

THE BARBER WHO READ
HISTORY

ESSAYS IN RADICAL HISTORY

Rowan Cahill and Terry Irving

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CONTENTS

The Barber Who Read History: Essays in Radical History

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To the memory of
ANTHONY ASHBOLT
(1954 - 2021)
Activist-Scholar



INTRODUCTION

Rowan Cahill and Terry Irving

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This book is a collection of our writings authored individually or jointly during the writing, but mostly following publication, of our co-authored *Radical Sydney: Places, Portraits and Unruly Episodes* (UNSW Press, 2010). They cover a broad range of topics concerning the writing and practice of history, the social and political roles of historians, the nature of the modern academy and of academia, and biographical and autobiographical portraits. In common is their linkage to the writing of our book, and to robust discussions and feedback following its publication. In common too is a conception of the scholar as an activist, taking part in public discourse and movements for social change.

The pieces were published in a variety of online and paper-based publications and sites, their circulation boosted by our uses of social media and various databases. So far as the modern Australian academy is concerned, and we have honorary associations in this system, these sorts of publishing outlets tend to be frowned upon, and the use of them discouraged. They fly under the radar of career determining algorithms and ratings' convolutions, systems which limit, restrain, and confine humanities' academics in particular, regarding what they write and publish.

While Rowan had previous experience of online journalism and commentary, for Terry it was a new world, his long involvement in writing, editing and publishing confined to the traditional paper-based world of academia. It was our publisher of *Radical Sydney* at the time, Phillipa McGuinness, who strongly suggested as we

came to the pointy end of publication, that if we wanted our book to be successful it would be advantageous if we took to social media and became proactive in promoting the book, rather than letting the publisher do all the running. So we jumped in, and with increasing confidence expanded our online work and visibility. Suffice to say, at the time of writing the book is still in print and selling after a decade; not an insignificant achievement in the world of Australian publishing.

The immediacies of online publishing and feedback, and the reach, nationally and internationally of our online work were enjoyable and appreciated. The databases we used provided ongoing statistics regarding views, downloads, the location of users, and the use and citation of our works. It was feedback well beyond that of the limits of our paper-based experiences. And as we variously dealt with copyright issues and put more of our respective back-catalogues of work online, they too benefited in terms of exposure and use.

We had come to the writing of *Radical Sydney* as labour historians, but from different biographical and work-related backgrounds. Rowan's work had largely been conducted outside of academia in trade union and social movement publications. That said, during the writing of the book he was also engaged in doctoral work (successfully completed in 2013). Terry's long and successful work, on the other hand, had been conducted within academia, in peer reviewed journals, books and forums.

We had co-authored previously in the 1960s and 1970s as new leftists, but now spent considerable time in the new century working at creating a common and seamless voice, and a form of historical writing that was at once authoritative, instructive, enjoyable, and readable by audiences beyond the specialist niches of academia. A result of this process was the focusing of existing reservations and disquiets we both had about historical writing, in particular labour and social movement history, and about academic knowledge production generally within the modern neoliberal academy, and with its dissemination.

We adopted the term 'radical history' for the type of historical

research and writing we saw ourselves engaged in and advocates for. In our essay 'Radical History and Mainstream History' we identified this as having three distinguishing features: its subject matter, its political stance, and its relationship to its audience. As we explained:

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

Embedded in this formulation of radical history is a critique of the modern academy. We were not spring chickens with regard to critiquing universities. Between its creation in 1967 and its winding up in 1972, we were amongst the founders and part of a

radical education experiment, the Sydney Free U. This arose out of contemporary student and staff dissatisfactions within Sydney University, and more generally our opposition to how we saw university education at the time, with its flawed emphasis on ‘training for the economy’, and with its continuation of the ‘forced-feed learning techniques’ that began in the school system. The Free U envisaged another sort of academy and educational experience. Based in rented premises off-campus, this had democratic and self-management principles at its core, and worked at bringing together scholarship and activism for social change. At its height during the Summer of 1968 – 1969, some 300 people were involved.

Following publication of *Radical Sydney* in 2010, and nearly forty years after the Free U closed its doors, we again focused on and wrote critically about the modern academy. The economic imperative was still central, but now more so than ever. Now, well and truly, the human and complex processes of teaching, learning, research, and knowledge production are toxically superintended by business models and corporate-style managements and processes, couched in weasel words and spin. Decision making was and is delivered by *fait accompli*, put in place top-down by highly paid elite advisors and HR professionals, and administered by compliant bureaucrats. While democratic governance gets a run in formal and public descriptions of governance and decision making within universities, this tends in reality to be lip service and as scarce as hen’s teeth. In many Australian academic workplaces, while the word collegiality is thrown around with abandon, in fact caution, timidity, and fear are toxic.

The worth of research and writing in this production model is less about its social worth, its contribution to the creation of a better world, its address of social injustices, and the promotion of a common wealth, than it is about how much funding it attracts and where it is published in a hierarchy of ranked journals and a hierarchy of academic publishers. In turn, this fosters in the humanities and social sciences, scholarly genres largely accessible only to fellow scholars trained in the genre discourses.

We regard all this as tragic, and it was a focus of our writings post-*Radical Sydney*. Knowledge, understandings, and ideas with transformative social, political and cultural possibilities and potentials are locked up behind the paywalls of academic journals published by multinational publishers, who benefit from the labour of academics whom they do not pay; and in prohibitively expensive books with small print-runs, often set and printed at low cost, that few read.

The multinationals make vast fortunes from this process, and academics buckle down, keep noses to the grindstone, because this is how you keep the roof over your head and food on the table. And this is how you advance careers. As for the work produced, novelist Umberto Eco saw it clearly in his medieval murder mystery novel *The Name of the Rose* (1980). Central in this is a monastic library in which the books and their contents are ruthlessly and murderously limited by the librarian with regard to their access and reading, the library acting as a knowledge prison that silences books. Treated this way, argues main character Brother William of Baskerville, books are ‘dumb’ because without readers, they are just collections of signs that produce ‘no concepts’. As with books, so too with academic articles. In the writings collected in this book we challenge this system, both in the saying, and the doing.

As 2021 got under way, authoritative data began to be reported by the Australian media on the devastating effects of the coronavirus pandemic lockdown and associated border security laws on Australian universities. Data had been available previously, but it was anecdotal and piecemeal. Now, according to data released in February (2021) by Universities Australia, the peak body representing Australia’s university administrations, it is clear that at least 17,300 academic jobs have gone, with the ominous expectation more will follow. Not included in this count are the jobs lost amongst the precariat, casualties of the slash and burn of courses and programmes across Australia and attendant organisational changes. This large body of insecure university workers was estimated in mid-2018 at 94,500 people, mainly in teaching-only roles. They were, in effect, the engine-room of the university system.

Like on old-time ocean liners in the days of steam, these were the unseen stokers deep below decks, stoking the boilers that enabled the decks and photo opportunities above to glisten and shine. It included many young researchers stitching together incomes on a semester-to-semester basis, trying to earn a living, many striving to build future academic careers. On the eve of the pandemic, for example, the University of Wollongong (NSW) topped the bill with insecure work; according to Gender Equality Agency data (2016 – 2017), it had the highest insecure workforce of all Australian universities, coming in at a whopping 76.8 per cent. While we have not seen supporting data at the time of writing regarding job losses in the precariat overall, anecdotally we understand that the biggest part of this is in the humanities and social sciences.

Hard data too of the parlous financial straits of the universities emerged, something their administrations had tried to paper over during 2020, and which the media had obligingly passed on. As the result of the 2020 pandemic crisis, gone are the billions of dollars long harvested by Australian universities via international student fees (\$10 billion banked during 2019), with the largest percentage of this coming from China (37 per cent in 2019). Prior to 2020, this was a financial booty that Australian university administrations recklessly banked and planned on, often ignoring cautionary advice to the contrary. In 2019, for example, this provided 27 per cent of their revenue. Given the state of Australia's deteriorating relations with China in particular at the time of writing, and the resurgence of White Australia attitudes that have re-emerged blatantly in recent times, this treasure chest is unlikely to be refilled any time soon, if ever.

Metaphorically, and overall, this is not a James Cook/June 1770 *Endeavour* situation, where your ship is holed below the waterline on the Barrier Reef, so you toss cannons overboard, lighten ship, then beach and repair it and successfully continue the voyage. Rather, in our view, this is more akin to a Daniel Defoe/*Robinson Crusoe* situation, where one is cast ashore on a desert island because your ship has sunk, and a new beginning has to be figured out and built with whatever can be salvaged. If we are correct, then this will be

a long process. Hopefully, despite being shattered and demoralised, the staff who are left will be able to contribute from below to that re-building.

One thing is certain; a lot of fine, critical, dissident scholars are never going to be able to work as they once did in the 'publish or perish' regime. They are now outside the system, and their jobs have gone; some have contractually burnt their bridges in the process of redundancy. If they want to remain active and research and write and publish, they will have to find ways and means and alternatives outside the niches and highly specialist routes they were trained to travel.

They will have to build, in effect, a new and autonomous intellectual sphere, and wherever they find suitable sites for this – in the thinking of ecological and other social movements, in Free Schools and Universities, in communities strategising to escape oppression, among radical labour thinkers, etc – their unifying experience will be that of building a moral universe guided by socialist principles and politics rather than academic careerism.

And the same applies to radical scholars who remain in the universities. Their task will be just as difficult: to reclaim the universities for learning and scholarship by resisting the current neoliberal, audit culture; and to orientate their teaching and research to the autonomous intellectual sphere generated by the struggles of movements for social change outside the academy.

We hope that our words and thoughts and examples in this book go some way towards helping both groups.

Some of our essays are quite short; we include them because we want to show our thematic and intellectual consistency. Readers interested in the details regarding original publication of the various pieces, and footnoting where it was provided, will find these in the Notes at the end of the book.

March 2021.

PART 1

SHAPING TIMES

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THE BARBER WHO READ HISTORY
AND WAS OVERWHELMED

Rowan Cahill

Early July 2016. I'm away from home, interstate, and in wooded hill country on the outskirts of an Australian metropole. I need a haircut, grey locks well down my back, and see a Barber's sign, old-style ... check in, coffee for free, one barber, a couple of old blokes like me, head nods and smiles all round, he streaming Glastonbury from the net to his big-screen television, Adele pumping out songs in between chattering, but he doesn't like her chatter and keeps going to the controls to eliminate it, and there's three well browsed piles of fish killing and deer and pig killing and gun magazines on offer going back to 2010 on a cane table, so I flip through pages of trophy photos of proud masculinity decked out in expensive hunting togs posing with slaughtered animals and photos of bright shiny guns that cost a mint and read how animal-liberationists have taken over the RSPCA ... and wait my turn ... which arrives, he cleans the old-style chair of previous hair, and I seat myself ... he takes my styling direction, and begins to chat, and it doesn't take long for him to dominate and reveal himself as an historian after I respond to his what do you do question and say I'm a history teacher and he laments how people these days don't learn from history and I agree which is the go-ahead trigger and he's off like a cut snake ... take the anti-gun people all over the place, don't we understand that disarming people is the first step towards authoritarianism?, a well-known lesson from history, then Michael Moore gets a serve, a well-known film-making fraudster who invents his facts and he is followed by George Orwell who knew a thing or two about governments and how they work, know why?, because he actually

was one of them, really a government stooge, and did I know that the Jews and the Bankers actually got communism up and running?, saw a movie about it once, think it was *The Train* or something, well they put Stalin on a sealed train and sent him off to Moscow and he set about making communism, because they, the Jews and the Bankers, wanted something scary to frighten people with so they could keep control of everything ... he has the cut-throat and I listen to his one-way dialogue with Adele in the background from Glastonbury and realise that we all carry around in our heads versions of the past, real, invented, imagined, and on the basis of these we make decisions that guide our lives, even horribly twisted invented imagined histories ...

* * *

We all carry histories within us. As soon as we look back on and reflect upon our own lives, for whatever reason, whenever, regardless of the import of the reflection, even the recall of something trivial in our individual past, and even if for a reason as commonplace as making a point in conversation based upon personal experience, we are thinking of ourselves, and treating ourselves, historically, as an historical subject, as having a past to recall and think about, as having a history. Looking back on that past we are acting in a basic way as historians, especially if in remembering we are trying to make some sort of sense of a personal past, to construct some sort of chronology, create some sort of narrative. And if in the process of recalling and reflecting, there are faults and errors, for example if misremembering takes place, if inaccurate chronologies are constructed, if invention takes place, these too are part of the historical process, faults and shortcomings that professional historians seek to avoid by training, collegial and peer interventions, and by disciplinary tenets and conventions.

* * *

When we categorise ourselves, when we think of ourselves as part of an entity, for example as a citizen of a nation state, as part of a race of people, as part of a religion, as having certain values and morals, indeed any thinking which puts us in contrast to another which is not us, our difference reliant on there being *otherness* and *others* that are not *me/us*, then we are regarding ourselves historically. Unless the *me/us* and the *other/otherness* appeared immediately *here and now* as if by miracle or magic, then they have pasts, and are rooted in pasts, no matter how any of these are understood, misunderstood, construed, misconstrued by the perceiver. This process of classification/identification is an historical process, involving judgements and comparisons of pasts and histories, regardless whether this process is conscious or unconscious, deliberate or accidental, voluntary or involuntary.

* * *

We are all Time Travellers, our every NOW an interface where the past, present, and future seamlessly merge, part of the past in the immediacy of happening, part of the future in the immediacy of before, and all three in the instant of NOW.

* * *

We are all part of history. Our individual beings and daily lives constitute what will be the grist future historians will mull and turn over, even though the vast bulk of us will be individually unknown, anonymous, unacknowledged, uncredited. We are all part of history, and are all historical beings, contributing to and creating the now and future that will be the past.

* * *

In his often cited 'history from below' poem, *A Worker Reads History* (1936), Bertolt Brecht alerts the reader to the fact that behind history's traditionally top-down account of great and celebrated people, events, and achievements, are large numbers of

anonymous and uncredited people. This is the bottom-up way of looking at the past.

Beginning rhetorically with the question 'Who built the seven gates of Thebes?' Brecht provides the answer, pointing to the huge labours of the artisans and workers involved in the actual physicality of the building of Thebes. The rest of the poem is a brief catalogue of similar well-known historical examples – people, events, cities, Empires – Brecht making the point that in telling history from the viewpoints of the rulers and the rich and the powerful, the immense contributions of the labouring masses are ignored.

Young Alexander conquered India.
He alone?
Caesar beat the Gauls.
Was there not even a cook in his army?
Phillip of Spain wept as his fleet
was sunk and destroyed. Were there no other tears?
Frederick the Great triumphed in the Seven Years War.
Who triumphed with him?

This unacknowledged contribution is not directly referred to as exploitative, although Brecht does refer to 'slaves' in his reference to the sinking of mythical Atlantis, and in the cases of the achievements of Alexander the Great and Philip of Spain to the vast numbers of uncredited and anonymous people who perished militarily in the making of the historically remembered exploits of these greats.

For Brecht, the aim of the poem is to create a bottom-up awareness of history, not to propose any redress or action. Rather he ends his poem with these two lines:

So many particulars.
So many questions.

Brecht leaves the situation open, its analysis a future project for others.

Returning to where I started, on the outskirts of the metropole, I see my Barber as caught up in a nightmare version of this Brechtian world, part of the unacknowledged mass of atomised individuals, overwhelmed by and fearful of the largeness of government, the power of the state, and the duplicities and conspiracies of the rich and powerful, to the extent that even those who resist, like George Orwell and Michael Moore, seem to be but feathers in the wind, their actions null and void because nothing seems to change, and thus they come to be regarded as part of the problem too, mere diversions/fools, maybe even part of conspiracies involving those they allegedly oppose. In this situation a possible way of redress is to escape into cynicism, suspicion, fear and loathing and find refuge in the sanctity of atomised individuality and the protection of the gun, a naïve intellectual response akin to the desperate savagery of a cornered wild animal. There is a Brechtian poem in this: 'The Barber Who Read History and was Overwhelmed'.

Brecht's worker/history poem is an invitation for the reader to reimagine history: instead of the mainstream top-down version, with the systemic exploitations, iniquities, dissemblings and silences of ruling class power, to imagine history from the bottom-up, to recognise and realise the labour and productivity and creativity of the anonymous mass, the common people, the source of the 'greatness' and 'achievement' traditionally attributed to a few at the top. With this Brechtian imaginative leap, the fabric of historical narrative is rent, facilitating the development and growth of alternative narratives and possibilities. For the reality is that the uncredited anonymous mass, the common people, has never been totally docile, quiescent, co-operative, tame, unquestioning, compliant, unchallenging, and the past abounds with examples and instances of critiques, resistance, uprisings, rebellions from below, indeed a myriad of examples, successful and/or otherwise, where individuals have rejected atomisation and found/built/created common purpose and unity and come together in movement and made history together.

It is in the interests of the top-down mainstream spinners of

historical narratives to keep this alternative history hidden, badmouthed, obfuscated, and it is the role of the radical historian to reveal its extent, dimensions, diversity, richness, its successes and failures. In many ways the stories of the past we carry within our beings, embedded in our psyches and imaginations, no matter how accurately, how fragmentally understood, or misunderstood, help shape our understandings of the present, how we act or don't act, and how we envisage the future. If we do not understand that individuals can have agency, that people have in the past shrugged off atomisation and come together in movement, then chances are we will not recognise our own agency in the present, and will possibly see the future, like my barber, cynically, alone, and without hope.

Simply, history does not need to overwhelm, and as Brecht concluded, once the imaginative leap is taken, what was top-down certainty is replaced with the uncertainties and challenges of many questions, and everything, including the future, is open.

RADICAL ACADEMIA: BEYOND THE AUDIT CULTURE TREADMILL

Rowan Cahill and Terry Irving

MISSING IN ACTION

In the social sciences and humanities, radicals have retreated since the 1970s, and not just because of political timidity; they had been outflanked. Knowledge production has changed in ways that disadvantaged radicals.

This happened as universities ceased being elite institutions variously producing educated and research elites. They transformed and morphed to become business institutions producing masses of highly educated graduates for an ever-increasing array of employment situations, and specialist researchers for their own use, conducting their operations and accountability processes on models adapted/adopted from the corporate and business worlds.

While the numbers of academics needed to service these institutions dramatically expanded, this did not lead to the democratisation of knowledge and research, nor to the creation of an intellectual commons. Instead, academic jobs and career advancement came to rely on knowledge production in specified quantities (amounts varying between and within institutions) gifted to and published in a hierarchy of journals of varying status and prestige, some more preferred than others, most of which ultimately were, or came, under the control and/or ownership of huge multi-billion-dollar global publishing empires.

These publications tended to have their own preferred styles, genres, and content ranges, their editors/editorial boards in

effect acting as intellectual conditioners and gatekeepers. In the affluent First world, in whatever country, in whatever institution, as this process gathered pace the role of academic scholar as ‘researcher’ and ‘thinker’ became that of vassal labourer, reliant on the multinational-billion-dollar scholarly publishing empires for employment and career advancement.

Mostly funded by public monies, the items the vassals produced as part of their labour were handed over for free to private enterprise where, with the development of cyber technologies, they were locked up behind the paywalls and liberated only on a user-pay basis, a one-way financial process that totally excluded the original creator/producer. The scale and extent of this sort of intellectual production is now immense. While reliable figures are difficult to come by, estimates of the number of peer-reviewed papers published globally place the figure at around 1.5 million items annually.

The cost per download of an article under this system often approximates to the cost of a mass-marketed paperback book, hence the huge profits generated by academic publishers, it being a necessary part of the academic research model to mine and trawl within the relevant empires of published research. Scientific scholarly/academic publisher Elsevier, for example, reported revenue of \$US3.5 billion, and a profit of \$US1.5 billion, in 2013.

The research departments responsible for the academic accountability processes of the business-model university demanded not only evidence as to quantity, that is, number of publications, but also evidence that this material had been used, and so looked for referencing and citation in the same or related outlets in which the original material appeared. This in turn created self-perpetuating intellectual communities, encouraging discussions and the framing of ideas in genres of writing and language that need only be understood by, and therefore only attract the interest of, specialised audiences of similar ilk. The success of a piece of academic scholarly work came to be measured in terms of its circulation within gated intellectual communities, that being the audience sought, it never being the aim of the process to engage in a democratic way with the

public in general, to reach beyond the niche.

What we have arrived at, in effect, is the colonisation of scholarship and research, and the creation by the coloniser, the academic publishers, of metropolises of learning/knowledge, within which there is enough room for creative manoeuvre and difference, but only within the metropole.

It is a mode of intellectual work and production that is not inclusive, but parallel to and compounding, for example, what Raewyn Connell drew attention to in the pioneering *Southern Theory: The global dynamics of knowledge in the social sciences* (Sydney, 2007): the systematic historical neglect by the affluent intellectual worlds of Europe and North America of the richness of social science understandings and insights from Africa, Latin America, Asia, and within these their alternative modes of intellectual activity and production.

For radical academic scholars with a passion for social justice, or with the evils of capitalism in their sights, the career questions have not been of the kind ‘What social justice problem has your work been used to address?’; ‘What social movements, picket lines, barricades, revolts, insurrections, etc, has your work helped inspire/inform?’ Not, ‘What public forums, outlets has your work been referenced/appeared in?’, but rather ‘In what journal, what scholarly book (with a very small print-run, say 200 copies, and a huge price tag) has your work appeared in?’; ‘In which part of what multi-billion-dollar academic publishing empire has your work been drawn upon or cited or referenced?’

Moreover, when it comes to the actual physical participation of the academic scholar in public affairs, forums, and events outside of the academy, there are constraints. Workloads are such that after teaching and administrative responsibilities, including the huge bureaucratic process associated with the career prerequisite of competitively seeking funding and grants, have been attended to, and after research has taken place, there is little time for public affairs, especially if a personal life and rest and recreation are also the rights of the academic scholar. Add to this the imperative to

write and publish, and the work of the academic that has emerged in the modern business university is one conducive to living one's life in an enclosed institutional and intellectual setting.

Moreover, the mode of intellectual production and its related publishing model in turn shapes the political/public behaviour of the university-based intellectual worker. For many radical academics the university has become a working and creative environment where the production of a published scholarly academic piece is viewed as a political act and as an engagement in struggle/contestation.

Given all this, it is easy, perhaps 'natural', to think that this is the intellectual/scholarly model, that this is the way academics/scholars behave, and should behave. No matter that a cursory backwards glance shows that considerable thinking and ideas and understandings of great intellectual significance in the humanities and social sciences were created away from the academy, often in publications or formats that today would be regarded 'off limits' so far as academic scholarly career prospects and advancement are concerned. One only has to mention in regard to Europe, Antonio Gramsci and Walter Benjamin, to see the point.

Too often, university-based intellectual workers, and those they train to be their future replacements, see themselves as idea makers and not idea users as well. The notion that there is more to ideas than just thinking them and putting them in journals or in whatever academic formats, that they have to also be part of life, has to be said and said and said again and again, so the idea makers actually accept as part of their brief and role that ideas and action and social transformations are all part of the one dimension, and are not afraid of or tainted by the thought.

A key part of this 'action' is seeking ways to go beyond the academic/scholarly format and conceiving of intellectual work as engaging democratically with more than niche audiences. It is not impossible. In Barcelona in 2012, trained historians and 'history-tellers, historical agitators, artists, independent archivists, history groups, political archaeologists etc' came together to set up the 'International History from Below Network'. As the document for

its meeting in Manchester (May 2015) explained, the network aims to create a 'self-organized, do-it-yourself practice', an historical sub-culture of 'commoning and levelling, promoting the sharing of resources and countering the idea that history is solely the province of professional historians. We aim to find new practices and arenas for radical history beyond the austere mood and sensibility of the academic lecture and conference.'

If intellectual workers keep perpetuating the idea that writing a scholarly article is the political act and therefore the end of the matter, then they defraud themselves, disempowering and emasculating both themselves as idea makers and the possibilities for change.

★ ★ ★

WHAT CAN BE DONE

BEGINNINGS

During the late 1960s and early 70s, we were part of a collective that created a 'Free University' in inner-city Sydney, one of many radical education experiments of the time globally. Courses commenced in December 1967 and ran through to 1972. At its height, during the Summer of 1968-69, over 300 people were involved in the Sydney initiative in communal, collaborative, radical education projects. Similar Australian experiments followed in Adelaide, Armidale, Brisbane, Hobart, and Melbourne, though it appears the Sydney initiative was the most successful. Nearly 50 years later, we have not fallen far from that tree, and during recent years it has been gratifying to meet young radical activists variously experimenting similarly, internationally and locally. Regarding the latter, we note in particular the Brisbane Free University project.

As to what a university should be, we like this recent encapsulation by education activist Marc Spooner:

'an accessible institution dedicated to fostering critical,

creative, engaged citizens while generating public-interest research’, as distinct from the current neoliberal drive to build entrepreneurial training centres ‘churning out atomized workers and corporate-directed R&D’.

As for teaching and education practice, the formulation of critical pedagogy, elaborated by educationist/activist Henry Giroux, resonates. He argues

that teachers and academics should combine the mutually interdependent roles of critical educator and active citizen. This requires finding ways to connect the practice of classroom teaching with issues that bear down on their lives and the larger society and to provide the conditions for students to view themselves as critical agents capable of making those who exercise authority and power answerable for their actions. The role of a critical education is not to train students solely for jobs, but also to educate them to question critically the institutions, policies, and values that shape their lives, relationships to others, and their myriad of connections to the larger world.

DOCTORAL GLUT?

Figures for Australia in 2014 show that 49,950 academics had a research or teaching and research function, a small decline on the previous year, and including overseas students, there were 62,471 research students in 2013. In that year, 7,787 PhDs were completed, along with 1,422 masters by research degrees. The reality of this situation, compounding each year, is that there is little hope whatsoever of all current and future PhD graduates gaining either long-term contracts or tenured position within academia, those seeking entry pretty well destined to long term or permanent (and precarious) confinement in the large pool of casual academic labour and/or the perpetual quest for post-doctoral work. The situation for

Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) graduates is even more dire, given the propensity for Australian university bean-counters and managerialists to variously trim, prune, shed jobs, amalgamate or otherwise ‘disappear’ faculties or departments in these areas. Add to this the competition of job-seeking academics from abroad, often loaded with publications, prepared to take status and/or wage cuts to get footholds in Australia, and the problem intensifies. For every HASS position offered, there may be a couple of hundred applicants, or more.

Which is a tragedy, since anecdotal evidence suggests many doctoral students desire/aspire to academic careers, and little is done in their preparation to dissuade them otherwise, or to prepare them for ways and means of using their doctorates and skills outside of the academy, which the majority will have to do eventually, if they don’t throw in the towel and give the whole game away.

What the production rate does mean is that there is a huge pool of casual and ultimately cheap labour available to do teaching in situations where tenured and contract staff have the political muscle to resist increased teaching workloads, and this pool is constantly replenished as casuals variously find more secure employments either inside or outside the academy. Not to prepare post-graduates for employment outside the academy is negligent and remiss of universities; to simply add to the academic cheap labour pool an abuse and a betrayal.

A cultural result of this situation is the cultivation of rivalry, individuality, and competition. Securing an academic job of substance is intensely competitive, there are limited places available, so each *other* person with similar skills and abilities, even a friend, is a *rival* as job seeker/job taker, a situation conducive neither to peer collaborative work nor the development of a sense of scholarly community. Beginning in the post-graduate years, this atomisation and individualism tends to continue as part of professional life.

This is not an argument in favour of cutting the numbers of doctorates being minted, nor a call for the creation of vocational doctorates along the lines of the Master of Business, only more

upmarket. It is, however, a call for radical scholars, especially newly minted additions to the doctoral glut, to reject servitude to the 'production' model of scholarship, writing, and publishing, with its very small audiences, its paywalls, its jargon and theoreticism accessible only to the initiate. Instead, they must research, write, publish and work in ways that do challenge capitalism and address social justice issues, and actually reach out to, and engage with, audiences wider than self-referential *niches*.

EFFECTS ON RESEARCH

As we have seen, during the 1960s and onwards, publishing companies began the global collection and harvesting of journals from academic organisations and societies, becoming the owners and controllers of the journals, a role academics surrendered because they were more interested in researching and writing, rather than the actual process of publishing, a process requiring expertise and financing often beyond the world and expertise and time constraints of the academic scholar. At the time it was a paper-based publishing world, and small circulation academic journals, unable to survive by subscriptions and advertising, were turned into profit-makers via the power and ability of publishing houses to sell packages of journal titles to libraries globally.

Once the digital revolution caught up with academic publishing, and a huge amount of research in the humanities became digitally-based, as academics strived to produce their assigned outputs, paywalls became a licence to print money, in the process turning the academic into an unpaid labourer for the publishing companies, since the only receiver of money from this process tended to be the publishing companies, the academic producer/labourer meant to be content with 'publication' and 'performance target met'.

But worse was to happen. In the humanities and social sciences, once post-modernism kicked in, breaking down traditional disciplines, generating new inter-disciplinary fields, inventing a plethora of jargons and theoretical positions, making basically anything capable of being studied or researched, no matter how small

the audience, the pressure to publish continuously and widely, taking advantage of the commercial academic publishing industry, became a form of consumerism. And like other forms of consumerism, it encouraged academics to turn towards self-formation. The drive to publish necessitates new angles, new subject matters, new interpretations, not necessarily related to societal or knowledge/cultural concerns but to the 'performance' need 'to publish'. This process successfully inoculates the academic scholar from connections and engagements with other scholars, and ultimately with the larger world. Thus, it works against the development and encouragement of critical/dissident/radical scholars capable of engagement and agency.

A casualty of this process was the sort of journal many progressive and radical scholars produced in the 1960s and 1970s, journals produced collectively, with peer-reviewing part of that communal process, often aimed at audiences beyond the niches of academia. These journals were produced via the then empowering offset printing technology, in its time as revolutionary a technology as was the humble gestetner earlier in the century, technologies which greatly facilitated the circulation of ideas and creative work independent of large-scale commercial publishers.

It is as though modern academia is suffering a form of amnesia, for, at hand in the digital technologies, is the power and wherewithal to make anyone and any group, a communicator and spreader of ideas and research and writing, and to find and target audiences, without the hindrances of the peer-review fetish, and without the commercial 'academic' publisher.

PEER REVIEWING AND THE AUDIT CULTURE

As the 'the production model' advanced, and academic scholars became chained to its 'publish or perish' demand, the auditing function in academic life intensified. Scholars were rated according to the status of the journals in which they published. 'Peer review' also became an auditing tool because it created an elite of gatekeeper-editors dedicated to defending the system.

Peer reviewing, described as the touchstone of the scientific method, has been around for a long time – since the 18th century in the sciences – but it is only in the last 30 years that peer reviewing itself has been subject to scientific scrutiny. And the main finding? It is riddled with defects. Here is how Richard Smith, a former editor of the *British Medical Journal* described them in 2006: ‘In addition to being poor at detecting gross defects and almost useless for detecting fraud it is slow, expensive, profligate of academic time, highly subjective, something of a lottery, prone to bias, and easily abused’. And there is much more along these lines to be found by searching the internet, where suggested alternatives are divided between improvements to the system, and a movement to re-imagine knowledge production as creative, reflexive, engaged and collective.

But let’s not talk about peer reviewing as an abstraction. The social relations of making knowledge are well understood, but usually within narrow limits: the laboratory or department, the academic or professional society, the national academy or ‘royal’ society. But as we look at the recent griping about peer reviewing, it is pretty obvious that it coincides with the neoliberal capture of the universities over the last thirty years.

So, we need to push the analysis out to talk about a wider field of human relations, encompassing the state and markets: to talk about the government policies that managerialised academic self-government, and the funding and publishing arrangements that privatised public knowledge to the benefit of multinational publishing firms. As a problem for the working scholar, the irrationality of peer-reviewing goes hand in hand with the ‘publish or perish’ horror of the audit culture.

If you follow debates about what is wrong with peer-reviewing, the big worry is that it reinforces the power of an academic elite and discourages original, innovative ideas. In the abstract, there is no reason for these tendencies to pertain, but in the real world of giant publishing corporations snaffling up independent journals and spawning new ones, and then enhancing the profiles of the

academics who edit them, authority can easily come to outrank truth in the peer-reviewing system. It becomes a game restricted to teams already in the competition, teams that never question the rules.

Well, what’s wrong with that, assuming all those who play are signed up to a team? Once again, we have to talk about the fact that in the last thirty years the academic world has changed. The earlier kind of university, built as a community of scholars, their right to seek the truth protected by tenure, their knowledge enhanced and passed on by teaching, has been replaced by the production-model university, copied from the corporate world and focused on training, and measured by outputs. In this model, scholarship and teaching are separated, and a caste system privileges the few and exploits the mass, the former tenured academics, the latter the casual and/or temporary teaching academics. In some countries up to 70% of university teaching is done by this component of the precariat.

The peer-review system really only benefits the tenured elite. Even the small minority of the precariat who reckon they stand a good chance of eventually moving into the tenured elite have no guarantee that the system will work for them, and the more original they are the less their chances. As Richard Smith said, pleasing the god-like peers is a lottery. So why would it be rational for any member of the academic underclass to submit their work to the peer-reviewed journals, especially junior scholars of radical disposition? Would it not be better for them to focus their intellectual lives in ways that reach out beyond the niche readerships of the peer-reviewed journals to engage in movements for social justice and the common good? And, with optimism of the will, this is possible. They could set up their own networks outside the professional associations, hold their own conferences, start their own journals, even set up their own Free universities. We did all these in the sixties and seventies, and now it should be easier, given academic precarity on the ground, and the internet in the ether.

To be fair: this is already happening, and with support from established scholars – but not from enough of them. We agree with Marc Spooner that radical academics, while studying and sometimes

embracing the new anti-capitalist ‘horizontal’ movements, have not done enough to challenge their own status of academic servitude. In particular they have gone along with the farce that is peer-reviewing. As Spooner points out: ‘Peer-reviewed articles ... do not represent the full complement of scholarly possibility’. Gary Zabel, commenting on the Academia.edu discussion begun by his brief paper ‘Against Peer Review’ lists some of these possibilities: ‘old-fashioned edited journal and magazines, self-published projects, open on-line journals, open journals that publish everything along with the peer reviews, blogs, etc’.

If the academic precariat has nothing to lose by rejecting the peer review system, it is also true that tenured academics have little to gain. As several commentators have pointed out, it is academic complicity that keeps the system going. As Cameron Neylon writes on his blog: ‘We are all complicit. Everyone is playing the game, but that does not mean that all players have the same freedom to change it’. He calls on senior researchers and even Vice Chancellors to take the lead. But in our view even more influential, indeed decisive, will be the collective action of all workers in the universities, tenured and untenured, academic and non-academic.

REJECTING COMPLICITY

Rejecting the ‘complicity’ described above, does not need to be grandiose or dramatic. It can start small. Recently a slow scholarship movement has started to gain ground. When an article about it, ‘For Slow Scholarship: A Feminist Politics of Resistance through Collective Action in the Neoliberal University’, was posted on Academia.edu it was viewed over 18,000 times.

Since the emergence of the slow food movement in Italian communist circles thirty years ago the practice of slowness *as resistance to capitalism* has often been lost in the many ‘slow movements’ that have followed its lead. Instead, it has become a way of reclaiming personal freedom, an individualistic practice that offers no challenge to the forces constructing us as neoliberal subjects. This is not the perspective of the authors of ‘For Slow

Scholarship’. With roots in the feminist movement, and particularly in its ethic of care, they argue for a collective response. Slow scholarship – time to think, to engage in critical dialogue, and to translate ideas into public action – should not be an entitlement for the privileged few – those with tenure – but a principle around which to build a campus-wide movement to re-imagine academic work (including teaching), recapture control of the university, as well as to rediscover the creative, reflexive, and passionate aspect of the life of the mind.

The authors of ‘For Slow Scholarship’ make a number of suggestions about consciousness-raising, organisation, and caring as the foundations for collective resistance to the neoliberal university. And there are two other aspects of their article that can serve as examples to us of what to do next.

First, theirs is a collectively written article. There are eleven authors, drawn from the Great Lakes Feminist Geography Collective, and they have adopted this mode of writing as a political act:

Collective authorship and the decision not to identify individuals by name or otherwise represent a feminist politics: a commitment to working together to resist and challenge neoliberal regimes of time, and the difficult, depoliticizing conditions they impose on work and life for all of us. This is our version of refusal, our attempt to act in-against-and beyond the university.

Second, there is their chosen publication outlet: refusing to submit to the unethical paywalls imposed on publicly-funded knowledge by mega-profitable international publishing corporations, they have chosen an internet-based open-access journal *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*.

OPEN ACCESS, AND THE DRUG-MODEL

We support the idea of Open Access (OA), the unrestricted access online to scholarly analysis, discussion, research, with attendant freedoms of use, distribution, copying, linking etc, and proper attribution of authorship. OA is a relatively recent phenomenon, the term formulated in the early 2000s. Since then the huge corporations that came to control academic publishing in its old forms, generating huge profits in the process, have variously sought to colonise and exploit the territory of OA, seeking to preserve and enhance their hegemony. In some respects, even as the idea of OA catches on and platforms proliferate, the world of the OA commons is being enclosed. Which is not to say the OA project is doomed, but that OA projects can only remain OA in the original senses of the term if the platforms are run in ways that quarantine them from profit motives and capitalist predators. Which is, of course, entirely possible.

We fear there is a dark side to the world of OA. Imagine that a group of venture capitalists come together and create a popular OA platform for academics/scholars, using the business model of entrepreneurs in the world of illicit drugs, providing a free product to attract and hook players, until it is time to recoup the investment and generate profits, variously privatising, maybe trawling the mass of accumulated materials and selling off metadata...the sky is the limit when profits enter the equation.

Just as we reject the idea of university teaching via MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) we should reject the idea of disseminating knowledge via massive open access academic sharing sites (MOAASS). We should resist the push by neoliberal universities to present MOAASS as an ethical alternative to corporate pay-wall print-based publishing. They are not, because increasingly they too are being swallowed by multi-national publishers, as Elsevier did in 2013 with 'open science' movement icon Mendeley (launched in 2007).

But it is not just corporate ownership that will be the problem – although when the paywalls go up or our data is bundled up for sale, we will feel betrayed and imposed upon. It is rather that, seduced

by the thought of getting hundreds of downloads, thousands of views, we will begin producing knowledge for publication on these sites that aligns with the interests of the only force that is really global: transnational capitalism. And we are not just talking about the humanities and social sciences, or the applied natural sciences. Pure science too is distorted when it is framed by the needs of corporatised transnationalism.

Contrarily, we imagine instead a model of knowledge dispersion which grows organically, by word of mouth, by personal contact, by writing for readers whose situation we understand, and by reading purposively, because we are seeking answers to questions rooted in experience. The knowledge it disperses is authenticated not by superior authority but by the democratic process that produces it. The more widely democratic the process the more likely the knowledge will spread beyond the local. This is the kind of public, an alternative world of knowledge making and action, that the left has always lived in. Why should its principles and practices be thrown away just because we live in supposedly global world?

OUTSIDE THE ACADEMY

When activist intellectual Stuart Hall (1932-2014) died, there was a deluge of obituaries in academic outlets, correctly acknowledging his role as a founder of cultural studies.

What was lost in the obituaries was that Hall was neither a slave to the audit culture, nor to the academic journal genre of writing. He was not a scholar who confined himself to academia and its routines. He was the author of no single-authored monograph, the usual holy grail of humanities academics, but is credited with many co-authored and edited works, as well as essays, journalism, political speeches, radio and television talks. Much of Hall's work appeared in outlets such as *Universities and Left Review*, *The New Reasoner*, *New Left Review*, *Marxism Today*, in many cases Hall being his own editor and publisher, even in a journal of which he was a founder. He had a preference for collaborative work and believed in the scholar as an activist who should take part in public discourse and

issues of social justice. Our point is that Hall is not the model of the academic scholar preferred by the neoliberal university. And post-mortem, his model of the academic scholar tends to get lost in the academic celebration of his life.

Over the years we have seen many post-graduate students and scholars avidly trawl through the works of Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) and Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), for insights and arguments and quotes, thinkers and writers who wrote and published outside of the academy, one in partisan publications, his major work in the form of notes written in the confines of a Italian fascist prison, the other a writer who regarded himself as a ‘Man of Letters’ and had a troubled relationship with the academy, and spent much of his life writing for money.

It is easy, and convenient, to forget within the confines of modern academia, that significant intellectual work, innovations, critical breakthroughs, can and do take place outside of the academy, and that there are means of being scholarly and intellectual beyond the audit culture and its preferred models of scholarship.

THE FUTURE PROFESSORIATE

Terry Irving

According to the American Historical Association (AHA), historians with new PhDs have about a 50% chance of academic employment at the time of their graduation. Is that good or bad? Well, it’s bad, for what the AHA report fails to say is that the ‘lucky’ half will be exploited as temporary adjuncts, without tenure or health benefits, working twice as many hours as the tenured professors for half the salary. A favoured few will manage to move into the tenure track; the rest will labour in this academic underworld all their working lives – or until they join the underpaid in some other industry. As one of the adjuncts, Martin Mulford, explained recently, their situation is not unique; it’s par for the American way of life. They are just as expendable as other workers, suffering because of the conquest of academic life by America’s ‘unfettered, rampant, predatory capitalism’.

So, I got a bit of a jolt when I came across a conference call from the University of Syracuse, a private college in affluent up-state New York. In its Department of History, says the announcement, the graduate students work in what is called ‘The Future Professoriate Program’. Future recruits to the precariat, more like!

Is the program a bad joke, I wondered, or just another example of elite arrogance and market ideology? And is its linguistic cleverness self-deception or deliberate? And if the ruling professoriate can get away with misnaming their school in this way, are the courses they offer tailored to produce a similarly false view of the world and its history?

The reason the Syracuse announcement caught my eye was that the conference's theme was 'Violence and Resistance', described thus: 'These have become increasingly central to scholarship and have been a palpable presence both on the news and in our classrooms' – in the latter presumably as matters for discussion rather than as results of an actual struggle to democratize universities. The assumption at Syracuse seems to be that historians study the representations of violence and resistance, latterly in a virtual world on the news channels, rather than the things themselves.

Then follows a short list of conference topics: 'Memory, religion, gender, military, community identity, popular culture, family, imperialism/colonial experiences, landscape, the self, politics.' My guess is that they reflect the theses that the students in the school are writing. Culture, experience, identity, memory: these are the organizing ideas of a history profession still in retreat from the radical materialist scholarship of the late twentieth century. Look at what the list ignores: the structures of racial and class power, surely among the main arenas of violence and resistance; periodisation, a concept that holds out the possibility of another period of progressive action against oppression and its supporting violence; and the social structuring of power and thus the crucial insight, for a study of this kind, that the state, as the sphere of legitimate violence, is responsible for spreading the very idea of violence as a way of settling conflict.

In the Syracuse announcement, the missing event is 'Occupy'; the missing concepts are those of historical materialism.

One of the most encouraging recent developments in the practice of radical history is the renewal of the materialist understanding of history as a creative and collective process. This has occurred as millions of people have shown what that means right now, on the streets and in the squares of hundreds of cities across the globe. If violence and resistance are part of historical analyses today it is because of this movement. It reminds historians of the palpable existence of violence and resistance, and that they have to contextualize them, to consider their material causes and effects, to

see them as actions as well as experiences, to analyse their economic and political reality as well as their representations.

The graduate students of Syracuse are right to perceive that current events have placed violence and resistance on the historians' agenda. I hope there will be a good roll up of radical historians at their conference, in order to restore the conceptual balance and turn historians into historical actors themselves. That's the kind of professoriate so many of us are waiting for; not least because the professors need to carry the fight against capitalism into their own campuses.

PART 2

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LABOUR HISTORY AND RADICAL HISTORY

NEVER NEUTRAL: ON LABOUR
HISTORY/RADICAL HISTORY

Rowan Cahill

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Eric Fry, one of the founders of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History (ASSLH), wrote about radical history in the 'Introduction' to his neglected *Rebels & Radicals* (1983). The book is not listed in Greg Patmore's comprehensive listing of labour history publications (1991), rates no mention in the 1992 tribute to Fry's work edited by Jim Hagan and Andrew Wells, and receives only brief mentions in the *Labour History* tribute issue to Eric Fry and fellow ASSLH pioneer Bob Gollan (2008). Arguably with good reason, since the book was exploring a different way of writing dissident history, one not in accord with the traditional practice of academic labour history as it developed in Australia, but in accord with the 'broadness of scope and orientation' of labour history envisaged by Fry and Gollan as early as 1961 in the early days of the ASSLH.

Rebels & Radicals is an edited collection of twelve biographical essays. The threads linking the twelve lives were not the traditional hallmarks of labour history, not their membership of labour movement institutions, not their advocacy of working-class principles, but, as Fry explained in his 'Introduction', all of them were 'little known', their lives having 'to be pieced together from fragments', and they all 'stood against the dominant beliefs and policies of their times'. For Fry in this book, the writing of history was about dominant classes, hegemony, the exercise of political power, contesting power, contesting the ideas that were part and parcel of this power, and the role of rebels and radicals, and sometimes violence, in this process. *Rebels & Radicals* was about

conflict, and about historians being on the side of the rebels:

The Australia in which we live is made up of social classes differing greatly in wealth and power. Dominant ideas suit the dominant class. In effect the rulers write history, aware that the way we view the world today is shaped by our conceptions of the past. They need not do so consciously, since they can simply take their own values for granted and their own self-interest as being the national interest. Nor do they need to do it themselves. Professional historians lay the foundations in research and scholarly books; journalists, novelists, the media and teachers broaden and popularise the original version, again usually without having to consider what view of society they are endorsing. History is never neutral.

This book shows another side, turning away from rulers to the ruled, from victors to victims. These rebels and radicals confronted the powerful authorities of their day. Some resisted with force and were hanged or shot, others were jailed, many led tragic lives, and all suffered from persecution or discrimination. So, were they simply losers, not worth remembering? No. They and the people for whom they stood had their effect on the shaping of Australia, for the dominant classes are always restricted by the forces opposing them. They do not rule untrammelled, their power is always constrained by a web of conflicts. Fortunes ebb and flow, changes may be long delayed, but out of the resolution of one struggle another is born. Once we recognise that our past, like the present, is a process of contradictory forces we can see that the rebels and radicals are the other side of the coin and an indispensable part of our history.

Fry was not alone in radical experimentation. For example, earlier, in 1982, a Sydney-based collective of historians, referring

to themselves as the Sydney Labour History Group, published a collection of ten essays titled *What Rough Beast?* Broad in approach and content, the essays variously explored the concept of the state in Australian history. Interdisciplinary, adventurous and stimulating, the essays were modestly termed 'excursions into historical analysis', the state conceived not as a 'monolithic functional entity operating for maximum social order' but as a formation of institutions that change/d over time, far from cohesive, sometimes characterized by disorder and indecision, a site of diverse and multi-faceted conflict, contradictions, and change.

Fry's short pointed sentence about history never being neutral would have been a new consideration for some of his readers; for others, a reminder. For Fry it was his starting point. When the contemporary Australian incarnation of labour history was conceived in the late 1950s and early 1960s by Bob Gollan, Fry and others as an organisation (the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History-ASSLH) based at the Australian National University (Canberra) with a journal (*Labour History*), relying both on academic and non-academic practitioners, the Cold War was in full swing. Australia was 'another country': the Australian Labor Party (ALP) had been in the Federal political wilderness since late 1949; the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) had power and influence amongst trade unionists and intellectuals. The trade union movement represented a peak of about 62 per cent of employees in the mid-1950s, and held on to over 50 per cent of employees through to 1980. The ALP still had its famous socialisation objective printed on its membership tickets. For people on the Left, working class militancy 'was the great engine of change'.

Something else was blowing in the wind. The Vietnam War was around the corner and social protest was about to be rediscovered as a tool of the powerless, with social protest movements proliferating in the decade 1965-1975; the first of the baby boomers were about to enter a tertiary system expanded especially for them; traditional subject disciplines were about to be agonisingly challenged and changed by new disciplines and radical ways of looking at the world.

The ASSLH pioneers were on the threshold of a new world, in many ways beyond their ken, but they did so politically and courageously, as radical intellectual warriors, part of the power struggle against the conservative hegemony of their day, participants in an intellectual/cultural struggle between radicals and conservatives to control ‘the agenda of ideas in Australia’. It took courage to make this stand in academia at the time. Leftist and former leftist academics held real fears for their jobs and their futures as academics; the case of the failure of leftist historian Russel Ward in 1955 to secure a lectureship at the new University of Technology, Sydney (later the University of New South Wales) due to political intervention, crystallised their fears.

Gollan and Fry were amongst a number of historians inside and outside the academy, people like Brian Fitzpatrick, Lloyd Churchward, Noel Ebbels, Ian Turner, Russel Ward, for whom the ‘writing of history and engagement in political struggle were understood as bedfellows’. So far as the ASSLH founders were concerned, labour history as a specialisation and as an organisation would help the ALP and the labour movement generally gain the historical recognition due to significant historical movers and shakers, a recognition denied at the time; further, in a utilitarian sense, the past was there to be learned from, and it was intended that lessons learned would help in the political power struggles ahead.

The ASSLH concept of labour history grew out of the experiences of its founders during the 1930s, the Second World War, and post-war, with an eye on both left historical debate and initiatives in the United Kingdom, and on a body of Australian labour history writing and analysis that went back to the late 1880s. The formulators were also part of a creative radical-nationalist intellectual cohort which included writers, artists, poets, musicians, actors, folk revivalists. As Drew Cottle has explained, strength was found in the collectivism and anti-authoritarianism of the common people, and in these ‘an alternative to the individualism, consumerism and conformity’ which characterised the developing Cold War Australia of the Menzies era. In part too, the ASSLH constituted a flexing of muscles by relatively newly minted academics in an expanding and

malleable tertiary sector, articulating their conception of academics as people who consciously and deliberately operated both inside and outside the academy. They also understood that there were intellectuals outside, and unrecognised by, the academy, a situation they sought to address by including them as equal participants and contributors to intellectual/historical debate, research and writing. As Terry reveals in Chapter 5, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) recognised the political threat, hence the watch it mounted on the infant ASSLH, and the spoiling operations directed against it.

Since those Cold War days, the powerbase to which the ASSLH warriors attached and aligned their hopes, aspirations and strategies, has changed dramatically. The fortunes of the CPA declined to the extent the party wound itself up in 1991. Trade union density declined until by 2000 only 28 per cent of the workforce was unionised. The ALP broke with its socialist traditions and became more firmly embedded in the capitalist system than hitherto, and, in office during the 1980s, acted as a midwife for neoliberalism.

Reflecting these broad and profound changes, the original counter hegemonic intent and impetus of labour history was either lost or forgotten. The very notion of labour history became a constraining, limiting concept, inhibiting researchers. They now wrote in an academic style for publication in an available space that was narrowly focused, isolating them from subjects and styles more in tune with their preferred political-historical visions and true-selves; research undertaken at times ‘to fill in the gaps’ in the record, or simply because there was a body of ‘unfurrowed’ archival material available. ‘Labour history’ emerged as a genre of historical research and writing more concerned with academic credentialing and advancement than political purpose.

As the tertiary world expanded and as scholarship and teaching became increasingly susceptible to the commodifying demands of purse-strings, accountants, and market forces, there was a worrying and increasing tendency for academic labour historians to be ‘disappeared’, variously gathered under the umbrellas of

Departments of Management/Employment/Business or Whatever studies, creating environments and futures where the pursuit of counter-hegemonic agendas was increasingly remote.

Of course, there were notable forays that resisted the apolitical trend, most recently, for example, books by Meredith and Verity Burgmann, and by Greg Mallory, which embraced the original political intent of labour history, and variously explored the concept of trade union renewal and social responsibility; Sean Scalmer's concise history of Australian trade unions and their contribution to the shaping of the Australian nation, aimed at a mass audience and written in the context of intense anti-union campaigning by the Commonwealth government and much of the mass media; Tom Bramble's account of the declining fortunes of the Australian trade union movement since the 1960s, and strategies for revival and renewal; Humphrey McQueen's account of Australia's building labourers, a history that seamlessly blended labour, Capital, and social history with a confronting detailing of working conditions reminiscent of Upton Sinclair's 1906 exposure of Chicago's meatpacking plants.

It is relevant here to recall Noam Chomsky's 1977 analysis regarding intellectuals in capitalist democracies. He argued that while intellectuals are generally held to be 'fiercely independent' and 'antagonistic' to the establishment, they were in fact shaped, moulded, contained by the state. The capitalist democratic state does not 'stake out a position to which all must conform', but it does work 'to determine and limit the entire spectrum of thought', establishing both the official doctrine and the tolerated extreme, creating a spectrum of thought in which 'fundamental assumptions are insinuated, though rarely expressed, presupposed but not asserted'; it is a hegemonic system in which criticism takes place, but within 'narrow bounds'. Chomsky's analysis is still relevant, even more so as Australian universities struggle both internally and against each other to develop corporate links, establish capitalist enterprises, and develop close relationships with the apparatus of the state merely to survive, let alone thrive. Arguably much research undertaken by academics is shaped and led by funding which reflect

corporate and state agendas.

A consensus view of the past dominates the orthodox histories that shape Australian culture. Along with the noble passage of arms and the shedding of blood across the globe, from the veldts of South Africa to the mountain wastes of Afghanistan, the nation got to where it is because of mateship, good sense, talking things out, agreement, the institutionalised mannered combat of the two-party system, and so on. Industrial disputation was contained within the Arbitration system, except during breakouts like the 1949 Coal Strike – undesirable, alien blips on the otherwise clear-radar-screen, and not indicative of something deeper, like class struggle for instance. All so benign: sport, mateship, unquestioned service to the nation in time of war, and sticking together in time of cyclone, flood and bushfire are what the nation was, and is, all about. It is a view of the past that glosses over an often-calamitous past, one of oppression and significant struggle and conflict.

What we have here is a process akin to fascist monism. In his 1997 discussion of fascism, Michael Parenti points out that fascist doctrine stresses monistic values: 'The people are no longer to be concerned with class divisions but must see themselves as part of a harmonious whole, rich and poor as one, a view that supports the economic status quo by cloaking the ongoing system of class exploitation. This is in contrast to a left agenda that advocates the articulation of popular demands and a sharpened awareness of social injustice and class struggle.'

In 2002, Keith Windschuttle's strident, aggressive, robust assault against the 'Bloody Frontier' version of the Australian past was in part successful because it meshed comfortably with the world view propounded by the post-Hanson, neo-con Howard government (1996-2007), and with its conservative political and social agenda. The mass media variously agreed with Windschuttle and/or enjoyed the attack by a non-specialist outsider on experts, exposing their methodological 'flaws' and their selection of facts. Also contributing to the assault's success was the way in which the 'Bloody Frontier' account had stained a triumphalist post-1788 colonial-settler account

of the Australian past, a stain for which Windschuttle provided the detergent.

Similarly, the 1998 War on the Waterfront stood in historical isolation. Few accounts drew parallels with the past: the conservative desire since the early Cold War days to cripple the union movement by destroying the maritime unions; the twenty-year neo-con thug tactic of employing American style union busters as part of IR normalcy; the clandestine involvement of the military as a feature of Australian industrial relations going back to the 1923 Melbourne Police strike at least, longer when the conflict of 1890 Maritime Strike is taken into account; the collusion, yet again, between government and big business in planning, aiding and abetting attacks on the union movement.

A more expansive historical approach is needed, one in which the traditional labour history subject area exists alongside, for example, Capital history, historical examinations of right-wing thinkers and conservative ideology, accounts of social protest movements which cross social class, alongside histories of the anti-war and peace movements; I have in mind the sort of expansive inclusiveness evident in Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (1980, 2001), and locally in the 1988 four-volume project edited by Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee, *A People's History of Australia since 1788*.

In today's world, the labour movement in all its manifestations is too narrow a focus for historians seeking a world in which social justice and equity are maximised, a society and world in which human beings can live in harmony with other humans and their cultures, other species, and nature in general.

Many left-wing people look to solutions beyond the labour movement and the ALP. What was radical in the late 1950s, early 60s, is not necessarily radical now. If we want to use history with a leftist consciousness to understand, confront and challenge the conservative hegemony of today, as the labour history pioneers did in their day, then a more inclusive, wider history, beyond the trade unions, the ALP, beyond a fixation on industrial capitalism of the

19th and 20th centuries, albeit with forays into gender and race, has to be opened to radical investigation and analysis.

Which is where radical history, in the spirit of the project enunciated by Fry in *Rebels & Radicals*, comes in. Radical history has an emancipatory dimension, the power to move people to act, so there is a sense in which radical historians are present-minded. By studying the past, and movements and people over time, it can show that change is possible, that apparently powerless or humble organisations and people can overcome apparently insurmountable odds; it can heighten perceptions and understandings, enhancing the desire for change; it can show not what is inevitable, but what could and might be. The political reality is that personal discontent and senses of wrongness in the present are of little account without access to ideas, dissenting traditions, and organisations that know how to protest and challenge. It is important to not feel alone, to not have to invent the wheel all over again, even though the point of reference and identification is in the past and may no longer be.

The mission of radical historians is to confront and contest the consensus view of the Australian past and its ideological underpinnings. And part of the way it attempts to do this is by returning to historical discussion and analysis, ideas, events, people, themes, that have been variously sidelined, ignored, 'forgotten' by the consensus process. We need to keep in mind the observation of Walter Benjamin that 'every image of the past that is not recognised by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably'. This process of 'disappearance' is the ongoing political and social threat posed by consensus historians; in effect they not only manufacture a past pervaded by consensus, but also help manufacture a present in which dissent and dissidence are limited, curtailed, a present heading for a future in which these are increasingly proscribed, if not eliminated.

There is no end to History. Thus, it was a mistake to think that the gains and advances made in the wake of the 1960s upsurge of social movements, the gains for example of women, Aborigines, the environment, and for social justice and compassion generally, were

permanent, ongoing. The resolve, dedication, and ruthlessness of those who would have it otherwise were underestimated. No matter what direction the wind is blowing historically, radical historians need that toughness of mind and spirit Albert Camus was indicating as he ended his metaphoric novel *The Plague*: ‘the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good ... it can lie dormant for years and year ... and that perhaps the day would come when ... it would rouse up its rats again and sent them forth to die in a happy city’. On one hand the plague symbolised Nazism and the Occupation of France, but more generally, anti-democratic and authoritarian pestilences full stop. Radical historians address the Camus metaphor, and if unable to eradicate the plague bacillus, at least work to keep it at bay.

ASIO AND THE LABOUR HISTORY SOCIETY: AN INCIDENT IN 1964

Terry Irving

People sometimes ask me whether I think labour history has a future. When I was very young, we had a family friend called Gus. He wore a green star as a badge in his lapel. Because most of the badges in my family were red, this was intriguing. Gus, my mother told me, was an Esperantist. To my childish mind this explanation for the green badge was satisfactory, since I then understood that Gus grew asparagus. Not that we grew asparagus; we were far too busy letter-boxing, but I had an Aunt in the far west of New South Wales who hand-watered exotic vegetables, including asparagus, with a cracked cup and a bucket. Later I discovered that Esperanto was an international second language, developed in the late nineteenth century.

For the past fifteen years, walking to Sydney University from Redfern station, I have often recalled this childish confusion as I pass the Esperanto Domo, the headquarters on Lawson Street of the dwindling band of Sydney Esperantists. It is their habit to pin on the paling fence of their domo a handmade poster about the attractions of Esperanto, and the most recent one never fails to divert my thoughts into a pleasing melancholia as I trudge along, thinking of labour history. On an A4 sheet, the bubble-jet colours already fading, are the words: ‘Facts About Esperanto. Every month one or two CDs of Esperanto music are produced in the world.’

So, you see, I really have *no* doubts about the future of labour history. If the Esperantists can survive, so can we.

What I want to talk about tonight is a principal reason for our

survival, and at the same time a threat to our existence: I mean, labour history's unavoidable political situation. Most of you will know my preoccupation with this theme. Not many, however, will know of the political struggles over historical ideas that accompanied the birth of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, or the attention that the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation paid to the Society, and how a disruptive incident in 1964 was resolved when the protagonists, seemingly on opposite sides in the Cold War, agreed to a liberal intellectual practice for the Society.

Like all successful organisations, we have our foundational myth, and ours runs true to type by glossing over the contentious elements in our beginnings. In our myth the founding-fathers are academics, they are left-wing, but moving away from the control and dogmatism of the Communist party, they are influenced to form the ASSLH by the British example, and they reach out to non-academic labour historians to involve them in the Society. There is a brief moment of contention, but it is caused by one member who has personal differences with others on the Executive.

As I came into the Society at this time, I know that there are truthful elements in this myth. I remember attending the public meeting in 1961, a few months after the formation of the Society, where Eric Fry and Bob Gollan addressed a meeting of academics and trade unionists during White Collar Festival Week in Sydney. As a post-graduate student, from a Communist family, I had both professional and political motives for getting involved in the Sydney branch. But the professional was paramount: I published my first academic article in *Labour History* two years later. Therefore, when a brief article appeared in 1964 in a right-wing journal, *The Bulletin*, about a purported Communist take-over of the ASSLH I was predisposed to dismiss it as a Cold War beat-up.

I thought nothing more about this article until recently, when I began to research the development of historical awareness in the labour movement. I soon discovered that the Society's foundational myth was skewed strongly in the direction of the academic contribution, and that it was far too benign. I also recalled that I

had witnessed an exchange between Miriam Dixson and Alan Martin that was part of the conflictual and heated climate in which the Society was born. It occurred at the ANZAAS Conference in Sydney in 1962. The renowned liberal scholar, Alan Martin, gave a paper on what he called 'the whig view of Australian history', by which he meant the labour history view. He likened labour history to a body of British historical writing in which events are placed in a story of ever-widening political freedom, under the wise leadership of the great 'whig' statesmen. In the Australian version, labour historians unfolded the history of our social and political democracy in a similar way, as a story of progress led by the labour movement. In his paper, Martin gave labour historians a severe trouncing for their romanticism, bias, and parochialism. The lecture room, which contained many labour historians, was tense. There were several comments, but it was the courage of Miriam Dixon's intervention that I remember. In an agitated voice she responded to the confrontational character of the event by insisting on the validity of our field of study. In a room dominated by the middle-aged male professoriate here was a young, articulate woman defending labour history. Clearly, there was something like a war going on, and it had gender as well as political fronts.

In fact, only a few months earlier Peter Coleman had published a book in which he set out the war-aims of a new generation of conservative intellectuals. One of those aims was to conduct what Coleman described as 'the counter-revolution in Australian historiography.' Under attack was the tradition of committed radical history, exemplified by Gordon Childe, Bert Evatt, and Brian Fitzpatrick, a tradition then receiving reinforcement, as Coleman pointed out, from within the universities in the work of Russel Ward and Robin Gollan. Coleman's manifesto was the culmination of a trend that had been gathering force for almost a decade, since Manning Clark had mocked the romanticism of radical historians in 1955.

All this is well known to any student of Australian historiography, and no doubt many of us today would agree that there were defects in the work of the first generation of labour historians that laid

them open to some of this criticism. But what we often forget is the usually unspoken political function of intellectual argument, and the mobilisation of political resources on both sides of this debate about labour history in the fifties and sixties. Thus, while Bob Gollan and Eric Fry were taking the first steps to organise the labour history society, Coleman was organising contributors for the new conservative manifesto. A few months earlier, a debate in the Commonwealth parliament revealed ASIO's role in the decision by the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor of the University of New South Wales to prevent the appointment of radical historian Russel Ward to a lectureship in history.

I should have realised that the resources of the security service would be deployed against the society when I read the 1964 item on the society in *The Bulletin*. How else could the writer have discussed the membership in such detail, naming as members Labor's federal leader, Arthur Calwell, and NSW Premier, Jack Renshaw, as well as B.A. Santamaria? Using information given to me by radical scholar, David McKnight, I have been able to confirm this.

ASIO received a report on the ASSLH a few months after its first Annual General Meeting in 1962. A year later the same informant, having diligently kept a record of what happened in the Sydney branch during 1963 – politically suggestive utterances, attendance, the lot – sent a long report to ASIO. Curiously, some of its details could not have been discovered simply by attending the branch's meetings. Obscure middle names, addresses, membership of the Communist party or ALP: these are not usually announced when labour historians gather for discussion. And there was a third report, in February 1964, which delivered to ASIO a full list of subscribers to the journal, *Labour History*, and details of the executives, corresponding committees, and memberships of the State branches. So, if there was a Sydney mole, there was a Canberra one too, with access to the files kept by the society's Federal Executive.

I have often wondered about the identity of the Sydney mole, because according to his report I was there, at those Sydney branch meetings in 1963. The logical person to finger was Fred Wells,

whom the whisperers on the Left already identified as an ASIO spy. Wells had been a coming man in the Seamen's Union, and a prominent Communist militant since 1945, until in 1960 he began writing well-informed articles on the party for *The Bulletin* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*. When I met him at the Sydney branch meetings he was in his mid-forties, but one could easily imagine him, in the nineteen-forties and fifties in the thick of Communist street demonstrations (he was arrested in three of them), a dark-complexioned nuggety man, proud of his strength and his intelligence. Officers of the security organisation have since confirmed to David McKnight that Wells was reporting to a case officer by 1963. Yet, although Wells would be a key player in the disruption of the society in 1964, I doubt that he wrote the ASIO report on the branch. It showed for one thing that he attended only three of the meetings, and it always referred to Wells in the third person. Incidentally, Wells published in *Labour History* a useful and dispassionate account of his part in a Communist street demonstration, 'The King Street Riot', and he was, according to Bede Nairn's tribute to him, an energetic secretary of the branch in 1963-64.

I believe the ASIO informant was Jack Clowes. When right-wing Labor politician, Bob Carr, met Clowes, 'a little old man with a briefcase and a battered hat', it was at a Catholic Club in Sydney. Carr was introduced to him probably by right-wing union official, John Ducker, and if so, it was Ducker who described Clowes as 'an amiable old ASIO man'. (Just like Le Carré's honourable schoolboy, really). Formidable, would have been a more apt description, for since the early fifties, Clowes' 'incredible card index system', and his ASIO connection, had enabled the Catholic Right to retain control of key unions and the Labor Council. By 1971, Ducker had installed Clowes, recently retired, in the library of the Labor Council. What makes me believe that Clowes wrote the report on the Sydney branch? Firstly, its language reveals it as the work of an ASIO officer, accustomed to the organisation's information needs and mental habits. Before he retired Clowes was certainly an ASIO officer. Secondly, the details about industrial and political individuals are fuller than for students and academics.

As Carr pointed out, Clowes' specialism at ASIO was trade union personnel. Thirdly, when historian Marilyn Dodkin interviewed Labor politician, Barry Unsworth he defended Clowes against Left-wing 'fantasists' (he was thinking of David McKnight) by saying: 'Clowes was a Labor historian. He belonged to the Labor History Association.' Now, I don't remember Clowes at Sydney branch meetings; I never met him or had him pointed out to me. But I was a young post-graduate; I knew very few of the people who attended the branch meetings. Clowes could certainly have been there, an unremarkable old man, with a battered hat and a briefcase, taking notes down the back. So, the fact that Unsworth remembers him as a labour historian, although there is no record of Clowes making any contribution in that role, clinches it for me.

Incidentally, Unsworth's remark meant that he also was taking an interest in the political role of the Sydney labour history branch. This was to be expected, given that the Sydney branch attracted a handful of the Communist party's leading publicists. I remember journalists Bill Wood, Len Fox, and Rupert Lockwood at early meetings, as well as Jack Blake, a dissident communist by then, and Roger Coates who had guided the CP's work among students before he became a school teacher. It also meant that when the first crisis in the society arrived in the following year, those who created it could justify their actions by claiming they were exposing a Communist plan to take over the Society.

For five months, February to June 1964, the work of the Society was disrupted. The Executive in Canberra was dysfunctional, and production of issue 6 of *Labour History* behind schedule. In Sydney, Labor Premier Jack Renshaw had heard the rumours about a Red takeover and telephoned Bede Nairn. But was there a Communist plan that needed exposure? The idea of course was incongruous, given the recent history of the relationship between Left intellectuals and the Communist party. It was no secret that the Society had been set up by academics, some formerly, and others who were presently, in the Communist party. But why had they had gone out of their way to include non-Communists in the running of the Society? What the promoters of the 'Communist plot' scenario did not understand

was the crisis among Communist intellectuals that followed the publication of Khrushchev's secret 1956 speech attacking Stalin. Denying the authenticity of the speech, the Australian party's Stalinist leadership had resisted the demand for open discussion and sharing of knowledge in the party. There followed an exodus of intellectuals from the CPA, and with it the discrediting of the intellectual role that Communists had adopted under Stalinism, that of the militant communist intellectual. In recoil from that role, the defecting intellectuals dedicated themselves to liberal intellectual values. The formation of the Labour History Society was part of the emergence of a New Left in which labour intellectuals, many of them in the expanding Universities, would have a more independent and critical relationship with the organisations of the labour movement.

Finally, what is the point of my talking about this Communist plot that never was? Firstly, it is reassuring, and diverting, to recall the incompetence and the failures of intelligence that characterised anti-communism. How could anyone believe that if Eric Fry enthusiastically introduced Jim Hagan (a long-time member of the Labor Party) as a potential volunteer worker for the Canberra Executive that this was evidence of a Communist plot – even if Eric also recommended Roger Coates as a Sydney member of the Corresponding Society in the same letter? Yet this introduction of Hagan, and his subsequent election as Vice-President at the next AGM, after it altered the Constitution to allow the election of two Vice-Presidents, were the central allegations of those who were disrupting the Society. Luckily, their counter-conspiracy soon fell apart. They challenged the validity of the AGM, and of the constitutional change, but a legal opinion found that neither Jim Hagan's election nor the general meeting were invalid. They published their allegations in an issue of *The Crucible*, published by the ANU Labor Club, but subsequently the ANU Labor Club disowned the issue and condemned its 'character sniping and unethical journalism'. They hoped that Sam Merrifield and Bede Nairn, prominent non-Communist historians, would come out publicly against 'the Communists', but each very definitely told the disruptors that they were wrong.

Secondly, it is interesting to speculate about how the counter-conspiracy worked. Eric Fry, in one of his letters at the time explained the disruption as the product of the coalescence of personal differences in Canberra and political differences in Sydney. If so, it had to be more than co-incidental. The sequence of events is crucial here. Eric's reference to 'personal differences' related to the Society's Secretary/Treasurer, and co-editor of the first five issues of *Labour History*, Bruce Shields. He had carried a large share of the Society's organising load and had been complaining about it since 1962. He thought 'the academics' were not taking their fair share (he was an archivist). In his grumbles, however, there was no hint of anti-Communism until 1964, and even then not till *after* the notorious AGM. Suddenly, in May, Shields began to call the Executive 'Communist-dominated' and to refer to an influx of Communists at the last Sydney branch meeting. He then traveled to Sydney to spread the rumour that the Society has been taken over by the Reds. Back in Canberra he worked with Bob Harney to produce the article in *The Crucible*. But how did he make these connections? The chief disruptor in Sydney was Fred Wells, whose budding career as an ASIO informant we have already noted, and it must have been ASIO that provided Harney and Shields with the *Crucible's* material about the Communist party. Now that we know the extent of ASIO's interest in the Society it is difficult not to conclude that it was the security organisation that coordinated the disruption.

Thirdly, although the disruption was set to collapse under the weight of its own incompetence, the efforts of the Society's founders to head off the disruptors enormously strengthened the Society. Indeed, the Society has survived since this incident because, as a result of those efforts, it is now based on what the relationship between labour intellectuals and the labour movement ought to be. Eric Fry took a trip to Melbourne at the end of May for informal discussions with Merrifield and others. Almost immediately afterwards he went to Sydney, where together with the rest of the Canberra Executive he held a meeting with Bede Nairn (who was Chairman of the Sydney branch) and Fred Wells, the branch Secretary. But Shields would not attend, preferring to stay in Canberra to assist in the production of

The Crucible. This was a big mistake. At the meeting it was agreed that the participants would dedicate themselves to preventing any form of political or ideological domination of the Society. As a result, Wells found himself 'neutralised', to use Bob Gollan's word, and agreed to write a piece for *The Bulletin* rejecting the allegations in *The Crucible*. And that was what I missed when I read Wells's *Bulletin* article. To be sure, nine-tenths of it was about the alleged Communist take-over, but what I overlooked was the reference to the Sydney meeting of the Executive with Nairn and Wells, and the statement that even before *The Crucible* was printed and distributed the matter had been 'discussed, acted upon and eliminated.' So, Fred Wells kept his side of the bargain.

Isolated in Canberra, Shields lasted a few more weeks before resigning at the end of June. John Merritt filled his place on the Executive, and a new stage in the history of the Society began.

REDISCOVERING RADICAL HISTORY

Terry Irving

Today there are still politically active labour historians for whom history is a cause as well as a profession. The ASSLH's leaders still make connections with the labour movement at an official level, and the Society's campaigns to preserve labour heritage and archives, and its efforts to encourage a love of history among movement activists have benefitted from the support of progressive parliamentarians and union officers. Yet, over the fifty years of the ASSLH's history, the importance of politics to how labour history is practiced, if it has not disappeared, has certainly declined. The political and the professional tend to exist in separate spheres of the ASSLH, the former in the branches, and the latter in the Society's internationally recognized scholarly journal, *Labour History*. Of course, much has changed in the environment in which labour historians work, especially in class relations and in politics, as Rowan Cahill showed in Chapter 4. In this essay I want to point to another change. Eric Fry and his comrades were part of a movement tradition of history work that was political by definition. There is an intellectual dimension to what we have largely lost: they wrote radical history, not just labour history.

In 1991, Melbourne labour history stalwart, Peter Love, interviewed Eric Fry about the ASSLH that Eric had helped to form thirty years earlier. Both Peter and Eric were up-beat about the story: a small group of enthusiasts had built a federal society with branches around the country; a roughly produced small-circulation *Bulletin* became *Labour History*, an international scholarly journal; the Society's scholars widened the scope of historical enquiry to embrace the



common people in this country; and, together with other historians, they made Australian history ‘a popular pursuit, a study, and a part of ordinary people’s lives’.

To highlight these achievements, I had to read the interview in a particular way, to emphasize the professional and historiographical elements of the story. Had I given due weight to the autobiographical elements a rather different picture would have emerged. When he returned to Sydney University after the Second World War Fry said he felt part of a radical generation that believed in history and philosophy as guides to action, as tools of change as well as understanding. Then, as a doctoral student in history at the Australian National University during the Cold War, he identified with a group of similar dissident intellectuals. He described himself a few years later forming the Society with them, characterizing their work as an effort to build ‘a bridge between ordinary people and academics’. Finally, at the end of the interview, looking back at the progress of the Society, he emphasized that the whole point of it was to find ‘new ways and new people’ to ‘change the world’: ‘we didn’t want this to be an ivory tower organization’.

In this essay I will focus on the generational moment that was so important for Eric’s understanding of his role in the formation of the Society. In the foundational myth of the Society the professionalization of labour history is in the foreground. It is also not uncommon to notice that Robin Gollan, Fry and others at this time were in the process of distancing themselves from the Communist Party and creating a more liberal role for themselves as left intellectuals. There are three other aspects of this moment that deserve attention. First, the 1950s and early 1960s were marked by fierce ideological differences among historians, the culmination of the development of imperial and radical traditions of history writing since the early 1900s. Second, as labour historians entered the universities it was possible to make links between academic and radical historians in the labour movement. Third, Robin Gollan’s most important book demonstrated that radical historians could be in thrall to liberal parliamentarist illusions about democracy, illusions that obscured in their work the persistence of struggles for

popular democracy in Australia.

HISTORY WORK IN THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

Eric Fry’s choice to create historical knowledge was not unusual in the labour movement. From the 1880s to the 1950s labour intellectuals had been writing and editing labour’s journals, speaking on street corners, writing manifestos, drafting legislation, painting banners, and so on – giving voice to its values of co-operation, solidarity, popular democracy, and militancy. Through their work they created an alternative world for working people, a radical labour public, in which workers and their families could learn to understand their situation and how to change it. Then as unionists, community activists, and Labor (or less effectively, Communist) voters they could take the appropriate action, becoming agents of history. So, it came about that those who now imagined themselves as makers of the present and the future wanted to know more about the past. They expected labour intellectuals to provide them with the kind of historical knowledge that would show a pattern in human history to justify their struggles.

This was the tradition that Fry became part of in the 1950s. His predecessors were embedded in labour movement institutions; they wrote or lectured about the materialist conception of history, the history of trade unions, and the Labor, socialist and communist political traditions. They condemned the history taught in public schools because of its imperial and ruling class biases. We know the names of some of them – Childe, Evatt, Fitzpatrick, Lloyd Ross etc – because their contributions conformed to the publishing conventions of the ruling culture: they wrote books. We are less familiar with Bob and May Brodney who lectured at the Victorian Labor College; or Frank Hyett, the railway union official who republished Craik’s *Outline History of the Modern British Working Class Movement*; or Gordon Crane, a railway union education officer; or Adela Walsh and Esther Wait who attacked imperialist propaganda in school history texts; or George Black, Bill Gollan, Bill McNamara and Clarrie Martin who promoted the history of the Labor Party; or

Ernie Campbell who did the same for the Communist Party; or Dave McNeil whose sketch of natural and social history from a materialist position, 'Back in the Beginning of Things' was serialized in the miners' paper, *Common Cause* and the *Newcastle Morning Herald*. There are dozens – perhaps hundreds – of others.

This is a tradition of labour history scarcely recognized by labour historians, despite the fact that several important aspects of academic labour history – the study of labour institutions; the use of class analysis; the radical nationalist tradition – have their roots in this vulgar soil. It is also neglected by the wider historical profession which is consequently unaware of the extent to which the dominant imperial account of our history was challenged by labour's radical historical work.

The survey by Professor Brian Fletcher of Australian history produced in New South Wales is an example of this neglect. Although he trawled the country press for the slightest piece of antiquarian history trivia, he totally ignored the labour press – including three dailies, the weekly *Worker*, dozens of socialist, communist and anarchist papers, and several substantial journals published by trade unions. Consequently, he makes no mention of Sam Rosa's remarkable 'A Political History of Australia', whose 213 chapters were serialized in the *Labour Daily* for almost three years (1926-29). At a time when academic Australian history was firmly fixed in its imperial framework, Rosa, a labour journalist, agitator and organizer, wrote a history that was anti-imperial. A decade before Brian Fitzpatrick set out to interpret Australian history in economic terms, Rosa proudly announced that his materialist account of politics would be anchored in 'the economic development of society', and organized into three economic periods – pastoral, gold mining, and industrial. And two decades before Bob Gollan set out to write a doctoral thesis about how 'an advanced democracy was established' in Australia, Rosa compiled vivid stories of the popular struggles that would later appear in Gollan's *Radical and Working Class Politics* as the radicalizing force in the history of representative government. But neither Rosa's work nor that of any of the dozens of labour intellectuals writing partisan, radical history for the movement is

apparent to Fletcher. Having ignored the labour press, he concludes predictably that the history he discovered was written 'from above, as seen through the ideas of the ruling group' and that it 'reflected the values ... of the white community in general'.

Surviving in the papers of James Normington Rawling is a scrapbook in which he had pasted every chapter of Rosa's massive work. Rawling was a history graduate from the University of Sydney so he knew the difference between the document-based 'scientific' style of history taught in universities and the labour movement's radical history. Clearly, Rawling believed that Rosa's history would be valuable for his own research and writing. We need to know what Rawling found in the radical historical culture of the labour movement; we need to know more about the interaction of radical history and the foot-noted scholarly history written by Rawling – and by Gordon Childe, Brian Fitzpatrick, Bert Evatt, Lloyd Ross, Esmonde Higgins, Bob Walshe, Lloyd Churchward, Bob Gollan, Ian Turner, Eric Fry, and Jim Hagan – not to speak of the second generation of labour historians. In what ways did history work in the labour movement point these scholars to questions and topics for investigation, theories for testing, and a moral stance that sided with the people against their rulers, and with the nation against the empire?

When James Rawling's articles in the *Communist Review* in the 1930s and his unfinished six-volume *The Story of the Australian People*, published by the Communist Party in 1938-9, came to Fletcher's attention he commented predictably on their 'ideological overtones'. But he let pass without a similar comment the information that the secondary school syllabus in New South Wales prepared under the guidance of K.R. Cramp in the 1920s mandated the teaching of history via 'the medium of biographical sketches of the careers of men who were leaders in our race development'. Apparently, racist and patriarchal history is not ideological.

If Fletcher had read the *Labour Daily* in 1928, he would have discovered that history teachers with labour movement affiliations vigorously attacked Cramp's *A Story of the Australian People*, first

published in 1927 but still used when I went to primary school in the 1940s. According to Clutha Robertson, of the Labour Educational League, Cramp had revealed ‘how not to write history’. His ‘most objectionable text book’ slurred over economic changes, thus disguising ‘the whole contour of history’. Instead of showing how the peoples of the world were divided into classes, he promoted ‘the vanity of race’. On page 394 of Cramp’s book, Robertson revealed, ‘the question is asked: “what brought about the Great War? We cannot answer this question here.” The reader might venture the opinion that wars are partly caused by just such textbooks as these by keeping the rising generation in a state of international jealousy and ignorance of economic factors’.

By the 1950s, when the ASSLH’s founders were beginning their academic careers, history work in the labour movement was producing both scholarly studies and popular pamphlets of considerable power. A second edition of Brian Fitzpatrick’s *The Australian People, 1788-1945* appeared in 1951. For this popularization of his pioneering, anti-imperialist economic interpretation of our history, Fitzpatrick took as his models, *We, The People* by the U.S. socialist, Leo Huberman, and *Poverty and Progress in New Zealand* by W.B. Sutch, which had started life as a government-sponsored centennial history before it was rejected as too left wing. The Communist Party’s interest in promoting history bore fruit with the publication of R.D. Walshe’s *The Eureka Stockade, 1854-1954*. Two years later the party published Walshe’s *Australia’s Fight for Independence and Parliamentary Democracy*, which was actually the product of collaboration with Bob Gollan. In 1957, the WEA in Sydney published Esmonde Higgins’s biography of carpenter and educationist, David Stewart, and the Sydney branch of the Waterside Workers’ Federation published Tom Nelson’s iconic pamphlet-history of *The Hungry Mile*. Meanwhile, a group of radical historians, including Gollan and Ian Turner had been building on the nucleus of Australian labour documents collected by Noel Ebbels. This resulted in a book, *The Australian Labor Movement, 1850-1907: Extracts from Contemporary Documents*, published in 1960 by the Australasian Book Society, a co-operative aimed at

developing a radical working-class readership. Lloyd Churchward edited and introduced the collection, while Manning Clark provided a memoir of Ebbels.

By this time, the contested character of history was becoming increasingly apparent to Eric Fry’s generation. Academic historians, assisted by right-wing commentators, had decided the growing influence of the labour movement’s alternative radical-nationalist history had to be stopped. ‘The counter-revolution in Australian historiography’ (as it was dubbed by Peter Coleman, conservative intellectual and parliamentarian) took its cue from Manning Clark, who in 1955 gently ridiculed the ‘popular romantic’ interpretation of the nineteenth century that inflated the role of Eureka rebels, land reformers, radical democrats and Barcaldine shearers. Next to weigh in was Hartley Grattan, employee of the Ford Foundation, who used the second issue of the CIA-funded *Quadrant* in 1957 to attack the supposed dominance of economic determinism in the writing of Australian history, as in the work of Brian Fitzpatrick. By a remarkable co-incidence, in the same year, Australian historians ambushed the unfortunate Fitzpatrick at a conference at the ANU that was organized to demolish his work. In 1958 the attacks on radical history continued in books published by *Sydney Morning Herald* editor, J.D. Pringle, and conservative economist Colin Clark. Then the doyen of Australian academic historians, Max Crawford, made known his criticism of radical history in a slim volume published in 1960. Meanwhile, Coleman was rounding up contributors to a new conservative academic manifesto, published in 1962 as *Australian Civilization – A Symposium*, that welcomed the ‘counter-revolution’ and warned that the evil radical historians were gaining traction in the universities through the work of Gollan and Russell Ward. The Howard years were not the first time that a ‘history war’ erupted.

In 1960, a more sinister aspect of the attack on radical history was revealed. In 1955 Professor R.M. Hartwell had recommended Russel Ward for a lectureship in history at the University of New South Wales, but the Vice-Chancellor Baxter and Chancellor Wurth vetoed his appointment because Ward ‘had been active in seditious circles in Canberra’. After trying vainly to fight this blatant political

decision, Hartwell resigned in disgust from the university and went to Oxford. A student at the time, I recall the consternation that these events created in left-wing university circles, but it was not until 1960 that an ASIO connection was aired publicly. It was prompted when Hartwell broke his silence about the matter, prompting questions from the Labor opposition in the Commonwealth Parliament. Although Prime Minister Menzies denied that ASIO influenced the decision nobody on the left believed it. We now know that Wurth unofficially but routinely consulted ASIO about appointments.

This was the intellectual climate for radical historians at the beginning of the 1960s. They were under attack for their ideas and their politics in the universities and in the print sphere of the bourgeois public. The extent of the threat to their careers was further revealed when in 1964 an item appeared in *The Bulletin* about the Labour History Society with information that could only have come from ASIO. Their response was to do what radicals do best: organize. Radical academic historians needed the protection that a professional association could provide. The formation of the Labour History Society may be understood in several intellectually forward-looking ways – as making the labour movement’s history work more rigorous; as bringing history ‘from below’ into historical scholarship – but we can also acknowledge what the founders might have been unwilling in public to do: that it provided the defence of professional standing for a group of embattled radical historians.

A HISTORY OF RADICAL DEMOCRACY

In a recent article on the intellectual legacy of Eric Fry and Robin Gollan, Verity Burgmann has reminded us of the anti-labour Cold War atmosphere of the time, and the courage required by left intellectuals to set up a labour history society, especially one that was committed (as she points out) to maintaining links with the labour movement. What I have done in the previous sections of the essay is meant to strengthen this point, particularly by suggesting that the links were not just organization to organization, not just between academics as members of the Society and labour activists

as members of parties and unions, but between labour intellectuals working in different spheres, and that the character of the linkage was intellectual, a shared interest in promoting a radical view of history.

In fact, it is interesting to remember that the two books that heralded the arrival of radical history in the quiet corridors of the universities, Russell Ward’s *The Australian Legend* (1958) and Gollan’s *Radical and Working-Class Politics* (1960) were not typical works of labour history at all. Ward’s was about the contribution to Australian mythology of the popular culture of the nineteenth-century working classes; Gollan’s was about how ‘an advanced democracy was established’ in Australia in the second half of the nineteenth century. They were prequels to labour history, if you like; but they were also histories that concerned themselves with broader processes than those within the world of organised labour.

Burgmann in her article quotes an important passage from a later book by Gollan, *Revolutionaries and Reformists* (1975), in which he distanced himself from the post-war nationalism of the Communist Party, a policy that, he said, idealized the ‘militant and democratic stance’ of ‘the convicts, bushrangers, gold-diggers and unionists who fought the bitter battles of the 1890s’, while censoring out or muting their ‘xenophobia and racism’. Such a statement had an obvious appeal to Burgmann, herself one of the pioneers of the study of racism in the working class. When I read it, however, I think of how it relates to Gollan’s treatment of these militant democrats in *Radical and Working Class Politics*. I would argue that in this book Gollan demonstrates not an idealization of the nineteenth-century working class but an idealization of the liberal parliamentary state – and that this was the real disfigurement of his analysis, and that it too was attributable to Communist ideology at the time.

Left intellectuals of Gollan’s generation, formed by the Communist Party’s united front against fascism and the Labor-led national mobilization during the Second World War, believed that socialism could be achieved through a strategy of radical parliamentarism, that is, a form of government recognizing the right of working men

and women not only to elect representatives but also to exert mass pressure on government. Such a government, if truly democratic, might become an effective weapon against the economic and social power of the capitalist class. And the Australian case was instructive, as Gollan showed in *Radical and Working Class Politics*. In the twenty years between 1890 and 1910, when the labour movement was rejecting many of the ruling class's cultural and political conventions (eg freedom of contract and political deference), the economic and social interventions of Australian governments went much further than those of other countries 'to modify the capitalist system' (p. 153). Such a state might even, at a stretch, be called socialist, or at least social-democratic. Such was Gollan's rather rosy view.

It would, however, also continue as a state in which elected representatives produced undemocratic outcomes. Gollan did not understand that the very system of representative government was introduced to prevent the rise of democracy as popular rule. This will be clearer if we tease out the meaning of Gollan's phrase 'advanced democracy'.

Gollan wrote about democracy in two different ways in his book. In the first way he was thinking about the democratic aspects of liberal parliamentary institutions. The pages dealing with the early introduction of manhood suffrage, the struggle of the popularly-elected assembly in Victoria to assert its dominance over the Council, and Labor's campaign to abolish plural voting, its (qualified) support for female suffrage, and its opposition to the unrepresentative character of the Senate in the federal Constitution Bills contained his most sustained discussions of democracy.

This story of struggles about representative democracy Gollan sets within a framework of movements 'to make life more tolerable for the majority'. He devotes many pages to the radical and working-class movements to unlock the lands, secure the eight-hour day, legitimize trade unions, and form Labor parties, emphasizing their contentious and sometimes disruptive politics. If one follows his narrative a second and quite different conception of democracy begins to take

shape. The democracy of working people, it appears, is something more than just a matter of political rights, and of opportunities to influence their rulers through elections. Democracy is also a matter of popular empowerment, with two distinct features: it involves acting in concert (often on the streets) and it seeks tangible benefits, such as owning land or controlling one's labour power that impede the operation of capitalist markets. Thus, the public meetings, the marches, the organization-building and the strikes were on the same continuum as the mobilization of voters. They were expressions of working-class empowerment, an advanced form of democracy, as well as a labour movement in formation. The discursive world and the political identities defined in this popular process were as much about democracy as they were about class struggle.

Gollan failed to clarify this distinction, never describing the empowerment of working people as democratic, implying that it was only because their struggles radicalized the system of representative government that working people contributed to democracy. He acknowledged their agency, but then transformed it into a supportive pillar of the liberal state. Without a concept of the popular will he fell back on the nebulous underpinnings of liberal social theory – the class, gender and race-blind concepts of 'public opinion' and 'underlying values' – to explain how these movements contributed to the triumph and subsequent radicalizing of political democracy.

I think that what Gollan failed to write – a history of the tension between popular movements and parliamentary politics – still needs to be written. It would be a history of 'popular' democratic practice and of conceptions of democracy separate from representative government, drawing on the growing literature in recent decades about 'radical democracy' by political theorists. It would bring into the foreground such practices as control from below in trade unions and other popular organizations, delegation rather than representation, accountability of representatives between elections, picketing and intimidation of representative assemblies, direct action, defence of commonage rights, workers' control movements, co-operatives, deliberative assemblies, the underground press, selection by lot rather than election by ballot, democracy in communal settlements,

democratic education, Black Power movements, etc. My research (limited as it is at the moment) suggests three significant periods.

First, the 1830s to the 1850s, when, against a background of violence on the streets, radical workingmen and intellectuals established a democratic public life of meetings, organizations and publishing, in counterpoint to the aristocratic routines of representation. They established a tradition that continued after the introduction of parliamentary government, a tradition that demanded accountability from politicians not only through elections but also through connection to a public mobilized by agitation and prepared to menace authority.

This ‘proletarian democracy’, as Childe called it, entered a second moment between the 1880s and 1910, when in order to ensure that ‘the issues to be submitted to the people must also be determined by the people...’ (Childe again), workers formed a movement to control their political representatives. Historians call this the labour movement. The labour movement was not just a political movement of trade unionists (which is how it is defined by Gollan) but also and more importantly a movement of democrats most of whom were trade unionists. They were democrats in the sense that they attempted to impose popular rule on Labor politicians through the mechanisms of caucus, pledge and conference.

A third moment arrives in the 1910s when an outbreak of working-class rebelliousness develops into a revolt against ‘politicalism’, or parliamentarism, in the labour movement. There was strike action taken without consulting the union or in the absence of a union. There were strikes in which workers defied their union, and in some cases Labor politicians. There was lawlessness, as workers attacked ‘scabs’ [strike-breakers] and the police defending them. There were explicit ‘anti-politicalist’ actions designed to break the nexus between the unions and the Labor Party or to set up new industrial labour parties. Each of these phenomena involved workers exercising bottom-up control over their situations.

Later moments? I hope that interested readers of this essay will want to contribute to discovering them. If we are right, we might

conclude that the desire for popular democracy was as important as class or gender in the making of identity among working people, that in recent years indigenous and youthful resistance combined with the spread of higher education brought other cohorts of support for popular self-government, and that representative government was more contested, and liberal ideology less accepted, than we usually assume. At a time when disaffection from parliaments and politicians in Australia and other heartland states of liberal democracy has never been greater, our discoveries might produce a useful history indeed for democrats.

*LABOUR HISTORY AND ITS
POLITICAL ROLE: A NEW
LANDSCAPE*

Terry Irving

As I was thinking about what to say today, on the occasion of *Labour History's* 100th issue, I read an article on Manning Clark and found something that made me pause. It was a description of our venerable journal, characterizing it in terms that none of us would use, at least not in public. Instead of describing our field, our sources, our methods, or our long list of illustrious contributors, it said that *Labour History* was the journal of Australia's left-wing historians.

Well, this was in Wikipedia – but nonetheless it struck me that, yes, this is a truth I am prepared to accept. I'm sure there are others here today – editors, contributors, readers – who share my acceptance. While I was editor of the journal, I assumed it was part of a cluster of left-wing journals, and of course its founding editors were quite clear about its left-wing purpose. And yet, in academic gatherings today labour historians rarely talk about themselves as left-wing.

To use a very tired metaphor, left-wing politics is our elephant in the room. If that is so, perhaps with a bit of imagination we might get our gear together and move into a new landscape.

As a term, labour history reeks of politics – of the sweat of unfree work, of unpaid housework, and of wage slavery; of the fear-drenched sweat staining the shirts and blouses of demonstrators



and dusty convention halls; of the breath of the agitator and the after shave of the pin-striped politician. It recalls for us the mobilization of voters as well as politics outside the liberal democratic pale; it smells of the corruption, broken promises and electoral fetishism that have discredited liberal democracy. Sometimes it is the fresh breeze of the future; at others it is the musty past.

When academic labour history took off in the early 1960s, its proponents had far-reaching ambitions. They were going to reinvent social history 'as a way of writing the history of movements and societies as integrated wholes'. This was a political ambition because it would require the naming of the largest integrated whole as capitalism. In the meantime, they would insert labour history into the university curriculum as stand-alone courses, and this was political because it would bring the masses into the classroom. But by the time Verity Burgmann wrote 'The strange death of labour history' in 1991, these dreams had faded.

The retreat of labour history into a mere topic in courses on employment relations or social history, or into the specialized world of higher degree supervision – the retreat from politics in the teaching of labour history – was also a theme of Burgmann's essay. In fact, she placed it in a broader context, the strange death of politics in mainstream history teaching and research, especially in social history, which, somewhat desperately, our journal adopted into its sub-title just a decade before.

So, let us remind ourselves that for a long time now there have been almost no dedicated courses in labour history for undergraduates in British, New Zealand, Canadian or Australian universities. Even in the United States they are getting scarcer. I noticed recently on H-Labor that there was great interest in the possibility of teaching the labour history of food. Just another example of labour history with the politics left out?

But there is some good news. Despite its retreat in teaching, politics has not disappeared from the pages of *Labour History*, nor from the labour history community formed by the branches of the Australian Society for the Study of *Labour History* (ASSLH). Of

course, when I say 'politics' I don't mean just the history of the Labor Party and its members, or even the broader understanding required to write the history of power relations in all aspects of workers' lives, but as Janis Bailey and Ross Gwyther said in Issue 99 of *Labour History*, I mean the exposure of 'unequal power relations' and the promotion of 'new social orders'. I mean the writing of socially engaged history by political intellectuals of the left. Incidentally, as Janis and Ross point out, the same definition of politics may be applied to environmental history.

Issue 99 is a beauty from this point of view, and it is a fitting tribute to Greg Patmore, whose last issue as editor this was. But let me take you back to issue number 1. It appeared at a time of apparent stasis in labour's progress after the years of heady post-war advance, and of a conservative intellectual backlash against the radical-nationalist history that intellectuals of the labour movement had been developing over the previous fifty years. The first generation of academic labour historians were responding to both these challenges when they formed the ASSLH. The words 'labour history' were inscribed on their banner because they wanted, as Bob Gollan said in the first issue, to 'be of immediate practical value to the labour movement'. There was a second reason, best expressed in Eric Fry's words, to make Australian history 'a popular pursuit, a study, and a part of ordinary people's lives'. Labour history would be useful history, in both a narrow and a broad sense.

If Bob Gollan and Eric Fry were alive today, wanting as socially engaged intellectuals to write a useful history, would they choose the words 'labour history' to express their intention? Should we use those words to express our intention? The answer depends on what it means today to be left-wing. To the extent that working people still manage to organize within the diminishing range of the social state and its labour relations I would like our history work to be of use to them. Being of 'immediate practical value to the labour movement' still seems a worthwhile, if contracting, project.

The extent of the labour movement's grip on the lives of ordinary people today is much less than it was in Fry and Gollan's day. Trade

unionism is in decline, the Labor Party has an aging and diminishing membership, and work itself has changed. So, what would it mean to make labour history ‘a part of ordinary people’s lives’ again, to find (in Fry’s words) ‘new ways and new people’ to ‘change the world’.

The answer is not unrelated to the question of reformulating the subjects and conceptual underpinnings of labour history, a task that has been led by Marcel van der Linden. He has urged labour historians to break with Eurocentric and nationalist frameworks. At a time when national union movements and parties of labour within the nation state are declining this is a logical move, and I think we in Australia should do more to follow his advice.

(Before leaving this point, I notice that Marcel includes Australasian labour historians among those guilty of Eurocentric prejudice. If this is true, we need a bit of self-criticism, but more importantly his characterization suggests we have failed to develop arguments to show how our labour institutions, our class structure and state, our form of settler capitalism have produced a version of labour history different from that of Europe.)

If labour history’s empirical focus needs to change, so do its concepts, and Marcel’s recent writings discuss the necessary foundations for a global history of labour. His discussion of the two-fold meaning of labour – as toil undertaken in consequence of the commodification of labour, and as creative work – brings out the problems of applying this Western concept to the global South. Then, and most interesting for the purposes of my argument today, he questions the use of the term ‘working class’. It is its 19th century European connotations that he finds limiting. He insists that there have always been a range of forms of commodified labour – he points to slavery, indentured labour, and share-cropping, but we would of course want to include convictism – and that consequently we need the idea of ‘the extended or subaltern working class’. He says: ‘it is the historic dynamics of this multitude that we [labour historians] should try to understand.’

For producing a new direction for labour history, these ideas

(the multitude, and the binary concept of labour) may prove as significant as was E.P. Thompson’s idea of class as a relationship in the Preface to *The Making of the English Working Class*. Van der Linden’s argument is based on the history of labour; mine today is based on its present – a present that labour historians must consider if they wish to remain left-wing. Where are the struggles of labour to be found today? Or more accurately, where are the struggles of the multitude – the extended, subaltern class of workers? Where will they be found in the future?

It would take more time than I have at this session to answer those questions adequately. I would however like to refer to two recent studies. In *New Left Review*, November-December 2010, Michael Denning’s article on wageless life shows how social democracy through a compact with state organizations in the twentieth century constituted a normal subject, the wage earner, and by so doing made ‘much of capitalism’s multitude ... unrecognizable to the labour movement’. He means the multitude of workers who lived and still live outside typical employment and unemployment – for example, women working in their own households, people living in communities oppressed by ethnic or racial prejudice, or devastated by de-industrialization, and in the US, agricultural labourers, and so on.

The ‘atypical’ work done by the multitude has always existed, and it is not disappearing but increasing as casualisation, sub-contracting and self-employment spreads. Today, its growth is an object of neo-liberal economic theory and state policy. The I.L.O, reports that at the beginning of the 21st century, ‘non-standard, atypical work’ comprised 30% of over-all employment in 15 European countries, and 25% of total employment in the United States. Labour historians already study these workers, but perhaps not with the understanding that their work is becoming typical. Writing a history of this kind of work, the social, cultural and political contexts in which it occurs, the managerial and government strategies that encourage it, and the forms of resistance it creates, would seem to me to be a fruitful task for labour historians today.

And there is resistance to capitalism among these workers. It is part of the story of global labour history, as important as the struggles in the South told by Van der Linden. Here I would like to refer you to the journal *Antipode*. Self-described as ‘a radical journal of geography’ it regularly carries a section headed ‘Interventions’, and in the September 2010 issue this section dealt with autonomist politics and activism over the past decade. Autonomist political activity refers to both the anti-globalization ‘movement of movements’ that has been developing since the Seattle demonstrations against the World Trade Organisation in 1990, and to the myriad self-managed experiments by unwaged communities in the capitalist North to meet actual rather than market-generated needs. Of course, much of this activism involves people not connected to labour organizations, but many unionists share their concern for social and ecological justice. More central to our argument, the editor points out that all of this section’s articles ‘in different ways address the issue of labour and work’. They begin from an awareness of the way work has become more precarious and instrumental, and they rely on the binary concept of labour recommended to us by Van der Linden and Denning. In particular John Holloway grounds the theory of autonomism in the difference between ‘labour’ that is externally imposed and experienced, which autonomists reject, and ‘doing’ that is freely chosen and pushes towards self-determination.

To sum up: here’s what I think those of us associated with the Australian journal of *Labour History*, should do:

We should drop the present subtitle. ‘Social history’ no longer conveys anything radical or intellectually challenging. As a new subtitle, ‘A journal of global labour history’ would be both.

We should pay more attention to the theoretical debates about working class, multitude and subalternity that have the capacity to extend our range of historical topics, and in the words of Paul Chatterton, of the ideas of ‘survival, self-management and the commons’ that together offer a new radical utopia for working people, and hence for our writing about them.

We should be more politically engaged, encouraging the submission

of articles that shine the light of history on contemporary struggles by working people, whether through the labour movement or not.

FROM LABOUR HISTORY TO THE HISTORY OF THE WORKING CLASS

Terry Irving

In the 1970s, when Raewyn Connell and I wrote *Class Structure in Australian History*, the organised working class was in a militant mood. Today in Australia we are in a very different moment. Unions are much smaller and corralled by the state, social-democratic corporatism has succumbed to neo-liberalism, revolutionary parties are as sectarian as ever, organised labour militancy is rare, and parliamentary democracy has been ‘hollowed out’. Consequently, it is not surprising that the study of class is different, responding to different forms of struggle and a different kind of working class. Briefly, those differences are: (i) the working class has become global; (ii) work is precarious even in the core capitalist economies; (iii) the class struggle has broken out of its institutionalized straight-jacket and is now increasingly tumultuous and on the streets; and (iv) workers – especially those who are young, well-educated and precariously employed – are a key component of a radical democratic movement, refusing representation by the political class and flirting with horizontalism and other alternative models of politics.

As a result, scholars of working-class history are looking for new organising ideas. In the presence of the awakening working class of the Global South it is not enough to embrace transnational histories, as if the nations on different sides of the ‘trans’ were commensurate. Imperial relationships were clearly never of that kind. And, it is impossible now to imagine labour progressing through ever-



stronger organisation and deeper penetration of the capitalist state to socialism, let alone social democracy. The abject submission of organised labour in the capitalist heartlands to neo-liberalism has dealt the final blow to that faded – not to speak of unintelligent and deceptive – vision of postponed liberation.

Among the theoretical developments, there are three that I find compelling, and I can sum them up in three words: informal, porous and autonomous, each of them describing an approach to the study of the global working class.

Informal labour is labour that is unregulated and precarious. It is now an increasing condition of labour markets under the sway of neo-liberalism in the countries of the North Atlantic tier, Japan and Australasia, but it has always been a feature of labour in the Global South. Jan Breman and Marcel van der Linden argue that, as informal labour extends its reach, the ‘West’ is becoming like the ‘Rest’ of the world. Trade unionism and collective bargaining, seen by earlier theorists and labour movement activists as the typical forms of working-class engagement with capital, and the acme of class formation for less mature working classes in the South, must now be recognised as atypical historical phenomena, confined to just a few countries for just a few decades. Can labour replace this ‘classical’ model? Breman and van der Linden see new forms of collective action emerging in response to the spread of informal labour.

Their work raises another question. In the West, prior to those few decades, is there a history of precarious labour relationships and informal collective behaviour in the working class? Should Western labour historians be looking for instances of workers striking without, or prior to, the involvement of a union, or striking in defiance of a union? Should we be looking for the go-slow, sabotage, organised pilfering, customary insolence etc on the part of workers? And if so, should we conceptualise working class collectivism in a different way, a way that releases it from the submerged teleology that dominated labour history in its formative period.

In Australia we have tended to date the origins of the working

class to the unions formed after the gold rushes. My book, *The Southern Tree of Liberty*, put a dint in this lazy view by restoring working people to the story of representative government in the years before 1856, their contribution made possible by decades of grass roots organizing to obtain political rights and economic independence. I relied for part of the argument on articles by Michael Quinlan, that were later incorporated in his book *The Origins of Worker Mobilization: Australia 1788-1850* (2018). This is a truly path-breaking study of the collective impulse among workers, with important pointers for the global historiography of labour.

The novel aspect of his study is that it reveals the extent of informal, that is non-union, collective organisation among workers, both convict and free. Certainly, there was a handful of organisations pursuing collective bargaining, but their members were more likely to experience worker power outside of those organizations. When I read the manuscript of his book, Quinlan had discovered 1370 instances of worker mobilisation; now he tells me that the number has risen to over 6000 (he is still entering recently discovered data), and he estimates there are another 2000 instances to document. This staggering figure is the result of Quinlan’s three decades of digital computation of evidence of strikes, court actions, go-slows, demonstrations, mutual insurance schemes, petitions, mass abscondings, sabotage, political meetings etc, gained through painstaking reading of convict conduct records, police gazettes, court bench-books and colonial newspapers. When historians now talk about this period, how can they not call it a period of class struggle? When they talk about the coming of self-government how can they ignore its meaning for workers who had been struggling to gain some self-government in their lives since 1788 (yes 1788 – there were three instances of collective resistance by convict workers that year)?

Quinlan hopes his book will ‘act as a counter point to cultural/identity analysis that seems to have forgotten class as the critical category of social determination in capitalism (and you don’t need to ignore women, migrants or non-Europeans to do this)’. With that in mind we can answer questions about the meaning of workers’

actions – such as supporting a new constitution for the colonies – by revealing their material situation as well as their discursive world. Workers wanted parliamentary self-government to mean tight control of their representatives. They wanted legislation for an eight-hour day, land reform, and restricted immigration. That was what the ‘right’ to self-government meant to them, not just something philosophical, or a practice, such as voting, empty of content.

Turning now to porosity: by this term I mean the fact that workers were not typically defined by a life-time spent in a particular kind of labour – say, waged, or unfree, or domestic, or self-employed. Rather, individual workers have always participated in various kinds of commodified and un-commodified labour, for the boundaries within and between them were porous. There have been several theoretical paths to this insight. Andrea Komlosy has produced a global history of work since the time of Classical Greece and Rome, *Work: The Last Thousand Years*, and provided a chapter for the book edited by Jürgen Kocka and Marcel van der Linden, *Capitalism: The Re-emergence of a Historical Concept*. She insists that working class history shows a blurring of the distinction between free and unfree labour, and warns that labour history’s blindness to non-waged work, assuming the primacy of the commodity form of labour, is leading us into intellectual and political dead ends. Consequently, we need a more differentiated form of workers’ history.

Another path can be found in the work of Marcel van der Linden, of the International Institute for Social History. In his influential paper, ‘Conceptualising the World Working Class’ (in Sara R. Farris, *Returns of Marxism: Marxist Theory in a Time of Crisis*), he constructs a typology of the forms of labour commodification and concludes that in capitalist society the boundaries between ‘free’ wage labourers and other workers are ‘vague and gradual’:

In the first place, there are extensive and complicated grey areas full of transitional locations between “free” wage labourers and slaves, the self-employed and the lumpen

proletarians. Secondly, almost all subaltern workers belong to households that combine several modes of labour. Thirdly, individual subaltern workers can combine different modes of labour, both synchronically and diachronically. And finally, the distinction between different kinds of subaltern workers is not clear-cut. The implications are far-reaching. Apparently, there is a large class of working people within capitalism, whose labour power is commodified in more than one way.

On the basis of this typological analysis, Van der Linden speaks of a class of subaltern workers rather than the working class. ‘It is the historical dynamics of this multitude’ that labour and social historians should try to understand. Those dynamics of course include how subaltern workers make themselves into a historical subject, a class, a process that typological analysis cannot, and does not aim to, grasp.

It is a process that autonomist Marxism places at the centre of its analysis. This is a strand of Marxist theory associated particularly with the theorist Antonio Negri who drew on his experiences as an anti-authoritarian Communist in the Italian ‘operaismo’ movement of the 1960s and 70s.

The Australian historian and political scientist, Verity Burgmann, has recently promoted this strand of Marxist theory to labour historians, in an article in *International Labor and Working Class History*, and to political scientists in her just published book, *Globalization and Labour in the Twenty-First Century*. Autonomism is the latest in a long tradition of Marxist critiques of economic determinism, starting with Gramsci in the 1920s and including J-P. Sartre, and E.P. Thompson. Amongst recent historians, Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker are often cited as contributing to this anti-determinism through their book, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*. Burgmann argues that although the earlier Marxist anti-determinism recognised the agency, subjectivity

and class consciousness of the working class, it still worked with the 'classical' or 'second international' understanding that capital accumulation and exploitation shaped the existence of the working class. Workers might have agency, but they would always be reactive.

But Autonomist Marxism, in Burgmann's words, 'is more far-reaching'. Negri and his comrades placed 'labor at the very beginning of the labor-capital dialectic. Labor can exist independently of capital, but capital needs to command labor to ensure profit; therefore, capitalist development does not occur due to internal momentum but in reaction to labor's tendency to unloose itself from capital.' History written from an autonomist perspective would place labour history within the internal history of the working class, a process of composition (as it becomes a class for itself), of decomposition (as the ruling class seeks to disrupt working class solidarity), and re-composition (as the working class fights back by developing new forms of struggle).

These three paths all point in the same direction: towards a history that takes the working class, not the labour movement, as its subject. We need to move from labour history to working class history. A history of informal mobilisation widens the understanding of worker power, showing that it can be expressed collectively in many ways. Unlike labour history, it would not produce studies that are merely institutional (ignoring the fleeting and peripheral) or social (if that means exclusive of social labour) or cultural (if that means exclusive of culture's material context). The focus of working-class history would be political, finding the common element of power in those studies. A history of subaltern labour that recognises that commodification takes many forms would make working class history global as well as open to current responses by workers to precarious uncertainty. And last, a history that adopts an autonomous perspective on the working class and its relation to capitalism would banish the idea that society is 'an order' and that the working class is subordinate. Capitalist exploitation and domination produce disorder, a dynamic of social struggles that is open-ended and complex. Working class history would approach capitalism as itself constructed historically through social struggles.



PART 3

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THINKING, WRITING,
AND ENGAGEMENT

TALE OF A MANUSCRIPT

Rowan Cahill

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A recent culling of my papers yielded a battered foolscap folder containing a yellowing 147-page typescript, its front page titled ‘The Seamen’s Union of Australia: A Short History’ by Brian Fitzpatrick. Produced during the early years of the Cold War in Australia, it is a pioneering excursion into what much later would become the academic speciality of ‘Labour History’. Author Brian Fitzpatrick (1905-1965) was an independent leftist scholar and a dogged and very effective guardian of, and advocate for, civil liberties.

The manuscript begins with the formation of the Seamen’s Union of Australia (SUA) in 1872, and takes the union’s history through to the end of World War II. The period from then until the early 1950s is dealt with in an eight-page ‘Epilogue’ titled ‘The Union after the War’. Writing in 1979, Fitzpatrick’s biographer Don Watson, not having access to the manuscript, described it as an ‘apparently undistinguished work’, a sentiment echoed subsequently by others. Well, it was and it wasn’t.

The ‘Short History’ was commissioned by the SUA in 1949, in part as a way of helping finance Fitzpatrick’s independent leftist scholarship and his vigorous and effective civil libertarian activism, a financial arrangement later joined by other sympathetic unions. The plan was to publish the work during the 1950s, and an ‘Introduction’ for the proposed book by the union’s national leader, E. V. Elliott, dated 1956 was prepared for publication. While the book did not eventuate, excerpts were variously published contemporaneously in Fitzpatrick’s news commentary *Australian Democrat*, and in the *Seamen’s Journal*.

By his own admission, in a letter to E. V. Elliott (8 April 1958),

Fitzpatrick completed the project 'in haste'. Which is understandable. As the Cold War in Australia intensified during the late 40s, early 50s, and especially during the attempt by the Menzies' government to ban the Communist Party of Australia and during the Petrov Affair (1954-1955), Fitzpatrick engaged vigorously and heroically in high profile ways as an intellectual activist and advocate combatting the Cold War and its concerted attacks on the left, on the militant communist-led trade unions, and upon civil liberties generally.

In 1970, with a newly minted BA (Hons), I was hired by the SUA for two-years on a journalist's wage, to complete the Fitzpatrick account for the Centenary of the union in 1972, Fitzpatrick's account forming Part 1 of an envisaged book. I had been introduced to the SUA and the project by Sydney University economic historian and civil libertarian Ken Buckley. Ken was friends with E.V. and Della Elliott, and I had forged a friendship with Ken in the anti-Vietnam War movement and in my own jousting with prevailing censorship laws. An offer by Ken of his editorial services to the union, free of charge, to overcome the deficiencies of the Fitzpatrick text, was rejected; E. V. Elliott was sentimentally attached to the manuscript.

I completed my task on time, but for a variety of reasons, explained elsewhere, including a printery fire which destroyed the letterpress setting of the book as galleys were being corrected, the book was not published until 1981, as Brian Fitzpatrick and Rowan J Cahill, *The Seamen's Union of Australia 1872-1972: A History*. I also wrote a potted serialised version of the union's history and this was published in the *Seamen's Journal* during 1972, culminating in an enlarged, glossy, and magnificently illustrated Centenary edition of the journal.

The Cahill manuscript of 1972, covering the period 1935 to 1972, was ahead of the time in many ways, noting the absence of mariners and the maritime from Australian history, and detailing the international/transnational aspects of the SUA's history, all of which would become scholarly commonplace well down the track. As it was, this pioneering sortie tended to get overlooked by academic historiographers.

A RADICAL HISTORY BOOK AND HOW WE CAME TO WRITE IT

Terry Irving

Rowan Cahill and I have lived with the idea of our book, *Radical Sydney*, since December 2001, when Ian Syson, an independent publisher from Melbourne, suggested to us that we might write about Sydney for a series of books on 'radical cities' published by his company, Vulgar Books. The organizing idea was a walking tour of about 50 places associated with radical events or people in the city, each site identified on a map, described in a short slab of text, and illustrated by two images: one of the site, as it was at the height of its radical notoriety, and another as it is today. The first in the series, *Radical Melbourne*, had sold a couple of thousand copies and Ian was keen to capitalize on this success.

It seemed like a piece of cake, especially as Lucy Taksa and I had just compiled the *Labour Heritage Register of New South Wales*, which we believed would point us to the sites to write about. So, we said yes.

Then the problems began. Transplanting the walking tour idea seemed almost impossible. While the Melbourne authors (Jeff and Jill Sparrow) could plan a manageable walk because their sites were concentrated in the centre of Melbourne, our sites were much more dispersed. We began to talk about three separate walks to take in radical sites in the inner suburbs; clearly this was an unwieldy solution. Worse: most of Sydney's radical buildings had been pulled down. In March 2002, after taking a walk around the CBD to look at radical sites I wrote to Rowan that the result was depressing: I saw 28 sites, of which the original buildings on 19 were gone

completely, on 3 they were still visible, and on 6 they were possibly extant, that is hidden behind new facades.

The walking tour idea was also intellectually troublesome for us. We were historians; the authors of *Radical Melbourne* were not. We had a long-standing interest in the changing forms, aims, methods, and discourses of radicalism. How could we convey this history to readers if the book's chapters jumped around in time in order to meet the requirements of a walking-person's view of the past? We felt we wanted to explore themes and provide a sense of a radical tradition, in other words to write a chronologically arranged story. But we also felt we had to be loyal to the publisher's concept for the book

Our progress slowed down while we failed to deal with this dilemma. It was still unresolved when our publisher postponed the delivery date. Eventually, he cut us adrift and we had to find a new publisher, UNSW Press, who luckily pushed us in the direction we needed to go. But that came much later, in 2008. In the meantime, we put the book on the back-burner and worked on different projects.

Mine was a history of the practice of democracy in the mid 19th century – which became *The Southern Tree of Liberty*. I discovered four things that reinforced my desire to write a radical history of Sydney rather than a guide for a radical walking tour.

First, I discovered that radical democrats (both working people and intellectuals) played a larger and more innovative role in the struggle for self-government than I expected.

Second, it became clear to me that European theorists of representative government, who argued that the reason for its introduction was to curtail democracy, i.e. popular sovereignty, were correct. In Sydney, liberals as well as conservatives argued for representative government in order to disarm the radical democrats, and they used their power in the legislature to pass laws repressing democratic politics.

Third, I could see how Sydney's topography separated Sydney's working people from the dwellings of their rulers, and I could trace the emergence of a spatial or regional identity for radical politics in

the inner suburbs of the south and west of the city.

Fourth, I was amazed to discover that violence was commonplace in the politics of the period. During election campaigns property was destroyed, demonstrators were injured, and two people were killed. Crowds celebrated January 26th and the Queen's Birthday by attacking police stations. The Irish and the British fought the Battle of the Boyne again on the streets of Sydney. Unemployed workers, men and women, menaced the Governor and tried to provoke a convict revolt. On the western goldfields huge crowds burnt effigies of conservative colonial politician, W.C. Wentworth. These were not rare events: every year there were several occasions when the military were called out to restore order in the city and towns. The working people and radical intellectuals were menacing authority and demanding a democratic government, and the more the government resorted to force the more violence there was.

I was not prepared by earlier study to recognize this violent political terrain. My work with Raewyn Connell on the history of the class structure in Australia, which became the book *Class Structure in Australian History*, had established for me the importance of the social structuring of power as a subject for historical writing, but it was written under influence of the theory of cultural hegemony. Hegemony functions to preclude the need to impose ruling power by force, and it defuses a forceful response by those who are ruled. But, *The Southern Tree of Liberty* showed violence popping up all over the place. I had to rethink the history of rule and of being ruled. I had discovered the limits of hegemony, a moment when the state's use of police and military force was as important for maintaining the social order as a more generalised and impersonal control exercised through a ruling culture. That occurred in the 1840s and 50s. Other historians had looked at this period but not understood the meaning of its violence. Could they have misunderstood other periods of turbulence too: the 1880s, or the 1910s, or the 1930s, or the 1970s? Perhaps in Australia's past, to use Rowan's words, 'significant political and social ferment, dissent, turbulence are not strangers, nor occasional'.

Rowan Cahill has been a comrade, collaborator and sounding board for my ideas ever since the 1960s, so of course he was privy to this readjustment of my thinking. Indeed, freed from building an academic career by discovering ever-more ingenious ways to confirm the dominant paradigms, he had been working towards the same position about how to write Australian history for longer than me.

So, with his words in my ear it did not take much reflection to see that these discoveries about the 1840s and 50s did not fit into the mainstream of Australian historical writing: a mainstream that celebrates the liberal businessmen and landowners rather than the working men and women in the coming of parliamentary government; that assumes that parliamentary government is synonymous with democracy; that neglects the importance of place in the formation of the labour tradition; and that plays down violence or the threat of violence in our history.

When we returned to working on *Radical Sydney*, we knew that we were going to write the kind of history that had not been written since Lloyd Ross introduced us to Billy Lane struggling with utopian communism in Paraguay, or since Bert Evatt wrote about the Tolpuddle Martyrs, or Brian Fitzpatrick celebrated working class politics in his short history of the labour movement, or since Gordon Childe skewered the Labor Party for betraying the hopes of Australia's 'proletarian democrats'.

Drawing on this tradition our book would be an example of radical history, rejecting the top-down, consensus version of our history, and presenting instead a history of ruling and being ruled, of the violence this entailed, a history of turbulence and alternative ways of thinking and doing.

We were definitely not interested in defending the position attacked by John Howard in the History Wars – ours would not be a 'black armband' version of history. The academic historians of race, gender and ethnicity (John Howard's targets) have widened our understanding of the different kinds of oppression and of how oppression was internalized. Subjectivity and identity became

their new buzz-words. All of this we applaud. But they turned to linguistic theory to make sense of this new focus, and in the process forgot about the material world. They lost sight of context, and of the structures of class and power. So, they had (and have) very little to say to a world where freedom is shrinking, violence is increasing, species are disappearing, and politicians are lying.

Nor would our story of the past be a bloodless, apolitical 'history from below', a re-run of the trivialized 'people's history' of the 1960s and 70s. There was one aspect of that earlier 'people's history', however, that we did want to emulate. We wanted to speak to an audience wider than academic historians and their students. Many academic historians prefer critique and jargon to story-telling; they write only for each other. But there are some academic historians with a commitment to social change who do reach out to a wider readership with narrative and political stance. The trouble is: their books about the plight of women, aborigines, migrants and workers in the past don't sell, except to specialists and niche readers. Why is this?

I think the stories they tell are the problem. The oppressions of the past when explored through the construction of identity, the process of representation, and the deconstruction of texts will never grab an anxious person by the elbow, even if enticed by whispers about justice and recognition of difference. Instead the non-academic reader feels talked-down to and short-changed. She fails to find a serious treatment of the most basic democratic, almost instinctive, response to oppression, the gathering together of people to demonstrate their feelings in public. The subjects in these books are shown as empowered to know who they are, but not how they can act. They have no agency, and they leave the reader with no useful lessons from the past.

Radical historians believe that the kind of historical writing that will connect with today's problems is one in which the material world of action and power is given equal standing with the world of representations and texts. We write a history in which language is not seen as the most important element of politics. For example, we

want history to give us the back-story of the economic and political interests, forces and events that allowed liberal political systems to be taken over by business elites. We write a history in which ordinary people have agency as well as identities, and we want to know why agency in the past has sometimes worked, but why at other times interests and structures have defeated popular action.

Radical Sydney is an illustrated popular history, not a scholarly monograph, so finding new sources, or working in a new way with old sources, was not our main consideration. But there are two source-related aspects of the book that you might find interesting.

In 1950 I learnt about the unemployed camps in the Great Depression of the 1930s from Vera Deacon, a young woman living with my family during the post-war housing shortage. In these camps of humpies made of tin, sacking and boxes she had spent eight years of her childhood. As I became more involved in radical politics, I discovered that the collective memory of marches and meeting places, campaigns and organizations, including those of the 1930s, was a significant marker of identity for the left. So, when I decided to write about Sydney's eviction wars of 1931, I was delighted to find on Lee Rhiannon's website her memory of her parents and friends sitting around the kitchen table in Newtown recalling the siege of Union Street. In fact, there are radio programs, plays, songs and novels (and several university theses) about that pitched battle between the police and the Unemployed Workers' Movement, whose members were trying to prevent the eviction of families unable to pay rent. This exciting and empowering event, which has since fed into the creative imagination, is remembered by lots of people.

So, popular memory has been an important source for us. About 20 of the book's chapters deal with the period from the 1920s to the 1980s, and they draw on recent memories recollected in print or on the Internet. In the process of using these sources we discovered something about how radical history is transmitted: we found older radicals in the city passing on their experiences to a younger generation. For example, when the Black Power radicals came to Redfern in the 1970s, they found a suburb with an existing militant

tradition, a tradition that included support for Aboriginal rights. They met Aboriginal worker, Chicka Dixon, who had received his political education in the militant Waterside Worker's Federation. Another example: the Whitlam-era students of the New Left, in pursuit of alternative organizing spaces (for women's liberation, the free university, underground media, racial equality, resident action and so on) went to live in the inner-city suburbs, where they met and learnt from their neighbours, working-class activists of the Old Left. Creating popular memory through this process of transmission was a political act, just as our history book is.

The other distinctive source is archival. Every radical historian will tell you how exciting it is to discover the evidence of radical persons and events obsessively preserved in the files of the security and intelligence organizations of the state. In our case, most of the chapters on the period from the First World War rely partly on these files, researched either by us or by the scholars whose publications we used as sources. Sometimes other archival collections were used. I was able to follow Gordon Childe's career with the NSW government through the files of the Premier's Department.

Finally, let me quote from Anna Clark, a feminist historian in the United States who is critical of the way in which the linguistic turn has made historians fearful of narrative:

We understand of course that when historians write narratives, they are constructing delusive stories. ... However, popular audiences crave stories and personal narratives rather than austere critiques. We have come to understand, for instance, that the Chartist movement drew in huge numbers of working-class people, not because they had the correct socialist analysis of working-class identity, but because they constructed powerful metaphors and rhetorics which evoked working class misery and promised a better day. Can we write stories which engage audiences from a radical, rather than a conservative perspective without delusions?

In *Radical Sydney* Rowan and I have tried to write stories that engage people from a radical perspective. Anna Clark worries about deluding people. I think that the best way to expose a delusion is to act, and radical history ought to make people want to act. It might be impossible to write a non-delusive narrative, according to proponents of the linguistic turn, but if people are persuaded to act as a result of our stories of the past, why should we feel that we have failed them?

RADICAL HISTORY AND MAINSTREAM HISTORY

Rowan Cahill and Terry Irving

KICKING AWAY THE PROPS

In recent years, in various places and on our blog ‘Radical Sydney/ Radical History’, we have written about radical history. As radical historians we seek out, explore, and celebrate the range of alternatives and oppositions, arguing there is a basic tension between radical history and ‘mainstream history’, a history that is constituted to prop up both capitalism and the state. We see our history as part of the struggle against capitalism and the state. In researching the past, we do not do it nostalgically, but with utilitarian, political intent, recognising that the past has the capacity to variously inspire and inform the present and the future. In a nutshell, while mainstream history would like people to read it, radical history wants its readers to act as history makers; while mainstream history props, radical history unprops.

So, in more abstract terms we believe radical history has three distinguishing features: its subject matter, its political stance, and its relationship to its audience. Radical historians write about the system of ruling and being ruled, the struggles of disempowered people to stand up to their oppressors and exploiters, in order to take control of their lives by attacking coercive authority and by socializing power. They tell stories of resistance and agency, not of ruling and maintaining order, which are the signs of ruling class history. Radical historians, secondly, are partisan. They write with a social purpose, and in doing so they draw on radical philosophies and methods. They write history as a political act. Thirdly, although

writing about the past, they want to encourage people in the present to resist and rebel. Because the radical past was always being made anew their work is pregnant with possibilities, alerting their readers to the possibilities for action in their own situations. This has consequences for how they write. Readers must be given space to reflect on the present as well as the past. It is not enough to tell stories; the stories have to be shaped by theory, sharpened by the historian's passion, and pregnant with political questions needing answers. Moreover, whether writing for other radical intellectuals, engaging with scholarship and theory, or seeking a wider audience, radical historians place a high value on clarity of expression, avoiding like the plague the over-theoretical language of academic in-groups, and their self-aggrandizing citation of trendy thinkers.

Today, we write radical history from an urban perspective. The capitalist city is as distinctive a historical space as, say, the nation state, the free-trade empire or the eighteenth/nineteenth century slave ship. Like them it is organized by the processes of capital accumulation and class relations into zones of activity and meaning that change over time. Because radicalism in capitalist cities expresses resistance to the exploitation and oppression inherent in those processes, it is never free of spatial dynamics. It always exhibits a desire to appropriate space, to make places into resources for radical struggle and symbols of popular rights to the capitalist city. The task of the historian of the radical city is to find the patterns in these dynamics and to relate these to the changing nature of radical struggle.

Radical history as a tradition, as an approach to viewing and writing history, has depth in terms of time and variety. It includes magisterial works like those of A. L. Morton, G.D.H. Cole and Raymond Postgate, Howard Zinn, Edward Vallance, and William A. Pelz. It is the tradition in which practitioners like maritime historian Marcus Rediker and commons historian Peter Linebaugh work. When Australian historians conceived 'labour history' in the early 1960s, they did so in the radical history tradition, determining to make working people part of Australian historical discourse and challenge the prevailing hegemony of imperial/colonial/ruling class

histories, and seeking to use the study of labouring people and their institutions as a political tool to assist the shaping of the present and future. In 1983 Eric Fry, one of these pioneers, published *Rebels & Radicals*, asserting the role of conflict, struggle and rebellion as important parts of the Australian story, a notion that had become muted in the academic study of labourism.

Before the 1960s, and particularly within the orbit of the Communist Party of Australia, labour intellectuals (such as Bob Walshe, James Rawling, Bill Wood, and Rupert Lockwood) researched, wrote, and published in labour movement outlets, radical histories of Australian struggles for popular democracy and of the agency of working people. The work and output of these historians is, still, virtually unfurrowed by researchers, and undeservedly so. Their approach to popularizing radical history can be traced back to socialist pioneer, agitator, artist and poet, William Morris, whose writings on history have been collected by Nicholas Salmon. Dorothy Thompson, radical historian of Chartism, recalled that in 1991 she asked husband E.P. Thompson whether he was still the Marxist historian he once was, and he replied, 'that he preferred to call himself 'a Morrisist'''. This reply is both poetic and political, capturing the step 'beyond' to which radical historians aspire.

It is the aspiration that publisher Ian Syson and authors Jeff and Jill Sparrow brought to the radical history of the geographical-political space that is Melbourne in *Radical Melbourne: A Secret History*. Since then, other 'radical city' books have followed: *Radical Melbourne II* (by the same authors), *Radical Brisbane*, edited by Raymond Evans and Carole Ferrier, and *Radical Sydney*.

Earlier at the University of Ballarat in 2009, Robert Hodder successfully produced a two-part doctoral thesis (exegesis and documents) titled 'Radical Tasmania: Rebellion, reaction and resistance: A thesis in creative nonfiction.' Later, a Wollongong team, working from a script written by John Rainford, released their 60 minutes-long film *Radical Wollongong: A People's History of Wollongong* in 2014, which went on to tour Australia and parts of Asia and to win two Awards at the Canadian Labour International

Film Festival (2014), including ‘Best in Festival’. Then in 2019, *Radical Perth, Militant Fremantle* appeared, edited by Charlie Fox, Alexis Vassiley, Bobbie Oliver and Lenore Layman. As the co-authors of *Radical Sydney*, we are keen to see this form of radical history continued.

RADICAL NEWCASTLE: INVENTING THE WHEEL?

The reader picking up *Radical Newcastle*, edited by James Bennett, Nancy Cushing, and Erik Eklund, could be forgiven for thinking that the editors, all University of Newcastle historians, have invented the wheel, for there is no recognition in the book that *Radical Newcastle* is part of this vibrant and visible, if somewhat marginalised in Australian academic circles, area of historical work. The editors seem completely indifferent to the long tradition of writing about history from a radical perspective, the tradition of radical history of which the ‘radical city’ books are a part. Nor are they aware of the recent radical scholarship by Mike Davis, David Harvey, Adam Morton, Justin McGuirk, and others, that has transformed the study of cities.

The editors of *Radical Newcastle* describe their book as ‘the outcome of community-engaged research’ that aimed to connect ‘with the interests and concerns of our local community’. In other words, its genre is public history with community involvement. Fair enough; that’s a recognised kind of history, although one frequently derailed by deceptive ideas of social unity. The problem is that the subject of their history book is radicalism, and radical history is a tradition the editors don’t engage with. Should they have? Well, imagine writing a book called ‘Indigenous Newcastle’ but neglecting to take into account the literature of Aboriginal history.

The editors’ neglect of the radical history tradition of writing is symptomatic of a deeper problem. Their approach to writing history is called, in the trade, academic empiricism. A classic case in fact: they begin with a definition of radicalism based on the *Oxford English Dictionary* and a British handbook on radicalism, then proceed to look for examples of it in the past. But is this how

historians should work, using a timeless, generic definition to corral the past into a predefined pen? Relying on ahistorical thinking? Surely what historians should do is historicize, that is, to work with an understanding of society as process, as a series of situations in which people act, institutions react, and structures change. Historians need to be able to think abstractly as well as concretely, otherwise they are trapped by empiricism, and make the mistake of starting with definitions instead of an historical understanding of their subject. Meaning, not definition; that’s what has to be grasped, as has the historian’s own position in relation to the subject.

Radicalism has a symbiotic relationship with capitalism, a word that the editors fail to mention in their Introduction, and capitalism also structured Newcastle as a city. In *Radical Newcastle*, places seem to be incidental. About a dozen places appear on the maps at the start of the book, but none of them has a main entry in the index. Of the thirty chapters, just a few refer to a place in their titles. This neglect does a great disservice to Newcastle’s dense geography of struggle, which can be detected in *The Labour Heritage Register of New South Wales*, where Terry Irving and Lucy Taksa have listed about 60 of Newcastle and the Hunter’s sites of radical activity: the speakers’ corners, meeting rooms, union offices, halls, factory gates, parks and so on. And these are just the sites associated with the labour movement. What about the places associated with the new social movements? Although one of the chapters (by Peta Belic and Erik Eklund) identifies Newcastle’s radicalism as a defining city characteristic, this is not enough. We have to ask how Newcastle *as a city* worked for and against its radicals. Were there labour or bohemian precincts in the city? Are there patterns in the distribution of radical sites? How did agitators move around their radical city? Again: what route or routes were taken by radical processions, and was the route chosen as a symbolic gesture against ruling institutions? Did the routes change over time? Did women and children march? Unless there is a systematic exploration of questions like these that arise out of an awareness of Newcastle’s geography, of the city’s spatial organization as an aspect of radical struggles, a whole dimension of the radical experience in Newcastle is lost.

There are thirty chapters in this book; less than half of them qualify as radical history. The others would have been at home in a book on Liberal Newcastle, their tone bland and even-handed, the product of an academic culture that values description over commitment. Readers, it seems, must not be allowed to assume that the authors are identifying with embarrassing ideas like class and domination, or contentious action that ignores the ‘right’ channels for protest. Taking the book as a whole this is hodge-podge history, without any sense of radical Newcastle’s patterns in time or space. The deficiencies of the book – as spatial history and radical history – are down to the editors; luckily, some of the contributors show us what the book could have been.

THE RADICAL CHAPTERS

What makes their chapters examples of radical history is that in them we can detect a radical point of view. It is not just that their chapters are about people in movement, challenging, resisting, and so on. Rather the authors are keen to tell us about it in a way that stirs the heart and the head in order to consider our own situation. Sometimes our attention is caught by the drama of the struggle, as in Rod Noble’s account of the mass civil disobedience of mining communities in the late nineteenth century, and in Ross Edmonds’ chapter on the *Silksworth* dispute in which militant unionists showed that ‘the radical spirit of anti-imperialism and internationalism’ could overcome ‘unthinking racism’. In Ann Curthoys’ chapter on Barbara Curthoys’ involvement in the Aboriginal rent strike at Purfleet Reserve, however, it is the attention to organisation that compels. We learn not just about the tasks and the planning, the meetings and publicity, but also about the history of Aboriginal politics and Communist Party strategy. We also learn, of course, about a remarkable woman, an intellectual as well as an activist, who, as Ann writes, had a deep effect on her own involvement in Aboriginal issues. There is another mother-daughter connection in Jude Conway’s chapter on the Right to Choose Abortion Coalition that Josephine Conway helped to form. When Josephine turned 80

a friend said that she was a living reminder that radicalism was a way of life, a description that comes across also in the first-hand accounts of their environmental campaigning by Bernadette Smith, and Paula Morrow. The personal dimension of these chapters helps us understand radicalism as a living force rather than a dead definition.

It has always been a radical approach to history writing to insist on rescuing the common people and subversive ideas that mainstream history neglects. There are several chapters that meet that criterion. Tony Laffan’s chapter on the Hall of Science discovers a local free thought movement nurturing and nurtured by industrial militancy, while the chapter by Peta Belic and Erik Eklund on the One Big Union shows the persistence of syndicalist ideas. Among the courageous anti-conscriptionists of 1916, there was a range of forces and views, and Tod Moore and Harry Williams argue that the most radical were not reported in the press and have consequently disappeared from history. In his chapter, John Maynard successfully restores the significant activism of two white activists, John Maloney and his daughter Dorothy. They campaigned for Aboriginal rights, making contact with the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association, the first all-Aboriginal political organisation in Australia. And here’s another sign of radicalism as a living tradition: one of the founders of this association was Fred Maynard, the grandfather of the author, John Maynard.

In the best radical history, the actors are never ciphers but real flesh-and-blood people. Two chapters stand out in this regard: Troy Duncan’s on Father Alf Clint, and Shane Hopkinson’s and Tom Griffiths’ on Neville Cunningham. We cherish the image of the reverend inviting the militant Jim Comerford, a teetotaler and temperance advocate, to drink a pint with him in the local miners’ pub. And we are filled with uncomfortable admiration for the idiomatic flair of an ASIO informant who described Neville Cunningham – Communist, activist and working class intellectual – as ‘a fighter ... a crude one, rough but direct ... Nev has no time for nice trimmings, nor for calling a spade by any other name ... He is a likeable chap, all proletarian, dead set against authority.’

Finally, we want to cheer for two chapters of forensic social analysis. Bernadette Smith situates the 1979 Star Hotel riot in the context of Newcastle's history of class struggle, before placing the state in the frame and looking at local policing and power politics. She also explains the culture of the pub in a sociological way, challenging/undermining a whole lot of safe/traditional academic wisdom. Griff Foley, internationally respected in adult education and social learning circles, has brought together five cases of 'community conservation' – a neglected aspect of environmental history – in order to address the most important question in social movement as well as revolutionary politics: how do activists learn? The answer: informally and incidentally; and making this explicit helps their practice. It's a lesson that radical historians should take on board: we should be thinking about our own intellectual practice as we engage with our next project.

Overall, *Radical Newcastle* is a mixed bag of hits, almos, and misses. Considered in the context of Australian radical historical writing, it provides opportunity to reflect upon the nature of radical history, how it is written, and how the historian can render struggles of the past in ways that instruct and inspire the present.

VIOLENCE IN AUSTRALIAN HISTORY: WE'D RATHER NOT KNOW ABOUT IT

Terry Irving

It is to radical social history, which my generation discovered in the 1970s, that we owe the acceptance among academic historians that subordinate peoples, however defined, have historical agency. Duly acknowledged, this idea became the frame for a sprinkling of more general histories of Australia that appeared in the 1980s and 90s, the best of them enriched by feminist theory.

Agency is not enough. The radical tradition must insist that violence is a basic feature of capitalism. Its source is the antagonistic and coercive relationship between capital and labour, the major arena of actual or threatened violence. But as the class struggle folds into its grasp the oppressions of gender, race, generation and sexuality, the germ of violence also infects these spheres of life.

Thus, relations between dominant and subordinate classes, races, sexualities, genders and generations are, throughout their construction in history, always characterised by violence, real or threatened, direct or indirect, and from below as well as above. The rulers of the society in which these structured relationships exist develop ways to suppress, contain or dissipate its propensity for violence, and the subordinate groups counter-strategize to use their violence creatively.

But what of hegemony? True, capitalism as a system relies on persuasion as well as coercion, but even in its moments of greatest

persuasiveness we may detect the frisson of anticipated – because always threatened – violence among those who rule and those who resist.

And what of morality? Because radicals alert workers to capitalist violence and believe that popular violence is a legitimate response to it, conservatives accuse the left of immorality. For conservatives, all violence is immoral. They judge violence in a timeless way, as a sign of godlessness, as God's punishment for humanity's depravity, in the process creating a myth that justifies the status quo. This is abundantly clear in their endless hysteria about the evil Terror of the French Revolution – which they see as the fount of the godless totalitarianism that defines (in the conservative view) the subsequent history of the Left. Their interpretation of the French Revolution, however, is biased. In fact, as Sophie Wahnich has shown in her book, *In Defence of the Terror: Liberty of Death in the French Revolution*, the Jacobins sought to contain legitimate popular violence, to plan it and control it so that it would not descend into destructive madness. Their object was to save the revolution. The lesson for radicals is that violence has to be understood as the product of historical necessity.

Decades after social history's moment, I'm still waiting for violence to become as common as agency in the thinking of my radical history colleagues. The exceptions stand out: Bruce Scates on the 1890s maritime strike, Raymond Evans on the 1919 Red Flag riots in Brisbane, Verity Burgmann on the IWW. Otherwise, the record is spotty among the second generation of labour historians impacted by the New Left moment. As for the first generation, violence was rarely a term in their political thinking.

Perhaps there was not much top-down or bottom-up violence anyway? This is the standard line of general history texts. *Australians: A Historical Dictionary* (1987) has no entry for violence, and nor does *The Oxford Companion to Australian History* (1998). In the *Cambridge History of Australia* (2013) only the chapters on 'Gender and Sexuality' and 'Indigenous and Settler Relations' discuss violence, and once again in the index to each of the volumes there is no entry for violence. Apparently, Australia has seen no violence,

whether threatened or actual, direct or indirect, during strikes, political meetings, electoral rallies, sectarian marches, unemployed demonstrations, military mutinies, or youth culture clashes. How good is Australia!

The truth is that there is very little research on violence by academic Australian historians. Even when scholars – radicals for the most part – do discuss violent moments they seem to be too fastidious to use the term or specify the violent means. Example: I like Stuart Macintyre's *The Succeeding Age* (1986) because it links lives and events with structures, and the pages describing the 1919 strike wave are particularly good. But he avoids the word 'violence'. Instead, we get references to 'an atmosphere of disorder', and conflicts 'that flared up', and returned soldiers who 'lashed out' at workers, socialists, do-gooders and policemen. Another example: Terrence Cutler's study of the 1918-19 meat workers' strike in Townsville is excellent on the context and the drama but his distaste for revolutionary violence is plain. He dismisses it as 'anarchism', and as bound to fail.

Calling these situations disorderly or tumultuous; pigeon-holing them as a strike wave: such words are inadequate both descriptively and analytically. Class, gender and ethnicity were organising forces in these events. Coercion by military means in those events was ultimately decisive in controlling a pre-revolutionary situation. The descriptive term we need here is violence; the idea we need is the place of organised violence in contradictory social relationships. Here's the point: if you don't have the concept for the thing you don't see the thing.

Among Australian historians, the best survey and analysis of violence in our history is by Mick Armstrong, a member of the Marxist organisation, Socialist Alternative. In a 2012 article he insists that riots are a legitimate and liberating form of struggle, just as much part of the tradition of rebellion as 'strikes, picket-lines, occupations, or mutinies.' Indeed, his analysis of some of Australia's major strikes – from the 1890s Maritime Strike to the Broadmeadows Strike of 1973 – disproves mainstream history's

fond belief that violent action is counterproductive in industrial disputes. Some years ago, I undertook the same task for the 1840s, and surprised myself at how often incidents of political contention took a violent turn, and how many riots there were.

The historical actors in these fraught relationships were not so reticent; they knew the terror and named the cause. Here's an example. Jennie Scott Griffiths was part of the migration of radicals from New South Wales to Queensland in 1918. A revolutionary feminist, she spent two years in Brisbane, lecturing, writing, lobbying – and fighting. Her son recalls that during the notorious red flag procession in Brisbane in March 1919, Jennie, although only 4 ft 6 inches (137 centimetres) high, was seen beating a tattoo on the chest of a policeman, yelling 'Give me back my flag!' She saw the proto-fascist violence that followed and had to suffer an invasion of her own house by armed soldiers. Afterwards she predicted 'successive strikes, lock-outs and riots' because Australian workers would not 'allow themselves to be batoned by police without hitting back.'

A few months later the Labor politicians, union officials and the arbitration judge who were suppressing a working-class uprising in Townsville were congratulating Queenslanders on their rejection of violence and their loyalty to constitutional principles. The minds of both sides were obsessed by the violence.

Startled by Jennie Scott Griffiths' embrace of public violence, I decided to see how much of it I could find in the 1910s. So, I sampled the daily press in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane. For the years Jennie was in Brisbane, 1918-19, I logged almost 100 incidents of actual or threatened violence. As for the entire decade, the evidence was staggering. These were years of working-class rebellion in Australia, expressed through large scale industrial confrontations, through a myriad of small strikes, through workers rejecting the authority of union leaders and Labor politicians, through the defeat of two conscription referenda and the split in the Labor Party, and through support for radical, anti-parliamentarist ideas of democracy, including workers' control of industry.

Confronted by these opposing views, why should the historian choose to construct their narrative around the view that delegitimizes violence – the view of state officials and those complicit in their ruling-class project – rather than the view of Jennie and her comrades?

WILLIAM ASTLEY (PRICE WARUNG)
AND THE RADICAL INVENTION
OF THE LABOR PARTY

Terry Irving

LABOR: A PARTY OF A NEW TYPE

Living with the Australian Labor Party for over 130 years we have become accustomed to the fact that it poses no threat to the capitalist system. More than that, we have become resigned to its role in the political system as a pillar of liberal representative government. But when Labor was formed in 1891 a very different future for it seemed possible. Not on the economic front, because as Gordon Childe wrote about it then, ‘while the Labor platform can give the workers no real improvement under capitalism, it offers them no escape from capitalism’. A hundred years later we can all say ‘aye’ to that.

If we look, however, at Labor’s intellectual and social history, we can be more sanguine, for in its early days Labor offered itself as a party with a vision of radical democracy. In fact, for three decades this was a live issue in the party. Its most advanced thinkers countered liberalism’s parliamentary focus with a vision of Labor as an extra-parliamentary movement. They saw Labor as a political force for self-government by the working class – at work and in working-class communities. This vision of popular democracy, rather than any program of ‘reforms’ which capitalist markets always managed to neutralise, provides the real interest of Labor’s formative years for radical historians.



Childe called this vision Labor's 'new theory of democracy', defining it in a phrase as 'the issues to be submitted to the people must also be determined by the people.' In other words, the theory required Labor to be a party of a new type, not just a mass membership party but one mobilising working people so that they could govern themselves. The party, in short, was the voice of a movement. Its politicians did not represent an 'interest' or a constituency – as liberal political theory required – but 'the democracy', a workers' movement founded on the solidarity generated in their struggles, not on the institutional or legislative needs of the unions. The ethos of solidarity, moreover, had to extend to the party's politicians. They were to be bound by their pledge to support the party platform and by the decisions of caucus – the body of party members in the parliament.

Conservative political groups said – correctly – that this theory was 'opposed to the [liberal] principles of sound parliamentary government', basically because it prevented the individual parliamentary representative from exercising their judgement. But the theory was also rejected by many trade union officials. As potential 'representatives' of the trade union 'interest', they expected to be able exercise the same freedom of judgement as other parliamentarians.

And so a struggle broke out in the movement. The trade unions in New South Wales had to be dragged against their will into forming the Party along the lines dictated by 'the new theory'. (The story was different in Queensland because of the dominance there of William Lane and other labour intellectuals). After being elected to Parliament, the trade union officials mounted a counterattack against party authority. It took three splits in the parliamentary party and four party conferences over three years (1891-94) to establish the principle that the movement, through the pledge, caucus, and the decisions of annual conference, should control the politicians. Those who fought to assert the power of the working-class movement over the politicians were less aligned with trade unionism than with the intellectual field – men like W.A. Holman, W.M. Hughes, and William Astley.

'PRICE WARUNG'

In the 1890s, William Astley used the pen name, Price Warung, for his fictionalised accounts of convict life. Two of the books that made his reputation were *Tales of the Convict System* and *Tales of the Isle of Death (Norfolk Island)*. With their sensational climaxes and vivid descriptions, Price Warung's stories have remained popular with readers who understand that convicts were victims of social injustice, brutalised and exploited by the convict system. So scathing were Warung's stories about the malfeasance of the ruling class men in charge of the system that a British publisher at the time rejected them, and as late as the Second World War the Commonwealth Literary Fund refused to subsidise a selection of the stories, lest the enemy use them as propaganda against us. Writers Vance and Nettie Palmer, and other radical nationalists, however, had a more positive view of Warung. In 1960, labour historian, Ian Turner, edited a selection of Warung's stories for the left-wing Australasian Book Society.

But under his own name, there was a time when William Astley was recognized in New South Wales as an important labour intellectual. He was born in Liverpool, England, in 1855, the son of a watchmaker who took his family to the gold fields when William was four years old. He grew up in the Melbourne suburb of Richmond, and began a career as a journalist in 1875. For the next sixteen years he was rarely in one town more than two years, working in Richmond, Echuca, Casterton, Nhill, Warrnambool, Bathurst, Tumut as well as Melbourne and Sydney, where he arrived for the second time in March 1891, just as the great Maritime Strike expired.

As a republican and experienced journalist, Astley was naturally drawn to Sydney's radical nationalist magazine, *The Bulletin*, which would publish about 80 of his convict tales over the next two years. At the same time, he was mixing with intellectuals sympathetic to the trade unions as they took the final steps to form a political movement after the strike. He lectured to the Australian Socialist League and the Australasian Secular Association, and joined the West Sydney Labor Electoral League. He helped to organise the

campaign for labour candidates in several constituencies in the elections of 1891, where Labor made such a startling debut, and in 1893 became the editor of the weekly *Australian Workman*. In that year he began a vigorous campaign in working-class suburbs to raise funds for Australia's first labour daily – the short-lived *Daily Post*. As a young man, George Beeby first heard Astley speak at one of these meetings:

That fellow fascinated me ... [He] used to appear at political meetings as if he'd stepped down from some other world and was ready to give us the benefit of his wisdom. Well-dressed. Good looking, and in some queer way 'distinguished'. Yet no suggestion of the charlatan about him. I used to follow him about: I'd never met a man who filled me with such admiration and positive awe. ... There were those eyes of his, at once fierce and saturnine. [Journalist] Fred Broomfield said he looked like the confidential agent of a mysterious and hidden power. That was right. He used to urge us to organize, organize...

That 'mysterious and hidden power' was the force that social movement scholars have recently begun to analyse, 'power in movement'. This was also the idea that Astley and other labour intellectuals would work with when proposing that Labor should be a movement-based democracy.

WILLIAM ASTLEY'S USE OF THE PAST

Beeby, later a Labor politician and then an arbitration judge, said something else of significance about Astley: he wanted to give the young democrats 'the benefit of his wisdom'. But what could the writer of convict tales have to say that was so important that it seemed as if it came 'from another world'? To answer this question, we need to understand what Astley intended by his fictionalised versions of Australia's past.

Astley was a dedicated historical investigator. For almost 20 years before his first convict tale appeared, he had sought out people who had personal or family experience of the penal system – on both sides of the lash. His project, however, was wider in its scope than convictism. In a letter to Henry Parkes, who had complained to Astley that he got no enjoyment out of reading about convicts, the author defended himself. He aimed 'to cover with successive series of stories the whole field of Australasian life – political, mining, pastoral, etc. How could I then eliminate from my scheme the nature of [the convict] system...?' So, it is not surprising to find him in 1892 applying for the position of editor of the *Historical Records of New South Wales*. He produced an impressive application, attaching examples of his indexes to the thousands of books, pamphlets and newspapers that he had collected or consulted. The aim of all this research had been 'to qualify himself for the position of Historiographer of the Australian Colonies.' Moreover, he made the claim that his stories were a form of historical writing – 'historical narratives' he called them.

Astley however was always more than a research historian, a collector of facts, for as a labour intellectual he understood the role historical argument could play in class politics. I think he might have been slightly discomfited when applying for a position that would have made him the official voice for the capitalist state's view of its past. Some evidence for this discomfort can be found in his application. He carefully avoided the term 'convict system', referring instead to 'the delicate questions' raised by Australia's early history', and insisting on the importance of accuracy in historical work. But in his reply to Parkes, Astley, now on his democratic high-horse, asserted that it was his duty not simply to deal with the penal system but to preserve its 'spirit' in his fiction. His stories of injustice, arbitrary power, and secret resistance in the convict period made plain what he meant by this 'spirit'. Moreover, its influence was still present:

The Transportation System has knitted itself into the fibres

of our national being...No man can put his finger on the date when it ended, for the reason that it glided imperceptibly into the vigorous and splendid, if still imperfect, present.

The idea that historical episodes could be defined by their spirit was one that he returned to. Australia, he said, was a country 'governed by the *instincts* of democracy'. Not yet fully democratic; only governed by the instincts of democracy. But even before the triumph of the people, between Australia and the mother-country, governed by caste and class, there could be no equality. 'Faulty though our democratic institutions may be, they still own the one great virtue that the people rule themselves, and are not ruled by class or classes.'

In a manuscript fragment headed 'Australian History' Astley clarified this. Australian history, he said, was not simply about 'incidents of romance and adventure, but also of vitally enduring issues of political development.' Posing a question that Donald Horne would make the basis of his 1964 book *The Lucky Country*, Astley asked why problems that in old-world countries had produced revolution were being peacefully solved in Australia, despite the fact that Australia's rulers were mediocre compared to the 'statesmen of wider knowledge and more consummate skill' of the old world. The answer could only be found in Australia's unique history – 'our peculiar types of industrial and social organisations'. He had in mind, of course, the rapid growth of trade unionism and the dramatic break-through of the Labor party. Or to put it another way, the Labor Party and the unions were successfully managing working class discontent in the Australian colonies.

How far did Astley endorse this view? As against the idea of 'peculiar' social and industrial institutions that allowed Australia to avoid revolution, Astley in other contexts stressed the 'spirit' of resistance in the convict system, and the colonists' 'instinct' for democracy. As we will see, these ideas would form the basis of a view of Australian history that would arm the campaign to bring Labor politicians under the control of the movement. Every

movement seeks a usable past. For the emerging labour movement in Australia Astley developed a narrative of injustice and democratic resistance, a counter narrative of the past that would inspire current struggles and raise the possibility of a popular democratic future with Labor in the lead.

ASTLEY ON 'POWER IN MOVEMENT'

While he was constructing his narrative of Australia's past, Astley continued to write about the political present. Besides a regular output of articles for the labour press, between 1891 and 1894 he wrote three works that were important interventions in the struggle to make the Labor party a movement-based democracy. The first, the pamphlet, 'Distrust the Politicians – A Letter to the Wage-Earners of New South Wales' has not been found in a printed form, but in his papers there are three drafts: a hand-written copy, a typed copy, and a final typed copy marked up for printing. So, we can be sure that Astley thought carefully about its contents. Internal evidence suggests it was written after June 1892. The second intervention was an incomplete novel, *The Strike of '95*, which appeared in early 1893 while he was editing *The Australian Workman*, which made it the first novel about the Australian labour movement published as a serial in the labour press. There were 10 episodes of this novel, but such is the deteriorating state of the *Australian Workman* in libraries, that only four remain. We can, however, get an idea of the plot from the synopses Astley provided before two of the episodes and a projection in the last episode of how he intended to finish the novel. The third intervention was the pamphlet, *Labor in Politics: The Conference of November 1893 – A Criticism and an Appeal*, based on his articles in *The Australian Workman* in November and December 1893. It was published, the text suggests, to assist Labor in the elections of July 1894.

'Distrust the Politicians', written after a year of Labor representation in the colony's parliament, is a scathing attack on parliamentarism and the first Labor politicians, three of whom (George Black, John Fitzgerald, and Francis Cotton) came in

for extended and blistering denunciation. But it was not just the flawed character of Labor's representatives that was the problem. Parliament, Astley said, only seems the best avenue to redress social wrongs. In practice, 'no parliamentary vote will break the economic power of capitalists.' So, Astley's main concern was that 'the wage-earners of New South Wales' had lost their way:

At the time of the Strike, you had dimly discerned that reforms must spring from yourselves, not from outside and above. At the time of the General Election, you forgot that much – you pinned your faith once more to Parliamentary representatives – and you were once more deceived.

This message was reinforced by Astley's account of his own politics. He was 'a socialist of the William Morris school because I am a democrat and an economist'. Socialism, he went on, 'promises the realisation of the true democratic and economic ideal, which is not "Government of the people, for the people, and by the people"... but the absence of all government.' Hence, another ground for scorning the Labor parliamentarians, who 'work for the substitution of State slavery for wage slavery'.

Astley proposed an alternative, and it is this, rather than his second-hand (and changeable) ideas about anti-state socialism, that makes the pamphlet part of the process of inventing the Labor Party. Just as he had castigated the wage-earners for forgetting that during the strike they had taken the process of reform into their own hands, he concluded by exhorting them to reclaim that process:

Who, then are you to trust? The answer is simple: YOURSELVES. Look to yourselves, to your own manhood ...Define to yourselves what is involved in the term manhood, what is meant by manliness, what is intended by Justice, what is implied by Democracy.

But, he told them also, do not be vengeful. Society relies on co-

operation, so your class enemies must be treated fairly during the long period before socialism is attained. An earlier passing reference to 'the reconstruction of society through bloody means' was just for show. And fairness apparently did not extend to women in his masculinist utopia. His headline message was that the transition to socialism would be a gradual process of moral regeneration over 'many generations', in which the movement would enable individual (male) empowerment (he called it 'flowering') as well as the abolition of government.

Although Astley in this pamphlet provided a moral dimension to the idea of movement action, his alternative was clearly unsatisfactory as a guide to 'what is to be done' to achieve socialism. The subtitle, *A Story of The Passing Time*, to his novel, *The Strike of '95*, certainly confirms that Astley was thinking about the transition to socialism. In the novel he took up the problem of understanding 'power in movement' by focusing on the question of leadership. Its main characters are a leading capitalist, a leading democrat, and the capitalist's clerk, who is also a democrat. Interestingly, Astley describes all of them as intellectuals. The capitalist, Dutton, is 'the head of the intellectual plutocracy (as distinguished from 'the plutes who are merely vomiters of money'); the leading democrat, Hughes, is a worker who 'has recognized the demands of the intellect and the soul'; and the hero of the story, the clerk Warner, like Astley himself, writes in his spare time for the press, including *The Bulletin* (called *The Blisterer* in the novel).

The plot revolves around Dutton's plan to defend his property as the colony's democrats, campaigning against the monopoly of land and wealth, threatened to rectify the land-grab that had occurred in the convict period. Dutton, the intellectual capitalist, realises he will have to defend the system of ownership in order to protect his own property. He plans to subvert Warner, his democratic clerk, with money and the attentions of his attractive daughter, but he wants Warner to retain his democratic leanings. As a dishonest democrat, Warner will cause dissension in the ranks of the democracy. Using Warner to argue among the democrats for a compromise with the landowners will simply elicit more extreme demands, for

example repudiation of a debt that might be claimed by the former landowners if the democracy triumphs and takes back the land. With the democracy divided, the present rulers will be safe.

What Dutton has not allowed for is that the democracy is organised and wisely led. The vehicle of this leadership is a secret society, with sections covering both manual and brain workers, called The League of the Emancipation. The clerk Warner is a member, and secretly conveys his employer's strategy to the League. Two of the surviving episodes are devoted to describing the meeting at which this happens. The meeting room, disguised as the office of a business, is furnished with republican simplicity. The League's chief, Hughes, is given heroic status by being likened to a Hercules or an Agamemnon. He lectures the delegates on the historic wrong of the iniquitous land-grab, but wisely counsels them to eschew the idea of repudiation, for

when the new generation of Australia had awoke to the fact that it was burdened by an enormous debt by which the nation had benefited little, whilst the first impulse would be towards repudiation, the nobler determination would be to accept the financial obligation which it had inherited.

Astley indicated that he intended to have 'the two bodies of foes' meet 'in the electoral arena, and possibly in a bloodier field'.

Warner, who had done the right thing by revealing Dutton's plans to the League, would nonetheless become 'confused in the tangled issues of life' as he wrestled with the conflict between duty to his comrades and desire for Dutton's daughter: 'He became a pawn in Dutton's game after all, and in so doing destroyed himself.' Was there a warning here for those Labor politicians seduced by the comforts and privileges of parliamentary life? Dutton too ultimately 'lost his game'. We are not told how, and that in itself is interesting. There is enough ambiguity and vagueness in Astley's projected conclusion for the story to suggest that he had not decided. Perhaps he shied away from the obvious. Given the history

of the nineteenth century Europe, what other outcome could there be in the struggle between a secret society of democrats and the plutocrats than revolution? Yet Astley shrank from violence, from vengeance, from expropriation and repudiation. Meanwhile, as editor of *The Australian Workman*, he knew that the struggle to bring the politicians under the movement's control was gaining momentum. If 'power in movement' could not be faced up to as the product of secret leadership, perhaps it could be understood as an organisational process, so that 'the new Australia' could be born in the polling booth rather than at the barricades?

Astley attended Labor's crucial 'unity conference' of November 1893, where it was made clear by the labour intellectuals who ran the conference that the purpose of the pledge (which all Labor parliamentarians were required to sign) was to break the link between the Labor politician and their constituents. His pamphlet, *Labor in Politics*, is a defence of this position against those Labor members of parliament outside of caucus who rejected it, and a counter-attack against the journalists of the capitalist press who, dismissing labour's preoccupation with itself as a movement, concentrated on the vanity and selfishness of individual participants. Two of the themes of the earlier pamphlet and novel re-appear in this pamphlet. First, continuing his retreat from revolution Astley insisted that while 'the rectification of abuses' is labour's aim it can only be achieved 'by the self-restraint of the mass'. Second, he repeated his belief in the moral capacity of the labour movement. The conference 'clearly expressed a moral craving', as if its participants were saying, 'We are in this movement for Right and not for Wrong'.

In fact, scattered through the pamphlet are indications of the centrality of the idea of movement to Astley's argument. As he concluded on the last page, the conference 'has exalted the conception of the movement in many minds'. Foremost among its features was its 'great educative potential', so that Labor could train its own intellectuals without having to rely on 'buying brains and culture and experience', as Capitalism did. Moreover, the movement's moral capacity, based in 'the earnestness of the mass', was guaranteed because the mass was 'ever unbribable, and

therefore it will ever remain whole-hearted and single-eyed.' The idea of common needs justified this faith in the mass. As Astley explained it, 'the expanding and progressive force in the movement originates in needs which throb in every pulse, and aspirations which stir the molecules of every brain.' And the support of the mass, given spontaneously, to the labour movement, was the secret of movement power. Reaching for grandiloquence, Astley summed his faith in 'the power of movement':

Combine the fire of the earnest spirit, and an eager zest for instruction, with the indomitable resolution which will never rest content with less than Justice, and you equip an irresistible army.'

If the movement was an army then it was also an organised force, with appropriate procedures and principles. Astley was determined to make this point because it was an advance on his previous understanding of movement power as purely moral or conspiratorial.

He began by declaring that 'the originating impulse of the movement' was political. But if the movement was, as it were, genetically political then it was 'inexact' to speak of 'Labor-in-politics'. Now his thinking was certainly moving into new territory. When the issue was how to represent labour as a movement in parliament it was apparent that what he called 'the old system of representation' had to be abandoned. He was proposing in fact a break with the English parliamentary tradition, that is, with the responsibility of the member to his constituents, and with the individualist right of the member to vote according to his conscience. Under that system of representation, 'the people had disintegrated representation'. For proof one had only to consider the behaviour of labour's representatives in the New South Wales parliament over the past few years. The incoherence and chaos among the workers' representatives existed because they did not represent 'the workers in the mass'.

The workers therefore needed a new system of representation,

one that would satisfy 'the democratic mind' by keeping 'a tight hand upon [Labor's] delegates in Parliament':

The democratic tendency is to bring the elected and the electors into closer relation, and the 'representative' must give place to the 'delegate' upon all vital issues.

Hence the significance of the pledge that the conference had spent so much time debating. Astley knew that its opponents in the caucus called it coercive, but he firmly declared that they were out of step:

If, then, the men who have hitherto represented the workers of New South Wales in Parliament are not prepared to abandon the ancient representative theory in favour of an approximation to delegateship, which is the thing now possible, then their place, wherever it may be will certainly not be in the ranks of the labour movement.

Relieved of the burden of such individualists, the movement could devote itself to improving its 'machinery'. Astley warned of the dangers of 'neglect of rational and well-considered procedure.' He advocated a more powerful secretariat, equal representation of all sections of the movement in all committees, and revised rules of debate in the movement. Together with the supreme policy making role of annual conference, the pledge, and caucus discipline, these procedures would make a new generation of Labor parliamentarians the delegates of a movement.

CONCLUSION

Astley in these years worked through a number of ways to understand and harness the force of movement action: as moral regeneration, secret conspiracy, and organisational procedures. In fact, to widen our horizon, democracy as movement representation was just the

most important of three doctrines that Astley and his fellow labour intellectuals were responsible for attaching to the Labor party in the 1890s. The others were support in return for concessions, and state socialism. Astley was well aware that it was people in his circle, journalists and agitators in the movement, Labor Electoral League activists rather than union leaders, who formulated and had to practice these doctrines. The new theory of democracy promoted the skills of representing and mediating between interests in the movement. Support in return for concessions relied on negotiating skills to deal with the government in parliament. The framing of socialism as a project consonant with the feelings of individualistic Australians depended on a well-developed sense of ‘the public’ and the skill of publicity. These were skills that very few of the old trade union leaders were able to develop. In the process some leaders who spoke for labour in the past were sidelined, but a labour intelligentsia was created.

Astley’s story gives us a way of understanding the emergence of Labor as a party of a new type – a party subversive of liberal democracy. Question: what happened to this idea and to Labor as a field for democratic practice in working class politics? That is a story that still needs to be told, as part of the wider history of radical democracy in Australia.

A LIVING TRADITION

Rowan Cahill

At the recent Historical Materialism Australasia Conference (Sydney, July 2015), the keynote address was delivered by Terry Irving and Raewyn Connell. The subject was their seminal book *Class Structure in Australian History* (CSAH), the first edition of which was published by Longman Cheshire in 1980, followed by a second edition in 1992. Whilst in print the book sold at least 12,000 copies, a significant figure at the time for an Australian scholarly book, still a figure to set a publisher’s lips drooling, and in terms of international academic/scholarly publishing, where print runs of 200 copies struggle to sell, a runaway success. As they say in the classics, CSAH ‘walked off the shelves’.

In 1979/80, the book was lucky to make its way into print. At the last minute the publisher apparently had second thoughts and on the negative advice of a reader new to Australia, threatened to pull the plug in the project. Simply the book was eccentric in many respects, too Australian and non-metropole for a start, and in terms of analysis not in accord with the latest scholarly/intellectual happenings and trends in the US in particular. However, the young authors refused to back down and stuck to the original commissioning terms. Hey presto, a best-seller.

Reviewers tended to approach the book as a general history, and found it wanting, problematic: it took class analysis seriously, was thematic rather than an extended narrative, was too much of a mix with its blend of documents, narrative and argument, and it brashly defied traditional discipline boundaries, the text at once historical,

sociological, political. Simply, the young authors were unwelcome challengers to the masterly likes of Ernest Scott, Keith Hancock, R.M. Crawford, and the soon-to-be iconic Manning Clark. However, despite reviewer negativities, CSAH sold.

The book emerged from a period of energised Australian intellectual and social ferment. During the mid-sixties and through the 1970s, Australia changed dramatically and significantly, a period some historians have termed a 'cultural revolution', as the skids were put under the prevailing culture that Donald Horne described as 'racist, anglo-centric-imperialist, puritan, sexist, politically genteel acquiescent, capitalist, bureaucratic and developmentalist'. Granted, in future decades conservative forces would regroup and variously seek, successfully in some respects, to return to that conservative utopia, but that was in the future.

CSAH was not a product of the corporatized 'knowledge' factory that universities have become, where scholars are metaphorically chained to computer screens, generating texts in a desperate 'publish or perish' culture. Rather the Connell/Irving work emerged slowly, in a collective way modern spin-doctors and box-tickers would term 'collegial'. The initial book contract with Longmans was signed in 1971, but the idea for the book emerged in discussions and projects at the Free University, Sydney (1967-1972), a radical experimental self-managed study and research outfit, Connell and Irving being two of the founders. Draft chapters of the future book were circulated for discussion and comment amongst radical scholars during the 1970s, and the project progressed as the result of a series of Class Analysis Conferences during 1975-1977.

So why bother with CSAH in 2015? Well, in some quarters it is regarded as a seminal work, and a bit of internet searching indicates it has been a well cited text, continues to be cited, and arguably fulfils some sort of 'need'. But that is not the point. Rather, the book's existence, its reception, its longevity, point to something intellectual gatekeepers of all kinds either ignore, play-down, and/or dissemble about. There is in the Australian intellectual culture a strong tradition of Marxism and class analysis, going back to the

19th century and continuing today. It is robust, diversified, and exists both inside and outside the academy, something other intellectual traditions often fail to achieve. Its practitioners and exponents are variously academics and non-academics; its outlets and modes of dissemination are variously academic and non-academic. The nature and extent of the tradition is outlined by Rick Kuhn, winner of the 2007 Isaac and Tamara Deutscher Memorial Prize, in his essay 'The History of Class Analysis in Australia' (2005). In a micro/qualitative study, Thomas Barnes and Damien Cahill have demonstrated the extent and diversity of this tradition during the period since the 1970s in their article 'Marxist Class Analysis: A Living Tradition in Australian Scholarship' (*Journal of Australian Political Economy*, Issue 70, 2012).

So yes, there is an Australian Marxist/class analysis scholarly tradition, and CSAH is a significant part of this. While the tradition might not be touted as being obvious or encouraged and/or welcomed by scholarly/academic gatekeepers, it steadfastly streams through Australian intellectual life as surely as an ocean current.

PART 4

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SOME RADICAL
HISTORIANS

WITNESSING AGAINST THE BEAST:
EDWARD THOMPSON

Rowan Cahill

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I read *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* soon after it was published in 1993, following the death that same year of its author, veteran radical historian and anti-nuclear campaigner, E. P. Thompson.

I found the book a source of strength because it dealt with themes and issues I was grappling with as the Greedy 1980s gave way to the corporate banditry and Economic Rationalism of the 1990s, and as post-Cold War intellectuals heaped scorn on anyone who still took socialism and/or Marxism seriously. For me, Thompson's book was a statement of radical affirmation: it was about the passing on of radical faith across generations and centuries; it was about how the no-names of history, those people and outfits not listed amongst history's winners, may, in a sense, be the real winners.

Thompson begins disarmingly. As he explains, *Witness Against the Beast* is his contribution to 'the overfull shelves of studies of William Blake'. Having said that, Thompson explains what the book is not; it is not an introduction to the poet, nor to his work; nor is it an interpretative study 'of his life, his writing, his art, his mythology, his thought'.

Rather it is an attempt to place Blake 'in the intellectual and social life of London between 1780 and 1820' and identify 'what particular traditions were at work in his mind'. In particular Thompson seeks to link Blake to the Christian tradition of antinomianism, specifically the Muggletonian tradition, and to reconstruct his eclectic mode of thought and learning, largely inaccessible now, according to

Thompson, in times where education institutions, hierarchies and orthodoxies shape and define disciplines and intellectual accomplishment.

It is an eccentric book in the best sense of that term, and modestly prefaced with an apology for its existence. Thompson describes his book as a ‘voyage’ and welcomes the reader ‘aboard’; he creates an atmosphere of intimacy, relaxation, adventure, and discovery, ranging easily through a galaxy of styles, at times relaxed, conversational, colloquial, then argumentative and polemical, other times scholarly. Experiencing the book is akin to being the Wedding Guest cornered and enthralled by the Ancient Mariner.

Thompson thinks aloud as he considers the intellectual options and alternatives his material presents; he fantasizes about what he wishes his data could prove, before settling for what it does support. In some ways *Witness Against the Beast* is also a portrait of a historian at work.

Obviously, this Blake book meant a great deal to Thompson. Its roots are in his classic *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963); in 1968 he gave a lecture on Blake at Columbia University organised by Students for a Democratic Society; the book took shape from lectures he delivered at the University of Toronto in 1978. Anti-nuclear campaigning, earning a living, other writing projects, and ill-health contributed to the project going onto the backburner, Thompson finally presenting the manuscript to his publisher not long before his death in 1993; in all, a thirty year ‘voyage’.

Muggletonians are central to Thompson’s study. Originating in the seventeenth century English revolution with the London tailor Ludowick Muggleton, the obscure Protestant sect survived for 300 years, never more than a few hundred members at most. Muggletonians rejected the laws of the Church and the State as oppressive, were fiercely anti-clerical, and opposed tithes, oaths and the bearing of arms; they met in private homes and taverns, singing ‘divine songs’ to the popular and patriotic tunes of the day; they conducted their affairs in secrecy, by correspondence, and often in the form of hand copied literature and tracts.

The sect was thought to have died out in the nineteenth century; their arduously preserved records were available for historical scrutiny until the 1860s, after which they disappeared. Thompson’s patient sleuthing rediscovered them in Kent in 1975, some 80 apple boxes full of records dating from the seventeenth century, in the possession of 70-year-old apple farmer, Philip Noakes, the last Muggletonian, who had saved the records from the German bombing of London in 1940-41. The archive is now in the British Library.

Little is known about William Blake’s intellectual evolution, though there is much conjectural history of ideas. Initially, Thompson hoped to show that Blake was a Muggletonian, since so much of Blake is resonant of Muggletonian conduct, symbolism, debate, attitudes, and processes. However, in spite of his literary and historical sleuthing, and massive archival endeavours, Thompson could only conclude that Blake was deeply influenced by the Muggletonian tradition.

So why did Thompson bother to produce this book? No matter what was intended at the outset of his project, by the time the mature Thompson got around to actually writing his book it had turned into a personal political allegory. ‘I like these Muggletonians’, says Thompson, even though ‘they were not among history’s winners’. Many things about the Muggletonians appeal to him: their tenacity, and survival; their contribution to the late seventeenth/eighteenth century vortex of ideas which was disproportionate to their actual numbers; their confident intellectualising ‘from below’ without reference to official education and religious hierarchies; their preparedness to tackle the great issues of Good and Evil and wrestle with the antagonisms between the Law of Moses and the Gospel of Jesus; their cantankerousness; their resistance to the State; their mode of operation; the richness and complexity of their symbolism which enabled them to conceptualise and debate all aspects of the human condition; and so on. Most of all Thompson seems to like them for the way they ‘struggled to define their own sense of system’.

Thompson admires William Blake. The poet never submitted to the State. And when radical compatriots turned to conservatism and Toryism in despair, as they recoiled from the shambles the French Revolution became, Blake remained a lifelong radical. According to Thompson this constancy drew strength from Blake's belief system, at the core of which was the affirmation of Thou Shalt Love and Thou Shalt Forgive, and with this the ability to live with 'constellations of related attitudes and images' and connected insights rather than a coherent intellectual system. Further, Blake understood that human nature is not finally perfectible, and that reason alone is not all there is to life; that there is a 'kingdom within' each one of us that needs to be touched and liberated. In the Thompson analysis Blake can provide us with 'a plank in the floor upon which the future must walk'.

With 'the plank' reference to Blake the allegorical nature of the book is apparent. *Witness Against the Beast* is Edward Thompson's message to the future. There is hope for dissenters, and a point to dissent, in the post-modern world, in spite of the end of ideology and the apparent global dominance of market materialism. In other times, in other uphill struggles against triumphant materialism backed by a ruthless state, the Muggletonians, and Blake, remained rebellious and dissenting on task, keeping alive alternatives, other expectations, and the possibility for human renewal.

More than a study of a Protestant sect and William Blake, *Witness Against the Beast* is about maintaining radical perspectives and faith when the pressure is on to variously recant, compromise, give up, opt out. It is also about the nature of the sort of radical intellect and faith that survives. Biographically it can be seen as the final personal summative statement by a major radical intellectual, about being a radical intellectual.

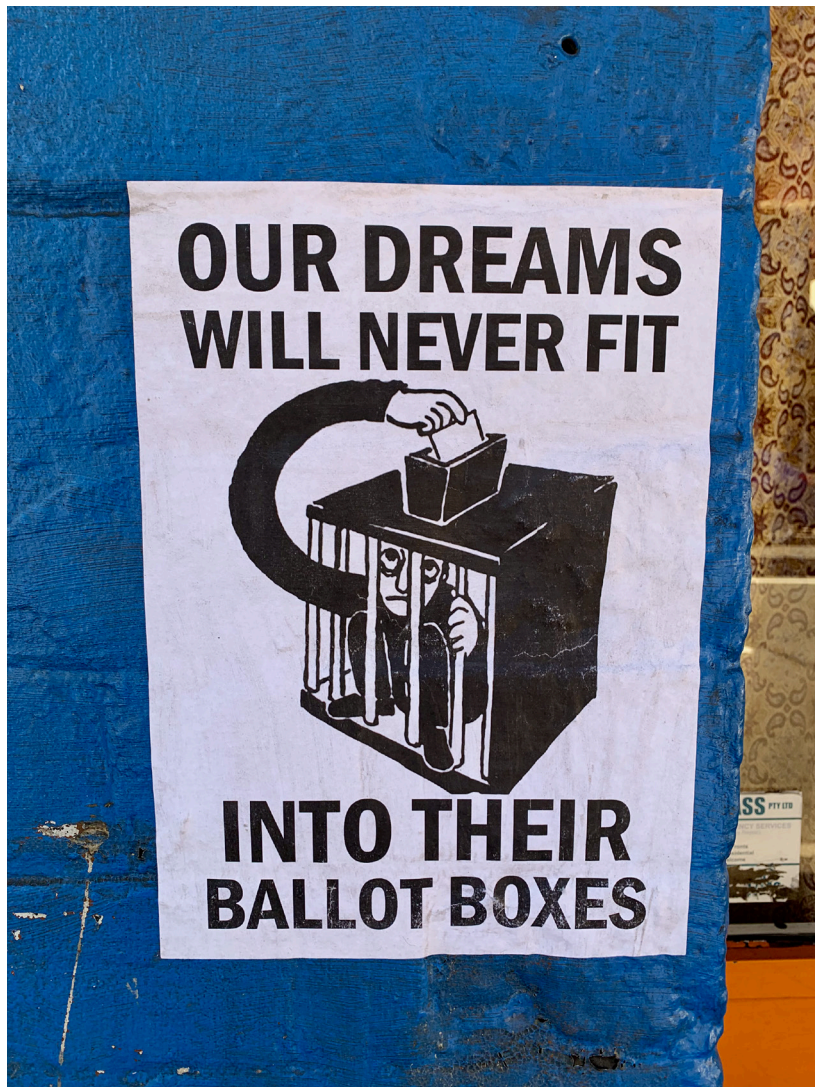
In a couple of senses *Witness Against the Beast* brought Thompson full circle: the son of tough liberal, religious non-conformists (his parents had been Methodist missionaries in India, his father a critic of British imperialism) rounded his life with a book about religious and political non-conformity; the academic who cut his teeth on a

major study of William Morris (1955), concluded his career with a study of another radical and original literary figure.

For those of us who think of ourselves as socialists, and if we are serious about taking our great visionary, humane, and combative tradition into the twenty-first century, *Witness Against the Beast* is worth reading; a book to be reflected upon rather than filleted for footnotes.

COMMONS AND OUTLAWS:
PETER LINEBAUGH AND
MARCUS REDIKER

Rowan Cahill



Two historians: Peter Linebaugh, and Marcus Rediker. Together they gave us *The Many-Headed Hydra* (2000), a robust, at times poetic, scholarly history of the origins of radical thinking in the eighteenth century that eventually led to the American Revolution, the Declaration of the Rights of Man, and the Age of Revolution on both sides of the Atlantic.

In this account, the radical impetus and the ideas that spun the web of dissent and revolt during the period did not solely originate in the coffee houses and libraries and salons of the wealthy and the well-to-do and their circles, not from the lawyers, politicians, reformers, rebel colonial statesmen, intellectuals, the mainstay of traditional accounts of the period and era. Instead the egalitarian and revolutionary impetus came out of the taverns, the waterfronts, off the heaving decks of ships, out of the island refuges of pirates and escapees from slavery, courtesy of the outcasts of the Atlantic world and the Americas, the seamen, pirates, rebel slaves, indentured workers, and maritime workers of all kinds. In this account, the sea, ships, and seamen, the necessary components in the accumulation of capital in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, were the disseminating agencies. Overall, a brilliant tour de force.

Linebaugh and Rediker deployed a vast, diverse and rich tapestry of sources in the weaving of their history, and rounded it off with a marvellously radical and refreshing discussion of the poet William

Blake (1757-1827), tapping his poem *The Tyger* and letting its revolutionary sentiment flow. As Linebaugh recently commented regarding the anti-capitalist resistance, ‘our movement needs poetry’.

Two new books by these authors draw my attention. First up Linebaugh’s *Stop, Thief! The Commons, Enclosures and Resistance* (2014), since this made it onto the shelves first. *Stop, Thief!* is a collection of mostly previously published essays on the idea of ‘commons’, the subjects eclectically ranging through the U.K. and the U.S.A., from Karl Marx, to the poet Shelley, to William Morris, to E. P. Thompson, to Thomas Paine, the Levellers, the Luddites, through to the modern Occupy Wall Street Movement...and the ways in which the enclosure process has been variously resisted over time.

Eclecticism is to be expected in Linebaugh; so too Rediker. It was a feature of the sources in their *Hydra* study. ‘Eclecticism’ in their case should be qualified by use of ‘informed’ and ‘learned’, for their respective familiarity with, and understanding of, their sources and subjects are deep and expert.

Traditionally, ‘the commons’ and their destruction by enclosure refers to a time and a specific Western European historical process from the twelfth century through to the nineteenth century, related to traditional common lands. In Linebaugh’s treatment it is this, in Britain and in America, but it is also more. The author conceptualises the destruction of ‘commons’ as ‘a universality of expropriation’ that transcends time and space, continuing today in processes like the privatisation of utilities, diminishing public spaces, to the ways life itself is being commodified and manipulated by racism, militarism, and consumerism.

Linebaugh’s essay collection is not only an historian’s reading of history but it is intended also as a spiritual uplifting for modern dissidents and activists, a writing of history that liberates and encourages radical possibilities, the ‘resistance’ in his title not only referring to the subject matter of his text, but to the present and to the future. For Linebaugh, we are ‘losing the ground of our subsistence

to the privileged and the mighty. With the theft of our pensions, houses, universities, and land, people all over the world cry, Stop Thief! and start to think about the commons and act in its name’. This acting, be it *protecting* or *imagining and creating* ‘commons’, is termed ‘commoning’ by Linebaugh. This historical vision, intent, and inspiration might be said to be at the core of radical history.

Rediker’s new book is *Outlaws of the Atlantic: Sailors, Pirates, and Motley Crews in the Age of Sail* (2014). Its aim is to challenge what Rediker terms *terracentric* history, in which the land and land-bound people and their institutions are the makers and shapers of history, the sea is regarded as an empty place, and ships and mariners are essentially dismissible presences of little consequence.

Rediker regards seamen as global vectors of communication, and sets out to restore to history the unacknowledged contributions and agency of a multiethnic (‘motley’) mix of seamen, indentured servants, slaves, pirates, and other outlaws of their time, from the ships and waterfronts of the Atlantic and Caribbean during the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries. He shows they were variously affected by ‘the lofty histories of philosophy, political thought, drama, poetry, and literature’, helping ‘inaugurate a broader age of revolution throughout the world’. In Rediker’s telling, this motley crew profoundly contributed to the shaping of the American Revolution and to the abolition of slavery.

As with Linebaugh’s *Stop, Thief!*, Rediker’s account is distinguished by the accessibility of the language, and an enjoyable narrative/discussion. Both authors, in the books discussed, model scholarship that is meant to be read and understood by more than niche audiences, and also model scholarly writing that is authoritative and convincing, free from the suffocating shackles and swaddling of obscure/confusing terminologies, and free from theoretical perambulations that often choke the meaning and intent of scholarly writing. Again, aspects of the art of writing radical history.

Rediker has been writing the histories of rebels and outlaws for all of his career as a historian, and readers who have followed

his work will be familiar with aspects of his new book. But this is possibly the most forthright and political of his works, the author making the case that his *Atlantic Outlaws* have much to offer us in our era of capitalist globalisation. The outlaws of Rediker's *Atlantic* are rebels, and criminalised, in the context of the emergence of modern capitalism, key factors in which were ships, exploited and disposable maritime labour, and slavery.

The import of Rediker's study is that the rebellions and protests and alternative social structures and alternative cultures that these outlaws variously engaged in, conceived, created, dreamed: well, they mattered. In short, the outlaws had agency. And it is this affirmation by Rediker, that their rebellions mattered, and matter, that they had impacts on the cause and course of egalitarianism and social justice, that is the radical message. If Rediker is right, then rebellion and protest by ordinary people in today's world against the injustices, austerities, and rapacious greed of the 1% that is part and parcel of the globalised capitalist juggernaut of today, are not without point. According to Rediker's reading of outlaw history, the dispossessed and the marginal can have agency, indeed, mightily so.

A SHELF OF REDS: NEGLECTED AUSTRALIAN HISTORIANS

Rowan Cahill and Terry Irving

These are some of the books by Australian radical historians that have meant a lot to us as scholars and activists writing and exploring radical history for ten years together, and for much longer separately. We have selected books that either never made it into the academic history canon or, if they did, are now neglected. In the neo-liberal university, the production model of research and post-modern theoreticism have deadened the feeling that drove the authors in our selection – the sense of agency and engagement, of being able to make socially useful knowledge in a creative and passionate way. It is hard for scholars on a treadmill, their heads full of buzzwords, to recognise the value of the kind of books we have chosen; hence the neglect.

The books in our selection share some or all of six features that have drawn us to radical history. First, a tradition: over 80 years of radical historical writing, from the 1930s to the present. Second, a bottom-up method: a history of the common people, and the historical dynamic of struggle in movement. Third, a connection with social movements: of writing within movements, of publishing by movements, and of addressing movements. Fourth, a breaking of new ground, as in pioneering studies of events, themes and movements disdained by the ruling historical culture and the leading academic history professionals. Fifth, a battle waged by the authors against indifference on the part of commercial publishers,

political parties and leading historians. Sixth, and most importantly, an approach to writing that inspires us to think and act: the authors are partisan and passionate, moved by feelings as well as ideas.

This is our personal selection, deliberately focused on earlier writings so as to establish the existence of a tradition. Others will no doubt have different favourites. That said, it should be understood there are many present-day intellectuals in Australia carrying on the radical history tradition, and we follow their work closely. We have in mind people such as Paul Adams, Mick Armstrong, Janis Bailey, Sandra Bloodworth, Rob Bollard, Bob Boughton, Tom Bramble, Meredith Burgmann, Verity Burgmann, Drew Cottle, Phillip Deery, Raymond Evans, Carole Ferrier, Di Fieldes, Gary Foley, Hannah Forsyth, Heather Goodall, Sarah Gregson, Phil Griffiths, Ross Gwyther, Elizabeth Humphrys, Deborah Jordan, Di Kelly, Julie Kimber, Rick Kuhn, Peter Love, Lenore Layman, Bobbie Oliver, Greg Mallory, Humphrey McQueen, Lisa Milner, Andrew Moore, Tony Moore, Tom O'Lincoln, John Rainford, Jeff Rickert, Liz Ross, Sean Scalmer, Carmel Shute, Judith Smart, Jeff Sparrow, Beverley Symons, Nathan Wise.

We offer this selection as a sign of our respect for intellectuals continuing the tradition of radical history in this country, and in the hope that others will follow their example.

★ ★ ★

Keith Amos, *The New Guard Movement 1931-1935*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1976. This small book (142 pages) was ground breaking, published at a time when the NSW New Guard tended to be regarded as an eccentric, aberrant and isolated rightist response to the Labor government of NSW Premier J. T. Lang in the 1930s. In the hands of Amos however, the New Guard emerged as a highly organised, well financed, and serious fascist organisation, one of a number of right-wing, secret 'armies' that developed between the wars in Australia. The book was well researched drawing on a wide range of materials including official sources, private papers, and interviews. Amos was a public-school

teacher at the time of his book's publication, and he opened the way for subsequent sustained studies of rightist secret 'armies' in Australia between the wars, notably Michael Cathcart, *Defending the National Tuckshop* (McPhee Gribble, Fitzroy, 1988), and Andrew Moore, *The Secret Army and the Premier* (New South Wales University Press, Kensington, 1989). Collectively, these historians established the existence of a plethora of secret rightist paramilitary political formations between the wars, anti-democratic and fascist in character, with connections to serving military personnel, and with membership, organisational and financial links to the highest echelons of the Australian ruling class, and with a collective, often overlapping male membership of some 130,000 members at a time when the male population of Australia stood at two million.

Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee (editors), *A Most Valuable Acquisition: A People's History of Australia since 1788*, McPhee Gribble/Penguin, Melbourne, 1988; Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee (editors), *Constructing a Culture: A People's History of Australia since 1788*, McPhee Gribble/Penguin, Melbourne, 1988; Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee (editors), *Making a Life: A People's History of Australia since 1788*, McPhee Gribble/Penguin, Melbourne, 1988; Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee (editors), *Staining the Wattle: A People's History of Australia since 1788*, McPhee Gribble/Penguin, Melbourne, 1988. Edited by academic Verity Burgmann and archivist/literary editor Jenny Lee, this illustrated four-volume People's History was conceived and published as a critical challenge to the multi-million-dollar carnival of celebratory histories and dress-up nationalist re-enactments which marked the 1988 Centenary celebration of the European invasion of Australia. Beginning in 1983 with themed volumes in mind, the editors assembled a large team of specialist contributors, academic and non-academic. The brief was to produce essays on society and culture, with attention to issues of class, race, gender, and sexuality, and to be authoritative, concise, accessible. It was a long, often painful, collaborative creative process.

The editors explained their series aimed at recapturing and bringing into history the voices and experiences of those neglected

in conventional histories: ‘Aboriginal people, women, members of ethnic or racial minorities and the working class in general’. The intent was to present readers with ideas and new ways ‘of exploring the past, comprehending the present, and making the future’. Contributor Andrew Milner, in an essay on the history of Australian radical intellectuals inside and outside the academy, argued that academic intellectuals who confine themselves to addressing social justice issues amongst niche audiences of fellow academics in the belief they were tending ‘the tree of liberty’, were delusional and in reality did not change anything; radical intellectual activity had to be part of social movements and the masses. He presciently anticipated the fate of academic intellectuals and their emasculation by the contemporary neoliberal university.

Drew Cottle, *The Brisbane Line: A Reappraisal*, Upfront Publishing, Leicestershire, 2002. Cottle’s book, based on his doctoral thesis (Macquarie University, 1991), encountered difficulties securing publication via traditional scholarly outlets, hence the less orthodox mode via Upfront. Consequently, the book did not receive the promotion and distribution provided by a regular publisher and was generally cold-shouldered by academia. Cottle’s focus was the belief held by some journalists, politicians and elements of the Australian intelligence community during the 1930s and 1940s, that in the event of the invasion of Australia by Japan, collaborators would emerge to help administer the nation in the interests of Japan, and that these would come from the elites of Australian industry, business, conservative politics, and the intelligentsia. Essentially Cottle chases a phantom, a ‘what if’ scenario, and, ultimately, he comes up empty handed. But in hunting this phantom, he engages in a robust examination of Australian capitalism, politics and culture between the wars. Drawing on a huge body of secondary sources, and immersing himself in the shadow worlds of Australian security and intelligence files across numerous agencies, Cottle interviewed key players, trawled through private papers and consular records, along with the records of business and private organisations. His documentation and interrogation of sources is exhaustive and forensic, and in ferreting sources Cottle acted at times as a detective.

The result is a political and economic tour de force, one that casts light on some dark places in the Australian national soul, and rattles skeletons in the closet of its ruling class.

R.N. Ebbels, *The Australian Labor Movement 1850-1907 – Extracts from contemporary documents*, Sydney, Noel Ebbels Memorial Committee in Association with Australasian Book Society, Sydney, 1960. Noel Ebbels became a legend to left-wing students and intellectuals after his death in 1952, thrown from the back of a semi-trailer while hitch-hiking between Sydney and Melbourne as the student organizer for the Communist party. Manning Clark, in a memoir written for this book, remembers his great personal charm and the way charity and compassion enriched his communist beliefs. The documents published here – supplemented by others contributed by a group of well-known radical scholars – were a product of his studies in history at Melbourne University for which he received a first-class honours degree. Their significance lies in the way they illustrated the current left-wing myth about the Australian working class’s history – at least in the period they cover – a myth that equated political maturity with socialist consciousness. So, on that score the book is an historical curiosity. But the documents are preceded by a long introduction written by Lloyd Churchward that does something different. He places the working class in its capitalist setting, making one of the first structural analyses of class relations in this period. And a particular point he makes is worth contemplating in the light of the way liberal historians dismiss all scholarly work of this kind as ‘radical nationalist’. Churchward points out that Labor’s twentieth century nationalism was focused on state-building whereas the earlier nationalism of the labour movement in the 1880s and 90s was ‘a democratically based nationalism’, focusing on building a working-class movement. In fact, Churchward was prefiguring a radical critique of the nationalist strain in labour history.

Raymond Evans, *The Red Flag Riots – A Study of Intolerance*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland, 1988. This was the first book-length study to confront the ‘popular and professional complacency’ about violence in Australian history.

The professionals Ray Evans had in mind were the historians of the generation that wrote and taught in ‘the second long boom’, a period when conservatives tried to bemuse us with ideas of people’s capitalism, class harmony and upward mobility. These historians taught us to turn our eyes away from violence; there was even a general text about Australia called *The Quiet Continent*. Evans was from the succeeding generation of historians whose world-view was framed by conflict. In their work, the role of violence in class and race relations came into focus. But there was often something missing from their studies, a description, or better still an analysis as well as a description, of a ruling class at work. Ray Evans’s book on the extraordinary events of 1919 in Brisbane made up for that absence. He directs our attention not just to the horror of the pogrom against Brisbane’s Russians and to the vindictive harassment of industrial militants but more importantly to the mobilization of intolerance and repression, the range of establishment forces involved, the conspiratorial process needed to direct them, and the sinister connection between wealthy men and state personnel, including elements from the Labor government. In his introduction Evans explains how he was drawn to write ‘people’s history’, and his book does capture the words and experiences of workers and agitators, but it does much more. It shows a ruling class in action, using right-wing vigilantes and pliant state authorities to defend its interests.

Raymond Evans, Kay Saunders, and Kathryn Cronin, *Exclusion, Exploitation and Extermination: Race Relations in Colonial Queensland*, Australia and New Zealand Book Co., Sydney, 1975. Later republished by the University of Queensland Press with the title inverted, this book comprised a series of linked thematic essays examining the multi-faceted often violent and bloody history of race relations and racism in colonial Queensland with respect to Aboriginals, Melanesians, and Chinese. For the authors, racist legacies of this colonial past were ongoing in the Queensland of their day. While subjecting Queensland to forensic scrutiny, the authors understood that that racism was part of a wider Australian past and present. Blending history and sociology, this was the first Australian

book to attempt the comprehensive analysis/discussion of Anglo-Australian racism as it applied to targeted minorities. It blazed a trail, and evolved out of the authors’ various involvements during the 1960s and 1970s with issues of class, feminism, human rights, and in the anti-Viet Nam war movement and the anti-apartheid campaign against the 1971 Springbok Rugby Tour of Australia.

It was a passionate, committed book, addressing a hidden, forgotten, ignored and denied traumatic past. The authors looked forward to a future in which the legacies of this past were addressed, and society was moving on to a humane social justice-based future. Around them they saw hopeful signs that Australia was moving forward in this direction. Their book was conceived to help kick the ball along. Their research was deep, their footnoting comprehensive. Critics picked up on the latter and wrongly accused the authors of cobbling three doctoral theses together. However, at the time none of the authors had doctorates. But even if correct, that misunderstood the book’s purpose and intent. The footnotes documented the existence of a hugely traumatic past, generously pointed future researchers to sources, and martialled evidence; in many ways the book was not only history, but also the past on trial.

Young scholars when they wrote, the authors received little institutional support. They were warned off the project by academic colleagues, and variously faced hostility and apathy. Openly committed scholarship was not the name of the game. Once the book was published, some bookshops refused to sell it. Despite all this, the book went through three editions (1975, 1988, 1993), each with a new Preface discussing related issues and updating historiographical and research developments between editions. As for the authors, two subsequently built academic careers, and one became a human rights lawyer.

Eric Fry (editor), *Rebels & Radicals*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1983. Editor Eric Fry was a labour history pioneer in Australia, and in this book he endeavoured to break away from the genre he had helped create, which at the time had tended to become focused on the Labor party and the trade union movement to the exclusion of

broader and more inclusive radical/social historical approaches. Moreover, in terms of labour biography, a canon of characters had emerged, again, primarily personalities associated with the Labor party and the trade union movement. But as Fry argued in 1983, the past and the present involve contradictory and conflicting social and historical forces; rebels and radicals are indispensable agents, helping shape the future by opposing and restricting society's rulers, paving the way for social change, opening doors for reformers, and giving birth to what at the time might appear as 'unthinkable'. In the process of this contestation, radical and rebels not only empower themselves, but also others. Fry cast his net widely, and in twelve biographical essays his contributors wrote of a range of Australian radicals, crossing class, race, and gender divides, lives that had previously existed in historical records in fragmentary ways, their radicalism variously played down, and their contributions denied acknowledgement as credible critics of society in Australian historical canons, mainstream and otherwise.

Hall Greenland, *Red Hot: The Life & Times of Nick Origlass*, Wellington Lane Press, Neutral Bay, 1998. This book began as a post-graduate project in the early 1970s, before Greenland's possible future as an academic was stymied by vengeful authorities for his radical critiques and campus activities in pursuit of the democratisation of university structures and processes at Sydney University. Ever the activist, Greenland subsequently chalked up a lengthy record in local social and environmental issues in Sydney, was a pioneer in the development of Green politics in NSW, and became a journalist in alternative media, picking up a coveted Walkley Award along the way. Trotskyist Nick Origlass (1908-1996) was one of Greenland's mentors in the 1960s/70s. This book is the study of a cantankerous self-educated intellectual, trade unionist, and local politician, who came to understand that global issues could be fought locally, and that the local could be global. It is a radical spatial study of a small area of Sydney (Balmain), its politics, culture, and radical traditions, and of a minor yet important Sydney intellectual/political tradition, Trotskyism, seldom discussed outside of the literature of left internecine warfare. Empathetic, critical, scholarly,

enjoyably readable, *Red Hot* also demonstrates that communities can organise, resist, challenge, and defeat powerful interests and forces, and decisions, often corrupt, made at their expense.

Joe Harris, *The Bitter Fight – A Pictorial History of the Australian Labor Movement*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Qld, 1970. Joe Harris was a Queensland building worker and rank and file union activist who wanted to do something about the ignorance of labour history among his fellow workers. He took his collection of Queensland labour movement ephemera to a sympathetic publisher who urged him to extend it to the rest of the country. It appeared during a period of rising popular struggles, so when its 'stridently partisan tone' was attacked he responded: 'I am a militant socialist, an industrial worker with first-hand experience of strikes, stoppages, and victimization. With such a background it is difficult to be "objective" about the events that shaped the labor movement, or to see much merit in the arguments of those on the opposite side of the industrial picture'. Hence the book's title. It's a big book, with nearly five hundred illustrations, tied together by Harris's pithy commentary. The photographs, cartoons, leaflets and extracts from the newspapers are beautifully reproduced. Jim Cairns, hero of left labour and the anti-war movement, wrote the foreword – too idiosyncratic to be helpful – but reading it won't detract from the experience of being immersed in a powerful story of successful and unsuccessful struggles, of forgotten events such as the Administrator of the Northern Territory being deported from Darwin by the workers' movement, and of eccentric characters like the future Soviet commissar, Artem, who won the metal shovelling championship while working on the Warwick railway line. Of course, there are portraits of the officials and politicians but the lasting impression that the book leaves is of a vibrant labour movement culture, produced by artists, writers and educators – labour intellectuals in short, like Joe Harris himself.

Audrey Johnson, *Bread and Roses – A personal history of three militant women and their friends, 1902-1988*, Left Book Club, Sydney, 1990. Before second wave feminism, the left was as sexist and male dominated as the rest of Australian society, and feminist

historians in the 1970s were right to point this out. They also contributed to exposing the androcentric bias of class analysis. By 1978, the left was moving to embrace feminism. In that year 2000 women attended the first Women and Labour conference, the papers later collected as *Women, Class and History – Feminist Perspectives on Australia 1788-1978* (edited by Elizabeth Windschuttle, Fontana, 1980). But socialist and communist women, seen through the lens of gendered oppression in the academic feminist studies, often lost their agency as working-class militants. Audrey Johnson's book lovingly restored that agency. Her book is a collective biography of Mary Lamm (Wright), Topsy Small, and Flo Davis (Cluff), and a dozen or so of their friends, based on interviews and documents of the time. It follows their lives of continuous political activism from the late 1920s to the late 1980s, in party and union struggles, as rank and file activists and officials, as orators and writers. As the title says, this is a personal history, letting us hear the voices of Mary, Topsy and Flo, but also the author's voice as she sets the scene and explains the significance of campaigns with the same commitment to socialism as her three militants. In their eighties they were still fighting for pensions, women's rights and a nuclear free Pacific. Audrey herself was from a working-class family. After she won a scholarship to Sydney University, where she was a member of the Labour Club and the Communist Party, she became a social worker and administrator. We met her in the first New Left in the 1960s. As well as this book, Audrey Johnson wrote a biography of left-wing Senator, Bill Morrow, *Fly a Rebel Flag*.

Rupert Lockwood, *Black Armada*, Australasian Book Society, South Sydney, 1975. Publication of this book was rejected during the 1960s by the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) in which Lockwood was prominent as journalist, editor, orator, pamphleteer, and intellectual (1939-1969). It was eventually published following the encouragement and support of Indonesia scholars Rex Mortimer and Benedict Anderson. Reprinted twice, it was also translated and published in Indonesia (1983). Drawing on insider knowledge, personal involvement, original research, interviews, and correspondence, Lockwood detailed the lengthy boycott

(1945-1949) by Australian trade unions, particularly the maritime unions, of Dutch shipping in Australian waters which contributed to the formation of the Indonesian Republic. Thoroughly footnoted, Lockwood's account was a transnational study and explored aspects of White Australia before these became Australian academic industries. It was also written as a demonstration, and assertion, of the possibilities of trade unions engaging in social and political activities beyond the purview of wages and conditions.

Lloyd Ross, *William Lane and the Australian Labor Movement*, Lloyd Ross, 313 Cleveland Street, Redfern, 1935. This is an unusual book in the library of Australian radicalism. It is both a seminal study of Labor's betrayal of socialism and also an account of what was betrayed, a movement cemented not by personal ambition and collective opportunism but by idealism and feelings, especially love, intimacy and kinship. These were the feelings that Lane inspired and which he drew on for his vision of communism. Lloyd Ross was moved by those feelings too. He wrote the book as a socialist activist on many fronts: cultural, educational, political as well as industrial, for he was the secretary of the New South Wales branch of the Australian Railways Union when it appeared. In fact, he self-published it, using his own funds and the offices of the union in Redfern (Sydney), because no commercial publisher would touch it. And no wonder. He called its first chapter on the 1890s, 'Poets and Revolutionaries', because he wanted his readers to understand two things: that Lane's power was that of a poet, in a time 'when a poet could be a leader', and that 'only when Labor recovers its own idealism will it be able to do justice to Lane.' Since then Labor has been deserted by both poets and revolutionaries; labour history has lost its radical bite; and the book itself has been forgotten. It was almost lost. In the thirties, without the promotion of a commercial publisher, sales were slow. Unbound pages, gathering dust at the back of a Communist bookshop, were seized on the night the Menzies government banned the Communist Party in 1940. Then in the late seventies radical author and publisher, Michael Wilding, discovered that Lloyd Ross had retrieved and stored the unbound pages. Ross gladly released them and radical publishers, Hale and

Iremonger, bound them, with a loose cover for which Ross wrote a few paragraphs confirming that fifty years later he still stood by the book's conclusions about Lane and the labour movement. As we do.

Malcolm Saunders and Ralph Summy, *The Australian Peace Movement: A Short History*, Peace Research Centre Australian National University, Canberra, 1986. This small book (78pp) is still the only one on the topic in the field, and that field (Peace Studies) not exactly an Australian growth industry currently or ever. It is a pauper concern in a national culture that bankrolls pro-military academic studies and war commemoration with multi-millions of dollars, and publishers who generate a tsunami of military themed publications. Saunders and Summy were pioneer scholars in Peace Studies, and this book is simply what it says it is, the authors comprehensively describing a tradition of peace activism reaching back to short lived and limited protests against Australian colonial support for the British in the Sudan in the late 1880s, but not becoming established and creating continuities until the Boer War of 1899-1902. We have both used this book over the years in our various works, and regard it as an important publication despite its brevity and size, simply because it does exist in a world where mainstream history tends to ignore the subject or treat it as an irrelevancy. When 'peace' and 'anti-war' sentiment has to be discussed, as in the 1960s/70s and the Vietnam War, 'anti-war' activism is treated as being specific to a time, in many ways derivative and imported, and not part of a counter, at times radical, Australian tradition with a long history.

R.D. (Bob) Walshe, *1854 The Eureka Stockade 1954*, Current Book Distributors, Sydney, 1954; and *Australia's Fight for Independence and Parliamentary Democracy*, Current Book Distributors, Sydney, 1956. Bob Walshe, although a former student of history at Sydney University, drew on the anti-imperial tradition that had developed within the labour movement when writing these booklets. He read the books and articles of movement intellectuals who wrote history in and for the movement, people such as Gordon Childe, Brian Fitzpatrick, Bert Evatt, Sam Rosa, Bob Ross, Lloyd Ross and Jim Rawling.

In the first of these booklets Walshe quoted Evatt: 'Australian

Democracy Was Born at Eureka', and taken together his booklets provided the first attempt by a radical historian to justify this statement. He insisted that Australia gained from a world-wide struggle for freedom and that within Australia the colonists struggled to make parliamentary government democratic and to win complete self-government. Thus, these booklets laid down the foundations for the radical study of democracy in Australia, the common thread being the idea of popular struggle. At that time the new profession of academic history paid little attention to Australia, dissolving our history into that of Britain. The development of government organisations in the nineteenth century colonies was called 'the coming of self-government', as if it were a natural process. There was little interest in seeing the process as a contest between the colonies and Britain, and even less on seeing it as contested within Australia.

Much later, Walshe became a publisher and prolific author and editor of books on history and education. His school textbook *The Student's Guide to World History*, in print from 1963-1980 (three revised editions), introduced generations of Australian students to the subject, encouraging a self-directed approach to the subject and its methods. His original 1950s research on Eureka continues to be cited.

In Chapter 21, Rowan presents in more detail his research into Bob Walshe's life.

A MATERIALIST HISTORY OF THE SILVERTOWN STRIKE: JOHN TULLY

Terry Irving



John Tully writes in the Preface to his new book, *Silvertown – The Lost Story of a Strike that Shook London and Helped Launch the Modern Labour Movement*, that ‘Conservatives have attacked some of my previous work as being partisan, and this book should upset them again.’ Radical historians, however, will welcome it for precisely that reason. And learn from it, because this is a way of writing labour history – or any history – that academic historians usually run a mile from. Radical historians know that it is impossible to be non-partisan. As Tully explains, ‘Historians must always be scrupulous with the facts, but we should be deeply suspicious of claims that studies of human society can be ‘value free’.’

More than a century of industrialisation preceded the Silvertown strike in 1889. To illustrate his position on partisanship, Tully reminds us of the historical debates about the social impacts of industrialisation: ‘Historians have established that the Victorian era was a time of endless pain for the British working class. ... Incredibly, there are some today who deny the undeniable, just as there were many at the time who ignored the conditions that created their wealth.’

So, this is what he is saying: there was a class struggle then and there is a class struggle now. The historian writing about ‘then’ has to be partisan ‘now’, if she wants to be scrupulous with the facts (about that pain and the struggle waged against its causes); the

partisan historian writing ‘now’ commits to continuing that struggle by bringing the past into the present. Tully refuses to apologise for having written back into history the labourers of Silvertown.

John Tully also deliberately sets out to make his book ‘as accessible to a wide readership as possible’, and this may be as upsetting to conservatives as his approach to his subject. In an interview on the *Monthly Review Press* website, he explains:

I guess that stems from my agreement with Marx in his ‘Theses on Feuerbach’ that ‘philosophers have hitherto interpreted history, the point, however, is to change it’. For an academic like myself, ideas are intrinsically interesting things, but as a socialist academic, I hope that my writing can help change the world.

Changing the world: that is the key to why John Tully writes materialist history. Materialists are routinely accused of being old fashioned by fellow academics. This accusation was directed at me recently. We are charged with being ignorant of the latest epistemological thinking that has supposedly made historical materialism obsolete, and we are treated with disdain for not engaging with the latest idealist ways of doing history.

You can always tell an idealist historian by this test: their analyses of ideas, representations, individual lives or even movements are never connected to analyses of social power. In effect, what is going on when idealist historians make this charge is a move to sidestep the issue of socially organised power as an irreducible element in any historical situation, and hence the issue of historians taking sides in the ideological battles arising from the relationships of power in their situation. John Tully, socialist, historian, political scientist and novelist, a rigger in his youth, knows a thing or two about class power, and what he knows frames everything in this book.

This is a brilliant book about a strike that, although lost, was part of a struggle that ensured that class and socialism would be central to the British labour movement. He tells the story at a cracking pace

and seductive changes of voice. He reveals the sources discovered during his meticulous research. But most importantly, he takes the trouble to justify his partisan position and choice of method.

The book begins by recreating the day in 1889 when the yardmen at Silver’s India-Rubber, Gutta-Percha and Telegraph works submitted a written petition to management for a pay rise. He imagines them emboldened by the long struggle of 16,000 workers in the neighbouring Royal Docks for ‘the dockers’ tanner’, and by the earlier victories of the ‘little match girls’ at Bryant and May’s and the gas workers at Beckton. A New Unionism for the labouring masses was emerging, and they hoped to be part of it. Soon 3,000 workers at Silver’s, desperate for better conditions and higher wages, would join the struggle, led by Will Thorne’s newly formed socialist union of gas workers and general labourers. Thorne was an emerging leader of the labour movement, as were Tom Mann and Eleanor Marx, who joined the agitation at Silver’s, the latter forming a women’s branch of the union, but the strike committee of workers led the struggle. What they did and how they were defeated after twelve bitter weeks is the story that John Tully goes on to tell.

It is a story of the uses of social power in a variety of settings. He describes the firm and its place in the political economy of Britain’s imperial system. It was at the cutting edge of the telegraphic and electrical revolutions and thus enormously profitable. He contrasts the obscene wealth of the firm’s owners and the appalling living conditions of its workers, whose infants died at a faster rate than children in the most oppressed countries today. Then we reach the moment of hope: the strike begins just as the dockers win their demand for sixpence an hour. We learn what impelled the men, women and children at Silver’s to strike: the harsh work rules and punishments, the unhealthy work, the starvation wages. Some workers, the fitters and turners who maintained the machinery, received better treatment, and because their union, the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, dominated by ‘labour aristocrats’, refused to instruct their members to join the strike, production at Silver’s continued. So, class betrayal corroded the struggle. But what ultimately doomed it was the ruling class’s determination to stop the advance of the New Unionism. The

company used its connections with the government and the press, and worked out a repertoire of oppression that employers, judges, press barons and police would deploy time and again over the next decade, ‘the Silvertown formula’: refuse to recognise unions; refuse to negotiate or accept arbitrators; recruit scabs en masse and billet them on site; intimidate strikers with police and soldiers, take the strikers to court, and use the Silvertown press to depict the strikers as thugs depriving ‘free labourers’ of the right to work.

Hitler’s bombs and Thatcher’s de-industrialisation destroyed Silvertown, the grim East End suburb on the Thames where these brave people lived and worked, but their struggle ‘helped build a movement that recast the face of Britain’. And there are lessons to be learnt. Tully writes: ‘Those who today resist what is in effect the declaration of class war by a feral ruling class may find inspiration in the story of these forgotten labourers over 120 years ago’.

John Tully tells their story with passion and purpose, which is how labour history ought to be written. Sometimes he imagines the mood of the people, sometimes he describes the setting and explains ideas, and sometimes – quite properly but somewhat unusually – he justifies his own partisan position and choice of the historical materialist method.

BEYOND LUMINARIES: THOMPSON, LINDSAY AND CHILDE

Terry Irving

As I was reviewing a new book of E.P. Thompson’s essays, edited by Cal Winslow, I remembered reading about a small, invitation-only meeting in London in 1945 to hear a paper by Jack Lindsay. The memory was triggered by the similarity of ideas put forward by Thompson in 1957 with those in Lindsay’s account of what he said at that meeting.

Jack Lindsay was an expatriate Australian, as was Gordon Childe. They had met in Brisbane’s socialist circles in 1919, but they were not in touch with each other again until 1945. By this time, they were Marxists, and Lindsay had joined the British Communist Party. Childe – whose *What Happened in History*, 1942, was a best-seller for Penguin Books – was about to take up his appointment as Director of the London Institute of Archaeology. Lindsay – a well-known writer and publisher – was devoting himself to strengthening the progressive cultural upsurge of the 1940s.

Thompson in later years would be famous as the author of *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963). He was also, as Cal Winslow reminds us ‘a poet, tank commander, Communist, teacher, historian, founder of the New Left, public intellectual, spokesperson for European Nuclear Disarmament, and active socialist for over fifty years’. He also wrote a novel and published several collections of his polemical essays in the 1970s and 80s.

Thompson’s early ‘essays and polemics’ of the late 1950s and early 1960s remained unpublished in book form until Winslow collected thirteen of them and wrote a thoughtful and sympathetic

essay introducing them. Winslow, an American union activist and historian, studied under Thompson at the University of Warwick, and took part in the 1970 occupation of the Vice Chancellor's office where files were found revealing the close ties between local industry and the university. Thompson documented this in his book, *Warwick University Limited* (1971).

Winslow produced an excellent book. Thompson's essays hang together as proposals for, and responses to, the first New Left, and as evidence of the intimate connection between Thompson's historical writing and his politics. They provide an intellectual history of those dramatic years on two levels. Thompson is powerful and elegant; Winslow is as passionate about intellectuals in socialist politics as Thompson was when he wrote these indispensable essays. But we need to understand what they built on.

It is now pretty well understood that Edward Thompson wrote *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) in the grip of disgust with the mechanical materialism of 'orthodox' Marxism'. He was not the first to feel that way. The meeting in 1945 was organized by the British Communist Party's Cultural Committee, and Jack Lindsay's paper was a documented rejection of Stalin's concept of 'reflection' in cultural matters (as in the formula that the 'superstructure' of ideas and art in a society simply reflected its economic 'base').

Lindsay argued that base and superstructure interacted, and that 'spirit and consciousness were a necessary element in productive activity'. He prefaced his paper with a quote from Gordon Childe's *What Happened in History* (1942): 'The reckoning may be long postponed. An obsolete ideology can hamper an economy and impede its change for longer than Marxists admit.' Lindsay had sent Childe a copy of the paper; they corresponded about it; and before the meeting they had dinner together.

There was a furious attack on Lindsay at the meeting by the party's Stalinists. The only person to support Lindsay was a young history student: Edward Thompson. Childe, who was not a member of the party and attended as Lindsay's guest, diplomatically said

nothing, but in *History* (1947) he would write: 'a superstructure – institutions, faiths, ideals – is actually indispensable for the productive process itself. ... Relations of production must ... be lubricated with sentiment. To provide motives for action they have to be transformed in the human mind into ideas and ideals.' Lindsay expanded his 1945 argument into a book, published in 1949 as *Marxism and Contemporary Science*, an attack on the vulgarization of Marxism by both Stalinists and anti-Marxists. A notable feature of the book is its attention to the question of Marxist morality, which would also become a theme in Thompson's essays. A decade before the first New Left, Lindsay and Childe had breached the walls of 'orthodox' Marxism.

There is a glimpse of this key moment of Marxist ideological rift and shared intellectual biography in Jack Lindsay's 'Foreword' to Sally Green, *Prehistorian – A Biography of V. Gordon Childe*, 1981.

Twelve years after he had defended Jack Lindsay, Thompson published a long essay in *The New Reasoner*, the journal of dissident British Communists. Ten thousand of them had exited the party, appalled by Khrushchev's 'secret speech' and the Soviet invasion of Hungary, and Edward Thompson was their most stirring leader. In this essay, 'Socialist Humanism', Thompson demolished the distortions of Stalinism, especially its over-simplified version of economic determinism in history that belittled 'the part played by men's ideas and moral attitudes in the making of history.' It was the nearest the New Left got to a manifesto, exposing Stalinism as an ideology of a bureaucratic elite, insisting that Marxism must have an 'ethical sensibility', and reintroducing its 'lost vocabulary' of agency and moral choice. According to Winslow, 'Socialist Humanism' is 'still the most discussed (and criticised) of his contributions in these years'. It contains no mention of either Lindsay or Childe.

Writing about Lindsay's ideas in the 1940s, Victor N. Paananen says: 'Publication of his theoretical work proved difficult at times, and small press runs and lack of an academic platform meant it was overlooked'. But Thompson was present in 1945. And it is simply impossible to believe that Thompson was unaware of Childe's

popularising of a non-orthodox Marxist theory of history as a creative process in the forties. Why did he fail to acknowledge them? Lindsay was unwilling to join the revolt in the British Communist Party, and Childe, who was not a member, was unable to. In 1957 he retired to Australia to commit suicide. His body was found at the bottom of a cliff in the Blue Mountains, just a few months after Thompson's essay on 'Socialist Humanism' appeared. Yesterday's men of the Old Left, they could be ignored.

I am not the first person to make this argument. In 1984, Robert Mackie wrote in *Jack Lindsay – The Thirties and Forties*: 'The current, and deserved, acclaim for E.P. Thompson and Raymond Williams, for example, obscures the ways in which Jack Lindsay helped establish, a generation before, the foundations of the British new left.'

Back to Thompson: it is perhaps not well understood that he did not write *The Making* for scholars of labour history. As well as struggling with problems of Marxist theory he was actively engaged in working class politics in the West Riding of Yorkshire, where he lived, and in the peace movement nationally. He wrote this great 900-page book for the students in his workers' education classes and for the activists of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the New Left. Like his *William Morris – Romantic to Revolutionary* (1955), it was the product of his belief that it was the duty of socialist intellectuals 'to make socialists'. All the more reason, then, to wonder at his indifference to the work of Lindsay and Childe, who shared this belief. Childe in particular: like the barefoot historians of Germany or the early History Workshop movement in Britain, Childe wanted to democratise archaeology to encourage working-class history-making.

Winslow's collection includes Thompson's 1959 address on 'The Communism of William Morris'. It is invaluable as a revelation of the sources of Thompson's Communism – in Britain's long socialist tradition – and of his vision of the New Left becoming a movement that would enlist the people at every level of power. At a time when there were up to 40 New Left Clubs, Thompson celebrated Morris's

aim 'to make Socialists ... [and] cover the country with a network of associations composed of men who feel their antagonism to the dominant classes, and have no temptation to waste their time in the thousand follies of party politics'.

These essays were written while Thompson was working on *The Making*, and there are signs of its emphases and argument everywhere. This is from 'Revolution' (1960): 'The *kind* of revolution which we can make today is different from that envisaged by Marx or Morris ... Nor is there only one kind of revolution which can be made in any one context. A revolution does not 'happen'; it must be *made* by men's actions and choices'. Another essay, 'Homage to Tom Maguire' (1960), is Thompson's riposte to the national and institutional focus of labour history as it entered its professionalized stage. He said: the customary national focus of histories of the breakthrough of the Independent Labour Party (in the West Riding) 'implies an appalling attitude of condescension towards these provincial folk who are credited with every virtue except the capital human virtue of conscious action in a conscious historical role'.

And if you have been baffled by Raymond Williams – unable to read more than a page of his books before nodding off – there is an essay that shows Thompson is on your side. In 'The Long Revolution' (1961) he damns Williams's writing style – impersonal and passive – and criticises his liking for abstractions. This produces (in Williams) an argument about culture that obscures class conflict and denies the need for sustained historical, anthropological and archaeological (guess who!) research. Like the advice offered by the iconic fictional anthropologist, Indiana Jones in Spielberg's 2008 movie, *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, Thompson says Williams would do better to read the works of Gordon Childe before announcing a general theory of culture.

Which brings us back to Marxism. I was surprised to find, in Winslow's introduction to his book, statements that at the end of his life Thompson was not 'really a Marxist at all', and that he claimed only 'to work within the Marxist tradition'. As to the first statement, we should consider Theodore Koditschek's discovery

in Thompson's later work of a 'Gramscian turn' that signalled that he was moving towards a more sophisticated Marxism. As for the second, surely in the absence (thankfully) of a Marxism whose orthodoxy is guaranteed by Stalinist political power, the tradition of Marxism is all there is. And if we are going to study Marxism as a tradition (which I acknowledge Winslow was not trying to do) it would be a good idea to look beyond its luminaries.

NEGLECTED SCHOLARSHIP

Rowan Cahill

During the Cold War, Rupert Lockwood (1908-1997) was one of Australia's best-known communists. During 1954-55 he was a high-profile hostile witness subpoenaed by the Royal Commission on Espionage, established following the defection of Canberra based Soviet diplomat and counter-intelligence operative Vladimir Petrov. The Commission was partisan political theatre, seeking, unsuccessfully, to establish links between Soviet espionage, the Australian Labour Party (ALP), and the Communist Party of Australia (CPA). When Lockwood left the CPA in 1969 following the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, it was an event drawing national media attention. His death in 1997 occasioned national and international attention.

Lockwood joined the CPA in 1939. Trained from early childhood as a typesetter/journalist on the small rural newspaper owned by his father in rural Victoria, and educated in the elite Wesley College (Melbourne), Lockwood joined the growing media empire of Australian press baron Sir Keith Murdoch in 1930, working on the Murdoch flagship, the Melbourne *Herald*. Historian Don Watson has described the paper at the time as 'a hotchpotch of almost incredible banality, and intelligent, often liberal, social and political comment'. Its young journalists were among 'the best of their generation'.

The liberal leftism of colleagues helped shape Lockwood's politics, and in 1935 he went abroad with permission to find media work and add to his value as a member of the Murdoch organisation. With a roving commission to file *Herald* feature articles, Lockwood

headed to Asia. Based in Singapore, he variously worked for the English language press and Reuters. He travelled extensively, visiting the Netherlands East Indies, Siam, French Indo China, and Japan. In the process he became aware of European racist attitudes and policies, the strength of national independence movements, and foresaw a future Asia freed from colonialism. He also became alarmed by the strength, ruthlessness, and expansionist intent of Japanese militarism, something not widely understood in Australia at the time.

Heading to Fleet Street, Lockwood made his way through China, Russia, Europe, and in 1937 began filing reports from the front lines of the Spanish Civil War reporting the Republican cause. These experiences radicalised him. Upon returning to Melbourne and the *Herald*, he increasingly became involved in anti-fascist, left-wing, and civil libertarian issues and politics. Following a personal clash with Murdoch in 1939, Lockwood quit the paper and joined the CPA.

By 1950 Lockwood had become widely known in Australia as a communist, journalist, pamphleteer, broadcaster and orator, and was the subject of intense surveillance by Australian security services. During the Cold War, aside from party work, he edited the *Maritime Worker* journal of the Waterside Workers Federation (WWF). This was an 8-page fortnightly newspaper for between 24,000-27,000 unionised waterfront workers, organised nationally in some 50 port branches.

According to Industrial Relations' historian Tom Sheridan, Lockwood's role as journalist/editor was a significant factor contributing to the long and successful term in office of WWF General Secretary Jim Healy between 1937 and 1961, contributing significantly to keeping right-wing influence at bay while keeping alive a militant political culture within the union.

Lockwood was a powerful public speaker, eloquent and witty, according to numerous commentators and comments in his security dossiers. He was also a prolific and popular pamphleteer. In Lockwood's pamphlets the oral and the literary met, the launch

of one of his pamphlets mounted as an event, usually done in association with a public address by Lockwood. The pamphlets were produced in runs of between 5,000-20,000 copies, in booklet form of about 4,000 words in length. Overall, these pamphlets had educational purpose and intent, tended to be lively, entertaining, and the language accessible. His approach to pamphleteering tended to reject the quotation and referencing of communist stalwarts like Marx, Lenin, Stalin, and instead referenced a diversity of other sources, for example the Bible, Oscar Wilde, Shakespeare, Lord Byron.

Sometimes CPA pamphlets became 'books', longer and sustained works, more expensive but not prohibitively so, and packaged cheaply and marketed in the same way as a pamphlet. This was the case with Lockwood's 94-page *America Invades Australia* (1955), dealing with the growth and extent of American investment in the Australian economy, especially post-1945, and the ways in which this acted to establish a relationship of colonial dependence with the US economy. It also examined the historical foundations of the key capitalist interests involved. The account was supported by Lockwood's readings of American historical sources, and extensive reading of financial literatures.

The end result of the Australia/US relationship, Lockwood argued, was that Australia would become enmeshed in America's future 'plan for aggression against Asia', with Australia used as a safe American military base for deployments against Asia. This text, a fragment of extensive original research by Lockwood on Australian political economy now in the archives of the National Library of Australia, has largely gone unnoticed. Writing in 1998, North American historian Bruce C. Daniels considered it a 'prophetic' book, a pioneering work of political economy manifesting an interest and a theme that Australian scholars and analysts would take up a decade later.

During the 1950s Lockwood also published original work about Australian history and political economy in the *Communist Review*, the CPA 'theoretical journal' (1934-1966). It is a body of work that

political scientist John Playford in 1970 reckoned that Australian scholars ‘could have learned a great deal from’. Complete with endnotes regarding sources, these articles ranged across Australian history, anticipating themes and issues associated with academic historians and political economists from the late 1960s onwards: indigenous dispossession and extermination; the development of ‘White Australia’ attitudes and policies; the history of monopolies and monopoly behaviour; the political economy of the 1890s; the development of political labour; the history and nature of the ALP and its emergence as ‘the principal political organisation of Australian national capital’; US and Australia relations during the twentieth century; the development in Australia of a sense of ‘Pacific regional security’, in which the US was regarded as a necessary partner.

Demonstrating the utilitarian way Lockwood saw his role as an historian – as contributing to ongoing industrial/political campaigning and struggles – a cluster of articles in 1955-1956 was devoted to aspects of the Australian shipping industry. Lockwood explored reasons why Australian shipowners had failed to create a national/international shipping presence commensurate with the nation’s volume of imports/exports. According to Lockwood, reasons were to be found in the ways British shipping interests had worked, historically, to hinder/prevent the development of Australian shipping. In the Lockwood analysis, the roots of this were in colonial history, and colonial attitudes prevailing post-Federation. These articles linked with a long running campaign by the Seamen’s Union of Australia to extend the operations, and increase the size, of the Australian shipping fleet.

Regarding monopolies generally, Lockwood argued it was simplistic to lump them together as though they and their behaviours were all the same. While they often acted together, as capitalist formations they were best understood with regard to factors like their individual histories, the origins of their capital, the nature of their investments, the biographies of their leaderships.

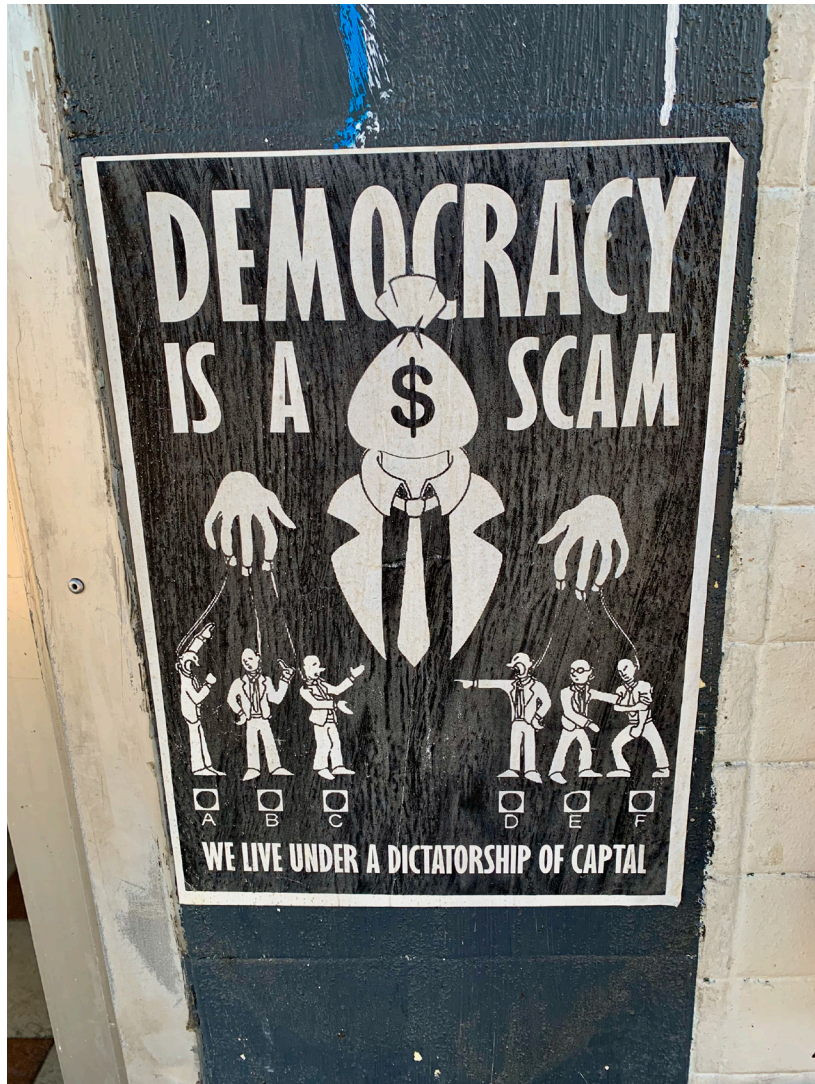
Lockwood’s focus on Australian history was part of a cultural milieu within the CPA that developed significantly during the 1940s

and continued through the Cold War amongst intellectuals drawn to the party. It was an attempt to understand and describe/define the ‘Australianness’ of Australian culture, particularly in terms of literature and history. The aim was to develop a sense of radical nationalism, one free from the legacies of British colonialism, strong enough during the 1950s to counter the conservatism of British traditions embodied in the ideology of the Menzies government, and robust enough to enable Australia to face the future independent from increasing subservience to the US.

In researching, writing and publishing ‘history’ in the communist press, Lockwood was part of an Australian tradition of historians (as Terry Irving has shown) ‘embedded in labour movement institutions’, their significant work variously challenging imperial, white dominated, ruling class histories, their accounts ‘scarcely recognised’ in the academy, their work often anticipating/pre-dating themes and issues that are regarded as originating later in the academy. This ‘scarce recognition’ applies too, to Lockwood’s writings on political economy.

AN ACTIVIST FOR ALL SEASONS

Rowan Cahill



During his lifetime Robert Daniel ‘Bob’ Walshe (1923-2018) was many things, variously factory labourer, soldier, communist, organiser, activist, pamphleteer, teacher, editor, publisher, historian, educationist, environmentalist. He was the author, co-author or editor of some forty books. Education historian, Alan Barcan, described Walshe as ‘a model activist’. Never ego driven, and, still an activist at the time of his death, he could be described as ‘the most famous person you do not know’.

Born in Sydney’s Eastern suburbs in 1923, Walshe once described his family life as ‘not very harmonious’. His father, a milkman in the Bondi area, was a severely wounded World War 1 veteran, in and out of hospital during the 1920s. To his mother, Walshe credited his lifelong love of books. Outdoors there was joy, and Walshe, his two brothers and sister relished their childhoods in the environs of Bondi and Bronte beaches, and Waverley Park.

Leaving school at 14, Walshe obtained labouring work in a butter factory, which he hated, then work with another employer as a clerk on the proviso he undertook a correspondence accountancy course, which he also hated. World War II came as a relief and at 18 he signed up at the Holsworthy Camp (Sydney) as a cook, before joining the AIF when he turned 19. After training, he was assigned to an Ambulance unit in Darwin where he saw out the war. His brothers also signed up, his elder brother captured in the Fall of Singapore, spending the rest of the war as a POW in Japan.

With about one in six Australian soldiers actually seeing action

against the enemy, military authorities resolved to fill their spare time with activities, and an innovative program of liberal education was introduced. This was delivered by the Army Education Service via lectures and a huge range of cultural activities, and *Salt*, a popular, topical, current affairs/literary journal. Both enterprises became sites of communist activity. During the war thousands of members of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) joined the armed forces, estimations ranging from 4000 to 6000. Following the legalisation of the CPA in 1942, communists in the Army operated more or less openly, and within the bounds of military regulations conducted leftist meetings, circulated communist literature, and recruited members. Walshe was radicalised in this milieu and joined the party.

POST-WAR RETRAINING

Demobilised, Walshe had a brief stint as a farm worker, then took advantage of the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme designed to help integrate discharged members of the armed forces back into civilian life. Enthused by the cultural activities he had been exposed to in the army he decided to further his education, matriculating (Sydney Technical College, 1946), then attending Sydney University (1947-51) and graduating with Honours in History and the Diploma in Education. From then until 1964 he taught English and History in secondary schools in the Sutherland Shire south of Sydney.

During the late 1940s, newly-weds Bob and wife Pat (née McEvoy), a nurse, moved to the Sutherland Shire, a favourite destination amongst Sydney lefties. In those days it was on the outskirts of Sydney, connected to the city by rail. Land was cheap, and relaxed local regulations permitted owner-builders to erect simple wooden framed fibro clad dwellings, and live in them as they completed a house. The Walshes stayed in the Shire for the rest of their lives, Pat dying in 1989 after 42 years together.

At university, Walshe significantly developed his organisational skills, primarily as President of the NSW Council of Reconstruction

Trainees, an outfit he had a role in organising, its aim to operate as a trade union and protect and advance the welfare and interests of the thousands of ex-service trainees undertaking studies. He was successful and effective in this role, engaging in lobbying at the highest levels with politicians and bureaucrats. During this time, he produced a 46-page booklet titled *Student Work for Progress* (1947). Its recommendations about how to successfully organise from below have not dated, while his advocacy for women, and his arguments against what he termed the 'mid-Victorian conception (of the) essential inferiority' of women, were well ahead of the time.

In July 1947, Walshe was amongst the fourteen students arrested during a protest in support of Indonesian nationalism outside the Dutch Consulate in Margaret Street, Sydney. A photo of Walshe being arrested by members of the thuggish Squad 21 was prominent in the *Daily Telegraph's* coverage of the protest. When Walshe appeared in court, he was wearing his ex-service association badge. According to historian Alan Barcan, Walshe's main concern about being arrested was if his future mother-in-law saw the newspaper photo; he feared her negative reaction.

TEACHER AT LARGE

As a school teacher, Walshe was instrumental in helping organise the History Teachers' Association (NSW), and was its Chairman 1962-63. Curriculum change was in the air as the influence of Sydney University's conservative historian Sir Stephen Roberts was replaced by new curriculum thinking in NSW. In time for the early 1960s, and arguably helping radicalise a generation, the new Leaving Certificate (senior school) History course aimed at understanding the 'modern world' from the Enlightenment onwards. Innovatively, much of the world beyond Europe was included. Economic history was introduced, and terms like liberalism, fascism, communism, nationalism studied. The notion of 'class' also got a run. The curriculum encouraged the study of cause and effect, and emphasised the idea that study of the past could help one understand the present. In the hands of teachers who were up

to it, the curriculum also encouraged student initiative and research beyond the set-texts.

Some best-selling and long-lasting texts emerged from the ranks of this generation of HTA teachers: the two volumes of *World History Since 1789* edited by James Hagan (later Professor James Hagan, Wollongong University, doyen labour historian), and *The Student's Guide to World History* by Walshe. First published in 1962, Walshe's book was revised four times, reprinted eight times, and encouraged a self-directed approach to the subject and its methods. The last revised edition was in 1980. Published accounts of lessons by HTA members during its early years indicate teaching techniques and initiatives that would still be regarded as innovative and dynamic two decades later.

Initially, Walshe could not find a publisher for his *Student's Guide*, so he self-published. Emboldened by the success of the book he formed his own company, Martindale Press (Sydney) in 1963, and left classroom teaching. With Martindale he embarked on an innovative, extensive and successful programme of educational and academic publishing before selling the company to an international publishing interest in 1970. Martindale illustrates a solution constant in Walshe's life: if there is a blockage of some kind, and you can't get somebody to fix it, then figure out a way forward and do it yourself.

While I am not privy to his financial situation, it is apparent post-Martindale that Walshe's need for full-time employment was no longer a necessity. Gradually, then fully, volunteer activities took over. Further, from my dealings with him and from watching him work, including his commissioning me to revise the final edition of his *Student's Guide* (Longmans 1980), when endeavours he deemed worthwhile needed funds or help with equipment and operational costs, the money became available.

WRITING RADICAL HISTORY

Within the Communist Party, Walshe was recognised as a significant intellectual talent, and his historical skills were utilised. While still teaching full-time he produced a series of detailed historical notes for leftist trade unions on events like Eureka Stockade, the 8-Hour Day, and the Tolpuddle Martyrs. In 1954 he had a key role in organising Sydney's celebrations for the Centennial Commemoration of the Eureka Stockade uprising. For this he produced a 32-page booklet on the Eureka events and their significance, and two original and significant pieces of scholarly research on Eureka published in the scholarly journal *Historical Studies of Australia and New Zealand* (1954). These latter are still being cited by historians. Walshe's interest in Eureka was life-long. He later produced a book (2005) on the uprising as part of Australia's democratic evolution, revisiting and extending his original research. From 2004 onwards he was a main facilitator of the annual commemoration of Eureka in Sydney.

In 1956 Walshe produced a 62-page booklet on the radical origins of Australian democracy, *Australia's Fight for Independence and Parliamentary Democracy*, in which he laid down the foundations for the radical study of democracy in Australia.

Writing to me in 2012, Walshe explained his approach to history. Historians, he wrote, need to find 'times in the past when the best of humanity, struggling against privilege, greed, oppression, war, find reason to affirm again the confident humanism of the Enlightenment, its critical rationalism and its exciting science, its faith in giving direction by democratic agency to society's incessant change, thereby to release energy in a reader to be active in the cause of human betterment'.

PART 5

SHAPING HISTORIES

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TERRY IRVING

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In February 2013 I was interviewed by Sadia Schneider, from the University of Melbourne, who was writing a thesis on New Left historians. She sent me a list of six pertinent questions, and with her permission I have reproduced them below with my answers. Since the interview I have added some more information about my family background and intellectual interests.

1. General biographical background (parents, school, uni etc). When did you become involved in the left? How? What about your decision to study history?

My parents were both working class. My father's family came from Cessnock in the coalmining region of the Hunter Valley. His father, John Henry Irving, was a baker in the Co-Op store, and his brother and two brothers-in-law were all underground miners. My father, the youngest child was saved from the pit by his mother, Emily, and by his musical talent (he played the violin); he was apprenticed and in due course became a tradesman – in carpentry, joinery and cabinet making. As for the violin: although taught by legendary teacher Jascha Gopinko and playing with Ernest Llewellyn of Sydney Symphony Orchestra fame, as a working-class young man in the 1930s, my father had no choice but to work full-time at his trade.

My mother left school at 14 and by her late twenties she was a trained psychiatric nurse. Unlike her husband, my mother was a great reader, probably something she learnt from her mother and

father – Elsie and Sam Spink. Grandmother Spink was a pillar of the local Church of England Mothers' Union while my grandfather was a professional photographer (much of his work is in local, state and national collections), who was educated in a minor 'public' school in England. But by the 1920s theirs was a downwardly mobile family. None of the children of the Spinks (or the Irvings) in my parents' generation had much education.

Sometime in the mid-to late-thirties James Hamilton Irving and Eva May Spink arrived in Sydney from the country and became radicals. They met in a boarding house in Drummoyne, married, and in time I was born into a family that was moving from 'progressive' to 'revolutionary'. I can illustrate what that meant by a story about Gordon Childe's *Progress and Archaeology*, which I bought second hand in my first year at university. Published in 1944 under the auspices of the Rationalist Press Association, it was number 102 in The Thinker's Library.

I felt good about the purchase. Although I bought it to study for an ancient history exam, I knew it was the kind of book someone like me ought to own. For one thing it looked familiar. Our bookshelves at home, scant as they were, held other books in this series – pocket-sized, hardback, cheaply presented – by Darwin, Huxley, Winwood Reade, Wells and so on – books by the scientists and secularists who gave voice to the movement of 'unbelief' – the great late nineteenth and early twentieth century intellectual challenge to religion and conventional wisdom. Their books were meant for autodidacts and rationalists who wanted to be 'broad' – not 'narrow' – thinkers. Narrow: in our house there was no worse epithet for someone. Broad thinkers were 'progressive', which as an accolade was not quite as high as 'Communist', but at least it was better than 'reformist'. It was progressive to believe in birth control, kindergartens, 'new' education, parks, libraries, town planning and bringing art to the people. You were progressive if you understood that history was moving out of the period of economic crises and imperialist wars into a new world of planning, international co-operation and science. You were progressive most obviously if you understood history as progress.

People like my parents saw 'progressives' as the allies of the labour movement, but they had to be organised, which was one of the special tasks of Communists. Progressives had to be shown that, really, they were socialists. This was one of our peculiar (and dangerous) illusions on the left at that time, that we had the running in revealing the meaning of history, and that it was our task to tell everybody else what to do and think.

Childe's book affirmed my belief in history as progress. According to the dust jacket, its aim was 'to describe the progressive tendencies of mankind during the last 50,000 years as revealed by archaeological discoveries.' Wow – not just since 1917! This was certainly my kind of book.

When Japanese submarines attacked Sydney my parents, who were living across the river from the Mortlake gas works, moved to a place of greater safety on the lower North Shore, and a few months later I started school at the local primary. According to the Inspector who reported on the school for the Department of Education, Roseville Practice School had 'a high spiritual and civic tone'. I discovered what he meant at age seven. During the National Anthem at one of the weekly assemblies I was mischievously leading one or two other creative spirits in singing alternative words – probably spontaneously composed. To our surprise a teacher traced the resultant cacophony, and at recess we were told to report to the Headmistress, who gave us each six of the best. Ouch! Thus, we learnt that rulers like to enforce their values, painfully if necessary. From this experience I must have drawn a pragmatic conclusion, because by sixth class I was happily standing in front of the national flag at every Monday morning assembly, leading the rest of the boys in pledging that we honoured a god and served a king – neither of which I believed in. Although unable to articulate the idea of conditional allegiance, by pretending to be from the middle class I discovered an ability for passing.

After primary school I went to the 'selective' North Sydney Boys High in 1951. I did well at primary school (dux and captain) but not so well at High School, probably because of the rancour and violence

in my parents' marriage, which broke down completely as I was starting at North Sydney. We then became very poor. My younger brother and I were often farmed out to live with relatives while my mother took live-in jobs at hospitals and hotels. Nonetheless by my final year at North Sydney I was taking Honours in English and History, and at the end of the year I was awarded the Treloar Prize in History, and I won two scholarships to Sydney University.

A further reason affecting my high school performance was the impact of the Cold War on our family. My mother was still in the Communist Party and she became somewhat notorious locally when she and Helen Hambly were arrested in 1950 for collecting signatures to the Stockholm Peace petition at Chatswood railway station and when her picture appeared on the front page of an evening newspaper showing her being evicted from a Sydney Town Hall meeting where Menzies was speaking. Being a 'red' was not easy; being a 'commo kid' was harder, especially for one without adequate family support.

Perhaps this is the place to refer to how my parents became Communists. My father was called up and joined the air-force as a tradesman, and he was recruited to the CPA while serving in the Northern Territory. My mother, left behind in a rented suburban house, was recruited over the back fence by Christina Stead's half-brother, Gilbert, in 1944. We were living on the lower North Shore, so the party's members and supporters were a mixture of tradesmen, white collar workers, middle class professionals, and even a few businessmen – very typical of the area's population generally. They were all earnest talkers and avid readers, at least of 'approved' publications, and they were continually busy on party campaigns. The Communist household was an alternative public space, with cupboards full of party 'literature', and lounge rooms occupied every week by branch meetings, educational classes, cottage lectures and socials. As I became socialised into this way of life I naturally equated politics with ideas, with intellectual activity. (It was a rude shock when I got to Uni and met ALP student politicians.) Under conditions of Cold War surveillance and repression most of this activity had to be done carefully, tactfully and behind the cover of

'front' bodies, and I think I learnt then that persuasion was not the same as pushing one's ideas down people's throats.

I belonged to the Junior Eureka League (the Communist children's organization), and I rose to a leadership position as a 'Pioneer'. I was taught how to address meetings, the importance of organisation and improvisation, the ethical value of collective living and decision-making, and the rudiments of a working-class perspective on current affairs and social structure. It was an invaluable training, delivered in what for me was a welcome alternative family.

Commo kids were more likely than others of their age to be budding intellectuals – I recall several of my JEL cohort who like me became academics – and we spent a lot of time informally discussing left-wing writers and the history of the international left. At this time (the early-fifties to the early-sixties) the CPA's campaign to defend Australian culture and promote the radical view of Australian history and culture was underway. We read *The Realist Writer* and the books published by the Australasian Book Society. My mother was in the folk-musical 'Reedy River' and sang in a trade union choir called The Unity Singers. On one occasion blankets were nailed to the walls of the lounge room to convert it into a sound studio for recording radical songs. My mother's friends included folklorists John Meredith and Rex Whalan, and members of the original Bushwackers' Band, John Meredith, Cecil Grivas and Chris Kempster. In time I was drawn into this counter-hegemonic, rough and ready acting and singing world, running the JEL drama club and appearing in a New Theatre play by Mona Brand, 'Better a Millstone'. Since then I have often been drawn to radical projects that present as spontaneous, improvised and anti-professional (and been attacked for it by those for whom organisation is a fetish!).

I did not 'discover' the study of history; it was just a normal part of this milieu, at least as far as I understood it. I read the pamphlets on Australia's radical past by party intellectuals RD Walshe, and WA Wood; I sang songs about Eureka and the Great Strikes of the 1890s; from comrades who boarded with us I learnt about the anti-eviction wars of the 1930s, the socialist movement in Broken Hill

and the bashing of Communist MP Fred Patterson in Brisbane. But exciting as all this was it could not match the intellectual seriousness of the British Communist Party's historical work. I read the books and articles in *Our History* and *Marxism Today* by the British Marxist historians, AL Morton, Dona Torr, Eric Hobsbawm, and other members of the CPGB's Historians Group. I saw that history was argument and scholarship as well as a support for political positions. Taking History Honours at school and university was an almost inevitable result, especially as I found that the historical nature of my left-wing thinking gave me an edge over other students, particularly because of its materialist focus on economic and social forces, which to those brought up on the empiricist and idealist works of mainstream history are often mysterious. In time I became an academic, but 'professing history' has always been less vital for me than the (sporadically realized, alas) practice of living history through radical politics.

2. *What was your relationship with the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) (did you ever join/leave, were you involved in joint activities etc.)?*

I started University in 1956, turned 18 at the end of that year and promptly joined the CPA. I was primed to do this by my background, but it was also a kind of gift to my mother for her struggles on behalf of my brother and me, and a tribute to her for her steadfast faith. These were years of turmoil in the CP. I was assigned to the (very small) University Branch, which was suspected rightly of 'revisionism', but I retained my membership even as others drifted away. My party responsibility was to lead the University Labour Club, which I did until about 1961. The late fifties were quiet years on campus; my political tasks were to arrange lunch-time meetings for party speakers, to organize united fronts with religious groups to support the peace movement, and to hold the occasional demo downtown against nuclear weapons. It was all very safe and very controlled by party headquarters in the city. It was boring, sectarian (especially needed when combating

'the Trots') and ultimately futile. Well perhaps not; it might have prepared the way for the dramatic popular events of the New Left. I am certainly embarrassed now by the puppet-like aspect of that activity, but until the explosion of student (and worker) radicalism in the late sixties, the only alternative was the ALP Club, which was even worse: mindless, factional, and electoral. I was given leave by the CP in 1965 to finish my thesis. Within a few years the political climate had changed, the student radicals did not want or need outside 'leadership', and my marriage had broken down. I never renewed my CP membership.

3. *What about the 'Old Left'? Were there particular Old Left historians you met/read etc. How did you see the Old Left historians (eg. Brian Fitzpatrick, Ian Turner, Robin Gollan, Stephen Murray-Smith, Geoffrey Serle, Russel Ward)?*

I met all of them except Geoffrey Serle, but I need to explain here the ambivalent relationship I had with the Old Left historians. When I took up my PhD scholarship Robin Gollan's *Radical and Working-Class Politics* (1960) had just appeared, and I conceived my work on the 1840s and early 50s as a prequel to his. But I was also influenced by the imperial history of John Manning Ward, my supervisor. The power relationships between colony and metropolis – administrative and economic – I thought provided a 'realist' framing for my thesis; Gollan on the other hand was rather opaque about material interests and particularly how class forces worked at the political level. The development of liberal politics (ideas, organisation, policy), the focus of my thesis, could definitely be explained in the framework of the tension between imperial and colonial forces, so I dropped the emphasis that Gollan would have placed on my topic – the transfer of British liberalism to the colony. My thesis explained politics in terms of 'interests' (I had a mentor in the Department of Government who was taken with the current fad in political science, 'group theory', which I understood as prioritizing economic and social 'group interests'); so this was

not class analysis in the conventional sense, but it was materialist history. This materialism was its attraction to Bob (later Raewyn) Connell; hence our working together on the class structure book a few years later, but I had a lot to learn from him about the kind of structuralist thinking that it required by class analysis, that is, generative thinking.

Looking back at that thesis I realize, and regret, that my adoption of the imperial ‘realist’ framework meant that I sidelined the emergence of working men’s politics and the discursive and material contexts in which it was formed. My book, *The Southern Tree of Liberty* (2006) was an attempt to repair those absences.

Gollan reacted ambivalently to the book I wrote with Raewyn Connell, *Class Structure in Australian History* (1980); he saw its contribution to radical history but disliked it because it was grounded in theory. A decade earlier he had been attacked by McQueen as an exponent of labour history’s ‘Australian legend’, a form of humanitarian writing lacking a revolutionary theory. Correct, but unlike McQueen I think that the Old Left historians, were onto something powerful for radical politics – hence my ambivalence about them. I always honoured their struggles, and joined in their efforts to establish the Labour History Society. What I saw in their efforts was this – and it is often ignored today: while they supposedly ‘romanticized’ the struggles of the working class past they were continuing a now forgotten tradition of historical writing developed by labour intellectuals as part of the working class’s attempt to resist ruling class ideas. These earlier movement intellectuals – RS and L Ross, Evatt, Fitzpatrick, Childe, Walshe, Jim Rawling, Esmonde Higgins, et al – expected that their history would make its readers want to act. Their arguments were read within labour movement institutions. This is what Gollan, Fry, Turner etc were doing when they set up the Labour History Society – extending the institutional scope of movement intellectual work into the universities and public debate. As their careers developed, alas, the cozy assumptions that McQueen criticized overwhelmed the political impulse in their work. They became mainly academic intellectuals. Actually, this process of incorporation was already

apparent in Gollan’s book: the liberal understanding of democracy, the constitutionalism, and the neglect of anti-parliamentary politics. As I have said elsewhere, Gollan’s book is not a good example of radical history because it idealizes the capitalist state as liberal and parliamentary.

4. What were you reading and most influenced by? In particular, did you read Lukács, Gramsci or Althusser? Were there figures in the UK you were inspired by (E.P. Thompson, Perry Anderson, Gareth Stedman Jones, Hobsbawm)?

I read, with different degrees of seriousness and understanding, all of the above – and also C Wright Mills, William Appleman Williams, Paul Goodman, Ralph Miliband, George Lichtheim, Herbert Marcuse, Stuart Hall, et al. I subscribed to movement journals: *Studies on the Left*, *Socialist Revolution*, *Radical America*, *New Left Review*, and *Marxism Today*. I was always more concerned with the progress of the movement rather than ideological purity. I subscribed as well to *Nation*, *New Statesman* and *Times Literary Supplement*, and found support for an engaged, materialist history from three non-Marxist sources. In my fourth year I was introduced to the ideas of R.G. Collingwood. A distinguished contributor to philosophical idealism, Collingwood nonetheless attracted me because of his insistence that historians had to work critically (he was famous for his rejection of ‘scissors and paste’ empiricism in historical studies) and that the object of their study was the creative response of humans to their situation. (Later I would discover that this view of Collingwood’s helped Gordon Childe formulate his rejection of the mechanical materialist proposition that there were laws of history.) In the early sixties I discovered Karl Mannheim’s sociology of knowledge, which gave me the basis for a critical approach to ideology, and John Dewey’s philosophy of pragmatism, with its stress on inquiry as a process aiming at knowledge that is useful for, and validated by, human action. I was also inspired by his commitment to democratic practices in education.

5. *What do you remember as being the defining event of the late 1960s and early 1970s in terms of shaping your worldview? What were your thoughts on the student movement, the anti-war movement, the Clarrie O'Shea strike, developments in China like the cultural revolution and Maoism? What about the defeat of the Labor Party led by Arthur Calwell in 1966 or the election of Gough Whitlam?*

This question for me is a bit beside the point, as I was never 'defined' by a particular event in the way that the younger New Left might have been, particularly if they were coming across radical ideas and movements for the first time. Of course, I hoped for a Labor victory in 1966 and 1972, I was inspired by the O'Shea general strike, and I protested in the streets when Whitlam was removed by Kerr's coup. The invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 confirmed my growing belief that Russian Communism was an abomination, and ultimately pointed me to bottom-up ideas of socialism and democracy, as distant as possible from the state apparatus, such as it might be after the revolution.

6. *Did you think of yourself as 'New Left'? What did that mean to you? What would you say you and others of your generation were trying to do? How successful do you think it was? In what ways did it constitute a group or network? Who were you in touch with?*

I certainly thought of myself as New Left – that is, First New Left, for I was half a generation in front of the Second New Left. The first New Left was attempting to recover that moment of revolutionary exhilaration following the Russian Revolution when intellectuals and workers could have melded themselves into a single public of Communist idealism, before the barbarities of Stalinism and the indignities of Social-Democratic welfare-statism sucked hope and morality out of the Left.

In the early sixties my wife was involved with Helen Palmer's

socialist magazine, *Outlook*, which was read by independent socialists and dissident Communists, while I was involved with *Arena*, a Melbourne-based journal with a similar readership but a stronger interest in theoretical issues, eg the changing composition of the working class, study of elites, impact of automation and higher education on young workers, etc. I organised an *Arena* Conference in Sydney in 1964.

Through the Free University (1967-1971) I came in contact with younger people (mainly students) who were part of what is usually thought of as the New Left. Many of them were introduced to political militancy by the 'student action' movement, whose main expressions in Sydney were the 'Freedom Ride' bus tour to racially integrate rural communities, the defence of student rights on campus, the anti-conscription campaigns, and the anti-Viet Nam war moratoria. But Free U was not activist in a militant sense; rather it sought to investigate and analyse, in order to assist action. Typical courses were: Class and Power in Australian Life; Aboriginal History; the Australian Radical Tradition; Drugs; the Brain; etc. In relation to this 'second' New Left, because of my age I was more an advisor than a participant (except of course for the moratoria). In another educative role, I was one of the organizers of the Socialist Scholars Conference in 1970.

Returning from study leave in early 1973 I was caught up in three campaigns at Sydney Uni linking staff-student power and radical knowledge: defence of the Women's Course in Philosophy, the Political Economy struggle in Economics, and the Democratisation of the Government Department (where I was a Senior Lecturer). These campaigns were central to my political activities until at least 1976 – and in 1977 I was elected to the Academic Board and became Acting Head of Department partly as a result of them. In relation to the democratization of the Government department, we succeeded in establishing for a short time a dual power situation, in which a Department Committee with equal representation of staff and students acted alongside the two professors, curtailing their powers in matters internal to the Department. The professors in our department wisely refrained from exercising their veto, and

the Department Committee elected the Head of Department and submitted their name to the Vice Chancellor, who always accepted the nomination. Gradually, student representation disappeared but until I retired in 1998 the Department continued as an example of staff power.

Meanwhile, I was one of the main organizers of two Class Analysis Conferences (neither of them on campus) in 1975 and 1976. This was at the time Connell and I were working on the class structure book, and several chapters were circulated in draft form. Although the Class Analysis conferences were meant as a bridge between younger radical academics and the staff and activists of left unions, left parties and independent socialists, the first in 1975 was dominated by the academics. The second in 1976 was better prepared and attended, and as well as scholarly papers there were two workshops with trade union activists. There was a third conference in 1977, but as I disagreed with the rigid, narrowly focused and Marxist theoreticism of the leading activists (who insisted on restricting the conference to certain themes about current class politics) I was sidelined. There were no more CACs, and I suspect the main organizers were then incorporated into the Political Economy movement.

How did my New Left experience affect my historical writing, bearing in mind that my political background had already convinced me of both the need to understand the history of capitalism, and 'history work' as a proper political task for revolutionaries? First, it encouraged it by identifying a new generation of radicals seeking historical awareness. Second, the feeling of political liberation from the CP's bureaucratic control encouraged intellectual liberation, so I discarded economic determinism and its base-superstructure model, discovering a long line of Marxists dating back to the twenties who had done the same – i.e., the Western Marxist tradition beginning with Lukacs. Third, the New Left's emphasis on democracy as self-government, as a politics apart from the state, reinforced my interest in popular challenges to liberal parliamentary government as a crucial theme in the history of resistance to capitalism. Fourth, as a corollary, I realized that the process of working class formation can

be reformulated so as to include elements not centrally associated with the institutional growth of the labour movement (based on male proletarians) – eg women, youth, immigrants, indigenes, criminals, bohemians, rootless intellectuals, etc, because these elements were often the least habituated to the process of representation, and thus less starry-eyed about representative institutions such as unions and governments, or to put that another way, the most likely to employ direct action to improve their lives.

I would later realise that collective direct action is a form of 'savage democracy'; savage democracy is thus socialism in action, a form of politics *sans doctrine, sans l'état*.

ROWAN CAHILL



I was born in Sydney in 1945 and raised in the north-eastern backblocks of the North Shore. Dad was an insurance clerk, working his way up in a major company; Mum a former secretary in a law office. Their politics were conservative. Dad was very anti-labour, anti-communist, and had been in the fascist New Guard in his youth. For me, childhood was a time of shadows and sunshine. Atomic Bombs and the threat of World War III were ever present in radio news, in newspapers, and in the Saturday Matinee newsreels. Despite these haunting shadows, there was joy, with plenty of bushland nearby, fresh water in the creeks, and a suburban world where remnant dairying and orcharding still took place. For me and my brother and mates, growing-up was largely spent ranging far and wide in that bush, stealing fruit from the orchards, swimming in the creeks and waterholes, camping in caves, fishing in the upper reaches of Middle Harbour. My schooling was through the state system, secondary education taking place in the brand-new Normanhurst Boys High School. Apart from peers who went into the private school system, or were streamed off into a very elite 'selective' system, and excluding the Catholic kids who were already locked into their apartheid system, male students within a specific radius of miles were in this High School, the well-off kids, the poor kids, the whole range of intellectual abilities, including kids requiring remedial attention.

History appealed virtually from the beginning. Dad taught my brother and me bush survival skills and told stories – about the

histories of plants and places, so there was a growing awareness we were part of a present shaped by the past. In early childhood, one of my treasured books was a cast-off school history textbook that had belonged to my elder sister. I treated this with wonder, looking at the pictures, struggling with the text, until it was later replaced by the Christmas gift of a comprehensive encyclopaedia, jam packed with photos and illustrations and digestible chunks of information, marvel and wonder. Eve Pownall's *The Australia Book* (1952) was another Christmas treasure.

SCHOOLING

A couple of seminal events intensified my focus on history. Doing a school research assignment about the age of 13/14, I was shocked to find out that the 1915 Gallipoli campaign was a military disaster, blunder, defeat and retreat, all the time through early childhood having absorbed through compulsory school Anzac Day ceremonies the received version with its ideas of glory, success, military triumph. This left me confused and wondering at the time, about false belief and reality, though I did not have the intellectual tools at the time to give this confusion names or understand it. Later, in my mid-teens, I read for enjoyment an adult biography on the life of one of my adolescent heroes, Lawrence of Arabia. It was a critical biography, raising psychological and sexuality issues, revealing a different person behind the romantic image I had formed from populist accounts. It was a revelatory experience as I encountered critical biography and critical historical research; an epiphany.

In senior school, my cohort and I were exposed to a new Modern History syllabus, covering European and some Asian history from 1750 until the end of WW2, with emphasis on the social, economic and political, and introducing the notion of social class as a major force in history. At the same time, we were taught by a gifted teacher, Ian Vacchini, one of the young people who had entered the teaching industry post-war. He rejected the Dickensian 'Gradgrind' approach of many of his older colleagues, and instead encouraged research, discussion, student initiative, transferring to us his enthusiasm for

the subject, constantly demonstrating relationships between the past and present, explaining the nature of historical cause and effect in history. In his class, ideas were not strangers, debate and controversy not alien, and the past and present were related. Further, it was all done in a way that made learning and understanding enjoyable and important. In his class and subject, I was very successful. He had a subversive side too, and in my final school year suggested I give the annual Commonwealth Day student address to the whole school, and let me give my preferred slightly anti-imperial version. This displeased the Principal and some staff members but delighted many of my peers. Vacchini went on to become a high-ranking Department of Education leader in future years. He was also amongst the first teachers in NSW to recommend and use, which he did with us, the innovative student-centred text *The Student's Guide to Modern History* (1962), by former communist intellectual R. D. (Bob) Walshe. An education publishing phenomenon, this influential book stayed in print for nearly three decades. In 1980 I revised and updated the fifth and last edition and added a chapter on 'Revolution'.

Generally, the teaching staff at Normanhurst during my time there as a student were interesting. It included the communist actor, intellectual, future award-winning writer, Roger Milliss, an English teacher who influenced me; Wal Suchting, future academic Marxist philosopher; Len Flegg, Andersonian and future psychologist. It was Len Flegg who helped my first tentative steps in creative writing, and gradually introduced me to the ideas of libertarian philosopher John Anderson. Len and I remained friends until his death many years later. And there was my teacher of French, 'Froggy', a retired teacher recalled to the classroom because of the postwar baby-boom and the lack of available teachers. He turned out to be an original Gallipoli veteran. Back in the classroom after one particularly jingoistic school Anzac Day ceremony, he wept in front of us as he told us the realities of war. Milliss intervened, came into the class and helped him back to the staffroom, then returned and explained the old man's distress. It was an event that still lives in my mind.

During secondary schooling I started to grow away from the

politics of my parents; an accidental evolution rather than any deliberate separation. Looking back, this had a great deal to do with schooling, with the curriculum we were exposed to, to some of the teachers, and to the sorts of things going on around me ... enjoying the first issues of the satirical magazine *Oz* with peers, encountering in senior English the 19th century Romantics and being exposed to Byron, Wordsworth, Shelley, Coleridge, learning about the French Revolution in History, its long-term and immediate causes, and from this an inkling that protest, rebellion, revolution were parts of how the world worked, discovering for myself rebellious modern literature ...

UNIVERSITY

I went to Sydney University in 1964, the first person in my family to 'go to university'. I had just turned 18, a middle-class rebel-in-waiting, aspiring to be 'a writer', with one published poem and an article in *The Phoenix* (the school's magazine), and some rejection slips from *The Bulletin*, to my credit. Menzies and conscription lit the fuse to what may have otherwise dissipated in a flash of youthful rebellion ...

At university, history continued to be something I was good at and enjoyed. There was really nothing else, until after I was conscripted in 1965. The Menzies government had introduced a selective system of conscription without public debate, in 1964. As a tertiary student, I could defer surrendering myself to the government and the Army until I had completed my first degree. I did so, and deferment gave me the luxury of working things out. My initial reaction to being conscripted was a defiant 'no', based on the libertarian thinking that had been part of my world for a few years, courtesy of Len Flegg. Looking back, I reckon a cranky independent resolve, inherited from my mother, was also part of the mix. When conscription became a feed-line for Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War not long afterwards, my interest in history began to morph. It morphed as I began to deploy my historical skills, primitive though they were, in finding out about the origins and nature of the

Vietnam war, a personal investigation that undermined the version of the war peddled by the Australian and American governments. It was on the basis of this counter-understanding of the history of the war that I became a student activist and prominent in the anti-war movement, the counter-understanding leading and drawing me to like-minded people and groups on campus, and beyond. Along the way I destroyed my call-up notification, and registered as a conscientious objector – which required proving opposition to all war, not a specific war.

So, for me, history became less a theoretical terrain, and more an activist one. History was not something you theorised about. It was something you were part of; it was something you did. History was not about squirreling yourself away in a library, researching and writing, and that was it, but about understanding what had happened, what was happening, and doing something with that. History was not about being part of a passing parade that just drifted along to who knows where, but about getting traction in time, of seeking and having agency.

HISTORY FROM BELOW

From 1965 through to 1970, the year I began working as an historian with the Seamen's Union of Australia, I grew as an historian. There was a complexity of influences...honing skills boringly via English Constitutional history, but teaching me to be confident about examining legal/political concepts and institutions, and understanding the ways state power attempted 'legitimation'; exploring dissidence in the ranks of Cromwell's New Army, and encountering Christopher Hill's deliberations on the period; reading the revelation that was E. H. Carr's *What is History?*; understanding nationalism as a political and cultural force in history via Hans Kohn's writings; American history, the early colonial intellectual struggles to conceptualise democracy; enthusiastically encountering the 19th century US 'muckraker' journalistic tradition; meeting and being taught by History tutor Terry Irving, a distant, and unknown to me, family relative via marriage; pondering the

nature of democracy through the prism of De Tocqueville, and socialism through Durkheim; having much to do personally with Karl Mannheim's one-time associate Professor Ernest Bramsted, a major contributor to my understanding of history, ideas in history, individual morality in history, the conception and nature of utopian thinking in history, and the dynamics of propaganda as an instrument of social/political control; reading Russian history and the varieties of dissent and resistance during the nineteenth century through to 1917, analysing Lenin's *What is to be Done?*, reading Isaac Deutscher on Trotsky, reading John Reed on 1917 and glimpsing the role of journalist as observer/participant, a theme of my own later journalistic practice; developing friendship with Terry, and meeting up with R. W. Connell, newly arrived PhD student from Melbourne, and through them coming to understand that history was not a stand-alone subject, that it should embrace interdisciplinary approaches, an unpopular and largely alien idea at Sydney University at the time; in 1968, the amazing and liberating challenge of Perry Anderson's exegesis in *New Left Review* (1/50, July- August 1968), 'Components of the National Culture' ... and through all this, increasingly understanding how history was an action at the interface of the past and the present, with a role in shaping the future.

COMMUNIST PARTY OF AUSTRALIA

I never joined the Communist Party of Australia (CPA). However, as a result of my activism in the student and anti-war movements and articles in a variety of student and left publications, there was a roundabout invitation to meet Alec Robertson, editor of *Tribune*, flagship of the CPA. I did so, and in 1968 found myself in a meeting in the Day Street CPA headquarters with Alec, Eric Aarons, Mavis Robertson, Harry Stein, and Malcolm Salmon. By the end of the meeting I had agreed to become the anonymous 'special correspondent' covering mounting student activism nationally. Later that year I was commissioned by the party to compile a report on the New Left in Australia, no doubt intended as a briefing on the

state of the local student revolt prior to the party figuring out how to relate to it. This was published as a monograph by the Australian Marxist Research Foundation (1969). In 1969, following a secret meeting on the isolated CPA property in the bush backblocks of Minto, I became part of the editorial board of the party's theoretical journal, *Australian Left Review* (ALR). This brought me into contact with left academics Alastair Davidson, then a pioneer promoter of Gramsci's work in Australia with the support of ALR; Dan O'Neill, a subtle and imaginative analyst of capitalist power and its contestation, influenced by Gramsci and Ivan Illich; John Playford, a political sociologist owing much to C. Wright Mills, attune to the power elite critique and examination of capitalism; and anti-Stalinist CPA activist intellectuals Eric Aarons, Mavis Robertson, and Bernie Taft. Over the next few years I became close to Eric, had many discussions with him on revolutionary theory and strategy, and met international radical intellectuals like Robin Blackburn and Roger Garaudy.

Independent of the party, but related to it, during 1969 via Harry Stein I met the left journalist Rupert Lockwood (1908-1997). He was on the verge of leaving the CPA. Recently returned from assignment in the USSR, he was looking for a place to live. Harry asked me if I knew of accommodation; the next-door flat was empty in the block where my wife and I rented in Balmain, so Rupert and his wife moved in. Subsequently Rupert and I became friends, and we remained so for the rest of his life. It was a meeting and friendship that had a profound influence on my subsequent personal and historical development. From Rupert I learned much about the less scrutinised by-ways of Australian political history; listening to him, a gifted raconteur, was like listening to a visitor from a parallel universe – Australia; the same Australia that I lived in with the same chronological history, and yet in many ways so very, very different. During the early 1980s I resolved to write Lockwood's biography; I made some inroads, but the telling really had to be done post-mortem, when relevant documentation became available, including his own papers, and Australian Cold War historiography had dramatically changed following the public release of the Venona

transcripts by US authorities in 1995. To an extent, the Lockwood story became my albatross, my fixation, from which I did not feel released until the completion of my doctoral dissertation on Rupert in 2013.

HISTORIAN AT WORK

As an historian, 1970 was a watershed year. During 1969, after protracted court appearances and complex legal manoeuvrings, I had my status as a conscientious objector recognised, and was involved working at a high level towards the first Moratorium (May 1970). Now, with an Honours degree, and a Diploma of Education, I owed an immediate substantial Bond repayment to the NSW Department of Education, having gone through university on a Teacher's College scholarship, then refusing to work the Bond out with rural school teaching. Politically I needed to remain in Sydney, was married, and faced considerable jail-time if I failed to successfully defend myself against a significant criminal charge arising from my dissident activities. Simply, money was needed. I managed to tap into three History related income streams. Len Flegg got me a part-time teaching job in the Technical Education system, teaching a crash course in Higher School Certificate (HSC) Modern History to people interested in gaining the HSC and prepared to do the two-year course in one year. In this I found a trio of texts by broadly leftist authors useful: the Walshe *Guide*, Eric Hobsbawm's *The Age of Revolution*, and Jim Hagan's *Modern History and its Themes*. With this teaching, I was thrown in the deep end, teaching longer per period than either schools or universities timetabled, and learning how to teach as I went along. Teacher's College had been poor preparation. I drew on 'best practice' as modelled in my past by Flegg, Milliss, and Vacchini, and learned that teaching could be a two-way learning experience, enjoyable, and meaningful. At the same time, I accepted the offer of an MA scholarship at Sydney University, under the supervision of the conservative imperial historian Professor John Manning Ward. My thesis, never completed, concerned trade union militancy. While it was tolerated

by Ward, he consistently chided and derided labour history and labour historians, regarding his liberal-conservative approach real history. My third income source was a two-year contract with the militant Seamen's Union of Australia (SUA) to complete a history of the Union commenced post-war by the late Brian Fitzpatrick, with me picking the story up at World War 2. Publication was intended to coincide with the Union's centenary in 1972, but SUA industrial struggles and the destruction of the letterpress setting of the book in a printery fire, stalled publication until 1981. One significant read during 1970, beginning in May according to a notation in my Penguin edition copy, was E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*.

My time with the SUA was an awakening. I began the task when maritime history had yet to emerge as a scholarly speciality in Australia, at a time when the field tended to be filled with 'ship-lover' publications. John Bach's comprehensive *Maritime History of Australia* (1976), and the first issue of the journal *Great Circle* (Australasian Association for Maritime History, 1979) were in the future. The SUA wanted an institutional history. Mixing and talking with maritime veterans whose experiences went back to World War I, some of whom had gone to sea under sail, I came to see my task as manifold: to not only write the history of a unique trade union, but to also try to explain the sources of its militancy, to accurately depict the great loss of Australian seamen's lives in peace and in war, to document the union's incredible record supporting causes at home and abroad beyond traditional matters relating to pay and working conditions. When I walked around the Sydney waterfront, for so long the main port-city of the island nation, I saw a simple 'fact': there was no Australia without the sea and ships; the wealth and enterprise symbolised by the Sydney cityscape, emerged through the medium of the sea and the portal of the waterfront, via the sweat and sacrifices of maritime workers. I came to see my job as going some small way towards bringing seamen, absent from mainstream histories, into the recorded history of Australia. A big call. I started the project in part elitist in my thinking, a tertiary trained historian doing a job, and finished humbled in many ways, having met new

teachers in those I met along the way. It was an experience that put a wedge between me and the academy, and academic writing. And I did not become part of the academy again until late in life (2007-), after a working life in secondary schools, freelance writing, and agricultural labouring.

After the SUA job, the idea of history as practice continued to grow, and the theoretical concerns of academia largely failed to grip me. Not that I wasn't aware of the debates; having quit the city to live and work, I kept abroad of issues via publications like *New Left Review*, correspondence with comrades variously making their ways through academe, regular visits to university libraries where major local international and local scholastic journals were available. My main point of contact with history was the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History (ASSLH), its various branch publications, and *Labour History*. While some publication of my history related work was in this latter, most of my material was published in non-scholarly outlets – trade union journals, *Overland*, the ASSLH branch publications *Hummer* (Sydney), *Illawarra Unity* (Illawarra), and in the cyber-age, *Workers Online* and *Leftwrites*. Other political writing and ruminations on education/teaching related matters were also published in non-scholarly outlets. To the end of 2012, this output amounted to some 600 items in 104 publications – journalism, articles, book reviews; some of the publications carrying my work only lasted a single issue. While this method of publication did not make me part of academic intellectual debate or, except in the eyes of a few, a 'scholar/intellectual', it did mean that along with other historians drawn to Thompsonesque 'history from below' and writing social movement/political history, I eventually became a 'participant' in history. As Thompson classically demonstrated, echoing Gramsci writing much earlier in his fascist prison, away from the hegemonic cultural/political institutions of the metropole was/is a world of discourse, and intellectual activity that tends to miss out on being accorded 'intellectual' status by the gate keepers for the ruling system of ideas.

My association with the SUA led to an ongoing relationship with old-time mariners and militants, and subsequently with the

Maritime Union of Australia, which formed in 1993 when the SUA and the Waterside Workers Federation amalgamated. Over time, I did a number of history-related jobs for these unions. Generally, this association, and that with Lockwood, meant that I gained historical insights, information, contacts that were unique; these I shared with researchers who requested my assistance (some 90 at last count), but not without first doing background checks on their bona fides. Beginning in 1965, I had become a target of Australian Security Intelligence Organisation surveillance, and was well aware of the information gathering techniques of spooks. I also encouraged/helped arrange the deposit of significant left historical records and personal papers with archival holdings.

THE NEW LEFT

There has been some interest in me as part of the New Left, for example in Alan Barcan's *From New Left to Factional Left* (Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 2011). As early as 1969, I had problems with the term, regarding it more as a journalistic device rather than a term with real meaning, a point I made in my *Notes on the New Left in Australia* (Marxist Research Foundation, Sydney, 1969). During the late 1960s, and coming into the 1970s, I was part of the leadership of the Association for International Cooperation and Disarmament (AICD), helping to build the first Moratorium. In those capacities, I had to work with many political tendencies, factions, and organisations involving people who crossed social class divides. My immediate aim was to confront and defeat a war, and the government that supported it, and that could not be achieved by inter-factional political purities and associated internecine battling; a mass movement was the key. It also had to do with the people who I met in those roles, some of whom were communists with backgrounds in united front politics. These latter made sense: great evils like the Vietnam war, and capitalism itself, would not be taken down by factionalised battling, which at times seemed to generate more invective against comrades than against the targeted Leviathans. This carried on into my historical work,

and in the long run gave rise to thinking about radical/dissenting traditions that crossed social classes, rather than in specific micro-components, as in ‘labour history’, which after much thought and deliberation I came to regard as a limiting historical approach. Essentially this was private thinking, but during a three-year stint as an agricultural worker, starting my shift in the pre-dawn hours and labouring alone for much of the time, I did a lot of thinking, and figured it was time to make my position clear. This I did in ‘Thoughts on Radical History’, a paper circulated privately within the Australian labour history community in 2004. Eventually this was published as ‘Never Neutral’ (*Illawarra Unity*, 2010). This thinking about radicalism was also manifested in *Radical Sydney* (UNSW Press, Sydney, 2010), co-authored with Terry Irving.

A BRUSH WITH WEIMAR

Rowan Cahill

Forty-eight years-ago tonight: it was 1969, and the night before Pam (1948-2015) and I married, and we were amongst the small number of guests invited to a function to farewell Associate Professor Ernest K. Bramsted (1901-1978) as he retired from Sydney University and prepared to return to the UK where he had citizenship. He had come to Sydney University in 1952 but was now deemed to have reached his use-by date. As it turned out, he still had a couple of books in him, and some teaching gigs.

Bramsted had been one of my teachers during my undergraduate years at Sydney University (1964-68) and had helped supervise my Honours work in 1968. We had become close during this time, and had had many discussions – about history, socialism, utopias, propaganda, rebellion, dissent, my own radical activities, morality, responsibility ...

Born in Germany into a liberal Jewish tradition, Bramsted had contributed to the socialist press in the early years of the Weimer Republic, gained a doctorate from the University of Berlin (1926), and a second at the University of London (1936), this latter thesis, with its mix of sociology, history, and literature, was published in 1937 as *Aristocracy and the Middle-Classes in Germany: Social Types in German Literature 1830-1900* (republished in 1964). Bramsted’s academic mentor and influence was the pioneer sociologist Karl Mannheim (1893-1947), and he later co-edited a collection of Mannheim’s last writings, *Freedom, Power, and Democratic Planning* (1951).

A victim of, and refugee from, the anti-semitism unleashed by Hitler's 1933 Enabling Act, Bramsted moved to Holland, then Britain, and during WW11 worked in counter-propaganda for the BBC, and later in secret war work for the Foreign Office in 'political intelligence'. Post-war he worked in Berlin on the transfer of Nazi documents into the public realm and gained an international reputation as a critical authority on propaganda and its coercive and shaping roles through the close case study of Joseph Goebbels, whose work he had monitored as part of his war work. Bramsted was a religious person and part of the Unitarian Church, his theological strand rejecting the notion of 'original sin', locating the genesis of evil/sin within the human being and the choices each one of us makes.

From tutorials and one-to-one discussions, through the haze of his yellow stained fingers chain smoking and quietly pointed but challenging Germanic accented English, I absorbed a lot from Bramsted ... about the history of ideas, about the roles of intellectuals in society and history, about the roles of fear and intimidation in controlling society, about the legitimacy of revolution, about events like the advent of Nazism and the Holocaust not being historical abnormalities but the results of human actions and inactions, with the emphasis on the latter, and that mass society is always about individuals, and at any time, individuals can have agency and it is compliance/complicity or otherwise – resistance – that counts. Metaphysically and historically, Evil is something each of us helps along, or counters.

There was only a handful of us young people at Bramsted's function, and Pam and I left early, returning to our respective parental homes. On the morrow we would marry and begin a new life together ... there was conscription and a related war to end; authorities with significant jail-time in mind for me, to be thwarted; and a world to win ... and the individual had agency, particularly if organised ... for better or for worse, and until death did us part, chances were that life was probably always going to be a bit different.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For supporting and encouraging our work, we thank the editors and publishers of *Hummer* (Sydney Branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History), *Illawarra Unity* (Illawarra Branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History), *Labour History Melbourne*, and *Recorder* (Melbourne Branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History), *Labour History: A Journal of Labour and Social History* (Australian Society for the Study of Labour History), *Marxist Left Review* (Socialist Alternative), *Progress in Political Economy* (Department of Political Economy, Sydney University), and *Working-Class Studies* (Working-Class Studies Association).

The University of Wollongong has been supportive by granting us Honorary associations – for Terry, since 2008; for Rowan, since 2014. As well, for Rowan, the warmth and inclusiveness of the education community that is the Southern Highlands campus of the University of Wollongong, have been crucial.

Rowan is grateful for the support and inputs of his partner, the late Pam Cahill (1948-2015) who was an integral part of his writing life, and acknowledges with regard to this book the many and varied contributions of: Anthony Ashbolt, Damien Cahill, Erin Cahill, Tim Cahill, Sharon Crozier-De Rosa, Phillip Deery, Monica Donoso, Hannah Forsyth, Diana Kelly, Julie Kimber, Adam Morton, John O'Brien, Michael Organ, Jodie Stewart, Kath Wilson.

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NOTES

In these Notes, the blog **Radical Sydney/Radical History** (radicalsydney.blogspot.com) is frequently referenced. We set it up in June 2010 as a means of promoting our book *Radical Sydney*, UNSW Press, 2010. Later it was expanded as a platform for our writings about history. It is regularly archived in the Pandora Web Archive of the National Library of Australia.

INTRODUCTION

The founding manifesto of the Sydney Free University, 'The Lost Ideal', was published in the Sydney University student paper *Honi Soit*, 3 October 1967. It is available on the **Reason in Revolt** site at:

<https://www.reasoninrevolt.net.au/objects/htm/a000522.htm>

For a later generation's review of the Free U experiment and discussion of its current relevance, see Nina Dillon Britton, 'The Free University: A people's history', *Honi Soit*, 26 October 2020:

<https://honisoit.com/2020/10/the-free-university-a-peoples-history/>

For a powerful critique of modern universities, and for a practical vision of change, see Raewyn Connell, *The Good University: What universities actually do and why it's time for radical change*, Monash University Publishing, Clayton, Victoria, 2019. Connell was one of the founders of the Sydney Free University.

PART 1: SHAPING TIMES

1. THE BARBER WHO READ HISTORY AND WAS OVERWHELMED

This was first published on the **Radical Sydney/Radical History** blog, July 2016. It was written following a haircut in rural Victoria during a road trip earlier that month. Adele is the mononymously known English singer-songwriter, popular in Australia at the time. The title of the essay references Bertolt Brecht's poem 'A Worker Reads History' (1936).

2. RADICAL ACADEMIA: BEYOND THE AUDIT CULTURE

This essay was written and published in two stages. 'Missing in Action' was intended as a stand-alone piece, and was published on the **Radical Sydney/Radical History** blog, 19 May 2015. Significant feedback followed nationally and internationally, raising questions and issues we thought needed to be addressed. We did so in a series of notes as 'What Can Be Done', and added this on 22 October 2015. Discussion of the generous collaborative work of Stuart Hall in this essay and his role as author should note the qualification that he did produce a sole-authored book in English, *The Hard Road to Renewal*, 1988, a collection of some of his magazine pieces previously published regarding Thatcherism and the need for a new politics of the Left. The complete 'Radical Academia' essay with Endnotes is at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/lhapapers/2149>

3. THE FUTURE PROFESSORiate

This was written in January 2013 and published on the **Radical Sydney/Radical History** blog. It takes aim at the short-sighted careerism of senior historians when training their doctoral students. It also introduces one of our themes, the pathetic milk-and-water history of 'representations' of the material world that dominated the thinking of historians in retreat from radical materialist scholarship. For further reading see Martin R. Mulford, 'The Commodification and De-professionalization of the PhD', *Perspectives on History*, February 2009.

4. NEVER NEUTRAL: ON LABOUR HISTORY/RADICAL HISTORY

This essay began as a privately circulated discussion paper in 2004 titled 'Thoughts on Radical History'. Following completion of the writing of *Radical Sydney* it was expanded and published in *Illawarra Unity - Journal of the Illawarra Branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History*, in 2010. The title references the classic memoir by doyen American radical historian Howard Zinn, *You Can't be Neutral on a Moving Train: A Personal History*, 2002. The essay is best accessed, complete with extensive and detailed Endnotes, at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/unity/vol10/iss1/4>

5. ASIO AND LABOUR HISTORY

This began life as Terry's Dinner Address to the Eighth Biennial Australian Labour History Conference, Brisbane, 4 October 2003. Slightly revised, it was published in *The Hummer*, journal of the Sydney branch of the Labour History Society, vol. 4, no. 1, Summer 2003-04, where the footnotes can be found, or on-line here: <https://www.labourhistory.org.au/hummer/vol-4-no-1/asio/>

6. REDISCOVERING RADICAL HISTORY

Reflections on the early days of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History (ASSLH), and the first attempt by Terry to show the close connection between the tradition of history writing in the labour movement from the 1880s to the 1950s and the formation of the ASSLH. It also reflects on Robin Gollan's connection with this tradition. It was published on the **Radical Sydney/Radical History** blog in 2010 before being revised for *The Hummer*, where it appeared in vol. 6, no. 2, 2010. With extensive footnotes it is available online here: <https://www.labourhistory.org.au/hummer/vol-6-no-2/radica/>

7. LABOUR HISTORY AND ITS POLITICAL ROLE

An address by Terry to a conference in 2011 on the occasion of the journal *Labour History's* 100th issue, where he took the opportunity to suggest some changes to the title and subject matter of the journal in order to reclaim its connection with contemporary labour and social movements. He would later recall this as 'A waste of breath: it was like talking to a brick wall'. The address was published in March 2013 on the **Radical Sydney/Radical History** blog, where the footnotes may be consulted.

8. FROM LABOUR HISTORY TO THE HISTORY OF THE WORKING CLASS

This essay is an extract from an address to the Sydney Historical Research Network in March 2017, as part of a session on 'Histories of Class Now'. The other speakers were Hannah Forsyth and Elizabeth Humphrys. The speakers were asked to say something about their current research. A revised version of the address appeared in *Journal of Working-Class Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1, June 2017. The online file with footnotes: <https://workingclassstudiesjournal.files.wordpress.com/2016/06/jwcs-vol-2-issue-1-june-2017-irving1.pdf>

9. TALE OF A MANUSCRIPT

This brief piece was published on the 'Radical Ruminations' page of the **Radical Sydney/Radical History** blog in May 2019. The times and project discussed in the piece were formative learning experiences for Rowan, and the beginning of decades of historical research and writing outside of the academy. It is available at: http://works.bepress.com/rowan_cahill/250/

10. A RADICAL HISTORY BOOK AND HOW WE CAME TO WRITE IT
Originally published with footnotes in *Illawarra Unity: Journal of the Illawarra Branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History*, Volume 10, Issue 1, 2010, pp. 58-65.
11. RADICAL HISTORY AND MAINSTREAM HISTORY
Originally published on the **Labour History Melbourne** site as ‘Radical History: Thinking, Writing and Engagement’, 14 March 2016, and variously republished subsequently.
12. VIOLENCE IN AUSTRALIAN HISTORY: WE’D RATHER NOT KNOW ABOUT IT
This first appeared in the ‘Ruminations’ section of our blog, **Radical Sydney/Radical History** in April 2012, and subsequently updated with regard to its references to later standard general histories of Australia. Mentioned in the text: Mick Armstrong, ‘Disturbing the Peace: Riots and the Working Class’, *Marxist Left Review*, no. 4, Winter 2012; Terrence Cutler, ‘Sunday, Bloody Sunday: the Townsville Meat Strike of 1918-19’ in J. Iremonger et al (eds), *Strikes*, 1973, pp 81-102; Terry Irving ‘To revolutionise Australia – The Surprising History of Early Working-Class Politics’, *Illawarra Unity*, vol. 7, issue 1, 2007, pp 5-15; Sophie Wahnich, *In Defence of the Terror: Liberty or Death in the French Revolution*, London and New York, Verso, 2012.
13. WILLIAM ASTLEY (PRICE WARUNG) AND THE RADICAL INVENTION OF THE LABOUR PARTY.
This is a revised version of Terry’s paper delivered to the Eighth National Labour History Conference. The original was published in Bradley Bowden and John Kellett (eds), *Transforming Labour: Work, Workers, Struggle and Change*, Brisbane Labour History Association, 2003, where the footnotes can be found. In this essay, Terry uses a concept, radical democracy, unusual in mainstream history. To understand the history of liberal democracy as an ideology intended to suppress radical democracy, see Bernard Manin, *The Principles of Representative Government*, Cambridge University Press, 1997. For a political thinker’s approach see Sheldon Wolin, *Fugitive Democracy and Other Essays*, Princeton University Press, 2016. For insights into radical democracy’s history in Australia see Essay 6 in this collection, and Terry Irving, *The Southern Tree of Liberty*, Sydney, Federation Press, 2006, and Terry Irving, *The Fatal Lure of Politics: The Life and Thought of Vere Gordon Childe*, Monash University Press, 2020, Chs 9 and 11. On labour intellectuals, see his article written with Sean Scalmer, ‘Labour Intellectuals in Australia: Modes, Traditions, Generations,

Transformations’, *International Review of Social History*, 50/1, April 2005, pp 1-26. See also Barry Andrews, *Price Warung* (William Astley), Twayne Publishers, Boston, 1976.

14. A LIVING TRADITION
Originally published on the **Radical Sydney/Radical History** blog, 30 July 2015.
15. WITNESSING AGAINST THE BEAST: EDWARD THOMPSON
First published in *Hummer*, Journal of the Sydney Branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, in 2000. It is an indication of the mindset of its author before the writing of *Radical Sydney*, and on the eve of that beginning.
16. COMMONS AND OUTLAWS: PETER LINEBAUGH AND MARCUS REDIKER
Originally published on the **Radical Sydney/Radical History** blog 16 September 2014. The review was subsequently used by Linebaugh’s publisher in publicising *Commons and Outlaws*.
17. A SHELF OF REDS: NEGLECTED AUSTRALIAN HISTORIANS
This piece took a fair bit of discussion to arrive at the works selected. In the end we chose publications that meant something to us personally, and which more widely reflected the long radical historical writing tradition largely ignored by historians working within the neoliberal academy. For further reading about this tradition, see Terry Irving and Sean Scalmer, ‘Australian Labour Intellectuals: an Introduction’, *Labour History*, Number 77, November 1999, pp 1-10.
18. A MATERIALIST HISTORY OF THE SILVERTOWN STRIKE:
JOHN TULLY
This essay combines a review of John Tully’s *Silvertown*, Monthly Review Press, 2014, in *Recorder*, July 2014, with comment on its materialist approach to history published on our blog, **Radical Sydney/Radical History**. This comment was reprinted by Monthly Review Press in August 2014. Mentioned books are: Rachel Holmes, *Eleanor Marx: a Life*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London, 2015; Dona Torr, *Tom Mann and His Times, Volume 1*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1956; John Tully, *Silvertown – The Lost Story of a Strike that Shook London and Helped Launch the Modern Labour Movement*, Monthly Review Press, New York and London, 2014.

19. BEYOND LUMINARIES: THOMPSON, LINDSAY AND CHILDE

This essay appeared in the ‘Ruminations’ section of our blog, **Radical Sydney/Radical History** in March 2015, sparked by Terry’s review of Cal Winslow’s *E.P. Thompson and the Making of the New Left: Essays and Polemics*, Monthly Review Press, 2014, in *Labour History*, 108 (May 2015). Mentioned in the text: Theodore Koditschek, in Roger Fieldhouse and Richard Taylor, eds. *E.P. Thompson and English Radicalism*, 2014; Victor N. Paananen, *British Marxist Criticism*, 2014, p. 56.

20. NEGLECTED SCHOLARSHIP: RUPERT LOCKWOOD

First published on the **Progress in Political Economy** site (www.ppesydney.net) based in the Department of Political Economy, Sydney University, 29 January 2016. For a detailed study of Lockwood see Rowan Cahill, ‘Rupert Lockwood (1908-1997): Journalist, Communist, Intellectual’, available open access at: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/theses/3942>

21. AN ACTIVIST FOR ALL SEASONS: R. D. WALSHE

First published on the **Radical Sydney/Radical History** blog, 24 March 2018. It was subsequently drawn upon in Rowan’s Obituary for Bob Walshe published in *Labour History* No. 114, May 2018. In his Will, Walshe tasked Rowan with the care of his papers. These are now in the State Library of NSW, catalogued as the ‘Bob Walshe papers ca. 1939-ca. 2014’ at MLMSS 10457.

22&23. TERRY IRVING, ROWAN CAHILL

These autobiographical pieces were published on the **Radical Sydney/Radical History** blog, May 2013, as a two-parter titled ‘Shaping Histories’. We wrote them following interview requests from researchers variously interested in our work. They are also exercises in doing something we believe all historians should do as part of being ‘historians’: that is being able to account for one’s interest in history in a way that is at once autobiographical, and a self-history of ideas. This is a process that might help keep the historian grounded with an eye on the humanity of historical tasks, and act as an antidote to the siren lure of, and drowning in, theory. Part of the process perhaps, as this two-parter demonstrates, is acknowledgement of the byways and unexpected sources that bring us to where we are.

As explained at the beginning of Terry’s piece, he was stimulated by Sadia Schneider’s research on New Left historians, and questions she put to him during her research. Since answering her questions he added some more information. The essay should be read in conjunction with another autobiographical essay that appeared as ‘A Red Metamorphosis’ in our

blog, April 2014, and as ‘Which Voice? Which Working Class?’ in Dee Michel, Jacqueline Z. Wilson and Verity Archer (eds), *Bread and Roses: Voices of Australian Academics from the Working Class*, Rotterdam, 2015. Further relevant reading: Sadia Schneider, ‘The Australian New Left: a study in historiography and social change’, BA Honours thesis, University of Melbourne, 2013:

<https://minerva-access.unimelb.edu.au/handle/11343/41790>

Humphrey McQueen, *A New Britannia: An argument concerning the social origins of Australian radicalism and nationalism*, Penguin Books, 1970.

24. BRUSH WITH WEIMAR

First published on the ‘Radical Ruminations’ page of the **Radical Sydney/Radical History** blog, 16 May 2017. It is available at: http://works.bepress.com/rowan_cahill/234/.

For a biographical overview of its subject, historian Ernest Bramsted, see John Hooper, ‘Ernest K. Bramsted (1901-1987): a European historian in Germany, England and Australia’, *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, Volume 31, Issue 3, December 1985, pp. 397-407.

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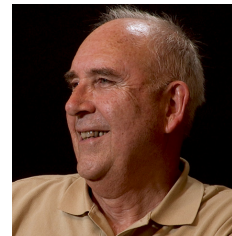
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