

The Queensland Journal of Labour History

No. 41 Summer 2025/2026



Brisbane
Labour
History
Association

The Queensland Journal of Labour History

The biannual radical history journal of the
Brisbane Labour History Association (BLHA)

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Cover illustration: Vintage Reds Queensland meeting October 2019, at
which Thomas Mayo presented the 1st Edition of his book

Finding the Heart of the Nation.

Among the attendees notable is comrade Col Davies who passed in June 2025.

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.

[//brisbanelabourhistory.org/](http://brisbanelabourhistory.org/)

BLHA President: Craig Buckley

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No. 41. Summer 2025/2026

ISSN 1832-9926

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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

On Liberating Libraries

Elina Abou Sleiman

*And all the arts of life they chang'd into the arts of death
... intricate wheels invented... to bind to labours
Of day & night the myriads of Eternity, that they might file
And polish brass & iron hour after hour, laborious workmanship,
Kept ignorant of the use that they might spend the days of wisdom
In sorrowful drudgery to obtain a scanty pittance of bread,
In ignorance to view a small portion & think that All...*

William Blake, *Jerusalem*, 1804-1820

We were sitting surrounded by so many books and we were talking, of course, of history. Of time and memory, Humphrey had seen much more than I, but I was trying, after all, to catch up. It was early September 2023, a few more weeks and there was Gaza, battling death, her heroic struggle returning to the spotlight of History and blasting open my faraway life. “The birds stop singing and pay heed to the war”¹ wrote Mahmoud Darwish in 1982, and I followed suit. It was Brisbane I was supposed to be writing about, our radical history and our collective memory, but my words were elsewhere, walking along the border to Palestine and crumbling there, “falling as if they were leaves”.²

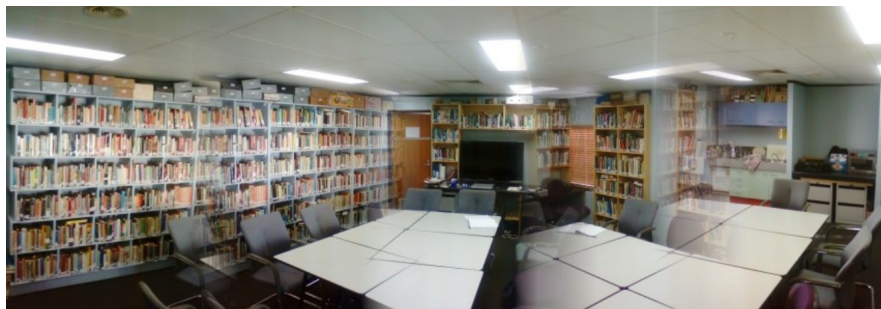
“What does a man do with his words if they aren't useful for anything?”³ asked Elias Khoury, or as Darwish put it, “What are you writing in this war, Poet? – I’m writing my silence.”⁴ Another month, November, and I was expected to present a paper in Canberra for the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History at its biennial conference. The paper, discussing a grassroots library in Brisbane and its political potential, was never delivered: my words sat down beside me and turned away. If Gaza was battling death, then death, I discovered, was the defeat of language. So, what to make of all those words, of the historical worlds, surviving on the shelves of one radical Brisbane lib-

rary? We might return at first to Humphrey McQueen and that early September meeting. For what I hope we find there are the threads of knowledge that could bring to life the library which sat beside us, and in doing so, might return my words to a useful language.

We were sitting in a subterranean place, across the road from Centenary Place, where Humphrey was to give a talk on ‘scaffolds and shit-houses’. Informed by his 2009 book *Framework of Flesh: Builders’ Labourers Battle for Health and Safety*, Humphrey was here to “re-tell our past from the experiences of that majority”⁵ which constitutes the working class, to remember those labourers “whose sweat and blood are mingled in the concrete and bricks as surely as if the walls were built over a framework of human flesh.”⁶ It was human labour, in other words, that built our city, in the context of both its own exploitation and resistance. With almost each page of this history documented in *Framework of Flesh*, another worker falls to his death, until we ultimately agree with Humphrey’s hypothetical labourer who confuses the ‘scaffold’ with his ‘execution place’.⁷ This prevalence of industrial injury and death is of course no mere accident, but the direct result of the “illogic that compels capitalism”.⁸ That is, the

bosses’ imperative for profit: profit appropriated from the ‘surplus value’ of labour, and increased through ‘speed-ups’ and other precarious methods, in direct opposition to workers’ struggles for safe and survivable work. These struggles, Humphrey reminds us, occur within the broader structures and dynamics of capitalism: its origins in chattel slavery and bonded labour, the enclosure of common land by which a self-sufficient majority was forced into waged labour, the disciplining of labour time, and the war making of ‘nation-market-states’ to secure resources and sales. Gaza returns here, battling an ‘illogic that compels’, battling death.

But where does our library appear? Of course, in a literal sense, the library sat right beside us; as Humphrey discussed health and safety, a collection of literature listened in from the room next door. The collection, known to us simply as ‘the library’, contains books and archival ephemera, old leaflets, booklets, and newsletters, previously stored at West End’s Ahimsa House. In the complicated history of this library’s lineage, one thread connects to the Red and Black bookshop, established by the student radicals of the late sixties and maintained by Brisbane anarchists into the early eighties. Led by another thread, we eventually find the com-



*Radical Books collection held by the Institute of Social Ecology at the Ellen Taylor Community Centre, West End, Brisbane
(Workers Bush Telegraph website: <https://workersbushtelegraph.com.au/books/>)*

munists' Anvil Bookshop of 1935. With the criminalisation of the Communist Party in June 1940, a police raid, and a ban on importing socialist material, the Anvil was forced to close, although its stock was used for establishing a lending library. This collection then formed the People's Bookshop, operating from the Communist Party's headquarters in Fortitude Valley until 1991.⁹ During the nineties it seems that some of the books, from both the Red and Black and the People's Bookshop, ultimately found their way to a library above Emma's Bookshop in West End.¹⁰ By the 2000s, this library became part of the Institute of Social Ecology at Ahimsa House, a community space established by retired meatworker Ross Taylor. Here, as above Emma's, a library collective sorted and catalogued regular donations from Brisbane's radical readers. By 2011 however, Ahimsa House was also at its end, after years of mis-

management involving the exploitation and abuse of an elderly Ross Taylor, the project was bankrupt and the property sold off by the Public Trustee.¹¹ But the books were rescued, all two thousand of them, to eventually find their way back to Fortitude Valley.¹²

There is another, smaller library that enters our story here, an anarchist library maintained by the Brisbane Solidarity Network, inherited from Brisbane's 'Indymedia' and the Black and Green bookshop of the early 2000s. The two collections now reside together, although the historical library that they form is not accessible to the public. Yet something significant remains to be said of the library's existence, something that ultimately returns to our earlier discussion of capitalism and death, of words and survival. No doubt, the library is a rare material testament to the history of Brisbane's anarchist and communist tra-



*Bill Sutton with his regular bookstall at the University of Queensland
(Fryer Library UQFL234, box 33, image 30)*

ditions, hosting everything from the complete works of Lenin or Murray Bookchin, to the poetry of Lionel Fogarty and the frontier histories of Henry Reynolds; flyers from Brisbane's Self-Management Group, from nineties anarchists the 'Angry People', the 1985 Queensland Coalition for Democratic Rights, and the *Black Nation* newspaper of 1982. Even a precious book or two with a notice glued to the back: 'Workers' Educational Association of Queensland... Lending Library', with a list of dates stamped inside, 1938 to 1944, and another address, 'Anvil Book Shop 83 Elizabeth Street'. Evidently, if capitalism produces much injury and death for those whose labour, or land, it exploits, it remains that the exploited and dispossessed do resist, in word and deed, through organisation and

communication with one another. It is evidence of this broad historical force that survives in the library, with the words that our predecessors read, wrote, and found important enough to pass on. The dead, in other words, do not die without leaving a trace, but something of their words, of their alternative worlds, survive to us.

We might remember for example, Bill Sutton, a shearer and meatworker, a writer and manager of the People's Bookshop, who befriended the student radicals of the late sixties with a regular bookstall at the University of Queensland. On the eve of his death in 1976, one friend remembered Bill through the questions and conversations of the bookshop: "Tell us about the Shearers' Strike Bill?" and "Who were the



*Common House Radical History Library 17 May 2021
(Facebook)*

Wobblies... The written and unwritten history of the working class is here, and we are seeking it out... Our wares are not the books, but the ideas and thoughts of the left in those books".¹³ Though inaccessible, a collection of Bill's short stories remains in the Ahimsa library, and digital scans of his work can be found online,¹⁴ but what survives of the tradition that he embodied, of a collective practice embracing political, historical, and intellectual enquiry? What is necessary, in other words, is a living library, not for collecting static historical artefacts, as relics or props, but for transforming ourselves through dialogue: dialogue between our 'written and unwritten' past, between past and present, between reflection, understanding and intervention, to then recreate history ourselves. This is

the dialogue of Paulo Freire¹⁵ or Humphrey McQueen, who, having shared his knowledge with us in September 2023, then waited patiently until others began to speak, slowly at first, but with increasing confidence, of their own experiences of harmful work. It is the library we are yet to create that could encourage this industrial experience of violence into a broader understanding of capitalism and its relentless production of death, encompassing those great contradictions of our time: imperialism, climate collapse, genocide and global fascism, and yet, the Third World, in increasing youthful uprising.

Of the Ahimsa library that does exist, stored away in a subterranean place, there are many more stories we could tell. Like the forgotten la-



Omar Hamad with his library in Gaza, "the first one to be rescued during the Genocide".

September/October 2025

(https://www.instagram.com/p/DOeV_xZDK8E/?img_index=1 https://www.instagram.com/p/DPTRPdXDMJf/?img_index=2)

bour stored in our city's walls, there remains in each product of a people's power a latent, dormant potential, a reserve of creative energies lying in wait. How might we begin to reproduce a useful collective knowledge, grounded in historical clarity as in present realities? How might our political inheritance be collectively and democratically shared? These are questions of strategic importance, and yet in concluding my words it is to emotion I feel we must turn. After all, that night in September, it was emotion that pulled me into understanding Humphrey's words; his third day on the job, Joel, sixteen years old, fell to his death.¹⁶ Speaking of Joel's family, a grandmother shattered, a father withdrawn from life, and a mother who fought for justice, Humphrey began to cry, and his

tears joined my own. I had other words in mind, a line of a poem by twenty-two-year-old Zoe, who lived her own chapter in the history of anarchist Brisbane and who died that same week in early September. "It takes all of us, it takes it all from us." It is here, in her words, that I find the closest proclamation for our living library yet to be born. 'It takes all of us,' and we are yet to be limited by history. If the dead and their words do survive to us, their voices seem to call out, in solidarity with our present struggles. We must return this solidarity to the past, to the dead, by refusing to neglect nor disperse and scatter their words, but to gather in and act from their memory. But how can we collectively do so, if there survives no lending library, no radical bookstore, no reliable meeting place?

‘It takes it all from us.’ “I believe in life”, wrote Assata Shakur, “and I have seen the death parade/ march through the torso of the earth.”¹⁷ If we find ourselves marching against this death, it is the dead who walk beside us, both the ‘myriads of eternity’ who “seem at times to have been sealed in their work like a tomb”¹⁸ and those friends, young and old, who we struggled alongside in life. Each year, I hear that more elders of our radical movements have died, and I hear of their books, found in heaps at the local thrift shops. At the second-hand bookfair, we diligently scour the aisles, searching for useful words. And finally, I find some; on one crowded table, two dozen abandoned editions of *Labour History*, on another, a book of Palestinian folk tales called *Speak Bird, Speak Again*. In Gaza, Omar Hamad, a tailor and writer, rescues a library of books. Again and again, eleven times displaced, Omar carries his library with him, to each besieged place.¹⁹ He writes, “I was forced to abandon reading and became bound to writing blood...”²⁰ He writes, “I write to you under the final sky my last wishes from a place where life and death cannot coexist... I write to you the last words I have stored in the pockets of my memory. My words have all run out...”²¹ He writes, “Perhaps our story ends here, on this dark road that I always tried to light with my

words. But the words have gone out, never to return, and death has become nothing more than a matter of time.”²² It has long been a problem of life and death that we find a way for our words to transform into actions. Our words must find a place to meet each other, to meet the past, and transcend it. What liberatory libraries might we now build?

Elina Abou Sleiman is a writer and researcher who for the last four years has been investigating radical politics and memory in Brisbane. She is curious about how the radical past is remembered, passed on, and what potential it holds as a catalyst for a liberatory present.

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- ¹ Mahmoud Darwish, *Memory for Forgetfulness: August, Beirut, 1982*, trans. Ibrahim Muhawi (University of California Press, 1995), 10.
- ² Elias Khoury, *City Gates*, trans. Paula Haydar (Picador, 1993), 4.
- ³ Ibid, 3- 4.
- ⁴ Darwish, *Memory For Forgetfulness*, 61.
- ⁵ Humphrey McQueen, *Framework of Flesh: Builders' Labourers Battle for Health and Safety* (Adelaide: Ginniderra Press, 2009), 10.
- ⁶ Charlie Sullivan, quoted in McQueen, *Framework of Flesh*, 9-10.
- ⁷ Ibid, 18.
- ⁸ Ibid, 237.

⁹ See, *Brisbane Bookshops*, eds. Anne Richards and Mathew Wengert (AndAlso Books, 2023); and, Connie Healy, “Radical Bookshops,” in *Radical Brisbane: an Unruly History*, eds. Raymond Evans and Carole Ferrier (The Vulgar Press, 2004), 198-205.

¹⁰ Although it has been difficult to establish the exact details of the library’s history, I have summarised here the evidence available to me, including information shared in oral history interviews, personal communications, and from the books of the collection themselves (many retaining for example stamps from the Red and Black and People’s Bookshop).

¹¹ See, Ian Curr, “Campaign to save AHIMSA House,” Workers Bush Telegraph, published March 15, 2022, <https://workersbushtelegraph.com.au/2022/03/15/plenty-of-vision-no-action-on-corrupt-public-trustees-office/>; Ian Curr, “The Failure of AHIMSA House,” Workers Bush Telegraph, published April 8, 2021, <https://workersbushtelegraph.com.au/2021/04/08/the-failure-of-ahimsa-house/>.

¹² In rescuing the library from Ahimsa House I would like to acknowledge the efforts of both Bernie Neville and the library collective, particularly Peter Gamble, who then stored the collection at his own home for two years as an interim measure.

¹³ Quoted in Raymond Evans, “Buried In Books,” in *Brisbane Bookshops*, eds. Anne Richards and Mathew Wengert (AndAlso Books, 2023), 126.

¹⁴ See, “Workers’ Writing: Bill Sutton,” Brisbane Labour History Association, accessed October 2025, <http://brisbanelabourhistory.org/brisbane-labour-history-association/resources/workers-writing>.

¹⁵ See, Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (Continuum, 1985). See also, Peter Curtis, *Educating the Educator: A Meeting of Minds* (Never Say Die Publications), <https://www.surplusvalue.org.au/FivePillars/Education/Educating%20the%20Educator.pdf>.

¹⁶ See, McQueen, *Framework of Flesh*, 84.

¹⁷ Assata Shakur, *Assata: An Autobiography* (Lawrence Hill Books, 1987), 1.

¹⁸ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Penguin Books, 1968), 488.

¹⁹ Omar Hamad (omar.hamad7), “These books are part of my being, of my soul. I cannot imagine a day when they would be gone from me...” Instagram, September 7, 2025, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DORXWE8DLMN/>.

²⁰ Omar Hamad (omar.hamad7), Instagram, September 29, 2025, https://www.instagram.com/p/DPLfDA0DHF6/?img_index=4.

²¹ Omar Hamad (omar.hamad7), “From the boiling point, I write to you the last words I have stored in the pockets of my memory...” Instagram, September 12, 2025, https://www.instagram.com/p/DoFwSiiDGS0/?img_index=1.

²² Omar Hamad (omar.hamad7), “Is a human being capable of healing from this suffering?” Instagram, September 12, 2025.

Editorial

On alternate Tuesday evenings a group of young activists have been meeting for much of this year at various locations in Brisbane's West End to discuss the radical history of our city.

The focus of each evening's session is determined by reading a chapter from the out-of-print book *Radical Brisbane*, by Raymond Evans, Carole Ferrier and Jeff Rickertt. The chapter is read aloud from a well-worn copy (or two) of the book, which is passed from hand to hand. The ensuing discussion can be wide-ranging; the locales and the individuals, the motives, the conditions that were fought against, the success or the failure, the hindsight, and the lessons that could be applied to today. The reason, of course, for writing radical history.

I have infrequently attended these meetings but at one of them, one of the comrades had acquired an additional copy of the book, which he had recently discovered by chance in an op-shop. The copy was inscribed by Raymond Evans to a comrade whose obituary had been submitted very recently to this journal.

From this revelation the discussion expanded to the absence of a community-based radical history library in Brisbane.

I have been present at many BLHA Management Committee meetings at which individuals or their families had reached out for advice about what to do with their left-wing book and item collections. Invariably these people have been (mis)directed to contact the Fryer or the SLQ.

The University of Queensland's Fryer Library and the State Library of Queensland are undoubtedly immensely useful for radical historians; these institutions have an impressive record of collecting, preserving, managing and making available sources of radical knowledge. They are, however, limited in their acquisition of items of interest. The BLHA advice is misdirected because when these libraries already have copies of items, they are unwilling, and in terms of space unable, to accommodate further copies. Individuals, or their families, have been left to direct their left-wing collections to the nearest Salvos.

The collection of books at Common

House in Fortitude Valley, which Elina Abou Sleiman refers to in this issue's Guest Editorial, is not a library. It is a collection. Libraries by definition are a service providing access to information. Without access, there is no library. The Anarchist-Communist Meanjin (ACM) organisation appear committed to keeping the collection and maintaining its integrity, but the items are largely inaccessible to outsiders (and are stored in an environmentally unsuitable cellar). The books at Common House are merely a collection the ACM inherited with the premises and continue to store. They are, in essence, administering a warehouse.

Elina's Guest Editorial came out of the ongoing online discussion between activists about the Common House collection, and the possibility of creating a viable community-based radical library in Brisbane today. The track record of community libraries is not outstanding; as Elina's article makes clear, radical libraries have failed in more radical eras—when space to rent was also far cheaper. Enthusiasm is also a variable element, even when premises are available. The Queensland Council of Unions was very keen on establishing the Alex Macdonald Memorial Library at their premises in Peel Street in the late 1980s; by

the noughties they had turned the library into an office and had discarded their labour history collection to a local bookseller.

The possibility of a decentralised virtual library, with physical books stored across different storage sites, may be possible these days. The project could perhaps be co-ordinated online. If this library is established it could become available for future donations and expanded to include other collections. This is something that a number of comrades are considering going into next year, but further thought and discussion is essential. I urge anyone with any input to contact the group, initially via the journal email address:

qldlabhist@gmail.com

Early this year management at the Queensland Council of Unions decided that the long tradition of radical and community groups using their Peel Street premises after hours, for meetings and events, could not continue unless these groups paid for security. As a result the BLHA Management Committee has been meeting in the State Library, and BLHA events have taken place at the ETU's premises on the same dangerous South Brisbane street. In July an event commemorating forty years since the SEQEB dispute took



BLHA Events over Winter 2025

(Above) BLHA President Craig Buckley speaks at July's SEQEB commemoration event alongside fellow speakers Stuart Traill and Bob Carnegie. Claire Moore chaired the event.

(Below) Lyn Trad gave an introductory speech about her father, Alex Macdonald, at November's 2025 Alex Macdonald Memorial Lecture. Jenny Hocking gave this year's lecture, detailing the role of the British Royal Family in the Dismissal of the elected Gough Whitlam-led ALP Government in 1975.

(images QJLH)



place with Bob Carnegie, Stuart Traill and Craig Buckley speaking; we hope to include speeches from this event in the next issue. This year's Alex Macdonald Memorial Lecture and Annual General Meeting also took place at the ETU.

The Alex Macdonald Memorial Lecture commemorated fifty years since the Dismissal, and was delivered by Emeritus Professor Jenny Hocking, focusing on the role of the Monarchy in November 1975.

Jenny revealed how much the National Archives of Australia have tried to stop anyone accessing the records; nevertheless she was still able to discover how the Royal Family was very proactive in encouraging John Kerr to dismiss Whitlam. The Dismissal clearly made the Royals feel relevant and allowed them to strike a blow against democracy.

Jenny's research has been covered extensively by national media and the lecture she delivered to the BLHA was repeated in part at the ASSLH National Conference in November. For further reading see: [//johnmenadue.com/post/2025/11/the-dismissal-at-50-a-calculated-plot-an-ambush-a-coup/](https://johnmenadue.com/post/2025/11/the-dismissal-at-50-a-calculated-plot-an-ambush-a-coup/)

Before Jenny spoke, Lyn Trad gave a presentation about the life and political beliefs of her father Alex

Macdonald. We are currently considering ways to publish her speech on our website, and also perhaps including it in a revised edition of the booklet the BLHA produced some time ago about Alex.

This journal is, as always, a team effort. The *QJLH* Journal Committee meets informally twice yearly to brainstorm possible content for the next issue. We consider upcoming anniversaries and topical issues about which historical articles might be timely.

Between meetings, Allan Gardiner, Howard Guille and myself co-ordinate the journal from these ideas to copy-editing and then on to formatting the printed result. Jeff Rickertt assists in these copy-editing roles when he can and recently David Faber, the immediate Past President of the South Australia branch of the ASSLH has joined us. Welcome David!

Submissions to the journal are always welcome and advice for contributors is given in every issue. Alternatively, if you are interested in brainstorming content, or are aware of upcoming anniversaries or issues that we should perhaps research, or you would like to get involved in the copy-editing or formatting process, please let us know at the email address above.

Dean Wharton, Lead Editor, *QJLH*

The Greater Brisbane Council; a Step to Socialism or Just Plain Efficiency?

Howard Guille

The “greater” Brisbane Council came into effect on 1st October 1925. Brisbane became the largest city administration by area in the southern hemisphere.¹ In the 1915 election campaign both the then Liberal Premier Digby Denham and Labor Opposition Leader Thomas Joseph (T.J.) Ryan had supported the Greater Brisbane concept but for different reasons.² My question is whether the amalgamation is better understood as a step towards socialism or as an exercise in more effective liberal governance?

Under the City of Brisbane Act 1924, twenty existing local authorities from Sandgate to Yeerongpilly and Moggill to Belmont amalgamated.³ A map of the constituent authorities is at figure 1.⁴ The Council assumed responsibility for metropolitan-wide tramway operations, water and sewerage supply and cemeteries.⁵ There were also demands for the Council to take over milk supply and operate a municipal abattoir.

According to the Brisbane City Council’s (BCC) centenary com-

memorative website, the amalgamation was one of the greatest achievements in Australian local government. Two perspectives compete as to why the amalgamation occurred and why it occurred in the 1920s. Conventional accounts rest on functional arguments about governance and operational efficacy. The centenary website describes the amalgamation as ‘a transformative period in the city’s history driven by the need for more effective governance and a desire for greater civic unity.’⁶

The alternative is an explicitly political account emphasising the implementation of the policy platform of the 1915–28 Ryan-Theodore ALP Governments with ideas of municipal socialism having an underlying, potent influence. T.J. Ryan had laid out the ALP agenda in a policy speech at Bardon for the 1915 State election. He said:

Local authorities will be given power and assistance to acquire and control all public utilities and quasi-public utilities’. These would include street car services, gas, electri-



Figure 1. Map of previous local government authorities before amalgamation in 1925
(Brisbane City Archives: <https://brisbane.recollectcms.com/nodes/view/31573#idx65721>)

city, electric lighting and power, water and sewerage, fish markets, and distribution of fish, fruit and produce markets, bakeries, milk supply, meat depots, parcel delivery etc.⁷

And

This will require that the franchise for local authorities will have to be broadened.⁷

This suggests that the formation of the greater Brisbane City involved solid political drivers that were at least as, if not more, important than the pressures of administrative efficacy and efficiency.

The argument between efficiency and socialism remains relevant in 2025. The efficiency explanation is being made into an orthodox history

that obscures and diminishes not only the politics of the 1910s and 20s but also the contributions of left ideas and organisations. This, in my opinion, is evident in some of the centenary events held in 2025 including a 'Brisbane 100 - One City Together' History day at the Brisbane City Hall⁸ and a 'History Conference (Academic Event)' organised by the Royal Historical Society of Queensland (RHSQ).⁹ Neither seemed to encompass the socialist and radical demands that were live before and at the time of the amalgamation.

The efficiency explanation echoes Gordon Greenwood and John Laverty's history of BCC. They write that the Greater Brisbane Scheme was 'largely due to a failure to devise administrative techniques which could resolve the peculiar difficulties encountered by the system in the metropolitan area'.¹⁰ In particular, the large number of councils impeded the provision of city-wide (that is metropolis) utilities and services.

The essence of the alternative political explanation is that socialist and social democratic ideas deserve more centrality in historical accounts and understanding of the Greater Brisbane Scheme. Local government was a very live object of reform for the ALP beginning

with its first electoral platform of the late 1880s—early 1890s. Groups to the left of the ALP argued for 'municipal socialism' which was very much a global idea and practice at the time.

Furthermore, the establishment of the greater Brisbane Council should be seen as the outcome of some quite intense political conflicts rather than of technical and administrative fixes. Widening the franchise for local authority elections, setting up municipal enterprises including a public abattoir and ensuring 'local' employment with good conditions were key demands. However, one coda is that even though the amalgamation was a 'left project', the outcomes were disappointing to the left—both then and now.

The Context

The T.J. Ryan-led Labor Government was elected in 1915 as the first majority ALP Government in Queensland. The ALP held government from 1915 to 1929. Ted Theodore succeeded Ryan in 1919 and the ALP was re-elected with a reduced majority in 1920 but won the 1923 election with an increased majority.¹¹

There is a broad consensus that this was a period of extensive reform. For example, Supreme Court Judge Keane said in a 2022 lecture that,

In those eventful four years, Ryan's government proved itself to be the most radical reforming government to have been democratically elected anywhere in the world to that time.¹²

The Parliamentary archive states; His (Ryan's) government's key reforms relate to workers' compensation, public corporations for competition with monopolies, the establishment of the Golden Casket lottery, and women's right to stand for parliament.¹³

Similarly, Cochrane writes of the achievements of Ryan, the SGIO; the Office of Public Curator; the stabilisation of agriculture; the abolition of the death penalty; workers compensation; unemployment insurance at the state level—later, of course, shall more recognisably the dole; arbitration and conciliation; workplace reforms in working conditions; and equal rights to vote and access by women to previously denied participation in a range of ways.¹⁴

It is a substantial list. At the time and subsequently, there was a considerable critique from the left that the Ryan and Theodore govern-

ments could and should have been more socialist. Against this there was considerable reaction from conservatives about what they saw as unfettered bolshevism and fenianism. Yet there is much to admire in the adamant enthusiasm of the statement of the 1891 Platform that, the adoption of a People's Parliament platform and the subordination of all other measures to that all-important step. In one year a People's Parliament will give Queensland workers more justice than can be wrung from capitalistic parliament.¹⁵

The abolition of the unelected Queensland Legislative Council in 1922 can be seen as part of achieving a 'People's Parliament'. Many reforms including the Greater Brisbane amalgamation and the abolition of capital punishment occurred either after the 'swamping' of the Legislative Council with Labor nominees or its abolition.¹⁶

Another part of the context is that in early 1920, Theodore was met by a "strike of capital" in trying to renegotiate loans in London. As Cochrane concludes

(Theodore) is defeated by the power of capital over a particular issue which was the raising of loan funds for Queensland's development—in par-

ticular, this radical idea of a state's iron and steelworks.'¹⁷

Fitzgerald records that 'a prominent business delegation from Brisbane' (including former Premier Philp and Alfred Cowley the Chair of the Bank of Queensland) 'raised the alarm among British financiers, effectively destroying the Queensland government's credit'.¹⁸ The 'loans crisis' meant that 'plans for state industrial enterprises, railway construction and welfare legislation had to be abandoned or drastically modified'.¹⁹ As Glen Lewis concluded this was 'one of the most blatant instances of the blackmail of an Australian Labor government by financial interests'.²⁰

Franchise Reform

Greenwood and Lavery recognise that aspects of legislative and administrative changes including the BCC amalgamation, 'reflected important social changes arising from egalitarian forces in the social and political life of the State'.²¹ They make especial reference to the abolition of the property qualification and the adoption of a universal franchise in local authority elections.

The first voting arrangements in Queensland dating from 1860 were based on a property qualification.

Multiple voting was possible through multiple property ownership and there was a three year residence qualification for other than property owners or lessees for whom it was six months.²² It is estimated that one-third of the male population was disenfranchised by the property qualification.²³

A version of universal white male suffrage for elections to the Queensland legislative assembly was introduced in 1872. There was a property qualification for voting but limited to one vote per electorate. Nonetheless, plural voting was possible by meeting the property qualification in more than one electorate.²⁴ A six-month residency qualification further limited the ability of itinerant workers to vote so that

A significant sector of the over twenty-one male population was disenfranchised because they were unable to fulfill the six months residency qualification, or own or lease property.²⁵

The 1872 changes, limited as they were, applied only to voting in Legislative Assembly elections. The Legislative Council was unelected. Voting in local authorities remained restricted to ratepaying property owners and plural voting continued.

The ALP had a clear position on voting rights. Joseph Collins reminded the Legislative Council in 1921 that the first plank of the 1889 Australian Labour Federation political platform read

Universal white adult suffrage for all parliamentary and local elections: no plural voting: no nominee or property qualification chamber.²⁶

The Electoral Act, covering State elections, was changed in 1905 to abolish the property qualification and to enfranchise women over 21. The legislation expressly provided that 'No aboriginal native of Australia, Asia, Africa, or the Islands of the Pacific shall be entitled to have his name placed on an Electoral Roll'.²⁷

However, a property qualification and plural voting continued in local authority elections until the 1920 Local Authorities Amendment Act. The property qualification and rights of property-owners were strongly defended by conservatives. For example, Thomas Vowles, Leader of the Opposition and of the Country and Northern Country Party, stated that 'I am strongly opposed to the principle of the elector, instead of the taxpayer or occupier, getting a vote'.²⁸

Vowles said that property owners

who did not live in the local government area where their property was situated, would 'have no votes for the protection of their property'. Referring to universal suffrage he said, 'The principle in my mind is absolutely wrong. If a man is entitled to own property, he should have the power to protect it'. Vowles also said in the debate that the change in the franchise would mean that 'prostitutes would have an equal vote to the property owner'.²⁹

From 1920, the voting qualification for local authority elections was registration on the State Electoral Roll at an address in the local authority. This was confirmed in the legislation establishing the greater Brisbane City Council where an elector was defined as

A person whose name is enrolled on an electoral roll compiled pursuant to the Elections Act for an electoral district or part thereof comprised within the City.³⁰

ALP candidates gained majorities in a number of local authorities following the 1920 changes to the franchise. In 1924, Brisbane and South Brisbane and Ithaca Councils all elected sizeable Labor majorities and Coorparoo had a small Labor majority. Ironically, perhaps, the United Party won the first elec-

tions for the new amalgamated BCC in February 1925 with William Jolly elected Mayor. This election was fought on party grounds with the Nationalists urging 'all Nationalists to vote the party ticket and protect their own pockets.'³¹

Labor won only 6 of the 24 wards. The Brisbane press celebrated; a *Brisbane Courier* headline said, 'United Party's Resounding Victory; Labour Strongholds Revert To Nationalists.'³² *The Telegraph*, under the headline, 'BRISBANE IS SAFE', said,

The constituencies gave a verdict that cannot be misunderstood. They decided that the new metropolis must begin its existence free from the menace of Socialism, unhampered by cranky politicians.³³

This electoral outcome foreshadowed difficulties for the other major left demands of municipal enterprises and improved pay and conditions for council workers. In 1924, the ALP had gained a majority in the then (pre-amalgamation) Brisbane City Council. This Council instituted union preference for council employment, a 44 hour working week and increased wages of council employees by 5 shillings over the award.³⁴ This was registered by the then Council and 17 unions as an Industrial Agreement with the Arbitration Court in an effort to protect it. However, one of the very

first acts of the new greater Brisbane City Council, with its conservative majority, was to ask the Court to rescind the industrial agreement and remove the over-award rates.³⁵

The Southern Queensland Branch of the Meatworkers Union asked the 1924 Brisbane Council to prioritise the establishment of a public abattoir in metropolitan Brisbane. In light of the February 1924 election result for the greater Brisbane Council, the Trades and Labour Council asked the new Labor Premier, William Gillies for funds to start the abattoir project. Gillies turned them down.³⁶

Craig Buckley summarises the position as

even though the state Labor government obviously played an important part in giving some shape to the new Brisbane council, for the broader labour movement its more ambitious plans for municipal enterprises and the Greater Brisbane council met with some immediate disappointment.³⁷

The Demand for Municipal Socialism

Verity Burgmann argues that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, 'Queensland socialism distinguished itself from the movement elsewhere in its emphasis on muni-

icipal socialism'.³⁸ Ned Lowry was a prominent example and in 1897 he was re-elected to the Townsville City Council on, according to Burgmann, 'a platform of municipal socialism, advocating municipal ownership and control of gas, tram and other industries.'³⁹

The Socialist Democratic Vanguard was formed in Brisbane in 1900. Ernie Lane was the first Secretary. It 'adhered to the principles of Democracy and Socialism' and 'desiring that the Parliamentary Labour Party be an avowedly Socialist Party with the Vanguard's object a permanent feature of its Platform.'⁴⁰

The Vanguard explicitly supported municipal socialism stating that 'Modern Municipalism' was presenting splendid object lessons in Collectivism' and

Certain it is that in local administration lies splendid opportunities of demonstrating the wisdom and utility of Collectivism ... the Vanguard urges the need of a radical amending of the Local Government Acts, providing inter alia that the franchise be broadened, taxation be on the betterment principle, and payment of Councillors be instituted.⁴¹

In 1906, J.S Collings, at the time the President of the Socialist Democratic

Vanguard, gave a public lecture on the subject of municipal socialism. He advocated for reform of the franchise which 'should get new blood infused into municipal life' and these newly elected people

might proceed to communalise, as opportunity offered, such things as gas, electricity, and water supplies, trams and other methods of transit, restaurants, laundries, baths, and wash-houses, abattoirs, milk supply, etc.⁴²

The issues of extending the franchise and municipal takeover and provision of utilities and services raised by Collings in 1906 are identical with those pressed by Ryan and Theodore Governments in the 1915-25 period. Indeed, as already noted, Collings, by then one of the 'swampees' appointed to the Legislative Council, spoke in favour of the abolition of the property qualification in 1920.

The Global Context

Queensland socialists shared the demand for municipal socialism with left groups in the UK, the USA, New Zealand and Europe. Figure 2, from 1915, is one example.⁴³

Shelton Stromquist is eloquent about the similarities between cities and countries;

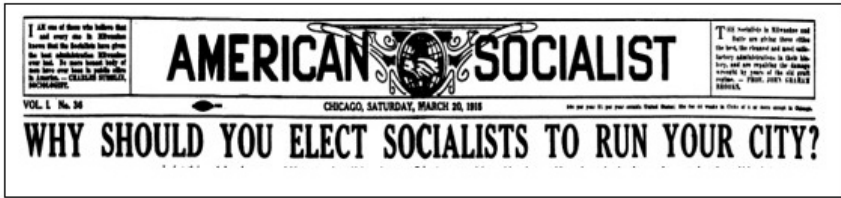


Figure 2. *The world-wide demand for municipal socialism*
 (www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/american-socialist/v1n36-mar-20-1915)

We can talk about Cripple Creek, Colorado, and Broken Hill, New South Wales in the same breath, and similarly, Cleveland, Ohio, and Brisbane, Australia, Christchurch, New Zealand, and Malmö, Sweden; Hamburg, Germany, and Liverpool, England; Vienna, Austria, and Chicago.⁴⁴

The list of cities is imposing. In an impressive research publication, Stromquist documents the impact of the global crisis of capitalism and the intense labour conflict including general strikes in 1880s—90s. A struggle for ‘Municipal socialism’, was, he says one result. In this,

Local activists crafted a new politics that addressed the immediate and tangible needs of workers’ daily lives in cities. This “politics of every day”—the outgrowth in many instances of bitterly fought strikes—opened political space at the local level for workers to challenge tradi-

tions of urban elites’ governance in which, for centuries, protection of the “rights of property” had been the guiding principle.⁴⁵

Municipalisation attracted substantial interest from academics. For example, Gustav Cohn described the 71 municipal slaughter houses, 24 electric works and the 20 or more municipal bakeries in Italy in 1898.⁴⁶ Likewise, Edgard Milhaud detailed the improvements that public management made to a range of services including railways, water-supply and food preparation in a number of European cities and countries.⁴⁷

Demands, and frequently achievements, were very similar everywhere. In brief, they were improved living conditions especially housing and amenities; city-run public enterprises for water, electricity, gas and public transport; day labour with trade union rights employed by the city instead of contractors and with the best pos-

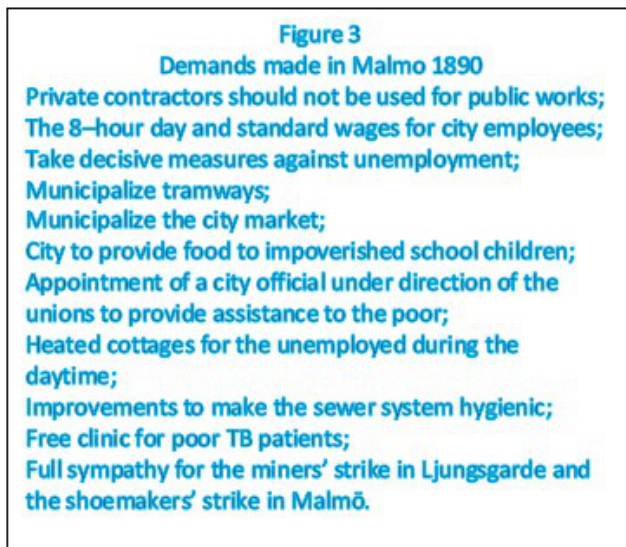


Figure 3
(Arbetet, 9 December 1890, quoted by Stromquist, ibid, pp131-2)

sible wages and conditions including the eight-hour day. Figure 3 shows a set of demands made in Malmo, Sweden.⁴⁸

This list could have applied in Brisbane - if 'heated cottages' was replaced with 'ventilated and cooled'!

'Red' Vienna of 1919–1934 became the most highly developed and celebrated example of municipal socialism; especially in providing public housing and workers' culture. Crockett describes it as 'the most ambitious democratic political project in the world of its time'.^{49 50} However, the

main Australian and New Zealand cities were also at the forefront—in part because of the relatively early unionisation and politicisation of workers.

Spreading the Word

The various endeavours of municipal socialism were, as Stromquist notes, 'linked through the cross-fertilization of political ideas'.⁵¹ Some of this was via publications. *The Australian Worker* is one example; in 1925 it published a number of articles about Vienna; one was titled 'Vienna is the only city of over a million inhabitants; which is governed by Socialists'.⁵² *The In-*

ternational Socialist Review, published in Chicago, is another example; in 1905 it included an article by Tom Mann on developments in Australia.⁵³

More ‘cross-fertilization’ occurred through travel and visits. Stromquist states ‘In the period between 1890 and 1925, a diverse, far-flung cadre of locally grounded internationalists spread a gospel of labor and socialist radicalism around the world’.⁵⁴ A long list of socialist and semi-socialist visitors came to Australia and New Zealand. Albert Métin author of ‘*Le socialisme sans doctrines*’ came from France.⁵⁵ Visitors from Britain included the Fabians Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Ben Tillet of the Dockers’ Union and Keir Hardie of the Independent Labour Party. Walter Thomas Mills of the Socialist Party of America from Milwaukee was another very influential visitor. So too was Michael Davitt, one of the founders of the Irish Land League. There were visits from Australasia to the UK, Europe and the US including by Jim Thorn from Christchurch and Australian railway union leader Claude Thompson who went to the US, Britain and Europe. Many of these contacts were made through the Second International. As Andrew Bonnell writes,

Despite the small size and lack of resources of Australian socialist groups before 1914,

they managed to keep up surprisingly frequent contacts with the International, directly or through proxies, and there was often keen interest among the parties of the Second International in developments in the Antipodes.⁵⁶

Interactions between Tom Mann and R.S. (Bob) Ross were perhaps the best known. Neville Kirk concludes, Mann, Ross and other connected radicals in the Anglophone world both influenced and were influenced by not only national and international, but also transnational connections, networks, ideas and movements. In the course of their activities, moreover, they developed transnational as well as national, sub-national and international identities and attachments.⁵⁷

The links between Tom Mann and Bob Ross are confirmed in Mann’s memoirs where he says of Ross ‘He was, and is, a great force with the pen, which he has used to spread the gospel in all parts of the southern hemisphere...’⁵⁸

A Reprise

Clearly, the creation of the greater Brisbane City in 1925 had a substantial pedigree in left and social-

ist ideas of the time. Moreover, these ideas had a global basis to which the developments in Australia and New Zealand contributed.

The conservative parties and press were extremely quick and strident about 'socialism', which is at least indirect evidence that the origin of the Council was much more than

improving governance and the efficiency of services.

Perhaps a suitable place to end is to cite the *Daily Standard* which in February 1926 nicely turned the argument back on the conservatives.

Figure 4 shows their words in text and cartoon form.⁵⁹

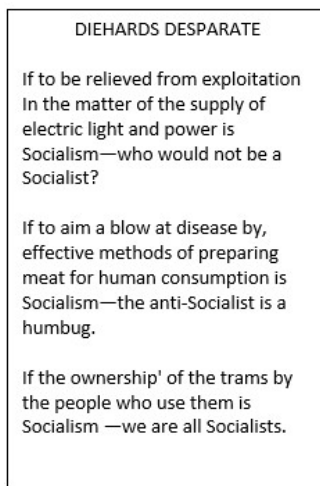


Figure 4
 (Daily Standard, 25 Feb 1926. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/179491614>.)

Howard Guille retired as Queensland Secretary of the NTEU in 2006 and is the secretary of the North Stradmoke Island Museum on Minjerrabah. He is co-editor of *The Queensland Journal of Labour History*.

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Note that more recent sources refer to the 1890 or 1891 Platform of the Australian Labour Federation. For example *Reason in Revolt* presents the first plank as *Universal And Equal Adult White Suffrage—The right to Vote. Abolition Of the Nominee Chamber*; citing 'Appendix to Murphy and Hughes (eds.), *Prelude to Power*, pp267-91. Reprinted in David Lovell, *Marxism and Australian Socialism before the Bolshevik Revolution*, Melbourne, Australian Scholarly Publishing, c1997.

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²⁹ Ibid p317

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³¹ J.P Fry, MLA Whip of the United Party, The Telegraph, Mon 24 Mar 1924, trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/182473376

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³³ *The Telegraph*, Mon 23 Feb 1925 trove.nla.gov.

[au/newspaper/article/178386445](https://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/newspaper/article/178386445) *Capitals original*.

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⁴⁰ Manifesto of the Socialist Vanguard in *The Red Light: Handbook of the Queensland Social Democracy*, 1901, available at www.reasoninrevolt.net.au/objects/pdf/a000333.pdf

Though not directly pertinent to the current discussion, it is notable that it followed Bernstein not Kautsky. The manifesto also includes the statement 'The Vanguard recognises that Socialism must come through Parliament'. The Vanguard continued until, in Verity Burgmann's words, it collapsed itself into the Labor Party about 1909. Ultimately, the Vanguard's existence as a determined socialist organisation foundered on the rocks of parliamentary expediency. Ernest Lane describes the history of the Vanguard as 'tragic' because, after he left for Cosme and R.S. Ross for Broken Hill, in 1902, it degenerated into a political mutual admiration society, 'eventually to sink in the slough of complete bankruptcy, financially and morally'. (in Burgmann)

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⁵⁷ Neville Kirk, *Transnational Radicalism and the Connected Lives of Tom Mann and Robert Samuel Ross*, Liverpool University Press, 2017, p4

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The Other Side of the Story - Hiroshima - Eighty Years of Resistance

Ross Gwyther

Introduction

At 9:15am on Monday 6th August 1945, Colonel Paul Tibbets was captaining a B29 superfortress named “Enola Gay” (after his mother) in the skies above Hiroshima, Japan. He and the other aircrew turned to look back in the distance at the city upon which they had just dropped the first atomic bomb:

The site that greeted our eyes was quite beyond what we had expected, because we saw this cloud of boiling dust and debris below us with this tremendous mushroom on top. Beneath that was hidden the ruins of the city of Hiroshima.¹

On the city’s outskirts, photographer Yoshito Matsushige, after several minutes working up the courage to trip the shutter, took five photographs at a place called Miyuki Bridge. He could only bear to take a few photographs. He then just went home. These are the only photographs taken that day within Hiroshima that are known.²

The awe and the horror that both the American airmen and the Japanese photographer experienced foreshadowed eighty years of an ever-present threat of world-wide nuclear catastrophe.

Commemorations of the horror of the 1945 atomic blasts are held on ‘Hiroshima Day’ in cities throughout Australia. The message of Hiroshima Day is ‘never again’. The same must be said about the twelve live-test explosions carried out in Australia by the British Government in the 1950s. These tests had a total explosive power equal to 18 Hiroshima bombs. They left a radioactive legacy and social and cultural destruction on the country of the Maralinga Tjarutja people. Other atomic testing by, respectively the British, French and US Governments had severe impacts on peoples across the Pacific.

The eighty years of the nuclear age has also been eighty years of resistance to the nuclear marauders. The resistance has been and is a peoples’ movement determined to



Fig 1. Opening of the *Peace is Union Business* exhibition at the Queensland Council of Unions building, Peel Street, Brisbane, August 2025

keep the world safe from nuclear catastrophe.

In 2025, members of the Brisbane Just Peace organisation and the National Independent and Peaceful Australia Network (IPAN), curated an exhibition documenting this resistance. The exhibition '*Peace is Union Business*' covered 80 years of campaigns by unions, workers and communities to end the nuclear nightmare. It ran over 5th to 12th August, the week of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki commemorations. The Queensland Council of Unions (QCU) hosted the exhibition in the foyer of the TLC Building in South Brisbane.

The research undertaken for the exhibition is the basis of this article. The term 'nuclear weapons' will be

used as a generic descriptor. It covers fission atomic weapons and thermonuclear (fusion) weapons.³

Two themes are interwoven. One is the trajectory of nuclear design since the 1940s. This includes development, testing and the latent threats to use nuclear weapons. Opposition to nuclear weapons is the other theme. The account centres on Queensland but, as appropriate, references the rest of Australia and other parts of the world.

The article will show that the opposition to nuclear weapons began almost immediately after their use against Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The opposition was very broad-based in Queensland and Australia. Unions and individual

unionists joined with community organisations and were prominent in generating and maintaining the opposition.

The intensity of the campaign against nuclear weapons fluctuated over the eighty years very much in response to the amount of testing and the level of apprehension about their possible use. It also seems reasonable to conclude that while the opposition has not eradicated nuclear weapons from the world, some successes were achieved and some constraints put on them.

The Genesis of Opposition

Some of the scientists who had been directly involved in developing atomic weapons were among the first to condemn them. J. Robert Oppenheimer and Albert Einstein, who were crucial to the development of the atomic bombs and nuclear energy, became strong opponents to such weapons. So did the Australian nuclear physicist Mark Oliphant, whose work in England was directly responsible for establishing the Manhattan project in 1943. He began to publicly oppose nuclear weapons from 1945 – even as he enthusiastically promoted the so-called peaceful-use of nuclear power.

Australian churches and trade unions started campaigning to have atomic weapons banned in 1945–46. Proposed testing of long-range rockets and atomic weapons in Australia were issues. This was because the British Government established a research program for guided missiles (then termed rockets) in 1945. Areas of low population were needed to test them and the Australian Government obliged. The first test site was at Mt Eba, (100 km northwest of Woomera). In November 1946 Woomera became the ‘rangehead’ for rockets test fired 1000km northwest towards the Broome coast. The cooperative project between Britain and Australia was called the Long-Range Weapons Organisation with a technical base at Salisbury, north of Adelaide.

Public opposition mounted to the long-range rocket tests. This included concern for the Aboriginal peoples living in the range area and fears that testing of atomic bombs would be part of the project. In March 1947 the Adelaide Combined TLC recommended to the ACTU that ‘a ban be placed on the manufacture of the “rocket weapon” in South Australia’. They resolved that ‘the way to world peace lay in total disarmament by all nations, including the manufacture of the atomic bomb’.⁴

The US Atomic Energy Act of 1946 excluded the British presence from US nuclear weapon development programs as they were suspicious of 'alien' elements among nuclear scientists. Accordingly, the British committed to developing their own 'H bomb' type fusion weapons. They needed somewhere to test them.

The possibility of testing British nuclear weapons in Australia was rejected by the Chifley government in a Parliamentary statement of late 1946. Even so, rumours persisted because of the proposed British rocket range at Woomera. In 1951, the British Attlee government asked the Menzies Government to agree to such testing. In February 1952, Menzies announced agreement to the first British atomic test at the Monte Bello Islands off north-west Australia for October that year.⁵

Opposition to the tests was strong. Common Cause was a South Australian organisation formed in 1943 to promote post-war social and economic reconstruction.⁶ It was very broad bringing together senior public servants, professors, large business operators and union secretaries. As Mitchell states, 'the original membership was not a collection of nondescript individuals but comprised of some of the most influential people in

South Australia'.⁷ While its membership fell after the war, it remained active in protests against the impact of British rocket testing on Aboriginal people in the test areas. A petition of October 1946 was forwarded to both the British Prime Minister, and the League of Coloured Peoples in London.⁸

Union protests were also prominent. The South Australia Trades and Labour Council passed a motion in August 1946 strongly protesting the 'proposed rocket bomb tests and demanding that they be cancelled'.⁹ This is shown as Figure 2.

PROTEST AGAINST ROCKET TESTS Labor Council Demands Cancellation

A motion strongly protesting to the Federal Government against proposed rocket bomb tests in Central Australia, and demanding that they be cancelled, was carried at a meeting of the SA Trades and Labor Council at the Trades Hall last night.

It was also resolved to demand of the Federal Government that the control of atomic and rocket energy be taken out of the hands of military chiefs and placed in charge of a civilian commission under the direct control of Parliament.

The protest is to be presented to the Prime Minister, Federal Ministers, State MPs, and circulated throughout the trade union movement.

Fig 2. South Australia Trades and Labour Council response to rocket testing in central Australia, (Advertiser (Adelaide, SA), 17 August 1946 p11)

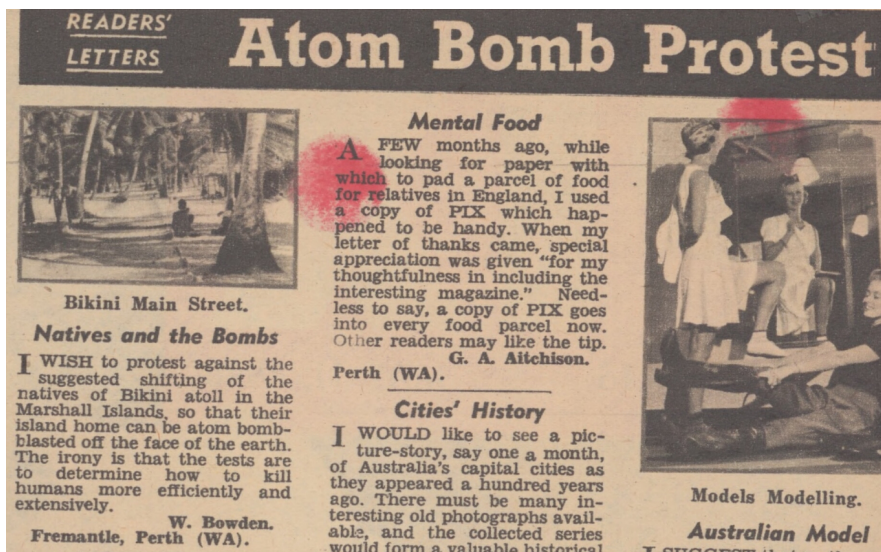


Fig 3. Pix Atomic Bomb letter to editor 1946

The Victorian Building Trades Federation called for a ban on work at the proposed South Australian rocket range.¹⁰ The Tasmanian branch of the BWIU directed their State Executive to 'support peace and calls for general disarmament and the outlawing of the atom bomb'.¹¹

And the opposition got a hearing in some less expected sources. For those who remember visiting the hairdresser or barber in the 1950s, the pictorial magazine *Pix* was a constant to leaf through. A 1946 letter to the editor protesting the atomic tests on Bikini Atoll in the Pacific and the toll it would take on the local Indigenous people is shown at Figure 3.

Tribune, published by the Communist Party of Australia, set out very strong concerns about what it termed 'urgent pleas for atomic defence' and called upon the Australian Government to support a call from the ACTU, the World Federation of Unions, the New Democracies and the USSR, for outlawing of the atomic bomb at Figure 4.¹²

"ATOMIC DEFENCE" SHOWS NEED FOR OUTLAWING BOMB

"Urgent" plans for "atomic defence" in Australia highlight the need for Australian Government support at UNO of the Australasian Council of Trade Unions, World Federation of Trade Unions, the New Democracies and the Soviet Union's demands for outlawry of the atomic bomb.

Announcements of "atomic defence plans," to the accompaniment of press scaremongering, should also remind the Australian people of the consequences of the refusal of External Affairs Minister Evatt and the Chifley Government to fight for outlawry of the atomic bomb.

If the press reports are correct, the "atomic defence plan" means that the Australian Government fatalistically accepts the probability that there will be a Third World War fought with atomic bombs, guided missiles and other modern horrors.

Fig 4. 1948 ACTU - Atomic defence and the need to ban the bomb

The Peace Movement in Queensland

A state-wide peace movement developed in Queensland in the 1940s. More than 40 peace auxiliaries were organised in Queensland cities and rural areas. The movement included church members and trade unionists. The monthly newsletter *Fight for Peace* was first published in 1948.¹³

A Queensland Peace Conference was held in October 1949. The convening committee included church leaders from the Congregational, Methodist, Salvation Army, Presbyterian and Quaker churches, as well as Mick Healy from the Queensland Trades and Labour Council and representatives from the Australian Legion of ex-Servicemen and Women. The conference was a fulsome success with delegates from 145 organisations from throughout the State. The aims included the prohibition of atomic weapons and other means of mass destruction.¹⁴

The conference also supported the 'development of atomic energy for peaceful purposes.' Enthusiasm for the peaceful atom was fostered by the establishment of Atomic Energy Commissions in many western countries and by President

Eisenhower's 1953 'Atoms for Peace' speech. Production of electricity from nuclear plants started in the US in 1951 which was followed by the UK and USSR and then, in the 1960s, Japan, South Korea and France.¹⁵ The nuclear reactors also provided enriched materials for nuclear weapons.¹⁶

The 1950s Elsewhere in Australia

The peace activities in Queensland were mirrored in other parts of Australia. In April 1950 the national Australian Peace Congress was held in the Melbourne Exhibition Building. Around 10,000 delegates attended. The Congress program extended over three days, with separate Women's, Youth, Religious, Trade Union, and Writers commissions and a final public rally. A photograph of the Congress is shown at Figure 5.

Campaigning to ban atomic weapons and to oppose testing them in Australia intensified in the 1950s with a considerable number of Community Peace Groups set up. Peace committees were established in more progressive union branches. For example, in January 1950:

seventy-four waterside workers, elected as delegates from nearly every ship in the port of Sydney,



Fig 5. 1950 Australian Peace Congress

met on Wednesday night and formed a Waterside Workers' Peace Committee. The 74 delegates elected an executive of 15, which included Communists, Labor Party workers, Industrial Group members and non-party workers, to lead the work of the Peace Committee.¹⁷

In December 1950 the President of the Southern Miners' branch of the Miners Federation called on the local newspaper *Daily Mercury* to 'join with the trade union movement in its fight for peace and the national independence of all peoples'. It also set out historical reasons why;

In 1935 the Federal Council denounced the predatory war of Fascist imperialism in Abyssinia. In October 1937 we passed the 'Hands Off China' resolution. In February

1938, the council endorsed and congratulated waterside workers on their refusal to load munitions and pig-iron for use by Japan in the Far Eastern conflict. In August 1947 we condemned Dutch aggression in Indonesia. In February 1950 we opposed and called for no Australian intervention in Malaya (this, incidentally, was the policy of the Federal Labor Party). In August 1950 we called for the withdrawal of United Nations forces from Korea despite the fact that at that time the North Koreans were carrying all before them. During the whole course of the present conflict the Federation has consistently supported the withdrawal of the United Nations forces in the interests of peace and national independence.¹⁸

In 1952 peace committees around Australia worked together to organise a 3-day Youth Carnival for Peace and Friendship. Focused on opposition to Australian involvement in the Korean War, the program also highlighted the dangers of nuclear war and atomic testing. The event attracted 12,000 young people from across Australia, with 30,000 people attending the final closing ceremony in the Sydney Domain.¹⁹

Protests about Testing

There was also growing community opposition to the proposed atom bomb testing at Monte Bello Islands. In September 1952 the Adelaide Congress of the Australasian Ornithologists protested at the environmental impact of the atomic tests.²⁰

Opposition to the Monte Bello and Emu Field tests raised concerns amongst UK defence chiefs. In 1954, articles in British newspapers foreshadowed the abandonment of these sites. Chapman Pincher, scientific correspondent of the British Daily Express, commented on the departure of an English Mission for Australia for secret talks on atom trials. He reported that feeling against such tests had increased considerably since world-wide reverberations caused

Miners had last word on Carnival

(By a correspondent)

WHEN miners at BHP's Burwood pit stayed listening to Youth Carnival sport organiser Max Heidke last week, the management provocatively blew the 'no work' whistle. Miners continued to listen to Mr. Heidke, then decided that they would go home for two days instead of one day as the BHP had decreed.

Fig 6. 1952 Miners and Youth Carnival

BIRD LOVERS PROTEST ON ATOM BLAST

Adelaide—The likely destruction of bird life at the Monte Bello Islands and nearby Barrow Island during the forthcoming atom tests was the subject of protests by members of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union at its annual congress in Adelaide today.

Fig 7. 1952 Birders protest of Monte Bello

by the explosion of a hydrogen bomb by the U.S. in the Pacific. That nuclear explosion showered radioactive ash on Japanese fishermen close to the testing ground.

In April 1955, The NSW Peace Council used its newsletter Peace to promote and call for signatories to the 'Appeal against Preparations for Atomic War' which had been launched by the World Peace Council. That Council was formed by Cominform in 1949.²¹ In 1950, it

had launched the Stockholm Peace Appeal which claimed to have 1.5 million signatories within two weeks and the support of 200 million people across 72 countries within four months.²²

Early Australian signatories to the Appeal included essayist and academic Walter Murdoch, writers Mary Gilmore and Vance Palmer, artist Max Meldrum, and more than 130 Ministers of Religion, as well as ALP figures. The same newsletter detailed the policy of the Evatt-led Federal ALP Opposition for effective international control of nuclear weapons. There was also a report of a meeting of 500 people in the School of Arts, Peakhurst, Sydney demonstrating local community opposition to the manufacture, testing and use of atomic weapons.

The Communist Party of Australia magazine *Tribune* readily published accounts of worker opposition to atomic weapons tests. Seamen in Sydney stopped work on June 26 1956 to protest at further atom bomb tests and called on the trade union movement to organise a protest march on Canberra. The Newcastle Trades Hall Council Executive expressed:

deep concern at the Federal Government decision to allow further tests at Maralinga, and

said that we join with the ACTU, the Federal ALP and all leading church dignitaries in condemning manufacture, use and experimentation of nuclear weapons.²³

The Newcastle TLC quoted Queensland University Physics Professor Webster in drawing attention to the danger of radiation blowing across the Australian continent from bomb tests.²⁴

The effects of the radiation from the tests deserves a separate and detailed story. There was considerable hard scientific evidence that dangerous levels of radiation had spread across large areas of the continent after the Maralinga and Emu Field tests. CSIRO had set up monitoring sites around Australia and Chief CSIRO scientist Hedley Marston measured radioactive iodine levels 300 times higher than normal in Rockhampton. Yet, his research was severely criticised by the Australian scientific head of the atomic tests, Sir Ernest Titterton, who was an enthusiast for speeding up nuclear weapons development. Titterton managed to have Marston's research papers suppressed until 1957 by which time tests had been abandoned because of continuing public pressure.²⁵

Sustained Opposition via the TLC

One avenue of protest for workers in Queensland was motions of opposition to bomb tests and preparations for atomic war at various levels within the union movement. The annual congress of the Queensland Trades and Labour Council was one such venue through the 1950s and 1960s when Alex Macdonald was Secretary. The agenda of each of these congresses included issues such as free speech, international peace and disarmament, atomic weapons, international affairs and anti-colonial struggles. Conscription and the war in Vietnam became important in the mid-1960s.²⁶

Between 1956 to 1969 well over one hundred resolutions from union affiliates and regional TLCs called for peace, the end of atomic war preparations and the end of the testing of nuclear weapons.²⁷ Other resolutions called for an end to Australian involvement in the British campaign to retain colonial control over Malaya and supported a nuclear-free Pacific.

To the extent that a single resolution can convey the overall approach, it perhaps comes from the 1962 motion submitted by the Hospital Employees Federation:

(Noting that)...the danger of suicidal nuclear war is very great, we therefore urge the Queensland trade union movement to 'Make Peace union business', and to strengthen all aspects of the peace movement.

It is notable that the Hospital Employees Federation would not be usually considered one of the leading radical unions.

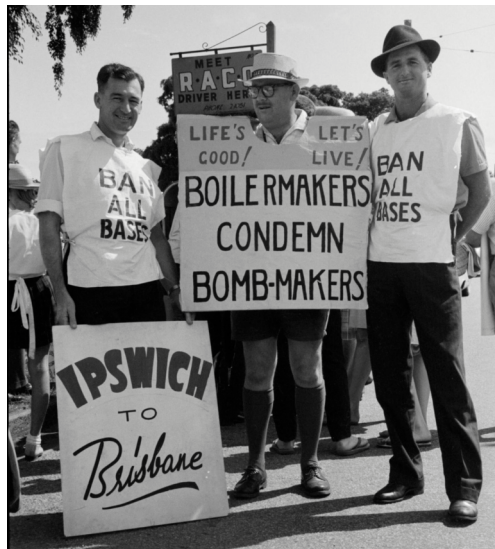


Fig 8. Poster advertising the Ipswich Brisbane peace march



*Fig 9/10. 1964 marchers -
Ipswich to Brisbane*

During this period, unions and the TLC worked with the Australian Peace Committee. This was the umbrella body facilitating and connecting local and regional community peace groups. One initiative was the replication of the Trafalgar Square London to Aldermaston marches which the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) held each Easter from 1959. Aldermaston was a former World War 2 airfield on the outskirts of London, re-



purposed as the centre of the UK Atomic Weapons Research Establishment. The Queensland "Aldermaston" peace marches were held for several years during the early 1960s, starting at Ipswich and marching the 40 km to Brisbane city.

The Peace Movement as a CPA Front

In the 1950s and 60s union peace resolutions were routinely attacked in the mainstream media as communist subversion. Community peace committees were portrayed as communist fronts.

Such claims hardly fit with either logic or history. The Australian workforce in 1950 was about 2 million, rising to 4 million by the mid-1960s; union members comprised well over half of the workforce. Communist Party of Australia (CPA) membership was less than 12,000 in 1950 and fell rapidly over the decade as the Menzies Government made the party its public enemy number one and undertook the failed anti-communist Bill and Referendum.²⁸

We can reasonably infer that while the few CPA members in any union workplace or local branch may well have put forward many of the ideas contained in union campaigns and resolutions, they were only adopted as union positions because the much larger workforce, who were not CPA members, supported them.

Moreover, union peace campaigns were contemporaneous with the fierce ideological battle in unions and workplaces between CPA

members and anti-communist 'groupers' aligned with the Industrial Groups of the National Civic Council.

1960s and Widespread Opposition to Nuclear Weapons

The Cuban missile crisis in October 1962 heightened fears of nuclear war and obliteration. Local authorities in Australia made actual preparations for nuclear attack. For example, in 1961, Lil Gwyther, Principal of Ashgrove West Pre-School in Brisbane, was required to undertake a civil defence course, about the effects of nuclear weapons, the use of bomb shelters and post-attack measures.²⁹ As can be seen from the certificate in Figure 11, this was called an 'indoctrination course'.

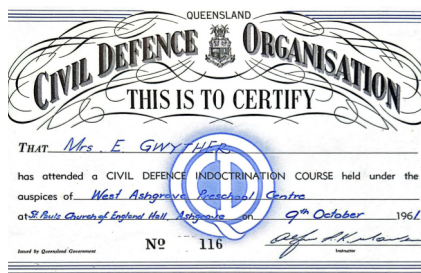


Fig 11. Civil Defence course completion certificate from 1961

Joint actions between unions and community organisations to argue for peace and the end of nuclear testing became more frequent. In 1964, for example, the ACTU executive resolved to support the Australian Congress for International Co-operation and Disarmament (ACICD) which was calling for no French tests in the Pacific. The ACTU also supported the ACICD call for extending the partial test ban treaty, establishing nuclear free zones and general and complete disarmament as shown by Figure 12.



Fig 12. ACICD poster showing ACTU endorsement under ACTU President A.E.Monk

French Tests and Uranium Mining

In the late 1960s-early 1970s the Vietnam war and conscription became more prominent issues for unions than nuclear matters. However, increased French testing re-stimulated union and community concerns about nuclear war.

A large rally against the French tests was held in the Brisbane City Hall in June 1972. This had 25 speakers including union, church and peace group representatives and parliamentarians. At the same period, the growing environmental movement linked the issue of nuclear power generation with those of uranium mining, storage of nuclear waste and the plans for uranium enrichment plants. In 1975 plans for uranium mining in the northern Territory were opposed by the Yolgnu people on whose lands the mining would occur.

The Campaign Against Nuclear Power (CANP) was established in 1975. By 1977, CANP had 500 members in Queensland, with subgroups established in Nambour, Gold Coast, Ipswich, Toowoomba, Townsville, Mackay, Rockhampton, Gatton, Dalby, Warwick and Gympie.

In August 1975 a national Uranium

Moratorium Declaration was signed by 35,000 Queenslanders, with 260,000 signatures across Australia. The rapid growth of this campaign was mirrored in strong union activity. A rally held in the King George Square in October 1977, organised by CANP with the assistance of the Trade Union Anti-Nuclear Lobby, attracted 5,000 people as part of a national mobilisation.

The Bjelke Peterson Government attempted to prevent a street march by the rally participants. Over 400 people were arrested in the confrontation with Police that followed. This fed into the separate, “right to march” campaign of the time. The membership of CANP continued to grow in the 1970s with the CANP newsletter distributed by the 25 or so Brisbane and regional groups reaching a peak circulation of 6,000.

One outcome of the protests about nuclear power and uranium mining was the Ranger Uranium Environmental Inquiry set up in 1975 by the Whitlam Government. The first report in 1976 concluded that uranium mining could proceed if ‘appropriately’ regulated. The second report in 1977 considered the Ranger mine which it recommended be excised from the proposed Kakadu National Park.³⁰ The Fraser



Fig 13 Anti-uranium rally in King George Square on October 22, 1977: FL2640204 SLQ Jennifer Gow



Fig 14. CANP newsletter, with peak circulation of 6000.

Coalition Government approved Ranger which commenced mining in 1980.³¹

The campaign against uranium mining can be considered partially successful as it limited the extent of mining in Kakadu. In addition, the ALP adopted its ‘three mine’ policy in 1984 restricting Australian uranium mining activities to the three sites already operational: Ranger, Nabarlek and Olympic Dam. But against this, the Olympic Dam/Roxby Downs mine was to

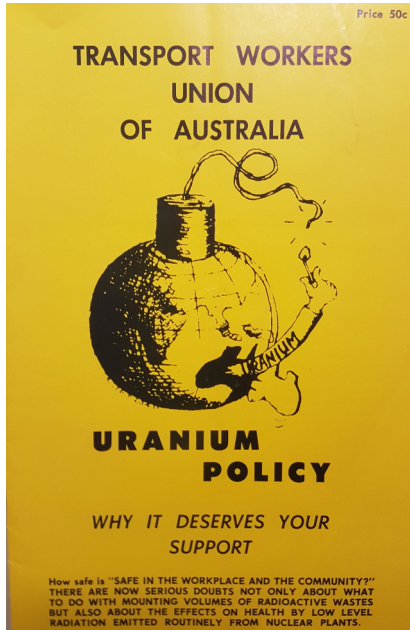


Fig 15.

1977 anti-uranium booklet by Transport Workers Federal Union

become the second largest uranium mine in the world. Moreover, Roxby Downs expanded after 1988 with relatively little community opposition. Though some unions, including the Electrical Trades Union, maintained strong opposition to all aspects of nuclear power.

The High Point of the PND

From 1980 onwards, contention between the USA and the Soviet Union and the expansion of the numbers and scale of nuclear weapons became the central issue for the peace movement.

Queensland Labor Senator George Georges organised an annual Rally for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament. In Brisbane, 10,000 people marched for an end to nuclear confrontation on Palm Sunday 1983.

People for Nuclear Disarmament (PND Queensland) was formed in July 1983 out of the earlier organisation ACICD.³² 3,000 people attended a public meeting in the Brisbane City Hall in October. Speakers included the President of the Queensland TLC Harry Hauenschild, retired US army officer, Colonel David Hackworth, Quentin Bryce (later to be Governor of Queensland and Governor-General of Australia), Anglican Dean Bob Butterss, poet and activist Kath Walker (Oodgeroo Noonucal), Dr Hiram Baddley from the Medical Association for Prevention of War, with TV personality Mike Higgins compering and Margaret Roadknight providing music.

PND, with similar organisations in other States, became one of the largest mass movements in post-war Australian history. A sense of the scale of its support is the turnout at the PND-organised Palm Sunday marches. Nationally more than 250,000 people attended the 1984 marches, including 20,000 in Brisbane. These marches included



Fig 16. 1984 nuclear disarmament march in Brisbane

hundreds of Christian church members carrying palm fronds.

The UN designated 1986 as the International Year of Peace. By this time, PND Queensland had 3,000 members in 28 local branches across the state. PND published a magazine *Common Ground* with a distribution to newsagents of 15,000 copies via the journal distributors Gordon and Gotch, as well as delivery by PND members to 200 sales points. The breadth and variety of PND activities in Queensland included Peace Picnics, a young people's 'Peace Links' workshop, an International Year for Peace Community fair, bush dances and book fairs, a '*Legs against arms*' 'fun-run' as well as preparation for

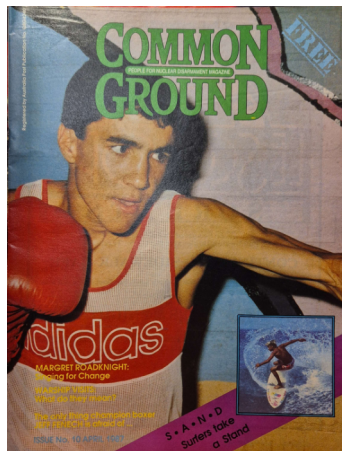


Fig 17 PND magazine *Common Ground* published from 1985 to 1989 (April 1987) circulation 20,000

protests against visiting nuclear armed warships.

Trade Union support for PND was strong particularly via donations. In November 1986, Moura miner and PND member Ernie Kidd arranged for the Mining Union to coordinate the construction of a sign calling Moura a "Peace Pit".

In April 1988 PND co-convenor Annette Brownlie and committee member Jack Sherrington addressed the Queensland TLC about the Nuclear Disarmament Declaration. The TLC voted to endorse the campaign, give some funds, and encourage affiliate unions to give their support. The Declaration was finally presented to the Australian Parliament in 1989 with over 200,000 signatures,



*Fig 18 200,000 people around Australia sign
Nuclear Disarmament Declaration 1989*

including 22,000 from
Queensland.³³

Other aspects of the nuclear disarmament campaign during the 1980s included:

- Forming a branch of Scientists Against Nuclear Arms (SANA) in Brisbane. SANA held regular public meetings addressed by visiting scientists and produced detailed documents on the impacts of nuclear tests and the dangers of nuclear warships and the likelihood of a 'nuclear winter' following a nuclear war.
- The appointment in 1983 of Richard Butler as Ambassador for Disarmament in line with the ALP Platform for the 1982 Election.³⁴

- The Nuclear Disarmament Party in 1984 contested Senate seats in all States in the 1984 Federal Election with an overall vote of over 7% and with Jo Vallentine being elected Senator in WA.

- A successful campaign by the Peace Research and Resource Centre from Queensland University to establish a permanent centre for the peace movement in Brisbane. This culminated in the Federal Government gifting a warehouse building in Albion to the movement. This building continues to operate as the Albion Peace Centre.

- In the mid-1980s the Queensland Teachers Union established a Peace committee linked to PND. The union requested the Queensland Director of Education to include Peace Education in the school curriculum.

- In 1992 PND joined the international campaign to free Mordechi Vanunu, an Israeli nuclear technician who was imprisoned after revealing the existence of an Israeli nuclear weapons program.³⁵

French Testing Again

From 1966 to 1996, France conducted 193 nuclear tests in the

Pacific at the Moruroa and Fangataufa Atolls in French Polynesia. Protests at the testing was linked to the wider campaign of banning all nuclear weapons.

In 1986, a 'World Court Project' was established in New Zealand seeking to get the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to give an advisory opinion on the legal status of nuclear weapons.³⁶ This grew into a world-wide campaign, launched in the United Nations in 1992 by three organisations - the IPB - International Peace Bureau (Nobel Peace Prize winner, [1910](#))³⁷, IPPNW (International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War - Nobel Peace Prize winner [1985](#)), and International Association of Lawyers against Nuclear Arms. In 1994 the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution asking the Court urgently to give its opinion on the question: "Is the threat or use of nuclear weapons in any circumstance permitted under international law?"

In July 1995, PND members joined a meeting of the South Pacific and Oceanic Council of Trade Unions held in the TLC Building, Brisbane, to protest French nuclear tests. Later that month, Brisbane Lord Mayor Jim Soorley organised a Picnic in the Park against French nuclear tests; thousands of families attended.

In 1995, Brisbane City Council voted to reinstate Brisbane as a Nuclear Free Zone. That designation had not been rescinded at the time of writing (late 2025).

Later in 1995, a student gathering (organised by students from several Brisbane High Schools) filled the City Hall to protest French tests.

In 1995 the ACTU adopted a resolution strongly calling for peace and nuclear disarmament (Fig 19).

By July 1996, the ICJ released its decision on the illegality of nuclear weapons. Its first finding was that nuclear weapons are 'generally' contrary to the rules of international law applicable in armed conflict. Its second finding was the legality or illegality of the use or threat of nuclear weapons in an extreme circumstance of self-defence was unable to be determined.³⁸

This decision was unsatisfactory for the nuclear disarmament movement. However, another aim of the campaign had been successful in forcing the French Government to stop nuclear testing. The final French nuclear test was held on January 27, 1996, at the Fangataufa Atoll.³⁹ Only six of the series of eight tests announced in 1995 were held; arguably because of international protests and boycotts.⁴⁰

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS POLICY
ACTU Congress September 1995

2.4 The ACTU

- (i) demands that the pursuit of peace should have priority over all political objectives;
- (ii) is firmly committed to the peaceful resolution of international conflicts;
- (iii) recognises the right of all the peoples of the world who are prepared to defend their freedom;
- (iv) condemns the reliance on nuclear weapons which pose a threat to all human life and the earth's environment;
- (v) condemns the enormous growth in the build-up of conventional weapons throughout the world;
- (vi) supports national trade union policies for the abandonment of nuclear weapons in accordance with ACTU policies; and
- (vii) demands effective national and international control of the arms trade.

Fig 19 1995 ACTU resolution for peace and nuclear disarmament

Standing up for Australian Sovereignty and the Iraq War

The other focus of the Australian peace movement in the 1990-2000s was conflict in the Middle East. In 1990-91 this was first about Iraq; the Iraq conflict with Kuwait in 1990 and then the US-led invasion of Iraq in 1991. Over the next decade United States-led sanctions resulted in tens of thousands of Iraqi deaths. In the 2000s the US responded to the 11 September 2001 attack on the New York Twin Towers with a 'war on terror'. Afghanistan was invaded in 2002 and Iraq in 2003.

Brisbane activists from the nuclear disarmament movement formed an

organisation calling for peaceful and just resolution of international conflicts. Just Peace Queensland was established in 2002. The aim was to network organisations that could resist expansion of war and armed conflict. The 'Queensland Peace Network' (QPN) was initiated in late 2002.

In February 2003, protest marches led by the QPN and similar networks in other States attracted more than 300,000 people opposing any Australian involvement in the US planned invasion of Iraq.

This public opposition was echoed in many unions around the country with the ACTU calling for the Australian Government to refuse



Fig 20 Iraq 2003 protests, Courier Mail cover - Queensland Peace Network rally opposing the impending invasion of Iraq

involvement in the planned invasion of Iraq.⁴¹ In spite of this massive public and trade union opposition, the Howard Government continued with troop deployment. Just Peace has remained active to the present day, working with several unions such as the ETU and NTEU. It holds regular public meetings and rallies, publishes leaflets and a regular newsletter, and links music and protest in regular concerts.

The international nuclear disarmament campaign gained renewed strength in 2006 with the formation of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear

Weapons (ICAN).⁴² This initiative was immensely successful, with the United Nations adopting the *Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons* (TPNW) in July 2017. A seventy-two-year long struggle had finally achieved one of its aims - an official declaration that nuclear weapons are illegal. ICAN was awarded the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize. As of 2025, there are 95 state signatories, with 74 “State Parties” ratifying the Treaty. The current Australian Labor Party Government has refused to sign the treaty.

AUKUS and All That

The campaign for nuclear



Fig 21. Auntie Sue Coleman with the ICAN 2017 Nobel Peace Prize, Canberra, 2018 Photo: Martin Ollman

disarmament - including pressure on the Australian Labor Government to make good on its promise to sign the TPNW - continues. A parallel campaign aims to build public pressure for Australia to adopt a foreign and defence policy based on peace. Currently, Australia seems to be entirely subservient to United States military and war preparation and fighting.

The announcement by the Gillard and Obama Governments in 2011 that 2,500 US marines would be “rotated” permanently in Darwin made it clear that foreign troops and foreign military bases are making Australia a post of the American military empire.

Just Peace and groups in other states such as the Medical Association for Prevention of War, Spirit of Eureka,

and the long running Australian Anti-Bases Campaign have grouped into the Independent and Peaceful Australia Network (IPAN). Formed in 2012, this network has over 50 organisation and 300 individual members in 2025.

IPAN has extended its work from the campaign to abolish nuclear weapons and to change Australia’s military links with the US. Opposition to the AUKUS ‘defence’ pact (Australia, UK and US) is now a major focus. AUKUS was announced in 2021 and according to its proponents is intended to facilitate “integrated deterrence” in the Indo-Pacific region.⁴³

AUKUS has two ‘pillars’. Pillar 1 is the \$368 billion nuclear purchase of eight nuclear powered attack submarines. Pillar 2 ‘serves as a platform for advanced technology cooperation’.⁴⁴ IPAN’s view is that Pillar 2 will mean the domination of the Australian military through AI and quantum sensing technologies provided by the high-tech corporate giants such as Amazon, Google and Microsoft.

The IPAN campaign has included 15 unions around Australia, including the Queensland branches of five unions - MUA, QTU, QNMU, NTEU and ETU.

Impacts of Eighty Years of Campaigning

There have been eighty years of nuclear weapons and eighty years of protests against them since Hiroshima. Figure 22 is a graphic comparing the two and the timing of the various international nuclear weapons treaties.

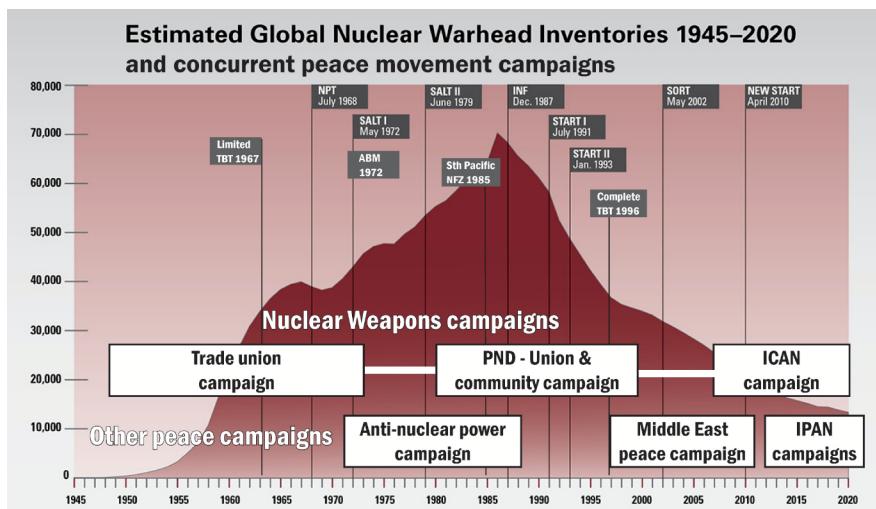
The first major treaty was the Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963 concluded between the USA and USSR. Atmospheric nuclear tests were banned and ones under water or in space. The Nuclear Proliferation Treaty was signed in 1968, followed in 1972 by the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty aimed at limiting the dangers of a nuclear arms race.

The protest organisations of the 1950s and 60s concentrated on ‘ban the bomb’, and banning nuclear testing. Such campaigns occurred in many western countries as well as Australia. For example, CND⁴⁵ in the UK and the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE)⁴⁶ in the USA. This operated alongside the group of prominent scientists and intellectuals called Pugwash, which held annual conferences to highlight the dangers of nuclear weapons.⁴⁷

The campaigns of the 1980s, shown on Figure 22, sought to stop a nuclear confrontation between the US and USSR. They were worldwide. In Europe protests focused on preventing the deployment of medium range US and Soviet nuclear missiles, including US Pershing missiles in Germany close to the Soviet border. Significant strategic nuclear weapons treaties were signed in this decade. In 1979, the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) limited the number of nuclear capable missiles, as well as some limits on the number of warheads each missile could deliver. In 1985, repeated protests across the Pacific and Australia saw the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone (NFZ) Treaty signed.⁴⁸ The Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) was signed in 1987.⁴⁹

Two Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties (START I and II) were agreed in 1991 and 1993,⁵⁰ followed by the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in 1996.⁵¹ In 2010 a New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) was signed by the USA and the Russian Federation.⁵²

The most recent treaty, as discussed above, is the UN sponsored Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), introduced to the UN in 2017 and ratified by 50 nations so



*Fig 22 Nukes and campaigns diagram
Treaties shown in grey boxes at top, and the campaigns shown in
white boxes underneath*

becoming part of international law in 2021.

There is a strong coincidence about 1986 which was the International Year of Peace. As shown in Figure 22, this was the high point of worldwide nuclear weapons stocks. It is no exaggeration to say that this year was also the high point of worldwide (and Australian) anti-nuclear protest.

The world has been completely free of nuclear war for the eighty years since Hiroshima. These treaties have probably contributed to restraining national leaders from using nuclear

weapons in any of the hundreds of international conflicts that have occurred. Whether or not it was explicitly stated, a shared rationale for the national governments which signed these treaties seems to have been the fear of nuclear war and its catastrophic results.

The breadth, strength and consistency of the campaigns against nuclear weapons over those eighty years strongly suggests that the peoples' movements have been the real force driving the making of treaties and limiting political and military choices for using the 'nuclear option'.

This conclusion is strengthened when we remember that there have always been military leaders calling for the use of nuclear weapons. General Macarthur, the commander of UN forces during the Korean War, was very open about his plans to use atomic bombs on 'retardation targets'.⁵³ Cables (declassified in 2018) from General Westmoreland, Army Commander of US forces in Vietnam, to US headquarters requested nuclear weapons be shipped for use if the US forces were defeated in the battle for the Khe Sahn Base.⁵⁴

At the height of the 1961 Cuban missile crisis, President Kennedy was resigned to actual conflict with the Soviet Union, and the danger of escalation to nuclear war⁵⁵ with Air Force Chief of Staff Curtis LeMay urging bombing and invasion of Cuba.⁵⁶

The Future

Elbridge A. Colby serves as current (2025) Under Secretary of War for Policy in the Second Trump Administration.⁵⁷ He has written about his plans to goad the Chinese government into attacking Taiwan while, at the same time, significantly increasing the US arsenal of nuclear weapons. One Colby essay is titled '*If you want peace, prepare for nuclear war*'.⁵⁸

It is a testament to the strength of working peoples' struggles against the nuclear threat that in the face of voices like the above, nuclear treaties have been signed and nuclear catastrophe has been averted. Yet political victories are never permanent. US President George W Bush withdrew the US from the ABM treaty in 2002, and President Trump withdrew the US from the INF Treaty in 2019.

Peace, as always, must remain an important priority for workers and their unions. It is worth protesting for.

Ross Gwyther worked in Brisbane as a state organiser with the National Tertiary Education Union for 10 years, after an earlier career as a research geophysicist and some years working in factories and on the Qld railways. His experience has reinforced the importance of labour history as an essential tool for workers to use in building and crafting organisations capable of not only resisting the many onslaughts of capital, but also capable of building a better world. His interests centre around strategies for labour movement renewal and union organisation, and the intersection of these with community movements around ecological and peace issues

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Roy Dalgarno in Queensland

Allan Gardiner



Roy Dalgarno / Australia NSW 1910 - 2001 / Smoko 1939 / Oil on canvas on composition board / 47 × 55.4cm / Purchased 1940 / Accession No: 1:0282 / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art / © QAGOMA / <https://collection.qagoma.qld.gov.au/objects/7917>

Some of the Queensland Art Gallery's stored works by local artists have been aired in the free exhibition, 'Under a Modern Sun: Art in Queensland 1930s–1950s,' which runs until January 2026. Amongst the visually harmonious landscapes that make up the bulk of this exhibition, one painting seems to let off a noisy raspberry. This painting of workers is by an artist called Roy Dalgarno whose Queensland story is well worth knowing.

As its name, *Smoko*, implies, the picture shows a group of cane cutters grabbing a bit of shade to boil a billy. As gallery strollers look through this time-scope onto a historically specific world of toil, the toilers squint back at us with languid self-assurance.

Smoko probably made it into the QAG collection in 1940 on its artistic strength, and it was rescued from storage for this exhibition be-



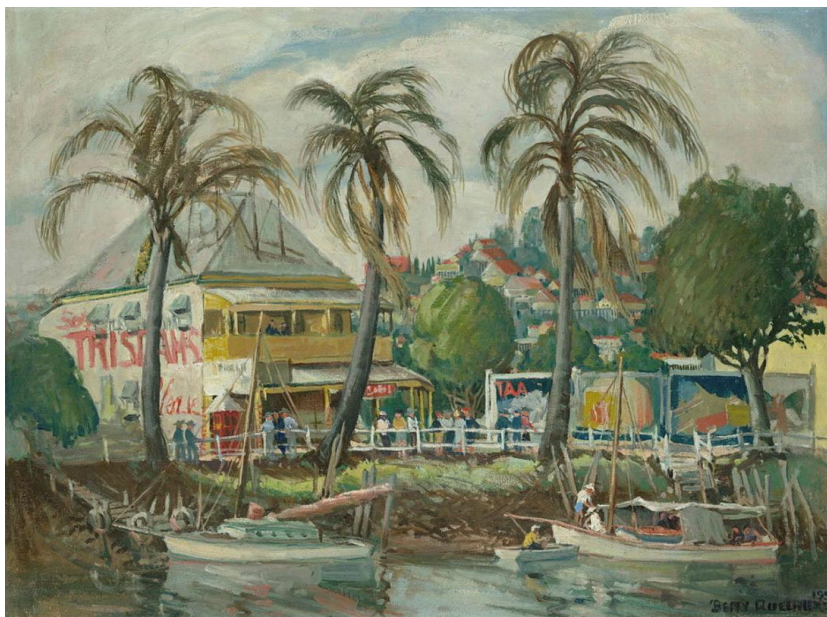
Kenneth Macquoen / Australia NSW/QLD 1897 - 1960 / (*Feeding the pigs*) c.1929 / Watercolour over pencil on paper / 38 x 48.3cm / Gift of Revan and Nell Macquoen through the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art Foundation 2018. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program / Accession No: 2018.007 / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art / © Kenneth Macquoen Estate / <https://collection.qagoma.qld.gov.au/objects/30537>

cause, sure enough, it is in a modern style (though not the Deco modernism otherwise on show) and it drips sunlight. However its theme is not really the aesthetics of light; rather it is about the character of these rural workers of North Queensland. The only other painting on show featuring workers, *Feeding the pigs* by Kenneth Macquoen, is more about the patterning of light and dark; figures are rare and incidental in Macquoen's work.

A couple of other paintings in the show evoke a working class life of the past - such as *The convenience*

store, Breakfast Creek by Betty Quelhurst, but Dalgarno's attention is very much on work and workers – male workers admittedly, but the point is their lack of deference and thus their democratic potential. Dalgarno's project, for much of his career, was to amass figure studies of specific workers until they formed a sort of composite portrait of the working class itself through time.

Dalgarno's interest in the figure as a social motif rather than as an art school exercise began when he and Ray Lindsay (Norman Lindsay's Brisbane-born second son) made



Betty Quelhurst / Australia QLD 1919 - 2008 / *The convenience store, Breakfast Creek 1955* / Oil on canvas / 55 x 76cm / Gift of the artist through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation 1997 / Accession No: 1997.124 / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art / © Betty Quelhurst / <https://collection.qagoma.qld.gov.au/objects/8753>

excursions outside Sydney to document the unemployed as they moved from place to place to claim sustenance handouts. Dalgarno's time in Queensland greatly intensified his focus on the figures, gestures and expressiveness of people at work. Later he would deny that he arrived at this subject matter due to politics, but such professions of a-politicality are commonplace amongst the Communist artists and intellectuals of his generation. This is due to the need to make a living in a capitalist society and also due to the atrocities of Stalinism.

Of course, it is also true that individual self-expression and freedom is particularly prized by creative people. However, without the influence of politics, Dalgarno's interest and treatment of people as workers is unimaginable.

Dalgarno's intellectual and artistic education was integrated with his early political education. In the late 1920s, after he emerged from a lower middle-class family and a Ballarat boarding school, he joined an extended cohort of emerging artists in Melbourne and Sydney



Yosl Bergner, *Aboriginals in Fitzroy*, 1941. Art Gallery of South Australia c/o the artist
<https://www.agsa.sa.gov.au/collection-publications/collection/works/aborigines-in-fitzroy/29704/>

who found socialist art and theory an exciting and energetic response to the failure of capitalist economics and the rise of fascism. Dalgarno recalls that they were:

caught up in the social aspect, the semi-political approach to art; drawing the underdog, the worker, the underprivileged, who were evident everywhere in increasing numbers. We were all impressed by Yosl Bergner [a 17-year-old Polish immigrant]...

What he had was just beginning to be felt in Melbourne, and that was a dedication to making art, free from any commercial motivations. This dedication must have come from the knowledge and experience of pain, something that we Australians had not really experienced yet as a people. He had a big influence immediately on the young painters like [Noel] Counihan, Jim Wigley and Vic O'Connor.¹

Through his association with the Workers Art Club in Melbourne, Dalgarno had also encountered the communist cultural ideas of the time. This ferment of ideas amongst a close group of friends continued:

About the time I left for Sydney, Nutter Buzacott had given Noel Counihan Marxist books, particularly *The Communist Manifesto*. Soon after I came back I found that he had read Frederick Engels' *Origin of the Family*, which I also read. I remember buying it from the Workers Bookshop in Melbourne. Moscow used to publish cheap red-covered editions of the Marxist classics. I hadn't read much Marxist stuff so Noel was well in advance of me. He was influenced by such interesting figures as Guido Baracchi, Jack Maughan and Gino Nibbi.

In 1936 Roy, his wife Nadine and their son, Lyn, moved to Brisbane seeking better-paid work. By this time they were Communist Party members, and they soon found a social group to join among the Brisbane comrades. Roy walked into a well-paid job as an advertising agency art director and also did freelance cartoons and illustrations for the *Courier Mail*, where Nadine worked as secretary to the editor.

Of course, he created propaganda materials for the Party but he also found another political role. "About this time," he recalls,

I came across a young, unemployed man named Hugh Greenfield; he had got himself onto the committee of the Unemployed Workers' Union - the Party had kicked him out as he was termed a Trotskyite - a troublemaker.

Through Greenfield, Dalgarno got involved in political cartooning for the UWM's paper, *The Organiser*. He signed himself 'Lynd' after the US graphic artist Lynd Ward, who had published in the communist-friendly US cultural journal *New Masses*.

At the same time, he was working with the UWM, Dalgarno's advertising agency, Johnston & Jones, included Bulimba Breweries amongst its clients. While creating ads for this firm, Dalgarno was simultaneously attacking it in *The Organiser* for its lock-out of striking workers (see figure opposite).

The secret police predictably stepped in:

I soon heard that a state security official called on the boss, Mr Johnson and told him what I was doing. Of course they called me in and in an embarrassed way

Nadine still had her job and Roy could do freelance work but their financial difficulties and shaky marriage started Roy thinking about an extended painting adventure amongst the rural labourers and fishers and native people of Northern Queensland who he had heard about from Jack Henry, the ex-cane cutter and State Secretary of the Communist Party. When he

In the meantime, Dalgarno taught art at the Workers Educational Association. The WEA was, supposedly, liberal rather than socialist in philosophy, but the conflict between these two traditions was not very evident in Brisbane at this time. Just as modernists of any political

In 1938, Dalgarno published an essay in the *WEA Bulletin* that displays a familiarity

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with an (understandably Stalinist but still quite sophisticated) historicism by relating culture to stages of social evolution.

Quoting Goya on the creative transformation of material rather than its mere copying, he says today's art must perform the transformation of material with strong social aspects. The present period is one of "a crumbling and outworn social system with, at the same time, the emergence of a new and higher system." The old society "limits more and more the freedom of development" of art through economic and educational coercion. The buying public is politicised towards conservatism, thus coercing artists in their choices. Against this, creativity has to substitute "human social understanding".

He divides contemporary artists into two groups: One uses formalism, academicism and naturalism to escape from the responsibility posed by the "main problems of art and society." The other includes the artists who accept this responsibility and know that art without "constructive purpose" is "sterile and decadent."²

Dalgarno decided to pursue art more seriously: "I was beginning

to find out what I wanted to do and had accomplished quite a body of work." He started showing his work, still mainly graphic art, including at exhibitions by the Royal Queensland Art Society (RQAS). A *Courier Mail* exhibition review drew the attention of Noel Wood, who Dalgarno had met some years before in Adelaide. Wood wrote to invite Dalgarno to join him where he now lived in seclusion on Bedara Island, near Dunk Island, seven miles from Tully. Wood was a competent painter of north Queensland's pleasing tropical landscapes and two of his paintings are also included in the 'Under the Sun' exhibition.

Like other left artists in Brisbane, Dalgarno enjoyed the friendship and patronage of RQAS president Dr James Vincent Duhig – who should not be confused with his uncle, archbishop James Duhig. Whatever the uncle's spiritual legacy, it is surely dwarfed by the nephew's material legacy. J.V. Duhig was a pioneer of pathology and medical education in the state. Their political contrast is even starker: The cleric was a staunch conservative while the doctor was, Dalgarno recalls, labelled "a raving red" prominent in "demonstrations and in Town Hall meetings to raise money for peace or anything that was progressive."

Duhig's patronage went beyond buying paintings, says Dalgarno. When the coming war led many to expect a mass invasion of Japanese troops, Duhig "worked out a project to inoculate, free of charge, all his left-wing friends with anti-this and anti-that drugs."

Dalgarno told Duhig his wish to paint in north Queensland:

Jimmie Duhig said, "Well how much do you need? I said about a hundred pounds would do me; living on the island would be pretty cheap according to Noel. So Duhig came round to my studio, stood there stocky with his legs apart, swinging left and right, and said, "I'll take this, this, this, this" speaking quickly. He picked out the best of what I had lying about – forty or fifty pieces, drawings and paintings and I was grateful to him.

So began Dalgarno's north Queensland adventure which was to consolidate an artistic direction he would follow and expand through his lifetime. *Smoko* was an early result. That journey was full of incident and interest. It took place in a social and historical moment where the rural and natural dreaminess barely obscured an encircling violence from police looking for the now-

criminalised Communists, from rural capitalists ready to keep their workers controlled and from a White Australian terror of the traditional owners.

Telling the story of that journey will require another instalment.

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¹*Winking of an Eye*. Unpublished autobiography of Roy Dalgarno; typescript held by me. All quotations of Dalgarno's words and other unreferenced statements come from this source or from interviews I conducted with him shortly before his death in 2001 in Auckland.

Any researchers interested in the material I collected from and about Roy are very welcome to contact me.

² Roy Dalgarno, "Society and the Artist." WEA Bulletin [Workers Educational Association, Brisbane] 1.1 (September 1938): pp15-16

Dr Allan Gardiner is a retired public servant. He is a co-editor of *The Queensland Journal of Labour History*. Allan met Roy Dalgarno on the recommendation of Carole Ferrier, who had interviewed him when researching *Jean Devanny: Romantic Revolutionary* (1999). Dalgarno's death cut short attempts to help him finish his memoirs.

Book Review

No Greater Power: A History of Union Action in Australia

By Liam Byrne

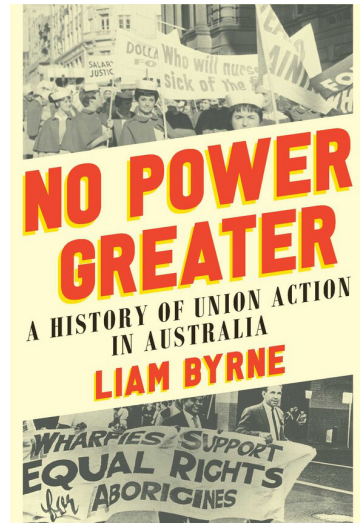
Carlton, Melbourne University Press, 2025

Reviewed by John McCollow

Liam Byrne's title for his "history of union action in Australia", invoking the famous phrase from "Solidarity Forever", might be read as ironic given, as the author notes in his introduction:

Today's unions are not the youthful and expanding movement for change they were 140 years ago. In fact, unions have been on a trajectory of decline for decades...Australia has witnessed growing wealth inequality, a reduction in real wages, a loosening of workplace protections, the growth of insecure work, and the rise of the gig economy. These shifts have been underpinned by laws that have impeded the ability of many workers to be collectively represented by their unions. (p.4)

But Byrne's book is hopeful. The "humanising mission" of trade unionism remains important and



collective action by workers remains the chief means of defending and expanding workers' rights.

Byrne states that he has not written "a definitive history of all aspects of the union story in Australia" (p.5). Readers will note that some significant events are not mentioned or are treated summarily. Significant disputes that are not included in Byrne's book, for example, are the 1890 Maritime

Strike, the Brisbane General Strike of 1912, the Mudginberri dispute of the early 1980s, the 1985 SEQEB dispute, and the 1985 Dollar Sweets case (mentioned in passing). It would be churlish, however, to criticise Byrne for a failure to produce a work that he never intended to produce. Additionally, it should be noted that the book includes an extensive bibliography for those readers who want to delve more comprehensively into Australian labour history.

Byrne's intended audience, I think, is not labour historians, nor even committed trade unionists (though both groups will, as I suggest below, benefit from reading the work). Rather Byrne is writing mainly for the general public. In an era where union density is estimated at around 13 per cent of the labour force, and where much of labour history is "neglected, ignored, or simply forgotten" (p. 10), there is a clear place for a book that seeks to provide answers to such basic questions as: what are trade unions? What do they stand for? What do they do? Do they have a future? To Byrne's credit, in answering these questions, he confronts "stark and uncomfortable realities about the union story, not only those aspects of the movement's history that are most favourable to it" (p.10).

Byrne's narrative is structured around "two interconnected

arguments" (p.5). The first relates to "the historic mission of unionism that has motivated the movement's actions from its foundation until today" (ibid.). That mission is the "mobilisation of the working population seeking to assert their fundamental humanity against the dehumanising effects of the untrammelled labour market" (p.6).

What was sought in the Australian context was not the total decommodification of the labour market – "labour power was still bought and sold" (p.7). But the union movement's insistence that quality of life mattered delivered many improvements, including the 8-hour day, a minimum wage, annual, sick and maternity leave, and more equal pay.

Byrne acknowledges that not all union actions were a direct expression of this humanising mission and that there are many examples of bad-faith actors. Nevertheless, this mission has "functioned as the underpinning of the movement's shared identity" (ibid.). Byrne explores how each successive generation has understood this mission and responded to the particular challenges of their times, noting strengths and limitations, successes and failures, continuities and changes.

The second argument posited by Byrne is that:

[U]nions are more than institutions – they are ‘emotional communities’, composed of people who have come together, struggled and sacrificed and built a collective identity.

Levels of commitment and connection to this emotional community vary. But the movement has always been sustained at its core by highly committed members with a strong emotional attachment to the mission and values of unionism ... The form and structure of these organisations have changed across time and place, but the emotional communities underpinning them have endured.

This emotional community is not passive, but active. It sustains and perpetuates itself through struggle, advocacy, campaigning, and other forms of ongoing commitment. This can be transformative – unleashing internal capacities long smothered beneath the weight of disempowerment that is imposed on working people. (pp.7-8)

Importantly, Byrne notes that the construction and maintenance of an emotional community involves **exclusion** as well as **inclusion**. In its infancy, the Australian union movement consisted of skilled, white, male, manual workers. While these workers banded together to seek greater recognition of their humanity through better pay and working conditions, this humanising vision was significantly constrained – reflecting the ideologies of its times, it excluded non-whites and women. For Byrne one of the important developments in Australian union history is the efforts of excluded groups to challenge exclusion and expand the emotional community of the movement.

Byrne’s account of how groups initially excluded or marginalised came to claim a place in the movement is one of the strengths of the book. This struggle involved taking on not just employers but the hierarchy of the union movement and general social attitudes/ideology. He includes, for example, accounts of:

- Efforts in the late 19th Century by unions of Chinese workers to seek better pay and conditions – efforts that received “little interest...and scant support” from the union movement generally (p.54).

- The long struggle for equal pay for women.
- The fight to achieve not just industrial, but basic human rights for Indigenous workers, including the 1936 strike by Torres Strait pearlers, the Pilbara pastoral strike of 1946-49, and the Wave Hill walk-off of 1966.
- The inclusion over time in the 20th Century of immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds in the movement.

These accounts are made more evocative by Byrne's description of the personal journeys, challenges and accomplishments of selected activists, such as:

- Ellen Cresswell, a leading figure in the strike by tailoresses in the late 19th Century.
- Muriel Heagney, who worked tirelessly for equal pay for women in the first half of the 20th Century.
- William Cooper, prominent Aboriginal leader and union activist of the mid-20th Century, whose efforts spurred some unions to take up the cause of Aboriginal rights but were resisted and opposed by other unions.
- Greek immigrant, George Zangalis, who as a Communist Party organiser, coordinated support for migrant workers in the vehicle manufacturing strikes in Melbourne in the 1960s, and later, after a move to the railway industry, organised the

first Migrant Workers' Conference at Melbourne Trades Hall.

While Byrne excels in highlighting the human dimensions of trade union history, he is less successful, in my opinion, in dealing with important ideological and strategic debates such as those between revolutionaries and reformists, on the respective roles of arbitration versus direct action, over the nature of the relationship between the industrial and political wings of the labour movement, and assessments of the Accord of the 1980s. In each case, Byrne describes the context of these debates and outlines the counterposing arguments, but the arguments are not, to my mind, sufficiently interrogated. It may be that, with his intended audience of the general public in mind, Byrne did not want to bog the reader down in esoterics. It is also true that, however much labour historians and trade union activists would have appreciated a more robust exposition and assessment of these debates, Byrne does provide a useful starting point for some vigorous discussions.

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.

Vale Comrades

Col Davies

20 September 1944–03 June 2025

Rebecca Albrecht

Written by **Rebecca Albrecht**
(Col's eldest daughter)
in conjunction with **Mick Carr**
(MUA life member and friend).

As I finally sit down to write about my Col Davies, I am forced to acknowledge the finality of it all. A celebration of life was held for Col on 13 June 2025 (ten days after his passing) and was attended by in excess of 250 people! Members of Parliament (from both sides of the table), union members, published authors and activists joined with family and friends to remember a life well lived.

Born in Williamstown Victoria on 20 September 1944 to Eddie and Tess Davies, Col grew up as one of three brothers, in Newport, Melbourne. In primary school kids would call him “freckles” but as a teen he decided this was not on and he started brawling with anyone who persisted to do so! This resulted in his most enduring (though not necessarily better) nickname of



*Col and Faye Davies
Maritime Union of Australia Queensland Branch
Veteran's Christmas Lunch 2023
(MUA Queensland Facebook page)*

“Daffy”. In reference to do his penchant for doing silly things (like fighting kids who called him “freckles”), not because of Daffy Duck!

Col was generous to a fault and loved wholeheartedly...On his second date with the love of his life, he told her “Faye, what’s mine is yours” and, from that day forward he kept his word. The story begins with him marrying Faye on Sat 5

October 1974, in the Williamstown Gardens. From all accounts it was a low-key affair with family and friends and was followed with a reception at their home around the corner, on Osbourne Street. A great night ensued with ample drinks, food and dancing (in that order)! The success of the event demonstrated by the number of bodies lying around the next morning. The celebration was cut short though as urgent repairs were required for Col's truck, which had broken down at Tarcutta on the Hume highway due to a fried wheel bearing. The start of their married life was a 470-kilometre journey to Tarcutta to carry out repairs and a quick feed. The honeymoon consisted of the drive back home on Sunday evening and a sleep before starting work on the wharf the following morning! Fifty years later Col and Faye were still going strong. Partial to a driving holiday Col did not bat an eyelid at the prospect of a Townsville to Melbourne road trip, or similar, through the years.

The fact that his youngest daughter would ask "have we got enough petrol" on repeat never deterred him and his eldest daughter would stay up during the nightshifts to make sure he was not lonely. Later in life Col and Faye loved nothing more than hitching up the camper trailer or caravan and heading off for a

length of time to be determined only by where the road took them and what the weather was like.

Officially joining the waterfront in August 1974, at the Port of Melbourne, Col found that selection criteria were quite different to today. Step one was an application by mail, followed by an interview with the Association of Employers of Waterside Labour (AEWL) and then a medical. If you were still standing after all of this, you would then front a Site Wide Meeting (SWM) and get a once over from membership. That meeting was held at the old Melbourne Stadium and Col was paraded, along with 50 other hopefuls, in front of an 11,000 strong Waterside Worker Federation (WWF) membership after general business. He recalls this as an intimidating experience in which about 7 blokes missed the cut. It wasn't until Col retired and took a moment to think about things that he told Mick Carr (former Maritime Union of Australia [MUA] Branch Secretary and Lifetime Member), that being a wharfie and, subsequently an official, was the best job he ever had, "he had found his tribe". The first job Col was tasked with was lumping 58 kilo bags of flour for the Columbo plan; an older wharfie later confessed that this was a test and, 17 of the fresh 43 candidates did not last the two weeks. Col

was on his way, participating in delegate training and relishing the camaraderie and power of the collective. Dad knew he belonged and he never looked back!

Growing up, I knew Col as a hard-working wharfie who cleaned schools on the side to provide for his family. I would listen to the radio with Dad waiting for the number 34 to be called, to see what upcoming shifts he had! Dad was also a fish and for as long as I can remember he could not resist a dip if there was water available. Col swam well enough to represent Brisbane in the Masters games for a few years running. These events were always held on the Gold Coast and were fun family getaways.

In Melbourne Col would swim up and down Williamstown beach, in Townsville he would swim on the Strand while dodging the jelly fish, and in Brisbane I remember going with him to the Spring Hill baths and Centenary pool. Here he encouraged bravery and proved that diving from the 10-metre platform was easy and fun! It took me what felt like hours to take the plunge and a lot of encouragement for me to go through with it but, as usual, Dad was right!

As a wharfie Col worked through all the stages of activism, political and

industrial, representing members interests as delegate on the job and in committees. This led to him becoming the final Queensland Branch Secretary of the WWF in 1992 and the inaugural Queensland Branch Secretary of the newly amalgamated, Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) in 1993. According to Paddy Crumlin (National Secretary of the MUA) these were some of the most difficult and challenging times of the union's history.

Events of note during Col's time as state secretary include negotiations with Sea-Land Terminals in their attempt to move into Brisbane as a third operator. The company eventually folded after negotiation for a proper roster and conditions could not be met. He led and supported members through the 1997 dispute in Cairns and in 1998, was one of the key figures in the massive, history making, Patricks dispute, which tested the MUA to its limits. It was very hard to keep track of Dad at the time and even harder to have a private conversation with him. I recall Col standing in the kitchen rushing some cereal at the start of the dispute saying to mum "is my pre-occupation noticeable?". Towards the end of the dispute, I drove from Fisherman's Island and then to Hamilton in a desperate attempt to talk through whatever was going on in my life at the time, only to be told



*Col and Barney Sanders relating the history of the seafarers unions at the MUA Delegates Course in Brisbane, November 2024
(MUA Queensland Facebook page)*

by the men on the picket “Sorry love, he left to go to Fishers about 20 minutes ago”. We could have done with a couple of smartphones back then! His opinion on how to manage difficult situations meant so much to me that I drove back to Fishers, finally found Dad and then sat in the gutter, on the picket line, in the dark and talked. Once found, he was there for me 100% and his pre-occupation was not noticeable!

My work ethic is the direct result of his influence and growing up I recall Col’s thoughts on many things. I could be on death’s door in primary school, and he would remind me that being resilient and having a strong work ethic was more important than having a day off. The one and only time a day off

school was acceptable, and indeed expected, was for the Wharfie’s Picnic. Melbourne Cup days were awesome growing up! Over the years Col’s strength of conviction regarding the rights of workers grew stronger. In the 70’s he spoke to Faye’s boss and lost her a job as he deemed her rights were not being respected or upheld. In the late 80’s he spoke to my boss, at the local fish and chip shop, and lost me a job for the same reasons.

Ironically, one of the hardest challenges of Col’s time as State Secretary was the closure of the Waterside Workers Club in Macrossan Street. A staunch leader who stood firm in his beliefs, he never wavered in his commitment to the cause. Mick Carr recalls leaving the office

around 5pm with Col still there, sorting through minutes to ensure meetings were lined up and that all scenarios had been considered and worked through for the following day on many occasions. For a long time 'The Club' was at the heart of things for dock workers but with labour long transitioned away from the area and toward the mouth of the river, patronage was on a steep decline and the inevitable reality that the club would have to close was dawning.

Col Davies had a substantial impact on the union movement, and particularly the MUA, but he was much more than a comrade! Growing up I remember watching mum and Dad rock and roll dancing, I was in awe, they made the perfect pair. When I was tiny, Dad would stand me on the coffee table, so I was tall enough to see him and feel the cues he gave before spins (of which there were an ever-increasing number) or dips. When the family went out for dinner at a local club Dad would show off our skills.

Weekends were always busy growing up with social gatherings booked in advance. From playing decommissioned poker machines at a mate's place in Melbourne with 1& 2 cent pieces, to being tricked in Townsville and told we had to go and help him clean the school and

ending up at the movie of the moment, *Ghostbusters*, or going to a water park.

Col loved food and was often referred to as "the clutching claw". Chinese was a favourite and as kids we were so well behaved as he had convinced us that "the Wood Chopper" would come and get us if we were naughty...he lived in the air conditioning vents in the ceiling! After late night grocery shopping as a family the tradition was to bring home a BBQ chicken and a six pack of Cheese and Bacon rolls. Every time, without fail, Dad would hover his hand near our plates. I worked out pretty quickly that if I didn't make a fuss, he would take a tiny piece of something and say thanks. Sadly, my sister did not get the subtlety of his teaching and lost many an item she really wanted!

Reminiscing about the memorable times I can see that Col was also partial to an overseas adventure and was able to meet union comrades from many corners of the globe including New Zealand, Fiji, Vietnam, Canada, Alaska, America, England and Scotland to name a few. Never one to sit still for long Col was elected Secretary of MUA Veterans Queensland in 2002. Col became an expert in managing Christmas functions, amongst other

things. His motto “Retired from the workforce – not the struggle”.

For twelve years Col was the national secretary of the “Fair Go for Pensioners” organisation and visited Canberra on five occasions to fight for the cause until ill health prevailed. He was also the first to remind anyone who may not be aware, that the lunch breaks, rest pauses and leave entitlements we all take for granted were fought for, and won, by a union!

Col’s role as an activist, delegate and official was instrumental in the success of the MUA Queensland Branch but also the broader Union movement. With Faye by his side, they were a formidable team. Whether packing the Prado and hooking up the van for one of their many adventures around our great land, organising meetings or putting on Christmas feasts for the veterans, everything was done to ensure success!

Col faced many physical challenges in his life. He was involved in a serious car accident as a 22-year-old and after many unsuccessful surgeries developed a codeine dependence that spanned more than 20 years. He was diagnosed with bladder cancer in 2014 and in 2017 was faced with major surgery to remove his bladder and prostate. Such was the man, he

continued to play his role as activist, husband, father and grandfather to the fullest. When asked how he was travelling he would tell you, “some days are diamonds and some days are stone”. He lived to support others though and never missed a function with the veterans or an engagement with his beloved MUA Queensland Branch.

Col was many things to many people. Always empathetic, he had a listening ear for anyone who needed to chat. With the strongest moral purpose of anyone I have ever known Col would confidently and intelligently challenge the opinions of people who may not be as empathetic, or rights focussed, as he was, with irrefutable fact. This was (more often than not) followed by some less than subtle, or downright blunt, advice! As a life member, Col will be remembered as “an inspirational character”. Taking part in branch committee meetings, speaking at new member inductions and delegate training courses and attending stop work meetings, to the end! A devoted family man, Col loved hard, worked tirelessly and never gave up on anything or anyone. He was a fine son of the working class, a steady hand in difficult times, a leader and a friend but, most of all, a loving husband, father and Grandfather. Vale Col Davies - gone but never forgotten.

Rod Welford: a Reminiscence

30 September 1958–28 June 2025

Howard Guille



Rod Welford was a comrade and friend. Over the years, the words we most frequently used with each other were ‘*have you read this.*’ They were a prompt for conversation about ‘big’ issues and to vent about inadequate analysis and inchoate policies. ‘*Have you read this*’ was accompanied by swarms of missives from policy think-tanks like the *Australia Institute* and downloads of essays from the likes of *London Review of Books*, *Saturday Paper* and *Le Monde Diplomatique*.

Rod was intellectually curious with a strong ‘need to know’. He valued

knowledge and the cerebral. As recounted to *Queensland Speaks*, he thought that ‘*injecting ideas*’ and ‘*intellectual effort*’ were his distinctive contributions to political life.¹

Rod was elected to the Queensland Parliament in 1989 when the ALP took government after 32 years of conservative rule. He served for 20 years including three ministerial positions; in sequence, Environment, Heritage and Natural Resources (1998-2004), Attorney-General and Justice (2004-2005), and Education, Training and Arts (2005-2008).²

Changing Things

Rod effected change. During his term in the Environment portfolio the first-ever limits were put on broadscale land clearing in Queensland and the Environmental Protection Agency was established. The former was crucial in Australia meeting the Kyoto Protocol carbon emissions target. The EPA was an effort to handle the inadequate enforcement of environmental regulations. As an influential report stated, *'The failure of Fitzgerald's 1989 reforms in relation to environmental protection is indisputable'*.³ Though it is perhaps salutary that the EPA of 1998 was not all that successful and the Queensland Conservation Council and Environmental Defenders Office have since said that it did not have *'sufficient independence mechanisms, resources or strong governance'*.⁴

There were the expected critics; Santo Santoro complained about *'bureaucratic burdens'*; Howard Hobbs talked of the *'green police'* and Brian Littleproud said that *'a lady called Dr Aila Keto lived in the back of the Minister's office.'*⁵⁶

In 2002, as Attorney-General, Rod oversaw significant amendments to anti-discrimination legislation. One change was *'inserting a new*

uniform definition of 'spouse' in all Queensland legislation which incorporates defacto partners, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation'.⁷ The amendments *'prohibited discrimination on the basis of a number of new attributes, namely, 'family responsibilities', 'sexuality' and 'gender identity'*. This was the first protection of transgender people in Queensland. Another change was to limit the exemptions from the anti-discrimination legislation given to religious bodies and their schools and other organisations. A substantial stoush ensued with the churches and religious schools which was settled by late-night negotiations between a big cast of religious luminaries and the Premier and Attorney-General.⁸

Rod's genuine commitment, indeed, even audacity, is evident in the Hansard reports of the debates on these changes. His credentials are clear from the *bon mots* in his second reading speech; *'We should treat every member of our community as if they were our neighbour and friend.'*⁹

In Education, he renewed the school curriculum while in Arts he oversaw the completion of the Cultural Centre redevelopment, including the new Gallery of Modern Art (GOMA) and the refurbished State

Library of Queensland. As Leenane Enoch has said, *‘Rod believed profoundly that the arts are not an optional extra but central to who we are...’*.¹⁰ The Regional Arts Development Fund (RADF) was a major achievement; it is still the major source for local cultural initiatives across the entire State operating in 59 regional councils.¹¹

Political Credo

Various people described Rod as one of the ‘better’ politicians. As Bruce Hawker [wrote](#), *‘he was in politics for the right reasons’*.¹² It was also an intellectual input: as Rod himself [said](#), his approach to politics was to *‘inject ideas and make systemic change’*. He sought *‘foundational reforms’* based on institutions; *‘not new art galleries but a planning system for new galleries’*.¹³

Rod was a “Whitlam social democrat”. He wrote that *‘The Whitlam Government transformed a nation, not only in its laws and institutions, but in the way of seeing itself’*. He reminds us that Gough Whitlam,

set out to create a more equal, open, tolerant and independent Australia; and to promote equality; to involve the people of Australia in the decision-making processes of our land; and to liberate

the talents and uplift the horizons of the Australian people.¹⁴

The Whitlam Institute (WISER)

The formation and operation of WISER was a very compelling example of Rod’s political credo. The genesis was a regular, though informal, gathering of politicians and union officers that started in 1990 after the election of the Goss Government. The purpose was to discuss progressive ideas and policies including a wide range of ‘new’ issues that the Goss Government brought to the industrial and political agenda. These included human rights and anti-discrimination, justice for First Nations, native title, regional planning and heritage, revitalising skills training, gender equity, industry development, conservation and the start of the debates on climate change. Another priority was combating the insidious spread of neo-liberalism and economic rationalism.

In 1992, Rod proposed a more formal arrangement under the name ‘Whitlam Institute for Social and Economic Research’ and obtained the endorsement of Whitlam.¹⁵ Gough launched the Institute in the Queensland Parliamentary Annex. It was neither factional nor

transactional but about how to put freedom, equality, justice, democracy and solidarity into practice.

The Shoals of Social Democracy

Barry Jones gave a lecture in 2015 with the grand title '*Gough Whitlam and the Social Democratic Imagination*'.¹⁶ Perhaps though, the grand title is almost negated with the Barry Jonesism '*I like the term 'Social Democratic imagination' but it is hard to define, and elusive to find*'. Maybe it is just another left unicorn!

Whitlamism is a seductive but elusive label. A central notion is that the prime purpose of politics is to enact social change. This was expounded succinctly by Indian politician B. R. Ambedkar using terms such as justice, equality and rights.¹⁷

The more august Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung puts '*belief in the superiority of political reform to create a democratic state*' as the defining characteristic of social democrats.¹⁸ Such a state would be able to implement social, economic and cultural rights so ensuring a free and just life for all citizens.¹⁹ Carol Johnson argues that Whitlam's social democracy centred on actively promoting and implementing '*positive equality*'. This, she adds, involved a



'*substantial transformation*' of longstanding Australian laborism centred on wage-earners welfare.²⁰ This, as Castles famously espoused, rested on arbitration, protection and control of migration.²¹ Pertinently though, the debate between Whitlam-social democracy and labourism is decidedly narrow compared with the convulsions about reformism and revolution in the German left of the 1890s-1910s. Rod was neither a Bernstein nor a Luxembourg.

A Big Agenda

Rod took a big agenda from Whitlamism. He advocated 'positive equality' that added to the 'public good'. He wanted to both widen the scope of rights and the exercise of the rights that came with and from citizenship. The aim of a progressive government was to ensure equal rights and social justice for the entire citizenry. Pursuit of

social equality is qualitatively and quantitatively more radical than equality of opportunity for which more tepid liberals are willing to settle.

‘Sustainability’, environmental and ecological destruction and climate change were central to Rod’s political and post-political activity. He extended the Whitlam-period agenda by recognising the rights of nature and non-human species. His ethos of sustainability was fused with social justice and collectivism. Put plainly, environmental sustainability is for the planet and for all citizens. It is not only for the materially privileged.

Scepticism About Markets

Since markets bring inequality, market mechanisms, such as water pricing and trading or carbon offsets, are hardly the most suitable means of achieving carbon neutrality or a positive ecological footprint. While Rod had green credentials, I think that his intense scepticism about market and pricing solutions set him apart from the political Greens of the 1990s-2000s. Indeed, and perhaps despite his own strong identification with Whitlam, he was a staunch democratic socialist.²²

Rod kept his scepticism about markets. He wrote to me in 2024,

The sad truth is, as you and I know, the Labor Party drank the neo-liberal Koolaid long ago. And they're still hostage to it....

Don't get me wrong. Labor is implementing lots of good policy. But if you look at the macro view, the only difference between the LNP and Labor is that Labor takes us to the inevitable economic, social and environmental disaster less quickly!

Rod was a honest and consistent person; not just as a politician. I hold dear my last early morning swims with him in the Coral Sea. And I treasure the CD and booklet ‘*Mozart Paraphrasen*’.²³ It was almost the last “*have you heard this*” he gave me. Memorable as music; memorable as a cooperative product of a public university and a department of state.

Howard Guille retired as Queensland Secretary of the NTEU in 2006 and is the secretary of the North Stradmoke Island Museum on Minjerrabah. He is co-editor of *The Queensland Journal of Labour History*.

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⁶Aila Keto was founder of the Australian Rainforest Conservation Society. She achieved three successful world heritage listings—the Wet Tropics, K'gari (formerly Fraser Island) and the Central Eastern Rainforest Reserves of Australia. In 1988 the listing of Queensland's Wet Tropics as a world heritage site saved 1.5 million hectares of land, then in 1999 another 1.25 million hectares of Queensland hardwood forests were preserved through the historic South East Queensland Forest Agreement. See 2005 Queensland Greats recipients, www.qld.gov.au/about/events-awards-honours/awards/qld-greats-awards/2005-queensland-greats-recipients

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The National Party and the Liberal Party were operating as separate parties in 2002. They amalgamated to form the LNP in 2008. Intriguingly, the Liberal Party voted with the ALP in favour of the changes to the gender and sexuality changes made to the Anti-Discrimination Act. The National Party were opposed.

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¹³ *Queensland Speaks* op cit

¹⁴ Rod Welford, Presentation to Vintage Reds & Brisbane Labour History Association Forum: “*From Gough to Albo and beyond: Is progressive Labor reform possible?*”. 26th October 2022. Rod refers to Whitlam’s November 1975 Election Launch Speech. The presentation is included in www.youtube.com/watch?v=YRpb6WHhrBE

¹⁵ The Institute published WISER, a quarterly journal, from 1993 to 1998 and copies are held by the State Library. It organised workshops and debates including packing a room in Brisbane Town Hall when Noel Pearson spoke at what might have been the first big public event about implementing the Mabo Decision.

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¹⁷ See Gyan Prakash, A 'Life of Contradictions', *New York Review of Books*, 20 June 2024 <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2024/06/20/a-life-of-contradictions-b-r-ambekar/>

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[150-germanys-pioneer-of-democracy/a-56447749](https://www.dw.com/en/friedrich-ebert-at-150-germanys-pioneer-of-democracy/a-56447749) and 'Friedrich Ebert', *Spartacus Educational*, <https://spartacus-educational.com/GERebert.htm>

¹⁹ *ibid*

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²² Demonstrated, formally at least, by his membership of the Left faction of the ALP. As stated on the Queensland Left web-site 'We believe in a democratic socialist society,.....' <https://theleft.org.au/>

²³ *Mozart Paraphrasen*, a joint production of Hessian Ministry of Higher Education, Research and the Arts Frankfurt University of Music and Performing Arts, 2005

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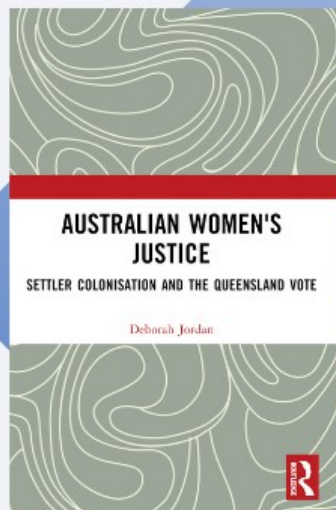
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