IN THIS EDITION:
- Annual General Meeting, p. 1
- 40th Anniversary of the Whitlam Government, p. 1
- The People’s Story Museum, by Peter Love, pp. 2-3
- Labour and ANZAC Conference, by Phillip Deery, p. 3
- John Ellis Memoirs, by Peter Love, p. 3
- Labour History and Sam Merrifield, p. 3
- Joe Owens, by Verity Burgmann, p. 4
- DLP members in Victorian Parliament, by Ainsley Simons, pp. 4-5
- I’ll Be There, Victorian Trade Union Choir Special Event, p. 5
- Wisconsin Rising, p. 6
- On Darkened Days and Sleepless Nights, by Rowan Cahill, p. 6
- Obituaries: Norm Clapton, Dom Mintoff & Peter Nolan, by Brian Smiddy, p. 7
- In Davitt’s footsteps along the Murray, by Val Noone, pp. 7-11
- Section Overboard, by Brian Costar, pp. 11-12
- Notes, correspondence, branch news and contact details, p. 12

NOTICE OF AGM

MELBOURNE BRANCH, ASSLH
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
Thursday 13 December at 5.30pm
Melbourne Trades Hall
Evatt Room

Agenda
Reports: President, Secretary, Treasurer.

Election of Office Bearers and General Business.

Please also note that your 2013 membership renewal is now due.

WHITLAM GOVERNMENT’S 40TH BIRTHDAY

The Melbourne ASSLH, New International Bookshop and Search Foundation have combined to bring you two events to celebrate the election of the Whitlam Government on 2 December 1972.

Forum on the Significance of the Whitlam Government
Friday 30 November, 5.30 for 7.00pm
Melbourne Conference Centre
(Opposite the State Library. Entrance at side of Church)
5.30 pm for drinks, nibbles & comradely catch-ups followed by 7.00 pm for speakers and open forum.

Historians Jenny Hocking and Paul Strangio will join Whitlam Government Minister Moss Cass to open discussion, with Louise Connor in the Chair.

Source: NAA

Whitlam Government 40th Birthday Party
Sunday 2 December, 4.00pm
Melbourne Trades Hall

Food, drink, historical film clips, music and comradely jollifications. Add a little historical verisimilitude to the occasion by wearing your (or your parents’ or grand-parents’) 1970s clothes, badges, etc. We look forward to seeing you at either or both events.
By Peter Love

Manchester’s People’s History Museum, known to many Recorder readers, has a sister in Edinburgh. The People’s Story Museum, located on the Canongate section of the Royal Mile, is smaller than its Mancunian relative but equally fascinating in its own way, and entry is free! It is housed in a late 16th century building that has served numerous civic functions, from a tollbooth to a jail. Its permanent and periodic exhibitions explore the work, leisure and political activism of Edinburgh’s ordinary people since the end of the 18th century.

It has assembled a remarkably fine collection of banners proclaiming political causes and trade union pride. In rooms on the two main floors of the museum there are small alcove displays about working life, such as the making of books – entirely appropriate in a city of literature that celebrates its authors so proudly. There is another devoted to the everyday artifacts of friendly societies, which through mutuality gave the common folk some protection against the depredations of precarious employment. A domestic servant cleans the hearth of her bourgeois masters in another exhibit.

Collections of hand tools remind us of the craft skills that built and maintained the great city. Photos, pamphlets, handbills and banners commemorate the political agitation around such issues as votes for women, the anti-apartheid campaigns, ethnic discrimination and the politics of sexual identity. There is a particularly interesting map of Spain prepared by the Edinburgh Spanish Relief Committee to illustrate the progress of the Civil War.

In keeping with the building’s history as a jail, there are exhibitions of the artefacts of how law and order was imposed on an occasionally wayward populace. One of the more interesting items is a catchpole, a spring-loaded metal yoke fixed to the end of a pole for snaring suspected miscreants.

If you visit their website you’ll see the titles of some recent exhibitions which give a good sense of the curator’s interests. They include: Strength in Numbers; Pride and Protest; The Demon Drink; For King and Country; Turbulent Times: Politics and Religion; The City of Print; and Power to the People. These periodic exhibitions have been so popular that the museum has had to refuse many donations to its already bulging collection. That problem, however, does give them the ability to rotate exhibitions regularly. This gives The People’s Story a continuing vitality. It is a fine and engaging little museum that Recorder can heartily recommend on your next visit to Edinburgh.

While you’re there, by way of contrast, you may care to go into the churchyard next door, walk to the back of the People’s Story building and visit the fenced, gated and locked gravesite of Adam Smith that lurks in the shade of the museum. Visually, it is an ironic inversion of the way that Smith’s ideas have overshadowed the lives of the common people of Edinburgh and elsewhere.
As a sacred site of the Neo-Classicalists, both Smith's remains and his ideas are symbolically barricaded against those who would desecrate or molest either.

Labour and ANZAC Conference: Canberra, 21–22 September 2012

By Phillip Deery

A splendid little conference revolving around the theme 'Labour and Anzac' was held at the National Archives of Australia in late September. Auspiced by the History of Anzac Day research project at Monash University but organised by the indefatigable Frank Bongiorno at ANU, it sought to 'bring together research being carried out by scholars working on various aspects of the relationship between the Anzac legend, the labour movement and the working class'. It succeeded in this goal.

Because the papers were focused and the audience small (about 40 people), numerous cross-currents and interconnections emerged. The Melbourne Branch of the ASSLH was well represented: members Robert Bollard, Frank Bongiorno, Phillip Deery, Nick Dyrenfurth and Val Noone all presented papers. A selection of the papers will be published in a Labour and Anzac 'thematic' issue of Labour History in 2014, timed to coincide with the centenary of the beginning of the Great War.

John Ellis Memoirs

By Peter Love

Most members of the Melbourne Branch will know our comrade John Ellis for his political activism, membership of the Trade Union Choir and his remarkable photographic collection of labour and progressive political subjects. His career working as a typesetter at the Herald Weekly Times, where he was an active trade unionist, is less well known. He has recently published an account of all this under the title A Working Life: a memoir of the printing industry 1945-1990, incorporating the author’s political activism and his passion for photography. So far, John has only circulated it among friends and comrades. He hasn’t told us whether it will be more widely available for purchase, but we’ll pass on the news about that when he decides what he wants to do with it. Meanwhile, it’s a rattling good sixty-four pages of reading that remind us of how interesting working lives can be when set down in engaging memoirs like this. It is also an implied invitation to others to do the same. Even though most of us don’t think our lives would be particularly interesting to others, it’s surprising how a lively account of rank-and-file activism can add vitality to the more generalised histories of we common people. In keeping with its founding charter, the Labour History Society encourages members and friends to do the same as John. Go to it Comrades!

Labour History & Sam Merrifield

Carolyn Rasmussen recently posted on Labour History Melbourne’s Facebook page a quote from Sam Merrifield in Recorder, vol. 1, no. 8, September 1965. We thought it worth reprinting: ‘There is no point, no purpose, in studying labour history and those who made it if we are not prepared to follow the example that that history gives us. We have the choice – to carry on the struggle which was begun in the earlier days – ’for truly there were giants in those days’ – or to live entirely in the past, and wallow in the successes of a bygone era.’
Joe Owens

By Verity Burgmann

On 20th September the cranes of Sydney stopped for one minute during the memorial service at the NSW Trades Hall to commemorate the life of Joe Owens, who died at the age of 77.

Joe succeeded Jack Mundey as Secretary of the NSW Builders Labourers’ Federation, a position he occupied from 1973 to 1975 when the green bans were at their height and the battles against the developers fiercest, including the fight to preserve The Rocks. Interviewed in the press in 1973, Joe argued that unions had ‘the ability to restrain corporations and prompt governments to reconsider foolish decisions’, so should concern themselves with ‘important social issues’ such as protection of environment and heritage.

In her eulogy, Joe’s widow Jan stated that ‘Joe’s commitment to the struggle to get better wages and conditions for building workers was total’. Born in Durham County in the north of England, Joe’s Welsh father was an underground coalminer in an industry where wages were low and the men frequently sick with ‘black lung’ from the lousy conditions in the mines. After arriving in Australia in 1958 by skipping ship as a seaman, Joe cut cane in Queensland before taking up work as a dogman in the Sydney building industry, where he also became a member of the Communist Party of Australia. As a dogman and during his period as Assistant Secretary (1970-1973), Joe campaigned against the dangerous practice of ‘riding the hook’ and was instrumental in establishing the principle of two dogmen per crane, not one as the employers wanted.

When NSW Premier Robert Askin announced drastic anti-strike legislation, Owens commented: ‘It simply proves what so many people have thought for a long time—that Sir Robert has one of the finest minds of the nineteenth century.’

Jan was also right in stating of Joe that he was a gifted public speaker and at union meetings and Green Ban gatherings could hold an audience spellbound, reducing the complex to the understandable and breaking the serious with wit and humour. Joe was great company and his contribution to the cause immense.


By Ainsley Symons

The election of Peter Kavanagh to the Victorian Legislative Council in 2006 was the first time that his Democratic Labor Party (DLP) had been represented in the Victorian Parliament since 1958. The Melbourne media were unaware of this fact when Kavanagh was elected, for the role of the six DLP members of the Victorian Parliament between 1955 and 1958 has been virtually ignored by historians of the period, let alone by the media. Kavanagh is the grandson of Bill Barry, one of the two original leaders of the DLP, the lower house Member for Carlton and also a Melbourne City Councillor.

The role of the Victorian Parliamentary DLP must be examined in the context of Australian Labor Party (ALP) politics during this era. The ALP split in 1955 and those loyal to the federal leadership of H.V. Evatt and the state leadership of John Cain formed one party, and those opposed to Evatt and Cain formed the other. The breakaway party initially called itself the Australian Labor Party (Anti-Communist), and the media used the terminology Barry Labor or Coleman-Barry Labor after the party’s original leaders. The term DLP was originally adopted in 1956, but will be used here to refer to the whole of our period for the benefit of readers.

Twelve members of the lower house Legislative Assembly and six members of the upper house Legislative Council were originally members of the DLP. The lower house members were William Barry (Carlton), Stan Corrigan (Port Melbourne), Les D’Arcy (Grant), George Fewster (Essendon), Tom Hayes (Melbourne), Michael Lucy (Ivanhoe), Edmund Morrissey (Mernda), Charlie Murphy (Hawthorn), Joseph O’Carroll (Clifton Hill), Peter Randles (Brunswick), Frank Scully (Richmond) and George White (Mentone). The upper house members were Bert Bailey (Melbourne West), Tom Brennan (Monash), Les Coleman (Melbourne West), Paul Jones (Doutta Galla), Jack Little (Melbourne North) and Patrick Sheehy (Melbourne). All represented Melbourne metropolitan electorates, with the exception of D’Arcy and Morrissey. Only two members, White in the Assembly and Brennan in the Council, represented metropolitan electorates wholly south of the River Yarra. Hawthorn, now a safe conservative electorate, is currently represented by Victoria’s Liberal Premier Ted Baillieu, but in 1952 when it was won by Murphy for the ALP it was very marginal, as it included areas on both sides of the Yarra, with polling booths in working class Burnley voting heavily for Labor candidates. The original DLP did not attract state parliamentarians from the provincial cities of Bendigo, Ballarat or Geelong.

In April 1955 the Cain government fell, with the breakaway members of the lower house voting against it on a confidence motion. Cain saw the
Governor and went to the polls. The ensuing election resulted in a lower house majority for the Liberal and Country Party, led by Henry Bolte, who governed without the Country Party in coalition. At the 1955 elections for the Legislative Assembly all DLP members were defeated except for Frank Scully in Richmond. Both leaders, Barry in the lower house and Coleman in the upper house, lost their seats. The sole surviving DLP member in the lower house, Scully, became the party’s parliamentary leader, and of the five remaining upper house members with a term expiring in 1958 Little became the DLP leader in that chamber.

Scully was a member of the Catholic Social Studies Movement (CSSM), also known as the Movement, an organisation controlled by B.A. Santamaria. Interestingly the two original Victorian parliamentary leaders of the DLP were probably not CSSM members, and certainly not in the case of Coleman, although both were Catholics. Little, later to become state leader of the DLP was not a Catholic, the only non-Catholic member of the DLP in the Victorian parliament. Before entering parliament in 1954, Little was an official of the Boot Trades Union, and a strong supporter of the anti-Communist Industrial Groups, ALP members who contested trade union elections as ALP Industrial Group candidates opposed to Communist officeholders. Coleman was to claim in 1958 that the DLP favoured Little rather than himself as its lead Senate candidate in that year because it wanted a non-Catholic candidate, for the DLP was widely regarded as a Church party or even as a party of the Roman Catholic Church. In fact the Catholic Church never instructed its members how to vote, except that they were forbidden to vote for Communist candidates.

The majority of breakaway members played no part in parliamentary divisions. We will never know how they would have voted on any issue. Scully in the Assembly voted against the Bolte government most of the time, but his vote was meaningless as he was never in a balance of power position. He frequently attacked both ALP federal leader H.V. Evatt and the Communist Party. In the Council the five DLP members never held the balance of power. The Liberal and Country Party held a majority of seats from 1955-58, but on one occasion the DLP members were able to prevent the passage of legislation allowing for a Jackpot Totalisator, not because they were opposed to gambling but out of political expediency. Their vote enabled the defeat of a key Bolte piece of legislation, for several conservative members opposed to the extension of gambling laws voted with the ALP and the DLP against the Bill. The DLP upper house members generally supported traditional Labor positions. For example, they were opposed to capital punishment and laws restricting the powers of trade unions. On moral issues they supported a Bill that enabled greater police powers over prostitution, but Catholic attitudes in this period were more concerned with anti-Communism than issues like pornography or abortion or even nude bathing that aroused strong feelings a decade or so later.

The actions of the six DLP Victorian parliamentary Members in the three years after the 1955 split provide the only demonstration of their party’s performance in a state parliament anywhere in Australia. That performance was different from their party’s performance outside of parliament. In parliament they voted with the ALP more often than not. Outside of parliament the direction of preferences by their party to the conservative parties kept Labor out of office federally until 1972, and in Victoria until 1982.

Ainsley Symons is a political activist in Altona Meadows, Victoria.

**I'll Be There! Songs and Stories of Solidarity**

Two special performances only. 8pm on Friday 16 and Saturday 17 November 2012

New Ballroom – Trades Hall
Lygon and Victoria Streets (entry via Lygon Street)

Created and produced by members of the Victorian Trade Union Choir with award winning playwright Rebecca Lister and Musical Director Michael Roper, *I’LL BE THERE* is an hour of songs and stories – funny, scary, moving and inspiring – gathered from the rich history of the trade union and labour movements and the Victorian Trade Union Choir.

The Choir has sung for 22 years at rallies, protests, strikes, marches and commemorations. The show presents a diverse repertoire of music including trade union favourites such as *Solidarity*, Billy Bragg’s *Power in a Union*, South African freedom song *We shall not give up the fight*, Kev Carmody’s *Freedom* and celebrates union achievements such as the Eight Hour Day. It tells stories of the power of song in unlikely places: at the bottom of a swimming pool; on the back of a truck escaping Contra gunfire in Nicaragua; on a picket line in a wedding dress – between the ceremony and the reception.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tickets</th>
<th>Advance sale</th>
<th>Door price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full</td>
<td>$25</td>
<td>$30 (if available)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concession</td>
<td>$17</td>
<td>$20 (if available)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group (10+)</td>
<td>$22.50</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bookings at Bella Union http://www.bellaunion.com.au/program_guide/show_649 or 9650 5699
Wisconsin Uprising

http://monthlyreview.org/press/books/pb2808/

On Darkened Days and Sleepless Nights

By Rowan Cahill

Recently, two separate 'events' intertwined in my mind. Last week I visited the blockade of a coal seam/coal gas exploration site, out in the rural backblocks of the Southern Highlands in NSW. It was Day 10 of a 24-hour blockade: a reception tent cum kitchen, a caravan for sleeping, a few tractors, horse floats, huge rolls of hay, and an assortment of determined townies and farmers. They were, and are, opposing coal seam gas exploration, and the controversial and increasing scientifically and environmentally condemned practice of 'fracking', the depletion of water qualities, possible increased salination, possible damage to aquifers. They are up against the law which permits speculative exploration over and above property rights; huge corporate wealth with bottomless overseas capital reserves; politicians of all hues who seem to bend to the rustle of money; smiling corporate front people with cut-and-paste smiles and cut-and-paste PR and expert 'wouldn't-hurt-a-fly-trust-me' smarm and conviction who could charm their ways past St. Peter; and floods of expensive propaganda in the local media....And I'd just read an essay in the New York Review of Books about Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), the anti-Nazi Lutheran theologian who went with his faith into the realms of espionage, subterfuge, and complicity in assassination, and his little known brother-in-law accomplice, lawyer Hans von Dohnanyi (1902-1945), both executed by the Nazi-state.  
Bonhoeffer has long interested me, having been first brought to my attention as an undergraduate in the 1960s by one of my teachers, the historian and sociologist (Professor) Ernst Bramstedt, then teaching at Sydney University. Dohnanyi is new to me.

As I said, two strands intertwined. What is the point, I asked myself rhetorically, of holding out against great wealth, great power, great injustices, in the name of principles, for what is right, when the end is almost the certainty of getting rolled, of sticking to your guns and ending up like Bonhoeffer and Dohnanyi in the hangman's noose, real or metaphorical? Granted, Bonhoeffer 'survives' today, well known because of his actions and his stand; the Nazi machine could not delete him from history as he had significant international theological and intellectual clout and repute before he took his stand. But that does not apply to the coal seam blockaders, nor to the locals, for example, in New Guinea, in Africa, in the Amazon region, variously struggling to protect their habitats and livelihoods from the depredations of logging, mining, and oil operations, or to countless others all over the world variously opposing those who would otherwise walk over them in the name of the State, corporate gains, austerity, or whatever....

While protest actions and dissenting activities do succeed, particularly when they are part of social movements or linked with mass movements and class struggles, and let us not be deceived by the silences of history, over time there have been victories aplenty, like the grains of sand on a beach, too numerous to count; however, the point is that protest actions, acts of resistance, of saying No, do not require success to be validated; they are their own validation. Ideally there is a receptive and sympathetic audience, ideally a mass movement of some kind, but in the end the No-saying boils down to an individual act, irrespective of the context; it is something only the individual can do, being at core an individual ethical, moral, political response to a circumstance/situation.

And it counts, no matter the audience, no matter the chance of success. Every declaration of No, every act of resistance is a hurdle for those who seek and prefer an acquiescent roll-over-me world, a level playing field in which there is no opposition. It is the act of resistance that is crucial, not necessarily its success or otherwise. Resistance and the saying of No is what darkens the days and haunts the nights of those who envisage the well-tended compliance of acquiescent playing fields. And the act of saying No, the act of resistance, is what frustrates and prevents the realisation of those playing fields, both now and in the future.

For radical historians, one of their tasks is to keep knowledge of the dissenters, the resisters, the NOSayers, alive and accessible. Another, is to add the lives and actions and struggles and contexts of the many unknown and nameless ones who have variously struggled against wealth and power for a voice and agency in history, to those that are known. In doing so, these lives and actions can be political and moral compass points for the present and the future, and like Bonhoeffer, offer profound challenges to what it means to live meaningfully and well.

Rowan Cahill, 21 October 2012. Originally posted on Radical Ruminations, a blog that is written by Terry Irving and Rowan Cahill.  
Obituaries

By Brian Smiddy

Norm Clapton
6/12/1923 – 28/10/2012

Norm Clapton, a former organiser of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, died recently in Melbourne. Norm had a distinguished career as a union official, mainly organising in the northern suburbs of Melbourne. He held many important official positions in the Union. We mourn his passing and we extend our deepest sympathies to his family.

Dom Mintoff

Many people who take an interest in international affairs will be saddened to learn of the death of Dom Mintoff, Prime Minister of Malta from 1955 to 1958 and 1971 to 1984. The career of Mintoff was controversial, but he believed he always acted in the best interest of his country and its people.

Australians of Maltese heritage will fondly remember his struggle to help Malta achieve its independence in 1964. He had many clashes with his colonial masters, Great Britain and also with leaders of the country's Catholic Church. With the death of Dom Mintoff, another person who led the struggle against colonialism has left this earth. To his family and the people of Malta we extend our deepest sympathy.

Peter Nolan
1934 – 2012

With the death of Peter Nolan, an outstanding career of a great trade union leader has come to an end.

Peter was born in Brisbane and after leaving school took up an apprenticeship in the printing industry. While on holidays in Hobart he gained employment at the Mercury newspaper. He became a member of the Printing and Kindred Industries Union (PKIU) and subsequently Father of the Chapel at the newspaper. Later, he became Secretary of the Tasmanian PKIU.

When he moved to Melbourne he became a Research Officer at the Victorian Trades Hall Council and was then elected Assistant Secretary. In 1971 he transferred to the ACTU, becoming Secretary in 1977. In 1984 he was appointed to the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission.

Peter possessed great patience and was a formidable negotiator. He was highly respected by both trade unionists and employers. He made a significant contribution to the activities of the PKIU, both at a state and national level. To his wife Sophie and his family, we extend our deepest sympathy at his passing.

In Davitt’s footsteps along the Murray

By Val Noone

At Newman College on 16 October 2012, Val Noone gave a talk on his field trip in July this year to the sites of the Murray Valley labour cooperatives which Irish revolutionary Michael Davitt visited in 1895. This is an abridged version. The full talk is available on the Labour History Melbourne website.

For the third time in a decade I have learned much about the 1890s in Australian history, and not just Irish Australian history, by researching and writing about Michael Davitt’s 1895 visit to Australia. The key source for this is his 1898 book, Life and Progress in Australasia, an important, elegant and somewhat rosy but nevertheless neglected source.

This, my third paper about Davitt, concerns the spotlight he put on cooperative and socialistic settlements in the Murray Valley of the 1890s, which are hardly ever mentioned these days but deserve a mention in this United Nations Year of the Cooperative. By way of exception to the general trend, Verity Burgmann’s ‘In Our Time: Socialism and the Rise of Labor, 1885-1905 drew on, and supplements, Davitt’s book in her insightful summary of the Murray Valley cooperative settlements.

From 1893, in a time of high unemployment, the South Australian government pressured by the trade union movement, financed pioneer cooperative farming settlements along the Murray between Morgan and Renmark. Under the legislation ‘any twenty or more persons of the age of eighteen years and upwards may, by subscribing their names in the manner prescribed, form an association for the purpose of Village Settlement’. A grant of 16,000 acres was made to any group of 100 families that applied. The government gave loans for supplies and equipment to 50% of the value of improvements made, with a three-year interest-free period and then ten years at 5%. This was a vision of a new cooperative and an anti-capitalist way of doing things.

Davitt saw a moment of hope and possibility. His account raised the questions of what sort of social order prevailed in Australia during the fateful 1890s and what sort of society Australia might have become. This paper raises again, as labour and other historians have done in recent decades, the topic of whether the Australian labour activists of bygone years were, like their bosses, often blind to Indigenous rights and environmental degradation, or not, and why or why not. In my conclusion I shall relate Davitt’s trip and my field trip to these matters.

With Keith Pescod, who wrote recently in the Australasian Journal of Irish Studies about trade unions, I am trying also to take a small step towards
overcoming the startling lack of a substantial study of the Irish in the Australian labour movement.

**Sketch of Davitt's 1895 trip**

At midday on Friday 14 June 1895, a winter's day in Adelaide, mild by comparison with winter in England and Ireland where he came from, Michael Davitt boarded a steam train for Morgan on the banks of the Murray River, 100 miles (165 kilometres) to the northeast. As a member of the British parliament, leader of the international labour movement, veteran Irish revolutionary with more than seven years jail served in the cause of his native land, Davitt was a high-profile visitor. He had just completed the first of seven months he was spending touring Australia and New Zealand.

As Carla King outlined here at Newman College in her 17 July 2012 lecture on the places, personalities and issues of Davitt’s visit to Australia, Davitt had at least four objectives: to speak in a general way on Irish matters; to see Australia and how things worked in what seemed to him a flourishing new society; to benefit his health; and, by lecturing, to make a little money for the Irish Parliamentary Party at home and to defray his expenses.

This Friday in June he was tackling one of the most important objectives within his plan to learn about Australia, namely, to study the new socialistic cooperative colonies along the Murray River between Morgan and Renmark. He was delighted to have as his travelling companion for the first two days John Anderson Hartley, inspector general of schools in South Australia, a leading progressive figure in education who as a Wesleyan Methodist favoured inclusion of Christian education in state schools.

Davitt, who was to use the concept of ‘progress’ as an organising theme for his 470-page 1898 book about this trip, found many interests in common with Hartley and learned much from him.

After Davitt and Hartley’s train reached Morgan [they then took the 8.30 pm] coach for the demanding overnight trip along 70 miles (115 kilometres) of rough tracks to Renmark. Unhappy about the ‘foolish enterprise’ of this ride, they were pleased to see sunrise over the Murray River.

Renmark, then six years old, was the centre of an innovative irrigation scheme run by the American Chaffey Brothers, William and George. Hundreds of people in the town were newly arrived from the United Kingdom to join the project. The Chaffeys had gone broke, owed wages and bank loans, and the South Australian government had taken over the finance for the scheme.

Be that as it may, as the *Renmark Pioneer* reported the next morning, Davitt was driven round the settlement in a four-horse drag, accompanied by the youngest brother Charles Chaffey and some colleagues. Charles had been left in charge at Renmark while the two older brothers were away fighting legal battles over their debts or starting new schemes. The local paper reported that Davitt ‘highly commended the enterprise of the promoters and the settlers in turning a Mallee wilderness into a fruitful garden’.

[Declining a request to lecture, Davitt and Hartley set off to visit the other settlements including Lyrup, Pyap, New Residence and Kingston]

Indeed, as happens when trying to fit several visits into a busy timetable, by turning downstream Davitt thus dropped from his itinerary a visit to the already much publicised cooperative colony at Murtho, which he had hoped to visit.

Tuesday he left Kingston at 11.00 am for Overland Point, walking the 7 miles (12 kilometres) in three hours. A coach took him next morning to catch the 8.00 am train to Adelaide. He had limited his visit to five days so as to fit in a lecture at Petersburg (since World War I Peterborough) on Thursday 20 June.

*On Monday 2 July 2012, Carla King, Mary Doyle and I set out at 5.00 am from Melbourne and drove to Renmark to spend three days retracing Davitt’s steps around the cooperative settlements of Lyrup, Pyap, New Residence, Moorook and Kingston.*

*We come into this so called Riverland region knowing that for perhaps 40,000 years, from its junction with the Murrumbidgee down to the Coorong, the Murray Valley has been the most densely settled area of Aboriginal Australia. We enjoyed an evening meal overlooking the Murray, thinking but not comprehending all that has happened along the river since the days when Naralte people fished and hunted here.*

**Five cooperatives visited by Davitt**

Here, then, is an introductory tour of these five cooperative settlements visited by Davitt, illustrated with images taken by Davitt’s contemporaries as well as with images taken on our field trip. Davitt was a keen photographer but no photographs of the settlements survive in his collection.

**Lyrup: Irish trade unionist link, baker his host**

Of Lyrup, Davitt wrote: ‘I confess I found the experience one of the most agreeable of many pleasant and instructive incidents in my tour through Australasia.’ Davitt found common ground with the ‘semi-communistic’ ways of this settlement, its doing
away with money and so on. He admired Rupert Bambrick, the early organiser of this group, stayed with Cornelius Egan, a baker, and developed a close link with Irish-born Mr Shelly, founder of the Cordial Makers Union in Adelaide, leader of the Adelaide Trades Council and an active member of the Hibernian Society.

**Pyap: statesmen and bush lawyers**

Davitt left Pyap unhappy about their preference for excessive oratory and debate ahead of work, and for recognising women’s right to vote but then letting it lapse. He called this ‘The statesmen’s camp’. It consisted of 90 carefully chosen mechanics and their families. Better to have a mix of skilled and unskilled people, Davitt commented. Technically, Pyap is remembered for a long chimney-tunnel from the wood-burning steam pump reaching to the top of a hill, in order to give the fire the best possible draught. According to Wikipedia, Roscrea-born Daisy Bates lived at Pyap for several years from 1936.

**New Residence, Moorook and Kingston**

The next settlement which Davitt visited was New Residence, already in trouble and, by the time he wrote his book, closed. Nonetheless, he described its chairman Harry Hoffman as a Hercules.

Good storyteller that he is, Davitt gives plenty of space to the Cornish fisherman whom he met along the road who was an individualist and strongly opposed to those who held things in common. Also he asked the Cornishman to tell a contact named Mr Conneybeare that his friend Charles Thomas had been killed in an accident at Southern Cross, Coolgardie, in Western Australia. At Moorook and Kingston he met dock workers and their families from Port Adelaide who had been neighbours and comrades in the trade union movement before moving to the Murray. They had moved not so much in desperation in the face of unemployment and poverty, but rather as workers who wished to experiment with a new socialist social order. Davitt was delighted to meet at Kingston a socialist midwife from Cork who told him, among other things, that she had never been so busy and never so happy.

**Murtho: single taxers and Christian socialists**

From my limited bibliographical searches, the settlement at Murtho, upstream from Renmark, has had most written about it, partly because its members atypically came from, or were connected with, intellectual and literary backgrounds. Davitt noted that, according to reports he had, they were followers of Henry George and his single tax policy. A key leader there was John Birks, a pharmacist and Methodist. This group brought personal financial capital with them and saw their ethical Christian socialism as an alternative to class struggle. They had links to Methodist Rev Hugh Gilmour of Wellington Square and the Adelaide journal *The Voice*. They read Thoreau, Ruskin and Carlyle. Historian Melissa Bellanta has pointed recently to a form of mateship at Murtho which included feminism. Their motto was the well known ‘From each according to their ability, to each according to their need’.

**‘A big experiment’**

Davitt saw the cooperative settlements as an important ‘big experiment’. Around Australia in the winter of 1893, a harsh one in Adelaide, some 25% of tradesmen were unemployed and the rate was higher for unskilled workers. Davitt was impressed by the role of trade unions in promoting the scheme and the Kingston government for responding. In his book he included three pages of statistics and other documentation. Davitt was impressed that the settlements – often living in humpies because they gave priority over house building to clearing the land – grew wheat, barley, lucerne, vegetables, vines and citrus while keeping cattle, horses, pigs and sheep. In places he writes as if life on the land was inherently healthier and more moral than life in the cities. At one time he summed up his feelings:

‘My earnest wishes while I was among the villages on the Murray were for the triumph of the co-operative-communistic plan at the end of the experimental period. Everything I saw contrasted most favourably with the ordinary conditions of wage-earning life, in even the highest-paid labour centres of Australia. There was no poverty or want felt by anybody. The work, though necessarily rough in the main, was not exhausting, while it was robbed of that which links the task of ordinary daily toil to servitudes – the feeling that you were at the disposal of somebody for so much.’

**Discussion of findings: Comparison with Leongatha**

By way of comparison with what Davitt found in South Australia I revisited John Murphy’s booklet on the Leongatha Labour Colony of 1893-1919 which catered for over 9,000 men. For a number of years an Irishman, Jacob Goldstein, was in charge of the Leongatha colony. Born in Ireland of Polish Jewish and Irish background, he has another claim to fame, namely that he was the father of well known suffragist and anti-war resister, Vida Goldstein.
I also investigated other sources on related settlements in Victoria and was amazed to find how extensive the village settlement movement of the 1890s was in Victoria. The village settlement movement had both a socialist wing that wanted an alternative society and also a mainstream capitalist wing. The latter, which saw it as a way of getting menacing unemployed workers and agitators out of the cities, tended to use the settlements to provide a pool of cheap casual farm labour. In contrast to Murphy's positive account, R.E.W. Kennedy has argued that those controlling the Leongatha Labour Colony belonged in 'the anti-utopian tradition of the workhouse labour-test' who were fearful of 'socialist claims of a right to work guaranteed and, if necessary, implemented by the state'. Nonetheless Burgmann, who shares the instinct of Davitt, Kennedy and others, quoted L.K. Kerr in defence of the labour colonies:

'At the very worst, [the labour colony movement] provided an estimated 22,270 Australian with food and shelter in a period of great national distress. It saved good, hard-working citizens from starvation and gave their children the chance of a better life. It delivered them from insanitary slums to the healthy bush life. Finally, communality gave most of its adherents an independence and resourcefulness which they could never have experienced if they had remained in the cities.'

Links to New Australia in Paraguay

Many of those who joined the cooperative labour colonies had considered going with William Lane – the son of an Irish father – to his utopian New Australia and Cosme colonies in Paraguay. When Lane's chosen ship the Royal Tar spent two days in Adelaide in December 1893, 5,600 people visited it. Indeed, some in government supported the colonies in the Murray Valley to stop more people leaving Australia. A leading newspaper editor in the Renmark region, Harry Taylor, who supported local development and imperial policies, had begun his public career by joining William Lane in New Australia and then Cosme.

Work, water and progress on Aboriginal land

Elsewhere in his book Davitt speaks on support of the rights of Aboriginal people, but they are invisible in his accounts of the Murray colonies. I am not sure what to make of that. Like most of his contemporaries and like most of us in our youth, he took the concept of 'progress' to be good and normal. In the past five decades as the public has seen more evidence of factors such as environmental degradation, high levels of carbon in the atmosphere, the exponential use of fossil fuels, climate change and global warming, that concept has become less simple.

Davitt, like most Australians, English and Irish of his time – and indeed as Dipesh Chakrabaty has recently argued about most twentieth-century leaders of newly emerging nations such as Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, Soekarno of Indonesia, Jawarhal Nehru of India – saw the land as something to be used and brought into the capitalist (or socialist) economy, and assumed the appropriateness of an industrial economy based on carbon. He said of the Murray Valley:

'Six years previously Renmark was part of the uncleared bush. Irrigation has produced the industrial miracle which is found there now. Without water the soil grows nothing but the everlasting gum, she-oak and Mallee scrub. How these trees manage to live in so dry a climate is one of the many wonders which the European learns from a visit to these anomalous antipodes.'

The wood and water of the Murray Valley were economic units to Davitt and his contemporaries. No thought then that the Murray-Darling Basin and its river red gums and its Coorong could ever be a dying ecosystem. It is our duty to remark without accusation that Davitt's writing lacks a sense of nature in its diversity and wilderness as something that we respect rather than own. As Geoff Lacey has recently argued, one of the great tasks of our time is to find an ecological understanding built on our experience of the power and mystery of the landscape – an understanding that was, and is, part and parcel of the worldview of many Indigenous Australians – articulate it and make it work. Our study of Davitt on cooperatives is all the stronger for being seen in a perspective of today's pressing new challenges.

Davitt and others on why the Murray coops closed

Except for Lyrup, which continues in a limited way to be a community to this day, within a decade the Murray River labour colonies closed. Writing two years after his visit Davitt, well informed by mail and cable, saw that this might be the case. In his book he offered a brief explanation: 'the desire to own property of some kind is all but impossible to eliminate from the minds of those who are bred and born under the property-owning system of our modern society.'

Indeed, he was philosophical about it all, mentioning lessons from the seventeenth and eighteenth-century Jesuit redactions in Paraguay, Fabian and Marxist thought and the Cosme case. The historian of Lyrup, Alan Jones, goes so far as to say that Lyrup only succeeded by moving away from socialism and communalism after Shelly and other committed socialists found themselves in a minority and resigned.

On the other hand there were concrete, physical and economic reasons for the closures. Syd Phillips, sometime teacher at Lyrup in its communal days, said that the pumps and engines sent by the government to the settlements were never new or efficient. Verity Burgmann quotes him as saying that had the government sent a party of police to clear out the inhabitants, it would not have been more effective than 'that rusty, ancient, misfit collection of wheels and cylinders'. Other authors point to seepage losses
from unlined channels, subsequent land salination, unsuitable crops planted, lack of transport to markets, fruit diseases and many other troubles. In dry years the Murray would be dry in places, impassible even to small flat-bottomed boats.

**Davitt and the cooperative ideal**

In this the United Nations International Year of the Cooperatives, Davitt’s enthusiasm for the labour colonies experiment along the Murray in the 1890s keeps alive the ideal that it is possible to pursue economic progress while still respecting the needs of those less wealthy or less powerful. At a one-day conference on cooperatives at Melbourne Trades Hall in September, Stefan Gigacz quoted two contemporaries of Davitt from the English trade union movement, Tom Mann and Ben Tillett, as saying that the new unionism of the 1890s was about building ‘a co-operative commonwealth’. Coinciding with the UN promotion, Moira Scollay has published a detailed study of a twentieth-century grass roots cooperative in Melbourne’s northern working-class suburbs, which was named after Peter Lalor, the Irish leader of the miners at Eureka. In such a context, Davitt’s efforts to draw attention to the Murray River labour colonies have contemporary relevance.

---

**Section overboard**

**By Brian Costar**

THE expert panel investigating recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the [Australian constitution](index) has recommended that the document be purged of all references to ‘race,’ a term it describes as ‘biologically and scientifically defunct.’ Some of the commentary about the committee’s report has mistakenly described one of the key sections under discussion, section 25, as racist. The fact that this is wrong doesn’t mean that the section should stay, but a bit of history (and a trip down the Hawkesbury River) shows what it set out to do and why it failed.

Removing race from the constitution would involve two amendments: to section 25, which seeks to punish any state government that denies the vote to ‘all persons of any race,’ and to section 51(xxvi), which empowers federal parliament to make laws ‘for the people of any race for whom it is deemed necessary to make special laws.’ Another ‘race’ provision, section 127 (which excluded Indigenous people from the census count), was excised by referendum in 1967.

Section 51(xxvi) cannot simply be deleted because to do so would take us back to the pre-1967 era, when the federal parliament had power to legislate only for Indigenous Australians who lived in the Northern Territory and the ACT. A debate has already begun as to whether the amended clause should include a general guarantee that laws will not be racially discriminatory.

In relation to section 25, meanwhile, the panel reported that the overwhelming majority of the submissions it received advocated a total repeal. The 1988 Constitutional Commission was of the same view, arguing that the section was ‘redundant’ and that the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 ‘would prevent the states from discriminating against people on grounds of race.’ But that legislation can be amended or even repealed by parliament, which creates a potential conundrum: while the discredited term ‘race’ has no place in the progressive and democratic Australian constitution, would the deletion of section 25 strip the document of what the Constitutional Commission also described as ‘a mild deterrent to discrimination on racial grounds’?

Before considering a resolution, it is important to look at how the section entered the constitution and what have been its effects. Significantly, its origins were American: when a version of section 25 first appeared in the 1891 draft of the Australian constitution, it came as an amalgam of the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments to the US constitution. These were post–Civil War ‘reconstruction’ amendments designed to force the defeated Confederacy to enfranchise recently liberated slaves.

The problem was that after federal troops were removed from the south of the United States in the mid 1870s, white supremacists soon rendered the two democratising amendments inoperative. African Americans were effectively denied the franchise by a battery of contrivances including literacy tests, poll taxes, good character tests, grandfather clauses and whites-only primaries. Racially biased state courts and even the US Supreme Court upheld the legality of most of these methods.

The debates at the Australian constitutional conventions of the 1890s showed that the heavy hitters among the delegates were very well informed about the US constitution and its politics. They must therefore have known that the two US amendments were dead letters long before 1891, and were likely to be equally ineffective in Australia. Why, then, did they bother retaining section 25?

We don’t know for sure. We do have the Hansard record of the 1890s convention debates, but we don’t have the minutes of the all-important drafting committee, nor do we have access to private negotiations such as those conducted on board the Queensland government’s yacht, the SS Lucinda, as it plied the Hawkesbury River, laden with prominent colonial politicians, over the Easter of 1891.

What would become section 25 was the subject of a long, rambling and confused debate at the Melbourne convention in 1898. The radical Dr John Cockburn from South Australia believed the section to be unnecessary because ‘we are not going to have a civil war here over a racial question.’ Some delegates were alarmed that references to citizenship in the
fourteenth amendment to the US constitution might confer rights; others feared for the integrity of state Factory Acts, which restricted Chinese involvement in the manufacture of furniture. An exasperated Patrick McMahon Glynn (SA) thought it all unnecessary because ‘races have been provided for already. Honourable members have races in their heads too much, I think.’

Despite confusion as to its meaning and likely effect, section 25 survived. It reads, in full:

‘For the purposes of the last section, if by the law of any State all persons of any race are disqualified from voting at elections for the more numerous House of the Parliament of the State, then, in reckoning the number of the people of the State or of the Commonwealth, persons of the race resident in that State shall not be counted.’

If used, this section would mean that if a state refused the vote to any group of adults on racial grounds it would have its allocation of House of Representatives electorates reduced correspondingly, depriving it of influence at the federal level. But the section has never been used in this way, despite the fact that Queensland was in breach until 1965, when it finally extended the vote to all Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. Given that federal parliament itself didn’t fully enfranchise Indigenous Australians until 1962, this is hardly surprising.

But what if the federal parliament had wanted to reduce Queensland’s numbers in the House of Representatives at some time between 1901 and 1965? Would section 25 have proved efficacious? No, because it could easily have been circumvented. The killer words are ‘all persons of any race.’ Despite Edmund Barton’s arguing in 1898 that there was no difference between the phrases ‘the people of any race’ and ‘all persons of any race,’ the latter constituted a loophole through which a state could discriminate in extending the right to vote by drafting laws in a manner that did not exclude all members of a targeted racial group. Queensland could have vitiated the potency of section 25 simply by amending its Electoral Act to restrict the vote to forty-five-year-old Aboriginal men, for example.

Circumstances changed in 2007, with the High Court’s decision in Roach v Electoral Commissioner, the challenge to the validity of the Howard government’s 2006 legislation reducing the voting rights of prisoners. As well as restoring the rights of short-term prisoners, the court identified an implied right to vote in the constitution that would make it well nigh impossible for a state (or the Commonwealth) to disenfranchise any class of citizen, including Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. So – the people willing – we can quite safely wave goodbye to section 25.


The Museum of Australian Democracy has just completed its 300th oral history recording. They chose Quentin O’Keefe, then working in the Members’ Bar at Parliament House. On Budget night in 1974 she was presented with a unique conundrum: to serve those in the queue or to bypass its order and serve the PM. Whitlam’s response to her decision to stick with the order of those queuing (‘he can wait his turn’); was to say ‘Well said, comrade’. You can hear this interview and many more by going to the website of the Museum http://moadoph.gov.au/blog/our-300th-recording-introducing-mrs-quentin-o-keefe/

 ****

Earlier this year the John Oxley Library commemorated the 100th anniversary of the 1912 General Strike in Queensland. It released a photo album with several compelling images from the demonstrations and their response. You can access it via the library’s blog post http://blogs.slq.qld.gov.au/jol/2012/01/31/centenary-of-the-brisbane-general-strike-of-1912/

 ****

The Merrifield prize (deadline extended) The Merrifield prize of $400 will be awarded for the most outstanding paper on Australian labour and radical history. Entries should be in the form of an original piece of research into any aspect of Australian labour or radical history. The manuscript must be based on recent research conducted in 2011 and/or 2012. Applications should be sent electronically to Dr Peter Love, Branch President. Applications for the 2012 grant will now close on 30 November 2012 and be awarded in December 2012. Further information can be found at our webpage: http://labourhistorymelbourne.wordpress.com/about/sam-merrifield-prize/.