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Front Cover Photo:

Trade Hall staff assemble with those released from jail for breaching the Hanlon Government Anti-picketing Laws in 1948.

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Editorial

Howard Guille

A nation building election – but the wrong nation?

All elections are, in their own way, historic; if only for the ‘what ifs’. Perhaps the most substantial feature of the 2016 Federal Election is that the ALP did relatively poorly in Queensland. The state-wide swing to the ALP in Queensland was 1.1 per cent compared with 2.4 in New South Wales, 3.1 in Tasmania and 3.7 in Western Australia. Only Victoria (0.8 per cent) was lower than Queensland. If this was the most substantial feature, the most remarked is the election of two Senators from Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Party (ONP). They are two of four senators elected for the party across Australia giving it a strong position in the balance of parliamentary power.

The ALP gained two seats in the House of Representatives - Longman with a swing of 7.71 per cent and Herbert with a swing of 6.19 per cent (but a majority of 37). The LNP retained Capricornia, its most marginal seat in Queensland where the swing to the ALP was a miniscule 0.14 per cent. ‘If only’, the ALP had won, the Coalition Government would not have had a

majority in the House; perhaps also, Malcolm Turnbull would not have been Liberal leader and Prime Minister.

There is an echo of 1961, when Jim Killen won Moreton for the Liberals by 130 votes after the distribution of preferences. If one ‘counts’ Morton as the last seat, it gave the Coalition 62 seats in the House to 60 for the ALP and kept Menzies in government. The folk-story is that Killen won on Communist Party voter preferences. 93 second preferences did go from Max Julius¹, the Communist Party candidate to Jim Killen. If these had gone to the ALP, and there had been no other changes, the net change of 186 would have won the seat for the ALP candidate, John Edward O’Donnell. But, this is not the full story since 193 second preferences from Communist Party voters went to the Democratic Labor Party (DLP). Killen won on DLP preferences and at least some of the Communist second preferences going to the DLP would have put Liberals third and Labor fourth. As Andrew Bartlett states *‘the very large percentage of Communist Party preferences which went to the DLP’* is *‘the more remarkable’*.

Menzies may have campaigned against the communists for a

long-time (he did try to make the whole party illegal after all), but being anti-communist was one of the central tenets of the DLP's whole existence.²

Labor's failure to win Capricornia in 2016 also depended on the distribution of preferences. The LNP got 40.1 per cent of first preferences and the ALP 38.1. Both of these were relatively high - for example in Herbert, Labor's first preference vote was 30.5 per cent and the LNP 35.5. The main difference was that the One Nation candidate got 13.5% of first preferences in Herbert but there was no ONP candidate in Capricornia. The ALP received a 1.1 per cent swing on first preferences in both Capricornia and Herbert. However, the LNP had a 7.8 per cent swing against it in Herbert but a small positive swing of 0.5 per cent in Capricornia. With six candidates in each electorate and preferences seemingly scattering every which way, there is a distinctive sense that Labour (just) won Herbert because of the presence of One Nation and, perhaps, did not win Capricornia because of their absence.

A disturbing outcome of the Senate election in Queensland is that the gender balance went backwards from four of twelve to three of twelve. It is not a great outcome.. Queensland elected five LNP Senators (all men), four ALP (one woman, three men), two ONP (one woman, one man) and one Green (a woman). The LNP had

one woman senate candidate (sitting Senator Joanne Lindgren) who was sixth of eight on their ticker. The ALP had three women out of six candidates with Senator Claire Moore in an electable position at third on the ticket. Jane Casey and Cheryl Thompson were fifth and sixth respectively.

The LNP professes to pre-select its candidates on merit and eschews gender quotas. The seven men on their ticket must have superlative talents if they are all better than all but one of the possible women candidates. The 2015 ALP State Conference passed a resolution to have at least 50 per cent women in winnable seats. However, this year's Senate ticket is not affected since the rule cuts in in 2025, Senator Jan McLucas could be replaced by a man and the order of the ticket could put two men first and two women last.

Yet the big news is that Pauline Hanson and Malcolm Roberts have been elected as Senators for Queensland. Some of their views are infamous; Pauline has been professing strong views about Muslims and Malcolm says climate change is a United Nations conspiracy. One Nation received 9.2 per cent of the first preference Senate vote across Queensland as a whole. But it was very much a vote from outside the South East. In the Brisbane electorate, the ONP Senate vote was 1.8 per cent; 2.9 per cent in Moreton; 6.1 per cent in Oxley and 6.3 per cent in Moncrieff (Gold Coast). However the ONP vote

was 13.3 per cent in Herbert, 12.3 per cent in Groom, 15.6 per cent in Capricornia and 17.1 per cent in Hinkler. In all of these electorates, the Green vote in the Senate was around four to five per cent.

History is probably better at understanding economic and structural changes than short-run shifts in voting. Though it is pleasing that the polling booth in Barcaldine showed a 10.7 per cent swing to the ALP even though the final count in Maranoa was between the LNP and ONP with the ALP eliminated.³

At the beginning of Federation, the ALP and the Deakinite Liberals shared the objectives of arbitration based on unions, industrial protection and white Australia. Now there are some curious couplings. The LNP are for market deregulation, free trade, against refugees who come on boats but for short-term visas for overseas workers and for population growth. They are also anti-union. The ALP are for free trade and quite a lot of market; they are against refugees who come on boats and are alright about overseas workers so long as they get award wages. They are for population growth and for unions. One Nation is against free trade and too much market, against refugees and Muslim immigrants; they support unions to ‘*protect them (workers) from unscrupulous employers*’.⁴ The Greens are against free trade and market globalisation, for refugees but against

population growth. They support unions and industry regulation.

It is a curious mix – for example which party (and which part of a party) is heir to which part of the Federation legacy. Furthermore, there are likely to be some odd and intriguing alliances on particular matters. It will not be easy for the ALP or the Greens to evading voting with One Nation on some matters. The Beattie gambit of the 1990’s is not available. Moreover, the ALP (and perhaps unions as well) need to work out what to do in the regional and coastal areas of Queensland where the collapse of the mining and commodity economy is visiting high levels of underemployment on workers and their communities. The Federation trio of arbitration, protection and white were a response to not dissimilar economic conditions.

Themes of nation and divisions occur in some of the articles in this issue. Raymond Evans argues that ‘*There never was a greater tragedy than World War One*’. In a magisterial article (in the best possible sense) he exposes the triteness of the legend of the creation of a nation. Thus, ‘*Instead of a dominant narrative of national unity, a story of incessant struggle, conflict and division continued to grow*’. Jeff Rickertt also writes about the first world war and how the 1917 anti-conscription campaign in Queensland movement ‘*split into a Laborist majority and a revolutionary minority*’. The article is a spin-off from

his superb biography of Ernie Lane, *'The Conscientious Communist'*. This will be reviewed in the next issue of QJLH; however our advice is get it and read it now.

Bob Carnegie, the Queensland Secretary of the MUA gave the 2016 Alex Macdonald lecture and a transcript is published in this issue. Bob challenges the business union model - very graphically in describing how hard it can be even to get into the offices of some unions. He challenges all of us to think about genuinely opening up unions to, of all things, their members.

John McCollow provides a learned and sympathetic reading of Errol O'Neill's plays in the first of two investigations of his work – the second part to be published in March 2017. These plays were also about divisions. As well as particular conflicts between capital and labour, *'they explore conflicts within the labour movement at greater length and in greater depth'*. The plays are about ideas; especially important for *'the labour movement which is the clearing house for far-reaching socially progressive initiatives'*. Bob Carnegie would agree.

Rob Whyte remembers Errol O'Neill. And with Errol's words

You realise you owe a great debt to the legions of real people you have known and dealt with over a lifetime and from whom you

have taken lessons in the simple and honest art of being human.

John McCollow also notes that Errol tried to 'write women back into the history of the labour movement'. This is very germane to the article by Jan Ryall about her mother Norma Nord. This is an important article - part of what Jan and Jocelynn Scutt see as the need to *'recapture the lives of women, lives which have been written out of official history or simply ignored by the pundits'*.

Notes

- 1 Max Julius is also renowned as one of the three people, with Mick Healy and E.C. E. C. Englart to be imprisoned for non-payment of fines during the 1948 Rail Strike. See, among other sources John McGuire, 'Julius, Max Nordau (1916–1963)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/julius-max-nordau-10652/text18929>
- 2 Andrew Bartlett, Sir James Killen: Moreton, Menzies and Mythology, 17 January, 2007 <http://andrewbartlett.com/sir-james-killen-moreton-menzies-and-mythology/>
- 3 In Maroon, the ALP was eliminated before the final count and the final two-party-preferred decision was between the LNP and One Nation.
- 4 <http://www.onenation.com.au/policies/employment>

BLHA

President's Column

Greg Mallory

The Alex Macdonald Lecture was held in early June and was attended by around 70 people. The talk was on the declining militancy in the trade union movement. The speaker was Bob Carneige, current secretary of the Queensland branch of the MUA. Bob has had a long involvement in the trade union movement extending over 30 years. Bob traced back this declining militancy to the 1980s when the Federal Labor Government developed a relationship with the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) which was known as the Accord. This relationship weakened the trade union movement's ability to properly fight for better pay and conditions. The talk by Bob was well received and a lively discussion followed the talk.

It is with great sadness that we received news of the death of one of our most active members, Erroll O'Neill. Erroll was a playwright, actor, director and an active labour historian. He had produced a number of plays including ones on the Shearers Strike of the 1890s, the Brisbane General strike of

1912 (often referred to as the Brisbane Tramway Strike), the Rail Strike of the late 1940s and the SEQEB dispute of the 1980s. Erroll was our resident expert in these areas of Queensland labour history and whenever we would receive a general enquiry from the general public about any of these areas we would always consult Erroll. In 2012 he represented the Association when he spoke at a Labor Party branch meeting and a Socialist Alliance meeting discussing the 1912 General Strike. In this edition of the journal there is an article by John McCollow on Erroll's work as well as an obituary.

The planning of the 2017 National Labour History Conference, of which the BLHA is organising, is progressing well. We have received notification that Ruth Milkman will be one of our keynote speakers. Ruth is Distinguished Professor of Sociology at the City University of New York Graduate Center and Research Director at the Joseph S Murphy Institute for Worker Education and Labor Studies. In 2015 she was elected President of

the American Sociological Association. She has written extensively on labour relations in the US and Japan. The planning committee is currently organising procedures for the acceptance of papers for the conference as well as meeting with unions who we hope will support the conference.

One of our members Jeff Rickert recently launched his book, *The Conscientious Communist* which traces the life of Brisbane socialist Ernie Lane. The launch was well attended and launched by Bob Carneige at the QCU Building. Jeff will be organising a walking tour around Brisbane tracing some of the places where Ernie Lane was active. Further details of the tour will be forthcoming to members as they come to hand.

Also this month BLHA will be participating in a joint event with

Magdas Artz Space and the CFMEU to highlight the struggle of coal miners through music and drama. Included in the function will be an address from one of the CFMEU leaders on the current issues they face around black lung.

In this edition there is a notice from Lyn Trad, Alex Macdonald's daughter, about seeking any interest in someone writing a biography of Alex. A lot of the preliminary work has been done by Cecily Cameron, Alex's former secretary and is located in the Fryer Library.

I would like to finish this column by mentioning our former Secretary and Life member, Ted Riethmuller, who is doing it tough with ill health. The Association would like to wish him well in his current struggle.

What Went Wrong?

Bob Carnegie

It is a huge honour to be here tonight. My talk centres on an issue that's been discussed many times, but not necessarily from a rank-and-file militant staff position, so I think it's one that should be examined once again.

For the last few weeks I've been tied up in a big struggle that we are having up in Hay Point there, where our 22 tug workers are in the process of being replaced by BMA, who is the largest coking coal operator in the world. BMA is owned 50 per cent by BHP the largest mining council in the world, and the other 50 per cent is owned by Mitsubishi Corporation, which is one of the ten largest industrial conglomerates on this planet.

So we're up against the top end of capital there. There's 22 of them, and we've decided as a Union and hopefully as a Movement that we're going to tackle them — tackle them industrially, and then tackle them politically, tackle them socially and we're going to fight them, because sometimes in life — I've told my membership this quite bluntly — that the odds of us winning initially are probably 5%, but it's a fight that has to be fought, and we've got some wonderful people there,

particularly, there's a grouping of some young women there that have been able to get work in a male-dominated industry, and they're just the salt of the working class movement and it would be so irresponsible for us to walk away from it and say, 'Well, you've got to spend hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars fighting for 22 jobs. It doesn't make much financial sense,' but when Trade Unions start speaking about how much they spend on fighting right against wrong, that's when we've really got a problem, and that's one of the reasons we've really got a problem. So we'll keep fighting up there and my promise to Jenna (who is one of the young women there who's just bought a house with her husband, a young boilermaker whose life's been turned upside-down.)

The simple reason is that he had a job in the coal mine, the coal mine finished, and now he's thrown into the lap of labour hire in the manufacturing and mining industry where wages have been cut by 50–60% over the last 12 months. So they're some of the issues we are fighting at the present time.

But it's not all doom and gloom. I just wanted you to know that you always have to fight for right, even though it's not easy. I was just thinking about it because we get tied up so much in the Union Movement with legalities and whatever, and you pay legal bills and whatever and it gives you the shits. Lawyers are not free. Well, these

three men [Bob Reid, Terry Fisher and Craig Buckley — in the audience — BR] have given, fair dinkum, more free legal advice to working class people I know than the entire Bar Association, the entire Caxton Street Legal Service, the whole lot. They've been some of the unknown stalwarts of the Labor Movement. They've done so many wonderful, wonderful things that kept so many union members out of jail and out of all sorts of trouble, that it's absolutely amazing. Really, these three men, I just think they need acknowledgment.

(Acclamation)

Okay. The last thing I'd like to say is to Margaret Ellis's family. Your Dad was an outstanding person. He was a man of great honour and great dignity who did so much for the movement. He was one of the few Trade Union Leaders of his time or any time, that actually understood the great need to develop unity between working class people and the Unions, very much in the same model as a Jack Mundy type leader. It's a real, real big honour to me to be able to speak here tonight.

What's gone wrong, and why hasn't the bleeding in the Trade Union Movement been addressed? This talk tonight is not that of a scholar. I had to leave school 40 years ago to relieve the financial stress on my family at 15. So this talk is part of my own analysing of life's experiences, of a genuine rank-and-file

militant, and I hope at times now of a relatively hard-working, and I hope still militant Trade Union leader.

In my life I've had three great intellectual passions, and the greatest one of all has been a lifelong interest and passion in the US Trade Union Movement, where the strikes have meant bloodshed, where strikes have meant struggles, and some of the great personalities of the entire international working class and Trade Union Movement have come out of that. I remember when I was a young lad of about 13 being at the John Oxley Library and reading about Eugene Victor Debbs and Big Bill Hayward and the stories were like something out of the old West and the battles they had to try to build a union against gun thugs and things.

The other two great interests in my life have been the great struggles between the Wehrmacht and the Red Army, between 1941 and 1945 where by a thread, the forces of evil were defeated by a Red Army that had suffered such losses that, you know, they were almost, and still are, almost unbelievable.

Thirdly, the great other interest of my life has been Stalinism, and I remember being a Stalinist at one stage in my own life, sadly when I was a young guy. One thing that I didn't put in that biography is that in 1980 I spent seven months at the Marxist-Leninist Institute in the Soviet Union. They closed the

Marxist-Leninist Institute down. I don't know whether that was because of a combination of Boris Yeltsin listening to me at a philosophy lecture. I'll give you the hint about my brilliant analysis of dialectics after this lecture, because if you ever hear about it, it's not brilliant. The poor old Philosophy Professor, he just looked at me and he said, "What?" He said, "Do you just not get anything?" You know, he said, "You say something in Australia about your understanding of Philosophy" I said, "Oh, what?" He said, "A drongo." I said, "Oh, thanks very much." And in particular the great terror from 1936 to 1988, and about how a nation can be ruled by fear. The effects that it had on the Australian Trade Union Movement are still profound, in my view.

What went wrong? In 1957, at the time of the great Labor Party split in Queensland, this state had one of the largest trade union densities in the developed western world, approximately 85 per cent. Today, 60 years later, it is less than 15 per cent and it may be just over 10 per cent in the private sphere.

I tried to find out some of the reasons, not only the objective but also the subjective reasons for this massive decline in trade unions and some ideas so that we might have a re-birth. In the Australian Bureau of Statistics data released on 27 October 2015, there was a headline: *Characteristics of Employment Australia, August 2014*.

The following data can be extracted: The proportion of employees who are Trade Union members in their main job fell to 15 per cent down to 17% in August 2013, so there was an effective two percentage point decline in trade union membership during the year.

The more historic account of 1982, some 53 per cent of employees were in their main job trade union members, and in 1992 it was some 40 per cent of eligible employees, so today it's gone down to 15 per cent. Already, according to the OECD figures, the Australian Trade Union density figures had gone from 25.4 per cent in 1999 to 15.5 per cent today. Why is it so severe in Australia, and what can we learn from it?

It can't just be what many of the union leaderships believe, that it is just a neo-Liberal sop. If it was, the same level of decline would be seen across the whole of the OECD, but it simply isn't.

David Peetz, in a book called, *Unions in a Contrary World*, argues that there are four areas of concern. One is structural, casualisation, industries growing from very low traditional densities, growth in certain self-employment areas, tradies, franchises and all that, according to Peetz, accounts for about 50 per cent of the loss. Institutional factors, which he calls things such as legislative changes, and he uses New Zealand as a very powerful example of that. The New Zealand experiment

when they put in the Employment Contracts Act in 1991, saw the elimination of unions in lots of areas. The Employment Contracts Act was put in by a Conservative Government, but prior to that they had “Rogernomics” under a Labour Government, under their Finance Minister. He was the Labour Minister that started it all off.

Peetz also talks about aggressive employer strategies and the inability of Unions to respond. The Unions’ inability to respond to the great attacks has been one of the historic problems. I think that we’ve really got a huge problem. I disagree with Peetz when he talks about the effects of the Prices and Incomes policies of the government, that it gave the Australian Trade Union Movement a certain amount of time, and it sort of gave us the ability to respond to some of the attacks that were happening elsewhere in the world so they weren’t so severe here. To me, going through that period of time, I have to say that my account of things is completely different. What I saw and realised little bit later on — it took me a few years to actually understand this — is that what I saw was a slow strangulation of a once-militant Union Movement in this country. The genius of Hawke and Kelty is not so much in the development of a Price and Income Accord — they’ve been done in other countries of the world. In my opinion, their genius was in the way they co-opted the Left, the way that

the CPA dominated influence in the Metal Workers Union. The Communist leadership was turned into a prime mover of what one could call the disciplining of the Australian Left and the Australian Trade Union Movement.

The SPA which influenced the Building Workers Industrial Union, was led by Casey McDonald and Sharkey, was another prime example of what happened. So you had the two great Lefts in Australia, the CPA and the SPA — one was a Moscow line, the other one was Euro-Communist, but it’s very interesting to see how a section of the SPA dominated, and also the CPA dominated the two major left unions in Australia. And they both came to a common conclusion that jumping in bed with a Labor Government was going to somehow sort out all the problems that the working class faced in this country. It was a huge mistake. The wider history I think has proven that.

What I have noticed through this period was the trade union response to employer attacks became much more muted. And in this particular area if I could zero in on a specific year, it would be 1985.

In 1985 not just because I was involved in a major industrial dispute at that time as a support, but it had a critical turn to it. In 1985, four things happened in the Australian trade union movement. They are all negative. One,

the first one, is Mudginberri and the Meatworks Union where through the help of the Westpac Bank Corporation, the almost ironing out of existence of the Meatworkers Union where some of the meetings in the end were up for over \$5million in fines and damages, simply because of the struggles to try to do fundamental trade union principles. The response from the working class and the Australian trade union movement and its leadership was muted at best. We then get down to the SEQEB dispute, one of the biggest disputes that any of us, all of us here, have been involved in, in the last 30 years in this country, a dispute that was over fundamental, basic principles than an industry shouldn't be sub-contracted out, that an industry deserved to have workers on union rates of pay being the driving force in that industry.

Because of that, 1007 linesmen were sacked in February 1985, and a massive dispute arose from that. Once again, we saw a very piecemeal effort in trying to resolve that dispute, some of it treacherous, some of it totally unprincipled, but also we saw wonderful things, because many of us here got involved in picket-lines back in 1985. There wouldn't have been too much need for us to be so involved in picket-lines if we had shut down the country for a day, it wouldn't have needed much. Our appeals to the Trade Union leadership, including the wonderful appeals that Bernie Neville (who's here in the audience — stand

up, Bernie, please). Bernie Neville led the rank-and-file movement of SEQEB workers and saw much of the treachery first-hand.

And so, after seven months of torturous and difficult, hard struggle, eventually the dispute was sort of run down. It never really to my way of thinking, never really was called off, but in the end 1007 men, working people, had lost their economic livelihood, 1007 families were thrown onto the scrapheap and it took the ETU almost a generation to re-build.

The third one is an area I don't think has been examined enough in Australia, and that has been the de-unionisation of the Pilbara. When I was a young man, I was up in the Pilbara, and the Pilbara was a hard, tough environment, long distances between towns, just a hard, difficult place to earn a living. But the unions were very strong and very tough, and they extracted decent wages out of rapacious multi-nationals such as BHP and CRA Australia, who became Rio Tinto. Around the '85 period, Rio Tinto decided to pick a blue, which they did, and they used that blue then to go on like the Mormons. They were like the Mormon Church on steroids, going round and knocking on peoples' door and forcing contracts down their throats.

The Pilbara went from a place where there was almost 100 per cent union density within a couple of years to

10 per cent, and today it's non-union paradise. I was up there only recently. Apart from the waterfront and a few little spots, it's just completely non-union, and it's had an enormous effect — you know, you can talk about your miners earning a hundred grand a year, but fair dinkum, you'd want a hundred grand a year just to look at the joint.

What happens is that there's no collectivity, everybody has been atomised and turned into individuals. Then of course, in 1985 I think the worst of the process began, and that was the de-registration and proceedings started against the Builders' Labourers Federation and don't let anyone ever think that that wasn't a planned, sustained attack by sections of trade union leaderships and the Labor Government. I actually stayed as a young man for a weekend course in Marxism-Leninism, at a senior BWU Official's place down on the Central Coast of New South Wales, and just over a steak, having a hamburger, talking about what was going to happen to the BLF and it was not going to be a slaughter-house as far as they were concerned. What did they destroy? Well, in fact what they did was, it was like the scenario would be, but the sword that they thrust through the heart of the BLF, eventually they actually thrust into themselves, and we to some extent today we still haven't recovered in the labour movement from those de-registration proceedings. That I believe is by far the most sinister thing that's

happened under the whole Prices and Income Accord.

I'm spending a lot of time on this, you know, because it's a process that I think this lays down the whole basis and the whole foundations for what came after. The other thing that Prices and Income Accord did, was to achieve the co-option of certain people in trade unions into the capitalist system. My argument is fundamentally this: that large sections of the trade union movement's leadership was co-opted into the system where they were never were before. Okay? Trade union officials prior to the Prices and Income Accord, didn't tend to sit on any boards. They didn't, but after the Prices and Income Accord and things such as so-called universal superannuation, they started sitting on industry super boards.

Self-proclaimed communists and socialists, started sitting down with employers, and even more so than that, they started meeting with funds managers, the so-called masters of the universe. In Finland, Iceland, Denmark, Norway and Sweden, trade union density is an average of around 70 per cent. In Iceland it's 85/90, but they're different countries, and this is something you don't often want to talk about, on the Left I believe. They're homogenous cultures. People in Sweden are Swedes. People in Norway are Norwegian. Plus the trade unions a long time even before the Depression years decided that it would be very

98 Days on the Hutchison Picket



MUA members and supporters during 2015 waterfront dispute. Photo courtesy of MUA

smart to get involved in the paying of social benefits, so they negotiated with long-term social democratic governments, that the Unions be an essential party in the payment of such things as unemployment benefits. Consequently, it's very, very difficult to get rid of the trade union in the Scandinavian Countries, because it's such an integrated and integral part, not just of your life, but also of the whole society. So it's much different. I think we're much more close to, say, Great Britain and the United States, but also I did a speaking tour of Britain last year, and a couple of things really impressed me about the British trade union movement, in spite of all the problems that they have faced over the last 30 to 35 years.

One is most of the big unions have annual conferences, I think that's a great thing. Huge conferences. Some of it is somewhat bureaucratic, but every Union's big conference has fringe groups on the side, so although you mightn't be able to speak it at the

main conference, your organisation or the Party that you're a member of, or your Socialist grouping, or whatever, you'd have fringe events at all these conferences, and it was a wonderful expression, I think, of the democratic culture within their organisation. They've allowed these things to happen, and we don't seem to do that a great deal here in Australia.

Also in Great Britain, in comparing that to Australia, I think in Australia the real problem that's happened is that our Fair Work Commission (you know, the mis-named Fair Work Commission) is that this system of labour courts in Australia has turned everything terribly legalistic about how you put on a blue, how do you get on to a worksite, how do you do everything. It's a legal nightmare. People talk about the legal problems that the British Unions face. It's not the same.

A British Union's big problem is when they might call a strike and then it's challenged in the High Court and the

ballots are examined, whatever, but fundamentally a British Union has a lot more freedom in the basic workplace than we do in Australia.

On the other hand, you have the United States, where one great thing I think in the States is that if you get 50 plus 1 per cent, in the 27 of the 50 States, that means that you get 100 per cent Union coverage. In the other 23 right to work states you have union density rates down to like in Texas, where it's less than 2 per cent, South Carolina is 2.9 per cent. In our sort of country union density does have a definite reflection on what our standard of living is eventually going to be. If you have poor union density level in a developed industrial or post-industrial economy then you're going to see a collapse in living standards.

Now some thoughts on how can we fix these problems up. I think Trade Unions must always be fundamentally oppositional. We have to be oppositionists. We must be the oppositional force in Australian society, and we must never allow again for the co-option of our movement into the arms of Government, or employers, or any private organisations like that. No more Prices and Income Accords. If we really have a growth problem, we'll all sit down together and we'll work it out. No. We can work with the Government in certain areas, that's good, but let's always have our standards very clear, because once they put their arms

around you, once they embrace you, once they place you on the Boards, the saddest part is that most people from the trade union movement — not all, but most — will start trying to ape what you call their social betters. They do. I've seen it all my life.

It's embarrassing at times, but it's also a tragedy for our movement. I think trade unions must become a lot leaner in the way that they are run, and that's a reflection of my own organisation where our national office has become very heavily bureaucratised. I've seen it again in other organisations. For example, 15 years ago we might have had a million extra members in absolute terms in Australian trade unions, but there is now probably 25–30 per cent more union officials running around the place.

One of the reasons is that EBAs have been a nightmare. Any union official or delegate that's here will tell you, it's an absolute nightmare to try and — I just finished one, EBA that took eight months to run. My mate Graham here worked for Kew for Chris Corrigan's Kew, this bloke should get a Victoria Cross he's been there 20 years. He was in the last round of talks with Kew and it took two years. Why would it take two years to run an EBA. My thinking is that if you can't do it after six weeks, you might as well put in for protected action and go and have the blue.

We really need to be lean. We need to be able to delegate our responsibilities to delegates. I think trade unions have to be far less bureaucratic in their dealings with their members, potential members, and with the public.

I went to the Miners Union building yesterday, some of my great and dearest comrades in coal-mining, wonderful people, some wonderful leadership, great people. You go to the building, and fair dinkum, you'd have more chance of getting into the Australian Mint than getting into the Miners Union building. You have to press a button. You have to wait before that button opens the door and when the door opens, you go up the stairs, and then you have to press another button. Make it a bit harder to get into a union office — union offices have to be open. Okay? They have to be. They have to be welcoming places.

What we're doing indirectly is that we're just putting barriers in front of what we're going to become, or what we're supposed to be about. I think there has to be a radical re-development and re-engagement in industry though the development of the shop stewards movement in this country that's not particularly run by union officials. We need some type of shop stewards movement that can come across in all different types of industry.

One of the things I hope to develop if our merger's successful with the

CFMEU, where we'll have five or six different lots of groupings where we can start developing strong shop stewards culture across industry, so that if you start cross-pollinating ideas and start getting people really keen about each other's problems, that it's not just your own industry that's the problem.

I think all Unions really have to have monthly meetings open to all members. The CFMEU General Construction Division, you know, a wonderful union, great, fighting organisation, fantastic, but if you're a Building Labourer who's just been amalgamated with the CFMEU, General Construction Division, you'd probably think something is odd. The BLF, despite all its difficulties and it's, you know, a bit rough around the edges at times but the BLF used to have monthly general meetings, and at that monthly general meeting under the rules of the BLF, the secretary of the Union could be fired by the monthly meeting, and in fact that's how John Cummings in the end got rid of Norman Gallagher. He did it from the floor of a meeting in Melbourne of the BLF. So we need to do those things, the sort of basic things that I think really sort of democratise us.

This place here used to have monthly meetings. Then they went to quarterly meetings. I don't know whether they have meetings — I think only the Executive meets now, so once upon a

time, and in fact when I was a younger man — and Alan Muir, he would certainly remember — is that we used to have fortnightly meetings in the Trades Hall. Remember?

And they were fair dinkum. People would get up, you'd have really powerful debate, different sides. It was fantastic. I think the other thing we have to do on the legislative front is really fight for genuine legislation to make organising a less torturous business than it is, and that requires institutional reform. We have to have it, we have to demand that a Labor Government looks at things like anti-scab legislation, like they actually have in Canada. Another thing we need is an unfettered right of entry to any workplace. The third is you have a bargaining agent or an anti-freeloading legislation, because the part that gives me the greatest shits of all is you organise and organise and organise. You get EBAs up, you get improvements in conditions, and then dozens don't join the Union.

The last thing that I want to speak about goes to that idea about becoming leaner. Trade unions in Australia have to really look on the fact that in Britain the average price of union dues is round about four quid a week — okay — about eight bucks. At our National Conference in February, I was the only official who spoke against it, the union dues at the National Conference. The average union dues the wharfie's going to pay from July 2017 will be \$52

a week, \$208 a month. The average wharfie will also in the terminals pay \$5 a week into their own hardship fund, and they also pay another \$4 a week to the State Branch. That will put their dues up to about \$61 or \$62 a week. They're going to find some wharfies will start baulking over it — not many, but some will start baulking, but it starts the rot. It's got out of hand. Organisations really have to start saying, 'Well, look, you can't just keep increasing and increasing.' This isn't just an MUA thing. Unions are supposed to be social movements. We didn't become Union leaders just to dress nicely. We really have to examine those issues and really make sure that joining the union has to be a really easy process. It shouldn't be a difficult process. It shouldn't be a torturous process. You shouldn't have to wait out in the rain or something, waiting for somebody to buzz you in. It should be simple. It should be easy. It should be friendly, so that people really think that the union is an absolute part of their lives, not just something that they have to pay for because all their workmates pay it, so I'll pay it, because that, doesn't create the sort of union movement we want, one with a militant fighting spirit.

Note: This paper is a transcription of Bob Carnegie's address to the BLHA for the 2016 Alex Macdonald Lecture.

Unity or Division? The Queensland Home- front in World War One

Raymond Evans

From an address to a Qld State Library Symposium “On the Home Front” in May 2016.

I have posed the title to this talk as an either/or question as if the jury were still very much out on the matter — but, as I hope you will see, this is not really the case — for the plethora of historical research that has been undertaken on the Australian home-front over the last 40 years has more or less produced a pretty incontrovertible verdict on the subject.

This year, 2016 marks one hundred years since Australian soldiers went into battle on the Western Front and the terrible carnage caused by such events as the Battle of Fromelles, where Australians lost more casualties in several hours than at any other time in the nation’s military history — and the subsequent horrific Somme Campaign where almost another 30 000 were sacrificed. Less portentously, it also marks thirty years since the publication of a book of mine, *Loyalty and Disloyalty. Social Conflict on the Queensland Homefront*, that deals with the impact on the antipodean home-place of a terrible, distant war. The following year, a second work entitled *The Red Flag Riots. A Study of Intolerance* also appeared from my pen,

dealing in far more depth with the latter stages of the war, and culminating in that strange, disheveled year of 1919, when so much division and violence occurred in Australia — particularly in Queensland.

Loyalty and Disloyalty was based on a doctorate I had worked on during the 1970’s, in a decade when the way Australian social historians interpreted the home-front experience began undergoing radical change. When I put the finishing touches to the resultant book for Allen and Unwin in the 1980’s, I dedicated it to my paternal Welsh grandfather, Handel Evans, whom I described as a stretcher-bearer on the Western Front. That was all I knew at the time. It was not for many years that I learned that he had been a pacifist conscientious objector, forced to the Front in an ambulance brigade. Here he had been wounded and gassed and carried shrapnel in his body for the rest of his life. But the news that brought me up with the biggest start was that he had become this casualty at the notorious, afore-mentioned Battle of Fromelles, where 5,533 Australians of the 5th Division had rapidly fallen, some 2,000 of whom were killed. My Welsh pacifist grand-dad had no doubt been helping wounded, dying and terrified young Australian men when he too went down. So this Great War, so distant now in time, can still deliver its surprises. It can still pack quite a punch — at times directly to the heart.

The Australian home-front probably holds as many surprises for the uninitiated as the warfront does. For this war was without precedent in its impact, its intensity, its global scope and its dreadful novelty. And it is so immense, it is always difficult to get one's head around. As the historian, Bill Gammage puts it:

There never was a greater tragedy than World War One. It engulfed an age and conditioned the times that followed. It contaminated every ideal for which it was waged; it threw up waste and horror worse than all the evils it sought to avert ...

So all the war-involved nations, we could say, underwent a process of dramatic social change domestically via this experience of massive and traumatic ordeal. How did a small, distant and new nation of just under five million people deal with this onslaught?

We know the casualty rates were staggering. Around 63,000 Australians killed out of approximately 330,000 who actually saw combat. Around 156 000 were wounded, often horrifically; and there were prisoners of war, non-combat deaths and an enormous number of war-induced illnesses, including a shocking 50,000 cases of venereal disease. When the entire loss is totalled, it comes to an amazing 616,606 casualties — for certain men suffered several inflictions. Let me run

that past you again: Out of the 417,000 who enlisted and the 330,000 who fought, there were 616,606 casualties. How does a nation deal with this monstrosity, inflicted largely upon its young, male population, without entirely losing its mind?

A good argument can be made that Australia suffered more from the imposition of war censorship and propaganda than most other places, for combat material that had already been censored by the British War Office was re-censored when it reached Australia. The British War Propaganda machine was augmented once more by official, press and film propaganda in Australia itself. Every effort was made to stop the Australian public learning what was actually going on. There were thus really two different wars to contend with — the paper war of suppressions, distortions and lies being fed to those back home and the real war of terror, suffering and stalemate being experienced by the troops over there. The British Prime Minister, Lloyd George famously remarked during the war that if the people actually knew the truth of what was happening, the conflict would stop tomorrow. Australian non-combatants only learned circuitously and partially of that truth from the mounting casualty lists that continued “with ghastly regularity for three and one half years” (Robson), the occasional graphic letters smuggled home that had somehow avoided the military censors and the

often appalling condition of returned veterans with severe physical wounds and shell-shock. The public had painfully to put two and two together over time in the face of press accounts that usually attempted to spread the exactly opposite story. For instance, after the Battle Of Fromelles on 19 July 1916, where, as we have seen, more than 5,500 fell in several hours, all the Australian public learned from the dispatch of War Correspondent, CEW Bean in their daily newspapers was that the Australians broke into the German trenches, stayed there awhile and then came away, bringing with them 140 prisoners “with a loss that was slight”—a bit of a stroll in the park really! Nevertheless the growing realisation that what was being told was not the same as what was actually happening contributed substantially to the plummeting enlistment figures from 1916 and a definite, expanding anti-war mood in Australia in the war’s latter stages.

When historians began writing about the Australian home-front experience in the 1930’s, they propounded a national unity thesis predominately, tying this neatly in with the highly popular claim that the Anzac/Gallipoli experience had somehow created the Australian nation. This is not particularly surprising, for not only had the idea of home-front unity become the dominant socio-cultural motif of the time but also the historians who initially wrote about this home-front had all been

intimately caught up in the war effort and a thoroughly Empire loyalist approach to war service themselves. I am speaking here of writers such as the war correspondent turned historian, CEW Bean, the former journalist and journeyman historian, Ernest Scott who hated anti-conscriptionists so much he even refused to have a photo of the Catholic Prelate, Daniel Mannix in his volume; and Sir John Gellibrand, the former Major General, active at Gallipoli and the Western Front, and later Tasmanian Nationalist politician, who emphasised the ‘national welding together’ that the war experience had brought. Both Bean’s and Canberra’s influence played an important role in moulding and censoring the writing of Scott’s well-known official home-front history of the Great War. All were concerned that old animosities from the war years not be stirred up in the account — ‘steer clear of rocks,’ Bean warned Scott — and that wartime politicians and senior public servants be allowed to bathe in the historical limelight — which of course they eventually and avidly did. The role of ordinary Australians was considerably abstruded from this top-down kind of analysis. In short, the study proceeded upon the notion that the home-front story must be exclusively told as one of ‘remarkable achievement’; just like Bean’s war-front story in his several other volumes of the official account had emphasized the ‘remarkable achievements’ of the ANZAC troops.

This interpretive paradigm of national strength, unity, resolve and propriety remained dominant right up into the 1970's in academic circles — and publicly it probably still remains the favoured consensual viewpoint today. I began thinking about investigating this home-front story in the late 1960's after reading a social history of Britain during the war called *The Deluge* (1965) by Arthur Marwick that argued that the War, however terrible, had brought about positive and lasting social effects. I wondered how well this thesis could be applied to Australia or more specifically to Queensland. The more empirical research I undertook from contemporary primary sources, however, the more convinced I became that Marwick's model, however appropriate to Britain, simply did not accord with the local scene. Contrary to Marwick's conclusions for the UK, Australia had experienced the war much more as a loss rather than a gain; high participation levels had not smoothly led on to social rewards for the participants; the challenge of war had not arguably improved the adaptability and fairness of Australia's democratic institutions; and the colossal emotional and psychological experience of the war on the general population had tended to create trauma rather than stoicism and adaptability. This country's war involvement was a waste rather than an advantage.

As I read the official documents in the State Archives, the contemporary

newspapers and the manuscripts in the Oxley and Fryer libraries as well as in many other repositories around the world, instead of a dominant narrative of national unity, a story of incessant struggle, conflict and division continued to grow. Such divisions were not ephemeral — they inundated the fundamental industrial and class relations of the society; they further deteriorated already parlous ethnic and racial relations; they intensified political conflict at State and Federal levels; they created fundamental rifts about war prosecution and the call for peace; and of course introduced the enormously dis-uniting issue of military conscription, entirely dominating the mid-war years. One found little or no emphasis on this in the nationalist accounts of the Empire Loyalist historians — the issues simply were not raised there even though the available data was seemingly saturated with them.

My research as a young post-graduate scholar, working on a PhD thesis during the 1970's, made me feel both excited and alarmed. Excited because what I was uncovering seemed to be turning Australia's national birth and unity paradigm on its head — the evidence showed that the war experience was not uniting the nation; rather it was actually doing the opposite – i.e. fragmenting it — but also alarmed because of my utter isolation as a scholar in reaching such a conclusion: Why was I seemingly alone in beginning to see all this? Why

were no other historians arriving at similar findings? Was I perhaps getting it all utterly wrong?

Then out of the blue in 1975 there appeared a book written by someone I had never heard of — Marilyn Lake — and entitled *A Divided Society. Tasmania during World War One*. Examining another State at close quarters as I was doing, it came to similar conclusions about the War's enervative local impact. Lake concluded:

The effect of the impact of war was not a 'welding together' but a disintegration, a fragmentation of a community ... Men did not draw nearer to one another, but rather stood further apart. Class was set against class, creed against creed, district against district, soldier against civilian ...

The Labour historian, Ian Turner also suggested around this time:

... perhaps the most immediate impact of the war on Australian society was in the divisions it fomented; capital against labour, government against the unions, ex-servicemen against civilians, the war generation against their children, the traditional modes of behaviour against the new ...

Even by mid-1915 or so, Turner wrote in 1974, "there was a simmer of

discontent below the surface that was soon to boil." The Queensland material I was independently uncovering bore all this out — especially from 1915 into the post-war era — maybe even as late as 1922 — this was a period of great civil disturbance — a bitter, violent and disillusioning time, with industrial, sectarian, ethnic, racial and ex-combatant versus non-combatant opposition at a height.

Other State-based studies then began appearing, continuing to support a fragmentation analysis. Dan Coward's doctoral work at ANU in 1974, "The Impacts of War on New South Wales 1914–1917" argued that conflicting interests and divisions were apparent even from War's outbreak, although masked by censorship and suppression, and continued to mount. He found so much evidence of ongoing division, especially in relation to class, that his huge thesis could not even cover the entire war period. Then Bobbie Oliver's study, *War and Peace in Western Australia. The Social and Political Impact of the Great War 1914–1926*, completed in 1990 and published in 1995, blew apart the warfront consensus model for that State; only to be followed by Judith Smart's doctoral study of Melbourne during the war years, 'A Divided National Capital', arguing that polarisation there occurred "over the war itself, over civil liberties, over the economy and over a plethora of social and moral issues". Smart charts in great

detail: “a period of violence and bitter recrimination that lasted from 1915 through the rest of the war years and beyond. Class lines hardened and were increasingly inflected by gender and sectarian divisions.” Melbourne at the time had close to the same population as the whole of Queensland.

So all of the States, apart from South Australia, have now been explored by home-front histories that each independently arrive at roughly the same conclusion: The war experience was not a cementing one for the Australian nation; rather it was more like an uncontrolled demolition. National studies by Michael McKernan and Joan Beaumont reach similar interpretive destinations. Beaumont in particular has produced a monumental account that intricately inter-knits the war-front with the home-front for the first time. Her title, *Broken Nation. Australians in the Great War* says it all — not a created nation, not a strengthened nation, not an enlivened nation — but a broken nation. Using much new data, she presents the home-front as undergoing a prolonged and intense crisis of adaptation to the war. The terrible, and, today, almost unimaginable war-front losses changed the demographics of Australian society. The negative economic effects of war involvement — recession, inflation, trade dislocation, shortages, frozen wages, unemployment, declining buying power etc — impacted with severe material effects on the people.

A wartime census into the distribution of wealth disclosed that the top 5% held two-thirds of all the resources. In Queensland, over 70% of the population had only 8% of the total wealth to share unevenly amongst themselves. No wonder there was so much working class discontent!

The middle class reacted to this challenge by creating vigilante mobilisations that were not slow to resort to extreme violence, often with the covert support of the Federal Government. There had never been so much street rioting evident in Australian society, first against pacifists and so-called ‘enemy aliens’ and then against anti-conscriptionists, trade unionists and Bolsheviks — and as Beaumont writes, such loyalist elements remained mobilised against the so-called ‘threat of the left’ well into the 1920’s and 1930’s. The proto-fascist right-wing armies that were such a feature of the interwar years in Australia saw their post-war beginnings in Queensland during the violent explosions that marked the period known as ‘The Red Flag Riots’.

And, to quote Beaumont further:

Added to this was the less quantifiable embittering of public life. No community can wage battles as polarising as the conscription debates of 1916 and 1917 without carrying scars. Postwar Australia remained divided for years

into the camps that the war had spawned: a broken nation in which the volunteer was pitted against the 'shirker'; the conscriptionist against the anti-conscriptionist; and, though sectarianism was not created by the war, the Catholic against the Protestant. ... The war had also given free rein to a xenophobia and insularity that continued beyond the peace ...

Robert Bollard's study, *In the Shadow of Gallipoli. The hidden history of Australia in World War One* that appeared at the same time as Beaumont's monumental study is not so ambitious in scope — though it still packs quite an interpretive punch. Bollard argues that preoccupation with the war-front has been used to hide the many machinations of a quite contradictory home-front where barely tolerable socio-economic conditions produced two enormous crests of industrial strike activity — the almost insurrectionary General Strike of 1917 that engulfed New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland and involved over 100 000 workers who were often determinedly moving even beyond the constraints of their trade union leaders; and the biggest strike explosion in Australian history that erupted in 1919, when there were almost 4 200 man-days lost per 1 000 workers. He also draws attention to the point that, as the casualties mounted in 1915 and 1916,

many Australians began to ask why they were dying. The patriotic consensus of 1914 rapidly dissolved and by the war's end it was, arguably, as unpopular as the Vietnam conflict would be by the early 1970's. That quote in particular caught my eye because I had started to think about and research the Queensland home-front and its travails at the same time as I had myself, as a young man, been involved in the anti-Vietnam struggle. Perhaps it was that involvement that had alerted me to the spores of discontent here during World War One and to the discovery of a social order falling conspicuously into disorder — riven by class and ethnic tensions and burgeoning public violence. Looking at Queensland in 1914–1920, at least, I think it is still possible to suggest that it is the prototype example of disturbance during this time. It is a hard one to call, but it had the largest number of Germans, Irish Catholics, Russians and Southern Europeans — indeed the largest numbers of non-British, including Aborigines, in Australia. The predisposition towards ethnic disturbance was locked into both the demography and the racial culture of the place. It also had the most dramatic traditions of industrial action, stretching back to the Great Shearers' strikes of the 1890's, the enormous sugar strike of 1911 and the unprecedented Brisbane General Strike of 1912. There was in its class history a predisposition to resistance and mayhem. It was also, under the

progressive Ryan Labor Government, the only State that stood out against military conscription — and its society in both referenda followed suit. Thus by war's end, it was being depicted by infuriated loyalist writers as the most “anti-British, anti-Imperial, pro-Irish republic, pro-Hun and pro-Bolshevik” place in Australia — if not the Empire. So, as a result, if I may close with this quote from *Loyalty and Disloyalty* itself:

Anti-radical, anti-alien campaigns were used by right-wing forces in Queensland to crudely dramatise the virtues of loyalty and the perils of disloyalty before a mass audience. In this amplification, the conservative press took a central part, inciting widespread panic and channeling it against key left-wing targets and ethnic scapegoats. The violence and agitation engendered at various times in centres such as Brisbane, Townsville, Hughenden, Ayr, Dalby, Charters Towers, Kingaroy, Charleville, Toowoomba, Maryborough, Bundaberg, Warwick, Rockhampton, Proserpine and other towns clearly illustrate the point that in this era ‘power rested less on consent and more on force than it had done before or was to do later. Strikes and lockouts repeatedly turned into riots;

violence against unionists was widespread and several times para-military organisations were formed against the Left’ ... The annual sanctification of the ANZAC legend kept nationalism ensconced within boundaries of military and Imperial sacrifice. Any national flirtations with republicanism or socialism were debarred. Racism too had been enhanced by the war experience and, as ethnic mistrust was enlivened, racial and ethnic fragmentation and internal conflict among Queensland workers persisted.

Thus, in my estimation, division trumps unity in Queensland in this time on virtually all levels — political, cultural, economic, social and ideological — as indeed it does in all other parts of Australia. Queensland limped out of World War One like a badly wounded Digger. It was figuratively covered in many lesions and deep lacerations. It had experienced a national drubbing rather than a national ‘birth’. The ANZAC legend would eventually be applied like a tourniquet to staunch these badly suppurating wounds. It was not so much a place that, through war sacrifice, had suddenly found its national ‘meaning’. Rather, it was a highly polarised society — an aggrieved and rancorous place, nursing the heartbreak and trauma of its ‘glorious dead’.

Just Scratching the Surface: A Snapshot of Norma Nord

Jan Ryall

The preamble of my Masters Exegesis states: “My Mother and her friends, the women familiar to me as a child were growing old. I was a witness to their youth. They were once part of a vanguard community of leftwing warriors for multi-faceted reform, mostly hard won. Via their resilience and faith in the power of community, I grew up immersed in opportunity and choice and surrounded by powerful female role models.”

The contributing factor to the lack of a comprehensive written history of Queensland post war activist women may be the commonplace trivializing of the role played by women in labour movements. Is their role less important?

The women of my childhood certainly did not think so. They include Nancy Wills, Janet Henderson, Stella Nord, Norma Chalmers, Win and Vi Buzacott, Jean Leary, Eva Robinson, Alice Hughes, Connie Healy, Clarice Brown, Kath Thomas, Eva Bacon and of course my Mother, Norma Nord, formerly Norma Ryall.

As my mother and I struggled together against her creeping dementia, I

recorded to camera the life stories of many socialist women including Norma. If it was too late for some, I interviewed their daughters, the friends of my childhood. We ‘the kiddies’ lived through the cold war and felt the slings and arrows of vilification. As a result, with few exceptions, the children of socialist parents associate their childhood with stigma and trauma while at the same time recognizing the enormous contribution they made.

So it was with a surge of joy that I read Deborah Jordan’s article in the Brisbane Labour History journal on the activism of Eva Bacon and the writer’s observation that “let us not lose sight of her, but also make sure other significant Queensland women can be seen to be walking alongside.”

It’s not easy to write the life story of one’s Mother and I have been procrastinating since her death almost two years ago.

Norma Alexandra Porter’s story begins in 1915 in Inglewood, Central Victoria. Her father was overseas serving with the Light Horse Brigade in W.W.1 Her earliest memories include playing in a large garden and being forced into a car by a woman in a large black hat. That was the precursor to Norma and her father ‘s life spent for some years on the lam. She remembered being alone in boarding houses or the homes of strangers for lengthy periods of time. She never knew when her father



*Norma during her time running the
Grass Roots centre in West End*

would return. These are very strong influences. I found a mention in Trove of a court case in Perth documenting her father's arrest. It was recorded that Norma's mother Olga Renisson agreed to give him custody. This insecure life on the run with a shell-shocked father was interspersed with visits to Inglewood. She once talked of tennis matches and not fitting in. Judging from papers I have recently found, she was a beneficiary of a sizable estate paying dividends from livestock, farming, and drapery stores. Some years later Norma's childhood settled down. She gained two stepsisters and a much-adored stepmother. She had

endured. In later life Pop would say "I went to jail for you, girl"

Norma often said that little recognition has been given to the women who also suffered after the war. They had to cope with injured and sick menfolk afflicted with war neurosis. She should know.

The newly blended family settled in Oxley, Brisbane. The farm legacy allowed her to attend Nunn and Triffids, a private business college for women in Brisbane.

Norma followed her sisters into New Theatre. We learn from Connie Healy's book *Defiance* that 1936 saw the formation of Student Theatre in Brisbane, later to become New Theatre. The Communist Party was then a significant cultural force. Norma lived at New Farm. Audrey Johnson wrote in *Bread & Roses* that

There was an unemployed men's hostel in Fortitude Valley on the city's edge and there were some lively minds among the men living there. Socialist books were passed around and those who were interested could meet in the Botanical Gardens to discuss them. ¹

The membership of the Communist Party was growing significantly. The 1936 Spanish Civil War was a rallying cry for the left. Australian Communists and anti-fascists used their skills and support to mount a powerful solidarity



*A photo of Norma Ryall attending a peace conference in 1963
– taken by ASIO officers and extracted from her ASIO file.*

campaign. Of the twenty-eight Australians who went to fight in Spain nine were from Queensland. Large sums were raised to aid the Spanish Republicans. The Workers Weekly in 1936 stated, “The Australian workers and all other anti-fascists must force Lyons to render direct aid ... Fascism must be defeated in Spain.”²

Norma bought a copy of the Workers Weekly from a man at the Valley. She read analysis and reporting of international issues. It was a light bulb moment and it prompted her to seek out and join the Communist Party.

The Second World War impacted on the women of Australia. They entered

the workforce in large numbers. For the first time, many earned wages close to male rates. Women replaced male workers in a wide range of industries. Some received 90% of male rates.³

The membership of the Party was increasing. The cover page of my Mother's ASIO File is dated 28.5.52. I learn that she was a Delegate to Youth Carnival for Peace and Friendship. In 1953 the file states "her activities suggest she is a Party Member of high standing and wife of David James RYALL, Waterside Worker and known Communist."

When Robert Menzies sent the Reds under the Beds, Norma was the Communist Party State Treasurer. Because banks were too risky, Norma carried large amounts of money in her handbag to a drop off point at the 'Gabba where Jack Henry would emerge from the shadows. That was how she worked. As well as money, Norma carried lists of names. She writes: "Jack Henry was in hiding at the time and constantly being moved to various safe houses in West End. A chain of underground messengers was set up with someone first receiving the relevant package or correspondence, then passing it on to someone else and then someone gave it to me and so on. We always knew the contact, and mine was a girl who worked in the museum. She would give me the information and I would meet Jack Henry at the Woolloongabba rail yards in the middle

of the night and hand them over to him." She always referred to herself as the Underground Mole.

At her New Farm home Norma buried her books in the backyard. Everyone found novel hiding places for incriminating evidence. Vi Wright hid hers in the chook shed. The toilet was also a popular spot while others simply burnt everything.

Our parents were involved in the very public "Save the Rosenbergs" campaign. At school we kiddies kept our mouths shut about our parents and their politics and when confronted most of us would deny it. We were the Commie Kids. Lee Dunn, a childhood friend said of her parents "I don't think they quite realized what it was like for the kids in that very very strict cold war. I remember when the Rosenbergs were executed in America that was probably the worst time when they were considered to be traitors and so we were by association traitors." Lee's Mother Wyn Buzacott often said: "We'll have socialism in 10 years or near as damn it. Man the Barricades!"⁴

Norma was always a busy mother and her ASIO File confirms it. I remember her tapping away on an old black typewriter on the front verandah of our housing commission home at Moorooka. Encouraged by the Party, she worked broadly in the Peace movement at this time. She and I would visit the Peace rooms in Duncan Street

in the Valley and together we rolled out never ending pages of newsletters and pamphlets on an old and very messy roneo machine.

Women's Committees in support of the men and their Union were also encouraged by the Party. The first auxiliary, later renamed committee, among seamen's wives arose in Sydney during World War II, and they became a general feature after the war. Norma was a member of the Union of Australian Women, which grew out of a groundbreaking International Women's Conference.

While I learn from her ASIO file that she was on the Qld. Peace Council, I also learn via her ASIO File Date of Information 6.4.1956, "In conversation Norma Alexandra RYALL stated that she is the only member of the Communist Party on the new women's committee of the Waterside Workers Federation."

Norma writes in her memoirs:

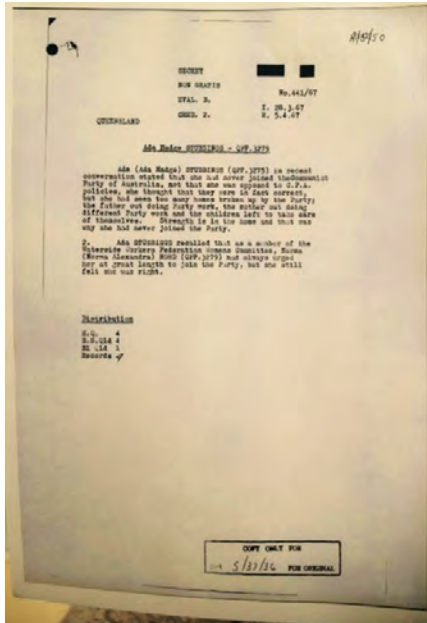
War years in the Communist Party saw women in leading positions on Committees and I met my future husband when I was tutoring Marxist theory. He joined the WWF and my membership of the UAW had put me in touch with The Seamen's Women's committee set up a few years earlier than the WWF Women's Committee. I was not very active in the

UAW although I did set up a local branch. I believed I could work in a more political direction and take specific action in support of my husband and the union. I also believed it would strengthen the UAW and the Women's Movement as it appeared to me the Seamen Women's Committee worked in this way. Norma was the first Secretary of the WWF Women's Committee.

It was a battle to gain representation on the platform with the men during stop work meetings and other occasions. When Big Jim Healy came to Brisbane the public meetings held at the City Hall were standing room only. Norma writes, "No other woman would speak but myself." One of the union officials, Matt Monroe, commented that 'our members have had to be won over to the idea of any committees of women but now our committee and our members' wives are invited to our stop works'⁵.

Norma kept a page of a report from the Brisbane delegation to a 1958 Women's' Conference in Sydney:

We have maintained our attendance at all Stop-Work Meetings of the Union. When it is agreed that we address the menfolk, we write or phone the Union for permission to do so, and with one exception this has always been agreed to. I would say that now it is the accepted



File note from Norma Nord's ASIO file. Reads:

“Ada (Madge) STUBBINGS in recent conversation stated that she had never joined the Communist Party of Australia, not that she was opposed to CPA policies, she thought that they were in fact correct, but she had seen too many homes broken up by the Party; the father out doing party work, the mother out doing different party work and the children left to take care of themselves. Strength is in the home and that was why she had never joined the Party.

2. Ada STUBBINGS recalled that as a member of the Waterside Workers Federation Women's Committee, Norma (Norma Alexandra) NORD had always urged her at great length to join the Party, but she still felt she was right...”

thing that the women sit on the platform and speak if they wish to do so. We all feel that it is absolutely necessary to attend the Stop-Work meetings. It is quite apparent that our regular attendance has won for us our place at such meetings. It is not very easy for our women to attend but we do our best to be certain that our Committee is represented.

Women Were Breaking Out! The women I remember never really did fit the stereotype of a 1950's housewife. An example is my Aunty by marriage Stella Nord who, although on the Central Committee was rarely seen at meetings, preferring to do her party work another way. She worked in the meat works where she saw the power of raising the consciousness of the women on the factory floor. She encouraged them to get involved with their union and take on the men. They shifted the paradigm.

The women I knew were always organizing something: luncheons with guest speakers, the veterans' wives Xmas party, functions with the U.A.W. and other Trade Union women's committees, Hiroshima Day, International Women's Day, Soviet women visitors, peace socials and the cabaret evenings of the union. They took part in the equal pay campaign, speaking at stop work meetings and at the pay shed, and staged deputations

to shipping offices. As well, they collected signatures. They organized the yearly picnics, convened branch meetings and on and on it goes. You need good organizing skills to do all that! The women leading the charge were usually CPA members. Activities were interlocked and support was given across the spectrum of women's committees and broader movements such as Peace Committees, UAW campaigns and attending interstate branch meetings. I recall that most parents were also actively engaged with local issues including the P. & C. Committees.

The kiddies were also well organized. We went to endless fund raising events including film nights, folk music and singing events, the annual party fair, and socials with guest speakers, picnics, May Day floats, Peace rallies and marches. On Saturday mornings Fay Jones took the Junior Players meeting in the U.A.W. rooms in Ann Street, the Wattle Dance Group met at the Trades Hall, Bill Sutton held magic classes and Helen Collings taught art and music. I was a Little Wattle under the tutelage of Janet Henderson and the accompanying piano of Jean Leary.

The women, who came in to their own in Australia after the Second World War, the women familiar to me as a child, had already been emancipated. They were the vanguard of their time. But Norma knew how it was for many Brisbane women. She writes: "Women

were still inside the home and many had never earned their own money."

She married Bert Nord, in about 1970. Theirs was a very solid partnership that endured for the remainder of their lives. Bert did most of the heavy lifting.

In 1974 Norma took advantage of funding on offer by the Whitlam Government during International Women's Year. She recognized the value of women's cottage industry, their inside work, finding their own space and the value of women coming together. A public meeting was called and the local newspapers gave it plenty of publicity. Sixty women attended, eight women volunteered to teach arts and crafts, others wanted discussion groups. They could showcase their work, stand for committee positions, hold exhibitions, sell their craft, roster in the shop, and earn money from their labour. And some preferred yoga classes and consciousness raising groups.

From a small space at Galloway's Hill the space moved to larger premises at Stanley Street in the Gabba and in August 1988 found a permanent home with predominantly a craft focus in the Greenslopes Shopping Mall.

Norma established the Grass Roots Community Centre in the middle of the busy West End alternative scene at 237 Boundary Street, and filled a vacuum in Brisbane. The shop opened

its large front doors in 1995 as “A place for people and organizations to gather together” The flyer also stated its aims as: “Linking and supporting kindred organizations by community networking, creating new democratic structures for justice and peace. We aim to build bridges of support and to cooperate and coordinate through networking and sharing. “

Good News publication states: “Now coordinating the Grass Roots Centre in Brisbane’s West End, Norma is practicing what she preaches. At the tender young age of 85 she feels inspired to keep up the good fight by the people she meets every day.”

The Queensland Greens set up an office in the Grass Roots Centre, as did Women in Film and Television, Connect, Women’s Circus, Community Environment Network, Reworking Australia, Emma Miller Women’s Group, National Friends for Peace, Eco Group. The doors were always open.

Kevin Rudd said in 2003:

Norma Nord has accumulated a history of community service for most of her long and generous life. She has volunteered her time and skills to a variety of different causes including politics, the environment and founding and operating the Women’s Arts Centre. For her many years of humanitarian service, I feel privileged to

honour Norma with a Griffith Australia Day Award.

I found a letter addressed to me in a file marked personal and never posted. It is dated 27th. May 2004, my daughter’s 24th birthday. I am overwhelmed with emotion when I read:

Dearest Jan, I’m sad when I see these letterheads now heading for the rubbish bin at my place. History is made day by day far too quickly for me. Perhaps I shouldn’t say, “That the Grass Roots Resource Centre was unique” also I dare not count the number of mistakes I made, I even created new ones.

A final word from Jocelyne A. Scutt: “In Australia today real efforts are being made to recapture the lives of women, lives which have been written out of official history or simply ignored by the pundits yet sadly some feminist historians have fallen in to the trap of accepting the 1950’s as the dark ages of women, a time of total absence of women from the political scene, the public world.”

Norma lived to the age of 99.

Acknowledgments

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4. Lee Dunn Interview to Camera 2009.

5. Tom O'Lincoln, *Against the stream* (web version) *Women and the left, 1945–1968*
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6. Jocelyne A. Scutt *The Sexual Gerrymander: Women, men and the Socialist Ideal*

Spinifex Press; First Edition edition (February 28, 1994) and On Line

My acknowledgment and thanks to the SEARCH Foundation for the 2011 publication of *Australian Communism in the 20th. Century a graphic history*.

The Labour History Plays of Errol O'Neill,¹ Part 1

John McCollow

Introduction

Errol O'Neill (1945–2016) was a Brisbane actor, director, short-story writer, playwright and social activist. Over the period of 1983 to 2011, O'Neill wrote five plays dealing with various episodes of labour history in Queensland.² These were:

- *Faces in the Street* (first performed 1983) — concerning the Brisbane general strike of 1912;
- *Popular Front* (first performed 1986) — concerning the labour movement (and in particular of the Communist Party and Queensland MP Fred Paterson) during the tumultuous period of 1930 to 1950;
- *On the Whipping Side* (first performed 1991)– concerning the 1891 shearers' strike;
- *The Hope of the World* (first performed 1996) — concerning the 1985 SEQEB strike;
- *Red Soil, White Sugar* (first performed 2011) — concerning the Isis district sugar strike of 1911.

This article is the first of two that describe and analyse these works, which make a valuable contribution

to our understanding of labour history in Queensland in particular and of the nature of the labour movement generally. As can be seen, the plays are listed and will be considered in the order that they were written, not in chronological order of the events they depict. This article will deal with *Faces in the Street* and *Popular Front*. The second article will consider *On the Whipping Side*, *The Hope of the World*, and *Red Soil, White Sugar*.

O'Neill's style of playwriting

Writing about his experience as a playwright in Australia in 1998, O'Neill (p. 152) identified two basic approaches to drama: the Stanislavskian, in which 'the basic unit of theatre is the single character' and the Brechtian, in which 'the basic unit is the social interaction between characters'. He positions himself firmly in the latter tradition, stating that he attempts to produce 'work which does not simply concern itself with the fate of individuals, but can come to have much more important symbolic significance in terms of society as a whole' (Ibid., p. 151). Kelly (2016) recalls that O'Neill acted in a production of Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* in 1981 and had 'long conversations about what that style meant and how it should be done'. O'Neill believed that theatre should be a 'vehicle for expressing ideas' (O'Neill, 1998, p. 152) and had a particular interest in exploring the 'void in the culture of this country,

particularly the culture of Queensland, when it comes to critical examination of our past' (Ibid., p. 160).

Kelly (2016) states that O'Neill:

... was an actor first and writer after ... he saw his play-writing through the lens of performance — very conscious of what it would be to act that part, be on stage in that scene, etc. It's why he insisted on having his material workshopped with actors as a way of refining it ... his view of how plays should be written was I think very influenced by his (then) primary role as an actor.

O'Neill acknowledged his development as a playwright in the context of the agitprop political satires produced as a member of the Popular Theatre Troupe (PTT).³ His move into 'more traditional mainstage drama' (O'Neill, 1998, p. 152) can be seen more as a development of this work than as a rejection of it. The labour plays retain features that hark back to the work of the PTT, for example, in their use of actors in multiple roles, and of poetry and song. But O'Neill was looking for ways of 'embodying the ideas within believable dramatic characters' (Ibid.) in plays that 'dramatise important parts of the personal and psychological history of Australian society' (Ibid., p. 159). For O'Neill, ideas are important. Reviewers used to "traditional" theatre (where the Stanislavski approach is by

far the ascendant) can find O'Neill's labour history plays overly didactic.⁴ But this may reflect more on their expectations than on O'Neill's plays. It is not that O'Neill ignores emotions, he depicts clearly the costs to individuals and their personal relationships of the way in which society is organised and of engagement in the struggle for change. He does not, however, allow the audience to forget the wider context of social and ideological conflict.

Historical drama can add an important dimension often missing or underplayed in "straight" history: it re-inserts people into the account, allowing the audience to gain a greater comprehension of how events are shaped by the hopes, ideas and frailties of people and, in turn, of the stresses, joys and disappointments that are experienced as the events unfold. When this is done well, the audience member does not just experience empathy, but has cause to re-examine her or his own assumptions and ideas.

One of the interesting features of O'Neill's labour history plays is that while each centres on a specific historical conflict between capital and labour,⁵ they explore conflicts *within* the labour movement at greater length and in greater depth. In his introduction to the first of these plays, *Faces in the Street*, O'Neill writes of this in terms that are applicable to all of the plays:

... the general strike was full of conflicting ideologies. The class war was certainly there — the basic battle for the recognition of trade unions was the major impetus for the strike. But for me, the most interesting dramatic element was the tension between different viewpoints in the labour camp. Previously, I had conceived labour history naively, thinking the class war was the only war. It seemed the play would be interesting if it also examined the divisions on the left.

There are contemporary resonances, of course. The history of the left has always been, and still is, the history of splits, of enormously important ideological distinctions. And the labour movement, more than most other institutions, has always provided the clearing house for far-reaching socially progressive initiatives. Political conservatives always stand by with clean hands and impeccable suits while they observe the blood, sweat and tears, the argument and bitter division of the left that accompanies most social change. (O'Neill, 1993, Introduction, pp. 5–6)

While the ongoing resonances and enduring legacies of the intellectual, ideological and strategic conflicts within the labour movement are



Strikers emptying sacks of grain during the General Strike in Brisbane in 1912

important, so too are the differences in the social and political contexts in which these conflicts play out. O'Neill's plays provide an interesting base for exploring continuities and differences in these struggles. O'Neill's first historical play, *Faces in the Street*, for example, is set in a time when utopian hopes for socialist project were, if not high, at least plausible, before the Russian revolution, before Labor in Queensland had established a track record in government, and when the White Australia Policy was a pillar of the labour movement. The play was first produced in 1983, when anti-Viet Nam War activism was a not too distant memory, Labor in Queensland had been out power for over 25 years, Joh Bjelke-Petersen was at the height of his reign, and when project of international socialism had been dealt

a severe blow by the legacy of Stalin but the Soviet Union remained a super-power. In 2016, we view *Faces in the Street* through a lens shaped by the fall of Soviet communism, 25 years of post-Fitzgerald Inquiry politics in Queensland, and 30 years of neo-liberal interventions in our economy and polity.

O'Neill sprinkles little reminders of these historical continuities and differences across these plays. William Lane plays a prominent role in *On the Whipping Side*; in *Faces in the Street*, the fictional character Marian carries a copy of Lane's book *The Workingman's Paradise* and argues with historical character Harry Coyne about Lane's departure to South America. Ned Hanlon makes a couple of brief appearances as a disembodied

voice seconding motions relating to the general strike in *Faces in the Street* and returns as a reactionary Labor premier in *Popular Front*. Joh Bjelke-Peterson appears briefly in *Popular Front* as a newly elected backbencher who insults Fred Paterson and (ironically) speaks in parliament against Hanlon's gerrymander; though he doesn't appear in *The Hope of the World*, his presence and influence on the events is clear — the last line of the play is 'give the sack to Joh!'. Paterson himself is a central character in *Popular Front*; in *The Hope of the World*, the fictional characters of Red and Clare look down from a hotel room on the spot where he was bashed.

As with Joh's anti-gerrymander speech in *Popular Front*, there are other speeches or lines in the plays that echo

across time. In *Faces in the Street*, in an exchange that no doubt resonated with Queensland audiences of the early 1980s, Harry and Marion discuss a ban on street marches. Marion exclaims, 'that's a basic democratic right'. Harry responds, 'since when did the Premier of Queensland care about basic democratic rights?' (O'Neill, 1993, p. 45).

Another noteworthy feature of O'Neill's work is his attempt to write women back into the history of the labour movement. He writes in the Introduction to *Popular Front*:

A major problem that confronted me as a male writer ... was that comparatively little of the history of women had been recorded with the



Mounted police gather in Albert Square during the General Strike in Brisbane 1912, with resonances of the Bjelke Peterson years of street protests.

same solemnity as the history of men in the period ... I felt uncomfortable with the situation and did not want to create yet another play where the plum roles were for men and the women merely provided a bit of humanising background ... Not to strive for equality of representation in our artistic product is to perpetuate the inequalities that exist in our current social and political cultures. (O'Neill, 1988, Introduction, p. 7)

While O'Neill includes some historical women figures, such as communist writer Jean Devanny⁶, in his plays, he is hamstrung somewhat by the fact that the recorded history of the events that he is recreating is dominated by accounts of the activities of male participants. In *Popular Front*, he deliberately makes the two comical narrators female,

... to make the very point that our history is usually passed on as the doings of great men. To see two women telling the story, commenting on it, and then participating in it dramatically, helps to remind the audience that the values of the men who were controlling the events were not necessarily the same as the values of the women being influenced by those events. The events themselves, and their values, are thereby subjected to closer scrutiny. (Ibid., p. 8)

It is, however, through the naturalistic fictional characters in the plays that O'Neill really succeeds in writing women into the account of Australian labour. Marion and Bridget in *Faces in the Street*, Margherita in *Popular Front*, Helen and Moira in *On the Whipping Side*, Maureen in *The Hope of the World*, and Alice in *Red Soil*, *White Sugar* are all strong characters and the stories of their struggles form important parts of the respective plays.

Faces in the Street

The Brisbane general strike of 1912 began when tram drivers were locked out for wearing union badges at work. The trams system manager, an American named Joseph Badger, refused to negotiate with the union. In response, trade unionists went out on a general strike that brought Brisbane to a standstill. The issue was seen as about the right to unionise. Eventually, the state government intervened, banning marches and swearing in "special constables" to enforce order. Police who attended demonstrations 'with not only their rifles, but often with fixed bayonets' (O'Neill, 2012, p. 26).

During the strike, the combined unions (strike) committee:

... became an alternative government. No work could be undertaken in Brisbane without a special permit from the Strike Committee. This

Committee organised 500 vigilance officers to keep order among strikers and set up its own Ambulance Brigade. Government departments and private employers needed the Strike Committee's permission to carry out any work. The Strike Committee issued strike coupons that were honoured by various firms. (QP Museum, 2012)

Additionally, the strike committee published a daily newspaper, which continued to be published for many years after the strike. The degree of organisation and level of public support caused Premier Digby Denham genuinely to fear the possibility of revolution (O'Neill, 2012, p. 28).

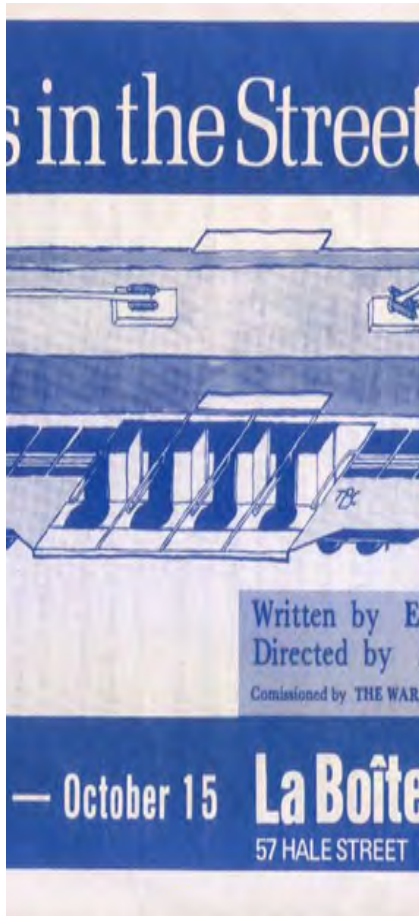
An application by the strike committee for a permit for a march was refused by the police but a large crowd gathered in central Brisbane on 2 February 1912 (Black Friday). The crowd was estimated at 15,000 people (ten per cent of Brisbane's then population). On the orders of the police commissioner, the police made a fierce baton charge on the crowd.

Eventually, support for the strike waned as workers went without pay, access to services and food were restricted and government repression continued. Despite the arbitration court finding that the requirement not to wear union badges was unreasonable,

negative public reaction to police violence, and a commitment from the employers' federation that the strikers would not be victimised, the striking employees were not re-instated when the strike was called off — though they were eventually re-instated when state government (then under a Labor administration) took over the tram system (in 1924). The conservative state government won the next election, but three years later, the Labor Party under TJ Ryan won government. The degree to which the strike paved the



Leaders of the bush contingents outside old Government House ready for the General Strike in Brisbane 1912



way for a Labor election is subject to ongoing debate.

Faces in the Street takes its name from the famous poem by Henry Lawson and the play ends with the cast singing a musical adaptation of the poem. The first act also ends in song and snatches of familiar tunes are heard in various scenes. This use of poetry and song is a consistent feature of O'Neill's plays.

In this instance the Lawson poem takes on a powerful new emotive force from the context provided by the play and the poem/song contributes, in turn, a rousing ending to the play.⁷

Characters representing the conservative side of politics in the play include the historical figure, Mary Hall, who acts as a sort of narrator/commentator. Hall was an English woman who wrote of her travels in Australia and other parts of the world and who was in Brisbane at the time of the general strike. Hall's views are thoroughly British and establishment, politically and socially, and her now anachronistic opinions and impatience with working-class values and habits provide a number of humorous moments in the play.

Contrasted with Hall's old-school British values is the brash, pragmatic and free-enterprise approach of the American tramways boss, Joseph Badger. O'Neill (1993, p. 11) describes this character as 'able, courageous, and ruthless'. Badger is the most "modern" of the conservatives depicted in the play. His early Twentieth Century version of neo-liberalism resonates even more strongly today than it would have at the time of the play's first production in 1983.

Digby Denham, on the other hand, is a historical anomaly. A conservative Premier whose links are with business, in a state where rural interests have

dominated. Later, in 1915, Denham was to become the only sitting Queensland Premier to lose his seat in a general election, until Campbell Newman replicated this achievement a hundred years later.

Others on the non-labour side of the conflict depicted in the play include Police Commissioner Cahill, the stern and rigid enforcer of public order. There is no suggestion of police corruption in the play (this is picked up in later plays), but *Faces in the Street* does highlight the way in which the Queensland police force has historically acted as an instrument of the government of the day.

Finally on the non-labour side is the fictional character of the Monsignor, who enunciates the position of the Catholic Church. O'Neill recognises the important role that the church played in the lives of many working class people, especially given the high proportion of workers of Irish heritage. This role is further explored in *Popular Front* (in relation to workers of Irish and Italian heritage). The Monsignor enunciates the church's position, as expressed in the papal encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, that class warfare must be rejected and capital and labour work cooperatively.

As O'Neill acknowledges in an essay written in 2012 about the Brisbane general strike (p. 30), his chief interest in writing *Faces in the Street* was 'in

exploring the arguments *within* the labour ranks' (emphasis added). A key feature of these arguments was 'the tension between the pragmatic political ambitions of the Labour⁸ party and the idealism of the socialist principles that gave rise to the labour movement' (p. 32).

A key scene in *Faces in the Street* is an argument between the historical character of Harry Coyne⁹, a Labor member of parliament, the fictional character Marion Regan, a socialist activist returned from William Lane's failed Paraguayan experiment, but with her commitment to socialism undimmed, and the fictional character of Paddy Duffner, 'an itinerant shearer and untutored militant concerned more with a response to injustice than the niceties of gaining political power' (O'Neill, 2012, p. 32). In this scene (O'Neill, 1993, pp. 88–91), Coyne states that the strike will probably be lost and expresses his concern that no steps should be taken that might jeopardise Labor's chances of being elected or compromise its ability to govern. Marion expresses disappointment that Labor has limited its ambitions to simply providing 'an alternative management of capitalism'. Duffner goes further, predicting, against Coyne's protestations, that Labor in government would use the police to strike break just as the Tories had done.

Through characters such as Joe, a tramway conductor, and his wife Bridget, O'Neill shows the effects of the strike on ordinary people, for whom issues of survival trump strategic or ideological issues. Joe observes forlornly over a serving of 'yesterday's stew' that:

The strikes only hurting the people who are on side. Everything else is business as usual. It's supposed to be the other way around. (O'Neill, 1993, p. 63)



Earlier, Joe has poignantly confessed that he almost lost his nerve:

What worries me is I almost didn't [wear the union badge]. Me, who's been preachin' union louder than any of 'em. I felt weak and alone. I came that close (gesture with fingers) to scabbin'. A man's a bloody rat. (Ibid., p. 36)

In a scene near the end of the play, the tensions between Joe and Bridget arising from Joe's uncertain future after the failure of the strike are manifest:

Joe: What's the matter?

Bridget: You could have told me what you were thinking. I'd got myself into the state of mind where I was prepared to see it through, for your sake ...

Joe: You must've known I was getting' jack of it.

Bridget: That's not the point. You should have **told** me. We could have talked about it. You're not the only one involved. (Ibid., p. 96)

Faces in the Street was first performed at La Boite Theatre in 1983 as part of the Brisbane Warana Festival. The reviews were favourable. Dickson (1983) called it 'an excellent piece of drama' and a 'triumph'. Masters (1983) stated that it was 'entertaining and challenging'. Treble (1983) enthused that it was 'a splendid production ... strong fare, beautifully written, deeply compassionate in its human insights, and played with distinction by 24 actors'. *The Courier-Mail's* David Rowbotham (1983) couldn't overcome his distaste for political theatre, but did allow that the play was 'well written' and that O'Neill 'has proved he has writing skill'.

Faces in the Street was published in in 1993 by Playlab Press. The publication includes an introduction by the playwright that helpfully identifies the historical and fictional characters. The playwright also provides a bibliography of relevant works. The

publication includes photos of the strike, of Brisbane generally in the early twentieth century and of a scene from the 1983 *La Boite* production. The cover reproduces the famous “Black Friday” poster of 1912, created by Jim Case for *The Worker* newspaper. At the time of writing, the play is out of print, but Playlab has advised that it is considering re-issuing it.¹⁰

Popular Front

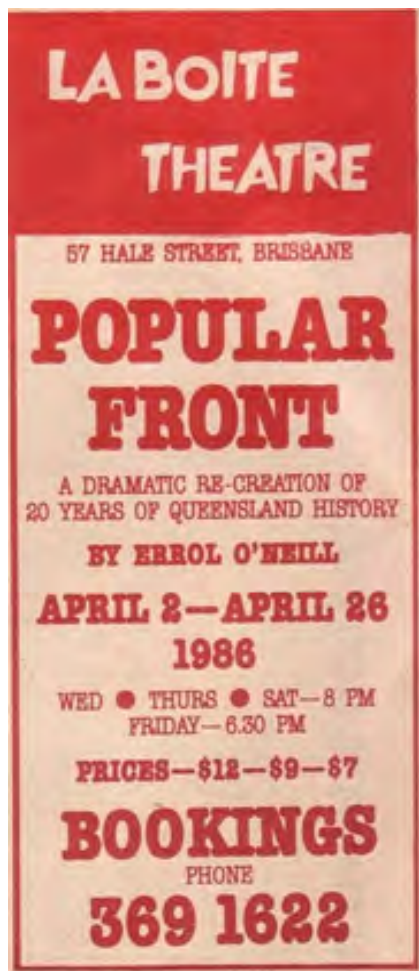
The 1930s and 1940s were tumultuous decades with the Great Depression, the rise of fascism in Europe and militarism in Japan, World War Two, and emergence of the Cold War. *Popular Front* examines the activities of the labour movement in Queensland during this period focusing in particular on the career of Fred Paterson, lawyer and the only communist ever elected to an Australian state (or federal) parliament.

Popular Front is the most ambitious of O’Neill’s labour history plays in terms of events portrayed and issues considered. The play covers a lot of historical ground including — among other things — tensions between fascist supporters and anti-fascists in the north Queensland Italian community, the canecutter strike of 1935 to control the spread of Weil’s disease through the burning of sugar cane prior to harvesting, Stalin’s non-aggression pact with Hitler, the establishment of the Queensland electoral gerrymander

by the Hanlon Labor Government, and the 1948 Queensland rail strike (during which Paterson was viciously beaten by Queensland police).

The play takes its title from the position that leftists should make common cause with each other on issues such as measures to support employment and the fight against fascism. This was a position Paterson supported even if neither the Communist Party nor the Labor Party were ever completely comfortable with it.

Of O’Neill’s labour history plays, *Popular Front* is the one that draws most heavily on the style of his previous satirical work with the Popular Theatre Troupe. Two female narrators, “Audax” and “Fidelis”¹¹ accompanied in the Brisbane production by a three-piece band, joke and argue with each other, comment on the goings-on, engage the audience, and adopt various character roles in the proceedings. The other major characters are, however, played realistically. The play is therefore a complex mixture of farce and drama. As instances of the former we have Audax, playing not one but two thick-as-planks coppers (whose testimony is interchangeable), being cross-examined in Paterson’s sedition trial (Audax: ‘you did say that the workers should take the law into their own hands ... that’s our job’), or later, with encouragement from Fidelis, “hamming it up” as a pig that an unemployed worker has been



accused of stealing. In contrast is the straight dramatic tension of the scenes between Kevin, an Irish-Australian railway worker and Labor man, and his wife Margherita, an Italian-Australian communist and feminist, in which they struggle to understand each other and their relationship. Kevin's debates with his local Catholic priest parallel

Margherita's with the Communist Party central committee.

Popular Front is primarily a play about ideas and a wide range of social issues are debated by the characters. It is interspersed with various speeches based on episodes in Paterson's career, that elucidate his political philosophy and serve as testimony to his analytical ability and eloquence. But, as in *Faces in the Street*, O'Neill does not forget that we are dealing with peoples' lives as much as with ideological debates. The death of Margherita's canecutter father from Weil's disease and the break up of her marriage to Kevin show the human dimensions of labour history.

Reviews of *Popular Front*, both of its premier production in Brisbane and a subsequent production in Melbourne, were mixed. Several were lavish in their praise. Harris (1986) stated that it was 'absorbing, entertaining and commendable'; while Walsh (1987) found it 'engrossing' and 'chock-a-block with impassioned ideas ... [and] engaging characters'. Other reviewers found it too didactic (Gough, 1986) or propagandistic (Thomson, 1987).

A number of preview articles regarding the play had portrayed it as a novelty item or curiosity piece — a play about leftists coming out of Joh Bjelke-Peterson's home state.¹² This and the play's odd mixture of farce and serious drama may have caused



Bob Myles being arrested during the 1948 Railway Strike on St. Patrick's Day in Brisbane

some confusion amongst reviewers as to what sort of play it actually was supposed to be. Indeed, one reviewer (Gough, 1986) described the play as 'schizophrenic'. It is unknown if this response caused O'Neill to abandon the use of overt farce (though not humour) in his subsequent plays. If so, it is a pity. *Popular Front* represents a fascinating attempt to combine naturalistic and satirical 'ways of telling the story' (O'Neill, 1988, p.11) which deserved to be further explored and developed.

O'Neill appears also to have been let down somewhat by the quality of the productions themselves. Reviewers of both the Brisbane (e.g. Dickson, 1986)

and Melbourne (e.g. Radic, 1987) productions note that the quality of the acting varied. The director of the latter production also chose to alter the script (eliminating the characters of Audax and Fidelis) and to stage it using a specially constructed tower — decisions which were arguable. Writing of the Brisbane production, Dickson (Ibid.) felt that weaknesses in the production 'undermined some of the potential impact of what is an adventurous play'. Reading the play now it is possible to see both how its strange combination of satiric farce and naturalism could open up some wonderful theatrical possibilities and present formidable problems for producers and audiences.

The reviews do make some valid criticisms of the play. One is that the character of Paterson is the same "saintlike" presence from start to finish. We never see him love or hate, wrestle with his conscience, engage in self-doubt or falter. He is, as Ross (1987) reports O'Neill as saying, 'almost too good to be true'. It is the character of Margherita who stands out as fully developed and engaging, providing the true drama of the play.

Another criticism was of the play's length and the range of issues dealt with including, 'feminism, racism, Catholicism, socialism, fascism, unemployment and the depression' (Dickson, 1986). Both the Brisbane and Melbourne productions were reported as being of three hours or more in



Wharf strike involving the cargo ship Barossa about 1948

length. One reviewer suggested that there was 'too much material' and that a number of the sub-plots in the play could have been developed into plays on their own (Koch, 1986). Another stated that, 'O'Neill has a series not a play on his hands' (Gough, 1986). These critics (e.g. Dickson, Koch, Gough) felt that the play was not tightly structured enough.

It is unclear to what degree the concerns expressed by its critics can be put down to flaws in the script or difficulties in the productions, or, indeed, to a failure on the part of critics to understand

what O'Neill was trying to achieve. While *Popular Front* has flaws and is difficult to produce, it stands out for the ambitiousness of its scope and its unique blend of naturalism and satire.

Popular Front was published by Playlab Press in 1988. The publication includes a foreword by Patsy McCarthy and an introduction by the playwright. It includes photos of the 1948 railway strike and of a scene from the 1986 La Boite production of the play. At the time of writing, the play is out of print, but Playlab has advised that it is considering re-issuing it.¹³

Photos courtesy of Qld State Library Pictures collection.

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Notes

- 1 The author would like to thank Mary Kelly who kindly provided access to Errol O'Neill's papers.
- 2 The first three were apparently conceived as a trilogy; O'Neill describes them as such in his Introduction to *On the Whipping Side* (O'Neill, 1991, pp. 9–10). O'Neill wrote a number of other plays, notably political satires for the Popular Theatre Troupe (in the 1970s and 1980s), and *The Mayne Inheritance*, a 2004 adaptation of Rosamond Siemon's non-fiction account of Brisbane's Mayne family.
- 3 Capelin (1995) contains three contributions from O'Neill, a history of the PTT, a chronology of the PTT, and the script of his play 'It's MAD', which was performed by the PTT.
- 4 The notoriously stodgy Courier-Mail theatre critic David Rowbotham (1983), for example, in his review of *Faces in the Street*, acknowledged the effectiveness and emotional impact of the play, but concluded that it was 'in the final analysis ... a theatrical lecture'. He counselled O'Neill to in the future 'employ his talents for the gripping compression [...] true drama requires,

instead of sticking to the basically hectoring undramatic sketch-form of documentary theatre’.

- 5 The exception is *Popular Front*, which deals with a variety of episodes across the period 1930–1950. Nevertheless, it retains with the other plays a strong focus on conflicts *within* the labour movement.
- 6 In *Popular Front*. Writing in 2012, O’Neill expressed regret that he did not include Emma Miller, who famously stabbed police commissioner Cahill’s horse with a hatpin on “Black Friday”, as a character in *Faces in the Street*. ‘If I ever re-write this play, I’ll be sure to make amends.’ (p. 30)
- 7 One reviewer (Rowbotham, 1983) called the performance of the song/poem at the play’s end ‘something like inspiration’.
- 8 O’Neill spells it “Labour”, which is historically correct as the party had not adopted the American spelling at the time of the 1912 general strike.
- 9 Interestingly, in the 1983 production of the play, the character of Harry Coyne was played by Matt Foley, who would go on to have a career as a Labor parliamentarian, including stints as Attorney-General and Minister for the Arts.
- 10 Phone conversation with Playlab Press, 18 July 2016.
- 11 ‘Audax at Fidelis’ (Bold but Faithful) is the motto on the Queensland Coat of Arms.
- 12 ‘My goodness, pinko play from the far north!’ read the headline of an article in The Melbourne Times (Heath, 1987).
- 13 Phone conversation with Playlab Press, 18 July 2016.

Brisbane Anti-Conscription Walking Tour



“I’LL HAVE YOU!”

Presented by the Brisbane Labour History Association

You’ve heard the stories of Gallipoli and the Western Front. Now learn the alternative history of WW1. One hundred years after Australian workers and peace activists mobilised in their thousands to defeat military conscription, join labour historian Jeff Rickertt for a tour of the sites of this dramatic struggle.

Sunday 30 October 2016, 10am

Meet outside State Law Building
50 Ann St, on cnr of George St
free event, bookings essential
contact Craig: 0418 197 205,
craig@arnieuqld.asn.au



Brisbane
Labour
History
Association

In Memorium

Errol O'Neill

Rob Whyte,
(with supporting information
from Ian Curr, Sally McKenzie
and Paul Dellit).



Errol Joseph O'Neill was born in 1945 in Brisbane, Queensland. As a young man, his deep political convictions meant he would dedicate himself to fighting injustice, discrimination and elitism. Never one to shy away from a challenge, he chose to do it with art.

As a writer, actor and theatre director, Errol had a long and successful career. He was a contemporary of both Geoffrey Rush and Bille Brown at the start of their careers in Brisbane as they transitioned from university to the mainstream. All three were regarded as equally talented, but Errol's commitment to telling the stories of Queenslanders for Queenslanders persuaded him to remain in Brisbane. As a writer, especially as a playwright, recognition came later, but he never wavered, either in his political convictions or his determination to realise them through his craft.

Errol studied philosophy and theology at the Gregorian University, Rome, then studied arts, majoring in English language and literature, at the University of Queensland. While at university he began writing, performing, directing and producing theatre.

As his political focus sharpened, Errol joined forces with like-minded, talented people in theatre and activism. He was instrumental in The Popular Theatre Troupe, a ensemble arguably the most politically articulate and radical theatre company ever to emerge from Queensland, touring its

acerbically witty political satires all over Australia in the 1970s including to the Pram Factory in Melbourne — the heart of the Australian New Wave theatre movement. His main-stage plays focused on Queensland's history and themes of greed and power.

Ian Curr wrote in the *Bush Telegraph*, “We owe a lot to Errol O’Neill for helping provide the education we did not get at school, about the political history of Queensland, about brothers, Ernie and William Lane, about Fred Paterson, the only communist elected to parliament in Australia. Errol’s trilogy of plays, *On the Whipping Side*, *Faces in the Street* and *Popular Front* were worth a thousand social studies textbooks. His complicated optimism and despair came through in all his plays — including *The Hope of the World* which made up his ‘quadrology’.” *The Hope of the World* was his play about the SEQEB strike in which he had played an active role, which led him to be “...standing in protest, with many other believers, on a public footpath outside an electricity depot in Taringa.” Errol said of his presence, “By refusing to be involved, you allow the forces that are dominant to take control of your life.”

Despite his anti-establishment views, or perhaps because of them, Errol was involved in many organisations dedicated to improving the performing arts industry and was respected for his industry contribution. From 1984 to 1987 he was a member of the Australia

Council, serving on Literature Board grant committees. He was a committee member of the Queensland branch of the Australian Writers Guild and the Queensland representative on their National Stage Committee. In 2003 he was awarded a Centenary Medal. He received the Playlab Award for services to new work in Queensland. Errol had 17 film and TV credits, including *Len in East of Everything*, *Sirlak in Mission: Impossible* and *Sergeant Rutter in the 1976 feature film Surrender in Paradise*.

His prodigious talent came in three interwoven strands. As a writer of stories and plays, he was able to turn a minute interaction or an ordinary moment in time into a rich and layered insight into the human condition. It was this insight he brought to his acting. In one of Errol’s recent short stories *Character*, about his life as an actor in Queensland, he writes:

“Sometimes during a performance, no matter how well controlled and rehearsed, you find yourself in uncharted waters, and your resolve, strength and confidence come not from your own conscious abilities but from the deep pool within yourself.

“Sometimes you are jolted to the core of your being as you realise you are bringing people close to tears in the audience. Making them laugh is not as memorable, but when you bring them to tears you realise you are connecting in some grand way with the essence of humanity. You realise you owe a

great debt to the legions of real people you have known and dealt with over a lifetime and from whom you have taken lessons in the simple and honest art of being human.”

He was able to see what made people tick because he could see how they were shaped by the forces around them. For Errol, the combination of the domains of writing, acting, and direct political action were all one seamless integrated quest. His success as a director and producer revealed his drive and determination to take his art and his politics “to the streets” (not to mention factories and shopping centres, as well as theatre venues from church halls to Southbank).

“I don’t think I am any less of an artist, writer or actor because I have a dominant political motive,” Errol once said. “I would not like to be seen as a neutral artist. There is no such thing as neutral art. All art is political”.

Born of Lebanese and Irish parents, Errol was 71 when he died. His mother Gladys Lutvey was a descendant of the Lutvey and Farrah families who came to Australia from Zahle Lebanon in the late 1800s. They settled in Gayndah in South East Queensland and opened a store there in 1898. Errol’s dad was Frank ‘Bluey’ O’Neill who drove a taxi often seen parked at the Stones Corner rank. This was a trade Errol himself took up to finance his art. ‘Bluey’ and Gladys sent their sons to St James school at Coorparoo. Errol is survived by his partner Mary Kelly and sons

Kieran and Joseph. An industry tribute to Errol was standing room only at a Southbank auditorium.

Errol was the best of us. We were all political. We all shared his strong views on political activism. We strove as he did to be honest, courageous, defiant and compassionate in our private and public lives. We believed the key to being better people and living a ‘good life’ (philosophically speaking) was to radically improve society as a whole. Yes, we talked about it. We even marched for it, stood in picket lines for it and got bashed for it, when things got really bad. But more than any of us, Errol made it his life.

The shocking news of Errol’s sudden death by heart failure, during a brief hospital stay, shook all his friends and colleagues like a physical blow. Emotions flooded our minds with feelings of loss and regret. A great loss (of Errol taken from us) and the regret we had not honoured him more, been more like him, spent more time with him and learned more from him. In the same moment these thoughts took us to the edge of tears, an image appeared, like a too-real memory, of Errol looking back at us with a curious and amused gaze, a dry smile on his lips and laughter in his eyes, saying, “That’s a bit rich, mate.”

Even now, Errol, you make us cry and you make us laugh, as you always could.

Project — A Biography of Alex Macdonald

Can you help?

Lyn Trad



Alex Macdonald. Photo courtesy of Fryer Library

My sister Margaret Liessi and I would both love to think that there is someone who would be interested in writing Dad's biography. It was the dream of Cecily Cameron long time colleague and friend of Dad's — to write his biography; and she conducted

a considerable amount of research to that end. She wrote drafts of a foreword and the first four chapters — before, sadly, dying in 2007 without realizing her dream of completing the project.

Prior to her death Cecily organized the research materials and resources in her possession relating to the project: these were placed in the Fryer Library, University of Queensland — in all eleven boxes and two parcels of materials. These contain not only extensive items relating to Alex's biography, including his early and later life and role within the trade union movement, but also many resources pertaining to the Trades and Labour Council and trade union history in Queensland and Australia. Alex himself had been passionately interested in trade union history and had spent time before his death organizing, compiling and indexing old records and material held in the TLC library at the old Trades Hall in Edward Street. Had he lived longer he would himself have written on the subject of labour history in Australia — he had already reproduced some material in conjunction with the annual Trade Union Congress.

To reiterate, Margaret and I would be glad to know of anyone interested in undertaking the biography project: both in relation to Alex's role within the labour movement, and with respect also to the broader trade union and labour contexts of the post-war period



Alex (far right) marching in the trades Hall contingent in the 1965 May Day march, with other workers from the Trades Hall offices. Ron Brown is to his right. Photos by Graham Garner, courtesy of Fryer Library

in which he operated. The requisite research and analytical skills and resources are outside our own fields of expertise — however all family and other resources we hold would of course be available to anyone prepared to take up the challenge. I add also that Cecily had researched Alex's early life in Scotland and his migration to Australia; she had also conducted numerous interviews — such records are all included with the materials in the Fryer Library. Further, I have previously applied to National Archives of Australia for the transfer to them of ASIO records pertaining to Alex, our mother Molly and myself — I have not yet sighted these though

have been advised that they are now in the possession of NAA.

Any suggestions you may have or ideas as to how to proceed with this project will be most appreciated.

Lyn Trad: lynettetrad44@gmail.com

Sewell v Riordan and the Fracturing of the First World War Anti- Conscription Movement in Queensland

Jeff Rickertt

The victory of the ‘No’ campaign in two referenda on conscription for overseas military service, the first on 28 October 1916, the second on 20 December 1917, has rightly been celebrated as one of the Australian labour movement’s greatest achievements. Against a Commonwealth government prepared to censor, criminalise and gaol its political opponents, and facing the formidable resources of most of the churches, state governments, the pro-empire press and the patriotic middle class, workers and peace activists mobilised in their tens of thousands to stymie the government’s intention to conscript reinforcements to the battlegrounds of France and Palestine. Queensland was a key state in the outcome of both referenda. Fifty two per cent of the State electorate voted ‘No’ in 1916, and 56 per cent in 1917, a proportion higher in each year than the corresponding national ‘No’ vote.

The Queensland victories were all the more remarkable for the fact that the main organising body in both years, the Anti-Conscription

Campaign Committee (ACCC), comprised individuals from across the ideological spectrum. Pacifists and anti-war socialists worked alongside empire loyalists who advocated voluntary enlistment; supporters of the revolutionary Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) sat in committee with career politicians. In 1916 a functional unity prevailed amongst these factions, cemented by a common desire to defeat Hughes. Under the intense pressure of the 1917 campaign, however, the movement split into a Laborist majority and a revolutionary minority. Victory in Queensland was achieved despite the disharmony.

The most startling episode of disunity surfaced less than a week out from the second referendum. On 14 December 1917, two leading figures on the Queensland anti-conscription side, Talbot Henry Sewell and William James Riordan, publicly went to war. Their battle was fought not in Ypres or the Sinai but in the Supreme Court of Queensland. Their foe was not the ‘Huns’ or ‘Johnny Turk’ but each other. Alleging that Riordan had called him a spy and pimp for the military, Talbot Sewell issued a writ against Riordan for defamation, claiming reputational and financial injury to the value of £2000.¹ News of the conflict was seized upon with delight by the pro-conscription press. ‘Split in the No Party’, trumpeted the *Brisbane Telegraph*; ‘Anti-Conscription Split’, trilled *The Daily Mail*; ‘Trades Hall



Queensland Government Gazette

EXTRAORDINARY.

PUBLISHED BY AUTHORITY.

[Registered at the General Post Office, Brisbane, for Transmission by Post as a Newspaper.]

Vol. CIX.]

TUESDAY, 27TH NOVEMBER, 1917.

[No. 213.

Chief Secretary's Department,
Brisbane, 27th November, 1917.

TO THE PUBLIC OF QUEENSLAND,—

I deem it my duty on behalf of the Government of Queensland, a sovereign State of the Commonwealth of Australia, to inform you that "Hansard" No. 37, containing a report of the proceedings of the Legislative Assembly of this State on the 22nd instant, has been denied transmission through the Post Office by the Federal Government.

Further, on the 23rd instant, the Queensland Government Printer received the following memorandum from the Censor:—

COMMONWEALTH MILITARY FORCES.
1ST MILITARY DISTRICT.

No. S.B. 7706.

Censor's Office, G.P.O.,
Brisbane, 23rd November, 1917.

MEMORANDUM from the Censor to The Government Printer, Brisbane.

Take notice that I, the undersigned, being duly authorised in that behalf by the Deputy Chief Censor, do hereby forbid you, as Printer and Publisher of Parliamentary Debates of the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly of Queensland, to print or publish in contravention of the War Precautions Regulations, 1915, any matter being or purporting to be a report of a debate in the Legislative Assembly of Queensland on the 22nd day of November, 1917, on the question of Military Censorship, without the permission of an Officer of the Censorship Staff.

(Signed) J. J. STABLE, Captain,
Censor, 1st Military District.

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Front page of the Queensland Government Gazette: Extraordinary, Vol CIX, No. 213, 27 November 1917. The interception by Commonwealth authorities of Hansard number 37 and the extraordinary gazette led to the allegation that Talbot Sewell was a spy and a pimp for the military. (QSA, Digital Image ID 26706)

sensation', declared the *Queensland Times*.²

The case of *Sewell v Riordan* did not markedly affect the outcome of the referendum. Consequently, the episode has been relegated to the footnotes as a colourful but irrelevant fringe story. This article will pull it back into prominence as the subject of inquiry. It will argue that whatever their personal motivations, Sewell and Riordan's antipathy was but an echo of deep rifts in the workers' movement which no anti-conscription campaign or victory could bridge. Sewell's litigation and the referenda campaigns that spawned it masked a fundamental struggle between revolutionary and Laborist forces for the soul of organised labour. The dissection of this one court case exposes the ideological anatomy of an entire movement.

The 1916 Campaign

Nationally, the first mobilisations against conscription were organised by anti-war socialists from the IWW (the Wobblies), the Australian Socialist Party (ASP), the Victorian Socialist Party and the left-wing of the Labor Party. In Brisbane the various elements of the anti-war Left came together in August 1915 to form the Anti-Conscription and Anti-Militarist League (ACAML). With the addition of the Australian Peace Alliance (APA) and the Women's Peace Army (WPA), the League emerged as a

formidable campaigning coalition. On 3 August 1916 it organised the city's first public anti-conscription and anti-war meeting, packing out the spacious Lyceum Theatre. With rousing cheers, the audience unanimously condemned conscription and demanded an immediate peace.³

August 1916 was the turning point. Disapproval of the war was increasing, speculation was spreading that conscription was imminent, the persistent propaganda work of left-wing activists had begun to pay dividends. On 26 August, the BIC convened a union conference on the conscription threat. Fifty six unions, including the AWU, were represented, along with the APA, the WPA, the ASP and the IWW as non-voting participants. After two days of deliberation the delegates resolved to launch a general strike in the event of conscription being enacted. The resolution was circulated in the form of a comprehensive 'No Conscription' manifesto.⁴

Five days later Hughes announced a referendum on conscription would be held on 28 October. Its confidence high after organising 'one of the most representative trade union conferences ever held in Brisbane', the BIC, supported by the anti-war groups, seemed poised to lead the 'No' case in Queensland.⁵ But it was not to be. The anti-war Left and in turn the progressive BIC unions had created the local anti-conscription movement, but they would

THE WIN-THE-WAR-ER IN 'QUEENSLAND.



*Claude Marquet cartoon portraying a devious and bloodied Prime Minister Hughes after murdering free speech in Queensland. Published in *The Australian Worker*, 3 December 1917.*

play second fiddle to the conservatives of the AWU and the Labor politicians during the referendum campaign.

Sensing which way the political wind was blowing on the conscription issue, and fearful of being eclipsed by the BIC, the AWU's William Dunstan informed the Central Political Executive (CPE) of the ALP on 8 September that the union intended to form a committee for the purpose of 'conducting and controlling' the campaign against conscription.⁶ Drawing on the political kudos of its close relationship with the Ryan Cabinet, which had only recently declared its opposition to conscription, the AWU convened a meeting of the parliamentary and industrial 'wings' of the labour movement at its own conference rooms on 14 September. Representatives from all sections of the movement attended and agreed to form the ACCC. Labor politician Edward (Ted) Theodore was elected chairman, and Lewis McDonald, the fulltime secretary of the CPE, became secretary. For the first time, anti-war activists and proponents of voluntarism were brought together in one organisation. It was apparent from the outset, however, that the official campaign would steer clear from criticising the war.⁷

The 1917 Campaign

Hughes lost the gamble in 1916 but 12 months later he felt confident enough to try again. Buoyed by his party's sweeping electoral victory in May

1917, his government's devastating crackdown on the IWW, culminating in its banning in July, and by the defeat of the New South Wales general strike in September and October, Hughes announced another referendum.

In Brisbane, the left had been preparing. As repression of the IWW intensified, many Wobblies moved north, believing the Ryan government would afford them some level of protection from prosecution. They regrouped in the Universal Freedom League (UFL), an outfit founded in September 1916 to organise eligible men to defy a military call up. The UFL was heavily involved in anti-conscription initiatives throughout 1917.

The APA was also active. A well-attended conference in Melbourne in April was followed by a successful speaking tour of regional Queensland by leading activist Margaret Thorp. On 28 May APA members and supporters gathered in record numbers at Brisbane Trades Hall to elect a new Queensland executive and plan future events, kicking off with a 'monster anti-conscription conference'.⁸

Again, the plans of the anti-war Left were sidelined by the AWU. Two weeks after the APA meeting the AWU reconvened the ACCC. They were even more determined this time to 'control' the anti-conscription movement by curtailing the leftists. Earlier in the year, the ACCC executive had refused

to fund the travel and living expenses of two anti-war activists elected by the general committee to represent it at the Melbourne conference.⁹ In June AWU officials manipulated one of their own ballots to prevent anti-war socialist Ernie Lane from serving as the union's delegate to the ACCC.¹⁰ Across the State, the AWU hounded the IWW and other militants out of the union or into silence. 'The AWU', testified its Secretary William Dunstan in 1918, 'fought the IWW very hard'. After the Wobblies were banned, Dunstan addressed '23 or 24' AWU meetings in regional Queensland in protest against the IWW'. He was aided by the state police, who supplied him with the names of the more active IWW members.¹¹

But the AWU's undemocratic manoeuvres could not halt the growth of anti-war sentiment or prevent that sentiment being expressed in the composition of the ACCC. The 1917 iteration of the ACCC included representatives from the UFL, the APA and the WPA. The BIC, which had recently reaffirmed its outright opposition to the war with a unanimous vote of its 49 delegates, was also represented. Even Ernie Lane could not be denied, gaining a spot as a delegate of the Toowoomba Anti-Conscription Committee. On the executive, the AWU-ALP conservatives — Theodore, Riordan and McDonald — were checked by the progressives — Joseph Silver Collings, Cuthbert Butler, Billy

Wallace (from the Painters' Union) and E. Brady (from the Meatworkers' Union). With the IWW now under criminal sanction, Commonwealth censors on the rampage, and a belligerent Hughes prepared to smear any opponent with the IWW bogey, the volatile mixture of political elements making up the ACCC, combustible enough in 1916, was now dangerously explosive.

The spark that ignited the blast began when the Chief Censor, Captain J.J. Stable, decided to prevent the *The Daily Standard* from publishing Premier Ryan's opening anti-conscription speech in full. When the state government countered by having the suppressed portions read into the parliamentary record on 22 November, the Commonwealth upped the ante by seizing copies of the relevant Hansard and blocking its transmission through the post. Having arrived in Brisbane to address a conscription rally, the Prime Minister personally led a military raid on the Government Printing Office late in the evening of 26 November. Theodore then concocted a plan to print in secrecy a four-page *Government Gazette Extraordinary*, which would reveal relevant correspondence between Stable and Queensland's Government Printer, A.J. Cumming, along with a letter of protest from Ryan to Hughes, penned on 27 November. The gazette rolled off the presses that evening.

The ACCC executive was heavily involved in both the Hansard and Gazette operations. Its role was to coordinate the distribution of copies to the unions and Labor Party branches (then known as Workers' Political Organisations or WPOs), which would in turn circulate them throughout the wider community. While Ryan's speech was being re-read in parliament, the ACCC sent a circular to all WPOs, requesting their cooperation in the plan. Another circular to the WPOs compiled on 27 November explained the events of the previous five days and again asked for assistance, this time to distribute the extraordinary gazette.¹²

The fact that Stable seized copies of the Hansard at the GPO before they could be posted alerted the ACCC to the possibility that their circular of 22 November may have been intercepted. Over the next few days they were able to confirm that some WPOs had not received any recent mail from the ACCC. This series of events raised the inevitable question: had the postal and censorship authorities been tipped off? In the extraordinary atmosphere of tension, fear and conspiratorial intrigue enveloping both sides in those cat-and-mouse days, it was little wonder that many anti-conscription activists began to think they might harbour a traitor in their midst. Adding to the drama, on 30 November Hughes initiated legal action against Ryan, Theodore, McDonald and Butler for conspiring to circulate the Hansard and Gazette

without first submitting the contents to the censor.

Who was Talbot Sewell and was he a spy?

In December 1917 Sewell was only 29 years of age and a rising figure in the Queensland labour movement. Before taking up a position as a draftsman in the electrical engineering branch of the Postmaster General's department, he had honed his drafting skills in the Queensland Lands Department. In May 1915, in his role as secretary of the Fortitude Valley WPO, Sewell had directed Labor leader Dave Bowman's local campaign for the state election. By the end of the year he was secretary of the metropolitan council of WPOs. After Bowman died in office in February 1916, Sewell nominated to stand as Labor's replacement. In the preselection ballot he received only 10 caucus votes, placing him fourth in a field of five.

His electoral ambitions thwarted, Sewell shifted his attention to the trade unions. He became prominent as state secretary of the Australian Theatrical and Amusement Employees' Association (ATAEA), and, in 1917, as an eloquent public speaker for the Brisbane Industrial Council and Universal Freedom League. By the time of the 1917 referendum campaign he was a trustee of the BIC, secretary of the construction section of the AWU, assistant secretary of the

AWU's metropolitan section, state secretary of the ATAEA, a delegate to the Metropolitan District Council and president of the UFL.¹³

Politically, Sewell was on the Left. Only two months into his public service career he had been disciplined for shouting 'Hooray, another parasite gone!' upon hearing the news of Edward VII's death.¹⁴ By 1915 he was lecturing for the Fortitude Valley WPO on 'Socialism: Utopian and Scientific'.¹⁵ Two years later he told an audience in the Domain that general strikes would fail 'unless a sympathetic government was in power, prepared to take over control of production, or unless the unions were prepared to take control'. The watchwords of the future, he concluded, 'must be industrial organisation, education and militancy'.¹⁶

Sewell's view of militarism was no less strident. At one particularly memorable public meeting in Gympie, on 7 October 1916, Sewell, having declared it was time for plain speaking, spoke plainly for nearly an hour and a half on the political economy of war. The 'largest, most representative, most enthusiastic meeting ever held in Gympie' listened attentively as the radical draftsmen from Brisbane developed his analysis:

The workers were opening their eyes to the truth that no national war was ever fought for freedom, but for the

enrichment and privilege of the few. Today, as in the past, those who made and controlled war, and the class they represented, were the shareholders in the armament trust, shipping rings and other institutions thriving on economic robbery of the workers. War was their business, and the longer it continued the richer did they grow on the blood of slaughtered conscripts of Europe.¹⁷

In 1917, Sewell regularly chaired and spoke at UFL meetings and rallies, holding his own alongside the firebrands J.W. Roche, Percy Mandeno, Gordon Brown and Archie Eastcrabb.¹⁸

Yet Talbot Sewell was no Wobbly. He had been keen on a seat in parliament in 1916, and in October 1917 he nominated for a spot on the metropolitan Water and Sewerage Board, an important municipal body elected by popular vote. The Labor Party's four candidates were selected by plebiscites of union and WPO members. Sewell was one of 11 candidates endorsed by the party's Central Political Executive. The plebiscites were only just getting underway when the spy allegations surfaced.¹⁹

Was Sewell an informant? The claim was never tested in court. Riordan did not rely for his defence on the truth of the allegation; rather, he denied ever making it. The pivotal evidence was

the claim by two brothers, Welsley and George 'Curly' Johnson, that in the Carlton Club Hotel in Brisbane on 3 December, Riordan told them that Sewell was a spy and a pimp for the military. Under oath, Riordan denied ever being in the hotel at that time, and his alibi was supported by William Dunstan and John Hanlon.²⁰

The supposed hotel conversation occurred three days after Riordan had announced the expulsion of Sewell from the ACCC. At a full meeting of the Committee held only hours after the conspiracy charges were laid against Ryan, Theodore, McDonald and Butler, Riordan told the delegates that the executive had decided to exclude Sewell. No reason was given and Sewell was not afforded an opportunity to respond to any charge of misconduct. Sewell later claimed that during Riordan's responses to the perplexed delegates he implied that the reason for the expulsion would not be disclosed because they were of such a grave nature. 'The lives of our nation are in our hands', he is said to have told them. This incident, coupled with the alleged spy comments at the hotel, formed the basis of Sewell's claim of defamation.²¹

No hard evidence has ever surfaced that Sewell was a spy for the Commonwealth. Riordan and his allies never produced any conclusive proof. More tellingly, the Commonwealth intelligence reports never identified

Sewell as a knowing informant. On the contrary, the spooks named him as one of the 'adherents to the IWW', and, elsewhere, included him on a list of 'disloyalists associated directly or indirectly with Ryan and the [Queensland] government.'²² We now know that Sewell himself was under surveillance by military intelligence. In November his correspondence was intercepted to assist the military track the movements of William Jackson, considered by the Commonwealth to be one of the most dangerous of the Wobbly activists.²³ Then in December, alarmed about the convergence of Wobblies and other radicals in Brisbane in the countdown to the referendum, the military succeeded in planting an operative within the UFL. Known only as X, the spy was present at a raucous UFL meeting on 2 December, called by Eastcrabb to discuss Sewell's expulsion from the ACCC.²⁴ X and Sewell were clearly not the same person.

While it is possible that Sewell did rat on his comrades, perhaps to protect his public service career, it seems unlikely. For if he valued his career more than his reputation and standing in the labour movement, his decision to take legal action does not make sense. Sewell was evidently desperate to clear his name. The spy rumour was destroying him. At the trial, Archie Eastcrabb testified that the spy allegation was known widely and believed by many in the early days of December 1917. He had heard the story from Cuthbert Butler,

who, he said, was adamant that it was true, even though he admitted to not having seen any proof.²⁵ Within days of the ACCC incident, the rumour was being whispered as truth in the hyper-conspiratorial circles of the UFL. On 5 December the League, an organisation to which Sewell had devoted many long hours and represented at meetings and rallies throughout Southeast Queensland, expelled him on the strength of hearsay and innuendo alone.²⁶

What was the real reason for Talbot Sewell's expulsion from the ACCC?

One telling fact in the whole saga is that Sewell was not the only delegate excluded from the ACCC. William Jackson was banned as well. Yet at no stage was Jackson accused of passing information to the Commonwealth. The evidence suggests that even had no allegation of spying emerged, Sewell would still have been booted out. Ultimately, the spy story was a furphy, albeit a devastating one for Sewell. To get to the truth, we have to look beyond the claims of treachery.

One credible source of information was William (Billy) Wallace, secretary of the Painters' Union and a member of the ACCC executive when Sewell was expelled. At the defamation trial he gave evidence in Riordan's favour. Unlike Dunstan and McDonald, Wallace was not in Riordan's political camp. He was a left-wing union

official, and active in the Brisbane Industrial Council. Among his peers he was known as a man of principle. According to Ernie Lane, Wallace was 'one of the very, very few union officials who ... retained the ideals of their youth and never deviated from the hard and thorny path that does not lead to political preferment or remunerative office'.²⁷ A respected militant and anti-militarist, Wallace was no ally of Riordan's, so his decision to testify in Riordan's defence was obviously not motivated by narrow considerations of personal or political loyalty. His words carry weight.

Wallace told the jury that the ACCC executive expelled Sewell because he represented the Universal Freedom League. He denied that an allegation of spying was ever a factor. According to the press reports, Wallace testified that Sewell was 'put off the committee' because 'he was president of a league [the UFL] which was shadowed by the police and it was as much in the interests of this man, and also the men he represented, that he should not be put in gaol'.²⁸ The catalyst for the expulsion was the UFL's actions on 25 November. Without ACCC agreement or a police permit, the League had held its own speak-out and taken up its own money collection in the Domain prior to an official ACCC rally, even causing a delay to the latter's advertised starting time. Sewell was one of the UFL's two speakers. On the day, Wallace had personally objected to the UFL's

behaviour, and it was on the basis of his report to the ACCC executive that Sewell was expelled.²⁹

Wallace's testimony broadly corroborated the evidence of other defence witnesses. The ACCC executive as a whole knew that Hughes and his agencies were determined to discredit the ACCC and the Ryan government by linking them in the public mind to the IWW, which the pro-conscriptionists had painted as an organisation committed to anarchic violence and disruption. With the referendum struggle entering its decisive final weeks, and with a conspiracy charge now hanging over Theodore, McDonald, Butler and Ryan, the executive was desperate to avoid the IWW smear. But there in the midst of their own organisation, like a burr under the skin, was the UFL, widely acknowledged as the IWW's political base in Queensland. They had been told by State police that prominent UFL figures were under Commonwealth surveillance and facing arrest. What to do?

The executive found the solution in a rule binding all affiliates to adhere to the committee's platform. In their propaganda and oratory, and evidently in Sewell's speech on 25 November, the UFL made it known that they would refuse to accept a 'yes' vote in the referendum, declaring that any post-referendum attempt to introduce conscription would be met with civil

disobedience. In the eyes of the ACCC executive, this position was a breach of the committee's platform. Here were the grounds to oust the troublesome Sewell and his even more dangerous sidekick Jackson.³⁰

The three AWU/government members of the executive, Riordan, Theodore and McDonald, understood better than anyone how high the stakes were. They knew that publicly and privately, Hughes was deploying wedge tactics to entrap Ryan. In a series of written exchanges in September and October, the Prime Minister had pressured the Queensland Premier to prosecute suspected Wobblies under the *Unlawful Associations Act*. It was cunning politics. If Ryan agreed, he would compromise his claim to be the champion of liberty and free speech against the draconian consequences of conscription. If he refused, he exposed himself to the allegation that he was soft on disloyalists, or even a disloyalist himself. Ryan and his advisors had to walk a fine line.

Their strategy was to avoid an open state crackdown on revolutionaries and militants, delegating the task of control to the unions, acting in quiet partnership with the state police. In September 1917 Ryan wrote to Hughes: 'I am advised that unions in Queensland are expelling members of the IWW and discouraging their propaganda'.³¹ Pressed by Hughes for

stronger action, Ryan telegraphed the Prime Minister on 29 September:

Union disapproval of IWW in this State and police surveillance are having most beneficial results. Moreover Commissioner of Police refuses permits to IWW for holding meetings and this is also a factor in minimising their activities. I am most anxious to take such steps as will deal effectively with the evil aimed at but very much doubt the wisdom of precipitate action. I have reason to believe the methods adopted in this State are those most conducive to good results.³²

So they were. Riordan and Dunstan had been successfully fighting IWW influence within the AWU since July, even implementing a blacklist of militants supplied by the North Queensland police.³³ Once the referendum campaign started, the ACCC worked closely with police to control the subversives. Late in November, Sergeant Edward Blackmore told McDonald that permits for the ACCC to hold public gatherings would be granted if UFL members Sewell, Eastcrabb, Kelly, Brown, Mandeno, Anlezark, Bright, Fredlein and Burke were not speakers.³⁴ The executive cooperated completely. After Sewell and Jackson were expelled, the executive allowed two other UFL delegates — Barcan and McNeill — to take their place, having vetted both men

with the police. The executive even cynically agreed at general committee meetings to submit public speaking applications on the UFL's behalf, only to take no further action afterwards. This tactic allowed the UFL to 'blow off steam', as Riordan put it.³⁵

By December, radical voices had been banished from the platforms of the official anti-conscription movement. On the 18 December, Sergeant Blackmore wrote to his Superintendent about the ACCC's application to hold a torch procession culminating in a monster rally in William Street, Brisbane, between 8 pm and 10.30 pm on the eve of the referendum. Anticipating a vast crowd, the ACCC intended to operate four speaking platforms simultaneously. Blackmore informed his boss that Lewis McDonald had personally guaranteed that 'no member of the Universal Freedom League will be permitted to address the meeting'.³⁶

The ACCC executive was united in its stance against the UFL. Individual motives varied, however. While the leftists Wallace, Collings and Brady supported Sewell and Jackson's expulsion out of an honest desire to protect the ACCC, the Queensland Premier and the anti-conscription campaign, the conservatives harboured a darker agenda. They, no less than Hughes, wanted to destroy the IWW and the revolutionary challenge it posed to their own class collaborationist politics. As Dunstan testified, the AWU did

all it could to avoid stopping industry or causing injury to capitalists.³⁷ In this respect, the militants posed a far greater threat than Hughes ever would. Indeed, Hughes' IWW ban was a gift to the senior officials of the AWU.

While Talbot Sewell was not a Wobbly, he was a powerful voice for militancy and a potential leader of the State's radical forces. He had no place in Dunstan's AWU, no place in Riordan and Theodore's ALP. Sewell believed he was slandered because Riordan considered him a career rival. Sewell was probably right. But whatever personal animosity the AWU-ALP apparatchiks bore towards Sewell, it was informed by an instinctive hatred of the politics of class struggle socialism. At his most radical, Sewell propagated ideas which challenged the very infrastructures of power upon which his opponents' bureaucratic and parliamentary privileges were based. Sewell had to be removed because he was a no-nonsense anti-capitalist rebel with a flair for activism, a combination altogether too dangerous for the official anti-conscription movement.

Outcomes

In other states Hughes crushed the Wobblies with criminal sanctions. In Queensland, as Ryan had anticipated, the IWW 'evil' was broken using less precipitative methods. The actions of the ACCC executive, working in close collaboration with the Queensland

police, left the UFL divided and weakened. In 1918 the police continued to deny the League permission to hold street meetings, while the Brisbane Industrial Council refused it representation at union conferences and rallies.³⁸

Ryan emerged from the referendum campaign triumphant and poised for a career in federal politics, clearing the way for Theodore's eventual rise to the Premier's job. Riordan lost the defamation case but suffered no political damage. He remained a member of the Queensland Legislative Council until it was abolished in 1922. He held senior positions in the AWU until 1933, when he resigned to begin a 20-year career as a member of the Queensland Industrial Court.

Despite a hostile judge, the jury in the defamation trial awarded Talbot Sewell £200 plus costs. But his reputation in the labour movement was damaged irretrievably. After his removal from the ACCC and the UFL, he was expelled from the Brisbane Industrial Council and the General Committee of the Metropolitan Section of the AWU. He was shunned at the Metropolitan District Labor Council. His tilt at office with the Water and Sewerage Board came to nothing. Cut adrift by the labour movement, Sewell eventually moved to Sydney, claiming that he was being victimised in Brisbane. He faded out of public life.³⁹

Sewell v Riordan was more than a sideshow. The story of this bitter confrontation between two prominent men of labour reveals the deep divisions within the anti-conscription movement, how Prime Minister Hughes sought to exploit those divisions to defeat T.J. Ryan and his government, and how the Right of the labour movement in Queensland manipulated the crisis to consolidate control of the anti-conscription campaign and inflict political damage on their left-wing opponents. The Right won the internal struggle in 1917 but the anti-war Left fought on, and as popular revulsion against the carnage on the western front grew, the Left critique of the conflict eventually entered the labour mainstream. By 1923 even the AWU national conference was prepared to accept that the war had been a sordid capitalist struggle for trade supremacy and territorial conquest.⁴⁰

Notes

- 1 Statement of Claim, Sewell v Riordan, Queensland State Archives, Item ID 870817, Writ.
- 2 *The Telegraph*, 15 Dec 1917; *The Daily Mail*, 15 Dec 1917; *Queensland Times*, 15 Dec 1917.
- 3 *The Daily Standard*, 4 August 1916.
- 4 *The Daily Standard*, 27 August 1916; *The Worker*, 7 September 1916.
- 5 *The Daily Standard*, 27 August 1916.
- 6 CPE Minutes 8 September 1916, Vol. 4, Box 2389, OMEQ, Australian Labor Party Records, John Oxley Library.
- 7 *The Daily Standard*, 15 September 1916.
- 8 *The Daily Standard*, 10, 16, 27 April, 30 May 1917.
- 9 E.H. Lane, *Dawn to Dusk: Reminiscences of a Rebel* (Brisbane: William Brooks & Co, 1939), 178.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 180–81.
- 11 *The Daily Standard*, 29 May 1918.
- 12 *The Daily Standard*, 20 May 1918.
- 13 *The Telegraph*, 10 March 1910, 3 October 1916; *The Brisbane Courier*, 14 August 1913, 20 March 1916; *The Daily Standard*, 9 September 1913, 18 May 1915, 8 October 1917; *The Truth*, 25 April 1915; *The Worker*, 25 November 1915; Statement of Claim, Sewell v Riordan, Queensland State Archives, Item ID 870817, Writ.
- 14 *The Daily Standard*, 21 May 1918.
- 15 *The Daily Standard*, 28 September 1915.
- 16 *The Daily Standard*, 8 October 1917.
- 17 *The Daily Standard*, 9 October 1916.
- 18 *The Daily Standard*, 19 November 1917, 21 May 1918.
- 19 *The Daily Standard*, 17 October, 8 December 1917; *The Brisbane Courier*, 9 January 1918.
- 20 *The Daily Standard*, 24, 29, 30 May 1918.
- 21 Statement of Claim, Sewell v Riordan, Queensland State Archives, Item ID 870817, Writ.
- 22 Censor's report QF453, National Archives of Australia, BP4/2, QF403-QF500; 'The Real Facts Concerning Hon. T.J. Ryan – Premier of Queensland, Aus', National Archives of Australia: B197, 2021/1/270.
- 23 Censor's report QF435, National Archives of Australia, BP4/2, QF403-QF500.
- 24 Censor's report QF453, National Archives of Australia, BP4/2, QF403-QF500.
- 25 *The Daily Standard*, 22 May 1918.
- 26 *The Daily Standard*, 22 May 1918.
- 27 Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*, 207–8.
- 28 *The Brisbane Courier*, 31 May 1918; *The Daily Standard*, 30 May 1918.
- 29 *The Daily Standard*, 30 May 1918.
- 30 *The Daily Standard*, 28 May 1918.
- 31 Telegram from Premier of Queensland to Prime Minister, 24 September 1917, National Archives of Australia: A367, C1409.

- 32 Telegram from Premier of Queensland to Prime Minister, 29 September 1917, National Archives of Australia: A367, C1409.
- 33 *The Daily Standard*, 29 May 1918.
- 34 *The Daily Standard*, 24,25, 28, 31 May 1918
- 35 *The Daily Standard*, 25 May 1918.
- 36 Letter from Acting Sergeant E.J. Blackmore to the Superintendent of Traffic, Brisbane, 18 December 1917, Queensland State Archives Digital Image 25120.
- 37 *The Daily Standard*, 29 May 1918.
- 38 *The Daily Standard*, 4 March, 24 May, 7 June 1918.
- 39 In a remarkable postscript, in the 1940s Talbot Sewell came to the attention of the intelligence services again, this time as a Nazi sympathiser. Never one to hide his opinions, Sewell had taken to praising Nazism to his work colleagues after attending the Berlin Olympics in 1936. Lieutenant-Colonel R. Powell from military intelligence concluded, just as William Riordan had done 44 years earlier, that Sewell's ideas, network of associates and powers of rhetoric made him 'a most dangerous person'. Letter from Lt-Colonel R. Powell to I.S.G.S. Northern Command, 9 October 1941, 'Sewell, Talbot Henry', National Archives of Australia: C123, 16163.
- 40 *The Worker*, 1 March 1923.

Contributors

John McCollow, now retired, was a long-time research officer with the Queensland Teachers' Union. As a sometime casual academic he was also a member of the NTEU. His PhD thesis was about FAUSA, one of the predecessor organisations of the NTEU.

Raymond Evans is a well known Queensland social historian who has written widely on many issues central to an understanding of Australia's past — especially in the areas of racial, ethnic, class, gender and generational relations. His extensive work on the World War One Home-front has served to question the prevailing consensus that a national spirit was somehow first forged during these war years.

Robert Whyte is a novelist (*Manacles* 1985), environmentalist (*The Creek in Our Back Yard*, 2011, 2013) and research scientist (at Queensland Museum). He is a co-owner of ToadShow and was an editor of *The Cane Toad Times* from 1985 to 1990.

Jan Ryall recently completed a Masters Honours Degree in Screen Production at Griffith University, South Bank campus. Research for a documentary film included interviews with the children of Brisbane's post war feminists who formed committees and organisations and swam against the tide of Brisbane's parochialism particularly during those cold war years when public vilification was common place. The realisation that history has not recorded the extraordinary achievements of our brave and revolutionary Mothers has led her to a determination to record for future generations their significant feminist and revolutionary activism.

Bob Carnegie was arrested 11 times in 1985 during the SEQEB dispute. He was jailed in Maximum Security for three weeks for refusing to sign bail conditions. He was a member of Apartheid Queensland from 1984 to 92, was President and Assistant Secretary of the Qld Branch of the Seamen's Union of Australia during the 1990s. He has been Qld Coordinator of the International Transport Federation, active in the Patricks dispute, and was elected an Organiser in the BLF in 2004. He is currently Secretary of the Qld Branch of the Maritime Union of Australia.

Jeff Rickertt is a librarian and labour historian. He is a former editor of the *Queensland Journal of Labour History*, and was a contributor and assistant editor to *Radical Brisbane: An Unruly History*. His latest book, *The Conscientious Communist: Ernie Lane and the Rise of Australian Socialism*, was published in 2016.

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.

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