

Recorder

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In this edition:

Melbourne Branch Event: Radical Sydney, p. 1
Rogue Police Action: The Melbourne Jewish-Communist
Controversy of May 1950, by Philip Mendes, p. 2
Vale Jim Griffin, p. 2
Labour History at AIRAANZ, by Peter Love, p. 3
What's in a name: Princes Pier, by Paddy Garrity, pp. 3-4

May Day 2010, by Peter Love, pp. 4-5
Labour Songs at the National Folk Festival, by Peter Love, pp. 5-6
To be a 'Queenslander', *Voices* Review by Rob Pascoe, pp. 6-7
Retirement of M. Kingham & A. Littler, by Peter Love, pp. 7-8
What's on and Research Notice, p. 8
Melbourne branch ASSLH contacts & meeting place, p.8

Melbourne Branch Event: Writing Radical History

Jeff Sparrow in conversation with Terry Irving & Rowan Cahill

A Melbourne Branch, ASSLH & NIBS @ *underground* event

TERRY IRVING | ROWAN CAHILL

Writing Radical History Wednesday 16 June

6.30 pm

Launch and Discussion: 'Writing Radical History' with Terry Irving, Rowan Cahill, Jeff Sparrow, and Peter Love moderating

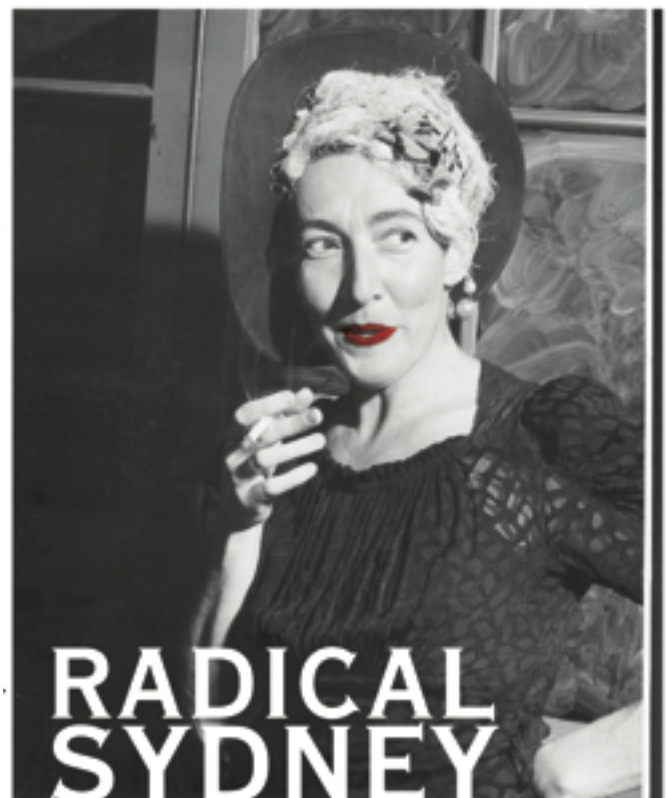
New International Bookshop

Underground, Trades Hall, 54 Victoria Street, Carlton South

Drinks and Nibbles provided

For more information and details on the writing of *Radical Sydney* visit: <http://www.radicalsydney.blogspot.com/>

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PEOPLE, PLACES AND UNRULY EPISODES

Rogue Police Action

By Philip Mendes

The Melbourne Jewish-Communist Controversy of May 1950

In May 1950, 20 young people belonging to the left-wing Kadimah Youth Organisation and the Zionist youth group Hatikvah were questioned by uninformed police in the Melbourne suburbs of Carlton, North Carlton, St Kilda and Elwood concerning their alleged involvement in anti-British and Communist activities. Some of their parents were also approached and intimidated, and a number of overseas-born activists were threatened with deportation.

The interrogations, which seem to have been inspired by the introduction of the Communist Party Dissolution Bill into the federal Parliament, caused great consternation within the Jewish community given the tragic historical consequences of alleged Jewish-Communist links in Nazi Germany and elsewhere.

The left-wing Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism denounced the police actions as allegedly anti-Semitic given that only Jews seemed to have been investigated. It also publicised the incidents in the Jewish and daily press. In addition, the Kadimah Cultural Centre held a large protest meeting against the interrogations at which one speaker drew analogies with Nazi Germany. The Victorian Jewish Board of Deputies took a quieter approach which involved forwarding letters of concern to the Chief Commissioner of Police and the Premier of Victoria. The Premier, J.G.B. McDonald, eventually provided assurances that the Jewish community had not been singled out, and that no such actions would reoccur in the future. From there the matter fizzled out.

But the affair raised a number of serious questions that were never properly answered. The first question was who had authorised the interrogations. Clearly not the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation. The Prime Minister Robert Menzies specifically denied in Parliament that any Commonwealth officer or Minister had authorised or organised the police actions. But the embarrassed Victorian Chief Commissioner also denied having personally authorised or known of the interrogations, and later ordered a departmental inquiry to uncover what had happened.

The ASIO file on the Kadimah Jewish Youth Organisation (A6122/153) suggests a partial answer. In response to a September 1953 memorandum from ASIO, the Victorian Special Branch clarified that they had requested the Officers in Charge at the North Carlton, Carlton and St Kilda police stations to undertake 'the usual discreet and confidential inquiries concerning persons of interest to this Branch'. It would appear that some of the constables involved pursued these inquiries over-enthusiastically, and that anti-Semitism may have played some role in their behaviour given the strangely exclusive focus on Jewish youth.

The second question was why Zionists as well as Communists were investigated. One simple answer is that the police may not have understood the ideological differences between the two groups. This was understandable given that the KYO (reflecting the Communist Party's brief period of pro-Zionist sympathies) was passionately pro-Israel as well as pro-Soviet. The other explanation appears to be that the police were asked to investigate 'anti-British' as well as explicitly Communist activities, and the Zionist groups appeared to fit into this category given their earlier support for the Zionist campaign to end British rule in Palestine.

The controversy also had one ironic note. The Victorian Jewish Board of Deputies strenuously claimed in its correspondence with the Police Commissioner and the Premier that the Kadimah Youth Organisation was a 'non-political organisation'. This was nonsense. Although the KYO publicly denied any political affiliations, it was in fact a pro-Communist group closely linked to the Communist Party's Eureka Youth League, and the Communist-aligned peace movement.

Associate Professor Philip Mendes teaches Social Policy and Community Development at Monash University: philip.mendes@med.monash.edu.au

Vale Jim Griffin

It is with great regret that we announce the death of Jim Griffin on 9 May. Jim, the husband of former Australian Dictionary of Biography staffer, Helga Griffin, was a great supporter of the ADB and wrote 21 entries, including the controversial entries on Archbishop Daniel Mannix and John Wren.

Labour History at 24th AIRAANZ Conference

By Peter Love

The Australian Society for the Study of Labour History (ASSLH) and the Association of Industrial Relations Academics of Australia and New Zealand (AIRAANZ) have long had overlapping constituencies. The current president of AIRAANZ, Ray Markey, is a long-standing and active member of ASSLH, while the President of ASSLH, Nicola (Nikki) Balnave (pictured), is an IR academic and was an organiser of the AIRAANZ Conference. In light of the two organisations' cognate interests it seemed an entirely logical step when Nikki Balnave and Alison Barnes suggested that there be a labour history stream at the AIRAANZ Conference, held in the Sydney Trades Hall on 3-5 February this year.



The session, chaired by Lucy Taksa and Nikki Balnave heard papers from Cathy Brigden, Sarah Gregson, Julie Kimber and Peter Love, all Labour History comrades. Many of the papers in other streams had things to say that would interest ASSLH folk. Paul Thompson's keynote address on 'Financialised Capitalism' had many interesting implications for labour historians, as did Andrew Stewart's address on the early days of the Fair Work Act. There may be an opportunity for further collaboration, especially since the AIRAANZ mob are such a sociable lot.

What's in a name: Princes Pier

By Paddy Garrity

Recorder readers will remember Paddy's piece 'Working Class ANZAC Heroes' in the October 2009 edition of the newsletter. Here he retells the story alongside a current push to rename Princes Pier: the site of the fatal shooting of Whittaker.



Princes Pier c1920s

Waterfront Dispute

The 1928 maritime dispute was created when Justice Beeby of the Arbitration Court handed down a new award. The award reduced wages, took away many hard won conditions and forced waterside workers to register under a discriminatory licensing system they called 'the Dog Collar Act'. This dispute was similar to the 1998 political attack on waterfront unionists, when ship-owners and the Federal Government, acting in collusion, replaced unionised workers with non-union labor in an unsuccessful attempt to smash the waterfront union.

Some locked out workers came from families who had worked these wharves for generations and were now forced to watch non-union labour doing their work, while at home their wives and children were living in starvation and poverty. In 1928, the unemployment rate was 11 per cent but some historians place the figure for Port Melbourne at 70 per cent.

On the morning of 2 November 1928, armed police were protecting non-union labour working ships at Port Melbourne's Princes Pier. Angry and frustrated, 300 unionists ran around 27 police guarding the end of the Pier in an attempt to stop scabs going up the ships' gangways. After some minor scuffles were over, and as the unionists were leaving the pier, the Police

shot and wounded four waterside workers. One of them, Allan Whittaker, died three months later.

Despite requests from many concerned organisations, no public inquiry was ever held into this shooting. The only inquiry was an internal police one, conducted by Commissioner of Police, Sir Thomas Blamey, well known for his anti-union attitude. The result of this inquiry has never been released and despite police naming the ringleaders of an alleged riot – which they claimed had forced them to shoot – no waterside worker was ever questioned over this matter or charged with any offence. A Coroner's Report into Allan Whittaker's death stated it was 'Justifiable homicide – by gun.' The identity of the police officer that fired the fatal bullet has also never been released. The media never mentioned that three of the four workers shot at Princes Pier were war veterans from the First World War.

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Princes Pier

The researchers who unearthed the Whittaker story looked for a way to undo this historical injustice and honour his memory. Since the shooting occurred on Princes Pier – currently being refurbished and hopefully used to reflect local community maritime history – we thought we should investigate the possibilities of renaming the Pier.

Built in 1918 and known as Railway Pier, in 1920 it was named Princes Pier, in honour of Edward, Prince of Wales, later known as Edward VIII. He abdicated his right to the throne in 1936 and was also a well-known sympathiser of Adolf Hitler. When WWII started, he was removed from his post as a Major General and packed off as Governor of the Bahamas. This was largely because, as a senior member of the British Army, he was preaching a policy of appeasement with fascist Germany.

Edward VIII wrote several famous letters, in which he declared that 'niggers' and 'wogs' were low forms of life. He made a particular reference to Australian Aborigines, quoted in the 'Godfrey Letters' (held in the Churchill Archives.) It read:

'Outside Adelaide, Australia. 11 July 1920: They showed us some of the Native Aborigines at a wayside station on the great plain yesterday afternoon, thought they are the most revolting form of living creature I've ever seen!! They are the lowest known form of human beings & are the nearest thing to monkeys that I have ever seen.'

Today's Australians would not want to continue naming a Pier after a racist and fascist sympathiser. If a name change is required, it would seem appropriate to rename it after an ANZAC veteran and citizen of Port Melbourne, who was shot and killed on this Pier by state police.

The author recognises that the right to change the name of this Pier lies with the people of Port Melbourne.

May Day 2010 By Peter Love

The annual May Day march was held on Sunday 2 May this year. A slightly smaller than usual crowd assembled at Trades Hall just after lunch and milled about, exchanging the customary comradely banter. Despite a good representation of younger enthusiasts, the average age of the marchers appears to be increasing, so much so that the model train laid on by the organisers for the comradely codgers was full this time. It was good to see our venerable ASSLH members, Molly Hadfield and Gwen Goedecke, among the stalwarts riding the peace train.



After the procession had completed the usual circuit through the city, they took their places in front of the stage to hear music and speeches about the struggles of workers and oppressed people around the world. The Victorian Trade Union Choir led us in rousing choruses of *Solidarity Forever* and the *Internationale*. There was also a performance of the song *It's Time*, about the travails of establishing a union for rural workers at the end of the 19th century.

We heard again this year about the troubles confronting Latin American workers fighting for the most basic of civil, political, economic and social

rights. Richard Downs of the Alyawarr People language group (pictured below) gave one of the most arresting speeches about the continuing struggle of Indigenous Australians for wage justice, civil and social rights, and for recognition as full members of our political community. He emphasised the stalwart support that some unions and communists had given to those campaigns over the years. The crowd acknowledged the importance of his message with their silent attention and warm applause.



After a thoroughly satisfactory afternoon of ritually observing the need for solidarity among all oppressed people, the comrades packed up and adjourned into the Trades Hall for the customary afternoon tea.

Labour Songs at the National Folk Festival, Canberra, Easter 2010
By Peter Love

Songs about working life, the labour movement and liberation struggles have been a staple of the folk music genre since its revival in the 1960s. It was part of the nationalist left's cultural landscape and figured in the work of prominent historians like Russel Ward and Ian Turner. Wendy Lowenstein, known principally for her work as an oral historian, was also a major collector of folk music, much of it published in the folklore magazine *Tradition*. Our very own Margaret Walters, without whose editorial strictures *Labour History* would be much the poorer, is a major folk singer in her own right. There is also a significant overlapping membership between ASSLH branches and trade union choirs in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Tasmania and Perth. Accordingly, it was no surprise to see that labour songs were such an integral part of the program at this

year's National Folk Festival, nor that Unions ACT was one of the sponsors.



There were four union choirs in this year's program: the Sydney Trade Union Choir, Canberra Union Voices, the Tasmanian Grassroots Union Choir and our Victorian Trade Union Choir. The Festival organisers, keen to use every available space – indoors, under canvas and outdoors – assigned many of the choirs' street gigs. Each choir would assemble at a busy spot around the National Exhibition Centre for their 20 minute set, people would gather around to listen or join in the chorus of songs from a familiar repertoire. The Victorians sang a welcoming set at one of the main entrance gates, another in a busy intersection at the centre of the Festival activity and came together as a combined choir for a brief open-air concert. On another occasion they squashed together under canvas for a series of individual and combined songs. While the majority of the items were performed *a capella*, some were accompanied by acoustic instruments. There seemed to be an interesting pattern in the various choirs' musical preferences: while the Sydney choir sang social movement songs, the Tasmanians focused on working life and the Victorians on the labour movement and liberation struggles.

One of the Festival's highlights was the Union Songs concert in the main auditorium. Sponsored by Unions ACT, it featured three acts well known in the folk music fraternity. The first was Bernard Carney, the prominent West Australian singer-songwriter and his instrumentalist comrade David Hyams. (*Recorder* readers who attended the 2009 National Conference in Perth may remember Bernard as the conductor of the union choir that sang at the conference dinner in the Midland Railway Workshops.)

Their set of Carney songs combined the rousing *Stand*

Together, the thoughtful and resonant *Refuge for a Refugee*, a satirical reflection on an armament manufacturer's claim to be making Green Weapons, and *Far Canal*, a rollicking piss-take of a WA Liberal leader's proposal to bring water from the State's tropical north to its parched south. They were followed by the Kavisha Mazzella Trio whose vibrant musicality lent a rich poignancy to a song about Italian women rice workers in the Po valley, and a driving force to the song about the campaign for women's suffrage. They are truly passionate musicians. The last act was our old mate and national treasure Danny Spooner (pictured), who reminded us of our long history with a moving performance of *Tolpuddle Man*. In introducing his final song, John Warner's *Bring Out The Banners*, he told a story of singing it at a concert in Michigan where, as he came to the chorus for a second time, most of the audience rose to their feet singing lustily and proudly holding their union cards high. In what might become our answer to the monarchist God-botherers' ritual of standing for the Hallelujah chorus of Handel's *Messiah*, many people in the Canberra audience rose with cards rampant! It was a grand moment at a splendid Festival.



In all, the labour songs at the National Folk Festival provided a timely reminder to we desiccated print bound historians that there is an energetic, vibrant culture at work linking our past and present in a form more engagingly accessible than much of our writing. We'll have to try harder to make our prose sing!

To be a 'Queenslander'

By Robert Pascoe

Review of Greg Mallory, *Voices from Brisbane Rugby League: Oral Histories from the 50s to the 70s*, edited by Gail Cartwright, The Author, 30 Broadmere Street, Annerley Qld 4103, 2009, xiv + 202 pp.

'Rugby football' as played in the Australian states of New South Wales and Queensland can mean one of two things – amateur Rugby Union as played in the more prosperous communities, and professional (paid) Rugby League more closely associated with working-class communities, after 1907/08.

The Brisbane Rugby League was a breakaway competition formed in 1922 after a schism in the Queensland Rugby League. This of course coincided with the abolition of Queensland's upper house and the amalgamation into one metropolitan council of Brisbane (the capital city of a decentralised state).

The Brisbane Rugby League ended in 1997, following the formation of the Brisbane Broncos in 1988 and the subsequent absorption of the Brisbane football community into what became the National Rugby League, dominated by the New South Wales clubs.

There are striking parallels with the Australian Rules football story, with the Western Australian and South Australian state competitions (also centred on the state capitals) relegated to second-tier status in a national competition dominated by Victoria.

Brisbane labour historian Greg Mallory makes the case, though, that the fate of Brisbane in its code's history was far worse than what befell Perth and Adelaide. In a mathematical sense, he is absolutely correct. In 2010 there are four Perth and Adelaide clubs of the 16 making up the Australian Rules competition, while in the 16-team National Rugby League the Brisbane Broncos and two other clubs represent Queensland, while metropolitan Sydney still boasts nine clubs. Brisbane is reduced to being a one-team town.

Mallory has interviewed 12 players, referees and commentators from the old Brisbane Rugby League. This is a valuable time capsule of a period of rugby league that has disappeared, perhaps forever.

Brisbane Rugby League was not a dirty game, just a tough game. It represented genuine communities, across the sectarian divide. One club, the Brothers,

was originally comprised of graduates of Catholic schools. (Its real name was the Past Brothers, but no one ever called it that!) Another was the Valleys, more properly the Fortitude Valley Diehards, representing a section of Brisbane that was once lumpenproletarian, not merely proletarian.

Women are absent from these interviews (except as players' wives), because this is a masculine game, with a mostly male following. In the junior Shiftworkers League there was an Aboriginal side (p. 10), but this code was mostly white as well as working-class. Their send-off power gave referees much more authority and power than the umpires of Australian Rules. And the enemy, above all else, was New South Wales, whom one player (Barry Muir) successfully dubbed 'the Cockroaches'.

Every time the State of Origin contest appears on our television screens, the feeling it provokes can be readily explained by reference to Mallory's marvellous time capsule of a book. To read these interviews from the safe distance of another capital city is to sign up for all time as a 'Queenslander', perhaps the greatest honorific going round in Rugby League.

Professor Robert Pascoe is Dean Laureate at Victoria University in Melbourne and the author of histories of Australian Rules football. He hails from Rockhampton on his mother's side.

Retirement of Martin Kingham and Albert Littler

By Peter Love

The labour movement, particularly the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, paid tribute to two of their most stalwart comrades with a grand farewell lunch in the Plaza Ballroom at the Regent Theatre on Friday 7 May. It was a particularly appropriate place to hold the celebration of Martin and Albert's work. The building industry unions were significant partners in saving and restoring the theatre and the ballroom was the venue for so many of Albert's fund-raising functions, most notably the famous AFL Grand Final Breakfasts.

The tables were packed with well-wishers, family and friends keen to acknowledge the remarkable range of service that Martin and Albert have given the movement and associated good causes. There were representatives of the building industry, many of them old industrial adversaries, determined to pay their respects and, possibly, to be sure that they actually

were retiring! Sharan Burrow and Jeff Lawrence were the principal ACTU representatives, Marcus Clayton was among the labour law contingent, along with numerous Labor politicians. Mike Brady, singer-songwriter, was the MC for the afternoon. We look forward to his forthcoming 'Up There Albert' and 'Martin's One Day in September'!



Martin's remarkable career as a chippy in the BWIU, OH&S representative, union secretary and recalcitrant witness before the Cole Royal Commission, is well known. His stubborn refusal to give names to the Commission, under threat of incarceration, earned him enduring respect in the movement. The details of his colourful public life will doubtless be well covered in the CFMEU's publications and in other places. We could not do it justice in this brief report. Suffice it to say that the ASSLH is delighted to have worked with Martin when he was President of the VTHC and played such a central part in the 150th anniversary celebrations of the Eight Hour Day in Victoria. It was a genuine pleasure to have him as one of our leading comrades in that series of events.

Albert's career with the Operative Painters and Decorators' Union and later the CFMEU is less well known outside the labour movement. Inside it, he's a legendary figure with skills that range from BBQ cook to consummate bagman. Albert's contribution as a senior officer of the union, the ALP left and the building industry superannuation fund will most likely be detailed elsewhere. All that the ASSLH can do to add to that story, on behalf of those of us who have been fanged by Albert for one of his good causes, is to publish for the first time a photo of him GIVING money. As a history society, however, we are acutely aware of how deeply Albert cares about the movement's history. In addition to the conservation

battles that the CFMEU have fought, Albert's indefatigable work on the Labour Historic Graves Committee has been remarkable. He is one of the main enthusiasts who ensured that all the original Eight Hour Day pioneers' graves were restored with appropriate respect for their families and their memory. One wit on that Committee was heard suggesting that after Albert had taken his hand out of your pocket, if you were any good and stood still long enough, he'd nail a brass plaque to you!



The Labour History mob want to register our deep appreciation for the work that Martin and Albert have done to help preserve and publicise the history of the labour movement. We also hope very sincerely that the Australian electorate does not give them compelling reasons to come out of retirement.

Research Notice

Cold War researchers in Melbourne will be interested to learn that the Transcripts of the Royal Commission into Espionage (1954-55) will soon be available from the Radical Literature Collection at the Footscray campus of Victoria University's Library.

What's On

BIG RED BOOK FAIR: Saturday 19 & Sunday 20 June

Start saving that shrapnel! This June, the greatest book fair in the known universe returns for another year of back-to-the-future bargains at prehistoric prices. And it's not just their amazing collection of history and politics on display. With every genre imaginable up for grabs, there really is something for everyone. 11am to 5pm, Trades Hall. **DONATE BOOKS NOW!** There is no wrong time to donate your unwanted books. Just bring them into the shop or, if necessary, call NIBS on 9662 3744 (or email nibs@nibs.org.au) to arrange a pick-up.

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RALLY & MARCH: Sunday 20 June REFUGEES ARE WELCOME – WORLD REFUGEE DAY

A broad coalition of individuals and groups, under the umbrella of the 'Refugee Advocates Network', are organising a rally on World Refugee Day, at the State Library, Swanston Street, City. They will call on the government to reverse recent decisions to freeze processing of all claims by asylum seekers from Afghanistan and Sri Lanka, and to re-open the notorious Curtin detention centre. Info: 0413 377 978.

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Meetings of the society are held either in Meeting Room 1 in the Trades Hall or in the New International Bookshop. All photographs in this issue, with the exception of the file photo of Princes Pier, were taken by Peter Love.