

RECORDER

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Ben Chifley Remembered

By Brian Smiddy

When I visit the City of Bathurst, NSW, I always try to remember the great Labor leader, Ben Chifley. It is pleasing to report that the Federal Executive of the ALP and the ACTU on behalf of the Labor Movement of Australia, have erected a beautiful memorial at the gravesite of Ben Chifley, in the Bathurst Cemetery.



Ben was Prime Minister of Australia from July 1945 until December 1949. Prior to holding this appointment, he was Treasurer in John Curtin's Labor Wartime Government.



On the memorial is the great Chifley statement made on 10 June 1951, 'if an idea is worth fighting for, no matter the penalty, fight for the right, and truth and justice will prevail'. It is still as relevant today.

In addition a recent story from the Bathurst City Council newsletter, reports that Chifley's locomotive has been brought back to Bathurst. This section is reprinted here:-

'Final stop for Chifley Engine. A journey of more than two decades has come to an end with the Chifley Engine now back on display at the Bathurst Railway Station, around twenty years after it was originally removed for restoration.

The DSO Class steam locomotive, number 5112 was driven by Australia's 16th Prime Minister, Ben Chifley when he worked on the railways around Bathurst prior to his political career. After a \$240,000 restoration project the Engine is back in its rightful place.

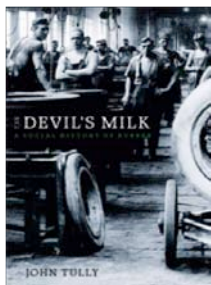
Since it was lowered into place at the Railway Station in November last year, the Council has constructed a shed, complete with security, around the engine and the area surrounding the shed is being landscaped to complete the display.'

(Photographs: Brian Smiddy at Chifley's memorial; The Chifley House at Busby Street. Photographs by Brian & Ellen Smiddy)

The Devil's Milk: A Social History of Rubber

Launched in New York 22 February 2011

By Phillip Deery



Launch of John Tully's *The Devil's Milk: A Social History of Rubber* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011)

A small but politically committed crowd were present at the New York launch of a new book, *The Devil's Milk* at the left-leaning Brecht Forum in West Village, Manhattan, on 22 February 2011. The author, John Tully, is a member of the Melbourne branch of ASSLH. The senior editor of Monthly Review Press, John Mage, described the book as 'one of the best we've ever published' and destined to become 'a classic'. John, a lecturer in politics at Melbourne's Victoria University, then spoke at some length about why he had dedicated the book to a range of individuals – all in some way connected to rubber – from Primo Levi to Chico Mendes. In doing so he illuminated the scope and range of his study that embraced examination of the archives at Auschwitz, Poland to the archives of Akron, Ohio. John's political economy framework and social history emphasis meant that rubber must be seen not as a substance, but as a commodity, and therefore a site of oppression, exploitation and resistance.



As the publisher's blurb stated, 'From the early stages of primitive accumulation to the heights of the industrial revolution and beyond, rubber is one of a handful of commodities that has played a crucial role in shaping the modern world', and yet, as John Tully shows in this remarkable book, 'laboring people around the globe have every reason to regard it as "the devil's milk." All the advancements made possible by rubber—industrial machinery, telegraph technology, medical equipment, countless consumer goods—have occurred against a

backdrop of seemingly endless exploitation, conquest, slavery, and war.' But Tully is quick to remind us that the vast terrain of rubber production has always been a site of struggle, and that 'the oppressed who toil closest to "the devil's milk" in all its forms have never accepted their immiseration without a fight.'

The launch concluded in a typical American way: innumerable questions and discussion points: a measure of the interest that the contents of John's book aroused. A review of the book will appear in the November issue of Labour History.

Photograph: John Mage and John Tully speaking at the New York launch (By Phillip Deery)

Not Dark Yet

Recorder readers will be interested in historian David Walker's new book *Not Dark Yet: A Personal History*. In a recent review of the book for the *Canberra Times*, Michael McKernan aptly describes Walker as a 'warm and tender writer'. *Not Dark Yet* situates Walker's life and recent loss of sight within the broader lineage of his family's rich history. This is a personal history that will resonate with many readers. The book is published by Giramondo. The book will be launched by Don Watson at Fitzroy Nursery, 390 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, on the 31st of March 2011. 6.00 for 6.30pm start.

RSVP: fitzroynursery@fitzroynursery.com.au

NIBS Events of Interest

6:30pm Wednesday 16 March
Unfinished Nation: Could Indonesia go the way of Egypt?
Max Lane @ Underground Talk

6:30pm Wednesday 23 March
Cash Cows and PR Factories: Indian Overseas Students and the Education Boom
Michiel Bass @ Underground Talk

New International Bookshop
Trades Hall, cnr Victoria & Lygon Sts, Carlton

Entry to all events \$5/ \$2 concession. More info: (ph) 9662 3744, (email) nibs@nibs.org.au

Muriel Heagney on Equal Pay in 1918

By Peter Love

Not many *Recorder* readers will be aware that Muriel Heagney was a foundation member of the Melbourne Branch of the ASSLH. In the past months I have been researching the history of our Branch and have read much of the material held in the Sam Merrifield collection. Merrifield was, as many readers will know, the foundation President of the Branch and creator of *Recorder*. During this research I came across correspondence between Heagney and Merrifield which followed a talk she had given to the Branch on the 1921 ALP Socialisation Conference. This letter, written to Sam Merrifield on 26 June 1962 clarified a few points in the talk. As an addition to his growing collection of labour movement records, she attached a copy of an article from *The Clerk*, 7 June 1918. On the centenary anniversary of International Women's Day it seems an apt article to reprint.

SISTERS OF THE PEN

Conducted by Muriel Heagney and Rose Smith

EQUAL PAY FOR THE SEXES

The question of whether it is desirable that women should be employed in industry at all is, to say the least of it, is somewhat academic. They are firmly established in industry, and are almost as much bound to it by the bondage of wage-slavery as the male wage-earner. Women's place in industry will in the long run be decided mainly by women themselves. If they desire to remain in industry no one can say them nay. If they desire to leave industry they will do so as soon as an alternative method of economic independence is offered them. Till then they cannot leave, even if they would. (G. D. H. Cole in 'Labour in War Time')

When first the demand went forth for equal pay and equal opportunity for the sexes men stood aghast. So accustomed had the world grown to the passive acceptance of women of a position of inferiority and subjection that this idea was like a social volcano. Embodied in it was the claim for economic independence for women, and this threatened all the privileges the ages had bestowed on men. Firstly, if this principle were established, the capitalist would be deprived of an effective means of cheapening labour; consequently, opposition to equal pay has never been found wanting.

To the honour of the Clerks' Union it must be said that equal pay for the sexes has long been part of its policy. On one occasion a wages board award including equal pay was obtained, but, unfortunately, the award was afterwards annulled by the Industrial Appeal Court. The main objections put forward to equal pay may be summed up as follows:-

1. Woman's place is in the home.
2. Woman's work is not equal in value to that of man.
3. Man's responsibilities are greater than woman's.

To the first, which is only a bogey, we reply that the women of the working class have long since been forced into the factory and office that they might exist. Moreover, in the average home today there is not sufficient to employ the daughters of a household, as there was in early Victorian times, when women made practically everything in the way of food and clothing.

In answer to No.2. we are prepared to let worth and efficiency be the test and we are confident that trained women workers will equal trained men in everything that is not beyond their physical strength. In England, France, and America today, in field, factory, and workshop women have taken up the technical work of the men who have been drawn off for military purposes, and everywhere they have proved themselves capable of carrying on. In the forges of the great engineering works and in the docks strong women are doing work that before the war was deemed beyond their power; and their weaker sisters are filling men's places at complicated machines in the factories. Whether this innovation be good or bad it is too late to discuss. Women are in, and, they will have to be reckoned with as an industrial factor when peace comes.

In the third objection lies the crux of the whole matter. The writer is far from satisfied with the present method of fixing the basic wage and is of the opinion that the hour is ripe for radical change. The fixing of a minimum wage upon the very much pruned requirements of a married man with wife and two children certainly gives an advantage to a single man and woman without dependents. But a wage so fixed is quite inadequate for a man with six or seven children – as often occurs amongst workers – and for many women who are called upon to provide for relatives. Consequently, we must aim at an ever-increasing minimum for both sexes, pending a better system, as any attempt to differentiate would give an advantage to employers.

And now a word of suggestion. Peace will call for organization of industry, if we are to avoid the calamity of a depression like that which succeeded the land boom in Victoria, and we should now be planning for the future. The organization and pay of the army affords a striking example of what might be attempted in industry.

The soldier receives the same pay whether working or playing, sick or well, and his dependents are provided for by a special allowance at a fixed rate for each dependent. The whole thing has worked well, and there is no reason why this system should not be applied to the army of industry. By this means we should dispense with the horrors of unemployment and provide adequately for the social burdens of each individual.

Red Letters: the Frank Hardy and Howard Fast correspondence

By Phillip Deery

My research into the political activities of the highly popular American writer, Howard Fast, during the depths of McCarthyism has led me to a vast collection of letters that he received. In 2010 these were acquired by the Manuscript Library at the University of Pennsylvania and are still largely uncatalogued. One of Fast's correspondents was Frank Hardy, with whom readers of *Recorder* would be familiar and to whom the following may be of interest. Excerpts from only two letters are reproduced here; but each confirms that geography was never a barrier to the development of fraternal relations between the American and Australian communist parties. The letters also point to some of the abiding concerns of communists in the early 1950s: passport control, the Rosenberg case, political repression in the United States, devotion to the Soviet Union and, for writers such as Fast and Hardy, the difficulties of distributing blacklisted books.

13/3/52

Dear Comrade Howard Fast,

We have just received news that you have been refused a visa to Australia for the [Youth] Carnival of Peace and Friendship. This is just another sign of the deep fear of the Peoples Movement for Peace that grips the present rulers of your country. Our Watt Street puppet Government has, I understand, refused entry to the Chinese delegation, another symptom of the malady. Protest action is pending.

Cyril Henshaw, Victorian Secretary of the Fellowship of Australian Writers, has informed me that you are endeavouring to publish my novel "Power Without Glory" in America. Further, Joseph Waters, who distributed the book, tells me that he has written to you offering to exchange copies of "Power Without Glory" for one of your works, "Spartacus". This latter seems to me to be the best way around the problem.[1]

I have just put to press a book on my recent visit to the Soviet Union called "Journey into the Future". Since my return I have had excellent meetings especially at factories – great interest in the Soviet Union here.

The progressive writers of Australia were looking forward to meeting you in Sydney as we have long been admirers of your books and your courage in fighting for progressive causes. We still cling to the hope that a wide enough protest may develop to reverse the decision of the State Department which has made itself the subject of the ridicule and contempt of mankind's progressive majority. Warm greetings to you in the sacred cause of literature for Peace.
Frank J Hardy.

5/1/53

Dear Howard,

Apologies for my long silence in our correspondence. I have just completed a nation wide tour (over 100 meetings) for the Australasian Book Society selling my book about the Soviet Union, "Journey into the Future". [2] The Society is a progressive book club, run on a non-profit basis by writers and trade unionists; its membership is approaching the 3,500 mark and rising steadily; members are mainly workers.[3]

This tour, writing a novel and ill health have seriously interfered with my correspondence. I write now, only to mention the Steve Nelson and the Rosenberg cases. Both, especially the latter, have received wide publicity here, the progressive press has given excellent coverage and many protests have been sent by individuals and organisations.[4] Re-reading this letter to Steve Nelson, I feel it is inadequate – I have not the power to express myself well enough to fit such an occasion.

Regarding the Rosenbergs. As time is running out, I have sent, instead of a letter of protest, a cable signed by myself and more than a dozen other Australian writers.[5]

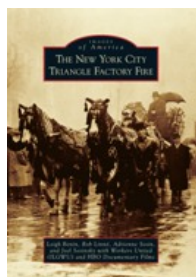
I see where the U.S. authorities have refused "Power Without Glory" entry into America, so I presume the barter deal is off.[6] 2000 copies of "Spartacus" have arrived from England. It is selling well. I am doing a review of it ...I'll send you a copy when it appears next week....

Yours in the cause of literature for Peace,
Frank Hardy [7]

1. Because of the communist affiliations of each writer, both *Power Without Glory* and *Spartacus* were self-published and therefore lacked the normal distribution outlets.
2. Hardy attached two photos of himself selling his book, along with explanatory captions on the back. One read: 'An engine driver purchases a copy of Frank Hardy's book, "Journey into the Future", after a factory gate meeting outside the Newport Railway Workshops.' In another letter Hardy expressed the wish that these photos accompany a review of *Journey into the Future* in the communist publication, *Masses and Mainstream*.
3. The ABS was paralleled in the United States by the Liberty Book Club, which Fast founded in New York in 1952.
4. Steve Nelson, a close friend of Fast's and a Communist Party leader, was twice jailed in the 1950s (under the 1919 Sedition Act, and the 1940 Smith Act).
5. After a further, unsuccessful appeal for a stay-of-execution, Ethel and Julius Rosenberg were electrocuted 4 months later.
6. This is referred to in the previous letter.
7. A personal inscription of Hardy's first edition of Fast's *The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti* reads 'For Frank Hardy, Good comrade, great writer and bold fighter for peace. Howard Fast, Aug. 1953'.

The New York City Triangle Factory Fire

By Phillip Deery



Leigh Benin et al, *The New York City Triangle Factory Fire*, Charleston, North Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2011. USD21.99

Until 9/11, the deadliest event in the history of New York City occurred 100 years ago, near closing time on Saturday 25 March 1911. 146 garment workers, mostly immigrant Jewish women, half of them teenagers, were either burned alive or jumped to their deaths from the ninth floor of the Triangle 'Shirtwaist' factory. This book, timed to coincide with the centenary of this industrial tragedy, was launched this month by the New York Labor History Association at NYU's Tamiment Library. Its arresting images – mostly contemporary photographs – framed by a spare narrative, vividly evokes the horror of the day, the victims and survivors, the protests that followed and the commemorative events that were established.

In 1911 the Triangle Waist Company was a typical sweated factory in downtown Manhattan: conditions were poor and unsafe. Workers, mostly from the Lower East Side, toiled for 14 hours per day to earn \$12 per week. To prevent stealing, all exit doors bar one were locked, and this proved fatal on the afternoon of 25 March. The factory produced 'shirtwaists', and the owners, Max Blanck and Isaac Harris, had grown wealthy on shirtwaists. The main threat to their empire was the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU). Although the Triangle Factory was a non-union shop, it did not prevent a massive spontaneous walkout in 1909 and its participation in a general strike in the industry, organised by the ILGWU, in 1910. A feature of that long, bitter strike were the routine arrests and beatings by hired thugs and corrupt police of the women picketers. Many of these same women, who refused to be intimidated, were incinerated the following year.

It took this tragedy to transform labour history. Within two years more than thirty new laws were enacted to address workplace conditions, child labour and the minimum wage. Some historians suggest that the New Deal had its genesis in these interventionist regulatory changes (although, ironically, a young New York politician, Franklin Roosevelt, voted against every legislative reform). There also developed a greater consciousness of rights and a growing belief in the importance of unions to improve unsafe conditions in workshops. But the sheer horror of the fire remained seared into memories of those who experienced or witnessed it for another generation.

There are many photos at <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/trianglefire/primary/photos/illustrations/index.html>

News

VTHC's Annual Labour Day Dinner Dance 2011



The VTHC's Annual Labour Day Dinner Dance for 2011 is on again. It is being held on Friday 15th April 2011 at the famous San Remo Ballroom, 365 Nicholson Street, North Carlton. Book through your union today.

Redmond Barry Fellowship

The Redmond Barry Fellowship for 2011 is now open for applications. The Fellowship shall be awarded to scholars and writers to facilitate research and the production of works of literature that utilise the superb collections of the State Library of Victoria and the University of Melbourne.

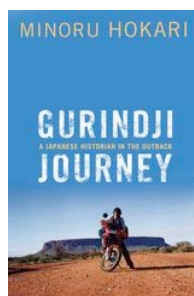
Up to \$20,000 shall be awarded to assist with travel, living and research expenses. Applications close on 29 October 2011. For more information visit the Redmond Barry Fellowship website: <http://www.unimelb.edu.au/culturalcollections/events/redmondbarry.html>

Australian Historical Association, 2011 Regional Conference, History at the Edge

The 2011 AHA regional conference will be held on 4 -8 July, 2011, University of Tasmania, Inveresk Campus, Launceston, Tasmania. Early bird registration closes on 1 April. See their website for details: <http://www.ahahistoryattheedge.org/>

Harry Holland Honoured

The Canberra Branch reports that a heritage sign has been placed at the Ginninderra Village in Canberra 'to honour the memory of a labour hero who made a significant contribution to both Australian and New Zealand politics'. For the full story see: <http://asslh.org.au/branches/canberra/>



Minoru Hokari's posthumously published *Gurindji Journey: A Japanese historian in the outback* will be launched in Sydney on 10 May. The book is published by UNSW Press and is a testament to the high regard in which Hokari is held.

Notices & Events of Interest

Footprints

Footprints: the journey of Lucy and Pepper traces the lives of an Aboriginal family in the first half of the twentieth century. Their story is a remarkable parable about the strength of family in the face of adversity.

The exhibition will be formally launched by the Hon. Jeanette Powell MP, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs at 12:30pm Wednesday 16 March. Victorian Archives Centre in March 2011. Visit www.prov.vic.gov.au/footprints

History from the 1950s

Wed, 18 May, Prahran Mechanics Institute, 140 High Street, Prahran (Mel Ref 2L H12).

Reflecting on a key time in history in post-war Melbourne. How has this period shaped our history as a city, and what techniques were employed by these historians in their respective disciplines when researching this period? Dr Carla Pascoe (Department of Planning and Community Development) and Simon Reeves (Built Heritage) will talk about their research in this field covering a broad range of history constructs including architectural, heritage, social and urban history.

Remembering Dunera

On Thursday 14 April 2011 at 5:30pm - 7:00pm, Ken Inglis, ANU Emeritus Professor of History, will speak on his research on the 'Dunera Boys'. The lecture, sponsored by the Jewish Museum of Australia, is part of the Making Public Histories series. Free entry, to book contact bookings@slv.vic.gov.au or call 03 8664 7099. (Venue: [Experimedia](http://www.experimedia.com.au) Main entry, Swanston Street).

State Library of Victoria

The State Library of Victoria has a number of exhibitions this year that are worth a visit. All those mentioned below are in the Dome Galleries and are on display throughout the year. These include the 'Mirror of the world' (Dome Galleries) exhibit of some of the library's 'rare, beautiful and historically significant books'; 'The changing face of Victoria' exhibit, also the exhibit 'Celebrating the 150th Melbourne Cup'. See www.slv.vic.gov.au

12th National Labour History Conference

The National Centre of Biography, in association with the Canberra branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, is organising the Twelfth Biennial Labour History Conference, Labour History & Its People, to be held at the Manning Clark Centre, Australian National University, on 15-17 September 2011.

The conference marks the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History by ANU academics.

Labour historian and Director of the National Centre of Biography, Professor Melanie Nolan, is convening the conference which has as its theme the role of biography in the study of Australian labour history.

Keynote speakers include:

- Kim Sattler, Secretary of UnionsACT, who has been involved in the establishment of the National Museum of Labour History in Canberra)
- Professor Stuart Macintyre (University of Melbourne), will discuss '50 Years Hard Labour: A Retrospect'

Melbourne Branch ASSLH News & Contacts

At the AGM of the Melbourne Branch held on the 9th of December, Peter Love, Brian Smiddy and Phillip Deery were re-elected President, Secretary and Treasurer, respectively. Our thanks go to these three for their work in helping to sustain the branch. Our thanks also to Ellen Smiddy for her help with *Recorder*. At the meeting the branch affirmed its commitment to the newly established Museum of Labour and we have now become a Foundation member of the organisation.

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(or just type in 'Labour History Melbourne')

Recorder is published four times a year. The opinions of the contributors are their own and not necessarily those of the Editor or Executive of the ASSLH, Melbourne Branch. Send all contributions and queries to the editor, Julie Kimber (jkimber@swin.edu.au)