The Queensland Journal of Labour History

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Brisbane Labour History Association

The Queensland Journal of Labour History

The biannual radical history journal of the Brisbane Labour History Association

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Front Cover Image: Trade union support for a Yes vote in the 14 October 2023 Indigenous Voice referendum c/o **unitedworkers.org.au/voteforvoice/**

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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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The Queensland Journal of Labour History (QJLH) is compiled and published twice a year by the Brisbane (Meanjin) Labour History Association (BLHA), the Queensland branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History. The BLHA 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 Meanjin/Brisbane and Queensland, we support the study of working-class history in its local, national and transnational settings. We also encourage the study of social movements in which workers have participated or which have affected workers' personal, social, political or economic circumstances.

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

Notes for contributors

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

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

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

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

Please ensure that your name, any relevant organisational affiliation and all contact details are included in the article itself as well as in the covering email. Please also send details of any graphics, photographs, maps, drawings, cartoons etc. that might accompany your article.

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Jeff Rickertt

The Usefulness of Labour History

Jeff Rickertt is a radical historian, activist and librarian, and a former BLHA President and editor of this journal. He contributed to *Radical Brisbane: An Unruly History*, and authored *The Conscientious Communist: Ernie Lane and the Rise of Australian Socialism*.

At the 2022 AGM, Jeff explained the BLHA's approach to the telling of labour history, as part of his retiring speech as BLHA President.

Although the BLHA has always endeavoured to deliver history that is accessible to non-academic audiences, in recent years we have consciously sought to generate and promote historical knowledge that is useful to workers and others involved in contemporary struggles. As I finish my final term as BLHA president, I want to take this opportunity to reflect upon what a commitment to providing useful knowledge actually means for an organisation like ours.

In my view, useful history must be critical history; it must subject the past and, by extrapolation, the present to critical analysis. It ought not accept that where we have ar-

rived at as a labour movement or as a society was inevitable. History invites us to question received wisdom and dominant assumptions about the world in which we live, including the strategies and politics adopted by our organisations. It invites unionists to question our very purpose as a movement.

As partisans of the labour cause, labour historians should accept this invitation. We can encourage those who engage with history to ask: why did this outcome occur and not another? Why was this direction taken and not another? What were the possibilities and why were certain options pursued and not others? Critical history seeks to understand why things turned out the way they did.

Such a project runs counter to much of the history we hear and read. It has become something of a mantra that the practice of history is, or ought to be, an exercise in telling stories. History, we are told, is a story-telling art. The best history books are, we hear, those that tell a story well. I suspect that this orthodoxy developed as a healthy corrective to the impenetrable verbosity, jargon, and theoretical density of much academic history. In this respect, it has my full support. However, history as storytelling is also often informed by an assumption that the construction of stories is a practice free of ideology. Somehow, storytelling is apolitical, an innocent act of assembling available neutral facts about people, institutions, and events from a previous time. To the extent that ideology comes into play, it occurs, so the argument goes, only within the process of determining which stories get to be heard. The stories themselves are neutral. No history practice, however, is neutral. The very claim that the selection and presentation of empirical information from the past can be free of ideology and partisanship is itself an ideological position.

One danger of 'merely' telling stories is that it can easily lapse into the spinning of simple celebratory yarns or the uncritical recycling of myths. Such versions of history encourage the view that the past is merely a source of entertainment or solace; interesting, sometimes tragic, often inspirational, but ultimately ephemeral.

That risk aside, there is a deeper problem. In the absence of an overtly critical framework, the

narrative linearity of stories, yarns, and myths (the idea that event A leads to event B leads to event C in inexorable fashion) constructs history as an eternal unfolding of incremental change. In the field of labour history, this eternal unfolding of events ends up looking like a balance sheet of achievements and setbacks, with the achievements invariably coming up trumps in the long run. In the process, the ongoing and (for capitalism) structurally necessary inequalities and forms of exploitation and oppression which continue to blight the lives of billions of people are pushed to the margins or ignored altogether.

In this form, narrative history serves to rationalise a limited and limiting realpolitik which precludes any possibility of a radical structural critique, let alone radical transformation. The substance of history at large is confined to narratives told from a perspective determined by the constraints of capitalism, never from a position external to it. Capitalism itself is not the object of investigation. In this sense, orthodox labour history mirrors the ALP's infamous compromise with its radical wing in 1921: the Party, so the dominant faction decided, would remain notionally socialist but socialism (however minimal in substance) would be a long-term objective with no bearing on the term-to-term parliamentary program of Labor politicians. Like a mirage on the horizon, the ALP's socialism would shimmer in the far distance but nothing the Party did would bring it any closer. Now, of course, even the mirage has disappeared. In any case, challenging capitalism was/is regarded as off limits, a project beyond the terrain of the possible and therefore beyond the scope of history. The best we can hope for is a heroic narrative of improvements fought for, won, and defended, stretching from the past into the future.

I am not disputing the value of celebratory stories and heroic tales, nor the importance of ameliorative reforms. We need our Emma Millers and Joe Hills and Jack Mundeys. We need to know about the Victorian nurses and midwives who stood firm against the hostility of State and Commonwealth Labor governments in 1986 and, after a 50-day strike, won their demands for better wages, working conditions and staff-patient ratios. We need to know about the Gurindji walkout from Wave

Hill Station and the unions which made positive contributions to that landmark struggle. These stories and countless others are important and should be told and retold. However, if history as a practice is to play a useful role in meeting the challenges faced by the planet's labouring majority in 2022, it must adopt a critical approach to all our industrial and political institutions and the goals we set ourselves.

Useful history must interrogate the very structures of power, both the operation of capitalism as a mode of production, and the power relations and conflicting material interests within our own side. Rather than celebrate a linear tale of progress, useful history would treat the past as unfinished business which we in the present have an opportunity to settle. Perhaps it would not be misguided for us to adopt as our touchstone the adage penned by writer Ursula Le Guin: 'We live in capitalism – its power seems inescapable. But so did the divine right of kings.'

Such critical histories need not be obscure or dull. Indeed, one would struggle to find works of history livelier than the books of Verity Burgmann, Raymond Evans, Marcus Rediker, Robert Bollard, Ilan Pappé, Sheila Fitzpatrick, Terry Irving, Neil Faulkner and Vijay Prashad, to name only a random handful of notables in the union of historians writing with critical intent. Communicating history effectively is indeed a craft which no labour historian should neglect but as a craft it is all the more effective if it is undertaken with critical purpose.

Our dilemma as a labour history association is that critical history will inevitably put us at odds with many people within the official organisations of labour. If we are to continue regarding ourselves as producers and conduits of useful history, however, we must confront this dilemma head-on; we must answer the question: useful history, sure, but useful for whom?

I recently delivered a talk to a conference of ETU apprentices. My main point in that talk was that labour makes history; living labour as human energy interacting with nature to reproduce humans biologically and socially and to create all social wealth; living labour as the source of all profit and capital; and living labour as the most potent, although often latent, source

of social power in existence. I wanted those young workers to see themselves as central to history and history as central to them. I wanted to place them at the core of a radical story of labour as the hope of the world. I make the same point here. If useful history is critical history, I contend that critical history must be grounded in a radical history of labour, recognising labour's indispensable role (both paid and unpaid) in the functioning of all human societies, and labour's ongoing transformative social power when embodied in mass movements. More limiting conceptions of labour must be contested.

The practice of history can demonstrate its usefulness by serving labour at its most fundamental level – as a global majority social class which has no borders and no interests in common with any national bloc of capital. The immensity of the ecological, social and military crises created by the competitive drive of capital and capitalist nation-states threatens everyone. As historians and educators, we must align ourselves with movements that challenge the catastrophic direction into which capitalism has locked us. Drawing on the historical record and our skills as reconstructors and analysers of the past, we have an opportunity – one could say an obligation – to explain how labour can be the crucial ally in the fight for a world without exploitation, inequality and the threat of annihilation.

During the mass slaughter of World War One, Rosa Luxemburg adopted the slogan 'socialism or barbarism' to represent the binary choice facing humanity under capitalism. She was right, and the barbarism of which she warned is now threatening to overwhelm us. We saw it earlier this year in the human-induced floods that covered one-third of the land mass of Pakistan, affecting more than 33 million people and destroying or damaging more than one million houses, while Labor governments in Australia continued to approve new coal and gas mines. We see it every day in the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians and the fact that unarmed Palestinians are murdered under the world's gaze with complete impunity. It shows its face when tech manufacturers in China lock their factory workers in horrendous conditions in barracks to prevent COVID disruptions.

Barbarism is present again when

Anthony Albanese wears a Rio Tinto company logo and praises their iron ore operations, which included the destruction of a 46,000 year old Indigenous Australia sacred rock shelter at Juukan Gorge in 2020 (28/8/2003). Two days after showing his support for the company, the PM announced the date of the referendum to create an Indigenous Australian Voice to Parliament.
(https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12451819/Anthony-Albanese-sparks-outrage-Rio-Tinto-outfit-Prime-Minister-grilled-wearing-shirt-mining-giant-Karratha.html)

an Australian mining company *(Rio Tinto)* destroys a 46,000-year-old Aboriginal sacred site – the Juukan Gorge caves in Western Australia – and then pays its departing CEO $18.6 million in bonuses. It is revealed in the bipartisan support for offshore immigration detention and the indefinite and torturous incarceration of ill refugees. It is present in the words of a State premier who applauds a court for gaoling a climate emergency protestor for 15 months for blocking one lane of Sydney traffic for less than 20 minutes. In these contexts, and in so many others, historians must choose sides and play their part in speaking truth to power. The BLHA likewise.

As I see it, a radical history of labour offers the only way we can continue to be relevant. In our selection of public activities in 2022, and in the framing of these events, as well as in some of the content of the journal, we have endeavoured to tilt to a more critical and in some cases radical approach to history. I encourage the Association to continue along this path and I hope this orientation will be judged favourably by worker activists.

Who are these worker activists? They are the workers active in the industrial struggles of their union, the ones holding the line in their workplaces. They are the Apple retail workers walking off the job

and picketing their workplaces for the first time. They are the unionists, like the ETU Youth Crew, who picketed the Kangaroo Point refugee prison, they are the workers who regard the climate emergency as union business, the workers who hold reservations that the new Commonwealth IR Act is designed, as its spruikers claim, to deliver justice for the rank and file. These workers constitute the audience we must reach. In the United States and the United Kingdom there are signs of a resurgence of organised labour from amongst young and hitherto unorganised workers. In Australia we lag behind these developments but there are emerging pockets of resistance here too, especially amongst retail and distribution workers, and workers in healthcare.

That most of these workers have not grown up with labour movement nostalgia and myths is perhaps a factor working to their advantage. Like the history they are themselves creating, the past for them is unwritten. We have a role here. We can help to make history useful to them. Even taking into account the inevitable differences between then and now, history can provide knowledge about how to organise and win struggles. It can clarify pitfalls and traps. It can show that collective struggle can be successful. It can help workers understand that the past does not have to determine the future.

As the cultural critic Fredric Jameson argued, we must adopt an approach to history 'in which the past speaks to us about our own virtual and unrealized "human potentialities".' This approach, he contended, will not provide us with an 'edifying lesson'; rather, it will be 'a lesson of privation, which radically calls into question the commodified daily life, the reified spectacle, and the simulated experience of our own plastic-and-cellophane society...'[1]

Far from light relief or, worse, a dead weight, history conceived in this way can be a tool of agency for workers and social movement activists at the forefront of today's struggle. That's the direction labour history and labour history organisations should take.

[1]Jamieson, F, 'Marxism and Historicism', *New Literary History*, vol.11 no. 1 (1979), p.70

Presidential Matters

Craig Buckley & Greg Mallory

The Brisbane Labour History Association has enjoyed a busy year in 2023, with still more activities planned before the year's end.

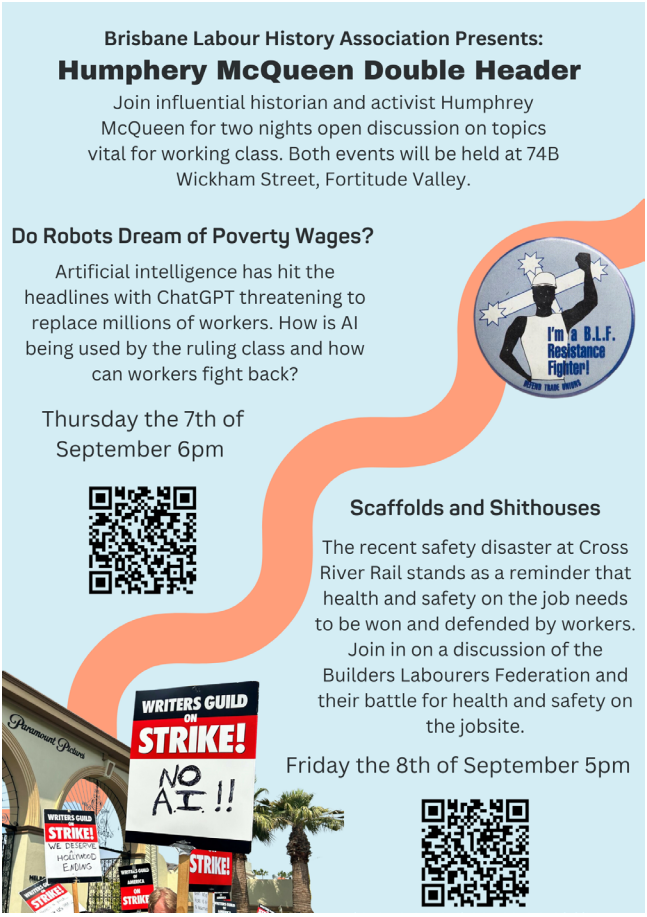
The Alex Macdonald Memorial Lecture in 2023 was presented by Dr Phil Griffiths. Although now back in Melbourne, Phil was previously based in Queensland, and served for some years on the Executive Committee of BLHA and as editor of this journal. The Committee was very pleased that Phil agreed to deliver this year's lecture. He chose as his subject the origins of the White Australia Policy, which he has studied for the best part of two decades. In a very detailed and fascinating lecture, he tackled the myth that this policy was the creation of the labour movement or working-class representatives. Phil's lecture is the primary article in this issue of the journal, and it provides an important corrective to some of the common misconceptions about the policy's beginnings. There is likely to be much that will be new, and even surprising, to readers.

The BLHA partnered with the University of Queensland's Fryer Library on Saturday 24 June to showcase some of the library's impressive collections relating to Queensland labour movement history. Hosted by former BLHA President and Fryer librarian, Dr Jeff Rickertt, the occasion provided an opportunity for participants to discuss the importance of labour history and labour records, and enjoy a hands-on experience with records documenting the organisations, campaigns and struggles of the workers' movement in this state.

Highlights included the earliest minutes of the Meatworkers' Union in Queensland (1889), the founding minute book of the Queensland Trades and Labor Council, the minutes of the Rockhampton Workers' Political Organisation showing TJ Ryan joining the Labor Party in 1904, and a set of the original strike bulletins of the 1912 Brisbane General Strike.

'Hands on History' Queensland labour movement records in the Fryer Library event, June 24th 2023

images Belinda Spinaze



Jeff emphasised that all Fryer Library collections are available for members of the public to access by appointment. More information is available at https://web.library.uq.edu.au/library-services/special-collections. The BLHA would like to extend our thanks to Jeff for all his work in organising this event.

Labour historian and public intellectual, Humphrey McQueen, was in Brisbane in early September and generously gave of his time to speak at two BLHA events. Both were held at Common House in Fortitude Valley, and it was pleasing to see many younger activists in attendance. At the first

event, Humphrey addressed the topic of artificial intelligence (A.I.) and it's use by the ruling class to discipline labour time. The second event dealt with the struggles of rank-and-file workers for occupational health and safety – drawing especially upon his history of such struggles by members of the Builders' Labourers Federation.

BLHA's Vice-President, Greg Mallory attended the memorial service for Peter Wertheim held at the Sandgate Town Hall on 15 August. Greg recalled that Peter had a lasting impression on his life and that of many others at the University of Queensland in the 1960s. He was a Philosophy Lecturer and a frequent speaker at the Forum area with Dan O'Neill and Brian Laver. He was involved in trying to change the uncritical and authoritarian attitudes of the then Vice Chancellor, Zelman Cowan. He was also involved in people learning from Indigenous struggles. The Town Hall was packed which demonstrated how widespread his influence was upon so many people. Amongst other speakers, Dan O'Neill made a passionate speech recalling his life through growing up in Melbourne to his time at the University of Queensland. Vale Peter Wertheim.

Greg also attended, at the end of Semester One, Colin Stewart's retirement function at the Kenmore Tavern. Greg was a fellow union representative with Colin at Kenmore State High School in the 1990s and early 2000s. During that time the two of them were responsible for getting the Local Consultative Committee started and functioning at the school. Colin has an impressive record in education, being with the Education Department for 51 years and at Kenmore for 39 years. He was union representative for all of this time and also at Atherton State High School, making a total of 42 years as a union rep. At the function he was given recognition by the Education Minister, Grace Grace, and the President of the Queensland Teachers Union, Cresta Richardson. Congratulations to Colin on a lifetime of dedication to trade unionism.

Craig Buckley **President**

Greg Mallory **Vice-President**

The Brisbane Labour History Association 2023 Alex Macdonald Memorial Lecture

The 2023 Alex Macdonald Memorial Lecture was delivered by Dr Phil Griffiths: *White Australia and the Labour Movement*.

Phil Griffiths began political life as a member of Students for a Democratic Society at Melbourne University, a draft resister, and a union activist in the AISF (insurance workers union), a forerunner of the FSU. In 1972 he began his life-long involvement in organised socialist politics in the Marxist Workers Group in Melbourne, and when the International Socialists was formed in 1975, became editor of its paper, *The Battler* for three years, then from the mid-1980s until 1994 he edited *The Socialist/ Socialist Worker*.

In 1995 Phil returned part time to university, writing his honours thesis on "The decline of free trade in Australian politics, 1901-1909," and from 1999-2006 his PhD thesis, "The making of White Australia: Ruling class agendas, 1876-1888". During his Canberra years he co-convened the 2001 Labour History Conference and was also Convenor of the Refugee Action Committee.

From 2008-2021 he lectured in Political Economy at the University of Southern Queensland, and served on the Management Committee of the Brisbane Labour History Association and as a lead editor of the *Queensland Journal of Labour History*.

Along with his socialist journalism, he has also published a study of Australian attitudes to Japan, book chapters on inequality and racism, and a number of academic journal articles on aspects of the evolution of the White Australia policy.

Phil currently lives in Melbourne, where he is an active member of Solidarity, the socialist organisation, and is involved in the campaign against AUKUS and Australian militarism.

The argument in this lecture is made most comprehensively in Phil Griffiths, '*The making of White Australia: Ruling class agendas, 1876-1888*', PhD thesis, ANU 2007, online at https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/47107; also online at UQ Library (hereafter: Griffiths PhD thesis). Specific aspects of the argument made here have also been published, including:

Phil Griffiths, 'The strategic fears of the ruling class: the construction of Queensland's Chinese Immigrants Regulation Act of 1877', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 58, no. 1, 2012, pp. 1–19

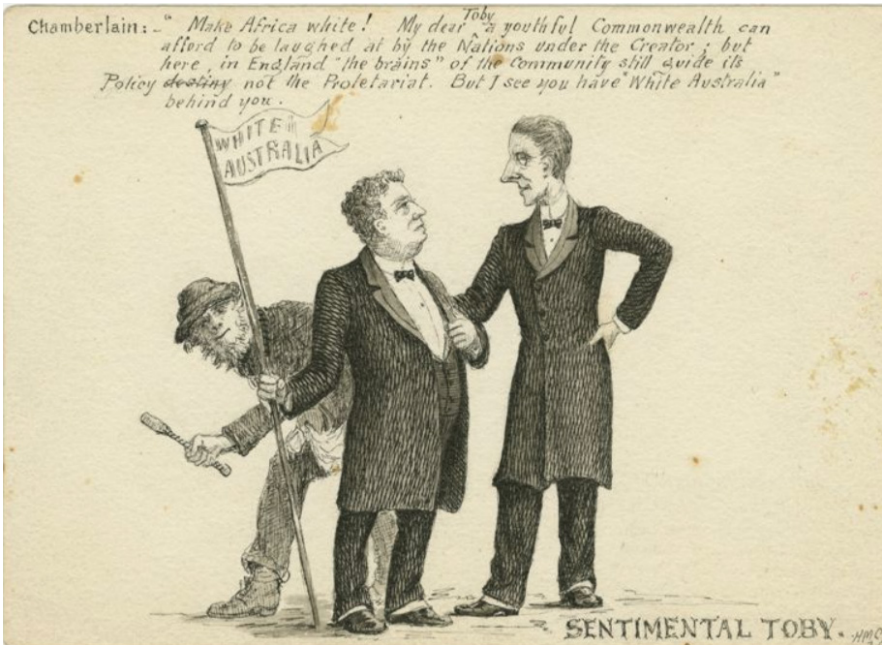
Phil Griffiths, 'The 'necessity' of a socially homogeneous population: the ruling class embraces racial exclusion', *Labour History* (Australia), no. 108, May 2015, pp. 123-44.

Phil Griffiths, ''This is a British colony': The Ruling Class Politics of the Seafarers' Strike, 1878-79', *Labour History* (Australia), no. 105, November 2013, pp. 131-51.

Phil Griffiths, 'The coolie labour crisis in colonial Queensland', in Diane Kirkby and Sophie Loy-Wilson (eds), *Labour history and the 'coolie question'*, *Labour History* (Australia) no. 113, November 2017, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Haymarket, pp. 53-78.

This work was inspired by the writings of **Verity Burgmann**, who I failed to acknowledge in the lecture itself and in the original version of this text. She made trenchant and convincing arguments against the idea that the working class could have been responsible for Australian racism, especially in 'Capital and labour', in Ann Curthoys and Andrew Markus (eds), *Who are our enemies? Racism and the Australian working class*, Hale and Iremonger in association with the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Neutral Bay (NSW), 1978, pp. 20-34; 'Comment: Who our enemies are: Andrew Markus and the baloney view of Australian racism', *Labour History* (Australia), no. 49, November 1985, pp. 97-101; and in 'Writing racism out of history', *Arena* [first series], no. 67, 1984, pp. 78-92

Phil Griffiths.



H.M Callinor cartoon c1901-1903

UK Secretary of State for the Colonies Joseph Chamberlain confronts Australia's First PM Edmund (Toby) Barton.

Chamberlain: "Make Africa White! My dear Toby, a youthful Commonwealth can afford to be laughed at by the Nations under the Creator; but here, in England, "the brains" of the Community still guide its policy, not the Proletariat. But I see you have "White Australia" behind you."

image SLQ: https://collections.slq.qld.gov.au/viewer/IE2710650 JOL 27362

The BLHA would like to thank Lachlan Hurse for video recording the lecture, and making it available online on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JT2-PusV6v8

An audio recording of the lecture has also been published online at Solidarity's podcast site: https://soundofsolidarity.podbean.com/e/white-australia-and-the-labour-movement/

White Australia and the Labour Movement

Phil Griffiths

Dr Phil Griffiths presenting the 2023 Alex Macdonald Memorial Lecture

image Lachlan Hurse

There is an enduring myth about the White Australia policy; the myth that it was the creation of the Australian working class; that workers fought for it, imposed it on the ruling class, defended it and benefited from it.

John Howard summed it up in a speech titled 'Politics and Patriotism', which he gave in Melbourne in December 1995, shortly before the 1996 election, where he declared: 'It was the Coalition which finally put an end to Labor's White Australia policy.'[1]

Up until the 1960s, the idea that the labour movement created the White Australia policy was the proud boast of most Labor politicians and many union leaders.

The movement against the Vietnam war—which necessarily confronted anti-Asian racism—

Montagu Scott, 'The White Australia Policy: Labour's Xmas Box To The Commonwealth.' Worker (Brisbane), 14 December 1901, p. 1. http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article70831369

and the wider anti-racist movement of the time sparked a whole new surge of interest in the origins of White Australia, but historians largely regurgitated the idea that it had been created by the labour movement. In 1985, Ann Curthoys summed this up:

> A major issue in the 1960s and 1970s ... was whom to blame for its existence in the first place. The most common answer from historians had been the working class, the trade unions, and the Labor Party.[2]

But even the most cursory glance at the historical record shows that from the Gold Rushes to the late 1880s, every single piece of legislation imposing racial discrimination and racial exclusion was passed by parliaments composed entirely, or almost entirely, of capitalists and their

direct political representatives. There was no Labor Party, and virtually no union-backed MPs.

Then, the Immigration Restriction Act—which allowed the Customs authorities to exclude people on the basis of a dictation test—was written by Alfred Deakin, a bitter opponent of the Labor Party and strikes. The legislation was supported by every member of the bourgeois Protectionist Party (which had 33/75 MHRs) and most members of the official opposition, the right-wing Free Trade Party (with 26/75 MHRs). So whatever the Coalition put an end to, it was a policy made by their direct predecessors.[3]

Almost all historians acknowledge that all classes overwhelmingly supported White Australia, but, apart from Verity Burgmann, no historian had ever seriously examined the class motives that led the vast majority of the Anglo-Australian ruling class to adopt White Australia.

This chasm in historical explanation was highlighted by Peter Corris in 1973:

> If racialism was ... an ingredient in the thinking and behaviour of all Australians, regardless of class, right through the political spectrum, the present emphasis in discussion on working-class and radical racialism will be misleading to any attempt to understand racialism as a whole. What about the bosses?[4]

That is the question I set out to answer through two decades of research.

I concluded that three broad agendas led the large majority of the ruling class to fight for White Australia. Those three agendas were:

1. A concern that Chinese immigrants were a strategic threat to Anglo-Australian control of the continent.

The fear was sharpest about Northern Australia, where there were only tiny numbers of 'white' settlers; and it was intensified in the mid-1880s when China was seen as a rising military power, having resisted a French invasion of Taiwan.

Alongside those concerns was a fear that Britain would fail to protect the colonies from demands

made by the Chinese government because China was widely seen as a crucial ally in Britain's global conflict with the Russian empire.

2. The determination of a large majority in the ruling class to build a modern, industrial economy, which could be threatened by allowing a regime of plantation agriculture to develop in the North, based on exploiting unfree labourers from the Pacific Islands.

This concern was driven by theories of slavery and by the experience of the United States and especially the Civil War.

3. The final agenda was the desire to construct an homogeneous population.

This was seen as necessary for containing social discontent and creating space for bourgeois rule through parliamentary government.

This agenda was shaped by the arguments of John Stuart Mill, the dominant political philosopher of mid-nineteenth century Britain and truly the theorist of White Australia.

Once I identified the significance of these three agendas, I discovered that the story of White Australia, the narrative of why and how we got it, was very different from all existing accounts, and I hope to tell a little of that alternative story.

Aboriginal people did not figure as important for the ruling class in these debates; they were overwhelmingly focused on the population the ruling class intended to engineer in the colonies.

None of this is to in any way seek to whitewash the history of racism within the labour movement. So, I will end up by reflecting on what I see as some of the key misunderstandings and mistakes made by even the best militants in the labour movement. While the greatest suffering was experienced by the people who were racialised, I want to also look at the price paid by so-called 'white' workers for accepting or embracing White Australia.

The Ruling Class Agendas behind White Australia

The three key agendas that led the majority of the ruling class to adopt the White Australia policy were:

1. **Establishing strategic control of an incompletely colonised continent**[5]

Most histories of White Australia begin with the gold rushes and the laws limiting Chinese immigration passed in Victoria, South Australia and NSW. But those laws were all repealed fairly quickly. In 1867 there were no laws in any of the colonies restricting the entry of Chinese people.[6]

The wave of legislation that led to the White Australia policy in 1901 began in Queensland in 1876, when parliament passed a new Goldfields Bill imposing higher licence fees on Chinese miners and businesspeople. Then in 1877 parliament passed the Chinese Immigrants Regulation Bill which limited the number of Chinese people who could enter Queensland by boat and imposed an entry tax of £10. This became the model for legislation later passed in other colonies.

There are a number of remarkable features about this legislation.

First: the parliament which passed these laws was dominated by squatters, sugar planters and their urban representatives and supporters, people who supported the 'recruitment' of Pacific Islanders for the sugar industry. Indeed, just a few years earlier, the Liberal government had tried to get Chinese workers for the pastoral and sugar industries.

The sudden shift in their position was in response to the arrival of large numbers of Chinese people to the Palmer River goldfields in the far north.

At the time, there were barely 200,000 settlers of European origin in Queensland and only a few thousand in the far north. As the number of Chinese miners in the north grew towards 10,000 and then past it, the ruling class became alarmed at the possibility that they could lose control of the north.

They started talking about Chinese immigration as an 'invasion'. John Douglas, the Liberal Premier in 1877 said:

> He did not hesitate to make use of the term 'invasion', for it really was an invasion, and as they were backed up by many millions of their countrymen ... a more dangerous invasion than any which they

might be called upon to resist by armed effort.[7]

This rhetoric became a systematic theme in the speeches of ruling class politicians in the decades following.

Second: This attack on Chinese immigration was not a response to campaigning by the working class—there was hardly any labour movement at all in Queensland in 1877—nor a response to anti-Chinese violence on the goldfields.

What's more, there had been minimal violence against Chinese miners on the goldfields since 1872. Organised attacks on Chinese miners resumed only after the press started hysterically attacking Chinese immigrants and after moves to start legislating against them.

So, the first threats of violence against Chinese people came in June 1875, after the first legislative moves against Chinese mining; the first serious physical attack came in October 1876 when a crowd of whites fired on Chinese attempting to land at Trinity Bay, Cairns. This came after the passing of the first anti-Chinese laws in parliament with all the wild anti-Chinese rhetoric that involved.[8]

Third: the event that galvanised almost the whole of the Queensland ruling class behind racial exclusion was the action of the Imperial Government in London in vetoing the Goldfields Act passed in 1876 that imposed higher licence fees.

Lord Carnarvon, the British Colonial Secretary, declared that the Goldfields Act offended Britain's policy of open borders and contravened various treaties of peace and amity entered into between Britain and China, which gave the citizens of both powers the right to enter each other's territory.

The *Brisbane Courier* newspaper, then a serious and sophisticated publication, had rejected scaremongering about Chinese immigrants through 1876.

But two days after it found out that the Goldfields legislation had been vetoed, it accused the imperial government of 'assisting the Chinese invasion'.

'Australia cannot be both Chinese and British,' it wrote. 'Every Chinese immigrant ... by his

(Detail from) Harvest of Endurance: A History of the Chinese in Australia 1788–1988. Scene 3 - Violence against Chinese Miners. Copyright Australia China Friendship Society. National Museum of Australia. Photo: George Serras
https://www.nma.gov.au/explore/features/harvest-of-endurance/scroll/violence-on-goldfields

presence amongst us, renders the colony less attractive to European immigrants.'[9]

In parliament the far right of the ruling class, the very richest men in the colonial parliaments, swung behind this argument.

Sir Arthur Palmer, the leader of Queensland's squatters, made it clear he was against 'filling the Northern portion of the colony with Chinese'.[10] The immensely wealthy squatter, Joshua Peter Bell declared, 'No action in this matter could be too strong ... to prevent this country being inundated by Chinese.'[11]

The obligations placed on the Australian colonies by the treaties with China would continue to be a sore point for the whole Australian ruling class. The co-ordinated legislation against Chinese immigration agreed to by the colonies in 1888 was sparked when the Chinese government complained about discriminatory legislation, and the imperial government in London demanded to know the reasons for it.

There was open speculation in the British and Australian press that Britain had a secret alliance with China in its global conflict with

Russia, and that the Australian ruling classes couldn't trust the British to stand up for their interests in controlling Chinese immigration.

This was a nationalist response, but it was not an anti-imperialist nationalism; quite the opposite. Its aim was to more firmly secure the ability of the Anglo-Australian ruling class to control its territory and population within the wider British empire.

Many writers have explained the hostility to Asian immigrants as being a product of Australia being a colonial settler state, and I think that's broadly right. But there is an additional factor. Australia was and still is a relatively sparsely settled colonial settler state, and that has magnified that hostility.

This has also driven the Australian state's obsession with forward defence.

2. **Opposition to a system of racialised exploitation**[12]

The second great bourgeois agenda that drove the White Australia policy was opposition to the widespread use of racialised indentured labour.

This was most eloquently summed up by the Tasmanian Attorney-General, Andrew Inglis-Clark, in 1888 when responding to the demand that the colonies explain the reasons for their anti-Chinese laws.

Inglis-Clark argued that if significant numbers of Chinese people came to the colonies, they would either threaten 'the supremacy of the present legislative and administrative authorities', or, if they accepted an inferior social or political status, they:

> ... would create a combined political and industrial division of society upon the basis of a racial distinction. This would inevitably produce in the majority of the remainder of the population a degraded estimate of manual labour similar to that which has always existed in those communities where African slavery has been permitted, and thereby call into existence a class similar in habit and character to the 'mean whites' of the Southern States of the American Union before the Civil War. Societies so divided ... are doomed to certain deterioration.[13]

Note that Clark was *not* arguing that Chinese immigrants would undercut established wage levels for European labourers.

Instead, his argument rested on nearly a century of mainstream bourgeois critiques of slavery.

This bourgeois critique combined humanitarianism, evangelical moral individualism, and laissez-faire economics.

The greatest of all liberal, free-market advocates, Adam Smith, had argued that free labour led to a greater intensity of labour than slavery. John Stuart Mill agreed: 'Labour extorted by fear of punishment is inefficient and unproductive ... All processes carried on by slave labour are conducted in the rudest and most unimproved manner.'[14]

And JE Cairnes, author of one of the most widely read critiques of slavery, argued that because the slave's labour was so crude, it was 'quite impossible that he [sic] should take part with efficiency in the difficult and delicate operations which most manufacturing and mechanical processes involve'.[15]

Let's pause here to note that this was an argument that slave-based production was insufficiently exploitative. This was not an argument grounded in the interests of either the workers in bondage or so-called free labourers.

For the ruling class, this was no abstract problem. Nearly 40 per cent of Australia's land mass is in the tropics, which start just north of Rockhampton, and most colonial politicians were convinced of the racist myth that 'white men' could not safely do manual labour in this climate.

They were left with the thought, terrible to many, that the only form of economic development that was possible involved plantation-based agriculture exploiting some group of indentured 'coloured' workers, which in turn raised in their minds the spectre of slavery and hence economic backwardness, moral corruption, aristocratic rule and social degeneration.

In north Queensland a large and growing sugar industry was being developed by kidnapping, recruiting, and exploiting indentured Pacific Islanders.

For the urban and liberal bourgeoisie of both Queensland and the southern Australian colonies, this was — in the words of one Queensland Governor, Sir Anthony Musgrave — 'a system ... as much like slavery and the slave trade as anything can well be'.[16]

The problem was that the sugar industry was driving colonisation of the north coast of Queensland and stimulating all kinds of capitalist industry—for instance in the manufacture of equipment—as well as producing housing, food, and other essentials for the 'white' population.

To shut it down would cripple Queensland's colonisation; to allow it to grow would be to plant the seeds of a society divided by race and the terrible possibility of a future war between north and south.

The seriousness of it can be seen in a proposal made by NSW Premier, Henry Parkes, in 1879, to merge the three main southern colonies: New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia, with Queensland deliberately excluded.

'Her capabilities of soil and climate,' he wrote, 'so clearly mark her out for a colonising career dissimilar from that of her elder sisters.'[17]

The War over Plantation Agriculture in Queensland[18]

The issue of indentured labour on the sugar plantations unleashed the most bitter political struggle within the Queensland ruling class in the entire nineteenth century.

In the mid-1880s, as the sugar industry boomed, recruitment of Pacific Islanders became more difficult. The recruiters started turning back to kidnapping, while the planters—backed by the Conservative government—launched a campaign to get labourers from India, which was already providing plantation labour for other British colonies.

This became the central issue in the 1883 general election, in which the Conservatives were defeated.

When the planters responded to this defeat by recruiting Chinese labourers, the new Liberal government imposed tighter limits on Chinese immigration and legislated to allow the recruitment

of European immigrants for long periods of indenture on wages far lower than standard.

This shows how little the opposition to racialised labour was driven by the activities or interests of the labour movement.

The planters responded by launching a fight for the separation of North Queensland into a separate colony, one whose government they expected to dominate.

This broke the broad ruling class consensus which had tolerated the use of indentured Pacific Islanders.

In September 1886, the representatives of the Separation movement in the Queensland Parliament moved a motion for the division of the Colony.

They expected the motion to be defeated; but what they did not expect was that every non-northern politician, Conservative as well as Liberal, squatters as well as urban capitalists, voted against it.

Many of these had supported the sugar industry and its exploitation of racialised indentured workers. But they did not support anything which would reduce the size of

A group of South Sea Islander women labourers on a sugar cane plantation near Cairns, Queensland, about 1895. (John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland. Neg 63220)

Queensland's internal market; and more importantly, they did not support anything that would take Queensland down the American road.

The *Brisbane Courier* editorialised:

> Political severance from the great bulk of the European population of Australia will intensify the social effect of the change [in population] ... the obvious effect of labourer and employer being separated by the broad bar of colour and race. A Northern aristocracy — a race aristocracy — will confront the Australian white democracy, and no strong effort of imagination is needed to picture the result ... a legacy of evil as that from which America only rid herself by the most terrible fratricidal war which the modern world has seen.[19]

Again, just to be clear, this was not an argument against all indentured racialised labour. It was an argument that this needed to be a minor part of the economy, one whose effects were restrained by the 'democratic majority'.

The revival of Pacific Islander labour recruitment in the 1890s was consistent with this position; a desperate and brutal decision that lasted only until Federation allowed the wider Australian ruling class to terminate the labour trade — to the dismay of the planters.

This experience alone ought to explode the myth that the bulk of capitalists, or even pastoralists, wanted 'cheap coloured labour'.

And it profoundly undermines the idea that the labour movement played some significant role in this prior to the 1890s. The weekly meeting of the Brisbane Trades and Labour Council held a few days after the motion for northern separation was moved in parliament did not even discuss separation, much less mobilise on the issue.[20]

3. **The construction of a supposedly homogeneous population**[21]

We now come to the third major agenda behind the decision of the majority of the ruling class to adopt a White Australia policy: their belief that a free and democratic society needed to be culturally homogeneous; and that

by threatening that homogeneity, people of colour — Chinese people, Pacific Islanders — would threaten freedom and parliamentary government in Australia.

This supposed need for an homogeneous population was a central theme in all the official memoranda sent by Australian colonial governments to London in 1888 in response to Britain's demand that they justify their 'exceptional legislation' affecting Chinese people.

Earlier, in 1880, the conservative *Brisbane Courier* outlined the over-arching reasons for limiting the use of 'coloured labour':

> It is not merely or mainly because white workmen dislike Polynesian labor that we are legislating to restrict it within as narrow bounds as possible. It is because we are all desirous of forming, as far as climate and the circumstances of the colony will allow, a homogenous community.[22]

At one level, the idea that Chinese people could not become part of an Australian community is just pure racism, as is the idea that their very existence would be a threat to democracy.

But there was more involved. Colonial politicians were dealing with a serious issue for all ruling classes: how do we maintain control? How do we prevent the working class from becoming rebellious? How do we contain their discontent?

In arguing for a culturally homogeneous population, Australia's colonial politicians were drawing on ideas argued by Britain's leading political philosopher, John Stuart Mill.

In his book, *Considerations on Representative Government*, Mill argued that parliamentary government based on 'free institutions' was the best, most stable form of government. But like all societies it faced the danger of rival interests—including the working class—tearing society and the state apart.

To avoid this, 'free institutions' required racial homogeneity, a dominant nationalism and strong support for law and order.[23]

Duncan (1973) notes that writings by Mill were obsessed with the danger posed by 'the ignorance and especially the selfishness

and brutality of the mass'; 'the uncultivated herd who now compose the labouring masses'; and 'that source *(of)* animosity which is universal in this country towards the whole class of employers, in the whole class of employed.'[24]

In such a society, universal suffrage was dangerous; it may well produce 'a legislature reflecting exclusively the opinions and preferences of the most ignorant class'.[25]

Historically, Mill is remembered as a leading liberal, and among other things that normally means a defender of the Enlightenment. But this potential threat to property led Mill to embrace some of the key political ideas of anti-liberal, anti-Enlightenment reactionaries such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Thomas Carlyle.

They wanted a return to the values of the Middle Ages. And they railed against the rising bourgeoisie, arguing its individualism, selfishness and laissez-faire would lead to the destruction of society.

While rejecting their attacks on liberal economics, Mill praised these reactionaries for identifying 'the three requisites which [are] essential principles of all permanent forms of social existence.'[26] These were:

- A system of education for citizens which aimed at teaching them to subordinate their own desires to the broader needs of society; a role played 'in modern nations ... principally by religious teaching.'

- A feeling of loyalty to some element of society's broad constitution, 'something which is settled, something permanent, and not to be called into question,' which enables society—ie capitalist exploitation—to weather the storms of internal dissension. This could be adherence to a common god or acceptance of an hereditary ruler or ruling class.

- Cohesion among the members of society, a sense of common feeling in some sense — and an attachment to the state or nation.[27]

Thus, a stable parliamentary democracy was only possible where the ruling class was able to assert ideological hegemony over the population as a whole, and also strong institutions capable

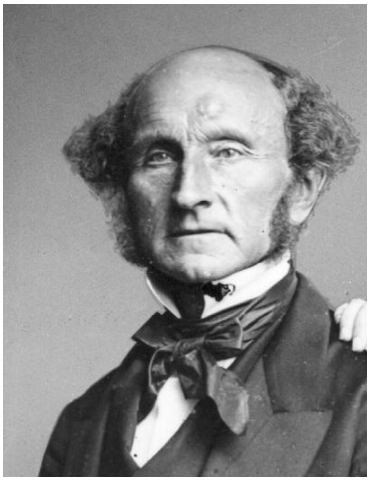
of making compromises between rival interests and enforcing these.

In this Mill rejected the democratic ideas of earlier thinkers, 'in which it was customary to claim representative democracy for England or France by arguments which would equally have proved it the only fit form of government for Bedouins or Malays.'[28]

Thus, class hegemony and racism were fused in Mill: a racial idea of the nation became a means to contain class struggle and social strife at home.

Thus, it was neither in labourism, nor classical liberalism, but in the aristocratic anti-liberalism of the early nineteenth century that one of the principal intellectual foundations of the White Australia policy can be found: the idea of the homogeneous nation, protected by strong immigration laws against people who supposedly could not assimilate into a British culture.

In embracing racial exclusion, the labour movement was strengthening the ruling class's strategy of ideological domination over the working class.



John Stuart Mill
https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=8443874

There were, however, many problems with Mill's ideal of a homogeneous population. One of the most obvious was that no nation on earth was homogeneous. Britain and France themselves were multi-national, multi-ethnic states.

To deal with this, Mill promoted the idea of assimilation. But this would not be the intermixing of equals; he argued that stronger nationalities could absorb and transform weaker and more backward ones, and this would benefit humanity.

In an infamous passage he argued:

> Nobody can suppose that it is not more beneficial to a

> Breton, or a Basque of French Navarre ... to be a member of the French nationality ... than to sulk on his own rocks, the half-savage relic of past times, revolving in his own little mental orbit. The same remark applies to the Welshman or the Scottish Highlander as members of the British nation.[29]

This was the idea that the English 'race' had a unique power to assimilate the people of certain other societies.

In reality, the pursuit of homogeneity necessarily involved the oppression of minority language and cultural groups. It intensified social division around identity, the problem it claimed to be dealing with.

As a colonial settler state, the peopling of Australia had been a deliberate process, quite unlike the construction of European nations. Vast sums of money had been spent to attract immigrants; and parliaments, newspapers and the public debated the kind of people they wanted.

Most contentious were the Irish. They were easier to attract as immigrants and their labour was needed. But they came with potentially dangerous ideas: both Roman Catholicism, which was seen by the Protestant elite as an obstacle to progress, and a profound antipathy to British imperialism.

The tensions between Catholic and Protestant, between Irish nationalists and those who identified with British imperialism, meant that no Australian nationalism that included the Irish could be described as 'English' or 'British'.

This is the real significance of the concept of a 'white' Australia: it was potentially inclusive of the Irish, as well as substantial numbers of northern European immigrants. It meant that an immigrant of Irish Catholic origin could identify with Australia and Australian nationalism while hating the empire to which the Australian state was committed.

Racial Exclusion and the Seafarers Strike of 1878-79[30]

I would now like to show how this approach to the issue of racial exclusion can change the way we

understand one of the key events in the making of White Australia, the famous Seafarers Strike of 1878-79.

This was by far the largest industrial struggle before the great strikes of the 1890s.[31]

The dispute began in July 1878 when the ASN company, the largest shipping line in the Australia colonies, replaced 180 European sailors with Chinese workers. The sackings were initially fought through a mass campaign against Chinese immigration.

When hundreds more European sailors were sacked on 18 November, the union then launched an all-out strike. Wharf labourers in Sydney refused to load and unload ASN ships, while coal miners in the Hunter and South Coast refused to cut coal for ASN steamers, paralysing most of the fleet. The company responded by recruiting hundreds more sailors from Hong Kong to use as strike breakers.

At the height of the strike, there were mass anti-Chinese riots in the city and regional centres, with Chinese people beaten and their shops and homes torched.

Historians such as Ann Curthoys have argued that the strike 'laid the basis ... for the weakening of capital's interest in Chinese as a source of cheap, or even extra, labour' and that this was 'a precondition for the emergency of a nationally supported White Australia policy'.[32]

I've already shown that most politicians who represented capitalists large and small had no such interest in 1878 and that they were opposed to such a strategy.

With few exceptions, the mainstream newspapers strongly supported the seafarers. Let's start with the *Evening News*, Sydney's largest circulation newspaper. Its politics were Protestant, militantly free trade, pro-empire, pro-law and order. It was contemptuous of poor people and the Irish and saturated with racism. It ridiculed trade unionists and opposed strikes.

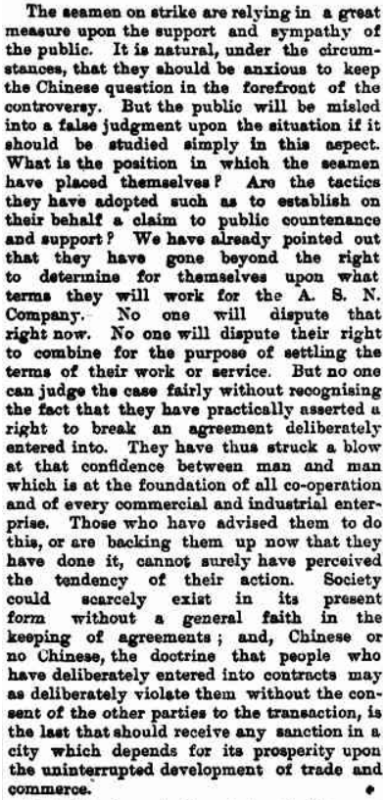
But this strike was different. 'This is a British colony,' it thundered, 'and we wish to maintain its essentially British character as the best heritage we can hand down to our children.'[33] Capitalists, it argued, had a duty to the nation and the race.[34]

Right through regional NSW, most lesser papers agreed and many campaigned against ASN and in favour of the strikers.

Most of the argument that sees the ruling class as supporting the use of Chinese workers as cheap labour rests on opposition to the strike by the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the leading capitalist newspaper, and the refusal of the unelected members of the NSW Legislative Council to pass legislation limiting Chinese immigration.

First, the *Herald*'s opposition to the strike was not grounded in support for Chinese immigration. For nearly a decade it ran the most appalling and dishonest 'exposes' vilifying Chinese people. Its editorials 'warned' of the 'special dangers' supposedly represented by Chinese immigrants. Just months before the dispute began, the President of the Seamen's Union praised the *Herald* for doing 'all it could to show what the colony would suffer if the 'yellow agony' were admitted into it'.[35]

When the strike began the paper bitterly attacked the union on a *class* basis, arguing that the workers had broken their contracts of work.[36]



The seamen on strike are relying in a great measure upon the support and sympathy of the public. It is natural, under the circumstances, that they should be anxious to keep the Chinese question in the forefront of the controversy. But the public will be misled into a false judgment upon the situation if it should be studied simply in this aspect. What is the position in which the seamen have placed themselves? Are the tactics they have adopted such as to establish on their behalf a claim to public countenance and support? We have already pointed out that they have gone beyond the right to determine for themselves upon what terms they will work for the A. S. N. Company. No one will dispute that right now. No one will dispute their right to combine for the purpose of settling the terms of their work or service. But no one can judge the case fairly without recognising the fact that they have practically asserted a right to break an agreement deliberately entered into. They have thus struck a blow at that confidence between man and man which is at the foundation of all co-operation and of every commercial and industrial enterprise. Those who have advised them to do this, or are backing them up now that they have done it, cannot surely have perceived the tendency of their action. Society could scarcely exist in its present form without a general faith in the keeping of agreements; and, Chinese or no Chinese, the doctrine that people who have deliberately entered into contracts may as deliberately violate them without the consent of the other parties to the transaction, is the last that should receive any sanction in a city which depends for its prosperity upon the uninterrupted development of trade and commerce.

Excerpt, Sydney Morning Herald (1842-1954)
Editorial, November 27 1878, p4
http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-page1433719

When the strike was finally settled, it became even more fixated on the class dimensions of the issue, railing against the 'moral degradation' of people looking to the government for protection.

In 1879, in the wake of the strike, the Parkes government proposed legislation restricting Chinese

immigration. In the Legislative Council there was not a single comment approving Chinese immigrants as 'cheap labour'. The majority addressed the ruling-class concern for strategic control and successful colonisation of the continent, and the idea that this would be threatened if Chinese immigration were not restricted. Those who opposed the bill saw no immediate danger. Some of them also saw it as an attack on the principles of free trade. So much for the argument that capitalists in NSW had supported Chinese immigrants as cheap labour.

It was in Queensland where the press was most vociferous in supporting the seafarers' strike; and the Conservative papers were the most militant. The *Brisbane Courier* editorialised:

> As a rule strikes are bad things ... But, if anything can justify a strike, and a general exhibition of public sympathy with the strikers, the step taken by the company would do so.[37]

It is in this spirit we wish to express our regret at the action which the A.S.N. Company have seen fit to take, and which has led to the seamen's strike which our telegraphic correspondent describes. It appears that the company had taken steps to introduce secretly a number of Chinese sailors to the port of Sydney, with the intention of substituting them for Europeans in manning, or partly manning their vessels. This action the seamen promptly resented by a strike. As a rule strikes are bad things, partaking of the nature of the folly which children describe as quarrelling with one's bread and butter. But, if anything can justify a strike, and a general exhibition of public sympathy with the strikers, the step taken by the company would do so. The experience of every community in which Chinese have established themselves has been that their wholesale employment in one trade has led to their gradual encroachment on the white worker in every other handicraft. The Sydney seamen, in making their instant and decided protest, acted for themselves in the first instance; but also struck a blow for their fellow-workmen of every handicraft and the general community of wage earners. It is hardly necessary to repeat the well-known arguments on the subject. Summed up, they come to this: that the Chinese workman can undersell his European competitor, because he is content to live under conditions which the latter cannot accept without descending many steps in the ladder of humanity, and becoming unfit for the citizenship of a free State. We Australians—for in this matter we speak the conviction not of a colony, but of the continent—are agreed that it is better for us to have a community capable of the highest civilisation, even if we have to forego whatever advantage may be derived from the ant-like industry of the Chinese. The rights of individuals, employers and employed, have one admitted limit—the safety and welfare of the community; when that limit is threatened with infringement we are at liberty to take all lawful means to check it.

Excerpt, Brisbane Courier (1864-1933) Editorial, November 20 1878, p2
http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article1376693

And it argued that the growing military power of China justified the strike.

An anti-Chinese committee was organised in Brisbane, and it met, not at a trades hall, but in the rooms of the Brisbane Chamber of Commerce.

They wanted public meetings called across the colony, so when it came to Ipswich, they wrote—not to the miners' union—but to William Ginn, a prominent Ipswich merchant and councillor. Ginn's own attitude to unions was made clear at the meeting in Ipswich.

> Personally, he was not in favour of strikes ... They were injurious to the men themselves, to their employers, and to trade and their pernicious influences extended far beyond the immediate places in which they took place.[38]

There was no record of local unionists or miners being involved in the meeting.

Their absence wasn't going to stop the hardy merchants of Ipswich. They called a meeting on the issue for Ipswich's coal miners. After traipsing out to 'a green near the Immigration Depot', the well-fed William Ginn met with indifference. The miners agreed only to invite the Brisbane seafarers to send a speaker to inform them of the facts of the matter. Many feared destitution if they took industrial action.[39]

ASN was finally defeated when a ship bringing 350 Chinese workers sank in the Torres Strait and the Queensland Government stripped the company of its lucrative mail contract, as the Queensland conservatives had been demanding.

The Agendas that have Endured

I'd just like to sum up the argument so far. The policies of racial exclusion that we saw in the late nineteenth century, and which morphed into an explicit White Australia policy, were ruling class policies enacted for three primary reasons:

- to ensure their strategic control of the continent at a time when that control was either tenuous, or non-existent across vast areas of the north.

- to ensure that the economy was a modern capitalist economy,

grounded in the exploitation of relatively skilled wage labour, rather than one in which the large-scale use of racialised, unfree labourers led to either economic stagnation, or even civil war.

• to buttress the system of parliamentary government by maximising the illusion that the population was homogeneous, racially, and culturally, similar.

With the ending of indentured labour in the sugar industry, the deportation of many islanders and the agreement that the new Commonwealth would take over responsibility for the Northern Territory, the second agenda was essentially fulfilled.

The first and third remained key drivers of government policy well into the second half of the twentieth century.

So, for instance, the government set up a tax on sugar to fund the employment of as many white workers as possible in the sugar industry, which was mainly in North Queensland, for strategic reasons, which in turn required the industry to export most of its production. This was viable only because they received a subsidy paid by Australian workers on every kilo of sugar.

Today the government is still spending billions to develop and populate the north.

The third agenda also persisted. Right through the 1950s and into the 1960s, the Menzies government was defending White Australia to the newly independent governments of Asia on the basis that they were just ensuring the homogeneity and stability of their society, just as those new governments were attempting to do.

When the far-right ex-Labor politician Graeme Campbell argued against Asian immigration in the 1990s, he too quoted from John Stuart Mill to justify his racism.[40]

Even today, assimilation remains a cornerstone of immigration policy, even if explicit racial homogeneity has been replaced by 'multiculturalism'.

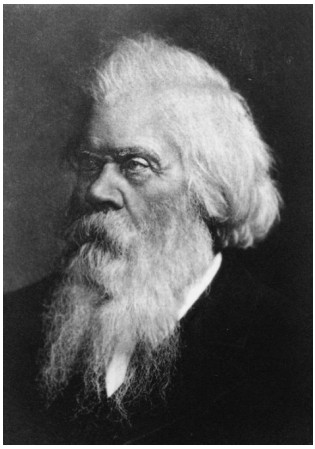
The Price Paid by Workers and the Labour Movement

Support for racial exclusion led unions and workers to support their bosses against other workers.

Chinese workers were not slaves. They were accused of being an instrument that would allow the rise of an aristocracy over the parliamentary system. That was not only racist, but profoundly wrong; Chinese workers fought for their rights and were just as willing to strike against their Chinese bosses as other groups of workers.

For instance: in Melbourne and Sydney, non-Chinese furniture workers were sucked into a campaign against Chinese-made furniture, a campaign that only strengthened their bosses; while the Chinese workers showed a willingness to take action against their bosses and looked for solidarity with non-Chinese workers, solidarity they didn't get.[41]

Some years ago, I did research to see if there was any relationship between Chinese immigration and wage levels, and found there was none. Chinese immigration never led to a fall in wages or living standards and, when Chinese



Henry Parkes, John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland, Undated Negative number 195954

immigration was stopped, there was no improvement in wages. Indeed, the greatest collapse in living standards ever in our history happened four years after the ending of Chinese immigration, as the 1880s boom collapsed into the Great Depression of the 1890s.[42]

Racial exclusion allowed the enemies of the labour movement to be presented as the friends of the working class.

The classic example of this was the attitude of the movement towards Henry Parkes, the long-serving Premier of NSW. When Parkes pushed legislation restricting Chinese immigration through Parliament in 1888, the NSW

Branch of the Seamen's Union passed a resolution assuring Parkes 'of his having earned the well wishes and admiration of the Ten Thousand Seamen composing this body'.[43]

In reality Parkes was an enemy of the working class and organised labour. Just a year earlier, amidst rising unemployment, he cut rations to all but the most destitute and used police to smash protest demonstrations.[44]

In 1879, his government had responded to a miners' strike in the Hunter Valley by sending troops and artillery to intimidate the strikers.[45] And in 1888, just months after the Secretary of the Sydney Trades and Labor Council told Parkes that 'it behoves us to support them who support us', they did it again.[46]

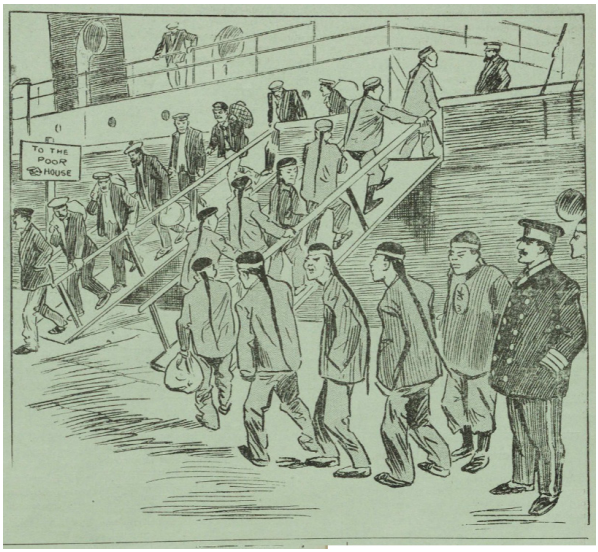
There are many similar examples. In 1888 many Queensland workers voted for the Conservatives, led by Sir Thomas McIlwraith, in the belief that the Liberals led by Griffith were soft on Chinese immigration. Two years later McIlwraith's government would round up the leaders of striking shearers and send them in chains to an island prison.

That political disorientation was partly driven by a populist view of the ruling class.

By that I mean the belief that one prominent, and particularly nasty, section of the ruling class represents the class as a whole. The sugar planters and a minority of squatters might have been very rich but there was a wider ruling class that used the power of the state—and its influence over much of the media—to discipline them and pursue a different agenda.

In reality, the urban capitalist class was the most substantial economically and the dominant political factor: the merchants, financiers, construction capitalists, food manufacturers and breweries, equipment manufacturers, footwear and clothing capitalists and their hangers-on. To that we can add state capital: the railways, ports, and so on — all represented vast capital investments and they all wanted broad-based capitalist development. And many squatters and mining capitalists also wanted that.[47]

That broader ruling class agenda was not hidden. Everything discussed in this presentation was



Reflective of many illustrations throughout the English-speaking-world from the late 19th Century, this image from a National Union of Seamen (UK) newspaper of 27/06/1913 offers no working-class solidarity.
The Seaman vol 1 no 18 - Chinamen on British Ships
NUS Ref 175A-4-1-2-18 Warwick University Digital Collections

openly canvassed in the newspapers and parliament.

This is a long-standing problem in the labour movement; attempting to find a section of the ruling class that is progressive because it has differences with other powerful sections of capital, whether they are banks (the money power), mining companies, multinationals not based in Australia, whatever.

This populist view of the ruling class facilitated the construction of a hegemonic ideology of Australian nationalism based on racism.

This was a nationalism that saw Australian society as white, as inclusive of the Irish and other European immigrants, rather than as narrowly English or British, and hence ultimately loyal to the British empire.

I won't dwell on this; it's been widely discussed by historians. But it is worth listening to the assessment of WG Spence, the famous, if conservative, organiser of the Shearers' Union. In his memoir, *Australia's Awakening* published in 1909, he argued that, where once republicanism had

been a force in Australia:

> The practical independence of government granted under the Australian Constitution, with the manifest advantages of being part of a big Empire and under its protection if need arose, together with the growth of the national spirit of a 'White Australia' and the broad humanitarianism taught by the Labor Party, we have developed a feeling of loyalty to race rather than governments, but have abolished any talk of either republicanism or independence.[48]

That ideology of loyalty to race drew the working class behind the pro-imperial and sub-imperial agendas of the Australian ruling class.

The idea that Asian peoples were poised to invade the country and threaten the livelihood of workers in Australia helped persuade many workers to accept conscription introduced by Labor in 1910 and to join the army with the outbreak of the bloodbath of 1914-18.

The Labor government at the time did everything they could to send as many young Australians as possible to the killing fields of Gallipoli and France. As far as they were concerned, the British Empire had to win the war, because Australian capitalism relied on British markets and investment, and relied on the Royal Navy for protection of its trade routes and its insecure grip on this vast land mass.

But just as importantly, they feared another power getting control of German colonies in the Pacific and, in particular, feared Japan's imperial ambitions. So Australian lives were sacrificed so that Australian sub-imperialism would directly control all of PNG, along with Nauru and Bougainville, and would dominate the rest of the south-western Pacific.[49]

I am old enough to remember the way the government and the DLP persuaded many workers to support the Vietnam War by using images of the 'Asian hordes' descending on Australia, imagery straight out of White Australia propaganda of the 1880s and 1890s.

Conclusion

It was an historically important achievement for the earlier generation of activists and

historians to insist that White Australia was racist, that it was not about defending living standards, and that racism had disfigured the labour movement. But they were wrong about who was responsible.

Getting to grips with the real history of White Australia doesn't just strengthen our ability to fight racism, which we must, but to better understand the nature of the capitalist system, its state machine, its ideologies and the rival strategies of major capitalists.

This has been a rather dense talk on ruling class history. But isn't the ruling class one of the major actors in labour history? Isn't a better understanding of them, as well as of our movement, essential for waging the class struggle today? And for transforming society tomorrow?

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[15]Quoted in Richard William Fogel and Stanley L Engerman, *Time on the cross: The economics of American Negro slavery*, vol. 1 (of 2), Little Brown, Boston and Toronto, 1974, p. 187.

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[19]*Brisbane Courier*, 21 August 1886, p. 4, col 6.

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[34]*Evening News*, Sydney, 26 Dec 1878, p. 4, col. 3.

[35]*SMH*, 24 July 1878, p. 3, col. 6.

[36]*SMH*, 21 Nov 1878, p. 4, cols. 5-6; 27 Nov 1878, p. 4, cols. 5-6.

[37]*Brisbane Courier*, 20 Nov 1878, p. 2, cols. 3-4.

[38]*Queensland Times* (*QT*), Ipswich Qld, 19 Dec 1878.

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Peace is Union Business
Howard Guille & Ross Gwyther

In 2002 Just Peace Queensland was established in the wake of the upswing of imperialist war that occurred following the terrorism of September 11 2001. The November 2022 issue of Just Peace's newsletter *The Peace Issue* commemorated twenty years of the group's anti-war campaigning.

Labour movement activists have often been at the forefront of campaigns against imperialist war. The initial Christian, Humanist and Marxist foundations of the movement in the nineteenth century were reflected in the anti-conscription campaigns of the First World War and the anti-Vietnam War movement, and in all the protests against imperialist action that occured before and since. These campaigns were often led by unionists.

Howard Guille's article is reproduced from the November 2022 *The Peace Issue*. He sets out the role the trade union movement played in events of twenty years ago and states why Peace is Union Business. Howard was Queensland State Secretary of the NTEU 1993-2006.

Ross Gwyther is committee member of Just Peace Queensland and a national committee member of the Independent and Peaceful Australia Network (IPAN). Ross's article gives us an update on the work of Just Peace and of IPAN.

Howard Guille:

In the 1980s and 1990s, Joan Shears and Jack Sherrington taught us that peace is union business.[1] Unions and their members were full and proud participants in the Palm Sunday peace and nuclear disarmament rallies that started in the 1980s. While recent rallies are now not as mammoth as those of the 1980s, the President of the Queensland Council of Unions was a speaker at the 2021 Palm Sunday Rally for Peace and Refugees.

Before the virtual world and communications by text, email, and social media, organising a rally depended on meetings, word of mouth, posters and fliers. Access to a photocopier and clunky com-

[1]Joan Shears OAM was a lifelong peace activist in Queensland. For Jack Sherrington, see Ross Gwyther; Stephanie Sherrington, "Jack Sherrington - 1922 - 2011." *Queensland Journal of Labour History*, (14), pp. 4–5

Gulf War protest march in Brisbane 2003.
John Oxley Library, SLQ. Image gwc00009

puters to make and copy fliers and posters was the kind of practical support that unions and the offices of sympathetic politicians could provide. And making sure that a union organiser had a bundle of them to put up in the usual places. People like Joan Shears, Norma Nord and others were tireless in their efforts and, so far as my memory goes, welcome to quietly use the machines in many union offices around the city.

It is useful to trace how unions participated in the struggle for peace over the last twenty years. Trade union banners, including the NTEU's, were prominent in Brisbane on February 16, 2003 among the 100,000 people in the rally against the invasion of Iraq. And union voices were loud in the gathering at the Botanic Gardens trying to toughen the stance of then ALP Federal leader Simon Crean. Union banners had also been carried on the June 4, 2000, walk for reconciliation across the William Jolly Bridge when some 70,000 people showed support for Indigenous Australians.

The protest against Australian participation in the invasion of Iraq was perhaps the largest demonstration for peace in the last two to three decades. But it was only one of many union actions over the period. Others included public protests against Indonesian actions in Timor L'Este in 1999-2000; against the military regime in Myanmar across the 2000s and then against the military coup there in 2021; against the civil war in Bougainville in the 1990s (described by John Momis, President of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, as the largest conflict in Oceania since the end of World War II) and against the coups in Fiji - the 1987 one by Sitiveni Rabuka against Timoci Bavadra, the 2000 one by Frank Bainimarama against Mahendra Chaudhry, and the 2006 one when Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase was deposed by Frank Bainimarama. The first two coups attracted considerable condemnation from unions because they were against the Fiji Labour Party and union activists. In both 1987 and 2000, bans were placed on goods, services, and financial movements to Fiji. The NTEU was directly involved because a commercial subsidiary of Central Queensland University operated in Suva and employed NTEU union members.

Unions can work for peace through industrial actions. These vary between industries; perhaps the most historically famous in Australia is the wharfie's strike to stop the export of pig iron from Port Kembla in 1938. Less well known is that the Waterside Workers Federation were acting with the authority of a members' resolution passed after the Japanese invasion of China. It stated that "we as members of the Australian working class are prepared to assist the Chinese workers in their fight against Fascist Japan." Right-wing politicians have always been quick to condemn unions for such actions and the infamous bans on secondary boycotts (Sections 45d and e of the Trade Practices Act) were introduced by the Fraser Government in 1977 in light of bans by unions on the export of uranium. In 2019, the Morrison Government wanted to extend similar provisions to environmental and community groups.

Unions are political as well as industrial organisations. They are political not because of links to political parties but because the protection and improvement of the conditions of life of workers and members goes well beyond their workplaces. It requires, among other things, economic and social

1963 Brisbane March for Peace
images from video taken by Grahame Garner available to view at the Radical Times Youtube account
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5zhbdkvXCs&t=493s

equality, the best possible natural and constructed environments, human rights, and opportunities to practice and enjoy cultures. The pursuit of peace is justified by the principle that 'an injury to one is an injury to all.' This was the dictum of the Industrial Workers of the World who sought to organise all workers in a single union, regardless of skills, craft, sex, nationality or race. Put plainly, class comes before nationality. War puts one worker against another and enriches the capitalist owner.

The solidaristic principle is why unions must act globally - whether it is fighting against the exploitation of seafarers who move the goods of the global supply chain or against the rank mistreatment of temporary and migrant workers including in Europe, North America, Australia, and the Middle East. It is also why unions covering education and research workers need to combine globally to protect freedom of learning from the demands of governments, religions, and those corporations whose products, including weapons, defile the world.

The union people who taught that peace is union business used the slogan that 'the unity of labour is the hope of the world.' This was made prominent by US unionist Eugene Debs in 1891, saying:

> But should the time come when working people fraternize and, recognizing the interdependence of all, rally to the standard of right and justice, determined to be heard, then the millennium of labor will dawn. The plutocratic Satan will be chained for at least a thousand years, and the unity of labor being recognized there will be peace in the earth.

In 2023 we still need a just peace.

Ross Gwyther:

September 2023 was the twenty second anniversary of the horrific twin towers attack, and the even more disastrous "war on terror" launched by the United States in response. In Brisbane a peace group was formed at that time to give voice to the community concern that military invasions of Middle Eastern countries would lead to far more bloodshed. The group was called Just Peace in the spirit of Howard's final sentence above.

Just Peace has been active over the intervening two decades, organising large public meetings, rallies and producing information sheets. The union movement has often supported and spoken at these rallies and meetings – for example in two large meetings organised by Just Peace filling the Brisbane City Hall in 2004 and 2007 ("Australia at the Crossroads"), Julie Bignall from the ASU, and Sharon Burrow from the ACTU were key speakers.

Ten years ago Just Peace was one of the key organisations to establish a nationwide network campaigning for a genuinely independent and peaceful Australia (IPAN). IPAN has focussed on the negative impacts on every aspect of Australian life from our government's close integration into the United States military and war-fighting approach to world affairs. Over the past three years IPAN conducted a major People's Inquiry into the Costs and Consequences of our involvement in US-led Wars resulting in publication of a detailed 90 page report.

Trade Unions have been a central part of the IPAN network, with over 15 unions affiliated nationally, including five in Queensland – the ETU, MUA, NTEU, QTU and QNMU. Officials and members of these unions have set up an IPAN working group called "Peace and Justice are Union Business" and meet regularly to develop material suitable to distribute to their members, as well as working on a delegate training kit focussed on this issue.

The current focus in IPAN is on the AUKUS military pact (Australia, UK and US), announced with no public debate in 2021 by the Morrison Government, and then enthusiastically taken up by the current Federal ALP Government. A major component of AUKUS is a commitment by Australia to spend $368 billion on the purchase of

Trade union activists at the anti-AUKUS rally outside the ALP National Conference in Brisbane 18th August 2023 image Mike Henry

eight nuclear powered attack submarines, including dealing with weapons-grade nuclear waste when their power plants are replaced each 30 years. Other components of the AUKUS deal include basing US B52 nuclear-capable bombers in the Northern Territory, extending even further the use of US bases in Australia for satellite spying, and using Artificial Intelligence for autonomous killer robots.

The unions in IPAN have been active in speaking out on AUKUS. At a rally held outside the recent national conference of the ALP in Brisbane, ETU Secretary Peter Ong addressed the rally, with a cluster of TV cameras filming him, to denounce the AUKUS pact, and emphasise the strong anti-nuclear stance which the ETU has reaffirmed at each of their state and national conferences for many years. Unions in each of the cities mentioned officially as possible sites for a port for the nuclear submarines, namely Brisbane, Newcastle or Port Kembla, have been campaigning strongly against the AUKUS plans.

Unions are the organised force of working people in Australia. As such, their voice in the peace movement is not only important, but is essential. If you are a union member or retired unionist, think about joining Just Peace Qld (justpeaceqld.org.au).

When the Workers Humiliated Menzies

Jeff Rickertt

August 1953. The North Queensland cane crushing season is reaching its peak. A bumper year. The sugar barons, however, are not happy. The Producers' Association is bleating about delays in shipping out the processed sugar, delays they find convenient to blame on poor waterfront productivity. They demand the Waterside Workers' Federation (WWF) make available 150 extra men at the six northern sugar ports. The Federation is wary, suspecting that the employers harbour a hidden agenda to break the union's control over the allocation of labour.

On 12 August their fears are vindicated. Out of the blue the Commonwealth government – led by the hated 'Pig Iron' Bob Menzies – threatens to recruit non-union labour unless the Wharfies comply. 'Federal Cabinet is determined to engage in a test of strength with the Communist-controlled federation,' reports the conservative *Cairns Post*. For once, the newspaper is on the money. By 27 August the union is supplying enough members to meet the official labour quota for every northern port. But Menzies presses on. On 2 September, troops from Brisbane are flown north to work the wharf, the government now claiming that meat shipments are being held up. By the following day over 200 troops have arrived in Bowen. At 2 p.m. they begin loading refrigerated meat stored on site. Later, they organise to truck-in meat from the nearby Merinda meatworks.

The WWF is not having a bar of it. The Bowen wharfies attend the daily pickup that morning but refuse to start work when told of the troops' arrival. A mass meeting of the Townsville branch of the Federation demands a national waterfront strike if the military is not with-

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BALL SEE PAGE 10

The Courier-Mail

FIRST WITH THE NEWS

WALLACE BISHOP'S

Telephone FA 0111 BRISBANE WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 2 1953 PRICE 3d

GOVERNMENT FLIES TROOPS TO BOWEN

Orders to 70 to work on wharf

TO LOAD MEAT FOR ABROAD

From ELGIN REID

CANBERRA (by teleprinter)—The Commonwealth Government is flying 70 troops to Bowen this morning to load overseas ships with meat.

The full waterside force at Bowen will be concentrated on sugar loading until congestion has been relieved at the North Queensland port.

The Labour Minister (Mr. Holt) announced last night that the Government's action was to meet an emergency—to avoid serious loss of vitally important food production, and unemployment at meatworks, sugar mills, and in the cane fields.

The first of the troops—a captain, lieutenant, and five NCOs stationed in Brisbane—arrived at Eagle Farm airport last night.

They were followed soon after, at 10.41 pm, by two trucks, containing 50 troops.

The troops, from the Brisbane area, are due to begin work in Bowen by noon to-day.

The Australian Council of Trade Unions president (Mr. Monk) and the Waterside Workers' Federation general secretary (Mr.

DRIVERS WARNED AT ROCKHAMPTON

"YOU HAD PICNIC RUN THIS FAR"

Down came the wall of silence on reports of troop movements

Brisbane is thrown into confusion

BRISBANE was thrown into confusion last night by reports that troops were to be flown to Bowen.

First exclusive reports to reach The Courier-Mail were that nine planes able to carry at least 240 troops were standing by.

The planes believed to be involved in the stand-by order were a Convair, two DC4's, and 6 DC3's.

It was reported that normal schedules of major airline companies had been interrupted to meet the emergency.

The State Government was informed by the Commonwealth late yesterday afternoon that the troop movement would have to be made to ensure continued meat loading from Bowen.

"All quiet"

This dramatic news was passed immediately to the Police Commissioner (Mr Smith) but at 10 o'clock last night the only police officer on duty in Bowen said:—

"I have not heard anything about this. Everything is quiet in Bowen."

It is understood that few people outside the Acting Premier (Mr Duggan) and Mr Smith knew anything of the Government move which was a closely guarded

BOY HURT IN BOAT BLAZE

REDCLIFFE (by telephone)—A boy was burnt about the face and arms when a prawning boat caught fire off Woody Point yesterday.

He is Desmond Wilson, 15, of Jeays Street, Scarborough, who was given ambulance attention and taken to a doctor.

The boat, the Lady Claire, sank 10 minutes after petrol from an overturned drum, was ignited by a kerosene cooker.

Wilson and his companion, Alan Patrick McQuade, 45, jumped from the boat.

10.50 P.M.: READY TO FLY TO NORTHERN PORT

10.50 P.M. PICTURE of troops from the Brisbane area arriving at Eagle Farm last night

The Courier-Mail (1933-1954) Front cover 1st September 1953
http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-page2040631

drawn within 48 hours. The national office of the WWF promptly sends this call as a recommendation to branches across Australia. On the same day, railway unionists ban the movement of all meat from Merinda to the port of Bowen and place an embargo on handling any sugar arriving in the Bowen railway yard. No locomotive can leave the depot. For their part, the meatworkers at Merinda walk off the job. The army is quickly stymied. The refined sugar is stranded. There is soon no meat to transport.

With the troops in Bowen standing idle and the government facing the likelihood of a national waterfront stoppage, the government opts to back down. A settlement is reached on 4 September. The soldiers are withdrawn, work on the wharf recommences with union labour, and the Federation agrees to transfer 40 wharfies temporarily from Brisbane to Bowen at the government's expense. Menzies is humiliated. Worker militancy, organisation and solidarity have won the day.

The South Brisbane Cemetery Tour
Further Comrades
Neil Frost

Neil Frost is a former industrial officer at the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union and The Services Union. For the past 15 years he has been a Modern History teacher at high schools across Queensland. As part of a recently completed Master of History from the University of New England, Neil undertook a research project into the contribution of several people buried at South Brisbane Cemetery to the development of workers, socialist, and radical movements in Queensland during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This formed the basis of a BLHA walking tour led by Neil in August 2022.

In our last issue of the *QJLH* Neil detailed the activity of two female activists in the Brisbane General Strike of 1912. In this issue, individuals from outside the mainstream of the labour movement are described. Neil is a member of the BLHA Management Committee and is preparing a pamphlet of his research for distribution by the Friends of South Brisbane Cemetery.

Introduction

South Brisbane Cemetery first opened as a working cemetery in the inner southern Brisbane suburb of Dutton Park in 1870. It was one of Brisbane's main cemeteries until it reached capacity and was closed to new burials in 1961.[1] It was listed on the Queensland Heritage Register in 2003[2] and since 2005 Friends of South Brisbane Cemetery have undertaken several history and community activities to preserve and protect the cemetery including research, tours, history talks and a monthly cleaning bee.[3]

The Cemetery contains the graves of several individuals who made important contributions to the development of the Communist Party and other sections of the extra-parliamentary left. Hugo Kunze played a significant role in the development of the internationalist tradition within the socialist movement in Queensland, while the burials of John and Carl

Vasilenkov illustrated the growing strength of the Communist Party in Queensland during the 1930s. Available evidence suggests that Edoardo Manassero was involved in the political struggles of Italian migrants in North Queensland during the 1930s and 1940s. Areas for future research include individuals such as Irish Republican Army volunteer Daniel O'Carroll, as well as the graves of prisoners executed at Boggo Road Prison, close to the cemetery.

Hugo Kunze

Hugo Kunze, buried at South Brisbane on 8 January 1934, played a significant role in the development of the internationalist tradition within the socialist movement in Queensland. A political refugee from the anti-socialist laws of Bismarck's Germany, he came to live in South Brisbane in the 1890s and became active in left-wing politics.[4] Along with prominent socialist Ernest Lane, he helped to found the Social Democratic Vanguard (SDV) in 1900, a self-described 'Socialist propagandist organisation' that concentrated on publishing socialist pamphlets and propaganda, including writing articles for pro-labour papers such as *The Worker*.[5] Kunze personally sent thousands of pamphlets and articles around the state in an effort to, as he put it, 'paint the state red'.[6] He also maintained close links with the international socialist and workers' movement, acting as a correspondent for a number of publications in North America and in Europe.[7] Kunze was active during the 1912 General Strike as a member of the Painters Union, marching in the front row of the union's ranks in a number of demonstrations.[8]

Although he was less active in politics after the First World War, Kunze seems to have played a part in the growth of the Communist Party in Queensland during the 1920s, incurring the active surveillance of the Commonwealth Investigation Branch (CIB).[9] As late as 1927, the CIB sent a report to the Commonwealth Attorney-General describing Kunze as a fundraiser and secret organiser for the Communist Party, using his painting business to employ militants.[10] His graveside service at South Brisbane in 1934 was addressed by his old SDV comrades T.L. Jones and Ernest Lane.

He was remembered as a someone who had not only contributed to efforts to organise workers through

his propaganda activities, but also as someone who contributed to the development of the intellectual and internationalist aspects of the socialist movement in Australia.[11]
Hugo Kunze, location N64 South Brisbane Cemetery

John and Carl Vasilenkov

The most striking feature of the grave of John and Carl Vasilenkov is the prominent hammer and sickle on the base of the grave. The father and son were buried five months apart in 1936 and contemporary newspaper reports described how the Communist Party played a prominent role in their funerals.

Carl, a member of the Young Communist League and a talented cyclist, was killed in an accident during a race at Nudgee in Brisbane on 18 July 1936, at the age of eighteen.[12] His funeral ceremony, while devoid of any religious elements, involved numerous elements of communist ceremony.[13] The *Courier Mail* acknowledged the 'simple impressiveness' of the ceremony, attended as it was by approximately one hundred representatives of different communist organisations.[14] The ceremony started with the funeral cortege marching to the graveside in which Carl's coffin was accompanied by representatives of each of the communist organisations. The many wreathes on the coffin were made up predominantly of red flowers, with a wreath in the shape of a hammer and sickle being placed at the coffin's head and a red silken shroud with the emblem of the Communist Youth League and fringed with gold lace placed over his coffin. [15]

The graveside service began with the 'Red Front', a communist salute which involved those present raising a tightly clenched left fist to their shoulders. The funeral was addressed by J. Wilson as a representative of the Young Communist League and Gilbert Burns, at the time the secretary of District Three of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) in Queensland. (Burns would later go on to become an executive member of the CPA in Queensland before being convicted of sedition and gaoled for six months in 1948 for his work on behalf of the party during the Miners' Strike.[16])

After the speeches, Carl's coffin was lowered into the ground as people sang the first two verses of 'The Red Flag'. Then, members of the Communist Youth League stepped

up to the open grave and cried out 'Goodbye, Carl. Goodbye, Comrade.' A permanent wreath shaped into a hammer and sickle was placed on the funeral mound after the burial.[17]

When Carl's father John Vasilenkov, also a party member, died five months later, he was also given a service presided over by members of the CPA, although less detail remains about the nature of the graveside service.[18]

The large and elaborate funeral ceremonies conducted for the Vasilenkovs are indicative of the Party's relative strength in Queensland during the interwar period. Branches of the Party were established in Queensland early in 1922. The Party in Queensland grew rapidly, with more than 1200 members of the Party by 1939.[19] The Communists put a great deal of effort into establishing and maintaining auxiliary organisations such as those that attended Carl Vasilenkov's funeral. Some were based on a section of the population such as women or youth, some around sports and outdoor activities, while still others were centred around cultural and intellectual activities such as art, theatre, and literature. These organisations were designed to not only provide an outlet for Party members, but they also served the purpose of attracting people from outside the Party and drawing them in.[20] The number and profile of Party organisations all added to the strength of the Queensland Branch of the Communist Party by the time of the funerals of John and Carl Vasilenkov. The Party's greatest strength was in the north of the state between Mackay and Cairns, particularly amongst miners, shearers, meatworkers, and most importantly amongst the canecutters and mill workers involved in the sugar industry, as well as amongst the Italian migrant workers in and around the regional towns of Innisfail and Ingham.[21]

Carl and John Vasilenkov, location U222 South Brisbane Cemetery

Edoardo Manassero

Edoardo Manassero was one such Italian migrant involved in the broad left in North Queensland during the period from the late 1920s until the early 1940s. Prior to this research, little was known about Manassero other than what was stated on his epitaph, 'Our dear Brother and Anti-Fascist Comrade' A copy of Manassero's record of internment during the Second

World War was located that has helped to fill in some of the gaps regarding his life.

Edoardo Manessero was born in Allesandria in Piedmont Italy in 1900, working as a bootmaker before going on to undertake compulsory military serve in the Italian Army from 1918 to 1921.[22] He arrived in Australia at Brisbane on 15 March 1925 on the *Regina d'Italia* and then travelled on to live with his brother Paolo in Ingham, where he lived and worked for the next seventeen years.[23] No detail is recorded in his file of his time in Ingham, until his arrest on 7 March 1942, after which he was transferred to Gaythorne Internment camp in Brisbane and then Loveday Internment Camp in South Australia. Manassero was subsequently moved to Wayville, a suburb of Adelaide, before being released on 21 August 1943.[24]

While further research could fill in the gaps in Manassero's life, a great deal is known about the role of the Italian community in North Queensland generally, and Ingham in particular, during the period that he lived there.

There was a surge in Italian migration to Queensland after the rise to power of fascist dictator Benito Mussolini in 1922 so that by 1930, over 20,000 Italians had settled in North Queensland, becoming the largest non-Anglo-Celtic group in the state by 1933.[25] The assassination of socialist politician Giacomo Matteotti in June 1924 led to the collapse of democratic resistance to fascism and the consolidation of Mussolini's dictatorship[26] and Italian immigration to the state tripled in 1924 and 1925.[27] Most of these Italian migrants settled in the sugar growing areas of north Queensland including the town of Ingham and its surrounds.[28]

In North Queensland, there was a significant number of both Fascist and Anti-Fascists, resulting in regular clashes between the two groups.[29] In 1931, three Italian Anti-Fascists were charged with assaulting the Italian Counsel during a visit to Ingham from Brisbane, with the men ripping off his Fascist Party badge, and a larger group of anti-fascist protestors forcing the band that had been waiting to play the Fascist Anthem to instead play the communist anthem *The Internationale*.[30]

The Communist Party had strong support from Italian migrants in North Queensland through a

combination of identifying with the anti-fascist cause and becoming involved in the issues of concern to the local communities in the area. The CPA became closely associated with efforts to overturn the discriminatory policy of preference for labour in the sugar industry that reserved seventy-five per cent of jobs for 'British' workers, which was enforced by the cane growers with the help of the Australian Workers' Union (AWU).[31] The party was also heavily involved in organising the Weil's Disease dispute of 1934-35. Weil's disease, which was potentially fatal, was caused by contact with the urine of infected rats which lived in the sugar cane fields and could be largely eliminated by the burning of the cane before harvesting.[32] Many of the canecutters who became infected and subsequently died, particularly in the Ingham district, were Italians.[33] It is therefore not surprising that many of the rank-and-file unionists, led by members of the Communist Party, who took strike action about Weil's disease were Italians in the Ingham area.[34]

While the strike was broken by the collective efforts of the cane growers, the AWU and the state government, it was ultimately successful as it led to an Industrial Court ruling in July 1936 that ordered the burning of cane fields before all future harvesting.[35] The dispute also had the effect of increasing support for the Communist Party throughout North Queensland. Due to the efforts of Italian Anti-Fascists and others, the perception of the CPA changed amongst working people in the region 'from an alien threat into a source of strength and protection.'[36] This increase in support was viewed with alarm by the authorities, with Italian anti-fascists coming under surveillance from Commonwealth security agencies in the lead up to the Second World War.[37]

Clues as to what occurred during Manassero's period of detention can be found from a fellow Italian Anti-Fascist from Ingham, Frank Fantin. Like Manassero, Fantin had left Italy in 1924 in the wake of Mussolini's rise to power and had gone to live with an elder brother in Ingham.[38] In Australia, Fantin remained politically active and was involved in opposing British preference in the sugar industry, and in supporting the Weil's Disease dispute.[39] Fantin was arrested in Ingham in February 1942, approximately one month before Manassero. As Manassero would be after him, Fantin was first transferred to Gaythorne

Internment camp in Brisbane and then to Loveday Internment Camp in South Australia.[40] Life for the Italian Anti-Fascists like Fantin and Manassero in internment was not easy, with many being interred alongside known and active Fascists. Substantial documentary evidence outlines that the Anti-Fascists were subjected to sustained harassment by Fascists within the camps who engaged in acts of violence against their opponents.[41] Fantin was an effective leader of the Anti-Fascist grouping within Italian internees of camp 14A at Loveday, the same camp in which Manassero was interred.[42] However, because of his political activity, he was murdered by Fascist internees on 16 November 1942.[43] Fantin's murder was a turning point in the internment of Italians, with many Anti-Fascists being released in the months after his death.[44]

A letter to federal authorities from prominent communist and General Secretary of the Waterside Workers Federation Jim Healy in the wake of Frank Fantin's death may indicate Manassero's level of political activity.[45] Healy recommended the release of nine Anti-Fascist internees including a "Manassero".[46]

No information could be found about the seven-week period between Manassero's release from internment in Adelaide and his death and burial in South Brisbane Cemetery. Further research into the life of this activist is needed.

Eduardo Manessero (with Anglicised version of name) location T291-E South Brisbane Cemetery

Conclusion

The research conducted into burials at South Brisbane Cemetery has confirmed that a number of the people buried there made substantial contributions to the development of workers, socialist and radical movements in Queensland during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

These individuals, from outside of the mainstream of the Labour Movement, made important contributions to the development of the Communist Party, and other sections of the extra-parliamentary left.

Further research could uncover other figures in this and other cemeteries and thus add a working class dimension to the presentation of local histories via cemetery visits.

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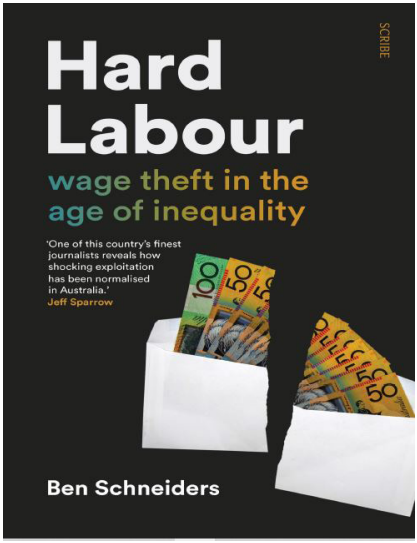
Book Review

Hard Labour: Wage Theft in the Age of Inequality
by Ben Schneiders
Scribe (Melbourne) (2022)

Reviewed by **Duncan Hart**



As one of the people centrally involved in the 2015-16 Coles Case dealt with in Ben's book, I appreciate the invitation of the editor of this journal to put in my two cents to reflect on the outcomes and the years since.

To give some background, I joined the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association (SDA), the retail union, in 2006 when I started my first job at Target Capalaba. When I started at university in 2008, I became active with Socialist Alternative, the revolutionary socialist organisation which publishes *Red Flag*, the *Marxist Left Review* and has recently been leading the first credible socialist electoral campaign in Australia since the Communist Party, in the form of the Victorian Socialists.

Through my involvement in socialist organisation and learning more about the history of class struggle and working-class politics in this country, I also became more interested in being active in my union. In 2009, I volunteered to be a shop steward in the SDA. I attended a few union training sessions in that role but certainly learned a lot more about unionism through my involvement in Socialist Alternative.

While I had been aware that the SDA was a socially conservative and industrially passive union, what really elevated this to the

front of my mind was the 2010 public announcement by then SDA National Secretary, Joe De Bruyn, slamming the Gillard government for agreeing to a symbolic Greens' motion about consulting the electorate on their views regarding "gay marriage" as it was known at the time.[1] De Bruyn even said that marriage equality would result in social collapse.[2] In response I mobilised SDA members to attend a quarterly members' meeting in February 2011 to oppose this unrepresentative and homophobic rubbish. Rank-and-file workers, including SDA shop stewards, were totally unaware of the conservative social views held by the SDA officials, and which were being held out as representative of a disproportionately young and female workforce. Even in 2010, 80% of people under 24 years old, and 67% of women overall, were in favour of marriage equality.[3]

At the time I found it quite easy to approach fellow shop stewards in the big retail stores, like K Mart, Bunnings, Coles and so on in my shopping centre to sign a petition condemning De Bruyn's comments, and if memory serves about six people came with me to the members' meeting. At the meeting however, SDA state secretary, and later Queensland ALP senator, Chris Ketter, forestalled debate on the issue by moving a motion endorsing Joe De Bruyn's comments, which the meeting of around 50 people duly voted up.

From that point on I was involved in establishing a rank-and-file group called "SDA Members for Marriage Equality" which agitated on the issue in the union. In 2013 we threw our weight behind an SDA organiser, Alan Swetman, who sought to challenge Chris Ketter as Queensland state secretary. Swetman further exposed the SDA leadership's deeply conservative religious bigotry. It emerged that organisers maintained databases on their shop stewards, noting their religion and their political loyalty to the SDA's line. An ex-National Civic Council operative, Rocco Mimmo, who maintains some kind of religious lobby group called the Ambrose Centre for Religious Liberty, conducted political-religious meetings with selected SDA shop stewards, in a perverted echo of Communist Party training efforts conducted in unions like the Seamens' years prior. Swetman, despite eighteen years of service as an organiser, was sacked from his

SDA members at rally for marriage equality, King George Square, November 2013
image Duncan Hart

position the day before nominations for the position of state secretary closed.[4]

A Federal Court case brought by the SDA was somehow able to convince the court that Swetman was not eligible to contest the election. Following these events, I and several other SDA shop stewards and another organiser who backed Swetman were sacked from our union positions.[5]

Over these years it had become abundantly clear just how bankrupt and conservative the SDA was as an organisation. But it was only after starting as a trolley collector at Coles in 2014 and following the news of the challenge mounted to the rubber-stamping of the Coles Agreement by an NTEU official, Josh Cullinan, that I started to really understand just what the leadership of the SDA was costing retail and fast food workers.[6]

Josh's 2015 analysis of the Coles Agreement was backed by the Australian Meat Industry Employees' Union (AMIEU), which covers meatworkers at Coles. Josh clearly explained that the Coles Agreement left a large proportion of workers worse off, as compared to the General Retail Award. The Award in every industry should act as a safety net, which Enterprise Agreements negotiated between

unions and bosses are not supposed to fall below, under the "Better Off Overall Test" (BOOT).

The means by which this had occurred was through trading off penalty rates in exchange for higher base rates of pay, obfuscating the reality of underpayment. In 2015, the base rate of pay for Coles workers was 11% higher than under the Award. However, workers who worked primarily after 6pm (all night-fill workers), or on weekends, when they were entitled to penalty rates of between 25% and 100% on their usual rates, were earning thousands of dollars a year less than they would if they were employed on the Award. It also meant that Coles was free to roster workers at practically any time of the day or night, with penalty rates only applying at the rate of 30% from midnight to 5am and 50% on Sundays. In my own personal case as a worker who had a full Sunday shift and worked late nights cleaning, I was $60 a week worse off, earning 20% less than I would under the Award.[7]

When I contacted Josh for an interview for *Red Flag* on the Coles agreement, he explained the full scale of this to me.[8] It was during that conversation that Josh told me that a Coles worker could bring an appeal against the agreement's certification, an appeal he would be only too happy to assist with. This was the start of a struggle which would unearth the thoroughly rotten underbelly of retail unionism in this country.

Ben Schneiders' *Hard Labour* includes an account of this legal case, and the scene he paints of the Fair Work Commission sessions that heard the case are poignant. Siobhan Kelly, the barrister who represented me pro bono, as well as Josh Cullinan himself, were both extremely qualified and passionate advocates in my case. On the other side, the SDA had the services of Warren Friend, then-Queen's Counsel, while Coles had a veritable gang selling their services, led by Stuart Wood, then-Queen's Counsel. Wood received an "Order of Australia" for "significant service in the legal profession, particularly in the area of industrial relations" in 2019, the same year that a certain Kathryn Campbell of Robodebt fame received similar acclamation. Wood is a right-wing activist in the Samuel Griffith Society and has previously spoken at HR Nicholls Society events.[9]

Along with the lawyers, Coles and the SDA called a bevy of mercenary "experts" to argue why Coles workers benefited more from the provisions of apparent "flexibility" in working conditions than higher pay for anti-social hours. These academics, Ernst and Young partners, executives in the Country Fire Authority and similar luminaries were no doubt "commissioned" appropriately for their expert testimony.

A low point in the testimony of these people was when Bruno Cecchini of Ernst and Young, under cross-examination from Siobhan Kelly, said without a trace of embarrassment that a worker could just scrape ahead in financial benefit under the Coles Agreement if they took "'8 hours blood donor leave; 10 days' defence service leave; 5 days of unpaid leave; 11 days of carer's leave; 3 days' compassionate leave; 3 days' emergency services leave; 3 days' natural disaster leave; were off work for 26 weeks with [a] serious injury' receiving accident make-up pay and were made redundant."[10]

It emerged six months later, and after we had won the case, that Bruno Cecchini had advised Coles in a confidential report at the time of his testimony to the Commission that, on average, each Coles worker was $1,497 a year worse off under the agreement, saving Coles between $60 million and $70 million a year.[11]

The experience of the hearings in the Fair Work Commission showed up the farce the legal and arbitration systems are when it comes to workers fighting for our rights. A pack of vultures receiving thousands of dollars an hour for their time produced thousands of pages of arcane legal argument to deny workers—who are doing fundamentally necessary labour stocking shelves, cleaning floors and scanning barcodes—a few dollars more for anti-social hours. The notion that a worker without specialised legal training could access this system, or that the system was even intended to be accessed, was shown to be completely ludicrous. The Fair Work Commissioners and their predecessors had allowed this legalised wage theft to occur for decades unopposed. Despite this, the clarity of our case and the fact I had Siobhan and Josh in my corner, who were able to parse the bullshit from the other side, meant that my appeal was successful in a decision handed down on 31 May 2016.[12]

Rallying outside the Fair Work Commission in Melbourne 27 April 2016
image Duncan Hart

The implications of the case were enormous. Not only was the third largest employer in Australia shown up underpaying its workers, but the results of the case meant that practically identical SDA agreements at Woolworths, McDonalds and everywhere across the retail and fast-food sector were under threat – exposed as breaching the BOOT. In my opinion, it showed that the "Catholic conservatism" of the SDA leadership, as professed by the long-serving National Secretary Joe De Bruyn and his associates, was just a cover for venal corruption. In a 1994 interview with oral historian Richard Raxworthy, De Bruyn had put himself forward as a social conservative, yes, but one willing to fight against neoliberalism and rampant free markets trampling workers.[13] The reality was that the SDA functioned as an adjunct to the bosses, paying them 10% of members' dues to maintain their protection racket.[14] In exchange for access to recruiting members, the SDA offered bosses a method to save money and put workers to work anytime they pleased. How many tens of thousands of workers' family lives, supposedly sacred to the likes of De Bruyn, were disrupted or even destroyed by scrambling for the basic necessities?

During the year that the case ran, I undertook research into the history of the SDA to understand how this

had come about. The results of that research, which were published in this journal in 2016, I shared with Ben Schneiders and he used it in his book. [15] To summarise that history, the SDA underwent a factional struggle in the 1970's which had cemented the control of a Catholic far-right group called the National Civic Council over the union. This group had defeated their rivals in the union by relying on employer control over union fee deductions to transfer control over the union's assets to the NCC faction led by Joe De Bruyn. Employer deductions, negotiated originally in 1971 as part of a closed-shop agreement with Coles and Woolworths, are still the only means by which the SDA accesses union dues from its members. To maintain this friendly arrangement, the SDA from the onset of enterprise bargaining in the 1990s steadily traded away award conditions, until being challenged in my case. The SDA can then use its large and passive membership for influence in the Labor Party, enabling such current SDA-affiliated politicians as Don Farrell, Peter Malinauskas and Tony Burke, among many others, to ascend to political power on workers' backs.

One of the features of the Coles case worth being remembered, but which Ben as a reporter wasn't involved with, was the efforts of rank-and-file Coles' unionists (particularly members of Socialist Alternative) to organise around the case. We made a number of efforts to engage workers in the issues at stake, being convinced that unless workers were participating, any victory in the Commission would be at best limited by the connivance of the SDA and the bosses.

A great early tool we worked with was a leaflet which we distributed in our workplaces, and in Coles stores all around Brisbane, which clearly showed the differences between the Award rates of pay and the agreement. We set up a Facebook page, Coles Workers Against Wage Theft, which grew to over 1,000 followers. More active engagement was harder to achieve. Our first event was a public forum organised with the help of the meatworkers' union, but despite our leafletting and the publicity around the case, from memory only half a dozen workers attended. At some stage we organised a protest outside the Coles in New Farm – the layout of the shopping complex meant it was possible to leaflet outside the store – but again it was hard to engage workers even though passers-by were sympathetic.

While these efforts didn't bear fruit, I am still convinced that we were correct to try them. After winning the case halfway through 2016, Coles refused to carry out the recommendations of Fair Work, and instead reverted to an older agreement.[16] So it was only in March 2018, after a further legal fight by another Coles worker, Penny Vickers, calling for a reversion to the Award, that Coles workers actually received our award conditions in the form of a new agreement that was substantially similar to the retail award.[17]

Up to the present, the continued domination of the SDA's conservative bureaucracy has hamstrung Coles' workers. When the 2018 agreement expired in 2020, Coles refused to negotiate, and the SDA refused to organise workers to fight. As of writing this, three years later, that huge workforce is sitting on an expired agreement, with their pay increases based only on the increases mandated by Fair Work every July. It is a similar situation at other large retailers and fast-food giants where award conditions have since been restored, though the

Wages paid under the Coles Store Team Enterprise Agreement 2014-2017 compared to the General Retail Industry Award 2010

Time	Monday to Friday		Saturday		Sunday	
	Award	Agreement	Award	Agreement	Award	Agreement
Midnight to 5am	$28.48	$27.68	$33.23	$27.68	$56.96	$42.58
5am	$28.48	$21.29	$33.23	$21.29	$56.96	$42.58
6am	$28.48	$21.29	$33.23	$21.29	$56.96	$31.93
7am till 9am	$18.99	$21.29	$23.74	$21.29	$56.96	$31.93
9am till 6pm	$18.99	$21.29	$23.74	$21.29	$37.98	$31.93
6pm till 9pm	$23.74	$21.29	$23.74	$21.29	$37.98	$31.93
9pm	$23.74	$21.29	$23.74	$21.29	$37.98	$42.93
10pm	$23.74	$21.29	$23.74	$26.612	$37.98	$42.93
11pm	$33.23	$21.29	$33.23	$26.612	$56.96	$42.93

Sources: http://newcastle.amieu.asn.au/files/2015/07/Coles-supermarkets-Bi-Lo-AMIEU-2014-to-2017.pdf
https://www.fwc.gov.au/documents/documents/modern_awards/award/ma000004/default.htm

Coles leaflet 2015

image Duncan Hart

passage of the Secure Jobs, Better Pay bill at the end of 2022 has forced them to at least pretend to negotiate, opening the potential for legal industrial action by workers.[18]

Retail and Fast-Food Workers' Union

One of the lasting legacies of the Coles case was the formation of the Retail and Fast-Food Workers' Union (RAFFWU) by Josh Cullinan in November 2016. Josh was able to successfully use the profile and fundraising created from his successful prosecution of the case to form the union and has launched a crusade with the help of workers across the industry to restore award conditions stolen from workers. This successful fight is immensely to his credit. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been restored to low-paid workers because of this work. At the time of the formation of RAFFWU I was sceptical of the value of organising a separate union to the SDA rather than cohering a stronger internal opposition, but I have always been and continue to be willing to fight alongside RAFFWU members every time an opportunity arises. As the recent strike organised by RAFFWU at Apple retail stores across Australia indicated, the capacity for rank-and-file led action among retail workers exists.

My final reflection on Ben's book, which I think is my primary criticism of it, is regarding the necessity for hard-nosed class struggle. While most unions do not operate on a basis as blatant as the SDA's partnership with the bosses, the broader phenomenon of heavily exploited, powerless and low wage workers across large swathes of the Australian economy which Ben Schneider's book deals with is not just an indictment of the ruling class. It is also an indictment of the leaders of the workers' movement who have allowed this to fester for so long without any strategy to push back. The examples that Ben does discuss, in particular with the United Workers' Union and farmworkers, make it crystal clear how their modest successes were earned – old fashioned organising. If readers of Ben's book come away with anything, let it be a burning hatred for the exploiters and bureaucrats, and a desire to fight.

Duncan Hart is a PhD candidate at the University of Queensland, studying the far left in Australia in the post Great War years. He has been a union activist since beginning work at Target while at high school and a member of Socialist Alternative since 2008.

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Obituaries

Hugh Ross Hamilton
by Joanne Watson

Hugh Ross Hamilton

born 18/09/1930, died 22/07/2023

Known to many as the former State Secretary of the Building Workers Industrial Union, Hugh Hamilton was born in Rockhampton in 1930. He was one of three children to carpenter Hugh Hamilton and his wife Janet. In 1925, Hugh Senior had emigrated from Glasgow at the age of 20 with his 16-year-old brother; two unaccompanied young men, coming to Australia to flee the starvation of their homeland. It was here that he met Janet, also from Glasgow.

Hugh Senior and Janet raised three young children during the Depression years. Recently, when Hugh was in a nursing home and in his 90s, he told me that at one point the family lived close to my own home here in Cleveland. Their home at that time had been a tent. They shared the spot of land with another family and at the end of the road the men had erected a sign on cardboard: 'Work wanted. Will do anything.'

Hugh Hamilton speaking at a Right to March rally in late 1977
Radical Times - https://vimeo.com/56494332

The Hamiltons were rescued from destitution by the war mobilisations that led to his family (amongst others) being sent to work in Army Base camps, in this case in Wallangarra. Hugh had

great memories of running around 'wild in the bush' with the other kids. Not all families were in the Army. There were many doing construction work and odd jobs. The parents offered education. Hugh loved the schooling and remembered really enjoying some of the books they read.

Settling in Rockhampton, Hugh Senior and his son Hugh were able to build a small home for the family from mostly scrap materials. Hugh's parents remained in that home until the end. Hugh Junior began an apprenticeship as a carpenter at the age of 14. Not long after that he was spraying asbestos on pipes – no mask, no warnings. Hugh became a shop floor activist in the building trade. Later in life, after he became State Secretary of the BWIU, he was instrumental in setting up screening and a compensation fund for workers suffering from asbestosis.

Despite his limited access to formal education, Hugh was engaged in self-education throughout his whole life. He was always curious about people, literature, theatre, and ideas, inclusive of differences and eager to learn wherever he could. He joined the Eureka Youth League and met my father Geoff Watson when they both joined the Communist Party in their late teens. My father was attracted to the Party on intellectual grounds. Dad had won a scholarship to pursue education formally and was exploring Marxism. Hugh gravitated to the Party as a working-class activist with a trade unionist father. But they connected and engaged in a cross fertilisation of ideas and experiences, alongside Hugh's lovely wife Judy, over many years. This was further extended through their involvement in New Theatre, where my parents met each other as well as befriending Judy and her mother, Connie Gutteridge. The connections became lifelong friendships.

These were the Cold War years. And these were folks, our parents, and elders, who had food and crap thrown at them when they tried to sell the CPA paper, *Tribune*. The Holland Park Hotel footpath was the site of some vicious drive-by attacks. You could (and my father, like others, did) lose a job for being found to be associated with the Party. The country might have voted No to banning the CPA, but no one seemed to pass that message on to ASIO, employers or the rednecks.

While the Party had passed its peak membership of more than 22,000 in 1945, it still had extensive roots in the labour movement, doggedly pursuing a united front strategy. This required patience, building connections with people who think differently to you. The later revelations of the brutality and deceit of Stalinism, by Khruschev and others, led to a terrible sense of betrayal and many left the Party. Hugh told me that he had been instructed not to speak to my father, who had been one of the first to raise the alarm. Hugh ignored that direction.

Like my parents at Wellers Hill, Hugh and Judy raised their children in the Housing Commission area of Mt Gravatt. When our mother passed away at a young age, leaving my 36-year-old father a widower with three young daughters, Hugh and Judy stepped up. They helped with the house, took us girls out on adventures and embraced us at Christmas time at Grandma Connie Guttridge's home at Southport. We went to see *On Stage Vietnam* at the Rialto theatre in West End and to a Joan Baez concert, who charged only $2 because it was a tribute to activists of the anti-war movement. There were many barbeques and parties at Hugh and Judy's home. There were workshop days making placards for the Vietnam Moratorium and dressing up trucks for the Labour Day marches. There were the O'Connors, the Giffords, the Englarts, Georgie Briton, the Andersons, and many others: builders, plumbers, waterside workers, meat workers, barmaids and office workers. There was a camaraderie that was infectious.

The CFMEU (formerly the Building Workers Industrial Union) have paid tribute to Hugh's contribution to the labour movement in an obituary published shortly after his death. It notes that Hugh 'devoted his entire life to the building industry and the men and women who work in it. Building workers today have Hugh's legacy to thank for many of the conditions we now enjoy but were hard fought and won over many years of struggle.'

Even after his retirement, Hugh continued his activism, helping to found the construction training centre at Salisbury and teaching there, as well as setting up MATES in Construction – to address the high rates of suicide in the building industry. On one occasion I was heading to my office in town. It

Hugh Hamilton
c/o Mates Helping Mates: A History of Mates in Construction Queensland 2008-2018
by Greg Shannon, p6

was 1998 so Hugh would have been 68 years old. He was bounding up the stairs of the Neville Bonner building, telling me he had a meeting with Labour Ministers to set up a program of shipping prefabricated housing to East Timor and offering training by Aussie builders to set them up.

In his position with the BWIU and on the Trades and Labour Council, Hugh provided a voice for many social movements that might have otherwise been absent at the TLC level. He provided leadership in the anti-war moratorium movement, the campaign against the Apartheid Springboks tour, and the civil liberties campaign of the late 1970s. In 1979, at the age of 18, I was assaulted and arrested for marching by a copper whom Hugh later identified as a member of the Task Force – a group that trained alongside the CIA in Vietnam. Hugh bailed me out at midnight and some days later dropped into our home to give me a copy of *No No to Joh!* in which he had written 'Welcome to the Movement Comrade.' He never stopped giving. And he never stopped protesting. In 2016, at the age of 86 he marched (using his walking stick) with his daughter and me in protest about the horrific treatment of young Aboriginal kids in Don Dale Detention Centre. That same year he attended the memorial for the late Errol O'Neill and gave an eloquent speech, paying tribute to Errol's partner Mary Kelly, and the many women who struggled so hard in the early days, to gain a voice within the trade union movement.

On his birthday at the age of 90, Hugh delivered a speech via interactive video to the CFMEUs Conference of young people, where he talked about the dark days of 'Bjelke-Petersen, the Arsehole.' As Dan O'Neill later noted, it was as if it was all one word, like just part of his surname. Hugh detailed the

fight for hard hats in the building trade, for compulsory unionism, even for workplace health and safety legislation – for the things that we take for granted today. He also expressed his respect for young people and their greater awareness of many issues, like climate change, and the fact that they will be the leaders of the future. The young people present responded with great respect in return, and then the whole conference sang Happy Birthday, followed by the chant 'I say union, you say Power!'

Hugh did not want a funeral. He felt happy with his birthday celebrations and felt no need of anything more. He formed great friendships with the nurses in his retirement home and enjoyed talking to them daily about their conditions and their rights, about unionism, politics, and history. Hugh showed great stoicism coping with near total loss of sight and poor hearing. He gave (dictated) a speech for a retirement celebration of the Nurse Manager at the complex only days before he died and he continued cracking jokes right up until his peaceful end earlier this year, at the age of 92.

Eulogies are about writing with respect for the deceased and for the grieving family and friends. They are about trying to capture 'the whole man.' I have not been sure how to do that with a person who had such incredible energy and such an appetite for life; who made such a contribution to social change while also providing enormous support to friends and family. It feels impossible to do. But when I think of him now, I try to remember something his wife Judy once told me some years ago. We were sitting on her daughter Jan's veranda at Woolloongabba when she turned to me and said, 'Gee we used to laugh a lot when we were young. Your father was a laugh-a-minute. And the three of us would race all over town, going to events and gatherings, meeting new people, laughing our heads off! Gee we had fun.'

Joanne Watson is a retired Senior History and English teacher. She is the author of *Palm Island - through a long lens.*

Betty Hounslow
by Tim Quinn

Betty Hounslow

born 01/08/1951, died 27/07/2023

Betty Hounslow who died in Sydney on 27 July after a short illness was a lifelong political activist who devoted her enormous energy and formidable intellectual ability to a wide range of progressive and social justice-based campaigns and organisations.

Betty Hounslow
Asylum Seekers Resource Centre tribute to Betty: https://asylumseekerscentre.org.au/tribute-to-asc-board-member-betty-hounslow-am/

All her life Betty worked with and advocated for the many people in our society with little voice and power in the face of big and uncaring governments, bureaucracies and corporations.

Betty was a socialist, a feminist and a committed trade unionist who had been active in the Communist and the New Left Parties. Her obituary in the *Sydney Morning Herald* wrote that she "was a lifelong social and political activist with a deep commitment to social justice and humanity. During her long and active life, she assisted women, including women in prison, the LGBTQ community, immigrants and asylum seekers, and many marginalised groups at odds with society. She worked for foundations, sat on and chaired boards, lobbied governments and campaigned ceaselessly for justice."

Betty was strongly involved in the movement for LGBTQ rights. She was one of the participants in the first Sydney Mardi Gras Parade in June 1978, when the marchers faced police brutality and arrests. She was active in the community campaign to defend those arrested,

Betty Hounslow, Secretary Bowen Hills Protest Committee 1972
image from The Battle For Bowen Hills (1982) https://vimeo.com/21222102

helped organise the 1981 Mardi Gras and later became an active member of the First Mardi Gras 78ers Committee.

Her dedicated commitment and highly effective work for a wide range of organisations in the community and social justice sectors has been recognised by the many tributes paid to her life work by those organisations and by speakers at a large memorial gathering held in Glebe Town Hall. In 2013 she was awarded an Order of Australia for her work.

Among the tributes was one from the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS), where Betty served as Executive Director from 1994 – 2001, a time of great challenge through the early Howard Government years, yet significant social progress.

Others have been from the Asylum Seekers Centre, the Public Interest Advocacy Centre, Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA, the LGBTQ community and the Search Foundation.

Amidst all these significant tributes, it is also important to remember the important contribution Betty made to community organisations in Brisbane at a young age. Although she spent the last almost fifty years of her life in Sydney

and on the national stage, she was born and lived her early years in Doomben and received her formal education at All Hallows School and University of Queensland.

Memories of Betty by those who knew her in Brisbane are that she was a strong, committed person of great intellect and ability, a determined fighter for justice who never backed away from a confrontation with those in power if required. Though she was tough and could be confronting, she is also remembered for her warmth, kindness, generosity and support for those she worked with or represented. Betty had a great sense of humour, was good company and left an impact on all who knew her.

Julie Allen from the Sunshine Coast knew Betty around 1970 when both were in local Christian social justice groups together. Regarding Betty as an influential mentor, Julie has written: "I was only aware later of some of what Betty went on to do in her own life in addressing poverty in Cambodia and in working for the Fred Hollows Foundation and for ACOSS, standing with asylum seekers, and working tirelessly for gay rights and the Mardi Gras Movement. Knowing her in those younger days, I am gratified to learn more about her achievements and how she continued to be hugely influential in all those struggles for a better world, as her determination to be a change agent was strikingly apparent from very early in her life.

As I thought about Betty, I was reminded of what Matthew Fox says: 'Political movements for justice are part of the fuller development of the cosmos ... Liberation movements are a (further) development of the cosmos's sense of harmony, balance, justice and celebration.'

I celebrate Betty's brave life in which she did so much that was principled, compassionate and noble. I am deeply grateful for her positive impact on my own life and on that of so many people, and I mourn her passing, but with huge admiration and appreciation for what she did.

Betty studied for a Diploma in Education at UQ in 1973. Together with some other colleagues, it was great experience to have Betty in the course with us as a good friend and born leader. She was a strong speaker, with a great command of language in all its forms, and the ability to put together a clear,

convincing argument. She was part of, often leading, every effort to make the course more relevant for us and for the students we were being prepared to teach. She would have made a great teacher, loved by students and worker colleagues. I am less certain how well the education bureaucracy would have coped. Instead of taking up a teaching position, Betty became the co-ordinator of the Brisbane Freeway and Compensation Committee.

In this role, she is well remembered by many people who were involved in the struggles for social justice and human rights against the Bjelke-Petersen government of the 1970s and 1980s. She was a courageous and determined leader of the significant protest movement against the proposed Northern Freeway. This broadly-based community and environmental struggle was to stop the freeway destroying a small, working class community in Bowen Hills, without any consultation with those affected and very inadequate compensation for the residents whose houses were resumed.

The campaign put up a prolonged struggle over several years, including the occupation and reuse of those houses already resumed. This led to a brutal confrontation by the government and police with evictions and arrests. The *Truth*, a Brisbane newspaper of the time ran the heading: From Convent to Street Brawl, reflecting the fact that Betty had some years earlier spent a short time training with the Sisters of Mercy.

Marg O'Byrne, now living in Fremantle, recalled those events in Bowen Hills.

> "I knew Betty from the anti-freeway movement in Brisbane in 1974 when I lived next door to her in one of the houses in Markwell Street, Bowen Hills. Betty was a force to be reckoned with. A real fighter - articulate, courageous and determined. Her political leadership galvanised the movement, but it was her humanity and down to earth ability to communicate with the residents of that working class suburb, that inspired ordinary people to take extraordinary action and resist the onslaught of the Bjelke-Petersen regime. I'm proud to say I was with Betty in an anti-freeway demo on

Betty at WorldPride New York in June 2019
image courtesy of Betty's partner, Kate Harrison
(https://www.78ers.org.au/news-all/2023/7/30/vale-betty-hounslow)

> the day the police charged the protesters. It was frightening, unnecessary and violent. Betty was so courageous."

Further information about the significance of those protests are available on the State Library of Qld Anti-Freeway Protest Digital Story interview with Betty and Tom O'Brien, the initial Secretary of the Anti-Freeway Movement, recorded in 2019. Also the *Workers Bush Telegraph,* edited by Ian Curr, contains an obituary for Betty and more detailed information, including the Peter Gray film, *The Battle for Bowen Hills* (*https://workersbushtelegraph.com.au/2023/07/31/vale-betty-hounslow/*). The Northern Freeway was not built; residents had won but the government had demolished a large part of the neighbourhood. Importantly though, the campaign was one of the first major discussions and actions in which residents of Brisbane demanded a real say in the town planning future of their city,

Many of Betty's friends locally and all those who work for social justice will mourn her passing away but celebrate and long remember with admiration a life of commitment and purpose, so well lived. My condolences to Betty's partner Kate Harrison, to her sisters Mary and Margaret Hounslow and to her extended family.

Tim Quinn is a friend of Betty's who studied with her in 1973. He was a member of Brisbane City Council from 1985 to 2004 with a strong interest in town planning and was Chair of Urban Planning Committee for twelve years.

Knocking The Top Off

A People's History of Alcohol in Australia

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- Triple Zed's Joint Efforts: Beer, Bands, and Breaking The News
- Rockhampton Accessible Pub Crawls, 1989-2022

Contributors include Wendy Bacon, Maggie Brady, Rowan Cahill, Bruce Carter, Carol Corless, Daniel A. Elias, Alex Ettling, Gary Foley, Alison Holland, Terry Irving, Phoebe Kelloway, Diane Kirkby, Tanja Luckins, Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, Chris McConville, Iain McIntyre, Lisa Milner, David Nichols, Michael Quinlan, Nick Southall, Jeff Sparrow, Janey Stone and Graham Willett.

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