

The Queensland Journal of Labour History

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Brisbane
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Association

The Queensland Journal of Labour History

The biannual radical history journal of the
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The BLHA is the Brisbane/Meanjin branch of the
Australian Society for the Study of Labour History.

The BLHA organises seminars, lectures, meetings, conferences and publications on themes of labour history. Membership is open to all individuals and organisations who subscribe to the Association's objectives.

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

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

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

Material published herein does not necessarily reflect the views of the BLHA or the editorial committee of the *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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Guest Editorial

Reflections on The Coming of the Amity

Howard Guille

The HM Colonial Brig *Amity* first came into the waters of the Quandamooka people in September 1824. The *Amity* brought convicts, soldiers, colonialism and capitalism. It manifested the British power that dispossessed the Turrbal, Jaggera, Quandamooka, Ningy Ningy and Gubbi Gubbi peoples and established the Moreton Bay Penal Settlement. The latter was the genesis of the Colony and then the State of Queensland. As Jennifer Harrison elegantly understates, "Indigenous peoples were marginalised as British incomers adopted the traditional European practice of conquest and direct rule."¹

Moreton Bay "became the most remote garrison in Britain's global empire."²

This article is partly a rumination about the 1820s to 1850s—especially how to understand the political economy of the Moreton Bay Settlement and, as a corollary, that of early nineteenth-century

colonisation in Australia. One intriguing hypothetical is the possibility of a common front between Aboriginal people and the newly arrived radical soldiers, sailors and convicts. This leads almost directly to reviewing the scope for common cause between First Nations peoples and Left organisations in the 2020s. I think this is imperative since the failure to make a settlement with First Nations' peoples ruins Australian politics and society and gives succour to reaction and conservatism.

Deep despair and alarm at how right-wing and conservative views have come to dominate political, social and cultural discourse inform this article. History and ideas about the past are now used as a cudgel for the present. Benoît Bréville describes this as "rewriting the past to discredit enemies and stoke hatred," adding that "history should help to explain the origins and motives of conflicts, but is instead used to fuel them."³

Referendum and Truth-telling

The 2023 Voice referendum was replete with such ‘re-writing’ of the past’ undertaken so successfully that the No vote of over 60% was the biggest ever in a referendum. It behoves radicals to appreciate the comparison with the 1951 Referendum to ban the Communist Party where the No vote was only 50.6% .

The political right has reveled in the outcome of the Voice referendum. The Institute of Public Affairs calls the result “one of the most significant events in Australia’s cultural and political history” and argues that the proposal for an Aboriginal Voice impugned “the foundation principle of liberal democracy that all citizens have equal political rights.”⁴

Equal rights are a matter for the beholder. The IPA’s charter is expressly about what it terms “economic and political freedom.” Under this rubric it includes “freedom of speech’, ‘protection of property rights’ and ‘self-reliance and development of character, rather than dependence on the State’.”⁵ These are firmly based in a social and political ethos of individualism, markets and private property.

The loss in the Voice Referendum empowered reaction. The Queensland LNP used the result as grounds to withdraw its previous support for the Queensland Truth to Treaty arrangements. In May 2023, David Cristafulli said that Path to Treaty was “an opportunity I believe Queensland should embrace wholeheartedly.”⁶ After the referendum, Treaty was something that “will only create further division.”⁷ In one of the first actions after gaining government, the Path to Treaty process was abolished with, according to the Chair of the Truth Telling Inquiry, “no communication from the new government.”⁸ Subsequently, the Federal Coalition has announced policies to curtail ‘welcome to country’ recognition at government events and even to discontinue displaying the Aboriginal and the Torres Strait Islander flags at media events.⁹

The Voice Referendum result was a triumph for the assiduous build-up and promulgation of conservative ideas which began, in its most recent variant, with John Howard’s warning about the “black arm-band view of history” in 1996. Howard was determined “that our history as a nation is not written definitively by those who take the view that we should apologise for most of it.”¹⁰ As Anne Curthoys argues, John



Figure 1

Pilot boat at Amity Point being rowed by an Aboriginal boat crew 1847

(Owen Stanley watercolour, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, IE3174589, FL3175487)

Howard was determined to establish a conservative history to counter Paul Keating. This had three main aspects; teaching narrative history in schools, the militarization of Australian History and a heritage built around the likes of Don Bradman, Captain Cook, and Ned Kelly. Further, Howard’s revision of history was most obvious in Aboriginal policy. The idea was to tell a history “to minimise, but to not do away with entirely, recognition of past injustices towards Aboriginal people.” This would underpin a return to the politics of assimilation and reject ideals of self-determination, autonomy and treaty.¹¹

Moreton Bay

Mention of ‘past injustices’ towards Aboriginal people returns this discussion to the Moreton Bay Penal Settlement. It was small: from 1824 to May 1839, when nearly all the population was evacuated to Sydney, just over 2,400 convicts, 800 soldiers and close to three dozen civilians had lived there.¹² As Raymond Evans writes,

The white toeholds of occupation, first at Redcliffe Point, then upon the Brisbane River, Stradbroke Island and Limestone were like tiny migrant enclaves, surrounded

by the societies of the indigenous others.¹³

Or, as Ray Kerkhove says, the penal settlement was essentially “an island in Aboriginal lands.”¹⁴ On one pole, Aboriginal-British relationships were almost intimate. At the other pole, there was considerable inter-racial caution. Raymond Evans concludes that civil and military officials had a “sense of manifest mission and superior right.”¹⁵ Such a sense seems to be a characteristic, if not essential, trait of colonisers.

Even so there was considerable interaction and material exchange.¹⁶ The staffing and crewing of the Amity Pilot Station established in 1825 is a notable example;¹⁷ figure 1 (*previous page*) shows a painting of 1847 with an entire Aboriginal crew of the Pilot Boat. The extent and longevity of Aboriginal camps in and around the British at Moreton Bay/Brisbane reinforces the interaction. As Ray Kerkhove says, “the convict settlement didn't exist in isolation but functioned within an Indigenous world.”¹⁸

A Global Context

As the National Museum puts it, “Moreton Bay Penal Settlement was established as a place of exile

and punishment for re-offending convicts.” It followed the Bigge Report on how to “restore terror” including secondary penal places for recidivists.¹⁹ Though small and remote, it was still part of a global empire established during a period of tumult. Martin Empson has compiled a list of events of “The World Turned Upside Down” that are contemporaneous to the colonisation of Australia.²⁰ The list is shown in figure 2.

The list mixes, among other things, war, literature, politics, technology and industrial conflict. The first half-century of colonisation of Australia was contemporaneous with, among others, the defeat of the British in the American War of Independence, a naval mutiny, the successful revolt of slaves in Haiti and Dominque, the Peterloo Massacre and the Chartist campaign, industrial sabotage by the Luddites, the rising of the United Irishmen and the Scottish clearances.

The period was one of peak movement of people across the world. As James Belich writes, “These include the mass transfer of people, information, and goods, as well as the ideology of ‘settlerism’.”²¹ It was led by the Anglos.²² For Belich, “Sydney, 1788, is another candidate for the

The world turned upside down

Chronology

1773: ‘Boston Tea Party’	1807: Britain bans slave trade.
1775: Fighting at Lexington and Bunker Hill,	1810: First risings against Spanish rule in Mexico and Venezuela.
1776: American Declaration of Independence.	1810-16: ‘Luddites’ attack machines in north of England.
1781: British defeat at Yorktown.	1814-15: Napoleon defeated. Restoration of old monarchs. Waterloo.
1780s to 1830s: Spread of factory system and mining in Britain	1811-18: Publication of novels by Jane Eyre and Walter Scott.
1793-94: Jacobins rule France, end of feudal dues, ‘Terror’	1819: ‘Peterloo’ massacre of working-class demonstrators.
1794: Fall of Jacobins, ‘Thermidor’	1830: Revolution in Paris replaces one monarchy by another.
1793-98: British take over Saint-Domingue, defeated by ex-slave army	1830s: Novels by Stendhal and Balzac.
1797: British naval mutinies	1830: World’s first passenger railway.
1798: Rising against British rule in Ireland, formation of Orange Order to combat it	1831: Faraday discovers electric induction
1799: Combination laws ban trade unions in Britain, Napoleon takes all power in France	1832: British middle class gets vote,
1801-03: Napoleon tries to reimpose slavery in Haiti, imprisonment and death of Toussaint, Dessalines leads ex-slave army to victory	1834: Poor Law Amendment Act establishes workhouses in Britain.
1804: Beethoven’s <i>Eroica</i> symphony.	1838-9: Chartist movement demands vote for workers.
1805: Napoleon becomes emperor.	1839-42: Opium War against China.
1807: Hegel’s <i>Phenomenology of Mind</i> .	1842: General Strike in Lancashire.
	1840s to 1860s: Novels of Dickens, George Eliot, Brontes.
	Mid 1840s: Tai-ping rebels take control of nearly half of China.
	1846-49: Great Irish Famine.
	1847: <i>The Communist Manifesto</i> .

Figure 2

(Reproduction of) Martin Empson’s compilation of a list of events that are contemporaneous to the colonisation of Australia

(Martin Empson, *Land and Labour; Marxism, Ecology and Human History*, Bookmarks Publications 2014)

place and time of globalisation’s birth.”²³ In Emma Fajgenbaum’s summary,

clear, important outposts of empire.²⁴

A Period of Social Conflict

the Australian colonies were never just dumping grounds for Britain’s surplus population, though convicts did provide useful labour. Nor were they simply territories to be subjected to colonial extraction and exploitation. They were, Fernandes makes

The extent of First Nations’ resistance to invasion and dispossession is perhaps becoming better documented and understood. The Colonial Frontier Massacres project led by Lyndall Ryan is especially important. One of its conclusions is that “frontier

massacres of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia are a significant component of the violent colonisation of Australia.”²⁵ The first massacre in Moreton Bay was in July 1831 when 20 Ngugi people were killed on Mulgumpin/Moreton Island.²⁶

There was also substantial conflict within the invading ranks. The labour of convicts was coerced and the labour of soldiers and sailors was provided under military discipline. The multi-media *Conviction Politics* project from Monash University shows how “Australia’s first work force resisted exploitation through inventive solidarity in the face of coercion.”²⁷ Likewise, Hamish Maxwell-Stewart and Michael Quinlan, who document and analyse the revolt of “unfree labour,” are clear that “Absconding was a form of industrial dissent among convicts. It was practiced on a large scale and could have wider political ramifications.”²⁸ And that, “The attempt to harness the labour of thieves for public and private profit was systematically resisted.”²⁹ Moreover, much of the action was collective with “10,903 instances of collective action involving at least 43,275 convicts” between 1788-1860.³⁰

Militant resistance continued in the

face of floggings, other punishments and banishment to places like Moreton Bay. The resistance was collective and informed such that “unfree workers did not just defy the language of convictism in Australia, they reorganised across trades and regional divides to make common purpose....That common purpose coalesced around a counter ideology.”³¹

Considerable political and industrial disruption and conflict was occurring in Britain itself in the period from the 1780s to 1840s. Evan Wilson writes

In the decade after Waterloo, soldiers and sailors participated on both sides of an almost revolution in Britain. From the Corn Law riots in 1815 through the famous massacre at Peterloo in 1819 to the Cato Street Conspiracy in 1820, Britain was teetering on the brink of domestic collapse even while it seemed to be the greatest victor of the Napoleonic Wars.³²

This period marked the emergence of a radicalised working class as a social and political force. Marcus Rediker writes:

Long before the American Revolution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man, a motley crew of sailors, slaves, pirates, laborers, market women, and indentured servants had ideas about freedom and equality that would forever change history.³³

The years 1790–1792 were a revolutionary moment. Egalitarian, multi-ethnic conceptions of humanity had not evolved in isolation, but rather through solidarity and connection within and among social movements and individuals.

This “motley crew” were connected through their solidarity and ideas of egalitarianism. In turn, their ideas and sense of solidarity were “circulated with the planetary currents around the Atlantic, often eastward, from American plantations, Irish commons, and deep-sea vessels back to the metropolises of Europe.”³⁴

Seafarers were the world's first globalized workforce. Since sailors were the most prominent activists and carriers of radicalism and solidarity, it is extremely likely that these ideas came to the New South Wales outpost of empire. Indeed, there is a report that the sailing of the First Fleet was delayed by three

days because of “a dispute by sailors of the *Fishburn* about pay, they refused to leave until resolved.”³⁵

An Antidote to Settlerism

The concern with labour and social conflict discussed above differs from the emphasis on land in the theory of “settler colonialism” especially as expanded by Patrick Wolfe and Lorenzo Veracini. Wolfe states,

settler colonies were not primarily established to extract surplus value from indigenous labour. Rather, they are premised on displacing indigenes from (or replacing them on) the land.³⁶

In similar vein, it was “a form of colonialism premised on land over labour.”³⁷

While complicatedly conceptual, this approach provides a strong narrative for categorising Aboriginal dispossession by the British as genocide. Dirk Moses is a good exponent.³⁸ This is especially so if combined with the more empirical accounts such as Lyndall Ryan’s careful and chilling account of what occurred in Tasmania.³⁹ Raymond Evans and Bill Thorpe are perhaps just as

convincing and the term *Indigenocide* which they developed conveys a “three-way onslaught upon lives, land, and culture.”⁴⁰ This echoes the potent words of Manning Clark about the ‘three great evils’:

the violence against the original inhabitants of the country, the Aborigines; the violence against the first European Labor force in Australia, the convicts; and the violence done to the land itself.⁴¹

As developed by David Denoon, “settler colonialism” was an important and informative contribution to comparative understanding of colonisation and economic development in Australasia. It was materialist history. However Wolfe and Veracini and their acolytes are of the ‘post’ schools and write at more abstract conceptual levels.⁴² One concern is that the approach writes labour ‘out’ of history and political economy. In settlerism theory, capitalists gain profit through ‘primary accumulation’. This starts in the early period of colonisation and continues through to the present. I prefer a more expressly Marxian view that

‘primitive accumulation’ is what comes before full-blooded

capitalism. The funds gathered by enclosing the commons, by seizing new lands, and by trading on the margins are all the original seed capital for the industrial revolution.⁴³

In turn, as John Bellamy Foster states,

there is a historical-materialist approach to settler colonialism that sees it as dialectically connected to capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism, rather than as an isolated category.⁴⁴

Sai Engert has a similar approach arguing that “Exploitation and elimination operated side by side....oiling the wheels of economic growth in Europe and across the settler world.”⁴⁵

In these more Marxian views, the development of a capitalist Australia involved both dispossession of First Nations and the exploitation of coerced and free (hired) labour. It is timely to recognise the substantial contribution made by Bill Thorpe when he set out in his 1996 book, “to reassert the importance of colonialism, capitalism and class in the historical analysis of Queensland in particular and Australia more generally.”⁴⁶

Cause for Action

Bill Thorpe's concept of Aboriginal people being used as ‘colonised labour’ is especially useful. This was distinct from slavery, convict labour or migrant ‘free’ labour. He also shows that ‘colonised Aboriginal people were not always a minor element in the political economy and in some places and cases were the major element.

The labour of Quandamooka people on Minjerribah was used almost from the beginning of colonisation. It created a pathway for Aboriginal workers at the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum to use the institutions of ‘white’ unionism to pursue and win equal pay in 1944. On a bigger scale, Aboriginal labour was central to the northern pastoral and maritime industries and effective alliances were made between Aboriginal workers and white Communist trade unionists in the Northern Territory and WA. Understanding these alliances needs a history that engages with class. This opens up possibility of alliances and politics which can actually challenge structures of power. At the beginning of this article, I raised a hypothetical question about a common front between Aboriginal people and radical soldiers, sailors and convicts 200 years ago.

There should be nothing hypothetical and everything real about practical and active solidarity between Aboriginal people and organised labour in the 2020s.

In 1992, Paul Keating in his Redfern Speech called for “Recognition that it was we who did the dispossessing.”⁴⁷ Recognition is now required that in 2023, we voted down the request from Aboriginal people for a formal Voice. It is for ‘us’ to humbly ask Aboriginal people how we can recover from our humiliation. To end with a less often quoted part of the Redfern Speech

The message should be that there is nothing to fear or to lose in the recognition of historical truth, or the extension of social justice, or the deepening of Australian social democracy to include Indigenous Australians. There is everything to gain.⁴⁸

Howard Guille retired as Queensland Secretary of the NTEU in 2006 and is the secretary of the North Stradbroke Island Museum on Minjerribah.

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He said "this 'black arm band' view of our past reflects a belief that most Australian history since 1788 has been little more than a disgraceful story of imperialism, exploitation, racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination. In contrast, 'the balance sheet of our history is one of heroic achievement and that we have achieved much more as a nation of which we can be proud than of which we should be ashamed."

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Editorial

The Queensland Journal of Labour History often refers to Alex Macdonald, the Queensland Trades and Labour Council (TLC) Secretary between 1951 and 1969. He personifies our belief that the labour movement should use its power and influence to create, or aspire to create, radical change for underprivileged groups both in Australia and abroad (be they members of a trade union or not).

In issue 38 we described how Alex thought the main challenge for the labour movement, in 1969, more than half a century ago, was the elimination of the inequalities faced by Indigenous Australians. His support for equal rights for women was genuine and long-term. He linked campaigns in Queensland to fighting injustice abroad. The knighthood his close friend Jack Egerton accepted in 1976 was something that he would never have considered. He saw his position as a means to an end, the end being the elimination of injustice rather than a comfortable career for himself.

When Alex died in office, one of the first changes under the next TLC administration was to abolish the women’s committee that Alex had supported. The position of women

in the workforce and society needed no more help from the male-dominated union movement.

And herein lies a contradiction at the heart of the study of labour history. For every radical in the labour movement like Alex Macdonald, there is a reactionary, and nowadays, pro-business neo-liberal.

This journal is unashamedly biased. We deliberately steer the reader to history that embraces radicalism.

When we print articles on the anti-conscription battles of the First World War, we don’t seek the standpoint of ALP governments that wanted conscription. We don’t argue how necessary legislation was that successive Queensland ALP governments introduced, such as the *Transport Acts 1938-42*—statutory instruments used so effectively by the governments of Joh Bjelke-Petersen. We don’t write on the side of the ALP Hanlon government in the 1948 Railway Strike and excuse their acquiescence in the attempt to assassinate Queensland MP Fred Paterson. We don’t argue that neo-liberalism was inevitable, that Hawke and Keating had no choice but to follow Thatcher and Reagan

in crippling unions, deregulating industry and privatising public services. We celebrate the achievements of the women's movement that for over a century campaigned to create legislative equality - often in the face of resistance from the labour movement.

However, we could and should be going further.

The disconnect between the labour movement and the fight against climate change - the biggest threat to the future well-being of society - is ensured by the ALP's actual support for the expansion of fossil fuels. To tell the story of the radical movement that emerged to fight this political orthodoxy is to take us close to the political enemies of the ALP. And maybe we should.

In the last ten years we have only carried one article on climate change. This was Alison Stewart's research in issue 36 into the green-ban the Queensland TLC put in place to save the Great Barrier Reef from industrial development in 1970. This is an highly important history, showing how effective the labour movement can be in enacting positive climate outcomes. This article was offered to the current QCU to publicise, but we received no response.

For many people within the labour movement, the need to have the ALP in government has become more important than considering what the party will do when they get there. The lack of radical change enacted by government is reflected in an anti-radical stance growing within the movement. Very few current labour leaders inspire radical societal change.

Alex Macdonald's belief that the labour movement should use its power to influence or create radical change has been in reverse for a very long time.

In September 1824 the Moreton Bay Penal Settlement was established on the banks of what is now Humpybong Creek in Redcliffe. Abandoned within eight months, the settlement moved to North Quay on the Brisbane River.

Thus, May 2025 was the bicentenary of the establishment of the settlement that became the City of Brisbane. This anniversary of the British conquest of the Indigenous Australian land on which we now live was heralded by a muted fanfare, at least outside the confines of royal historical group circles.

The impact of the conquest on the traditional owners of the land and the ruthless treatment faced by the

earliest 'settlers' is not something to look back on and commemorate. This is a city looking forward to spending a fortune on being the centre of the world's attention for a few weeks during the 2032 Olympics; even the LNP are steering clear of this anniversary.

In previous pages Howard Guille addressed this uncomfortable history, how imperial power commodified not just the land but the labour of both convicts and Indigenous Australians.

Jeff Rickertt's article also discusses a politicised history. The BLHA had considered hosting an event to commemorate the centenary of the dedication of the Richard Ramo's Peace Temple at Toowong Cemetery in late 2024, but a brief look at the circumstances around Ramo's life suggested that doing so would be in bad taste. Even including an article in this issue was deemed inappropriate by some. However Jeff has unearthed new revelations about Ramo's story. This casts more light into how his history has been interpreted.

In other articles in this issue Alex North gives us a history of the campaigns to unionise the casinos of South East Queensland, Allan Gardiner provides us with a history of the working class in Newstead,

John McCollow gives us a run-down on the activity of Queensland's Vintage Reds, and Jeff Rickertt conveys the story of shop workers strikes in Broken Hill in 1913. Thank you to all our contributors and to my joint editors.

Since the last issue of our journal the trial by media of the CFMEU has continued. Allegations of corruption remain untested and unsubstantiated despite months of intense scrutiny by media, state and federal police. The fact that a union was taken over by the state, with the support of the ACTU, remains a lesson in how far the leadership of the labour movement will go to protect ALP politicians.

In our last issue we printed the speech that Rebecca Barrigos gave to the CFMEU solidarity rally in August 2024. Following her speech Rebecca was requested to attend a disciplinary meeting of her union's (QTU) Executive. She was threatened with expulsion from the union for taking a stance against the takeover of the CFMEU.

Rebecca has published the disciplinary charges made against her on the Queensland Teachers Fightback website: <https://www.qldteachersfightback.org/correspondence-regarding-becs-speech-at-etu-rally.html>

Peter Riedlinger and Judy Powell highlighted an error in the last issue in Glenn Davies's article on the 80th anniversary of Fred Paterson's election to the Queensland State Parliament. Paul Turnbull, now at the University of Tasmania, confirmed that it was Peter and Judy who came up with the idea of the conference on the early history of the labour movement in North Queensland, held in the Australian Workers Hall in Townsville on 6-8 June 1987. They received support from a group of comrades in Mackay to organise speakers and raise funds from various unions to assist with the running of the conference.

Judy and Peter, along with fellow comrade Chris Dwyer, transcribed the recordings from the weekend conference. Paul Turnbull also used the facilities of James Cook University History department to transcribe several personal interviews he conducted during the weekend. All these tapes and transcriptions are accessible from the Fryer Library, University of Queensland.

As Glenn stated by email, as a history undergraduate in 1987:

I can remember being blown away at the strength of will and fight still in the very bones of

all these old comrades. It was a weekend that quite fundamentally moved me and I'm very grateful for the efforts of north Queensland activists in having the foresight to bring together for one more time many of the surviving northern communist activists from the 1930s onwards.

Almost 40 years later this conference needs to be remembered as a seminal moment in developing the historiography of 'The Red North'. It's also important to acknowledge the individuals responsible for bringing about this Townsville based conference on the early labour movement of North Queensland.

On page 75 of our last issue the caption under the image of Deborah Jordan at the launch of her book *Australian Women's Justice: Settler Colonisation and the Queensland Vote* was incorrect. The image was of Lee Butterworth and Dot Wickham of the Harry Gentle Resource Centre at Griffith University, and not members of the Women's International League of Peace and Freedom.

Dean Wharton
Lead Editor, *QJLH*

President's Report

At our 2024 Annual General Meeting, Virginia Clarke was elected Secretary of the BLHA. Virginia is an enthusiastic and energetic organiser, and a very welcome addition to our executive committee. I would like to both congratulate her and thank her for accepting the role.

In 2024, BLHA awarded the Stella Nord Bursary to Glenn Davies and Matthew Wengert. The bursary is \$1000, and a certificate was awarded at the BLHA AGM. Matthew Wengert accepted the award on behalf of himself and Glenn, and gave the meeting an outline of their joint research project. They are researching the 1919 meatworks strikes in Townsville, events which resulted in violent clashes with police after union activists were arrested. The discussion was very interesting. I had some familiarity with the history of the dispute, in part because of my work (I am an industrial officer with the Australasian Meat Industry Employees' Union (AMIEU)), and in part from discussions with BLHA past President Jeff Rickertt, who has done a great deal of research on the early years of the AMIEU. Despite that, Matt and Glenn's



BLHA Vice-President Greg Mallory presents the 2024 Stella Nord Bursary to Matthew Wengert, with which he and Glenn Davies were awarded.
(image *QJLH*)

research has discovered some interesting detail I had not been aware of, including the way in which events were impacted by the (worldwide) influenza epidemic. I very much look forward to the final outcome of their research.

The AGM was also pleased to confer Life Membership of BLHA upon Carole Ferrier. The Life Membership was awarded both



BLHA Management Committee Member, and QJLH Editor Allan Gardiner presents Carole Ferrier with BLHA Life Membership

for Carole's contributions to BLHA as an organisation, and also for significant contribution to labour and radical history as both historian and activist. Carole shared some details of her academic career and political activism with the meeting, which was both informative and engaging.

Our AGM also included a presentation from Lesley Synge, who had previously been awarded the inaugural Stella Nord Bursary. Lesley's research into the Indigenous workers at the Rewan horse breeding station resulted in her book, *Know Their Names*. Lesley addressed the meeting to present the results of her research and an overview of the book, followed by questions and discussion.

In terms of upcoming events for 2025, there are some changes from past years.

Firstly, we have decided to move the Alex Macdonald Memorial Lecture, normally held mid-year (May-July) to October. The reason for this is that 2025 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Dismissal of the a Whitlam government. BLHA has been fortunate in having Jenny Hocking agree to present this year's Alex Macdonald Lecture. It will be held on 22 October, as we decided to hold the event closer to the November anniversary date.

Unfortunately however, the Alex Macdonald lecture will not be held in its traditional venue, the QCU (formerly TLC) building in Peel Street. To the best of my knowledge, all of our lectures have been held at the QCU with one exception (in the dying days of the Covid pandemic when it was necessary to secure a venue that allowed the speaker to deliver the lecture by video conference). The QCU has been generous in providing facilities for after hours meetings and events to a wide variety of organizations, including BLHA, over many years. While we have been grateful for such support, a recent decision of the QCU requiring security for after hours events, with the cost borne by the hosting organisation, has made the



*BLHA Vice-President Greg Mallory, President Craig Buckley and Life Member of the BLHA, Carole Ferrier, at the BLHA AGM, November 2024.
(image QJLH)*

cost of holding events at the QCU prohibitive for BLHA, and no doubt, many other groups.

One of the strengths of BLHA over the years has been its ability to foster connections and collaboration between academic historians and other trades unionists. Indeed, one of the principal reasons that our annual lecture is named after Alex Macdonald (a former General Secretary of the Queensland Trades and Labour Council) is the example he set of forging links between trade unions and broader radical political movements.

While the loss of the QCU as a viable event venue is greatly

disappointing, this will not change BLHA's commitment to engaging with unions, union officials, and rank-and-file activists who understand the importance of past for our current struggles.

With the Alex Macdonald lecture being held later in the year, BLHA plans to hold another event mid-year. While details are not yet finalized, it is hoped to organise a seminar discussing some of the major industrial struggles of the mid-1980s (SEQEB, Mudginberri, and others.)

Craig Buckley

President,
Brisbane Labour History
Association

Articles



Anarchist-communist flag at the December 2024 anniversary of the dedication of Toowong Cemetery's Peace Temple

Throughout 2024 the Brisbane Labour History Association (BLHA) considered organising an event to commemorate the centenary of the dedication of Richard Ramo's Temple of Peace in Toowong Cemetery.

This monument to the lost generation of the Great War, 1914-1918, is as relevant today, in its condemnation of nationalism and genocide, as it was at its dedication. Relevant and inconvenient.

For detractors of the monument, the personal history of Richard Ramo has provided ample, and justifiable, ammunition that has been used to undermine any message of peace. Ramo abandoned at least one family, in Sydney, with an indication in court that cruelty was involved. Ramo dedicated the monument to his lost sons but only one had died in battle and the others were estranged from him for much of his life. History suggests that Ramo was a misogynist and a liar. The BLHA could not therefore commemorate the anniversary.

However, the monument's message retains its relevance and the monument itself remains an important part of Brisbane's radical heritage. New research by Jeff Rickertt and a fresh look at the historiography suggests that Ramo's story was far from a simple matter of him being a woman-hater and a liar.

Dean Wharton (Editor)

The Temple of Peace, Our Radical Heritage

Jeff Rickertt

On a sultry day in December 2024, a small group of people converged on a mausoleum situated on the lower corner of Toowong Cemetery in Brisbane. They set to work tidying the site as best they could and then laid red roses and the red-and-black flag of anarchist-communism on the ground in front of the tomb. Blocked from entering the mausoleum by a padlocked perspex door—erected by the Brisbane City Council after acts of vandalism—some of the participants placed roses against the perspex. The site's historical and contemporary significance was discussed. Then the gathering raised a collective voice to sing the Red Flag, the anthem of the international working class. Above the traffic noise, the chorus carried up the hill:

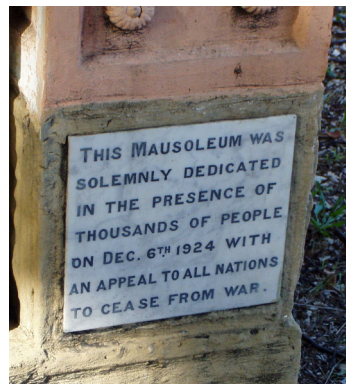
Then raise the scarlet standard
high.
Within its shade we'll live and
die,
Though cowards flinch and
traitors sneer,
We'll keep the red flag flying
here.



2024: the Peace Temple in Toowong Cemetery

The edifice at which they had gathered is no stranger to the raising of the scarlet standard, either in song or cloth. The structure had been built not only as a grave, but also as a radical Temple of Peace and a monument to the cause of socialist internationalism.

It had been dedicated one hundred years earlier, on 6 December 1924, at an event attended by thousands and addressed by one of the nation's most prominent antiwar activists, Harry Scott Bennett. Its creator, Richard Ramo, also in attendance in 1924, was a socialist who had played an active role in the antiwar and socialist movements in Sydney during and after World War I.



*Peace Temple dedication
(Jeff Rickertt)*

In leftwing circles in Brisbane, the outline story of Richard Ramo's Temple of Peace has been passed through the generations. The temple's place in radical folklore was reinforced in 2004 by a short article I wrote for the book *Radical Brisbane*.¹ That piece drew on newspaper articles and other public records about the temple's genesis. From these contemporaneous documents, as well as the inscriptions on the temple, we learnt that Ramo designed the structure as a tomb for one Ferdinand (Fred) Borell, a young man Ramo had unofficially adopted and who had taken his own life in November 1923. As conceived by Ramo, however, the edifice was much more than a mausoleum for a much-loved son. Its inscriptions and iconography linked Fred's death to a series of other personal tragedies in Ramo's life that in his view were products of the violence

endemic to capitalism. Fred's shocking death by a self-inflicted gunshot wound seemed to Ramo to allude to the broader tragedy of the millions of working-class men who had gone to their deaths at Gallipoli, Palestine and the Western Front only a few years earlier. The monument pays tribute to Fred and three other sons, Gordon, Victor and Henry, who, the inscriptions inform us, were all killed in World War One.

In Brisbane at least, the temple is unique as a totem of radical resistance, a rare material marker of a history of radical ideology and politics, sitting uneasily in an urban landscape in which 'heritage' is usually a vehicle for celebrating the triumph of pioneering settler perseverance, private wealth accumulation and hegemonic nation building. In cutting against



On the 7 December 2024, a group of anti-war radicals gathered at the Temple of Peace in Toowong Cemetery to mark the centenary of the monument's dedication. Afterwards they issued the following statement:

On Saturday 7 of December 2024, several anarchists met at the Toowong cemetery to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Temple of Peace. Roses and a red and black flag were left at the site and comrades sang *The Red Flag*, in honour of the slogan engraved on the monument, "When the red flag of humanity flies over the world, I shall not have died in vain." The Temple was dedicated in the presence of thousands of people on the 6 December 1923, and it was our intention to honour not just the memory of those interred within the Temple itself, but the thousands who have committed their energy and lives to the cause of peace and justice on Earth.

The Temple was built by Richard Ramo in protest at the war that killed his sons. World War One was one of the greatest slaughters in human history, benefiting no-one except the ruling class. In 2024, we once again witness slaughter on an industrial scale, as Israel pummels the Gaza Strip, the Burmese military junta brutalises their nation's people and Russia assaults Ukraine with millions of tons of ordinance, to name just some of the conflicts occurring in our age. And once again, bosses and politicians are the only ones who stand to profit.

It is the duty of anarchists, socialists and all who stand for human solidarity and freedom to oppose what Ramo called the god of war. It is our duty to recognise and remember the efforts of those who came before us in this struggle, to honour the bedrock they set down for us. Equally, it is our duty to build on those foundations for generations to come, until the red flag of humanity indeed flies over our world.

As is inscribed on the monument itself, "There is no Heaven! We shall not meet again. Make thy Heaven here and thou shalt not have lived in vain!"



*Peace Temple internal view
(Jeff Rickertt)*

this grain, the Temple of Peace is not only a monument to the particular causes espoused by Richard Ramo, it is a stone-and-glass exemplar of the more general subject of 'the radical' in history, signalling an alternative narrative of subaltern groups challenging the power of settler colonial capitalism and its oppressive social conventions. Its very materiality demands a response, and that response, even if in the form of visible neglect, illuminates the broader treatment of dissent in historiography and heritage management.

The centenary of the temple seems like an opportune time to give that illumination a sharper focus. Twenty years after the *Radical Brisbane* piece was published, this article returns to the topic of Richard Ramo's Temple of Peace. The subject this time, however, is not the temple taken at face value as an instance of radical Brisbane, but the temple as a problem for history's gatekeepers, a site of contestation, an object of political struggle in its own right. What follows is a detailed and critical account of the official reception of

the temple over the decades, and a defence of the monument as an important material legacy of early 20th century movements for peace and socialism. In defending this legacy, and in the spirit of the radicals who gathered at the site in 1924 and again a century later, the article will make the case that the history of subaltern struggle is no more permanently secure than the gains of subaltern struggle. Both are perpetually vulnerable from establishment depredation; both require constant reaffirmation and protection.

Unveiling a Radical Critique of War

Today, it should not surprise anyone that Ramo's brazen challenge to the shibboleths of official war remembrance would ruffle feathers. Since Federation, and especially since the 1914-1918 war, the careful construction of war memory has played a significant role in inducing ideological commitment to the Australian nation state. To critique it, even mildly, is to invite state and media opprobrium. Nowhere is this more evident than when critical voices are raised about official representations of war and military service and the almost sacred status afforded to the many physical

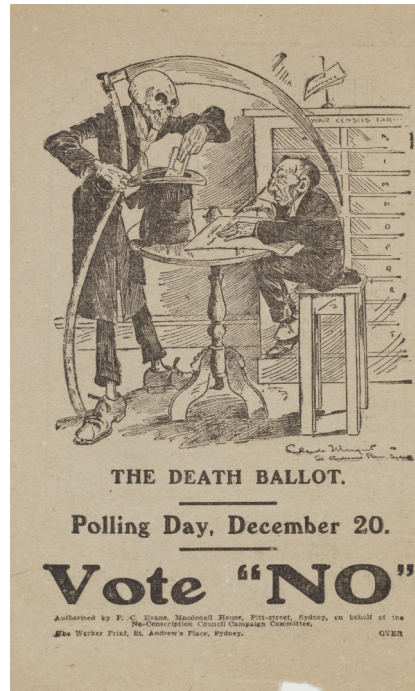
memorials to Australia's war dead. As I wrote in 2004 of this nation's war monuments:

Such sites occasion a powerful sense of sacrifice and loss. But they operate symbolically within a frame of reference that discourages critical questioning of war or the decisions that have led to war. They usually serve to evoke a notion of a unified national purpose and as a vehicle to channel feelings of grief and respect into a sense of patriotic pride. Through these monuments and the annual ceremonies that draw attention to them, wartime events such as the slaughter at Gallipoli are represented as seminal experiences in the forging of an Australian national identity, against which the history of anti-militarism is all too easily condemned as an affront to the memory of the fallen.²

An affront to the fallen; and in our current khaki times, almost an act of treason. But not, it seems, in 1924. Or not so much. At that time, a nationalist cult of war was still in the making, with the prospect of success far from assured. In 1916 and 1917 the majority of voting Australians had rejected military conscription in two referenda. Over

44 per cent of serving soldiers voted 'no' in both referenda. On the home front, tens of thousands mobilised against the prospect of conscription, and as the carnage at the Western Front continued, a significant minority of these dissenters hardened their position from opposition to conscription to repudiation of the war itself. Some ex-soldiers formed veterans' groups that were openly hostile to militarism, with Brisbane's own Comrades of War League a prominent example.³

ANZAC Day, the nation's preeminent occasion for official war commemorations, was, as historian Mark Cryle has put it, "still a work in progress" in the early postwar period. It had failed to unify the nation, as its backers intended. "Many circled the day on their calendars and acknowledged its significance, commemorating it in their own way. Still others were alienated from the patriotic clamour and obsequious deference to empire which surrounded the occasion."⁴ Six years after the armistice, revulsion at the industrial-scale slaughter of World War One was still widespread. Many servicemen had returned physically and psychologically damaged and unwilling to participate in ritualistic public ceremonies of remembrance. It was



Anti-Conscription Flyer, 1917, depicting ALP Prime Minister Billy Hughes completing the death ballot.

(Museums Victoria, cartoonist Claude Marquet)

in this context that thousands of Brisbane residents were prepared to converge on Toowong Cemetery to show their sympathy for Ramo and his grief-stricken denunciation of war and capitalism.

Nevertheless, even then, Ramo would have known he was venturing into potentially dangerous ideological territory. It is probably no coincidence that he built his temple only 30 metres from two official war memorials,

dedicated on Anzac Day 1924, around the time Ramo started his project. Ramo and his comrades had reason for anxiety on 6 December 1924. Less than six years earlier, Brisbane's streets had erupted into rioting as the city's reactionary king and empire forces mobilised against socialists, trade unionists and emigre Russian leftists. These anti-Bolshevik pogroms, or Red Flag Riots, as they came to be called, were led by ex-military officers working in partnership with loyalists from the city's professional and business elite and the emergent rightwing returned soldiers' organisations. Across a series of episodes culminating in a riot by up to 8000 ex-soldiers on 23 March 1919, scores of Russians and leftists were bashed and at least nineteen police officers attempting to quell the disturbance were seriously injured. Fifteen socialists who were victims of the attacks were subsequently gaoled, and eleven Russians were deported without due process.⁵

Fortunately for the gathering in late 1924, the hysteria of this postwar Red Scare had abated somewhat, and the Temple of Peace and its dedication ceremony suffered no backlash. For their part, the city's conservative newspapers seem to have decided that an open attack on Ramo and his temple was not

necessary, and possibly even counter-productive. Their tone was patronising rather than overtly hostile. They emphasised the pathos of Ramo's personal situation rather than the subversiveness of his politics. It was, in a sense, the perfect inversion of Ramo's intention. Whereas he wished to share with the world his radical political understanding of his tragedy, the press portrayal of him as a man deeply scarred by personal loss encouraged readers to dismiss his political message as a product of unbalanced eccentricity, not to be taken seriously. Ramo and his temple were, in this view, objects of pity, oddities best forgotten.

Variations of this approach have been the mainstay of establishment reactions to Ramo's temple ever since. Throughout the site's post-dedication history, silence and neglect have been dominant themes. But in recent times there has been a surge of negative commentary. As in 1924, this has mainly taken the form of allegations about Ramo the person rather than serious engagement with the temple's political message.

The Temple of Peace as Official Heritage

The Temple of Peace was entered on the Queensland Heritage

Register on 21 October 1992. In broad terms, this means it cannot lawfully be destroyed or altered in ways deemed inconsistent with the preservation of its heritage significance.

According to the Register entry, the temple is “an impassioned anti-war statement and has outstanding historical significance in reflecting the volatility and instability of post-war Australian society.” Ramo is described as a “Brisbane dissident” with links to the revolutionary socialist group, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). The site’s aesthetic significance, the entry asserts, lies in the temple’s “extravagant and eccentric design and embellishments and its emotive inscriptions, evoking a sense of loss, instability, despair and hopelessness.”⁶ As the owner of the cemetery, Brisbane City Council assumed responsibility for protecting the structure’s newly-acquired status as State heritage.

What is significant about the listing of the temple is that it happened at all. On the one hand, the temple gained state protection during the afterglow of public relief and enthusiasm engendered by the election of a modestly reformist Labor government in 1989 – the first Labor administration of any kind in Queensland for 32 years. It

may have seemed a propitious time for honouring sites of progressive politics, and consequently the temple was on the first lists of places to be protected by the *Queensland Heritage Act*, itself a product of the new broom sweeping Queensland parliament.

On the other hand, whatever Labor’s intentions, the administration of the heritage protection processes by the Queensland Heritage Council, the statutory body charged with deciding what gets added to the Register, and why, has been far from representative or inclusive. The heritage of the struggles of First Nations, workers and trade unionists, oppressed minority groups and political dissidents – what Howard Guille has called subaltern groups and subaltern resistance – are significantly underrepresented on the Heritage Register. This omission has taken two forms. The Register includes only a handful of places directly relating to popular resistance. “It is,” writes Guille, “big on churches, war memorials and grand buildings,” but offers few “stories of the underlings.” He cites the dearth of trade union sites as an example. Unionism has played a major role in Queensland since the mid-nineteenth century, yet, as he points out, of the 1,791 places



*Perhaps the only known image of Richard Ramo,
The Daily Standard, 9th December 1924
(State Library Queensland)*

registered (as at 2021, the year of Guille’s article), only six were specifically trade union sites.⁷

The second form of exclusion has been enacted through highly selective histories of many of the sites on the list. “Stories of labour and other subaltern heritage are either not collected or are ‘written-out’ of the histories of the places on the Heritage Register,” writes Guille.⁸ One striking illustration is the entry for the former Burns,

Philp & Company building in Flinders Street, Townsville. The Register states the building is important “in demonstrating the evolution and pattern of Queensland’s history, being evidence of the close association between Burns, Philp & Company Ltd and the development of Townsville as the principal town and port of North Queensland in the late 19th century.”⁹ Neither the significance statement nor the accompanying site history provides

any information about the workers employed by the company, apart from mentioning there were 300 of them. Even more startling, there is no mention of the company's direct and prominent role in the abduction and other forms of coerced recruitment of South Pacific Islanders to work under indenture in the Australian colonies. Such omissions are frequent in the Register, and necessarily lead to an inference that the systems designed to protect heritage in Queensland have functioned to marginalise subaltern history while celebrating the role of capital, church and state.

In this context, official recognition of the Temple of Peace is somewhat anomalous, for its political message – indeed its main purpose – is a direct critique of all three of these pillars of Queensland society. Capitalism is excoriated, nationalism rejected, the church repudiated; one epitaph on the temple declares, “There is no heaven! We shall not meet again, Make thy heaven here and thou shalt not have lived in vain.” By any measure, having this place on a list which, as of January 2025, includes 98 churches and five cathedrals (but tellingly only one synagogue and no mosques) is a particularly startling exception that proves the general rule. Evidence of this exceptionalism can be found

in its subsequent treatment by the authorities responsible for protecting its heritage values. The temple has been physically neglected, while its status as State heritage has been undermined by a disparaging reassessment from the Heritage Council itself. As is often the case in Queensland, the terms of this revisionism were established by the conservative press.

The Case of Ramo the Liar

In August 2001, almost nine years after the heritage listing, *The Sunday Mail* published three articles over successive Sundays, questioning the existence of two of the sons named on the temple's walls: Henry and Victor. According to the monument's inscriptions, Victor was killed at Messines in Belgium at the age of 33, and Henry, aged 29, died in Belgium from wounds. *The Sunday Mail* reported that searches of AIF service records had revealed that “no one bearing those names served in World War One.” The newspaper corroborated this claim with testimony from Ramo's great-granddaughter, Ruth Bannerman, who, it was reported, had conducted her own research and found no trace of Henry or Victor. “Who these other sons are is as much a mystery to me as to anyone,” she told the columnist.¹⁰

The Sunday Mail was able to confirm the existence of three sons. Two of them served with the AIF in the war. Gordon, named on the temple, died at Gallipoli under the surname Redcliff (spelt Redcliffe by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and *The Sunday Mail*). Cecil, who adopted the surname Raymo, also fought but returned home alive. A third son, Percy, who went by the surname Redcliffe (with an ‘e’) did not enlist and eventually became Ruth Bannerman's grandfather.

From this evidence, *The Sunday Mail* concluded that “Brisbane's most famous ANZAC grave is a fake, honouring two men who were not killed in the war and probably never existed...”¹¹ Perhaps wary of *The Sunday Mail*'s credentials as a source of truth, the heritage authorities chose not to take any immediate action to revise its listing of the site.

Eight years after the newspaper story appeared, the historian Judith McKay, who had researched and written the 1992 Register entry for the temple, published an article, ‘Brisbane's Temple of Peace: War and Myth-Making’, in the journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland.¹² A manuscript version of that article was also supplied to the Heritage Council.¹³ By then, the

inclusion of the Temple of Peace in the *Radical Brisbane* book had triggered a fresh wave of public interest in the site. McKay's article opens with the point that the temple had attracted “considerable attention from historians and others alike,” citing the *Radical Brisbane* piece and other sources, including her own, the implication being that the growth of this sympathetic attention was troublesome because Ramo had been exposed as a fraud and by extrapolation, his monument was inauthentic.¹⁴ It seems that during the years since *The Sunday Mail*'s exposé, the case for corrective action had grown too strong to ignore. The story of Richard Ramo and the Temple of Peace had to be revisited.

The findings of McKay's fresh research, as published in the ‘War and Myth-Making’ article, concurred with *The Sunday Mail* conclusion that Victor and Henry were fictitious, and that only one of Ramo's known sons died in war service. “So much,” McKay wrote, “for all the sons becoming war casualties!” She was even more emphatic when interviewed by the ABC in November 2014. “Only one of Ramo's sons died in the war, the other two are complete inventions,” she said.¹⁵

One new piece of evidence cited by

McKay relates to the claim, reported in the press in 1924, that the ashes of at least two of the three soldier-sons were interred in the mausoleum. This was, she writes, “preposterous, being inconsistent with Australian and British practice at the time.”¹⁶ McKay argues that of the tens of thousands of Australian soldiers who died in World War One’s battles, only one, William Bridges, was brought home. The remains of the rest, if recovered, were interred (without cremation) near the battlefields where they perished. Gordon was buried at Shrapnel Valley at Gallipoli.¹⁷

The Case of Ramo the Depressive

Convinced that Ramo had perpetrated a massive deception, McKay felt compelled to provide an explanation for his behaviour. She settled on mental illness. “What is certain,” she declared, “is that he suffered a psychiatric disorder.” This certainty rested on two foundations: ‘evidence’ from three episodes in Ramo’s life, and the opinion of a psychiatrist friend of McKay’s, Dr John Slaughter, with whom she discussed Ramo’s case.

One of the elements of Ramo’s biography mentioned by McKay concerned his pre-Brisbane family

life. In Gordon Redcliff’s war service record, McKay discovered evidence that Ramo’s relationship with his family was fractured. This file contains letters and statements from Gordon’s brother Percy and his mother (Ramo’s ex-wife) Elise (also known as Eliza), written after Gordon’s death. As McKay points out, they indicate that Ramo had deserted the family and that Gordon, the youngest son, had become a ward of the state before being released into Percy’s care. A statutory declaration from Percy states that prior to sailing to war, Gordon had said that in the event of his death he wanted none of his possessions to go to his father. A later letter from Elise requests the military authorities to assist her regain contact with her surviving sons. She had lost touch with them after being admitted to a psychiatric institution. Adding to this material, Ramo’s great-granddaughter, Ruth Bannerman, told McKay in 2007 that Ramo “had his wife ‘put away’ in an asylum after years of cruelty and abuse.”¹⁸

A more complete and accurate account of Ramo’s family history has been revealed by another source which I have recently discovered. In May 1908 Ramo, then living in Sydney and going by his original surname of Retzlaff, petitioned the Supreme Court of

New South Wales to compel his wife Eliza to return to the marital home. Eliza’s response testifies to a long history of cruelty and neglect by Ramo, including prolonged periods when he abandoned her and the children without means of support. As a result of Ramo’s “harsh, dominating, irritating and neglectful conduct,” she declared, her mental health had suffered, culminating in June 1904 in a complete mental collapse. (From a different source we know that in July she attempted to take her own life.¹⁹) Eliza would spend the next 12 months in the Callan Park Hospital for the Insane. After she was discharged she returned to Ramo but on 29 September 1905 he physically assaulted her and forced her to leave. This pattern of cruelty affected her general health; “she [had] suffered and still suffers both mentally and physically,” her statement declared. Eliza counter-petitioned the court for a divorce and custody of the children.²⁰ Along with these details, Percy’s story of Gordon being placed into state care has also been confirmed. According to the New South Wales Dependent Children’s Register, this happened in September 1907.²¹

Having found out some of this story, McKay then added to the picture of trauma by turning to Ramo’s actions at the inquest into

Fred’s death. From the newspaper reports, she pieces together a precis of Ramo’s behaviour in the courtroom:

he was highly excitable and subject to periodic fits; a condition no doubt worsened by this tragedy. During the inquest Ramo collapsed, crashing from his chair, and had to be carried from the courtroom.²²

The possibility that these ‘fits’ were the direct consequence of the stress of the situation, rather than the manifestation of a ‘condition’ worsened by the situation, was not countenanced. Nor was the possibility that if Ramo did indeed suffer from a pre-existing illness, it could have been epilepsy or any number of physical ailments with symptoms matching those he displayed. Instead, the implication of McKay’s line of inquiry is that Ramo was chronically mentally ill.

The details here are important. For instance, the press reported only one fit, not “periodic fits”. *The Truth* provided a summary of Ramo’s behaviour over the course of the inquest:

Throughout the entire hearing of the case Ramo listened to the evidence with an intense

hungry interest. For the most part tears had streamed down his care-worn face. When last seen in court, about a fortnight ago, his features were drawn and haggard. When called upon to give evidence he had frequently to be fortified by a stimulant. His body so shook that he had to grasp the tumbler in both hands, and even then he could not prevent it rattling against his teeth. Everyone will remember the dramatic narrative he unfolded. [Witness James] Conway had no sooner finished relating the few facts in his possession when Ramo was taken suddenly ill. His face was livid and he fell headlong from his chair, crashing to the floor in a fit. It was some time before he was sufficiently restored to be conveyed from the scene of his agony.²³

The Brisbane Courier and *The Telegraph* also reported only one episode of Ramo collapsing:

A pitiful scene was witnessed in the Inquiry Court yesterday, when Richard Ramo, an elderly man, and a previous witness in the inquiry ... suddenly fell from his chair, seized with a fit. For a time he was completely prostrated. He was carried from the court, and subsequently

recovered his composure.²⁴

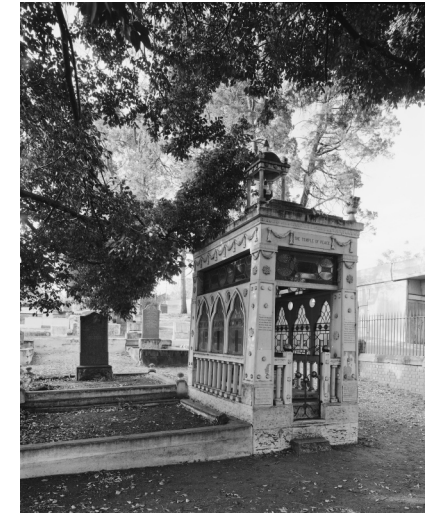
With no way of knowing the precise reason for Ramo's collapse, the most obvious explanation is also the most feasible: having argued with Fred and then witnessed him end his life in an act of extreme violence, Ramo, a physically frail man, found the additional strain of the inquest proceedings too much to bear, as would many people.

For McKay, however, another explanation is needed, not because Ramo's courtroom behaviour was so unusual or bizarre in the circumstances, but because his purported lies over the coming year were. It is to this period and Ramo's preoccupation with constructing the temple that McKay's article ultimately turns. Ramo's political radicalism is discussed at length, ostensibly as a motivating factor for his monument project, but in reality to bolster a view that political radicalism itself is contiguous with mental illness. After summarising Ramo's affinity with the politics of the IWW, McKay quotes psychologist Elton Mayo to support a claim that political instability and mental instability are complementary:

According to the social theorist Elton Mayo (then living in

Brisbane), these groups [the IWW and the Communist Party of Australia] were largely responsible for the 'irritability and emotional instability' of contemporary Australian society with its alarming levels of industrial strife and social conflict. Ramo, with his own instability, would have easily fitted into this environment.²⁵

With this we have reached the nub of the argument. Like the sociology of deviance that took hold in Cold War America to explain (while simultaneously repudiating) everything from rebellious youth culture to homosexuality to membership of the Communist Party, McKay's invocation of Mayo's notion of emotional instability functions as a device for explaining (while simultaneously repudiating) the behaviour of people engaging in nonconformist behaviour in the 1910s and 1920s. Mayo's postulations do of course beg a few questions. What drove the instability? What was the root cause of the dissidents' desire to irritate, and of Ramo's personal irritability? Assuredly not, it seems, the prevailing conditions of social and economic alienation in which most Australians were compelled to live. McKay believes the answer lies not in history but psychiatry. Having reviewed the evidence – the



The Temple before Encasement
(Richard Stringer, 'Temple of Peace, Toowong Cemetery, 1995', SLQ Image 5698)

family turbulence, the courtroom drama, the obsession with the peace temple – her friend Dr Slaughter ruled out psychopathy, as this condition, he pointed out, is inconsistent with Ramo's demonstrated ability to complete such a monumental project. Rather, we are informed that Ramo might have been the victim of an unhappy childhood. The diagnosis-cum-explanation in full is as follows:

More likely he was a depressive frustrated by his inability to maintain personal relationships and consumed by guilt at his behaviour towards his own family. In erecting the

monument, he was lamenting their loss, not through war but by his own doing.²⁶

Here is where the investigation of Ramo has led us. Possible anomalies in Ramo's personal story are explained as lies. The purported propensity to lie has taken us, via Elton Mayo, to a psychology of instability, which we are told is both an individual affliction manifested as guilt and depression over personal failings, and a more general pathology afflicting the malcontents of the Left. And through this conclusion, the Temple of Peace has been transformed from a mausoleum and antiwar monument into one man's personal lament for his sense of failure as a parent and husband. As McKay put it, approvingly quoting Slaughter, the monument "was more of a cenotaph than a tomb and possibly stands for [Ramo's] own broken life."²⁷ McKay repeated this assessment in the ABC interview in November 2014.²⁸

It would be an interesting thought experiment to imagine the same line of argument being applied to the hundreds of official war memorials erected by various levels of Australian government. Should we consider those structures as officialdom's subconscious lament for the loss of

a nation's war dead, not through war but by officialdom's own doing? Should those monuments, too, be described as manifestations of guilt?

The Heritage Council 'Fixes' the Record

In due course the McKay article elicited an official public response. The response was to completely accept McKay's findings. The Heritage Council had the Department of Heritage amend the text of the Register entry for the temple. According to the revised significance statement, the temple only "*purports* to mourn the deaths of Ramo's three natural sons on active service in World War I." (my emphasis) The official site history, a more expansive text than the significance statement, now incorporates the conclusions of, and even substantial passages from, the McKay article. The fact that only one of Ramo's three known sons died in Australian uniform in WW1 is given prominence, as is the debunking of the claim that the tomb could contain the ashes of any Allied soldier. Ramo's troubled relationship with his wife and sons is covered, including the testimony of his great granddaughter, whose claim that Ramo had had Eliza "put away" was at that stage lacking any corroborative evidence. The history

goes on to assert that "other evidence indicates Ramo is also likely to have suffered from mental health issues." The evidence is not provided, the sentence simply cites McKay's article.²⁹

The overall effect of the revisions to the site history is to leave a question mark hanging over Ramo's entire project. At one point in the site history, again quoting bits and pieces from McKay (without acknowledging them), the text makes the problematising of the temple quite explicit:

The motivations behind Richard Ramo's decision to erect the Temple of Peace remain unclear; Ramo, scarcely literate, left no papers. Queensland, along with the rest of Australia, experienced significant volatility and instability in the years following World War I, marked by industrial strife and social, political and ideological conflict. The sanctification of war, expressed most visibly through the erection of war memorials, was not supported by all members of the community. Ramo was certainly a pacifist and socialist, though the precise

nature of his beliefs remains unknown.³⁰

Not only are we invited by this passage to question Ramo's motives, we are encouraged to draw an inference that his politics are mysterious, unknown and likely unknowable.

To complete the discursive reframing of the temple as a dubious and fraudulent monument, the Brisbane City Council has inscribed on the perspex encasing the edifice a didactic text which replicates key aspects of the Heritage Council's new assessment. The temple "*purports*" to be a memorial to Ramo's three sons, the text informs visitors. The names of two of those sons, it declares, "are incorrect" and only one "was actually killed during World War I." Then the *coup de grâce*: "Why Ramo created such a deliberate deception is unknown..."³¹

Was Ramo a Liar?

But was it a deception, deliberate or otherwise? Did Ramo lie? Let us begin with the lesser of the two alleged lies, the claim that the mausoleum contains the ashes of one or more sons killed in World War One.

(a) The Temple as a Mausoleum for War Remains

There is no evidence that this was a claim made by Richard Ramo. The inscriptions on the temple inform us that Gordon was killed at Gallipoli, Victor was killed at Messines and Henry died of wounds in Belgium. The temple is silent on the fate of their remains.

Neither is there any evidence that in late 1924 Ramo stated in any other forum that his sons' ashes were interred at Toowong. On 28 November he placed an *in memoriam* notice in the press, dedicated to the memory of Victor, Henry, Gordon and Fred. The main body of the notice is a poem addressed to Fred. One verse declares:

Memories of you come stealing
As I build your resting place,
Oh! That tragedy had never
Robbed me of your boyish
face.³²

The other three young men are memorialised but without any suggestion they would find a resting place alongside Fred. Similarly, in the funeral notice Ramo placed in *The Brisbane Courier* on the eve of the ceremony, he invited friends and sympathisers to attend "the reinterment of my

adopted son Fred, and the dedication of the Mausoleum."³³ There is no reference to interring other remains. The press reports of his speech at the ceremony the next day also contain no mention of him making such a claim.

Strong evidence for the proposition that no such claim was made by Ramo or his associates can be evinced by a close reading of Bennett's oration at the ceremony. It was quoted comprehensively (probably in verbatim) by *The Daily Standard*. Bennett told the crowd that "there has been placed within this mausoleum the remains of one whose end was surrounded by circumstances dramatically tragic and unspeakably sad." After this piece of information was disclosed, he moved to another aspect of the temple's role, the two sections of the speech punctuated by an emphatic 'but':

But this citadel of the dead,
raised for the most part by a
father's loving hand, a tribute
to the dead and an exhortation
of the living, stands *also as a*
memorial for other lives,
victims of the lust for war...
(my emphasis)³⁴

In this transitional passage, Bennett is making a sharp distinction between the temple's function as a

'citadel of the dead', a role he has already covered in his comments on Fred's awful suicide, and the temple's second purpose as a 'memorial for other lives.' Logically, the adjective 'other' can refer only to Ramo's soldier sons and, by extension, all victims of war. Clearly, Bennett is not intending that any of the war dead are to be considered part of the temple's citadel role. For them, the temple serves as a monument. It is only for Fred that it serves as a final resting place.

If the story about the ashes did not come from Ramo, where did it originate? The claim was made by at least three local newspapers on 8 December 1924, and one on 12 December.³⁵ The wording of each report is similar, suggesting the story was picked up and replicated across the mastheads, a practice still common in lazy journalism today. Significantly, not one of the reports attribute the story to Ramo. Also worth noting, the Brisbane newspaper politically closest to Ramo and most familiar with his project, the trade union masthead *The Daily Standard*, did not include the ashes story in its detailed account of the ceremony.³⁶ It is reasonable to conclude from this evidence that a newspaper reporter either concocted the story, heard a rumour and published it as fact

without checking, or misinterpreted the temple's dual role and assumed it was a tomb for the remains of the soldier sons as well as those of Fred. Perhaps the truth is a mixture of all three of these possibilities.

McKay herself makes no claim that Ramo was the source of the ashes story. It was a story, she writes, available in "contemporary accounts," for which she cites the press articles.³⁷

The only piece of evidence that could lend credence to the allegation that Ramo made up lies about his sons' war remains is the *in memoriam* notice he placed in *The Brisbane Courier* in November 1925, almost a year after the temple dedication. In it he pays tribute to Victor, Henry, Gordon and Fred with a verse:

You were strong, like the reeds
upon the Nile,
Which no storm can break,
But cut down like the flowers
in the field
By the God of War (Mars),
Loving hands laid your
remains
Within a resting place,
Which will be a guide to the
unthinking,
To save the lives of many,
For the honour and glory and
benefit of mankind.³⁸

As the verse does not name any of the sons, it is not clear to whom the 'you' refers. But there is a strong case that, paradoxically, it referred to all four sons while specifically addressing only Fred. As Ramo saw it, the God of War, for him a figure of generalised violence in capitalist society, had cut down all of them, and Fred symbolised this wider loss. This pattern of memorialising was evident in the notice of November 1924, which had honoured all four sons but addressed its verse specifically to the one who had died in Brisbane and would be entombed in the temple. It is also consistent with Ramo's words on 6 December 1924: "the mausoleum was a tribute to the memory of his lost loved ones and a protest against war..."³⁹

(b) Victor and Henry

On the strength of the evidence, the allegation of an ashes hoax is unfounded. But what of the main allegation? What about the existence of Henry and Victor? There is no evidence that anyone using the known variations of the family name – Retzlaff, Redcliff, Redcliffe, Raymo and Ramo – and with the given name Henry or Victor, served with the Commonwealth forces in World War One. We can confidently conclude it did not happen.

There are, however, other possibilities. We know Fred was unofficially 'adopted' by Ramo in Brisbane. Could Henry and Victor also have been unofficially adopted, perhaps during Ramo's Sydney years when he was prominent in radical circles? In that case, their surnames, like Fred's, would not have been Ramo, Retzlaff or any known variation, and it is unlikely we will ever discover who they were. 547 Victors (including spelling variations) and 2871 Henrys (including spelling variations) who served in AIF uniform in World War One are buried in war graves in Western Europe.⁴⁰

There is an even more tantalising possibility. Could Henry and Victor have been the offspring of a relationship before Ramo arrived in Australia? In his application for naturalisation, Ramo gave his name as Richard Paul Carl Retzlaff and stated he was born in Stargard, Pommern, on 7 November 1863. Although part of Prussia in 1863, Pommern (or Pomerania) would soon become a province of unified Germany. Following World War Two, it was incorporated into Poland.⁴¹

If Victor and Henry were born in Germany, they may have served on the German side in the war. Two

clues, taken together, leave open this possibility. Both men were said to have died on the Western Front in 1915, yet the Australian forces did not begin arriving in Europe until 1916, after they were evacuated from Gallipoli.⁴² Messines, where Victor is said to have died, was in German hands in August 1915, having been captured by them in November of the previous year. The combatants in that field of conflict in 1915 were German, French, British and Canadian. If we accept for a moment that Ramo was not a liar, we have to conclude that he himself was tacitly ruling out that these two men served with the Australian forces.

Further to this, Ramo had had carved on the inside wall of the temple that Victor was 33 when he died, and Henry was 29. If true, this would mean they were born before Ramo emigrated to Australia in 1887. If they existed, they could not have been children from any relationship he formed on these shores.

Searches of the German archives for Ramo/Retzlaff and any offspring have proved inconclusive. There are numerous records pertaining to people bearing the Retzlaff surname and various combinations of Ramo's

given names, but none specifically match the data provided by Ramo himself. Birth records for various Victors (or Viktors) and Henrys (or Heinrichs) have been discovered too, but none has so far been linked to Ramo.

A search of war records has revealed that at least one Viktor Retzlaff and several Heinrich Retzlaffs were wounded or killed in Europe in World War One. Their data does not precisely match Ramo's information either, and these records do not reveal parentage or details of siblings. One Heinrich Retzlaff was killed at Luneville, France, on 4 November 1915. Another Heinrich is buried in the German military cemetery at Menen in Belgium. A Viktor Retzlaff from Karthaus, West Prussia, was reported as wounded on 14 October 1917. Altogether, 665 Retzlaffs killed in World War One have been buried in German war cemeteries.⁴³ These discoveries are, of course, mere starting points, not outcomes. Much more research is required.

As things stand, it is true to say that Ramo might have made up Victor and Henry. But to state as a matter of certainty that they are "complete inventions" is a leap too far, even on the balance of probabilities. For now, we simply do not know. The

claim of lying can be taken as no more than an allegation, at best a theory.

If the story of Victor and Henry was concocted, Ramo was certainly persistent in maintaining the fabrication. He stuck to it long after the temple had faded from public consciousness, long after he could have expected sympathetic attention from a fresh public airing. He was still honouring four sons in November 1930, as a small notice in *The Telegraph's* Roll of Honour column attests:

In mournful but loving memory of my four boys, Victor, Henry, Gordon, killed in the last war, 1915; Fred, died in Brisbane, 1923. Inserted by their father.⁴⁴

Nine years later, in November 1939, as the world again plunged into war, Ramo placed a slightly-revised version of the notice in *The Courier-Mail*:

In loving but mournful memory of my 4 boys, Victor, killed Messines, 1915; Henry, died of wounds, Belgium, 1915; Gordon, killed at Gallipoli, 1915; Fred, died Brisbane 28/11/23. They gave their lives to end war. What now? Inserted by their Father.⁴⁵

The message here returns to the themes of the temple erected 15 years earlier. The violent deaths of four young men are linked to the scourge of war. But whereas in 1924 Ramo explicitly looked in hope to socialism as a solution, in 1939 he simply asks, "What now?" In this notice, Ramo is paying tribute to those he has lost, but he is also asking the hard question of an international political order turning once more to mass violence. He is again invoking the radical understanding offered by his Temple of Peace. What now? A question for its time, directed at everyone: the governments of 1939 embarking on a new war, the people who will be its victims, the movement that rose against similar bloodshed 23 years earlier. Ramo's question and its implied critique remain central to the story.

The Temple of Peace as Radical Heritage

What should our attitude be to the temple in the light of what we now know? Historians have an obligation to be honest about the people they hold up as noble. In the case of Richard Ramo, we owe it to his wife Eliza and her sons and descendants to tell the truth about Ramo's abuse and neglect. And if it does turn out that Victor and Henry were fictitious, we must acknowledge that too.

Conversely, if we discover that they did exist and were German, we must confront the likelihood that Ramo abandoned not one but two families. There can be no shying away from any of that.

The question here, though, is how to evaluate the Temple of Peace. The official assessment has downplayed the temple's politics, or, more accurately, subsumed the politics into flights of speculation about the mental health of the temple's creator. Somehow, Ramo's purported psychological ill-health has implicated the radical political position he was attempting to present, the one apparently cancelling out the other. This conflation of the psychological with the political was of course made easy by Ramo's insistence on using his personal circumstances as a vehicle for a radical critique. In a sense, he was asking for trouble. But does he deserve it? More to the point, does the temple deserve it?

The answer is largely about consistency. If we are to frame the story of every person represented on the Queensland Heritage Register with a psychological analysis of their deeds, good and bad, the Heritage Council has much retrospective work to do, and we have many salacious or harrowing stories to look forward to when that work is done.

Alternatively, if places are to be assessed for their significance as "State cultural heritage", as the *Queensland Heritage Act* says they ought to be assessed, then that standard should apply to all sites, including the Temple of Peace. Having determined that the temple is "important in demonstrating the evolution or pattern of Queensland history," the reasons for that determination should comprehensively inform the Heritage Council's entry on the Register.⁴⁶ Above anything else it might be, the temple is, and should be recognised as, the material legacy of both the mass movement against military conscription and war that convulsed Queensland (and the nation) during World War One, and the radical socialist tradition which influenced that movement and continued to shape Queensland politics for much of the twentieth century.

To that end, the Register entry and the didactic text at the site should contain far less speculation about Ramo's psychological state, and far more facts about the political causes he and his temple represent. For a start, his history of socialist activism could be included.

Ramo was a well-known member of the Social Democratic League (SDL) in Sydney, serving as an

organiser and trustee for the group and, on occasion, as one of its orators.⁴⁷ Formed in April 1917, the SDL was principally a propaganda organisation, aiming to spread the word of socialism throughout the labour movement. Although not directly associated with the Industrial Workers of the World, the League was influenced by the IWW's revolutionary class outlook. The SDL based its politics on four principles: class struggle, industrial unionism, anti-militarism and internationalism. It aspired to bring about a system wherein "the means of production will be socially owned and democratically controlled by those who carry on the processes of wealth production."⁴⁸

As the conscription threat revived in 1917, the SDL worked closely with the Anti-Conscription League (ACL), the two groups often sharing speaking platforms to present a radical antiwar perspective. At one of its first public outings, a rally in the Sydney Domain on 6 May, the SDL joined with the ACL to sponsor a resolution welcoming the workers' overthrow of tsarist rule in Russia and the first stirrings of the workers' revolution in Germany:

We...view with pleasure the reported rising of the German

workers against the war-mad militarists of their own country, and trust that the time is not far distant when they will be able to join hands with their comrades in all other countries, and throw off for ever the abominable yoke of militarism, imperialism, and their corollary, war, thus paving the way for the final overthrow of capitalism, and the establishment of the International Co-operative Commonwealth.⁴⁹

This set the tone for their collaborative activism throughout the coming months of the conscription struggle.

It was through the SDL that Ramo would have gotten to know Harry Scott Bennett, who toured Australia extensively in this period as a lecturer for the SDL's kindred organisation, the Victorian Socialist Party (VSP).⁵⁰ The examples set by the SDL and the VSP motivated Brisbane socialists to form the Queensland Socialist League (QSL) in April 1918, with objectives mirroring those of its interstate counterparts.⁵¹ The Queensland League survived long enough to leave its mark on a rising new generation of Queensland radicals. One of their number, the young stonemason and Scottish immigrant, John Bramwell (JB)

Miles, went on to become General Secretary of the Communist Party of Australia from 1929 to 1948, during the height of its influence on Queensland and Australian political and industrial life.⁵²

This is the political provenance of the Temple of Peace. The site undoubtedly resonates with Ramo's sadness. But far from "evoking a sense of loss, instability, despair and hopelessness," as the Heritage Council claims, the temple actually represents the rallying cry of socialism as it swept across global, national and Queensland politics in the early decades of the 20th century. It is this strident antiwar and socialist outlook that gives the temple its heritage significance. It is those causes which drew thousands of people to the dedication ceremony in 1924 and which continue to attract people to the site 100 years later.

The Temple of Peace is the heritage of leftwing radicalism. Its treatment by the gatekeepers of history demonstrates that the intellectual fields of history and heritage, no less than any other sphere of human activity, are sites of contestation. History as knowledge, as our understanding of what has gone before this moment, is not something made in the past; it is continually made and remade in the

present. The case of the Temple of Peace shows the dangers of leaving this process in the hands of the establishment media, the agencies of the state or the practitioners of 'professional' history. State protection of sites like the temple is important and welcome, and there should be more of it. But if the integrity of radical history as knowledge is to be preserved, it must continually be fought for by the people and movements that make that history every day.

Jeff Rickertt wishes to thank **Professor Andrew Bonnell** from The University of Queensland for his assistance with searching the German records.

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The Queensland Journal of Labour History

Jeff Rickertt has compiled an online spreadsheet of all articles in the last 39 issues of the *QJLH*

This can be found at:

<http://brisbanelabourhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Index-to-QJLH.pdf>

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'Deal Us In': SEQ Casino Organising and the Strikes of 2001 and 2009

Alex North

The hospitality sector is notorious for wage theft, job insecurity, and miniscule levels of unionisation¹ – with one notable exception, *casinos*. There are 33,000 casino workers in Australia and 11,000 of them are union members,² meaning that casinos are one of the most highly unionised industries in Australia, comparable with the education and training sector at 27 per cent.³

As former Brisbane casino union delegate, Andrew Bough, phrased it, "behind the glitz and glamour...[there] is a huge army of workers helping, making everything run smoothly and look perfect for patrons."⁴ Behind this façade, has been a long history of intense industrial activity, lockouts, strikes, and litigation.

The Casino and the Casino Worker

Casinos are entertainment factories. Like a production line, dealers line up across the rainbow

sea of the gaming floor, each repeatedly performing the same game in exactly the same, highly-regulated motions.⁵ The hundreds of chefs, stewards, and food and beverage attendants collectively produce thousands of dishes in each round of service, while cleaners keep the place clean and laundry attendants wash both staff and guests' clothes.

Casinos in south-east Queensland have their own maintenance department, store-persons, theatre/audio-visual staff, and a legion of security guards and surveillance operators to surveil not only their patrons, but staff as well. The Gold Coast casino alone employs approximately 2,100 workers, with the recently completed Brisbane Queens Wharf Casino projected to employ 8,000 workers when at full capacity.

As a large employer and wielder of capital, the relationship between casinos and state governments in Australia has been characterised as

one of interdependence.⁶ Casino lobbyists and apologists boast of the necessity of the gaming industry, as levies and taxes alone are expected to contribute 8.6% of Queensland's State Government's taxation revenue in 2024-2025.⁷ It is a matter of debate as to whether casinos produce any value or merely redistribute value created by other sectors, but as former Star Brisbane Croupier and UWW delegate Kyle Bennett put it, "you don't take home anything close to what you take at the table."⁸

Early Organising Efforts

Hospitality has historically been a poorly unionised industry. However, during the 1970s and the 1980s, the Federated Liquor and Allied Industries Employees Union of Australia (LTU) had a significant foothold in Brisbane pubs and clubs.⁹ Many of these businesses had been compelled to facilitate "closed shop" union arrangements, due to the LTU's tactic of leveraging its power at the point of production and distribution at the breweries (most notably the Castlemaine Brewery). If employers refused to cooperate, the LTU brewery union members and delegates would disrupt the supply of alcohol to the pubs with orders 'conveniently being misplaced' or deliveries turning up short or even

going missing. Although the union had this membership in the hospitality sector, the reality behind the bar was that the union lacked an active and engaged membership.¹⁰ This weakness would prove fatal during the New Right employer offensives in the 1980s with the rise of neoliberalism—epitomised by the viciously anti-union, corporate-backed H.R. Nicholls Society.¹¹ After the union movement's ability to use primary and secondary boycott tactics was crushed in the aftermath of the Dollar Sweets (1985) and Mudginberri disputes (1983-1986), the LTU's membership began to collapse in pubs and clubs across Brisbane.

1.1. The Gold Coast Casino Industrial and Political Struggle for a First Agreement

The First Casino License in Queensland was granted to Jupiters Casino and Resorts in 1986 through the *Casino Control Act* of 1982.

In the first few years of opening, Jupiters Gold Coast agreed to a closed shop arrangement with the LTU to ensure industrial peace and steady supply-lines of grog on site. The union had a limited on-site presence, with only one delegate/collector appointed to collect the dues and connect members with an



Bird's Eye View Of Jupiter's Casino on the Gold Coast (2010)
(By thienzieyung <https://www.flickr.com/photos/26978304@N08/5279587103>)

official if a dispute arose on site, as the union focused instead on its traditional base at the breweries. Once the fallout of the Mudginberri dispute became clear, Jupiters—like many employers of 1986/7—simply stopped providing the union with payroll deductions and threatened litigation against the union if it attempted to use the old boycott tactics.¹² Membership then collapsed. However, due to the centralised wage fixing system at the time, the union retained a finger on the pulse as a party to the *Casino Employees Award* and advocated for pay increases at each review.¹³

The introduction of Enterprise

Bargaining Agreements (EBAs) by the Keating government in 1991 was a massive paradigm shift for all unions. It changed the orientation of organising, from industry-wide award campaigns to individual business and even sub-sections of workers within an enterprise. To improve the wages and conditions of casino workers, the LTU would now need to negotiate an agreement with the casino and have at least fifty per cent plus one of employees in favour of bargaining if the casino refused.¹⁴ Unable to adapt to the new industrial regime, and weakened by redundancies in the breweries, the LTU's membership dwindled.¹⁵ In an era of 'union rationalisation'¹⁶ and



Brisbane's (non-closed) Treasury Casino, with the recently opened Star Casino in the background (January 2025)
Image: QJLH

super amalgamations, the LTU decided to amalgamate in 1992 with the Federated Miscellaneous Workers' Union of Australia, to form the Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers' Union (LHMU).

The transition to a service-based economy in the 1990s, saw a decline of the historically well-unionised large-scale employers in manufacturing and heavy industry. The LHMU decided to put resources into growing the union and identified the casino industry as a potentially new core industry for organising. A new section was formed in 1995, *Casino Employees Queensland*, that targeted Jupiters Gold Coast and saw one hundred workers join up in a

campaign for a first-generation Agreement.

Together with this campaign, the LHMU utilised its relationship with the Goss Labor state government to apply pressure on Jupiters to negotiate with the union. The then LHMU National Secretary, Jeff Lawrence, met with Jupiters general manager and signed a 'Memorandum of Intent' in 1996 that outlined a framework for negotiations, including the facilitation of payroll deductions of union dues. After a year of organising, the union's newsletter *LHMU News* felt confident enough to boast that 'Jupiters joins the union'!¹⁷ However, negotiations broke down in early 1997, with no progress being

made on the union's key claims of wage increases, job security, and entrenching union rights. Jupiters then rushed an agreement out to vote but it was voted down by workers.¹⁸ Peter Knight, a union member at Jupiters at the time, said that 'the company was putting up a list of pay rates that didn't match what the Union [was fighting for].'¹⁹ Irene Munro, who was later to be a key figure in the union's organising efforts in 2000-2001, understood that the company's appetite for an enterprise agreement ended when the vote failed.²⁰ Membership at this critical stage remained below twenty per cent and the state government's willingness to pressure Jupiters changed when Goss was no longer the Premier. Jupiters saw an opportunity to retaliate. Thereafter, union officials were denied entry to the site, deductions ceased, union materials and notices seized and destroyed, and union activists sacked.

The Brisbane Casino – Political Struggle for a first Agreement

Before the Brisbane 'Treasury' Casino even opened its doors in 1995, motions were already in place for an agreement.

The Goss Labor government's granting of Queensland's second casino license to Conrad Hotels

(later to merge with Gold Coast Jupiters casino) came with the caveat that there needed to be an agreement made with the union movement. As a site of potentially thousands of members, two unions pressed to negotiate a 'Greenfields' agreement with Conrad: the LHMU and the Australian Workers' Union (AWU).

A 'Greenfields' agreement is a term used to describe an Enterprise Bargaining Agreement that is negotiated between an Employer and a Union to set the terms of employment for a new business that is *yet to employ any employees*. For unions, it is an opportunity to be a party to an agreement at ground zero and lay the foundations to build membership. For employers, it allows them to avoid a disruptive organising campaign by a union to establish an EBA and gives them leverage in negotiations as a union without members is powerless.

Unlike at the Gold Coast, an agreement was reached with the LHMU. Gary Bullock, who was at the time the Assistant Branch Secretary of the Union, put it this way:

Unfortunately, with the Greenfields legislation at the time, it allowed for the AWU to come in, so they effectively

started an auction on workers' conditions...there was quite a lot of debate internally in our union [LHMU] about it...but if we didn't negotiate, the AWU would have taken the first agreement and the union's view was at the time...that we believed even if starting at a lower rate we could organise to get it back up, as we were unsure whether our colleague union [AWU] could do that...We eventually said enough was enough with the company, and were threatening to campaign against the Company but they then agreed and signed with us.²¹

Conrad agreed to grant the union access to new employee inductions when they commenced for a closed-door opportunity to try to sign them up. While the union managed to sign up 600 workers over the first year of the casinos opening,²² membership began to decline as campaigns for better wages and conditions would have to wait several years before the Greenfields agreement expired. When Jupiter's acquired Conrads, the relationship between the casino, the union, and the state government fell apart and Jupiters terminated the union's induction access. With staff turnover sitting between 40-50 per

cent, organising the casino became something of a Sisyphean effort.

Over the next decade, several replacement agreements would be negotiated with wages higher than their non-agreement Gold Coast counterparts,²³ but as membership lagged between 20-30 per cent of the workforce and as there was rampant free-ridership, negotiations were more of a one-sided affair.²⁴

A Tale of Two Strikes: 2001 Gold Coast and 2009 Brisbane

"Deal US In": The 2001 Gold Coast Casino Strike.

When Irene Munro joined the LHMU as a casino organiser full-time, she made the decision to 'go full Gold Coast' and relocate there. Irene has described some of the challenges she and other officials faced when trying to organise the site: Jupiters openly flaunted right of entry provisions and denied organisers access to meet with workers, workers were sectoral and fragmented into different departments, and a mindset was prevalent amongst the workers that the union was 'weak' and 'incapable of standing up to the casino.'²⁵ With onsite meetings blocked, that left only offsite meetings.

Front-facing casino staff (especially dealers) tended to be younger workers who enjoyed the nightlife that the Gold Coast offered. Irene and the other LHMU officials decided that they would try instead to meet workers at the bars and nightclubs they frequented after work. Over time and many drinking occasions, Irene reports that they built relationships—even friendships—with casino staff who would become activists and, later, delegates. Offsite meetings solidified the officials' credibility, dedication, and trust to fight for the workers and led these activists to successfully agitate and spread union materials inside the casino. When the union eventually won a case at the Industrial Relations Commission against Jupiters for impeding union officials' right to enter the workplace, a network of unionists inside the casino ensured a steady supply of workers that now wanted to hear what the union had to say. The message had come at the right time. The Gold Coast casino was now the last casino in the country without an agreement and its staff were paid an average of \$3.00 an hour less than comparable workers at other [unionised] casinos.²⁶

As the strategy focused on front-facing staff, back-facing staff (such as chefs and cleaners) were not

organised. Gary Bullock recalled that despite the progress, there still was not yet 'a sense of unionism across the casino' and there was a us-versus-them mentality with the union perceived as only advocating for the front-facing staff.²⁷ However, there was one thing that united all Jupiters workers—*The Watchdog*.

The Watchdog was an unofficial staff newsletter that ruthlessly critiqued the company, poked fun at the overzealous union officials, and spread salacious gossip. It was a local hit and widely read by staff, much to the chagrin of management. Its authorship was a mystery to managers and union organisers alike. Irene saw this as the missing key to the site, "as *The Watchdog* was the real union on site, we had to find out who ran it and convince them to become union."²⁸

The tone of *The Watchdog* changed when negotiations recommenced for an enterprise agreement and again stalled. The editor approached Irene in secret and agreed to join with the union and together form one voice. After this, membership soared.

In January 2001, the union launched a 'union badge' industrial action campaign, where employees



flaunted the uniform policy, donning badges with union slogans and informing patrons of how the house refused to pay out for staff. One croupier wore enough badges on his blue suit to be mistaken for military regalia, but on closer inspection they revealed the message that Conrad Jupiters really put the ‘CON in Conrad.’ The casino tolerated this action at first, but when multiple dealers started to up-the-ante and wear more than one badge, tolerance reached its end.

On Friday night, 2 February 2001, the casino's management showed its hand. A lockout notice was handed to fifteen of the union's ringleaders.²⁹ The ultimatum was

clear—either remove the badges or we will remove you. In their turn, as *Workplace Express* wrote at the time, “all but three of the 100 gaming table employees walked off the floor” in protest and gathered workers in a march out of the casino.³⁰

Doubling down, Jupiters then tabled new counterclaims to cut back dealers' break times to 15 minutes per hour.³¹ Over the next few months, a back-and-forth ensued between the casino and the union, with multiple rounds of lockouts and rolling industrial action. In June 2001, members had had enough and endorsed an indefinite picket.

Friday night, 22 June 2001. Irene and several union officials disguised themselves as members of the public and snuck into the casino. Delegates were ready at their tables, midway through dealing games of blackjack, roulette, and Texas hold ‘em. At peak time the signal was given. Delegates and organisers revealed whistles and began blowing on them loudly, announcing the time to strike. A massive walk out was then staged.³²

On the entry roads to Casino Island, the LHMU organised massive picket lines to surround the casino



Gold Coast picket line 2001 (Image: Alex North)

and when media arrived next day, striking workers could be seen standing with signs reading ‘Jupiters \$ All Gain \$ No Pay \$\$\$\$’, ‘Jupiter and Uranus, Closer than You Think!’, and a call for the casino to finally ‘Deal US In.’

Negotiations then resumed. The action was immediately effective, especially as the main money generators—the licenced games dealers—were not replaceable and the main gaming floors were virtually shut.³³

After a week of action, the dispute ended with both parties reaching agreement,³⁴ and the house finally folded.

The struggle for an enterprise agreement at Jupiters had begun as early as 1992 and finally concluded almost a decade later in 2001. The

pressure brought on the casino by the strike resulted in one of the best casino agreements in the country. In the end, the LHMU could boast of a union density of 99 per cent among gaming employees at the casino³⁵ and having successfully led one of the few cases of serious industrial action in the hospitality industry.

‘The Strike that Never Happened’: 2009 Brisbane Casino

In contrast to the Gold Coast casino, the Brisbane 'Treasury' casino began its life as a 'union site' without a single union member.

Without a history of struggle, agitation, and campaigning to fight for an agreement, the union had struggled to build a membership amongst a workforce that was

accustomed to ‘free-riding’ the wage increases negotiated in tri-yearly agreements. In the subsequent years since the 2001 Gold Coast strike, the Brisbane casino had fallen far behind its glittering sister casino. Leading up to the 2008 negotiations, the union decided to make a significant push to build membership on the site with additional resources³⁶ and to prepare the members to follow the path laid by the Gold Coast and take industrial action. By the first EBA meeting held on 10 November 2008, the union had managed to unionise exactly half of the workforce and train a new generation of delegates. In a precipitous repetition of events, the casino began utilising intimidation tactics by blocking officials access to the site and their workers.

On 14 April 2009 the union organised the first in a series of mass meetings across from the Casino at Queens Park to overcome the entry issue. Over two hundred workers rallied in the green space on their off-shift or breaks. For those on-shift, members inside the casino working in security and surveillance had secretly hacked into the casino’s PA system to broadcast the live rally throughout the public and staff sections of the casino.³⁷ The *Brisbane Times* reported the union’s message at the

mass meeting, that ‘profits up casinos workers’ wages down.’³⁸ It noted that the parties were far apart, with the union seeking a wage increase of 5.5 per cent per year to achieve equity with the Gold Coast casino. After the company’s first ballot of the agreement was voted down, union members voted to escalate the dispute and take industrial action.

In 2009, the *Fair Work Act* had come into force and changed the laws surrounding industrial action. The Act required the union to make an application to the new *Fair Work Commission* for a *protected industrial action ballot order*, which the Australian Electoral Commission would conduct through a ballot via mail. At the conclusion of the application process—which could take over a month—the union was permitted to take limited forms of protected industrial action, but only after giving three days written notice to the employer and specifying the action to be taken and the duration. In an echo of the penal powers under the defunct *Arbitration and Conciliation Act*³⁹, any unprotected action or threat of action made by the union outside of this process potentially carried severe and hefty penalties for the union, its delegates, and even individual rank-and-file members. The



Brisbane Casino mass meeting at Queensland Park (2009) (Image: Alex North)

planned strike action at Treasury would be one of the first cases under this new regime.

After a month had passed since the Queens Park mass meetings endorsing strike action, the union’s application was approved. The union then served notice to Conrad Jupiters that members would engage in a full stoppage of work in three days.

Less than 24 hours before the intended strike action, the Casino’s Human Resources team discovered a technical error in the union’s paperwork and swiftly applied to the Commission for an immediate suspension of the impending action. The Commission ruled in the casino’s favour. The action was declared unprotected.

Jupiters then articulated their

position very carefully to the union. The company would pursue the full penalties available to them under the new laws and would reserve the right to litigate against any and every individual member who participated in the strike. Potentially facing thousands of dollars in fines, the union organisers called off the strike.

The casino then played its winning hand. Its Human Resources team mocked up a quick agreement and began bombarding their employees to vote yes or face a second worse offer. As Ian Rintoul reported in *Solidarity* at the time, a union delegate had been pressured by his supervisor to ‘vote yes...or we don’t get a pay rise this year’ and to ‘do the right thing.’⁴⁰

Meanwhile, the union membership was divided. Half of the members

still wanted to pursue strike action, no matter how long the reapplication process would take, while the other half felt demoralised and accepted defeat. Gary Bullock recalled how the site was split down the middle.⁴¹ Only 50 per cent of the casino was unionised and only half of the membership now wanted to continue the fight. When the day of the vote arrived, the delegates committee mirrored this division and made no decision on whether to endorse the offer or not. The results of the vote came in razor thin. 51 per cent in favour, 49 per cent against – with only eight votes separating the two.⁴²

The fallout broke the union. The militant delegates led a mass resignation of the membership, and the remaining delegates resigned in despondency. A former union delegate went to the media and was reported saying “I feel as though I was ripped off by the union, paying for more than six months membership which in the end resulted in nothing.”⁴³

That ‘nothing’, at face value, seems like a contradiction. The agreement did achieve annual wage increases of 3.5 per cent per year with other key union claims incorporated, which would exceed their dues contributions (all in an economic

environment dominated by the global financial crisis). However, that ‘nothing’ had less to do with monetary gains and more to do with the feeling that the union had failed to show leadership at a critical time and had bungled the strike. Yet, if the organisers had led a strike of only 25 per cent of the workforce, it is unlikely that the action would have proved effective. As Gary Bullock summarised it, “it was a ‘lose-lose’ situation.”⁴⁴

The legacy of the ‘strike that never happened’ at the Brisbane Casino, was still echoing as late as 2022.⁴⁵ When former casino union organiser and Gold Coast union delegate, Danny Lorroway, joined the casinos’ team in 2011, the Brisbane casino site was referred to as a ‘shit site’—due to the hostility of workers on the site towards the union and the minuscule membership.⁴⁶ New organisers would get a crash course on this history when starting out on site, and new workers were forewarned by their elder workmates not to join the union because they ‘bungled the strike in 2009.’⁴⁷

Political Power and Union Power – Deed of Agreement 2017

Laborism—close ties with the Australian Labor Party—has been a

tenet of the Australian union movement since the rise of the ALP. In its most pragmatic and concrete sense, it is about achieving the union’s aims through political means.

In 2015, the Queensland Liberal National Party (LNP) government led by Campbell Newman was defeated by the Labor Party led by Palaszczuk. United Voice—the renamed LHMU—had played a highly influential role in providing donations and volunteers on the ground to secure the election of the new government.⁴⁸

The outgoing LNP government had unofficially granted the lucrative new mega casino licence for ‘Queens Wharf’ to the current owners of the Brisbane and Gold Coast casinos, Star Entertainment Group. United Voice utilised its political relationship with the new Palaszczuk government to apply pressure on Star to discuss their relationship with the union, in particular, at the Brisbane casino. The United Voice State Secretary at the time, Gary Bullock, says the union used its political relationship within the Palaszczuk government to apply pressure on Star to discuss their behaviour towards the union, using the threat of putting the new casino licence up for tender as leverage. Given the tumultuous

history, especially at the Brisbane casino, serious concessions were sought by the union. The result was the establishment of a ‘Deed of Agreement,’ which outlined several new rights for the union and some that had been lost when Conrad-Jupiters merged. Officials would now always be granted access to the site, given the right to 30-minute paid inductions of new staff members, provided an on-site office with printing facilities for delegates, and the company would agree to limit the use of labour-hire and casual workers.

The Deed of Agreement emerged as a tool to overcome an organising deadlock, that arose from an unhappy marriage of anti-union legislation and the legacy of the 2009 failed strike.

When the present author of this article joined the casinos’ team in 2021 as a union organiser, the Deed had improved the organising environment. No longer limited to restrictive entry requirements under the *Fair Work Act*, officials and delegates could establish a permanent presence in the workplace and focus on campaigning and organising around issues, and not lose time in costly legal battles at the Commission for access. During the period from 2017 to 2022, the

union's density had increased significantly onsite with this increased access, and for the first time exceeded 50 per cent of the site. While the Deed did not replace a typical organising strategy, it opened a pathway in the long shadow of 2009.

The Gold Coast casino has always—and continues to—have a significantly higher level of unionisation to its Brisbane counterpart. What distinguishes the two is the success and failure of the two strikes and the origin of their agreements. For workers in Brisbane, it seems like the EBA fell from heaven or ex nihilo, as wages and conditions were already 'won' before their positions were even advertised. While for Gold Coast workers, their EBA emerged from a tumultuous struggle and workers—new and old—knew the tale of the great strike.

Lessons

At the end of the *Your Rights at Work* campaign in 2007, the union movement had hoped that the incoming Rudd-Labor government would set the stage for a union renaissance.⁴⁹ That did not happen. Instead, the *Fair Work Act* emerged as a kind of Frankenstein's monster. It retained the skeleton of *Workchoices*, restricting union

activity and regulating industrial action, while patching on pieces to restore rights to the individual rather than the collective.

The quagmire of industrial law that unions find themselves in today is in large part due to the ALP's pro-capital rebalancing of workplace laws since Hawke/Keating. There is some irony in the casino union having to rely on leveraging the ALP to navigate the miasma that they themselves created.

The story of organising the casinos is a microcosm of this tendency. Where, in the 21st century, a strike can be broken not by bullets and batons, but by a mis-click or typo in the paperwork.

And while sometimes the player wins the game, ultimately, the house always wins. Why then should we change the rules, when it is the players that should stand up and reclaim the game.

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The Buried History of Newstead

Allan Gardiner

The Brisbane suburb of Newstead lies north of Fortitude Valley and south of the ‘nob’s hill’ of Hamilton. Here, Breakfast Creek meets the Brisbane River, although Jonathan Sriranganathan, former Greens councillor, points out that the creek is simply the last part of Enoggera Creek, from the Aboriginal name, Euoggeru. Jonathan Sri’s essay contrasts the area’s current appearance with its history as an Indigenous Australian settlement. He identifies that the existence of Aboriginal settlement directly led to the preservation of green spaces in the area; the expanding city was compelled to skirt the perimeter of the villages; while Breakfast Creek lingers as the redundant name of a waterway that already has another name, the Aboriginal town of Breakfast Creek – which featured so prominently in the invaders’ minds and public discourse throughout the 1800s – has ceased to exist in our city’s mainstream memory.¹

There is also another history below the current structures: Newstead’s working-class history. Three

buildings clustered around the mouth of Breakfast Creek – two still standing and one now gone – suggest something about that unmemorialised history.

Newstead House

Newstead House was built in 1845 after a decade or so of forays into the site by the colonisers. The official history of the house dismisses the Aboriginal prior occupation by grammatical sleight of hand; “Once settlers arrived, colonisation changed the landscape.” This presents the change as value neutral and peaceful. The history implies a continuity: Just as Aboriginals used to meet in the area, the Newstead House toffs carried on the tradition by holding parties!² No mention of the essential use of Aboriginal fisheries for food for the early colonists. No mention of the repeated burning down of the Aboriginal settlements thereafter.³

The official history puffs up the procession of capitalist owners of the House but says nothing of their roles in Brisbane’s social and economic system, which is the sort



Flood waters at the Breakfast Creek Hotel, Brisbane, 1893 (no date) (SLQ FL20501)

of history that allows ordinary people to understand what their antecedents experienced and how we got to our present situation.

I visited the House with my partner’s granddaughter. After viewing the rich material evidence of the lives of these “upstairs” dwellers we ventured down to the servant’s quarters. “Is this the dungeon?” asked Willow. The historical information boards down there said nothing about the obvious fact that the area was windowless, cramped and dominated by smoky fireplaces supplying the feasts for the owners and guests.

At least the servants here did not have to worry about the frequent

flooding of the river, as the House is carefully located on high ground. This safety was not assured for other cellar-dwelling toilers in nearby properties.

Breakfast Creek Hotel

One such property still stands today, diagonally opposite Newstead House. This is the Breakfast Creek Hotel. According to the Queensland Heritage Register:

At the rear of the Hotel were the kitchen, servant’s rooms and stables, the latter floored with hardwood blocks set in cement. With the ground being particularly damp, the whole of the subfloor was

occupied by cellars, the walls and floors of which were constructed of concrete, and in effect forming the foundations.⁴

As the picture above shows, ‘damp’ might have seemed to the servants to be a bit of an understatement!

Although the Breakfast Creek Hotel is now refurbished and caters to a more middle-class clientele, it was originally the watering hole for the wharfies and sailors from the nearby Hamilton Wharves. The pub has another link to labour history, because of the man for whom it was built in 1889, William McNaughton Galloway. Galloway was secretary of the Seamen's Union when he became the first President of the Brisbane Trades and Labour Council, established in 1885. (This first version of the TLC was short-lived; it was disbanded four years later to make way for the Australian Labour Federation.)⁵

In 1888, Galloway was the first person to contest an election as a member of the Australian labour movement when he ran unsuccessfully in the district of Fortitude Valley for the Queensland Legislative Assembly. Between the years of 1884 to 1891, however, he had successes as an

alderman in the Brisbane Municipal Council. In 1889, the year he moved into his pub, he was also made the Mayor of what was then the Town of Brisbane.

Was Galloway a bit of an opportunist who cast his lot with the workers only when it suited his career? He must have had money when he and his wife Anne came to Brisbane and/or made money as a ship's chandler because the hotel he had built when he was fifty years old was a substantial pile in the French Renaissance Revival style popular in the 19th century.

The Worker of 19 January 1895 paused in its attacks on “Japs” and “kanakas” long enough to “regret” Galloway's death, but it notes that he is “long since out of the movement”, which may suggest his reputation had soured. If so, perhaps it was because of his drinking or perhaps because he had changed class allegiance? As a publican, he had become an officer in the Queensland United Licensed Victuallers' Association and presumably Mayoral candidates were well on-side with the bosses and toffs.

Galloway appears mostly in the historical records not for his links to the early organisation of the working class but for the rather

lurid manner of his death. The *Brisbane Courier's* report of what it calls a “magisterial inquiry” into that death gives some facts, but a full explanation is harder to discern.

Galloway was on a bender throughout the three weeks leading up to his death on 12 January 1895, according to William Floyd, his barman. Concerned by his behaviour, the night before his death his wife had tried to call a doctor, and Floyd had stayed with him throughout the night.

After drinking all morning the next day, Galloway had left the bar to look for his wife and Floyd took the opportunity to lock him into a second-floor bathroom. Galloway tried to escape through the window, as witnessed by Mrs Lambert, a neighbouring shopkeeper. She saw him holding on to a downpipe and trying to reach a balcony four feet away from the window. She pointed this out to a passing constable, Hopper.

A sailor, Ernest Heritage, was also passing. He saw Galloway:

standing with one foot on the balcony and one hand on the windowsill. He appeared to be in the act of jumping from the window to the balcony. He jumped and caught the balcony

railing with both hands. One hand gave way, and he fell in an upright position until he reached the floor of the balcony, when he turned, and seemed to fall on his back.

Hopper, along with Mrs Lambert and Heritage rushed into the bar to tell Mrs Galloway. Hopper and Floyd ran upstairs to the bathroom but looking out of the window saw Galloway already lying on the ground 17 feet below. When they went down to him he was muttering incoherently. Floyd went to fetch a Dr. O'Doherty, but a Dr. Byrne arrived first. Byrne certified that death was from concussion of the brain.⁶

For many years after Galloway's death, Anne continued to run the pub and she seems to have had a long life.

Radio 4KQ

As mentioned above, The Breakfast Creek hotel catered for workers. Those working at or going to the nearby races (Eagle Farm Racecourse was established in 1865) and, from the mid-1920s, the nearby wharfs. Later it was also patronised by the ALP types in the Party offices that were located across the creek where currently stands the “Breakfast Creek

Lifestyle Precinct” along with a very posh car dealership.

This “Precinct” is one of those history-less commercial slabs plonked over the sites of ordinary peoples past lives.⁷ In this case, it is hiding the remains of the building that, in the 1950s and 60s, contained the radio station 4KQ and, within that, the offices of the Australian Labor Party.

From its start in 1947 until its sale in 1986, Radio 4KQ was owned by the Queensland ALP. Radio stations owned by Labor were established in five state capitals in the 1940s, including, according to Goot and Scalmer, 2KY in Sydney, 3KZ in Melbourne and 5KA in Adelaide.⁸ This fact might sound odd today. We might wonder whether it meant that left wing ideas were being broadcast on mainstream media with the authority of a mainstream political party. And in its report on the establishment of 4KQ, *The Worker* (which by this time was the organ of the Australian Workers Union and the ALP) seemed to suggest this was the purpose in its references to “the Labor message” making use of “this necessary means of communication”:

When the Premier (Mr. E. M. Hanlon) officially declared 4KQ “on the air” on

Wednesday night, the gap in the Labor radio broadcasting chain on the Australian mainland was closed, and the Labor message was going on the ether from transmission units in the five State capital cities.

Labor stations now “cover” the country. Though Queensland was behind the other states in establishing this necessary means of communication it now has, in 4KQ, the benefit of the most recent technical advances in radiocasting.⁹

But there is scant evidence for interesting political activities using these radio stations. As Goot and Scalmer say:

3KZ and 5KA were ‘only nominally in labour hands’, according to a report, prepared in 1950, ‘and had sacrificed propaganda value to money and success’.

In fact, it seems 4KQ was a little more politically implicated than the others were. During his campaigning for the “No” case against Menzies’ Communist Party Dissolution Referendum, H.V. Evatt made more use of 4KQ than of the other Labor stations. There was even, according to Ross Fitzgerald, agitation by Jack Egerton and the

Trades Hall leadership “for 4KQ to be used as a propaganda organ.”¹⁰

Little came of this agitation, but it is surprising nevertheless, considering that Egerton is best remembered as the Trades Hall figure who took the poisoned offer of a knighthood by Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser in 1975 following Fraser’s “coup” against the Whitlam government. Presumably Fraser was grateful to a union power player being on his side in the wash up.

When Egerton’s Trades Hall Group succeeded in controlling the Queensland ALP Executive after 1966, it depended on 4KQ to bolster the Party’s financiers in the absence of the lucrative capitation fees of the usurped AWU. Ian Brusasco hints darkly that Egerton had been mismanaging 4KQ in various ways and the station was in dire straits by 1976 when Brusasco was called in by Clem Jones to make changes.¹¹

Brusasco, who proudly boasts that he didn’t care about politics, purged the scraps of labour movement ideas from the station:

They would play the Labour Half Hour at midday. Clem Jones and Tom Burns would read it. I said, “Do you want to run a business or do you want party-political propaganda?” Got rid of it. And we used to

have the Wharfie’s Call for Work. We got rid of it.

Brusasco explains that the floundering station was kept afloat partly by trade union donations, notably the ETU, but it doesn’t occur to him that a political purpose in favour of the trade union movement is a genuine reason to broadcast. On the contrary, Brusasco tried airing the program pedalled by right-wing shock-jock John Laws – and only abandoned it because it didn’t rate here in Brisbane.

The political visions of those behind 4ZZZ and 4KQ at that time offer a stark contrast. 4ZZZ was pioneering in the new community radio movement and bravely adding its resources, on a volunteer and donation basis, to the progressive political and cultural movements in the face of Bjelke-Petersen’s militant anti-worker New Right regime.

On a personal note, I recall that in the early 1960s, after my sisters had gone to school and Dad had headed to work in the Coorparoo yards of the Brisbane City Council Electricity Department, Mum always had 4KQ playing. I used to listen with a sense of wonder to the Wharfie’s Call for Work that it broadcast each morning, and I

became aware that it meant that around Brisbane, men with families like mine were waiting to see if they would get work that day. I think that hearing that broadcast gave me the feeling of being, in E.P. Thompson's famous phrase, a member of "a class in itself". Without this, I could not later have joined the struggle to create a class that was acting "for itself" and thereby acting for a more just world.

So, buried under that "Lifestyle Precinct" in Newstead is a memory of a radio studio that once guided my fundamental perspective on life. It helped me to feel part of a group which formed a social class "in itself." Without this, I could not later have joined the struggle to create a class that was acting "for itself" and thereby acting for a more just world for all.

Dr Allan Gardiner is a retired public servant. He is a co-editor of *The Queensland Journal of Labour History*.

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When Australian Shop Assistants Discovered Power in a Union

Jeff Rickertt

The year is 1913, and the bosses of Broken Hill in western New South Wales still can't sleep easy. More than 20 years of intense class struggle – including major defeats in 1892 and 1909 – has not dented the fighting spirit of the city's industrial workers. In March the Barrier Labour Federation (BLF), representing most of the local unions, launches a 'show card day' to ensure all workers are unionised. The campaign succeeds easily in the mines, but an attempt by the Silverton Tramway Company to exempt certain of its employees from union membership sparks a walk out by tramway workers. They return only after management reduces its list of exempt 'staff' from 42 to seven.

Then in August the city's shop assistants – many of them women – decide it is their turn to enter the fray. The working-class women of Broken Hill are no strangers to active class struggle. They had played prominent support roles in previous industrial confrontations. When the bosses locked out the miners in 1909, women formed a

Relief Committee to feed and clothe affected families. This time, however, they will be on the front line.

Pay and conditions in retail are appalling. But the assistants know the remedy; they join the Shop Assistants and Warehouse Employees' Union (SAWEU).

The union formulates a log of claims. Realising their best chance of success depends on united industrial power, the union executive entrusts leadership of the campaign to the BLF. The SAWEU and the BLF jointly request a conference with the companies. The Federation declares publicly that if the bosses refuse to meet them, all shop assistants will stop work from 8.00am on Friday 15 August.

The employers scoff but can't hide their concern. The local Chamber of Commerce and the Retail Traders' Association rush to the Arbitration Court for an injunction against strike action. Justice Charles Heydon duly grants their



*Shop assistants on duty in a Broken Hill drapery, 1908.
(Aussie Mobs website)*



*The Broken Hill Trades Hall, organising centre for the 1913 shop assistants' strike.
(Image B-54756-10, State Library of South Australia)*

request on the day before the threatened walk-out.

The bosses' jubilation quickly turns to shock when the union ignores the judge's order. At 8.00am on Friday the 'hired help' – over 350 SAWEU members across Broken Hill – refuse to work. The capitalist press report that "business has been almost completely paralysed, and many of the shops have been closed." Smaller shops operate only with the labour of the owners. Compounding the bosses' woes, the carters employed by the firms come out in solidarity. No deliveries can be made, either to the

shops or from the shops to their customers. The wholesale establishments are similarly left stranded.

The shops are quiet, with one notable exception: the union-owned Co-op outlets continue trading because the Co-op has agreed to a modified version of the claims. Even these workers, however, will soon join the strike because their bosses fail to honour the deal.

The modified log calls for a minimum of £3 10s per week for male assistants, and £2 10s for

females. For juniors (workers under 21) the log stipulates wages ranging from 10 shillings per week for a girl of 14, up to £3 for a 'boy' of 20. Casuals will receive a penalty rate of five percent of the senior rate. Although these demands will significantly improve incomes, they will barely lift pay above the State's average minimum. The log also stipulates a 48-hour week. The *Sydney Morning Herald* describes the whole thing as "preposterous".

On the first morning of the strike the workers meet at Trades Hall. The turn-out is large, with female members prominent in the crowd.

The workers endorse the revised log and form a picket committee to enforce compliance. Members patrol the streets, on the look-out for scabs, and ever ready with a discouraging word for shoppers patronising the few non-Co-op businesses still open.

One week into the strike the workers noisily gate-crash an employer-backed meeting calling for a return to work. Several hundred assistants meet separately and vote by overwhelming majority to continue striking. The bosses respond by inviting the strikers to repudiate their demands and return

to work on Monday 25 August. They imply that anyone refusing will be blacklisted. They also make a wage offer well below the union's demands. The union responds with a huge mass meeting of shop assistants on the Monday, at which the workers vow to fight on. They issue an appeal to other Broken Hill unions for financial support.

The following day, Industrial Magistrate Butler uses his statutory powers to appoint a Wages Board, a form of compulsory arbitration in which both sides pick representatives to negotiate a binding settlement. The employers readily nominate delegates, but the unions are disdainful and uncooperative. Butler finds two shop foremen and conservative SAWEU members, F.J. Miller and D. Storer, to serve as 'employee representatives'. Miller and Storer use their newfound status to propose to a union meeting that members return to work pending the Board's determination. Only one other person votes for their proposal.

On Wednesday 10 September Butler hands down the Wages Board award. It offers a 15 per cent increase on the existing rates, which is up to six per cent above the employers' offer, but well below the union's claims. The

Chamber of Commerce and the Retail Traders' Association announce they will pay the new rates and honour any current above-award payments, on condition that employees apply for "reinstatement" on or before Monday 15th. They insinuate that applications received after the deadline will be rejected.

The BLF is determined to rebuff the bosses' award. At a mass meeting of all Broken Hill unions on the Sunday before the deadline, the city's organised working class endorses the BLF's wish. A second motion views "with intense satisfaction the militant stand taken by the shop assistants, and pledges to support them, provided they do not compromise or concede one inch of industrial ground."

On Monday, however, the resolve of the shop workers finally cracks. Many of them return to work. Later in the week, the Amalgamated Miners' Association (AMA) donates £1000 as strike relief, but it is too late. In the weeks ahead, a boycott of shops is implemented, and some workers who have gone back are harassed. One unionist, Harry Wood, is convicted of riotous behaviour while picketing and is fined £2, in default a month in prison. His conviction is later overturned on appeal. In the



*The organised working class of Broken Hill march on Labour Day, ca. 1911.
(Image PRG-280-1-11-108, courtesy State Library of South Australia)*

evening of Friday 19 September, police draw their revolvers to prevent an angry crowd of about 2000 people from attacking Miller, the bosses' stooge who had served on the Wages Board.

These acts of collective militancy fail to turn the tide. On 28 September a mass meeting of all unions declares the strike over.

A defeat but not a defeat. The strike won a collective award with a 15 per cent wage increase, and brought the plight of retail workers to

national attention. More importantly, in waging a total strike for six weeks – the first in Australian retail – the shop assistants of Broken Hill showed it was not only miners and trammies who could take the fight to employers. Shop workers, too, were now a force to be reckoned with.

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Always Activists: The Queensland Vintage Reds

John McCollow

Vintage Reds (VR) is an activist group, based in Brisbane, of retired trade union members. It is affiliated with the national ACTU Retired Unionists Network (RUN). Members of Vintage Reds, though retired, remain committed to actively supporting workers' rights, union campaigns and social justice. Membership is free.

The organisation:

- promotes and supports the interests of trade unionism and retired unionists,
- provides forums for political discussion, education and camaraderie, and
- participates in industrial campaigns, social justice forums, debates, demonstrations and rallies consistent with its principles and values.

At the 2018 ACTU Congress held in Brisbane a number Brisbane-based retired unionists attended a presentation from Vintage Reds, Canberra, a retired unionist organisation that had been established in 2014. Following the presentation, local retired unionists

discussed whether such a group should be established here. Among the points discussed was that, while some unions support retired members groups, and some of these promote continued active engagement in industrial and political campaigns, other retired members groups restrict themselves to social activities. In some unions, communication and engagement with members ceases almost entirely upon a member's retirement.

It was agreed that Brisbane would benefit from an organisation for retired unionists that was more than a social club – an organisation committed to industrial and political activism. It was also noted that such an organisation should seek to cooperate, rather than compete, with existing retired unionist groups (and with other like-minded socially progressive organisations). The name Vintage Reds – copied from Canberra – was adopted.

The launch and inaugural meeting of Queensland Vintage Reds was held in December 2018 at the



Rally at Queensland LNP Convention 2024 (Lachlan Hulse)

Queensland TLC Building and attracted more than 60 people. Uncle Bob Anderson delivered the welcome to country and spoke about his long life as a unionist. Hugh Hamilton, a former secretary of the BWIU, spoke about the importance of our continuing role, supporting union struggles and opposing neo-liberalism. QCU Secretary, Ros McLennan, spoke about the challenges facing the union movement particularly in the lead up to the 2019 federal election.

The first AGM of VR was held in March 2019, at which a committee was elected. The committee set to work developing a set of "Principles and Rules", setting out plans for the year and organising speakers for our

monthly meetings. The committee is now elected annually at our AGM.

VR meets on the first Thursday of the month from March to December and each meeting features a guest speaker. Our first speaker of the year is usually the Secretary of the QCU, who is asked to set out the Queensland union movement's priorities for the year. These meetings are well-attended and over the years we have had an impressive list of guest speakers covering a range of industrial, political, economic and social justice issues. Examples include:

- Thomas Mayo (MUA), Lara Watson (ACTU), Rachel Bos (ACTU), the Voice referendum and



Climate Strike 2019 (Lachlan Hurse)



Thomas Mayo, Finding the Heart of the Nation event 2021 (Lachlan Hurse)

its aftermath (several sessions)

- Beth Mohle (QNMU), Aged Care
- Kurt Maroske (QCOSS), Homelessness and Inequality
- Ian Curr, Laura Hanlon, Terry Fisher, Panel discussion: “Criminalising Dissent”
- Annette Brownlie and Barbara Hartley, IPAN Inquiry: Exploring the Case for an Independent and Peaceful Australia
- Arch Tudehope (MEU), Black Lung Disease
- Terry Farr, the History of the Workers’ Health Centre
- Penny Carr, Housing and Homelessness
- John Falzon, Inequality
- Prof. Colin Mackerras, “Is China a Threat?”
- Ian Rintoul, Refugees
- Bob Russell and Pam Blamey, “Climate Denial, Union Busting, and

the Atlas Network”

- Former Labor Senator Claire Moore, Q&A
- Wendy Streets (FSU), the Banking Royal Commission
- Prof. David Peetz, the Future of Work
- Sally Gunner (CPSU), Public Service Issues
- Barbara Hartley and Dave Copeman, “Nuclearisation – No Way!”

Vintage Reds is affiliated with the ACTU RUN, which holds monthly Zoom meetings that also feature guest speakers on topics of interest. These meetings are open to any retired unionist and details are provided to members via the VR newsletter.

The VR email newsletter has become a very useful source of

information on social and industrial issues, and other issues of interest. Through the newsletter we alert members to relevant announcements, events, conferences, book launches, and film screenings, and promote member participation in campaigns, rallies, and events.

VR seeks to cooperate with other labour and/or progressive social organisations. We have worked with and/or affiliated with the following to date: Just Peace; Independent and Peaceful Australia Network; Fair Go for Pensioners; the Australia Cuba Friendship Society; and Living Incomes for Everyone. In 2022, we co-sponsored with the BLHA an evening assessing the legacy of the Whitlam government on the 50th anniversary of its election. The evening included an

address by John Faulkner and a panel discussion.

As noted above, VR seeks to be more than just a social club or discussion group, but to foster industrial and political activism. To this end, we encourage members to participate in a range of political and industrial actions. In addition to the activities in which members participate individually (e.g. campaigning in elections, campaigning for “Yes”), VR members also participate as part of the VR collective. The Vintage Reds banner and/or Vintage Reds placards have been proudly on display at a number of events, rallies, marches, and picket lines. Examples include:

- the Chemist Warehouse workers picket line in their strike over the

employers intention to cut pay and conditions in EBA negotiations (2019)

- the QI glassworkers picket line (2019)
- the NUW members at Visy strike over pay and conditions (2022)
- the QCU picket of a Carpet Court franchise in support of CFMEU Manufacturing members (July, 2022)
- the Independent Teachers Union members picketing at an RTO refusing to allow union badges, stickers etc. in the workplace (2019)
- the Rally for Abortion Rights (2022)
- the annual Workers Memorial Day ceremony
- QCU Women's Conference
- the NTEU rally to protest Griffith University's plan to close its creative arts studios (2020)
- the NTEU rally/picket line, strike at UQ (2023)
- QNMU Social Justice Forum (2021)
- the Aged Care Workers Rally, Queens Gardens Park (2022)
- annual participation in Labour Day
- QNMU Midwives Rally, Parliament House (2023)
- the Mater Hospital Rally in support of the ETU, AMWU and Plumbers Union members trying for over a year to get an EBA (2021)
- the Rally against Morrison's IR

Omnibus Bill (2021)

- the School Strike for Climate Change, supporting the school kids demands for a future (2019)
- the Women's March for Justice (2021)

The Vintage Reds are a success story (we now have nearly 200 members), but there is still a lot of unrealised potential. Many unions have yet to realise that retired activists can be a useful resource. VR's stall at the 2023 ACTU Organising Conference was a small step in educating the union movement that retired unionists have a reservoir of skills, a deep commitment and a willingness to get involved (not to mention free time on their hands). It is to be hoped that Vintage Reds will continue to grow and to play its part in developing union activism as a life-long passion.

Brisbane-based retired unionists can join Vintage Reds by contacting us at vintageredsqld@gmail.com. A VR website is currently under construction.

Dr John McCollow is a life member of the QTU and AEU, having been a secondary school teacher and a union officer. He is a foundation member and currently serves on the committee of Queensland Vintage Reds.



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.

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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/



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