

The Queensland Journal of Labour History

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Association

The Queensland Journal of Labour History

The biannual radical history journal of the
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Editors: Dean Wharton, Allan Gardiner & Howard Guille

Editorial Committee: Ross Gwyther, Greg Mallory,
Kel O'Neil & Alison Stewart

Correspondence to:

Brisbane Labour History Association
PO Box 766, Mount Gravatt Plaza, QLD 4122
qldlabhist@gmail.com

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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
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objectives.

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Guest Editorial

Safeguarding Our Democratic Right to Use Our Industrial Muscle

Rebecca Barrigos

Introduction by **Greg Mallory**,
current BLHA Vice-President and former BLHA President.

Over the past month or so I attended several rallies held in Brisbane in support of the CFMEU leadership that was sacked by the Federal Labor Government appointed administrator. There were rallies and protests throughout Australia including huge rallies and marches in Sydney and Melbourne. The sacking of these trade union officials reminded me of the actions of the ALP Government of John Cain in Victoria against the Builders Labourers Federation (BLF), and the Liberal Government in New South Wales response to the Green Bans of the NSW BLF. Green Bans which have been universally recognised as saving various historically important properties across Sydney.

The legislation which regulates the administration of trade unions has provisions which allow the General Manager of the Fair Work Commission to go to the Federal Courts with evidence of wrongdoing and convince the court that administration is justified. Alleged criminal activity should have been investigated by the police and evidence should have been produced in court.

When the CFMEU did not agree to administration voluntarily the Federal ALP Government, with LNP support, passed legislation to put the union into administration without having to prove in court that administration was justified. The ALP Government has been supported in this move by the ACTU. This has led to the sacking of many trade union officials nationally. Individuals that have been sacked are rightly mounting a High Court challenge to the Labor Government legislation.

As well as being simply disgraceful for a Labor government to act in this fashion, it sets a dangerous precedent that can be replicated by future Liberal-National Party Coalition and ALP governments. Considering the historically significant aspects of the actions against the CFMEU, the editors of this

journal have decided to publish Rebecca Barrigos's very well-received speech given at the community rally in Brisbane held on 17th September 2024 to express concern about the moves against the elected CFMEU officials.

Rebecca Barrigos is a rank-and-file teacher and union militant of Queensland Teachers' Fightback

I was proud to stand with comrades at the ETU demonstration for democracy on Tuesday the 17th of September and to extend a message of solidarity to CFMEU members.

I moved a motion that was carried at the State Council of the Queensland Teachers Union expressing solidarity with the rank-and-file members of the CFMEU – Queensland branch and its workplace delegates, and support for the democratic right of all workers to be represented by a union, rather than appointed administrators.

The attack the government has launched on the CFMEU is a precedent-setting attack on democracy and all unionists. And it must be resisted.

Support for democracy for union members should be unionism 101 - but unfortunately it isn't. Honestly, as a delegate, I can say that my union is too wanting on this front, with officials that have been too often prepared to collaborate with bosses first, too prepared to accept deals that cut against the interests of our

members, or too prepared to make excuses for governments who have shown no interests in workers' rights, or to ignore ballots for strike action.

For decades workers' interests have come last in our industrial landscape. Our rights definitely don't rate in the pro-boss media which has opportunistically and slanderously attacked the CFMEU Queensland branch, in order to promote an attack on all unions.

It's been the bosses who have set the agenda and the Labor governments have shamefully said "How high can we jump for you?"

We need more of a say as workers. We need more democracy to safeguard our industrial rights and we need unions who will defy the bosses and the courts when needed - not make the sweetheart deals with bosses and the government that have dominated a passive approach to unionism in this country for decades. This approach has only delivered pay cuts and attacks while the bosses in this country have raked in their profits.



*CFMEU Demonstration Emma Miller Place, Brisbane, 17 September 2024
Image: Allan Gardiner*

This democracy, a voice for workers' rights, is crucial to improving working conditions in this country. If the governments and bosses won't listen to it, it's our responsibility to make them hear us. They've got no interest in democracy as they run a dictatorship of bosses after all.

In the wake of the appointment of the administrator, some disgraceful comments were made by women union leaders like Sally McManus and federal education union officials. Those women unionists shamefully used the rhetoric of support for women to attack the CFMEU. As a unionist from a women-dominated industry, I can

say with confidence that the only way to defend women workers' rights is to build fighting unions who will challenge the bosses who benefit from our oppression, the gender pay gap, and conditions that compromise our safety at work.

For too long the education unions have shied away from a fight for our rights that is necessary and we've seen our conditions worsen because of class collaboration, obeying the industrial courts and accepting sub-par pay offers from our employer - the government. NSW nurses, in another women-dominated industry, struck in September for a second time this year for a 15% pay increase.

Similarly, last year, NSW teachers improved their pay offer only due to strike action and a serious public campaign of protests throughout the state. When the Liberals were kicked out, the new Labor Minns Government tried to tear up their promises to improve pay and conditions for teachers. It was only a continuation of their public campaign and threats of further strike action, that secured them a significant pay increase.

These workers have shown that we win only if we're prepared to defy the courts and their anti-worker laws and fight. We won't get our rights by standing with the bosses to attack the thousands of women members of the CFMEU and all workers across the board.

An important part of the solidarity motion I moved at my union's State Council was a statement of solidarity with striking CFMEU workers from the Cross River Rail project. These comrades have been in a heroic battle for months for an agreement to secure equal pay and safe work conditions to prevent deaths on site. I was proud to reiterate that solidarity at the ETU rally, and thanked these workers for showing the way. We all have a lot to learn from these staunch workers.

We have common interests at stake in the CFMEU's fight to defend

democracy for its members. It may not look to a lot of people like we have common interests - teachers and construction workers, blue collar workers and white collar. but make no mistake we do. Public school teachers are workers whose safety is under threat every single day on the job, and our employer, the government, has done nothing to improve those conditions. So, the solidarity we extend to the Cross River Rail workers is not just words it's about recognition that we are in a common fight to secure the safety of workers in Queensland. That's a fight that depends on safeguarding our democratic right to use our industrial muscle and strike when needed, and to elect officials who will pull the trigger and stop work to save their members' lives.

The only response to a historic attack on unions is a historic level of resistance.

That resistance will need to be sustained. Our enemy is determined. We recognise that this is only the beginning, and in that struggle the rank-and-file network I convene, Queensland Teachers' Fightback, extends its maximum solidarity to its CFMEU comrades - touch one touch all; if we don't fight, we'll lose. But history has always shown our class that when we dare to struggle, and especially together, we dare to win.

Editorial



Image: Oliver Graham

In light of her significant and continuing contribution to the study of labour history, the BLHA awarded life membership to Verity Burgmann at our 2023 AGM. Verity was unable to receive the award in person so Oliver Graham, of the BLHA Management Committee, presented her with her certificate at the National Conference of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History last November. As often is the case, some of Verity's research is mentioned in our lead article.

The BLHA events that took place over the last twelve months were our 2023 AGM, a book launch

and our annual lecture. Articles derived from each of these events are included in this issue.

Andrew Bonnell is a long-term member of the BLHA and has supported this journal for many years. In July Andrew delivered the BLHA's 2024 Alex Macdonald Memorial Lecture on the subject of the Australian Labour Movement - the View from the Second International. This was a fascinating historical lecture and translates into an interesting article.

A few years ago the editing team became aware of the research being undertaken by Janis Hanley into the

history of the woollen mills in Ipswich. This led eventually to Janis's presentation on the subject of gender discrimination at the mills, which she delivered at the 2023 BLHA AGM. Her article on this subject is in this issue.

In April 2024 the BLHA sponsored the launch of Deborah Jordan's latest book *Australian Women's Justice: Settler colonisation and the Queensland Vote*. Claire Moore has kindly provided us with a review of the book.

Other articles in this issue include a reminder of the eightieth anniversary of Fred Paterson's election to the Queensland Parliament. This was provided by a recent joint-recipient of the BLHA's Stella Nord Award, Glenn Davies.

Pat Comben recently published his research on *Tommy Ryan and the Birth of Labor*. We approached Pat about this book, and he has allowed us to use excerpts to highlight Tommy Ryan's story.

Jeff Rickertt reviews two books on the 1989 Pilots dispute, Allan Gardiner reviews a recent publication highlighting the Punk scene in 1970s/80s Brisbane, and I review two books on Australian utopias and dystopias.

During the copy-editing process one of our contributors noted that our obituaries are often a celebration of the life of our departed comrades, rather than a deadpan biography. This is perhaps how it should be, looking at the impact of the lives that were led by these people on those around them, and on the society we share. In this issue we pay tribute to Merv Langford and Merle Thornton, with contributions from John Jiggins and Margaret Reynolds. Thanks also should be given to the contributors of images for these articles.

Thank you to all the contributors, and particularly copy-editors and contributors Allan Gardiner and Howard Guille, in making this issue possible.

Dean Wharton

Articles

Alex Macdonald Memorial Lecture 2024

The Australian Labour Movement: The View from the Second International

Andrew Bonnell

On 6 October 1907, Camille Huysmans, head of the Brussels-based secretariat of the Second Socialist International, wrote to Robert Michels. Michels, a budding social scientist, had been active in the German Social Democratic Party, contributed regularly to a French revolutionary syndicalist journal, *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, and was well-connected in the Italian socialist movement. He had corresponded with Huysmans since 1905. Michels had acquired the reputation of being something of an expert on the international socialist movement. After sharing his views on developments in the German and Russian socialist parties, Huysmans wrote: 'I would like someone to officially advise me that the Australian workers' parties adhere to the principles of international socialism. Then one could not continue to write books about "Socialism without Doctrine"'.¹

Huysmans was referring to the book



Albert Métin (1913)
Image: Public Domain

by the French author and politician Albert Métin, *Le Socialisme sans Doctrines* (Socialism without Doctrine), which had appeared in 1901. Métin had visited Australia in 1899 and was impressed by what he discovered about the influence of the Australian labour movement, and by the new Australian federation's advances in social and industrial legislation. Métin's book is familiar

to Australian labour historians, thanks to a translation and edition by Russel Ward, that was published in 1977.² Huysmans's apparent impatience with Métin's characterisation of the Australian labour movement throws up a number of questions: given that the Australian Labor Party was not affiliated with the Second International, what links did the International have with the labour movement in Australia? How much attention did the International and its affiliated parties pay to developments in Australia? And how much did the small and geographically dispersed socialist groups in Australia look towards the Second International for guidance and inspiration? Despite the small size and lack of resources of Australian socialist groups before 1914, they managed to keep up surprisingly frequent contacts with the International, directly or through proxies, and there was often keen interest among the parties of the Second International in developments in the Antipodes.

At the founding congress of the Second International in Paris in 1889, William Morris, speaking on behalf of the British Socialist League, reported on the development of socialism in Britain, and also referred to the emergence of socialist ideas in Australia: 'Let us not forget to mention that socialism

is spreading more and more in Australia, not in the way in which we see it unfold in America, but rather in a manner that approximates that of the English movement'.

That meant that socialism was a movement of ideas, nourished by the idealism of those who were committed to the ideals of equality, rather than relying on what Morris called 'economic fatalism'.³

Also at the Paris congress, the British member of parliament and Scottish Liberal-turned socialist, Robert Cunninghame Graham, stressed the importance of practical improvements for British workers, such as the eight-hour day, and pointed to the Australian legislation on the regulation of the working day as a model.⁴

The second congress of the International, held two years later in Brussels, proclaimed that it represented 'political and economic organisations from the various countries of Europe, America and Australia'. The Australians were only able to declare their support for the International in writing, however: messages had been received from 'various socialist parties and unionists' in Australia.⁵

At the next congress, at Zurich in 1893, Australian socialists were fi-

nally represented in person, by the Sicilian-born member of the Australian Socialist League (ASL), Francis Sceusa. The ASL, composed of disparate socialist groupings that arose during the 1880s, had regrouped and grown in the wake of the great maritime strike of 1890, and by 1893 it claimed 9,000 members and 15 branches in New South Wales (although Verity Burgmann suspects that a misprint was at work in the congress proceedings and that the correct figure was closer to 900).⁶ Sceusa also spoke on behalf of four other Australian socialist organisations in Zurich, including the newly-constituted Social Democratic Federation and one German association (possibly the Süd-Australischer Allgemeiner Deutscher Verein, SA AD-V).⁷ Burgmann has provided a vivid portrait of Sceusa at Zurich – he attracted considerable attention both for his striking dress sense and for the publicity that surrounded his journey from the other side of the world and his triumphant return, which included a rapturous reception by thousands of workers in his native Sicily.⁸ At the Zurich congress, Sceusa shared the floor with prominent European socialists, such as Marx's son-in-law Edward Aveling, the Russian Marxist Georgi Plekhanov, the Dutch radical libertarian socialist Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis, and the American so-

cialist Daniel de Leon, and he would have heard Friedrich Engels, then 72 years old, give his last address to a workers' international congress.

Sceusa's interventions in the congress's debates suggest that he did not lack self-confidence in such illustrious company. Sceusa spoke in support of a motion by Domela Nieuwenhuis that demanded that:

socialist workers of the countries concerned are to respond to a declaration of war on the part of the governments with a refusal by conscripts of the army reserve to perform military service (military strike) and by a general strike, especially in all branches of war-related industry, and by an appeal to women, to hold back their husbands and sons.⁹

In the light of the long history of militarism and anti-militarism in Australia, Sceusa's speech in support of Nieuwenhuis's motion is worth recording:

I come from a country where there is neither a military power nor a diplomatic corps. Therefore I cannot understand how brothers can allow themselves to be commanded to tear each other to shreds. If I were to be ordered to such murder, I would be the first

man to shoot down my commanding officer; for this reason, I am voting for the Dutch motion.¹⁰

The Dutch motion was defeated, 14 votes to 4 (with voting by national contingent).¹¹

Sceusa's other intervention was on the question of May Day. On this occasion, he appealed against the closing off of debate before he had spoken, on the grounds that he had travelled thousands of miles to get to the congress. He was given the floor. Sceusa pointed out that May Day did not have the same resonance in Australia as it had in the northern hemisphere, where it coincided with the start of spring, and he also pointed out that Australia already had a celebration for the 8-hour-day, but Australian social democrats would be happy to join their international social democratic comrades in celebrating 1 May as well.¹²

The London congress in 1896 was attended by 770 delegates from 22 countries and was plagued by conflicts over the attendance of anarchists, whose credentials were queried.¹³ These conflicts persisted during the conference, leading to a walkout by the Dutch delegation led by Domela Nieuwenhuis. Meanwhile, the French delegation split

into two groups and demanded separate votes for each. This time, the Australian socialist groups were represented by a proxy, Edward Aveling. There was some critical commentary in the international press about the fact that Aveling, acting as a proxy for an absent nationality, could cast a country's vote and cancel out the more numerous delegates of a country with a large socialist party.¹⁴ A commentator from the British Independent Labour Party complained:

Voting by nationalities won't do. Dr. Aveling produces a letter from someone in N.S. Wales on the strength of which he is allowed to sit and vote, and he thereby acquires a power equal to the whole of the 472 British delegates.¹⁵

In her ground-breaking study of the early socialist movement in Australia, Verity Burgmann has linked the split within the Australian Socialist League (ASL) in the late 1890s to a reaction against a motion by Aveling at the London conference calling on socialists to refrain from agitation for immigration restriction. Aveling had moved this in response to a resolution from several British trade unions, including a number in the garments industry, which he referred to as 'consisting almost entirely of aliens'. The motion was carried.¹⁶ Such a split was

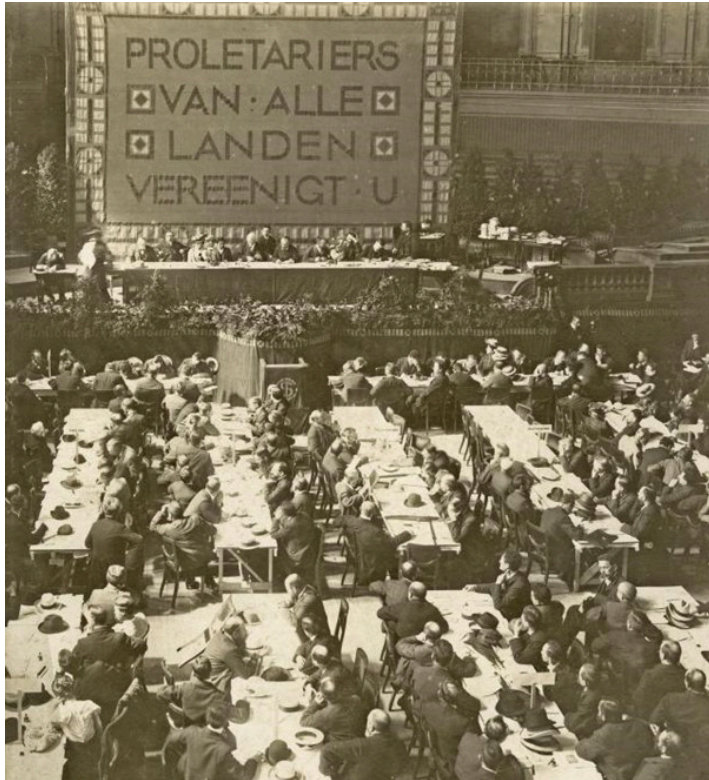
probably inevitable given the salience of the issue of the restriction of non-white immigration in the lead-up to Federation, not least within the labour movement. As a result of the split within the ASL, a number of socialists founded the International Socialist Club in Sydney, including a number of socialists from European backgrounds, such as Francis Sceusa and the German Heinrich Diercks.¹⁷ Clearly, the issue of support for a 'White Australia' had the potential to complicate relations between the Australian labour movement and the international socialist movement.

The observer from the British Independent Labour Party reflected critically on the London congress: 'It is self-evident that a Congress on the present lines is largely a farce. Nearly 1000 delegates come together and find the arrangements such that discussion of big questions is impossible'.¹⁸ The 1900 congress, held in Paris for a second time after a wave of state repression made it too difficult for the German Social Democrats to take their turn as hosts, comprised 1,400 delegates, nearly twice as many as London, 1,000 of whom were French.¹⁹ The others came from 20 other countries, but this time no-one represented the Australian socialists and Australia seems to have passed unnoticed in a congress preoccu-

pled with the revisionist controversy in Germany and the debate over Alexandre Millerand's participation in a coalition government in France.

Australia was among the 25 countries represented at the Amsterdam congress in 1904, this time by the West Australian Social Democratic Federation member Claude Thompson.²⁰ The congress was also the first one to be attended by a socialist from Asia, Sen Katayama. One of the high points of the conference was the handshake between Katayama and the Russian Georgi Plekhanov, to tumultuous applause which went on for several minutes, symbolizing socialists' commitment to peace despite the fact that their countries were at war at the time.²¹ Another memorable moment in the conference occurred when the French socialist leader Jean Jaurès found himself without a translator for his speech in the debate on socialist tactics and revisionism (speeches at the congresses were translated into French and German). Rosa Luxemburg, who was on the opposite side of that debate, stepped in and volunteered to translate Jaurès's speech from French into German, doing so eloquently.²²

On the last day of the Amsterdam congress, the question of immigration came to the surface. A resolu-



The Amsterdam Conference 1904

Image: <https://rosaluxemburgblog.wordpress.com/2012/07/09/photographs-from-the-amsterdam-congress/>

tion formulated by the majority of the congress's Resolutions Committee recognized that migrant labour was subject to capitalist exploitation and was often misused to break strikes and depress wages, but condemned efforts to restrict immigration or discriminate against migrants. The resolution called for stronger state regulation against the misuse and exploitation of migrant labour and called on trade unions to

do more to organize migrant workers. A counter-resolution was put forward by the Dutch, American and Australian delegations. The amended version specifically referred to the ways in which the migration of 'backward races', such as Chinese and Negroes, was used by capitalists to weaken labour organisation, and called on social democrats to oppose this. Sen Katayama indicated that he would

oppose the amended form of the resolution, and Nicholas Klein of the US Socialist Labor Party, speaking for the minority of the American delegation, also spoke out against it, stating: 'This amendment will lead to discord within the working class itself. The coolies are human beings too, and workers, and have the same rights as others'. The congress decided to defer the matter to the next congress but called on trade unions to do more to organize foreign workers, rather than excluding them.²³ The attempt to introduce the issue of restriction of non-white immigration into the congress was a less inspiring note than the expressions of fraternal anti-war sentiments with which the congress had begun.

The next congress was at Stuttgart, in the relatively liberal (by the standards of the German empire) Kingdom of Wurttemberg, in 1907. This time, Australia was represented by Victor Kroemer, a South Australian member of the Socialists' Federation of Australasia, who resided in Melbourne where he ran the socialist Sunday School for the Victorian Socialist Party (VSP). The Victorian branch of the Socialist Party of Australia also submitted a written report to the International Socialist Bureau for the congress, signed by J.P. Jones and the English labour movement activist Tom Mann, who



Victor Kroemer

Image c/o The Sydney Passengers (incorporating The Sherlock Holmes Society of Australia). Victor Kroemer was an acquaintance of spiritualist Arthur Conan Doyle.

See: http://www.sherlock.on.net/WebsitePhotos/Attachments/Passengers1_06_Montpellier_Photos/Attach/PassingAcquaintance_vACD_Prt1.pdf

was by then taking a leading role in the VSP.²⁴ Kroemer sat on the commission tasked with considering the motions on emigration and immigration, and participated in the commission's debates. At first, Kroemer sought to justify the hostility of Australian workers, who had attained a higher standard of living through their struggles, towards what he called the 'yellow invasion', which threatened to undermine these gains. In the course of the deliberations, Kroemer relented, stating (speaking after the Japanese delegate Tokyiro Kato) that:

The majority of the Australian

working class is opposed to immigration by workers of colour. Personally, as a socialist, I recognize the duty of international solidarity, and I hope that in the future all peoples of the earth will be seized by the ideas of socialism ([audience response: *Very good*]).²⁵

The commission rejected the version of the resolution put forward by Morris Hillquit of the Socialist Party of America that continued the line of the Dutch-Australian-American amendment singling out ‘coloured’ immigration. The resolution passed by the plenary congress at Stuttgart rejected immigration policies that sought to exclude ‘definite nations or races’, branding such a policy as ‘in conflict with the principle of proletarian solidarity’.²⁶ What was not recorded in the official proceedings of the congress, but appeared in press reports, was Kroemer’s announcement to the congress that he was a clairvoyant and that he predicted that the world revolution would start in South Australia.²⁷ A generous view of Kroemer’s intervention might conclude that he illustrated the connections between socialist groups in the early 1900s and various life reform movements, which in Kroemer’s case included Theosophy, vegetarianism, and the thought of the South Aus-

tralian bush prophet Theophilus Gum, whose writings Kroemer liberally plagiarized in his own.²⁸ Henry Hyndman, of the British Social Democratic Federation, took a less charitable view, reportedly writing to Australian comrades demanding ‘to know why Australia had selected such a stupid dreamer as its delegate’.²⁹ It is worth adding that the Stuttgart conference also featured a separate women’s conference. Despite the fact that (white) Australian women now had the right to vote that was a subject of discussion for the main congress as well, there were no delegates from Australia at the women’s conference.

No Australian delegates or proxies attended the 1910 Congress in Copenhagen, although the Australasian Socialist Federation affirmed its affiliation with the International, sending in a report.³⁰ Nor was there an Australian delegate at the emergency congress of the International in Basel in November 1912, held under the shadow of the threat of war in Europe as a result of the Balkan War then under way. However, the British socialist and suffrage campaigner Dora Montefiore carried the greetings and expressions of solidarity from Australia and New Zealand, as well as from the British Socialist Party, which she represented.³¹ Montefiore

was well qualified to speak for Australia, having spent part of her life there, and having been involved in both suffrage agitation (in the early 1890s) and socialist organisations during her periods of residence in Australia. (In 1912, she had just returned from two years in Australia, initially to visit her son, during which time she edited the *International Socialist Review of Australasia* when its regular editor Henry Holland fell ill.)³² In her address to the Congress, she advocated a general strike as the only means of preventing war, and spoke of ‘how imperialism and militarism rule in British colonies, how the people there are reduced to slavery and how the day will come when this miserable yoke will be shaken off and the domination of capitalism will cease’.³³ This was, of course, the last congress of the Second International before the outbreak of the First World War – the congress planned for Vienna in September 1914 did not take place.

Australian socialists did not confine their contacts with the Second International to the congresses. Once the standing secretariat, the International Socialist Bureau (ISB), was set up in 1900 in Brussels, it was possible for the International to liaise and correspond with member parties between congresses, and Australian socialists availed them-

selves of this opportunity. Charles Eyre of the International Socialist Club appears on a list of corresponding delegates as early as May 1901.³⁴ In 1904, the Bureau published a massive handbook on the international socialist workers’ movement, which includes a very detailed and useful fourteen-page account of socialist organisations in Australia, penned by Charles Eyre, as well as a five-page update from the International Socialist Club on the most recent developments followed by a short account of the Australian trade-union movement from the same source.³⁵ Interested European and other international readers thus had access to an authoritative short history of the socialist groups in Australia up to 1903. Eyre continued to be listed as a corresponding member of the International Socialist Bureau until 1904 inclusive. By early 1905, he was replaced by Heinrich Diercks (Eyre died prematurely in 1906, after a long illness.)³⁶ In the first half of 1905, Australian socialists were reported to have sent the sum of 125 francs, 60 centimes to the ISB’s fund to support the victims of Tsarism in the Russian revolution of that year – a symbolic sum, but a token of solidarity across the globe.³⁷ In March 1906, the ISB felt able to report in its review of the state of the international socialist movement that ‘the Australian workers’ movements are

making very definite strides towards socialism' (even though the International Socialist Club of Sydney was behind in its dues for ISB membership later that year).³⁸ In 1907, the ISB took note of Tom Mann's efforts to unify the disparate socialist groups in Australia, namely the Socialist Labor Party (Sydney); the Social Democratic Federation (Sydney); the International Socialist Club (Sydney); the Socialist Vanguard (Brisbane); the Social Democratic Club (Broken Hill); the Socialist Propaganda Group (Broken Hill); the Social Democratic Federation (Kalgoorlie); and the Socialist Party of Victoria.³⁹



Tom Mann
Image: Public Domain

A few letters from Australian and New Zealander socialists have survived in the papers of the ISB secretary, Camille Huysmans, albeit some in a very partial state of preservation. For example, on 31 January 1911, Henry Holland of the Socialist Federation of Australasia (whose letterhead proudly announced its affiliation with the International), wrote to the ISB to complain about the American and French socialist parties accepting invitations to send speakers to participate in events run by the Australian Labor Party. Holland wrote:

In its politics the Labor Party is not fundamentally different from the British Liberal Party, essentially a party of capitalist

interests, making racial hatred a vital part of its program, advocating forced militarism & jailing working-class boys who refuse to be conscripts, protesting its loyalty to throne and empire & also protesting its desire to legislate to protect the exploiting interests of the employers as well as the interests of the employees.

In short, Holland characterized the Labor Party as an 'anti-Socialist organization', and he called on the ISB to make the protest resolutions of the Socialist Federation on this matter known to member parties of the International.⁴⁰ In February 1911, James Moroney of the Social-

ist Labor Party of Australia wrote to Huysmans to enquire about the process and costs of affiliation with the International.⁴¹ The Industrial Workers of the World Club in Sydney, noting the reactions of the capitalist press to the Copenhagen anti-militarism resolutions, also sought affiliation with (and support from) the ISB.⁴²

Links between immigrants and socialist parties in their countries of origin

In addition to the formal links with the ISB, Australian socialist groups maintained informal links to socialists overseas. Tom Mann kept closely in touch with Henry Hyndman and other British socialists (Hyndman wanted Mann to go to the Stuttgart congress, but Mann chose to travel to Broken Hill to support the striking workers there instead, and Stuttgart ended up with Kroemer).

There is evidence that German social democratic groups in Australia maintained contact with the German Social Democratic Party. Members of the Allgemeiner Deutscher Verein (General German Association) in Adelaide corresponded with Julius Motteler, the so-called "Red Postmaster", who organized the distribution and smuggling of the German party

paper *Der Sozialdemokrat* during the years in which the party was banned by Bismarck's Anti-Socialist Law, to get subscriptions to that paper as well as access to other party literature.⁴³ The Brisbane Social Democratic Vanguard, whose active members included the Dresden-born Hugo Kunze, is reported to have corresponded with the German Social Democratic Party leader August Bebel, author of the international socialist bestseller *Woman and Socialism*.⁴⁴ Working-class migrants to Australia who arrived in Brisbane in 1910 are known to have kept in touch with their local Social Democratic party branch in the East End of Berlin.⁴⁵

International circulation of socialist publications

I have argued elsewhere that the socialist groups in Australia in the early 1900s were active participants in a transnational print culture.⁴⁶ Whereas Benedict Anderson argued that the rise of 'print capitalism' in early modern Europe was an essential precondition for the emergence of modern nationalism as an ideology, it could also be argued that 'print capitalism 3.0', involving the introduction of cheap newsprint, more efficient printing technology, and a literate urban working-class enables not

only the rise of the capitalist 'penny-press' as a mass medium, but the dissemination of socialist ideas in the late nineteenth century.⁴⁷

The organised German socialist groups in Australia – Verein Vorwärts in Melbourne and the SA ADV in Adelaide – maintained substantial libraries, including holdings of German socialist periodicals and newspapers.⁴⁸ The Brisbane Social Democratic Vanguard was indefatigable in disseminating socialist pamphlets around Queensland (in a process they called 'painting Queensland red'), as well as placing articles in the labour movement press.⁴⁹ The efforts of groups such as these contributed to the circulation of international socialist ideas within the Australian labour movement.

Australian socialist groups in the early 1900s were also prolific in publishing their own pamphlets and newspapers. They also imported what Frank Farrell called a 'virtual cascade of books from Charles H. Kerr & Co. of Chicago', which included cheap translations from Marx, Engels, Wilhelm Liebknecht and Karl Kautsky, as well as works by American socialists such as Daniel de Leon.⁵⁰ Despite the disadvantage of post taking several weeks

between Australia and Europe, Australian socialists managed to keep in touch with the European and international socialist press. For example, Hugo Kunze of the Brisbane Social Democratic Vanguard is reported to have been in touch with the Dutch socialist newspaper *Het Volk*, and the German Social Democratic newspaper *Vorwärts* ran occasional reports on conditions in Australia, including a front-page story on the formation of the Watson Labor government in 1904, which seems to have drawn on informants within Australia, citing the Brisbane *Worker* as a source.⁵¹ Australian socialists such as the SDV's Hugo Kunze and Andy Anderson also contributed articles to the United States-based *International Socialist Review*.⁵²

Coverage of Australian events in socialist newspapers and periodicals abroad

In addition to the contributions of Australian socialists themselves, the European socialist press took notice of developments in Australia. For example, Europe's foremost Marxist periodical, the weekly *Die Neue Zeit*, edited by Karl Kautsky, published a lengthy article in 1892 by Max Schippel on 'Workers' conditions in Australia',

based on the Report of the New South Wales Royal Commission into Strikes of 1891.⁵³ Schippel, later a prominent revisionist and advocate of a pro-colonial policy for the German Social Democratic Party, was developing a profile as an expert on colonial questions. In 1901, *Die Neue Zeit* also published the report to the International Socialist Bureau on the state of Social Democracy in Australia, and, in 1909 an article by an unnamed German worker in Melbourne on the state of the labour movement in Australia.⁵⁴ As already noted, *Vorwärts*, the flagship paper of Germany's Social Democratic press, gave prominent coverage to the formation of the Watson Labor government in 1904. *Vorwärts* wrote:

We have repeatedly pointed out, that the Australian worker is not completely identical with European social democracy. But the foregoing article [translated from the Brisbane *Worker*] shows on the other hand that in the Australian Labor Party we are not dealing with the kind of apolitical and wishy-washy formations that are prevalent in England.

The *Vorwärts* writer perceived a genuine class point of view in the *Worker's* article on the advent of

the Watson government, and an awareness of class interests that the more democratic political environment in Australia had brought to the fore.⁵⁵ *Vorwärts* followed the political fortunes of federal Labor in Australia, reporting on the formation and fall of the Andrew Fisher-led governments in 1908-1909 and 1910-1913. By 1913, *Vorwärts* concluded that the 'Australian Labor Party, which controls the federal parliament and the federal government, contains socialists, but is not a socialist party'. The same article noted the presence of the various socialist parties and propaganda associations in Australia.⁵⁶ In 1913, following the electoral defeat of the second Fisher government, the exiled Russian revolutionary socialist Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, writing in *Pravda*, came to a more definite conclusion than the German party paper over the question of whether the Australian Labor Party was socialist: 'The Australian Labour Party does not even call itself a socialist party. Actually, it is a liberal-bourgeois party', and a party that was the 'unalloyed representative of the non-socialist workers' trade unions'.⁵⁷

Albert Métin had concluded his study of Australia and New Zealand with observations on the consciousness of the working class in

Australia. He noted the popularity of horse-racing, and the degree to which ‘Australians’ were ‘for the most part enthusiastic supporters of Greater Britain, of colonial expansion and even wars of conquest’. On the latter point, he noted that the centre of Melbourne was adorned with both a statue of General Gordon of Khartoum and the 8-hour-day monument.⁵⁸ He wrote:

The ideal of international labour solidarity did not seem to be as strong as it is in Western Europe. Australasians are too remote from other peoples and too exclusively a part of the English world whence they draw all their books, news and information of every kind. That is why they have quite naturally set out to realize English middle-class ideals.

Métin concluded that under Australian conditions, democratic institutions and labour legislation had made greater strides than in the ‘mother country’, even while ‘spiritual improvement progresses less rapidly than material well-being’.⁵⁹ A closer examination of the connections between socialist groups in Australia and the Second International conveys a more complex picture. While Australia’s socialist groups in the era of the Second International remained numer-

ically small and even marginal, their tireless agitation and their contribution to the dissemination of socialist ideas undoubtedly helped to influence the socialist currents within the broader labour movement, opening up horizons far beyond the realisation of ‘English middle-class ideals’.

Andrew Bonnell is an Associate Professor in History at the University of Queensland, specialising in modern German and European history, and in particular on the German labour movement. He has written or edited nine books, most recently *Red Banners, Books and Beer Mugs: The Mental World of German Social Democrats, 1863-1914* (Brill, 2021) and *Robert Michels, Socialism, and Modernity* (Oxford University Press, 2023). He is also Branch President of the National Tertiary Education Union at the University of Queensland and also that union’s National Vice-President (Academic).

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Worth Less: Discrimination in the Predominantly Female Ipswich Woollen Industry

Janis Hanley

The Queensland Woollen Manufacturing Company (QWMC) began construction of a mill in North Ipswich, Queensland 150 years ago (1874). Alongside two other companies that built mills in Redbank and East Ipswich, the woollen industry operated in Ipswich between 1877 and 1994. The QWMC mill buildings were used for other industry until 2011, then following four years of disuse, became a heritage site owned by Ipswich City Council.

Two further companies built woollen mills in other parts of Queensland, in Charters Towers and Kedron—but both operated only briefly.

Apart from during World War II, when their bargaining power strengthened, the predominantly female workforce at the QWMC were treated as though they were worth less than their male colleagues.

Pay gaps between males and females are still a reality in 2024. What's often hidden is an emotional cost around being worth less: for too long, these gaps have infected attitudes and behaviours towards women. While industrialisation and technologies have made gender largely irrelevant to workplace roles, the pay decisions enacting this worth-less-ness have been personally and socially damaging.

The woollen textile industry in Ipswich offers a view into a predominantly female industry that ran

from 1877 to 1994, and for a time was the largest employer of women and girls. This article considers pay, working conditions and power in this workforce that was not only largely female, but mostly girls. For these women and girls, the insult of low pay rates disempowered, and brought invisibility. Examining a 'female' industry highlights the disparities, readily backed by the courts, that underpin current social issues driven by negative attitudes to women. Radical change is needed to address prevailing discrimination, harming women and girls.

Cyborg Encounter

The terminator stares down from the former woollen mill wall (Figure 1). Inhuman eyes red with rage. He leads an army, human, non-human, and beyond human. This is one of many artworks created by street artists who inhabited the mill building during the four years it was abandoned until Ipswich City Council purchased the site in 2015. The face is unmistakably former Prime Minister Tony Abbot¹, Tony the terminator, who no matter what, just repairs himself and keeps going. Abbott—the bloke’s bloke, a firefighter, a life saver, a doyen of male beach attire, and subject of Julia Gillard’s world famous misogyny speech.² This is the man who suggested that it might not be such a bad thing for men to have more power than women, that men might actually be better adapted to exercise authority or issue command, or that it might not be all that bad to have an under-representation of women in parliament. He wasn’t the architect of conservatives’ troubles with women, he just couldn’t see any problem with the philosophy.³ A year after Gillard’s take-down, and as Prime Minister, he appointed himself Minister for Women.

For social researchers, the image of Terminator Tony Abbot conjures

Donna Haraway’s (1985) *A Cyborg Manifesto*.⁴ It was a radical statement of feminist and social theory from 1985—the year of the first Terminator movie. Haraway identified the fundamental changes occurring in class, race, and gender. She saw a coming disruption similar in scope to industrial capitalism, describing a ‘homework economy’, made possible by technologies, able to integrate and control labour despite extensive dispersion and decentralisation. In 1985, the internet and Wi-Fi were yet to be born.

Haraway places the cyborg origins in nineteenth century automation offering non-human speed and capacity. Human labour was merged with the mechanical and gender became less relevant. The power no longer from human or animal sources, but itself manufactured from coal and other resources. It stepped up the blurring of lines between human and non-human, male and female, nature, and culture. Haraway’s manifesto helps focus the need to disrupt the socially constructed distinctions between male and female.

Returning to the origins of pay gaps, and the way this plays out in a predominantly female industry, reminds us of many past perceptions that remain entangled with



Figure 1 Street-art - Terminator Tony Abbot at QWMC Mill, Ipswich, Queensland.
Image: D. Morris (2018)

current values. Some situations seem almost too familiar while others are uncomfortable for 21st century sensibilities.

This paper is based on my doctoral research exploring what heritage does—what the presence of the QWMC, the state registered former woollen mill, can do and how it affects people and the community. Even though the mill site is not currently in use, there remains a living heritage through memories, people’s connections to this site, and community desires to honour this place. During my research, ethnographic interviews were conducted with twenty-four former mill workers, mostly women, who worked at one or more of the three woollen

mills in Ipswich that, for the main part, formed Queensland’s Woollen Textile Industry. The participants collectively worked at the mill during the period 1947–1994. Two on-site ‘go-alongs’ were also conducted: one with former mill workers from the QWMC, and the ‘Spinning Circle at the Mill’ for a group of Ipswich Fibre artists, some of whom worked at the mill (Figure 2).⁵

Women and Textile History

Technologies enabling the textile mills in England drove the Industrial Revolution which destroyed a widely dispersed and largely female home economy of spinners; bringing women and children into



Figure 2 Spinning Circle at the mill - fibre artists and former workers at the QWMC site
Image: D. Morris (2018)

factories.⁶ No longer could women work in their relatively child friendly rural homes. Spinning and weaving in homes previously offered economic relief from the feudal tenant existence. That pastoral textile homework economy disappeared quickly with industrialisation.

Resistance was futile. Rarely through time has the path of technology been thwarted: the desire for market advantage through harnessing new ways to tap non-human power is just too great. Ethics and politics might slow or condition it, but the cyborg technologies tightly coupled with entrepreneurial ambitions make it a forgone conclusion. It is no accident the term Luddite, a term of resistance and activism, has remained in use in the English language, however,

the term has become derogatory: A Luddite perspective offers space for reflection on what gets lost when technology replaces human expertise and the often unacknowledged loss of intellectual property.

Australia's colonial textile industry developed in parallel with British industrialisation, so there was never a home-based textile industry. The industry here began with factories.⁷

Since woman first picked up a stick to dig up a tuber, we've been tool dependent, human augmented by technology. Later string would be made, woven reed baskets hung off bodies, spindles invented to spin yarn, and looms created. Textiles became like gold, highly tradeable, and in Mesopotamia 'an independent middle class of free

women continued for centuries to create handsome, saleable textiles for the busy commercial caravans.⁸ However, the labour, and time to create textiles, was enormous, and the drive for technology strong.

Cyborg is not a metaphor, but recognition of the dissolving distinctions between human, machine, and matter. Gender becomes irrelevant as human physical capabilities (often gendered) become unimportant. In the woollen mill, human bodies fuse with machines as part of the process, particularly fingers, hands, and arms, making them vulnerable to the voracious factory equipment. Mill work, like most factory work, is physically demanding, dirty, tedious, and uncomfortable. The woollen mill environment prioritises the optimal conditions for wool, hot and humid, aiming to stop the wool breaking and becoming entangled with the machines. The machines were deafening, especially the looms. Human needs were second. And gender still defined work. The job of the women was to keep the machines fed, fix broken threads, and to stay out of their way.

Coincidentally, by 1985, Ipswich had lost its last woollen mill, Morris Mills, Redbank. The site was run for another nine years as a wool scour, owned by a Japanese com-

pany, finally closing in 1994. The company was fleeing complaints from residents about noxious smells when the wind blew the wrong way across the settling ponds. Tracing where the company went afterwards left only dead ends. The replacement wool scour may well have sprung up in some developing country where there were little concerns for the environment or working conditions.

Early Gendering of Pay and Roles

The basic wage was first set in the Harvester award case of 1907, establishing a male wage based on the need to support a wife and three children – 'normal needs' for human beings living in a 'civilised community'.⁹ It is questionable how civilised it is to neglect widowed and single women with children. Lamour further notes there was no statistical basis for arriving at 'normal needs', and yet it became the basis of wage fixing. In the case Justice Higgins made the comment that:

the share of men workers in the fruits of production will need to be reduced if women are to participate therein on an equal footing, or on a better footing generally than that to which they have hitherto been entitled.¹⁰

The first thing to remember is that married women were beneficiaries in higher male wages. No one likes a pay cut, and this would have been seen as a threat to the family budgets of married women, hardening social attitudes against independent unmarried women, with or without children. For others, it was an erosion of women's wages, increasing dependence on males, and a grave injustice leaving women and children vulnerable. The emphasis on the male breadwinner preferences social values over the value of production to the employer, however, it would have suited most employers to underpay women. For single women, it entrenched marriage as the most economically viable pathway. 'To the majority of working women then, the reward is gained after marriage, when the system shows some returns'.¹¹

Marriage is being set up as the way out of poverty. Justice Higgins makes the transaction clear: 'To raise the level of women's minimum wages...would at once depress the relative standard of living [of families] as a group'.¹² The woman worker is not just earning her own keep, her labour is subsidising families. Carolyn Berntsen points out the embedded assumption of Justice Higgins is that productivity is fixed: that there is no consideration of higher wages for

women, or competition between men and women bringing greater productivity.¹³

The Fruit Pickers case of 1912 set some guidelines for determining male and female wages. Male and Female Fruit pickers were awarded equal pay for equal work where men and women worked alongside each other—in these situations, to pay women less, threatened men's jobs and pay.¹⁴ Where women worked in jobs where there was little chance of displacing men, where women were considered 'inherently suitable' for the work, women were paid half the male wage.¹⁵ The example was fruit pitters, where the dexterity of women made them more suitable, they were paid half the rate: the half rate also applied to the base wage and any margins paid for additional skills.¹⁶ The question in wage setting becomes, 'Is a man really going to do this work?' If the answer is no, then the pay rate is half. Women were penalised where they were perceived to have natural workplace advantages. It also guaranteed a cheap pool of labour for businesses. Where the workforce was significantly female, as in the woollen mills, it provided a substantial profit margin, enabling strong dividend returns for shareholders.

The principles for differentiating

between male and female wages rates were set down in the telephonist case of 1917. Based on the male wage supporting a wife and three children, it was determined that a women's wage should be sufficient to keep a single woman in reasonable comfort.¹⁷ Constance Lamour comments that 'even in 1917 it would have been hard to justify such a sweeping simplification of Australian society' and that while the concept of a living wage was humane, it 'embodied great injustices', including ignoring women who were the sole providers for a family.¹⁸

The Queensland mills worked under state awards, while the mills in the rest of Australia were federal. This meant a continuous catch-up game in the state arbitration courts to align Queensland rates with the federal.

In the 1917 Queensland mill awards we see a base Adult Female wage of thirty shillings a week, being exactly fifty percent of the male wage (sixty shillings).¹⁹ The highest male wages were paid for Spinning Supervisors (seventy shillings), and the highest female wages were paid to weavers (thirty-eight shillings) being fifty-four percent of the male highest wage.²⁰ By the time males reached eighteen years of age, they were being paid the equivalent of an adult (over twenty-one years

old) female wage, and by twenty years old males were being paid more than the female weavers—the highest wage at the time.

These wages represented a significant increase at the time, and the judgement notes that:

There is no likelihood the [woollen textile] companies will be unable to pay the increased wages, as during the war they have made excellent profits, and it is likely they will continue to make good profits. Only a small proportion of woollen goods used by Australians is manufactured in Australia, a great wool producing land. The woollen manufacturing industry is one which should be encouraged. But the encouragement cannot be given by the Court sanctioning wages lower than those recognised as necessary to enable employees to maintain a fair standard of living.²¹

It appears to be okay not to give women a fair standard of living. The privileged wages for males, and attitudes about the worth of women, set up a dynamic in male-female relationships in workplaces and households that Australian society still suffers under. The damaging part was that the wage differentials, backed by the courts, were

generally accepted as just, dis-empowering women socially and economically, based on decisions that were arbitrary.

Gendered Roles at the Mill

According to Lynn Beaton, the way to maintain women as a cheap source of labour was to make women's work insignificant and women invisible.²² To ensure this, work needed to be gendered. Women's goals also needed to remain outside the workforce, namely marriage and children.²³

In the mills, there was a clear delimitation between male and female roles. The females operated the machines that were part of the spinning and weaving process, they mended faults in the weaving, and they undertook administration. Males' roles were maintaining the machines, supervising production (and the women operating machines), looking after the beginning and finishing processes. I interviewed, Ron, a former foreman of the worsted section (suing and upholstery fabrics): he had seventy-three women working for him at the age of nineteen. Miraculously, fifty years on, from handing out pay packets, he could still remember all their names, and the machines they operated.

The exceptions to male supervision

were that woman usually supervised the mending, and in some mills, post-World War II, women supervised the weaving section (although the Loom tuners, those who set up the "programs" for the looms were male).

Machine Maintenance

Machine maintenance was the job of men, but it seemed that part of this job, the cleaning, got foisted onto women...the gender lines blurred, and women weren't too happy about it.

'Norma' who had worked at all three mills (1957–1983) spoke of having to clean machines, one of the jobs that justified the extra male pay:

Well, you had to—otherwise you didn't have a job in those days...You had to get in there amongst all the gears and everything, with kerosene, and clean it all down in the motorised part of it and that. Kerosene—old rags and kerosene. You'd be black by the time you finished.'

The major cleaning happened on 'breakup day' before annual shutdown.

You'd start at 7.30 in the morning, and you'd work through until you'd cleaned all the machines, which could be up til

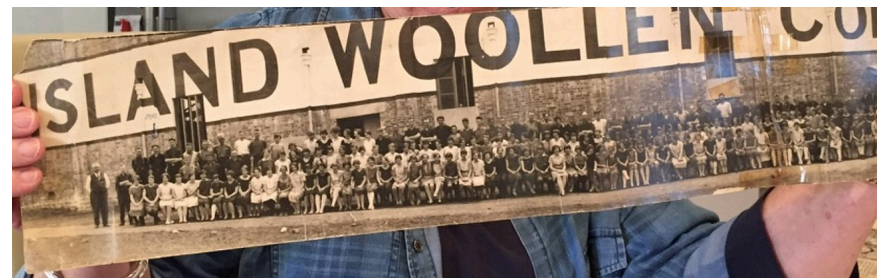


Figure 3 Staff of QWMC, c.1928

Marina, who is holding the photo scroll, estimated the year of the image to be 1928, and women's clothing suggest this era. The women would have dressed up for the photograph. From what the mill women told me, they wore old house dresses while at work.

There are 172 people in the image, 126 females to 46 males – that's a ratio of 3 to 1 female to male.

Image: Ipswich Historical Society

11 or 12 at night Because you didn't just do one, you helped do all of them. Then you'd go have a shower, get dressed and go out and have a break-up party. Then you'd be on holidays.²⁴

World War II Changed Everything The Women's Employment Board and Equal wages

During World War II, labour shortages gave women unprecedented opportunities to take on men's roles. Men grew concerned that women would permanently replace them in their jobs: the lower wage rates for women (usually fifty-four percent of the male rate), could mean that men would be out of work on their return from war.²⁵ For the unions, the only solution to this problem was equal pay. and in 1941

the ACTU demanded the right for all to have occupational rates according to the nature of the job rather than the gender of the workers.²⁶ The National Security Act granted the Curtin government 'unprecedented control of industry' and 'sweeping powers over the nation's workforce...one transformed by the entry of more than 800,000 female workers'.²⁷ This meant that by 1943 one-in-two women were unionists, up from one-in-three at the start of the war.²⁸ But as men enlisted, more and more women were required to join the workforce and suddenly it was even socially acceptable for married women to work.

The Women's Employment Board (WEB) was formed to arbitrate cases around pay equity. Where the women were taking on traditionally

male workplace roles, it opened the door for women to be paid equally to men during the war and was highly controversial at the time. Suggestions were made to not allow a woman to be employed in work where her face and hands might be soiled, or her comfort jeopardised—they obviously hadn't been to a mill.²⁹ Many employers were simply against the idea of increasing pay to women and what the long-term consequences to profit margins might be.

During World War II, in response to women's wages cases, a warning was given by the WEB's Judge Foster that after the War equal pay for women needed to be faced—and the community benefits that would flow through higher standards of living, greater culture and more leisure.³⁰

In 1938 the male minimum wage for woollen textile workers was eight-one shillings a week, and females was forty-three shillings per week (fifty-three percent of the male wage). In 1944, in Queensland's woollen mills, the award wage for 'Other', unspecified roles for women was fifty-six shillings, fifty-seven percent of the male award of ninety-eight shillings.³¹

However, in July 1944, the National Security, (Minimum Female Wage) Regulation came into force,

and the textile industry was declared a vital industry: women received seventy-five percent of the male base rate. It wasn't inserted into the award but paid based on the regulation.³² It was a significant pay increase from the fifty-seven percent of the male wages women were earning. However, it was applied as a flat rate, disregarding any margins paid for skills like mending.³³ The seventy-five percent flat rate continued until December 1949 when the regulation expired. In the face of potential industrial unrest, the employers decided to voluntarily continue paying the seventy-five percent until there was a federal decision.³⁴

In 1951 the matter was discussed in the Industrial Court of Queensland to insert the seventy-five percent female wage into the awards for a number of areas with a large female workforce, including: hospitals, meat preserving, stores, jam and fruit manufacturing, soap washing and soda crystals, and biscuit makers.³⁵ In terms of the textile workers the employer's representative evoked historical images of spinning and weaving always being women's work—that there was no competition between men and women meaning 'women's work' in textile mills was clearly defined. Surprise was expressed about the women even choosing working in



Figure 4. Women tying in the warp threads to the loom. This occurred at the start of each job on the loom. Depending on the fineness of the yarn (thread count) 1000 to 4000 thread would be individually tied in with reefknots. This was a skilled occupation.

Image: Ipswich Historical Society

mill given the conditions, but it was put down to piecework rates offering women the opportunity of above award wages. It was further argued by the employers that the seventy-five percent wage was brought in during the war to attract women to the vital industry, and on that basis, the seventy-five percent should not be continued and wages revert to sixty percent. However, the mills had been suffering shortages of women and there was concern about the impact of lowering wages.

The AWU argued for the seventy-five percent to be kept and the margins paid for skills also to be re-in-

stated.³⁶ The decision was made in July 1951 to formalise the seventy-five percent flat rate by inserting it into the award and removing any special female classifications. In July 1952 the full bench of the court decided not to pay any margins to women for skills, on the basis that paying the margins would mean the Queensland women's wages were higher than the federal award rate.³⁷ The skills margins paid for males however remained, (they were never in dispute) making women's wages effectively less than seventy-five percent of the male rate.

The loss of margins was significant to an already low wage bases—wiping out any recognition of women’s skills—another devaluation. In the 1967 award some of the margins returned, while the Female award remained seventy-five percent of the minimum male rate—unspecified. Juniors were paid proportionally the same of the adult wage based on gender.

War Time Industrial Action

The increase in demand for female labour during World War II was empowering. The textile industry was a protected industry, as wool was an essential wartime commodity. Madelyn Shaw and Trish Fitzsimons’s work underscore the dependence of war on woollen textile production as a strategic commodity for sending soldiers to fight wars in European winters.³⁸

Until World War II, ‘women were all but invisible in the AWU’: the male ethos from early on excluded women and foreigners.³⁹ Women were not encouraged to become active in the union hierarchy.⁴⁰ While unions were all supportive of the WEB and equal wages, it was driven by a need to protect men’s wages, rather than solidarity with women. The need was ensuring the returning soldiers came home to a male wage. Women had issues be-

yond pay though as these strike actions show. The newfound empowerment emboldened women to take strike action.

Sanitary Conditions, Language & Bomb Shelters

In a week-long 1942 strike at the QWMC mill, some ‘women’s issues’ were added to the central claim around payment of holidays. ‘Matters in dispute related to payment for three statutory holidays at Christmas, but additionally, the unsatisfactory sanitary arrangements at the mill, air-raid shelters provided for employees (currently only open slit trenches), the manner in which employees are spoken to by the foremen and the manager, the manner of treatment of employees by the management, and other complaints’.⁴¹

In response to the grievances, management was quoted as saying ‘they only needed to ask’ – a paternalistic response. According to the board of directors, ‘there was nothing in any of these matters which could not have been arranged without a strike, which has only meant a most unfortunate stoppage in the supplies of blankets and flannel for the Army.’⁴² The union officials (male) disagreed that claims could have been settled without a strike, and clarified that the workers were re-

turning to work, with a resolve to carry out duties of supplying material needed by soldiers.⁴³ The strike lasted eight days.

The striking female workforce had to contend with newspapers that ran a narrative of national betrayal by ‘these girls’. The local media suggested a disloyalty to the war effort by the girls at a time portrayed as being one of national patriotism.⁴⁴ The mill board was quoted: ‘As the mill was producing munitions of war the strike was most untimely and regrettable’.⁴⁵ There was a brick air raid shelter, purpose-built sometime during World War II, on the riverbank behind the mill’s back sheds.⁴⁶ The size of the shelter would not have held the 200 female workers of day shift.

According to a conversation with former female workers on site, the sanitation facilities for women remained problematic and insufficient post-war. They spoke of women and girls needing to get changed crouching behind machines, trying to stay out of view of male supervisors on elevated platforms. The women interviewed spoke of the supervisors’ elevated view giving the women the sense of always being watched, whether they were or not.⁴⁷

It is difficult also to assess if there

were any changes in the way women were spoken to. ‘Norma’ spoke of how she and her sister went for a job at QWMC in 1957. The boss, at the time was reluctant to hire them:

He said he didn’t like fat women. He said, ‘They don’t work properly’. Bev and I worked our tails off. We used to outclass the second shift. We worked—we got as much out or more out than they did, and there were seven of them on their shift. The boss did eventually apologise, He came round one day He said “Norma” and “Bev”, I have to make an apology to you pair’. He said, ‘I don’t like fat women working on the machines and that because they don’t work hard enough...but you pair are damn good.’⁴⁸

Norma made light of it in the interview—it was well remembered, and perhaps told many times. But there is an embedded attitude. In one way there is an honest assessment—that the women were bodies to be sized up in terms of productivity, making sure the human component of the cyborg was up to the task. The foreman was also throwing down the gantlet—perform or you are out. He did apologise, but it was a personally insulting way to be spoken to.

Females' Status in the Mill

There's a context to consider here in terms of the female mill workers. Many came to the mill because of a family member had worked there or was still there. It would have been a support but also another form of surveillance. What you do at work will follow you home. Until the 60s, many girls started at the mills at thirteen years old and left when they got married. The girls were straight from primary school and easily commanded. Many hadn't passed certificate, meaning a high school education was denied them, giving

them few options. Each year a new cohort of girls would enter the mill, with little social voice, and marriage presented as the main way to get out of the factory work. Many came to the factory as girls and left as girls, and being under twenty-one, never earned an adult wage. Their young age gave the female workforce little voice. They were quickly assimilated into the factory collective and supervised mostly by men.

Coral and Avril spoke of their time working on the spinning mules. The mules were long machines,

with two operators along the length of the machine. The mules were on wheels that ran back and forth on tracks. As they rolled out, they drew the wool, refining the yarn, then as the wheels came back in, the yarn was spun and at the same time, wound onto a bobbin—the same principle as a hand spinning wheel (without the tracks). In Figure 5, the rails behind the women would be for another spinning mule running the opposite way – it must have just run in when the photo was taken. You can see the supervisor sitting at the end, next to a lever that stopped the machine. The operator's job was to pick up the threads that broke through the process. The women are effectively embedded in the moving banks of machines on rails and walk back and forth with them. They walk miles in a day. The spinning mules in this image, were still operating at the QWMC when it closed in 1971.

Coral spoke of how if you saw it [the thread] go round the rollers in time, 'you could stop it and get it off, but sometimes it was really hard and tight to get off'. She would then just cut it:

Our cousin put her fingers in too far one day, lost the top of her finger. She walked up to the boss and said, 'I just lost my finger.' She wasn't fazed...they reckon it doesn't hurt to lose it.

..it's numb and you don't feel, but I reckon you'd have to feel it at the time.'

Avril spoke of an incident trying to fix a broken thread at the back of the spinning mule:

I went round the back to get a thread from here—it had broken. I went to get it, and as I did, I put my foot on the rail, and the wheel came and run over me foot. When [the wheel] came off [the rail], the whole, all those threads—they all broke—the whole lot. [Laughed]. [How was your foot? I asked.] It was alright, but ah gee I was scared I thought I'd be in trouble for all the threads breaking.

Avril's memories of the incident, as a young girl, focused more on fear of getting into trouble than being injured, while Coral's cousin expressed a toughness. Injures for them weren't portrayed as their highest concern. These may be outcomes of acceptance of the harshness of the environment and toughening up to get by. It was the culture of the time, 'One didn't complain'. The women themselves were considering their bodies in similar terms to the machines, Cyborg—bits of bodies aren't replaceable though. Not complaining didn't do women any favours.

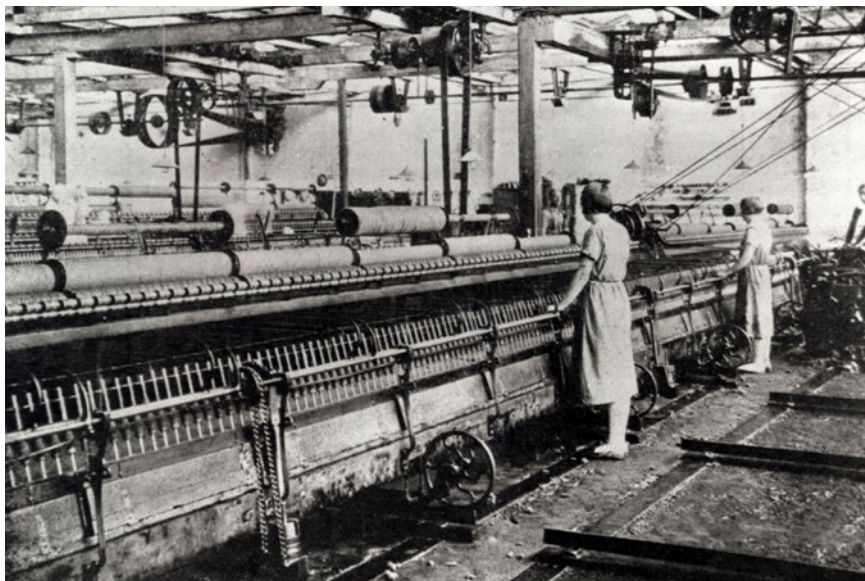


Figure 5. Spinning Mules, Ipswich Woollen Company c. 1920s.
Note the male supervisor on the right with the control stick.

Image: Ipswich Historical Society

Not all left the mill after marriage. Some women, like Coral, never married, and others married and had no choice but to keep working. ‘Norma’ worked through eight pregnancies, often returning to work six weeks after giving birth. There was no affordable childcare then, so shift work was one way to manage—going to work after they put dinner on the table, and kids in bed, and getting home to see them off to school the new morning. It was tough. “Norma” spoke of working in the afternoons. She was positioned next to louvres so she could watch her kids playing in the park after school, older ones looking after younger ones. She said when it was raining, and if the boss was in a good mood, he’d let the children come into the factory—better than outside, but no place for kids.

Loom Productivity Strike Action

Productivity on the looms was key and depended on the loom technology and the skilled attention of the weaver.

On 10 September 1941, seventy weavers at Morris Mills took industrial action. The girls were aged between seventeen and twenty. I first encountered this story in the police files at the state archive. The police were mostly concerned with any

kinds of insurrection or communism, so the files show close attention. Their first concern was the safety of the Mill owner, in this case Mr Morris, and whether to organise a military guard. Mr Morris was happy with just a police guard—if that was needed.⁴⁹

The trouble was two women had been brought up from Sydney, each to operate four automatic looms at once, when the current practice was one operator for two looms. Another new employee was appointed to operate two hand looms at once, instead of one operator for one hand loom.⁵⁰ It meant four girls were displaced and put on winding machines – at lower rates of pay.

The winding machine (Figure 6) shows women not looking so happy—its either about the job or the intrusion of the photographer. The machine’s role is to change the yarn over to a different bobbin for use on the next stage of process. It is quite tedious. swapping in and out bobbins of different sizes.

The girls walked off the job. The AWU told them to return to work. The girls refused.

The loom pictured in Figure 7 shows the looms configured for one operator and two looms. the operator can turn between the two. With



Figure 6. Women operating a winding machine.

Both images: Ipswich Historical Society

Figure 7. A woman operating two looms, with the loom behind clearly visible



four the operator would work within two sets of these.

To operate four looms, there would be two sets of these with the operator walking up and down.

The following day the terms of settlement were quickly reached. It was a happy bunch of girls. The women from Sydney, Ismay and Ivy, were to resign and return to Sydney. Any of the girls not returning to a loom would be given preference when one became available. However, a weaver was to start practising on four looms (resistance was futile in the face of potential saving in labour costs and higher productivity). A statement from Ismay was reported to the Industrial Magistrate, about hindering production and it affecting her three brothers in the AIF overseas.⁵¹ Even while the girls and women of the mill were gaining industrial power during the war, there was always this narrative directly or indirectly around them letting the war effort down—of being unpatriotic.

Post war, the pay structure for weavers changed over time. Older weavers from the QWMC told of being paid by the piece, and I also interviewed a mender paid on that basis—who worked from home. In the 1950 award, piecework rates were an arrangement with the em-

ployer. Piecework put pressure on those in the process before the weavers—the waged warpers and tying-in workers. to not hold them up. Weavers starting later in the fifties were paid a wage, although the award does allow generally for piecework.

Jane, a senior weaver when she worked at Morris Mills in the 1970, describes how the automatic looms worked:

[There was a feeler] on the back of the machine to pick up when a loose end breaks...you see, we used to work six looms. If there is a break and you picked it up after it's gone too far, well then, you've got to (undo the weaving)...otherwise it's too much for the menders. We were supposed to know whether the feelers are working okay...by continually walking up and down. But if you've got a bad job in...and some were absolutely shocking from either bad warping, or bad yarn...you would just continue to get breaks...that's when you found it hard working all the looms...⁵²

Norma spoke of looking after fourteen looms in tea breaks: One stayed behind.⁵³ Moving from operating one loom to six looms (and at

times more) speaks to changing loom technologies and operator skill – a more sophisticated cyborg could walk up and down between six looms, while the loom's feelers kept a 'finger' on the thread of each machine, signalling its human component of a possible breakage.

Mending Strike

The images below (Figure 8 and 9) show the mending room at QWMC. This was the next stage in the process from weaving, where any yarn breakages on the loom were fixed. It is highly skilled. This wasn't mending like darning a sock—it was invisible mending for a flawless finish. One thing apparent across my interviews with former workers was the level of pride in the work they did. They were

strongly aware of who came next in the process—and wanted the quality of their own work to be the best it could be.

A dispute in 1944, this time at Ipswich Woollen Company (East Ipswich), was reported in the *Queensland Times*⁵⁴ as follows: 'Eighteen menders walked out after Miss Smith, a highly skilled mender was suspended for refusing to mend an extremely bad piece of weaving of 114 yards, unless she received extra remuneration.' The news article continued. 'She'd already spent five hours mending ten yards and hadn't gotten to the bad section.'

Miss Williams, the union official (note female) had frequently informed the works manager of the

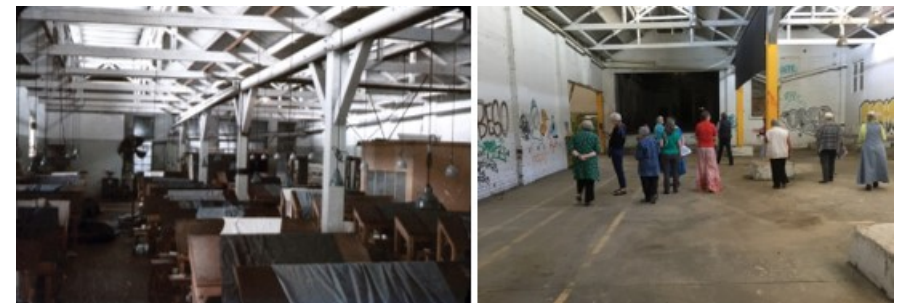


Figure 8 and 9.

Figure 8: Mending Room QWMC c.1960s. A mender would sit at each bench, drawing the fabric over it as they checked and mended. It would be inspected by the supervisor, who put the fabric over a frame so light would show faults. Menders at Redbank worked under a frame.

Image: Ipswich Historical Society

Figure 9. A similar orientation of the room taking at the Spinning circle at the mill. The wooden floor is gone.

Image: D. Morris 2018

bad work being turned out by the weavers. Management claimed wartime difficulties in find skilled workers, and admitted the piece in question was particularly bad.⁵⁵

The magistrate suggested the dispute be settled by granting the girl extra pay and allowing her supervisor to decide the bad pieces in the future. The girl was paid for an extra half an hour - one and a half shillings.⁵⁶

Mending such a badly woven textile means enormous time on fabric that will never be sound. It is like to sending an old, moth-eaten blanket to expert invisible menders for fixing. Commercially a mender would have a choice about accepting the work, and the actual fee if they were to go ahead. It is not a job a mender would want to do, or that would be worth doing. In this case it would be far better to spend the fifty hours to properly train the loom operators and discard bad output.

The strike action gave some recognition of the extra effort for the extremely bad piece, way beyond normal expectations of a mender – as meagre as the compensation was. Management showed complete disregard of the women's effort and skill. The union had equally shown disregard by telling

the girls to go back to work. More importantly, the mending supervisor now had authority to reject pieces that were just not worth mending.

The menders resistance was not futile in the face of poor-quality work.

Heat and Environmental conditions

All this happened in conditions of extreme heat, with humidifiers running, and not being able to open a window. Lyn, a worsted room worker at Redbank, ended up in hospital for a week after an extremely bad asthma attack. She knew going back would be bad for her health, but the night shifts enabled her to care for her children:

But we needed the money desperately...I could have worked in the office, and it would have been much easier for me, but I had the little girls, and [without working nights] we would have had to pay people to mind them. I didn't want to do that.⁵⁷

Another Morris mill worker, Jane speaks of union action in relation to the heat. Again, the union were less than supportive:

We weren't ever allowed to open the windows up and it was over forty. It was the first

time there was ever a strike in the weaving department...Anyway, they went on strike...[the Union] came down and...they didn't do a thing. So, the guy said that [the windows] had to be closed...we couldn't have the windows [open] because it affected, the **yarn**. Other ones got a fan and that sort of thing, but we never got a thing. We just had to put up with it.⁵⁸

Marion was a weaver from Ipswich Woollen company, and Redbank spoke of a lifetime of deafness because of the noise of the machines. There were other issues too:

Like I said, there was no [safety] guards around looms. There were no ear plugs. We didn't know that you'd go deaf for noise. There were no gloves for working with kerosene – now there's a real concern...So, there's lots of things...The women used to smoke on the job, place used to be full of cigarette smoke.⁵⁹

Apart from deafness, Marion suffered from severe dermatitis from the kerosene used for cleaning the machines.

There wasn't even the most basic safety—little machine guarding, and some machines, like the carder

were particularly ferocious—they were designed to grab wool and drag it in. The machines didn't discriminate, wool and body parts merge. There were serious, but infrequent accidents at the mills where people lost their arms. Each mill had its stories. Lyn explained that there were times when it was best to just let things go. 'Don't put your hand in, cause there's no stopping it. Often bodies, their sensitivities, and well-being, come last in the cyborg mix.

Equal Wages – Just Before the End

Finally, in 1969, the Federal Arbitration and Conciliation Commission arrived at equal pay for equal value to be phased in over three years but not where work was essentially performed by women, but men might also be employed—prolonging pay discrimination based on sex.⁶⁰ The unions and various women's organisations estimated only eighteen per cent of the workforce received equal pay in 1969.⁶¹

In 1972, technically gender was taken out of the picture, and equal pay for equal work was achieved.⁶² However, the uptake was slow, and determining value for predominantly female occupations was more difficult. It is not until 1976 that gender is taken out of the Queensland

Textile Workers award. In 1975, the Textile workers award showed wage for unspecified roles for adult females as \$77.33, being ninety-four percent of the adult male wage at \$81.99—getting close⁶³. In 1976, the award was no longer separated based on gender—there are just ‘Adults’, not adult males and adult females, and the wage for unspecified roles \$102.70.⁶⁴ Likewise male and female juniors were no longer separated.

Finally female textile mill workers were starting to be valued—or perhaps begrudgingly paid more. Norma explained about her pay:

Up until the last few years, the money wasn’t good until then. I think ‘67 I was earning about five pounds a week...then the wages went up to twice that much after ‘67—and it got better of course in the ‘80s. [Laughs]. But then we worked for it. We used to work sixteen-hour shifts sometimes.⁶⁵

Jane was pleased too, but annoyed: ‘I thought to myself, that’d be right. You know, I worked all those years for next to nothing.’

Jane had started at the mills in the early 1950s. Twenty years of being paid at three-quarters the going rate, just for being female. Imagine if there was back pay. A pay rise of

one-third for approximately seventy-five percent of the workforce would have been difficult for the mills to carry. It points to the mill’s products being under-priced and dividends overpaid for a long time.

Christine Short⁶⁶ surmised that generally in Australia ongoing pay inequities come down to women’s work being undervalued, and female occupations were thus undervalued. She also points to union structures contributing to pay inequity, with women’s awards largely state based, and the women’s industries also state based.⁶⁷ The women at the Queensland mills were represented by the Australian Workers Union, however, in other states they were represented by Australian Textile Workers Union. The woollen mills were dependent on women being paid a lower wage than men. It contributed significantly to their profit margin. However, levels of demand for woollen products would never again be as high as during the war. Blankets in homes would be replaced by doonas and electric blankets. Fashion was being casualised—out with suits and in with denim jeans, or the little synthetic jersey frocks in their fabulously bright colours. The mills were trying to adapt with synthetic mixes, but it wasn’t enough.

End of the Mills

In 1968 the QWMC had just merged with the East Ipswich mill (Ipswich woollen Mill) trying to get it out of financial trouble, becoming Australian Fabric Manufacturers (AFM). The AFM was already extended and vulnerable and closed three years later, leaving Morris Mills of Redbank the sole survivor. Morris Mills took as many staff as they could. In 1973 the Whitlam government cut tariffs across the board by twenty-five percent. Nationally, the woollen textile industry collapsed. Morris Mills sold to Primac in 1983. Shortly after the woollen mills section closed leaving just a wool scour; sold to a Japanese company, itself closing 1994.

The irony here is that the last employee of Ipswich’s woollen textile industry was a woman, Milomirka Radovic. Millie, a migrant who had started at Morris Mills in the 1970s, spoke little English, but was the most highly qualified, with a four-year university degree in textiles. She had run Morris’s quality control laboratories and then managed the wool scour until it closed.⁶⁸

For the young ones laid off, the closures opened their eyes to work opportunities beyond the mills. They couldn’t believe the pay they could get, working often in much more

interesting jobs. For older workers in their fifties, for both men and women there were few options. For Coral, who had worked in the mills since she left school, her only option was cleaning. She regretted not retraining when the AFM mill closed a decade earlier, but the job agency had encouraged her to stick with what she knew.

Queensland’s Ipswich woollen mill hub is gone, and today there few woollen mills left of the time nationally: Waverley Mills in Launceston, Tasmania, built in 1876 is still in operation but has had many struggles;⁶⁹ Creswick Woollen Mills, Victoria, operating since 1947;⁷⁰ Bendigo Woollen Mills, Victoria since 1988,⁷¹ late comer Nundle Woollen Mills, New South Wales, outside Tamworth started operating in 2001,⁷² and there are a few small later start-ups. The business models are very different, with much fewer staff, and some with pre-processing the wool overseas.

Conclusion

The wages situation for women, and therefore women themselves, were undervalued and wages structure from 1908 were set to discriminate against female workers and enforce a dependency on marriage for a reasonable standard of living. Over a century later, wages are still

not equal and there have been social consequences, too often violent, for the devaluing of women. Considering historically predominantly female workplaces highlights the social prejudices against women.

The lesson of Haraway's cyborg isn't resistance to technological change. Haraway writes of the cyborg from a feminist perspective as about being the power to survive—not a return to the old but in seizing the tools, recoding communication to subvert control.⁷³ The success of the cyborg is the seamless operation of disparate parts. It challenges us to confront binaries that never properly served us—and largely were used to disempower women and minorities. The answer is in embracing difference is a starting point.

In that short window of power during World War II the girls at the mill seized the opportunity to make things a little better, and over time brought women more into their own power. The mill stories bring to light inequities beyond pay that arise from disempowerment: the lack of change rooms, the surveillance, the disregard for not only skills, but the work foisted on women to clean up messes of poor work standards (as with the mending case), and the clean-up of the

machines themselves. The lack of safety measures, the noise and the heat were suffered by both men and women to varying degrees. There are glimpses also into the media's portrayals of the mill girls, as hindering the war effort, just because they take action for fair treatment in the face of new technologies allowing multiple looms to be operated.

And now new technologies are creating different crossroads, with the blurring of artificial and human, male and female, home and workplace, culture, and environment. The barriers for women, set in motion by artificially undervaluing the work that women do, and setting up dependencies on males has become entangled across workplaces, homes, and families in insidious ways. Even as wages equalised, they are still not equal, and attitudes devaluing women have not gone away, with added complexities around gender. New ways through can be found by embracing diversity, social and technological change to enable the radical recalibrations needed to shift damaging, and all too often, life-threatening attitudes towards women, and the marginalised.

Janis Hanley's doctoral research focused on Queensland's woollen textile industry centred in Ipswich. She conducted ethnographic interviews with 24 former mill workers about their work experiences and the impacts of the mill closures. Arranging in situ 'go-alongs' for former mill workers, and then local fibre artists, at the state heritage listed former mill at North Ipswich, enabled further explorations of mill memories and connections.

Janis's work focuses on what heritage can do, what it generates, through its presence in the landscape and creative activities: any ways of enabling people to connect with place and developing a living community around it. She is currently co-curating an exhibition in Rhode Island exploring the parallels between the demise of the textile industry in New England and Ipswich.

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80th Anniversary of Fred Paterson's election to State Parliament

Glenn Davies

2024 was the eightieth anniversary of the election of Fred Paterson to the Queensland seat of Bowen. Idealist, divinity student, champion athlete, Rhodes scholar, war veteran and barrister, Paterson is the only person elected to an Australian Parliament standing as a Communist Party of Australia (CPA) candidate.

I became interested in the story of Fred Paterson when I attended a conference on the early history of the labour movement in North Queensland held at the Australian Workers' Union Hall on Sturt Street, Townsville over the old Queen's Birthday weekend, 6-8 June 1987. This was organised by my James Cook University history lecturer, Professor Paul Turnbull. At the time I was a third-year history student at JCU and searching for an honours thesis topic on North Queensland political history.

The conference was attended by many of the surviving northern communist activists from the 1930's onwards, such as Jim Henderson. It was during this conference Paul Turnbull made record-

ings of discussions he had with them. These oral records are currently held in the Fryer Library, University of Queensland. To coincide with the event, the pamphlet *Fred Paterson: Speeches in Parliament* was printed for distribution at the conference.

The Communist Party of Australia made a major contribution to north Queensland history during the 1930s and 1940s, commonly referred to as 'The Red North'. Of particular influence after the First World War, was the role of Fred Paterson, the best-known Communist in North Queensland and possibly in Australia.

Fred Paterson had seen action on the battlefields of France during the First World War and when peace was declared took up his 1918 Rhodes Scholarship. After returning from Oxford, he studied law in Brisbane and became a barrister. It was during the early 1920s that Paterson joined the Communist Party of Australia.

In 1931, Paterson moved to Townsville where he set up as a barrister

involved in fighting the racist employment policies in the north Queensland sugar industry. He spent his time juggling both a part-time legal career and his burgeoning role as a travelling activist for the Communist Party. By this time, he had gained a reputation as a fine public speaker.

The Patersons lived from 1934 at 107 The Strand, Townsville. In 1937 they moved back a street from The Strand and up one block to 185 Mitchell Street, North Ward just back from the corner with Howitt Street where they lived until he won the State seat of Bowen on 15 April 1944.

During the late 1930s, the Communist Party continued to grow rapidly in North Queensland, with Paterson at the forefront. He played a significant role in the union movement in the sugar industry during a key strike over workplace conditions, and became involved in the anti-fascist movement.

In 1939, Fred Paterson stood successfully as an alderman for the Townsville City Council, becoming the first member of the Communist Party to win such an office in Australia. He was then re-elected in 1943. Ian Moles describes how Paterson and the other Communist aldermen on the Townsville Muni-

cipal Council worked closely during the early 1940s with the Independent ALP councilor and future Townsville State parliamentarian, Tom Aikens.

On 15 April 1944, Paterson again made history when he won the seat of Bowen at the Queensland state election. Jim Henderson, Paterson's 1944 election campaign manager, had also been elected to the Bowen shire council earlier in the year (the first Communist elected as a shire councilor in Australia).

On 17 March 1948, during a St Patrick's Day demonstration in Brisbane against Labor premier Edward Michael Hanlon's industrial laws, Australia's only communist Member of Parliament was brutally bashed from behind by a Queensland police officer. Fred Paterson had been standing on a Brisbane city footpath taking notes as a legal adviser to striking railway men in the march when the procession was intercepted near the intersection of Ann and Edward streets by about 150 uniformed policemen and plain-clothes detectives. No arrest or charge was ever laid against the police officer, Jack Mahony.

Professor Ross Fitzgerald wrote in *The Peoples Champion* in 1997 that as Paterson said late in his life:

The story of this action, and

the bashing of other people on this day is one that should be told again and again, to expose the corruption of some members of the police force and the corruption of some government administrators”.

This brutal action should never be forgotten.

Eighty years ago, Townsville and the broader north Queensland were brightly shining as the ‘Red North’,

with Fred Paterson leading the way. Truly amazing.

Dr Glenn Davies and Matthew Wengert have recently been awarded the 2023 Stella Nord Award to assist with research for ‘The Red North. Townsville 1919’, a history of the violent meat workers’ strike in Townsville and how this north Queensland moment was part of the global phenomenon that was the Red Summer of 1919.

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Tommy Ryan and the Birth of Labor: extracts

Pat Comben

Pat Comben, was an ALP state parliamentarian from 1983 to 1995, Minister for Environment and Heritage 1989-92 and Minister of Education 1992-95. He has written a history of Tommy Ryan who was chair of the Barcaldine Strike Committee in 1891 and was arrested with other Committee members but acquitted of a conspiracy charge. In 1892, he became the first endorsed ALP member to be elected to the Queensland Parliament when he defeated the Pastoral Employers' Association candidate.¹ Tommy Ryan was only in Parliament for a little over a year and was very much a victim of party infighting.

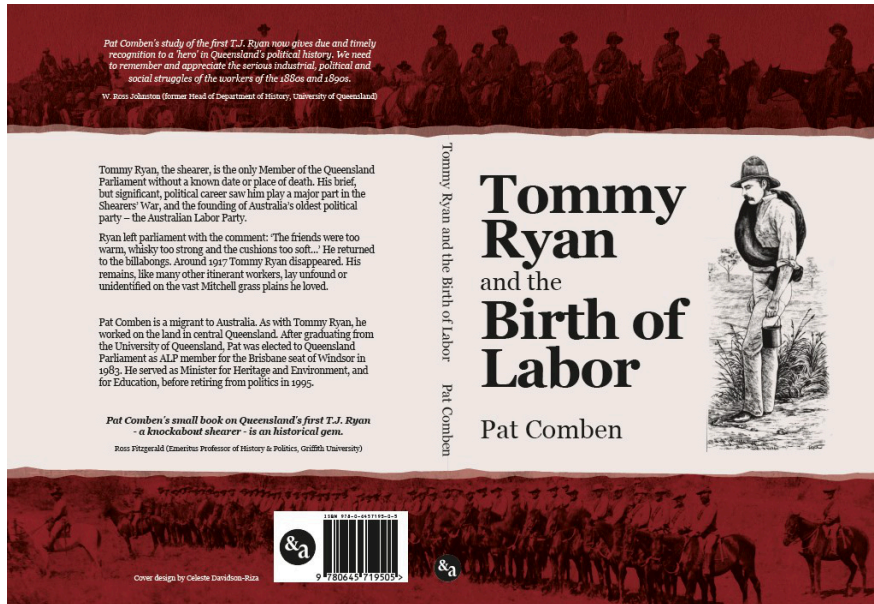
The book, *Tommy Ryan and the Birth of Labor*, is available from AndAlso Books at \$20.00. Lee Duffield has written a very sympathetic review at Independent Australia.²

QJLH, with Pat Comben’s agreement and cooperation, is publishing some extracts from the Introduction and from the final chapter of the book.

Introduction

Thomas Joseph (Tommy) Ryan – shearer, and the Australian Labor Party’s first member of the Queensland Parliament – is virtually unknown. The later legendary Thomas Joseph (‘TJ’) Ryan, teacher, barrister, Queensland Premier and reformer, overshadows Tommy Ryan, the shearer. Seventeen years separated the elections of the two men, with identical names, for the same central Queensland seat of Barcoo, but vastly different lives. The career, achievements and Shakespearean tragedy of the ‘first’ TJ (Tommy) Ryan, shearer, is told here

Tommy Ryan, the shearer, epitomises many early itinerant Australian bush workers, whose toils and tribulations helped shape a country’s future. Tragically only a few are remembered. Ryan transitioned, in less than two years, from being a shearer, to an imprisoned striker, to Labor’s first representative in the Queensland parliament. During his short parliamentary career, a militant



temperance advocate, working for the federated unions, drew the attention of the labour union's sober and sombre leaders, to rumours of Ryan's drinking and debts.³ The rumours inflicted fatal wounds.

Walking away from politics, Ryan provided only a subdued defence of his personal habits and parliamentary performance. The bushworker, shearer, trailblazing unionist and politician became a virtual pariah of the labour movement and the nascent Labor Party. Ryan considered he had been thrown aside by the early Labor Party's administration 'as

contemptuously as [they] would a worn-out garment'.

Departing the parliament he returned to the anonymity of Queensland's western plains with his comment for the ages saying much: 'The friends were too warm, the whisky too strong and the cushions too soft for Tommy Ryan. His place is out among the shearers on the billabongs.' Back in the bush he disappears, his place of death and final resting place remain a mystery.

Ryan's achievements provide an example. He, like other individuals in history who, when need called,

ably stood to be heard in the cause of industrial and social improvement. Ryan's election pointed to a better future when men and women – the workers of Queensland – needed hope. For that he deserves recognition. If there were flaws, let them, with the imperfections of all, be noted. But rising to meet a moment, requiring courage, for the betterment of all is the eternal story of successful human achievement.

Against the odds Tommy Ryan, shearer, spearheaded an innovative democratic movement in Queensland, assisting in the creation of the Australian Labor Party. His was a consequential life.

What Became of Tommy Ryan? (chapter 12)

Ryan left the parliament and virtually disappeared. He left behind the ultimate mystery of any person's unknown death, 'What became of him?' Ryan quickly slipped from public view. He had shown no residential address when enrolled in the Barcoo Electoral District in December 1891. His entry on the Barcoo Electoral Roll for 1893 and 1894 gave his address as 'Queensland Labourers' Union Office, Barcardine'. Ryan left no record of ever having owned or

leased residential property. He does not appear again on an electoral roll until 28 January 1899 at Blackall, with no street address or personal information recorded. A year later on 12 January 1900, his name appears on the electoral roll for the district of Gregory with his address simply stated as 'Boullia'. On that roll, his age is 48, fitting with his previously claimed but incorrect birth date of 1852; his occupation is stated as 'Labourer'.

The Worker reported on 14 September 1901, 'Tom Ryan, late Labour member for the Barcoo, is now shearing again in the Longreach district'.⁴

Ryan's Last Sightings

Charles Abbott (later the federal Member for Gwyder, and wartime Administrator of the Northern Territory) presented a Bowral station 2FC radio talk and a later newspaper article in 1949, both entitled, 'What Became of Tommy Ryan?'⁵ Abbott reflected on Tommy Ryan, the shearer and bushman, whom he met while both worked clearing scrub in the early 1900s on Oxford Downs, near Nebo, west of Mackay. His commentary on Ryan's life adds personal details and a sympathetic view of an older Ryan still working in Queensland's bush. The article

provides unique details of Ryan's disposition, including possible depression, and indicators of his eventual fate.

He recalled their time at the Oxford Downs woolshed. With the day's hard work over, the impressionable youth sat, with the tough old striker and parliamentarian, next to the campfire with a billy of tea. Abbott listened to Ryan's experiences gained over thirty years of shearing in many of Queensland's big woolsheds. Ryan mentioned his time in the Barcoo electorate, adding his belief that its residents had probably forgotten him. Abbot remembered him well:

Third extract (also from chapter 12)

Ryan told Abbott of being with Henry Lawson when they heard the news of the military issuing live ammunition to the Mounted Rifle volunteers to use against the striking shearers. Even after a decade, Ryan's anger flared as he recalled Colonel Price's address to volunteers:

Men of the Mounted Rifles:

'To do your work faintly would be a grave mistake. You will each be supplied with forty rounds of leaden bullets, and if the order is given to

fire, don't let me see any rifle point in the air; fire low and lay them out.'

And after that he marched them to Divine Service!

Tommy Ryan recounted to Abbott tales of the strikes, and his admiration for William Lane. Listening to Ryan speak about earlier Queensland unionists and politicians, Abbott asked, 'You seem to know all these men very well. Why did you leave Parliament?' Abbott recalled, 'He hesitated and laughed and then he told me.' Abbott did not disclose what Ryan told him. We might surmise it was related to the whisky that he admitted was 'too hard'.

The two men finished their job shortly thereafter. Abbott watched Ryan set out, with his swag, westward along the track to Clermont and the wide open country. Abbott headed to the coastal cane fields around Mackay, finishing with the observation of the sands of time running out for Ryan. 'He went out of public life into the shadows and quiet reaches of the bush'.⁶

The Worker, an important part of Ryan's political rise and dethroning, provided the last known comment concerning

rambling Tommy. On 3 May 1917, correcting a previous article about WH Campbell (Ryan's 1892 opponent) it reported, 'In 1892 Campbell stood for the Barcoo and was defeated by Labor candidate Thomas Joseph Ryan (not the present Premier), who, we believe, is still battling around the West'.

Where the Dead Men Lie!

*Out on the wastes of the Never Never -
That's where the dead men lie!
There where the heat-waves dance forever -
That's where the dead men lie!
That's where the Earth's loved sons are keeping
Endless tryst: not the west wind sweeping
Feverish pinions can wake their sleeping
Out where the dead men lie!-*

Barcroft Boake (1891)

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Book Reviews

Into The Wind: A Young Family and the Australian Pilots' Dispute as Told by an '89er

by Paul Edgley

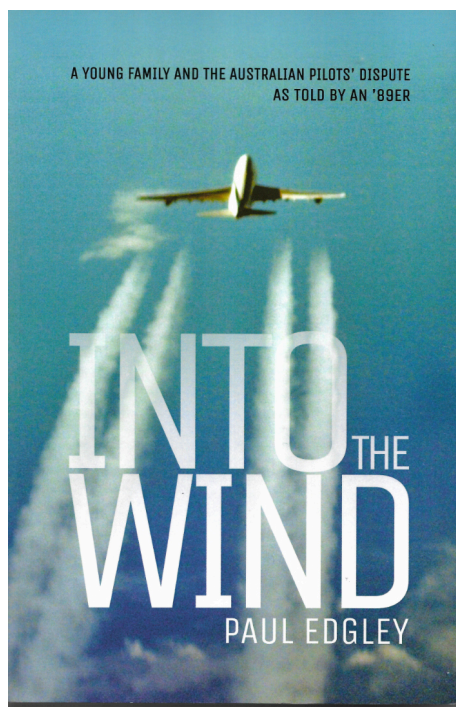
Brisbane, Boolarong Biographies, 2021

A Poisonous Affair: The Airline Dispute

by Morna Kenworthy

Melbourne, Morna Kenworthy, 2024

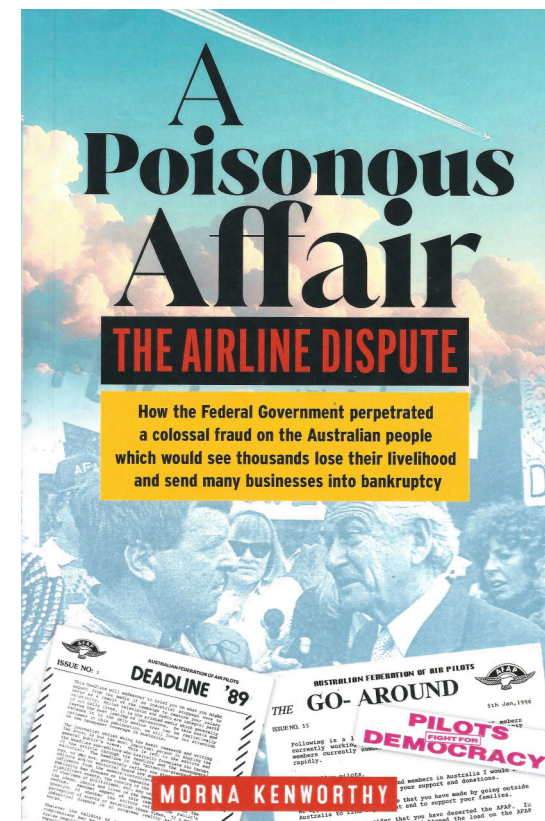
Reviewed by Jeff Rickertt



The phone rang. It was crewing; I had a trip. I didn't know what to say. Eventually, I asked for details. It was a flight to Melbourne. Was I refusing this duty? As I had spent much time on reserve, I knew the crewing officer. I remained confused, and he took pity. 'The flight's down for 4.00pm, so you won't be going: you guys made sure of that. I just have to ring everyone, and get you all on record as refusing.'.... 'I refuse to crew a flight that's not scheduled to fly.' 'I guess that'll do.' (Edgley p.7)

Thus began Paul Edgley's participation in one of Australia's most bitter and costly industrial confrontations: the airline pilots' dispute of 1989. Edgley was a First Officer with Ansett. The "guys" referred to were his colleagues in the Australian Federation of Air Pilots (AFAP).

Edgley was no union militant. He was a young man with a growing family and a mortgage, pursuing his dream of a career in aviation, working his way up through the pilot seniority lists, hoping to command a 767 one day. Like his AFAP comrades, however, he was not willing to accept being shortchanged by his employer. Wages in the industry had stagnated, trailing inflation by an average of 22 percent over the preceding five years. Contrary to media reports, most pilots were not lavishly remunerated. Entry level flight officers earned no more than \$13,000 per year. A B727 captain was paid around \$87,000, 34 per cent less than their counterpart in the United States. The most senior pilots could earn \$102,000, out of which they would pay over \$40,000 in tax. Hardly outrageous money for keeping people safe in



the sky. Company profits, on the other hand, were strong and the bosses were paying themselves handsomely. Edgley believed in fairness: if a 40 percent salary hike was good enough for Ansett executives, a decent pay increase was warranted for the workers who produced the profits. (Kenworthy p.100, Edgley p.218, alexpaterson.net)

Captain Bill Kenworthy was another 89er. Unlike Edgley, Ken-

worthy was at the top end of the Ansett scale. He had achieved his command way back in 1969, aged 28. By 1989 he was one of the company's most senior pilots. But he, too, had grown unhappy with the airline's treatment of its staff since control of the company had passed to Peter Abeles and Rupert Murdoch in 1981. It seemed to Kenworthy that management respect for pilots had declined, paralleling the fall in their wages. As his wife Morna explained, "their profession was being undermined and their reputation for excellence and the part they played in aviation safety put into question." (Kenworthy p.15) The airline, Bill argued, "was now being run by the bean counters..." (p.13). Kenworthy was no union militant either. But by August 1989 he too was ready to make a stand.

In the literature on industrial disputes in Australia, few books have been written by people on the front line of the workers' side. Pat Mackie's book (co-written with Elizabeth Vassilieff) on the 1964 Mt Isa dispute is one. Julian Stuart's account of the 1891 shearers' strike is another. With the publication of *Into the Wind* and *A Poisonous Affair*—both about the 1989 dispute—Paul Edgley and Morna Kenworthy have joined this exclusive club. Edgley stood by his union and became an

activist during the struggle. Morna Kenworthy was Bill's wife, and she, too, threw herself into the fray, attending pickets and public meetings and working tirelessly for the union in its office, even after Bill tragically died during the dispute. 'I have a story to tell,' she writes in her book's opening line. That she does. It's a dramatic story, one we need to know.

The AFAP covered pilots employed by Ansett, Australian Airlines, East West and Ipec. (Qantas pilots in 1989 did not fly domestic routes and were covered by a different union.) Prior to and after the Federation's collective agreements expiring on 30 June, it had tried to negotiate new contracts with the companies but had got nowhere. Peter Abeles was particularly hostile and led the companies' joint resistance. Frustrated, AFAP members had met to consider industrial action, a big step for a union with a record of only 14 days of stoppages in the previous 37 years. As career pilots they were reluctant to inconvenience the customers they served. But the intransigence of the airlines brought their anger to boiling point. So, in support of a wage claim of 29.4 per cent they resolved that from Friday 18 August they would refuse to fly outside the hours of 9 to 5.

From the beginning the Federation

understood it was not only up against the companies and their allies in the media. The Labor government of Bob Hawke and the ACTU under Secretary Bill Kelty also had an interest because as they saw it, the AFAP's wage claim threatened to undermine the centrepiece of the government's industrial relations policy, the Prices and Incomes Accord. Inspired by the Swedish model of peak-level agreements between labour, capital and government, the Accord was the brainchild of leading Communist Party and ALP figures in the union movement, who argued it would allow organised labour to directly influence national affairs; a figurative workers' seat at the table. In return for wage restraint, workers were promised an increase in government expenditure on services and welfare, the so-called social wage.

In practice, after Labor came to power in 1983 the Accord became a regularly re-negotiated compact between Hawke and Kelty which curtailed wage increases, sacrificed working conditions to productivity growth, and precipitated a massive decline in union density and workplace power. In its first five years the Accord cut real wages by about 7.5 per cent. Hawke restored universal healthcare – gutted by his predecessor Malcolm Fraser – but

in general the promised social wage amounted to tinkering, with a general trend away from universal provision towards 'targeted' welfare. Most dramatically, Hawke, Keating and Kelty crafted a share market-based industry superannuation system to displace the age pension as the primary source of workers' retirement income, leaving most working-class retirees dependent upon capitalist profit for a dignified retirement. In conjunction with Labor's program of deregulation and privatisation, the Accord facilitated a substantial transfer of national wealth from labour to capital.

Although the successive versions of the Accord had no standing in law, the Industrial Relations Commission (IRC) accepted the Accord's guidelines, and all registered unions were expected to comply. Prior to 1989 most had, but not all. In 1984 the Food Preservers' Union was threatened with deregistration for striking for a wage increase outside Accord guidelines. Labor went one step further in 1986 by deregistering the Builders Labourers Federation for achieving real wage increases with strike action. Also, in 1986 the Victorian Nurses and Midwives waged a successful 50-day strike to win a real pay rise from the Labor government in Victoria.

In pursuing their wage catch-up,

AFAP officials pointed out the hypocrisy and class bias of a system that suppressed workers' incomes while placing no constraints on profits or executive salaries. Not just CEOs but politicians and IRC judges were readily accepting salary hikes far in excess of the limits set by the Accord. Shareholders and private entrepreneurs were also riding high. As AFAP President Brian McCarthy put it, "those who did well out of the Accord were those who weren't in it." (Edgley p.183)

McCarthy and his comrades knew the stakes were high. After 18 August, however, it rapidly became apparent they were unprepared for the onslaught unleashed against them. Three days before the AFAP industrial ban was implemented, the government publicly signalled it was prepared to support the cancellation of the pilots' industrial awards. They were not bluffing. What the pilots did not know is that on that same day, 15 August, Hawke had convened a private meeting in his office with airline bosses and his ministers for Industrial Relations and Transport and Communications. Kelty joined the discussion briefly by phone. Hawke assured the airlines his government would support them if they applied to cancel the awards and then sued the union and individual pilots for financial

losses caused by the industrial action. Kelty concurred with the strategy. It probably helped that Hawke, Kelty and Abeles were mates. According to notes of the secret meeting (much later obtained in court by the AFAP), Kelty stressed that punitive measures would set an example. When asked by Hawke for his view, Kelty replied: "teach them what it's like to be out of the system. It is no soft option to be out of the system." (Edgley p.197, Kenworthy pp.85-89)

And so the plan was implemented. Upon application by the companies, the IRC cancelled the awards, and on 23 August the airlines grounded their fleets, locking out the workforce. The next morning, they commenced serving writs for damages on individual AFAP officials and members. Anticipating this move, most pilots, acting on the advice of the union, resigned their positions before they could be served, putting them beyond the reach of litigation. But a handful of members and the AFAP executive were left exposed. The AFAP ended up with a damages and legal bill in excess of \$6 million.

True to his word, Hawke backed the companies at every move. He provided compensation, allowed Australian embassies to serve as recruiting centres for hiring scab pi-



*Protesters in Queensland at a reception for Bob Hawke during the Pilots dispute
Image: Bob Paige Remembers Pilot Strike: www.youtube.com/watch?v=HqyIUkpiA30*

lots, and fast-tracked the visas of the recruits. His Cabinet authorised the RAAF to transport passengers inconvenienced by the shutdown, 40 years after another Labor Prime Minister, Ben Chifley, had similarly turned to the military to scab on striking coal miners.

With the AFAP reeling, the airlines offered pilots individual non-union contracts. Kelty personally tweaked and approved them. They offered a pay increase of 25 per cent, well above the Accord limit, demonstrating that despite the rhetoric, a wage hike was not the airlines' main concern. Overall operational costs, not individual wage rates, drove their belligerence. The contracts delivered savings because they eroded pilots' operational autonomy and the job security provided by the

seniority system. With no guarantee of ongoing employment, a pilot on an individual contract could be pressured to accept cost cutting measures and make in-flight decisions which saved the company money, despite potentially compromising aircraft safety. With the union sidelined, the companies were also free to slash pilot numbers, forcing more work from remaining crews. Kenworthy develops this point further by arguing that Abeles wanted the union out of the way to maximise Ansett's opportunities in the forthcoming deregulated aviation market. (pp. 499, 657)

Historically aloof from the rest of the labour movement, the Federation had entered the dispute without any powerful industrial allies.

While the earlier struggles by food preservers, builders labourers and nurses had signalled a growing discontent with the Accord, the AFAP was poorly positioned to galvanise support for a united fightback. Isolated, they had no viable path to victory, or even negotiated defeat.

Some pilots began taking the contracts. Many refused, holding out for as long as they could before seeking employment with airlines overseas, or abandoning the industry altogether. By December, more than 200 AFAP pilots were working outside of Australia, with another 199 applications under consideration. (Kenworthy p.298) AFAP membership collapsed from 2800 pilots before the dispute to about 800 in 1994. (Kenworthy p.670) For the pilots who returned to work without the union (and for the young pilots who came later) the price paid was high, as Morna Kenworthy explains:

They accepted that their line of seniority would no longer exist; they signed those individual contracts. They accepted an award based on that contract, made without any involvement from any industrial body. An award...that left their lives to be arranged and manipulated at the discretion of airline management. They knowingly gave away decades of benefits and a

powerful union representation by the AFAP. (p.678)

By the end, the lockout was estimated to have cost the Australian economy over one billion dollars, with some estimates as high as four billion. (Edgley p.341) The government spent tens of millions of public money to help Abeles and his fellow executives achieve their goals.

Both *Into the Wind* and *A Poisonous Affair* tell this disastrous story with passion and flair. They are, however, very different books. Edgley's is a personal account. The first half of *Into the Wind* narrates the development of his career, from his childhood aspiration to pilot a Lockheed Electra, to earning the three-bar epaulettes of a senior First Officer in January 1989, seven years after joining Ansett. As the narrative unfolds, we are introduced to his parents and his wife Sharon, and we follow the young couple as they repeatedly relocate around Australia for Edgley's pilot training and flying opportunities. The family expands to one, two, eventually four children, outgrowing Edgley's blue Holden panel van, a constant in his life since his young adulthood in Darwin, when he offside for his builder father and played drums in a rock'n'roll band. As the book traces the long journey from there to the

cockpit of an airliner, many sections are devoted to explaining Edgley's intensive pilot training. The reader is invited into the close circle of airline pilots, a fraternity of highly skilled workers who carry their skills with the pride of artisans.

The personal focus of *Into the Wind* has two important effects. We get to understand Edgley as a kind of working-class everyman, a panel-van-owning builder's son who chose a different trade to his father and whose aspiration for secure employment and a stable family is instantly recognisable. We also come to appreciate the immense effort and diligence required to qualify as an airline pilot, and the sacrifices this commitment entails for pilots and families alike. The life described here is a far cry from the images of pilots propagated by Abeles, Hawke and the media. In one infamous outburst Hawke referred to AFAP pilots as overpaid bus drivers, revealing in typically boorish fashion his contempt for both pilots and drivers. Edgley's story serves as a devastating rebuttal to Hawke's caricature.

Towards the end, the panel van appears one last time as a symbol of Edgley's journey and also, by then, of the shattering of his dream. As he sells the van before departing Australia, he remembers his father's ad-

vice to always take responsibility for his actions. And so, as he watches the van being driven away, he refuses to play the victim:

I knew, as the red taillight of that cherished vehicle disappeared around the corner, that everything that happened was a result of decisions we had made. We chose to stand for something we believed in, even if few outside our group understood. We chose to support our friends, colleagues and their families; we chose to fight in the streets, and we chose to counter the onslaught garnered by two of the most powerful businessmen in our country, coupled with the might of the Hawke-led government and the seething resentment of Kelty's ACTU. And we chose not to back down. (p.318)

Morna Kenworthy's *A Poisonous Affair*, although also an insider's account written in the first person, adopts a more journalistic approach, interweaving her own experiences with reporting and analysis of the unfolding events. Running to almost 700 pages, Kenworthy's book delivers a thorough, forensic examination of the entire dispute: its causes, its development and its consequences. She draws on both personal knowledge and an immense

trove of sources, including her own diaries and newspaper cuttings books, union records and a mountain of legal documents generated during the dispute and its long aftermath in the courts. Seldom has there been such a detailed study of the public and backroom manoeuvres of the antagonists in an industrial confrontation.

Many of her revelations are shocking. In late November 1989 Hawke agreed to meet AFAP representatives for the first time since the dispute commenced. The Federation hoped for a breakthrough. Instead, they were subjected to vile abuse. Kenworthy relies on the account by the AFAP's Vice President, Captain Richard (Dick) Holt:

When we got in there, he opened up straight away: "You fucking c...s.", and for the next 20 minutes we were bombarded with a stream of foul language. He was highly abusive and when he mentioned McCarthy's name, it was surrounded by more expletives. I had damp eyes more than once and I think Terry [O'Connell] did too. We had such high hopes for this meeting but it was obvious we were going nowhere. (p.265)

Hawke, the 'great negotiator', had no interest in negotiation.

One important difference between the two books is the timeframe applied to the dispute. Understandably, Edgley brings down the curtain on his story at the point he leaves Australia to work for Malaysia Airlines. In contrast, Kenworthy follows the threads of the broader conflict as they wind through the Federation's post-1989 legal fight for survival, the deregulation of the Australian airline industry, the efforts to rebuild the union and the collapse of Ansett in 2001. This context allows her to consider the longer-term consequences of the events of 1989. She argues that the cost of Abeles' efforts to crush the AFAP in the 1989 showdown and in subsequent legal action weakened the airline, contributing to its demise 12 years later. (pp.657-58) In this respect, Kenworthy's book can be read as the saga of Peter Abeles' harmful misadventures in the Australian aviation industry.

But the book is much more than that. Like *Into the Wind, A Poisonous Affair* is vitally concerned with the fate of the pilots and their Association. It tells a remarkable tale of solidarity amongst members of a union. Above all, these books expose a ruthless conspiracy – a collaboration of large companies with each other, a Labor government and the ACTU to smash a union.



Bill Kelty, image Linfox, of which he is a long-standing board member

In recent weeks Kelty has been critical of the Albanese Federal ALP Government, which he believes needs to introduce more business-friendly reform. In an article in The Australian (20/9/2024) he praised the 'brilliant and successful business leaders' he worked with to restructure the Australian economy. The ex-ACTU boss said these business 'geniuses' had agreed with the union leaders on three things: 'wage moderation,' 'no claims for companies to pay health insurance' and fixing the 'crazy' wages system that had allowed workers to fight for higher pay. Kelty wrote: 'It is true much of this was orchestrated by Keating and Hawke. But it could never have been done without the input of wonderful union warriors and employers who were prepared to stand up for the fight.'

Today, a similar conglomeration is conspiring to crush the CFMEU, and for similar reasons. The history of the 89ers might be repeating itself in another industry. It would appear that Labor PM Anthony Albanese, ACTU Secretary Sally McManus and the bosses in the construction sector would like this to be the case. But no outcome of class struggle is inevitable. How the attack on the CFMEU ends is largely in the hands of the workers; their future history is theirs to write. Thanks to Paul Edgley and Morna Kenworthy, they have been gifted two important books which shine a

light on the forces they are up against.

Jeff Rickertt is an historian and activist who recently retired from a career as a librarian.

He is a former BLHA President and a former editor of *The Queensland Journal of Labour History*. Jeff coordinated *Radical Brisbane: An Unruly History* and authored *The Conscientious Communist: Ernie Lane and the Rise of Australian Socialism*.

Australian Women's Justice: Settler Colonisation and the Queensland Vote

by Deborah Jordan

Oxon, Routledge, 2023

Reviewed by Claire Moore

What a glorious thing it is going to be when we get the vote!

Youthful enthusiast, Florence Stuart

Deb Jordan is a respected and much-quoted historian of Queensland history, particularly women's history and on the struggles for the vote and how best to use it. From her work with Carole Ferrier on the suffrage walking tours—held around the centenary of Queensland women's suffrage in 2005, and then re-walked in 2021—to her role in the wonderful discovery and digitisation of the 1894 and 1897 suffrage petitions in the Queensland Parliamentary Library and her papers on women peace activists published in 2018, Deb has informed, engaged, challenged and entertained.

This new publication, *Australian Women's Justice: Settler Colonisation and the Queensland Vote*, builds on so much of this previous scholarship, drawing us into the lives of women and men who shared the challenges, disappointments, conflict, exclusion and heady joys of the period 1893 until 1919. This was a significant era, containing indus-



Florence Stuart

image: ANU, <http://hdl.handle.net/1885/260773>

trial disputes; parliamentary upheaval and elections at state and federal levels; a new Labour/Labor political party; Australian federation; the formalisation of the White Australia policy; ongoing suppression of First Nations people; riots; women's suffrage and a world war.

In her introduction, Deb establishes her aim: 'to contribute to international debates on radical and labour



AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S JUSTICE

SETTLER COLONISATION AND THE QUEENSLAND VOTE

Deborah Jordan



women's activism and leadership, women's advocacy and social movements, with new findings on the role of the transgressive labour women in the largely forgotten successes of the campaign in Queensland.' She divides this book into three pivotal sections, chronologically: first, 1823–1894, Colonial Race, Gender and Property Intersections; the second section, 1894–1905, Suffrage Activism and Leadership; and the third section, Agency, Resistance, War and Empire 1905–1919. Each section maintains the focus on the development,

differences and impact of women's activism, through the tumultuous changes in Queensland and world history. Each demolishes the myths that women's suffrage was either a gracious gift from men, or a natural evolution.

This is a book which demands more than a single read. The amazing characters burst from the pages, as Deb's research uncovers interesting characters and events. Some are familiar. I have chosen two who represented different classes of women in the struggle, but who shared a strong passion for women's empowerment. The extraordinary Leontine Cooper (1837–1903), 'who, over the decades in Brisbane, emerged as one of the Australia's most significant nineteenth century lead-

ers: teacher, novelist, journalist, feminist intellectual, secretary of the Women's Suffrage League 1890–1891, long-term president of the Women's Franchise League, editor of a Queensland suffrage magazine and founding president of the Pioneer Club.' Why, I wonder, is there no fulsome biography of this woman whose essays include "Dogs and Women, Especially Dogs" and "Do Men Improve with Age"?

Emma Miller (1839–1917), 'the grand old Labour woman of Queensland', whose biographer

Pam Young, another strong Labor woman, sums up as 'a humane woman of courage, fearless in expressing her convictions and staunch in her beliefs; a pioneer and a propagandist of the emerging labour movement; a recognised leader of Queensland women's fight for the right to vote and a friend and organiser of women workers and active supporter of the trade union movement.' One of my favourite anecdotes from the book refers to an exchange between Leontine Cooper and Emma Miller in March 1896, two years after the turmoil of the split in 1894. Cooper wrote to Mrs Miller suggesting 'a joint meeting to make public that we want the franchise, and that we join hands in demanding it. While heartily agreeing, Mrs Miller explained that a meeting of that sort would be useless unless there were resolutions and that it would be impossible to have them 'without the foundation principles clashing, as my association would certainly not depart from the single-vote basis.' That is, Miller would not accept enfranchisement tied to property, nor would she accept shoddy meeting procedure.

The joy and the challenge of this book are that so many other names have been included through Deb's research and meticulous bibliography. Another unforgettable woman to appear is Florence Stuart, the Ip-

swich-based journalist. But each chapter calls the reader to look further and increase their knowledge of the women who made change. From Agnes McFarlane Keith, 'Queensland's earliest woman journalist' and her time in Ipswich, through Gertrude Donaldson, the first President of the Women's Equal Franchise Association, and the Misses Treacy, who joined a delegation to the State Premier, these women contributed to the struggle for the vote, and so many are not well known or remembered. Deb states that 'a full history of women's activism and leadership in the labour movement and Labor Party is yet to be written.' More attention should also be paid to the history of the Peace Movement and the fights against conscription across our state which engaged many women who bravely spoke out against the might of government in the context of threats from official censorship and a nation convulsed by the pain and tragedy of war. The bibliography of this book is extensive and points to directions for further work, but the challenge is to maintain the scholarship and celebrate the legacy.

The activism of women continued after the right to vote was won. The chapters on Labour Activism and Anti-War and Anti-Conscription Campaigns focus on the inclusion



*Deborah Jordan and Claire Moore at the launch of the book at the ETU training rooms in Brisbane
20/4/2024*

Image: Allan Gardiner

and engagement of women across Queensland in the struggles for a fair, safe community. The claims for equal pay for equal work and a place for women in trade unions developed from the activism for a political voice. The General Strike in Brisbane and the legendary Emma Miller hat pin is described in detail by Deb, as 'a spectacular, symbolic, transgressive and real challenge to conservative patriarchal forces.'

The redoubtable Mabel Lane wrote in a letter to British Labour politician Ramsay MacDonald about the anti-conscription campaigns. 'You will wonder how we ever won?' Chapter 9 answers this question, covering the feminist activism, the alliance with the Quakers, including Margaret Thorp forming the

Women's Peace Army, the Children's Peace Army and links with the labour movement, and naturally Emma Miller.

Media

Deb refers to the role of the media throughout the book. The period was a dynamic time for Queensland media, and the coverage of the suffrage issues varied from indifference, through support, vitriolic attack and partisanship – similar to the current situation, but absolutely print-based. In Chapter 2, the inflamed exchanges between Leontine Cooper and William and Annie Lane around the issues of the 'conservative' Women's Suffrage League's support for women's suffrage on the existing property basis, rather than

general equal voting rights for all, highlights this key division across the movement. The tumultuous 1894 meetings exposed this divide, and reports of the political disagreements were newsworthy. Reporters and editors were having a misogynist field day, building on rumour and innuendo. The mainstream media no longer reported on the activities of the suffrage associations at length, and coverage... began to disappear.'

Chapter 6 explores the media influence and continuing divisions leading to the Queensland vote in 1905. When the federal act to grant white women the vote in 1902 was passed, the Brisbane mainstream media initially ignored it. Deb argues that the role of 'New Women' journalists did not make the vote respectable, as is argued in some other countries where celebrity status had been seen as crucial in winning the vote, rather the campaigners in Queensland sought to powerfully expose the 'Saasoiety ladies remiss in their responsibilities to introduce reform.' Again, this class division which had continued since the 1890s emerged.

During the years leading to the first women's vote in the 1903 federal election, women across the political divide concentrated on educating women on the vote and enrolling them in the system. This continued

into 1904 and when the Legislative Council rejected the Franchise Bill on a technicality, after overwhelming support in the Legislative Assembly. A Public Indignation Meeting was held, and even the *Telegraph* demanded the will of the people be accepted:- a significant change from the press.

First Nations

The significant issue of the exclusion of all First Nations people from the vote until 1966 is a special case for discussion. Deb also faces the silence of women's voices around racial equality. Deb refers to Aileen Moreton-Robinson's valuable analysis of :

the nation-wide acceptance of whiteness and privilege ... and the discrepancies in power, incommensurabilities, different histories, experiences, epistemologies and material conditions between Indigenous women and white women. She notes that 'historians continue to reveal the drastic effects of colonisation on Indigenous women's lives.

In Queensland, First Nations and people of colour were specifically excluded from the right to vote in 1871. This state also had indentured labour for many years and particular legislation relating to Aboriginal Reserves.



*Deborah Jordan with members of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom at the book launch in Brisbane 20/4/2024
Image: Allan Gardiner*

The first voice in this book is a young, enthusiastic woman, Florence Stuart, celebrating her joy. 'What a glorious thing it was going to be when we get the vote.' Over the next ten chapters, Deb Jordan records the names of so many women who attended meetings, marched through the streets (and there were so many marches), joined committees (and there were so many committees), campaigned around petitions. organised fund raisers (including many boat trips down the river), argued fiercely and effectively and, after many years, changed the political system in Queensland. Emma Miller described the importance of 'indirect influence,' as no woman could actu-

ally cast a vote in the many parliamentary debates around this right. Their campaign inspires and challenges. This book continues both the inspiration and the challenge.

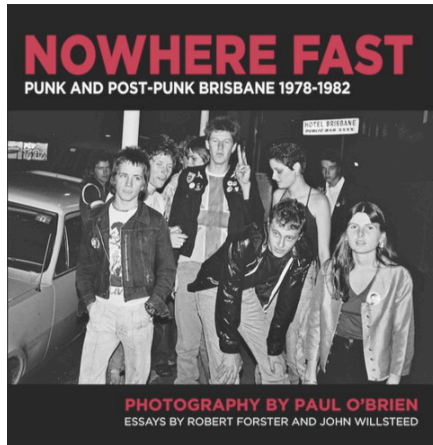
Claire Moore holds a BLHA life membership. She was Branch Secretary of the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) from 1994 until election to the Senate in 2002. Women's advancement is one of her enduring concerns She was a driving force for the availability of the abortion treatment, RU 486, in 2005 and was Shadow Minister for Women in 2013. She is a prominent member of Emilys List, which helps fund ALP women candidates for public office.

Nowhere Fast - Punk and Post-Punk Brisbane 1978–1982

Photography by Paul O'Brien
and essays by Robert Forster and John Willstead
Brisbane, AndAlso Books, 2024

Reviewed by Allan Gardiner

To take a photograph in the 1970s you had to use film. To manipulate the image, you had to have a camera with knobs and know how to twiddle them. Also, you had to know how film development worked. This was okay if you were a professional photographer, or at least a serious hobbyist. Paul O'Brien, however, was a Telecom worker. But being part of the punk scene, with its DIY attitude, he was also free to be a documentary street photographer if that is what he wanted to be.



Of course, since the scene centred around bands, rock photography rather than photojournalism was probably in O'Brien's mind. Maybe like me, he waited impatiently for each edition of the New Musical Express to make its months-long sea passage from London. But for O'Brien, taking the sort of shots featured in the music press was not an option. Nor was he trying to take publicity images. Often the musicians in his photos look like friends rather than stars. And most of the photographs in this book are candid

portraits and group shots of audience members.

This focus on the audience members is the special appeal of the pictures, as both editors note. 'The lens', writes Willstead:

is often pointed at the crowds. Slumped in corners, crouched on staircases, sprawled across footpaths, they ARE the scene - the splay of drunken, late-night legs, black clothes and spiky hair, the sneers, the smokes, the flagons, and the night.



All Photographs copyright Paul O'Brien, from the State Library of Queensland collections

Robert Forster sees the contrast here with the band-centrism of punk photography in the UK and New York. It is possible to quibble about this. After all, Caroline Coon in Britain and David Godlis in New York also often cast an affectionate eye on the fans. But I think it is correct to say that O'Brien's photos have a special feeling of coming from the position of a participant rather than an outside observer.

Willstead and Forster were themselves participants, albeit as musicians rather than fans. Willstead contributes not only a short essay but also some pen portraits of a few of the people whose faces reappear

in the book. It is not surprising that the images call forth memories of people from the past. It is for the same reason that the launch of the book, at the Woolloongabba Art Gallery, drew a big crowd. To document this social scene is like creating an album for a family or school reunion, over which the members pour in search of pictures of themselves and their friends when their limbs were 'rounded with the sap of youth.'

That does not mean that this book is an indulgence for a coterie; rather it has rare historical value. History is too often overpuffed with records of the Few who Have but scrubbed



clean of signs of the lives of the Many - we who have only ourselves and each other. Clearly this book has value as a rare example of the latter.

These photos lead me to wonder how the scene related to working-class culture. The class character of the movement is too little investigated. Visually, Brisbane punks were as separate from most working-class youth as they were from the rest of society. As Forster puts it, "No other group of people looked like this in Brisbane ... Hair short, clothes dark, with a sharp mod touch to some of the fashion." By contrast, most young people constituted "a shaggy, sunburnt, flared-trousered, post-hippie, blandly dressed population."

O'Brien's photos of groups in share houses and cafes and dance floors show that unlike in other cities, whether overseas or in Australia, there was very little weekend "performance" of punk identity.

And of course, punks disdained the ideas, tastes and desires modelled by the respectable institutions and the mass media. As music fanatics, they might force themselves to endure the ABC TV show Countdown in the hope that a hero like Iggy Pop might occasionally appear, but the show was a constant reminder of the bilge that most teenagers accepted.

It is hard not to believe that many punks had enough awareness to oppose the political right. The influen-

tial British scene tended to spread an identification with the political left due to the strong push there by socialist groups to organise Rock Against Racism.

It is often said that the punk scene was more intense in Queensland because of a police force that violently enforced the right-wing agenda of the National Party-dominated State government. The Queensland Police Annual Report of 1980, two years after RAZAR released the single "Task Force," lists 20 officers still assigned to the Force, which "operates in areas where hooliganism and unruly behaviour is prevalent."¹ This wording calls to mind the "trifecta" applied especially to Aboriginal youth, as described in an Aus-

tralian Human Rights Commission report like this:

This form of pre-emptive strike policy frequently results in conflict where kids, not unnaturally in any democracy, resist being apprehended for standing around, doing nothing. The trifecta is not an unusual result: charges of offensive language, resist arrest, assault police. Three more offences for the stats and a court appearance.²

What Aborigines called "the offence of being Black in a public place" was extended to the offence of being a punk. Task Force specialised in assaulting punks and it made 1,600 arrests in 1980 alone. An arrest meant a very unpleasant



experience in the watchhouse.

This sort of policing linked punks with political protesters. Bjelke Petersen's cops had beaten up anti-racist protesters in 1971, anti-nuclear protesters in the mid-1970s and right-to-march protesters in 1977. This would extend to beating up trade unionists in the 1980s. The protesters were mainly a slightly older generation of university students and trade unionists, but connections with punks were possible.

In 1974 the Whitlam government abolished tertiary education tuition fees and introduced a small allowance for students. (This was one of the last gasps of post-war social democracy; about a decade later,

another Labor government pushed education policy in the opposite direction.) Perhaps unsurprisingly, uptake was slow. Families like mine had no idea what a university even was. But a minority of working-class kids became aware of the freer atmosphere that existed in university and of the way some students were exercising that freedom. Willstead's mini biography of Marcella gives one example of how someone from the punk scene could fit into university life by connecting with politically progressive teachers such as Kay Saunders and with the feminist groups on campus.

Links between the punk scene and the University of Queensland increased in 1975 when 4ZZ (later

4ZZZ) began broadcasting from the University campus. Although left student politics was largely stuck in the 1960s, broadcasters like Michael Finucan dragged the station into playing and promoting punk music. It is no coincidence that many of O'Brien's photos are taken in the University student union's Relax Block or in other venues promoted by 4ZZZ.

But perhaps the book's most suggestive clues to the class-composition of the Brisbane punk scene is again in Willstead's handful of pen portraits. They were not selected to be representative or typical, but some themes recur, especially the topic of escaping to the city from a childhood in a geographical and social backwater. If – as the slogan of the time had it – Brisbane artists just wanted to get out of Brisbane, then a few suburban kids who had heard the whispers of a new movement just wanted to get **into** Brisbane.

Inner city kids, even poor working-class ones, tend to be more socially advanced than those from the suburbs, as NAPLAN tests prove.³ That fact is the premise for the Dave Warner song, "Suburban boy" (1978). Even a culturally backward city, such as Brisbane under Bjelke-Petersen, is still a city. Whereas the old hippie music had gravitated to-

wards an idealisation of living as nature children in the country, the new music was, to use the title of the anthology by Clinton Walker, the "Inner City Sound".⁴

It is difficult to pursue the social analysis of the punk scene much further. It quickly becomes necessary to point out internal differences rather than overall similarities. For example, The Saints and The Leftovers, along with their audiences, were often frankly scary. Other elements of the punk scene – and not just the middle-class ones – were, by comparison, rather gentle souls. I have memories that chime with Paul O'Brien's of gatherings that involved making scones and tea.⁵ I also remember hysterical laughter which had much more to do with friendship than the bags of mild leafy dope we bought ("Normally \$30 but for you just \$29.99!"). By the late 70s some of the nicest people I knew could now only think about their next hit of heroin. A lot of energy and fun disappeared quickly.

The 70s was when global capital declared the working class's hopes for the future were over. These photographs remind me that some of us laughed in their faces.

Allan Gardiner is on the editorial committee of the *QJLH* and is a retired public servant. He enrolled in the University of Queensland in 1975 when fees were abolished. He credits Emeritus Professor Carole Ferrier with teaching him as much in the Socialist Action organisation as in the Department of English.

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Brisbane: Utopian Dreams and Dystopian Nightmares

by William (Bill) Metcalf

Brisbane, Brisbane History Group/Boolarong Press, 2022

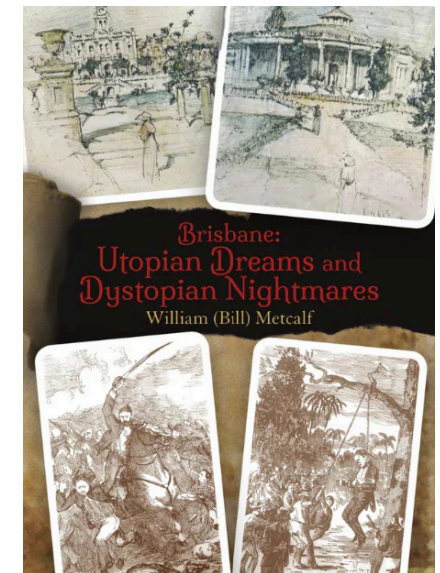
The Humming Bird Effect

by Kate Mildenhall

Sydney, Scribner, 2023

Reviewed by Dean Wharton

In *Radical Brisbane: An Unruly History*, Bill Metcalf and Darryll Bellingham discussed the visit of American theorist Henry George to Brisbane in 1890. George's single tax theory—replacing all taxes with one on the ownership of land—appealed to a wide range of radicals 'adhering to such labels as labour, suffrage, progressive, forward, vegetarian, spiritualist, socialist, christian socialist, communalist and communist.' (p78) They illustrated the appeal of George's writing by discussing the 1893 utopian novel *In Those Days - A Life in the 20th Century* by pseudonym Austin Smith. In this book the Rip Van Winkle-like narrator awakes from a century long sleep in Brisbane in 1995. Whilst he was sleeping, a Brisbane-inspired peaceful world revolution had taken place due to the implementation of George's tax theories. In this utopian future, electricity and worker co-



operatives have transformed life and eliminated class, banks have been nationalised and capitalism has been dismantled.

Bill Metcalf's more recent research *Brisbane: Utopian Dreams and Dystopian Nightmares* begins with

a brief overview of the concepts involved, and notes that ‘looking at historical utopias and dystopias helps us to understand past (and present) fears and hopes in our communities, and allows/encourages each of us to contemplate our social ideals.’ (p5)

Metcalf has uncovered nine novels, short stories or visions of utopian/dystopian Brisbane. All but one of which appeared within the decades around Federation. Austin Smith’s story reappears here, it was written by two brothers who shared the pseudonym. Three of the nine fantasies were inspired by the theories of Henry George. Several of the authors are familiar to labour historians, William and Annie Lane, George Randolph Bedford, James Wilkinson and Robert Michael Cochrane among them.

Metcalf provides an initial chapter on the social, economic and political situation in Brisbane from the 1880s through to Federation. Living in the same community and era, many of the authors knew, or knew of, each other. Within each subsequent chapter the life of each novelist or artist is detailed, along with an assessment and description of the fantasy they wrote.

These published works had real-

world impact; William Lane’s dystopia *Yellow or White? A Story of the Race War of AD1908* (1888) corresponded with rioting by whites against Brisbane’s Chinese community. His later utopia—which in the absence of the racism of the earlier novel and the inclusion of strong and consistent gender equality was perhaps largely written by William’s wife Annie—*The Workingman’s Paradise: An Australian Labour Novel* (1892), was written to support (including financially) the leaders of the recent Shearer’s Strike.

Some of the stories are fascinating. Dr. Thomas Pennington Lucas, who developed Lucas’s Pawpaw ointment, wrote a dystopian novel set in Brisbane in 2000 and a utopian novel set in 2200. He used these books to directly attack Brisbane society and those in positions of authority. Collectively the books were called *The Curse and The Cure in two volumes* (1894). Brisbane in 2000 is a deserted and overgrown city; the inequality, the greed and the corruption of 1890s Brisbane had been destroyed by a combined NSW-Victorian army (which incidentally led to the creation of the United States of Australia). By 2200, with the adoption of Christian Socialism, Brisbane had



been rebuilt as a utopia.

Metcalf considers how available each fantasy is to contemporary readers. Not only in terms of whether someone in 2024 can obtain a copy, but in terms of readability. Some of the books are illogical and simply don’t make any sense. Although he suggests that the racism of the 1890s would be particularly unpalatable to modern readers, he does mention in his conclusion that utopias and dystopias continue to be produced, and a recently published French dystopia centred on anti-muslim racism.

Kate Mildenhall’s *The Hummingbird Effect* (2023) is another dystopia for our era. The exploitation of workers, particularly women, is at the core of six intertwining narratives taking place around Melbourne at different points in time between 1933 and 2181. Trade unions and collective action is a key theme throughout. In her research for the industrial dispute that forms the basis of her 1933 storyline, the author acknowledges the ACTU and AMIEU as sources.

All of the voices we hear in this book are female; the few significant male characters are unsympathetic and dominate through violence.

The 1933 story is based on the dispute between the employer and slaughtermen that took place at the Angliss Meatworks in Footscray, Victoria, around 1934. The dispute was caused by the introduction of the ‘chain system’ of slaughter, immediately deskilling the skilled and semi-skilled workforce. For narrative purposes Angliss remains the employer in the book, but in reality the chain system was introduced soon after he sold the meat-works to new British owners Vestey.

The story of the dispute is told

through the lives of Lil, Angliss's office manager, and Peg, initially a worker there who takes lodgings with Lil, who later forms a relationship with Jack, a lead slaughterman.

The relationship and dependence between the two women is key to the story, as it is between that of lovers La and Kat in 2031, and sisters Maz and Onyx in 2181.

In Footscray in 2031 Cat and La are trying to have children but the public health system is on its knees. La applies for and lands a job at WANT Industries, an Amazon-like entity in whose warehouses working conditions are controlled and monitored constantly by AI. Productivity is everything; staff taking time off to care for dependents are no longer offered shifts, staff don't drink throughout their shift so that they don't need to spend time in the toilet. One poignant moment is a meeting of staff with a manager who explains the consequences if any employee interacts with a union; dismissal and the removal of medical benefits. Nevertheless La and her colleagues fight back.

In a couple of scenes La recognises her own voice, words she read out during a previous voice-acting job. An automated voice on the phone;

the voice instructing staff to leave during a work emergency. Her own voice, but it has been traded between companies as just another commodity and is no longer her property.

The consequences of unfettered capitalism and AI is borne by Maz and Onyx's contemporaries in 2181. Civilisation has gone and we are introduced to the sisters as they dive at a flooded city site, foraging for useful items amongst the sunken debris left over by our consumerist present (as detailed by La as she packed it for delivery generations earlier). The sisters hide from the sun, have lost their parents to competing tribes of survivors and only have each other.

A modern dystopia, and a fascinating mix of industrial politics, anti-capitalism and the need for collective action and support.

Dean Wharton has been lead editor of the *QJLH* since 2017. He was a Regional Representative for the Society of Radiographers (UK) and was a member-elected Branch Secretary of Leeds UNISON Health (UK). He treated cancer, as a radiation therapist, for 28 years.

Obituaries

Mervyn Langford

(10/10/1951–14/7/2024)

A High Degree in Caring

John Jiggins

I write this as a memorial, a celebration, of my friend, Mervyn Langford, who died on the 14th of July 2024.

I first met Mervyn Langford in the early 1970s when we were both Draft Resisters, opposing conscription for the Vietnam War, but Mervyn's political roots went back far earlier than that.

Merv's first political campaign began when he was only 14, assisting his mother Muriel Langford to garner support for the referendum in May 1967 to amend the Australian constitution, which treated First Nations people as second-class citizens, and acknowledge them as equal citizens. Unlike the recent referendum, it was successful with over 90 per cent support.

In the 1960s, attitudes to First Nations people in Australia were generally uncaring and extremely racist. Aboriginal people lived in reserves and shanty towns and were regarded as a dying race, not even human, and were not included in the census as



Mervyn Langford
Image: Don Wilson

members of the Australian population. It took courage to regard them as equals, to stand shoulder to shoulder with them, but that is what the Langford family did.

Merv's mother, Muriel Langford, was a spokesperson for OPAL (One People of Australia League), which founded OPAL house, Brisbane's first hostel for First Nations people in Russell Street, South Brisbane in 1961.

Jackie Huggins, who performed the acknowledgement to country at Mervyn's memorial, quoted a pas-

sage about OPAL in her mother Rita Huggins' book, *Auntie Rita*:

OPAL was for people like me who no longer lived on the reserves and had to move into towns and was a first step towards helping Aboriginal people. It gave white people another picture of us that they had never seen before. We had been out of sight and out of mind before that. We were decent people, and this could be seen now. We were just as good as white people, but different to white people. It brought Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people together for the first time, I began to feel like an equal. We became friends and socialised together. This was one of the most important parts of OPAL for me.

Jackie Huggins called the Langfords 'our first white family'. Mervyn was the youngest and they often spent weekends together, selling badges in town, campaigning for the referendum. With his blonde Surfie look, he was polite, charming, and acted as a big brother for the little Murri girls:

He would always have our backs, and he did, right up until the day he passed (...) The Langford family never left us. Nor did we. When I saw Mervyn, he always called me sister and I called him brother

and people would look at us and say what's the connection? We don't look anything like it do we?

Just before he died, Mervyn went on a journey from Brisbane to Alice Springs, and he caught up with Jackie Huggins' cousin Peter Holt in Longreach. Mervyn sent this message:

I've had a fabulous, marvellous time with Peter. 58 years since we met. Being part of the Murri community in SE Queensland has been one of the greatest, most important factors and worldview highlights of my life. I thank you for that.

Folk and Communists

Support for the 1967 referendum campaign came from churches, trade unions and the Communist Party, who were still influential then. As well as controversy, the communist influence brought with it Mervyn's other great love, folk music and bush ballads, through the influence of John Manifold and his circle.

Manifold was a Victorian squatter's son, who was educated at Geelong Grammar, worked for UK intelligence during the war, and then became a communist! In 1949 he settled in Wynnum in Brisbane's east. Inspired by Russell Ward's *The*

Australian Legend, Manifold collected Australian bush ballads, and published anthologies of Australian folk songs. His bush band 'The Bandicoots' regularly performed at his home and elsewhere, and his home became a bayside salon for Brisbane poets, folk musicians, leftists, and First Nations activists.

In this milieu, Mervyn's love of folk songs and bush ballads flourished. He was an enthusiastic performer, a livewire, who would quote with gusto, *How McDougall topped the score*, from memory at parties after cricket. I recall him singing, with similar gusto, a song he'd written about Julian Assange set to the theme music from the TV series *Robin Hood!* In the last decade of his life, Mervyn developed into an impresario, using the hall at Magda's to produce plays and musical events. He threw himself into Magda's with characteristic energy. Manifesting his inner Manifold, Magda Arts was a significant cultural influence in Brisbane's western suburbs until COVID and the city council closed it down.

The Bardon Consultative Group

The career Mervyn chose was to be a carer, like his mother, Muriel Langford. He and his partner Joan Rook became nurses and were posted to the Kingaroy hospital in the

1980s. There they raised four children, Rupert, Caitlin, Aiden, and Piers, in a beautiful old Queenslander with views over the Bunya Mountains, living a semi-hippie lifestyle with ducks and goats and other farmyard animals, holding birthday parties boasting bush ballads and folk songs, and hosting visiting Brisbane radicals in the heart of Bjelke-Petersen's stronghold.

Joan Rook came from a Quaker background, and she shared with Mervyn a view that nursing was more than a series of tasks, like taking vital signs and dispensing medication, and involved giving something of yourself, making a human connection. To friends, Joan seemed the calm that centred Mervyn's constant energy.

On returning to Brisbane, Mervyn worked as a nurse in the Queensland prison system, working there for three decades. In his final four years, Mervyn became deeply involved as an activist for prison reform with Keith Hamburger and the Bardon Consultative Group.

In February 2020, the Queensland Productivity Commission (QPC) released a [report on Imprisonment and Recidivism](#), showing Queensland's prisons were overflowing. The report gave an overview of the prison industry in which Mervyn worked.



*Merv Langford at Cedar Creek, 1 May 2022
Image: Malcolm Paterson*



*Merv Langford with Auntie Dawn Daylight 10 March 2024
Image: Malcolm Paterson*

First Nations people were grossly over-represented in the Queensland prison population. They made up only 4.6 per cent of the population but they made up 31 per cent of the prison population. Of the tens of thousands of prisoners cared for by Mervyn in his three decades of service as a prison nurse, one in three were First Nations' men. Another 20 per cent of the prison population were people with drug offences and other noncriminal offences. The QPC report suggested the Queensland government needed to question whether the current reliance on incarceration as the solution to many

health and social problems was working. ([Queensland has only the third highest rate of imprisonment of Aboriginal people](#) in Australia. Western Australia (43 percent) and the Northern Territory (84 percent) are higher.)¹

Keith Hamburger was the Director-General of the Qld Corrective Services Commission from 1988 to 1997 when Mervyn began working in the prison system. In 2020, I interviewed him about the QPC report, and found he was a passionate advocate of prison reform and restorative justice. The rate of Aboriginal in-

carceration in Queensland was a disgrace, and Keith Hamburger had been working on a solution.

A pleasing aspect of journalism is it allows you to connect people. I introduced Mervyn to Keith Hamburger, and they hit it off from the start, bonding over their mutual interest in justice reform for First Nations youth, even though they made an odd couple, as Keith Hamburger related at Mervyn's memorial:

As you can see, I'm a sort of a short back and sides, conservatively dressed sort of person with an approach focused on due process. Well, Mervyn, I'll just see if I can describe him

adequately, but he was a long haired, scraggly, bearded hippie from a bygone era, and I think it's fair to say, he had a questionable dress sense. He rode a push bike, and he got his jollies from poking fun at the establishment. As an example of his irreverence, very early in our association, Mervyn nicknamed me the Quarter Pounder. And he introduced me to people like that! I'm not sure, but I think it has something to do with my name. Anyway, at that first meeting I knew that I was in the presence of a very special person, clearly a fine intellect with a great respect for

history and how we should learn from the mistakes of the past.

Mervyn was a deeply caring person who had spent thirty years as a health professional, working at the coal face in a high security prison, treating an endless stream of First Nations people who disproportionately made up one third of the Queensland prison population. In Keith Hamburger, he found a kindred spirit. After spending a decade overseeing the Queensland prison system, Keith Hamburger spent the next two decades researching penal policies around the world and acting as a consultant on prison reform to other jurisdictions in Australia and overseas. In their many meetings, the pair shared their war stories, relating to their interaction with prisoners, many quite humorous and many very sad.

Mervyn convened the Bardon Consultative Group, which was a mixture of prison reformers and the Aunties and Elders who were his mother's friends from the 1960s referendum days and introduced them to Keith Hamburger, who spoke about his scheme to develop a new strategy to treat young First Nation offenders. Young people needed education, to develop skills, and to have good role models, not to be punished in adult prisons and have

criminals as their role models, Keith argued. Nor was he a fan of huge one-thousand-plus prisons. His scheme was to set up a small twenty-five bed community prison on First Nations land, where young offenders would receive skills training and cultural education, as a proof-of-concept test on cost and rates of recidivism. For Mervyn, the Bardon Consultative Group marked a return to his OPAL roots and the completion of the journey of his working life.

What Mervyn gave Keith Hamburger was an ally and a team of supporters in the Bardon Consultative Group. The life of a humane prison reformer is very tough, struggling against the outrage machinery of the Murdoch press and the radio shock jocks and their law-and-order politics. For many years, Keith Hamburger had been advocating the Queensland Government to adopt a reform model for juvenile justice and adult corrections that would reduce crime, reduce incarceration rates and save billions. As he remarked, he'd done everything he could to convince the government of the need for reform, except offer them a bonus set of steak knives.

Mervyn immediately saw the challenges Keith was facing as a great opportunity, and he and fellow members of the Bardon Consultative

Group got fully behind the reform model. After some initial strategy meetings, Mervyn and the Bardon group worked tirelessly with Keith Hamburger to raise awareness of the need for reform.

Their work was phenomenal. They had meetings with two premiers, ministers, heads of agencies, and numerous speaking engagements with community groups. They wrote letters to the editor, did radio and television interviews, wrote submissions to parliamentary committees, and had countless strategy sessions, refining the reform model and raising awareness within government, and within opposition parties across the Parliament.

Great progress was made, but they have yet to achieve the goal of government approval for the proof-of-concept test for handling young First Nation offenders. Keith Hamburger remains hopeful that Queensland will see a breakthrough in achieving justice reform. Before he met Mervyn, his wheels were spinning around but he was going nowhere, he said. Mervyn took charge, assembled a team of like-minded people, led the thinking on strategy, and focused the message. 'We've made huge progress, so we now have cause for optimism,' he said. When they do, Queenslanders will owe a debt of gratitude to Mervyn,

said Keith Hamburger.

Dr John Jiggins is a citizen journalist. He was the founding editor of *The Westender* and *The Cane Toad Times* and he currently works in the community newsroom at *Bay-FM* in Byron Bay.

A self-described "minor god of cannabis", he has published several books on the history of the genus and on the origins of cannabis prohibition, including *Sir Joseph Banks and the Question of Hemp*, *The Killer Cop and the Murder of Donald Mackay*, *The Joke* and, with Jack Herer, the Australian version of *The Emperor Wears No Clothes*. Along with Matt Mawson, Anne Jones and Damien Ledwich, he edited *The Best of The Cane Toad Times*.

His most popular work, however, remains his PhD, [*Marijuana Australiana: Cannabis Use, Popular Culture and the Americanisation of Drugs Policy in Australia 1938-1988*](#), which has been full-texted downloaded over 25,000 times.

¹ Aboriginal prison rates - Creative Spirits, retrieved from <https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/law/aboriginal-prison-rates>

If you want to find out more and support the Bardon Consultative Group plan: <https://knowledgeconsulting.com.au/mervyn/>

Merle Thornton

(02/10/1930–16/08/2024)

A Pioneering Feminist in Queensland

Margaret Reynolds

I am sure Merle Thornton could not have imagined what awaited her when she headed from Sydney to Brisbane in 1958. Like many of her generation of young women she was questioning the expectations and conventions of that era when women's public role was limited, and second wave feminism was about to challenge the masculine domination of the Australian community.

As Merle began her career as a pioneering feminist in Queensland, I was a first-year student at the University of Tasmania and much more engrossed in my social life than discovering the patriarchy. However, I did resent being excluded from the bars of several popular Hobart University pubs where 'the girls' were obliged to wait until boyfriends chose to join us in the Ladies Lounge. We didn't identify as ladies and the separation was a serious impediment to meeting 'the boys'. During the 1959 University Commencement Week celebrations a friend and I bought cheap dog



Merle Thornton: 14 November 2020, the day she was awarded a honorary doctor of letters by the University of Queensland

Image: https://stories.uq.edu.au/contact-magazine/2020/the-chain-reaction/index.html?origin=serp_auto

chains and secured ourselves to the brass railing in the bar of the Collins Street Ship Hotel. We were promptly removed by bemused staff familiar with the unruly behaviour of students and our 'protest' dismissed as yet another student prank.

A few years later, having also moved to Queensland, I was delighted to read of Merle Thornton's historic protest with Rosalie

Bognor at the riverside Regatta Hotel in Brisbane when they chained themselves to a bar rail to draw attention to the ban on serving women. I was so pleased this effort had drawn such broad media attention to obvious discrimination and that even in Queensland the old ways were being questioned for reform. It took another five years before that archaic law was changed, and Queensland women were legally entitled to drink in public bars from 1970.

I moved to Townsville in 1965 and like Merle it was in Queensland I learned about sexism, racism and socialism. Having grown up in quiet middle-class Tasmania, I was one of that generation who were ready to question a society which seemed to have women's lives mapped out for us. It was not surprising that Merle and so many other women in the 1960s rebelled and embraced feminist theory and practice to discover themselves as independent free-thinking women determined to try to change their own life direction as well as the opportunities for their sisters.

Merle established the Equal Opportunities for Women Association in Brisbane in 1965 and as its president led the campaign for the removal of the 'marriage bar' in both the State and Commonwealth Pub-

lic Services, resulting in legislation in 1966.

As a young teacher in the Queensland Education Department in 1970s I was reminded of my 'married woman' status because I was employed on a temporary basis and did not receive holiday pay. As I was giving demonstration classes to teacher trainees, I decided to apply for permanency which involved a special inspection to be scheduled to see if my work was up to standard. While my teaching skills impressed the friendly inspector, he was clearly confused by my request and asked, 'Why do you need permanency when your husband has a good job at the university?' The answer about wanting my own career must have been persuasive because I was surprisingly granted permanency and became one of the first married women in Queensland to not only achieve this status but then unpaid 'accouchement leave' when pregnant with our third child.

I wasn't surprised to read that Merle Thornton had attracted the attention of Queensland Special Branch and the Australian Security Intelligence Organization because everyone challenging the status quo in Queensland in those years was obviously immediately suspect. I too came to the attention of the security services and an ASIO operat-



*The Hecate collective in 1975 at the University of Queensland:
Carmel Shute, Merle Thornton, Marianna Shan, Trish Nivor and Carole Ferrier
Image: https://stories.uq.edu.au/contact-magazine/2020/the-chain-reaction/index.html?origin=serp_auto*

ive was sent from Melbourne to monitor the activities of Save our Sons as we opposed conscription and the Vietnam War in the northern army base city of Townsville. Our campaigning for Aboriginal rights were also closely scrutinised when we organised in 1967 a post Referendum Conference, which attracted prominent indigenous speakers and participants.

Merle Thornton had a distinguished academic career at the University of Queensland from 1960-1980 working in Philosophy, Government, Sociology departments and in 1972 she established the first Women's Studies course.

When Gough Whitlam's government abolished university fees I was able to finish my tertiary education becoming a part time distance education student at the University of Queensland. As a Tasmanian student, I was directed into education but twenty years later, having lived in Queensland, my horizons had changed so I wanted to study politics and begin to understand how Australian laws could be updated.

On several occasions my essays were marked by an M. Thornton who I didn't recognise at the time, but I welcomed Merle's comments which reflected her understanding

of the harsh reality of Queensland politics in that era. I was encouraged to question the bland media interpretation of current affairs, and I was especially proud of a major assignment completed about my experience of the Queensland Street March ban in Townsville when studying the Politics of Non-Violent Action.

I would have enjoyed knowing Merle personally, but we never met though we shared experiences and ideas of a generation of women determined to chart a new direction for themselves and one that many Australian women continue to follow. Thank you, Merle Thornton, for believing that reform was urgent and leading the way for us in Queensland.

Margaret Reynolds was politicized by her experience of campaigning against conscription and the Vietnam War in the 1960s. She continued working in the peace movement with People for Nuclear Disarmament and those opposed to the establishment of American military bases in Australia.

As a Queensland Labor senator Margaret was selected as the Australian representative of Parliamentarians for Global Action, a network of parliamentarians working to uphold international standards to protect all communities from war and exploitation.

She was one of nine government members and senators who opposed Australia sending military troops to the Gulf War and more recently has opposed Australian participation in United States military campaigns in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan. Margaret does praise the proud record of the Australian military in over 100 peacekeeping missions around the world since 1948.

Margaret is co patron with former Senator Doug Cameron of Labor Against War, a national network of ALP branches concerned about the Federal Government's commitment to AUKUS which undermines Australian sovereignty and independent foreign policy, She is National President of Women's International League for Peace and regularly comments about the Australian Government's failure to prioritize international law and peace-building.

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 *QJLH*.

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 BLHA) 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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The Australian Workers Film Guide provides a comprehensive record of Australian working class films, while also providing a reference resource for educational, cultural and future filmmaking purposes.

The focus of the guide is traditionally structured film and video content, such as feature films, documentaries, corporate videos, promotional videos and television commercials. In some instances, the guide does include non-structured content that is considered historically important, such as interviews and extended on-camera oral histories. A select number of historical working class newsreels are also included.

This searchable resource contains basic information about the films listed and their filmmakers, along with educational content summaries. While the guide does not provide access to the films given the changing nature of content access as well as uncertainties surrounding copyright ownership of particular films, the guide provides hints and information on where they can be accessed.

The Australian Workers Film Guide is a research project conducted by Swinburne University of Technology and was funded by the Union Education Foundation, a charitable trust established by the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU).

The project was led and authored by Dr Jeff Bird, Lecturer in Film & Television at Swinburne University of Technology. The project was supported by Ronin Films and the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance (MEAA).

TO ACCESS THE GUIDE VISIT

atui.org.au/australian-workers-film-guide/



Web
atui.org.au
Email
atui@actu.org.au

Phone
1300 486 466
Address
4/365 Queen Street, Melbourne VIC 3000



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