

Recorder

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Seeger at Eighty-Nine

90 ON MAY DAY – HAPPY BIRTHDAY PETE SEEGER

By Ken Mansell

Not many 89 year-olds are confident and feisty enough to produce a compact disk of their own recently-composed songs but American folk music giant Pete Seeger was always that sort of person.

Seeger, who defies old age to attend vigils against the Iraq war and climate change, has recorded 'Seeger at 89', an intriguing collection of relevant musings on contemporary social issues. It is the latest, and perhaps not the last, addition to the vast musical catalogue of one of the twentieth-century's greatest cultural figures. Seeger's life has been profoundly inspirational in all of its aspects: as a serious scholar of his country's folk traditions, as an intense and committed left-wing

political activist, and as a musician with a uniquely charismatic performance style.

Pete Seeger's apprenticeship was served at the union meeting and on the picket line, and at rallies against fascism. He earned enormous respect and a considerable international reputation when he stood out as a symbol of defiance in the dark days of the first Cold War. Blacklisted and hounded, he refused to be cowed and courageously defied the McCarthyist witch-hunters. In the more liberal period of the late-fifties and sixties, Seeger was the Johnny Appleseed for a new generation of singer-songwriters sprouting everywhere around him.

Where Seeger did taste commercial success (first with the Weavers, then with the song 'Little Boxes') he was bored by it. He conspired to reach out and change minds, not his own bank balance. Many of the folk movement's best-known anthems were composed by Seeger. On stage, and in the recording studio, he popularized folk instrumental (particularly Appalachian banjo) styles with virtuoso verve, and documented the rich corpus of black and white American folksong. Always a crusader for humanist causes rather than a mere entertainer, the power of Seeger's performance rested on its sincerity and passion. Seeger very rarely performed solo: he invariably obliterated the star-audience duality of Tin Pan Alley. The sound of Seeger rousing others to join him, his high-tenor voice freeing itself to soar above and beyond, became a signature of the optimistic sixties.

Pete Seeger will turn 90 on May 3rd this year. Following his example and singing out against injustice wherever possible would be the most fitting way to celebrate his wonderful life. A campaign has been mounted in the United States for Seeger to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and all are urged to join it. It is perhaps not too hyperbolic or corny to say that, like Joe Hill, Pete Seeger will never die. If he ever does, we can imagine him frailin' and pickin' all the way to the pearly gates. What a hootenanny they'll have up there!



Keith Windschuttle and the Macintyre Affair

By Robert Pascoe

The latest salvo in the History Wars was fired last October in an article in *Quadrant* by its editor, Keith Windschuttle. Entitled 'Stuart Macintyre and the Blainey Affair', its essential argument was that Macintyre was part of an academic cabal that hounded Blainey out of academia following his controversial foray into the immigration debate in 1984. In this telling, far from being a defender of academic freedom, Macintyre is depicted as a second-rank historian who helped in the left-wing conspiracy against Australia's best and most popular historian.[1]

This paper is a rebuttal of that argument, and an attempt to put this intriguing phase of the History Wars into some perspective; it was offered to Keith Windschuttle for consideration for publication in *Quadrant*, in the hope of stimulating an interesting debate, but he declined it with a brief email saying 'it was not my cup of tea'.

Perhaps Stuart Macintyre ought to be pleased that his name is regularly used by the New Right as a code for all they oppose in Australian social science. At the launch of a new book by Mark Lopez at Melbourne's Imperial Hotel on the evening of 14 October, speakers like Kevin Donnelly and Andrew Bolt used Macintyre's name freely as emblematic of left-wing orthodoxy. Things were so bad, quipped Bolt, that even the history teachers at his son's private school, an education for which he paid handsomely, accepted the Stolen Generations concept uncritically!

The opening proposition of the article in question is that Macintyre's history is Marxist. This rather obvious statement is not nuanced by any consideration of the kind of Marxist Macintyre might be, or, indeed, how his progression from the Communist Party to Marxist scholarship might have changed and developed over time. It is simply not enough, as Windschuttle does, merely to list Macintyre's works that have an obvious Marxist interest and to dismiss his scholarship on those grounds.

The issue is really what Macintyre does with his Marxist insights in his history-writing, and how his experiences as an historian have shaped that writing. In what is arguably one of his best books, *Little Moscows*, he understands Marxism as a way of life for three militant British communities – far from being a set of categories imposed on a population, it is a means by which people in these localities begin to understand how they fit within a larger capitalist world. With globalisation now taking jobs from people in the developed economies, this book still holds contemporary relevance.

The second step in Windschuttle's argument is to accuse Macintyre of a studied condescension toward older historians – this step is to foreground his alleged attack

on Blainey. Windschuttle takes a quote from Macintyre's *The History Wars* (p.35) in which Macintyre contends that Ernest Scott's history might now be seen as imperialist. Windschuttle truncates the quote to leave out the last sentence which makes exactly the opposite point: 'The duty of the historian is to understand how an earlier age might have held such views.' Far from condescending older historians, Macintyre has consistently sought to place them in their appropriate context.

Macintyre's interest in historiography (he helped supervise my PhD in this field, published as *The Manufacture of Australian History*, 1979) is one of the markers that distinguish him from Blainey. (In his works Blainey chooses not to engage in historiographical debate – he prefers to make his case directly from the primary sources. Blainey's *Black Kettle and Full Moon*, though unsung, is a great work in this genre.)

Since Macintyre is alert to cases of the persecution of left-wing historians in the Cold War era, Windschuttle challenges Macintyre's account of the famous Russel Ward affair of 1955. He cites the Frank Crowley article in *Quadrant*, May 2004, which disputes the left-wing claim of bias against Ward. He does not cite the three letters to *Quadrant*, published in the July-August 2004 issue, that challenge Crowley's version of events. The fact that Ward went on to a job at the University of New England and achieved great success with *The Australian Legend* hardly exonerates the University of New South Wales for deciding not to appoint him; if anything, it makes that university look all the more small-minded.

The crux of the Windschuttle case against Macintyre comes next, with the citation of the letter published in *The Age* on 19 May 1984 from all the members of the History Department at the University of Melbourne seeking to dissociate themselves from Blainey's views on immigration. In naming Macintyre as one of the 23 signatories, Windschuttle does not mention that far more illustrious (and non-Marxist) historians of the day, such as Greg Denning, also signed the letter. He also leaves out the detail that while the letter was published on p. 12 of that issue of *The Age*, there was also a front-page article in which the department chairman explained to journalist Rebecca Batrey that 'we are not accusing him of being extremist, but we are concerned that there is an opportunity for extremists to claim academic respectability for their views.'

In philosophical terms Blainey's right to academic freedom was not an issue – as Macintyre has pointed out, Blainey had immediate access to as much media attention as he would ever have wanted or needed. The real issue was that the freedom of speech (a different freedom) does not permit one to call out 'Fire!' in a crowded theatre. This is what the Warrnambool speech and subsequent pronouncements by Blainey amounted to.

Windschuttle next defends Blainey against the accusation that he is a racist, and then concedes that Macintyre says the same thing in print. He then goes on to criticise the collection of scholarly essays, *Surrender Australia?* (1985), that subjected Blainey's publications on immigration to detailed critique, and leaves out one inconvenient fact: Macintyre was not a contributor to that book! Again, the authors in this collection ranged across the ideological spectrum – it was hardly a left-wing get-up job.

Then comes Blainey's departure from academia. The story of Blainey's early retirement from the University of Melbourne in 1988, aged 58, has become part of the New Right's mythologising – this latest twist, that Macintyre is at the centre of it, is a new development.

The years between 1984 and 1988 have been glossed over in this account. In fact Blainey was re-elected as Dean during those years, because his leadership of the Faculty, with sub-dean Dinny O'Hearn as the manager, was viewed as successful. Academics are quick to criticise and undermine deans, as one or two of Blainey's successors at Melbourne have found. For Blainey to be re-appointed to a second term as dean seriously undermines the conspiracy theory.

But the story of the Blainey Affair continued to grow, helped by John Howard, Peter Ryan and others. When Howard spoke of 'the fangs of the left' in his speech at the *Quadrant* dinner in 2006, he overlooked the broad ideological spectrum represented by the 23 signatories.

The newspaper letter igniting the Affair came to be seen as an attack on academic freedom, instead of what it really was: a cautionary note about untrammelled freedom of speech. Blainey was seen to speak as an individual and not as an 'expert', precisely because academic freedom is premised on the notion that only by researching a field can one reasonably claim the right to speak out on the issue at hand. Even Blainey's strongest supporters (including the present author) would have difficulty portraying *All for Australia* as an objective, well-researched account of Australian immigration policy.

Blainey himself did not complain of his treatment at the hands of his colleagues. Only in 2006, long after the events had been mythologised, did he say anything remotely of this kind.[2] In an interview published in *Quadrant*, he was asked a leading question:

'Would you have stayed at Melbourne University if it hadn't been for the hostility whipped against you there? [Blainey] Oh yes. Why should you leave an institution you've been in for a long time, where you are close to a very good library, are well paid and have a lot of time to write after doing your teaching and administration?'

In his answer Blainey leaves out two critical aspects of the university experience: the pleasure of teaching students, and the camaraderie of academic colleagues with passions close to one's own. Blainey was an outstanding teacher. In 1975 I sat in on one of his lectures to Commerce students outlining material that later became part of *Triumph of the Nomads*. Here was his genius – to get undergraduates destined for a career in Collins Street to take seriously the economic life of a people far removed from their immediate experience.

When I interviewed him later that day, and put fairly mild criticisms of his work to him, he put up strong defences of what he had written in books such as *The Tyranny of Distance*. He did not want to debate what he saw as irrefutable propositions, based on meticulous research. That impression of him is reflected in what I wrote in my first book about him: 'Blainey has most determinedly set himself apart from those whom he regards as conventional historians'.[3] He was not comfortable in debate.

It is that quality of Blainey's that enlivens his best work; it is also a sufficient explanation for what happened to him in the mid-1980s. A conspiracy in which Macintyre took part is not necessary to explaining those events.

Windschuttle is wrong to argue that Macintyre conspired to unseat Blainey from his Chair in History at Melbourne. Blainey left freely at a time of his own choosing. He had been a freelance historian for the first third of his career; he returned to freelance work after 1988 and his subsequent books reflect the liberation from the constraints of academia that he sought. He was not crushed by his experiences of the mid-1980s and Macintyre rose to the top of the profession by dint of the value of his own (Marxist) scholarship.

[1] Keith Windschuttle, 'Stuart Macintyre and the Blainey Affair', *Quadrant*, vol. 57, no. 10, October 2008, pp. 30–35.

[2] Frank Devine, 'A conversation with Geoffrey Blainey', *Quadrant*, vol. 55, no. 10, pp. 48–52.

[3] Rob Pascoe, *The Manufacture of Australian History*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, p. 132.

11th NATIONAL LABOUR HISTORY CONFERENCE

Labour History in the New Century: the 11th National Labour History Conference, 8–10 July 2009, Perth.

Early Bird registration
closes on the 30th April

Convenor:
Bobbie Oliver

Email:
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Website:
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From Warsaw to Melbourne, Conflict between the Jewish Labour Bund and the Communists

By Philip Mendes

To understand the Bund/Communist conflict in Cold War Melbourne, we need to go back to events in late 19th and early 20th century Europe. The key dates are as follows:

1897: Jewish Labour Bund formed to combat class and ethnic oppression. Bund soon demands Jewish national rights as well as equal individual rights for Jewish workers. Bund stands for *doiykayt*, hereness, preserving Jewish life wherever Jews live.

March 1898: Bund plays a major role in the formation of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. Three of nine founding delegates are from the Bund, and meeting is held in Minsk which is a stronghold of the Bund.

1905-06 Russian Revolution: The Bund plays major role in revolution via initiating mass strikes and demonstrations, and organizes Jewish self-defence against pogroms.

1917-1922: Only minimal support from Jewish masses for Bolshevism, but a significant number of assimilated Jewish individuals including Trotsky, Kamenev, Zinoviev, Sverdlov, Uritskii, Litvinov and Radek are prominent in leadership. Russian Bund is active in the revolution, but is suppressed by the Bolsheviks and formally dissolves in 1921.

1918-1939 Poland. After long and complicated debate, the Polish Bund refuses to affiliate with the Comintern although a significant minority defects to the Communist Party. The Bund forms large social, cultural and political infrastructure including trade unions, schools, sporting groups, libraries and health centres. By the mid-to-late 1930s, the Bund becomes the strongest Jewish political organisation in Poland securing major victories in Jewish communal and Polish municipal elections. Jews also form a large component of Polish Communist Party – approximately 25 to 35 per cent of membership. Communists regularly attack Bund and its influence in trade unions including numerous examples of physical assaults and even murder.

1939-45: Many leading Bundists are arrested and/or eliminated by Soviet secret police during “Red Terror” including most famously Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter. Bund leads anti-Nazi resistance movement in ghettos, but loses most of its members and supporters in Holocaust.

1945-48: The Bund attempts to regroup in post-war Poland, but is suppressed by the Communist government. Most of its leaders emigrate to other countries including Australia by early 1949.

The early Australian Jewish Left was primarily an immigrant phenomenon associated with the post World War One arrival of European Jews. It existed principally in Melbourne and Sydney, had no significant trade union base, and was largely directed by middle-class males, although some activists had a background of European working-class affiliation.

The first major Jewish Left group – the Gezerd – was formed by Polish Jewish immigrants in 1930. The aim of the Gezerd (meaning “back to earth”) was to support the settlement of Jews in the Soviet Biro-Bidzhan, a far away Asiatic province of the USSR where the Bolsheviks hoped to establish a Jewish homeland. However, the Gezerd declined during the war due to its blind support of the Soviet Union, particularly at the time of the unpopular Nazi/Soviet pact. It was dissolved in 1944.

The most significant Australian Jewish Left group was the Melbourne Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism, a broad-based organization established in 1942 by a coalition of social democrats, communists and liberals (both immigrant and Anglo-Australian Jews) determined to take a public stand against anti-Semitism. In spite of its overt left-wing sympathies, the Council was a highly influential, if not dominant organization in the Melbourne Jewish community of the immediate post-war years, acting as the official public relations representative of the Victorian Jewish Board of Deputies (VJBD).

The Council’s emphasis on the joint struggle against the evils of fascism and anti-Semitism reflected the experiences of many Jewish refugees who had experienced persecution under anti-communist regimes. This emphasis suggested that potential dangers to Jews came principally from conservatives and the political Right. Conversely, the Council believed that left-wing groups and organizations were particularly sympathetic to Jews. This narrow strategy quickly came under attack with the beginnings of the Cold War in 1948. The Jewish political unity of the wartime period began to erode. Jewish support for the Soviet Union collapsed as increasing evidence of Stalinist anti-Semitism began to emerge. In addition, Jews locally and internationally were influenced by the growth of anti-communism, and the pressure to endorse new political alignments against the USSR.

In contrast, the Council rejected the Cold War consensus, and attempted to maintain its existing political links and strategies. As a result, the Council became involved in a series of public disputes and controversies which progressively weakened its previously strong support within the Jewish community. What was common in all these controversies was the allegation that the Council was associating the Jewish community per se with communist activities, and therefore creating, rather than combating anti-Semitism.

The allegation that the Council was controlled by Communist or pro-Soviet factions has some merit, but is also strongly linked to the Cold War politics of the period. On the one hand, there is little evidence of direct Communist Party control of the Council. On the other hand, there is little doubt that the Council was significantly influenced by a number of prominent Communist Party members and active sympathizers.

It was the Council's inadequate response to Stalinist anti-Semitism that finally destroyed its political credibility. In particular, the Council responded to the anti-Semitic Czech Slansky show trial of November 1952 and the associated USSR Doctors Plot of January 1953 by claiming that anti-Semitism and Communism were a contradiction in terms. Whilst the Council did not join the Communist Party of Australia in formally endorsing the show trials, it consistently denied that any anti-Jewish manifestations per se were involved. This position, which appeared to prioritise the Council's Left loyalties over its Jewish loyalties, eroded the Council's remaining support in the mainstream Jewish community.

The major Left opposition to the Jewish Council during the Cold War period came from the social democratic and anti-communist Jewish Labor Bund. The Bund was originally formed in Melbourne in 1928 by the newly-arrived Polish Jew, Sender Burstin, as a small outpost of the international Bund, but sharing its unique commitment to secular Yiddish culture and education, socialism, and anti-Zionism. The Melbourne branch grew significantly after World War Two with the arrival of many Yiddish-speaking Polish Jewish refugees. Bundists soon became involved in broader politics, joining the Labor Party and the affiliated New Australia Council (NAC) in significant numbers. Prominent Bundist Bono Wiener became Secretary of the NAC, and his friend Joseph Winkler the Treasurer.

Many of the Polish Bundists had been strongly influenced by the intense hatred which existed between the Communists and the Bund in Poland between the wars, and they detested the Soviet Union. Consequently, they colluded with the Zionist movement to destroy the Jewish Council's influence in the Jewish Board of Deputies and the Kadimah Cultural Centre including the Kadimah Youth organisation. They also campaigned against the Council and other alleged apologists for Communism within the Victorian ALP, but with less success. Eventually, the Victorian ALP dissolved the New Australia Council, and established a new committee headed by Jewish Council Secretary, Ernest Platz. Wiener was then expelled from the Victorian ALP following his unsuccessful attempt to discredit Council activist Sam Goldbloom as an alleged secret member of the Communist Party.

Jews have also been active in broader Australian Left parties and movements. For example, Jewish support for

the now defunct Communist Party of Australia (CPA) appears to have been significant during World War Two and the immediate post-war years. This support reflected the Soviet Union's wartime alliance with the Western powers, its rescue of many Polish Jews from the Nazi Holocaust, its strong support for the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, and the Party's strong stand against anti-Semitism in Australia. Conversely, the revelations of Stalinist anti-Semitism in the early 1950s, and the CPA's defence of the Soviet Union's policies quickly eroded much of this support.

Jewish support for the CPA took three principal forms. Firstly, a prominent Jewish fraction in the late 1940s and early 1950s included some forty to forty-five mainly youthful and mostly immigrant activists from the Melbourne suburb of Carlton. This fraction played a dominant role in the Jewish Council Youth Section, and in the associated Kadimah Youth Organization. In addition, a number of Jews played prominent roles in the CPA leadership. There is also some evidence of significant Jewish financial support for the CPA during the immediate post-war years. However, once it became clear that the Soviet Union was actually persecuting rather than defending Jews, these donations quickly declined.

'From Warsaw to Melbourne, Conflict between the Jewish Labour Bund and the Communists' is an edited version of a talk given by Philip Mendes at the Melbourne Jewish Museum exhibition on "Speaking for the Ordinary Man, Charles Aisen – tinsmith, socialist, folk artist", 19 February 2009.

Monty Miller Heritage Appeal

Monty Miller (1839-1920), the life long activist in labour movement, anti-war and trade union campaigns, celebrated as a veteran of the Eureka stockade - lies buried in the unmarked grave AA0003 at Karrakatta Cemetery, Perth with his wife Sarah and son Thomas.

The Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, in consultation with his descendants and the support of the National Trust, has launched a nation wide appeal to raise the necessary finance for:

- A modest plaque placed on the grave containing only the names of the people buried there and
- A separate memorial established in the vicinity of the grave which would recognise and record Monty's life-long political activities.

To make a donation to the Appeal please complete coupon and post to The National Trust, PO Box 1162, West Perth 6872. Donations are tax deductible. Cheque/Money Orders should be made out to the National Trust (WA). Monty Miller Heritage Appeal. To make a donation by credit card please download the flyer from the Perth Branch, ASSLH website: <http://www.asslh.org.au/perth>

Bookish and Labor to his bootstraps*

Vale Francis Daniel Crean
By Andrew West

Frank Crean combined a classic blue-collar heritage with a deep religious faith and a relentless drive towards self-improvement. He spent two decades in opposition before getting the chance to help Whitlam govern, first as treasurer and later as deputy prime minister, after Labor's victory in 1972 and re-election in 1974.

Crean was a committed Presbyterian - and a Sunday School superintendent for much of his life - with a distinctly Catholic name. Born Francis Daniel Crean on 28 February, 1916, in the Victorian town of Hamilton, his father, John, was a bicycle maker and labourer, and his mother, Alison, a school teacher.

In an autobiographical article in *The Melbourne* in 1993, Crean - a keen reader as a boy - said the town had no library, only a Mechanics Institute with a spartan collection of books. The Creans survived the Great Depression but the images of privation - of people with no work other than selling skinned rabbits door to door, and of those living with the shame of being "sussos" on the dole - were imprinted on the young Francis's mind. Crean sat the leaving certificate at Melbourne Boys High in 1933 and began work at the Tax Office. He studied accountancy at the YMCA and later gained degrees in commerce and arts at the University of Melbourne.

Crean settled in Albert Park, in Melbourne's inner suburbs. He joined the Labor Party in the early 1940s and in 1945 sought preselection for the state seat. But there was a hitch. The party's assistant secretary, Pat Kennelly, was worried about endorsing a man with a Catholic name, in an age of fierce sectarianism. "When I explained that despite my name, I was not a practising Catholic but a practising Presbyterian, this cleared the way," Crean wrote. "But I was advised to cut the Daniel and become plain Frank." He won the seat then married Mary Findlay, who was his wife for 63 years.

His parliamentary career was truncated by defeat in the 1947 state election. Two years later, he was elected the state MP for Prahran. In 1951 Crean was elected to the federal seat of Melbourne Ports and spent what were probably the most creative years of his life in Opposition.

His former colleague Doug McClelland said Crean's faith and family - he and Mary had three sons, Simon, David and Stephen - sustained him during 21 years out of power. "Frank was very devout," McClelland said. "He derived his sense of social justice and fairness from that radical Scottish Presbyterian tradition." But Crean was also a little prudish. "He hated swearing and I only once heard him use the word 'bloody'," McClelland said.

After Labor's victory in 1972, Whitlam, who came to power with a manifesto that would require big public spending, turned to the steady hand of Crean for the treasury portfolio. As Whitlam's speechwriter, Graham Freudenberg, said, Crean won the job he had long coveted but at the worst possible time.

His 1973 budget was considered a solid, successful job but two months after its delivery, the Yom Kippur War broke out and the oil shock followed. "Frank, like all of us, predicated the 1973 budget on continuing the long economic boom of the postwar years," Freudenberg said.

"We expected to pay for the program out of the proceeds of economic growth. But pretty soon we were facing the worst economic crisis between the Depression and the crisis we face now." McClelland says that throughout 1974, as the international economic crisis worsened, Crean tried to rein in the big-spending plans of his colleagues. "Frank warned us that inflation was getting out of hand because of the way we were spending. We were all in there trying to get a quid for our departments." But in late 1974, as the charismatic left-winger Jim Cairns began agitating for more expansionist economic policies, Whitlam finally allowed him his opportunity. Cairns became treasurer and Crean was bumped to international trade. The next year, Crean won the deputy prime minister's position but never regained treasury.

But McClelland said Crean never lost his political antennae. In late 1975, Whitlam, Crean and Fred Daly began negotiating with the Liberal leader, Malcolm Fraser, to try to break the budget impasse in the Senate. McClelland remembers asking Crean how negotiations were going. "'No bloody good,' he told me, and Frank never swore. He said he thought the Libs had something up their sleeve. I said: 'What?' He said, 'the governor-general'." Days later, the governor-general, Sir John Kerr, dismissed the Whitlam government.

Crean lived through Labor's defeat in 1975 and retired from politics in 1977. He is survived by his wife Mary and his sons Simon and David, a former minister in the Tasmanian Labor government. Stephen died in 1985.

*Edited version of an article which appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Reprinted with the permission of Fairfax Holdings and the author, Andrew West.

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