The Queensland Journal of Labour History

No. 35 Summer 2022-23

The Brisbane Labour History Association

Brisbane
Labour
History
Association

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The BLHA is the Brisbane/Meanjin 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.

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Front Cover Poster: ***Ted D'Urso speaking at the CND rally in Centenary Place, Brisbane, Easter Sunday, 1963 c/o UQ Fryer Library UQFL72 Box 1 Folder 4***

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Contents

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.

Editorial

Alison Stewart

The Queensland Journal of Labour History exists to promote the study of workers—their lives, their working conditions, their concerns and passions, and most importantly, their struggles.

In 2022, this can appear anachronistic. Union membership is very low as is the level of industrial disputation.

But working people are facing a critical juncture. Wages have been stagnant for years while inflation is escalating, eating into their standard of living and creating hardship. As I write this, Labor Treasurer Jim Chalmers' first budget is being handed down...with little immediate relief.

There have been welcome bursts of strike action—involving nurses, teachers and rail workers in NSW, and childcare workers and university workers nationally—campaigning for wage increases, secure jobs, respect, and recognition.

Learning from the past is vital for success.

The specific circumstances we face may be unique, but workers have been here before. Labour history can provide answers as to what worked to remedy the situation and what didn't. It can provide inspiration and ideas for action.

Our leading article in this issue, Terry Irving's address for the 2022 Alex Macdonald Memorial Lecture, examines this critical question: ***"How can history be useful to a workers' movement in 2022?"***

Terry counterposes the use of history by the official institutions of the labour movement—often a self-serving list of milestones—with the use of labour history to "reveal the struggles that led to the victories."

He uses the fascinating story of the role of "trees of knowledge" in the early Australian labour movement as opposed to the official Labor Party history of Barcaldine's Tree of Knowledge to make the point that victories should not be mistaken for the struggle.

He argues for a radical historical approach with activists as the audience, producing "stories of resistance and agency, written with social purpose...history as a political act", encouraging resistance and rebellion.

He says of radical historians, "Because the radical past was always

being made anew, their work is pregnant with possibilities, alerting their readers to the possibilities for action in their own situations."

Terry's lecture is followed by vignettes from the discussion chaired by BLHA president Jeff Rickertt with a panel of young Brisbane unionists and political activists providing insights into the importance of history in helping them to organise and campaign.

One of the panel, Electrical Trades Union media officer Kristin Perissinotto, is directly involved in a new multimedia history project "On Her Shoulders", highlighting the unacknowledged contribution of women to the Queensland union movement. Details of this exciting project are outlined later in this edition.

2022 is the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Queensland Trades and Labour Council (TLC), now known as the Queensland Council of Unions. In this issue we reproduce the history of that event that Alex Macdonald used to preface the 1957 TLC Annual Congress Agenda. Alex, who was the TLC Secretary between 1951 and 1969, had a deep interest in labour history, and in the preface to Congress described briefly the various attempts at inter-union co-operation and organisation before 1922. Like his preface, we also reproduce the minutes from the inaugural TLC meeting.

Jeff Rickertt's interview with Mike Barber in Towards 60 Years of Maritime Unionism offers a detailed portrait of working life at sea and invaluable insights into the processes that led to Mike's decades of union activism.

Mike relates his involvement in key maritime workers' struggles in the UK, New Zealand and Australia—including the Patrick's dispute. It is this type of labour history—a real-life "warts and all" record of a worker activist—that is priceless.

This year marks the centenary of the abolition of capital punishment in Queensland, legislated by the Labor State government under Premier T J Ryan. The Queensland government became the first anywhere in the British Empire to abolish capital punishment for all crimes. It is an achievement of which the labour movement can be unequivocally proud.

The recent BLHA tour conducted through South Brisbane Cemetery, recounted in this edition by activist Ian Curr highlighted the issue of capital punishment as this cemetery holds the graves of those executed at the nearby Boggo Road Gaol.

BLHA committee member Neil Frost, who conducted the tour, provided the 75 attendees with detailed statistics about those who suffered capital punishment in Queensland.

The significance of class and race was revealed to be stark. The disproportionate numbers of Indigenous Australians, South Sea Islanders, Irish and Chinese amongst those executed was shocking, if not unsurprising, to those of us with an interest in Queensland's history.

An event was held at Parliament House in August to commemorate this important centenary. As part of this day-long activity, the T J Ryan Foundation conducted a session on the history of this change to Queensland law.

A video recording of the session can be accessed at the T J Ryan Foundation's website: http://www.tjryanfoundation.org.au/cms/page.asp?ID=8613

The 2020 Australian novel, The Dictionary of Lost Words, by Pip Williams, is a work of fiction built around the true story of the production of the first edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary,* between 1884 and 1928. A fictional female worker on the dictionary, growing into womanhood and impacted by the emerging suffragette movement, realises that certain words, sometimes vulgar, but almost always associated with femininity, are denied and rejected by the Victorian patriarchy. She decides to save and collect these words for herself. In this issue, Deborah Jordan reviews the book and wonders why it has become so incredibly popular.

2022 has seen the passing of a number of those with distinguished involvement in Queensland's labour history. The lives and contributions of two of them, Owen Doogan and Salvatore "Ted" D'Urso, are acknowledged and celebrated in this edition.

What was inspiring about the Alex Macdonald Memorial Lecture this year was hearing from emerging leaders and seeing the interest of their colleagues and supporters in the audience.

If labour history is to have a future, then it must be relevant to this and the next generation of workers, unionists, and activists.

We hope that this edition approaches that standard.

On that note, I would like to encourage contributions to the journal. As it says in our blurb, 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.

Many thanks to Dean Wharton and his massive efforts to pull this edition together and to Allan Gardiner for his assistance in co-editing.

Vice-President's Report

Greg Mallory

A number of important figures involved in the labour movement recently passed. This issue carries obituaries for local comrades Ted D'Urso and Owen Doogan. Other lost comrades include:

Ray Markey, the author of *In Case of Oppression: The Life and Times of the Labor Council of New South Wales*, passed away on 28 April 2022. Ray was a Life Member of the Illawarra Labour History Association and its initial President. From 1979 to 2005 he was Associate Professor in Industrial Relations at the University of Wollongong. He moved on to become Professor of Employment Relations at Auckland University of Technology Business School and then Emeritus Professor at Macquarie University, Professor of Employment Relations from 2011 to 2016 and Director for Centre for Workforce Futures.

Tom McDonald passed away on 16 April 2022. Tom was a former President of the NSW Building Workers Industrial Union and a former Vice-President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions. In those roles he was responsible for universal superannuation, high minimum wage rates for building workers, stronger health and safety standards, accident pay and long service leave for building workers. Tom was a pro-Soviet Communist who at first opposed the green bans of the NSW Builders Labourers Federation but later rejected that position. He became a member of the Socialist Party of Australia when it split from the Communist Party of Australia. In retirement Tom stayed active and worked in training young unionists. He was a member of the Search Foundation.

Bill Ludwig passed away 11 April 2022. Bill was a shearer and Australian trade union official for the Australian Workers Union. He was elected Secretary of the Queensland Branch of the Australian Workers Union in 1988. Bill was a powerful figure within the Australian Labor Party with the AWU Faction. In 1997 he was awarded an OAM for his services to industrial relations.

BLHA events and projects

South Brisbane Cemetery tour. In August, the BLHA's Management Committee member Neil Frost guided us through the graves of South Brisbane cemetery, pointing out the radical history of the occupants. A report of this event on Ian Curr's Workers Bush Telegraph website appears in this issue.

"Records of Struggle" Fryer Library's labour archives. Dr Jeff Rickertt, our retiring BLHA President and an archivist librarian at Fryer Library, showed a capacity group around some of the resources available at the library for prospective researchers into the battles waged by Queensland workers and others. Demand for a repeat of this event is strong.

SEQEB Dispute Film Screening. *Friends and Enemies*, the 1987 feature documentary on the 1985 SEQEB strike, was shown on October 11 at the Elizabeth Sustainable Table Cinema. Among the speakers was the director, Tom Zubrycki. Clips of the film can be viewed at http://aso.gov.au/titles/documentaries/friends-and-enemies/

The Record of Struggle/Fryer Library event
c/o Neil Frost

Whitlam Government Election Anniversary. In collaboration with Vintage Reds, the BLHA held an event on 11th October marking the fiftieth anniversary of the election of the Whitlam Government.

4ZZZ Workers Power. The BLHA continues to be involved in monthly discussions on radical history during the Workers Power broadcast on 4ZZZ. An upcoming broadcast will feature the 1957 Palm Island strike, when Aboriginal Australians fought back against an horrific injustice. Podcasts of past discussion are available at: http://brisbanelabourhistory.org/brisbane-labour-history-association/resources/4zzz-podcasts

Banner project. The BLHA and the Queensland Council of Trade Unions are collaborating to compile a register of historic and contemporary banners held in union offices throughout the state. We hope that one outcome will be an exhibition of some notable examples. A more long-term aim is to begin a "heritage register" that will include the memorials of working-class history which are not adequately noted by the official heritage system; the suject of the 2021 Alex Macdonald Memorial Lecture delivered by Howard Guille (see QJLH Issue 33).

Other notable ongoing labour history projects

Queensland MUA archive project. 2022 marks the 150th anniversary of unionisation in Australia's maritime industries: a timely occasion for the Queensland branch of the Maritime Workers Union to undertake a major archiving project. The work was done by Andrew Reeves, an Associate Professor at Deakin University and a contributor to union-related collection in the National Museum of Australia. Professor Reeves has supplied the following information about the project:

> *Recently the MUA arranged to have historical material retained by the union at its Brisbane offices sorted and listed prior to transfer to the Butlin Archives at the National University. The material identified for retention runs to more than 130 boxes, with additional arch-lever files, photographs and other artefacts. It will join union material already held in Canberra.*
>
> *With few exceptions, the material*

dates from the 1960s, being highly concentrated in the years between 1975-2000. Material predating the establishment of the MUA is almost exclusively material from the Seamen's Union. It includes:

- *Subject files on a vast array of industrial, political and social issues.*
- *Campaign material from political campaigns and industrial disputes, including important files, correspondence and photographs from the 1998 Patrick's dispute.*
- *Paper, correspondence minutes and notes relating to National Conference and Executive meetings.*
- *A wide range of broken runs of minute books, including branch meetings, port committees, shipboard committees from Queensland, together with minutes from interstate branches from the 1970s-1980s.*
- *Papers and files collected by previous officials.*
- *Correspondence files including material relating to National Office, branch matters, industrial disputes and award/ EBA negotiations.*

In addition, a number of significant artefacts were located, including the 1953 banners of the Seamen's Union's Brisbane Women's Committee. A longer list of material, organised by box, is held by the union.

Researchers wishing to view the material should seek permission from the union.

The mention of "artefacts and banners" is especially interesting. The accessible examples of such material tend to be from southern states. This underlines the importance of the BLHA's banner project, mentioned above.

One exception of an artefact from Queensland that is kept in a national collection is the wharfie's hook used by Aboriginal activist Joe McGinness when he worked on the wharves as a member of the WWF in Cairns in the 1950s. The hook is held in the National Museum of Australia, and its catalogue entry notes that "in the 1950s the wharf industry was one of the few industries to accept Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander labour."

The Penalty is Death

A Troublemakers History of South Brisbane Cemetery

Ian Curr

A Report on the Brisbane Labour History Association's August 2022 tour of the South Brisbane Cemetery, hosted by Neil Frost of the BLHA Management Committee

Originally published on: https://workersbushtelegraph.com.au/

On Sunday 14 August 2022, Neil Frost from Brisbane's Labour History association gave an excellent tour called 'A Troublemakers History of South Brisbane Cemetery'.

'The South Brisbane Cemetery at Dutton Park is predominantly a working-class cemetery', so reads the pamphlet handed out to 100 or so onlookers who were given an insight into the lives of notable rebels buried in Dutton Park Cemetery on Annerley Road.

There were some chilling subjects including the death of a young mother of three children whose body was found dumped near the Brisbane Girls Grammar School on Gregory Terrace. Mary Emmett was the victim of an unscrupulous Wickham Terrace medico after she fell pregnant and was 'treated' for haemorrhaging. The doctor who performed the abortion procedure was let off scott-free during the long period of misogynist anti-abortion laws in Queensland. It was significant that the investigation into Ms Emmett's death was led by Frank Bishoff, the notoriously corrupt former Queensland Police Commissioner.

My mother Bettina Curr used to always tell me that if you keep on the way you're going you'll end up like Cousin Frank; in Boggo Road Gaol. Her prediction was accurate. Both cousin Frank and I ended up in Boggo Road gaol for different reasons. I was put in there because of the government's ban on street marches in 1977. Half the cabinet of the Bjelke-Peterson government were sentenced to gaol for corruption. The premier, Bjelke-Petersen, avoided that ignominy by rigging the jury.

Images of the event c/o Jeff Rickertt

One hundred years ago, Queensland became the first place in both Australia and the British Commonwealth to abolish the death penalty on 31 July 1922 – but not before 94 people perished at the end of a hangman's noose. So, the state of Queensland banned the death penalty long before Barry Jones appeared on *Pick-a-Box*.

Neil Frost described the racist basis for hanging in Queensland at the Dutton Park Cemetery. Perhaps most chilling and reprehensible of the deaths recorded in the cemetery were the capital punishment burials of forty-one men and one woman who were hung at the nearby Boggo Road Gaol. Those killed included thirteen South Sea Islanders and six first nations men. This disproportionate number of South Sea Islander and First Nations people indicate a criminalisation of groups whose offences could be seen as acts of resistance. These were often public events where South Sea Islanders and Aboriginal people were brought in to witness the cruel hangings to act as a deterrent for often violent resistance for their land being stolen or being the victims of 'blackbirding'.

The most infamous of all was the public hanging of resistance leader Dundalli that remains unremarked

(no grave, no official acknowledgement of his struggle for land rights) save for a small plaque in Post Office Square in Brisbane's CBD.

There were some dry humorous moments during the tour as well when our tour guide mentioned the hitherto unknown fallings-out amongst members of minuscule far-left groups.

Our tour leader celebrated the life of master painter and socialist activist Ernest Hugo Kunze who illuminated an internationalist tradition of left-wing members of the Australian labour movement. Kunze was a Marxist and former member of the German Social Democratic Party and was one of the inner group of activists in Brisbane who formed the Social Democratic Vanguard, a propagandist organisation which opposed the wage labour system.

The graves of John and Karl Vasilenkov, who died four months apart in 1936, had very distinctive but similar funerals. John was a farmer from Coopers Plains and like his son was a passionate communist. Carl who died in a cycling accident at Nudgee was a member of the Young Communist League and his burial service was free of religious kant. Several speeches were made at the graveside by prominent

members of the Communist Party, and as the coffin, which was draped in a red silken flag fringed with gold lace, was lowered, the assembled mourners sang the Red Flag. Carl's grave is adorned with a hammer and sickle.

But the one that most caught my attention was Eduardo Manassero, an Italian antifascist, who lived in north Queensland during the period of the Weil's disease dispute that led to widespread support for the Communist Party. This dispute ended up with the election of Australia's first and only Communist Party member of parliament, Fred Patterson. Patterson won his election because of support by Italian cane cutters and coal miners in the nearby Collinsville area. The only way the parliament could get rid of Fred Patterson was by dividing his seat into two, thus gerrymandering him out of the parliament.

Manassero was among a large number of Italians, both fascist and antifascist, who were interned together during World War II because of the accident of birth rather than their actual or potential loyalty to the Italian state. It was sad that shortly after his release in 1944 Eduardo passed away. The Italian community hid anti-fascists from the authorities to prevent them being interned during the war.

Thanks are due to Neil Frost, Jeff Rickertt, Greg Mallory and Craig Buckley from the Brisbane Labour History Association (BLHA) for putting on this thought-provoking event.

Ian Curr is a lifelong union member. He was sacked from the Commonwealth Public Service after 21 years for organising against the introduction of contract labour in Australian Taxation Office call centres.

Curr was an activist in Queensland's democratic rights struggles in the 1970s and 80s.

He was arrested during the 1985 SEQEB dispute for holding a Joh Must Go banner at a union picket and met Bernie Neville for the first time in the back of a police van.

He has been a member of the Technical and Laboratory Assistants Association, the UQ Student Union, the AWU, the Australian Clerical Officers Association and Commonwealth Public Sector Union, and the NTEU.

He is still active and helps organise the Big Ride for Palestine (Australia) in active partnership with APHEDA (Union Aid Abroad). He is a long-term member of LeftPress Printing Society and is editor of Workers Bush-Telegraph - a website dedicated to workers control and the abolition of private property.

Brisbane Labour History Association

A Troublemaker's History of South Brisbane Cemetery

Brisbane Labour History Association acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, the Yuggera people, and pay our respects to the Elders past, present, and emerging. This always was, and always will be, Aboriginal Land. Sovereignty was never ceded.

South Brisbane Cemetery is predominantly a working-class cemetery; most of the rich and powerful preferred to be buried in Toowong Cemetery, even those who spent their lives on the southside. Some of the people we will be talking about during the tour include:

Robert King: Labour member for Maranoa in the Queensland Legislative Assembly from 1893 until 1899, elected in the wake of the Shearers' Strike of 1891. Defeated in an anti-Catholic, anti-Irish sectarian campaign.

Digby Denham: Premier of Queensland (1911-1915), the first of only two Queensland Premiers to lose their own seat at a general election. Premier at the time of the 1912 General Strike which began when members of the Tramway Union were dismissed when they wore union badges to work. Led to a General Strike, not just for the right to wear a badge, but for the basic right to join a union. Denham used a range of draconian anti-union members to break the strike.

Daniel O'Carroll: Intelligence officer in "D" Co. 2nd Dublin Battalion of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) during the Irish War of Independence. Associate of Michael Collins, a hero of Irish Independence, member of Collins' Squad, which participated in operations against British Forces and collaborators.

Ellen Hewett: active member of the Labour Movement and participant in the General Strike of 1912. Worked with Emma Miller to support the strike and organise strike participants. Hewett went on the raise money to found a labour daily newspaper.

Maggie Finney: also involved in the General Strike, Finney was described as "a sterling and self-sacrificing worker in the Labour cause, both industrial and political, for a great part of her young life". Was involved during the strike in many late-night meetings that organised strike activities.

Capital Punishment Burials: Forty-one men and one woman who are buried in the cemetery were hung at nearby Boggo Road Gaol, thirteen South Sea Islanders and six First Nations men amongst them. The disproportionate number of South Sea Islander and First Nations people indicate a criminalisation of groups whose offences could be seen as acts of resistance. As a result of a campaign, largely led by Socialists in the Labour Movement, Queensland became the first part of the British Empire to abolish the Death Penalty.

John and Carl Vasilenkov: died four months apart in 1936 and had very distinctive but similar funerals. John was a farmer from Coopers Plains, and like his son was a passionate communist. Carl, who died in a cycling accident at Nudgee, was a member of the Young Communist League, and his burial service was free of religious ceremony. Several speeches were made at the graveside by prominent members of the Communist Party, and as the coffin, which was draped in a red silken flag fringed with gold lace, was lowered, the assembled mourners sang '*The Red Flag*'.

Edwardo Manassero: Italian Anti-Fascist who lived in North Queensland during the period of the Weil's disease dispute that led to widespread support for the Communist Party in North Queensland, and the election of Australia's first (and to date only) Communist Member of Parliament. Manassero was amongst many Italians (Fascist and Anti-Fascist) interned during the Second World War.

Hugo Kunze: The life of the master-painter and socialist activist Ernest Hugo Kunze can help to illuminate an internationalist tradition on the left wing of the Australian labour movement. Kunze, a Marxist and former member of the German Social Democratic Party, was one of the inner group of activists in Brisbane who formed the Social Democratic Vanguard (SDV), a "Socialist propagandist organisation" which opposed the wage labour system.

Mary Emmett: mother of three young children whose body was found dumped near the Girl's Grammar School. Following an investigation, it was found that she had sought an abortion, then illegal in Queensland, and that she had died because of the procedure. Mary's youngest child was just 20 months old, and Mary had almost died during this previous pregnancy. She had been advised to have no further children; however she fell pregnant again and had already been treated for haemorrhaging.

The Alex MacDonald Memorial Lecture 2022

Alex Macdonald Memorial Lecture image c/o Neil Frost.

Delivered at the Upper Mount Gravatt Library, 1st June 2022, with Terry Irving participating from Sydney via Zoom. Terry was introduced by The Brisbane Labour History Association (BLHA) President, Dr. Jeff Rickertt:

The BLHA is delighted to have Terry Irving present the Alex Macdonald Lecture for 2022. Terry is a radical historian and an educator. He was one of the founders of the Free University in Sydney in the late 1960s. He was an activist in the movement to democratise universities in the 1970s. He was a prominent New Left contributor to the writing of Australian history in the 1980s and he was the editor of *Labour History, A Journal of Labour and Social History* in the 1990s. From the 1960s he taught in universities in Australia and in the United States. He is the author of ten books including *Class Structure in Australian History* with Raewyn Connell, *Radical Sydney* with Rowan Cahill, and *The Fatal Lure of Politics: The Life and Thought of Vere Gordon Childe.*

The title of Terry's lecture takes the form of a question: How can history be useful to a workers' movement in 2022? For the BLHA this is a vital question because we strive to position ourselves as an organisation which fosters and communicates historical knowledge that is useful to workers and progressive organisations. This idea is germaine to our interests as an association and came out of a recent book that Terry co-wrote with Rowan Cahill: *The Barber who Read History: Essays in Radical History.*

How Can History be Useful to a Workers Movement in 2022?

Terry Irving

When I was growing up in the 1950s and 60s, Queensland was much in the minds of Australia's militant workers and revolutionaries because of a series of dramatic industrial and political events. There was a shearers' strike in 1956, an historic strike at Mt Isa in 1964, the establishment of the radical FOCO nightclub in the Brisbane Trades Hall in 1968, and the student-initiated anti-Vietnam War demonstrations in the second half of the 60s, and in all of them Alex Macdonald was centrally involved as Secretary of the Queensland Trades and Labour Council. He was a prominent member of the Communist Party, and as I was growing up in a communist household, reading the party press, his name was well known to me. I felt proud that my party included such an outstanding leader.

So, it is an honour for me to present this Alex Macdonald Lecture, and I thank Jeff Rickertt and the other members of the Executive of the Brisbane Labour History Association for inviting me.

Preparing a lecture in Alex Macdonald's name, however, has also been a poignant reminder of what we have lost, and a chance to consider how history might be useful in the process of re-building a workers' movement.

Celebration or struggle?

There's a wrong and a right way to use history in the labour movement. The wrong way is to remember the movement's historic achievements by extracting them from the context of struggle in which they occurred. The right way does the opposite: it reveals the struggles that led to the victories. But surely, you say, it's obvious that the second way is better. Well, perhaps, but only if you think like someone who is part of present-day struggles.

The reason there is a right way, and a wrong way, is that every movement has to create its own institutions, and the view from the institution is not always the same as the view from the field of struggle. The

labour leader and the rank-and-file worker may not view their common struggle in the same way. Why is this so?

Labour's institutions—for example unions and parties—are the product of a historical process that looks like this: in the beginning there are informal working-class struggles. They are sustained by loose networks of activists exchanging resources and knowledge. As the struggle becomes sharper, and widens, and the enemy more determined to suppress it, the activists find it necessary to establish roles and processes on a more permanent basis, in other words to set up organisations. They find that there are many roles and functions to define: liaison, publicity, strategy, agitation, finance, defence, record-keeping, administration, and providing the public face of the organisation. The skills required in these roles are developed naturally in the struggle, but some of them require extra study and time away from the day-to-day pressures of movement activity.

At this point a whole new dimension of struggle begins, between the rank-and-file activists and the leaders who, although they came out of the struggle, now have an interest in keeping the role that they have been given. It's a complex, dialectical situation, and there is no inevitability about which side wins.

In the early labour movement, control from below was almost a fetish; later, as the struggle became more complex and as the movement engaged with the state, politically and through the legal system, there was pressure from within and without to formalise roles and deliver continuity of leadership. The state required this, but so did the activists. So, constitutions were drawn up, lawyers were hired, elections held, and leadership became a career. Historically, this happened very quickly.

Many of the Australian Labor Party's new leaders became more interested in their place in the power structure of capitalism and its racial, gender and generational bases of rule than in the exploitation and oppressions of ordinary working people whom they supposedly represented. As Gordon Childe wrote in *How Labour Governs* in 1923, Labor's leaders, "united by a common desire to maintain their positions, undergo a mental transformation once they enter parliament." And he made the same point about union leaders once they "give up the tools." [1]

Meanwhile, rank-and-file activists developed a contempt for (as we call them now) 'the suits', and when they were in a position to do so, they fought back by forming caucuses or factions within labour organisations. With 'democracy' as their catchcry they were able to keep the worst abuses of careerist leadership in check; sometimes they were able to dominate and alter the culture and rules of the organisation.

As to the role of history in an institutionalised labour movement (or any social movement), it depends on whether you look at it from the point of view of the leadership or of the rank-and-file activist.

From the point of view of the leadership, there is always much in the past to celebrate, because the victories of the past justify their present power and authority. It is as if the leaders are saying to us, forget about the struggles of the past; rather focus on the succeeding victory. Why do they talk about the past like this? Because it is in their interest. Their position in the present is stronger the less they have to deal with an assertive and potentially disruptive rank-and-file that feels as if its interests are being subordinated to those of the leadership. Meanwhile, the leaders respond with their best argument: don't weaken the organisation because our victories were the result of its strengths. So, they say, celebrate the victories—and remember to vote!

But the rank-and-file militants say, no, the struggles of the past and those of the present are a continuum. The victories of the past were hard-won, and they were never as good as they ought to have been. They were compromises, half-successes; followed by attempts to achieve a better result after the so-called victory. So, the struggle continued. This is a lesson of history. *La lotta continua.*

Labor's Trees of Knowledge, and the 'future condition of things'

Let us look at an example of this division of interests in the workers' movement and how it effects our view of the past. On the website of the Queensland Labor Party this claim is made:

> Queensland holds a special place in the history of the Australian Labor Party. When striking shearers met under the Tree of Knowledge in Barcaldine in 1891, they formed the first Labour party in the country.[2]

And if you go to Barcaldine, on the site of the tree, you will find a granite plaque inscribed with these words:

> This plaque commemorates the loyalty, courage and sacrifice in 1891 of the stalwart men and women of the west from whom, beneath this tree, emerged Australia's labour and political movement.[3]

Well, was it a strike they were commemorating or a party recruitment drive? No mention here of the armed strikers' camps, the state troopers defending the scabs, the arson and violence, the solidarity of the workers over ten weeks, the procession celebrating International Workers' Day on the first of May, the involvement of the Australian Socialist League, and the gaoling of thirteen of the strike leaders. Moreover, the plaque is plainly wrong, for Barcaldine was not the site of the first labour political organisation in Queensland—let alone the rest of Australia—and at the time its tree was not referred to as 'the tree of knowledge'. In fact, it was not until 1948 that there was a reference to Barcaldine's tree as 'the tree of knowledge' in *The Brisbane Worker*.[4]

Meanwhile, from the 1910s, the

Prime Minister Bob Hawke at the Barcaldine Tree of Knowledge 1991.
c/o https://barcaldine-peopleplacesthings.org/tree-of-knowledge/

labour public elsewhere was embracing the usefulness of trees of knowledge. Journalists detected them in the several cities—Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney—and in many country towns. As well as Barcaldine, they were to be found in Townsville, Charters' Towers, Charleville, Blackall, Cloncurry, Bowen and Darwin. So, not one iconic tree to celebrate but a dozen, and suddenly we are faced with a different imperative: how to explain a hitherto neglected aspect of working-class struggle.

What was the attraction of these trees to workers? It was their informality and casual atmosphere. And, importantly, they could be used free of charge. They were places where itinerant workers could meet up to exchange news about jobs and friends. They allowed new converts to labour's cause to try out their ideas and talk about their reading. They were sites for meetings about the current struggle and assembly points for marches and protests. Messages and notices could be stuck to their trunks and flags hung from their branches.[5]

Respectable society was unhappy about such radical appropriations of public spaces. Over several months in Sydney in 1913, according to *The International Socialist*, there was a dogged war of position between some proletarian talkers and the city council's park rangers:

> The philosophers that gather round the tree of knowledge sit and talk all day. During the night the authorities carefully scatter all the seats, but it has no effect. The police had also tried to summon some of these men, but anon the philosophers still gather at the fountain.

Then the city council brought in a new by-law:

> On Saturday (Feb. 15) two rangers purposely walked up to a small crowd. One ranger [told] the men they were a mean lot and ordered the people off the seat so that he could shift it. The other ranger explained that they would be forced to prosecute under the new by-law, which, he said, was intended to break up that crowd.

The writer in *The International Socialist* concluded with a political point:

> This park was made by the sweat and toil of unionists

> and others who were sent out here as convicts for political reasons. Yet here we have the spectacle of a fat-bellied flunkey telling people they are a mean lot[...]Soon there will be no free speech in our parks.

So, the radical press kicked up a fuss to defend Sydney's tree of knowledge, and the city by-law was never enforced. And perhaps as a result of the campaign, the Labor government indicated its displeasure a few years later by gazetting a string of 'speakers' corners' in Sydney to mollify radical agitators angered at police harassment.[6]

By 1918, Sydney's tree of knowledge was so well known in labour circles that it was written-up in *The Brisbane Worker*:

> It is known colloquially as the 'Tree of Knowledge', and it is a gathering that is to be seen at any hour of the day or evening under a tree in the upper portion of Hyde Park, almost in the heart of Sydney. To the Tree, in the course of the day or evening, drift hundreds of interested persons [...] Every rebel in Sydney knows the Tree of Knowledge, though many may never go there, and many a Socialist, syndicalist, or anarchist, returning to Sydney after an absence in the country or in another State, finds men whom he is seeking under the tree in Hyde Park.

But the tree of knowledge was, according to this unnamed labour intellectual, not just a kind of letterbox for the peripatetic left, but, in its form of governance, 'a portent for all mankind'. Amazingly, it was orderly, and it ran without any constituted authority. The Tree had its own form of law, 'the law of the Tree':

> No man breaks that law by becoming abusive or disorderly, for any lapse from courtesy receives summary treatment at the Tree of Knowledge. It is the law of the Tree that all must combine against him who would seek to disturb the harmony which distinguishes it, and strangely enough few there be who break that law.

In other words, the writer offers a glimpse of how real self-government might work, based on 'individual right and common sense' and enforced by the direct, free exercise of the popular will:

> Meeting, as it does, with all its orderliness, out under the open sky, the gathering brings to those who are wearied of false laws the germ of the idea of the future condition of things when men and women will live in peace with each other, strong and just under a self-imposed discipline and code of honor far nobler than any law placed upon them by a ruling class.[7]

If there is any single 'tree of knowledge' that ought to be remembered it is the one in Townsville, because the region of North Queensland in the last months of the First World War became the centre of working-class rebellion. Strikes among copper miners, sugar workers, sanitary workers, female hotel domestics, employees of the state butchers' shops, and meat workers convulsed the region for almost two years. Townsville, the main town of the region, became the centre of a conflict between labour and capital that verged on a pre-revolutionary situation.

This was the context in which Townsville's unemployed workers established their tree of knowledge in 1918. Over the next 18 months meetings were held there almost daily. Some were to plan the campaign, some were to hear reports from delegates, others were educational, where workers shared their knowledge of labour history and of social evolution. When strikers attacked the police station and broke into shops to steal guns and ammunition on 29 June 1919, they had been aroused by speakers at an earlier meeting at the Tree of Knowledge.[8]

By the late 1920s that particular tree was dead, but another tree was dubbed with the now iconic name. Labor and Communist agitators campaigned from under this 'tree of knowledge' until the late 1940s.[9]

So, what's the story and what's the message here? It is this: that a history of working-class struggle associated with Trees of Knowledge has been suppressed, while in order to celebrate Labor *as an institution* a myth about one tree in Barcaldine has been propagated. The facts presented by the myth are historically wrong, but this is a minor matter. Even if the Barcaldine story was empirically correct, it would still be a misuse of history because it separates the struggle from the symbol. *The essence of working-class history is the informal collective impulse, the creative agency of working*

people, and their struggles against the bosses and the capitalist state, struggles without which labour institutions would not exist. There is a wrong way and a right way to use history in the labour movement.

Radical Philosophy/Radical History

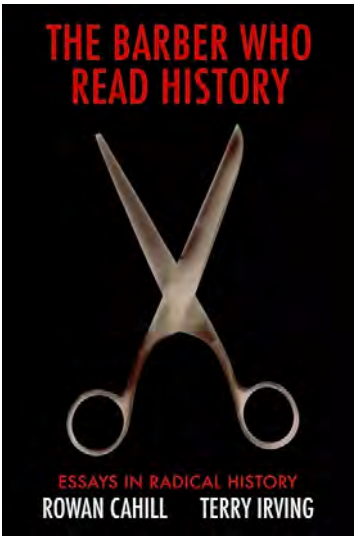
For most of my working life I have been a practicing labour historian, employed by universities until I retired in 1998. During that time, I directed my publications towards three large interpretive issues for the field: the structure of class relations, the role of labour intellectuals, and the liberating force of socialist and democratic ideas. Since retiring I still write what may be called labour history, but I have a wider readership in mind: not just students and scholars of labour history but also those activists who are making history through their struggles—sometimes in labour institutions, sometimes in the campaigns and institutions of other social movements for a host of causes.

My intellectual and political journey since retirement has been taken alongside Rowan Cahill, who delivered the Alex Macdonald Lecture in 2014. We call ourselves 'radical historians' to signify this shift towards a more activist audience. We have recently published a book, *The Barber Who Read History: Essays in Radical History* (2021), in which we celebrate radical history, discuss it as a tradition, including Australian examples, and use it as a base from which to criticise mainstream history. The book provides an arresting context for our discussion of radical history: the dire effects on radical scholarship of the audit culture of the neo-liberal university, a culture that rewards conformity and mindless pedantry while exhausting researchers with time-wasting paperwork. We excoriate the university bosses for their policy of casualising academic employment and for using the pandemic as an excuse to decimate the workforce.

But what is radical history? A few years ago, two distinguished academics wrote a book suggesting that it would be wonderful—indeed, by implication, it would be radical—if scholars wrote history that people wanted to read. Amen to that, but how much more radical would it be if we wrote history that made people want to act? I'll return to that point later, but first we might try to define radical history. I'm going to quote a passage from *The Barber Who Read His-*

tory, a passage that has begun to be quoted and cited as the current definition:

> Radical historians write about the system of ruling and being ruled, the struggles of disempowered people to stand up to their oppressors and exploiters, in order to take control of their lives by attacking coercive authority and by socialising power. They tell stories of resistance and agency, not of ruling and maintaining order, which are the signs of ruling class history.
>
> Radical historians, secondly, are partisan. They write with a social purpose, and in doing so they draw on radical philosophies and methods. They write history as a political act.
>
> Thirdly, although writing about the past, they want to encourage people in the present to resist and rebel. Because the radical past was always being made anew their work is pregnant with possibilities, alerting their readers to the possibilities for action in their own situations.
>
> This has consequences for how they write. Readers must be given space to reflect on the present as well as the past. It is not enough to tell stories; the stories have to be shaped by theory, sharpened by the historian's passion, and pregnant with political questions needing answers. Moreover, whether writing for other radical intellectuals, engaging with scholarship and theory, or seeking a wider audience, radical historians place a high value on clarity of expression, avoiding like the plague the over-theoretical language of academic in-groups, and their self-aggrandizing citation of trendy thinkers.[10]



Here's a point Rowan and I did not expand upon in *The Barber*. In the second of the defining characteristics listed above we refer to the need to draw on radical philosophies and methods. The importance of philosophy is often overlooked in radical history – indeed in all historical writing.

Mainstream history often presents itself as being entirely based on the facts, in contrast to what it wrongly calls the ideological bias of radical history. And often mainstream history is factual to a boring degree. But looking carefully at mainstream history, noticing what is omitted as well as what is included, what people, events, ideas, settings do and do not appear, we can see how a particular view of the world is conveyed by the so-called 'facts' of mainstream history.

It is a *philosophically liberal* view of the world, one in which society is made up of individuals, each of whom has a natural right to life, liberty and property, a formula that in the material world, in reality, makes ownership of property the basis of social life. It is a philosophy that justifies the fact that a class of property owners exists in capitalist society, and that justifies writing the history of that society to show that the interests of that class must prevail. Or to put it another way, it is a history of how society is ruled. It is ruling class history.

That is not the kind of history that radicals write. If mainstream history has its own philosophy, so do we. *The very concept of 'radical' can only be understood philosophically*—although Rowan and I had the disconcerting experience recently of reviewing a book, purportedly about radicalism, that began with a definition of radicalism drawn from a dictionary, as if radicalism were a word that could be neatly summed up in isolation from its context and then added like a pinch of salt to any story of the past you liked to choose.

Of course, radical historians don't fall for that trick, a trick that makes radicalism seem accidental, or a choice made at the whim of the historian. No, we organise our thinking with radical ideas, so that radical action appears necessary in our situation, as it was in the past.

Whereas liberal philosophy starts with the individual, *radical philosophy* starts with the idea of social structure and looks for the structures of domination in capitalist society. There are several types of

domination in capitalist societies. The primary one is class domination, which we experience most acutely at work, but the history of capitalism has spawned other forms of domination, for example patriarchy, and racialised capitalism. These in turn feed back into the class structure to strengthen the power of capital.

As a result, the social forces and movements resisting capitalism are wider than trade unionism. They include movements for the rights of First Nations people, for an end to violence against women, for refugee rights, for gender and sexual liberation, and for the survival of life on earth. All of these movements will include workers, and all of them may at times contribute to the workers' movement. So, there is a range of radical histories that may be necessary in our work, and therefore a range of necessary radical philosophies. Not just Marxism in its classical forms, but Marxist feminism, critical race theory, queer theory, and revolutionary ecology.[11]

Telling stories

Of course, talking about philosophy is not something we do every day. My point is that when we talk to fellow workers about our history, *we* should be philosophically grounded, but assume that they are not. And our philosophical grounding needs only to be broad and simple. As radicals bringing history into the workers' movements, we need only try to convey the idea that we—us workers—are ruled (dominated), and that resistance therefore is necessary. We will have the further understanding that because domination takes several forms (racial, sexual, economic, etc) and takes place in different settings, the forms of resistance will be varied and complex, with a correspondingly complex set of histories. My point here is that we should not expect every militant worker to be as clear about their philosophical groundings as we are. In fact, we should be careful about how we reveal our philosophical position lest we turn them away by using an incomprehensible jargon and a history about which they know little, if anything.

Let me illustrate this danger: I've done some research on an Australian communist worker-historian in the 1920s and thirties, Esmonde Higgins. Hig as he was always known, came from a Melbourne professional family. He learnt about socialism from his elder sister, Net-

Esmonde Higgins with sister Nettie Palmer, undated (N162-Album 10-258) c/o https://archives.anu.edu.au/exhibitions/reds-under-bed-100-years-communism-australia/profile-esmonde-higgins-1897-1960

tie Palmer, and during the First World War he was friendly with Guido Baracchi, one of the founders of the Australian Communist Party. Hig too became a cadre of the party in the mid-1920s. The party was tiny, the party's press was full of sloganising and rhetoric, and consequently most militant workers ignored it. This failure to communicate worried Hig, and in 1935, unemployed after being eased out of party leadership by its Stalinists, he was working for the dole in the outer Sydney suburb of Asquith. For the first time he spent his time with non-communist workers. On weekends some of them would gather at his house where, through talking to them as equals, he found that they were interested in his politics so long as he showed interest in their hobbies. In a letter to his sister, he wrote:

> I feel more than ever that Marxism is the only clue to life, but I'm overwhelmingly impressed that persuasion is the most difficult job in the world which can be performed *only on the basis of patient, diffuse, deliberate personal contact and conversation about 'human interests'*.[...] Revolutionaries should not be blind hacks but serve as a link between activists and philosophers enabling them to find a common language.[12]

That's what I feel too, only adding (in relation to tonight's lecture) that our common language will be suffused with historical understanding, because ultimately if resistance

is what we are aiming for, and every instance of resistance carries a piece of radical philosophical luggage, then our story conveys the sense that we are making history as well as having been formed by it. If we want history to be useful in building a workers' movement, we should look not just for specific lessons from the past but rather for the 'human interests' in the history of workers acting together.

So, telling a story is the best way of making history useful, because in every story, human interest is what holds the narrative together. In human social evolution, the act of storytelling was a crucial cultural skill, and one of its benefits was that it helped us understand ourselves through others, to understand our common humanity.

The very form of a story is historical. Telling stories of workers acting together, for common interests, will highlight their history of hopes, joys, freedoms, disappointments, resourcefulness, creativity, and their will to act—the deliberate choices they made, and are making—in order to bring about social change, in order that is to escape the distorted relationships, the anti-human impulses, of late capitalist society.

This is what Hig meant when he exhorted revolutionary intellectuals to find a common language to bridge the gap between activists and philosophers. We should tell our stories using a language of feelings as well as ideas, conveying the knowledge that only the practice of struggle leads to liberation from capitalist exploitation and oppression, and thence to the realisation of our common humanity. This is the main lesson of history for the workers' movement.

Summing up

When I began thinking about this lecture, I imagined two different audiences, the radical scholar-activists, trained as historians in universities, and the worker-historians who wanted history to provide practical advice about building a working-class movement. But the more I thought about the differences between the kind of capitalism in which the classical labour movement in the 19th and 20th centuries operated, and our present globalised capitalism, the more I began to doubt that the past had much concrete advice about organising to offer to worker-historians.

Today's workers are primed for a more sophisticated understanding

of history. The worker-historian today is not like the auto-didacts with limited formal education who created knowledge for the working class in its classical period. As an article in *Jacobin* pointed out, in the recent organising successes among workers in Amazon warehouses and Starbucks cafes in the United States, many workers or their leaders had higher education. Unlike the more homogeneous workforce of the early trade union movement, which was mostly white and male, these workers were also highly diverse in their racial, sexual and educational backgrounds. Despite these cultural differences they were equally caught up in the process of proletarianisation.[13]

As I was working on the lecture, I came across the pre-publication notice for Sam Wallman's comic book, called *Our Members Be Unlimited*. Wallman tells the story of how unionism arose, where it has flourished, and what are its challenges in the 21st century. But the book's central thrust is its exploration of "the urge to come together and co-operate that arises again and again in workers and workplaces everywhere."[14]

Wallman's 'urge to come together' is what I called earlier, 'the collective, informal impulse'. Its existence allowed the formation of the working class to begin, and it was present wherever workers experienced the commodification of their labour. It is therefore the source of the working-class *in* history, but also the subject of working-class history. The very act of exploring how workers gave it form and substance will make history useful to the workers' movement today. And this point applies to both the activist-scholars among trained historians and the worker-historians planning their next agitation.

I asked Judith McVey—a Melbourne-based socialist—to give me her ideas on the topic of this lecture, and I want to share with you her way of expressing the thrust of my argument. Struggle is an art, she wrote, and in learning from history, both ideas and experience matter.

This lecture has emphasised the importance of ideas but also the care—the artfulness—with which we should express them when agitating. To underline this, I want to end by returning to the story of labour's trees of knowledge.

In 1893, Arthur Rae, union organizer, journalist and one of the first

Labor members in the New South Wales parliament, delivered a lecture in Broken Hill on the need for a redistribution of wealth, starting with land:

> Whenever the world started – whether in the Garden of Eden or not – there were no capitalists walking about in white waistcoats. (Laughter.) There were two people [Adam and Eve] to whom the Garden was given; they had to graft, and what they made they ate. The world wants to get back to that state of affairs, and to do this we [are] required to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. (Hear, hear.) He hoped [the audience] would not carry out the parallel by looking upon him as the serpent who was tempting them. (Laughter.) It was only the possession of knowledge which would give people the opportunity of eating the fruit which they produced.[15]

If you haven't twigged already, the tree of knowledge metaphor comes from the Bible. But Rae has radically altered the Biblical meaning. According to the Book of Genesis (*Genesis* 2:17) God has given Adam and Eve eternal life and placed them in a paradise where they may eat anything *except* the fruit of the tree of knowledge—the knowledge of good and evil, which is divine knowledge—and He promises death if this rule is broken. You know this story: Eve is tempted by the serpent, she eats the forbidden fruit, and men and women become mortal. Here the Bible is introducing the reader to the ideas of obedience and terror. Subservience is the message; it is part of man's God-given nature, a trait that justifies him being ruled by other men as well as by God.

Arthur Rae is not having any of that ruling class propaganda. He radically subverts the story. Workers such as Rae were establishing a radical tree of knowledge tradition in which the knowledge produced by workers would help them throw off the yoke of capital and religion. In this labour reading of the Bible, the terror associated with disobeying God by trying to understand the mystery of good and evil is replaced by the hope of emancipation through practical knowledge produced by the experience of work and struggle.

Rae's speech is a perfect example of what Esmonde Higgins wanted labour activists to do – to find a 'com-

mon' language, in this case taken from the Bible, that they could use to arm workers with knowledge about exploitation, and the need to rebel against it, in order to reach the goal of working-class socialism.

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The Alex MacDonald Memorial Lecture 2022
Post-lecture discussion

The 2022 Alex Macdonald Memorial Lecture and the discussion that followed can be viewed at the Brisbane Labour History YouTube channel:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCAOFgDNEtL9RQVsv5Xs5RQQ

Some highlights of the discussion are reproduced here.

Jeff Rickertt:

To discuss the themes of Terry's lecture tonight, we are extremely fortunate to have been able to assemble a panel of union and political activists. Some of them are also scholars of history but the common thread here is their activism. The other common ingredient, as you may have noticed, is that our panelists are, shall we say, more youthful than the average labour history enthusiast. Both characteristics are not coincidences. If the question before us is the value of history in progressive struggles, then we must engage with people who are at the forefront of those struggles and who will continue to be so in the decades ahead.

So, I want to introduce each of our panelists and then I will facilitate a discussion about history as a tool in their activist tool kit. Terry will also join the conversation.

Elina Abou Sleiman is a young writer and historian who is currently undertaking a Master of Arts in History at the University of Melbourne, researching Brisbane's radical tradition.

Alex North is an organiser for the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and when previously underemployed was the President of the Australian Unemployed Workers Union.

Christian Rizzalli is undertaking a PhD at the University of Queensland (UQ) and working as a casual academic. His activism

Alex Macdonald Memorial Lecture image c/o Alison Stewart.

centres on his work in the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) where he and other socialists run the UQ arm of the left-wing activist group called NTEU Fight Back.

Manal Monsour identifies as an activist, social worker, unionist with the Together Union, Justice for Palestine Meanjin organiser, protest enthusiast and the youngest member of Left Press.

Kristin Perissinotto is the Media Officer and Women's Officer at the Queensland and Northern Territory branch of the Electrical Trades Union and is currently undertaking a Women in Queensland Unions project (On Her Shoulders see page48).

Jason Constable is a proud member of the ETU youth crew committee. Along with other comrades from the ETU's youth crew, Jason was a participant in the solidarity pickets outside the refugee prison at Kangaroo Point and involved with Unions for Refugees.

Participants began by stating how each first started to learn about history and Jeff noted that it was unfortunate that Aboriginal activist Sam Watson was unable to attend the meeting. The colonisation experience encountered, and still being lived through, by Indigenous Australians reinforces the idea that history is very much with us in the present.

Manal discussed this in the context of Palestine:

I think history is incredibly important - without having that understanding of the history of Palestine you can't really understand the struggle of the Palestinians and the intergenerational trauma that is caused from being expelled from their land and then the ongoing occupation of the land. Palestinians continue to demonstrate against the state of Israel by sharing their history of struggle with their youth. When I went to Palestine in 2015 the people talked about their day-to-day struggles - not being able to get through checkpoints or move freely, not having access to clean water - but they also talked about their families and their families' histories and the villages where they're from. It seemed to me the day-to-day battles with the occupation made life hard to live, but it was knowing their history and where they came from that galvanised and moved them forward.

In the context of the union movement:

Alex:

When I first got sacked from a warehouse that closed down back in South Australia, I was unemployed and had to go through the work for the dole system and stuff like that. When I was trying to kick off the Adelaide branch of the Unemployed Workers Union, I turned back to the 1930s and the struggle of the unemployed workers movement then and in the 1970s, and even going back to the 1890s and 1840s. I began to understand that this section of the working class is used basically as a reserve army of labour and I used history to study the forms of struggle and organisations needed.

Kristin:

I think that the union movement is nothing without history and the same could be said for the women's movement. None of us would be here today as activists, workers, women, or as marginalised peoples, without the struggles that came before us. Also, what we're doing now and the struggles and the fights we're having now, will in turn become history for future generations. I rarely speak to an activist who doesn't highlight the history of what has come before. The idea is that we are passing the torch from the activists who came before us and will ourselves pass that torch onto others who will come after us.

Jeff:

One of the most potent pieces of propaganda that the rich and the powerful use against people resisting exploitation and oppression is the idea that the status quo can't be changed. Things have always been this way. The past happened in a certain way. The present that we live in has been created by those events so can't be changed.

Christian:

The gatekeepers of this particularly effective propaganda, of the ruling class status quo, say that radical change isn't possible, even though the most obvious example of radical change in history was the bourgeois revolutions that put our current ruling class in place. They use the lie that radical change isn't possible to shut down left wing activists. Historical knowledge is essential to combat that view. Things can change, radical change happens constantly.

In my own context within the NTEU we're not only going up against the bosses, but we're also sometimes going up against our union bosses. It's very easy to feel disheartened in those kinds of situations. But hearing stories about left wing rebellions within unions in the past helped bolster us and countered the pessimism.

Elina:

I think that in the present this idea that there is simply no alternative is the prevailing ideological justification for capitalism. But when we look at history it becomes obvious that this is not true. There have always been alternatives. On this continent there's tens of thousands of years of history where societies existed without capitalism. We can look to every corner of the world and see long traditions of struggle. This shows us that it wasn't so long ago that capitalism wasn't accepted and wasn't so legitimate and that it was fiercely contested. We are part of that tradition and knowing that makes us stronger.

Jeff:

Those in power also encourage us to forget the past. Recently, Filipinos elected the son of Ferdinand Marcos to the presidency of the Philippines. In the 1970s and 80s Marcos senior was one of the most brutal dictators on the planet, a ruler who massacred his people and plundered the wealth of his nation while the Filipino masses lived

in abject poverty. Yet his son, who openly reveres his father, is now in power, and many impoverished Filipinos voted for him. It seems to me that a reason for that is there is a younger generation that are unaware of that history.

Closer to home, I did a quick calculation and discovered that only about 42 per cent of Queenslanders living here today would be old enough to remember Bjelke Petersen when he was Premier. History can be a source of inspiration. But are the stakes higher than that? Do we face real political risks if we fail to transmit knowledge of the past?

Lessons from the rise of fascism in Europe in the first half of the 20th Century, and the parallels between the Bjelke Petersen restrictions on protest and the restrictions experienced today, were discussed.

Jason noted that younger activists need to learn about the past within their workplace or field of work from older colleagues who have experienced disputes, such as the SEQEB dispute. Older colleagues were there in the front line. Additionally, the history is online.

Alex mentioned the struggle for workers health and safety. The laws that are there were not given to us, they were fought for. If we don't know that history, we don't approach the present with that knowledge of employer reluctance.

Jeff:

What role does an organisation like the BLHA with ties to the unions play in in this creation and transmission of historical consciousness?

Terry:

What I would like to see is something like what the Germans called the Barefoot History Movement or in Britain, the Peoples History Movement. Locally based groups of radicals get together and do their own research into the local situation, into the history of the struggles in their areas. They publish pamphlets, short accessible printed material. I reckon that the labour history societies should be encouraging little groups of people to get together on a project. The societies then should put some money into publishing and distributing them.

History is not something which is just a kind of antiquary lot of nonsense, it's about our struggles. The struggle itself is historic.

Centenary of The Queensland Trades and Labour Council 1922-2022

Alex Macdonald was the Secretary of the Queensland Trades and Labor Council (TLC) between 1951 and 1969. He had an extensive interest in labour history and prefaced the TLCs Annual Congress agendas with items of historical interest.

The Queensland TLC (now known as the Queensland Council of Unions) was established in April 1922. To mark the occasion, we reproduce the brief history of the trade union organisation up to 1922, which Alex used to preface the 1957 Annual Congress agenda. He reproduced the minutes of the first TLC meeting in the 1967 agenda, as we also do here. The original minutes, and the TLC agendas, reside in the University of Queensland's Fryer library.

1957 TLC Annual Congress Agenda:
Secretary of the TLC - Alex Macdonald

The Struggle to Build Trade Unions and the Trades and Labor Council

Much can be written about the history of trade unionism in Queensland. The virile trade union organisation that we have today has been built on solid foundations of working-class principle – of Justice for men and women workers with the aim of control of all production and distribution – Socialism.

The 8-Hour Day and higher wages were the central points of early union organisation in Queensland as elsewhere in Australia. Efforts to establish unions during that period can be clearly traced. Records show that on September 8, 1857, the first meeting was held in Queensland to call for an 8-hour day. That was 100 years ago and later this year we shall celebrate the centenary of that initial effort.

Formation of Labor Council

Two men played a big part in cre-

ating the first Trades and Labor Council. William Lane's ideas and William Galloway's activities combined to establish the first Trades and Labor Council in 1885. Officers elected were:

President: Mr W.M.Galloway (Seamen's Union)

Vice-Presidents: Messrs. Johnson (Bricklayers) and Rees (Stonemasons)

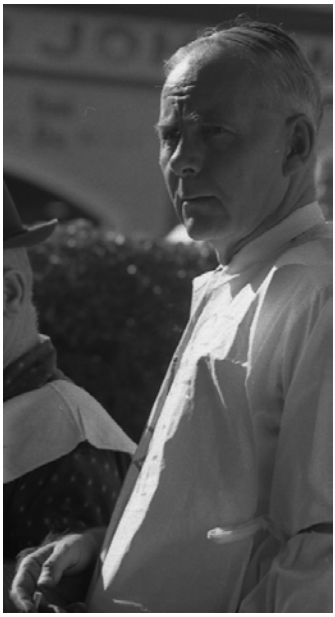
Secretary: Mr Colbourne, Typos, (Queensland Typographical Association)

Treasurer: Mr Hiley (union unknown)

Trustees: Messrs Galloway, Sweet and Mobsby (Painters)

Committee: Messrs Bancroft (ASC&J), Mullen (Queensland European Labourers Protective Society), McCosh (union unknown), French (Painters), Ripley (union unknown).

The Council lasted for five years and then gave way to the Australian Labor Federation. Another Council was formed in 1902 and continued until 1911. In 1914 the Brisbane Industrial Council was formed. Finally, on April 12, 1922, the amalgamation of the then three bodies; the Trades Hall Council, Labor Day Committee and Trades Hall Board of Management took place, and the present Trades and Labor Council was formed.



Alex Macdonald
c/o Alex Macdonald family

This brief record shows that courage and determination based on struggles around workers day to day problems and against exploitation of man by man gave us the Trade Union organisation that will play a big part in winning a happy future for all workers.

Minutes of First Meeting, Trades & Labor Council of Queensland 12 April 1922

Minutes of meeting of the above body held in the Trades Hall on Wednesday night, April 12th, 1922, at 8 p.m.

The President and Secretary of the Amalgamation Committee officiated in their respective capacities.

The President, Mr. J. Cahill, declared the meeting open for business and asked, that as each credential was read, the delegate named should rise and answer his name so that a check of attendance could be provided. This was agreed to, and credentials from the following unions were received. *(next page)*

The Chairman then called for nominations for the position of President of the Trades & Labor Council. At this stage of the meeting objection was taken by a delegate from the Milling & Baking Trade Union to the presence of Mr. Crocket (Queensland Drayman's Union) as a delegate to the Council, on the grounds that he had acted detrimental to the interests of the A.W.U. in a recent case before the Arbitration Court.

Mr. Dunstan spoke and declared that Mr. Martens, the A.W.U. ad. at the Court, had reported the circumstances to him and gave it as his (Mr. Martens) opinion that the A.W.U. would have been successful, but for the assistance rendered the other side by Mr. Crocket.

Mr. Crocket was asked by the Chairman if he had any explanation to offer Council in connection with the matter and replied that he was not acting in the interests of the other side but had merely been asked into Court to give his opinion as to what constituted a fair day's work.

Mr. Brice then moved, that further consideration of this matter be left in abeyance until the personnel of the New Council was formed, and that it then be the first business to be dealt with. Carried.

Mr. Wallace moved, and Mr. Lawson sec. that, the delegates here assembled shall constitute the Trades & Labor Council of Queensland. Carried unanimously.

The question of the Printers' Union which had not as yet agreed to affiliate with the New Body, but whose delegates were present, was raised, and the question asked, as to what position the Printers' Delegates held. It was agreed that they remain but should not vote. The motion was then put and carried on the voices.

The following nominations were then received for the position of President: Mr. G. Hamer, S. Bryan and J. Brice. Nominations were closed on the motion of Mr. Jones sec. by G. Lawson.

The Chairman explained that the vote would be by exhaustive ballot and asked for the appointment of scrutineers. It was decided that the

	UNION	REPRESENTED BY
1.	Operative Painters	J. Riddle & W. J. Wallace.
2.	A.M.I.E.U.	J. Miles & E. Stuart.
3.	Boilermakers	G. M. Rose & R. Cavill.
4.	Coal Workers	E. Sheppard & A. Cosh.
5.	Bricklayers	R. J. Irvine & W. Borrows.
6.	A.R.U.	J. W. Hayes & A. C. Knight.
7.	Builders' Laborers	J. Brice & G. Charlton.
8.	Waterside Workers	J. Skehan & A. Brown.
9.	Coopers	J. Cahill & W. Meer.
10.	Milling & Baking	J. Dowdle & C. Munro.
11.	Storemen & Packers	J. Roache & G. Hamer.
12.	Life & Fire Insurance	J. P. Ryan & G. E. Foggitt.
13.	Moulders	E. McConnel & T. B. Craddock.
14.	Sheet Metal Workers	J. Carter & W. Willson.
15.	Liquor Trade	J. F. McIntosh — W. Bourke.
16.	Boot Trade	J. L. Cain & F. J. Bartlett.
17.	Ironworkers' Association	M. A. Heenan & R. Taylor.
18.	Furnishing Trade	A. Morrison & W. Chambers.
19.	Saddlery & Leather Workers	J. F. Gleddell & H. A. Kluver.
20.	Clothing Trade	D. Lonengan & G. H. Kahler.
21.	Carters & Drivers	G. Lawson & S. Crank.
22.	Shop Assistants	J. Bell & E. Rusling.
23.	Ship Painters & Dockers	R. Kelly & C. Hunt.
24.	Merchants' Service Guild	R. S. Rogers & H. R. Doughty.
25.	Hairdressers	F. W. Jones & A. Skirving.
26.	A.W.U.	W. J. Reardon & W. J. Dunstan.
27.	Qld. Draymen's Union	R. McKay & A. McL. Crocket.
28.	Aust. Clerical Association	R. J. Mulvey & G. J. Lube.
29.	Plasterers' Union	J. Martin & J. Kitson.
30.	Plumbers' Union	J. Monoghan & A. G. Gatehouse.
31.	Carpenters	A. A. King & C. Fry.
32.	Tanners & Leather Dressers	J. O'Conner & J. Cuthbert.
33.	Electrical Trades	S. Bryan & D. Bloomfield.
34.	Miscellaneous Workers	J. Puckering & W. Crane.
35.	Seamen's Union	R. Seaton & A. Sullivan.
36.	Coachmakers	C. C. Tink & E. A. Chapman.
37.	Federated Engine Drivers	H. J. Smyth & H. J. Harvey.
38.	Qld. Railway Traffic Employees	W. Dudgeon & W. R. Higgins.
39.	A.S.E.	J. Munro & R. Leggett.
40.	Postal Linemen's Union	M. Driscoll — P. K. Mead.
41.	Fed .Loco. Enginemen's Union	J. C. Valentine & T. J. Keenan.
42.	Theatrical Union	J. McKew & W. J. Chappel.
43.	Letter Carriers	S. W. Plunket & W. C. Thompson.
44.	Musicians' Union	F. B. Harrop & C. W. Flook.
45.	Printers' Union	G. A. Barker & H. W. Massey.
46.	Jewellers & Watchmakers	Watkins & Brynes.

Delegates in attendance at the inaugural Queensand Trades and Labour Council (QTLC) meeting, 22nd April 1922,

reproduced from the 1967 QTLC Congress agenda, Box 90, UQFL118 Records of the Trades and Labour Council of Queensland 1894- , Fryer Library, University of Queensland

two Printers' delegates act.

On the ballot being declared, Mr. Hamer secured 44 votes, Mr. Brice 20, and Mr. Bryan 10. The Chairman declared Mr. Hamer elected. Mr. Hamer then took the chair, and suitably responded.

The President then asked that the meeting fix the remuneration to be paid to the Secretary before he called for nominations for that position.

Mr. W. Wallace moved, and Mr. Barker seconded, that the salary of the Secretary be six pounds (£6) per week. Mr. Valentine moved an addendum to the motion to provide that the salary be £6 per week until the capitation fees are finally fixed.

Mr. Wallace agreed to incorporate the addendum in his motion which was carried, on the understanding that the salary be reviewed after the 19th of June, l921.

The following nominations were received for the position of Secretary, Mr. R. J. Mulvey, E. Sheppard, and J. Miles.

A discussion was then entered into as to whether Mr. T. Finney was eligible to be nominated for this position, which finalised by the chair putting the question to the meeting which voted against the proposition.

The vote was then taken and resulted in Mr. Mulvey being elected by an absolute majority on the first count. 38, 15, 20. Total 73.

Mr. Mulvey thanked members for their confidence in him.

For Vice-President the following were nominated: Mr. G. Lawson, Mr. J. Roache, Mr. A. A. King, and Mr. S. Bryan, and the result of the first ballot was as follows: Lawson 36, Roache 21, King l 0, Bryan 9. Messrs. King & Bryan dropped out, and the final figures showed, Lawson 42, Roache 34, Mr. Lawson was declared elected.

For Treasurer two nominations were received, that of Messrs. J. Miles and F. Jones. Mr. Miles was elected with 43 votes to Mr. Jones 35. Mr. Miles was declared elected.

Trustees: The following nominations were received for this office, Messrs. Wallace, Rose, King, Bryan, Morrison, and Jones.

Mr. A. A. King and G. M. Rose were elected.

Assistant Secretary: For this position two nominations were received, that of E. Sheppard, and J. C. Valentine.

This ballot resulted in E. Sheppard being elected with 30 votes to J. C. Valentine 22.

Mr. Bryan raised a question in connection with a resignation from the Apprenticeship Committee, but this matter was left in abeyance.

The meeting was then adjourned until Wednesday, April l9th at 8 p.m.

Towards Sixty Years of Maritime Unionism: an Interview with MUA Member Mike Barber

Jeff Rickertt

To mark the 150th anniversary of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA), *The Queensland Journal of Labour History* is publishing a series of interviews with MUA members about their working lives and their involvement in maritime unions. The first interview is with seafarer Mike Barber. Raised on Merseyside in Northern England, Mike went to sea in September 1964 aged 15 years and 10 months, the minimum age for the industry at that time. Fifty-eight years later, he is still active in the MUA. This is the first part of a two-part edited version of Mike's conversation with BLHA President, Jeff Rickertt.

Seafaring out of the UK

Jeff: Was there a family background in seafaring? What was the motivation for you to go to sea?

Mike: Two things: my father and an uncle were in the Royal Navy, and my grandmother on my mother's side was on the ferries in Scotland, so I think I had that seagoing desire and understanding that this is where I was headed. Plus, I had no other skills other than cooking. Both those things were needed for ships, and that's what propelled me into it.

Jeff: Can you describe the working conditions when you started?

Mike: The company I was with ran to Japan and the Far East - Hong Kong, Singapore. They had a steady regular route every three months; you were on a ship for that long. Blue Funnel Line was the company, and they were understood to be an exceptional Liverpool company for good quality ships; with reasonably good accommodation in comparison to other shipping companies. But the main thing you must respond to is living aboard, how you're suddenly in a confined, captive working environment; that you can't go home if something goes wrong. As for wages, I think they were probably the average, around £20 or £22 a week plus overtime.

Leave was pitiful in the industry at that time, it was one day a week. One

day accumulative leave for a week's work; so if you did three months, you were lucky to get three weeks' leave. I suppose we thought that was great in those days, but the pay for our leave was only half the pay we'd normally earn, so, unfortunately by the time we'd done a three-month voyage, and you came back to Liverpool you were basically on the bones of your arse looking for another job.

Jeff: As a young man, the life would have been hard at first. Did people look out for you? Was there a sense of social solidarity on the part of the crews?

Mike: There was, but it was based on the department you were with. I mean, everybody was Liverpudlian—that's my background—it was socially cohesive and all-together, people looked after each other. But primarily, I got looked after by the chief steward, the chief cook, and the catering department; we sort of clung together; we went ashore together, so there was that good social cohesion then. The deck crowd—well, of course you mingled with the deck crowd as well, but there was that sort of 'oil and water don't mix' sort of thing, you know. They're the deck crowd; we're the catering. But there was never any social antagonism on board the ship.

I think what I lacked most was an understanding of the politics of

Mike Barber 2022
c/o Jeff Rickertt

the industry. My dad was a Labour person, and when I asked him before I went to sea, 'What's politics all about? What's the business with elections and all that?', his basic response was, 'if you have a business or property, you vote Conservative because you've got money, you own a business or you're in a socially different level; working people vote Labour.' That was his simple explanation. And while I understood that basic position, it really wasn't enough for me to understand how and why we were where we were as workers at that stage in shipping.

Jeff: Let's turn to the 1966 UK seamen's strike. My understanding of it is that it occurred following an attack on working hours during the

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BLHA Membership Application / Renewal Form

Please send applications to:

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

or craig@amieuqld.asn.au

Name:

Street address:

City or Suburb: **P/C:**

Mobile: **Phone:**

E-mail:

Signature:

Areas of Interest, Research, Activities:

Cost of Membership

Individual: waged $25 unwaged $10 **Organisation**: $100

Note a year's membership extends from 1st July to 30 June.

Your membership dues include:

- Membership of the *Australian Society for the Study of Labour History* (Federal body)
- Membership of the *Brisbane Labour History Association* (Brisbane branch of ASSLH)
- Two issues annually of *The Queensland Journal of Labour History*
  Please indicate your preferred method of delivery Paper ☐ Digital (email) ☐

Direct Deposit: BSB 064 000 Account 10005764
or/ I enclose a cheque for $... **Date...**

Direct deposit - please quote name and member no (if applicable) and send email notification of payment to Secretary

For further information contact the Secretary at 0418 197 205 or craig@amieuqld.asn.au

www.onhershoulders.com.au

On Her Shoulders is a new multimedia history project highlighting the contribution of women to the Queensland union movement. The brainchild of the Electrical Trades Union's media officer, **Kristin Perissinotto**, and sponsored by the ETU, the project was launched before a large and enthusiastic audience at the QCU on 20 July. As Kristin explained, women have played critical roles in the development and struggles of the union movement in Queensland since the 19th Century but their contributions have been documented only sparingly. The project aims to rectify this imbalance.

On Her Shoulders brings together digitised documents, photographs, reports and newspaper articles relating to union women. The centrepiece is a series of recorded interviews, delivered as podcasts on the project's website. Beginning at the launch, every Wednesday a new podcast is added to the platform. These fittingly started with the ETU's own Pat Rogers. Pat recently retired after decades of involvement in the union movement, including 19 years as an Industrial Officer for the ETU. The platform also features interviews with unionist, former Labor Senator and BLHA life member Claire Moore, former Queensland Teachers Union President Mary Kelly, and Di Zetlin, foundation President of the National Tertiary Education Union.

The project reminds us that for workers and women, progress has never been a linear advance. One strong theme of the interviews is that, to use Kristin's words, 'wins can be fleeting, and progress can be stripped in a moment.' This is why history is important: 'We stand on the shoulders of those who came before us. We reach down and offer a hand to those who will come next.'

With over 50 interviews already conducted and more to come, this is a project bound to generate interest well into the future as each weekly podcast is released. The website bills the project as 'an incomplete history of women in the Queensland union movement.' Incomplete it is bound to be, for the practice of documenting history can only ever be partial and representative. Nevertheless, On Her Shoulders represents a very impressive and important new initiative towards achieving due recognition for the hundreds of thousands of Queensland women who have over many decades been proud to call themselves unionists.

BLHA Podcasts from 4ZZZ

In November 2020 the Brisbane Labour History Association commenced a monthly guest spot on Workers Power, a program on Brisbane community radio station 4ZZZ. Each month a BLHA guest selects a topic from history and is interviewed for 30 to 60 minutes. The BLHA wishes to thank the program's convenor, Bill Storey Smith, and the Workers Power crew for this opportunity to bring labour history to a radio audience.

http://brisbanelabourhistory.org/brisbane-labour-history-association/resources/4zzz-podcasts

Stella Nord Bursary

Brisbane Labour History Association

The Brisbane Labour History Association is pleased to offer the Stella Nord Bursary. The award honours Stella Nord, a worker and campaigner whose writings reflected her commitment to the labour movement. Mindful of Stella's example, the BLHA wishes to assist emerging or established historians whose circumstances make it difficult to carry out a labour history project.

The BLHA undertakes to provide to the successful applicant a grant of up to $1000 and mentoring on historical research and writing if required.

Applications

Apply by completing the form available from brisbanelabourhistory.org and sending the form and any accompanying documents to the Stella Nord Bursary Administrator at:-

blha.bursary@gmail.com or

PO Box 5299
West End QLD 4101

Applicants will

1. outline a viable and original research project in the field of Australian labour history, and
2. explain how the bursary would alleviate the circumstances which limit their opportunities for undertaking historical research; for example, by assisting travel to relevant archives and libraries or by defraying costs of oral history recording.

The nominated project should be completed within 18 months, and the results will be presented in a format agreed to by the BLHA. Presentation formats may include but are not limited to a journal article, a talk at a BLHA event, or an audio-visual work suitable for online publication. A copy of the complete rules of the bursary is available to download from the BLHA website.

Please check the BLHA website for current deadlines.

More information available at brisbanelabourhistory.org.

previous year when an agreement was pushed through, basically behind the backs of members, that increased the working week.

Mike begins this discussion by describing the low profile of the National Union of Seamen amongst the membership and how he learned about the politics of the union.

Mike: I'm not sure whether it was a deliberate company thing or just neglect from the National Union of Seamen, but there was no union representation on the ships; there was no official delegate structure like we have in Australia or we had when I was living in New Zealand. And so you only ever saw the union official in port. He came on board to make sure we were all financial before we sailed, and then he'd nip upstairs and get his bottle of scotch and duty-free cigarettes, and that's the only official you saw. At the shipboard level, there was never any union discussion.

I was fortunate enough to go to Liverpool Nautical Catering College and bump into this Paddy Neary, who was studying too. He explained the politics of the industry, all the stuff I had lacked up to that time, about what we were fighting for and why, and what we'd tried to achieve unofficially because of the neglect of the officialdom in the NUS under Bill Hogarth *(General Secretary of the NUS, 1962-1973)*. As you can understand, at that age I didn't really understand structure and bureaucracy and all those things that I do today. But I came to understand that things had gone backwards from what they thought they'd achieved, and we were now going for a 48-hour week in the lead up to the '66 strike. And better conditions, better pay.

I didn't really know a lot about the background, but my enthusiasm propelled once the picketing started. Because you attended your consciousness suddenly rose, you know. You decide: 'I'm not just going to watch this; I'm going to go and get involved.' And so, I was allocated picket duties in Birkenhead for two or three days a week, and one day over in Liverpool, where they had mass rallies on the waterfront.

Jeff: The picket roster and the rallies and so on, were they organised by the officials or was that rank-and-file organisation?

Mike: There was no rank-and-file structure at the shipboard level, or if so, there certainly wasn't any that I understood existed or knew about.

The pickets were organised by the local branch, the Liverpool branch. They contacted you because they knew what ships you were on; they knew by your membership dues and fees; it was basically telephone conversations in those

National Union of Seamen (Mersey Area) mass meeting held at Liverpool Pierhead near the Seamen's war memorial during the ongoing seaman's strike, 16th May 1966
c/o Liverpool Echo 11/8/22: From gravediggers to dockers - 15 images of strikes from Liverpool's past
https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/nostalgia/gallery/gravediggers-dockers-15-images-strikes-24718900

days; they allocated you strike duties, picket duties, and you just followed those until the strike was resolved. The difficulty was you had a heap of enthusiasm to participate, but like most pickets and most demonstrations, you get disheartened with the walk-bys who don't care or are not interested. It didn't dishearten me *[laughs]*; I enjoyed it. Plus, you got six pound a week strike pay, you know.

Jeff: One analysis of the strike was that it was in a sense a phoney strike; it was arranged by senior leaders of the NUS, possibly in consultation with the shipowners and the government to head off a rank-and-file revolt that may have led to the formation of a breakaway union. In hindsight, do you share that view?

Mike: Absolutely. Recently there's been a revived analysis of several strikes that I've been involved in over my working life, and it's surprising what you don't see until you re-read history.

Jeff: And what was the official outcome of the strike?

Mike: Well, as a result of the strike we went from a 72-hour week to a 48-hour week and the overtime was doubled; I think the pay was increased by maybe another £5, to

£10 a week. They don't sound like significant figures, but that was the standard of living in those days. The increase in the basic pay and in the overtime figure was significant, particularly for caterers.

Jeff: You said that during the struggle, you were very enthusiastic about it; as a young worker it was your first experience of this kind of activity. What was the outcome for you personally? In what way did it change your views or develop your ideas about the union and about class struggle?

Mike: It led me to have a deeper consciousness about what it was to be working class. There were no illusions in my life or my father's life about being anything but working-class and workers. But the strike led to a deeper thirst for knowledge about what the working class was about; what were we struggling about; what were the politics of it all and who and where were our enemies. It wasn't hard to identify that the capitalist system was the initial problem we all faced as workers, regardless of whether you were in a union or not.

The UK was very unionised but the union members were very subservient to union officialdom. There was no genuine rank and file structural participation. I don't think I ever went to one branch meeting in the NUS in Liverpool or Birkenhead, the two sides of the River Mersey. Once you start to genuinely understand your political position, your consciousness obviously rises to newer and higher levels.

Jeff: Were there political organisations within the union that you could have turned to? Socialist, Communist organisations?

Mike: Not in the National Union of Seamen, there wasn't. As I say, it was basic industrial unionism. I never ever heard or saw any political opportunity to go and be educated or understand in a political sense what we were doing or why.

Jeff: So, your political development, your education, really came from having conversations with people like Paddy Neary and others like him, and by reading more yourself, motivated by your involvement in the strike?

Mike: Yep. Basically self-education, in that sense. Until I came to New Zealand and Australia to live.

Jeff: Before we move off the 1966 strike, the strike drew attention to the possibility of a rank and file led breakaway union. I wanted to ask you what your attitude is to rank and file breakaway unions. In your view, is there ever a valid case for a membership to simply walk away and start again?

Mike: You could say that [*a breakaway union*] could become a necessity at some stage. But I think initially you try and rectify the problems within the current union, provided there is a mechanism and a platform to be able to do that. There certainly wasn't any in the UK.

When I lived in New Zealand, I don't think there was any necessity to even consider something like that because they were such a responsive union – this was the Cooks' and Stewards' Union. Similarly, within the Seamen's Union of Australia, the constant assessment about capitalism, our work, and challenges within our industry and within the world, including the peace movement, the anti-apartheid movement, there wasn't any need to buck the [*existing union*] system because the union was responsive to all those things; rank and file involvement was high in those days. We would fill the Teachers' Club Hall in Sydney with 300 or 400 members minimum [*while*] half of the membership would be at sea. The union leadership was responsive to us.

Jeff: So, there was sufficient activity amongst the rank and file and sufficient structures within the union to transform things from within?

Mike: Absolutely. Crew members would have a democratic, open meeting and make democratic decisions based on the information and the decision-making that was required at the time. If they decided that this needed to be done or that needed to be done, it was responded to [*by the SUA officials*], and correctly responded to, which is most important. You had the sense that they were listening to you.

The Aotearoa (New Zealand) Years

Jeff: When did you move to New Zealand?

Mike: At the beginning of 1974. I had been running down there on English ships; a different company at this time. There were three or four major companies that ran the entire trade: New Zealand, Australia, back to the UK, before the UK joined the European Union.

You were meeting Pommie seamen that you'd sailed with, who knew you, and came on board the ships to catch up with friends, and you would listen to their stories.

I was on one-day-a-week leave if I was lucky; and they were on day for day, and you thought 'fantastic; how's that happening?' And you knew why it was happening: because the members were demanding it, and getting it. And so it was enticing for me, and I made the decision to

emigrate, and that's what I did in 1974.

In New Zealand Mike joined the Cooks' and Stewards' Union, which at that time had not amalgamated with the seamen.

Jeff: You found the industrial situation in New Zealand much different from what you had experienced in the UK?

Mike: Absolutely, yeah.

Jeff: Tell me a bit about those differences?

Mike: Well the National Union of Seamen didn't organise us, they designed it that way; they didn't want anybody rocking the boat.

From that to joining the Cooks' and Stewards' Union [*in New Zealand*], where we had regular meetings, we had a roster system for work, run properly by the union. You go on board, you've got a caterers' delegate, you've got a deck delegate, you've got an engine room delegate. It was overwhelming how much organisation and how much demand for improvements could be achieved from that solid rank and file representation.

The various unions on board—crew unions that is—were much more militant than I'd seen at that point in my life. It was a phenomenal experience, and it got me more engaged in not only understanding the conditions in New Zealand, but the politics. Here was a responsive union that listened to its members and, more importantly, were elected by its members. That was the big thing for me: that all the officials were elected from the rank and file.

Jeff: And that was different from the UK?

Mike: Yeah. I never knew anything about union elections in the UK; you never heard about it, it was all internal, I think. There may have been some process in the branch meetings, but again, information was nil, whereas here, you only had to go into the corner, as they called it in those days. Same as the roster system here when we used to have it.

Anything that needed to be discussed by the officials with the members was discussed there and then. It was open, it was honest, and you never doubted that if Joe Bloggs was at number five [*on the roster*] then he was at number five for a reason—he ended up getting the job because number one, two, three and four didn't want it. It was a genuine process, you know. And you knew anyone who came on leave after that was at the bottom and you gradually moved your way up.

Jeff: Did you become a delegate yourself?

Mike: Not during the time I was on the New Zealand ships, because mainly it was the chief steward that took it as the head of a department. That wasn't being hierarchical, it was basically because he spoke for the two cooks and the two stewards. I did consider running for office in New Zealand, but I didn't have sufficient knowledge. I was only a blow-in, as they call it. I thought about it, because I think I was determined to make a personal difference, but the margins for making a difference over there were very small because they were so responsive to the members' needs.

Solidarity with the *Amalric* Crew

Jeff: Before we move off New Zealand, let's talk about the *Amalric* strike late in 1975. This was a solidarity strike with the crew of the *SS Amalric*, which was in port in Auckland. The crew went on strike and set up a picket line in support of a range of demands: better safety at sea; better wages; general upgrade of conditions.

And eventually, workers from, I believe, sixteen UK-crewed ships around New Zealand were out in support.

What is significant about this strike in one sense is that none of this action was initiated by the leadership: it came from the rank and file, both the initial action by the *Amalric* crew and then all the solidarity action by crews of other ships in ports around New Zealand. Can you take me through that struggle and your involvement in that struggle?

Mike: Sure. The *Amalric* was what they call a cross-trader. British shipowners had adopted many cross-trading routes. This ship was running between New Zealand and the Caribbean, Jamaica and all those places. They initially would have had an English crew that had joined it in the UK before it came out. Like lots of seafarers in those days, many of the UK crew would pay off in New Zealand, and they would be replaced by local labour. So, on board her were four resident New Zealand affiliated members, and British workers.

They were not happy with the state of the ship, because, unfortunately, with English ships, even in my own experience, nothing would be resolved or done if things needed replacing or fixing until the ship got back to the UK. It was basically a rule; you couldn't do anything [*to repair the ship*] in any overseas ports; it had to be done in the UK.

Things deteriorated aboard, but then never got attended to. After

SS Almaric - River Mersey 8/9/1972
c/o Malcolm Cranfield
https://www.shipspotting.com/photos/3468593?navList=mostPopular&perPage=16&page=1&timestamp=1662704100&days=1

an average three- or six-month voyage overseas, upon return to the UK, all the crew members were paid off, and the ship continued its coastal discharge. So oncoming crew replacements were never informed or interested in pursuing [*onboard*] issues raised by the departing crew members.

And these cross-trading boats never went back to the UK. My understanding with the *Amalric* crew is that they were unhappy with the appalling conditions and motivated to do something about it. And they knew that they could only do it with great union support, initially with the New Zealand trade union movement.

I don't think they expected such spontaneous support for their strike, but there were so many British ships down there – Shaw Savill, Blue Star, Port Line and Federal Boats. They're the major companies, and they'd have two or three ships in various ports around the entire coast, North Island and South Island. The main ones: Auckland, Wellington, Lyttleton, Timaru; all those places.

So, what these guys thought was: 'this is the time to do something about the appalling conditions on the ship.' I think they consulted with the New

Zealand Seamen's Union Auckland branch, and they decided to put a picket in place. This was supported by the wharfies, who never crossed it.

All those other English ships decided to come out and support them. Some refused to do their own work duties, some just refused to sail. There was an amalgam of different responses. But, in essence, they were supportive and in solidarity. Until the *Amalric* crew were happy, they were sticking fast. At that time, I had just joined the *Auckland Star*, which was a Blue Star Line boat, as I'd decided to go back to the UK and work my passage back and that ship was in Auckland.

So there was this blue, and I realised that all the British ships—probably with no union structures in place—would be keen to do something but would not know how. It took leadership. I grasped the nettle and had a meeting with the boys because I'd had that two-years' political and industrial understanding about what was necessary and how to organise the unorganised.

I was on the *Auckland Star* in Auckland, as I say, and then we shifted to Lyttleton. But in the meantime, there was a total of sixteen ships all up. I knew two of the guys on the *Amalric* from my working and living in Auckland, and I got in touch with one of them and he asked me, 'what's happening where you are, down the South Island?' The problem was that crews in the South would be ringing the North Island and talking to different people and not knowing what to do, so it was obvious you needed a central communication process between the South Island and the North Island strike committees, and that's what I established.

But that wasn't till after we'd established a strike committee aboard the *Auckland Star*. We had four of us on the strike committee leadership. The solid support of the seafarers on board was amazing, and unexpected by myself. You're trying to persuade British seamen, who'd never been in strikes, a relatively young crew, as they are on most of those British ships running down there. They're there for a good time in Kiwi, you know, and enjoy themselves. So, I was quite buoyed by the enthusiasm and the solid support. And what we did on the *Auckland Star* was refuse to work. We didn't just not sail; we said, 'we're not working'.

There was a unified structure in Auckland, and those ships that were coming in were being met by the Auckland strike committee body that the *Amalric* crew had established themselves, with New Zealand Seamen's Union's support, and so they would visit those ships and explain their story and they would spontaneously come out on

strike. The majority refused to sail, which is the important thing; you're tying the ships up; you're tying the wharf up where commercial activity and discharge and loading came to a halt.

Jeff: Tell me more about this communication hub that you were instrumental in creating, because that obviously was going to be an important aspect of it: being able to keep in touch, keep people up to date and so on.

Mike: What happened was, once we'd reached Lyttleton, [*I went to*] the Lyttleton Seamen's Union office and appealed to be able to use their facilities. These are the days before mobile phones and phones sitting on the gangway, you know. You had to go ashore to make a phone call. So, I'd established a relationship with them and from there, I got in touch with all the different ports: Timaru, Dunedin, Bluff – as far down as Bluff. Those three major ports down there, there were ships trying to establish themselves, and the guy I knew from Auckland said to me, 'can you sort the guys down there, the ships, so we're not all cross-calling or offering different solutions, *et cetera*?' So that's what I did. I got in touch with those guys, and they communicated directly to me and then we communicated that to the Auckland strike committee. So that was a good, solid move.

Jeff: Was there a bulletin?

Mike: No; there was nothing because you never knew how long this struggle was going to proceed or if it would collapse.

We got the news that an NUS official, Wilkins, was being flown out to address the members. Remember, it's an unofficial strike, so their intent, obviously, is to sort it out, hopefully in our favour, but given the history of the NUS, to quell the thing down. That was revealed by the fact that Wilkins' air fare was paid by Shaw Savill, which was the company involved in the blue. I and a few others went up to Auckland. We had this first meeting with Wilkins.

At the meeting there was an obviously left-wing official of the Northern Drivers' Union – I can't think of his name now; Anderson, I think it was. And he told Wilkins, 'you're here to quell this; you're not here to respond to the members or their issues, you're just a lackey for the company and the union officialdom.' This was all good news for us. Wilkins listened, but he was playing two games, obviously.

I think we had two meetings; one was aboard a ship where he'd persuaded the members to sail because he promised to honour what the members on the *Amalric* wanted. The promises were all made, and so you had different ships, in the North

Island particularly, starting to lift their bans and set sail back to the UK. The South Island ships' crews were waiting for us to get back and communicate what was going on.

I think we were in the newspapers and the TV there a couple of nights because it had been going probably about four weeks by then.

The pressure was on those ships to get back because their cargo – whether it was mainly lamb or dairy produce or apples and oranges, whatever – needed to be in the UK by the end of that year for the imposed tariffs not to be affected.

There was a lot of pressure to break the strike and get the produce back before any tariffs came in on arrival. But although this assurance had been given us, we still hovered around for another two days' meetings, and there didn't seem to be any let up from the *Amalric* boys. They said, 'no; we want to see the things done first; promises are nothing. We want to see these things agreed to and implemented.'

Suddenly, out comes Sam McCluskie, the Assistant National Secretary of the NUS, the next up in the hierarchy at the national level in the NUS. Again, air fare paid for by the company; discussions with the Auckland Harbour Board, and then telling us, 'you've got to stop

Sam McCluskie, NUS Assistant Secretary of the NUS, later Chair of the British Labour Party (1982-3) & General Secretary of the NUS (1986-1990) c/o Wikipedia

this, boys; it's been agreed to.' Then there were threats to the Somalis who were down below in the engine room crew; that they were going to take their British passports off them if they didn't agree to sail, an inhumane threat to make.

After we had left Auckland and after McCluskie's meeting and his assurance that the company would implement all the concerns of the *Amalric* crew, and with our agreement to lift our protest support and action, we went back to the South Island and next thing we know McCluskie, along with some of the Harbour Board officialdom, smashed the picket line. They called

the police. They smashed the picket line and that broke the unofficial strike.

Wilkins and McCluskie had given us all these written assurances that nobody'd be worse off, and we'd be supported, there'd be no discrimination. We had it in writing, but it wasn't worth the paper it was written on. Aboard the *Auckland Star*, we were held up for a week in Napier to resolve our own issues, and of course that same pressure was there about getting the produce back within that UK tariff year. We finally let go, and we knew what was coming. We arrived back in Bristol – Avonmouth is the port. With a bit of foresight, I rang up the local radio station and told them that we anticipated a problem with the company once we arrived—the discrimination that would occur—and that we weren't leaving the ship. We weren't paying off, signing off articles, until the union came down and protected us.

The irony is this: many of the *Auckland Star* crew were Scottish, and it was New Year's Eve, so you can imagine how they were anxious to get home for Hogmanay, as they call it. But they were solid, and it was an amazing experience sitting there, 20-25 people supporting myself specifically and other strike committee leaders, to ensure we were not discriminated against. As soon as we berthed, the company officials were there, and I got the sack instantly; so did the second steward, who was on the strike committee. Some of the others who were on it didn't. I think they just picked the leadership, and focused upon us as there's always scapegoats required in retaliation, isn't there? Easier to sack two than it is four or the remaining 25 crew. I wasn't personally worried.

But the assurance I got from Wilkins was that I would retain my NUS membership, after repaying two years of back dues, and they would find work for me, and so the boys were happy, and we all went home.

Back to the UK

But I made a mistake *[laughs]*. I'd gone back to the UK, and I just went back ten years in conditions and to no representation. Not getting any work on the UK pool, I ended up having to go over to Rotterdam, to what they call the international pool over there, where you're just on a roster, made up of maritime labour of European nations. And ironically, the first ship I got was an English one. But that's another story. *[Laughs]*.

Jeff: So, you had intended to go back to the UK. Was that simply for family reasons?

Mike: No; it was more than that, it was an adjustment for me. Being

a seafarer of ten years, by then, or twelve years, if you include those first two in New Zealand, I had been used to three months at sea. I hadn't adjusted, I suppose, to doing two weeks on or two weeks off, which was predominantly the case on the Kiwi coast at the time. You picked a ship up and went from A to B. I found it difficult to adjust to what we call rock dodging, you know, between ports.

That was a trigger for me to go back [*to the UK*], thinking, 'I'll be going back to do what I normally do', but with this higher industrial knowledge and political consciousness.

Anyway, I end up on this English ship and I had all sorts of drama on there; the chief steward was issuing orange juice or fruit juice once a week, and I'd become used to just getting it out the fridge when you wanted it. All those restrictions and reactionary responses and non-understanding by the seafarers that I was sailing with at that time, just conflicted with me, you know.

Anyway, I did two months and then I ended up on another ship. I think it was a tender, one of those offshore ones that worked out in the North Sea. We were lucky; we were taking a rig from Oslo. We towed it round to the Irish Sea; they were starting to develop possible oil finds down there. We were based in Cork and we did a week out at sea; a week in the port; it was fantastic. Lovely place, Ireland. And of course, my Irish heritage from my dad's side, and on my mother's side, my Scottish heritage, so I think that's where the rebel in me comes to the fore, was rekindled and reignited, while there for over a month.

And then I joined this other horror ship out of London call the *Kindrance*; I called it the Hindrance in the end. All we were doing was London to Rouen in France with flour, either taking the stuff there or bringing stuff back. But if you ran out of eggs, the skipper would say, 'too bad; there's no allowance in the budget to purchase more'. And I'd say, 'we don't live like that', and forced the skipper to order more while in France, which was twice as expensive than properly storing in the UK.

Another issue aboard this ship was that when I first joined it was my understanding that there was meant to be a steward as well as a cook. I was the cook, but I was doing the cook's job and the steward's as well, serving at the tables and the captain's cabin. It was ridiculous. So, when we got back to Manchester, I rang the union branch in Manchester and said, 'what's going on here?' 'Oh, isn't there a steward there yet?' they asked. 'No!'

The Manchester Ship Canal
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We were berthed in Salford docks, and there's only one lock in or out of there into the Manchester Ship Canal. So, there is a bloke supposed to be coming down to join us, as promised and expected, but nobody turned up. We're in the locks, and ready to be lowered to the canal level, and I jumped off! Ships cannot sail without a cook. We held the lock up for half a day. Nothing could come in or out. [*Laughs*]. I kept my job, which is incredible.

Jeff: Did you get your steward?

Mike: Yes, we did. Yeah, he came down. I wasn't going to come back on board until they brought him down. He was a bloke from Liverpool, because that's only an hour away on the train; so, this bloke joined it, I jumped back on board and off we went. But of course, I was persona non grata for a while then, both with the union and the skipper.

In those days, like it used to be in Australia, you could just give your notice at the next port if wishing to legally relinquish your job. And again, it was a New Year's Eve, and we were due to berth in Leith, the port for Edinburgh, and I said to the skipper, 'here's my 24 hours' notice, I'm going.' 'You can't leave, we can't

get anybody', he said, and appealed for me to stay. I said, 'tough shit.' *[Laughs]*. She *[the ship]* sat there for ten days. In Scotland on New Year's Eve, do you think anybody's going to join a ship? I don't think so. So, that's what happened there.

But in the end, that's what triggered me to come back to New Zealand, knowing I couldn't nor shouldn't work in such historically reactionary conditions again. I was in New Zealand for a year, and then I came over here to Australia.

Work and Unionism in Australia

Jeff: So, when did you arrive in Australia?

Mike: December '77.

Jeff: You continued working in the industry here. And here in Australia you found allies within the Maritime Union Socialist Activities Association, MUSAA, and, of course, the Socialist Party of Australia. Can I start by asking about the SPA, the Socialist Party of Australia? By the time you arrived in Australia, you were very politically conscious; you had a lot of knowledge, a lot of experience about class politics and class treachery. What was it about the SPA which drew you to its orbit, and how was it different to Communist organisations that you had encountered in the UK or New Zealand?

Mike: Well, primarily, I hadn't encountered any in the UK. They were there, obviously, but my consciousness wasn't. In New Zealand I was tempted to join the Socialist Party of Aotearoa, as it was in those days, but I didn't because of my shifting sands in the sense of where I was going to settle – by that time, I was in my late twenties, early thirties.

The political consciousness was much more obvious in the leadership in Australia. I think half of the leadership were part of the central committee of the Socialist Party at the time, and so it was just a natural thing – you can't stifle that wanting to learn more and be engaged more in the political side of things. And so, it led to me joining the SPA down in Port Kembla, where a couple of good comrades down there had invited me to join. But within about a year and a half, we were all expelled...

Jeff: From the SPA?

Mike: *[Laughs]*, Yeah. It was based on the difficulties in interpreting Lenin's view about whether the trade union movement is a school of education or the Stalinist viewpoint that you follow the party line once it's decided and you implement that within the trade union structure. And this is

where the level of disagreement took place. And so, on the advice from our leading officials, we either copped that or we accepted being expelled, and that's when we formed MUSAA as a result.

With MUSAA you still had political and industrial continuity from the political leadership, with Pat Clancy and – can't think of his name now, from the BWIU. Just recently passed away.

Jeff: Tom Macdonald?

Mike: Tom Macdonald, yeah. And also, the APC, the Australian Peace Committee, with those identities there. I can't remember their names. So, you still had that continuity of political understanding and education, and an outlet to discuss where we were going in the Left, and what was happening. And of course, we were still aligned with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in those days. Not aligned, but affiliated in some way, both industrially and politically. And we had a lot of Soviet trade union officials come out to Australia...

Jeff: You and who else was involved in setting up MUSAA?

Mike: I didn't set up MUSAA but was an early advocate and joined at its embryonic stage of development. There was obviously the leading SUA officials and representatives. I think Wally Pritchard was one; Tony Pappas, I think. Not sure whether Geraghty was highly involved, but I believe so, particularly as he was the Federal Secretary of the SUA, along with Taffy Sweetenson. On the waterside, probably Tom Supple, though I'm not sure, and on the construction BWIU side, it would be the Macdonalds and others and I believe Pat Clancy.

It was more that they needed somewhere to go after being expelled from the SPA, and retain that core cadre, so there was continuity of political and industrial education and involvement for those who had been kicked out. It's one of those unfortunate things on the Left; this factionalism and simplistic division over specific theoretical points of view, and/or who was prominent and who was or who wasn't Leninist or Marxist or not Stalinist enough.

Jeff: Did MUSAA see itself as simply a network of socialists, or did it see itself as an embryonic new party?

Mike: I think initially it was to keep the network of those people who'd been in the Socialist Party, and I think it hoped it could be the start of an alternative to the SPA. The differences occurred over this interpretation of what the trade union should or shouldn't do. I believe they

would never have resolved that, so I suppose that may have given some of those people the inclination to start another party. But it just never got off the ground if that was the intention.

Jeff: On this point about the relationship between union and party, or class and party, where do you see the emphasis lying? It seems from your experiences and from the stories you've told me that, for you, the synthesis between party and class always must be resolved around the issue of giving primacy to the interests of the working class. That's your starting point and, in a sense, your end point, as well. I am wondering if that's a reasonable summary of how you approach industrial politics, and Marxist politics generally?

Mike: It is. This is a working-class struggle, and we don't achieve anything unless that working-class consciousness is prominent in why you do the things you do. And so, the whole – synthesis is the term you used – between party and working class, one falls from the other.

You may or may not necessarily be aligned to a political organisation, but class consciousness is more critical to me. Whether you choose to align yourself to any political group or groupings, it's important that you understand where you're at and who you are and what you're fighting for, and the system you're fighting against. If you then choose to move to the next level and align yourself and join a political party, then you must have that class consciousness.

One propels the other. The industrial activity propels the basis of why you're doing it, and hopefully, educates those who are willing to participate in any industrial action, but don't fully understand the extension of that, which is that you're fighting the system in general. I'm an internationalist, I suppose, like all good Marxists should be, we're internationalists. The working class is not defined by borders.

I've often cried out at stop-work meetings, 'we need a Lenin of today to take us forward, because we're just not getting it.' We're not getting it from our industrial structures, and that's not to cast anything upon individuals, it's just in general. I've always been highly critical of the Labor Party, even though I vote for them; there isn't much alternative.

I'm critical of the industrial movement tying itself too closely to [*the Labor Party*]. A previous leader of the SUA once told me that another long-term SUA leader, Elliott once said, 'don't ever give your industrial disputes or your political disputes to the ACTU or the ALP; they're the graveyard of any cause.' And I'm very conscious of that. And so, yes, my primary role and motivation is to make sure the

workers in the industry I work in understand why they're being called on to go on strike, or why they're being called on to follow a particular direction to achieve even just their industrial gains.

It's a political linkage that is missing now, particularly since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. There's been nobody at the wheel steering us or enlightening the working-class membership in a proper understanding of capitalism. You see the working-class rhetoric in our own *Maritime Worker* journal, but there's not very much action, until the need for defensive action, it's more a reaction to events than any expected long-term plan or strategy before predictable events or emerging patterns by capital's ongoing attacks.

Here, we're relying, really, upon the Labor Party to deliver, and it has never delivered. For example, on a secure legislated shipping sector. And so, this is the trap that union bureaucracies fall into in social democracy. You would never have thought that from the SUA. You would never have thought that from the MUA. You'd never have thought that would ever have happened, but it has.

And now it's even moved a stage further; you've gone from rank-and-file activity to a bureaucracy that appoints officials now, in interim roles rather than seek the endorsement of the membership until the next election cycle. This one-time rank and file organisation now openly objects to dissent. I went to a national conference in 2020. The national secretary got up and condemned 'fifth columnists', 'white anting', 'dissenters'. While I wasn't named and it wasn't personally directed at me, he was obviously targeting me. What does it reveal within the leadership? It exposes a Stalinist mentality, meaning, you toe the line or you're on the outer. While not sent to a 'Gulag' I have recently had my own equivalent 'show trial' by the Queensland Branch Executive.

Jeff: One of the ways that this tension is manifested is the way that disputes, or the outcomes of disputes, are interpreted. I think, in some respects, this goes back to the question of the role of the union in a broader context of class struggle. The outcomes of some disputes, and I'm thinking here specifically of something like the 1998 Patrick's lock-out, have been claimed as victories despite some quite considerable costs to members in terms of jobs and conditions. To claim something like that as a victory is possible only if one accepts that to protect the union as an entity is more important than the price that members might have to pay in terms of loss of conditions and jobs. Protecting the union is ultimately the most important thing, regardless

of what happens to the membership. Do you have a view on whether it's important always to look to protect the union regardless of the cost to the rank and file?

Mike: Look, there's a lot of differing views about the 1998 Patrick's dispute. If you look at it as a single issue, we retained our right to control the waterfront with union labour. But it's the cost, and that's the issue. The cost has been far higher than was originally sought by management – my understanding is that Patrick's were seeking a far lower number of people to be made redundant, with a reasonable payout—redundancy—and there were certainly sufficient numbers, from my understanding at the time, ready to take that redundancy without the industrial action that followed on over the dispute. The cost was higher.

We'll probably argue for a long time over whether that was good or bad. From my viewpoint it was a loss because you lost more than you gained and those agreed impositions in the settlement rolled on to other stevedore companies during their enterprise negotiations.

I think that disputes since the 1990s, including the Patrick's one and the CSL issue, where MUA crews were dragged off the ship at midnight, and similar confrontations with Hutchison which the Queensland branch had to take on in 2015, highlight that the ruling class is determined to smash us and any organised labour, regardless of how much appeasement is conceded at workers' expense.

At the 1999-2000 national conference, which I attended, the major changes under discussion were, firstly, the loss of the roster, and the reduction of MUA crews again. The roster had been used to provide a fair distribution of work through an open system of being allocated work or choosing to take a job. Also, there was a reduction, again, of MUA jobs, basically the caterers—the steward had to go. And there were some other issues. About nine of us continued to contest the 'take the package in full, or not at all' approach. There was no 'let's debate the aspects.' I could accept some things to retain Australian tonnage, but I couldn't accept the continuing loss of our members to appease the shipowners. We'd done enough, my view was.

Nevertheless, the majority ruled against us at conference, the majority consisting of about a third caterers—stewards—who were close to retirement anyway, who were going to get the best redundancy the union could ever get for anybody up till that time. Nine of us opposed it, particularly because of the loss of the roster. Well, we lost, and we ended up with company employment. And that

was the intent, of course. And with company employment, I knew from my experience on English ships what was coming. All the suck-holes rise to the surface.

Jeff: And it opens the door to blacklisting.

Mike: It opens the door to picking heads, blacklisting and denial of work opportunity. Initially, there was two structures out of that with the loss of the roster; one was a company-employed database, and the other one was a union-structured database. And of course, where do you think the employers would go? Everybody crawled over to the employers' database. They kept themselves on the union database too, but you didn't get too much work out of the union database. So that led to further disillusionment with the leadership decision making of that time. That was really when you see the demise of the intent to fight and struggle.

The Fight to Save the *Australian Enterprise*

One of the last blues I was personally involved in was in the late 90s; the *Australian Enterprise* dispute. The rank-and-file members were determined to win that dispute, because accepting the intention of the company would have meant the total loss of the last two container ships manned and operated and flagged by Australia. They were operated by CMA-CGM, the French company which had taken over the Australian National Line (ANL) fleet as a result of the betrayal by Labor and Liberal governments.

Jeff: Tell me a bit more about it.

Mike: Well, I had been on the ship for several swings by then, and it was on what they called the AAX consortium, which is a consortium of various companies and ships running from Asia back to Australia.

On this trip back from Singapore, the skipper called us all up and told us that 'the ship is finishing up under CMA-CGM ownership'. Or 'being taken out of the run,' I think were the words used. We decided that that's not good enough. We understood that there was a commitment to keep some parts of the ANL fleet. So, what happened was, we decided as a crew that we weren't going to cop it, that we would start a campaign to save the ship, and that's what we did. Good rank and file decision-making at shipboard level; we had no consultation at that stage with the leadership, it was 'our' decision, but we also expected them to support us.

We get to Brisbane, our first port. We arrived about midnight, I think. [*Branch officials*] Mick Carr and Dave Perry came down, and they supported us, but, you know,

it's midnight, what can they do? The ship was scheduled to sail the next morning. In recognising the determination and stand the crew were taking, they said, 'that's fine, we're aware of it now.'

We then get to Sydney. [*National official Paddy*] Crumlin came on board along with the branch secretary, I think, and outlined the difficulties and all the usual crap—of what we faced, and in my opinion, a testing of our determination. We said 'no, this crew is determined to take the course of action we had decided upon, and we assume the second crew will do the same, that we're going to have an industrial blue over this at some stage.' Crumlin said, 'well, if you let us manage the next stage of discussions and interaction, we support you; the branch supports you, Coombs supports you.' I said, 'that's fine, but you make no decisions.' I was speaking on behalf of the crew, obviously. We said, 'yeah; that's fine, but you make no decisions without consultation with us. We'll make the final decision.' He agreed to that.

We get to Melbourne; we're right at the latter stages of an industrial EBA being signed off, and we took the advice of John Higgins, the branch secretary there, that we didn't want to jeopardise the EBA result. We were still in the company then, ASP, that's a ship management company. And we said, 'ok, but beyond here is Adelaide, and we'll be taking industrial action there.' They agreed to that.

We get to Adelaide where Rick Newman was the branch secretary then. And he listened. He was a wharfie, by the way, and he said, 'look, we'll give you 100 per cent support.' A stop-work meeting was on the next day. We all went up there and addressed the members in Adelaide. They supported our stand. By the time we got back to our ship, Rick had organised the TV and the radio and said, 'this ship is not leaving till we've got some confirmation that these ships will remain Australian manned and flagged.' They gave us that assurance, but the second assurance was more important, that we didn't bypass Fremantle, which was the last leg on the way back up to Singapore. We got that, so we left after 24, maybe 48 hours. We were buoyed with all that and it fortified our view that we're telling the officials what we want, not them telling us what they want.

Jeff: So did you get a written agreement?

Mike: At that stage, no; it was all verbal, from the branch secretary, and so we sailed to Freo, Wally Pritchard was the branch secretary then, and he came down with Dean Somers, who was the deputy, I think, at that stage, and we told them what

Australian Enterprise, Melbourne 1973
c/o https://www.shipsnostalgia.com/media/australian-enterprise.423539/

we're doing, and they supported us. So, the following day, we had to appear in court, and the company had made many mistakes by then; they'd sent affidavits out to the ship with what they were charging us with for delaying the vessel; laws of tort and all its commercial legislation.

Jeff: This is in the Federal Court?

Mike: Yeah, this is the Federal Court. So, this is commercial legislation, not industrial. But they made the mistake of sending the charge affidavits to the skipper, and all he did was call up the two delegates—myself as the chief steward and the deck delegate—and he just showed us the cover pages. Well, we appeared in court the next morning, four of us went up there, and the judge said, 'well, have all the members who are respondents received the charges?' 'No, all we've got is the two pages from the skipper.' 'Oh, well', said the Judge, 'you'd better go back.' So, it was a good delaying tactic by the judge for us, but he was following the law, of course.

Anyway, we go back and there was no court hearing the next day. Unfortunately, the skipper was meddling and attempting to undermine our solidarity in the mess room, trying to appeal to people to waver, and we told him to keep company business upstairs. 'This is a union meeting and you're not here

to do that.' You're respectful to the skipper because he's the skipper, but not when it's union business. We all had to go up to court on the Thursday or Friday. And the long and short of it is that we were instructed by the court not to act collectively, to which we all agreed.

Looking at the faces of the ANL representatives, they must have thought, 'well, that's it; it's all over.' And some of our blokes were saying, 'well, is that it? Is it all over now?' I'm saying, 'no, it's not over; did you hear what the bloke said? You cannot act collectively. That doesn't stop you from acting individually.' And that was reinforced to them by the barrister representing us. There was still a little bit of unease because we'd been six days on strike by then; and we continued to hear about threats from ASP that they'd stop our pay, and we'd all go to gaol. All the usual threats that come with taking industrial action. Even good Aussie seafarers that had been involved in the union's industrial stuff all their working lives had not faced court before. For me, it's the first time I'd faced court. But you're fortified with the knowledge that a lot of it is bluff; who's bluffing who best? And so we all gave the commitments outlined above, and the judge didn't impose any orders against us. We returned to the ship and each of us was individually asked to sail. All the individuals said no.

Jeff: Individually refused?

Mike: Yes, when on the bridge and the captain asked us if we were prepared to sail, each MUA member responded, 'I'm individually refusing.' So, the bosses were fucked. What happened then is that ANL were hurriedly trying to get another hearing where they could address that issue, and the judge was going on two weeks' holiday the next day. The pressure was on: what are they going to do? We're refusing to sail. We weren't refusing to work; we were just refusing to sail. We'd all work on board as we would do normally. In the meantime, at that last hearing, I'd spoken to the ITF representative, Ross Storer. A good bloke, and I told him what we thought was going to happen.

We'd heard the rumours that they would sack us separately for the action we were taking to save the ship. And he said, 'look, leave it with me, I'll have a picket line down there tomorrow morning.' I said, 'great.' So, Saturday morning, there's no other court case, of course; we're in limbo; what's going to happen? We're still refusing to sail. No notice board was put up – officially, they must put a board up to say they are sailing at such and such a time. If there's no notification, we're not breaking any rules. And there wasn't one up; everyone was at a stalemate. The company didn't know what to do.

The ship's captain didn't know what to do, and the crew were just waiting for the axe.

We'd heard the rumour that ASP were going to sack us for breach of agreement, so we were all cleaning our rooms out just in case, as we normally would to hand over to a legitimate MUA oncoming crew. The other rumour that was even worse, which made us even more steadfast, that ASP was ringing around our own members on leave to come and replace us. Naturally, they all refused. But then a further rumour that CMA-CMG were looking at flying into Australia a foreign crew from Singapore to replace us. Ross told them, 'no way in the world are you going to be doing that.'

Anyway, Saturday morning, Ross is down. He's got the picket line up and the police come on board. They've been told to remove us, but they wouldn't cross the picket line, so that was great.

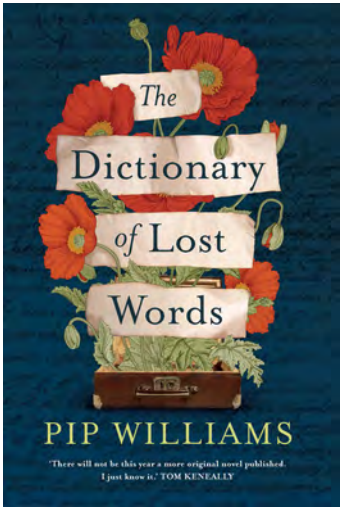
We were all sitting in the mess room. The next thing, Ross Storer rings me up and he says, 'Paddy's been on the phone to John Lyons, who's the CEO, and he's going to give you a ring.' There were mobile phones by that time. So, [Paddy] phoned us. He said they've agreed to keep the ship for at least another year, the two of them. So, when we got that news; we had a little cry and a hug and a laugh, which relieved the tension but was also a recognition that we had stayed the course. I think we sailed that evening, about six o'clock. So that was the *Australian Enterprise* dispute. Further developments unwound on the trip north...but that's another part of the story...

It was a struggle that you had to consciously participate in. There were threats of taking our homes and putting us in gaol. Paddy had assured us that that would never happen, but individually you've still got to face that challenge. And luckily, there was a good, solid, strong crew – there was a couple of waverers, but they got persuaded to remain on course, as they say. That was a good and principled struggle, a dispute focused upon keeping two Australian crewed and flagged container ships on that run.

Book Review

The Dictionary of Lost Words
by Pips Williams
Affirm Press (2020)

Reviewed by **Deborah Jordan**



When Queensland women won the federal vote in 1902, when the bill was passed in the newly federated Parliament, not one of the mainstream newspapers in Queensland reported it. Lost words, lost stories, or suppressed, censored, structurally excluded? Those suffragists who had worked for it for decades were behind the establishment of Queensland's daily Labor newspaper, *The Daily Standard*. Press photographs from this period remind me of the photograph Pip Williams uses of the *Oxford English Dictionary* staff of 1915, with only two demure women amongst all the men in the staff photograph.

The author and story: *The Dictionary of Lost Words* is a novel by English born Australian writer Pip Williams. It was sixth on the list of Australian fiction bestsellers for 2020 and by 2021 it had sold more than 100,000 copies.

The setting is *fin de siècle* England. Esme's mother died at her birth, so she is brought up by her father who works in the 'Scriptorium', where James Murray and a team of lexicographers compile *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Supposedly a 'true' story about the lost, excluded words of those used by and about women, Esme, assisted by her servant, nanny and bondmaid, begins to save and record them, during the years leading into the heydays of British suffragettes and World War I. Her granddaughter ends up in South Australia continuing to save words, and parallels are suggested with 'lost' indigenous languages.

The most immediate question after reading this historical fiction is how to explain its widespread success? Even on the local level, Brisbane City Council purchased 120 hard

copies, all of which were borrowed when I looked for a copy. What in this novel resonates with critics, publishers, and readers? Informal canvassing suggests non-historian readers love it.

For the aesthetic and literary rave reviews, check out https://bookmarks.reviews/reviews/all/the-dictionary-of-lost-words/ The novel has been reviewed widely and received numerous Australian awards. There are over 8,000 reviews in Goodreads. And the author is surely a skilled and engaging writer.

The novel is a refreshing look at English history, tracking and locating women, at a time when so much of the dominant narratives of popular history are written as if only one gender existed. Is its success more about the impoverishment of popular history than the gendered implications of the novel?

In some contexts, *The Dictionary of Lost Words* is billed as a dialogue about the importance of words in contrast to actions, with the women as victims without saved words in the dictionary seeking to rectify their omission. This recalls the suffragettes' struggle for political equality and the right to vote with their famous call 'deeds not words'. And Pip Williams' privileging of words is fun and provocative; she does it well. But I am left wondering about the power of the masculinist Christian precept *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*, while our earth heats up.

If we address the 'political' logic of the novel, in terms of the women's movement and feminism, it is clearly on more shaky ground, and much is nostalgic, stereotyped, and sentimental, perhaps allowable while Esme is young but not as an adult. I must admit I dislike historical fiction. Some of the tropes are merely irritating, such as the private girls' school where Esme is bullied, with no recognition of the importance of segregated education in that era. Some of it raises interesting issues about exactly how women were inducted into the paid labour force through paternal love.

Yet I find the lack of historical imagination of alternative realities, especially visceral experiences, very limiting. The novel lost me in its descriptions of victim Esme's naff sexual encounter and pregnancy. It gets worse when the saviour appears in the form of a young white male lover printer, whom the author must kill off. It's neat in its readings of 'bondmaid' and motherlove, bastard and 'lie-child', but the introduction of the Kaurna dictionary—a documentation of an Aboriginal langauge from South Australia—seems opportunistic and simplistic in its representation of settler colonialism and oral language cultures. I prefer words *and* deeds.

Obituaries

Owen Doogan 1957-2022
by Travis O'Brien

Owen Doogan

born 31/12/1957, died 27/05/2022

Owen had three great loves in his life. First was his family - his wife Vivienne and children, Siobhan and Liam. Another great love was the Celtic Football club; but of course his great love was the union movement.

Owen was born on the 31 December 1957 in Glasgow, Scotland to his parents Mary and Hugh Doogan who had emigrated from Ireland four years earlier as economic refugees. He spent his summers back in his parent's homeland of County Donegal, in a little place called Glenthornan with his Uncle John. One story of those summers that sticks in Siobhan's mind is of him falling asleep in a random farmer's shed on the long walk home from a dance with his cousin, probably after having a skin full.

From an early age Owen loved football. Celtic was his world.

When Owen was still in High School, he joined his local Labour Party branch in Knightswood. The Labor Party would be a constant throughout Owen's life.

He worked on election campaigns from a young age. At that time Scottish Young Labour was called the Young Socialists, a fitting name for Owen's views.

He dropped out of university and got a job in the railway as a guard in 1978.

Naturally he became very involved in his union, the National Union of Railwaymen, now known as the RMT. He worked on many political campaigns and industrial activities while working as a guard.

At 28, Owen was appointed to a role in the national office of his union in London. This marked the beginning of almost 35 years of working in the union movement.

When Owen reached London, his activism grew. He spoke of the RMT allowing the National Union of Miners to move into their building during the major strike of the Thatcher years 1984-85. He told stories about having conversations with Arthur Scargill at what was perhaps the most pivotal moment of the history of the union movement in the UK.

He also worked on campaigns against apartheid in South Africa. He lived for a time in a house that was filled with ANC members in the UK on political asylum.

Another pivotal day in Owen's life was the 27 of May 1988 when Owen went to pick up his sister's mate, Vivienne, from Heathrow airport.

He was late. And as Vivienne was to learn he was *always* late.

Owen said his sister told him to look after Vivienne. She may have meant for the trip, but I guess he interpreted that as meaning for life.

Owen and Vivienne decided to make a go of it. They were in a long-distance relationship from Townsville to London for 18 months before they settled in Brisbane in 1990.

In 1990 Owen commenced a job as an organiser with the Queensland Professional Officers Association, which after mergers became Together. He'd moved across the world and was still able to follow his passion for unionism.

Not long into his time at the POA he received a phone call from Les Crofton, the secretary of the Australian Railway Union, offering him a job as an industrial officer. He said yes.

The ARU, now known as the RTBU, became a huge part of the next 30 years of Owen's life.

He loved being back in a railway union.

In 2001, Les handed over the reins of the ARU to Owen as Acting Secretary. He won the next election to become the Secretary. For 19 years, Owen and the team he surrounded

himself with led the union through many industrial disputes. To name a few: WorkChoices, Your Rights at Work, asset sales and—something he was very proud of—modernising his union's views on women and women's involvement.

In 1992 Vivienne and Owen welcomed their first child, Siobhan.

In 1994 Owen became an Australian citizen. If someone asked him where he was from, he'd always say Australia. He considered himself Australian. He wasn't someone who dreamt of returning to Scotland or Ireland for good. He'd say, "Thirty-three Scottish winters is enough for a lifetime".

In 1996 Liam was born - long and skinny like his Dad once was.

As a family Vivienne, Owen, Siobhan and Liam went on holidays - Christmas on the Gold Coast, winter in the Bunya Mountains and traveling back to Scotland and Ireland every three years.

Owen wanted his children to be connected to where he came from and to know their family. His goal was to instil in his children a social conscience. Dinner time conversations often covered politics, news events and history. *The 7:30 Report* was religious viewing in the Doogan household. Sometimes the kids would be watching their Dad on *Stateline*.

He succeeded in this goal. Both his children have a keen sense of what is right and care deeply for others and the advancement of those with less voice or power than themselves.

As the kids grew up, Vivienne and Owen indulged more in their passion for travel. They had always had an ethos that you don't wait till you're retired to enjoy life.

For Vivienne, Owen was her rock. He supported her throughout her career, he was always in her corner. They are both headstrong passionate people. They came together to create a beautiful life, which in no way was perfect but was truly theirs.

When Vivienne went to work full time in her union, Together, Owen would joke that she was invading his space, but really he was incredibly proud of her change of career and her leadership skills.

One afternoon near the end of his life Owen sat down with Vivienne and Siobhan and said he couldn't believe that someone like Vivienne

Owen Doogan, Les Croften and Dale Jacobsen at the BLHA event to launch Dale's book in 2011
c/o Dale Jacobsen

would have wasted her time on him and that she'd be willing to set up a life with him. He was grateful for Vivienne and she was the love of his life.

For Siobhan as an adult, Owen was not just a kind supportive and proud father, he was always her sounding board and mentor, as she began her career in the union movement and later in politics.

At 21, when Siobhan moved to Darwin determined to create her own path and name, Owen was incredibly proud of her decision. Owen would often say he'd 'been out walking with Siobhan'. When Owen went for his daily evening walk he would call her nearly every night.

They spoke about everything, but the conversations usually came back to their shared passion – organising and politics.

Owen was incredibly proud of the compassionate, intelligent, headstrong woman she is today and never let her wonder, always telling her how much he loved her and Liam and how proud he was of both of them.

When Liam was little, he and Owen shared a joint love, football.

Much to Vivienne's disgust, when painting the house Owen took it upon himself to paint goals on their carport for Liam to practice on, smashing balls into the carport and later the fence, leaving many dints, some made by Owen too.

Later as Liam grew up, they shared a love of music, history, and philosophy. Owen was very impressed by his son's knowledge of music, his ability to recall and interpret history and his understanding of philosophy.

In November 2020, Owen retired as secretary of the RTBU after 19 years. But sadly, in December he was diagnosed with liver cancer. He discovered he had hepatitis C, undiagnosed from a blood transfusion, decades earlier in the UK.

He continued to enjoy life in between treatments, having more holidays with Vivienne, including returning to Scotland and Ireland and visiting Siobhan in Darwin.

Owen couldn't drink any more, but he still enjoyed his escapism of sitting in the pub drinking non-alcoholic beer and reading his book. He was known by name at the Montague Hotel and Brisbane Brewery for this activity.

On 27 May 2022, Owen passed away at St Vincents Hospital holding Vivienne's hand and with Liam in the room. His lasts words to Vivienne that morning were 'happy anniversary". In a full circle of life, Owen left 34 years to the day since he first met his love Vivienne at Heathrow Airport.

Owen will be remembered as a loving husband, father, uncle, brother, mate, and comrade. With a lot of his own quirks. He was a man who cared deeply for others and spent his life working to make society better. He has left a huge impact on those who knew him and he will not easily be forgotten.

Travis O'Brien is a barrister-at-law in private practice, and former official of the Finance Sector Union, and Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union, Construction and General Division.

The RTBU Queensland Branch ran a celebration of Owen's life on 3rd June 2022. The event can viewed on Facebook at:

https://www.facebook.com/RTBUQldBranch/videos/417128543616524

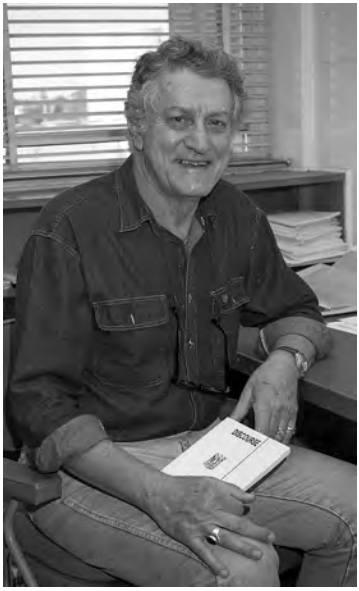
Salvatore D'Urso 1927-2022
by Dan O'Neill

Salvatore D'Urso

born 26/5/1927, died 16/6/2022.

Most people would have known him as Ted D'Urso, but his given name was Salvatore D'Urso. For he was proudly Sicilian on both his father and his mother's side. They were both immigrants from Sicily and part of the famous 'Red North' that was later to elect the only Communist ever, Fred Paterson, as a member of an Australian parliament. His father Alfio, to whose cane knife Ted gave pride of place on one of the bookshelves in his study, and his mother Luciana, both of whom Ted venerated all his life, conceived Ted out of wedlock on the Atherton Tableland in 1927, but Ted was to be born in their wedded state in Riposto in Sicily on the 26th of May in 1928, and his sister Concetta two years later.

The small family returned to Innisfail, and to Depression-time Australia in 1931. Ted did his primary and secondary education in Innisfail, Charters Towers, and Cairns. In the background of these studies



Ted D'Urso, 27 April 1993, c/o S909 image 7284, UQ Archives

was a close and affectionate home life sustained by the cane-cutting work of his father, and the billiard saloon that his father ran after being obliged by sickness to retire from the cane fields in his thirties after fifteen years of hard work. In his political memoir *Outlook Critical* Ted conveys the extracurricular enjoyment he derived from the age of nine learning to play billiards,

and eventually half-running the saloon when his father, despite having been a naturalised British subject for fifteen years, was interned for two years as an enemy alien and sent south to captivity in 1942.

In 1940, after passing Junior with excellent results, Ted applied to enter teaching. The discrimination (because of the unjust internment of his father) that he suspected and that kept him from succeeding in this lifelong vocational ambition, not only then but also later, was not to be verified for fifty years when his file was examined by a historian friend in the Department of Education. Ted was obliged to spend time working in an uncongenial public service job in the Railways. Later the same was to happen in statistics. But it was Alfio's insistence that, despite the setback to his teaching hopes, he should, with Alfio's financial assistance, study for Senior in Cairns, that was to set Ted on his eventual path.

A Commonwealth University Scholarship enabled Ted to start a Commerce degree at the University of Queensland in Brisbane in early 1947. Studying Economic History and Economics, and then Philosophy as part of his degree started Ted's lifelong interest in political ideas that was to characterise his subsequent intellectual life.

In his second year Ted could relax his dogged pursuit of good grades sufficiently to take an intense interest in student activities. It was a time when, under the post-war Rehabilitation Scheme, there were many ex-servicemen at the university, with more than the usual undergraduates' experience of the world. In the wake of the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union, and the great role played in the defeat of Nazism by its counterpart in Russia, the Communist Party of Australia had expanded its industrial influence and its membership greatly. This was reflected in the student life of the university, and in due course, as well as feeling what he described as a magnetic pull to the *Semper Floreat* student newspaper office, Ted became a member of what was called the Radical Club, 'the campus offshoot of the Communist Party'. The misreporting of a meeting of the Club addressed by Mick O'Brien of the Australian Railways Union by the anti-communist *Courier Mail* intensified Ted's radicalism. It was in September 1948 that he joined the Communist Party.

The membership was not to last long. In 1949 campus Communists fiercely supported the nation-wide

strike of the Coal Miner's Federation. In his memoir Ted called the strike, which was based on 'the refusal of coal miners to use more advanced extraction machinery which threatened their safety' to increase production outputs, 'perhaps the fiercest industrial conflict of the 20th century and a grim confirmation of the Marxist-Leninist theory of the class character of the state under capitalism'. When the Chifley Labor government used troops to break the strike Ted thought that it 'inflicted a historic defeat on the working-class movement and at the same time considerably weakened the power of the Communist Party within it'. But this opinion turned out to be most unwelcome to the Party Leadership, for both the Sydney *Tribune* and the Brisbane *Guardian* ran the line that it was a great victory for the Australian working class. Ted thought this was a transgression of the Leninist principle of total honesty towards the working class, and a loss of moral credibility. He wisely chose to resign from the party in the face of the imminent degrading choice between recantation and expulsion. He thus acquired the uncommon pre-1956/1968 honour of opposing the Stalinist deviation well ahead of others whom he was later to meet in one of the world's many Trotskyist factions, including the local party's ideological hitman who had been sent to put the hard word on him.

Recently, since Ted's death, I have had the task of looking through his books and papers. Among the books was one that he mentions in his memoir as having been bought on the 30th of May 1950. It is *The God That Failed: Six Studies in Communism*. I'll quote Ted directly:

> 'The contributors were famous writers who had been dedicated fighters for communism but who had come to reject its Stalinisation. The writers were Arthur Koestler, Ignazio Silone, Richard Wright, Andre Gide, Louis Fischer and Stephen Spender. Their collective recitals of disillusionment were unanswerable. It was this book, together with Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* and *The Yogi and the Commissar*, which convinced me of the rightness of my own conceptions and feelings, and led to the decision to resign from the Party'.

When Ted completed his Commerce degree he got a temporary job in the public service, and then made

Ted at the University of Queensland, 1947
c/o Salvatore D'Urso

another attempt to get a job teaching. He was successful in getting into the Teachers Training College, but was, again for what turned out to be political reasons, overlooked for secondary teaching training at the end of the year. An appeal to the Director General of Education succeeded. But when he got his first teaching appointment it turned out to have again the feel of discrimination about it. Instead of being sent to a secondary school it was to be to a sort of exile. He was to be the 'headteacher' of Lake Euramoo State School, 'a one teacher operation, in a rather isolated pocket of run-down dairy farms on the Atherton Tableland'. Here he was at the age of 23, unable for financial reasons to resign, isolated, sleeping among surplus school furniture in a classroom adjoining the one he taught in, with a mere 22 pupils and needing to walk to a nearby farmhouse for breakfast and evening meals. But he decided to make of it a stoical effort of self-development. He completed a course of planned reading of such classics as Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, *The Odyssey* of Homer, Benvenuto Cellini's *Autobiography*, Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, the Bible, and his favourite poet, T.S. Eliot, and books of Ancient History. The other day when I went through his books these volumes were still on the shelves. Ted had beautiful legible handwriting, and a very full exercise book of his notes on T.S. Eliot was one of the things I read out to him in his near-blindness on one of my latest monthly visits to him.

Back in Brisbane early in 1952, Ted got an interview with the then Deputy Director General of Education, himself formerly unfairly passed over for a position, and he was able to confirm that his placement at Euramoo was politically motivated banishment. The place was 'the second most isolated spot on the Atherton Tableland after Topaz on the western lee of Mt Bartle Frere'.

Ted completed an Arts degree to add to his Commerce degree. The

years from 1953 to 1955 were without political involvement, but began his entry into secondary school teaching, first in Malanda on the Tableland and then at Salisbury in Brisbane.

Kruschev's de-Stalinisation attempt 'infected' Hungary but led to the Soviet occupation in 1956. This had world-wide repercussions. In Australia, among other things it led to the publication by Helen Palmer, daughter of the novelists Vance and Nettie Palmer, of the magazine *Outlook*, a liberal-socialist bi-monthly. So soon there were a lot of other ex- Party members and other leftists belatedly joining Ted in his more independent form of what he continued to describe as 'classic Marxism'. Palmer suggested that discussion groups form around the journal in the capital cities. Ted soon became the Brisbane go-to person. The Brisbane group survived till 1962, and the journal into the 70s.

After the days of The Movement had sent a lot of ALP right-wingers into the DLP, and in Queensland, into the QLP, it seemed to Ted a good idea for a while to join the ALP, first in the Yeronga and then in the East Brisbane branch. He remained in it till 1967, when, living in Armidale he left it, disappointed by its 'ideological flaccidity and ineffectiveness against the destructive tendencies of capitalism'. Ted is only stating widely shared views on the left to the present day when he makes his valedictory remarks on leaving the ALP: 'Although I supported the ALP at election time as the lesser of the two blights of Australian political life, my adherence to classical Marxism remains unshaken. It remained the lodestar of my political journey as I entered my forties.'

Ted's next explicit political move was in the context of what he saw emerging in the 60s as the first New Left, the British movement around the merger of the two journals *Universities and Left Review* and *New Reasoner* to become the New Left Review. Ted associated this period with what he saw as a sort of rebirth of the relevance of Trotsky as a political guide in the aftermath of the Hungarian events. He found he was being sent material by a fictitious being called A. Mc Lean, PO Box 13, Balmain, New South Wales. This turned out to be Nick Origlass, who'd helped create a branch of the Fourth International way back in the 1930s, leaving the Party when Stalin exiled Trotsky from the USSR.

When Ted got in touch with the Sydney people it turned out that

up here there was already a Brisbane comrade, Ken Kemshead, who when met introduced Ted to others. When Ted married in August 1962, the meetings of the group were held at his home in Woolloongabba, when his wife Janet also became a participant. Their particular variant of the FI defined the Soviet Union as a 'bureaucratically deformed workers state'. They practised 'entrism' in relation to the ALP. Ted's retrospective view of the group was that it was effectively 'a left-radical discussion circle'.

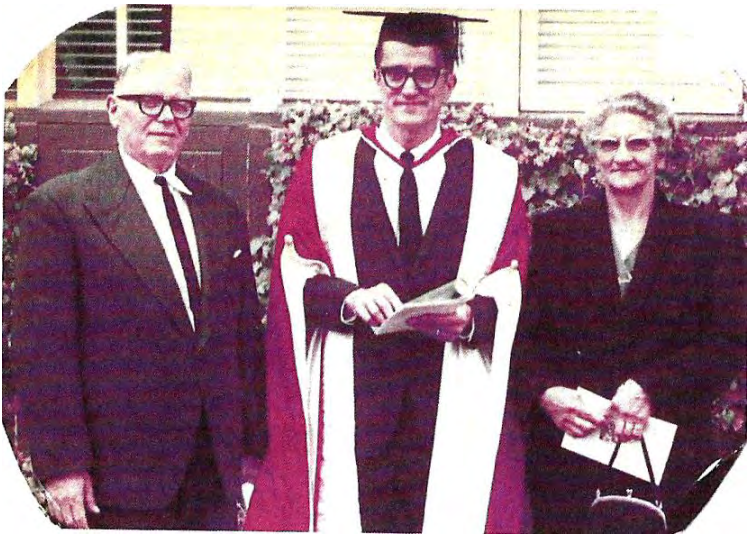
Probably more consequential in that time was Ted's involvement in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, a Brisbane offshoot of the British CND, which his wife and a friend who taught Linguistics at UQ, Liz Tarnawski created in the last months of 1962. By that time Ted had left secondary teaching and was seconded to a lecturing appointment at Kelvin Grove Teachers College. Janet took the most prominent role in CND until Ted's role in the College was made permanent.

CND did local events inspired by the British Aldermaston Marches, and an annual event to commemorate the atomic bombing of Hiroshima on the 6th of August. The members of Brisbane CND were interrogated by Federal Police when a reprint of the British *Spies for Peace* pamphlet (an exposure of how Britain would be administered in the event of a nuclear attack) appeared in Brisbane.

By early 1965 CND's vitality declined when the attention of radicals was shifting to the Vietnam War. Ted, who'd been teaching at Kelvin Grove for three years, had been appointed to a lecturing position at the University of New England at Armidale.

Ted's courses at Kelvin Grove had included the history of Asia in the 20th century, so he was very much aware of the Vietnamese independence struggle since World War II. He was a welcome addition to the small group of leftists at the university. He wrote against the war and organised a series of Sunday afternoon seminars that tried to put the conflict into the wider framework of radical social theory.

The next important phase of Ted's political life began with his appointment at the end of 1970 to a Senior Lectureship in the Department of Education at the University of Queensland. He arrived back in Brisbane in the middle one of the most tumultuous periods of radi-



Ted with his parents, Alfio and Luciana, after receiving his doctorate 11 April 1970
image c/o Salvatore D'Urso

cal protest in one of the two most radical campuses in Australia. As he wrote in his memoir:

> 'The volatility of student radicalism was not only stirred by the war in Vietnam as on the other metropolitan campuses, but more immediately by the repressive stance of the Bjelke-Petersen government on the exercise of civil rights by protestors. The flashpoint in 1971 was the tour by the whites-only South African rugby team the Springboks'.

Ted was not the only recent import from the University of New England. Another who'd already been there a couple of years, was the new Vice-Chancellor Zelman Cowen. His early hopes of charming the student-staff radical movement into more cooperative harmony with the status-quo had been savagely disappointed. Ted records in his memoir the Extraordinary Meeting of the Staff Association that was called to consider the motion, moved by Philosophy lecturer Peter Wertheim, that 'the Vice Chancellor resign his position as Vice Chancellor for the sake of the good health of this university'. Ted notes that it 'was only narrowly defeated with a sizeable number of abstentions.'

It was soon after Ted's arrival that

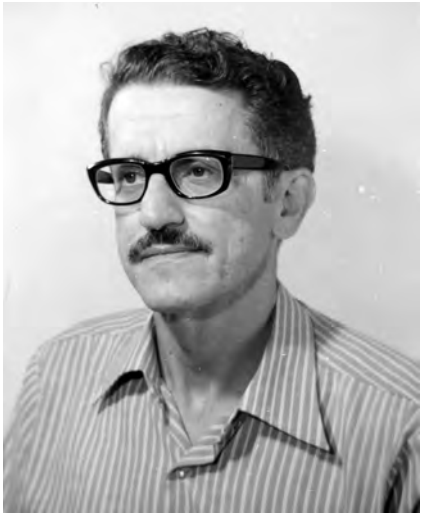
I first made his acquaintance. He invited me to contribute a couple of essays on university education that I had written to a book that he edited called *Counterpoints: Radical Writings in Australian Education*. It was published in early 1971. I was able to observe some of his lecturing and thought it remarkable for its theoretical content. I have encountered some of his former students, and they have uniformly praised him as one of the really stimulating teachers they have had. I remember having later told him that I had in 1972 spent three months in Cuernavaca at Ivan Illich's CIDOC, Centre for Intercultural Documentation, at the time that Illich was conducting seminars to feed into his thinking for the writing of his book *Tools for Conviviality*. Ted had been very enthusiastic about Illich's influential and controversial book *Deschooling Society*. He invited me to be one of two speakers in a panel that would initiate discussion about Illich in one of his classes. The discussion that emerged was much more penetrating than would have followed a mere lecture or tutorial. It was fascinating to observe the innovative nature of Ted's teaching techniques.

In his memoir, when he gets to this point, having recorded that he got his doctorate on 11 April 1970, he notes that there is a gap in academic teaching between theory and practice, and that, under the influence of his Marxism, as a radical intellectual, he was less interested in the sort of so-called 'research' that might lead to promotion than in being a politically committed teacher who would give political activity priority. One of Ted's heroes, along with Erich Fromm, and Lewis Mumford, was, as he frequently told me, the sociologist and activist-intellectual C Wright Mills. He would follow his example and be a 'cultural workman', connecting theory and practice.

This was the kind of thinking that led to one of Ted's remarkable ventures, the setting up of the Council for Democracy in Schools (CDS). It was triggered by his critique of the Radford Scheme of continuous school-based assessment, which was ostensibly about giving schools more freedom to participate in the continuous assessment of students' work, but which was constrained by the state-enforced bureaucratic need to ensure comparability across schools. Without going into detail at this late stage, suffice it to say that Ted's calling of a meeting to form this organisation in early March 1973 was in accord with the zeitgeist that was in favour, across a broad

front, of democratisation of institutions, especially educational ones. Already in July 1970 at the University of Queensland, about a hundred students and staff had published a democratising critique of the totality and most of the individual parts of the university. This new focus by Ted on the secondary level of education was timely enough to gather to its founding conference on the weekend of 30 June-1 July something between 350 to 400 participants. By the later part of September 1974 Ted was being fully initiated into the mystic confraternity of 'hateful freaks and monsters' that powerful right-wing Bjelke-ites had begun to vilify from about the end of 1967 on. There was a full afternoon's debate about CDS and Ted's role in it in the Queensland Parliament on the 19th of September 1974, (freakish) with a sequel on the 24th of September, (monstrous).

Ted saw the Whitlam dismissal and the Fraser government of December 1975 as the local variant of the inauguration of a neo-conservative period, a 'tectonic movement of capitalist forces that brought Margaret Thatcher to power in 1978 and Ronald Reagan to the American presidency in the election of 1980.' The 1983 Hawke government was just a false dawn, and the subsequent



Ted D'Urso, 21 February 1973
c/o S909 image 1514, UQ archives

thirteen years were just as capitulatory to deregulated neo-capitalism with 'Friedmanite monetarism, and Hayekian 'neoliberalism.'

The period from the late 70s to his retirement in 1993 was, I suspect, a constant temptation to pessimism. But his increasingly acute sense of its distinctiveness led to a great deepening of his thought. He went to Oregon on study leave in 1977, and it was there in the United States, in the belly of the beast as useful cliché has it, that he reports having felt that 'a threshold into a portentous time of global disasters had been crossed'. One of Ted's favourite writers was Robert Heilbroner. Here is

the passage from his 1975 book *An Inquiry into the Human Prospect* that struck Ted as giving the framework for useful thought about the future from that time forward:

> 'There is a question in the air, more sensed than seen, like the invisible approach of a distant storm, a question that I would hesitate to ask aloud did I not believe it existed unvoiced in the minds of many: 'Is there hope for man?'[...]the question asks whether we can imagine that future other than a continuation of the darkness, cruelty, and disorder of the past; worse, whether we do not foresee in the human prospect a deterioration of things, even an impending catastrophe of fearful dimensions'.

It was this darkly realistic perspective that directed Ted's thought and activity from the late 70s into the last decade and more of his teaching life until his retirement in 1993, and beyond that into the very fruitful deepening of his ongoing philosophical quest up until the day of his death. Which last phrase is not mere rhetorical cadence, for I visited him in the Wesley hospital a few hours before his death, to observe him putting philosophical views about the nature of the cosmos to Pete, the obviously admiring male nurse who was attending to his nightly medication.

This last period of Ted's thinking and acting was begun on his return from study leave, with the introduction of a new advanced level course on the nature and ideology of industrial capitalism, exploring the ecological unsustainability of its inbuilt growth imperative, and looking at social alternatives and the educational ways to assist their realisation. In his political memoir he notes that in the circumstances where a globalising neo-capitalism had subjugated and silenced traditional voices of protest one faced a rather confusing set of options, 'the tactics of reformism' within the system, or 'the strategy of stealthy revolution' in a perspective that went beyond one's own lifetime. 'Was it possible to meld the alternatives to avoid the either-or bind of traditional logic?' From the outside, as time wore on, the perceived emotional tone of this Sophie's choice must have invited such short summaries as that of even the most sympathetic of Ted's observers, for example that of Jeff Rickertt, whose brilliant editing was responsible for the appearance of Ted's privately written memoir in print: 'He hated capitalism

but was pessimistic about the possibilities of replacing it'. Although retaining 'classic Marxism', even as his deeper philosophical probings resituated it in the structure of his whole philosophy of life, his activism was reduced perforce to what he described as 'passive membership of Green groups' and 'support [for] any struggle for social equity within the system while also assisting action that might safeguard the planet from capitalist despoliation'. Ted confessed that: 'This 'solution' might be intellectually messy, but the imperatives of life rarely permit neat resolution of contradictions'. Taking a rather ironical view of himself Ted thought of this stance of his from the 1980s on as 'meditative political inactivism'. But which of us present or erstwhile activists, living on the present bare and rocky ground, is going to throw the first stone?

The last part of Ted's memoir briefly covers the period after this retirement. In short summary he says: 'When its strangeness quickly passed and I adjusted to its freedom, I put my metaphysical house in order through a closer acquaintance with Zen Buddhism and a working theory of creative cosmic evolution through a blend of my limited scientific understanding and philosophical speculation'. That is quoted from the second-last paragraph, but lest one think that he issues finally into any Schopenhauerian pessimism, the very last paragraph speaks of his unabated study of the developments of late capitalism and its ideology of postmodernism and the continuing capacity of Marxist theory to make sense of all this. In a way that is reminiscent of Terry Eagleton's recent book *Why Marx Was Right*, Ted quotes the famous line: 'All that is solid melts into air, all that is sacred is profaned', and concludes:

> 'Thus the spiral of my political life has now ended at the point it began in my youth. Social truths then felt with passionate intensity are now confirmed through experience with equally passionate clarity'.

If I may speak in conclusion about my own friendship with Ted, it intensified in the years of the new millennium, especially after I myself also retired. I fell into the practice of visiting Ted in his house at 33 Harts Road Indooroopilly every first Thursday morning of the month, and spending hours in conversation, often reading aloud and discussing various texts, whether sociological, historical or philosophical, that either he or I had re-

cently come across. From the very first time I entered his study I was greatly impressed by the many folders of material that he had compiled over many years, all classified into subsets according to subject-matter, theme, genre. Much of it was accompanied by Ted's marginal commentary in his beautiful totally legible handwriting. Many a memorable passage either excerpted or transcribed, from a huge variety of books, ancient and modern, many collections of epigrams, in poetry and prose, much of it pondered over years, much of it memorised accurately, and available for immediate quotation. What immediately came into my mind was that famous remark of Socrates in Plato's *Apology*, that the unexamined life is not worth living. Here was someone who lived by submitting his ongoing experience to examination constantly. There is much I could go more deeply into about this, but for the moment I want to bring this retrospect to an end by suggesting that one main significance of the life of Ted D'Urso is that, beyond his importance for those of us who began to be politically conscious with reference to the issues raised for us by the world, the Australia, the Queensland of the sixties, by giving us a bridge back to the activism of the years of the Cold War and World War II, there is a more universal importance.

He is a contemporary exemplar of the sort of life that has been made possible in the West by the rise of philosophical thinking in Ancient Greece. This gave rise to a way of asking rather speculative questions about the constitution of the universe, and about human life within it. These questions made it possible not to simply take for granted that the current mythology told you the main things you needed to know beyond where to get food, shelter, and warmth. Philosophy itself could be, not just oral lucubrations or written tracts, but a way of life, a way of living more fully.

In the most recent years of our friendship, under the more and more stringent necessities of coping with growing old—Trotsky called it the most surprising thing that happens to a man—Ted became at first more strictly housebound, and increasingly, within that, even bedridden, and finally just about blind for the purposes of that unrelenting avocation of reading that had been his very lifeline. He was more and more dependent on being read to, as a stimulus to discussion. This is what led to my coming upon,

among his typewritten papers, a paper written between October 1997 and February 1998. It was headed 'WHAT I BELIEVE: AN OUTLINE'. It was a whole series of ordered propositions numbered in strict sequence within subsections, a la Spinoza, going from THE UNIVERSE to PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY to HUMAN SOCIETY to EPISTEMOLOGY to SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY to (Ted's former professional discipline, I suppose) EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY.

Reading this out really blew me away, as they say. I realised that Ted wasn't ever just starting with 'classic Marxism'. You had to get to it, bit by bit, from first principles, the way Marx got to it, but perhaps starting from where you were, not from where Marx was. That way you could say, like Marx himself, that you weren't (just) 'a Marxist'. This was a new way of looking at whether Ted had wound up in the grip of 'pessimism' or not. Ted's first proposition couldn't possibly have been Marx's, for it was pretty much non-nineteenth century: '1(i) The universe "popped" into being through the "singularity" of the "big bang". It came out of a vacuum, i.e. out of nothingness, an eruption of "creative energy" from the void, as a "vacuum fluctuation". Talk about starting from first principles! I won't go into any of the later propositions, except to say that the phrase 'classical Marxism' doesn't get a guernsey till, many many pages later, logically-arrived-at subordinate proposition number III (D) (iv) turns up in its appointed place.

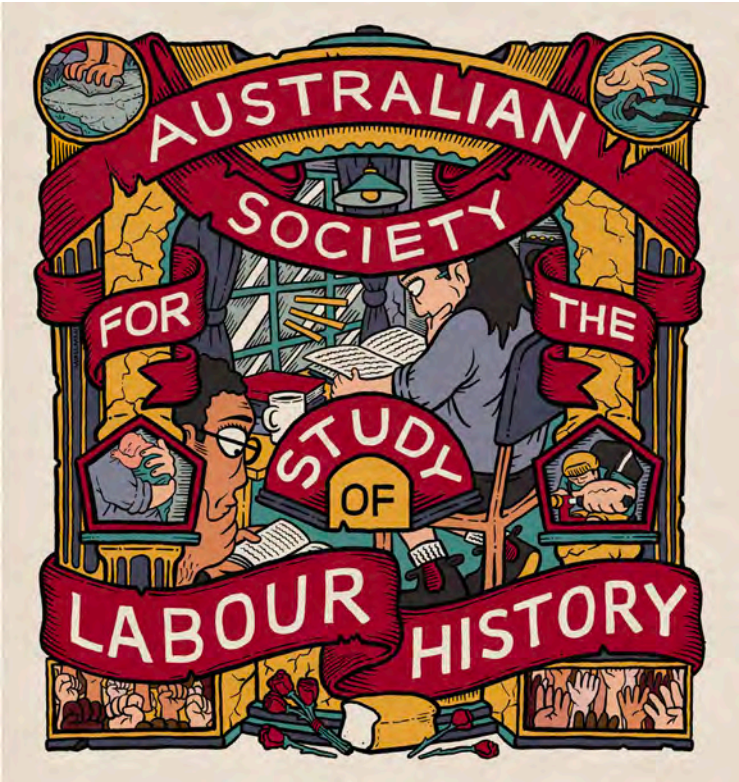
When I finished reading this out, and realised I'd have to read it again at leisure to really get a grip on it, I asked Ted, who was usually pretty paranoid about any of his stuff going astray, if, on a strict condition of bringing it back within minutes, I could take it to the university and photocopy it. He said yes, and so copies of it now exist. Which is good for two reasons, because (1) if any of you who read this appreciation of our deceased comrade want to read it you need only get in touch, and (2) I have only to re-read it to be challenged in the appropriate way to confront, as one of Ted's favourite poets, Matthew Arnold, put it, 'this iron time/Of doubts, disputes, distractions, fears'. Not necessarily in Ted's way, but in a way that takes the problem as seriously as he did and goes down as deep for the answers.

Which reminds me finally of something that he asked countless times, doubtless under the inspiration of

Catch 22, 'How does a sane man live in an insane world?' Is that pessimism? I wish he was here to answer. In his absence I can only recall another much-repeated expression of his: 'All real living is meeting and sharing'. Is that optimism? Or just hope?

Vale Salvatore D'Urso.

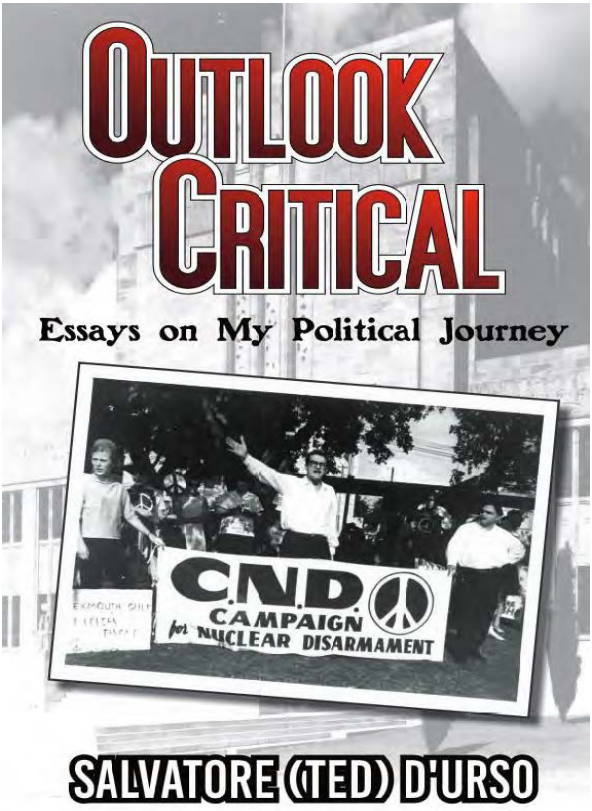
Dan O'Neill taught English at the University of Queensland from 1965 to 2003. He was involved in street protests throughout the period from the sixties to the SEQEB dispute. He currently convenes the 17 Group, a politico-cultural discussion group, as well as a number of reading groups that slowly discuss literary works.



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.

Outlook Critical: Essays on My Political Journey is an inspiring account of political commitment and courage.

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