason. He would not accept prizes or awards for any of his achievements.

Bob died at home in Hawthorne, Queensland, 19 August 2010, just before his 86th birthday. He died on his 60th wedding anniversary.

Graeme Walker

.....
.
.
.
*‘Everyone is a
prisoner of his own
experiences. No
one can eliminate
prejudices — just
recognize them.*
.
.
.
~ Edward R. Murrow
.
.....

Organising the Revolution by Ballot: Queensland's State Socialists, 1889–1905

By Jeff Rickertt

‘There is no joy for Labour if Socialism be not the goal.’

Henry Boote, Brisbane, 1903¹

Socialist ideas were present in Australia as early as 1840 but it was not until the late 1880s, as capitalist socio-economic relations consolidated, workers began to form mass unions, and anxiety over class inequality deepened, that antipodean socialism began to flourish. Like the ‘new unionism’ of this era, the socialism of the 1880s and 1890s was, in a sense, also new. The earlier influence of utopian theorists such as Owen and Fourier was still in evidence; indeed, as Burgmann and others have pointed out, in many respects the decade from 1886 would become the heyday of Australian utopianism, an era awash with fantastic schemes to create socialism beyond the geographical limits of capitalism, epitomised most famously by William Lane’s expedition ‘to write the future history of humanity on the rocks of the Andes’.² But this was not the path taken by most activists who embraced socialism in these years. This generation of socialists was the first to look to the industrial and electoral power of organised labour to build the

new society within the body of the old, to seek the future on the same terrain as the present. In this respect, we can conceptualise Henry Lawson, the poet of new unionism, as also a visionary for new socialism. In his poem ‘Faces in the Street’, capitalism is transcended within its own territorial space and, implicitly, by its own exploited citizenry:

like a swollen river that has broken
bank and wall,
The human flood came pouring
with the red flags over all,
And kindled eyes all blazing bright
with revolution’s heat,
And flashing swords reflecting
rigid faces in the street.³

Here we have echoes of Marx’s notion of labour as capitalism’s grave digger, the force within society most capable of ushering in a post-capitalist order and with the most to gain from doing so. In one form or another, this was the radical idea of the age, marking a new era in socialist thought and practice, even amongst socialists with little or no exposure to Marx’s own writings.

Nowhere in the colonies was this nexus between socialism and the organised working class stronger than in Queensland. The rise of organised labour north of the Tweed was accompanied by a growing interest in the politics of class, from both sides of the class divide. For labour, the project began with the Australian Labour

Federation, formed in Queensland in 1889 by worker socialists Charles Seymour, Albert Hinchcliffe and others, with journalistic support from Lane. Though ostensibly a union federation, the ALF made it clear it was seeking more than closer industrial unity. 'Federate as we will,' its first General Council declared in August 1890:

little indeed can be done so long as industry is conducted solely for the profit of the few and not for the good of all, so long as society neglects the duty of enforcing social justice and of reforming an industrial system which compels the toiling many to surrender the greater part of their wealth production to the few.⁴

With this in mind the delegates recommended to the district committees a comprehensive political platform along socialist lines, including:

1. The nationalisation of all sources of wealth and all means of producing and exchanging wealth.
2. The conducting by the State authority of all production and all exchange.
3. The pensioning by the State authority of all child-aged and invalid citizens.
4. The saving by the State authority of such proportion of the joint wealth production as may be requisite for instituting, maintaining, and increasing national capital.

5. The maintenance by the State authority from the joint wealth production of all educational and sanitary institutions.
6. The just division among all the citizens of the State of all wealth production, less only that part retained for public and common requirements.
7. The reorganization of society upon the above lines be commenced at once and pursued uninterruptedly until social justice is fully secured to each and every citizen.⁵

To achieve these goals, the ALF resolved at its founding conference 'to secure the direct representation of labour in Parliament'.

Having embarked upon the parliamentary road, the Federation soon confronted organisational constraints preventing it from playing a direct parliamentary role. Structurally segmented by the occupational and geographical divisions of the Queensland workforce, it was ill-suited to the task of organising in the electoral sphere. Ultimately, it attempted to resolve this problem by helping to set up the Labour Party as a parliamentary party of the working class.⁶ For the next 15 years, the majority of Queensland socialists, convinced that a reformist road to revolution was possible, devoted their lives to imagining, promoting and organising towards the possibility that Labour, or a party like it, could lead the working class to a post-capitalist future. This article traces the history of

this state socialist project through the activists, ideas and organisations that made it a political force in Queensland from the 1890s until the mid- 1900s.

1890s State Socialism in Theory

Historically, socialism can be defined by its insistence that the working masses that produce society's wealth are entitled collectively to the full fruits of their labour, an option necessarily denied them by capitalism. The solution proposed by the radical wing of the state socialist camp in Australia was the complete abolition of the capitalist system. But they conceived this system in only a partial way, limiting it to the expropriation of surplus value by private capitalists producing for the market. The target of their revolutionary critique and political practice was thus not capitalism as a mode of production, let alone a way of life, but capitalism as a set of private property relations. This conception of the problem led logically to a state socialist solution. If capitalism was purely a creature of the private sector, state employment would free workers from the shackles of capitalist exploitation, even if they remained wage dependent and continued to produce surplus value. Providing the surplus was controlled by the state and the state was controlled by workers through their political representatives, the profit system as these radicals theorised it would cease to exist.⁷ To use the terminology of Hal Draper, rather than a socialised economy in

which economic and political power was fused in a new state form based on workers' direct control over production, the state socialists were aiming for a nationalised or 'statified' economy managed through the institutions of the existing state.⁸

The statification project was not a choice 'determined' by Australian economic conditions. However, it was a program that was more likely to appeal to a working-class movement in which rural labour was socially and politically dominant. As various historians have observed, the nature of rural labour processes and their seasonal character gave Australian bush workers a degree of control and autonomy not available to their urban counterparts. Many of the former were in fact small-scale producers in their own right.⁹ For rural labour, the problem of the wage system was less about an oppressive, alienating work experience than about inequitable access to productive resources, especially land. Presented this way, the 'labour question' could be solved by breaking up the land monopolies through state or cooperative ownership of productive assets. In this sense, state socialism can be seen as a radical articulation of the long-standing 19th century preoccupation with land reform, a collectivist response to monopoly, running parallel to and to some extent displacing the older petit-bourgeois schemes of closer land settlement. In contrast, state socialism had less to offer the relatively small

urban proletariat; in the sphere of industrial capitalism, nationalisation alone could not deliver an escape from the drudgery and powerlessness of the wage labour experience.

Politically, state socialist theory rested on the assumption that the existing state was neutral, a force capable of serving capitalists or workers, depending on the outcome of the battle of politics. 'In one year,' enthused the ALF, 'a People's Parliament will give Queensland workers more justice than can be wrung from capitalistic parliaments in a generation'.¹⁰ The goal was to wrest control of the state from capitalist interests and implement a reform program that extended state economic activity through all spheres until private production was displaced entirely.

Historians of the left and right have dismissed this project as a utopian delusion.¹¹ However, for workers seeing their representatives in parliament for the first time and contemplating for the first time the possibility of a Labour majority forming government, a development that in itself seemed utopian only a mere handful of years ago, a fundamental reorganisation of society through legislative action seemed feasible. No-one in the 1880s and early 1890s, neither workers nor employers, had any way of knowing where the limits of progressive reform were. Even Marx and later Engels, it should be remembered, had not

been willing to rule out an electoral strategy and a radical reform program leading to a revolutionary outcome in some bourgeois democracies, though Marx had been quick to point out that a violent reaction could be expected from the capitalist class.¹²

Australian socialists shared Marx and Engels' more optimistic assessments but not their prediction of a capitalist backlash. Some of them honestly believed the employers could be persuaded of the merits of socialism and would peacefully submit. Henry Boote, for instance, argued that 'the capitalist will come to us — wildly improbable though it seem — because the inexorable operations of the system he has made whereby capital is rapidly getting into fewer and fewer hands, will drive him to socialism in self-preservation'.¹³

Confidence in the progressive potential of parliament was bolstered by the way colonial ruling-class power was structured at this time. Employers were only beginning to organise outside the sphere of the state, largely in response to the working class challenge. The state itself was still developing a modern form; its coercive forces still relied on civilian recruits (as special constables) in times of threatened civil disturbance, its managerial bureaucracy was still far from autonomous, it had yet to consolidate a caste of career politicians independently loyal to the capitalist order. Ruling-class political

power seemed to emanate directly and exclusively from plutocratic executive government, from the ‘fat, well-fed, heavy men who sit on the Treasury benches,’ as local socialist Ted James put it, referring to capitalist-politicians like Thomas McIlwraith.¹⁴ At the same time, due mainly to the gains already won by the popular movements for

democratic reform, state institutions appeared to hold further democratic potential.¹⁵ In these conditions, it was easy to think that winning the electoral battle could strike a decisive blow against private capital.



The battle of politics from the state socialist perspective in 1891. Revolutionary labour, armed with the vote, is blocked at the entrance of parliament by the forces of capital. (The Worker, 2 May 1891)

The Queensland Social Democratic Federation

On the face of it the state socialist program was not always easy to distinguish from the reform agendas of liberals who were also mobilising within the labour movement.¹⁶ As Rosa Luxemburg once wrote of the reformism of German Social Democrat, Eduard Bernstein, ultimately it was a question of goals: 'his theory tends to counsel the renunciation of the social transformation, the final goal of Social Democracy, and inversely, to make social reforms, which are the means of class struggle, into its end'.¹⁷ There were many Bernsteins in and around the Queensland Labour Party, men who agreed with full nationalisation as an 'objective' while settling in practice for measures that merely constrained some of the exploitative excesses of private capital accumulation. With the working class reeling from mass unemployment and the industrial defeat of 1891, the class confidence and organisation necessary to push for a radical working-class program collapsed, creating circumstances that favoured the ascendancy of these men of modest intent. Contrary to popular belief, industrial defeat did not lead organised labour to politics but merely settled for a time the question of what type of politics would dominate. Before 1891 the ALF had offered a socialist program, after 1891 the Labour Party lurched towards the politics of accommodation.

The state socialists were not about to give up on their socialist goal, however. As early as 1892, with only four Labour members in the Queensland parliament, some socialists in Brisbane were sufficiently concerned about the direction of the Party and the broader labour movement that they decided to organise a separate ginger group to revive the socialist cause. In May 1892 a well-attended meeting of socialist malcontents in Brisbane launched the Queensland Social Democratic Federation (SDF) with the aim of publishing and distributing literature on social and economic topics and 'to do such other work as may appear necessary for the advancement of socialism'.¹⁸ It set about its mission by establishing a mail service organised through a post box in Trades Hall.

The SDF imported political literature and also produced its own, distributing copies at a rate of six shillings per 100. Its first foray into publishing, pamphlet number one in its 'Leaflets for the People' series, was *What is Socialism?* by Charles Seymour. Seymour presented a socialism of the 'people', combining an uncompromising condemnation of the 'present system' with an aversion to a class-struggle approach to transforming it. 'Capital is not the enemy of Labour, but its right hand when properly used,' he asserted. Both sides suffered under the 'whip of competition', and both stood to gain from its abolition. To escape the uncertainties, waste and cruelties

of such a system, Seymour proposed village settlements on unused land to absorb the unemployed, the extension of state employment to abolish sweating, and the nationalisation of private syndicates and trusts for the protection of all.¹⁹

In early 1894, the SDF was relaunched, this time by socialists from amongst the new crop of Labour MHRs elected at the 1893 election. They were led by the Member for Toowong, Mat Reid. Reid had been a member of Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation in London before shipping to Brisbane in 1887, where he immediately immersed himself in labour movement activities. Before his election to parliament he had devoted much of his time to organising unions for the ALF. Under his guidance, the revived SDF kept the post box and embarked upon a program of Sunday afternoon lectures, the first delivered by Reid himself on the topic, 'Practical socialism and how to extend it'.

A week later the Member for Charters Towers and future leader of the world's first Labour government, Anderson Dawson, spoke on 'Socialism: its Economic Basis'. Dawson explained the difference between modern and earlier schools of socialism, drawing on, among other things, Marx's theory of value as well as figures showing the amount of profit extracted from the workers of Britain.²⁰ Within a month, two more of Queensland Labour's 16

parliamentarians — John Dunsford and Herbert Hardacre — had delivered the SDF's Sunday address, while a third, Charles McDonald, had played a chairing role.²¹

Though the Federation saw its main role as educative, it did not ignore other areas of political work. In July 1894 it organised a Monday night social and dance to raise funds for the striking bush workers. Some splendid songs and recitations were delivered, *The Worker* reported, while 'Labour women cheerfully waited on the customers'.²² Fundraising for the strike became a regular feature of SDF events.

The strike's defeat probably contributed to the SDF's demise, but the more direct reason was the organisation's reliance on parliamentarians for whom the demands of public office eventually overwhelmed their commitment to socialist proselytising. This was brought home in September when Reid, Dawson and McDonald were among six Labour MPs suspended and forcibly removed from the House during the debate over the Peace Preservation Bill. Reid, McDonald and William Browne unsuccessfully sued the Speaker for assault, trespass and false imprisonment, and had to pay costs. Parliament evidently offered more than enough combative excitement to occupy the time of these novice labour representatives. The SDF was left to wither. The last straw might have been S.W. Brooks' talk in

late September on 'Worldly Wisdom from a Spanish Jesuit.'²³ By February 1895 even the post box in trades hall had been discontinued.

The Queensland Socialist League

Brisbane's next socialist initiative came from Ernie Lane. Though the young Lane had been influenced by the idealism of his older brother, William, his formative political education owed much more to the radicals of Sydney, especially the communists, anarchists and Marxian state socialists who comprised the far left of the Australian Socialist League. Ernie ultimately did not embrace anarchism or the communitarian strands of socialism but he was deeply affected both emotionally and intellectually by the emancipatory impulse of this Sydney milieu and he emerged an uncompromising anti-capitalist who saw in the state socialist project not merely amelioration for workers but a path to a genuinely free and just society. It is, he would write in 1901:

the universality of socialism that enters into the hearts of all who wish to work towards the betterment of the workers rather than the absolutely economical, the communistic rather than the state ideal, the altruistic rather than the materialistic, that makes socialism an irresistible force.²⁴

In June 1896 Lane decided something needed to be done to revive this revolutionary spirit in Queensland. He enlisted the help of South Brisbane French polisher and Labour candidate John Bond, and former wharf labourer and gardener Henry (Harry) Turley MHR. Turley in turn sought help from Ted Holliday and R.S. (Bob) Ross. On 29 June this small band (10 in all) held a meeting at Trades Hall and launched the Queensland Socialist League. Their purpose: 'to organise and unite the Socialist thought and feeling in Queensland in order that it might become a more powerful factor in moulding the future of the social institutions under which the people have to live and work'.²⁵ Lane, Holliday and Ross would become the nucleus of this new organisation: three musketeers, recalled Lane, fired by youthful enthusiasm for the socialist cause.²⁶ Ernie was elected secretary.

Like the SDF before it, the QSL declared for the nationalisation of all means of production and distribution and committed itself to educating public opinion on socialism through lectures, meetings, debates and the circulation of 'socialistic literature'.²⁷ Its introductory circular was quick to dispel any suggestion that the League was an electoral organisation in competition with the Labour Party. It would 'co-operate with all other organisations, in so far as they have objects similar to its own'.²⁸ In coming months, however, it was evident that the

QSL's attitude to Parliamentary Labour was more ambivalent than the SDF's had been. In September Ted Holliday delivered an address on 'Socialism by Propaganda and Parliament' in which he called for the formation of a Socialist Party and challenged Labour members to declare their views on the matter.²⁹ In late November, in the aftermath of Parliamentary Labour's poor performance in holding the government to account on the QN Bank scandal, the QSL felt compelled to take an openly critical position. A League general meeting resolved:

That the Socialist League, representing the Socialistic sentiment in Queensland, disagrees with the discontinuance of the Parliamentary Labour Party's aggressive policy, and condemns its agreement with the Government on the QN Bank Guarantee Bill.

Secretary Lane published the censure in a letter to the labour press, marking the first public breach between Queensland socialists and the party they had helped create.³⁰ By the time of the League's first Annual Meeting in January 1897, some Leaguers were questioning the QSL policy of not selecting its own candidates for Parliament.³¹

Education, however, remained its focus. Soon after its founding meeting, a vigorous education routine was established, comprising fortnightly public meetings at Trades Hall, open-

air meetings on the Queen-Wharf and Queen-Edward street corners, at the Woolloongabba Fiveways and at West End, and a mail order service for radical literature, much of it inherited from the SDF. Auto-didactic worker radicals in far-flung corners of the state could satiate their thirst for earnest works of political economy or indulge in lighter fare such as *A Songbook for Socialists*, *Chants for Socialists* and *The Socialist Catechism*. A literary committee solicited pamphlets and tracts and oversaw their circulation, both through the post and by more direct means. 'Leaflets', it was suggested, 'can always be circulated at public meetings, surreptitiously posted up on fences and hoardings, quietly pushed under the doors of the homes of people, and so on'.³²

The Brisbane street meetings were energetic affairs, attracting crowds of up to 400 listeners when the best known speakers were on and the weather fine. Harry Turley was keynote orator at the first of these gatherings, held by torchlight on the Wharf Street corner on a balmy Saturday evening in October. Beneath a QSL banner, Turley put the case for public ownership of productive assets:

No politician in Queensland today would advocate the selling of our railways to a syndicate. If it is right and beneficial for the State to build a line and run an engine on it, why should it be wrong and injurious for

the State to build that engine or to mine for the coal it consumes?³³



Joseph Henry Lewis Turley, Harry to his friends, won the seat of Brisbane South for the Labour Party in 1893, and in 1896 helped form the Queensland Socialist League. He went on to become a Labour Senator for Queensland. (Image 68231, John Oxley Library)

Though only one woman — Miss Partridge — is recorded as having spoken at a QSL meeting, women were observed in the crowds and given encouragement to become involved. One Leaguer argued that recognising a woman's right to participate added to the group's potency: 'Her tart power of organisation, refinement, sincerity, and her social gifts aid wonderfully any

movement with which she connects herself,' was this activist's considered view.³⁴

After six months in operation, the QSL was already superior in size, industry and impact to its predecessor. Its activist base was even broad enough for the organisation to survive the loss of two key personnel: Ernie Lane temporarily left Brisbane in January 1897 and Ted Holliday departed the scene soon after. By December, however, the QSL's *Worker* correspondent had to concede the League had not 'set the Thames on fire'. Six months later the QSL had faded away, leaving the labour movement with no organised force on its left flank when Parliamentary Labour finally broke through to form a short-lived government in December 1899, the first of its kind in the world.

The Social Democratic Vanguard

Queensland's pioneering socialists were nothing if not irrepressible. In 1900 the old firm of Lane, Ross and Holliday joined Charles Seymour, Albert Hinchcliffe, Hugo Kunze, Tom Jones, Andy Anderson, and Robert Beattie (better known as Adam Tramp) to kick off the Social Democratic Vanguard, arguably the most influential socialist organisation in Queensland prior to the Communist Party. Lane, as apparently was his lot, again became inaugural secretary.

The SDV was formed purposefully in reaction to disenchantment with the Labour Party, its founding sponsor Sam Tanser boldly declaring:

...we have to face the fact that there has been on the part of many Labour members — if not a departure from — a less valiant and earnest adherence to the basic principle of social regeneration.

Alas and alack! their vigour has become enervated, their demand is now but as a still small voice.

So now comes the SDV. It is formed to speak unpleasant truths, to create disturbance, to indicate social dangers, to educate!³⁵

And educate it did. The sheer scale of the Vanguard literature distribution machine dwarfed anything the SDF or QSL had been able to offer. At the height of the QSL's outreach program, from January to July 1897, it despatched 152 newspapers and 72 pamphlets.³⁶ In the Vanguard's first four months alone, 5,735 pamphlets were circulated, along with 1,650 leaflets and 130 magazines and newspapers.³⁷ In the first eight months of 1902, the Vanguard posted an astonishing 253 parcels containing about 12,000 pieces of literature to contacts across the state.³⁸ It also succeeded in publishing a column in 11 Queensland newspapers, providing a local audience reach of truly Murdochian proportions.³⁹

It was not just the SDV's reach, however, that set it apart from its predecessors. Beyond its educative role, it was a campaigning organisation, prepared to intervene actively in the struggles of the day. Within months of its formation the Vanguard took up the fight against moves by municipal authorities to allow private operators to construct and own Brisbane's planned network of electric street lights. A key player behind the push was the London-owned Tramways Company, headed up by Joseph Badger, later to gain infamy as Boss Badger for his role in the General Strike of 1912.

On 27 July Ernie Lane and Bob Ross joined Aldermen J.G. McNab and W.G. Higgs and others at Slawson's Café in Queen Street to launch a public campaign to retain municipal control over the electrification scheme.⁴⁰ A series of public meetings in halls and street corners across the city was held leading up to a poll on the question on 23 August, with the SDV playing a leading role. Five thousand copies of an SDV pamphlet on the issue — the first publication under its own name — was produced and distributed at the meetings and around the suburbs.

As the reservoir of disenchantment with the parliamentary Labour Party deepened and a post-1890s' labour movement revival seemed to open up fresh political possibilities, elements within the SDV began to formulate their project in new ways. On the one

hand, the SDV printed and distributed Labour candidate Harry Turley's speech against railway syndicates, it sought Labour's financial support for its activities, and it invited Labour MPs to address its meetings.⁴¹ But many leading members also came to see the SDV as an independent political project, perhaps even one that might arrogate to itself Labour's historic role.



As crowds gathered in Queen Street in 1901 to greet the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York, SDV members fanned out from their club rooms and distributed 5000 leaflets calling for a society free of royal 'do-nothings' and 'parasites'. The club rooms are visible here on the 2nd floor of the building bearing the Baker and Rouse sign, located halfway between George and Albert Streets, roughly where Chifley at Lennons Hotel sits today. (John Oxley Library, image 186091)

The function of socialist education shifted from winning converts to the 'idea' of socialism to organising

converts into a political force. Talks and leaflets were often topical and interventionist: a meeting on Hobson's 'Capitalism and Imperialism in South Africa' was called to help 'stem the jingoistic torrent' in support of the Boer War; 5000 SDV leaflets attacking royal 'do-nothings', 'non-entities' and 'parasites' were distributed amongst the crowd gathered for the Federation visit of the Duke of Cornwall and York; Vanguard Tract 14, 'Women and the Social Problem', was written as a contribution to the women's franchise struggle.⁴²

At an organisational level, the Vanguard did not just cultivate a loose network of contacts and literature distributors, it set about building the apparatus of a party, with members signed up for 2s 6d per year and issued with membership tickets. By the time of their first Annual Meeting, in February 1901, Secretary Lane could report the SDV had 400 active members statewide.⁴³ Later, 'Comrade Mary' claimed a Vanguard membership of over 500.⁴⁴ Western centres were particular strongholds.⁴⁵ Through the convivial atmosphere of its Club rooms in Queen Street and its varied program of picnics and other social activities, the Vanguard created a vibrant membership culture, at least for those members who lived in or visited Brisbane. Political work combined with social solidarity fostered what Ernie Lane described as 'that close comradeship — that natural understanding and common purpose

which is the essential need of all working-class organisations'.⁴⁶

Providing basic socialist principles were respected, political differences within the group were tolerated and even encouraged. There was a majority, if not a consensus, that favoured the SDV taking a publicly critical attitude to the Labour Party. While the Socialist League had also been willing to rebuke the Party for its shortcomings in parliamentary performance, the SDV's critique went further, taking issue with the broader limitations of Labour's *modus operandi*. The core of the matter was the Vanguard's realisation that a working-class parliamentary party needed to be grounded in mass politics. As Comrade 'Revlis' saw it:

With a solid fighting party inside the House, prepared all the time to use their Parliamentary positions as a vantage ground for battle, and a strong, enthusiastic, well organised party outside, what might we not do?⁴⁷

The Labour Party, it was argued, was failing on both fronts, but the root of the problem lay in the extra-parliamentary sphere. In Vanguardier 'Diogenes' view:

we workers, if emancipation is to be obtained, must get it by our own efforts. Political shibboleths and political saviours are poor things without there [being] behind them

a strong, determined and intelligent rank and file'.⁴⁸

It was here in the realm of rank and file mass politics that the Vanguarders found their common purpose and distinctive voice, counterposing their organisation to what they regarded as the ineffectiveness of Labour. The Vanguard columnist for *The Gympie Truth* put the case explicitly:

We often hear about the magnificent organisation of the Labour Party in the electorates — where is it? The Workers' Political Organisations are in existence in many electorates, but are almost comatose except at election times. As agencies for propaganda work and the dissemination of the principles of social-democracy they are a failure, and the cause languishes. Reform can only be secured by active organisation and agitation. Let's see what the Vanguard can do ...?⁴⁹

In fact, it did very well, building an impressive socialist organisation in Brisbane and beyond in the short space of two years. It again took the departure of key political leaders — including Lane, Ross, Holliday and Beattie — to begin a process of decline. The vacuum was eventually filled by Labourite Joe Collings Jnr under whose leadership, in Lane's assessment, the Vanguard 'degenerated into a political mutual admiration society, eventually to sink in the slough of complete bankruptcy,

financially and morally' after voting to support the Kidston-Morgan Coalition.⁵⁰

In the scale of its operation and the sophistication of its political practice, the SDV could be said to represent the apotheosis of the state socialist project launched back in 1889. The state itself, however, had also moved on, consolidating its mechanisms of coercion and control, defining and thereby narrowing the limits of its own transformative potential. The Labour Party played a crucial role in this process of quarantining the state from radical contagion. It marginalised the more radical socialists in its own ranks, offered its working class base arbitration, pensions and workers' compensation in lieu of a socialised economy, and set about proving to the establishment it could make and keep deals with conservatives and, ultimately, rule without placing capitalism in danger. Drawing on the ideology of a White Australia, it became the ruling class's principal political vehicle for integrating organised labour into the state, capitalism's own agency of hegemony in the heart of the labour movement.

In stressing the importance of mass political forms in the struggle for socialism, SDV leaders had sensed this new reality, though perhaps only intuitively. As the decade wore on, many state socialists abandoned the parliamentary road altogether. Tom

Mann, for example, having seen what the Labour parties offered and having witnessed the lockout of the Broken Hill miners in 1909, concluded that 'reliance upon parliamentary action would never bring freedom'.⁵¹ He turned instead to industrial unionism. In Queensland, state socialism lingered on at the level of ideology and Fabian wishful thinking, but as a realisable project its *coup de grace* came with the election of the Ryan Government in 1915, when even a modest attempt to interfere with the prerogatives of capital were trumped by a conservative-inspired finance embargo imposed on Queensland by the London loan market. 'Really existing state socialism' exposed its own limitations and confirmed that the struggle for working class emancipation had to take other forms.

Notes

- 1 Touchstone [Henry Boote], *Whither?*, Social-Democratic Vanguard, Brisbane, 1903, p. 4.
- 2 Verity Burgmann, 'Refuting Marx and Engels: Australian Utopianism in the 1890s', *Arena*, no. 31, 2008, pp. 21–45; Bill Metcalf, 'A Brief History of Communal Experimentation in Australia', in B. Metcalf (ed), *From Utopian Dreaming to Communal Reality*, University of NSW Press, Sydney, 1995, pp. 18–31.
- 3 Henry Lawson, 'Faces in the Street', in Brian Kiernan (ed), *Portable Australian Authors: Henry Lawson*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia (Qld), 1976, p. 71.
- 4 *The Worker*, 1 September 1890.
- 5 *The Worker*, 1 September 1890.

- 6 D.J. Murphy, 'The Changing Structure of the Party', in D.J. Murphy, R.B. Joyce and Colin A. Hughes (eds), *Prelude to Power: The Rise of the Labour Party in Queensland, 1885–1915*, The Jacaranda Press, Milton (Qld), 1970, p. 92.
- 7 See *The Democrat* (Townsville), 17 April 1897, for precisely this formulation.
- 8 Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1977.
- 9 Raymond Markey, *The Making of the Labor Party in New South Wales, 1880–1900*, New South Wales University Press, Sydney, 1988, p. 61; Humphrey McQueen, *A New Britannia*, rev edn, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia (Qld), 2004, p. 164.
- 10 *The Worker*, 1 September 1890.
- 11 Markey, *Making of the Labor Party*, p. 243; Murphy, 'Changing Structure of the Party', p. 93.
- 12 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works, Volume 24*, p. 248, cited in David McLellan, *The Thought of Karl Marx: An Introduction*, 3rd edn, Macmillan General Books, London, 1995, p. 227. Also see Friedrich Engels, 'Preface to the English Edition of Capital', 1886, in Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume I*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1954, p. 6.
- 13 *The Catholicity of Socialism*, Queensland Social Democratic Federation, Brisbane, 1892.
- 14 *The Worker*, 28 January 1897. For an extended discussion of the structural basis of the state socialist strategy in the 1890s, see Terry Irving, 'The Roots of Parliamentary Socialism in Australia, 1850–1920', *Labour History*, vol. 67, 1994, p. 103
- 15 See Burgmann, 'Refuting Marx and Engels', p. 23.
- 16 See David W. Lovell, *Marxism and Australian Socialism before the Bolshevik Revolution*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 1997, p. 160.
- 17 Rosa Luxemburg, cited in Vincent Georghegan, *Utopianism and Marxism*, Peter Lang, Berm, 2008, p. 64.
- 18 *The Brisbane Courier*, 23 May 1892.
- 19 Charles Seymour, *What is Socialism?*, Queensland Social Democratic Federation, Brisbane, c1892.
- 20 *The Worker*, 14 July 1894.
- 21 *The Worker*, 18 August 1894.
- 22 *The Worker*, 28 July 1894.
- 23 *The Worker*, 29 September 1894.
- 24 *The Worker*, 13 April 1901.
- 25 *The Worker*, 4 July 1896.
- 26 E.H. Lane, *Dawn to Dusk: Reminiscences of a Rebel*, William Brooks & Co, Brisbane, 1939, p. 54.
- 27 *The Worker*, 4 July 1896.
- 28 *The Worker*, 4 July 1896.
- 29 *The Worker* 10 September 1896.
- 30 *The Worker*, 5 December 1896.
- 31 *The Worker*, 16 January 1897.
- 32 *The Worker*, 5 September 1896.
- 33 *The Worker*, 8 October 1896.
- 34 *The Worker*, 5 September 1896.
- 35 *The Worker*, 19 May 1900.
- 36 *The Worker*, 31 July 1897.
- 37 *The Gympie Truth*, 8 August 1900.
- 38 *The Worker*, 13 September 1902.
- 39 *The Worker*, 6 April 1901.
- 40 *The Brisbane Courier*, 28 July 1900.
- 41 *The Worker*, 11 August 1900.
- 42 *The Worker*, 26 May 1900, 18 May 1901, 13 September 1902.
- 43 *The Worker*, 2 March 1901.
- 44 Comrade Mary, *An Appeal to Women for the Van*, Social-Democratic Vanguard, Brisbane, c1901, p. 1.
- 45 *The Worker*, 13 October 1900.
- 46 Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*, p. 67.
- 47 *The Worker*, 3 August 1901.
- 48 *The Worker*, 9 August 1902.
- 49 *The Gympie Truth*, 22 August 1900.
- 50 Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*, p. 68.
- 51 Tom Mann, *Tom Mann's Memoirs*, The Labour Publishing Co., London, 1923, p. 239.

* * * *

A Century of the Queensland BLF

By Humphrey McQueen

The Queensland branch of the Australian Builders Labourers' Federation (BLF) is unique in keeping the BLF name alive for the Federation's centenary on 9 September 2010. Queensland has stood out from the six other branches in several ways, though it also shared a number of characteristics. The first builders labourers at Moreton Bay were convicts, as at Sydney and Hobart. In as much as building is a seasonal trade, Queensland slowed down during the wet summer but Melbourne for the winter, allowing some transfer of workers.

Early Days to 1915

The sub-tropical climate was an argument for shorter hours, with labourers forming a distinct group in the 1876 eight-hour parade and winning a 44-hour week in the 1880s. The unions that covered tradesmen's assistants usually kept their distance from navvies. Several labourers' unions emerged during the 1880s; for instance, the European Labourers' International Protection Association which had 200 members by 1885. Its secretary, CA Murrell, attended the Intercolonial Trades and Labour Congress in 1887 and was still around in early 1912 to become acting president of the Queensland BLF branch. A Bricklayers

Labourers' Union in 1898 was followed by the Builders and Contractors Labourers' Union in 1900. Brisbane officials played a key role in federating unions in the five eastern States when secretary Ted Jones went to Melbourne to convince the Victorians to sign on, and became the first federal president.

Queensland presented the new body with its first challenge when the branch struck for ten shillings a day on 16 December 1910, staying out for 14 weeks. When the Federal officials arrived in January, 300 BLs had stopped, and 800 tradesmen were stood down. The government imposed a Wages Board on the labourers to force them back on nine shillings and fourpence for experienced men, though with overtime at time-and-a-half and no piece work. Since navvies were left on eight shillings, the motion to accept this compromise 'almost created a riot at the meeting'. The defeat of the 1912 Brisbane General Strike, followed by the vicious Industrial Peace Act, added weight to the view that BLs needed to approach the Commonwealth Arbitration Court for an Award, which, in December 1913, provided a 20 percent loading for lost time as the prime benefit.

Leftward and Onward to 1941

Further improvements came from the State Labor government elected in 1915, arguably Australia's most progressive administration ever, at

least until 1923. In 1916 it enforced the licensing of scaffolders, as vital a reform as any for BLs. For those who were injured, compensation came through a Government Insurance Office, the model for other States, followed by an Unemployment Insurance Act, attacked as the 'Loafers' Paradise Bill'. After a rewriting of the Arbitration Act in 1916, the branch applied for registration on 16 November 1917, with John William Abbiss as secretary.

In 1919 a State award for BLs included 44-hours, and forbade piece rates. In return for agreeing not to strike, the union gained preference which offered more regular employment to those who usually worked in the industry. Almost at once, enthusiasm for One Big Union saw the branch join seven unions in a Building Trades Award which took Queensland outside federal coverage. In 1925, the federal secretary praised the Queensland award as being so far in advance of those in other States that he could use it to push for advances everywhere.

The Queenslanders were also in the forefront of creating a single industry union. In 1924 branch secretary, George Carleton, wanted to bring 'all workers not otherwise provided for' into a general labourers' union with tilers and railway navvies. In 1926 Federal Conference gave the branch permission to leave the Federation and join an industrial union. That new body did not get very far before right-

wing Federal officials during the 1930s blocked further attempts to join with what became the Building Workers' Industrial Union (BWIU). The regime of awards reinforced divisions between types of labourer and between labourers and tradesmen with the arbitration tribunals deciding that a petrol bowser was not a 'building' but that some bridges were very like one.



George Carleton. Photo Noel Butlin Archives Centre at the ANU.

Meanwhile, workers had battled to maintain their incomes in the turmoil from the Great War. Taking 1911 as the base year at 1,000 units, the real wage for a labourer by 1915, when unemployment went above 13 percent, was close to 760 units. During 1919–20, living costs rose by 20 percent

before recession from 1921 brought a wage cut of five shillings. Most unions campaigned until 1925 to restore that loss, when many also won a 44-hour week, against opposition from the Labor cabinet. Because building unions already had a 44-hour week, they moved to secure a 40-hour one.

That push led the branch into a defeat from which it never entirely recovered. On one hand, the leadership was as close to the IWW as to the Communist Party. This militancy did not erase faith in parliamentary reforms when the branch leadership put itself in the front rank of an ill-prepared strike for the shorter week from January until mid-March 1927. The unions were no match for a reformed Master Builders' Association backed by the Labor premier. The branch was deregistered for a year and in 1929 lost coverage above Mackay to the AWU.

Depression

All unions collapsed under the depression with branch numbers down from 2,375 in 1929 to 859 by 1932, at a time when everyone out of a job was claiming to be a labourer. The Building Trades journal recalled that, under the more openly anti-labour State government from 1929 to 1932, 'horrible as it may sound and as disgusting as it may be, it is none the less the truth, that many of our wives had no nightgowns to wear'.

A want of work on the sites spilt over into a scramble for union office, in the course of which a gang of no-hopers gained control for a year from 1934 before the Left reclaimed the leadership with Fred Jackson back as secretary, to be succeeded in 1940 by the Communist, Dick Surplus. By then, compulsory unionism had helped to lift financial membership to 1,065, but undermined militancy; as Surplus put it, 'job action would receive scant courtesy'.

The executive voiced its proletarian consciousness in 1934 when they presented the retiring president with a clock in 'the hope that he would live to hear it chime on the day the workers received the full value of their labour'. In this spirit, the branch co-sponsored the *Queensland Building Trades Worker* from 11 September 1934 to educate against the 'obsolete form of craft unionism'. A tradesman confessed in 1936 that 'experience proves that the Labourers have always been in the forefront of any move to improve conditions. It is an everlasting reproach to the tradesmen, that on numerous occasions, they have failed to give the Labourers the support they so richly deserved.' In line with this reputation, in 1937 the BLs voted 513 to 22 to amalgamate.

War Years

To build bases for the US military, the Commonwealth sent thousands of

labourers to Queensland in the Civil Construction Corps (CCC). To get their union dues, the branch had to fight the NSW and Federal secretary, the gangster Fred Thomas. Although the CCC won a special award, activists complained about ‘bad lighting, vermin-infested huts, wash tubs, clothes lines, banking facilities, tobacco, [and] sandshoes’ in their remote camps.

Right-wing Laborites took control from the mid-1940s, though it is not clear how the Left lost since the Reds strengthened their hold on the tradesmen’s unions. It is possible that the gulf between the tradesmen and their assistants contributed to this parting of the ways although, as late as 1945, the branch pushed the Federation to ‘take all necessary steps’ to allow Queensland to merge with the Communist-led BWIU. A shift in the members’ views came in 1949 when they voted 443 to 410 to break with the Communist-led Trades Hall Council, and did not rejoin until 1960. The branch always stayed in the Building Trades Group (BTG), relying on the Communist Gerry Dawson for court work.

As the war ended, materials and labour were in such short supply that employers went back to demanding that labourers bring their own picks and shovels. The new leadership won on this one but told members to find work elsewhere rather than black-ban ‘notorious sweaters’. Given

this attitude, it is not surprising that secretary Bill Tyrrell complained in 1948 that members would rather play cards than listen to him explain the latest balance sheet. Opposition to the officials flared against an increase of fees in 1947 and when 100 turned out to support strikers in NSW. Members were also insisting on holiday pay because being stood at Christmas meant more hardship than happiness.

Money Trails

Like the other branches, Queensland had its quota of alcoholics and thieves. One organiser was not sacked until after he had been arrested for being drunk on licensed premises. In April 1924, the Federal office learned that secretary Joe Brice had taken between £800 and £2,000 from the branch and the BTG. In 1943, the branch threatened legal action against ex-secretary Erroll Greaves unless he made up missing funds. State secretary and Federal president Ted Farrell confessed in late 1962 to stealing £700 to cover bets on the Rabbitohs. Members’ dues did not always reach the office for a secretary to steal. Between 1941 and 1966, eight job reps around Queensland took between £24 and £350. In contrast to such malfeasance was the office manager, Mrs Drew; Vince Dobinson recalled that when he became an organiser, ‘Whatever Mrs Drew said, I did’.

Despite these financial problems, Queensland was the wealthiest branch in 1956 when Tyrrell raised the prospect of its owning its own building, a further step away from the Reds who ran the Trades Hall. At the time, the branch had £17,000 in the bank, more than the combined debts and assets of the rest of the Federation. When the Buffaloes' Hall, at 697 Ann St, Fortitude Valley, came up for private sale at £27,500, the branch borrowed £10,000 and made the final repayment of £2,048 in March 1959 — two years early. The executive named the building after Tyrrell as the branch's longest serving secretary.

During the 1950s, attendance at meetings see-sawed between 25 and 150 but averaged about 30. For the 1958 elections, the returning officer posted 1,961 ballots. In the 1960s, attendance was rarely more than 20. The Left could never get more than three along although there was more opposition around the sites.

Politics

Across its first 30 years, Queensland had been the most consistently Left-wing of the branches. In October 1940, the branch had attacked the State Labor government's Public Safety Act which gave a sub-committee of the State cabinet — 'the Grand Fascist Council' — the power to decide who could be union officials. The branch declared: 'We cannot defeat fascism if fascist means are taken against the

working class'. The branch helped only parliamentary candidates who supported socialism and, in June 1944, called on the ALP to let the Communist Party affiliate.

Despite these policies, the Right was taking over. In 1940, Communist Dick Surplus held on to the secretaryship with 270 votes against 110 for his nearest rival. Next year, Greaves beat Surplus by 280 to 227, but had to resign in 1943. Tyrrell then defeated Surplus by 300 votes to 180. The right-wing takeover was more secure at the 1946 poll when Tyrrell won by 311 to 71. The new president, Jack Buck, denied that he had been thrown out of the Communist Party for stealing, yet, for the next 20 years, he sided with the Left on political questions.

The officials stomped on rank-and-file action on the jobs, and off. For instance, the executive charged five members with carrying the slogan, 'Unity: You and I can Do It', in the 1953 May Day parade. One man defended himself by saying that May Day's 'being the workers' day, he considered he was quite within his rights in carrying a banner'. Next year, the branch won the draw to lead the building trades' section of the march but, fearing that the BLF would be tarred with the Red slogans behind, the executive wanted a band between them and the rest. No wonder that the size of its contingent fell off. In 1958, Tyrrell was too out



Banner and march from circa 1960. Photo Noel Butlin Archives Centre at the ANU.

of condition to march and resigned shortly afterwards.

The branch had settled into a pattern peculiar to right-wing Labor in Queensland. Its leaders were never at ease among other right-wing unions such as the Ironworkers which competed for coverage. Tyrrell was not a Grouper in the Santamaria mould; rather, he was anti-communist and wary of the AWU. The branch stuck to 'Doc' Evatt and the ALP through the splits, although Tyrrell had backed premier Gair until his expulsion in May 1957. Thereafter, the branch accepted left-wing proposals so long as they could be squared with Labor Party policies, for example, Cuban nationalisations and a Nuclear-Free Pacific.

However, the leadership was reluctant to support civil liberties for radical students, partly because of political differences, but also because of the BLs' experience of university

students as scabs and for the refusal of engineering undergraduates to join unions when they took vacation jobs. The officials failed to see that the upsurge in action on campuses was



Australian Builders Labourers' Federation, Qld branch, 1964. Photo Noel Butlin Archives Centre at the ANU.

Front row — R.J. McPherson, J.A. Delaney, J.W. Buck, P.J. Walker, J.J. Taylor

Back row — O.J. Lapworth, G.J. Taylor, T.J. Ryan, J. Ozanne, V. Dobinson, T. Gibb

one sign that the social composition of tertiary education had altered to include the children of their members.

When the Left took charge of NSW in 1961, the Queenslanders were generous in lending the new officials funds to help get rid of the crooks and parasites. By 1964, the branch took the lead in making Sydney explain where the money was going. They donated to the 1970 strike fund and welcomed NSW secretary Munday to speak on 'No Ticket, No Start' later that year.

By 1974, secretary Dobinson was the most implacable of NSW's foes during the intervention, partly because of the political gulf, but also from clashes over what all the branches saw as the arrogance and dishonesty in Sydney. Well before Kelly's Bush, the branch involved itself in the most significant of environmental battles which saved the Great Barrier Reef in 1970, and later Fraser Island. Queensland imposed few demolition bans but protected the Regent Theatre.

The 1960s

The interplay of local peculiarities and nation-wide features became apparent during the 1960s with the demands for infrastructure in the coal-basin projects at the same time as the building industry was being transformed by concrete-and-steel high-rises. On what became known as the Gold Coast, labourers on the Broadbeach hotel in 1956 demanded thirty shillings extra. Against a union direction to find work elsewhere, the men voted 21 to 17 to continue their stoppage. Concrete also gave rise to conflicts with carpenters over formwork and with plasterers in finishing-off.

Despite a slow start to office blocks in the Brisbane CBD, one of Australia's early high-rise residentials, the Torbreck Tower, rose on Highgate Hill to become the site of running disputes. Deaths on other sites sparked stop-works and marches. The end of

compulsory unionism in 1966 added to the pressure on officials to win support among labourers by engaging them in struggle. One of the earliest breakings of concrete pours happened in Brisbane during the July 1968 margins campaign; officials expected the tactic to catch on because it had been shown on television.

Many times more disruptive to Tyrrell's style of organising were the demands from men erecting power stations. Secretary Jim Delaney confessed that when 'agreements had first been made we had been in our infancy' on construction projects. The rawness of locations such as Blackwater and Gladstone drew the BLF closer to other building unions to defend job reps, to win site allowances and to ward off the AWU. The branch depended on Gallagher to stop the contractors' jobs down south. Queensland brought itself under the Federal Award in 1971 as one more move to retake territory from the AWU.

Construction Division

Queensland was one of four branches to avoid de-registration in 1986, perhaps because premier Bjelke Petersen feared that the Communist-led tradesmen would take coverage. The branch joined the Construction Division of the CFMEU in 1994 but as a separate entity. One reason for sticking apart was that the BLs suspected that tradesmen would do as

they always had done, and ‘shit on us’, to quote secretary Greg Simcoe.

State secretary Pat Purcell went into the State parliament in 1992, and then to the Ministry in 2005, but found there was no place for a labourer in the New Labor of Goss and Beattie. The branch takes its organisers off the jobs, not graduates. It maintains a funeral fund and a multi-million dollar training system. BLs make up one of the largest and most vocal contingents in Labour Day marches, taking the fight against the Construction police up to Rudd, and headlining ‘Gillard Must Go’ in its August 2009 journal. The merger of the BLF(Q) into the Construction Division is only a question of time. Less certain is the effect that that administrative change will have on the BLs and on the State branch of that Division. The CFMEU as a whole remains skilled at ‘sticking apart’.

Despite the branch’s reverses and failings, the pressure of capital on the livelihood and safety of labourers has repeatedly brought their union back towards an activism which enlivens defence with defiance.

Further Reading

This list is confined to material related to the building trades.

ABLF Queensland Branch records in Fryer Library, University of Queensland, UQFL166.

Federal ABLF minutes, Noel Butlin Archives Center, ANU, N130.

Hall Greenland, *Red Hot: the Life and Times of Nick Origlass*, Wellington Lane Press, Sydney, 1990, chapter 7.

Humphrey McQueen, ‘Lessons from Defeat: the 1927 Claim for a 40-hour Week by Queensland Building Industry Unions’, *Queensland Journal of Labour History*, no. 3, September 2006, pp. 17–46.

Humphrey McQueen, ‘Improvising Nomads’, *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2008, pp. 223–250.

Humphrey McQueen, *Framework of Flesh, Builders’ Labourers Battle for Health and Safety*, Ginninderra Press, Port Adelaide, 2009.

Humphrey McQueen, *We Built this Country, Builders Labourers and their Unions, 1780s to the Future*, forthcoming.

S.K. Proctor, ‘The Rise and Decline of the Australian Building Industry Employees’ Union in Brisbane, 1912–18’, *Labour History*, no. 13, 1967, pp. 26–32.

Queensland Trades and Labor Council, *How Collinsville was Won*, QT&LC, Brisbane, 1969.

Interviews with three successive branch secretaries, Vince Dobinson, Pat Purcell and Greg Simcoe.

Queensland Industrial Gazette, 1916–

* * * *

Cornering the Conditions: Queensland White Collar Civil Servants, 1859–1864

By Tony Gough

A measure of the attractiveness of employment conditions for white collar civil servants in Queensland's immediate post-separation era can be gleaned from the following:

Notice to Persons Seeking Employment in the Queensland Civil Service

Colonial Secretary's Office

Brisbane 4 May 1864

In consequence of very numerous applications for employment in the Civil Service, it is notified for public information that there are now no vacancies to be filled up, and that the Government is not likely to require additional clerks or other employees for a considerable time to come.

No application can henceforth be received at this office; and those persons who have been for some time endeavouring to obtain appointments in the Civil Service are strongly recommended to seek other employment, as the Government will not be able to provide for them.¹

Sgnd Robert G.W. Herbert

An examination of events during the first half of the 1860s reveals that, largely speaking, it was the collective activity of the civil servants themselves that brought about the favourable 'industrial' conditions they enjoyed.

The census of the Colony of Queensland, taken on 7 April 1861, indicated a population of 30,059, with 20 per cent born in Queensland, and an overwhelming majority of the balance having migrated from Great Britain. Brisbane and suburbs contained 6,051 souls, and the authors of the report submitted that they could 'merely hazard a guess at the number of aboriginals'. It is noteworthy that 31 per cent of the (European) population could neither read nor write, while a further 12.25 per cent were able to read, but unable to write.² Civil servants were enumerated at 273, with 142 civil officers and 131 police magistrates and constables.³

As a consequence, it can be seen that civil servants held a particular advantage. It is perhaps tacit, but it can in passing be mentioned that an indispensable pre-condition for that category of employment was universal literacy. They were, therefore, able to spread ideas in writing, to promote a widespread recognition of identity of interest and to create a broad understanding of unanimity; clear evidence of collective activity with 'industrial welfare' at its core, will emerge.

The basic principles and philosophy of the organisation of the Queensland Civil Service was based upon the English model, wherein the structure was divided horizontally into classes (between higher and lower classes of work) and vertically (between different skills/professions). These notions were expounded in the 1853 English *Northcote–Trevelyan Report on the Organisation of the Permanent Civil Service*.⁴ January 1860 saw the initial framework and conditions laid down by the gubernatorial fiat of Governor Sir George Ferguson Bowen and the departments were structured thus:

	Minimum p.a.	Annual Increment	Maximum p.a.
Chief Clerk	£400	£20	£500
Clerk, first class	£300	£20	£400
Clerk, second class	£200	£20	£300
Clerk, third class	£100	£10	£200

Hours of duty were 10am–4pm, and while the records indicate ‘daily’, it can be assumed this embraced week days only. Bowen further recommended that consideration should be given to the introduction of a contributory superannuation scheme, and it is appropriate at this juncture to deal in part with this topic, an issue that was as constant as it was intractable.⁵

A question was raised by District Surveyor Arthur E. Wood, to the Surveyor-General, asking if it was to be the intention of the Queensland Government to recognise service from the date of entry in the Colony of New South Wales. The matter went to Executive Council, which arrived at the unquestioned conclusion that erstwhile New South Wales officers were entitled to have their full period of service taken into account. However, as funds to meet such cases *must* be voted by the Legislature, it was concluded that the subject ought properly to be submitted to Parliament.

More importantly, information from the Secretary of State for the Colonies had been obtained, and some details of the English *Superannuation Act of 1859* were tabled:

- after ten years service, pension of $\frac{10}{60}$ of annual salary provided;
- a further $\frac{1}{60}$ of annual salary added per year of additional service, to a maximum of $\frac{40}{60}$;
- resignation through severe bodily injury attracted a gratuity of three months salary per two years service;
- separation through ill-health was met with one month salary per year of service;
- should an office be abolished, and the occupant be retrenched, a special allowance capped at $\frac{2}{3}$ of annual salary was granted; however, if the recipient was age 60 or under, he could compulsorily

be transferred to a vacancy in any part of Her Majesty's dominions, and, if the posting was declined, the allowance was foregone.⁶

It can as a generality be seen that these notions, until the time of writing, have underpinned the basic design of Queensland Civil Service superannuation schemes.

Another constant in the history of the Queensland Civil Service is investigation into, and reports on the efficiency of, the various departments, and the Colony was barely six months old when the first Select Committee was appointed.⁷ The aim of the Committee was to examine departmental efficiency, to enquire as to the adequacy of staffing, and to determine if 1860 level salaries should be increased or diminished in the 1861 Estimates. The conclusions were:

- i. The number of first and second clerks was greater than necessary, and an increase in work should not necessitate additional staff;
- ii. Generally, there was not to be any augmentation of salaries, as rates were ample for the services performed;
- iii. But, the salaries of these Offices were to be amended:

Colonial Secretary	£850 p.a. to £950
Colonial Treasurer	£850 p.a. to £950
Attorney-General	£850 p.a. to £950
Speaker	£500 p.a. to £600
Chairman of Committees (L.A.)	£250 p.a. to £350

This demonstrates that difference of political outlook does less to divide elected representatives than identity of occupation does to unite them — politicians have the strongest informal industrial union in existence.

- iv. The Committee recommended that the work of the Survey Department be undertaken not by salaried officers, but by external contractors, however this did not survive the opposition of Surveyor-General Augustus C. Gregory.

1861 saw the first attempt to legislate for Civil Service conditions. The important aspects of the Bill were that there were to be two divisions, the ordinary and the subordinate.

The ordinary division would consist of Heads of Department together with 35 nominated senior positions, with salaries for this class voted for by the Parliament. The rest of the Service would fall into the subordinate division, employed under the following general conditions:

- The subordinate division, salaries:

	<u>Mini- mum</u>	<u>Annual Incre- ment</u>	<u>Maxi- mum</u>
Clerks, first class	£300	£25	£375 p.a.
Clerks, second class	£200	£20	£280
Clerks, third class	£150	£10	£190

- Upon enactment, present salaries above these thresholds were to remain, but increments to be foregone;
- Admission by competitive examination with six months probation at half salary — balance ‘back paid’ upon permanent appointment;
- ‘Outside’ appointment if no suitable internal candidate;
- One month leave annually on full pay;
- Twelve months leave on full pay after ten years service;
- Superannuation: Unsubsidised contribution two per cent; pension available at age 60 after at least ten years service; pension $\frac{10}{60}$, with $\frac{1}{60}$ per additional year of service, capped at $\frac{40}{60}$; disability allowance of two months salary per year of service, or identical payment to relict upon death.⁸

Member for Fortitude Valley, Charles Lilley, was the leading spokesman against the Bill. He claimed that ‘we should pay the Government servants adequately, and let them provide for themselves out of their present salary ... if Government servants thought themselves not paid adequately, let them take the advice given by Cobbett years ago, and turn their backs on Somerset House’.⁹ Patrick O’Sullivan (Ipswich) agreed and held that the superannuation provisions would ‘encourage idleness, cause a burden on the country, and lead to corruption’.¹⁰

Lilley added that he was ‘prepared to do anything that would get the bill out of existence as it struck down every manly feeling of self respect’.¹¹ Subsequently, he successfully moved that the ‘Bill be discharged from the notice paper’.¹²

The loss of this measure was seen by the civil servants as miserably unsatisfactory, and provided the springboard to action. The lessons learned had an almost immediate impact on the future, because within 24 months they formed a series of committees that produced a Bill, which, when carried by Parliament in 1863, became *An Act to Organise the Civil Service of Queensland*, the initial legislative instrument to govern the Service.

The *Brisbane Courier* of 22 July 1863, carried the following advertisement:

Civil Service

The members of the civil service are requested to attend a meeting at the Volunteer Armoury, this afternoon, the 22nd. inst. at 4.30p.m., to receive the report of the Committee.

sgnd William Martin Boyce. Hon. Sec.

It would be stretching credulity to categorise their activity as a ‘Union of Employees’ or even an ‘Association’, but two pieces of evidence support the conclusion that they were acting

collectively; some funds must have been available to meet the cost of newspaper advertisements, and there were extensive press reports of their meetings.¹³

It was announced that their meetings for the consideration of a Civil Service Bill resulted in the appointment of a committee to oversee the matter. The committee-men were: William Bell (Clerk, Registrar General), Rev Robert Creyke (Deputy Registrar General), Frederick Darvall (Registrar General), Augustus Gregory (Surveyor General), John McDonnell (Chief Clerk, Police), Thomas Prior (Postmaster General), Daniel Somerset (Chief Clerk, Customs), and possibly a second Robert Creyke (Junior Draftsman, Registrar General's Office).¹⁴

Their Bill called for the following:

- Two divisions — ordinary and professional, each of five classes;
- First and second class salaries as per the 1863 Appropriation Act;
- Salaries for both divisions:

<u>Class</u>	<u>Min.</u>	<u>Annual Increment</u>	<u>Max. p.a.</u>
Third	£300	£25	£375
Fourth	£200	£20	£280
Fifth	£150	£10	£190

- No salaries to be reduced below existing levels;
- If office abolished, one month salary per year of service and preference for re-employment;

- Six weeks leave per annum and fifteen weeks 'long service leave' after ten years service; [how else, it can be asked, could an expatriate English salaryman garner the financial wherewithal again to see red tunics and bearskin caps?];
- Six months probation upon initial appointment;
- Accusations of breach of duty were to be submitted to a Board of Inquiry, with gradations of punishment, and bankruptcy brought dismissal;
- A two per cent compulsory contributory superannuation scheme was to be introduced; and
- Gratuities were to be provided to officers injured in discharge of official duties, or, in the case of death, to widows/children.¹⁵

On 6 August 1863, the Colonial Secretary, Robert Herbert, moved in the Assembly to introduce the Bill. He stated the Government did not hold themselves responsible for the measure, but the main principles were such as they desired to support. It was the result of the deliberations of the civil servants of the Colony assembled together, and it was at the invitation of that body that he brought it before Parliament.¹⁶

Again the labyrinthine issue of superannuation arose, and it was not resolved until the proclamation on 12 September 1864 of the *Civil Service Act of 1863 Extension Act of 1864*. Pre-Separation officers stationed at

Moreton Bay were New South Wales civil servants, and their superannuation entitlement rested in clause 60 of the *New South Wales Constitution Act* of 1853, a scheme modelled on the 1832 Imperial Act. James Taylor (Western Downs) successfully moved for the elision of a clause in the bill which stipulated that the service of officers under the New South Wales Government was to be computed in the period of employment.¹⁷ Parochialism carried the day; Queensland moneys were not going to meet the cost of NSW service!

Herbert concurred, and insisted that service should not be deemed to commence from date of appointment, but from date of transfer to Moreton Bay, and he found support in the Upper House from his colleague, the Honourable John Bramston, who insisted there was no principle in the bill which might be considered objectionable.¹⁸ However, James Galloway successfully moved that continuous service for former NSW officers date from initial appointment be included and the amended bill was transmitted to the Lower House, where it arrived on 11 September 1863.¹⁹ Herbert rejected the amendment on the grounds that 'it would be unjust to charge the people of this Colony with compensation for services rendered neither to this Government, nor within its territory' and he utilised the weekend to consult with Bramston.²⁰ The latter again had carriage of the

matter in the Upper Chamber and moved that 'Council do not insist on the amendment'. The Council President, Maurice Charles O'Connell, opposed the motion on the basis that if the Colony were to accept the benefits of separation, they must also accept the responsibilities. Bramston countered with the statement that 'there was no retiring allowance made to the civil servants of NSW'.²¹ Bramston's motion was lost on division as Council concluded that there clearly was a transfer of obligation, and 'to deny that seemed to accord neither with public policy nor good faith'.²²

This rebuttal arrived in the Lower House on 17 September 1863 and Herbert asserted that he was unable to support a position that he did not conceive to be just. Robert Mackenzie, on the one hand agreeing with Herbert, also produced a compromise which permitted former NSW officers to 'buy back' years of pre-separation service at the rate of two per cent of average annual salary from 'the date of their removal to the now Queensland portion of NSW'.²³ This was remitted, and on the same day the Upper House accepted the compromise, the Assembly finally agreed, and the bill, initiated by civil servants in committee, received assent on 21 September 1863, becoming the first legislative instrument to govern Queensland Civil Service employment conditions.²⁴

At the close of 1863, the Civil Service structure comprised:

Class	Ordinary Division		Professional Division	
	Total	Pre-separation NSW appointees	Total	Pre-separation NSW appointees
First	Twenty-one	Seven	Eleven	Five
Second	Fifteen	Six	Eight	Two
Third	Twenty-five	One	Eight	Nil
Fourth	Thirty-five	Nil	Eighteen	Three
Fifth	Twenty-three	Nil	Fifteen	One ²⁵

In addition, 1864 saw the inclusion in Civil Service ranks proper of that category of officer whose grade can best be described as ‘unclassified’ and encompassed such occupations as messengers, turn-keys and female warders, matrons, letter-sorters, boatmen and office-keepers. This segment totalled 135 people, of whom 18 were pre-separation appointees, and included 12 females.²⁶ Remuneration per annum ranged from that paid to Susanna Walker and Susan Carter, office-keepers, at £40, to the £700 paid to Surveyor-General, Augustus C Gregory.

The unresolved issue of superannuation, which concerned the rights of 43 officers, can best be illustrated by highlighting the specific prescriptions:

Civil Service Act of 1863, 27 Vic., No.18, Clause 20

For previous New South Welsh officers, they were obliged to pay two percent from commencement of service until the date of their

removal to the (now) Queensland portion of New South Wales.²⁷

The lacuna is obvious, and an amending Act sought to remove the error:

Civil Service Act of 1863 Extension Act of 1864, 28 Vic., No.12, Clause 3:

The twentieth clause was repealed, and previous New South Welsh officers could now elect to ‘buy back years of service’ by paying within six months two percent of average annual salary from commencement of service until date of separation.²⁸

In the debate on the 1864 Extension Bill parochialism remained undiminished. Mackenzie complained and objected to the notion that Queensland moneys were going to defray New South Welsh expenses.²⁹ Attorney-General, Ratcliff Pring, continued to the effect that a man in the NSW service might three or four years before Separation have been transferred from Sydney to Moreton

Bay, but all the period from transfer to Separation would be counted as service, although for some of that period no deduction was levied. This, he insisted, was unfair, and also unjust to civil servants who had contributed to the Fund.³⁰ Arthur Macalister agreed with the view that former NSW officers wanted previous service counted, but officers appointed in Queensland said no.³¹

Dr Henry Challinor believed that the law, as it presently stood, 'would inflict a serious injustice upon the general revenue of the colony'. This solitary voice of actuarial percipience ought properly to be acknowledged, because the issue of employer subsidy of Queensland Civil Service post-employment income support schemes became a central item of debate over the ensuing half century.³²

On 17 August 1864 the Bill arrived in the Council and the president maintained his broader view and consistency in his attack on parochialism. He claimed the Government believed that 'nothing that had previously taken place was of any benefit to them,' and he insisted that there was clearly a transfer of obligations.³³ He estimated the additional liability incurred would amount to £748, and 'some officers' would have to contribute as much as £90.³⁴

The Bill was transmitted to the Assembly on 1 September, and that

House agreed to the matter without debate. The Extension Act received assent on Tuesday 13 September 1864.³⁵

In summary, it can be said that in the first half of the 1860s, the collective action of Queensland civil servants contributed significantly to their securing 'industrial conditions' vastly superior to the standards of the day. Security of tenure, guaranteed increments, relatively short working hours, and paid annual and long service leave were joined by a post-employment income support scheme which also embraced disability/death benefits. To demonstrate how superior Civil Service conditions were, one illustration ought to suffice: a clerk fifth class after six years service received £190 per annum — axemen and bush hands were offered 7/- per day, or £109/4/- per year.

The second half of the 1860s exhibited a different flavour. While public announcements by parliamentarians inferred the Civil Service Acts were unworkable, a critical analysis of their opposition suggests they were more concerned that the Act was a constraint on their own power. They spent the next five years removing it. In mid-April 1866 a Select Committee was appointed to 'Inquire into and report on the general working and organisation of the Civil Service,' and the report engendered several failed and finally a successful attempt (driven by the then

Colonial Secretary, Charles Lilley) to repeal the Acts.³⁶

- In August 1865 a Civil Service Acts Repeal Bill was discharged from the notice paper³⁷;
- In October 1866 a Bill to repeal an Act to organise the Civil Service of Queensland and an act to extend the provisions was withdrawn³⁸;
- A Civil Service Amendment Bill, introduced in September 1867 lapsed in February 1868³⁹;
- A Civil Acts Amendment Bill introduced on 27 January 1869, and a Civil Service Acts Repeal Bill introduced on 18 March 1869 were both stopped by prorogation on 25 March 1869.⁴⁰

Ultimately, the gains received by the civil servants and their remarkable collective efforts to secure them were undone, because with merely a superannuation savings clause, the September 1869 *Civil Service Repeal Act 33 Vic. No.3* removed protection from prospective appointees, an issue not re-addressed until two decades into the future.

Notes

- 1 *Queensland Government Gazette* (QGG), vol 5, no. 40, 7 May 1864, p. 305; and reprinted p. 317 and p. 346.
- 2 *Queensland Daily Guardian* (QDG), 13 November 1861, p. 2.
- 3 *QDG*, 16 November 1861, p. 4.
- 4 Northcote –Trevelyan, Report on the Organisation of the Permanent Civil Service 1853; presented February 1854, paper 1713: reprinted as Appendix B of The Fulton Report, vol. 1, London HMSO Cmnd 3638, presented June 1968.
- 5 Supplement to *QGG*, 21 January 1860, no. 7.
- 6 Queensland Legislative Assembly, *Votes and Proceedings* (V&P), First Parliament, First Session, 1860: Colonial Civil Service, (Correspondence and Minutes relating to the Superannuation of Officers), p. 431. Proceedings of the Executive Council, 28 February 1860.
- 7 Queensland Legislative Assembly, *V&P*, 1860: Select Committee No. 5 to report on Government Departments p. 258.
- 8 *QDG*, 5 June, 1861, p. 3.
- 9 *Brisbane Courier* (BC), 19 June, 1861, p. 3.
- 10 *QDG*, 22 June 1861, p. 3.
- 11 *QDG*, 26 June 1861, p. 3. In his report to the electors of Fortitude Valley on Monday 27 January, he told his listeners that it was upon his motion that the bill was discharged. See *QDG*, 29 January 1862, p. 3. He is on record asserting that ‘I am greatly opposed to the granting of pensions’. See *Queensland Parliamentary Debates* (QPD), vol. 2, 17 May 1865, p. 55.
- 12 *QDG*, 26 June 1861, p. 3.
- 13 The advertisements convening the meeting were in: *QDG*, 18 July 1863, p. 1; *QDG*, 22 July 1863, p. 1; *Brisbane Courier*, 22 July 1863, p.1; *QDG*, 22 July 1863, p. 2.
- 14 *QDG*, 8 July 1863, p. 2. Source *QGG*, vol. 5, No. 6, second supplement, 12 January 1864.
- 15 *BC*, 27 July 1863, p. 2.
- 16 See *BC*, 6 August 1863, p. 3; *BC*, 7 August 1863, p. 2; *BC*, 12 August 1863, p. 3.
- 17 *BC*, 20 August 1863, p. 3.
- 18 *BC*, 28 August 1863, p. 3.

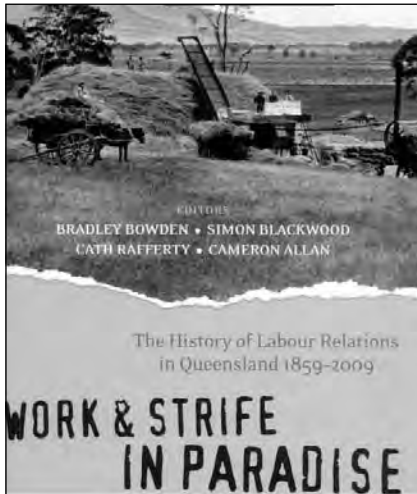
- 19 *Legislative Council Journal* (LCJ), vol. 6, 1863, p. 82; *BC*, 9 September 1863, p. 2; *V&P*, 1863, p. 154; *BC*, 12 September 1863, p. 3.
- 20 *V&P*, 1863, p. 165; *BC*, 15 September 1863, p. 2; *QDG*, 15 September 1863, p. 2.
- 21 *BC*, 17 September 1863, p. 2.
- 22 *QDG*, 17 September 1863, p. 4; *LCJ*, vol. 6, 1863, p. 102; and Division List, p. 132.
- 23 *V&P*, 1863, p. 185; *BC*, 18 September 1863, p. 5; *QDG*, 18 September 1863, p. 3. This, it subsequently was seen, produced a lacuna between arrival in Queensland and date of separation.
- 24 *BC*, 23 September 1863, p. 3; *QGG*, vol. 4, 1863, pp. 865–68.
- 25 *QGG*, List of Officers published according to the provisions of Act 27 Victoria, no. 18; vol. 5, no. 6, 12 January 1864, pp. 39–43.
- 26 *QGG*, List of Officers published according to the provisions of Acts 27 Victoria No.18 and 28 Victoria, no. 12; vol. 6, no. 16, 9 February 1865, pp. 118–19.
- 27 F.A. Cooper (ed.), *Statutes of the Colony of Queensland Volume 1*, J.C. Beal, Government Printer, 1881, p. 227.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 279.
- 29 *BC*, 21 May 1864, p. 3; *QDG*, 21 May 1864, p. 2.
- 30 *BC*, 21 May 1864, p. 3.
- 31 *Ibid.*
- 32 *BC*, 27 May 1864, p. 3; *QDG*, 27 May 1864, Supplement, p. 3.
- 33 *QPD*, Council, 19 August 1864, p. 299; *BC*, 20 August 1864, p. 5; *QDG*, 20 August 1864, p. 5.
- 34 *QPD*, Council, 19 August 1864, pp. 299–300.
- 35 *V&P*, 1 September 1864, p. 213; *V&P*, 13 September 1864, p. 257; *QGG*,

- vol. 5, 1864, pp. 667–68; *BC*, 14 September 1864, p. 2.
- 36 *V&P*, 1866, pp. 449–63.
- 37 *QPD*, Assembly, vol. 2, 22 August 1865, p. 521; *V&P*, 1865, Register of Bills, p. 349.
- 38 *V&P*, 1866, Register of Bills, p. 349.
- 39 *V&P*, 1867, Register of Bills, p. 585.
- 40 *V&P*, 1868–69, Register of Bills, p. 189.

The author thanks Gillian Gardiner for her kind assistance.

* * * *

.....
 •
 • 'The smart way to
 • keep people passive
 • and obedient is
 • to strictly limit
 • the spectrum of
 • acceptable opinion,
 • but allow very lively
 • debate within that
 • spectrum'
 •
 • ~ Noam Chomsky
 • (1928–) Institute
 • Professor Emeritus of
 • Linguistics
 •
 •



Review of

***Work and Strife in
Paradise: The History
of Labour Relations in
Queensland 1859–2009***

**Bradley Bowden, Simon
Blackwood, Cath Rafferty
and Cameron Allan (eds)**

Federation Press, Sydney, 2009

RRP: \$59.95, paperback

ISBN: 9781862877535

In 1979, an Indigenous worker from Yarrabah reserve, Arnold Murgha, successfully sued for wages owing, with the assistance of the Australian

Workers Union — as, with the help of the Queensland Nurses Union, two Cherbourg nurses were to do the following year. The government was in breach of both its own industrial laws and the federal Racial Discrimination Act. But individual victories achieved little; for years, the Queensland government resisted a 1996 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission directive to compensate underpaid Indigenous workers, with the situation dragging on and still not being resolved in 2010.

In 1925, a state-wide strike by 18,000 rail workers, led by Australian Railways Union leaders Tim Moroney and George Rymer, resulted in restoration of the basic wage and agreement to other union demands — although the ARU and other unions were to suffer a crushing defeat in the South Johnstone lockout two years later.

In 2001, Commissioner Glenys Fisher developed guidelines that allowed the Industrial Relations Commission to implement an Equal Remuneration Principle — some 80 years after the Queensland Teachers Union had brought the first equal pay case under state legislation, with Justice McCawley in the first decision finding ‘it is not established that the work [of male and female teachers] is the “same work”’.

These and other episodes in Queensland’s labour history are

brought to life in *Work and Strife in Paradise*.

As the first history of industrial relations in Queensland, this beautiful volume — the cover, for instance, is stylish and the 20 pages of historical photographs are very welcome — is a great addition to the bookshelves of anyone interested in the state's industrial relations. Produced during Queensland's Sesquicentenary celebrations in 2009 — notably, also the year of Australia's new federal Fair Work Act which has so significantly changed the institutional landscape — the book brings together the work of many of Queensland's labour historians.

The book is somewhat of a wake for the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission although, as Margaret Gardner highlights, the new Fair Work Act has many similarities with the 1999 Queensland legislation. And the Queensland IR system has in recent years been a pace-setter in areas such as pay equity, a model to be emulated by the federal Act which has some deficiencies in this respect.

The 'paradise' of the title refers to the words Henry Jordan — a public servant sent to attract immigrant labour to Queensland from the UK in 1859 — used to describe the new colony, which had just attained self-government. There has always been an ironic twist to the use of the word

'paradise' in Australian labour history; as Buckley and Wheelwright reminded us some time ago, Australia, despite its seemingly egalitarian ideology, was often 'no paradise for workers'.

The book is a 'thematic' labour history, rather than a chronological history. While the first chapter looks at the first 60 years (1857–1916) that led to the state's first conciliation and arbitration Act, other chapters focus on the institutions and their strategies (employer associations, unions, the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission and its legislation and government action in the areas of occupational health and safety and minimum employment standards). Later chapters focus on topics that include: Indigenous labour, women's workforce roles, notable strikes, the public service and a 'regional' excursion (to Rockhampton). Margaret Gardner's final chapter looks back on the full 150 years.

An impeccable series of very useful Appendices, compiled by Paul Florens, are well worth the almost-100 pages devoted to them; they cover such diverse subjects as labour force and strike statistics, names of key figures in the relevant government ministries, the Industrial Commission, the Queensland Council of Unions and the Australian Workers Union, and lists of unions and employer organisations operating in the state.

It is impossible to do justice in a review to the diverse contribution to the book. Barbara Webster's study of how the relations between unions and arbitration played out at the workplace is succinct and lively. Bradley Bowden's chapter on unions reminds us how dependent were the early fortunes of unions on a sympathetic government and a strong industrial relation system, a conjunction which started unravelling in the 1950s. Michael Barry's chapter underlines the importance of employer as well as worker coordination, and fills in gaps in the 'neglected' history of employers' associations. Linda Colley's chapter examines the politicisation of employment relations in the public sector, often neglected in historical scholarship on Australian industrial relations.

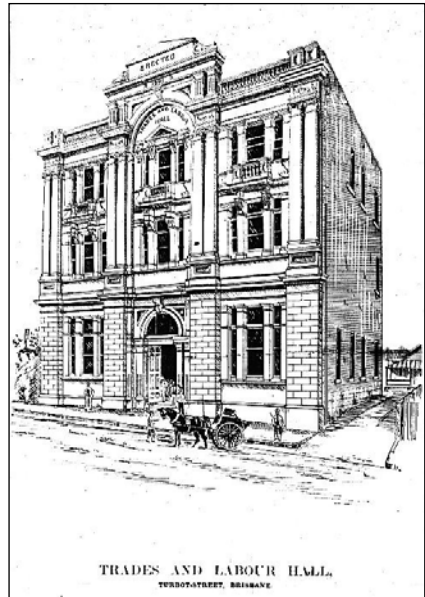
Some authors explicitly raise the issue of how a national system of industrial relations will affect the highly state-based system as it has existed to date in Queensland; in other chapters, the question is implicit. But one wonders: what of state-based unions (and employer associations); will we see their demise in coming years?

This is an excellent contribution to Queensland labour history. The state government should be commended for its support and sponsorship of the volume. At times the weight of legislative and institutional history tends to silence individual voices of those who acted on the stage of

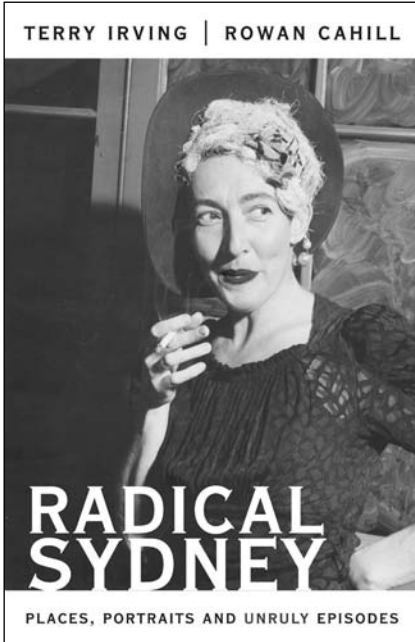
Queensland industrial relations, an unavoidable feature of a book with such a vast scope. And inevitably, given the book's thematic organisation, there is some minor repetition. Those are small quibbles, however. The book is very well balanced and a mine of information. It should be read by anyone wishing to understand the development of the state's labour relations.

Janis Bailey

* * * *



Trades and Labour Hall, Turbot Street, Brisbane. *The Worker*.



Review of

***Radical Sydney: Places,
Portraits and Unruly
Episodes***

**By Terry Irving and Rowan
Cahill**

UNSW Press, Sydney, 2010

RRP: \$39.95, paperback

ISBN: 9781742230931

Following in the footsteps of predecessors on radical culture in Brisbane (2004) and Melbourne (2001), this book is a worthy addition. Beyond

‘postcard Sydney’, as the authors remind us, is another Sydney — which is ‘both a place on a map and a product of the radical imagination’. The ‘radical city’ books are a way of writing a people’s history that challenges hegemonic voices and focuses on some of the rebels, revolutionaries, dreamers, agitators, demonstrators and artists who challenged the status quo in various ways.

‘Radical Sydney’ begins in The Rocks, encompassing Pyrmont, Ultimo, Chippendale, Redfern, Darlinghurst, Surry Hills, and Woolloomooloo, and spreading out to Balmain and other inner city suburbs, and southward to Botany, and westward to Bankstown. But geography is the beginning, not the end: it is ideas and ‘radical possibilities’ that give the book its impetus and it is the stories of people such as Victoria St activist Mick Fowler who put the flesh on the bones of ideas and utopian goals.

The book’s authors have been prominent in the New Left for many years and are both educationists and historians of many years standing. Their sympathy for, and knowledge of, their subject matter makes for a broad sweep, rendered with passion and verve. I am sure that many agonising hours were spent deciding what to leave out, as well as include.

The 47 contributions in the book take us from 1790 to 1998. The first and

the penultimate contributions fittingly relate to Indigenous people. The story starts with Lieutenant William Dawes, a First Fleet officer who carried out duties as varied as astronomer and ordnance officer, and who gives his name to Dawes Point, the land on which the southern pylon of the Sydney Harbour Bridge sits. The historical record has as yet failed to clarify whether Dawes — who had to leave the colony after failing to pursue an expedition against Aboriginal people as enthusiastically as Governor Phillip would have wished — was indeed a principled anti-slaver in his later life, or a racist administrator in Sierra Leone. This account points towards the need for good historical scholarship to clear up such ambiguities.

Events associated with ‘Survival Day’ in the bicentennial year are retold in the second-last chapter. A large march — about 40,000 — of Indigenous people and their supporters voiced the need for black and white reconciliation, marching on Sydney’s centre. A smaller group of Redfern radicals staged their own demonstration, re-enacting the invasion scenario near the Domain, right in the midst of ‘official’ celebrations. The rebels partied on into the night at the Regent Hotel in Redfern, clashing with police as the night wore on.

Other contributions highlight issues that many (of a certain age) will remember — but the events, not necessarily the

places associated with them. One example is the 1964–66 trial of the publishers of the magazine *Oz* (several years before the more famous UK trial). The original decision, unfavourable to the accused, was quashed on appeal. The story is anchored on the fountain-sculpture outside the P&O building in Hunter Street, which showed three men urinating in a sculpture (suspiciously like a public urinal) in front of the newly opened building. Not only was *Oz* crusading against the country’s ‘puritan hangover and monopolistic media structure’ but also ‘the Australian Ugliness’.

The courage of draft resisters like Michael Matteson, sentenced in 1972 to 20 months’ gaol for ignoring a call-up notice and for escaping from Federal police custody, is celebrated. Here the locale is the front lawn of Sydney University.

We are reminded, too, that Sydney’s Green Bans, important and successful as they were, did not always end in victory. One chapter recalls the ‘siege of Victoria Street’: the story of longstanding resident Mick Fowler, supported by newspaper proprietor Juanita Nielsen, publisher of *Now*, and the Builders Labourers’ Federation. Beginning in April 1973, the saga finally ended with Fowler’s eviction in 1976; some of the historical buildings were preserved, but the fight to incorporate low-cost housing was not; 300 working-class tenants were

evicted; the secretary of the group, Arthur King, was kidnapped and terrorised by thugs, and Nielsen lost her life. Two employees of Abe Saffron's Carousel Club were convicted of conspiracy to abduct her, but no-one was ever charged with her murder.

Cultural history — interleaved with the industrial and political history of radical Sydney — is well served. Bruce Scates, one of seven 'guest contributors', takes us on a tour of Sydney's radical bookshops. These include McNamara's Book and News Dept, the Active Service Brigade's Reading Rooms, the Australian Socialist League's bookshop and the offices of radical papers such as *The Dawn* and *The Worker* — not forgetting the street corner stalls and networks such as the Women's Literary Society that fostered not simply reading, but discussion, debate and working-class radicalism that looked towards creating a more just world.

Other chapters examine New Theatre, the Waterside Workers' Cultural Committee, and the Eureka League's 1952 Carnival for Peace and Friendship — further incursions into the radical cultural history of Sydney.

Many battles and places that have inscribed themselves on the radical imagination are celebrated: 'the Hungry Mile'; the battle of Union Street, Erskineville, in the Depression, one of a range of organised defences

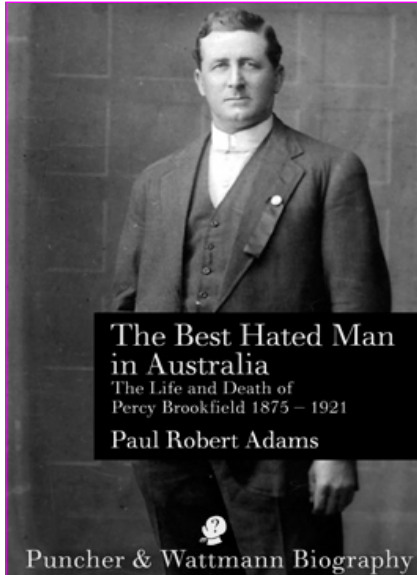
by families faced with eviction; the formation of the Chinese Seamen's Union in Hay Street in 1943, with support from the Seamen's Union of Australia; and many more.

A bibliography and a long list of 'recommended reading' conclude the book; it is good to see that the publications of the branches of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History receive a mention, including *The Queensland Journal of Labour History*, acknowledging their role in celebrating and recording labour history.

Terry Irving and Rowan Cahill and their guest contributors (Lucy Taksa, Peter Kirkpatrick, Michelle Arrow, Drew Cottle, Shane Cahill and Lisa Milner, as well as Bruce Scates) have done an outstanding job with *Radical Sydney*, which is well served by a stylish cover (Kylie Tennant, author and supporter of the International Labour Defence organisation in the 1930s) and many wonderful photographs. This book is an education and a delight.

Janis Bailey

* * * * *



Review of

***The Best Hated Man in
Australia: the Life and
Death of Percy Brookfield,
1876–1921***

By Paul Robert Adams

Puncher & Wattmann 2010

\$34, paperback, 377 pp.

ISBN 9781921450228

Why have I not met this man before? The name on the cover of the book for review was unfamiliar, as was the portrait. The eyes of the pleasant-featured, avuncular cove pictured conveyed clarity, calm fearlessness and

uncomplicated decency, perhaps of the sort associated with an old-time country bank manager, but there was nothing to hint at the circumstances that had made the earthly days of Percy Brookfield — miner, union leader and MLA in the New South Wales parliament — such tempestuous ones. Even after many years of reading Australian labour history, albeit mainly related to my native state of Queensland, his name was new to me, but after reading Paul Robert Adams's fine biography, it is a name that I will not forget.

Percy Brookfield (often referred to as 'Jack' in some circles for some reason that is lost to history) started out as a local hero of Broken Hill in early 1916, with his public life themed around the Byzantine and literally toxic political, industrial and social atmosphere of that city. In the five years that were left to him, Brookfield simultaneously endured widespread public opprobrium and, in the circles that he believed counted the most, hero worship as he laboured as a member of parliament, virulent anti-conscription debater, fearless champion for the imprisoned IWW Twelve and supporter of the workers during the NSW General Strike of 1917 and the Big Strike of 1919–1920. His brief national prominence, along with his life, was terminated by an incident as freakishly tragic as any to claim the life of a prominent Australian, with the probable exception of Steve Irwin.

The book heavily utilises two previous works, one a biography of Brookfield unpublished in the lifetime of its author, Giles Roper, and the other an account of Broken Hill's 'stormy years' by former NSW politician, Ernest Wetherell, that prominently featured Brookfield. In weaving the two together and adding a great deal of primary material, Adams has produced the definitive portrait of a man who in early 1916 was 'a little slow, even shy, in gaining his feet as a political activist' but by April 1917 was 'the most notorious man in the country'. Despite the latter designation, Brookfield's personal qualities were almost all attractive ones. Fundamental to his success was his public speaking style, through which he outlined his extreme but 'staunchly held and plainly stated' convictions, leavened with 'a well-balanced sense of humour and a happy knack of hitting hard in a nice way'. Peter Simonoff, described remarkably in this book as the 'unrecognised Russian Bolshevik consul-general', said of Brookfield: 'I don't think Jack had any sense of fear, just as he could not understand how he could be dishonest in anything at all. These two things were absolutely impossible for him.' All in all, Percy seems to have been a nice bloke to know, unless you happened to be William Morris Hughes, who on one occasion Brookfield *allegedly* termed 'the thing, the animal, the miserable little skunk ... traitor and a viper'.

One of the few politicians to be first approached to run for parliament while in gaol, Brookfield needed his sense of humour, fearlessness, honesty and plain speaking throughout his career. Although he was threatened with expulsion from the NSW Labor Party before even taking his seat in the Legislative Assembly (for declaring that the red flag was the only one he would fight for and that 'he would not spill a drop of blood for the Union Jack'), Brookfield was unwavering in his stance, and the party at this stage took no action against him, presaging a well-known remark that Lyndon Johnson would much later make about J Edgar Hoover and the inside and outside of tents. Later, when Brookfield took the unusual course of resigning from caucus, but not from the ALP, the party expelled him anyway.

Despite all this, he was a popular member of the Assembly, with even the Nationalists rather liking the man with 'a heart too big for his head', despite his inflexible (and somewhat alarming) stance on industrial issues: for example, he was not only sceptical of the benefits of arbitration, but was fervently opposed to its implementation. His course was uncompromising, but also good-humoured, clear-eyed and decent, making Brookfield's grimly ridiculous and precipitate departure from politics and this world a tragedy of the first order.

Adams has mastered a great deal of source material here, including material from various Broken Hill associations and the National Archives. He has produced a detailed and lucid account of a man almost forgotten outside Broken Hill, who along with the great Queensland Premier T.J. Ryan (whose dates of birth and death corresponded closely to Brookfield's) remains one of the great 'might-have-beens' of Australian labour history.

The select bibliography is a generous one, with many archival sources, police reports, and records of various Broken Hill associations, as well as a vast array of published sources and academic theses. For some reason, Edgar Ross's article on Brookfield in a 1961 edition of *Common Cause* is cited twice, but the bibliography, and indeed the whole publication seems to be otherwise free of typographical errors. (I am unable to supply the missing part of the newspaper citation in note 48 on page 328.) The index is, unusually, in a single column which makes it a little difficult to utilise, and could have benefitted from some extra descriptions instead of just page references. For example, there are over 50 references to the IWW that remain unelaborated. But full marks here for the helpful inclusion in the index of identifying remarks pertaining to persons. For example, 'Giles, Alfred Francis' is described as a 'youth arrested for not drilling', and the listing

for one Parrott describes Mr Parrott as a 'Zinc Corporation ambulance man'.

The book is handsomely produced with a stiff but not cloth or hardback cover, and features an attractive and easy-to-read font. It is truly heartening to know that biographies of relatively unknown political figures are still being produced in hard copy, and even more so when they are as capably, thoroughly and indeed lovingly produced as this one. If you like biographies, and are interested in the history of the labour movement in Australia (and if you are not, why are you reading this journal?) you will like *The Best Hated Man in Australia*. Highly recommended.

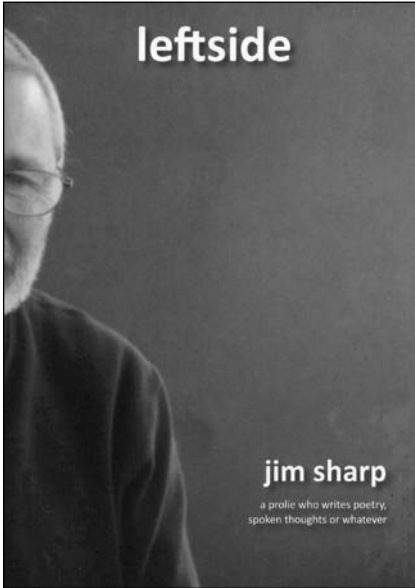
Brian F. Stevenson

* * * *

.....

• 'The worst sin
• toward our fellow
• creatures is not to
• hate them, but to be
• indifferent to them:
• That's the essence of
• inhumanity.'
•
• ~ George Bernard
• Shaw

.....



Review of

Leftside

By Jim Sharp

Ginninderra Press, Port Adelaide,
2010

\$22.50, paperback, 116 pp.

ISBN: 9781740276061

Who'd be a working-class poet: a label and a vocation dismissed by your enemies and underestimated by your allies?

Well Jim Sharp would. After a working life sharpening a boning knife, at the latter end of life of engagement in working-class politics, he has produced

a remarkable collection of verse that traces and reflects that life.

It's a life of stages reflected in the structure of the book: birth and youth in Yorkshire, emigration to Australia, establishing a life in Queensland, acknowledgement of ageing and awareness of impending death. Metaphors of cycle, spiral and connectedness in the poems reinforce these patterns.

The first poem in the collection, 'migration', foreshadows the structure of the life and the book:

Me roots & shoots were nurtured
in the rother-don valley confluence
one flowered & fruited &
me fallin' leaves be on the
antipodes
nowadays as a one-leaf tree
I'm reminiscin' life's restiveness
about the owd world & the new &
allus me ansestors' footpads &
mine
be magnetically lock-stepped
sharp familial souls on antipodal
soles.

While the poems capture a sense of duality between birth and death and north and south, they remain nonetheless written from very particular pair of perspectives. The outlook is based geographically in Australia and politically in the working class. Reference to England as the 'owd dart', a 'green-girt miserable

country' and the creeping of Australian terms into English dialect make the viewpoint clear. The passionate advocacy of working-class politics ensure the only political duality in the book is, appropriately, one of conflict.

One of the strengths of the collection is its idiosyncratic dialect voice. Read alone, the dialect of any given poem is too peculiar and isolated to work, but read as part of a whole the dialect starts to hit home. The cumulative effect is to teach the reader the rhythms and strange meanings of this life and its collection of poems.

Sharp uses terms of his own creation as if they were terms everyone owns and understands — and indeed they do own them, because this work has been created for all readers. Readers will also *understand* them, though perhaps not immediately. Phrases like 'monumental social continuum' and 'oz-pragmatic universalist' are new to the ear yet function to describe old processes we all comprehend. They convey Sharp's sharp sense of humour and wit but they also heighten the seriousness of the political processes he comes to support or undermine.

Sharp's idiosyncrasies are derived from his status as an autodidact. With few role models or mentors his poetry has emerged in a unique form. This is the case with many worker poets whose writing is nurtured outside the conventions of traditional or modern

poetry or after the travails of a hard working life. As Humphrey McQueen suggests in his Foreword:

Some delay awaits the worker who becomes a poet. Geoff Goodfellow got started only after injury put him out of the building game, Jennifer Maiden once she had left the factory floor for the university, Jim Sharp since he was made redundant. It is as if the grind that supplied their content prevented its expression. . . . Until made redundant, Jim was, in effect, illiterate.

McQueen also makes a connection with PiO, a writer who articulates the working-class argot of a Fitzroy crammed with European migrants. He makes the significant point that Sharp produces a very untypical Australian form — the English dialect poem — a form normally lost in the gap between the easier cultural accommodation of English migrants and the pyrotechnics of continental-European migrant cultural expression.

This is a terrific collection of poetry, because it records a life well-lived in a form that gives us a new way to think through the whole notion of living a life well. But its primary importance is that it keeps a candle burning for the diminishing art of working-class/political poetry.

There are any number of poems worthy of note but contemporary events push

me in the direction of ‘a false prophet’
which figures Pauline Hanson criss-
crossing Australia like a bushfire:

Don’t be allured by the wanderin’
redhead
as she jetssets thru cities &
towns preenin’
her fashions upon a socially
sour country.

While the accidental reading we could
make of this poem is hilarious and
one of its enticements, I think the
final stanza of the poem is as good a
metaphor for contemporary political
life as any other doing the rounds:

Yet! a blakk & white hoi polloi
together
are running up the down
escalator fast
undergoin’ deadly social
burn-backs.

Buy this book. Not for Jim or his
publisher but for yourself, to read, to
learn and to enjoy.

Ian Syson

Ed — Jim’s book can be viewed
at: [http://www.surplusvalue.org.au/
Leftside.html](http://www.surplusvalue.org.au/Leftside.html)

* * * *

principles & particulars

there’s alus two sides to every
question
and recognisin’ the principles be
easy
whilst understandin’ particular
particulars
and takin’ the appropriate steps
calls for much collective wisdom.

alena

come! ... uncle jim
come here ... come here!
and i’ll show you how i dance.

and wildly she spins
in her girlish excitement

one uninhibited life force
of dance & music within her soul.

Jim Sharp

Review
2010 Alex Macdonald Memorial Lecture
Presented by Dr Rosalind Kidd¹



‘One of the Great Scandals of Australia’s History: Aboriginal Labour in 20th Century Queensland’ was the title of this year’s Alex Macdonald Memorial Lecture, delivered on 20 May by historian Dr Ros Kidd. About 80 people attended the event, which was organised by the BLHA and sponsored by the Queensland Council of Unions.

Drawing on 20 years of exhaustive archival research, including unprecedented access to the Government’s own files, Kidd painted a picture of systemic racism across many decades, from the forced removal of Aboriginal people from their traditional lands, the virtual enslavement of young Aboriginal men and women on pastoral properties, and the confining of entire communities to reserves where they suffered from malnutrition, sub-

standard housing and lack of hygienic conditions and safe water.

‘Aboriginal labour was absolutely crucial to the development of the country,’ Kidd argued. ‘A major aim of the protection system was to control this labour. Wages were withheld, with only tobacco provided as payment for work.’ Complaints often led to punishment, including exile to places like Palm Island.

Kidd explained how police ‘protectors’ controlled wages paid to Aboriginal workers. Police fraud was widespread and wages were often not paid at all. The wages and welfare entitlements that were paid were eventually centralised in trust accounts in Brisbane, paving the way for new forms of abuse as successive Governments raided the funds for revenue. After a lifetime

of hard labour, many Aboriginal workers discovered their savings had disappeared.

Kidd spoke on the current campaign for wage justice. In 2002 the Beattie government offered ‘compensation’ of no more than \$7000 to each Aboriginal claimant, on condition they sign away their right to further claims. Kidd’s research shows the Government knew many claimants were owed much more. The Bligh government has proposed that \$20 million of the total \$55 million offered in 2002 be redirected to an Aboriginal Welfare Fund, to finance educational scholarships for Aboriginal children. As Kidd pointed out, it is another example of a government diverting Aboriginal monies without consent.

boy forced to find work. His wages were withheld from the age of 14. With support from the QCU, Uncle Conrad is currently pursuing legal action against the Queensland Government for the loss of his wages.

The 2010 Alex Macdonald Memorial Lecture told a shameful story, but it is not a story confined to history. If there is one abiding message from Kidd’s outstanding paper and the personal testimony shared by Uncle Conrad and others in the audience, it is that the past and the present are linked, that unless rectified the consequences of historical injustice live on. As Kidd declared: ‘Our duty is to force our governments to be accountable for their actions.’

Jeff Rickertt



Uncle Conrad Yeatman from Yarrabah was the BLHA’s special guest at the lecture. He told the audience how he was made to leave school prematurely because he was Aboriginal, was separated from his family and as a mere

¹ Dr Rosalind Kidd is the author of four books on the history of Aboriginal labour and stolen wages. Her most recent is *Hard Labour, Stolen Wages: National Report on Stolen Wages*, published by Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation in 2007.

* * * *

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 and current Fellow of the John Oxley Library.

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.

Bob Carnegie went to sea in 1981 and has held numerous union positions in the maritime industry, including Honorary President of the SUA Queensland Branch, Assistant Branch Secretary and organiser for the

Southern Queensland Branch of the MUA, and Queensland Inspector for the International Transport Federation. Bob has also worked in construction and served as an organiser for the Queensland Builders Labourers' Federation. Today he is back at sea, putting militant unionism into practice as a delegate for the MUA.

Graeme Walker runs a laboratory at the Queensland Institute of Medical Research. He has written many articles on the mechanisms of skin carcinogenesis due to ultraviolet radiation exposure. His philosophical and political views have been very influenced by those of his father, Bob Walker. Graeme is also a musician, a guitar player turned multi-instrumentalist after his father made a number of instruments for him and his brother.

Humphrey McQueen has written a broad-brush history of builders labourers and their unions from the 1780s to the future, *We built this country*. His website can be reached by googling 'Humphrey McQueen'.

Tony Gough Between 1983 and 1989, Tony Gough was the Research Officer at Queensland State Service Union and Employees, now the Queensland Public Sector Union. He finished his working life as the Legal Accounts Officer, Public Defender's Office, Queensland. He has an interest in

Queensland white-collar civil service unionism.

Janis Bailey lectures in the Department of Employment Relations and Human Resources at Griffith University. Her research interests include union strategy and culture, vulnerable workers, and teaching and learning in industrial relations. Before moving to Queensland in 2002, she taught at the University of WA and Edith Cowan University in Perth, and was on the committee of the Perth branch of the ASSLH. She worked as an industrial officer in the 1980s and 90s for various blue- and white-collar unions in Perth, and is currently a delegate for her union, the National Tertiary Education Union.

Brian Stevenson is a librarian, researcher and writer, and is currently Client Services and Reference Librarian at the Tropical North Queensland TAFE. He is the author of several commissioned organisational histories, and edited Peter Beattie's first book of memoirs, *In the arena* (1990.) He has written sixteen entries for the *Australian dictionary of biography*. In 2007 he was awarded a PhD from Griffith University for his biography of Vince Gair.

Ian Syson teaches poetry and working-class literature at Victoria University in Melbourne. 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.

* * * *

Noticeboard

Research support for 2 BLHA committee members

During November, Dr Greg Mallory (BLHA president) will undertake research at Manning Clark House on a comparative study examining Ted Roach, Harry Bridges, Pat Mackie and Jack Munday at critical junctures during their leadership. It is anticipated this will lead to a booklet or book.

Jeff Rickertt (co-editor of this journal and BLHA committee member) is the current John Oxley Library fellow. He is researching and writing a biography on Ernest Henry Lane: prominent figure in the Queensland labour movement for five decades from the early 1890s.

Flames of Discontent at Woodford Folk Festival again

Dale Jacobsen and Doug Eaton have again been working with the Woodford Folk Festival to include three events under the 'Flames of Discontent' banner which, this year, recognises the Green Bans. In the pipeline are: Screening of *Rocking the Foundations*; a forum 'Green Bans: would they work today?' with Jack Munday, Greg Mallory and others (BLHA is bringing Jack and Judy Munday to the festival); and a concert 'The Battle for Kelly's Bush'. For further information, contact Dale: dale@daleornajacobsen.com. Tickets for the festival are now on sale at: <http://www.woodfordfolkfestival.com>.

Australasian Meat Industry Employees' Union records donated to Fryer Library

The Queensland branch of the Australasian Meat Industry Employees' Union recently added 107 boxes of records to its collection at Fryer Library, out at the University of Queensland. The new material includes minutes, transcripts of conciliation and arbitration commission hearings, and correspondence from various periods of the union's history. Researchers investigating the formative years of the meatworkers' union will be particularly interested in the minute book of the Butchers' Employees' [sic] Union of Brisbane (South Brisbane), which begins with handwritten minutes of the union's founding meeting on 18 September 1889. The meatworkers had been spurred into action by local butchers moving to cut their wages. Members of the general public are welcome to access this collection.

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

No. 11, September 2010
ISSN 1832-9926

IN THIS ISSUE

Organising the Revolution by Ballot:
Queensland's State Socialists, 1889–1905

Jeff Rickertt

A Century of the Queensland BLF

Humphrey McQueen

Cornering the Conditions:
Queensland White Collar Civil Servants, 1859–1864

Tony Gough

OBITUARIES * BOOK REVIEWS * NOTICEBOARD

