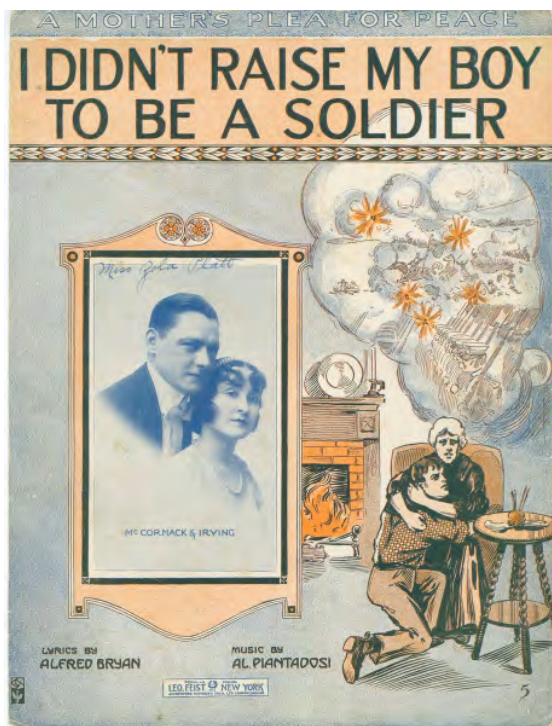


The Queensland Journal of Labour History

No. 27
Spring 2018



The Brisbane Labour History Association

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"I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier" sheet music cover (1915).
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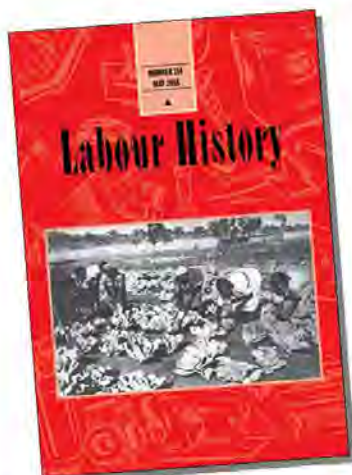
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LABOUR HISTORY

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Editorial

One focus of the Brisbane Labour History Association this year has been facilitating regular presentations and seminars in areas of interest to our members. This issue of the journal contains transcripts from two events that have taken place in 2018.

Back in May, Adrian Skerritt delivered a presentation detailing his attendance at this year's Labor Notes Conference in Chicago. The Labor Notes conference attracted around three thousand rank and file trade unionists to this biennial event. Adrian explains that there are currently sound theoretical and academic arguments for being optimistic about working class mobilisation in the USA. After 40 years of neoliberal attacks on working conditions, and with little support from trade union or political leaders, rank and file activists are becoming better organised and Adrian describes recent successful campaigns of teacher unions. We include Adrian's presentation in full.

In June our annual Alex MacDonald Memorial Lecture was given by former ABC journalist Matt Peacock, author of the book *Killer Company*. Matt talked about his experiences investigating

James Hardie's campaign to put profits from asbestos mining and use before the health of its own workers and that of the general Australian public. He details how trade union activists were crucial in uncovering the dangers; although unfortunately, sometimes they had to do this in opposition to their own union leadership.

With the anniversary of the Armistice at the end of World War One imminent we include an article from Deb Jordan on the role of radicalised women in the anti-war campaigns a hundred years ago. She highlights the lack of historical focus on these activists and how tragedy at the end of the war disrupted the legacy of the women's movement in Queensland.

Howard Guille reviews the book *Red North* by Diane Menghetti. Howard focuses on the original work from 1981 and the rationale behind the recent republishing of the work by Resistance Books.

In memory of Hughie Williams this issue also includes an obituary by Bob Reed.

BLHA

President's Column

Greg Mallory

The Alex Macdonald Lecture was held in June and Matt Peacock, veteran ABC journalist, was the speaker. Matt has worked on making people aware of the effects of asbestos on workers. Matt's speech outlined the campaign he conducted for over a period of approximately 40 years. The talk was well accepted and a vote of thanks was conducted by Andrew Ramsay from the Asbestos Disease Support Society.

I attended the ACTU Congress which was held in early July. The night before there was a rally held with speakers Sally McManus, Secretary of the ACTU, Ros McLennan Secretary of the QCU, Tom McDonald, former Secretary of the BWIU and Executive member of the ACTU, and Danny Glover, actor and labour activist. All the speakers spoke eloquently about the campaign to Change the Rules. I attended the Congress for the next day and a half. The main issue confronting the trade union movement is the increasing casualisation of the workforce. On the Tuesday afternoon we had speaker after speaker from various unions describing

their encounter with casualisation. There were meat workers who were living in accommodation of 10 in a shared house, with barely enough money to make ends meet. These were workers who were employed on 457 Visas. Other workers in the education industry spoke about how when they were employed by a private college, they had to work 10 hours a day to make a worthwhile living. There was the example of university teaching where approximately 60% of teaching is performed by casuals who have no holiday or sick pay. The frightening figures from the Congress were that the ACTU only covers 15% of the workforce and there was a call to increase the membership.

Bob Reed has resigned from the Executive. Bob has been a member of the Executive for many years and served as Vice-President for a number of years. The BLHA wish him all the best and hopes he can return to the Executive in future. James Morris has also stepped down from involvement in the journal whilst he undertakes research. We continue to seek new

people to be involved in the running of the BLHA and/or production of the journal.

The BLHA is organising a joint event with the Search Foundation in November. The theme of the seminar will be the struggle of women in employment around the issues of equal pay, superannuation, insecure work, discrimination and harassment. So far, we have Ros McLennan and Glenda Strahan as speakers. Further details of the seminar will be forthcoming.

American Teacher Union Insurgency and the Creation of a New Militant Minority

Adrian Skerritt

In May this year there were teachers' strikes in North Carolina. In Arizona recently, 70,000 teachers marched in the capital, Phoenix. Similar scenes occurred in Oklahoma, Puerto Rico and of course West Virginia. It is possible to speak now about a teacher insurgency in the US. Many of the activists who have played leading roles in these historic strikes met in Chicago in April at the Labor Notes conference, the most important gathering of trade union activists in the United States. This year 3000 unionists attended from transit, construction, health, waterside and public sector unions. There was a powerful belief that unions were rebuilding, that activists were becoming more confident and that strong industrial action could achieve results.

The Labor Notes Project

The Labor Notes project was launched in 1979, the beginning of a very difficult time for the US working class. Tens of thousands of manufacturing jobs would be destroyed by a recession and the fight seemed to drain from the trade unions. Labor Notes took stock of the situation and set itself a straightforward task—produce a regular newsletter and

put rank and file activists in contact with one another. They did not want to be seen as merely a front group for the far left. They wanted the project to be real and trusted.

Labor Notes publications contained a number of common themes. Newsletter articles looked at the way divisions along racial and gender lines had to be overcome. There were many reports on the experiences of African-American workers and women. The bulletins ran hundreds of stories about initiatives taken by rank-and-file workers and often described the way the leadership of unions simply gave in, accepting many concessions. Articles were highly critical of the way unions participated in workplace union/management forums.

The audience were rank-and-file leaders in the workplace. A staff writer for Labor Notes between 2002 in 2007 said that 'Labor Notes readers are workplace leaders. What struck me both editing articles or organising conferences was the relentless focus on winning power at work.' Mark Brennan describes the significance of the project in this way: 'promoting union reform as a strategy for revitalising the



Labor Notes Conference 2018. Photo by Adrian Skerritt

labour movement is one of our biggest contributions both theoretically because it injects politics so squarely into discussion but also practically [because it] helps generations of reformers think strategically about how to run for office and win.’ Probably the most well-known publication is *A Troublemaker’s Handbook: How to Fight Back Where you Work*. Its ideas are used to guide weekend Troublemaker schools aimed at workplace organising. The book is loaded with real life examples of organising and winning.

Labor Notes took their unique approach to organising across borders and formed strong relationships with Canadian auto and electrical workers as well as union activists in Mexico. Next year Labor Notes will be holding a regional Troublemakers conference in Japan. The cross-border initiatives seem full of promise but Kim Moody, one of the founders of Labor Notes, admits that, for the moment, the biennial conference is really the most

significant point where international dialogue can take place.

Moody writes in his latest book, *On New Terrain*, that ‘the Labour Notes network is a 21st-century democratic current within what is still in many ways a mid-20th century bureaucratic labour movement.’ I encountered this vibrant, successful, democratic current in Chicago over Easter.

The conference featured incredibly detailed discussions. Even the larger sessions held in the ballrooms focused on participants sharing stories about how to build campaigns in the workplace. The formula that these inspirational trade unionists have developed is to select a workplace issue to place at the centre of a campaign, ensuring that the majority of workers share the grievance and that they had a reasonable chance of winning. Participants described how to map a workplace in order to identify who could be relied on to carry an argument and do some legwork for a workplace campaign. A lot of time is invested in mapping the movement of power through the workplace. A strategy then evolves to ‘raise the temperature’ about the issue. You have to cause trouble to be an effective union activist.

The American labour movement is being rebuilt workplace by workplace, lunchroom by lunchroom. It was clear that participants at the conference

understood that this painstaking and very necessary work cannot be avoided.

The Teachers' Strike in West Virginia

The overall mood at the conference was very upbeat. This was largely a consequence of the historic West Virginia teachers' strike. All unions paid tribute to their courage and vision. Often, it seemed like the conference was a celebration of the 13-day strike in West Virginia and the teacher strike wave it inspired.

When the chair, convening a 2000 strong meeting in a conference ballroom, introduced the panel of strike leaders from West Virginia, she told them: 'we owe you a lot.' They had created history and possibly played a key role in revitalising the US labour movement. For many years unions have been paralysed by anti-union legislation. The Trump presidency accentuated the gloom.

Striking teachers cast aside fear and pessimism and defied unjust industrial laws. The strike was illegal. But the scale and confidence of the strike guaranteed that draconian anti-union laws could not be used. A strike leader shared with the conference a conversation she had with her husband about the strike. They were watching the news and listening to threats to charge strikers. This could have meant prison. They had four children under six years of age. He asked her if she

was doing the right thing by her family. Her response was: 'somebody has to do it.' The ballroom erupted in applause.

Early in the dispute there was talk of just using rolling stoppages. This was quickly replaced by a determination to get all 55 counties out at once. It seems that what fellow unionists 'owe' teachers from West Virginia is thanks for dusting off a strategy that belonged to a time when unions were able to champion entire communities: the strike. Between the 1970s and the first decade of the 21st century strikes in the US fell by 95 per cent. Teacher unions are turning this trend around.

Long term factors were behind the strike: cuts to public education, the introduction of a market mechanism into public education in the guise of 'choice', and the humiliation of 'merit-based pay'. Across the US wages had declined against cost of living increases. The sustained neo-liberal assault on public education, which became an all-out war on schools and teachers following the global financial crisis, created a lot of combustible material.

The spark was the dramatic rise of health insurance costs. The union leadership appeared unresponsive to teacher demands that something be done about the premiums. A Facebook page began on 6 January, and someone floated the idea of a strike. They asked 'why aren't we doing anything.'

Commentators have speculated where the concept to strike came from—a possible answer is that it came from the history of union militancy in the West Virginian coal mines. As the strike swept through counties people joined the union in record numbers. One speaker on the panel said that the ‘service provider model of unionism was broken.’

After five days out on strike the union leaders met with the governor. A deal was cobbled together—a five per cent increase for teachers, three per cent for other state sector employees, and a review of the despised health insurance premiums. The leadership urged members to accept the offer. Teachers outside the Capital Building said no. They chanted ‘55 unite’, ‘Fix it now’ and ‘Back to the table’. Ashlea Bassham from Logan County told Labor Notes: ‘After the unions announced the deal with the governor we were kind of upset. This was for not just teachers—the fact that this was five per cent for some and three per cent for others, we didn’t like that idea.’ The wildcat strike began. Rank and file teacher unionists became the drivers of the action. One of the eventual leaders of the strike was not even a union member at the start of the year—she joined during the strike.

The strike achieved a five per cent increase for all state sector employees, not just those who work in schools, but teachers have yet to resolve the issue of health insurance. A committee

of enquiry has been set up, but teachers are highly sceptical because representatives of the health insurance companies sit on the committee. Strike leaders spoke about the importance of maintaining connections over the summer. They said: ‘people need to be prepared to take more action when school returns in the next academic year.’

The leaders were rank and file members. They made key strategic decisions, such as launching wildcat action and shaping the politics of the campaign. They are cheerful, confident and incredibly humble. They seemed surprised that they had ended up in the centre of a labour conference and a teacher strike wave. Jay, one of the key organisers, said that last year he had stumbled across some information about Labor Notes, perused the past programs and thought it sounded like his kind of people. Very strange, he said, that he had become a keynote speaker in a packed conference ballroom.

Years of negotiating saw teachers’ wages stagnate. Unions offered concessions but that didn’t stop the attacks on public education. The strikes have changed everything. Teachers are winning. Teachers in Oklahoma won a \$6000 a year pay increase and remained on strike for nine days to restore public funding to public schools which had lost \$350 million to tax cuts. Surprisingly, union leaders called the strike off before additional funding had

been secured, but the wage increase is a clear victory. On 26 April, 75,000 teachers in Arizona went on strike and rallied in the capital, Phoenix. The governor, Doug Ducey, had said he would agree to a 20 per cent pay increase. Teachers went out on strike anyway, because the increase had not been accounted for in the budget.

Identifying sources to boost funding for education is a key feature of teacher union militancy in the US. For instance, there were fears in West Virginia that the governor would try to cover the pay increases by cutting Medicaid. Unionists responded by arguing that the revenue can be raised by taxing fossil fuel companies in the state. When state governors cry poor, teacher unions carry out the research to show that the issue is not lack of resources in the economy but failure to prioritise education. The task is getting corporations to pay proper taxes.

It is notable that, by and large, the strikes are taking place in Republican voting states. Arizona, a state that has seen spending on education drop by 36 per cent since 2008, has been solid Republican for years and many on strike are Republican voters. But they are sickened by the way the Republicans have attacked public education. Jamie Woodward, a registered Republican voter for 17 years, told the *New York Times*: ‘I’ll be voting for anyone who supports public education. We have impoverished teachers living in



Labor Notes Conference 2018. Photo by Adrian Skerritt

camper trailers.’ The Republicans, like conservatives everywhere, rely on misery, cynicism and division in the community to get them into office. The strikes have given people hope, enabling them to view politics in a different way.

The teachers at the conference were committed to ‘social justice unionism’. They believe that unions are strong when they not only look after their own members but reach out to fight alongside those parts of the community under attack. In the US this means teachers helping to build a rapid response when ICE agents—Immigrations and Customs Enforcement—swoop on a school or neighborhood to deport a student. Teachers have also teamed up with writers from Rethinking Schools to design curriculum material to support the Black Lives Matter campaign. Teachers from Philadelphia ran a brilliant workshop about ways to stand with black students and their families.



*Labor Notes Conference 2018. Photo by
Adrian Skerritt*

The Industrial Landscape in the US

There was also theoretical reflection about the US economy and prospects for the labour movement rediscovering its power. In one session Kim Moody drew on ideas from *On New Terrain* describing why the pessimism about the American labour movement was unfounded. His book challenges the notion that the working class has changed fundamentally in character over the last 10 to 20 years, so much so that we can no longer expect the labour movement be a key agent of social change; that broader, networked coalitions of the multitude are more likely to subvert capitalism. The rise of imports and the movement of capital offshore has, according to authors like Guy Standing, created a new class within western economies: the precariat. A related trend is the emergence of the ‘gig economy’.

Moody traces the actual contours of the US economy. From 1998

to 2014 new capital investment in structures amounted to \$658 billion in manufacturing, just over \$200 billion in warehouses and \$150 billion in transportation. It is difficult to imagine corporations leaving all of this sunk capital and moving operations offshore. Since 2014 there has been new direct investment in US manufacturing. Behind this ‘re-shoring’ of industry are strikes by an increasingly confident Chinese working class and improvements in wages in China. US corporations are looking at a restive Chinese working class and thinking, better the devil you know. Moody acknowledges that over the last 30 years manufacturing has shrunk in the US but argues the main cause is not the movement of operations offshore, but the massive growth in productivity within the US economy.

The essential structure of employment has not changed. Eighty-five per cent of US workers are still in traditional employment arrangements, suggesting that the expansion of precarious work is not as widespread as is commonly thought. It’s been assumed that the gig economy took off following the great recession of 2008 and that there is a growing army of workers making a living out two or three jobs on a highly innovative platform such as Task Rabbit or Uber. Moody writes that the percentage of multiple jobholders has not changed significantly since the 1970s when they accounted for 4.9 per cent of the workforce. It has

always been the case that a number of working class people have had jobs that do not pay enough to buy food, accommodation, clothing and transport. As one economist has noted, ‘you can see the age of self-employment everywhere except in the self-employment statistics.’

According to Moody, the focus on precarious employment misses far more important points, in particular the hideous growth of inequality in the US and the deterioration of wages and working conditions for the majority of working people over three decades. For example, in 1979 69 per cent of all employees had employer-provided health insurance. In 2010 it was down to 53 per cent and we can observe similar falls in employer-provided pensions.

The US working class—the huge majority of the class and not just those on the margins—suffers because of a sustained employer assault and work intensification. The Federal Reserve decision to abruptly crank up interest rates in 1979 heralded the grim dawn of neoliberalism and a concerted ruling class attack on working conditions and trade unions. Within the next three years 2.5 million manufacturing jobs were lost and the number of private sector union members fell by 26 per cent. An ominous calm descended on American workplaces. American capital was determined to extract as much profit out of the workforce as

possible. In the 1980s they introduced ‘lean production’ involving brutal measures to eliminate waste, stockpiles of inventory and anything that slowed production, such as health and safety concerns. We saw the emergence of new academic disciplines: human resource management and supply chain management. Labor Notes described all these measures as amounting to ‘management by stress’. In workplaces there has been a bitter struggle over time, which more often than not workers lost. A recent study of work intensification in the US found that between 1980 and 2000 the number of breaks fell by 30 per cent for men, 34 per cent for women, while the time allocated for breaks decreased by 29 per cent and 25 per cent respectively.

Recently, lean production methods have become more personally invasive for workers thanks to the use of global positioning systems within supply chains. An order arrives at the warehouse and you move quickly with the scanner in hand across the equivalent of two football fields. The scanner counts down the time you have to fill the order and tracks your movements between items. It is no wonder that Amazon warehouses rapidly destroy a person’s health.

Any teacher or nurse or public servant can testify that stress management innovations have not been limited to the private sector or assembly lines that make things that can ‘drop on

your foot'. The public sector has also been assailed by management by stress. Consider the impact that the 'continuous improvement' agenda has had upon schools in the US, where teachers are judged according to how well students do on standardised tests. And GPS trackers are used to monitor the movement of nurses around a hospital ward. Today, no worker escapes the logic of the production line.

These changes have combined to produce what Moody describes as 'the biggest job destroying intensifications of labour in the history of capitalism.'

Labour intensification has been a key strategy used by capital to increase productivity since the early 1980s. The other has been the process of mergers and acquisitions producing massive concentrations of capital. There are now in the US three big car companies—Ford, Chrysler and General Motors—employing 733,000 workers. We can see a similar concentration in the steel industry and the logistics network. For example, UPS and FedEx by themselves employ 40 per cent of the nation's 1.7 million transport and delivery workers. In the air Delta, American, United and Southwest now control 80 per cent of air passenger traffic.

What does the concentration of capital mean for workers? Workers are confronting fewer and fewer employers. American capitalism now

puts workers alongside each other in significant numbers. In 2008 there were 24.7 million workers employed in workplaces of 500 or more, or 20 per cent of the workforce. Those in workplaces of a thousand or more rose to 16.5 million or 14 per cent of the workforce. If organised and confident these workers could be formidable.

Hundreds of thousands of American workers find themselves locked into what Moody describes as a 'global supply chain gang', supporting corporate giants like Walmart and Amazon. The new, vast logistics and warehouse systems draw labour from the working class areas of Chicago, Los Angeles, New York and New Jersey. Many of these workers are Latino or African-American. It won't however be easy for corporations to rely on the oppression of blacks and Latinos to deliver them a compliant workforce. Generally, black workers are more likely to join a union than white workers and Latinos are joining unions in large numbers. Community campaigns for justice are strengthening union activism. Kim Moody writes that 'rapid growth in unionisation among immigrants and Latinos probably reflects activism in the Latino community' and that Black Lives Matter may lead to a 'growth in union membership and organisation among black workers.'

The conditions for a sustained fightback are evident. American

workers are concentrated in large numbers; they confront fewer enemies thanks to aggressive corporate acquisitions; billions in sunk capital mean corporations can't fly offshore; management by stress is creating oceans of resentment; and key sections of the working class are energised by community campaigns for justice. In the words of Eric Hobsbawm there are 'accumulations of inflammable material'. If organised well in each workplace and across industries, American workers could be formidable.

A Militant Minority

Much depends now, according to Kim Moody, on a return to the very serious workplace organising that occurred in the United States, Germany, Russia and Britain during and following World War I and in the US and Australia in the 1930s. Anger towards Taylorism or 'scientific' management following WW1 produced wave upon wave of rank and file rebellions. Rank and file organising created the Congress of Industrial Organisations, the CIO, in America in the 1930s and the historical labour insurgencies by Minneapolis Teamsters and Toledo autoworkers. Working class radicals were at the heart of the new delegates' networks underpinning the effectiveness of the CIO organising for several decades.

The most extraordinary case of rank-and-file militancy in US in recent times was the nine-day strike by the Chicago



United Campus Workers Local 3865 wins the 2018 Labor Notes Troublemakers Award.. Photo by Jim West, 2018 Labor Notes Conference

teachers' union in 2012. It was a strike that took on mayor Rahm Emmanuelle and created the platform for a union reform group to seize control of the union. The existing union bureaucracy simply failed to provide any leadership in the campaign to stop school closures. The reform Caucus without any official power organised rallies and created a vast network across Chicago schools that were able to turn each school into a fortress. The Chicago teachers' union strike in 2012 remains probably the best example of the way rank-and-file unionism can win power from a do-nothing bureaucracy and transform the union structure in the process.

The rank and file rebellions among teachers, teamsters, nurses and transit and telecommunication workers paused briefly at the Chicago conference to share information and strategies. Out of the Chicago teachers' strike the teachers formed a caucus of rank and file educators, CORE, which now unites teacher rank-and-file groups across the

country. One of the keynote speakers at the conference was the outgoing president of the Massachusetts teachers' union, Barbara Madeloni, who led a reform caucus into union office. She said that one of the most difficult challenges was not winning office but keeping that movement that won the election mobilised and engaging the rest of the 110,000 members of the union. Structures simply had to be transformed. More serious rank and file challenges are being coordinated right now.

The reform movements focus on the battle for democracy within their union and power within their workplace. This is the way they challenge the bureaucratic processes and the endless compromises with the employer. The battle for democracy in workplace power creates what Kim Moody describes as 'the leaders without titles'.

Kim Moody and the Labor Notes project call for the creation of a new Militant Minority. Workers will respond angrily and militantly to new stresses at work. With the teacher union insurgency moving across the United States it is possible to speak of very real opportunities to create a new Militant Minority. Perhaps the Labor Notes project is the foundation for this new Militant Minority.

I left Chicago thinking that the parts of the US labour represented at the Labor Notes conference—the transit

workers, the reform movement in the Teamsters, the wharfies, the warehouse and logistics workers, the cleaners and the teachers—could achieve remarkable things. Their detailed organising can turn each workplace into a fortress against neoliberalism and Trump's attacks. What the teachers have demonstrated is that you can be even more powerful by connecting each workplace, each fortress, through practical solidarity. The teachers of West Virginia stayed on strike because they wanted every state sector employee to receive the five per cent pay rise, not just themselves. At a time when the Trump presidency divides communities, targets the most vulnerable and drains public services of funding, union solidarity and militancy are giving people hope.

I would like to thank the MUA, the AMIEU, the office of Senator Andrew Bartlett, the Brisbane Labour History Association and staff at Centenary SHS for donating money and making it possible for me to attend the conference.

Further reading:

- Brenner, M, *How To Jump Start Your Union: Lessons from the Chicago Teacher Strike* (Labor Notes, 2014).
MacAlevey, J., *Raising Expectations, Raising Hell* (Verso, 2014).
Moody, K., *On New Terrain* (Haymarket, 2017).

The 2018 Alex MacDonald Memorial Lecture: Unions, The Media and the Fight Against Asbestos

Matt Peacock

Thank you very much for the invitation.

I'm very honoured to speak at a function named after Alex MacDonald, whom, although he was just a bit before my time, I feel like I know.

I'm here primarily to talk about asbestos, and to flog a few copies of my now out of print book about James Hardie, the one with the subtle title "Killer Company". But first I'd like to give you a little of my background in trade unionism, and how, amongst other things, I nearly had a punch-up with Martin Ferguson.

Almost by accident, I've spent most of my working life in the ABC, which was hardly a hotbed of trade unionism when I joined it. I came, in fact, from the student union, AUS, where I'd been editor of its newspaper, National U. When I joined the ABC, we had a staff association, run nationally and in Victoria, by Santamaria's National Civic Council and ABC staff had never taken any sort of industrial action but that would soon change. Whitlam was in Government, Double J was born, Marius Webb was elected our staff commissioner and things were happening. In a few years I found

myself on the NSW committee of the staff association, the biggest branch, and when Fraser abolished the staff elected commissioner position, stacked the Board and cut the budget, we all began a campaign of industrial action.

We put a ban on parliamentary broadcasts, being the least listened to program of the day, and aimed squarely at the government. Of course, it didn't take long for the tech who pulled the plug to be stood down, and all of a sudden, it was "everybody out!" Amazingly, pretty much all the staff did go on strike. The problem was, as our little committee realised when we got back to the staff association office, we'd forgotten to arrange a way to get them *back* to work. We had no meeting arranged.

It was a moment burnt on my brain. What the hell were we going to do? We were already public enemy number one, with the pollies, with the NCC, and with the Murdoch media. (Yes, some things never seem to change). Luckily, I'd met unionists from the APTU and the ATEA, as they were known then, at TUTA, and a quick and slightly desperate phone call saw me meet one of them at the GPO a few minutes before midnight with a



*Asbestos fibres. Photo c/- Australasian
Mine Safety Journal*

sack full of letters hand addressed to members calling a meeting; which was in the mail overnight.

I was reminded of all that this week when a call to arms went out from Friends of the ABC to rally in defence of the national broadcaster, given the continuing and malevolent attacks on the ABC by today's federal government, whether it's led by Malcolm Turnbull or Tony Abbott. Friends are organising a series of rallies around the country and are working in closely with the two unions — the MEAA and the CPSU. But already some of the Friends have objected. "Why are we working with trade unions?" some of them have sniffily asked. The truth is, depleted though unions are now, they are still the only organised force capable of serious resistance when the chips are down.

It was like that back then, too. The ABC was very conservative. Even Carolyn Jones was reluctant to strike, so we got her to host a free Sydney Symphony

Orchestra concert in the park. But I was in the Radio Science unit, where it was a bit different, and I had free range.

I must interrupt here and just say you shouldn't believe everything you see in the movies.

In *Devil's Dust*, my portrayal as a young science journalist researching asbestos is a little exaggerated. Yes, I did have long hair, but not nearly such long sideburns; and no, I didn't smoke the dreaded weed in the office...well, hardly. But despite my protestations they left that in the mini-series. (Luckily they took other bits out).

When I was first reading the screenplay on the train on the way home, I let out a groan of agony when I read one scene. I was meant to be driving down the road when I spotted students shoving what appeared to be asbestos cement into a bin, in a cloud of dust. "Stop, stop!" I shouted, explaining they were risking their lives. "Wait a minute, I know that voice," said a sexy young blonde amongst them. "You're Matt Peacock! You're a living legend!"

You can see why I groaned aloud when I first read that. Everyone on the train looked at me. So, I turned over the page. "Come back to bed" said the blonde girl in the first line of the next scene. I groaned again, even louder, and everyone *really* looked at me. So they took those scenes out. I was relieved at the time, but looking back now, some

years on, maybe they should have left them in...

Anyhow, there I was, a young science reporter. I did a program about occupational health, just a general program about how workers die every year from workplace injuries and diseases. A week later I got a phone call from James Hardie's PR company wanting to use a transcript. I'd interviewed a public servant who was in their pocket, who'd used a throw away line about how things weren't all bad, "some industries, like asbestos, had really cleaned up their act." That's how "on the case" they were.

Anyway, I became suspicious and began to dig. Within a few days I realised the best place for information about asbestos, apart from overseas, was with the unions. I made a beeline to the union offices and began photocopying their files, first the AMWSU, the BLF, then even at the AWU, where Charlie Oliver, late in life, surprisingly was quite helpful. The AWU's record on asbestos, like many things, is mixed. In the West, at Wittenoom, it was pathetic, turning a blind eye to the dust and doing very little for its members when they started dying. On the East coast, there was a brief flurry of activity on behalf of the Aboriginal workers at James Hardie's asbestos mine at Baryulgil, but that was largely due to a great unionist called Doug Howitt, a 'Missos' official

(Federated Miscellaneous Workers Union).

It was James Hardie who was the real asbestos manufacturing giant, and an insight into how it dealt with the unions was spelt out in a 1957 memo that was soon leaked to me. "This is a delicate situation. Little imagination is required to envisage a full-blown emotional attack on the company. However, with individual handling, based on our knowledge of the trade union personalities involved, we feel confident the matter will be resolved satisfactorily," it said.

And so it was. All those years Hardie grew and so did the Missos, even as their members started dying. By the late 1960's the union movement was getting warnings from its overseas affiliates, particularly about asbestos. James Hardie, of course, was way ahead. It was first sued for asbestosis in the 1930's, knew of the cancer connection



*Jack Trinidad boring white asbestos seam at the Nunyerry asbestos mine, 1957.
Photo: State Library of Western Australia*



Doug Howitt, 2004. Photo: Matt Peacock's personal collection

by the 1950's, and was alarmed by the mesothelioma connection by the late 1950's. Up here in Brisbane an ARU official travelling in Britain read about mesothelioma in the London Times: he sent the article around the ARU branches. The BWIU began circulating warnings also through the ACTU, as did the AMWU.

At the Missos, Hardie was managing the "delicate situation" with the help of Ray Gietzelt. His NSW secretary, Doug Howitt, had raised the alarm, writing several articles in the union journal and taking a hard line with Hardie, flatly telling them they might have to get out of asbestos altogether. Howitt soon found himself frozen out of the union, and with ill-health, retired to the NSW north coast. Back at the ABC Science Unit, I was unaware of this, but the memo gave me an inkling, and the downright hostility of the Missos to my programs made me very suspicious.

I received an anonymous tip to call this fellow Doug Howitt, but had no number and I was frankly less than enthusiastic about pursuing the union when the biggest problem was Hardie, which by then was producing more asbestos than ever. The Science Unit was suddenly introduced to blue singlets, as a steady stream of power station workers filed into my office. I met great unionists like Mick Smith of the FEDFA and his workmates, many of whom had been dusted and are now dead. Mick never gave up the battle. Only a few years ago we caught up on the phone and he was telling me with outrage that despite his warnings they had blown up the Bunnerong power station in Sydney's Mascot, scattering blue asbestos to the four winds.

Things often don't change in this story. Right now in Victoria there's controversy about another asbestos power station demolition gone wrong, and explosives were also recently used to blow up the mill at Woodsreef, Australia's only commercial white asbestos mine near Tamworth, shut down in the mid-1980s. It was colleagues of Mick's who barricaded the NSW Energy Minister in the control room of a power station back in the 80s, that led to the creation of the NSW Dust Diseases Tribunal.

They were outraged as they watched their workmates die painful deaths, as the asbestos companies and employers



Ray Gietzelt, general secretary of the Miscellaneous Workers Union, at Hardie's main asbestos factory at Camellia in 1958 speaking with his union delegates, one of whom, Jimmy Braid (at right), developed asbestosis and later died of lung cancer.

Asbestos dust is visible on their hat brims, shoes and overalls. This photo had pride of place in the federal office of the union. The photographer, the former NSW Secretary of the Missos, Doug Howitt, says Gietzelt silenced his warnings about asbestos.

Photo: Matt Peacock, personal collection

strung along their compensation cases so they would die before judgement. In those days, their cases effectively died with them, often leaving their families in dire straits. The Dust Diseases Tribunal established fast track procedures and a string of other precedents that soon flowed to other jurisdictions around the country.

I was young back in those days, and moved on from asbestos when Hardie announced it was abandoning the mineral. I was a bit too young to keep hanging around dying people. It was depressing. But 30 years later I got

back into the story when Hardie did a runner to the Netherlands.

I'd just returned from a posting in London and pounced on a story I'd spotted about Hardie's asbestos fund going broke. It didn't take me long to get back into the story with a vengeance and that's when I met Bernie Banton. We hit it off straight away — he appreciated that I knew something of the history of the Missos.

One reason why Gietzelt was paranoid back in the days when Bernie was a member was the push by the NCC to dislodge the soft left control of the



The sack race — photo taken at the Wittenoom racecourse which was covered in asbestos tailings.

Photo: Asbestos Disease Society of Australia Inc.

union. They funded a campaign by Frank Shanahan, who came within a few votes of dislodging Gietzelt. Ironically, Bernie used to meet at the pub with Shanahan where they complained about the union leadership. But Gietzelt survived and Shanahan did not. Shanahan was the man who a few years later gave evidence to the Labour Party's National Executive of how Brian Harradine had helped fund his challenge through the NCC and Harradine was expelled as a result.

A few years later Shanahan himself died a lonely death from mesothelioma contracted at Hardie. Bernie, though, kept going. I think it was largely the use of Bernie in the media that kept the pressure on Hardie to pay up in the more recent saga of this shameful company. We worked together closely, along with the union movement, and the public pressure became irresistible.

Although Banton was a Missos delegate and the Missos was the largest asbestos union in Australia, when the royal commission into Hardie's move offshore began the Missos was nowhere to be found amongst the twenty or so unions that appeared together before it. It was missing in action. Some, like Martin Ferguson, are still loyal to Gietzelt's legacy at James Hardie, for building a strong union out of a grab-bag of literally miscellaneous workers. I even interviewed Martin's father, Jack Ferguson, about asbestos. He was actually dusted from his work on the wharves during the war. (It didn't stop him smoking!)

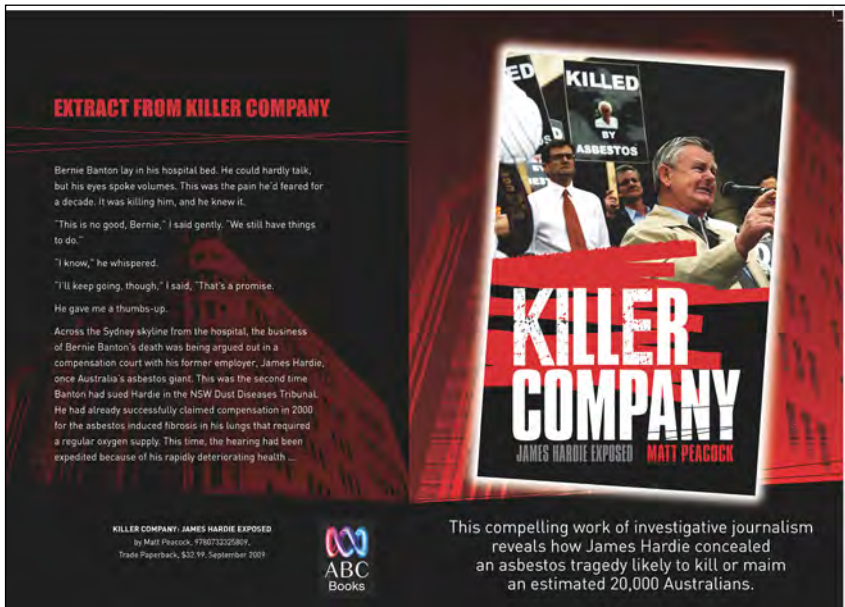
I observed at the launch of the federal parliamentary group on asbestos a few years ago that the asbestos industry had friends on both sides of politics, Julie Bishop, as the former CSR lawyer, and Martin Ferguson, as a former Missos official who dealt with Hardie. Word got back to Martin, who unexpectedly had a go at me at the Garma festival just after breakfast about four years ago. 'You said I was on the take from Hardie's, you ****' he said, poking me in the shoulder. We almost came to blows. I hadn't said that, nor did I think Ray Gietzelt had been. It was more subtle than that, a matter of co-option. As Gietzelt candidly said to me, Hardie weren't that stupid. But it had the same result. I guess it would be like putting in a petroleum resource rent tax on our billion-dollar gas industry that reaped

virtually no tax, then going off to work for the gas industry. It stinks.

Both unions have subsequently apologised for their poor record over asbestos. But despite this inglorious past, when I wrote my book “Killer Company”, I dedicated it to the many unionists who have fought an often lonely fight against the asbestos industry. Without them I have no doubt that many, many more people would die from exposure to the mineral. Virtually every advance in the struggle to improve conditions for those with disease and to prevent others from contracting it has been the result of union action. That is still the case today, when the battle has switched to Asia

where the industry is still growing. Australia’s union overseas aid arm, APHEDA, has led efforts to assist victims’ groups and fellow unions in the fight for bans and adequate medical care and compensation.

It was the union movement that successfully lobbied the federal Government under Labor leader Kevin Rudd to establish the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency, which has survived years of Coalition rule to see a comprehensive plan implemented nationally to eliminate asbestos from the built environment. It’s an ongoing struggle, still not won. But without the trade unions, it never will be.



Bernie Banton on the cover of Matt Peacock's book

Asbestos Disease Support

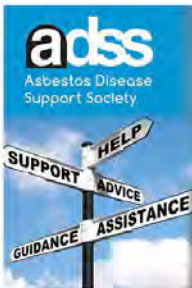
The Asbestos Disease Support Society was founded in 1992 and is a not-for-profit charitable organisation which provides support for people living with asbestos related diseases and information to the community on the dangers of exposure to asbestos.

The Society's mission is to:

- Support sufferers of an asbestos related disease, their family or carers
- Prevent asbestos exposure in the workplace and community
- Lobby for improvements on asbestos related matters
- Work with the health community to aid in better understanding of asbestos related disease

The Society provides the following services:

- Access to our Social Worker to provide emotional support, assist with a range of entitlements and



- ensure access to appropriate medical and health services
- Occupational Therapy assessment
- Dietetics and Nutrition consultation through the University of Qld Clinics
- Morning teas for sufferers in their local community;
- Telephone support from our volunteers;
- Up to date information on asbestos related disease

- In-service education for nursing and other health staff
 - Register of asbestos exposures from the community
 - Consultation with the Society's Lawyers
 - Quarterly newsletter
 - Biannual Symposium
- Our ethos is to assist sufferers to remain at home for as long as possible and as independent as possible

within the health care environment. Being a member of the Asbestos Disease Support Society is like belonging to a family. The diagnosis of an asbestos related disease can be devastating. YOU may feel disbelief, confusion or fear that you are suffering alone. YOU are not alone. WE are here to provide support.

Investigate before you Renovate



Asbestos
Exposed & Disease

ADSS is a support organisation which relies upon donations and grants to assist sufferers of asbestos disease, their families, friends and carers.

Your donation will go towards research for early diagnosis of asbestos disease, treatment options, increasing asbestos awareness and helping those affected by asbestos

adss
Asbestos Disease
Support Society

1800 776 412
www.adss.org.au

Queensland Anti-War Feminists During World War One

Deborah Jordan

Women were ‘at the forefront in the fight for peace’ in Australia during World War One.¹ Joy Damousi alerted us to their importance and their ‘leading role in their campaign against conscription’ in her invaluable study, *Women Come Rally*.

Women were also at the forefront globally and indeed ‘the most important gathering of women’ ever organised may have been the second Women’s International Congress for Peace, for ‘permanent peace’, in 1919.² Three Australian feminists attended this Women’s International League conference despite the extremely difficult logistics in attending. But what about women’s leaders from Queensland?

After all, Queensland was the place where anti-war leaders congregated. It was the national centre of anti-conscription campaigns when the Ryan Labor Government took office in 1915; where membership of the Industrial Workers of the World expanded; and where there was a vibrant labour daily Brisbane newspaper which was reputed to have a larger circulation than its two conservative competitors combined.

The impoverishment of women’s history and studies of gender in Queensland has been repeatedly noted.³ In 2001, historian Helen Hamley warned of the ‘dismissive’ and ‘brief’, hence tokenistic references to women in Queensland labour historiography.⁴ All this is compounded when Queensland is ignored in national narratives.

Biography, more than any other genre, has been the form of Queensland women’s history offering a different perspective. Two magnificent, still ground-breaking biographies, of Emma Miller and Margaret Thorp, tell of women’s agency during WW1. In her important historical biography, *Proud to Be a Rebel: The Life and Times of Emma Miller*, Pam Young finds Miller was:

a humane woman of courage, fearless in expressing her convictions and staunch in her beliefs; a pioneer and propagandist of the emerging labour movement; a recognised leader of Queensland women’s fight for the right to vote; and a friend and organiser of women workers and active supporter of the trade union movement.⁵



*Portrait of Mrs Emma Miller.
Photo: State Library Qld*

Miller, the feisty suffragist who has been called the ‘Mother of the Australian Labor Party’,⁶ was also a pacifist in her 70s.⁷ ‘The war could not continue without the workers’ she said.

Miller embraced the young idealist Quaker, Margaret Thorp, a young woman in her early 20s when she arrived from Tasmania. These two women with very different ways of thinking and experiences joined together to form a branch of the Women’s Peace Army [WPA]. In her outstanding biography of Thorp, Hilary Summy makes the case that she was pivotal in the ongoing achievements of the

WPA;⁸ and ‘provided the nexus which brought together the various factions in the struggle against conscription’.⁹

Many of these early women were ‘absolute pacifists’; for them there was no such thing as a “Just War”, no acceptable ‘rules of war, about treatment of prisoners, or killing of civilians’. A position of pacifism can be reached from different ways of thinking. Within certain religious traditions, such as the Quakers or Christianity, all life is sacred. Nineteenth century internationalism and some strands of Marxism, socialism and feminism also advocate non-violence. Capitalist wars resulted from production for profit rather than use value. The International Socialists for instance called for a world-wide general strike on the outbreak of war; (a strategy these women called for if compulsory conscription was introduced, a potent threat given the 1912 strike).

In April 1915, over one thousand women dedicated to stopping the war and calling for a negotiated solution had met in The Hague for the first Women’s Peace Congress. They set resolutions for the ending of all wars. These women were leaders thrown up by the international women’s movement in the long struggle for equality. No Australian women appear to have got there. A branch of the WPA was formed in Melbourne soon afterwards. The progressive elements of the Australian women’s movement divided between

Women's
Peace Army

QUEENSLAND BRANCH.

Member's Name *(Mrs) M Lane*
Address *Dauphin Terrace*
South Brisbane
Date Issued _____



President: MISS CLIO JENSEN, M.A.
Vice-Presidents: Mrs. Miller and Mrs. Lane.
Secretary and Treasurer:

MISS THORP,
Pied a Terre, Borva Street,
South Brisbane.

HEAD OFFICE:
LATROBE STREET, MELBOURNE.

Hon. Secretary: Miss CECELIA JOHN.

Women's Peace Army Queensland Branch Membership Form 1915 belonging to Mabel Lane (SLQ)

Aims and Objects of the W.P.A.

THE AIM of this movement is to bind together women of all political and religious faiths, into a united body who believe that by efficient organised effort peace may be permanently established.

THE OBJECT IS EDUCATIONAL. (1) To create a better understanding between the different nations of the world, by breaking down racial prejudice, by demanding women's rights, and finding points of contact by which women throughout the world may join forces in making practicable the ideals of humanity. (2) To make known with no uncertain voice the economic causes that make for war.

WE FIGHT AGAINST THE SYSTEM which compels Emperors, Czars, and Kings to march their people to the slaughter; against the system which leads men, kindly and generous in private life, to make fortunes out of blood and tears, by manufacturing munitions, and cornering foodstuffs; against the system which leads soldiers to corrupt our boys by training them in the art of killing and to set against all their highest instincts.

WE UNITE with the Women of All Nations who are fighting to save humanity from the effects of War and Preparations for War.

WE WORK FOR PEACE because our own freedom and the freedom of the human race is IMPOSSIBLE under the MILITARY SYSTEM.



WE BELIEVE in the establishment of INTERNATIONAL LAW made by men and women representatives of all nations elected by the votes of men and women of each country, which shall be based on JUSTICE, on the right of every nation to share equitably in the adjustment of trading privileges.

WE PROTEST against the system of Militarism in our own and every country, which chokes and poisons our humanity.

MEMBERS are those who pledge themselves to active service in the cause of peace and sign the following:—"I believe that war is a degradation of motherhood, an economic futility, and a crime against civilisation and humanity. I therefore, pledge myself to active service in the cause of peace by working against compulsory military training and every form of militarism. Further, I solemnly pledge myself to face unflinchingly adverse criticism, calumny, and persecution for my faith that LOVE and JUSTICE alone will bring peace to the world.

ASSOCIATES are those who oppose compulsory military training and militarism in all its forms, but cannot pledge themselves to do anything more than give a passive support to peace propaganda.



Adela Pankhurst. Photo: *The March of the Women Collection, Mary Evas Picture Library*



First WILPF Meeting, The Hague, April 1915. Photo: WILPF archive, LSE, London

those who were anti-war and those who supported the war. As part of the organisation's work Adela Pankhurst and Cecilia John toured NSW and Queensland.

One hundred women were waiting at the Central station in Brisbane to welcome the two leading peace women. About forty women, according to the newspapers, turned out to the reception.¹⁰ Thorp gave the welcome speech.

Pankhurst's public lecture¹¹ stirred the audience 'to their heart's core'. International warfare was a periodic event because of shifting allegiances and the interdependence of nations through trade, she told them. She spoke of the deprivations of even neutral countries during war, but especially of the impact on women and children. She called for an International Court of Arbitration. The audience of 1400 people was rapt. After a second lecture a meeting to form a Queensland branch of the WPA took place on the 16 November 1915.

One hundred women were present. Cecilia John spoke about the aims of the Victorian WPA, and similar organisations in America and Europe, also advocating general disarmament, international federation of workers, and 'government of tropical countries by international commissions'.¹² She talked of the harassment of the censor in their publication *The Woman Voter*, and

the terror instilled when organisations faced surveillance, prosecution and prison sentences. Pankhurst urged that women be included in the peace negotiations. Brisbane women were ready. Earlier attempts to form peace groups had come to naught. They passed a motion to form a peace army almost unanimously, and then invited Thorp to be secretary. Thorp had already had informal discussions at Mabel and Ernie Lane's home and outlined two types of membership. Members needed to commit. They had to take a pledge:

I believe that war is a degradation of motherhood, an economic futility, and a crime against civilisation and humanity. I therefore, pledge myself to active service in the cause of peace by working against compulsory military training and every form of militarism. Further I solemnly pledge myself to face unflinchingly adverse criticism, calumny, and persecution for my faith that LOVE and JUSTICE alone will bring peace to the world.¹³

Associate members were expected to help in any way they could. Soon afterwards the WPA booklet of aims and rules was printed; it was primarily a membership book and records the payment of membership fees (which were left voluntary, to allow all women to join). The WPA called for negotiated settlement of wars. When Australia



*World War One peace procession 1919
Photo: State Library Queensland*

goes to war should it be the decision of the prime minister, the cabinet or the two houses of parliament? Who should decide? Who should negotiate? The WPA called for a national referendum to make the decision; more recently the historian Professor Marilyn Lake has revisited this as an important demand for the present.

Mabel Lane

Mabel Lane's membership book survived. She was organiser, fund raiser, canvasser, networker and secretary. She took up key, and key enabling, positions in the WPA. She chaired the very first meeting in December 1915, after its formation, taking two positions, as a vice-president and assistant secretary,¹⁴ and she was nominated to join Miller and Thorp on a deputation to the Industrial Council about anti-conscription strategies. She was responsible for donations to the 'fighting fund'. Her work for the WPA has been eclipsed in our history books by the stories of her husband

Ernie, and brother-in-law, William. Ernie was chairman of the Brisbane branch of the Australian Workers Union, a member of the Queensland Central Executive of the Labor Party and had a regular column in the *Daily Standard*.¹⁵ Both Mabel and Ernie were very active on anti-conscription issues. Mabel Lane was responsible for the 'peace literature' which included distribution of the *Victorian Woman Voter*.¹⁶ In June 1917 a surprise party was thrown for her to acknowledge her 'tireless zeal for the Peace and Socialist movements, particularly on their social side'.¹⁷ 'No scheme was too big for her efforts'. Taken unawares, Mabel Lane expressed her 'keen appreciation of the presentation'. And while historical accounts might emphasise her domestic proclivities, the federal censor took her anti-war leadership as a serious threat.

Clio Jensen

Clio Jensen was elected the first president of the WPA in early 1916. She spoke at least four languages: English, German, Danish and Italian, and promised 'to do all in her power to help the movement', the international movement of women for peace.¹⁸ One of the new generation, an 'Advanced Woman', highly educated with an MA, and presumably of Danish origin, Jensen was the Classics mistress with Brisbane Girls' Grammar. She had taught at Ipswich Girls Grammar for five and a half years of 'efficient and faithful service' until the end of 1912,¹⁹

when she resigned to take up her position at Brisbane Girl's Grammar School. Early in her role as WPA president she presented an eloquent and considered paper,²⁰ wide-ranging and scholarly, at a public meeting hosted by the WPA in the School of Arts. Jensen had direct links with the international women's movement.²¹ The aims of 'the world-wide movement amongst women', she outlined, were 'the permanent abolition of war amongst civilised nations'. In her presentation she queried: 'Is it a good object, worthy of the best efforts of all women; is it possible of realisation; if so, what are the best means of attaining it. At Miller's behest, the *Daily Standard* published it in toto.

The very day after Jensen's paper was published, 'The Petticoated Peace Army' was attacked in the media. 'So that it should be accepted as a non-party, non-political association', opined the journalist, 'it was decided to appoint as president some woman who had not been associated with political propaganda. Choice finally fell on a lady who has earned the right to carry the letters MA as an appendage to her name', but continued the journalist, 'the WPA submitted to the "boss-ship" of Mrs Ernest Lane', who 'so thoroughly monopolises that erudite but far too modest lady's presidential functions and powers that she reduces her to the position of a mere onlooker'.²² What Jensen made of the scurrilous attack of the *Truth* journalist,

we might only be able to imagine, but enough here to acknowledge that there were a number of benefits for the WPA in Jensen taking on the presidency. The women's movement in Queensland had divided over the issue of votes for women; labour and socialist women were aware of the need to build bridges with the radical intellectual and often socialist sections of the women's movement. Jensen had links with the feminist elite in Brisbane; for example, she continued to attend social functions at the Women's College, University of Queensland. And she continued to publish occasional journalism, in the *Daily Standard*. Summy points to her working relationship with Thorp: they got on so well together that Thorp moved into Jensen's home in May 1916.²³ The combination, the 'tandem force' of 'militant and disrespectful' activity with moderate force, as Verity Burgmann might have it, was to be an effective and pragmatic strategy.²⁴

One of the first things Miller did on meeting Thorp was to introduce her to the women's and labour press.²⁵ At the *Daily Standard* office it was agreed that Thorp would submit a report of anti-war work each week. Presumably the 'lady editress' was responsible for a rather dismal women's page which included very conventional material. Thorp also met Miss Shirley, the 'editress' of the *Daily Telegraph*, and visited the *Truth* office. The WPA did not have the funds to print their own material. Not much of Thorp's reporting, however,

was to be published uncensored. The sub-editor of the *Telegraph* opposed Thorp's working with Pankhurst, given the widespread attacks on Pankhurst as a suffragette and 'disloyalist' and was to refuse her material. The *Daily Standard* was told not to insert any of Thorp's work unless it had been passed by the censor; what was published was very diluted, passive pacifism rather than the hard-hitting attack on war that was submitted. Activities of the WPA were to find some outlet through the Victorian *Woman Voter*, but it was also heavily censored. The difficult ongoing negotiations necessary for the anti-war women to get their material into print suggests that there were severe limits on their 'propaganda' work and their pacifist advocacy through journalism; and this subsequently limits the capacity of historians to assess their contributions.

With the plans to introduce conscription federally, the WPA suspended its activities of public speaking, responding to requests to address meeting in churches, unions and political organisations, distributing leaflets, selling the *Woman Voter*, advocating, lobbying, running study classes, corresponding with politicians, collecting and disseminating relief, protecting Germans and supporting Russians, and participating in deputations. They joined in the campaign to encourage people to vote no against compulsory military service at the referenda. Despite Miller's

ongoing call for unity, the women's movement was as deeply divided as the wider community. The powerful War Precautions Act was in place and anything prejudicial to recruiting was censored. By suspending its activities, members of the WPA were able to engage with other women who were anti-conscription, but not anti-war. A key figure was Helen Huxham who argued that 'The present international calamity would not have happened' 'if women had taken their place in politics earlier'.²⁶ She was an extraordinary woman, remembered by Hamley as the most important woman, after Miller, involved in the 'development and progress' of Labor in Queensland.²⁷ At her untimely death in 1925, accolades poured in: 'We regarded her as the most gifted woman in the Labor movement in the State and she was always of incalculable value in our election campaigns, on the platform and in an organising capacity.'²⁸ And just as Lane's, her home was a hub 'in a constant state of invasion' and her correspondence full of requests for assistance.

Helen Julia Dougherty/Huxham

Little is known about Helen Julia Dougherty's early years; her most active involvement was in promoting women's unions, in promoting 'justice, peace and better social conditions', in working 'tirelessly' for Labor between 1907 to 1920.²⁹ And much of the little that we do know about her is largely

available because of her relationship to her second husband, who was a senior Labor politician and Queensland's agent general in London. She trained as a nurse; her first husband was a Mr Meiklejohn. In 1897, widowed, she married John Huxham; they had one daughter. John Huxham was a merchant; he was elected to Queensland Parliament in 1907. Their daughter's blindness, presumably, encouraged the couple's active interest in the wider health and welfare sectors. John Huxham, 'quiet, moderate, a teetotaler' was also a Baptist lay-preacher.³⁰ 'Some people' observed a contemporary, attribute John Huxham's 'political success to the fact that he is Mrs Huxham's husband'.³¹

Helen Huxham, in her mid 40s during the war years, was a very experienced speaker in her own right, 'the most successful lady orator on Labour and economic subjects'. There are many reports of her talks and lectures to groups across the state, references to her public speaking not only indoors but also at rallies, to small groups and large crowds, and she often took the place of her husband on the podium when he was unavailable. She advocated the rights for women workers, took a position on the Recruiting Committee organised by the conservative National Council of Women to protect women workers' rights, and was extremely outspoken against compulsory military service. On numerous occasions she had to defend herself against rabid

attacks in the conservative press. How active she was in the WPA is less easy to discern. Huxham did attend the reception for Pankhurst and John on their visit from Melbourne. Presumably she was onboard the government boat on its trip down the Brisbane River accompanying her husband when the outlawed song 'I didn't raise my son to be a soldier' was sung. Presumably she was also acquainted with the tirade of abuse John Huxham had to face in Parliament and the conservative press in the days following. It may be that that is as far as her involvement with the WPA went?

Huxham believed that once women achieved universal suffrage across the globe, war was less likely. She was reported as saying: 'Women had taken a place in politics not a moment too soon. If they had taken that place earlier it was within the bounds of possibility that the present international calamity would not have happened.'³² And while she was prepared to denounce conscription, she urged women to be ready to do their share, and to 'watch their own interests'. She pointed out, heartfelt on numerous occasions, that many of her menfolk, her son, also her nephews, were at the war front. Was she indeed a member of the WPA? Many others, just as she did, strenuously opposed conscription but were not anti-war. Huxham worked closely with members of the WPA, and she spoke of how the 'coming generations' would 'bless' Thorp for her work in keeping

Australia 'free from the curse of militarism' at a celebration organised by the women on the Anti-Conscription Coalition Committee [ACCC].³³

Huxham was a significant leader in her own right. One journalist described her as 'equally dominant' in that life-long happy union of husband and wife, both 'equally sensitive to the calls of humanitarian amelioration'.³⁴ While it seems unlikely her husband confined her activities to the kitchen, he did say, on introducing legislation enabling white women to stand for the state's Lower House in 1915, that the measure was not completely to his liking, that he suspected that his 'own wife may aspire to a seat, and I may tell you that one Huxham in the House at a time is quite enough for me'.³⁵ Was he seeking to dispel masculinist 'anxiety', by 'joking' as Scott and Laurie find? Helen Huxham did stand for Labor Party pre-selection for the Senate in 1919, but although polling well, was unsuccessful.

Mary Ann Collings

Given the close strategic alliance between the campaigns for votes of women, and campaigns in support of the Labor Party candidates, it is not surprising that a number of the leaders of the women's movement were married to, or mothers and sisters of, rising Labor Party politicians or union leaders. Mary Ann Collings, a Quaker, had emigrated in 1885 with her

husband and children. Her 'first friend' in Queensland was Miller, whose integrity and commitment she found inspirational. She had been active in the Women's Equal Franchise Association, was on the platform to meet John and Pankhurst but presumably it was her daughter-in-law who was on the WPA committee. Her son Joe Silver Collings, was an organiser for the central political executive of the Labor Party in 1914–15, and in 1920 was nominated to the Queensland Senate. He later became a senior Labor Party politician federally. Presumably it was both her and her daughter-in-law, the two Mrs J S Collings reported in newspaper accounts, who were active in the WPA. Mary Ann Collings was to die soon after her friend Miller, but not before her namesake.

Kate McInherney/Collings

Her son's wife was Kate McInherney, a socialist extremely active in the Labour movement and honorary secretary for the Working Women's Political Organisation [WWPO] for some years. The WWPO had been established to advocate and educate labour women on parliamentary politics at the first federal election in which women could vote. Kate Collings had four children and is another significant Queensland woman whose life deserves investigation:

... doing her best, in season and out of season, to win political justice for her sex. Later,

when this much was at last achieved, she threw herself just as strenuously into the broader fight for social justice which the Labor movement stands for. In this great struggle she proved a worthy comrade and help-meet for her husband, the two of them being ever in the forefront of the fray, ever at hand ready to take on any task, big or little, that might be placed, upon their willing shoulders.³⁶

What is left out of this account is that during the war she signed a pledge, presumably, to fight for peace, with love and justice. She died unexpectedly in 1917.

Isabella Skirving

Isabella Skirving was another peacemaker and organiser who seems to have relied on her oral skills rather than any writing capacities, as none of her written material appears to have survived. She was also a key figure in an intimate partnership with a senior Labor man. Alexander Skirving, whom she had married in 1907, was president of the Industrial Council, stood for state office (unsuccessfully), and later was a member of the overturned Legislative Council with J S Collings, and a very successful long term alderman for the Brisbane City Council.³⁷ When he died in 1935, she stood for Labor pre-selection at a plebiscite in the ward the following year, unsuccessfully. Yet she

was highly regarded as a 'forceful and logical speaker', a 'born banner-bearer for Labor', early president of the Shop Assistants Union, and represented at the State Labor conferences. Born in Rockhampton in 1867, by the war years she had had long experience working alongside Miller and Huxham with the women's unions, in WEFA and was active in the Woolloongabba WWPO.³⁸ She was active in the WPA and the ACCC.

The WWPO was one of the key organisations that led to the defeat of the introduction of compulsory conscription. Drawn directly from the Labour movement, through the Workers' Political Organisations [WPO] which networked the state, Miller was the president and Kate Collings the secretary. The WPO had a number of state wide branches, with metropolitan branches at Ithaca; South Brisbane; North Brisbane; the Valley; Buranda; Toowong; Manly; Macarther; Oxley; Enoggera; Windsor and Paddington. Representatives from these often women dominated local groups joined the committee and included Lane, Huxham, Finney, Watson and other notable women representing their neighbourhoods. And just as with the wider membership and activities of the WPA, much of the history of the WWPO seems to have been lost. Even histories and memberships of the WPOs that they were drawn from are difficult to locate.

After the death of Emma Miller and Kate Collings

When Miller died in March 1917, it was the end of an era. Even more so when Kate Collings died the following month. This double loss of leadership meant difficulties facing the increasingly embattled peace women were almost insurmountable. Miller's immense funeral was attended by a wide cross section of Labor Party dignitaries, union leaders, and press. Lane represented the WPA, but presumably other members were there. If Joe Collings captured something of her importance when he represented her as embodying the movement, Mary Ann Collings warned of the dangers of underestimating her significance in the labour and women's movement.

The WPA continued to speak out against the war and respond to requests from a wide range of groups. A WPA was readily established in Ipswich, but the grounds may have been prepared by an extremely active and feminist WCTU branch there. The WPA were invited to visit regional Queensland; when Thorp went to Gympie to speak about negotiations for peace, no women turned up at the 'women's meeting', however her public meetings on the streets were successful, as too her talks with the unions to encourage their alliance with the APA. A separate WPA branch was started in Rockhampton after Thorp toured there and met Felicia Hopkins, a Quaker and

pacifist, also a long-term campaigner in the WCTU.³⁹ A further group formed through the auspices of Kate Sauer, a friend of Thorp's, was the Children's Army for Peace, working closely with children and the Education Department opposing militarism in schools.

Censorship and surveillance escalated and antagonisms across a wide range of groups increased. Bolshevik presence in Brisbane was palpable. Kathleen Hotson arrived from South Australia to take Thorp's place in the WPA when Thorp retreated to Buderim to care for her father, after the physical attack on her in Brisbane. Hotson is another figure virtually unknown in the public record. Again, the WPA went into abeyance when the second referendum on compulsory conscription was called, and members worked with the special women's auxiliary of the ACCC, with members from the WPOs among other groups. As women became radicalised by their experiences in opposing conscription, they joined forces with the APA and after the second referendum the WPA merged with them.

The WPA were not a 'tiny band of women' but the death of two of their key leaders in 1917 and the shift out of the city of the third the following year, signalled an utter transformation of the broad women's movement in Queensland. The tragedy, dislocation, disaster and disruption caused by the war resulted in lost ground for the Women's movement as a whole.

Outstanding labour and socialist women were excluded from positions of authority in the Labor Party and its press and they were specifically excluded from the increasingly influential, but notably conventional, women's groups such as the National Council of Women. These early women Labour leaders left little written legacy, a fact compounded by the obliteration of their material through censorship. The younger generation of pacifist women turned to the international scene working for permanent peace and to save the children. The stories of labour women suffragists in the anti-war movement who prepared the field for the Quakers and Advanced Women graduates, relying on their oratory skills and friendship with Labor politicians and who stopped the worst abuses of authoritarian corruption and militarism, went largely unsung, and their great successes of the previous decades were not developed. The first Labor woman politician was not elected in Queensland until 1966 and no woman yet has been Secretary General of the United Nations.

Notes

All newspapers sourced through Trove unless stated.

1 Joy Damousi, *Women Come Rally: Socialism, Communism and Gender in Australia 1890–1955* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994), 14. For a more recent account see Marilyn Lake “Pax International Women and the Australian Peace Movements”, <http://www.cpa.org.au/guardian/2011/1513/11-pax-international.html>

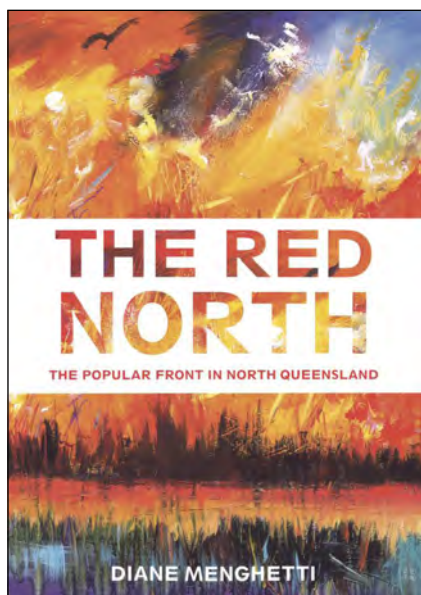
- 2 Malcolm Saunders, *Quiet Dissenter, The Life and thought of an Australian pacifist Eleanor May Moore, 1875–1949* (Canberra: ANU, 1993), 118.
- 3 See for example *Hibiscus & Ti-Tree* edited by Carole Ferrier and Deborah Jordan (St Lucia: Hecate Press, 2009), 5ff.
- 4 Helen Hamley, ““If you’ve got the women... you’ve got the men”: Women Activists in the Queensland Labour Movement 1880s to 1920”, *The World’s First Labor Government, Royal Historical Society of Queensland*, 2001, 59–74; “Invisible Ladies Step Out,” *Australian Women’s Book Review*, 19, 2, 2007: 22–27.
- 5 <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/miller-emma-7583>.
- 6 *Ross’s Magazine* qtd in Pam Young, *Proud to Be a Rebel: The Life and Times of Emma Miller* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1991), 227; *Woman Voter* qtd in Young, *Proud to be a Rebel*, 227; “Emma Miller”, blogs, John Oxley Library, <http://blogs.slq.qld.gov.au/jol/2012/03/05/emma-miller-mother-of-the-australianlabor-party/>, accessed 1 April 2012.
- 7 Young, *Proud to be a Rebel*, <http://www.textqueensland.com.au/item/book/04dfbd19aa87239362767ce1dd464a14>
- 8 Hilary N. Summy, *Peace Angel of World War 1 Dissent of Margaret Thorp* (St Lucia: ACPCS, 2006). See also “Peace Movements 1900 to 1960” <http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders/biogs/WLE0634b.htm> accessed 27 April 2017.
- 9 Summy, *Peace Angel*, 81.
- 10 “Social and Personal,” *Telegraph*, 12 November, 1915, 8.
- 11 “Adela Pankhurt’s Passionate Plea”, *Truth*, 14 November 1915, 2.
- 12 “Women’s Peace Army”, *Daily Standard*, 17 November 1915, 5.

- 13 A copy has been digitalised by the State Library. It belonged to Mabel Lane. <http://bishop.slq.qld.gov.au>.
- 14 "Women's Peace Army," *Worker*, 9 December 1915, 15.
- 15 Jeff Rickertt, *Ernie Lane: The Conscientious Communist* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2016).
- 16 "Women's Peace Army," *Daily Standard*, 23 September 1916, 4.
- 17 "Presentation to Mrs Lane," *Daily Standard*, 27 June 1917, 3.
- 18 "Women's Peace Army," *Daily Standard*, 21 February, 1916, 2.
- 19 "Girls' Grammar School," *Queensland Times*, 13 December 1912, 5.
- 20 "Abolition of War. Women's Part in the Future," *Daily Standard*, 13 May 1916, 14.
- 21 "Women's Peace Chain," *Daily Standard*, 29 November 1916, 7.
- 22 *Truth*, 14 May 1916, 7.
- 23 Summy, *Peace Angel*, 80.
- 24 Verity Burgmann in *Fighting Against War: Peace Activism in the Twentieth Century* (eds) Phillip Deery, Julie Kimber (Melbourne: Leftbank Press, 2015) passim.
- 25 Summy, *Peace Angel*, passim.
- 26 "Bremer Celebrates," *Daily Standard*, 2 August 1915, 4.
- 27 "The Late Helen Huxham," *Daily Standard*, 17 November 1924, 10.
- 28 "Buranda Tribute," *Daily Standard*, 17 November 1924, 10.
- 29 See Young, *Proud to be a Rebel*, 239–240.
- 30 G. N. Logan, "Huxham, John Saunders (1861–1949)," Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/huxham-john-saunders-6781/text11729>, accessed 26 April 2017.
- 31 "The Week in Brisbane," *The Catholic Press*, 23 September 1915, 27.
- 32 "Bremer Celebrates," *Daily Standard*, 2 August 1915, 4.
- 33 "Miss Thorp Honoured," *Woman Voter*, 7 December 1916, 3.
- 34 "The Week in Brisbane," *The Catholic Press*, 23 September 1915, 27.
- 35 Joanne Scott and Ross Laurie, "Promise and Performance: The Queensland Elections Act 1915 and Women's Right to Stand for Parliament," *Queensland Review*, 12, 2, November 2005, 53.
- 36 "Death of Mrs J. S. Collings," *Daily Standard*, 10 April 1917, 4.
- 37 "Alexander Skirving." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Skirving, accessed 27 April 2017.
- 38 Young, *Proud to be a Rebel*, passim.
- 39 This is the branch that directly morphs into WILPF in 1920.

Red North. A remarkable period but not grounds for atonement

Review of Di Menghetti, Red North, The Popular Front in North Queensland (1981), republished by Resistance Books, 2018

Howard Guille



Di Menghetti wrote the *Red North* as an Honours Thesis in 1980. It was published as a monograph by the History Department of James Cook University through the JCU Press in 1981. The book is about how, in the 1930s and 40s, the local leaders and members of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) in North and Far

North Queensland gained levels of political and industrial support much more substantial than anywhere else in Australia. Furthermore, it gained that support, including some electoral victories, despite the dominance of the ALP Government and the Australian Workers Union (AWU).

Red North has been republished by Resistance Books with a new introduction by Jim McIlroy. This is a two-fold review. First about the original work and second about whether, as declared in the new introduction, the work is a lighthouse to the ‘true path’ to socialism in 2018.

The re-publisher, Resistance Books shares a ‘left unity perspective’ with the Socialist Alliance and the Green Left Weekly¹. The Socialist Alliance is a registered political party and while it participates in elections has the clear position that change will come from workplace and community campaigning. As it says, ‘*Unlike other parties such as the Greens and the ALP, we don’t believe that parliament is the main vehicle for social change*’.² While not affiliated to the Fourth International, it is inspired by Trotskyist ideas of revolutionary change from workplace and campus action.

This re-publication by Resistance Books is very welcome and deserves thanks and congratulations. These stand even if the inspiration for republication is political activism not

scholarly grounds of labour history. Maybe the price of \$25, plus \$7.95 for postage, is a bit steep for the secondary and tertiary student readers that Jim McIlroy envisages. On the Reserve Bank Inflation calculator, the \$5 price in 1981 would now be about \$19.32. More generally, and perhaps an aside, the difficulty of getting literature to students and workers is one that the Labour History Societies might take up. While there is considerable material online, not all universities give open access to 'old' labour and political histories whether in books, articles or theses.

So far as I can tell, the re-publication is exact. Anyone with any interest at all in the history of Queensland should read it. It documents exceptional happenings. Di Menghetti's writing was always clear, bright and sparkling.³ This 'early' work is no exception. The history is always broad; theoretically informed but not theoretically arid. It is interesting and captivating and while written about particular locales it is neither local nor parochial.

The book seeks to explain how and why the '*Red Bogey*' (p79) became so important in North Queensland. The evidence is clear—sizeable party membership; women and men party members leading union and community campaigns and actions; substantial and increasing votes for party candidates in local and state elections; election of CPA candidates to Local Councils

and in 1944 of Fred Paterson to the Queensland Parliament. He was the only CPA candidate elected to any Parliament in Australia.

In 1943, the CPA was in a loose coalition with the Hermit Park Labour Party in running the Townsville City Council. The Mayor was Tom Aitkens who had been expelled from the ALP, followed by the entire Hermit Park Branch, for being too left and for its connections with 'aid to Russia'. In 1944, Aitkens was elected to the State Parliament as a Hermit Park Labour candidate (later renamed to North Queensland Labour Party).⁴

The book concentrates on the period 1935–1940 'when public prejudice against the Communist Party eroded' (p22). The period began with the CPA abandoning the 'Class against Class' position with its *social fascist* line against the ALP.⁵ Carmel Shute, in a review of *Red North* when it was first published, says that 'the bolshevisation of the CPA in the late 1920s and early '30s had had a devastating impact on the fledgling North Queensland organisation' with branches 'decimated or extinguished'.⁶

The CPA, following the line of the Communist International (Comintern) pursued a '*popular front*' with 'all Party activities to be subordinated to the fight against international fascism' (p29). The CPA instructed its cadres and members to cooperate

with other working class organisations (in Australia notably the ALP and ALP unionists) and extended party membership to “‘intellectuals”, small-shop keepers and working farmers’ (p30).

Di Menghetti documents the success of communists in North Queensland via accounts of the 1935 Weil’s Disease strike, the Spanish Relief Campaign, the anti-fascist movement, women’s activities, the party’s social role and the communist press (p21). A chapter is devoted to each of these. Each chapter is informed by primary sources, interviews, material from the Communist press (especially the *North Queensland Guardian* published from 1937 until it was suppressed in May 1940 with the proscribing of the CPA) and secondary sources. Each chapter is a rich and rewarding read, documenting the amazing levels of activity, what was able to be done and what was achieved. Carmel Shute gives a longer account of the content of *Red North* in her 1982 review which can be accessed on-line.

The sugar industry is the heart of the history and is treated as a ‘special case’. Communist activity in other industries (of which rail, meat and hard-rock and coal mining were the most important) is not discussed on the grounds that it resembled trade union activity in the rest of Australia (p22). The discussion about the CPA is particularly subtle. It succeeded because it had local leaders working on local issues with

local people. One example is that it represented Italian and Mediterranean workers (mainly but not entirely first generation migrants) as well as British-Australian workers. Not only that but Italian people were welcome in the Party and had local leadership and speaking roles. Leaflets were in Italian as well as English.

The AWU approach to non-British people was the complete opposite. It was unpleasant to be reminded that, in 1930, the Australian Sugar Producers Association (the millers), the Cane Growers Council and the AWU signed an agreement setting a 75% to 25% quota system for ‘British-Australians to migrants in getting cane-cutters tickets (p 49). The AWU position was that’ only ‘British’ unionists could be employed on cane farms’. Even more unpleasant to have read again the racist findings’ of the 1925 Parry Royal Commission established by the Queensland ALP Government to report on aliens in North Queensland (pp 48–50). This accepted the fiction of three distinct Caucasian races (Nordic, Alpine and Mediterranean) and categorised Southern Italians as inferior and socially dangerous.⁷

By the 1930s the AWU had completely shed any traces of radicalism. The model of an industrial road to socialism was long gone. So had Ernie Lane who in the 1910s–20s had advanced this within the AWU, as documented by Jeff Rickert in his recent biography.⁸

The AWU had become, and declared itself, an arbitration union and was the power within the Queensland ALP Governments that were in power from 1915–29 and from 1932–1956. In the early 1920s, Ted Theodore (Premier from 1919–1925) led the campaign within the Federal ALP to proscribe Communist members. He also led the opposition to the socialisation objective.

The contest between the AWU/ALP and the communists was between a centralised organisation and a more ‘grassroots’ one. The AWU channelled matters through the institutions it helped establish, especially arbitration, sugar industry regulation and the party-political process. The North Queensland communists relied on presence, frequent meetings and discussions with those affected, plus creative industrial and community activity. They filled the vacuum left by the ALP and the AWU.

Paradoxically, the Communist Party was at this time decidedly Stalinist and exercised strong central control and detailed political direction. This was especially so in the 1920s through to the early 1930s where it went through the “Third Period”. Stuart McIntyre cites ‘the rigid hierarchical structure, the iron discipline enforced by expulsions and reinforced by self-criticism’.⁹ Despite this, North Queensland communists prevailed against the ALP and AWU ‘machines’. Di Menghetti

argues, convincingly, that this was because the party was ‘naturalised’ and ‘was rapidly becoming an indigenous political party’ (p22).

An active social calendar was part of this—including what are termed ‘ideologically questionable developments’ such as “Younger Sets”, “Miss Spanish Relief” and “Miss Popularity” contests (p22). The conclusion is indirectly confirmed by the comment of General Secretary, J.B.Miles, (an arch Stalinist) to the Central Committee that ‘the North Queenslanders were “very radical” but suffered from an “anarchical tendency”’.¹⁰ Indeed, in the early 1930s, Fred Paterson had been made to retract statements that a bad ALP Government was still better than a conservative one as the sense of the ‘lesser evil’ breached the ‘Class against Class’ CPA line of the time.¹¹

It is very rare to be able to re-read a book just under forty years after its original publication and to do so with reference to reviews of the time. Carmel Shute’s review, as noted above, is an excellent synopsis of *Red North*. Doug Olive was a CPA activist who participated in the events of the book and went on to be District Secretary and Organiser. In 1983, he wrote, generously,

The author has captured the spirit of our party, its broad methods and style of work, approach and attitude that

*characterised it in the North at the time, and enabled communists to become an integral part of the daily lives of those with whom we lived and worked.*¹²

His article is extremely useful in discussing the CPA Sugar Program—adopted by small (family) cane farmers and by a pre-season mass meeting of cane cutters. A rare example of worker-farmer cooperation which, he says, was a decisive factor in cane farmers voting for Fred Paterson in 1944. He also relates how, in 1940, party members were able to turn around a vote of some 1,000 AWU cane-cutters in Ayr in favour of a resolution ‘We refuse to cut cane with enemy aliens and other “Dago Bastards”’. Doug Olive, while against the proposed strike, got himself elected to the strike committee and was subsequently invited by the AWU leadership to put a resolution ending the strike to a meeting called by the AWU. Both the sugar program and this strike were after the period covered in *Red North*.

The people and events of *Red North* should be better known and better admired. They deserve a prominent place in the pantheon of the Australian labour movement. However, drawing lessons for today’s (late 2010s) politics is another matter. This takes us to Jim McIlroy’s new introduction to the republished book.

The introduction has a section on ‘lessons for today’. The central lesson is that ‘a rounded strategy to rebuild the socialist movement in this country necessarily includes activity in all arenas of public life’ (p15). Today’s progressive campaigners, we are told, should pick their issues; be inclusive especially of ‘migrants’; work among women; have good media; practice ‘direct democracy’ and use the right kind of elected representatives as a ‘megaphone and platform’ (pp13–15). There is a bit of rhetoric: ‘a symbol of the possibilities for a new radicalisation of the people’ (p15), but it is generally unexceptional.

He also says that the success of the CPA was based on ‘a deep implantation in the working-class and farming communities of northern Queensland’ and refers to the ‘special highly-proletarianised character of the Queensland sugar and mining communities’ (p13). The term ‘*implantation*’ is noteworthy; it is something done or brought from outside. In the context of Jim McIlroy’s introduction, it could well imply that revolution remains the task of the professional revolutionary. I will leave it there but refer those wanting to explore this further to Bob Gould’s coruscating review of Jim McIlroy’s 2001 pamphlet.¹³

As history, I find Jim McIlroy’s account a kind of left-historical tourism. It needs context and analysis. Queensland sugar

production was (and is) best regarded as an industry not a rural pursuit. It imposed a severe monoculture and transformed landscapes most visibly with about 4,000 kilometres of cane tramways from farms to central mills.¹⁴ It was labour intensive—peaking in 1955, with a total of 8,754 cutters.¹⁵ In addition, the mills employed 5,000 or so permanent and seasonal workers.¹⁶ Sugar production was more integrated into the Australian economy than pastoral and wheat production and very much more than mining was or is now.

Industrial and material conflict became a three-way matter in the 20th century sugar industry in which central mills supplied by ‘small’ and family farms replaced plantations that had indentured Pacific island workers and their own mills. Conflicts were between workers, mill owners and cane farmers. The conservatism of the ALP Governments and the AWU from the mid-1920s to the 1940s is well stated. However, the institutional arrangements and structural re-ordering of the industry completed by the 1915 Ryan Government provided a quite unique regulatory framework.

These arrangements broke the dominance of CSR, favoured family farms and cooperative mills and established a state export agency with pooled prices. Local sugar boards set farm sizes and quotas and made it mandatory for central mills to take the sugar produced on allotted land. The

size of farms was set so as to ensure a living wage. The Industrial Arbitration Court (another Ryan initiative) was given powers over wages and disputes between workers, cane growers and millers. The Industrial Arbitration Court was also given powers to set cane prices and settle disputes between growers and millers.

These intricate and extremely comprehensive regulatory arrangements continued through to 1970s with deregulation starting under Bjelke-Petersen (driven by self-interested larger farmers) and completed in the 1980s and ‘90s with the neo-liberal urges that afflicted the Hawke-Keating governments. The importance of talking about institutions is that they channel conflicts. For instance, the issues of the Weil’s Disease strike—demand for the pre-harvest burning of cane and the rate of pay for cutting burnt cane—were eventually ordered by the Arbitration Court. Likewise, the CPA Sugar Program mentioned by Doug Olive was potent in getting grower electoral support because it could build on the extant regulatory arrangements. Doug Olive is also perceptive in noting that World War 2 led to an easing of economic tensions such that ‘with incomes vastly increased and conditions improved, agitation and struggle tended to decline’.¹⁷

In the first paragraph of his introduction, on the cover blurb and in publicity for

the re-published book, Jim McIlroy uses the ‘fact’ of *Red North* as a counter to the more “*deep north*” view of Queensland as the land of Bjelke-Petersen and Pauline Hanson. This seems to me as a plea for atonement or expiation. In other words ‘they’ might well think that Queensland (is this us/we?) might now be bad but once we were good. I find it base and trivial and not even a good argument for respectability among one’s socialist friends south of the border. The past informs the present, it cannot excuse it.

Notes

- 1 Website <https://www.resistancebooks.com/about-resistance-books/>
- 2 Socialist Alliance Membership Guide at <https://socialist-alliance.org/documents/membership-guide>
- 3 Howard Guille, ‘Diane (Di) Menghetti 1940–2012: An Appreciation’, *Queensland Journal of Labour History* 15, 2012, 71–74
- 4 D. W. Hunt, ‘Aikens, Thomas (Tom) (1900–1985)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/aikens-thomas-tom-12124/text21719>,
- 5 See Stuart McIntyre, *The Reds: The Communist Party of Australia From Origins to Illegality*, Allen & Unwin, 1999, esp p 206 ff
- 6 Carmel Shute, ‘Review: The Red North — The Popular Front in North Queensland by Diane Menghetti’, *Australian Left Review*, No 80, 1982, 52–56 . This is available at <http://ro.uow.edu.au/alr/vol1/iss80/9/>
- 7 Catherine Dewhirst, ‘The “Southern Question” in Australia: The 1925 Royal Commission’s Racialisation of Southern

- Italians’, *Queensland History Journal* 22 (4),316–332, is more detailed examination of the Perry Report. Available at https://eprints.usq.edu.au/24689/1/Dewhirst_QHJ_v22n4_PV.pdf
- 8 Jeff Rickertt, *The conscientious communist: Ernie Lane and the rise of Australian socialism*, North Melbourne, Australian Scholarly Press, 2016.
- 9 McIntyre *The Reds* op cit p 206. See also Bob Gould, ‘*The Communist Party in Australian life*’ 2000, available at Marxist Archive <https://www.marxists.org/archive/gould/2000/cpainaustralianlife.htm>
- 10 Quoted by McIntyre, *The Reds* op cit, p 353. ‘Anarchical tendency’ was a common party term of disapproval.
- 11 McIntyre *The Reds* op cit p 235
- 12 Doug Olive, Northern Reds, *Australian Left Review*, 85, 1983, 4–7. Available at:<http://ro.uow.edu.au/alr/vol1/iss85/3>
- 13 Bob Gould, ‘The DSP book of parables; The Red North: how not to write useful labour history from a Marxist standpoint’, January 1, 2002, at <http://members.optushome.com.au/spainter/Rednorth.html> also available at <http://marxists.anu.edu.au/archive/gould/2002/dspbookofparables.htm>
- 14 I. R. Crellin, Australian Sugar Tramways in 1980, *Light Railways* No.66, October 1979 http://www.lrrsa.org.au/LRR_SGRd.htm and John Browning, ‘Queensland sugar cane railways today’, http://www.lrrsa.org.au/LRR_SGRz.htm
- 15 Joanna Wills, ‘Remembering the cane: conserving the sugar legacy of far north Queensland’, Professional Historians Conference, St Lucia, 209, https://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:210147/p9780646519197_2_165.pdf
- 16 See <https://www.wilmarsugarmills.com.au/our-people>. Wilmar owns the former CSR/Sucrogen mills and crushes about half the crop.
- 17 Doug Olive, Northern Reds, op cit, p7

In Memorium

Memories of Hughie Williams



Hughie Williams died on 15 October 2017. By any stretch of the imagination, Hughie was a significant figure in Queensland Trade Union history, and so much more. This is not a typical obituary. The historical details of Hughie's life and times can be found in a number of books, notably *Hughie Williams: A Life* (self published, 2009) and Murray Johnson: *No Holds Barred: Hughie Williams: Olympic wrestler and trade union heavyweight* (CQU Press, 2003), and in various articles written both before and after his demise. My contribution is a disparate collection of anecdotes, observations and recollections of Hughie and the era in which he held sway. Some of those

recollections may be imperfect but they are what they are.

Most readers will know that Hughie was for many years the State Secretary of the Transport Workers' Union (TWU). I was never a member of that Union, although I have a cousin who was for many years a TWU member and a staunch Hughie supporter. I first became aware of Hughie Williams in the late 1970s when, as I recall, Hughie, as head of the progressive forces in the TWU, was locked in a battle with the right wing for control of the State TWU branch following the retirement of the conservative Arch Bevis Snr, father of the former ALP member for Brisbane, Arch Bevis Jnr. My recollection is that the conservative forces, headed by Len Ward, held the State Secretary's position for a period of time but, through a process which I never fully understood, Hughie had managed to secure himself a paid position as secretary of the "Brisbane Branch" of the TWU from which he marshalled the progressive forces. Hughie and his supporters ultimately wrested control of the State branch from the right wing and Hughie was installed as Queensland Branch Secretary.

At the time, I was a member of the Painters & Dockers' Union, an avowedly left wing member of the waterfront group of unions which included the Seamen's Union of Australia (SUA) and the Waterside Workers' Federation (WWF), prior to the amalgamation of those unions to form the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA). The leadership of the waterfront unions was dominated by members of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) and the Socialist Party of Australia (SPA). Hughie Williams and the TWU were regarded as friends and allies of the waterfront unions. To the best of my knowledge, Hughie was never a member of the CPA or the SPA and remained throughout a member of the ALP, although like Clancy of the Overflow's relationship with the office, I felt that Hughie never quite suited the ALP, being too much of an iconoclast and a progressive. I am of course talking of a time, at least in the early days, when the ALP could better tolerate large personalities with left wing ideas.

Hughie's great mate in the ALP was George Georges, the longtime Senator for Queensland. George, with the able assistance of Hughie and others, acquired land at Latrobe Terrace, Paddington and set up the Union Cooperative Society Ltd. The Co Op operated a financial arm, which included for a time a building society, and also a cooperative store and petrol station, as well as deriving income

from the lease of other property on what was a substantial parcel of land in a suburb rapidly gaining in value. I can remember as a young man borrowing money from the Co Op on very favourable terms and being accorded significant flexibility in meeting a repayment schedule when my financial circumstances caused difficulties in meeting the original level of repayments. The Co Op was indeed a mighty institution with a firm socialist intent and Hughie Williams played a strong part in its establishment and continuation.

A number of unions invested money in the Co Op to assist it in meeting its objectives. As chance would have it, I became a member of the Board of the Co Op in the mid-1990s at the behest of my then employer, the Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union (LHMU), which wanted to keep an eye on its investment against a background of rumours that the Co Op's financial situation was becoming unstable. At the time, Hughie was the Chairman of the Board and George Georges, despite his advancing years, was still an active protagonist.

Unfortunately, there was some truth to the rumours of financial instability. George had embarked on a rather ambitious plan to redevelop the Co Op site and had engaged Hutchinson Builders, then a rather fledgling company, to conduct the building work. Cashflow became an issue for the Co Op

and the relationship with Hutchinsons became somewhat strained. Litigation was commenced but was eventually staved off through a compromise arrangement. Unfortunately, the LHMU and other unions withdrew their financial support, but Hughie remained a firm rock at the head of the Co Op Board throughout its troubled times, including the passing of George Georges. I remained on the Board for some years as it worked through the tough times, restructuring and eventually coming out the other end intact. Hughie's chairmanship ensured meetings were well controlled and the agenda adhered to.

One of the Co Op's great projects, and one in which Hughie Williams was central, was the establishment on part of the Paddington site of the Paddington Workers' Club, a licensed club which served for a time as a popular watering hole for the progressive elements of the labour movement. Readers of a certain age will no doubt recall the Paddo Workers' Club as the last port of call for May Day celebrations, with the club and the car park packed with those young and staunch enough to be still standing at the end of a long day. The Club eventually had to close its doors because of dwindling custom but, in true Co Op fashion, reinvented itself as a function centre on reduced premises. It continues to provide a meeting place for progressive people of all stripes. To my knowledge, Hughie was heavily

involved in the reimagining of the facility.

It is a well held view, which I share, that, like many long term trade union officials before him, Hughie Williams made the mistake of trying to stay in office for too long. Although not privy to the internal workings of the TWU, it would appear from my observations, and discussions with many people in the trade union movement, that Hughie failed to listen to the advice of those who had loyally supported him over many years that he should stand down and hand over the reins to his long term trusted deputy Peter Biagini. It is my understanding that Hughie unfortunately turned on those who had supported him and brought about his own removal from office. Such endings to a great career are unnecessary and a source of regret to many, but in many ways Hughie Williams was a dramatic figure of Shakespearian proportions.

The TWU continues to operate strongly under the capable and committed leadership of Peter Biagini and others.

Hughie was the patron of the Brisbane Labour History Association (BLHA) from 2004 to 2010, further underlining his credentials as a man of many parts and a supporter of progressive intellectual undertakings. 2004 had been a year of internal conflict and restructuring in the BLHA and Hughie had made himself available to mediate the internal disputes. Tellingly, he

chose to accept the position of patron of BLHA at a time when there existed a rival institution then supported by the Queensland Council of Unions (QCU). I might say that the rival institution quickly withered on the vine and that the QCU has for many years, particularly from the time of Ron Monaghan, been a strong supporter of the BLHA. Perhaps another example of Hughie Williams' prescience.

From my point of view, a puzzling postscript to Hughie's life was that his funeral ceremony involved a requiem mass. My experience of Hughie had not discerned any sniff of adherence to the Catholic Church, quite the contrary. However, it is not this final act which matters; what truly deserves celebration are the formidable feats of a larger than life trade unionist and colossus of the labour movement.

Bob Reed

Contributors

Adrain Skerritt has been campaigning for human rights and peace for 30 years and has been an active trade movement since 1992. He has participated in a number of international political events such as the Asian Social Forum in Hyderabad in 2003, the World Social Forum in 2004, the Asian Asbestos Conference in Hong Kong in 2009 and the Labor Notes conference in Chicago this year.

Matt Peacock has been an award-winning journalist with the ABC for almost forty years, initially as a researcher for Australia's first current affairs TV show *This Day Tonight* before switching to radio, where he became an interviewer and presenter with the ABC Science Unit. It was as a science reporter that he broke the asbestos story in Australia with a series of radio broadcasts, a story he would later revisit in his book *Killer Company*, which inspired the TV mini-series *Devil's Dust*. Matt was chief political reporter in Canberra, then correspondent for ABC Radio's *AM*, *PM* and *The World Today* in Washington, New York and London, after working in the Northern Territory where he co-founded an Aboriginal production house, *Remote Area Media*. He also worked for ABC TV's *7.30*, *Lateline* and *Foreign Correspondent*, has written numerous newspaper and magazine articles and published three books. He was Adjunct Professor at UTS School of Journalism. In 2013 Matt was elected by staff to the ABC Board where he served for five years. He now works as a media consultant, speaker, trainer and writer and has also founded ABC Alumni.

Deborah Jordan, historian and independent scholar, is an adjunct research fellow with History at Monash, and associated with the T J Ryan Centre at QUT. *Loving Words Love Letters of Nettie and Vance Palmer 1909–1914* was published in 2018. So too a brief account *Negotiating the End of War: Leading Peace Women Brisbane 1914–1919* of which there might be a few copies left if you can get your library to order them.

Howard Guille worked and taught in Europe and New Zealand before coming to Australia in the mid-1970s. He was the foundation appointment in industrial relations at what became Brisbane CAE. He worked at the Trades and Labour Council of Queensland from 1988 to 1992. He was involved in major projects in restructuring, award restructuring, industrial policy and in trying to combat corporatisation, privatisation and national competition policy. Howard was the Queensland Secretary of the National Tertiary Education Union from 1994 to 2006. This became increasingly complex with enterprise bargaining and the assault of the Coalition Government on the NTEU. He was a member of

the TLC Executive from 1996 to 2006. He served as the QCU representative on the Queensland Heritage Council 2007–2012. In 2000, 2008 and 2013 Howard assisted the Papua New Guinea Trade Union Congress with research and submissions to the National Minimum Wage Boards of those years. He retired from the paid workforce in 2008 after two years as Associate Professor in Humanities at Queensland University of Technology. He has undertaken research and written on a wide range of topics including industrial relations theory and policy, labour market policy, globalisation, industry, housing and social policy.

Bob Reed was called to the bar in 1999 and has since then practised as a barrister in Brisbane, principally in the areas of industrial and employment law, human rights law and worker’s compensation. Bob also worked as a solicitor from 1992–1995 and from 1995–1999 as a research officer for the Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers’ Union. Along with Madeline Brennan of counsel and Warren Friend QC, Bob was part of the legal team assembled by Hall Payne Lawyers to represent Uncle Conrad Yeatman in his stolen wages case against the State of Queensland.

New Retired Unionist group in Brisbane

A new group for retired unionists to take an active interest in current social issues and the current struggles of many different unions has been established in Brisbane

During the recent ACTU congress in Brisbane, a visiting organiser, Jane Timbrell, from the Canberra based “Vintage Reds” gave a workshop on how retired unionists around Australia can set up their own groups. Following the workshop a number of us talked about setting up such a group in Brisbane.

We have now set up an interim committee to organise our first launch event, and to talk with both the QCU leadership and the retired members groups of unions. We welcome retired workers from all unions.

Our first “launch” event is planned for early October — so keep an eye or an ear out for it! For more details please contact Ross Gwyther 0408 782 983 rgwyther@optusnet.com.au.



Union Co-operative Society

In 2019 the Union Co-op is having its 50th anniversary. To align with this a history project has been proposed. The group organising this project are calling on anyone who has been involved with the Society to be part of an oral history project. Contact can be made at ekhardie@gmail.com The BLHA will be conducting a seminar on Co-operative Societies early next year.

**BRISBANE LABOUR HISTORY ASSOCIATION
and
SEARCH FOUNDATION**

**Invite you to attend a discussion
on**

*The struggles of women in employment
Wage disparity, superannuation, insecure work,
discrimination and harassment*

WHEN: Saturday 3 November, 1:00-5:00pm

WHERE: ETU 41 Peel St South Brisbane

SPEAKERS

Ros McLennan, General Secretary, QCU

Glenda Strachan, Emeritus Professor,
Griffith University

Penny Spalding, Women's Officer, QTU

Dr Linda Colley, CQU, ALP Anti-discrimination Committee

Young Worker's Hub, QCU (to be confirmed)

Refreshments will be provided during the afternoon.

RSVP to Greg Mallory, gmallory@vtown.com.au or
Patricia Hovey, patriciah10@bigpond.com

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 each year. Articles of any length up to 7000 words are invited; shorter contributions are encouraged.

First person accounts of trade union, social movement and progressive political struggles and organisations are particularly welcome. Reports on exhibitions, seminars and research projects are sought, as are book reviews and photo essays.

Contributions can be submitted either as hard copy (posted to The Secretary) or as an electronic file, emailed to craig@amieuqld.asn.au. Please use Styles rather than character formatting from your article as it interferes with the laying out of the journal. Please ensure that your name, any relevant organisational affiliation, and all contact details are included in the article itself, as well as in the covering email.

Please also send details of any graphics, photos, maps, drawings, cartoons etc that might accompany your article.

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Brisbane branch of the
Australian Society for the Study of Labour History