

# *The Queensland Journal of Labour History*

*No. 12  
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*The Brisbane Labour History Association*



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See inside back cover for *Editorial Policy* and *Notes for Contributors*.

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**Front Cover Photo:**

Aussie Vaughan (in hat), Jean Vaughan (with ban the bomb sign) and Tom Uren, Rockhampton 1960s. [Photo *The Rockhampton Morning Bulletin*]

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# The Queensland Journal Of Labour History

No. 12, March 2011

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*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](http://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.

The most recent issue of *Labour History* (November 2010) features a special section devoted to the cross-fertilisation of labour and environmental history. Edited by Janis Bailey and entitled 'Greening Labour History', this section includes articles from the 'Red Green and In-Between' conference held last year by the Brisbane Labour History Association. *Labour History* no. 100 will be published in May 2011. This special issue will feature nine articles that survey key aspects of Australian labour history. Along with a general overview of the field (Frank Bongiorno), there will be essays on the importance of labour history for the study of convict Australia (David Roberts), the rise and decline of Australian unionism (Brad Bowden), the historical interpretation of labour process (Christopher Wright), the politics of consumption (Nikola Balnave and Greg Patmore), the state and labour (Peter Sheldon and Louise Thornthwaite), labour-in-politics (Nick Dyrenfurth), labour biography (Mark Hearn and Harry Knowles), and comparative labour history (Ray Markey).

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# Editorial

Jeff Rickertt

As we go to press the world stands transfixed by the historic achievement of the Egyptian masses. A dictatorship that blighted people's lives and attracted the envy of torturers and tyrants everywhere for 30 years has ended, cut down by a popular uprising which no traditional opposition party has been able to control. A democratic tsunami is scouring the sludge of despotism out of Tunisia and Egypt. Where to next?

The politics of democracy are never straightforward. Ending tyranny in any form requires organisation and courage and resilience. It also calls for a vision of something better, and this is where things usually get complicated. In Egypt the people must decide what replaces dictatorship. Opinions are divided. In Australia, too, resisters of power have episodically united on the streets, only to divide over the fundamental conundrum: If not this, then what?

In this issue of the *Queensland Journal of Labour History*, we feature two articles that speak to two distinctly different historical approaches to this question of vision. Connie Healy's article outlines the history of Soviet

friendship organisations allied to the Communist Party which sought to represent the Stalinist USSR as the progressive alternative to bourgeois Australia. Healy traces the rise of the USSR's popularity in the Depression and WWII, its decline under the pressure of the Cold War and its demise with the fracturing of the Communist movement and the emergence in the 1960s of alternative radical visions.

In a sense, Jon Piccini's article picks up the story from there, examining the rise of the Brisbane student new left and the fraught efforts of student radicals and old-left trade unionists to find some common ground. For a brief historical moment, as Piccini explains, an uneasy good-will prevailed and the unions agreed to provide space at Trades Hall for a Sunday youth club called Foco. But the marriage didn't last. Conflicting personalities and material interests played their part in the breakdown but ultimately the bridge between old and new crumbled under the weight of different political visions.

Post-colonial Australia has warded off the would-be despots but we, along with the world at large, have endured something far more pervasive and, in

its own way, debilitating than political dictatorship: the tyranny of working for a wage. For millions of Australians, freedom ceases when work begins. Productive time is bosses' time. Yet this fundamental unfreedom at the heart of Australia's economic and social life rarely features as a topic of democracy. Indeed, what happens at work is seldom even a topic of labour history, except when it erupts into noticeable industrial conflict. In this issue, we seek to address this neglect by launching a series of articles and interviews about the experience of work and grassroots unionism, beginning with Ted Riethmuller's deftly-rendered account of the people and camaraderie he discovered during his first day as an electrical apprentice. We hope Ted's article will encourage other workers to come forward with their stories. Employed, unemployed or retired, white, grey or blue collar, we are keen to hear from you.

In this issue we pay tribute to two union stalwarts who are no longer with us: Jeff Slowgrove and Aussie Vaughan. We welcome the BLHA's new patron, Bob Anderson, and we tip our hat to BLHA life member, Wally Stubbings. Into this mix, we deal the usual full hand of reports, reviews and notices. As a labour history journal with a progressive bias we are always keen to salute the political, industrial and cultural achievements of workers and the oppressed. We duly dedicate this issue to the people of Egypt whose

bravery and determination over 18 days in January and February changed the course of history.

Happy International Women's Day in this, its centenary year.

\* \* \* \*



A "WALTER CRANE" CARTOON.

The Cause of Labour is the Hope of the World. A Walter Crane Cartoon. *The Worker* 23 June 1900

# BLHA

## President's Column

### Greg Mallory

The BLHA has been involved in a number of activities since the publication of the last journal. These activities include: a symposium in October 2010 on 'Labour in Politics, Past and Present', the launch of the David Peetz and Georgina Murray book, *Women of the Coal Rushes*, on women in the coal mining industry in Queensland, the AGM and three events at the Woodford Folk Festival. (The October symposium will be discussed in another section of the journal.)

#### **The AGM**

Members of the 2010 Executive were re-elected to their positions for 2011, and they are joined by Daniel Crute, who has been working on various technological matters for the Association. Daniel has already shown his tech flair by developing a Facebook page for the BLHA. Bob Anderson was elected Patron of the Association and I congratulate him on obtaining this position. Bob has had a long involvement with the union and Indigenous movements. I would like

to take this opportunity to thank our previous Patron, Hughie Williams, for his involvement with the Association since 2000.

Jason Stein reported that the membership has grown considerably over the last twelve months and a lot of this has been due to Jason's running an active recruiting campaign.

A motion was passed at the AGM for the BLHA Executive to examine the feasibility of setting up a state-wide labour history organisation. This might mean the BLHA becomes a sub-branch of this organisation. The Executive have been given a year to report to the membership on this proposal.

I would also like to congratulate Wally Stubbings on becoming a Life Member of the Association. Wally has had a life-long involvement with the labour movement, both industrially and politically, and there is an article on his life in a separate section of the journal.

## Woodford Folk Festival

At the Woodford Folk Festival the BLHA was associated with three events. I chaired the first one which involved a panel discussion with Jack Munday, Ian Lowe and Jason Stein discussing the topic ‘Green Bans: Would They Work Today?’ This was a particularly popular event attracting a large audience who asked questions of the panel. The second event was the screening of the film *Rocking the Foundations*, a documentary on Green Bans and the New South Wales BLF. Jack Munday introduced the film. The third event was a concert on the theme of the *Battle for Kelly’s Bush*, Kelly’s Bush being the Sydney BLF’s first Green Ban. Popular folk musician and general ‘all-rounder’ Martin Pearson was joined by Helen Rowe and Ann Birmingham for this performance, while Dale Jacobsen chaired.

I would take the opportunity to thank Dale Jacobsen for her work on the three events. She is in negotiations with Woodford Folk Festival for on-going partnership in these events.

## Federal Matters

I attended the ASSLH AGM in Sydney in November. I was re-elected to the Federal Executive, along with Julie Kimber from Melbourne and Sigrid McClausand, formerly an Executive member of the Canberra and Sydney branches and now a BLHA member.

The meeting considered a number of matters relevant to the branches. The Constitutional Committee is making slow progress in reviewing branch constitutions and bringing them into line with the Federal Constitution. The national Conference will be held on the 15–17 September in Canberra. The theme of the conference is ‘Labour History and its People’, with particular emphasis on the role of biography in the study of Australian labour history. Members should consult the ASSLH website for further details. The Melbourne branch has a Facebook page, which follows the setting up of the BLHA’s page.

Three other federal issues of note relate to the journal, *Labour History*. Thanks go to Janis Bailey for editing the recent issue, Number 99, on the red-green theme. Greg Patmore has stood down as editor of *Labour History* and he will be replaced by John Shields. This year sees the journal’s 100th edition and there will be a number of events to celebrate this milestone.

## Thanks

I would like to thank members for their support of the organisation over the years and I also wish to thank the Executive who have worked extremely well at the various BLHA events. Dale Jacobsen, Jeff Rickertt, Bob Reed and Jason Stein receive special mention.

\* \* \* \*



# In Memoriam

**Austin ‘Aussie’ Vaughan,  
1929–2010**

**Industrial and political  
activist**



John Austin ‘Aussie’ Vaughan  
Photo courtesy AEU - 1960

Former AMWU State Secretary John Austin ‘Aussie’ Vaughan passed away on 22 August 2010, leaving a half-century legacy of industrial and political activism. Aussie was born in May 1929 in the Mackay sugar producing district. A boy from the bush, he went to school in Pinnacle

in the Eungella Valley. Aussie would later recount how, as a child, he saw unemployment, exploitation and cane workers working 12-hour days for eight hours of pay.

Aussie’s early ambition was to be a railway porter and progress to train driver. In 1945 he moved to Rockhampton, where he started an apprenticeship as a turner in the railway workshops. On 16 August 1945 he joined the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU). At that time the AEU in Australia was a branch of its parent union in Britain, having been formed by immigrant British AEU members on a voyage to Australia.

Aussie married Jean Gill in 1950 and the couple formed a lasting partnership of political, social and industrial activism. They became well known in Rockhampton through their involvement in the peace movement, the anti-nuclear movement, the campaign against anti-uranium mining, and the struggle against the Vietnam war.

In 1957 Austin became an honorary part-time union official. In those days positions such as honorary district secretary and president and honorary branch secretary were demanding roles, undertaken while the office bearers were still working on the tools. Until the early 1970s, activists holding these positions also undertook the bulk of the organising work. Aussie's union employed fewer than a handful of full-time officials. During this period he was very active in the moves to establish AEU autonomy from Britain, putting a great deal of work into revising and drafting the union's rules.

For many years, the AEU leadership wanted Aussie to move to Brisbane to take up a role as a full-time official; an enticement he resisted while his two children were at school. Aussie was very active in the early days of the metalworkers amalgamations which began to take shape from 1968, and he always understood the need for unity with related trades and the wider union movement.

In 1970 he finally moved to Brisbane, becoming a full-time organiser. Two years later he was elected as the metalworkers' state secretary, a position he held until 1994. During these years he played a vital role in building a strong amalgamated union. Having been active in the Rockhampton TLC, Aussie continued his interest in peak councils after moving to Brisbane. In 1974 he became an executive member of the Queensland TLC (now

Queensland Council of Unions), and held the presidency from 1990 until 1994.

Aussie always referred to himself as working class and knew which side he was on. In a long union career, two notorious disputes that particularly tested his mettle were the 12-week brewery dispute and the 1985 SEQEB dispute.

Aussie Vaughan acknowledged that his life was shaped by three women. 'My grandmother on my mother's side was a kind compassionate person,' he said. 'She hated war and moulded my life in that regard. My mother hated injustice and war and helped build my character...and my wife Jean also hated injustice and war, and supported the underdog...She always understood what the movement and the issues were about.'

Aussie's funeral service in October 2010 was packed with family and representatives of the labour movement paying their respects. AMWU officials and delegates formed a guard of honour with union flags. The service was attended by Queensland Premier, Anna Bligh, many of her parliamentary colleagues (including former AMWU officials who are, or were, parliamentarians), industrial commissioners, a large contingent of past and present union officials, and employer representatives.

Eulogies were delivered by Robert Schwarten, MLA, and AMWU State Secretary and old family friend from Rockhampton, Andrew Dettmer, as well as Aussie's good friend and former AMWU Secretary, David Harrison. Aussie's children John and Claudia gave fond accounts of growing up with a kind, devoted father. Aussie is survived by his wife Jean, their two children, and their grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

On a personal note, I met Aussie when I was a rank-and-file AMWU member and boilermaker, and Aussie was AMWU State Secretary. He always made time for me, took my phone calls, and was a polite, humble gentleman who took an interest in individual activists. Despite his obvious stature and the esteem in which he was held, he always maintained a personal touch, as evidenced by the attendance at his funeral by employers, industrial commissioners, politicians, as well as trade union leaders and activists who shared similar experiences to mine. I'll leave the last word to Aussie's daughter, Claudia. When I asked her to check this obituary for accuracy, she had this to say about her father:

He was such a humble man. He would have had no idea that his life would have been honoured in this way.

**John Spreckley**

## **Jeff Slowgrove, 1949– 2010**

### **Stalwart of the trade union movement**



Jeff Slowgrove, a stalwart of the trade union movement, is no longer among us. Jeff died on 20 September 2010 after a short but wholehearted battle against illness.

Jeffrey John Slowgrove was born in Sydney on 26 December 1948 and grew up in the working-class suburb of Botany. The Slowgrove family residence was a natural gathering point for the broader family and associates, and politics and religion were very much the subjects of discussion. The

Slowgroves were supporters of the labour movement and Jeff's cousin, Barbara O'Reilly, recalls that, if Jeff's grandfather was not a Communist, he was at least a fellow traveller.

After leaving school, Jeff went to the University of New South Wales where, for a time, he studied drama, altogether a fine pre-requisite for his later career. After leaving University, Jeff worked in a variety of jobs, including a stint in a book company, a job no doubt reflective of Jeff's lifelong passion for books and reading and the stimulation thereby provided. Jeff joined the Australian Labor Party.

In the 1970s, Jeff was recruited to the ranks of the Federated Miscellaneous Workers' Union (FMWU) by Martin Ferguson, then an official of the Union. In 1981 Jeff agreed, at the request of Federal Secretary Ray Gietzelt, to come to Queensland as a Research Officer, following Federal Office intervention due to concerns about the Queensland branch's political direction. The FMWU offices in Brisbane were then located in the old Trades Hall in Turbot Street. It is fair to say that Jeff's arrival was greeted with some suspicion by the Queensland Branch Secretary, Harry Mellor, and that Jeff's appointment was not wholeheartedly embraced. Jeff's first office at Trades Hall consisted of a desk in a hallway. He apparently had no phone but I am reliably informed that he had access to one if he cared to reach through a nearby window.

Soon after coming to Queensland, Jeff forged alliances with then State President Wilf Ardill and particularly with a young organiser named Don Brown. Jeff's association with Don was to last many years and lead the Union into a new era. When Don Brown became State Secretary in the early 1990s, Jeff Slowgrove became Assistant Secretary.

Jeff, with Don, played a key role in ensuring that the amalgamation in Queensland of the FMWU and the Liquor Trades Union, which commenced in 1992, was amongst the easiest and most successful of all the branches. Jeff became Assistant Branch Secretary of the resulting Union, the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union (LHMU).

As an LHMU official, Jeff's principal areas of influence were the ambulance service, education and contract cleaning. Jeff's taste for a challenge was no better exemplified than in his organisation of the ambulance service membership, a fractious and idiosyncratic group with difficult issues. In contract cleaning, Jeff was instrumental in persuading the employers to form an association so that the union could bargain collectively with a large group of employers, thereby ensuring uniform wages and conditions across the sector. In education, Jeff's skills as an enterprise bargaining negotiator were evident, particularly in his capacity to

firmly hold the line in the interest of teacher aides in the face of sometimes disadvantageous positions put by the Queensland Teachers' Union (QTU). It was Jeff who was chosen on behalf of the Queensland Branch to give evidence in the lengthy demarcation disputes with the Australian Education Union and the National Tertiary Education Union in the 1990s. For several years Jeff also edited the branch journal, a frequent award winner recognised as the standard bearer for union journals during the period of Jeff's influence.

Jeff Slowgrove played a prominent role in one of the great defining events for the Queensland Branch of the LHMU: the school cleaners' dispute of 1996, precipitated by the decision of the Borbidge National Party government to terminate the employment of all school cleaners and replace them with contractors. Jeff was a key figure in developing and implementing a strategy of galvanising the rank and file and winning public support, ultimately leading to victory for the Union and its members in the dispute. The government was forced to reverse its decision. Following that resolution, which included an agreement that some cleaners would be able voluntarily to retire, Jeff oversaw a process which ensured that the first opportunities to volunteer were given to the longest-serving cleaners thereby guaranteeing that, if any of those employees wished to retire, they would be eligible for a decent payout.

Jeff left the LHMU in 2001 and threw himself into other important work within the labour movement, enjoying a relatively short but productive time at the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) and then settling as a workplace health and safety trainer at Safe Work. Jeff enjoyed his work there and was moved to resume study, obtaining an Associate Diploma in Public Health and substantially completing the Master of Health Science course at QUT. In a sad but fitting recognition of Jeff's achievements, he was posthumously awarded his Masters Degree in December 2010, accepted by his partner Michelle Robertson.

Jeff was farewelled at a packed funeral service on 24 September 2010 at Mt Thompson Crematorium, followed by a suitably vigorous celebration of his life at the QCU Headquarters.

Jeff Slowgrove was a true working-class intellectual, a man who devoured books endlessly and had an encyclopaedic memory of the history of the labour movement and the ALP. He was knowledgeable in most things and could converse at length on the theatre and films. He was a fine cook. He remained a South Sydney supporter to the end.

Jeff leaves behind a wide circle of family and friends, but particularly the three strong women in his life who provided so much love and support to him throughout their time together,

and particularly in his difficult last days: his partner Michelle Robertson, his daughter Nell Crump and his step-daughter Signe Bowman.

Jeff Slowgrove is sorely missed.

Vale Comrade.

### **Bob Reed**



\* \* \* \*

## **The Ties that Bind: Sixty Years of Australian-Soviet Friendship in Queensland**

**By Connie Healy**

Socialist ideas have been a force in Australian history for the last one hundred years and have been represented by a number of organisations claiming a socialist allegiance. However, the only political party embracing revolutionary socialism to achieve any significance during this period has been the Communist Party of Australia (CPA).<sup>1</sup> Inspired by the successful seizure of state power in Russia in 1917, in a revolution which was humanity's first attempt at building a society based on equality, justice and socialism, Australian socialists founded the Communist Party of Australia in 1920, following a conference of the Australian Socialist Party and other left-wing groupings.<sup>2</sup> From an obscure peripheral group, the Communist Party succeeded in becoming a powerful force within the labour movement. It became, from 1941 to 1945, the largest socialist party that Australia has seen.<sup>3</sup> Its aims were to transform society by replacing private by public, or social, ownership of the means of production, and by inaugurating the dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>4</sup>

## Founding FOSU

In September 1930 the CPA established the Friends of the Soviet Union (Australian Section), or FOSU, as a propaganda organisation to encourage interest in the USSR. James Morrison, born in Barcaldine, Queensland, and identified with the International Bookshop, became its first National Secretary. By 1931 FOSU was functioning in Brisbane, largely due to the efforts of Communist lawyer Fred Paterson. Admitted as a barrister in Queensland in March 1931, Paterson commenced his practice on his own, renting the first floor of a building in George Street that had been used as a dance hall. Due to the Depression, the rent was less than he would have had to pay for legal chambers. A corner of the floor was partitioned off as his chambers, and he gave the use of the rest of the space to the Friends of the Soviet Union for meetings, lectures, socials and dances. He had lantern slides made from photographs appearing in publications such as *The USSR in Construction* and delivered a series of lantern lectures on the first Five Year Plan and other aspects of Soviet life.<sup>5</sup> He would later be elected to the Queensland Parliament, the only Communist to hold parliamentary office in Australia.

In 1931, although no public demonstration was held to commemorate the 14<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Russian Revolution, FOSU

organised a gathering in the Trades Hall on 6 November, which was attended by over 200 guests. Leading Communist Party member J.B. Miles travelled from Sydney and addressed the gathering on the Soviet Five Year Plan and the danger of war. A tableaux was presented contrasting developments under socialism and capitalism. A social and dance was organised for 4 December to raise funds for Australian delegates to be sent to the Soviet Union to witness the 1932 May Day celebrations.<sup>6</sup>

By 1932 the organisation was beginning to grow.<sup>7</sup> Mick Healy recalled that when he came to Queensland from New Zealand that year, FOSU boasted excellent rooms and a large hall with a platform. Attached to the rooms was a library, well-used by the unemployed. The reading room, open every day from 10am to 7pm, carried an array of literature, including material outlining the progress in the Soviet Union. The rooms were located in Gray's Building, 240 George Street. By the end of 1932 the monthly publication, *The Soviets Today*, a magazine published by FOSU in Sydney, had achieved a national circulation of around 6000, and 620 in Queensland. In the same year, a new branch of the organisation was formed in North Queensland.

In July 1932 it was reported that the Federal Government was preparing to declare FOSU illegal. Supporters responded with protests,



Cover of *The Soviets Today*, August 1932, depicting the USSR as a steadfast infantryman standing alone against a predatory enemy. Published monthly by FOSU, *The Soviets Today* achieved a circulation of 20,000 by 1935.

(Image Fryer Library, UQ)

mass demonstrations and rallies.<sup>8</sup> Although the authorities succeeded in banning the film *The Five Year Plan*, the organisation itself escaped suppression. By 1935 *The Soviets Today* had a national circulation of 20,000 and the organisation had nearly 7,500 members.<sup>9</sup> The paper carried information about life in the Soviet Union, and advertised FOSU's book department which carried books and magazines such as *Working Woman*, *The USSR in Construction*, an illustrated magazine issued by the State Fine Arts

Press of the USSR in Moscow, and *The Red Leader*, the official organ of the Minority Movement, all of which could be ordered through FOSU.

In August 1932, on the initiative of Romain Rolland and Henri Barbusse, an International Committee was established to organise an International Congress against War. Australian Communist and writer Jean Devanny joined Rolland, Barbusse, Maxim Gorky, Upton Sinclair, Madame Sun Yat-Sen, Theodore Dreiser, Professor Albert Einstein, Professor Paul Langevin, John Dos Passos, F. Masereel and Elenor Despard to form the committee.<sup>10</sup>

In Brisbane, the George Street rooms were the centre for concerts, social evenings and weekly dances, all well-patronised. Every Saturday and Sunday night there was some activity, including regular Sunday night lectures on current questions. Street and cottage meetings also took place. Picnics were popular, as well as boat trips down to Bishop Island and up to Seventeen-Mile Rocks, and train picnics out to Ferny Grove.

In Queensland, May Day is celebrated as a holiday on the first Monday in May. FOSU participated in these celebrations with a float which depicted Soviet life and the advantages it considered socialism offered. The anniversary of the proclamation of the Soviet Socialist State, 7 November, was also celebrated.



Films about Soviet life were shown regularly, with at least one film, *Ten Days that Shook the World*, proving extremely popular.

Branches of FOSU were eventually established in Ipswich, Maryborough, Bundaberg, Toowoomba, Rockhampton, Townsville, Mackay and Cairns. Activities of these branches included films, lectures and the sale of *Soviets Today*, which rose to between six and eight thousand copies in Queensland. Interest in socialism and the Soviet Union during the Depression era grew, particularly amongst the unemployed, who thought that many of the problems of working people were being solved in the USSR.

### Visits to the Soviet Union

The friendship movement set out to encourage Australians to visit the Soviet Union. The first delegation set off from Australia in March 1932.<sup>11</sup> Despite opposition from the official trade union movement and the Labor Party, the delegation left in time to witness the May Day demonstration in Moscow.<sup>12</sup> This first delegation included Australian Railways Union Delegate Stuart



Some of the Delegates who left for the May Day Celebrations in the Soviet Union.

Australian delegates preparing to depart for Soviet May Day celebrations, 1932. *The Soviets Today*, April 1932 (Image Fryer Library, UQ)

Anderson from Queensland, delegates from New South Wales and Victoria and a woman described as Comrade Mrs Aarons.

Committees were established in workplaces to awaken interest in sending rank-and-file representatives. Various methods were used to raise money to finance the trips, including

raffles, collections and socials. Before the delegates left Sydney a banner conveying greetings from Australian workers to Soviet workers was presented to them at a farewell function. At the wharf, 2000 people gathered to give a last farewell. The *International* and *Red Flag* were sung lustily amidst the general excitement.<sup>13</sup>

Viv Daddow from Townsville was a delegate representing the rank and file. He later became a union official. Delegate Jim Elder from Northgate Railways was sent using money raised from activities at Ipswich, Mayne Junction and Northgate rail depots. Mayne Junction was also represented by Ike Williams. In 1934 the Mackay waterside workers elected Jim Healy and another waterside worker to represent them. With other Mackay trade unionists and the friendship organisation, they raised the funds to finance their trip. On their return the two delegates gave a detailed though not uncritical account of port operations in Odessa and Leningrad in the publication *Red Cargo*. Fired with enthusiasm by his visit to the USSR, Healy joined the CPA in 1935. He later became well-known as the General Secretary of the Waterside Workers' Federation. Tim Moroney, an official of the Australian Railways Union, was also part of the 1934 delegation.

Leading activists of the friendship movement in the early thirties in Brisbane included the Beckingham

family, the Lane family, the Surplus family and many people who later became prominent in the parliamentary sphere, in important government positions and in the trade union movement. These included MLAs Frank Marriott and George Taylor, Jack Hanson (Painters Union), Billy Wallace (Painters Union), Gerry Dawson (Carpenters Union), Tim Moroney and Frank Nolan (Australian Railways Union), Dr J. Duhig (Government Pathologist), Dr S. Julius (Assistant Superintendent, Brisbane General Hospital) and Dr. A. Pye (Superintendent, Brisbane General Hospital). One of the outstanding supporters of the Soviet Union was Tim Moroney. He frequently spoke in support of socialism at public meetings, while *The Railway Advocate*, the journal produced by his union, gave generous coverage of life in the Soviet Union.

The Anvil Bookshop, which opened in 1935 in Elizabeth Street, Brisbane, with Mick Healy as manager, was of great support to the friendship movement. It sold publications, books and magazines dealing with questions of socialism. *Soviets Today*, *Sovietland*, *Moscow News*, *USSR in Construction* and pamphlets dealing with Soviet life all enjoyed large sales. Many publications were imported from the United States, Great Britain and Europe, and many articles dealing with Soviet life were reproduced in trade union publications. One article which had great impact was

the interview of Lenin and H.G. Wells on 'Electrification of the USSR'.

FOSU lost much of its support in the latter part of the 1930s, particularly when the Nazi-Soviet pact was signed in 1939 and the Communist Party was declared illegal. Although FOSU was never suppressed, its monthly magazine was banned and other publications heavily censored.

## World War II

The movement for a united front against fascism failed and World War II commenced in September 1939. There was a lull in the activity of the friendship movement, but with the attack on the Soviet Union by Hitler's Germany in June 1941 there was a tremendous re-awakening of interest in the USSR.

FOSU, which was now the Australian-Soviet Friendship Society (ASFS), began to win back its lost support. Much greater interest was evinced amongst people generally about life in the Soviet Union and the struggle that the Soviet forces were waging against the fascist enemy. On the first day of the attack by Germany on the Soviet Union, Mick Healy (then Manager of the Anvil Bookshop) was interviewed by the Brisbane *Telegraph* and the *Courier Mail*, now keen to obtain pictures and information about the Soviet Union — particularly its military and air force. The whole of the

Australian press was now prepared to print pictures about Russia, which they had previously ignored or suppressed. There was a wave of interest and sympathy from the Australian people.

A movement developed to supply 'Sheepskins for Russia' and other assistance for the comfort of the Soviet army during the harsh Russian winter. In many workplaces collections were taken up to purchase Australian sheepskins for the cause. In 1940, the Queensland Trades and Labor Council decided to establish a committee to organise a Soviet Aid Congress. Mick Healy, a waterside worker at this time, was appointed by the Trades and Labor Council as organiser for the Congress. He was joined on the Committee by Frank Marriott (MLA, Bulimba) and George Taylor (MLA, Enoggera), both of whom had been expelled from the ALP by the right-wing Forgan Smith Government. The Congress was one of the most successful and representative of any held in Queensland. Over 2,400 delegates attended from all parts of Queensland, representing a wide section of the community. Proceedings were held in the Brisbane City Hall on Friday, Saturday (two sessions) and Sunday (two sessions). Harry J. Harvey, President of the Trades and Labor Council, chaired. The Australian writer Katharine Susannah Prichard, Dr A. Pye, Lady Jessie Street (President, Sydney ASFS Branch), Dr J. Duhig and Tim Moroney were amongst the delegates who presented papers.

With increased support, the ASFS had moved from rooms in George Street to an upstairs room in Blocksidge and Ferguson Arcade in Adelaide Street. Its secretary was Dr S. Julius. After the Congress, the ASFS was re-established in George Street. The building has since been demolished and in 2002 the site, situated on the corner of George and Adelaide Streets, was named Suncorp Park.

### **Postwar Era**

On 30 September 1946 the Australian Russian Society hired Brisbane City Hall to present part one of Sergei Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible*, complete with Russian dialogue. The screening was preceded by the National Anthem of the USSR and concluded with God Save the King.

A 3000-mile film-screening tour over 10 days with audiences including Italians, Aborigines, Chinese and Malayans was a feature of the Society's work during 1946. Films were shown in Mackay, Bowen, Collinsville, Townsville, Ingham, Tully, Innisfail, Gordonvale, Cairns and Charters Towers. The entire tour was handled by Clarrie Beckingham, ASFS Queensland Secretary, and his wife Dorothy and their two children. Clarrie handled the screenings, Dorothy looked after the money and the literature stock, and the children conducted the literature selling. Local Labor Councils cooperated in each

centre. At Collinsville the RSL handled all publicity and 60 people filled the small hall. Leaflets printed in Italian were distributed at Ingham and 90 per cent of the enthusiastic audience was Italian. Average attendance at all shows was more than 200, with Mackay's turnout of 350 being the highest.<sup>14</sup>

During 1958 the ASFS leased the Allhambra theatre at Stones Corner (which was no longer operating commercially) and Russian films were shown weekly. Mick Healy, who had rejoined the ASFS in May 1958, and Eileen Skea organised these showings. There was a big community of Russians in the Woolloongabba/Stones Corner area and the films were very popular. Difficulties with the authorities over a possible fire danger resulted in their cessation after about 12 months. Mavis Booth was succeeded as Secretary by Peg Penberthy.

Functions were held at the home of Mr and Mrs Koplick who lived in Grieves Road at Rochedale. In December 1959 three prominent people from the Soviet Union — Professor F. Korf, Director of the Institute of Oceanology Academy of Sciences, Mrs Tatyana Nikolaeva, pianist-composer with an international reputation, and Mr V. Gromeka, Director of the British Department, Union of Soviet Societies — visited Australia as guests of the Society. A private party was arranged at the residence of the Koplicks for

ASFS members and friends to meet the visitors.

Grahame Garner was another important ASFS activist. Garner joined the Tramway workshops as a fitter and turner after an interesting and colourful career in various occupations. He joined the Friendship society in 1958. In 1961 there was an exchange of photographs and information between the Tramway Workshops at Milton and the Aparkov Tramway Workshops in Moscow. A letter, written in English and Russian and accompanied by photographs, was received from the Secretary of the USSR Friendship Society. The Tramway Museum at Ferny Grove now displays the gift that was sent by the Aparkov workers to Australian tramwaymen — a track with a set of wheels.<sup>15</sup> In the same year Bill Mountier, Australian President of the Australian Soviet Friendship Society, arranged a visit by a group of Soviet citizens from many walks of life. I.D. Krotkov, hammersmith of the Aparkov Tramway Depot of Moscow, was a member of the Russian Committee that arranged the visit. The group included N.I. Maslova, a philology postgraduate from Moscow University. Garner had many conversations with Maslova about developing friendships between ordinary Russian and Australian people. The Russian delegation also included a tram driver, invited by the Brisbane workshops. During her visit, she drove a tram around the Milton, Woolloongabba, Light Street and

Paddington depots to the delight of the workers. Garner later hosted a party for the visitor.

A keen photographer for many years, Garner photographed many ballet groups, among them Russian ballet groups at Her Majesty's theatre in Brisbane. In October 1968, the ASFS's rooms at the Royal Geographical Hall, 177 Ann Street, Brisbane, were the venue for a Gorky Centenary talk, delivered by a Mr R. Byrnes. Dave Dickie, an actor from New Theatre, read selections of Gorky's works.<sup>16</sup>

These activities perhaps masked the ASFS's declining influence. The period of economic growth which followed the war resulted in comparative affluence within the Australian community. With the onset of the Cold War, moreover, socialist ideas no longer appealed. Membership of the Communist Party peaked in 1944 at 23,000, but by 1955 had dropped to 8000–9000. Khrushchev's revelations of Stalinist crimes and distortions of socialism sent shock waves through the Communist movement. With the invasion of Hungary by Soviet troops and the subsequent execution of Hungarian communist leader Imre Nagy, over one-quarter of the membership left or were expelled from the party in 1956–7 for 'revisionist tendencies'.<sup>17</sup>

The fragmentation of the Communist Party continued in the 1960s, with a minority group of mainly trade

unionists breaking away in 1961 to establish a Chinese-oriented party, the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist). The invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 by the Soviet Union to prevent the implementation of Dubcek's reforms of socialism crushed any hope that the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union was weakening. In 1971, another breakaway group, claiming, *inter alia*, that the Communist Party in Australia was now anti-Soviet and had deserted the working class in favour of students and intellectuals, formed the Socialist Party of Australia, a traditional Stalinist organisation retaining strong ties with the Soviet Union.<sup>18</sup> By now the Communist Party was just one of many left-wing groups and seemed incapable of forming any independent Marxist judgments or of projecting any clearly-defined socialist policy. The New Left had emerged at the end of the 1950s as an amalgamation of intellectuals and ex-communists. By the late 1970s the International Socialists and Socialist Workers' Party commanded small followings, mainly among students, and in 1984 the Socialist Forum was formed with links to the socialist left of the Labor Party.<sup>19</sup> Despite attempts to change its socialist orientation, the Communist Party finally went into voluntary liquidation in 1989–90.

The disintegration that was occurring within the CPA expressed itself within the Australian Russian Friendship Society. In 1968 a split occurred in the

Society over a resolution, introduced by then-Secretary Peg Penberthy, condemning the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. In spite of a change of name in December 1970 from the Australia Soviet Friendship Society to the Australia-USSR Society, and a change of officers — Mavis Booth resumed the Secretaryship and wharfie George Kellaway became Queensland President — the split eventually led to the collapse of the organisation.

### Notes

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- 17 Jack Blake, '1949 to 1956, Stalinism or Independence?', *Australian Left Review*, no. 76, 1981, p. 15.
- 18 See John Sedy, *Comrades Come Rally: Recollections of an Australian Communist*, Thomas Nelson Australia, Melbourne, 1978.
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## **‘A group of misguided way out individuals’: the Old Left and the Student Movement in Brisbane: 1966–70**

**By Jon Piccini**

On 15 May 1969 Brisbane’s labour movement came out for its yearly parade. Starting at the site of Trades Hall, abutting Edward and Turbot streets in the CBD, the march wound its usual way through Fortitude Valley to the RNA showgrounds. This was a show of strength and unity by a labour movement gearing up for an election campaign that was to see an 18-seat swing against the conservative government. Towards the end of this procession, however, a few hundred students carrying red and black flags as well as, by some accounts, wearing helmets emblazoned with the word VIETCONG, had other ideas.<sup>1</sup>

Marching alongside the Communist-led Building Workers’ Industrial Union (BWIU), this small group of around 300 — organised by the recently-formed Revolutionary Socialist Student Alliance through popular youth club Foco — sought to seize the international day of workers’ struggle ‘symbolically under red and black flags, socialism and freedom’.<sup>2</sup> Brisbane’s conservative *Courier-Mail*

described events: a group of about 250 students and others ‘sat in the streets during the procession, calling out ‘Ho Chi Minh’ [and] poked the federal ALP leader Mr. Whitlam with red flags’.<sup>3</sup> It was a provocative intervention, and threatened to rip apart the bonds between workers and students.

The sixties was a time of transnational ferment and change. Around the world, a generation of youths challenged the Cold War consensus, throwing off the strictures and rules of previous decades in favour of what French-American historian and cultural critic Kristin Ross has termed a ‘planetary generation of libertarian revolt’.<sup>4</sup> Such a statement is, however, a truth wrapped in a conceit. As Ross highlights, memorialisation of ‘sixties activism’ as the private domain of a privileged youthful elite throwing up barricades outside the Sorbonne forgets more than it remembers — leaving out especially the role of working-class militants in such struggles. If French students were dedicated to incorporating their struggles with those of the working class — as Ross amply illustrates in her work *May ’68 and its Afterlives* — then Australian students shared a similar inclination.<sup>5</sup>

Work by Lani Russell and others has located the working-class militant as central to the ‘radical imagination’ of youthful New Leftists in Australia, which must be seen alongside the idealised third-world guerrilla and

rebellious students in Europe and America.<sup>6</sup> The Old Left, for its part, often saw radicalising students in a less supportive light, with the Communist Party taking a hesitant and contradictory approach, and the trade union movement — generally associated with the ALP — often perceiving students as a threat to its respectability. This multi-layered relationship is best viewed through a snapshot in time, one amply provided by the period 1966–70 in Brisbane, which witnessed the birth of a working — if strained — relationship between student radicals and the Old Left, and that relationship’s eventual destruction. Through analysing primary sources from the period — amply collated at UQ’s Fryer Library — and the reminiscences of activists we can arrive at a nuanced understanding of a key turning point in Queensland’s left history.

### **A Search for Answers: the New Left meets the Old**

Brisbane’s Old Left — militant trade unionists and the Communist Party — had a history of involvement in ‘youth politics’ seemingly ill-suited to the sixties’ changing political-cultural mores. A listing of events for Trade Union Youth Week in 1967, publicised by the Queensland branch of the Waterside Workers’ Federation, reveals a ‘strong program’ highlighted by a golf day ‘organised in conjunction with the Waterside Workers’ Golf



Club', a discussion at Trades Hall on 'problems affecting young workers' and, to cap it all off, a 'cabaret supper dance' in Milton, where the queen of youth week was to be judged.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Communists sought to partition off 'youth work' from their more political activities through a diet of socialising, sport and, according to some, unconcealed sexism. Sydney Trotskyist John Percy describes the Eureka Youth League — led in 1965 by 35-year-old Mavis Robertson — as 'staid and controlled...rebelliousness was not a great part of it, and often there was not much politics either'.<sup>8</sup> An issue of their 'barely political and very amateurish' journal *Target*, Percy recalls, featured a back cover illustration on how 'birdwatching can be fun' — so long as one was fully up to date with the various strands of 'Avis Bikinium'. Clearly, the politics of gender was to be left till one was older.<sup>9</sup>

It is unsurprising, then, that when students at the University of Queensland began to question the Cold War consensus on a number of fronts — particularly the bloodshed in Vietnam — they sought answers outside of the radical establishment.<sup>10</sup> Dan O'Neill, English lecturer, leading 'left oppositionist' within the Catholic Newman Society and founding member of radical group Students (later Society) for Democratic Action (SDA) recalls how 1966 saw 'a number of independent sources of social criticism

emerge on campus' — culminating in SDA's formation over the August vacation.<sup>11</sup> This incipient group of radicals, led by O'Neill and the 'silver tongued' Brian Laver, 'began to recognise their concerns as very similar to those of other groups, especially in America...in particular they began to read the literature of SDS, notably the newspaper *National Guardian* and began to think beyond Vietnam'.<sup>12</sup> The example of America's Students for a Democratic Society — brought closer to Brisbane by two radical American academics, Ralph Summy and Marvin Kay — was enshrined in SDA's early literature, which heralded the American students' concept of 'grass-roots democracy' alongside their desire to challenge an array of social injustices with 'radical alternatives'.<sup>13</sup>

Vietnam was the group's overriding interest in its early period, betraying many members' previous involvement in the Vietnam Action Committee and Kay's Brisbane Professionals for Peace. This was an interest shared with the CPA and left-wing trade unions — it was, after all, they who organised initial protests against the war. However, it was students who pioneered the use of headline-grabbing American protest techniques. Raymond Evans, student and historian, writes in his diary of attending a 'draft-card burning' in March 1966 organised by Kit Guyatt and Jim Beatson, an office worker who was to become a founding member of SDA. Evans recalls how

‘[a]s the Action started, pamphlets rained down and various people with hidden placards attempted to display them. The man-handling by the cops had to be seen to be believed. Twisting a broken arm, rabbit punching’ — all dutifully captured by waiting TV cameras.<sup>14</sup> ‘The TLC [Trades and Labor Council of Queensland] President [Jack Egerton]’, Evans noted in an aside, ‘says it was the greatest breakthrough here for fifty years’.<sup>15</sup>

As such, Old and New Left met, finding a common enemy in the form of Queensland’s repression of protest. Under the *Traffic Act 1949* — a piece of legislation whose genealogy can be traced back to 1931’s *Railway Strike and Public Safety Act* — protests were illegal unless previously granted police permission, and a fee applied for the carrying of placards.<sup>16</sup> Early in 1967, UQ students and staff led by O’Neill, Summy and Laver formed a Civil Liberties Co-ordinating Committee that aimed — drawing loosely on the example of Berkeley’s Free Speech Movement — to unite as broad a group as possible behind demands to repeal ‘certain clauses of the *Traffic Act*’. This culminated in a 4000-strong march from the university to the city on 8 September 1967, which saw accusations of police brutality and 120 arrests.<sup>17</sup>

Six days later the Trades and Labor Council held a four-hour stop-work meeting in King George Square in

solidarity with the students’ demands. Attracting some 3000 people — despite ‘sharp divisions’ within some unions over the veracity of such a political stoppage — the rally ‘was addressed by representatives of the Students’ Civil Liberties Committee and from the TLC’ and saw the union movement ‘join in with the campaign so vigorously commenced by the students’, as Egerton reported to that year’s Trade Union Congress.<sup>18</sup> This period saw the beginnings of real student-worker co-operation. Laver, a history honours student, was employed as a researcher by the Trades and Labor Council to write an overview of the use of Penal Powers in Queensland against Trade Union activity, while another leading SDA member, Mitch Thompson, became private secretary to Left-Labor Senator George Georges. Additionally, the first months of 1968 saw SDA members join unionists in supporting a postal workers’ strike, with two youths arrested on a picket line.

### **‘Australia’s Most Evil and Repugnant Nightspot’: the Challenge of Foco**

These same months saw the germination of a youth political-cultural venue the likes of which Brisbane had never seen — an idea named simply Foco. Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara, Argentine-Cuban revolutionary, died in October 1967 at the hands of Bolivia’s US-backed military. An eminently photogenic figure, Che’s face adorned countless

meeting halls, cafes and living rooms around the world during the late sixties, and his ideas on revolutionary encampments — or Focos — were studied at length by many New Left groups.<sup>19</sup> In February 1968 a dozen Brisbane youth activists with experience in either political mobilisation or radical cultural production approached the Trades and Labor Council with the idea of a ‘multi-media extravaganza’ that, creatively transforming Che’s ideas, sought space to unite new and challenging art forms with a healthy dose of left politics. Growing out of a realisation that Brisbane’s protest movement was ‘pretty exhausted... by the political activities we’d been conducting in 66–67’, Laver — who claims to have come up with the name — recalls that:

[W]e needed something...where we could show film; where we could have folk singing, which was fairly big; where we could have political discussion; where we could distribute our leaflets. And there happened to be people around us who had many of these skills.<sup>20</sup>

All that was required was space, which was found in the third level of Trades Hall, usually hired out for functions and events.

Laver was able to use his position at Trades Hall to secure the location with only a ‘nominal’ rent, helped by what he describes as leading Communist

figures’ desire ‘to bring students and workers together’ in the hope that ‘there’d be a lot of young suits who might join the Communist Party’ — an organisation greatly depleted by Cold War fear mongering and its own subservience to the obscene dictates of Soviet foreign policy.<sup>21</sup> The choice of Trades Hall was, then, more than just an arrangement of convenience, but expressed a desire for a cross-class unity, with the making of ‘links with the...young workers’ movement’ a key priority of the Foco experiment, in Laver’s opinion.

Converting the open space into something capable of facilitating ‘youthful activity’, not to mention soundproofing the various rooms, was, however, a costly operation, one that had to be met by the TLC itself on the proviso that this would be paid back through revenues.<sup>22</sup> Foco opened on 3 March 1968 and was an immediate success. Operating on Sunday nights, possible in conservative Brisbane only if operating as a club, Foco attracted 2500 members by July and a regular attendance of some 500, many of whom saw the club’s disco as its main drawcard.<sup>23</sup> With acts such as the Coloured Balls, the Living End and the Wild Cherries as regulars, the disco was ‘adapted to controversial designs’, as a Foco poster explained.<sup>24</sup> More controversial, however, was the club’s political activities. Foco aimed ‘to provide a cultural and political environment and to politicise people’

— something facilitated through the club's sale of radical literature, posters and counter cultural paraphernalia, as well as its showing of political or international films and holding


of discussions with domestic and international figures.<sup>25</sup>

Bands such as Max Merritt and the Meteors, the Coloured Balls and the Living End provided a major drawcard for Brisbane's youth, so much so that the club occasionally opened Saturdays to cope with demand.

Such material soon created conflict. The Eureka Youth League, seeking to revitalise its image in the wake of an obvious explosion of global radicalism, rebadged itself the Young Socialist League at a 1967 conference, and began seeking broader alliances as a means of, in one member's opinion, 'breaking out of their ideological straight jacket'.<sup>26</sup> As such, they became involved with Foco at a high level, with leading member and young worker Alan Anderson taking on the position of club president. Shaking off old concerns about the danger of overt politics proved difficult, however, with Laver remembering a conflict over whether SDA's bookstand, 'probably the most radical literature you'll ever see', should be displayed prominently in the building's annexe. The delivery of an ultimatum that 'if you take that literature down the New Left will pull out of this operation' saw the Young Socialists withdraw their objection.<sup>27</sup> Despite such concerns, the radical politics of Foco fused well with its more cultural aspects — as was true of the sixties experience in general.<sup>28</sup> The club facilitated 'some really nice

# FOCO

SENSATIONAL EXCLUSIVE



## MAX MERRITT AND THE METEORS

SAT., 15 MARCH — ALL NIGHT  
 SUN., 16 MARCH — ALL NIGHT  
 SAT., 22 MARCH — ALL NIGHT  
 SUN., 23 MARCH — ALL NIGHT

At last the return of Australia's best group ever to Foco. Don't miss the incredible gutsy soul sound of Maxy, the King and the Meteors, on the last trip to Brisbane before leaving Australia for the American campus circuit.

# FOCO

TRADES HALL BRISBANE

Foco promotional leaflet, 1969

interactions between working class and middle class young people' and attracted everyone from 'the university people [to] hippies, the arty crowd and some of the flashy-dressing, middle-class beautiful people'.<sup>29</sup>

It was this very success that saw Foco challenge the worker-student relationship. Trade Union Week 1968, held in late September, was a much more exciting affair than previous years, with Foco assisting the TLC to organise a daytime concert in the Botanic Gardens that attracted between three and five thousand young people. Such success inspired Alan Anderson to propose that other, more 'hackneyed method[s]' of youth week, such as its 'Cabaret night' be abolished — while the holding of a debate on whether similarities existed between Czechoslovakia and Vietnam seemed to indicate the growing importance of New Left agendas.<sup>30</sup> Such an example of co-operation was, however, overshadowed by MHR Don Cameron's comments two weeks earlier in Federal Parliament, accusing the 'communist or almost-communist' leadership of 'Australia's most evil and repugnant nightspot' of drug peddling and prostitution. '[P]eople working there will arrange a young woman for a whole night in a matter of seconds,' Cameron insisted, hiding his 'evidence' behind parliamentary privilege.<sup>31</sup> Foco's location in 'the nerve centre of the ALP in Queensland', as Cameron put it, was exactly the

sort of publicity more conservative unions privately feared — despite the TLC's public support of Foco against its accusers.<sup>32</sup> The issue of money appears as particularly prominent in internal debates between Foco and the TLC — with Cameron accusing the Council of funding Foco to the tune of at least \$800, and internal documents revealing this to be the case despite public equivocation that the money was used to modernise the space, and was not paid directly to the club.<sup>33</sup>

Though a 'confidential' communication between Alex Macdonald and Queensland Police Commissioner Bischoff effectively exonerated Foco — and in fact revealed the force's deep distrust of Cameron's motives — his allegations 'had a certain amount of success', with Foco blaming concerned parents for 'attendance dropp[ing] as low as 200' by December.<sup>34</sup> The early months of 1969 proved difficult — attendance never climbed back to levels attained before 'Cameron dropped his bundle' — and in February the club announced its immanent closure if more members were not forthcoming.<sup>35</sup>

Foco produced a weekly newsletter in the best spirit of global underground publications. It was distributed free to the club's several thousand strong membership and carried advertisements for the club's weekly activities, in-depth discussion of what movie was to be shown or play to be performed,



Foco Newsletter

and occasionally reprints from such publications as Rolling Stone.

Other factors were also at play in Foco’s gradual demise. While YSL members were taking leading roles in Foco and transforming their politics in a New Left direction, other radicals began to turn away from the club. Anderson noted in a retrospective article in *Tribune* how ‘the student left developed a theory that Foco was not aiding the revolutionary movement... suggest[ing] it was channelling potential revolutionary people into non-revolutionary activity’.<sup>36</sup> This was an outcome of SDA’s radicalisation — spurred on by the global rebellion of ’68, Laver’s trip to Europe and a fascination with third world Marxism

— culminating in the April 1969 dissolution of the organisation. Members of SDA, organiser Mitch Thompson wrote, had decided in favour of ‘moving from a protest organisation to a ... revolutionary movement’, and this solidified in May as the Revolutionary Socialist Students Alliance.<sup>37</sup> This move left little scope for Foco’s eclectic cultural mix, which was attacked by several radical students as an attempt to ‘use the bourgeois ideology of personal liberation as an adjunct to the Marxist ideology of the liberation of the proletariat’, which ‘could [only] be contained within the functioning Foco for a limited period’.<sup>38</sup>

Despite the withdrawal of elements of the student left, Foco continued, only to be ‘murdered by a trade union movement steeped in conservatism’, as Anderson put it. Amongst the trade unions, Anderson explained:

there was little understanding of what Foco was about before it began and deplorably little developed later, this in spite of repeated invitations, both verbal and written, to affiliated unions and officials to observe the activities that Foco carried out.<sup>39</sup>

The events of May Day 1969 — a ‘European-style demonstration’ seeking to ‘transform into something effective a Labor (sic) Day which had in the past relied upon Punch and Judy shows and ice-cream for its

revolutionary content’ — provided ample grounds for severing Foco’s relationship with the trade union movement.<sup>40</sup> Condemning in the daily press the students and young workers who marched with Foco as ‘a group of misguided way out individuals’, Egerton claimed the TLC had never allocated money to the club and that ‘responsible trade union officials have no intention of allowing a group of scrubby, confused individuals who are unable to differentiate between civil liberties and anarchy to cause dissent in the trade union movement’.<sup>41</sup> Despite

pleas from Hugh Hamilton, CPA head of the Building Workers’ Industrial Union, to maintain TLC affiliations with the club, Foco was soon ousted as part of a ‘refurbishment’ project — ending with a bang a key point in Brisbane’s radical history.<sup>42</sup>

**‘The Communist Party is behind this moratorium — way behind’: the Student Left and the Communist Party post-Foco**

The YSL’s involvement with Foco was only part of a broader transformation within the Communist Party of Australia. After a tortuous 1963 split from pro-Chinese elements, members of the Aarons family became ascendant.<sup>43</sup> Inspired by the Italian CP, reformers questioned the Australian party’s subservience to Moscow and began to think a politics better suited to local conditions. The Conference for Left Action — held in Sydney over Easter, 1969 — was a key part of this new thinking, bringing together some 800 people and receiving a large patronage from Brisbane — with several prominent northern radicals speaking.<sup>44</sup> Laver’s speech, greeted with a standing ovation, asked whether ‘we will have to build a new party based on developments inside the Communist Party’ and the new social movements, as well as calling for militant solidarity with the NLF in Vietnam and other third world liberation struggles.<sup>45</sup>



May Day Poster, 1969 Drawing on a romanticised revolutionary aesthetic, this poster sought to rally involvement in Foco’s ‘intervention’ at May Day in 1969.

This was a time of experimentation within the old-style CPA, which was quick to condemn the Soviet Union's invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 — cutting once and for all financial aid from the Warsaw Pact — and offered key positions in the party to students and intellectuals of the New Left. Few took up such offers.<sup>46</sup> '[W]e were at this stage prepared to accept their bonafides', Laver explained in a later article, 'especially because of their developing stand against Stalinism' and the two groups soon formed a space for mutual collaboration, known as the Socialist Humanist Action Centre, (SHAC) which met in a house across from Toowong cemetery.<sup>47</sup> '[F]ormed to discuss particularly the application of the concepts of workers' control and self-management', elements of Brisbane's New Left saw SHAC 'as the basis for the formation of a new revolutionary organisation, of the possible transformation of the CPA into that organisation'.<sup>48</sup>

While many in the CPA shared RSSA's ambitions towards forming a unified revolutionary party, 'centrists' associated with its trade union wing argued that the process of developing consciousness would take time', invoking Lenin's work *Left-Wing Communism* to nullify radical demands. Such centrists — who in Laver's opinion used the rhetoric of anti-Stalinism to move Communist politics closer to those of the ALP — boycotted the Centre 'in an attempt to

stop activities getting off the ground', favouring instead an approach more in keeping with the CPA's essentially reformist 'coalition of the left' strategy. Only when SHAC decided to distribute literature at May Day 1970 calling for workers' control rather than union bureaucracy, did the centrists emerge in a failed attempt to 'get the decision reversed'. With memories still fresh of the previous year's incident, radical involvement in 1970's May Day was again controversial. Egerton 'issued statements to the press...saying that some of the student elements were going to provoke violence' and called on workers to 'deal with this ratbag element' — though in the end the Communist-led Waterside Workers' Federation allowed the radicals to march with its contingent, despite centrists in the party 'not condemn[ing] Egerton's statements or actions'.<sup>49</sup>

The first Moratorium rally on 8 May 1970 — occurring only days after these incidents — is generally remembered as the high point of anti-Vietnam war dissent in Australia, with over 100,000 marching in opposition to the war. However, in Brisbane what became known as 'the Laver incident' put a blemish on affairs, with the *Courier-Mail* claiming that organisers 'appl[ie]d the Moratorium gag', and radical students dramatically ending their association with the CPA's leadership via a fantastically titled broadsheet: 'The Communist Party is behind this Moratorium — way behind'.<sup>50</sup> Reports



of the incident of course vary. The Communist Party saw it as important enough to warrant a full page in their national weekly newspaper, where they describe Laver's 'emotional' response to his being left off a pre-march speaking list which saw him threaten 'to stop the march from the university by students, staff and others unless he gained access to the microphone'.<sup>51</sup>

After being repeatedly denied access to the platform, Laver attempted to seize the microphone, and was prevented by what *Tribune* described as the spontaneous action of workers. This reaction was justified by claiming Laver intended only to 'put a dampener on events', referencing comments he apparently made at SHAC the previous year, describing the United States Moratorium (which Australia's was modelled on) as 'a great victory for reactionary imperialists' due to its timidity.<sup>52</sup> Laver himself presents events in a different light, indicating that Egerton and centrists in the CP conspired to have him bumped back to the post-march speaking list, blocking a call for an occupation of Queen Street to 'prevent business as usual', an outcome the

*Tribune* writer claimed would have provoked violence. After the march — described by Laver as 'pitiful' and 'counter-revolutionary' — Laver gave a speech attacking the 'ALP-ites and centrists [who] mis-direct the anti-war struggle' into a 'support the ALP' platform, with 'the Stalinists and the centrists nationally collaborating to build up this lie'.<sup>53</sup>

## The Communist Party is behind this Moratorium —way behind



'The Communist Party is behind the Moratorium...' Radical student broadsheet responding to the 'Laver incident' at the Brisbane Moratorium in May 1970.

Student-worker relations were never the same after May's Moratorium incident. Though Communists within the union movement made one last effort to unite workers and students, they again struggled to overcome ideological differences. A Draft Resistance Centre — modeled on a similar operation in Sydney — was launched out of Trades Hall in July 1970 as a BWIU initiative. Offering counseling services to 'advise young men about to be conscripted into military service', what was labeled by Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen as 'the treason room' soon involved a number of young students and workers.<sup>54</sup> In a now familiar story, militant youths split from the centre only a few months after its inception. Many involved expressed a desire to launch a public campaign of non-compliance with the National Service Act, a move opposed by the TLC executive on the grounds that such a public display would bring 'embarrassment to the Council' in a time when much of its efforts were being put into the election of a Labor government and the smooth running of peaceful moratoria.<sup>55</sup> Though publically maintaining solidarity with the Centre's role as a counseling service, these dissenters established a Brisbane branch of the Draft Resisters' Union in late 1970, launching a radical campaign against conscription and once more frustrating the Old Left's attempted engagement with youth.<sup>56</sup>

Using the example of Brisbane in the mid to late 60s, we can re-locate the

centrality of the organised working class to 'Australia's sixties' — so often glossed over in generalisations about pot-smoking hippies and middle-class ultra leftists. For in fact, despite a search for fresh answers and approaches, Brisbane's New Left sought with varying degrees of success and conflict to relate their struggle to those of the 'Old'. From the early days of collaboration over Vietnam and the Civil Liberties campaign to the moral panic of Foco, Brisbane's radical youth movement sought unity with local trade unions and the Communist Party. The clashes of '69 and '70, however, reveal the problematic nature of this relationship. Many trade unionists saw radical youth as a challenge to ALP electability and their own generally conservative outlook, while the CPA's spasmodic relationship with the New Left and its theories was too inconsistent and beholden to opportunism and internal factional squabbles to allow a properly fruitful relationship to develop. What is made visible here is much more than the popular narrative of a sixties' 'Woodstock generation' whose promiscuity and individuality corresponds exactly with the present coordinates of lifestyle capitalism. Rather, we witness a group of people whose ambitious determination — if of an idealistic nature — saw a world beyond capitalism, and sought alliances across the generational (not to mention class) divide to make these dreams realities.

## Notes

- 1 This is noted in a recent ‘history’ of UQ for its centenary celebrations, which generally smears oppositional movements as only a commissioned history can. Ben Robertson, *The People’s University: 100 Years of the University of Queensland*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 2010.
- 2 Mitch Thompson, ‘SDA dissolves’, *Society for Democratic Action Ephemera*, FVF 381, Fryer Library.
- 3 ‘Student Radicals ‘Never Again’ at Labor Day’, *Courier-Mail*, 16 May 1969.
- 4 Kristin Ross, ‘Establishing Consensus: May ’68 in France as seen from the 1980s’, *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 28, no. 3, Spring 2002, p. 651.
- 5 Kristin Ross, *May ’68 and its Afterlives*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2002. See chapter two, ‘Forms and Practices’ for an analysis of the (un)remembering of worker participation in May ’68.
- 6 Lani Russell, ‘Today the students, tomorrow the workers! radical student politics and the Australian labour movement: 1960–1972’, PhD thesis, University of Technology, Sydney, 1999. Another example is Padraic Gibson, ‘Breaking down the politics of fear: radicalism on campus and at work, Australia 1965–75’, BA Hons thesis, University of Sydney, 2006.
- 7 P O’Brien for the WWF, *Branch News*, 14 September 1967, Dan O’Neill Collection, UQFL132, Fryer Library, Box 7, Folder 10.
- 8 John Percy, *A History of the Democratic Socialist Party and Resistance*, vol. 1: 1965–72, Resistance Books, Sydney, 2005, p. 59.
- 9 *ibid.*, p. 60. It must be noted that this was a certain conservatism born of the Party’s attempts to copy Eastern Bloc ‘youth publications’, and major improvements were made over the next few years.
- 10 The development of student radicalism on UQ will here be given only a brief glance. For further details see the opening chapters in both my honours thesis, ‘Building their own scene to do their own thing’: imagining and contesting space/s in Brisbane’s youth radicalisation, 1968–1976’, BA Hons thesis, University of Queensland, 2009, and Tim Briedis, ‘A map of the world that includes Utopia’: the Self Management Group and the Brisbane libertarians’, BA Hons thesis, University of Sydney, 2010.
- 11 Dan O’Neill, ‘The growth of the radical movement’, *Semper Floreat*, 17 March 1969, p. 9.
- 12 *ibid.*, p. 9.
- 13 ‘Society for Democratic Action’, *Miscellaneous Publications of the Society for Democratic Action*, F3235, Fryer Library; O’Neill, ‘The Growth’, p. 9.
- 14 Raymond Evans, ‘From Deserts the Marchers Come: Confessions of a Peripatetic Historian’, *Queensland Review*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2007, p. 13. This was as direct an importation as can be had: draft-cards were an American vernacular for what in Australia were termed call-up papers.
- 15 *ibid.*, p. 14.
- 16 See Raymond Evans, *A History of Queensland*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, p. 184.
- 17 See Carole Ferrier and Ken Mansell, ‘Student Revolt, 1960s and 1970s’ in

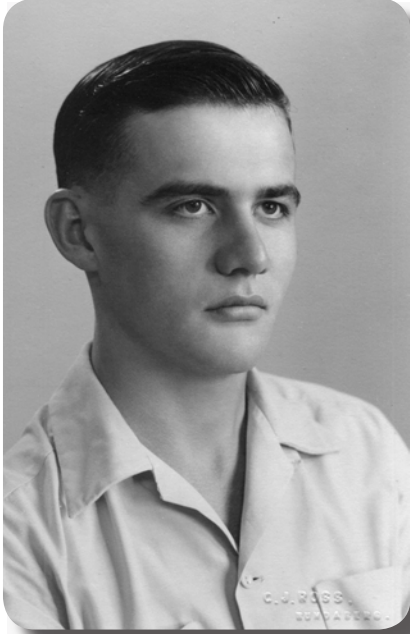
- Raymond Evans and Carole Ferrier (eds), *Radical Brisbane: an Unruly History*, Vulgar Press, North Carlton, 2004, p. 268.
- 18 'Who will stop work? Unions have problems on today's rally', *Courier-Mail*, 14 September 1967. Another report quoted state Minister for Industrial Development, Mr Campbell, as 'urg[ing] the Students Union to divorce its interests from those of the Communist Alex Macdonald and his followers', clearly highlighting the state's concerns over such an alliance. 'City work stop attacked', *The Telegraph*, 14 September 1967; Jack Egerton, 'Civil liberties spotlight focuses on Queensland', Queensland Trade Union Congress Reports, 1967, Trades and Labour Council of Queensland Records, 1894–(hereafter TLC), Fryer Library, UQFL118, Box 90.
  - 19 For more on this see Frederic Jameson, 'Periodising the Sixties' in Sohnya Sayres, et al (eds), *The 60s without Apology*, University of Minneapolis Press, Minneapolis, 1984.
  - 20 Brian Laver interviewed by Andrew Stafford, 6 Nov 2002, Andrew Stafford Papers, UQFL440, Fryer Library.
  - 21 *ibid.* For more on decline of CPA, albeit from a Trotskyist perspective, see Tom O'Lincoln, *Into the Mainstream: the Decline of Australian Communism*, Red Rag Publications, North Carlton, 2009 [1985]. No academic history of the post-war communist movement has been written — though see Stuart Macintyre, *The Reds*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1998, for a history of the party until its banning in 1940.
  - 22 Hugh Hamilton, 'Cost of suggested alterations to the Dance Hall for Youthful Activity', TLC, Box 357.
  - 23 Raymond Evans, 'Foco, Second Trades Hall', in Evans and Ferrier, *Radical Brisbane*, pp. 273–6.
  - 24 'Foco opening night poster', TLC, Box 357.
  - 25 For more on Foco as a venue, see my article "Australia's most evil and repugnant nightclub": Foco Club and transnational politics in Brisbane's '68", *Dialogues e-journal*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2010: <http://www.polsis.uq.edu.au/dialogue/Vol%208/Piccini.pdf>
  - 26 On changes to the EYL see Russell, 'Today the students', pp. 263–4; quote from Alan Anderson, 'The Foco story', *Tribune*, 8 September 1970.
  - 27 Laver interviewed by Stafford.
  - 28 On the inter-relation between counter cultural elements and the 'political' New Left see Doug Rossinow, 'The New Left in the counterculture: hypotheses and evidence', *Radical History Review*, no. 67, 1997, pp. 79–120.
  - 29 Laver interviewed by Stafford; Anderson, 'The Foco Story'.
  - 30 Anderson, 'The Foco Story'; Alan Anderson, 'Report on 1968 Union Youth Week', Queensland Trade Union Congress Reports, 1968, TLC, Box 90.
  - 31 'Drugs, Women claim on Foco', *Courier-Mail*, 13 September 1968.
  - 32 *ibid.*
  - 33 'Matters concerning Foco for Executive TLC' (undated), TLC, Box 357. Though undated, this document is a direct result of Cameron's allegations re TLC funding of Foco.
  - 34 Memo marked 'CONFIDENTIAL', TLC, Box 357. Notes not only that the involvement of Federal customs

- police in the investigation had greatly angered their State counterparts, but also that Cameron's source of information was untrustworthy; Foco Club Newsletter, 11 December 1968.
- 35 *ibid.*; Foco Club Newsletter, 26 February 1969.
- 36 Anderson, 'The Foco Story'.
- 37 Thompson, 'SDA Dissolves'.
- 38 Diane Zetlin and Larry Zetlin, Untitled paper solicited by *Oz Magazine*, 1970, Dan O'Neill Collection, UQFL132, Fryer Library, Box 14, Folder 1.
- 39 Anderson, 'The Foco Story'.
- 40 *ibid.*
- 41 'No union money went to Foco', *Courier-Mail*, 10 May 1969.
- 42 G.M. Dawson for the BWIU — Queensland Branch, 'Statement of policy on Youth and Students', TLC, Box 357.
- 43 O'Lincoln, *Into the Mainstream*, pp. 117–25. Mark Aarons, *The Family File*, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2010, also provides a narration of these events from a highly personalised perspective.
- 44 Tim Briedis, 'The Conference for Left Action, Easter 1969', unpublished paper, 2010.
- 45 Brian Laver, 'Strategies for social change', Conference for Left Action, Easter, 1969: Papers, Conference for Left Action, Sydney, 1969.
- 46 Russell, 'Today the students', pp. 273–4. The exception to this was Dennis Freney, who went from a member of Nick Origlass's Trotskyist circle to a leading member of the CPA's revolutionary wing.
- 47 Brian Laver, 'The Communist Party is behind this Moratorium — way behind: towards the Spring Offensive', B. Laver, Brisbane, 1970, p. 2. Also see Russell, 'Today the students', p. 273 for a very short discussion of the centre. The location of meetings was mentioned by Dan O'Neill, personal communication, 21 November 2010.
- 48 Laver, *The Communist Party*, p. 2.
- 49 Laver, *The Communist Party*, p. 2; 'Whitlam will lead march in the city', *Courier-Mail*, 4 May 1970.
- 50 'Applying the Moratorium gag', *Courier-Mail*, 9 May 1970.
- 51 C. Gifford, 'The facts about the 'Laver incident'', *Tribune*, 24 June 1970, p. 4.
- 52 *ibid.*, p. 4.
- 53 Laver, *The Communist Party*, p. 3.
- 54 Building Workers Industrial Union, *Don't Register! — a booklet of draft resistance information*, BWIU, Brisbane, 1971, p. 1. Quote from Bjelke-Petersen from *The Australian*, 25 July 1970.
- 55 'Minutes of meeting of Trades and Labour Council Draft Resistance Centre held on Monday 16 November 1970', TLC, Box 347.
- 56 'Resisters and TLC disagree', *Courier-Mail*, 19 November 1970.

\* \* \* \*

# I Join the Workforce

By Ted Riethmuller



Ted Riethmuller as an electrical apprentice in 1956

I remember the very first day I started work. My first grown-up job. It was raining and water was rushing down the gutters. It always rained in January back then; back in the fifties, in Bundaberg. In those days you could be certain of the weather, but it was the future that was uncertain, unknown, and for a 16-year-old lad, exciting. Now the weather is uncertain and, for me at least, it is the

future that is known — and it can't be avoided.

The family friends with whom I was staying dropped me off at my new workplace and I took shelter under the awning while the rain pelted down. The awning had on its front, bold sans-serif letters saying: W B B R E B. I knew that they stood for the Wide Bay-Burnett Regional Electricity Board.

My first choice was for an apprenticeship in Fitting and Turning. I was unsuccessful when I applied to the sugar mills for a position and when I had an offer of an electrical apprenticeship from the Regional Board I accepted. I had liked the idea of being a fitter because it involved working with steel and other metals and offered me a chance to exercise the manual skills I knew I possessed. I was attracted to metal and metal working tools and the attraction, I believe, is similar to the attraction cloth has for tailors and dressmakers, wood has for cabinet makers and paper has for printers and artists. But to be an electrician offered much the same scope as well as another dimension: harnessing and managing that still-modern energy that was invisible, had no taste or smell and was generally manifest only by what it could accomplish.

So there I was standing on the footpath uncertain of what to do. I sat down on my toolbox — Dad had made it for me from a wooden ammunition box — and waited. I had been instructed by letter to

present myself at 8 o'clock but the glass doors of the office were closed. It was still only about 7.45am. I did not want to be late. The waiting made me more nervous than I already was.

I was aware that some work vehicles with WBBREB Bundaberg painted on them were entering the yard through a gate alongside the building. A number of the drivers no doubt saw me patiently waiting but out of shyness I kept my eyes down, not wanting to signal an appeal for help. But soon a man carrying an umbrella came out and addressed me.

'You must be Ted Reissmuller.' It was an observation rather than a question. 'Riethmuller.' I offered the correction timidly.

'Yes right. I'm Reg Greer. Come and meet some of your work mates. Grab your tools.'

He made a gesture of sharing his umbrella with me but it was only a gesture and I got somewhat wet, but because I was new to Bundaberg I was happy enough to follow the example of my fellow citizens by ignoring a bit of damp. Reg took me through the gate and then through a side door of the building into a large office shared by supervisors and foremen. He made introductions.

'Ted Reissmuller, our new apprentice. That's Tom McIntyre and that's Col Dunn. They're Inspectors. You'll be working with Tom to begin with. That's Vic Theil. He's in charge of the electrical

installation side of things. You'll be meeting everyone soon enough.'

Reg was bluff and hearty with a loud voice. I soon learnt that he had a quick and shrewd mind and if he had any shortcomings, they were hidden by his unchallengeable self-confidence. He was able to take command, make decisions and accept responsibility. He was good at seeing the forest and was happy for others to care about the trees. Somehow his unfailing affability did not encourage others to challenge his dominance. He wore the unofficial uniform of his rank: neat khaki short-sleeved shirt with two large pockets, shorts of the same material and long socks and sturdy shoes.

The socks, when he displayed himself before the public as a sort of non-commissioned officer of the Regional Board staff, were straight and well pulled up, whereas when he was in the company of his troops in the field they would be pushed down for comfort. The shoes represented a compromise between the shoes that would be worn by an engineer or an office worker and the more robust footwear of his fellow employees who were on the tools. His ensemble included a one-ton Ford utility — larger and more powerful than his job required, but the bulk and gravitas of this vehicle suited his large frame and physical presence. In fact, although his climbing into the driver's seat lacked something in terms of grace and dignity, the cabin being rather high off the ground, his alighting from such

a height, which involved first turning in his seat and then dropping to the ground, landing on his feet, had an impressive dramatic quality to it. In due course I learnt his power and authority was usually expressed by issuing instructions disguised as helpful advice, and he was kindly by inclination.

Vic Theil was dressed in the same manner except that his outfit included a pipe, which he spent more time cleaning, packing with tobacco and generally fondling, than he spent smoking. Vic was somewhat stout and dumpy and while Reg was loud, Vic's words were softly spoken and ironic in tone. He imbued his utterances with authority and his professed scepticism as to the honesty and intelligence of people in power gave his pronouncements a veneer of wisdom. He was generous in so far as he was always offering his thoughts on a wide number of subjects freely to everyone. He would lean back in his chair and apply a match to the bowl of his pipe and, between juicy sucks, pass down judgements on current affairs.

On this particular morning the topic related to the fact that the electricians were out on strike. It was an historic occasion. A statewide walkout. He let it be known, and the others shared his views on this, that while he was sympathetic to the blokes on strike — and he would be with them if he didn't have to supervise the apprentices — their cause was lost.

'They deserve to get what they want but they're fucked.'

In those days Industrial Awards, binding agreements that enjoyed the force of law, governed wages and conditions. Electricians were grouped together with other metal trades and received the same wages. They didn't like this and one of the first things I learned at work is that electricians are better than any other trade and the fact that they are not paid accordingly is a great injustice. All sorts of cant and pseudo facts were used to bolster this belief.

Tom and Col, the two inspectors, diplomatic by nature and occupation, nodded their agreement. They were dressed much like Reg and Vic but because their work took them into people's homes to test recently-installed wiring, they had to look particularly well dressed. They needed to project an air of authority that, together with quotations from the SAA Wiring Rules, would impress the consumers in the case of any dispute. Their sartorial effort might mean an extra polish of their shoes or a shirt other than khaki — but nothing too excessive. There was a danger that they might look like shiny-bummed clerks and this would mean a loss of status in the eyes of their workmates — and in their own. This prejudice against white-collar occupations was common in those days and I had unconsciously absorbed it as a boy. It was this prejudice rather than my parents' wishes that impelled me to seek a trade rather than to go on to Senior.

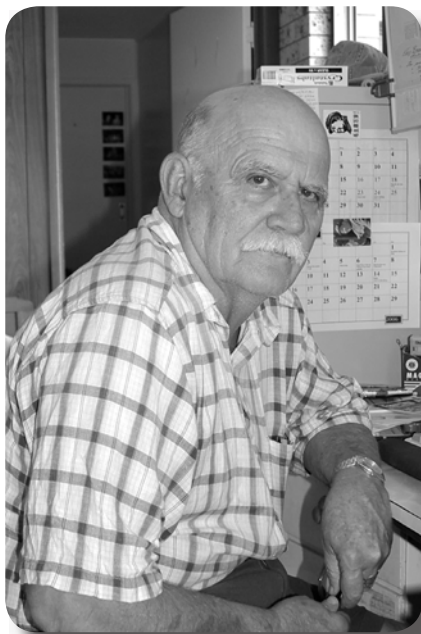


While I waited for instructions I listened to the conversation and observed what was going on and tried to make sense of it. Nothing seemed to be happening but I waited patiently and before long Reg bounced to his feet and said to me: ‘Come on Young Ted, let’s go for a drive’. Drive to where and what for? I had to wait to find out. So I joined him in his ute and we drove out along Takalvan Street to the main Sub-station. This was where the 66,000-volt transmission line from Howard terminated. There was a power station at Howard fired by coal from a nearby mine. At this sub-station huge transformers reduced the 66 kV power to 11kV for reticulation around the town and its environs. Power from Howard had only been connected for a few years. Before this, Bundaberg had been supplied with electricity generated by an old power station owned by Bundaberg City Electric Light. The old power station, behind our offices, was now decommissioned.

Reg took me into the switch-room of the sub-station where he began to write down readings from banks of impressive looking dials. When I asked what he was doing he said: ‘I’m just writing down these readings in the book’. What I took that to mean is that I would learn about such things in good time but right now it would be too tedious for him to explain. When I commented on the low steady hum emanating from the transformers he said: ‘Yes, that’s 50 cycle hum’. I was too shy to ask for an explanation then but I reassured myself that all

these mysteries would be revealed in due course. I had another five years of apprenticeship to go and learning all I wanted to know would be achieved by attending to my studies, listening to my more experienced workmates, observing everything closely and generally keeping my eyes and ears open.

I can’t remember what happened after we returned to the depot that day but I know I was happy that I had begun my education in the ways of the workplace. On that first day the main thing I can remember learning is that electricians, in our own minds at least, were superior to men of other trades.



Ted Riethmuller as we know him today

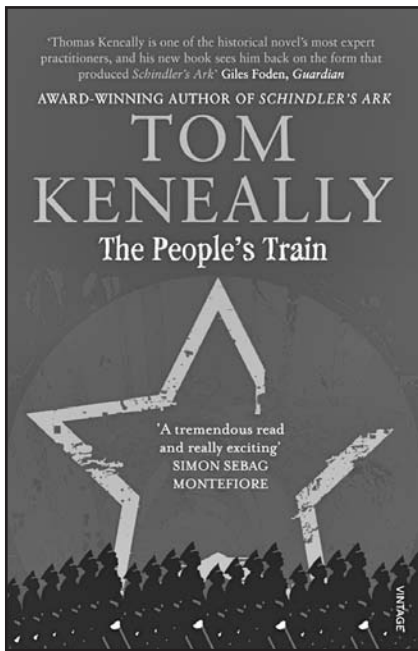
Review of

## *The People's Train*

By Tom Keneally

Random House Australia (Vintage),  
2009/2010

ISBN 9781741667455



Cynics and purists tend to dismiss 'historical fiction' as a contradiction in terms, neither one nor the other, a crafty way to disguise an author's historical and creative deficiencies.

Yet works of historical fiction have a huge reading public and, at their best, allow writers to probe the conceivable but unrecorded thoughts of their often illustrious characters and to dramatise historical events to the point where the reader arrives at an intuitive and heightened empathy with the subject, an emotional association that unfortunately many of our dry academic histories and orthodox biographies fail to achieve.

Historical fiction is a genre that Tom Keneally, one of Australia's most admired and irreplaceable authors, has made use of once again to reconstruct the story of the Russian political activist 'Artem' (Fedor Andreevich Sergeev or Big Tom Sergaev), arguably the most significant revolutionary figure ever to stroll the streets of Brisbane, later buried with full Bolshevik honours alongside the Kremlin Wall, yet largely unknown to the reading public in Australia. Based mainly on documents housed at the University of Queensland's Fryer Library and studies translated from the Russian, Keneally has recreated some of the most dramatic episodes of Artem's political activities in Queensland and revolutionary adventures in Russia.

After escaping from Tsarist detention following the Revolution of 1905, and travelling across Siberia and China, 'Artem Samsurov' (the novel's principal character) finally landed in Brisbane in 1911. Staying close to the historical record, Keneally recounts

how his hero actively participated in the tempestuous events of the time, when 'sleepy old Brisbane' belied its reputation and was the undisputed heart of radical activity in Australia, throbbing to the ceaseless din generated by disputatious Wobblies, Anarchists, Socialists and Russian firebrands of many sorts. Already a confirmed Bolshevik and confidant of Lenin, Artem threw his immense energies into editing *Australian Echo*, the first Russian-language newspaper in Australia, radicalising the local Union of Russian Emigrants and prodding aggrieved workers into militant action during the storied Tramway and General Strikes of 1912.

Keneally particularly enjoys relating the highly amusing antics of Artem and his fellow activists during the Free Speech movement of 1913–14, when they pricked the pompous airs of Brisbane's civic authorities. Challenging the ban on any non-religious gatherings planned for Sundays, Artem and his carefree band perched in trees, chained themselves to posts and loudly muttered socialist slogans as they paraded up and down Brisbane's thoroughfares, followed by lively crowds of well-wishers who vastly enjoyed the street theatre. Invariably the political jokesters appeared the next day in court where they slyly poked fun at the flustered magistrates, earning for their efforts a month or two in Boggo Road gaol. This was 'Lor and Horder', Queensland style.

This inspired lunacy and larrikinism lost much of its sparkle after the outbreak of war in 1914. Artem vigorously opposed conscription and pleaded with his fellow Russians not to join the AIF and participate in the slaughter on the Western Front. Australia's nationalism and racism in those years also profoundly disturbed the Russian, along with its lack of a class-conscious industrial proletariat. By 1917 Artem had already decided that Brisbane was 'a ridiculous choice of exile for me' and then came the exhilarating news that the Tsar had abdicated. The way was clear for the staunch Bolshevik to return home and join Lenin's Party in the seizure of revolutionary power.

It is at this point that the author abruptly switches the focus to Russia and, to this reviewer, that the historical narrative loses its coherence. Granted, Keneally shows by inference the sharp contrast between an Australia generally content with moderate reform and defence of the Empire versus a Russia about to plunge into a violent domestic upheaval, one that eventually threatened the western political and social order. Similarly, Artem, a somewhat baffled and frustrated political figure in the Australian context, became a decisive, self-confident and occasionally brutal revolutionary leader in the Russian milieu of 1917, first in explosive Kharkov and later in raging Petrograd during the seizure of the Winter Palace. In other words, Artem was well-suited to the ferocity of revolutionary Russia

but not to the more temperate politics of Australia. The two nations' political climates diverged radically, perhaps for all time.

However, herein arises the question of historical veracity. In a radio interview with the ABC's Margaret Throsby, the impish author cheerfully admitted that in his literary endeavours he often appropriated minor historical episodes and then added 'deliberate lies'. Such acceptable inventions in this fictional work might include Artem's alleged involvement in several improbable love affairs. More questionable are the many pages Keneally devotes to Artem's supposed incarceration in Brisbane's Boggo Road gaol in 1913. Queensland police and prison records simply do not substantiate this claim (see Dr Kevin Windle's discussion of this issue and his admirable translation of Artem's 'first-hand account' of imprisonment in Boggo Road in the *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, 2004).

Many other flaws appeared in the 2009 version of this novel, which has been distributed throughout the country. To mention a few blemishes, no fixed system of transliteration has been followed in rendering Russian words into English: for instance, *bolshinstvo* (majority) becomes *bolinstvo*, and *Budte dobry* (Please) is converted into *Bulbtyo Dobry*, which makes no sense at all. Many common Russian surnames are transposed, with *Rybakov* being rendered as *Rybukov* (a small difference, but strange to a Russian

ear). The given names of well-known Russian figures are also misprinted, for instance *Yuri* for *Yuly* Martov, the prominent Menshevik leader. There were at least 75 such errors in the 2009 version of the novel, which seemed never-ending to this reader.

However, to the credit of Vintage, a corrected copy of Keneally's novel was brought out in 2010, only a few months after the original version appeared in bookstores. Most of the egregious errors have been corrected in this much-improved printing, but not all of them. For instance, it would have been helpful if direct quotes in the text were enclosed in inverted commas, but their absence has led to numerous run-on sentences and much confusion for the reader. Russian geographic locations also present problems, as no Orthodox cathedral, as claimed, can be found near the General Staff Building on Petrograd's Palace Square in 1917. Moreover, it is doubtful that cannon could have been fired from St Isaac's Square at the Winter Palace on Palace Square, given the propinquity of the two squares. In addition, the proposed anti-Bolshevik *Krestny Khot* or *Krestny Khod* (religious procession) of October 1917 involved more than the parading of a miracle-working icon that had supposedly helped turn back Napoleon's forces in 1812, but stemmed from a celebrated religious and patriotic procession of 1612 which 'miraculously' saved Russia from Polish intervention. A similar procession by Cossacks and Orthodox

priests in October 1917 might have proven seriously inconvenient for the Bolsheviks as they planned their imminent coup.

The question of how much accuracy can be expected in any work of historical fiction is probably a matter for the individual reader. But for this reviewer the boundary of facts has been transgressed in this work of historical fiction. Fortunately, however, Keneally has held out the possibility of continuing the Artem saga through the tumultuous Civil War years and the Russian's bizarre death in an experimental train wreck in 1921, when 'The People's Train' of the title metaphorically and literally reached its last station. Most interesting during the final years of his life, Artem worked closely with Lenin and Stalin, an association that could provide rich material for the historical novelist (Stalin, in fact, adopted Artem's son after his death).

The Australian reading public owes a debt of gratitude to Tom Keneally for dramatising Artem's remarkable life in Queensland and his part in the Bolshevik Revolution. A sequel to *The People's Train* would give much pleasure to many of Keneally's devoted fans. But a modest suggestion offered by this reviewer is that the author should work more closely next time with an exacting editor and with a specialist in early Soviet history.

**Thomas Poole**

Review of

## ***Women of the Coal Rushes***

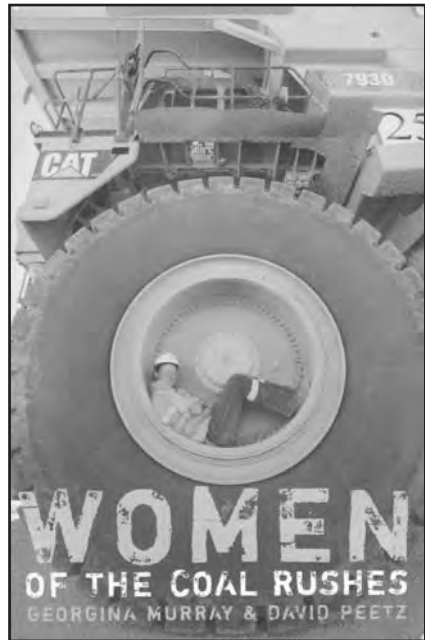
**By Georgina Murray  
& David Peetz**

UNSW Press, 2010

ISBN 978 1 74223 221 8

320pp, PB

AUD\$49.95



If this book had only been written for the first three pages, it would have been worth the effort. I won't spoil the impact by outlining Patti's story; suffice to say it captures the atmosphere of modern coal mining and encapsulates

the attitude of mine owners to miners in general, and women in particular.

Women's involvement in the coal industry of Queensland dates from the very beginning when they moved with their husbands, and often children, into makeshift communities of tents, caravans and corrugated-iron shanties. 'As wives and mothers they've fought long battles for better working conditions, run women's auxiliaries, and picked up the pieces after disasters. Now they're operating the trucks, diggers and draglines.'

To quote from *Preface and acknowledgments* –

The first chapter provides an overview of the variety of experiences that [the authors] encountered in [their] travels around Queensland, while chapters 2 to 6 go in depth into key aspects of those experiences — the early struggles to build housing and communities, the ongoing prospect of danger and death, the role of women's auxiliaries in shaping the struggles fought by the people of the communities.

The first half of the book deals with women's role as support for their men, from providing a stable home through to forming auxiliaries that aided many strikes. The first Queensland women's auxiliary was formed in Ipswich in 1938 after the miners realised the

importance of having sympathetic and involved women on side. The effects of these auxiliaries in achieving improved conditions of the miners was enormous, and most likely many strikes and pickets would not have lasted the distance were it not for the meals provided and the representation made by the women. In some instances, the miners did not appreciate their wives' involvement in their work; in others, the miners financed the Women's Auxiliary directly from their pay. There are detailed descriptions of mining disasters and their affect on the community.

Education, improved family life, accommodation all became the target of these women. While the mine owners appreciated that a miner living with his family was a more stable employee, they did not consider it their place to provide infrastructure to facilitate this. Women appeared before tribunals and the Arbitration Court in attempts to secure better housing and conditions for their families. They also provided a much-needed social network when families were hundreds, sometimes thousands, of kilometres away, giving, among many other things, assistance when a miner fell ill or died.

It was the aim of David and Georgina to present their work in a style accessible to everyone while not stinting in their treatment of the issues, and in this, they have succeeded admirably. Particularly pleasing is the way David

and Georgina have allowed the women to tell their stories in their own voice. This technique reveals as much about the women as the tales they impart. Darlene Allen tells how security guards were brought in from the south to protect assets belonging to BHP and their staff:

Really, what inflamed a lot of the women in the town, I feel, was that BMA brought in Security ... Security wasn't just on the mine site. They infiltrated the town and they were walking around the streets, really intimidating women and children throughout the town. I had never seen anything like that before in my life! We just said 'well, we are not going to stand for it!'

A generous number of images, mostly from the Pete Thomas Archive held at the Brisbane office of the CFMEU, show young, vibrant women in action.

Echoing the inclusion of women into the workforce over the years, the women of the coal fields gradually moved from auxiliaries into the mines: some to share the working life with their partners; others, because it was the lifestyle of their choosing. However, 'Despite years of management training and legislation on equal employment opportunity, some managers still hold negative views towards women mineworkers...[and] there are definitely guys out there that think we shouldn't be there.'

For those not familiar with industry lingo, or indeed Aussie lingo, there is a glossary, and also a map of Queensland showing the coal-mining towns.

This was a collaborative effort, including academics from Griffith University, the CFMEU (particularly the Queensland District of the Division, whose financial support was essential in making this project happen), and, of course, the many women who shared their stories and reminiscences.

I found I could not skim this book, every page demanded my attention.

**Dale Jacobsen**

\* \* \* \*

.....  
• *It's good of you to ask me,* •  
• *Sir, to tell you how I spend* •  
• *my days* •  
• *Down in a coal black* •  
• *tunnel, Sir, I hurry corves* •  
• *to earn my pay.* •  
• *The corves are full of coal,* •  
• *Kind Sir, I push them with* •  
• *my hands and head.* •  
• *It isn't lady-like, but Sir,* •  
• *you've got to earn your* •  
• *daily bread.* •  
• *~ From 'Testimony of* •  
• *Patience Kershaw' by* •  
• *Frank Higgins* •  
.....

## **BLHA Symposium: Labour in Politics**

Over 80 people attended the ‘Labour in Politics’ symposium organised by the Brisbane Labour History Association (BLHA) held in October. Given the current conflict between some sections of the Queensland trade union movement and the State Labor Government over the issue of the selling of public assets, it was fitting that the BLHA should organise a symposium that looks at this relationship between the Labor Party and the trade union movement from a historical and contemporary perspective. Four speakers examined the historical dimension, John Kellett, academic and former Secretary of the BLHA, Brian Randall, historian and a librarian at State Library, Jeff Rickertt, historian and Librarian and Dale Jacobsen, freelance author and former Secretary of the BLHA. Areas covered were the role of the Australian Labour Federation in the time leading up to the formation of the Labor Party, the rise of the Labor Party, socialist organising outside the Labor Party and the conflict between the McCormack Labor Government and the Australian Railways Union.

Each speaker was able to highlight certain tensions that existed between organised labour and its parliamentary wing. The practical situation of attempting to introduce a socialist

agenda by way of the ballot box was a major tension between these two groups. However the Labor Party kept more radical elements at a distance and it was in the long term that the moderate elements won out.

During the lunch break Brian Randall organised a viewing of a display of Queensland labour movement materials which included a variety of Labor Party campaign material as well as union material. One of the highlights of the display was the original manifesto of 1893 which is on UNESCO’s Memory of the World International Register.

The last session addressed the question: ‘Labour in Politics 120 years on: Does today’s Labor Party serve the cause of Labour?’

Each speaker gave their own perspective to this question. Peter Simpson, Secretary of the Electrical Trades Union, spoke about the present-day dispute that his and other unions were involved in with the Bligh Labor Government. Peter made the point that the majority of Queenslanders are not in favour of selling off public assets and also argued that the selling of these assets would result in the loss of jobs and the general lowering of working conditions.

Jo-Ann Miller, State Member for Bundamba, spoke about her own electorate and how she has a good relationship with the union movement.





Peter Simpson, Secretary ETU

She argued against the privatisation agenda in Caucus. She also made the point that within her local ALP branch, members are encouraged to join a community group in order to understand the day-to-day issues people are experiencing.



Jo-Ann Miller,  
State Member for Bundamba

Carol Corless, Vice-President of the Liquor Hospitality Miscellaneous Union (LHMU) and Phil Monsour, Queensland Teachers Union (QTU) workplace representative and State Councillor, discussed their own involvement in the union movement.



Phil Monsour, QTU

Jeff Rickertt deserves congratulations for organising this event. The symposium fits into the general BLHA approach to these events: namely to bring historical links to contemporary issues — to link the past with the present.

**Greg Mallory**

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## Review

### The Flames of Discontent at Woodford Folk Festival

Little did we know, when we complained of the rain on the first two days of the Woodford Folk Festival, just what was in store for Queensland. In hindsight, we realise we were lucky. But the rain and the mud did not dampen the enjoyment of those many thousands who did attend, and especially those who came to the Green House venue to hear a riveting debate — *Green Bans: would they work today?*



Participants in the forum, *Green Bans: would they work today?* Woodford Folk Festival

L-R — Dale Jacobsen, Greg Mallory, Jack Munday, Ian Lowe, Jason Stein

As most readers will know, the BLHA features a series of events at the festival under the banner ‘Flames of Discontent’. Each year, it has grown in size and attendance. This year, the association combined with the Queensland Folk Federation to bring Jack Munday to the festival; something that has long been on the BLHA agenda. On the strength of this, the whole of the Flames program was dedicated to celebration of the Green Bans of the 1970s.

An important question is, would Green Bans be effective today? To debate this issue before a full house, we had

a stellar cast: **Jack Munday** (former NSW secretary of the BLF); **Professor Ian Lowe** (scientist, environmentalist and president of the Australian Conservation Foundation.); **Dr Greg Mallory** (historian, author, academic and president of the BLHA); and **Jason Stein** (active member of the CFMEU and secretary/treasurer of the BLHA).

There was little doubt, from the rousing reception given to Jack, that he was the star attraction. Despite his advancing years, Jack delivered clear, well-chosen words that were directly relevant to

the times. Always an honest man of high moral character, his fundamental advice was: ‘be accountable for the end result of your labours’. All four men presented their case cogently, and all agreed that, for Green Bans to be effective today, workers would first need to return to their unions. The panel answered some, at times, challenging questions from the floor. Greg prepared an informative slide show outlining the Green Bans for those too young to remember.

That evening, Flames of Discontent screened *Rocking the Foundations*. Filmmaker Pat Fiske was one of the first women to be accepted as a builders labourer. Her film traced the development of the NSW branch of the BLF, that quite singular union whose social and political activities challenged the notion of what a union

should be. Jack Munday introduced the film.

A third event, *The Battle for Kelly’s Bush*, featured **Martin Pearson, Ann Bermingham** and **Helen Rowe**, three performers with a long history of social awareness. Songs, mostly written by Denis Kevans and John Dengate, were interspersed with a potted history of the Green Bans, commencing with the famous liaison between unions and Sydney middle-class housewives determined to protect the pocket of bushland known as Kelly’s Bush. Martin finished the concert with a tribute to another union, an earlier Sydney, and the late (and great) Alistair Hulett: a time during the Great Depression when the unemployed formed a union to fight evictions by heartless landlords of destitute families for non-payment of rent.



Greg Mallory chairs the Green Bans forum at Woodford Folk Festival

Talks are already underway for Flames of Discontent involvement with next Woodford. Watch this space.

**Dale Jacobsen**

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## Life Membership awarded to Wally Stubbings



Wally Stubbings receives Life Membership award from BLHA President, Greg Mallory

It was a great pleasure to nominate Wally Stubbings for life membership of the BLHA. Wally has been a BLHA member since 2000 and at 96 years of age, is one of the last remaining labour activists with links to the 1940s. Wally receives his life membership because of his involvement with the labour movement, both industrially and politically, over many decades.

Wally was born in Tasmania and worked as a timber worker in Strahan

in the 1930s. It was this activism in the Timber Workers Union which launched Wally's lifelong commitment to the workers' cause. After his time in the timber industry, Wally became a wharfie and this saw him transferring to the Hobart waterfront in 1940. In 1943, Wally moved to Brisbane to work as part of the war effort. He returned there to live in 1947, and

immediately joined the Waterside Workers Federation (WWF) and the Communist Party of Australia (CPA). He threw himself into activism in both organisations. He was elected to the executive of the Brisbane branch of the WWF and worked as a Vigilance Officer (VO) for four years. In the CPA he served on the State Committee and was campaign manager for various Communist candidates.

Wally's first industrial involvement was the 1948 Railway Strike in which he,

along with Fred Paterson and others, was bashed by Queensland police at a demonstration on St Patrick's Day. During the 1950s the WWF was involved in two national strikes: in 1954 and 1956. In the course of these showdowns, wharfies were involved in numerous demonstrations, as well as promoting their cause in various ways. Wally was sent to the countryside to talk to farmers. He took the attitude that wharfies needed to show the farmers that they, too, were interested in the economy and hence it was important that wharfies were actively talking to the population.

In the 1960s great changes were happening in the stevedoring industry with the introduction of containerisation. The WWF was heavily involved in this transformation, linking it to the issue of permanency for the workforce. Wally participated in these debates and once again argued that it was important to 'look outwards' in order to promote the best outcomes for wharfies.

The late 60s and early 70s was an era of upheaval in western democracies, particularly in relation to the Vietnam War. The WWF was one of the main unions opposed to the war and along with the student movement organised the Moratoriums. Wally was involved with this movement and worked alongside leading student activists of the day. He also took up the anti-conscription cause and

actively supported the movement against apartheid. Wally was a founding member of the Aboriginal Advancement League.

During the early 1970s the CPA underwent a major split, with a number of unionists, including wharfies from Sydney, forming the Socialist Party of Australia (SPA). Wally chose to remain with the CPA.

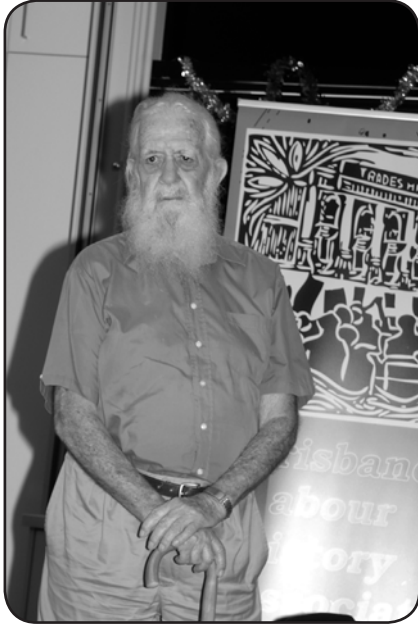
At the age of 63, when many of his contemporaries were looking forward to a restful retirement, Wally was still seeking new challenges. He took up Veteran Athletics and attended a number of world championships. He excelled over various distances on the track and went on to become the world 800-metre champion for his age.

The award of BLHA Life Membership honours Wally Stubbings' long life of activism and his tremendous contribution to the labour movement.

**Greg Mallory**

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## Dr Robert Vincent Anderson — our new Patron



Dr Robert Vincent Anderson OAM.  
New Patron of the BLHA

At the annual general meeting of the BLHA, 4 December 2010, the members present unanimously endorsed the Committee's nomination of Dr Robert Vincent Anderson OAM as the Association's patron for the coming year. Our new patron, better known as Bob or 'Uncle Bob', accepted the appointment warmly and expressed his gratitude to the organisation, declaring it an honour to accept the position.

Much of Bob Anderson's life has been devoted to struggle in the labour movement, the battle for recognition and equality for Australia's Indigenous people, and the fight for peace and justice in this country and internationally. The BLHA is privileged to have him as our patron.

Bob Anderson was born on 31 July 1929 at Overend Street in East Brisbane. From his mother Lydia's side, Bob is a proud descendant of the Ngugi Clan of Mulgumpin, known to many as Moreton Island. Bob's heritage also includes English and Irish, including a number of staunch republicans, his father Cecil amongst them.

Bob's early years were spent at East Brisbane and at North Stradbroke Island (Minjerrabah) where he lived for a time with his maternal grandmother, Mary Tripcony. Bob attended St Benedict's Convent School at East Brisbane and Dunwich State School on the Island. As the youngest of six children (five of whom survived), Bob led a tough working-class existence, with his mother working to support the family after a serious industrial injury to his father, a former dockyard worker at the South Brisbane Dry Dock. Like many of his era, Bob left school at age 13 and went to work. After short stints at a bakery and a fruit shop and two years at BAFS Chemist, he secured work as an apprentice carpenter and joiner in 1945 with Barnes Bros of Annerley.

It was during the period of his apprenticeship that Bob began to spend more time with his uncle Paul Tripcony. In accepting the position of patron at the AGM, Bob paid fond tribute to his uncle's influence. Paul Tripcony, an Indigenous man from Stradbroke Island, possessed little formal education but developed early in life a great love of books which he devoured voraciously and which supplemented his substantial knowledge, traditionally passed on, of the Indigenous traditions of Minjerribah. Paul passed on his love of books to Bob who would accompany Paul on Saturday mornings to visit various second-hand book shops. No doubt their discussions occasionally turned to workers' rights and the trade union movement as Paul, who had been sacked by Queensland Brewery for participation in an industrial dispute, was Vice President of the Federated Liquor Trades Union in Queensland.

Bob completed his apprenticeship in 1950 and, in the same year, married Isabella Millar, the daughter of Scottish immigrants who had settled in Colinsville, where her father worked as a miner and where both parents had joined the Communist Party of Australia. Bob also became involved in the New Theatre where he met a range of progressive people, including Jimmy Peterson, an organiser with the Building Workers' Industrial Union (BWIU). Bob joined that union in 1951 and became actively involved in union matters as well as broader political

issues. He took on roles as Union Delegate and in 1963 was elected State Organiser of the BWIU, a position which he held until 1978.

Two anecdotes reflect the skill and imagination Bob brought to his union roles. In the first, as a job delegate at the Rocklea Markets with CP Hornick, he solved a health and safety dispute caused by the pans in the workers' toilets not being emptied regularly, by advising the workers to use the employer's toilets instead. The problem was sorted quickly. In the second, told years later by Bob's brother Tom, Bob attended the construction of the T&G Building where workers complained about having to walk across a gap between two sections of the building (four floors up) on a plank which was too narrow. The boss threatened the workers with the sack if they did not use the plank and threatened to throw Bob off the site. Bob calmly explained to the boss that he was there on Union business and advised him that if he would walk on the plank, so would the workers. After the boss indicated that there was no way he was going to walk the plank, the issue was settled.

Bob played a role in major industrial disputes of the 1960s including the Mt Isa dispute and the Colinsville Powerhouse dispute in 1967. He threw himself into the broader political issues of the day. During the 1960s he was the BWIU Delegate in southeast Queensland on the Queensland Council

for Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and active in the campaign leading to the 1967 referendum. Bob and the BWIU were prominent opponents of the Vietnam War and the South African apartheid regime. In 1971, when the South African rugby team toured, Bob was active in convincing maintenance workers to strike and refuse to install wire protection at the Exhibition Grounds where the test match was being played. Bob was also instrumental in publicising the production of oversized police riot batons at the Alice Street Public Works workshop, publicity which led the Bjelke Petersen government to withdraw the order. Bob was active in the Peace Committee and accompanied the North Vietnamese delegation which visited Brisbane in the late 1970s.

Bob left his employment with the BWIU in 1978, due to staff shortages, and for the following five years worked in the ship repair industry as a member of the Federated Ship Painters' and Dockers' Union, before a workplace injury curtailed his career as a manual worker. However, Bob never severed his links with the trade union movement, contributing in recent years to the recording of the history of the CFMEU, of which he is now a life member.

In the years since 1985, Bob has been busier than ever, throwing himself into a bewildering array of roles in the public

arena including, naturally, much work for the Indigenous community. Lack of space prevents anything more than a brief summary of this extraordinary output, but Bob has served on the executives of the Queensland Conservation Council, the Australian Peace Committee, as chairperson of Australians For Reconciliation Committee (Queensland), as chair of the Aboriginal Consultative Committee to the Queensland Museum, on the Board of Murri Country Radio 4AAA, the Board of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Independent School, Vice President of FAIRA and the Quandamooka Land Council. Bob was an Official Visitor for the Queensland Corrective Services Commission (1992–1995), assisting to improve the lot of prisoners, particularly Indigenous prisoners, an Honorary Advisor to the Queensland Police Service on Indigenous issues and an architect of the Indigenous Justice Agreement with the Queensland Government.

Bob's extensive community work has been recognised by a host of awards, again too numerous to mention. Some of these include the Queensland Premier's Award 1997, NAIDOC Elder of the Year 1998, Honorary Doctorate from the Queensland University of Technology, one of five 'Queensland Greats' in 2000, Brisbane Citizen of the Year 2001 and recipient of the Order of Australia Medal (General Division) in 2001. Also in 2001, Bob celebrated his 50<sup>th</sup> year of involvement



with the trade union movement and led the Labour Day march. He was, in 2010, the subject of an exhibition at the Redlands Museum.

Bob Anderson and his partner Cathy Boyle have actively supported the BLHA for many years. We are delighted to have Bob as patron, and the members look forward to his

long continuing association with the organisation.

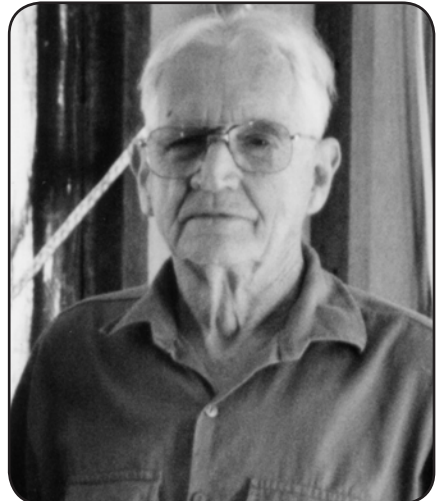
### **Bob Reed**

\* The writer acknowledges that much of the biographical material above is taken from Peacock: *History, Life and Times of Robert Anderson, Gheebelum Ngugi, Mulgumpin*, Uniikup Productions Limited (2002).

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## **Eureka Australia Day Medals awarded to Grahame and Esme Garner**

Eureka Australia Day Medals are awarded each year on 4 December (the anniversary of the Eureka stockade) by the Anarchist Media Institute to people who, through their activities, have embodied the ideas expressed in the Eureka Oath first sworn on the 29 November 1854: ‘We swear by the Southern Cross and stand truly by each other to fight and defend our rights and liberties’.



In 2010 Brisbane activists Grahame John Garner and Esme Merle Garner were awarded Eureka Australia Day medals in recognition of 50 years political and union involvement, defending the rights and liberties of Australian workers and citizens.

Grahame began working as a fitter and turner in the late 1950s and early 1960s at the Tramways Workshop in Brisbane where he became involved in labour politics as a union activist. Esme was a housewife looking after the couple's two young children, Jill (born 1958) and Bruce (born 1963).

Grahame had taken the Tramways job because there was no overtime, which left his weekends free to build a house in Coorparoo. (At the time many working-class jobs required working overtime to earn a living wage.) He was also active as a projectionist for the Australia Soviet Friendship Society, showing Soviet and Eastern European films.

At the Tramways workshop, he formed the Tramways Photographic Club, and began taking photographs for the *Queensland Guardian*. According to his ASIO file, the spooks believed the aim of the Tramways Photographic Club was to take photos of Brisbane and send them to Russia!

During his period as a photographer for the *Queensland Guardian*, Grahame took thousands of photos

of Peace marches, and moratorium demonstrations, many of which were donated to the Fryer Library. He was also one of the first chroniclers of the Queensland Ballet, an art form he discovered through photographing the Bolshoi Ballet, the Leningrad Ballet and various other Soviet dance groups for the Australian Soviet Friendship Society.

When the Clem Jones administration got rid of Brisbane's trams in the 1960s, Grahame helped organise and photograph the Last Tram Ride protest. He started working at Evans Deakin, where he became friendly with Bob Walker, and along with others, they formed the Industrial Group of the Self Management Group, which argued for Workers' self-management of industry. As a result of this, the family were heavily surveilled; their phone was tapped and visitors to their house routinely had their number plates recorded, so the secret police could open more files. ASIO's 13 volumes on the Garners amount to over 1500 pages.

Esme was involved with the Union of Australian Women and the Save our Sons committee. When the couple left the Communist Party and became involved with the Self Management Group, Esme worked casually in the Red and Black Bookshop. She was working in the bookshop when the police raided and seized the Little Red Schoolbook, and Esme was charged over this.

When Grahame was diagnosed with cancer in 1972, Esme began working to support the family as a typist in the Commonwealth offices under Gough Whitlam. (Her ASIO file would have prevented her employment under the Liberals.) She also benefited from the Whitlam Government's introduction of free university education to become a speech therapist.

In the late 1970s, the family relocated to Dulong, near Nambour. There they became involved in the anti-high-rise committee and Grahame ran for the local council, using it as a forum to oppose Gold Coast-style development. As a consequence, their home was torched by cronies of the developers, though, predictably, no-one was charged over this arson. With the aid of their son Bruce, they were able to rebuild.

### John Jiggins

•••••  
 • *Don't be too afraid girls, don't be* •  
 • *too afraid,* •  
 • *We're clearly underpaid girls,* •  
 • *clearly underpaid,* •  
 • *Tho' equal pay in principle is* •  
 • *every woman's right* •  
 • *To turn that into practice, we* •  
 • *must show a little fight.* •  
 • *~ From 'Don't be too Polite, Girls'* •  
 • *By Glen Tomasett, 1969* •  
 •••••

## CONTRIBUTORS

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

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

**John Spreckley** completed an apprenticeship as a Boilermaker / Welder in the Whyalla Shipyards and BHP Steelworks and worked as a qualified tradesperson for about 20 years. He has been a union industrial officer for around 15 years during which

time he has undertaken responsibilities as a rank-and-file elected job delegate for both the AMWU ('Metalworkers') and the ASU (Social and Community Services Division 'SACS') John is currently the Co-ordinator of the United Voice Queensland Industrial section and is responsible for managing a team of industrial officers within the Queensland Branch.

**Bob Reed** currently practises as a barrister in Brisbane, principally in the areas of industrial and employment law, human rights law and criminal law. From 1977 to 1988 he worked as a painter and docker in the ports of Brisbane and Sydney and from 1995 to 1999 as a research officer for the Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers' Union.

**Connie Healy** worked in trade union offices and at The University of Queensland. Twice married: first husband, an air force navigator, killed in World War II: second was QTLC Secretary 1942–52. Connie was widowed 1988. Awards — 1992: The Denis J. Murphy Memorial Scholarship UofQ: for academic merit to a postgraduate student intending to undertake research into the history of the labour movement in Australia; 1994 MA (History/English) at the UofQ; 2001 the Centenary Medal: 'For distinguished service to industrial relations'. Publications include: *Defiance: Political Theatre in Brisbane 1930–1962* (Based on her research for

MA thesis) (2000); five articles for *Radical Brisbane an unruly history* (2004); two entries for supplement to Australian Dictionary of Biography: Jim Crawford (playwright) and George Eaton (teacher, actor, producer) (2005).

**Jon Piccini** is a PhD candidate at The University of Queensland. His Honours thesis analysed several examples of 'political cultural activism' in Brisbane during the 'long sixties', while his doctoral research is in the transnational dimension of activism in Australia during the 1960s and 1970s. He has been involved in socialist and student union politics, and is currently a member of the Red Thread study group.

**Ted Riethmuller** served his time as an electrician in Bundaberg and Brisbane. Like many young Australians of the period he travelled to the UK and it was there that the class nature of society could not be ignored and as a consequence he joined the Communist Party, an action that supported his involvement in peace issues and the working-class movement. He now would describe himself as a lapsed communist although he still embraces the ideals of universal peace, fraternity and the emancipation of the down trodden. His interest in social history and labour history comes with a strong belief that the experiences of the common people deserve to be documented. In particular he wants to see the struggles and sacrifices of the

generations of activists acknowledged and honoured.

**Thomas Poole** was educated at Princeton, Kansas, and Massachusetts universities before emigrating to Australia in 1974 where he lectured in Russian and Soviet history for 27 years at the University of Queensland. A prime interest was Russian-Australian relations, which resulted in numerous academic exchanges to the USSR and Russian Federation. He also wrote articles for Russian academic journals and edited (along with John McNair) *Russia and the Fifth Continent* (1992), and with McNair and Alexander Massov, *Encounters Under the Southern Cross: Two Centuries of Russian-Australian Relations 1807-2007* (2007). Tom Keneally used some of the papers in the Poole-Fried Collection at the Fryer Library, University of Queensland, in researching *The People's Train*.

**Dale Lorna Jacobsen** is a freelance writer living in the mountains of Maleny in south-east Queensland, prior to which she was an environmental scientist at Griffith University and a luthier. Her first novel, *Union Jack*, is due for release mid-2011.

**Dr John Jiggins** is a writer and journalist who has published several books including *The Incredible Exploding Man*, *Marijuana Australiana*, *The Killer cop and the murder of Donald Mackay* and, with Jack Herer, the Australian version of

*The Emperor Wears No Clothes*. Along with Matt Mawson, Anne Jones and Damien Ledwich, he edited *The Best of The Cane Toad Times*. As a journalist, he has contributed feature articles to *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, *Rolling Stone*, *Penthouse*, *Simply Living* and many other magazines. He edited *The Cane Toad Times*, *The Westender* and *Brisbane Theatre Magazine*. His PhD was 'Marijuana Australiana: Cannabis Use, Popular Culture and the Americanisation of Drugs Policy in Australia 1938-1988'. The two volumes which derive from his doctoral dissertation are *The Killer cop and the murder of Donald Mackay* and *Marijuana Australiana*.

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• *For wolves may foam* •

• *and bark and bite* •

•

• *And gnash and gnaw* •

• *and hiss* •

•

• *But if a sheep should* •

• *dare bite back* •

•

• *He'd be a terrorist* •

•

• *~ From The Ballad of* •

• *The Fleas* •

•

• *By John Walker Lindh* •

•

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# Noticeboard

## **BLHA 2011 Calendar of Events**

Unless indicated, venues yet to be announced

26 May	Alex Macdonald Memorial Lecture — Di Zetlin
25 June	Book launch — <i>Union Jack</i> by Dale Jacobsen
29 July	BLHA Quiz Night
15–17 September	Twelfth Biennial Labour History Conference (Manning Clark Centre, ANU, Canberra)
15 October	Labour History Symposium The Red Scare Remembered: the 1951 Referendum on the Banning of the Communist Party
3 December	Annual General Meeting

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## **The Red Scare Remembered: the 1951 Referendum on the Banning of the Communist Party**

### *Call for Contributions and Papers*

On 15 October 2011 the BLHA will hold a symposium to commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the referendum on banning the Communist Party of Australia. The Association invites submissions for papers and other contributions to this event. While proposals for scholarly papers are encouraged, the organisers also welcome offers of less formal presentations. We are particularly keen to hear from political activists, trade unionists and others with direct experience of the referendum controversy and the Cold War politics of the era.

Please send proposals and suggestions to Jeff Rickertt at [jrickertt@optusnet.com.au](mailto:jrickertt@optusnet.com.au) or write to Brisbane Labour History Association, PO Box 5299, West End Qld 4101.

DEADLINE for submissions: 1 July 2011.

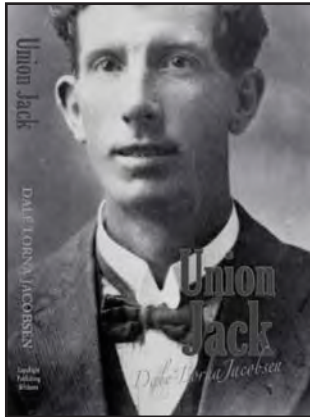
## Wanted: Stories of Working Life

With the inclusion in this issue of Ted Riethmuller's evocative account of joining the workforce, *The Queensland Journal of Labour History* kicks off a series of articles and interviews featuring stories of work, unionism and politics from a rank-and-file perspective. Workers, whether employed, unemployed or retired, are encouraged to share their experiences, either in writing or by agreeing to be interviewed. To contribute or find out more, contact Jeff Rickertt at [jrickertt@optusnet.com.au](mailto:jrickertt@optusnet.com.au) or write to Brisbane Labour History Association, PO Box 5299, West End Qld 4101.

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## Book launch

*Union Jack* by Dale Lorna Jacobsen (co-editor of this journal) will be released



around May this year by CopyRight Publishing, Brisbane. This political novel is set in Queensland in the 1920s. Jack O'Leary and his union — the Australian Railways Union (forerunner of the RTBU) — had, by remaining true to their ideology, played a major role in bringing corrupt politicians to account, an action that deeply affected Jack's life and his family. Jack O'Leary was Dale's grandfather.

Dale's paper, 'The ALP and the ARU: How Personal Vendettas can Bring down a Government', appeared in the March 2006 edition of *The Queensland Journal of Labour History*. She also presented a paper at the BLHA *Labour in Politics* symposium last October entitled 'Premier McCormack versus the ARU: Parliamentary Labor Put to the Test'. This novel is based on these events. There is a scheduled book launch by BLHA for June.

Orders or enquiries - Dale: ph (07) 5494 4046 or email: [dale@dalelornajacobsen.com](mailto:dale@dalelornajacobsen.com)

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# **The Brisbane Labour History Association**

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

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

## **Editorial Policy**

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

## **Notes for Contributors**

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

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

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



# The Queensland Journal Of Labour History

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