

The Queensland Journal of Labour History

No. 34 Autumn/Winter 2022



The Brisbane Labour History Association



Brisbane
Labour
History
Association

President: **Dr Jeff Rickertt**
jrickertt@optusnet.com.au

Secretary: **Craig Buckley**
0418 197 205
craig@amieuqld.asn.au

The Queensland Journal of Labour History qldlabhist@gmail.com

Editors: Allan Gardiner, Alison Stewart & Dean Wharton

Editorial Committee: Allan Gardiner, Howard Guille, Ross Gwyther, Greg Mallory, Corinne Smith & Dean Wharton.

The BLHA is the Brisbane branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History. The BLHA 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.

Correspondence to:
Craig Buckley
Brisbane Labour History Association
PO Box 5299
West End QLD 4101

Design and layout: **Dean Wharton**

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Front Cover Poster: Communist Party members speak at the side of the Brisbane River, 1940, *The Courier Mail*, 10 June 1940, page 5 c/o State Library of Queensland

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The Queensland Journal of Labour History (QJLH) is compiled and published twice a year by the Brisbane Labour History Association (BLHA), the Queensland branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History. The Brisbane Labour History Association is a not for profit collective of volunteers.

The BLHA seeks to assist rather than merely to document the activities of the working class. Neither is its conception of labour history narrowly academic, spanning, rather, all social aspects of the productive process. How were class relations formed? What was the role of the state and the production process? How does labour relate to race and gender? What were the industrial and political organisations created by workers and what struggles did they fight? What are the cultural expressions of class? How have these people, those who live by their labour, recorded, remembered, and represented their own history?

Although the BLHA has a particular focus on Brisbane (Meanjin) and Queensland, we support the study of working-class history in its local, national and transnational settings. We also encourage the study of social movements in which workers have participated or which have affected workers' personal, social, political or economic circumstances.

Material published herein does not necessarily reflect the views of the BLHA or the editorial committee of the BLHA.

Notes for contributors

The QJLH is published in Spring and Autumn each year. Articles of any length are invited. Contributors receive one-year membership of the BLHA.

First-person accounts of trade union, social movement and progressive political struggles and organisations are particularly welcome. We encourage oral history.

Reports on exhibitions, seminars and research projects are sought, as are book reviews and photo essays.

Contributions can be submitted either as hardcopy (posted to the Secretary) or as an electronic file emailed to qldlabhist@gmail.com or other BLHA email addresses.

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, photographs, maps, drawings, cartoons etc. that might accompany your article.

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Editorial

Allan Gardiner

Welcome to readers of this first issue of our journal for 2022. In these pages you will find more than the usual offering of stories from the past. There are also some signposts toward changes for the very project of writing the history of labouring people.

These signposts can be found in the book review written by our President, Jeff Rickertt, of *The Barber who Read History* by Rowan Cahill and Terry Irving. The book responds to the problem that universities are no longer a reliable base for labour historiography. Jeff's review points out that this problem cannot be minimised, as the major works of Australian labour history have mostly relied on academic institutional support to enable the historians to develop their careers and then to undertake original research and dedicated writing.

One of those dedicated historians, the late Stuart McIntyre, and one of his major research projects, are remembered and celebrated in this edition of the journal. In conjunction with the SEARCH Foundation, the BLHA hosted the Queensland launch of *The Party*, the continuation of Stuart's history of the Communist Party of Australia. The proceedings of the launch

have been captured in these pages, including a personal tribute to Stuart by Dr Jon Piccini, one of that increasingly rare breed of younger academic labour-oriented historians.

The lively discussion at the launch is also captured here, and two themes emerged. One is the marginalisation of Queensland experiences by national organisations and southern-based historians. The second theme is the deep personal and psychological effect of Party membership, not only on the members but even their families. The relation between personal identity and commitment to the labour movement re-emerges in Humphrey McQueen's loving memoir of his father, Dinny. In "The Making of an Australian Working Man" we see that serious personal commitment was not confined to CPA members. Dinny McQueen was a worker who plugged away in the Australian Labor Party and in his union, but, as Humphrey shows, the humane values of this man were intimately tied to his class consciousness and class solidarity.

This psychology associated with politics is also a theme in "Comrade Jim," one of the many tales Ted Reithmuller left us, based on his life

in the CPA and the wider left-wing movement. The “Jim” of the title was an ASIO spy, one of the people who deserve, to use Jeff Rickertt’s words, an “Up yours!” from those people they harassed. Communists joined their party not because they supported, or even suspected, the barbarities carried out by the Soviet Union but because, to quote Jeff again, they sought “a pathway to a post-capitalist world.”

In our book review section we meet more of those unsavoury toadies to state surveillance. Ross Gwyther’s review of *With My Little Eye* by Sandra Hogan shows the kind of tawdry life experience that spy par-

ents bequeathed to their children. Hogan’s book is not the only recent publication about ASIO’s paid do-bbers. Other writers have made use of ASIO files that have been made available. The other books are *Spies and Sparrows* by Phillip Deery and *The Spy Catchers* by David Horner.

Also in the review section is a book by Max Ogden, one of the CPA members from the period of its Eurocommunist turn. This final stage in the story of the CPA was not covered by Stuart Macintyre, but if he left his task incomplete, he also left an inspiring example to other historians who wish to take up the work.

Vice-President’s Report

Greg Mallory

BLHA members managed to meet quite often last year, and we have some promising plans for the rest of 2022. The latter part of 2021 was especially eventful.

Getting Equal!

Researchers associated with the North Stradbroke Island Museum, including our own Howard Guille, have established that unionised Quandamooka people employed as labourers at the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum were the first indigenous Australians who formally won equal pay following a long dispute.

On Saturday 12 October 2021, about thirty-five BLHA members and friends visited the *Getting Equal!* exhibition at the museum in Goompi/Dunwich on Minjerribah/North Stradbroke Island to hear the story of this historic win in 1944, told by descendants of the workers.



*Howard Guille explaining exhibits of the **Getting Equal** Exhibition, NSIMM, October 2021*

We also enjoyed a walking tour of the remains of the Asylum, the vast extent of which was a surprise to many. This is visible from the traces of the foundations of the many buildings. One of these, the men's mess hall, has been restored and is now the Dunwich Public Hall.



*Dunwich Benevolent Asylum, Queensland 1938
State Library of Queensland Negative number: 67741*

Women of Steel

In October, we held a film night organised by our new Executive team member, Kel O'Neill; our first but certainly not the last!

The Elizabeth Street Theatre (originally the premises of the Irish Club) was an excellent venue, and the film, *Women of Steel*, was inspiring.

It told the story of the struggle of a diverse group of women to be employed by BHP Steelworks in Wollongong, beginning in 1980. It depicted two victories that were achieved. First, the right of the women to work in the production jobs, and then their right not to be discriminated against when the layoffs started.

There was a good discussion after the film led by Louise Casson, who was involved in the making of the film, and Kristin Perissinotto from the ETU who spoke of the ongoing struggles, especially in the construction industry.

Please note - at the time of this journal's publication the documentary is available to view through the ABC's iview streaming service.

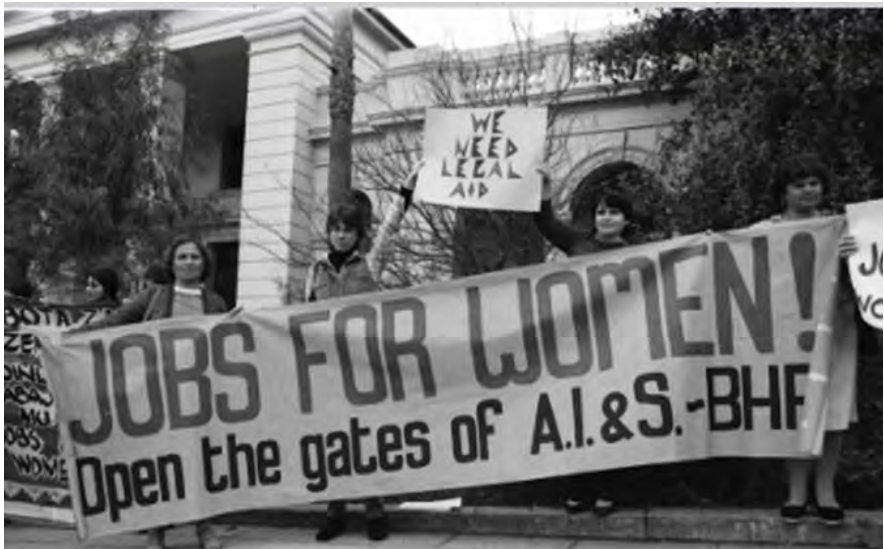


image c/o www.womenofsteelfilm.com/about/

Annual General Meeting, November 2021

At our AGM, Uncle Bob Anderson was awarded Honorary Life Membership of the association. The election returned the incumbent Executive members and Neil Frost was a welcome addition.

Terry Farr and Sophie Dwyer spoke about the formation of the Workers Health Centre in Queensland. Both speakers worked for the organisation, formed along the lines of the Workers Health Centre in Lidcombe in Sydney. The centre existed to provide information and research support to those active around questions of workplace health and safety. The Brisbane Centre was a co-operative, owned by a group of trade unions.

The BLHA's Secretary, Craig Buckley, was one of the many who lent a hand. It was underpinned by a philosophy that embraced two fundamental principles: 1. Workers on the job were the people who really understood safety risks and 2. Independent analysis was needed to identify the real causes of occupational health and safety risks. Terry and Sophie explained that one of its most important activities was its assistance in the campaign against the use of asbestos.

Research into the history of the Health Centre will be published in a future issue of this journal.



Sophie Dwyer and Terry Farr

The Party: The Communist Party of Australia from Heyday to Reckoning

by Stuart McIntyre

BLHA & SEARCH Foundation book launch

On the 26th of March, the Brisbane Labour History Association (BLHA) organised the Queensland launch of *The Party: The Communist Party of Australia from Heyday to Reckoning*, the second part of the late Stuart MacIntyre's history of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA). The launch was held at the Queensland Council of Unions building in South Brisbane and was co-hosted by the SEARCH Foundation.

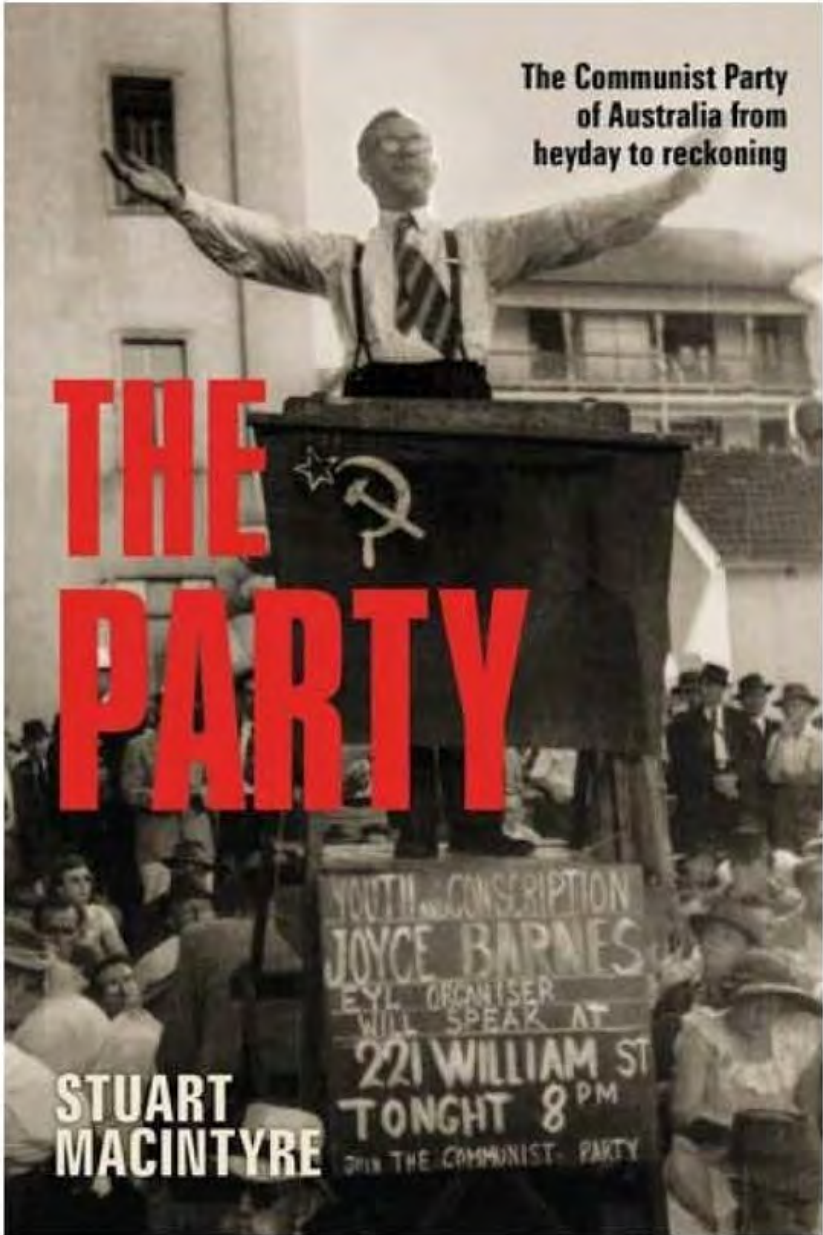
The event was chaired by Jeff Rickertt, President of the BLHA.

Speakers included Patricia Hovey, presenting a history of the SEARCH Foundation, and Beth Gordon, who related her experience of growing up in a CPA household in Brisbane.

Jon Piccini's speech launching *The Party* included comments which can be found in his review of the book, published later in this issue. Below, however, we reproduce Jon's reflections on Stuart McIntyre, his friend and mentor.

Uncle Bob Anderson delivered the Welcome to Country and related his own experience within the Communist Party as a Building Workers' Industrial Union organiser in North Queensland from the 1950s.





The Communist Party
of Australia from
heyday to reckoning

THE PARTY

STUART
MACINTYRE

YOUTH CONSCRIPTION
JOYCE BARNES
EYL ORGANISER
WILL SPEAK AT
221 WILLIAM ST
TONIGHT 8 PM
FOR THE COMMUNIST PARTY

Uncle Bob Anderson – Pathways of Political Experience

It's a pleasure for me to participate in these activities. I declare myself as being one of the usual suspects, because...

[Uncle Bob held up his CPA membership card].

...here is my Communist Party membership card from 1988 to 1990. So, probably fully financial!

That is part of the political discourse and pathway that I followed over the course of my lifetime. I think it was Walter Scott who said:

*Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said...*

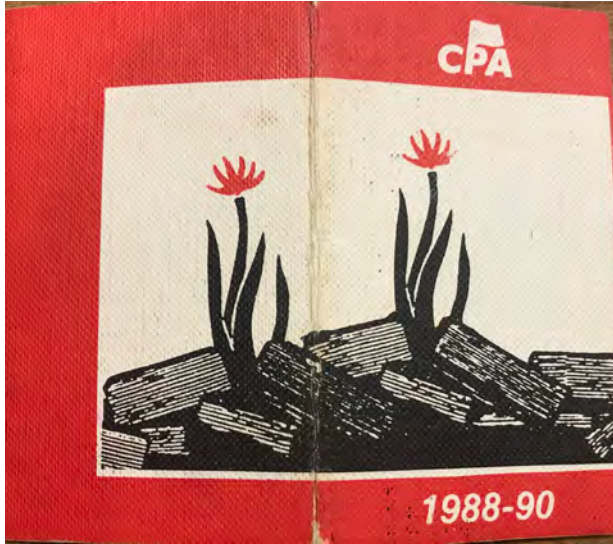
but we transposed that and said:

*Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,
Who never has been called a Red!*

I'm pleased to see everybody here participating because I've talked about my pathway and what we say is that you have joined my pathway of political experience and I have joined your political pathway as well.



Images of the book launch were taken by Neil Frost, Allan Gardiner, and Dean Wharton



Uncle Bob Anderson's CPA membership card 1988-1990 (above and below) c/o Bob Anderson

MEMBERSHIP DUES

Weekly Pre-Tax Income (\$)	Annual Dues (\$)
0 - 50	10
50 - 100	20
100 - 150	30
150 - 200	40
200 - 250	50
250 - 300	70
300 - 350	90
350 - 400	110
400 - 450	130
450 - 500	150
500 - 550	180
550 - 600	210
600 - 650	240
650 - 700	270
700 - 750	300
750 - 800	320
800 - 850	340
850 - 900	360
900 - 950	380
950 - 1000	400
1000+	400

1988-9
ANNUAL DUES 30

No 0895

1st Qtr. Jan-Mar.	2nd Qtr. April-June
3rd Qtr. July-Sept.	4th Qtr. Oct-Dec

88

1989-90
ANNUAL DUES 30

\$7.50
CTR

1st Qtr. Jan-Mar.	2nd Qtr. April-June.
3rd Qtr. July-Sept.	4th Qtr. Oct-Dec.

90

89

And that's the thing that binds us all together as working class people, and as parents too. So, on that basis, I say that I'm very pleased to participate.

I do remember my days of organising; I spent a lot of time in North Queensland. The Communist Party publications there were the *Tribune* – that was the national paper – the *Queensland Guardian* and the *North Queensland Guardian*. They provided information to all the people up in North Queensland and they were very important.

And there was the connection that Aboriginal people had, in particular the families from the Mona Mona mission [*near Kurunda on the Atherton Tableland*], such as the Grogan family, with Frank Bishop, who was the secretary of the Communist Party in Townsville. They would always go to see what he was doing. Frank had a great big place with choko trellises, and they could come and take some chokos back up to the tablelands. The Aboriginal people knew the political context and what parties stood for.

Those days have come and gone, part of our path, and we passed the baton on to others.

I met Fred Patterson. He was the elected member of the state seat of Bowen in North Queensland and his connection was with working class people in the two coal mines

there, Collinsville and Scottsville, and with the wharfies at Bowen. There was that political connection right through the north when they used to call it the Red North. Fred was bashed down in the streets of Brisbane on St Patrick's Day, 1948, when he was observing — as a barrister in his own right — the trade unionist march down the city to protest about one of the laws that was introduced by the Ned Hanlon government. Workers were bashed down in the streets in Brisbane. Patterson was taking notes and he was bashed down by a plainclothes policeman and I think Patterson's health suffered because of that.

I must say I am not a member now of any political party, but when they talk of 'true believers', I am a believer. But I am glad to see the younger ones coming to carry the battle on.

Patricia Hovey – The SEARCH Foundation



Introduction by **Jeff Rickertt**:

When Stuart Macintyre's illness returned last year, the SEARCH Foundation played a very important role in getting the publication of *The Party* across the line. SEARCH was established to manage the assets of the Communist Party of Australia after its dissolution. Today, SEARCH's mission is, in its own words, to "fight for a democratic socialist Australia, working with left wing movements for democracy, economic and social equality, environmental sustainability, human rights and international peace and cooperation", all of which we are in much need of today.

Patricia has been involved with the SEARCH Foundation for quite some time and for the past five years as the convener of its Communications subcommittee. Since retiring from the paid workforce, Patricia has been involved in the management committees of both the Vintage Reds retired trade unionists organisation and the Brisbane Combined Unions choir. In her spare time, she tells me she also does after-school grandparent duty.

Patricia Hovey:

As Jeff said, the SEARCH Foundation was established following the disbanding of the Communist Party of Australia. This was to secure the assets for the benefit of former members, many of whom joined the new organisation over the years.

The membership has grown to include members of the ALP and Greens and progressive people with no party affiliations. SEARCH is a company limited by guarantee with a management committee of fourteen, of which I am a member. I'm also one of the baby boomers who grew up in a Communist Party family and was a member of the Communist Party myself until just before it disbanded.

In the past, SEARCH mostly funded progressive organisations and individuals undertaking projects that aligned with our objectives. One of the important projects we funded in 2014 was the BLHA's oral history project to interview and record the lives and work of Queensland Communists. The project was called *Queensland Comrades Speak*. Ross Gwyther interviewed many comrades, most of whom have now passed on.

This work was immensely valuable as a source for the 2020 CPA Centenary project to publish biographies of Australian rank and file Communist Party members. We put out the call for biographies,

thinking we would get maybe twenty-five. We got 150 and one hundred of them were published in the book called *Comrades: The lives of Australian Communists*. It contained 100 biographies for 100 years, which we thought was a nice touch. The other fifty biographies were published on the SEARCH website.

There was a more recent collaboration between BLHA and SEARCH in 2018, when we held a joint seminar: Women's Work. We found women speakers from the union movement and academia to speak on the many aspects of women's employment disadvantage, such as wage disparity, low superannuation, wage theft, discrimination in recruitment and promotions, and sexual harassment.

In 2017, we conducted a national review of SEARCH's activities, holding members' workshops in all centres and culminating in a national members forum in Sydney. As a result, SEARCH now sees its role as linking and enabling and providing a safe space for discussion and action across the Left and progressive sector. In our publications and activities, we aim to contribute towards a democratic, ecologically sustainable socialist Australia.

Due to COVID, we were unable to hold more meetings and events such as our successful speaking tour in 2017 by Bea Campbell,

UK socialist feminist writer, broadcaster and activist. This was to mark the centenary of the Russian Revolution with the aim of exploring lessons for the Australian left one hundred years on. In Brisbane, the event was titled *What's Left?* shamelessly plagiarising the title of a book by the late Eric Aarons.

Like many other organisations, we resorted to Zoom meetings and webinars to present speakers, followed by Q&A sessions. We were fortunate to secure presentations from a wide range of people, such as Thomas Mayor on the Uluru Statement from the Heart, Sharon Burrows on the International Trade Union Council's work to defend the rights of workers internationally during the pandemic, Rebecca Huntley on her book *How to Talk about Climate Change*, Steve Murphy from the AMWU and Felicity Wade from the Labor Environment Action Network (LEAN) on the Hunter

Jobs Alliance, Allison Pennington from the Australia Institute's Centre for Future Work on the war on wages and how to win it, and many more.

Although it's getting to be safe, or safer, to meet in person this year, we'll probably continue to use Zoom for meetings where we want to hear from members in other centres besides Sydney, and there is still a place for webinars with overseas speakers.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the important work of labour history associations around the country in researching and publicising the history of the Australian labour movement to wider audiences, including younger generations of activists. I look forward to future collaborations with the Brisbane Labour History Association to hold events, such as this book launch, on topics of mutual interest. Thank you.



Beth Gordon - Communists in the Community



Introduction by **Jeff Rickertt**:

As Patricia mentioned, Stuart's book is the second volume of his history of the Communist Party of Australia. The first volume, the title of which was *The Reds: The Communist Party of Australia from Origins to Illegality*, covered the period from the Party's foundation up to its banning and period of illegality at the beginning of World War Two. This new volume picks up the story of the CPA from its wartime heyday.

Our next speaker is from a family whose history, like Patricia's, is intertwined with the subject of Stuart's book. While Stuart tackled the wide arc and the big themes of the Party's history, I think we should never lose sight of the fact

that this is a story made up from many individual and smaller stories from the Party faithful.

Beth Gordon came, as Patricia did, from a Communist family. She grew up in the 50s and 60s in what were then the outer suburbs of Brisbane, of Holland Park and Mount Gravatt. It was a very working-class place and time. She was part of the public education system that aimed to educate the large number of baby boomers and, as such, joined the sausage factory style of education that was typified by large class sizes and little choice in learning. And boy, do I remember that too. Nevertheless, Beth survived the system to become a primary school teacher herself, mostly due to her

family's attitude to the importance of education. She has raised three sons and is a grandmother to three children. When her own children were young, Beth joined People for Nuclear Disarmament, and she is also a founding member of Just Peace Queensland.

Beth Gordon:

Thanks Jeff, and I would also like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and acknowledge elders past and emerging and present. Thank you, Uncle Bob too. I've known Uncle Bob a very long time and I've known a lot of you in this room a very long time.

Now I was a bit young to have a full recollection of what life was like in the Communist Party, I wasn't even born when the 1951 referendum was threatening to outlaw the Party. However, I still grew up very much surrounded by the Party and I lived with the repercussions of that referendum even though it was not passed.

My father, Stan Irvine was his name, became politicised during the Second World War when he shared a tent with a Communist who influenced him greatly. And when he left the army, Dad became very actively involved in the Party. So much so that when the Communist Party and its members were threatened, he had to keep his books underneath the floorboards in our house, in case the house was

ever raided. So, there was a lot of fear around, but Dad was always a very passionate person, and he still went out almost every night of the week, either attending meetings or doing paste-ups, and my poor mother was left at home with three children. This is the real-life story of activism: when somebody is passionate about something, they have to forgo a lot. Mum used to crack up every so often because Dad was out all the time. At one time she said, "One day you're going to meet yourself coming out of a meeting."

By the time my memories started to form, the Communist Party was really waning. Roundabout the late 50s, Communist Party members were encouraged to go out into the community and start mixing with ordinary people rather than mixing with those already of the same persuasion. So, Dad joined the fledgling organisation called the Mt Gravatt Youth and Recreation Club along with a lot of other Communist members, including Patricia Hovey's dad. Patricia and I grew up together; our families were very close. Patricia's mum was my mum's best friend, so we spent a lot of time together as children. Dad, being Dad, threw himself one hundred per cent into this youth club, but our social life was still with other Communist Party members. There was a lovely security in knowing that.

Once we were old enough, we were told we had this family secret. We

could not tell anybody that my parents were in the Communist Party. There was the fear that there would be repercussions if we were to reveal that, and I think that was fairly common. For me, that secrecy, especially at ten years of age, was one of the trickiest elements when you desperately need to fit in with your crowd. There were a lot of people who wouldn't have cared, were totally unaware, but there were also those who made derisive comments about "so-and-so is a communist." And that leaves a bit of an imprint on you when you are surrounded by people who are putting you down, and you've got a secret you can't reveal.

One time somebody found out that Dad was a member of the Communist Party and at one of the club committee meetings he was called out. This person was absolutely vehement in the belief that Dad needed to be ostracised from this Mt Gravatt youth club. Then to Dad's surprise and delight, the rest of the committee sided with him and stood up for him.

But it still reinforced that need for secrecy which was always there. And years later, when I had the courage to come out and tell anybody, there *were* repercussions. One of my boyfriends that I had when I was about eighteen called it quits because I told him my parents were in the Communist Party.

Now my mother. She became involved in the Union of Australian

Women, which basically was the female arm of the Communist Party. So as a small child I went along regularly to UAW meetings. Patricia and I marched in the street regularly. It was normal for me to grow up marching in the street, and that's where it's very different from most people. The majority of people have never marched for anything, but growing up in the Party, it was really normal.

Recently, I told some friends that I protested outside the Convention Centre when the Arms Expo was on, and they were floored! "Really? You're one of them?" They seemed to see us as two-headed monsters or something, not people with an opinion.

Now, I was one of three kids, and as any parent will attest, every child interprets things differently. So, for me I didn't go anywhere near politics again until I was in my thirties. I wanted to steer clear. And in my experience many Communist Party children didn't want to have anything to do with it, probably due to that 'big secret'. But others, like Patricia and my sister, Annette Brownley, had a completely different response to me. Anyone who knows Annette knows how passionate she is, and she became passionate about politics in her teens.

But we all came out of it with a strong sense of justice. All our siblings, and I think anybody who grew up in a Communist family, gained a strong sense of justice. For

me, this led to my involvement in People for Nuclear Disarmament. The injustice of the powers-that-be having these weapons of mass destruction over the ordinary person. And Aboriginal land rights – well, all the social issues are there. And then after 2001, when the World Trade Centre’s towers were brought down, we formed Just Peace with the slogan: “Our grief is not a cry for war.” It was basically an anti-war movement.

So that’s about it from me, and I thank you for inviting me to speak.

Jeff Rickertt - Launching *The Party* in Queensland



This event is being held by SEARCH and the BLHA. BLHA’s mission is to record, promote and disseminate the history of the working-class movement. Our focus is Brisbane and Queensland, but we’re part of a wider network of labour history associations around the country and indeed internationally. We know the importance of the political organisations produced by the working class. Over time, there have been many of those, and the

Communist Party of Australia is one of the most important ones in this country, so we’re proud to be helping to launch a book about the history of the Communist Party.

To launch, in this city, the second volume of this national history of the Communist Party of Australia is, I think, a big deal. After all, Brisbane has often been a tough town for the CPA. It was in Brisbane that Hanlon – as Uncle Bob referred to earlier

– sent cops to bash senseless the Party’s only ever elected Member of Parliament. It was in this city that communist-led unions were, for a period, banned from participating in the annual Labour Day procession. And it was down in Fortitude Valley that neo-Nazis bombed the Party’s headquarters. So, the CPA has had a pretty tough gig in this city, and I think it’s a matter of some importance that the launch here is given some impressive status.

At one level I see this launch as a kind of ‘up yours!’ to all those bombers and bashers from the local establishment, all those Special Branch coppers who spent hours sitting in cars outside the homes of Communists and their families observing their every move. Because this is an occasion to honour the people inside those houses, the many people in this state who joined the CPA and dedicated the best part of their lives to it, seeing in it a pathway to a post-capitalist world.

There is of course another important reason to launch this book well, and that is to honour its author. Stuart Macintyre passed away, unfortunately, before he got to see this book in the shops. His death is a tremendous loss. He was a brilliant historian and writer, and a tireless advocate for labour history. He was the president of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, of which the BLHA is the local branch, and we miss him.

To give this book the Queensland launch it deserves, I can’t think of a better person than historian Dr Jon Piccini. Jon is a lecturer in history at Australian Catholic University, here in Brisbane. His PhD dissertation, at the University of Queensland, examined global revolution and Australian social movements in the 1960s and early 70s, the ‘long 60s’ as that period is sometimes referred to. Jon has published and lectured extensively on the history of the far left and the history of human rights as an ideological framework in 20th century progressive politics. His book, *Human Rights in 20th Century Australia*, published by Cambridge University Press, was a ground-breaking study of that topic. More recently, he co-edited *The Far Left in Australia since 1945*, a very fine collection of essays, two of them co-authored by Jon himself. Like Stuart was, Jon is a public intellectual. He writes for, and is interviewed by, the legacy media and his work can also be found in left publications like *Jacobin*. And like all the best writers of radical history, or at least the ones that I’ve come across, Jon is a staunch trade unionist. He’s very busy, but I can attest that he can usually be cornered for a chat at the NTEU tent at the annual Brisbane Labour Day celebration.

It is my great pleasure to welcome to the microphone to launch *The Party: The Communist Party of Australia from heyday to reckoning*, Dr Jon Piccini.

Jon Piccini – Stuart McIntyre and *The Party*

[The following is an excerpt from Jon Piccini's speech in which he delivered a personal tribute to Stuart Macintyre. Jon's review of the book follows this article]

I would like to thank Jeff for inviting me to make the speech and for his role, which he knows, in cultivating my interest in radical history, when I was an undergraduate at the University of Queensland and he was a mysterious, if knowledgeable, Fryer librarian guiding me through radical political collections.

I would like to pay homage to and honour the man who did so much for me and many others, and to this wonderful book, *The Party*, my well-thumbed copy of which I've brought along.

Stuart's work was my gateway into academic history. As a teenager, I wasn't particularly enthused with

Australia's past. I'm sure that the school system has something to do with that. I rather preferred the history of revolutions and the Cold War. It was remarkable when I was able to unearth Stuart's *The Reds*, the first volume of his history of the CPA, published in 1998. I was at my local council library, probably when I was in Grade 11 or 12. What this did, for the first time that I can recall, was to connect lonely and isolated Australia to the excitement of revolution and social change that so interested me overseas.

Stuart's *A Concise History of Australia*, which many of us probably have lying around in our homes, was my first history textbook





Stuart McIntyre 1947-2021

image c/o McIntyre family

at university. And his many other works on topics as diverse as the social sciences, civil liberties and post-war reconstruction have each dramatically informed my own thinking.

One thing that everyone remembers about Stuart was his generosity. This is certainly true in my experience. Stuart assessed my PhD thesis in 2013. He was a master of that onerous task, and he subsequently wrote numerous references for me in the high-stakes academic job market, and never bristled from doing it. And finally, he gave me and my co-editors the honour of launching our own contribution to the history of Australia's radical past, *The Far Left in Australia since 1945*, which Jeff mentioned.

Now, this mentorship and support that Stuart gave me was not rare. He extended it to many budding historians, setting off dozens if not hundreds of careers across our discipline and beyond. This idea of generosity is, I think, a good place to begin our discussion of *The Party*.

Stuart was once a communist. He briefly joined the Communist Party of Australia in the early 1970s, and then the Communist Party of Great Britain. When he was undertaking his PhD at Cambridge University, he was the treasurer of the CPGB's local Cambridge branch. And he was also particularly involved in the Party-adjacent journal, *Intervention*, which some might remember. And he was also, of course, a historian of communism.

He says that it was as a historian of communism that he got interested in and began his actual involvement in the party.

His first two books, published in the same year of 1980 – which is a remarkable feat – were both the result of doctoral and postdoctoral work at Cambridge. His first was entitled *A Proletarian Science: Marxism in Britain 1917-1933*, a study of the political culture of inter-war British Marxism. Here I think we can see something of the generosity that Stuart practiced in his life reflected in his approach to history. *A Proletarian Science* opens by arguing that British labour history “suffers from a preoccupation with the successful.” Historians focused on what he called the evolution of enduring practices and institutions, in so doing, offering helpful lessons to contemporary struggles, no doubt. But such thinking was, he said, the product

of a widespread notion of a linear historical process with a mainstream, which belongs to the victors, and various backwaters on which the vanquished lie, shipwrecked or becalmed.

Now, amongst those vanquished forces, Stuart placed the subject of his book: British Marxist intellectuals, often self-taught working men and, less commonly, women. These he sought to save from what that great British

social historian, Edward Palmer Thompson, called “the immense condescension of posterity.” Stuart’s insistence on paying attention to history’s vanquished was greatly influenced by Thompson’s own approach in *The Making of the English Working Class*, which some of us will have read.

Thompson insisted that while the struggles of people like Luddite croppers or utopian artisans might have been foolhardy or fantastical, they lived through these times of acute social disturbance, and we did not. “Their aspirations were valid in terms of their own experience.”

That’s a really vital sentence from E. P. Thompson’s classic book. A similar generosity of spirit, that accepted historical figures as they were, warts and all, animated Stuart’s subsequent scholarship. And I think that *The Party* shows this in spades.

Because the book is weighted to the 1940s and is Sydney-centric, there’s more work to be done, as Stuart himself realised. Those of us who follow in its wake to complete the task of chronicling communism’s long Australian history do not do so alone. Stuart has left us with an exemplary road map in *The Party*. And he has left us the example, more generally, of a humanist, generously critical method of scholarship with which to undertake the tasks ahead.

Discussion

Jeff Rickertt:

Jon's point about the Sydney-centric nature of the book, and indeed the CPA itself, is an interesting one.

A couple of years ago, in a conversation I had with Stuart, he was keen to come to Brisbane and spend time in the State Library and in the Fryer Library and he was particularly interested in doing research around Alex Macdonald and other Communist leaders in Queensland.

Stuart had agreed to deliver our annual Alex Macdonald Lecture in 2020. That never happened. With the pandemic and the decline in his health he never got to Brisbane to do that research.

One wonders, if he had made it to Brisbane, whether that research would be reflected in a slightly less southern-centric view of the Party's history.

There's always more work to be done. The task of telling history is never finished. There's always new material coming to light and different aspects of the story to be told, different perspectives and different analyses that need to be made.

Adrian Skeritt:

Perhaps there needs to be something

written about the Communist Party that builds on the work of Henry Reynolds, who wrote the book *North of Capricorn: the Untold Story of the People of Australia's North*.

What he describes is how the Torres Strait islands, Broome, Cairns, form a cosmopolitan and multi-ethnic community.

Whilst the big metropolitan cities of Melbourne and Sydney were forming the White Australia Policy, the Left in the North, including the Communist Party in time, had a more inclusive approach to race, a unique understanding of self-determination for the Torres Strait and an understanding of Indigenous Australians' conditions.

Jeff Rickertt:

There is a long historiography of labour in this country that focuses on the White Australia Policy, and so it focuses on the policies and the attitudes and the actions within a certain layer of the labour movement.

But when you go to North Queensland, the labour movement or the working class generally is, as Adrian said, ethnically diverse. And the labour movement and the activists in the labour movement there, were not, in the main, adherents to the White Australia Policy.

You can go back before the Communist Party and find evidence of Wobblies, IWW members, organising Japanese workers against the dictates of the AWU hierarchy in North Queensland. There's a long tradition of anti-racist organising, certainly in North Queensland, and I'm sure in other parts of Australia as well.

Howard Guille:

We need to give our respect to Diane Menghetti [author of *The Red North: The Popular Front in North Queensland*]. She documented some of the radical opposition to the AWU up north. In one of her papers, she says that radicals were translating the meetings into Italian and into Spanish.

Another point about the Left in North Queensland is that it fed into the official movement here in Brisbane. Certain important leaders of the metalworkers came down from the north and were politicised within the Party. One of them went on to be the Secretary of the Labour Council in the 1990s.

Jon Piccini:

That was where my family lived when they came over from Italy in the 1920s. They did sugar cane cutting in the 1920s and 1930s in the north.

Paddy Gibson has done an excellent PhD thesis on the Communist Party's approach to Aboriginal

rights, which documents a lot of the stuff that you're talking about.

Patricia Hovey:

My father went to North Queensland and organised with Frank Bishop, the local CPA Secretary [*mentioned by Uncle Bob*], particularly in the Italian cane farming community. There's that old story about how the Italians went to mass on Sunday morning and to their Party branch meeting in the afternoon. So, there was quite a strong focus on the multi-ethnic communities.

Unfortunately, Frank Bishop had already passed on when Ross Gwyther did the oral history of Communists and interviewed people from the north such as Stan Heilbron.

Frank did great work organising in North Queensland, but he didn't write much of his activity down. The written record on Frank doesn't exist whereas other Communist Party members, particularly those in leadership positions, had their paperwork placed in the Fryer Library or the John Oxley library. And of course, the people who knew Frank and worked with him are also gone by this time.

About the book being Sydney-centric, well the Party itself was. Within the SEARCH Foundation we have representatives from other regions, like me in Queensland, and others from Western and South Australia, the ACT and Victoria.

Allan Gardiner:

The BLHA has a spot each month on the 4ZZZ radio program, *Workers Power*. These discussions with BLHA speakers are all recorded and available on our website and well worth a look.

In Neil Frost's recent contribution to the series, about workers' activity in the Far North, he suggested that activists in the Party working up there might have benefitted from being a bit distanced from and neglected by the official party bureaucracy. This might have given women, for example, more scope to work in the Party.

Ross Gwyther:

The *Queensland Comrades Speaks* oral history project that has just

been mentioned again, that was my first retirement project. I just want to tell you what inspired me to do that.

Through my working life I've been involved in community politics in various organisations, and at these organising meetings there were always some very old people.

When you got to know them, you realised that a lot of them were old Communist Party members; ninety-two year-olds, like Uncle Bob, involved in just about every activity. That's what inspired me to do those interviews because those people inspired me.

This comes back to the question of the psychology and belief of the membership of the CPA.



*Delegates at the North Queensland Communist Party of Australia Conference, Dec 1937
c/o University of Queensland Fryer Library UFL234*

The Party: The Communist Party of Australia from Heyday to Reckoning

by **Stuart Macintyre**,
(Allen & Unwin,
Sydney, 2022)

Reviewed by Jon Piccini

[Reproduced from the April 2022 issue of *Jacobin*]

“Communism was a political movement like no other.” This is the opening line of *The Party*, the second volume of the late Stuart Macintyre’s history of Australian communism, which picks up in the late 1930s, where volume one, *The Reds: The Communist Party of Australia from Origins to Illegality*, left off.

Macintyre’s observation is a fact all too easily forgotten today. For much of the 20th century, communism was a global movement, with branches in almost every nation, that sought to do away with the present state of things. It demanded and inspired unswerving loyalty from its members, who built a counterculture embracing almost every aspect of their lives. In this way, communist parties were unlike

typical bourgeois parties, who only extend politics to elections and stakeholder management.

Indeed, for most leftists today, Macintyre’s account will come as a revelation. For example, Macintyre quotes Hall Alexander, an electrician, who joined the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) in the 1940s and remained a member until the bitter end. As Alexander explains, he joined

Because it gave us a rationale for the madness that was. Because it changed us from headbutting incompetents to some kind of thinking strategists. Because it gave us self-esteem. Because it educated us in the knowledge that WE were better than them.

From Illegality to a Mass Movement

The idea that communism was a “transformational life experience,” Macintyre explains, is one “seldom captured in Australian studies of the subject.” In his account, earlier histories failed to capture Communism’s distinctiveness and how “it charged the lives of its adherents with significance” by claiming “jurisdiction over every dimension of activity.” Perhaps this historical purpose might today seem foolhardy. However, to paraphrase the great British Marxist historian E.P. Thompson, communism made sense to its supporters because of their own experience.

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RUSSIA'S DAY

(By W. G. Pooley, Secretary, Association of Co-operative Building Societies, and Vice-President of Friendship with Russia League).

November 7, 1943, marked the twenty-sixth anniversary of the Russian Revolution, and the foundation of the U.S.S.R. Few people at that time realised the world significance of that event and the bearing it would have upon the very existence of our democracies twenty-six years later.

From the ashes of a decadent, illiterate, down-trodden and disunited Russia has arisen the mighty United States of Soviet Socialist Republics. Mighty, because it was founded on justice and truth, and its development motivated by one consideration—that of the welfare of the people. It is because of this that Stalingrad was possible—that Leningrad withstood the most bitter siege in history, and that the victorious Red Army was able to hurl back the conquering, ravaging hordes of the Hun when they were virtually knocking at the gates of Moscow.

To-day an admiring world pays tribute to the courage and tenacity of the Soviet Army and to the skill and judgment of its officers. To-day, a one-time critical world admits the wisdom and statesmanship of that greatest of all leaders, Joseph Stalin. All these things were made possible by the events of November 7, 1917, that memorable day when Lenin, with his able lieutenant, Stalin, directed the revolution which overthrew a despotic Czarist regime.

That the Soviet feats of arms have saved civilisation there can be no denial. That there can be no lasting peace without the close friendship and collaboration of the four great Powers, i.e., Great Britain, United States of America, China, and the Soviet Union, is also axiomatic—but that collaboration and co-operation can only be founded on education and understanding, and on the truth and enlightenment which alone banish the evils of suspicion and distrust. It is to this end that both Churchill and Roosevelt have declared for a close friendship and understanding between the Soviet and the English-speaking peoples—a friendship and understanding which have been further strengthened by the far-reaching decisions of the Moscow Conference.

On November 7, 1943, freedom-loving people throughout the world celebrated the outcome of this Conference as an Allied victory no less than those won by the Red Army on the Eastern Front of Europe and by the American, British and Australian forces in Southern Europe and the Pacific.

November 1943 edition of The International Powerboat and Aquatic Monthly: editorial exhibiting pro-Soviet propaganda prevalent at the time in Australian society (editors copy)

The Party begins at the CPA's most difficult moment. In late 1939, the Party was both illegal and struggling to sell implausible rationalisations for Stalin's pact with Hitler. Following Hitler's invasion of Russia, however, the USSR entered World War Two and the CPA turned sharply towards supporting the war effort. In a few years, the CPA would reach the zenith of its popularity and influence, in large part due to the USSR's role in defeating European fascism. Reflecting the spirit of the times, a 1945 edition of the *Australian Women's Weekly* featured Uncle Joe on its front cover, "painted in a plain military jacket, pipe in mouth, gazing resolutely into the future".

Overnight, communists went from pariahs to patriots as a wave of Russophilia swept Australia. In 1941, supporters founded the Russian Medical Aid Committee, which sold popular hammer and sickle earrings to fund the war effort. On 7 November of the same year, public buildings all over Australia flew the Soviet flag to mark the 24th anniversary of the Russian Revolution.

During the fight against Nazism, the Party grew to an estimated 22,000 members, which helped it secure influential positions in unions that were key to the war effort, including those covering miners, builders, waterside workers and heavy industry. These "fortress unions" would remain

under communist leadership for decades, providing most of the Party's membership.

As Macintyre explains, the CPA became "the leading war party." This saw it campaign for production increases in the name of anti-fascism while curtailing strike action in industries where its members were concentrated. This earned the Party substantial influence within the Curtin and Chifley Labor governments that many assumed would be ongoing. CPA big-wig Ernie Thornton even went so far as to call for the Party to become a ginger group within the Australian Labor Party (ALP).

The Party's rush of new members allowed it to acquire new premises, including Marx House in Sydney and Australia-Soviet House, on Flinders Street in Melbourne. In 1945, the total sales of CPA publications hit three million. Hundreds of suburban branches prepared detailed plans to transform their local areas in the "people's peace" that they expected soon after the war.

The Cold War

In August 1945, the CPA organised a party outside of Marx House in Sydney to celebrate the end of the war, fuelled by "a supply of pure alcohol brought by some young scientists from the University of Sydney, mixed with lemon squash."

No one was prepared, however,

for how quickly the tide would turn against the CPA as WW2 was followed by the Cold War. Following the mid-1940s, in which communism was almost mainstream, party members soon found themselves the targets of an ideological war that often spilled over into violence and intimidation. Between 1945 and 1948, Party membership halved from its wartime high point.

The catastrophic coal miners' strike of 1949 marked the beginning of an anti-communist witch hunt. This was followed by Liberal PM Robert Menzies' near-successful attempt to ban the CPA in 1950-1. Although the referendum to proscribe the Party failed, in part thanks to solidarity from the ALP and trade unions, Menzies' campaign resulted in the victimisation and harassment of communists. In one instance, several men accosted a young woman wearing a hammer and sickle lapel and threatened to throw her on the tracks. Cases like these only furthered a sense of isolation and victimhood among party members.

At the same time, Cold War persecution hardened the commitment of those cadres who stayed, unlike those "fair weather comrades" who departed. In 1956, however, two historic events shook even the most loyal CPA stalwarts. These were Khrushchev's secret speech, in which he denounced Stalinism, and the Soviet invasion

of Hungary, which followed only months later. Despite the risk of being labelled bourgeois revisionists, Party members covertly circulated Khrushchev's address amongst themselves, with many finding that it struck a chord with long-held, often suppressed, doubts.

The fallout from 1956 reduced the Party's membership by a further estimated 25 percent. For those who remained, the goal of CPA members shifted from changing Australia to changing the party itself. According to historian Pavel Kolar, the CPA compensated for dashed hopes for revolutionary transformation by becoming a self-contained "New Utopia."

The difficulties encountered by the CPA should not dissuade readers of *The Party* from persevering, however. Macintyre also captures the distinct sense of humour that helped communists endure. For example, during the period of illegality, the police threatened one group of Communists found handing out leaflets emblazoned with "CPSU." The communists, however, avoided prison by convincing police that "CPSU" stood for "Commonwealth Public Sector Union," and not "Communist Party of the Soviet Union". In another instance from the 1950s, communists dodged restrictions on public speaking by hiring a boat and floating it off the Fremantle esplanade.

The CPA's slow decline gave rise to introspection and two more splits. The first came in 1963, when a pro-China faction separated to found the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist). This split was followed by another eight years later, when another group departed in protest at the Party leadership's moves towards "socialism with Australian characteristics" and their condemnation of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. These Stalinist hardliners went on to form the Moscow-aligned Socialist Party of Australia (SPA).

The CPA was also home to a fair number of members, including some of the most disciplined apparatchiks, who viewed these developments with a characteristically Australian irreverence. For example, when Party official Claude Jones saw the Great Leap Forward first-hand, he noted his lack of enthusiasm for Mao Zedong's plan "to put steel furnaces in everyone's dunny."

Macintyre's willingness to give individual communists a "fair shake" is not limitless, however. For example, he reserves particular scorn for Ted Hill, a Melbourne barrister and head of the breakaway CPA(ML), whose humourless Stalinism was matched only by his conspiratorial worldview.

A Proud Legacy

In retrospect, it is easy to dismiss Australian communism as a failure.

However, as Macintyre knew better than most, history is not a zero-sum game. Communists made Australian history, even if not in the way they might have chosen, or as the party's official doctrine envisaged.

The CPA's work in the trade unions won substantial improvements, convincing workers that solidarity and militancy could improve their lot even under capitalism. The party's auxiliaries and front organisations can also be credited with substantial wins. Zelda D'Aprano stood at the forefront of the fight for equal wages for women. Shirley Andrews was instrumental to founding the Council for Aboriginal Rights, the result of her decades' long commitment to Indigenous rights, a cause she took up on Party assignment.

Frank Hardy, one of Australia's most renowned literary authors, was perhaps also the CPA's most famous member. His 1968 classic *The Unlucky Australians* told the story of the Gurindji strike in which Aboriginal stockmen walked off Wave Hill station demanding fair pay and land rights. Hardy's book was crucial to helping the strikers tell their story, and it changed the way many Australians — including Labor prime minister Gough Whitlam — viewed the issue of Aboriginal land rights. Indeed, Whitlam is said to have burst into tears upon seeing Hardy's body lying in state at his 1994 funeral.

As Stuart notes, after leaving the party, many ex-members also went on to make a substantial contribution. Peter Cundall, for example, stood as the Party's senate candidate for Tasmania in 1961 before later earning fame as the host of the ABC's much-loved program *Gardening Australia*.

Macintyre's narrative in *The Party* ends in 1971, with the split that led to the formation of the SPA. Although organisationally depleted once again, the CPA was hardly out for the count. Unencumbered by dogmatic Stalinism or Maoism, the Party's communists set out on new, more independent path.

1971 is also the year that Macintyre

himself joined the party as a student. Given his declining health — as well as his own personal involvement — he was unable to complete a full history of the CPA up to its dissolution in 1991. This is a task that remains for leftist historians today, and it can only be strengthened by a spirit of fidelity to Macintyre's approach to history. *The Party* treats communism not as a failure, but as a movement which charged the lives of its many thousands of adherents with purpose. And, at the same time, Macintyre's shrewd and critical approach to history writing means that his last book contains a wealth of lessons that will help us find our own way towards a better world today.



*Communist Party of Australia meeting, Brisbane 24/3/1966?
c/o Image 262 Folder 5 Graham Garner Collection F3400, Fryer Library, University of
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The Making of an Australian Working Man

Dinny McQueen 1899-1971

by his son, Humphrey McQueen

Humphrey McQueen is a prominent independent scholar and public intellectual. Beginning with his groundbreaking book, *A New Britannia* in 1970, he has published prolifically.

My father has been dead for fifty years. He was going on for seventy-two, and had been doing, on that Friday in late October 1971, what he had done for most of his life: labouring in a tannery. As usual on Friday nights, he brought home fish-and-chips and a bottle of Fourex, to fall asleep in front of the television. My mother could not wake him.

Born illegitimate on 31st March 1899 at Anakie in the gem fields of Central Queensland, he never mentioned his mother. Had she abandoned him, or did she die in childbirth? He did not know that his given name, 'Dennis,' was spelt with two 'ns,' or that he had a middle name, 'Eagers,' until he needed a birth certificate to marry late in 1941. Was 'Eagers' a clue to his father?

He was brought up by his gran who ran a shop in Clermont. When he was eleven, she sent him 700 kilometres south to Ipswich to work in another general store. On the morning of 2nd February 1912, the shopkeeper left him in charge while he, carrying a length of 4x2, rode his 'barrel mare' into Brisbane

to sign on as a special constable, breaking heads on 'Black Baton Friday' to put an end to the General Strike.

From work in an Eagle Street warehouse, my father found his first job in the leather trades with a backyard operation. When it closed in August 1916, he went back to his birthplace for nine months, in time to experience the deluge late in December 1916 when sixty-seven people drowned at Clermont. I can find no trace among the victims of one who might have been his gran. He returned to Brisbane with five rubies, only to have them stolen.

Back in Brisbane, he worked for one of the largest leather firms in Australia, T.C. Dixon & Sons, who had their tannery at Hill End near the river into which spilt its effluent. Their multi-storied brick boot-factory, now an arts centre, was on the other side of Montague Road.

Despite high levels of wartime unemployment, there was still a shortage of men willing and able to heave water-soaked hides out of the pits. Picture the foreman's



T.C. Dixon with staff following the opening of his new factory in 1908.

Photograph from the Thomas Dixon Centre website courtesy Kerry Viksne

relief when a huge Scandinavian asked for a job. No sooner had he got into the pit than he began a go-slow. The foreman screamed abuse, threatened, but would neither get into the pit himself nor halt the job. Word spread that there would be a brawl at lunch time. The newcomer was in no greater hurry to get out than he had been to throw up the hides. By the time he did, the entire workforce had gathered. My father recalled that the stranger ambled across to the foreman, 'king-hit' him, then turning to the men said: 'I'm from the Industrial Workers of the World and it's time you mugs got organised,' and walked out the gate.

They had never seen anyone stand

up to a boss like that. Within the year, most had joined the Leather Trades Union. Here indeed was 'propaganda by deed.' At the time, such deeds raged far beyond that clash between one agent of capital and a militant labourer. His king-hit landed in a world lit by the dawn of revolution.

By then, my father had moved to Drake Street, Hill End, 300 metres from the tannery. The landlady had been a teenage prostitute in John Wren's brothel on Highgate Hill to which clients were conveyed from North Quay by cab.¹ She and its driver fell for each other,

¹Wren was a Melbourne-based capitalist who was fictionalised as "John West" in Frank Hardy's *Power Without Glory*.

and decided to keep working until they could save enough for a Queenslander to run as a boarding house.

On several Saturday mornings each year, my father would visit her, sometimes taking me along. I was fascinated and frightened by her appearance as she stretched out on a settee, elephantine ears pierced by tiny gold rings, and ulcerated bare feet. A greater puzzle was the stream of men who dropped by, all calling her 'Mother,' as did my father. I knew that she was not my other grandmother, and could not have given birth to all her visitors. The explanation let me glimpse what class consciousness can mean in daily life. Throughout the interwar years, work was always intermittent.

By the early 1930s, employers laid off single men first, her boarders. She ran socialism in one boarding house. Those in work paid their rent. The unemployed did not. No one was evicted. They got a bed and something approaching three meals a day. What else could they call her but 'Mother'? She became the matriarch of Drake Street.

A few houses away, German cabinet-makers changed their named to Murton. Someone taught their cockatoo to shriek "Hang the King! Up the Kaiser!" It had to be covered with a blanket for the duration, but survived into the early 1950s for me to enjoy repeat performances.

Although the boss-class granted my father three years 'unpaid long-



Bookmakers at the dog track, Dinny at foot of photo c/o Humphrey McQueen

service leave' in the early 1930s, he was able to pay rent by working as a penciller with a bookie on the Flat at the dogs. My father, the bookmaker and the bagman each went threepence in the shilling with John Wren, who owned the racetrack and the Stadium, if not the Labor government. My father saw how easy it was to 'dope' a greyhound with an ounce of chopped liver or a teacup of stout too much or too little: "A man might be silly enough to put money on a bloody horse," he would say, "but he's not so bloody stupid as to put money on a dog."

His arithmetical skills intimidated me. How could someone who had left school before teenage keep track of dozens of threepenny bets so that the bookmaker knew by the minute what odds it was safe to offer. My father was no "mute, inglorious Newton" but his abilities show that workers are not as genetically stupid as alleged by Gary Marks and Pru Goward. Had he been born forty years later, he might have been an accountant, or taught STEM at TAFE.

Reading little beyond the *Courier Mail* and the *Telegraph*, and owning no books, he was not a worker-intellectual, yet he was curious. He watched the Sunday afternoon telecasts of Shakespeare. On getting up from *Hamlet*, he said, "So, that's what it's about." His generation valued leaders who put into words what they felt. From a rally on North Quay, he recalled, decades

later, the State Attorney-General, J.A. Fehilly, dismiss England as a land of "cant, hypocrisy and humbug."

Yet he was not stuck in the past. At the time of the 1957 split, the nearest State Labor member was Bert Turner who had held Kelvin Grove for twenty-five years. All Turner could say in response to the split was how terrible the Moore government had been during the opening years of the depression. My parents would have none of that. They needed no one to remind them of how dreadful life had been in the early 1930s, and after, but they were not blind to the ways Australia was being transformed. In 1961, they welcomed leaders like Clem Jones as Brisbane's Lord Mayor, and the university lecturer Max Poulter for the Senate, (who died of cancer before being sworn in).

Because my mother was a tribal Catholic - 'Vote Labor: Bank Commonwealth' - my father had to attend six sessions with a priest who explained that children of mixed marriages had to be brought up Catholic. He came away relieved that Father Humphries had not tried to convert him or make him confess his sins. So, he had me christened Humphrey, a given name he would also have known from Bogart. He was not an atheist, but rather an a-theist. The question of an afterlife never entered his thinking. Yet he had his clutch of superstitions: "Never pick up a tray

bit [threepence] on a racecourse.” “Don’t move house on a Friday.” As it happened, we shifted on Thursday 13th.

On marrying, my parents rented a Queenslander in Kenwyn Road, Red Hill, so he could work at Fulcher Brothers, whose tannery is now the site of the Brisbane Broncos. They took in my aunt, her two children and my mother’s mother. A flow of servicemen – some GIs – were welcome to spend a night or two on the verandah.

To protect us, my father excavated an air-raid shelter in the backyard. A pumpkin vine concealed the entrance. Whenever a siren sounded, instead of joining the other workers in their trench, he sprinted across Gilbert Park to be with us.

By August 1945, they were hoping to buy a 24-perch block, some twelve kilometres from the GPO in Payne Road, The Gap, for £22.10.00. Its owner insisted on selling his adjoining allotments for £45.00, which they agreed to pay in instalments. During 1949, they secured a twenty-year mortgage with the Permanent Building Society to have a five-square weatherboard-and-fibro house built for £1,000 just before Menzies got in to abolish price controls. My father’s best friend, Bob Hovey, got a slightly smaller place a year later for almost twice as much.

My father knew himself well enough

never to contemplate building his own place, unlike our neighbours, Dave Napier and Bert Hill.² Instead, he set about concreting and painting, repainting, and repainting. For a few years, my bedroom colour scheme featured mushroom and duck-egg blue. One summer, he decided to paint the outside in the Labor Party colours of alternating red and white stripes. He gave that political statement away after paints speckled the boards below.

He kept chooks, never gardened, apart from a few tomato plants, the regulation maximum of five banana trees, and a choko vine around the outhouse. For the first few months, he had to bury our night soil until Hunter Brothers extended their service into the Gap. We recycled the *Women’s Weekly* by nailing half-sheets to the dunny wall.

The newsagent delivered to barely 120 houses on a Sunday. There was no Council bus service. A private one ran to suit the owner-driver’s needs. More reliable were motorists who stopped for anyone walking to or from the tram. My father never owned a car or learned to drive. Before taking the train to visit us in Canberra early in 1971, he had never been further south than fishing trips to the Tweed. As we watched Sputnik pass, he shook his

² On the topic of post-war owner-builders, see McQueen, Humprey, “Bert Hill - The Castle”, published at: https://www.surplusvalue.org.au/McQueen/aus_hist/aus_hist_bert_hill.htm

head: 'I never thought a man would live to see a spaceship.'

Waterworks Road was the only sealed road in The Gap, but not curbed and channelled. By the end of each cyclonic summer, the condition of Payne Rd was such that, not only did we call it Pain Road, but the street sign at the top of its first hill warned drivers that they were henceforth on Paynes Rd. Clem fixed that, and sewered Greater Brisbane.

A two-stroke Victa mower served as a plough to level the yard. My father would lift it almost shoulder high to trim bushes. The tannery had to employ an engine driver to turn the power on in the morning and off in the afternoon. To fill in his seven hours fifty minutes, the driver did odd jobs for the other men, including keeping my father supplied with blades.

Since the ice-man did not deliver, our first durable good was a Silent Knight fridge. An electric range replaced the wood stove, and later still, a hot-water service took over from a chip-heater in the bathroom. Even though my parents paid off only one appliance at a time, they were careful not to take on too much debt for each one. When a Chesterfield suite turned up priced at £15, and not £12.5.00, they had a long discussion on the front steps as to whether they could let the delivery men bring it inside. That such considerations were normal was clear from the patience of those workers.

If frugal comfort was expanding, everyday life remained a good way short of affluence. Late in 1959, however, as I was about to start work, they could afford to pay off the first television set in the street – a Stromberg- Carlson. A year later, we stood agog watching the screen as the West Indies tied a cricket test match for the first time at the 'Gabba.

Given my father's upbringing, where did he acquire what today are marketed as parenting skills? Each occasion of my waywardness was met with "There'll be new rules and regulations in this household." There never were, perhaps because he was convinced that "Experience is the substitute for the good advice, we never take." Every night before bed, he kissed me on the forehead. At the time, I took his unconditional love for granted but have since seen it as remarkable. Was it the lesson he took from being orphaned?

When I left school to start work in the Commonwealth Public Service he felt that he had set me up for life since I would never be unemployed. But he didn't grumble when I resigned to attend university full-time from 1962. Other than the chemists at work, he had met no one who had been to a university until he got to know some from the St Lucia Branch of the Labor Party, in the same Federal electorate of Ryan.

In July 1962, an issue of the *Freethinker* made front-page leads in the *Sunday Mail* and *Truth*,

and me notorious.³ Despite the embarrassment that scandal must have caused him at work, there was never a glint of disapproval. “Home,” wrote Robert Frost, “is the place where, when you have to go there,/ They have to take you in.” Home was more than that for my parents for, as Frost adds, home is: “Something you somehow haven’t to deserve.”

When a friend of his remarked that I had grown an inch taller than his six-foot-one-inch, he replied: “I’d be even taller if someone had fed me as well as I’ve fed him.” That he was a ‘good provider’ was taken for granted. That he put food on the table was not the half of it. Four nights a week, he cooked ‘tea’—meat and three veg—and did the grocery shopping. He bought himself a pressure-cooker to coordinate the timing of the veges and to prepare tripe for himself.

If his cooking evening meals seems unusual for a man of the house it was no more so than that my mother had gone back to work in the late 1940s. (Her working life merits its own retelling.) She did the weekend baking and roasting. First thing on Saturday, he helped with the weekly wash, lifting the sheets out of the electric copper, putting them through the ringer, and hanging them around the Hills Hoist. To do so, was being fair.

³ For the atmospheric see Merle Thornton, *Bringing the Fight: A firebrand feminist’s life of defiance and determination* (Sydney: Harper-Collins, 2020), 130-56

Up each morning by 5.30, he shaved, fed the chooks, got his own breakfast of Weet-Bix, prepared his lunch, including a wedge of the boiled fruit cake that my mother made every Sunday, and was out the door by 6.30 am to start work before 7.30. He did not own a watch. Had he absorbed the time discipline of work?

After he had been in the Leather and Allied Trades Union for fifty years, the Queensland secretary got him to write up his experiences for its journal. He mentions none of the political matters I report here. Instead, he writes about the friends he had made, expressing “the greatest respect” for fellow labourers: “Bill and Jack have passed over the great divide, but Roy, like myself, is still plugging away.” (That other long-stayer was the father of Roy Harvey, Lord Mayor in the early 1980s.)

Here is also his satisfaction, approaching pride, on the quality of the leathers he had worked up in tanning kid, calf and kangaroo, even unborn calves (sleek) with their fur-like hairs intact. While assisting the chemists, he kept pages of recipes – if not formulae.

Chemistry had another dimension. Handling hides treated with chromium sulphate ate into his hands. My mother machine-stitched calico inserts for his rubber gloves, and he smeared his



*Dinny McQueen (2nd from right) in the Criterion bar with friends and the bar attendant.
c/o Humphrey McQueen*

hands with Zam-Buk ointment. The ulcers did not disappear until he switched to other tasks. Such injuries were accepted as a condition of work.

His stand-by cures were Goanna Salve for bruises, Friar's Balsam for congestion, Condy's Crystals and acriflavine for cuts and abrasions. I never saw him take an Aspro, which was as close to Big Pharma as any of us came in those days. A GP who called to treat his bronchial flu turned to my mother: "If he doesn't stop smoking, he won't see the boy grow up." Stop he did. Twenty years later when I asked him how he had quit he replied: "I stopped."

Apart from rubber gloves and galoshes, he never bought work clothes, never wore underpants, short-sleeves or short pants, always sported a hat, often as not on the back of his head. Saturday was different. Dressed up for the races, he allowed himself a set sum of spending money. If he had a good win, he'd arrive home in a cab with a couple of bottles of oysters to spice with Worcestershire sauce on buttered bread.

Men who had worked together over the decades in various tanneries dropped by the Saloon Bar of the old Criterion on Saturday forenoons for a couple of ales as one more strand

in sustaining friendships as the woof and warp of being working-class. Four of them took shares each week in the Golden Casket, settling up when they next met my father, the cashier. No sooner had my parents paid off their mortgage than they won £200.

With the legal of age of entry to hotels then twenty-one, he did not take me with him until I turned eighteen. I was struck by their respect for the barmaid. They stopped swearing when she came within what they judged to be earshot. A safe working environment was her right. My mother had been a barmaid at the Regatta when they met. Blokes entrusted barmaids with their pay packets on Friday nights, to collect when they sobered up.

They did not have to be told that they should not mistreat women, or neglect their children, which was a kind of scabbing. My father never asked the one neighbour who did not measure up to join the Labor Party. When a funeral passed, men faced the hearse, bowed their bared heads as one more common decency.

At home, my father confined swearing to the sanguinary adjective as in "The greatest bloody mystery of all bloody times what happened to that bloody hammer," or whatever else it was the office for my mother to hand him usually something that was under his nose. If they did not bicker, that was

not because she could not stick up for herself as she demonstrated at work and at Labor Party meetings. If she wanted to go to work when she was sick, he'd say, "Stella, when we think we can't be done without, stick your hand in a bucket of water, pull it out, and see what a bloody great hole we've left behind."

My parents had been recruited to the Labor Party in the early Fifties by a Grouper. The branch fell apart after the 1954 Split, to be started up again after the split in Queensland in 1957. A branch needed seven members and its monthly meetings in the Scout Hall five for a quorum. The day I turned fifteen, they enrolled me in the Great Australian Labor Party. The three McQueens became the core of a tiny branch in one of the safest Tory seats in the country, Mt Coot-tha for the State and City Council, and Ryan for the Feds.

Before Christmas that year, he asked a Communist friend to find a copy of Frank Hardy's *Power Without Glory*, which turned up as the two-volume Seven Seas edition from East Germany. He handed it to me saying: "You'd better to see what we've got you into."

All but one of our Branch members were blue-collar workers, including a plasterer, a PMG linesman, a pantry-maid, and two carpenters. Their vocabulary would now convict them of racism and sexism. Yet, in 1959, I found unanimous support in my Branch, and at the State and



*Dinny McQueen
Photograph c/o Humphrey McQueen*

Federal Electorate Committees, for a motion to amend the Party's Fighting Platform to rewrite the Aborigines Preservation and Protection Act (1897) in line with the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights. Returned servicemen backed Evatt's support for independence movements across the Empire/Commonwealth by recounting how they had seen natives being flogged to work harder. That was more than enough to convince the others.

The 1961 Federal poll was Australia's first television election. The ABC did its public duty by allowing the candidates screen-time. This included a scatter of

Communists. Their candidate for Brisbane, W.E. Bowden, was even less comfortable in front of the cameras than Menzies. Bowden took the safe course of reading out the Party's fighting platform – Nationalise the Banks; Nationalise the Oil companies; Nationalise BHP. After each proposal, my father interjected: "The bloody Labor Party should be saying that." Had he been in France or Italy, he, and most of his workmates and those in our ALP Branch would have voted Communist, and joined that Party. Here, voting Labor was their only option.

But parliament was not the be-all and end-all of life as a worker. Praise in *The Australian* from Henry Mayer for my 1968 articles about convicts and racism made my father be sure to read those fortnightly columns. From them, he sent off for anarchist pamphlets. Around the tannery, he pasted up 'Fast Workers Die Young,' an echo from the Wobbly era. The O'Shea strike, following the global earthquake in 1968, rekindled the spirit of 50 years before. Par for the course in an era of what, in effect, was still compulsory unionism, members lagged in paying their dues. Tired of chasing them up, he called a stop-work because of non-unionists on site. The officials were as flummoxed as the owners, as were the blokes, who promptly coughed up.

His most regular maxim was that "The worker has no friend but

himself.” Nothing was further from his mind than selfishness or egoism. Rather, this voiced his conviction that no one was going to do for us what we don’t do for ourselves. Branch members never gave a thought to personal gain. They had their hands in their pockets, scratching a few quid together to put leaflets into letter boxes, erect How-to-Vote signs and pay for cards to hand out on polling day.

At that time the Labor Party’s lapel badge proclaimed ‘The Unity of Labour is the Hope of the World. No more depressions. No more wars.’

Today, Canberra’s Labor Clubs sport the motto: ‘It’s all about YOU.’ My parents would have found that slogan incomprehensible. For them, it was all about all of us. Had I been able to explain the motto to them, their reaction would have been: “If that’s how you see the world, why aren’t you with the Liberal Party at the Golf Club?”

Marx refers to the wage-slave as “like someone who has brought his own hide to market, and now has nothing else to expect but a tanning.” That is not how my father would have summed up his working life. Yes, he knew that workers had no friends but themselves. But it was those friendships that made work less punishing and, more importantly, enriched other aspects of their being.

My father’s life was not a life in politics. Rather, it lets us glimpse the impress that, in those days, everyday doings bore on class consciousness. Long before ‘verballing’ became current as the term for being stitched up, he had taught me to “Never trust a copper.”

These pages say too little about the most significant source of that moral economy, his hour-by-hour cooperation with others to turn hides into boot and shoe leather, thereby building trust between them. Work gave their lives meaning through friendships, the capacity to support a family, to enjoy a few beers and a bet, and to feel that a job well done brought a wider benefit: “There’s no such thing as cheap shoes. They won’t last and they ruin your feet.”

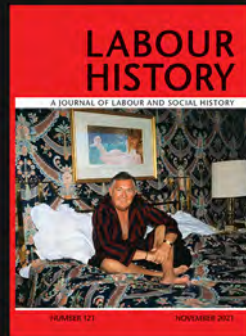
Through a neighbour, we got to know orchardists at Wyberba, a siding south of Stanthorpe. My parents took the train there for their annual leave where he helped out at a different rhythm in a cooler climate. Three weeks after he retired at sixty-five, he got his job back. His body was still as strong as a horse – his nickname. Shocking as his death was for my mother, his being bed-ridden, or even house-bound, would have been intolerable for him.

The only object I have of his are nail clippers. They were never sharp but designed to cut by pressure, so that they can be used equally by either hand. They must be older than he was when he died. They still work.

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“Comrade Jim”

Ted Reithmuller

Ted Reithmuller (1937-2019) was a Communist Party of Australia member and a life-long electrician and trade unionist. He was awarded life membership of the ETU and was Secretary of the Brisbane Labour History Association. He was very keen that the experiences of everyday workers be documented as well as the work processes, material and equipment they use—especially now in a period of rapid change. He encouraged workers to document their lives and tell their stories. No one else can. (Image c/o Reithmuller personal collection)



I was overseas when Alan got married to Pauline. This was back in January 1967. It was a pity because I missed one of the social occasions of the year – for the Brisbane leftwing community at least.

Many years later we were talking about it. “I suppose Alan, the reception was held in the Waterside Workers Hall?”

“No, that wasn’t available so we were going to have it in the Communist Party hall in St Paul’s Terrace.

But a few days before it was petrol bombed so we couldn’t use it.”

“That sort of thing happened a lot in those days.” I said, thinking back to a time in April 1972. I was attending a meeting in those premises when a bomb went off downstairs. It blew out the windows and filled the place with smoke. A couple of fascists had placed a few sticks of geli, lit the fuse and pissed off. Gary John Mangan stood trial but he got off of course. The common belief was that Mangan laid it on the line to the government, that if brought to

trial he would tell what finance and other help they got from the police. Mangan claimed the case was fixed by Special Branch.

When I told him this he said, "That's how the story goes but it can never be proved because the Special Branch files were destroyed in 1989."

"Convenient." I said, "So where did you have the reception?"

"Fraser Conserdyne booked the BLF hall in Ann Street. There were about a hundred people there. Our friends, Pauline's family, and of course a lot of Party well-wishers."

"And at least one or two spies for ASIO and the Special Branch."

"Of course, you couldn't keep them away. They would have been like flies around a honey pot. Who they were we didn't know or care. Surveillance was a fact of life and nobody worried about it. Jim Eustace was there."

I had seen photos taken at the reception. They showed a happy convivial occasion. Apart from Alan's friends in the Eureka Youth League there were a number of older comrades because they were proud of Alan.

Just after arriving in Brisbane Alan had found himself on the State Executive of the Communist Party – and the state executive of the

Plumbers Union. If only there were more like him in the Party.

One of the photos was of Alan and Pauline chatting with Jim. It was a picture devoid of any suggestion of treachery or malice.

Jim looked like an ordinary young man, fair with short hair and a beard. The beard was the only feature that distinguished him – as though if he shaved it off he would disappear into thin air. Beards weren't popular amongst radical youth at that time like it was in the early sixties. That's when I went overseas.

I knew some of the Eureka Youth League members. They were mostly children of communists and knew from personal experience what it was to be outcasts and outsiders

Perhaps that is why they affected a sceptical attitude to the society at large and duffel coats and beards were popular. The beatniks made outsiders, not so much respectable, but accepted.

When I returned to Australia in '67 the youth revolt was in full swing, the whole youth scene had changed.

But Jim Eustace somehow did not fit in. On a later occasion, many years later, Alan showed me a copy of an ASIO report, once secret of course. It read like an account of some family gathering reported in the local suburban newspaper.

As a document it was much like typewriter documents of the period but without mistakes. Yet it had a sinister aura about it.

The grammar was correct: under the heading of Attendance the reader was informed that, "About 100 persons attended the function amongst whom were the following:" Amongst whom! Such pedantic language used for such a scabrous purpose somehow offended me, as if using it for such a purpose demeaned our language.

Not all attendees' names were there but of those that were, their names were in full and they were accompanied by their ASIO file number. Jim's name was there: James Eustace QPF.11036.

"I knew Jim Eustace," I said to Alan. "I met him some time after the wedding. He was in my Communist Party branch. He was a quiet reserved sort of bloke, didn't have much to say for himself. He seemed painfully shy and people felt sorry for him. Charlie Gifford asked me to visit him and engage with him."

So I told Alan of how I went to his humble little flat in Albion.

It was part of an enclosed veranda of an old Queenslander. He seemed nonplussed to see me but he invited me in and offered me a cup of tea. He had the insides of a radio dismantled on the kitchen

table. He said that fixing radios was his hobby. I congratulated him on being clever enough to do that sort of thing but he didn't respond to my flattery.

I am not a good conversationalist but I can usually get a dialogue going by asking about the other person's life. But this didn't work.

He seemed to be a man without a past, without a family, without ambition.

When I tried to talk politics, I chose as a topic the dispute between the USSR and China. This was a favourite topic of conversation between communists at that time but he didn't seem to have any clues. The conversation was one sided and it kept petering out into silence. I gave up.

"Yes, poor old Jim," Alan said. "You know the story?"

"No, tell me." I had heard gossip but I looked forward to hearing what Alan knew.

"Well there was something funny about Jim. He was always asking stupid questions."

"Like what?"

"As an example, 'How many of us are there?'. Because everything was open and above board he would know the answer to that anyway. So why ask me? Questions like that which had no bearing on anything we were doing."

“Suspicious.”

“That’s right. So I went and visited Sonny Miles. I said, ‘Sonny, we’ve got this bloke in the League who’s always asking stupid bloody questions. I reckon he must be a plant of some kind.’

I asked Sonny what I should do.”

“What did he reckon?”

“He said, ‘Don’t worry about it mate. Just give him plenty of work to do. Doing paste-ups, selling the paper – that sort of thing. Put the bite on him all the time. People like that are really useful.’”

“So, no worries?” I asked.

“No, but he was always hanging about our place. Of course everyone else did too. I don’t know how Pauline put up with it. But Jim always seemed to be there. As if he adopted us as his family. Because he always tried to be congenial — in his own dopey way — and helpful I found it hard to piss him off. Like a dog without a home that comes in off the street and you know it would be heartless to kick him out.”

“But that situation could not continue?”

“That’s right. One day he came

up to me and said, ‘Alan, there’s something I have to tell you.’ I sensed that what he had to tell me was important so I was all ears.”

‘Alan,’ he said, ‘Since I’ve joined the EYL I’ve come to realise what nice decent people you are.’

“That’s nice Jim, and?”

‘I’ve been a spy all this time. I’m very sorry. I can’t say anything else except you’ll never see me again.’”

Alan and I thought about this for a while. “That’s a good story Alan, I suppose no one ever did see him again.”

“No, and I often wonder what happened to him. And I wonder if he really was an undercover plant for ASIO or Special Branch.”

“I know what you mean Alan,” I said. “You would expect that an agent would have more finesse than what he had. Perhaps he was living in a kind of fantasy world and it was all in his imagination. Jim Eustace, intrepid undercover operative – that sort of thing.”

“A Walter Mitty character? I’ve often wondered about that. But the point is we never saw him again Pauline was pleased about that.”

Ted Reithmullers labour history photography collection can be accessed online at www.takeyourpartners.com.au

Book Reviews

With My Little Eye
by Sandra Hogan
Allen and Unwin(2021)

Reviewed by **Ross Gwyther**

A fascinating account of ASIO agents Dudley and Joan Doherty, based in Brisbane during the 1950s and 60s, related through the story of their children.

The Dudleys joined ASIO in 1950, soon after it was established by Charles Spry the previous year. Working out of the ASIO office on Queen Street, Brisbane from 1956, the parents recruited their three children at a quite young age to collect information on unionists, communists, indigenous Australian campaigners as well as the Chinese community.

Family park visits were to King Edward Park so that Dudley could take notes and photos of the comings and goings at the old Trades Hall. Sunday afternoon drives were to the houses or holiday homes of activists to check car registration plates to find out who might be visiting.

For six years the Doherty's lived in Bardon and then for eight years in The Gap. A succession of visitors to the household included the Petrovs. They were taken out of Melbourne



and far from the Soviet contingent who accompanied the Olympic team in 1956. The Petrovs posed as grandparents for two months.

Dudley's cover was as an accountant and one of his major clients was his lifelong friend Abe Saffron. Throughout the book it is suggested that Dudley's ASIO work provided the perfect cover for his possibly illegal work for Saffron.

A disturbing book, it provides an interesting insight into the forensic amount of detail which ASIO was collecting on activists of the Left.

*The Barber who Read History:
Essays in Radical History,*
by Rowan Cahill and Terry
Irving
St Peters (NSW)
Bull Ant Press (2021)

Reviewed by **Jeff Rickertt**

What is the purpose of studying and writing history? This is the central question posed by Rowan Cahill and Terry Irving in their latest book, *The Barber who Read History: Essays in Radical History*, a disparate collection of analytical essays, anecdotes, speeches, reviews, personal reflections and critical assessments of other historical work. Cahill and Irving were motivated to publish the book by their discontent with the direction of historical studies in universities and the associated decline of academic labour history into a specialised niche produced by and for career academics. Their collaboration on the book, *Radical Sydney: Places, Portraits and Unruly Episodes* (2010), written for a non-specialist audience, intensified their reservations about how labour and social movement history had lost its original goal of providing politically useful knowledge to workers and other subaltern groups.

Cahill and Irving offer a critique of the neoliberal university and, as a counterpoint, set out to highlight and validate the long, occasionally subterranean tradition of scholars



working inside and outside the academy as ‘intellectual workers’ in the service of movements for progressive change. Most importantly, the authors aspire to revive this tradition, foregrounding their own recent work as an example, and drawing attention to other contemporary activist scholars whose works have often been ignored by the mainstream.

Their case for a revival of activist scholarship rests on the philosophical foundation that the practice of history can never be neutral anyway. At one level this is a question of values – the subjective act of choosing sides. Cahill and Irving, however, are

actually making a more profound epistemological point. What happens in any society is, they argue, unavoidably a question of the organisation and exercise of social power. No commentator writing about society, whether an historian writing about the past or a journalist or sociologist writing about the present, can 'know' that society or write about it from a position outside of that society's relations of power. This is a fundamental tenet of historical materialism. "Social being," as Marx wrote, "determines consciousness."

Cahill and Irving in effect take this point further. The very act of imagining that we can observe society 'objectively,' from a vantage point of neutrality as one might observe an ants' nest, is possible only in a society where a small minority of individuals exercise such a concentration of social power that they seem to stand above society, unrestrained by its social mores and structures and therefore capable of bending human affairs to their every whim. In reality, they don't and can't. While the actions of monarchs, generals, presidents, prime ministers and captains of industry can have immense impact, their views and values do not exist in a realm untouched by the materiality of social relations.

Failing to understand this point, idealists insist on privileging thought over material reality, both their own thought and the thought of their historical subjects. As Irving

puts it: "You can always tell an idealist historian by this test: their analyses of ideas, representations, individual lives or even movements are never connected to analyses of power." They seek "to sidestep the issue of socially organised power as an irreducible element in any historical situation, and hence the issue of historians taking sides in the ideological battles arising from the relationship of power in their situation." (p.160)

Whether traditional conservatives or postmodernists influenced by the linguistic turn, idealists who believe they can adopt a detached, bird's eye view of society will invariably be drawn to those historical actors whose ideas and actions seem similarly unencumbered. The powerful become the preferred subject of history and their power is made to seem natural and eternal. Conversely, when people from subaltern groups are studied, it is their lack of power that is the focus rather than their agency.

For Rowan Cahill and Terry Irving, then, mainstream history is no more neutral than radical history. Mainstream history, they contend, "is constituted to prop up both capitalism and the state." And "while mainstream history props, radical history unprops." (p.101) The radical historian is simply more honest. She acknowledges whose side she is on and works assiduously to produce useful knowledge for the struggles of workers and the oppressed. As the authors say of their own work, "in

researching the past, we do not do it nostalgically, but with utilitarian, political intent, recognising that the past has the capacity to variously inspire and inform the present and the future.” (p.101)

This sentence neatly brings together two distinguishing features of radical history as identified by Cahill and Irving: its political commitment and its orientation to an audience of workers and other subaltern groups. The third feature of radical history, in the authors’ view, is its choice of subject matter. Radical historians write about “the system of ruling and being ruled, the struggles of disempowered people to stand up to their oppressors and exploiters.” (p.101)

In this regard, the authors call for an overhaul of the field of labour history. In the chapter ‘From Labour History to the History of the Working Class,’ Irving identifies three facets of contemporary class relations that necessitate a new, more inclusive approach if historians are to succeed in generating politically useful knowledge for a contemporary constituency: the working class is now global, work is more precarious even in the core capitalist economies, and class struggle is no longer confined to the formal institutions of labour. (p.81) As Irving points out, the heyday of labour history was the era of the post-war boom and its immediate aftermath, when union density was high and the most consequential class struggles were waged by workers through industrial unions

and political parties. That moment has passed. Unionism has declined and the parties of labour have either disappeared (in the case of the CPA) or abandoned any pretence of advocating a transformative program to which radical history can make a contribution (the ALP).

To respond to this new environment, radical historians, argues Irving, should make the working class rather than the labour movement its subject:

We need to move from labour history to working class history. A history of informal mobilisation widens the understanding of worker power, showing that it can be expressed collectively in many ways. Unlike labour history, it would not produce studies that are merely institutional (ignoring the fleeting and peripheral) or social (if that means exclusive of social labour) or cultural (if that means exclusive of culture’s material context). The focus of working-class history would be political, finding the common element of power in those studies. (p.86)

I agree with this assessment but with reservations. It is certainly true that the history of the ‘labour movement’ has blinded us to the broader context of class relations in Australia. In one of my own areas of research interest – working class composition and struggle in Australia’s North – it has become increasingly

apparent to me that historians have focussed too exclusively on the official views, policies and actions of the Australian Workers Union leaders and the Labor and Communist parties. While these studies have produced important knowledge and insights, they have missed the point that by virtue of racially exclusionist practices and nationalist self-definitions, the labour movement was always much narrower than its potential class base, which actually transcended ethnic and language divisions and even, it can be argued, the national border that separated Queensland from the South Sea Islands, New Guinea, Indonesia and Asia more generally. By using the labour movement as the frame of reference, we have missed important episodes of resistance from indentured workers and other groups of marginalised migrant workers who populated the North.

Although a move for radical history to embrace the multitude and not just the organised few has merit, my caveat is not to throw the baby out with the bath water. Labour history's traditional focus on unions and political parties was not just a result of a possibly short-sighted view of where the action was to be found. Unions and political parties were important subjects of investigation also because they drew attention to where action could be most impactful. If our goal is to elicit information about how the economic and social power of the working class can be organised

effectively to challenge capital, we should not lose sight of the fact that union power and institutional political mobilisation have been both limiting and efficacious. Let's not lose sight of organised labour's victories nor stop writing about the 'labour movement' because of its current malaise. This is unlikely to be permanent.

Take the case of contemporary retail workers – a precariously employed, super-exploited, under-organised workforce. In recent years these workers have been most effective in forcing concessions where they have organised themselves into the Retail and Fast Food Workers Union (RAFFWU). If we want to provide them with useful historical knowledge, we would be foolish to focus simply on comparative historical instances of super exploitation and sporadic resistance while ignoring the concerted and in some case effective efforts of retail workers to organise unions, as they did in most colonial capitals in the 1880s and 90s.

While the discipline of labour history may have erred in focusing too exclusively on labour as a class for itself, a root-and-branch shift to studying labour as a class in itself (in all its social forms, with all its variegated experiences) needs to be undertaken with caution. Edward Thompson adopted an approach that encompassed both the working class and the labour movement and homed in on the dialectical relationship between the two

through time. This remains, in my view, the most fruitful framework in which to write useful history.

Alongside the political case for radical history, *The Barber who Read History* also addresses the question of how radical history as a practice can be sustained under the conditions of contemporary capitalism. Although, as the authors point out, there has always been a tension between mainstream and radical history within the academy and its kindred organisations, universities did once provide an institutional base for radical scholarship, albeit begrudgingly. This liberal intellectual space was extended in the 1970s and 80s as the social and industrial upheavals of the era spilled over into the academy. Most of these advances, however, have now been obliterated by the retreat from state funding, the transformation of universities into market-oriented businesses and the associated metamorphosis of academics into vassals of the multinational journal publishing monopolies. (p.18)

As Cahill and Irving point out, there have always been scholars outside the academy; historians like Vere Gordon Childe, Lloyd Ross and Russell Ward who were excluded from university positions. For them, a base could be found in the orbit of the unions and political parties formed by the working class. Most of their modern counterparts – the numerous PhD holders denied secure academic careers – have no similar opportunities.

So where can radical history find a home? Australia does not have the equivalent of Ruskin House, nor does it enjoy the economies of scale of America where even a marginalised labour movement can subsidise a scholarly labour studies program. In Australia, Cahill and Irving argue, dissident scholars forced outside the system “will have to build, in effect, a new and autonomous intellectual sphere,” while those who remain will have to resist the neoliberal culture and orientate their teaching and research to the external sphere generated by the struggles for social change outside the academy (p7). For those outside the academy, the authors propose various solutions: the free or open university modelled on the Sydney Free University of the 1960s and 70s, the public commons of online publishing, and the formal and semi-formal networks of historians working freelance.

While these are all fine ideas, they remind me of a complaint I once made to a musician friend to the effect that songwriters have it easy compared with historians. Bob Dylan could write a stunning work about war in the 20th century with little more than a rudimentary topical knowledge, a lyrical turn of phrase and a mastery of a few chords. Historians writing about the masters of war, on the other hand, need money and opportunity to sustain long periods of archival and oral history research, often away from home. They need their minds fresh to undertake

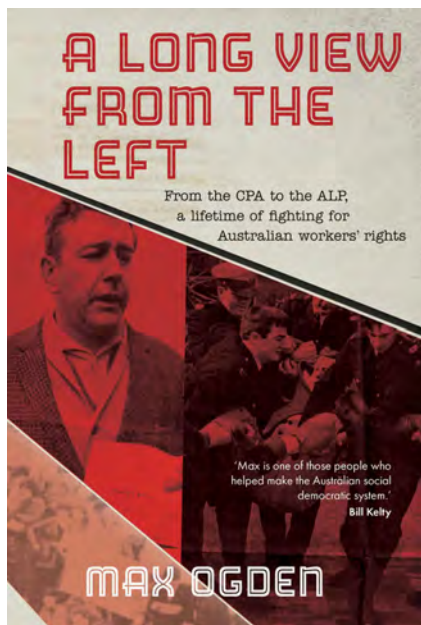
the long, difficult cognitive labour involved in organising evidence, undertaking analysis and writing. In short, they need freedom from both the necessity and the enervation of constant, extraneous waged toil. Here is the problem. Open universities, labour history associations and creative commons publishing initiatives may provide the social infrastructure for radical history to thrive but they are unlikely to liberate us from the burden of wage slavery that so depletes our time and energy.

In the absence of funding from the academy, the state or the labour movement, what is really at stake here is the notion of the historian as a singular career intellectual. History has always been a collaboration between historians, informants, archivists, librarians, colleagues in the same field, editors, proofreaders, audiences and publishers. But for Irving and Cahill's model to succeed against the material constraints of life under contemporary capitalism, a dramatic deepening of collaborative work will be required. The practice of history must either retreat to mere short-form commentary without original research or synthesis (as much journalism has done), or expand into a more fully collaborative enterprise where the burden of larger projects is carried on multiple shoulders.

What does this mean for single-author books of history? One of the final chapters of *The Barber*

who Read History is "A Shelf of Reds," essentially a list of worthy works of Australian radical history, including Drew Cottle's *The Brisbane Line: An Episode in Capital History*, Noel Ebbels' *The Australian Labor Movement 1850-1907: extracts from contemporary documents*, Raymond Evans' *The Red Flag Riots*, Eric Fry's *Rebels and Radicals*, Hall Greenland's *Red Hot: the Life and Times of Nick Origlass*, *Black Armada: Australia and the Struggle for Indonesian Independence 1942-49* by Rupert Lockwood, and *William Lane and the Australian Labor Movement* by Lloyd Ross. If Cahill and Irving are right with their prognosis, one wonders whether we will see the like of these books again.

The Barber who Read History is an important book for anyone interested in labour history and how it can survive as a political resource for workers and social movements. The chapters are short and written without academic jargon. There is humour and there are fascinating insights into the ebbs and flows of labour history in this country. Most importantly, the rationale and suggestions offered by Cahill and Irving for a regeneration of radical history can serve as a useful starting point for considering the future of historiography's contribution to progressive causes. We need more of this discussion.



A Long View From the Left
by Max Ogden
Bad Apple Press (2020)

Reviewed by **Howard Guille**

In 1955, Max Ogden joined the Australian Engineering Union (AEU), a precursor of what is now the Amalgamated Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU). This book is an intimate, and at times very candid, memoir of a life (and lifetime) in the Australian labour movement. And, as he says, it is a "long view from the left," especially the industrial and political spaces of the Metal Workers, the Communist Party of Australia

and, more recently, the Australian Labor Party.

The book has illuminating, and sometimes humorous, accounts of overseas excursions. His first trip was to the Seventh World Festival of Youth and Students in Vienna in 1959 with travel via Hong Kong, a month in the People's Republic of China and the Trans-Siberian Railway via Moscow. The next trip was six months in 1965 as part of the organising committee for the ninth festival in Algeria. This culminated when Ben Bella, the First President of Algeria was deposed in a coup led by Houari Boumédiène, the head of the military. The festival was abandoned, and Max and partner got back to Australia via Paris, Tampere in Finland and Moscow.

The funniest, though quite sinister, is the account of a visit to Papua New Guinea in 1972 to visit his sister and partner, when "it turned out I was the first member of the Communist Party to be officially allowed into New Guinea prior to independence." (p82) He was accompanied throughout by a substantial number of very conspicuous ASIO and Special Branch agents. Overseas travel as a member of the CPA was never easy — in 1978 Bob Hawke was needed to seek dispensation for Max to get a visa for the United States (p111).

The memoir covers Max's times as a shop steward and workplace delegate, state and national

education officer and industrial democracy officer for the AMWU, and then industrial officer at the ACTU. It includes times as an office holder in the Eureka Youth League (the youth wing of the CPA), member of the CPA Central Committee and, most recently, ALP Branch activist. As Max says, “sixty-five years as a union activist, thirty of them as a full-time official” (p211). And as Bill Kelty says, his “unusual contribution is that of a left-wing warrior” and, “he carried out his reputation as a Bologna Socialist — practical, honest and pragmatic advances for working people” (Foreword).

While Max does not use the term pragmatic, it is evident throughout his accounts of the numerous workplace and industry disputes. Repeatedly he returns to the adage “working with management does not mean being the bosses’ lackies. It creates opportunities to broaden the bargaining process and include management and wider issues” (p168). He records more than a few instances where what he sees as misplaced left ‘radicalism’ or just plain rigid views meant workers exerted less influence than they could, or should, have done.

It is true that Max was of the generation of Communists who looked to the example of the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI) in the 1970s. This was the start of “Eurocommunism” and when the PCI adopted the conception of revolution as a process instead

of a moment of social rupture. Max acknowledges the influence of Antonio Gramsci who he read in 1968 (p71) and emphasises the need for a “socialist/progressive ideological hegemony” that is “strategic, visionary but also attuned to the real, felt needs of workers” (p212).

A fundamental part of Max’s approach as detailed in his book is long-term strategic planning by unions and socialists about what to do, how to do it and who to do it with. His overwhelming contribution was that workers and unions should build on day-to-day bargaining by widening the issues on which they make demands and developing long-term strategies for the firm, industry and economy. ‘Industrial democracy’ and the quality and design of work were central to this. Worker education — which he very much saw as primarily an opportunity for learning practical skills of organising and second in extending horizons — was a vital component.

Max notes the lost opportunity that was Australia Reconstructed; a momentous strategic statement adopted unanimously by the 1987 ACTU Congress but of which little was implemented apart from union amalgamations (and those not really on the recommended industry lines) (pp 162-5). Many industry policies and strategic developments from the Accord were also lost opportunities;

some like change in the Pilbara fell at the hurdle of “productivity is the bosses job” (p168) and others like Pacific Dunlop with the incompetence and short-term financial horizons of corporations (p160).

In these areas, there’s a heavy emphasis on Nordic influences — exchanges with unions and practitioners in Norway, Sweden and Finland and accounts of worker education facilities and courses. The epitome of the approach was probably the Volvo plant at Uddevalla where cars were built by teams and not on an assembly line.¹

Max’s final chapter “What does it all mean” — his explicit “suggestions for the future” (p211) — could be the galvanising material for workers’ education courses. He reaffirms the link between building-up workers’ “power resources” and expanding democracy, and he stresses the need to combat “digital Taylorism.” He argues that “there has been little in the way of a ‘fight’ for a better society from the left” (p217). In particular, the unions of highly paid elite workers have

shown little solidarity for everyone else (p217). To which might be added that enterprise by enterprise bargaining has further reduced solidarity within industries and occupations and between permanent and precarious workers.

He is adamant that “one significant difference between the communists and the ALP is the willingness to explore new ideas” (p220). The left in the ALP needs to go beyond policy and pre-selection and start “propagating bold but practical ideas for social change”. Unions need industry-wide bargaining and to rely less on having a Labor government in power (p231). Finally, unions need to recognise the limitations of ACTU programs like Organising Works and unions@work which are essentially “external”. Instead, workers need a “visionary long-term strategy” for the workplace, industry and society” (pp 234-5).

Max has always asked, and tried to answer, the hard questions. The book is a treat which continues the tradition.

¹ Bob Hancké and Saul Rubinstein ‘Breaking with tradition: Saturn and Uddevalla’, in Sandberg, Åke, *Enriching Production: Perspectives on Volvo’s Uddevalla plant as an alternative to lean production*, Stockholm, Arbetslivsinstitutet, 1995, <https://1library.net/article/breaking-with-tradition-saturn-and-uddevalla.zxvlg5oy>



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USED AND LIMITS ON
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AUSTRALIA ISN'T ONE
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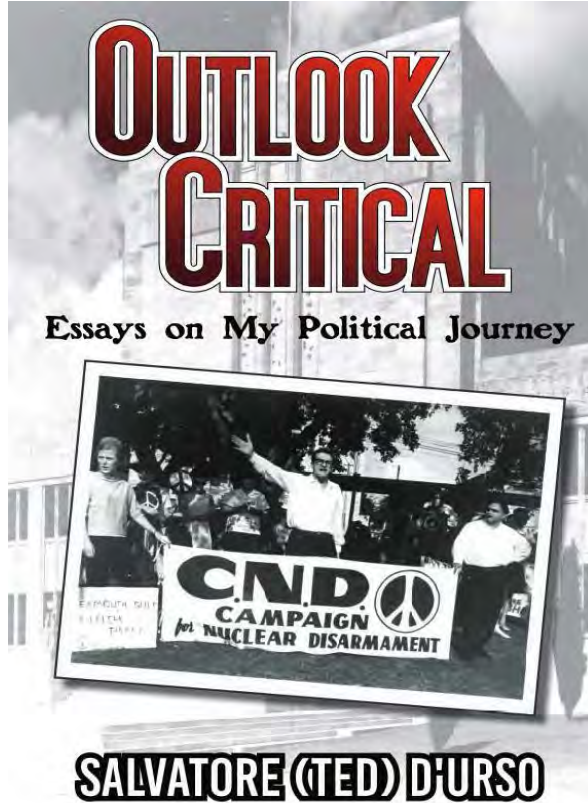


AUSTRALIAN
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Outlook Critical: Essays on My Political Journey

Salvatore (Ted) D'Urso

(Brisbane Labour History Association, 2020)



A non-aligned socialist, Trotskyist, peace activist and radical educationalist, D'Urso's political life spanned the Cold War and the authoritarian excesses and crackpottery of Queensland Premier, Johannes Bjelke-Petersen.

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