

CHAPTER

1

INTRODUCTION

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The extended commemorations to mark the 100th anniversary of the Great War have commenced in earnest. Over the next four years people around the world will struggle to avoid the politicised public narratives of these remembrances. Nationalistic sentiment is no less palpable today than imperial sentiment was a century ago. Its opponents are still there too. Among the countless commemorative activities that will occur, there are innumerable counter narratives. Although they are compelling in their telling of oppositional stories, they have yet to capture the imagination of the dominant storytellers of our generation. Mainstream media, governments, and politicians of all persuasions, remain a captive of “soft jingoism”,¹ and the myth making of Geoffrey Serle’s “fire-eating generals”.² In such a view, war remains a lamentable, but necessary evil. The true costs of war are absorbed only partially.

Given the destabilisation of much of the globe, and the increasing militarisation of domestic politics by Western governments, it is unsurprising that a widespread movement for peace is momentarily lost. But history provides hope. By looking back we can see the ebb and flow of peace movements, and the lessons here are instructive. The present commemorative phase provides historians with a license to tell the stories that underscore the feeble fabric of nationalistic hubris – ones that seek to analyse and understand the human condition rather than simply commemorate it. Tales of national re-birth are

but one facet of war, complicated by a much richer, dirtier, and more nuanced reality. This reality challenges the necessity of war, and allows us to empathise with war's victims, elucidate oppositional tactics, and provide explanations for the difficulties in sustaining a pacifist approach in the midst of war.

The chapters here deal with aspects of peace and anti-war, of memory, of forgetting, and of legacy. The majority – unsurprisingly, given the present historical moment – concentrate on the experience of the First World War. The shadows of that war are long, and the historiography they build on extensive. We open with a chapter by Douglas Newton, a scholar whose work has done much to challenge familiar assumptions. His story takes us to “London on the eve of war” and the attempt by the international women's movement to avert the coming catastrophe.

Newton's chapter highlights the “chance” event that brought together the International Woman Suffrage Alliance with British suffragettes, a combined force of organisations representing 26 countries around the world. These women, many of whom were voiceless at the ballot box, combined to make a passionate plea for international arbitration, “a last rally of peace forces and common sense”. Their demonstration in Kingsway Hall took place just hours before Britain's declaration. What seems at first glance a futile effort to stop the war is, Newton argues, a much more significant act of defiance. It foreshadowed both a split in the women's movement and also paved the way for the peace organisations that followed. Significantly, it also highlights that the standard line that the people of Britain “enthusiastically embraced the prospect of war” requires an alternate reading.

Carolyn Rasmussen's chapter picks up on the theme of women working for peace. Drawing on her research into the lives of Doris Hordern and Maurice Blackburn, her work reveals the complicated interactions between women's and peace movements in Australia. Hordern, “a willing acolyte” to Vida Goldstein, played a significant role in the Women's Political Association (WPA) until the tensions within the movement became too strained. Prefiguring Hordern's own distancing was the fraught relationship between the Association and Blackburn. Rebuffed by the hardening line of the WPA against men, Blackburn ultimately fell out with the organisation over his support for a citizen army (but not for overseas conscription). Rasmussen's work highlights the national and international complications affecting those working for peace. In an echo of the experiences of people in all the countries shaped by the war, once it had been declared, a position based purely on “absolute

pacifism” became increasingly difficult to sustain. How best to work for peace became a preoccupation with pragmatic strategy and, as Rasmussen shows, the larger question of a “negotiated settlement” to the war was overshadowed in Australia by the brutal conscription debates.

The efficacy of pragmatic strategy lies at the heart of Verity Burgmann’s chapter on socialists and syndicalists in the war. Seen by some as an insignificant rump, the extremist anti-war position run by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) is presented here as a necessary element in bringing the anti-conscriptionist cause into the mainstream. While the socialists split over the question of a citizen army, and found themselves flummoxed by the disintegration of the Second International as European socialists scrambled to defend national interests, the IWW assumed the leadership of the “radical flank”. Denigrated by much of the mainstream press and Prime Minister Hughes as disloyal, they nonetheless succeeded in broadening the political spectrum of debate, and in so doing, as Burgmann convincingly argues, they allowed the anti-conscription cause to seem a “reasonable compromise position that could attract majority support.” Burgmann’s thesis, which in many ways answers the question that had animated (and split) so many peace organisations during this time, proposes that “moderate gains” are brought about not by pragmatic, “respectable”, strategy but “by militant and disrespectful activity” acting in tandem with a moderate force.³ The IWW, as Childe had earlier suggested, “prepared the field” on which the Labor Party would slowly advance.⁴

The internal development of Labor moderate and socialist opposition to conscription in Victoria is the focus of Liam Byrne’s chapter. Using the two contrasting studies of John Curtin and James Scullin, Byrne explores the narrow defeat of calls for a general strike, and shows how the perennial question of strategy undermines what is otherwise a largely unified position among moderates and socialists to the question of conscription. The “historical symmetry” of the early and later lives of Curtin and Scullin (both editors of labour papers, both later Prime Ministers) provides an interesting vantage point to evaluate the competing agendas of these two factions of the Labor Party. Scullin’s moderate approach, shaped by a labourist ideology and unique conception of Australian nationalism sits in stark contrast with Curtin’s socialism. Yet with the threat of forced conscription the two joined the anti-conscriptionist forces providing powerful voices of opposition. Scullin’s editorship of Ballarat’s *Evening Echo* proved a strident and widely read antidote to the mainstream press.

The role of the *Evening Echo* on the conscription debates is the focus of a chapter by Anne Beggs-Sunter. It tells of the extensive influence of the paper, which far outstretched its geographical origins. Beggs-Sunter points out that Scullin managed to tread a path that neither questioned the war, nor undermined labour values, but which nonetheless successfully articulated a powerful argument against conscription. It did so by utilising the memory of Eureka and played on the fear of “cheap Asian labour” being used to cover the jobs of conscripted workers. Perhaps because of this approach, the *Echo* was read widely; it has been estimated that around 60,000 copies of the newspaper were circulated in Melbourne on a daily basis.⁵ As Beggs-Sunter argues, its contribution to the conscription debates in Victoria was “vital”, and it lays claim to being the “only daily newspaper in Victoria”, which fought against conscription.

The focus on the role of newspapers is continued in Rhys Cooper’s chapter on the treatment of conscientious objectors (COs) in Australia. His study confirms the unjust treatment of COs to which they were subjected by the press. Held in contradictory regard as both “weak” and “feminised” on the one hand, and as a “threat” to Australia on the other, this largely unknown group of men who objected to serving in war became an on-going object of derision. During the one month long period of forcible enlistment Cooper was able to analyse the voices of these men whose appearance before exemption courts was exhaustively reported by the newspapers. His conclusions demonstrate that in this time both newspapermen and many magistrates shared a common anger for the man who would reap the “benefits” but not the “burdens” of citizenship. Notwithstanding the occasional calls for sympathy by readers and clergy, the overwhelming dismissal of claims by conscientious objectors who did not want to fight leaves a bitter legacy.

Another group of people under suspicion of being less than ideal citizens were the Irish in Australia. Robert Bollard takes up L.L. Robson’s study, which pointed out that despite assumptions that many Irish Australians opposed the war, Catholics in general enlisted in rates that were statistically on par with the rest of Australia.⁶ In the context of Val Noone’s validation of McKernan’s thesis that radical Catholics led Archbishop Mannix into his anti-conscription stance, Bollard examines Catholic enlistment figures in several areas in an attempt to resolve the conflict.⁷ What he finds is a tentative correlation with McKernan’s observations that Catholic responses to the war had a class origin.⁸

As with the Irish, the Great War placed the loyalty of Italians in Australia under the harsh glare of xenophobia. In November 1917, just prior to the

second conscription referendum, the Australian government commenced the round-up and deportation of allied Italian males of military age, who would be required to serve in the Italian Army. Karen Agutter’s illuminating chapter examines the responses of the labour movement to this development against the backdrop of its earlier antipathy towards the Italian immigrant, who – allegedly – diluted racial norms and undermined working conditions. Agutter finds the level of support for the Italians uneven and the range of motives complex and sometimes contradictory. For staunch anti-conscriptionist Labor politicians, trade union leaders and socialist organisations, selective conscription of Italians was a prelude, by stealth, to universal conscription and they actively campaigned on the Italians’ behalf. On the other hand, rank and file sympathy remained minimal; residual racism overrode anti-militarism. But, for a brief period, in that last, difficult year of the Great War, a previously marginalised and distrusted group of Australians were incorporated into the struggle against pro-war policies.

Phil Roberts’ chapter tells the story of the indefatigable efforts of one community to commemorate its citizens who served in the First World War. He focuses on the regional Victorian city of Ballarat, judged by Weston Bate as “the most Empire-conscious of towns”. Pro-Empire sentiments were demonstrated by enlistment figures, public pronouncements, and casualty rates. In contrast, a solid core of Irish Catholic and socialist opinion expressed opposition to war and conscription. In Ballarat, a majority “no” vote was recorded in both conscription referenda. However, the movement to plant memorial trees and construct a commemorative arch evoked widespread and unifying support, even from Jim Scullin’s *Evening Echo*. Roberts traces the pivotal role of the “Lucas Girls” – employees of the local Lucas clothing factory – in initiating, planting, fundraising and sustaining Ballarat’s landmark Avenue of Honour (the longest in the world) and its imposing Arch of Victory.

The next contribution moves forward in time and onto the national stage. Lachlan Clohesy examines the position of Australia’s Minister for External Affairs, Dr H.V. Evatt, in the immediate post-World War II period. He argues that Evatt’s quest for peaceful international cooperation, a multilateral forum for the resolution of conflict, and his desire for rapprochement with the Soviet Union, were all consistent with his embrace of a liberal internationalist framework, more than a realist one, in the pursuit of foreign policy objectives. Clohesy maintains that Evatt’s thinking was profoundly influenced not by ideology but by his experience with the “great powers” during the war.

Accordingly, he envisaged a less reliant, more independent role for Australia in the postwar order until, Clohesy argues, 1948, when he accepted the realities of bi-polar Cold War conflict.

The early Cold War provides the backdrop for the next chapter. It focuses on those who eschewed polarities and became activists in the peace movement: left-wing Protestant clergymen and religious groups in Australia in the 1950s. In explaining this clerical opposition to war, Kim Thoday compellingly traces the theological reflections and ideological convictions of the “peace parsons”, which he locates within a long-standing tradition of Christian-Socialist dialogue. Such dialogue, Thoday contends, was a “living heritage”, which directly influenced sermons, teaching and activism. A leading peace activist, examined in this chapter, was Rev. Alf Dickie, perhaps the most prominent spokesperson of the Australian Peace Council. Thoday convincingly demonstrates that his, and others’, involvement in the peace movement was not due to communist manipulation, as frequently alleged, since the historical legacy of progressive and pacifist theology was too ingrained. Thoday grapples with the issue of Communist Party control and concludes that, notwithstanding significant covert influence, there was little overt control. Despite the Cold War equation of peace with communism, there existed space for a range of clerical groups with divergent motivations, ideologies and purposes to campaign against the seemingly imminent threat of war.

Religious-based opposition to war also underpins Bobbie Oliver’s exploration of the role of the small, independent newspaper, *The Peacemaker*, which reflected the liberal Christian views of, but was not beholden to, the Federal Pacifist Council. When it folded, in December 1971, it had been published for 32 years. Almost entirely overlooked in the historiography of opposition to the Vietnam war, *The Peacemaker* sought to influence public attitudes to the *National Service Act*; provide a forum for the views of conscientious objectors (both pacifists opposed to all wars and resisters opposed to the Vietnam war); and offer practical advice and support for conscientious objectors – some of whom used the paper as a conduit, an “unofficial postal service”, for communicating with other conscientious objectors on the run from the authorities. Oliver argues that *The Peacemaker* was an effective voice for peace and, especially, for bringing into focus the issue of non-compliance with the *National Service Act*.

Nick Irving’s chapter locates the two moratoriums against the Vietnam war, in May and September 1970, within a global context. In particular, he

demonstrates how the campaigns employed a transnational vocabulary of protest. This rhetoric of rebellion was borrowed by both the Marxist-influenced New Left and by the conservative mainstream press and politicians. By mid 1970, he argues, the language of the international counterculture had been integrated into the Australian political discourse. Most interestingly, Irving juxtaposes the ideas of Dr Jim Cairns, the chairman of the Vietnam Moratorium Committee, with those of the civil rights movement (especially Martin Luther King’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”) and the American New Left (especially the Students for a Democratic Society’s “Port Huron Statement”). These two intellectual foundations, when combined with his commitment to democratic socialism, produced Cairns’ distinctive ideology: participatory democracy with diminished reliance on parliamentary processes, and a conscientious obligation to defy, or break, immoral laws through civil disobedience, which could disrupt a repressive social structure. Irving concludes that the moratorium campaigns can be better understood by incorporating the language of the global protest movement into our analysis.

The last two chapters both take the long view in their assessments of Anzac, memory and war. Carolyn Holbrook explores the “psychological turn” in the Australian historiography of the Great War, and argues that reading the war through the lens of trauma contains an ideological ambivalence: it has the potential to both subvert and reinforce the sentimentalisation of war memory. The chapter examines the history of psychological representations of the Great War, stretching back to the 1930s, when the current emphasis on grief and emotion and suffering was then viewed with disdain or suspicion. However, Holbrook contends, such literature functioned as a form of protest, undermining the dominant narrative of imperial nationalism and the valorised martial virtues of the Anzacs. This chapter also expands on the work of Twomey, critically assesses the controversial *What’s Wrong with Anzac?*, and enters the debate between Scates, and McKenna and Ward over interpretations of the experience of battlefield pilgrimage.⁹ Holbrook concludes that trauma culture has been successfully incorporated into the Anzac mythology, an absorption nourished and politicised by military dignitaries and political leaders.

Chris McConville’s broad-ranging, provocative essay is a fitting final chapter. Drawing on different forms of memorialisation – from Maryborough, Victoria, in 1926 to Linz, Austria, in 2009 – McConville argues that Anzac and the First World War should be remembered in a different way. He suggests that, because the “iron grasp” of Anzac remembrance involves a process of collective

memorialisation, the term “memorial collective” rather than “collective memory” is more apt. Appeals to memory, most legitimate when a connection with the dead was direct, as existed between the wars, must be delineated from the constructed sense of memory embodied in contemporary evocations of “Lest We Forget” and “The Spirit Lives”. In contrast to the misappropriation of memory and memorialism inherent in Australia’s Anzac Centenary, McConville proposes that we look to Linz, and how its local council confronted suppressed memories of Nazi occupation. A heritage site that was dissonant with, rather than integrated into, the landscape was developed. Minimalist, white-stencilled texts were placed at sites associated with dark events; they are impermanent suggesting a state of tension with issues unresolved. Memorials, therefore, should engage people with a debate about the past, not serve as institutional sacred sites for state-sanctioned narratives.

Fighting against war implies a kind of symbolic violence at odds with pacifism. Individuals and organisations who are inspired to protest against war for ideological reasons, or for more immediate causes, such as anti-conscription, bring with them a variety of political strategies. Some are examined in this book. Histories of anti-war or pacifist movements simmer with tensions between moderate and radical wings. Opposition to conscription is not necessarily a pacifist position: approaches differ and distinctions between partial and absolute pacifism blur. Nonetheless, without the actions of those fighting against war, or conscription – invariably difficult and vulnerable to repression – our society would be vastly poorer. State-sponsored commemorative activities, and state-sanctioned forms of remembrance, rarely acknowledge the efforts of those who have struggled to defend ordinary people against the disfiguring effects of pro-war policies. It’s time that changed.

This edited collection contains some of the papers presented at the 14th biennial Labour History Conference, *Fighting Against War: Peace Activism in the Twentieth Century*, held at the University of Melbourne, 11–13 February 2015. The conference sought to restore the role of labour movement activists to our historical memory. Their peace activism stretched across a broad range of fronts throughout twentieth century Australia. With around seventy papers delivered with this aim in mind, the conference joins with the many other activities designed to counter the official narrative of Australia at war. Each of the chapters here has undergone double blind refereeing, and we are indebted to our supportive community of scholars in the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History and beyond, who assisted with this task. We wish to

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Endnotes

¹ Tony Harris, “As the Gallipoli centenary approaches: is the Anzac Legend bubble in danger of bursting?”, Watermelon, 9 May 2013 <http://watermelonharris.blogspot.com.au/2013/05/as-gallipoli-centenary-approaches-is.html>

² This phrase and Serle’s now oft quoted “Anzackery” can be found in Geoffrey Serle, “Godzone: 6) Austerica Unlimited?”, *Meanjin Quarterly* 26.3 (1967): 244. It should be read in conjunction with Geoffrey Serle, “The Digger Tradition and Australian Nationalism”, *Meanjin Quarterly* 24 no. 2 (1965): 148–158.

³ Verity Burgmann, *Power and Protest: Movements for Change in Australian Society* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1993), 262.

⁴ Vere Gordon Childe, *How Labour Governs* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1964) [1923], 137.

⁵ L.C. Jauncey, *The Story of Conscription in Australia*, (South Melbourne: Macmillan, 1968) [1935], 175.

⁶ L.L. Robson, “The Origin and Character of the First A.I.F., 1914–1918: Some Statistical Evidence,” *Historical Studies* 61 (1973): 737–49.

⁷ Val Noone, “Class factors in the Radicalisation of Daniel Mannix, 1913–17,” *Labour History* 106 (May 2014).

⁸ M. McKernan, “Catholics, Conscription and Archbishop Mannix,” *Historical Studies* 18 (1977).

⁹ See Christina Twomey, “Trauma and the Reinvigoration of Anzac: An Argument,” *History Australia* 10 no. 3 (2013); Marilyn Lake, Henry Reynolds, Mark McKenna, Joy Damousi and Carina Donaldson, *What’s Wrong with Anzac?, The Militarisation of Australian History* (Sydney: NewSouth, 2010); Mark McKenna and Stuart Ward, “‘It Was really Moving, Mate’: The Gallipoli Pilgrimage and Sentimental Nationalism in Australia,” *Australian Historical Studies* 39 no. 130 (2007); Bruce Scates, “The First Casualty of War: A Reply to McKenna’s and Ward’s ‘Gallipoli Pilgrimage and Sentimental Nationalism’,” *Australian Historical Studies* 39 no. 129 (2007).