

RECORDER

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Tolpuddle Martyrs' Museum: Salutory Reminder

Peter Love

On a recent visit to the Museum, *Recorder* roving correspondents Susanne Provis and Peter Love, spent some time chatting with the manager, Tolpuddle Tom, as he prefers to be known. Discussing the then coming UK elections, he set forth on the class structure and political culture of the district's Tory constituency and the intractable structures of inequality in the region, despite the 1950s Post-War Welfare State reforms. There have been, he alleged, improvements at the edges but not at the core of the system that used the law to impose a monstrously unjust sentence on the six village labourers in 1834. There were still many, he declared, who saw collectivism as conspiracy and industrial action as mutiny. Hence, it was still necessary to maintain the Museum as a continuing reminder of the need for union organisation and action, and an annual festival to reaffirm and celebrate the work of the labour movement.

As he was making his points in an increasingly declamatory manner, he was encouraged by our agreement to his line of analysis, despite some skepticism on matters of degree on particular points. We exchanged notes, so to speak, of matters such as the Australian Building and Construction Commission's secretive and coercive powers to condemn workers; the increasing restrictions in both countries on collective bargaining and the right to strike; and the steady decline in real wages and working conditions. We were equally dismayed at how our respective Labour/Labor governments, in their more pusillanimous moments, had contributed to this process. Under new leadership, we hoped for better things in the near future as neoliberalism's hold over the weaker intellects in our movement was finally broken. The entirely congenial meeting concluded on a note of furious agreement and an exchange of webpage and Facebook details to continue a comradely connection.

When Jeremy Corbyn addresses the Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival over the week-end of 14-16 July it will be interesting to see what issues he decides to address on such matters.



Susanne Provis with Tolpuddle Tom. Photograph by Peter Love.

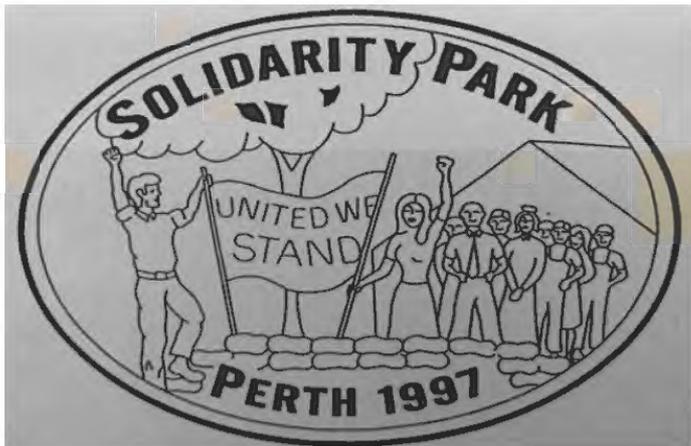


Susanne Provis with Peter Love. Photograph by Tolpuddle Tom.

Great Union Celebration in Perth

Brian Smiddy

On Friday 28 April 2017, union members and their friends gathered at Solidarity Park (right behind Parliament House) in Perth to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of their opposition to the "Third Wave" anti-union legislation which had been introduced by the Richard Court Liberal Government. The big gathering was entertained by speakers from key unionists who were involved in the long struggle. Music was provided by local artists.



Solidarity Park was founded in 1997 during the "Third Wave Campaign", when the Liberal Government introduced legislation that would significantly restrict the ability of unionists to protect members and the general community, from unfair and exploitative employment practices.

On 29 April 1997, 30,000 unionists and community supporters marched on Parliament House to demand the scrapping of these unjust laws. The Government rejected this demand. So, on 1 May (May Day) the site was pegged and legally claimed by unionists under the provisions of the Mining Act.

The unions co-ordinated a six month long, 24 hours a day, protest occupation of the site in defiance of pending legislation and attempts by the Government to require union and community protesters to 'move on'. They refused to do so and although the legislation was passed, it was never fully enacted for fear of further union backlash. The change of Government saw the laws repealed.

Originally called the Workers Embassy, the site was renamed Solidarity Park in late July 1997. The Mark Allen Memorial Wall, built on 21 June 1997, commemorates all killed and injured workers, with the International Workers' Memorial Day WA services held annually in April.

Thanks were given to all those who struggled against the unjust Third Wave legislation.



Neil Byrne, Brian Smiddy and Ron Knox.

Brian and Ellen Smiddy were visiting Perth at the time of the celebration. Ron Knox, Secretary of the Perth branch of the ASSLH extended their invitation. Ron is a former secretary of the AMWU Printing Division. We send a big thank you to the Perth Branch. It was a great night and we can assure readers that the Perth branch is a very active organisation.

Ripples of Wartime

Des Files

The video clips by documentary maker Malcolm McKinnon, entitled *Ripples of Wartime*, are up on the website of Brink Theatre Productions (www.brinkproductions.com/productions/ripples-of-wartime).

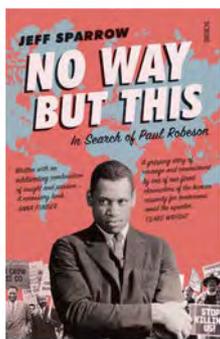
The theatre company has staged a play *Long Tan* at the Space theatre in Adelaide and commissioned Malcolm McKinnon to make the videos as a counterpoint to the play. The videos are shown in the foyer of the theatre by selection by audience members. There are 12 video clips and I am one of two activists talking about conscription. The other is Jean McLean. The other video clips present a range of views and experiences of the war in Vietnam. *Ripples of Wartime* has been professionally produced in a short space of time and I think it has the potential to be adapted for national television.



Des Files. ASIO Photograph. NAA: A9626, 591.

No Way But This

Andrew Moore



Jeff Sparrow, *No Way But This. In Search of Paul Robeson* (Scribe: Melbourne, 2017), pp. 304, \$32.99.

Jeff Sparrow's account of the life of Paul Robeson *No Way But This* begins with an episode well remembered by many Australians of a certain age. This was in 1960 when the imposing Afro-American sang to construction workers at Bennelong

Point building the Sydney Opera House. Robeson's rendition of 'Joe Hill' and 'Ol' Man River' thrilled the workers. Sparrow points out that the big man changed the words of the latter, his signature song, to reflect a tone of defiance rather than the subservience of the original. In keeping with a radical who stood up for working-class rights, Robeson's rich, deep voice intoned, 'Instead of cryin', I must keep fighting, until I'm dying'. Watching on YouTube more than fifty years later is still goose bump territory. (So, too, are the primitive scaffolding and occupational safety standards evident at the Opera House building site in 1960.)

Though there are many books published on Paul Robeson, clearly there are justifications for writing another one. Given amnesia, more than likely many have forgotten him. Robeson was – as people say these days – awesome. If he was a great singer, he was an even more impressive orator. A brilliant actor as well, not to mention a scholar, linguist and, in his youth, a top athlete. An anti-racist and socialist activist, a man of principle and courage, Robeson was a high profile victim of McCarthyism in America during the Cold War. His addresses to the House Un-American Activities Committee (of course, also preserved on YouTube) are inspirational. Handsome and built like a brick shit house, the man had it all.

Robeson's flaw in the clay, however, was that he was mired in the quicksand of a socialist who refused to recognise the horrors of Stalinist Russia, even after 1956 and the invasion of Hungary. It was his 'necessary lie', but one which, as Sparrow argues, had disastrous consequences. It may well have underpinned his mental collapse. More than that, Sparrow argues, 'In the long run, the refusal to acknowledge the crimes of the USSR fostered precisely the outcome Paul intended to prevent: an erosion of the American Left's moral authority and influence'. (p. 264) In this respect Robeson becomes a vehicle for pursuing Jeff Sparrow's own musings about democracy, socialism and the state of the Left.

As befits the now popular 'in search of' genre of biography Sparrow follows his subject around the world. Sparrow's travelogue embraces the principal

sites where Robeson lived his life in the United States, London, Wales, Russia and Spain. In large part this works well, and shows the reader some of the research process that underpins the book. The chapter on Spain and the Spanish Civil War is a highlight. Robeson's anti-fascist activities there feature alongside an interesting account of Sparrow's travelling through Madrid and Barcelona. Sometimes, however, the approach is intrusive when the author pushes the subject aside to pursue his own travel stories and musings. The experience becomes a little like watching the ABC's Tony Jones chair a debate on television. One wishes he would occasionally retire to the background. Even the chapter on the Spanish Civil War spoils an evocative account of Franco's appalling monument on the edge of Madrid, the Valle de los Caidos, with an unnecessarily self-referential throwaway line in conclusion that a publisher's editor could easily have removed.



Robeson at the Sydney Opera House, 1960.

Sparrow explains that his is not a conventional biography. Instead it pursues a 'ghost story, shaped by places where particular associations form an eerie bridge between then and now'. (p. 10). Nonetheless, a brief literature review of what is already known about Robeson and a statement of what this book adds to knowledge would have assisted the present reviewer. Even the State Library of New South Wales has nearly twenty biographies or books written about or by Robeson. It would have been useful to have some handle on them and what Sparrow's account has to offer that is new.

As mentioned above, Sparrow's publishers have done him no favours. The effusive endorsements proclaiming the book's brilliance that festoon its covers inside and out jar. The book lacks an index. Its references are a dog's breakfast and difficult to use. In large part I very much preferred Sparrow's earlier biography of Guido Baracchi, *Communism: A Love Story*, which is an excellent book.

Remembering Conscription

Des Files

Australia's anti-Vietnam war and anti-conscription movement had an integral role in the McMahon Liberal/Country Party government's defeat at the end of 1972. Twenty-three years of uninterrupted Liberal/Country Party governments ended on 2 December 1972 when the Labor Party, led by Gough Whitlam, won office. Three days later, conscription of 20-year-old males for the war in Vietnam was abolished by an administrative action by Lance Barnard, the newly sworn Minister for Defence, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and Supply (and other portfolios). For three days, Whitlam and Barnard formed a two-man government, prior to the entire new Cabinet being sworn in.

With this action, Lance Barnard cancelled the pending service of 2,200 conscripts who had been selected by the Army to begin training on 1 January 1973. He deferred indefinitely the obligation of 30,000 others to respond to the National Service Act (1964). He advised 8,000 members of the CMF, who had joined up through a provision of the National Service Act, they could leave the organisation. The Minister cancelled fines, convictions, prison terms, and investigations that applied to non-compliers of the coercive conscription scheme that had begun in 1965. Seven non-compliers were released from prison and by mid-December conscription was being consigned to history. A small number of Australian troops still stationed in Vietnam were recalled.

In May 1973, the Whitlam Labor government lowered the voting age from 21 to 18 as a corollary of previous years of public disquiet over 20-year-old conscripts being sent to war while considered too young to vote. The government also introduced into parliament the legislation for the National Service Termination Act (1973).

It was Billy McMahon, before he achieved his ambition to become PM by March 1971, who was in 1965 the Minister for Labour and National Service in the Menzies Liberal/Country Party government. He oversaw the implementation of the selective conscription scheme which operated on a birthdate ballot system. During his time as PM, McMahon had the administrative steps open to him, as Lance Barnard did, to end conscription but took no action, despite having withdrawn detachments of Australian troops from Vietnam. This came about after the previous Liberal Party Prime Minister, John Gorton, had declared in 1969 that when the Australian 8th Battalion had returned from Vietnam there would be no more troops sent to the war.

Despite this, McMahon continued to publicly support earlier specious 'red menace' arguments put forward by Bob Menzies, Prime Minister in 1965, who had on 29 April committed Australian troops to the war as an ally of the US in Vietnam. Racism was also a latent factor in Menzies' stratagem. One of those who saw through Menzies' bluster was Dr Jim Cairns, Labor MP for Yarra,

who argued against Australia entering the war, and pointed out that that the circumstances in Vietnam were related to the country's colonial history under the French.

Menzies' most damaging action to Australia in his last eighteen months as PM, was the development of the coercive selective conscription scheme. The Defence Forces Review of 1963 showed the Army was getting insufficient volunteers and too many of these had poor health and inadequate education. The National Service Act (1964) was a comprehensive measure of social engineering to suit the times of full employment and high levels of technical and tertiary education. The selection of 20 year olds for conscription gave the government an abundance of potential Army 'recruits' to select from while providing for deferments of service for apprentices and university students. The Menzies government had the opportunity, and the political imperative, to put the selective conscription scheme into legislation by having a majority in the House of Representatives and the Senate. Ultimately, around a third of troops who served in Vietnam were conscripts.

The Leader of the Opposition, Arthur Calwell, an implacable opponent of conscription, condemned its introduction, and took his opposition to it to the 1966 election. When Calwell was a 20-year-old in 1916 he campaigned for the No vote in the first plebiscite held on whether conscription should be introduced for service in World War I. Robert Menzies, on the other hand, was a law student at Melbourne University at the age of 19, during World War I. He supported conscription but chose not to enlist for the war after a family conference where his two brothers decided they would go.



The history of Australia's anti-Vietnam war and anti-conscription movement needs to acknowledge the formative experiences of those like Arthur Calwell, Jim Cairns, Moss Cass, Bill Hayden, Gough Whitlam, and Lance Barnard. Calwell's experiences went back to World War I; the others to World War II. After Barnard ended conscription Moss Cass, Bill Hayden and Gough Whitlam implemented one of the most enduring changes in Australian social history: establishing Medibank, the forerunner of today's Medicare. It is a remarkable legacy of the anti-war movement's integral role in the McMahon government losing office in 1972.

Ballads, Ballots and Bureaucratic Balderdash

Ken Mansell

I was born on the 9th of November 1945 and grew up in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. We lived in Camberwell until I turned eleven and then moved further out to Burwood. I attended Camberwell Central School through to Year 8 and then Ashwood High. It was a conservative, lower-middle-class upbringing. Political issues were rarely discussed at home but my parents were closet Liberals. I was never very religious but did the expected thing and regularly attended Sunday school.

From an early age sport was my most abiding passion. If I wasn't outside playing cricket or football I was inside poring over my scrapbooks and memorabilia. I was good at sport and played senior cricket and football locally. In teenage years I was shy with girls. In 1963 I was dumped by a girl and was so depressed I failed my matriculation. In 1964 I started work as a purchasing clerk at Kraft Foods in Port Melbourne. It was a dead-end job and I hated it.

While still at school I sought solace and meaning in folk music. What I learned through folk music changed my life. I became aware of the history of social struggles for the first time – in particular the inspirational African-American struggle for civil rights. I befriended a 'folkie' from Elwood called Laurie Cohen who, chipping away at the edifice of my middle-class morality, introduced me to a heady brew of *Oz* magazine satire, Voltaire, rationalism and Sartrean existentialism until there was little of my old world-view left and I broke with the Church theologically and socially. To keep myself sane at Kraft I began writing songs – privately and in the 'boss's time'. Over the next two years I wrote hundreds, covering every conceivable topical subject. Looking at these lyrical efforts now I find them valuable original documents allowing me to plot my emotional response to the great crisis of my generation – conscription. Many of the songs I wrote in 1964 expressed deeply-felt anti-war sentiment. Initially these 'peace' songs tended to be general statements of Christian pacifist principles.

*Shall we see the day when tank wheels are turning /
Through the dust of the houses burning / Past the women
on their knees crying tears of mourning / Shall we see,
shall we see, shall we see?*

Increasingly, however, my anti-war compositions reflected a more specific and urgent preoccupation; the rapid escalation of the war in Vietnam. 'The Defiant Digger' – my first lyrical reference to Vietnam and my first declaration of non-compliance with conscription – was an angry response to two particularly disturbing developments in June 1964. The Australian Government dispatched thirty more military advisors to Vietnam, and Australian newspapers reported a possible compulsory national service scheme.

*Well the other night I came home from Port Melbourne
The world reeling from the news of North Vietnam
My mother said in fun 'you'll be off to war my son'
And this is what I should have said to her
'Come on Mr Menzies try to take me / Try to take me to
fight your dirty war / I'll be staying here a-singing –
while your dirty ears are ringing / For it's me that's
gonna study war no more'*

On 10 November 1964 Prime Minister Menzies introduced a scheme for the conscription of twenty-year-olds, and put through legislation obliging conscripts to serve overseas. I recall being shocked and outraged. Nothing in my previous secure middle-class life had prepared me for this horror. The very thought of being dragged against my will to fight and die on some overseas battlefield filled me with dread. The injustice of having one's life chances subject to a lottery (especially when one could not yet vote) enraged me. I had already been politicised by friends and current events. This one particular government measure was a personal and existential threat. It radicalised me overnight. I was determined to resist and my lyrical output immediately reflected this.

*Conscription is an evil thing – it makes the mothers cry
To see their sons go off to war on some far field to die
And under some far rising sun in God's far distant lands
A mother cries and weeps for sons killed at Australia's hands
They'll put me in a Melbourne jail – treason as my crime
But if I took part in a war I'd have no peace of mind*

Several weeks later I was still mulling over the issue:

*There's a troopship that sails on a wild winter's night
Loaded with men all willing to fight
The troopship she sails on a wild stormy sea
That gun ship is one ship that will never get me
For I am not playing for any one side
And I'm not a victim of national pride
I'm tender and gentle and peaceful and tame
And I'm not a part of your patriot game*

The first registration period was from 25 January until 8 February 1965. I was not due to register until July but my anxiety level – and my anger – was rising. The war escalated significantly in April 1965. The Americans began their full-scale aerial bombing of North Vietnam and the large-scale commitment of combat troops. On 29 April 1965 Menzies told Parliament Australia would send an infantry battalion to Vietnam. Songs about war and peace in the abstract no longer sufficed. One had to take a stand on Vietnam.

*We're sending our brave servicemen to fight in Vietnam
It seems to me that Cabot Lodge has twisted Menzies arm
While Johnson in the White House can ring his hands in glee
To think that he controls us all from Washington DC
Sir Robert has committed us to fight a war again
If the cause is so important why just send 600 men*

*Oh out in the dew of the morning mother I was singing
with the birds / Among the notes that passed through my
mind a cannon could be heard / 'Yes I can hear that too my
son but nothing we can do / Can help the Vietnamese to
see their trouble through' / Oh out in the dew of the
morning mother our time is filled with wars / Yet even he
that holds the gun is doubtful of the cause / And still the
curses rumble mother and still the cannons roll / As little
children stumble down to add to Death's cruel toll*

Ever since November my mind had been churning with moral and existential questions. Should I register? If I did register, and then was balloted out and called-up, should I comply? Would I be game enough to resist? How far would I be prepared to resist? Resist to the extent of going to gaol? Because my objection was now political – towards a particular war – rather than religious or pacifist, exemption as a conscientious objector was unlikely. There were stiff penalties for non-compliance. Everybody else was eschewing the path of civil disobedience. Did I have the guts to go through with it? I knew of only one other young man, Peter Walters, who had contemplated draft resistance but I had lost contact with him. There seemed to be no-one, least of all my parents or the Church, I could turn to for advice and sympathy. My fellow workers at Kraft sniggered 'it would make a man of me'. Conscription was popular in the wider society. Since 10 November there had been little resistance or defiance (individual or organised). As the deadline for my registration loomed, there was still no Save Our Sons (SOS) or Youth Campaign against Conscription (YCAC) in Melbourne. Nor, apparently, was I aware of the Conscientious Objectors Advisory Committee. I had never before felt so alone. I do not remember any nocturnal nightmares, only the diurnal ones.

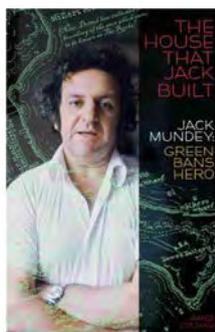
*I wasn't far when I met a car – the local cop inside
Although I swore he beat me more and quickly had me tied
He slammed the door and said 'there's war – you're in the
Army now
To join the other conscript suckers at Puckapunyal'*

The second registration period started on 28 July. My registration form duly arrived – and I dutifully registered. I look back now and wonder if this indicates I lacked the courage of my own convictions. My consoling recollection is that, along with almost everyone else, it never occurred to me not to register. But I remain convinced I would not have let them take me if I had been called up.

As a prisoner of fate I waited for the 10 September ballot. Eventually I received a letter from the Department of Labour and National Service 'indefinitely' deferring my call-up. I'm proud to say, however, that in subsequent years as Australia's involvement in Vietnam escalated, I became deeply committed to action – including civil disobedience – against Australian and American aggression in Vietnam. If the Liberal Party had wanted to avoid producing a phalanx of life-time anti-war activists they sure went the wrong way about it.

The House that Jack Built

Greg Mallory



James Colman, *The House that Jack Built: Jack Munday Green Bans Hero* (NewSouth Publishing: Sydney, 2016), 356 pp, \$49.99.

Jack Munday is a unique Australian. He has had a long involvement in the 'left' progressive movement through his membership of the former Communist Party, his position in the trade union movement as former secretary of the NSW Builders Labourers Federation (BLF), as well as being a pioneer in the environmental movement. In summing up Munday's political and environmental position he has said that 'Ecologists with a socialist perspective and socialists with an ecological perspective must form a coalition to tackle the wide-ranging problems relating to human survival.'

James Colman, Sydney based architect and planner, has penned a book which traces Munday's involvement in the green movement from the first ban at Kelly's Bush in 1971 to his involvement with environmental organisations over a forty-year period including his membership of the Greens Party.

Colman weaves together two themes in the book: Munday's political, social and environmental evolution, and the history of the heritage/green movement in Australia. The book begins with a discussion of Munday's background (including his shift from the Atherton Tablelands to Sydney to play Rugby League for Parramatta), and a history of heritage conservation in Australia.

It traces Munday's concept of calling bans 'green' when workers withdraw their labour for environmental protection. There is a discussion of the first green ban at Kelly's Bush contextualised against the history of the area. As secretary of the NSW BLF Munday initiated a policy that in order to place a ban there had to be a meeting of residents as well as a meeting of the BLF rank-and-file. This happened and a 600 strong public meeting endorsed the ban. Other green bans that are discussed include the Rocks, Woollahroomooloo, Pitt St Congregational Church, Victoria St, and Centennial Park. The Queen Victoria Building was also saved largely influenced by grass roots activism and the inspiration of the green ban era.

After the intervention of the Federal body, under the leadership of Norm Gallagher, into the NSW BLF branch, Munday lost his position and he began a life-long involvement of bringing trade unionists and environmentalists together. One of these first actions was a meeting of trade unionists and environmentalists in San Francisco with the Sierra

Club. He was also invited to England to address unionists and environmentalists by the Centre for Environmental Studies where he became involved in a campaign to save the Birmingham General Post Office which still stands today as a heritage building.

Munday was involved with a number of environmental organisations including the National Trust and the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF). He was on the Executive of the ACF for many years achieving Life Membership. He played a significant role in bringing the concept of urban conservation to the general attention of the public.

During his years of activism Munday developed working relationships with prominent Australian identities such as Patrick White (when a green ban was placed on Centennial Park) and Dick Dusseldorp, (when a green ban was placed on the Theatre Royal that was planned for demolition). Dusseldorp instructed the architect Harry Seidler (with whom Munday also had a good working relationship) to redesign his site to incorporate a theatre. Munday and Dusseldorp addressed a meeting and together put forward a motion that the green ban be lifted. All were happy with the outcome. Another prominent individual who was influenced by Munday was Ted Mack who had a strong conservation profile having held the position of Mayor, State member and then Federal member for the North Sydney area.

The strength of Colman's work lies in his ability to bring the activities of Munday into a broader conservation perspective. There are numerous conservation actions that Munday indirectly influenced including the formation of the West German Greens when Petra Kelly took the green ban message back to Germany after meeting with Munday in Sydney.

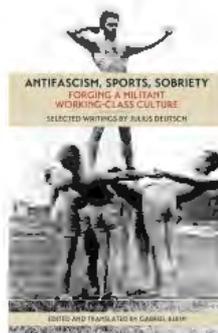
Munday has a long list of accomplishments including an Order of Australia, Honorary Doctor of Science from the University of NSW, Honorary Doctor of Letters from the University of Western Sydney, and an Honorary Master of the Environment from the University of Sydney. He is also a National Living Treasure (he was nominated by the National Trust). He also had two positions over his career, Alderman for the Sydney City Council and Chair of Historic Houses Trust of NSW.

The book concludes with Munday's current day involvement in conservation movements in Sydney, notably the Barangaroo development and other planned demolition of historic buildings. There are also two testimonials from prominent Australians: Joan Domicelj and Meredith Burgmann

The book is highly recommended for those who are interested in biography, the history of green bans, and the conservation and green movement in Australia.

Antifascism, Sports, Sobriety

Drew Cottle



Gabriel Kuhn, (edited and translated), *Antifascism, Sports, Sobriety: Forging a Militant Working-Class Culture - Selected Writings by Julius Deutsch* (PM Press: Oakland, 2017), pp. 114. US\$14.95.

In *Antifascism, Sports, Sobriety*, Gabriel Kuhn provides a critical focus on aspects of Austrian working class history at a crucial juncture: from the outbreak of the First Imperialist War to the rise of fascism. Kuhn offers a broad overview of Austromarxism, Red Vienna and Working-Class Culture which comprises half of the book before presenting three essays on proletarian self-defence, mass sports and the necessity of proletarian sobriety by Julius Deutsch, a leading 'Austromarxist' of that period, as well as a biographical note on Deutsch.

Kuhn locates these topics in a specific historical context. In the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918, there was the expectation that Austria, like Germany and Hungary, would experience revolutionary upsurges. The German and Hungarian insurrections were destroyed while in Austria the revolutionaries were never mobilised. This immobility was characteristic of Austromarxism until its extinction with the advent of a fascist State in 1934. Kuhn cannot decide whether Austromarxism was simply a more militant form of social democracy.

What is highlighted is the revolutionary tone of Austromarxism's rhetoric compared to its actual practice. Lenin had denounced the Austrian Karl Kautsky for reneging on the revolutionary road. Kautsky was not alone. The leading Austromarxists, Otto Bauer, Friedrich and Max Adler, Karl Renner as well as Julius Deutsch, always remained revolutionaries only in thought and on paper.

Unlike other historical studies of 'Red Vienna', its reputation is not romanticised by Kuhn. However, if worker's democracy flourished in the Austrian capital, Kuhn never asks who remained in control both of the productive means and the government? Vienna and few other Austrian cities were industrialised in a country that was a League of Nation's legislated bourgeois republic, where most Austrians were rural and conservative. But it is in Red Vienna and the other industrial centres and mining towns where what Kuhn vaguely describes as a 'militant working class culture' took root.

Was Vienna a 'worker's utopia' where 'modern housing, universal health care, efficient public transport, extensive social services, a diversity of communal facilities, and a vast network of educational

and cultural institutions existed'? (p. 8) Can this be assumed? Where is the evidence? We are not told by the author how or who organised workers' defence militias and sporting organisations. The reader can only assume their organisation was by existing trade unions, municipal councils or works committees. The workers' militias engaged in *Wehrsport* ('paramilitary sport') which consisted of cross country running, shooting and martial arts.

Julius Deutsch, a leading Austromarxist theorist, who had been drafted into the army of the Austro-Hungarian Empire during the war, believed *Wehrsport* would provide the training, discipline and dedication to the defence of workers. How many Austrian workers were members of these militias is never explained. Moreover, monarchist, Catholic and proto-fascist organisations established similar militias as well as sporting bodies in Austria during the 1920s. Even when workers were attacked or killed by these militias, the workers' defence organisations only continued to engage in exercises. (pp. 17-20) They were neither a police force nor a fighting defence force for the Austrian working class.

When the four day 'Austrian Civil War' broke out in 1934, the workers' defence forces in Red Vienna's Karl-Marx-Hof tenements were completely overwhelmed by the forces of the army, police and fascist militia. The Austromarxists never mobilised other workers' self defence units to fight in this 'war'. With the advent of Austrian fascism after the 'civil war', Austromarxists would claim that only they, unlike their German or Italian counterparts, had fought fascism.

Kuhn argues that the Austromarxists were 'at the forefront of proletarian cultural struggle' particularly through their advocacy for mass worker participation in sports. Austria in the 1920s had the 'world's biggest workers' sports association' with three hundred thousand members. (p. 26) Julius Deutsch championed the mass involvement of workers, particularly the young, in the worker sports movement. Deutsch believed their participation in these worker sports represented a struggle against individualism, competitiveness and commercialism and fostered a sense of community, 'sportsmanship' and health. Instead of running races there would be rambling in the country, life-saving would replace swimming competitions and tag wrestling by collective callisthenics.

Deutsch was elected president of the Austrian Workers Sports Federation in 1926 and later was the president of Socialist Workers Sport International (SWSI) which, by the late 1920s, registered two million members in twenty countries including America and the British mandate of Palestine. (p. 27) The SWSI staged workers' Olympics in Germany and Austria before the Great Depression of the 1930s where the athletes competed not as national representatives but as comrades and were an expression of openness and understanding between peoples.

The Austrian Social Democrat, Hans Gastgeb, saw the worker athlete, mass sports and political education as the means to mentally and physically 'prepare the proletariat to overthrow capitalism and prevail against the reactionary forces'. (p. 28) Such preparedness failed the proletariat in the events of 1934 in Red Vienna.

If workers' defence militias and worker sports were vital components to political, physical and mental preparedness of Austrian workers for Deutsch so was sobriety. Kuhn reasons that Deutsch's childhood as an inn keeper's son, who witnessed the drunken stupidity of workers, determined his adult insistence on abstention from alcohol. The demand of proletarian sobriety or abstinence was hardly a revolutionary objective or unique to the Austromarxists.

The social crusade against the demon drink had occurred throughout the emerging industrial capitalist countries from the mid-nineteenth century often by middle class public spirited Christians. Deutsch demanded sobriety of the Austrian working class yet never examined the power of alcohol as a means of social release from the material conditions of existence. The Bolsheviks under Lenin were concerned about the levels of drunkenness and alcoholism of Soviet workers and did try to change their material lives unlike the Austromarxists.

Kuhn's book delineates how the Austromarxists of Red Vienna, particularly Julius Deutsch, theoretically attempted to forge a militant working class culture but never a revolutionary struggle nor even a defence of the proletariat.

Trades Hall update

Peter Love

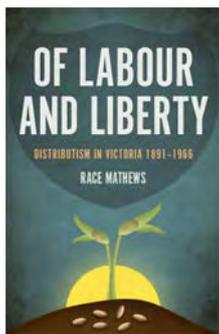
This picture shows the restored Lygon Street foyer of Trades Hall. *Recorder* readers will recall we had a picture of the scaffolding in the last edition. It's a lovely job of work. A credit to the restorer.



Photograph by Peter Love.

Distributism and co-operatives for today

Bruce Duncan



Race Mathews, *Of Labour and Liberty: Distributism in Victoria 1891-1966* (Melbourne: Monash Publishing, 2017) xi + 397 pp. \$35.95.

The backlash against the inequality and insecurity resulting from neoliberal economics in many Western countries in recent years has aroused new interest in more equitable and participatory economic and social policies, such as Distributism.

In his new book, *Of Labour and Liberty: Distributism in Victoria 1891-1966*, Race Mathews offers a fresh reading on aspects of labour history in Britain and Australia, focusing on debates about the role of the state and the market, and especially on Catholic social thought and movements. He contends that the polarisation in social reform movements after the Second World War undermined the opportunity in Australia to develop a more co-operative economy and society. He recognises, of course, that for some decades Australia enjoyed growing equity, with wages high enough to foster home ownership. But the free market ideology has since run to economic extremes, undermining the social gains of earlier years.

In what he calls his 'counter-factual' in his conclusion, Mathews imagines how social and economic policies in Australia could have taken a much more participatory course had the Labor struggles of the 1950s not polarised social and political networks. What if Labor moderates like Lloyd Ross and the Fabian Socialists had been able to work with the Catholic networks, most notably the Young Christian Workers (YCW) and other co-operative groups in the 1940s and 1950s, to build co-operative industries and worker participation schemes, as developed in Germany? Mathews argues that we have a new opportunity in Australia to adjust public policies to promote a sounder economy based to a significant extent on co-operative and mutualist principles.

Mathews is a senior Labor historian in Australia and a former president of the Fabian Society who has been closely involved in Labor politics, as chief of staff to Gough Whitlam during 1967-72 and later as a member of both Federal and Victorian parliaments. His books include *Australia's First Fabians: Middle-Class Radicals, Labour Activists and the Early Labour Movement* (1994) and *Jobs of Our Own: Building a Stakeholder Society* (1999). Not a Catholic himself, he writes objectively about Catholic critiques of capitalism and proposals to develop an economy with widespread ownership and participation by workers in the management of their industries. He is clearly interested in the overlap in Catholic and socialist thought.

Others have written extensively about the Santamaria Movement, the Communist Party and Labor networks,

most recently Bob Murray in his *Labor and Santamaria*. *Of Labour and Liberty* fills in some important gaps in this literature, and gives the first detailed account of the YCW co-operative credit unions, expanding later into the wider community co-operative movements.

Mathews outlines the polarisation of political views among members of the Catholic Campaign Society with the group publishing the *Catholic Worker* monthly, the Catholic Action groups like the independently minded YCW, and especially around the political activity of B.A. Santamaria and his anti-communist movement. Mathews stresses the work of Frank Maher and others to develop the Distributist vision of widely spread small and co-operative ownership, competing commercially in a free market. He further investigates how the anti-communist campaign diverted resources and support from pragmatic efforts to build wider community support for co-operative development in farming, industry, finance and housing.

After setting the context for Distributism in Catholic social movements overseas, a chapter on the English Cardinal Edward Manning highlights his social vision. Manning had been an Anglican priest very involved in social activism, and encouraged a new social consciousness among English Catholics. He became an international figure during the London dock strike of 1890, at a decisive moment helping secure a victory for the dock workers. His advocacy encouraged Pope Leo XIII in writing the 1891 social encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, which Manning helped translate as *On the Condition of the Working Class*. It helped swing Catholics more strongly behind labour reform movements.

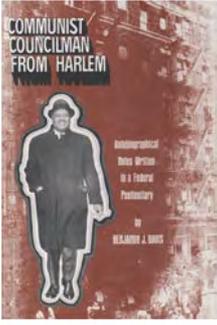
Sydney's Cardinal Patrick Moran tried to emulate Manning in social reform efforts in Australia, and attempted unsuccessfully to help settle the 1890 Maritime strike. He promoted Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* in its call for a living wage for workers, a wider distribution of wealth, the defence of trade unions and the right to strike, and the need for the state to regulate the economy and working conditions to advantage the poor. Manning also supported mechanisms of conciliation between employers and workers to settle disputes. He was aware of the many varieties of socialism, and rejected only extreme versions. The alignment with Labor aspirations was beginning to set.

After Moran, Catholic episcopal leadership passed to Melbourne's Archbishop Daniel Mannix and his role during the Irish 'Troubles', the conscription debates during the First World War and his social commentary during the Depression. His unquestioning support for Santamaria became contentious in the mid-1950s, contributing to the Split in the Labor movement, and even in the Church itself.

Mathews closes his history with a review of the giant Mondragon co-operatives in the Basque region of Spain, which have been spectacularly successful, and demonstrate how co-operatives, with extensive involvement of the workers in processes of consultation and management, can compete in the most technologically advanced markets. *Of Labour and Liberty: Distributism in Victoria 1891-1966* has an excellent 21-page bibliography and 20-page index.

Communist Councilman from Harlem

Barry York



Benjamin J. Davis, *Communist Councilman from Harlem: Autobiographical notes written in a federal penitentiary* (International Publishers: New York, second edition 1991, originally published 1969), pp. 237.

Benjamin J. Davis Jr was a black American communist who was elected to the New York City Council in 1943 and re-elected in 1945. He was the first black communist elected to public office in the USA. He probably would have been re-elected again were it not for his arrest under the Smith Act in 1948. Davis was sentenced to the five year maximum. The Act gaoled people who were regarded as conspiring to overthrow the US government. More than a hundred communists were gaoled under it, at a time when communism was gaining in popularity in the US and other western capitalist countries.

While in the Terre Haut penitentiary, Davis penned notes and episodes from his life: not so much an autobiography as a series of reminiscences, drawing political lessons and always cautious under the watchful eyes of prison officials. On release from prison in 1955 the authorities refused to release Davis' notepads. It wasn't until 1965, a year after his death, that his widow succeeded in obtaining them. What the text lacks in flow, it makes up for as a fascinating story about how a young descendant of slaves in the South became a leading and open communist and how he was able to unite enough support from blacks and whites to win election as an opponent of the Democrats and the Republicans.

His father, Ben Snr, was a member of the Republican Party's National Committee and a party leader in Georgia. In the twenty-first century, this comes as a jolt. But many African Americans favoured 'the party of Lincoln' back then. The southern Democrats were vile racists during the first half of the twentieth century.

Davis Jr was born in the small rural town of Dawson, Georgia, in 1903 – 'The whole town had the atmosphere of a feudal plantation' – but grew up in Atlanta. The black/white divide was inescapable and at times brutal. The fact that his father was in the 'middle class' of blacks, as the successful proprietor of an African-American newspaper, made the reality of racism no less harsh, but it did make him aware of the divisions within the black community.

Benjamin improved himself through formal education, attending Amherst College and Harvard Law School in the 1920s. This western liberal education, combined with his Baptist upbringing and the influence of his father's commitment to civil rights, placed him in a good position to analyse the racism with which he grew up

and, eventually, to embrace Marxism. Starting a law practice in Atlanta in 1932, he took on the case of a young black communist named Angelo Herndon who had been charged under a mid-nineteenth century Georgia law with attempting to incite insurrection. The prosecution sought the death penalty and Herndon's case attracted international attention. Herndon's real crime had been to attempt to unite black and white farm workers into a union. As Davis put it, 'The spectacle of Negro and white workers of the lowest economic level struggling together in comradeship and equality, defying segregation and white supremacy, was more than the Georgia Jim Crow practitioners could take.' (p. 54)

Evidence tendered against Herndon included his possession of communist literature, which Davis read carefully. In the court, prosecutor and judge freely used terms like 'nigger' and presumed guilt on the part of the defendant. Davis juxtaposed their attitudes against the dignity and principled courage of young Herndon. He gradually became convinced of the righteousness of the communist cause.



Benjamin J. Davis.

Moving to Harlem in 1935, he began life as a communist activist and editor. He was part of the community and knew the local issues. After election to the Council in the 1940s, he and his comrade, Peter Cacchione, an Italo-American communist, fought for rent control and opposed segregated housing and police brutality. But they never denied their communism, and connected the issues back to what they regarded as their source: capitalism. Council politics were part of a bigger strategy.

When Benjamin J. Davis was elected to New York City Council in 1943, there were only 33 elected black officials in all of America. In 1990, there were 7,370 – nearly 500 in Benjamin's home state of Georgia. I could not locate more recent figures but I do know there has been a black President and two black Secretaries of State since then! I'm sure Benjamin J. Davis would see all this as great progress, something his father's generation could not have imagined. This is not to suggest that anything is finally settled when it comes to racism. As a communist, Davis would oppose attempts to revive racial segregation – regardless of which side in the 'identity culture wars' was behind them.

I found the book uplifting, a reminder that struggle is not in vain. (Correspondence to Barryyork554@gmail.com)

A Short American Journey

Phillip Deery

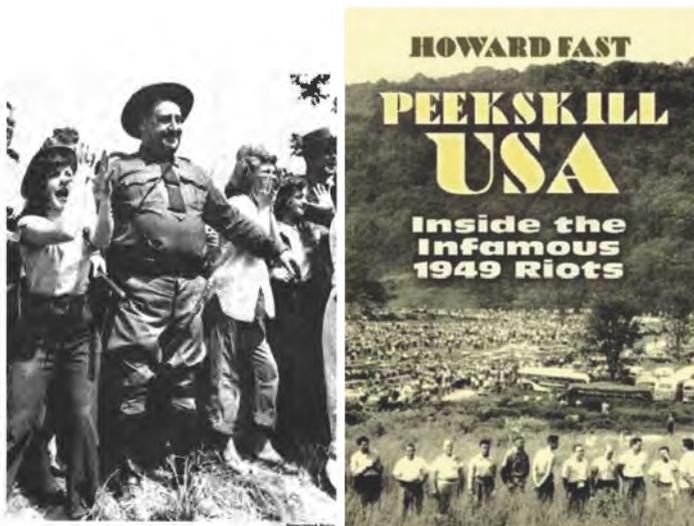
In mid-May 2017, I caught the Poughkeepsie train out of Grand Central station, New York City, and travelled up the picturesque Hudson Valley. My destination was the small village of Cold Spring. There, I was to meet Michael Meeropol, the elder son of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg. I was researching the story of Morton Sobell, the co-defendant of the Rosenbergs, sentenced to 30 years imprisonment in 1951 by Judge Irving Kaufman for 'conspiracy to commit espionage', and Michael knew 'Morty' well after his release in 1969. What I never knew were the historical landmarks on that Metro-North railroad. Three stations before Cold Spring was Ossining. Looking upwards through the train window, I could see the guard towers and barbed wire atop the long, dark, forbidding high walls of Sing Sing Federal Penitentiary. It was there, on 19 June 1953, all legal appeals exhausted, that Ethel and Julius were electrocuted. As a 10-year old, Michael Rosenberg travelled here in 1952 and 1953. The last visit he made, accompanied by his six-year old brother, Robert, and the Rosenbergs' lawyer and their temporary guardian, Emmanuel ('Manny') Block, was on 16 June 1953 – three days before Michael and Robert were orphaned.



Michael, Manny and Robbie at Sing Sing prison.

The next stop on my brief journey into America's Cold War past was Peekskill. The year before the Rosenbergs were arrested, on the Saturday night of 27 August 1949, an open-air concert to benefit the left-wing Civil Rights Congress (then defending the Trenton Six) and featuring Paul Robeson was scheduled. It became a riot. Hundreds of locals drawn from Westchester County – in which the American Legion, Catholic veterans' groups and, especially, the Ku Klux Klan were still strong – terrorised concert goers with verbal and physical abuse: epithets of 'dirty kikes' were hurled, rocks thrown, baseball bats wielded, chairs broken and 13 people seriously

injured. An effigy of Robeson was lynched and a cross was burnt. The local police arrived late and did little. The concert was aborted. On 4 September, a second concert was held, and Robeson sang. Security was organised by the Communist Party and hundreds of left-wing unionists, who formed a 'human wall' of defence around the entire concert ground. About 25,000 attended, including, I just discovered, Ethel and Julius Rosenberg. However, in a frightening display of organised violence, a mob of about 500 assaulted the exiting cars and buses of concertgoers with rocks shattering windscreens and sending many to hospital. William Patterson, an African-American communist, wrote in his forward to Howard Fast's *Peekskill USA* (1951), that these two dates, 27 August and 4 September 1949, 'are fixed upon the calendar of a free America.'



(Above Left): Some of the protestors at the first concert, which was "protected" by state troopers.

(Above Right): This book cover photo shows a section of the long defence line protecting the audience at the second Peekskill concert.



Violence at Peekskill.



Paul Robeson holds one of the rocks thrown into the bus. Howard Fast is on the right.

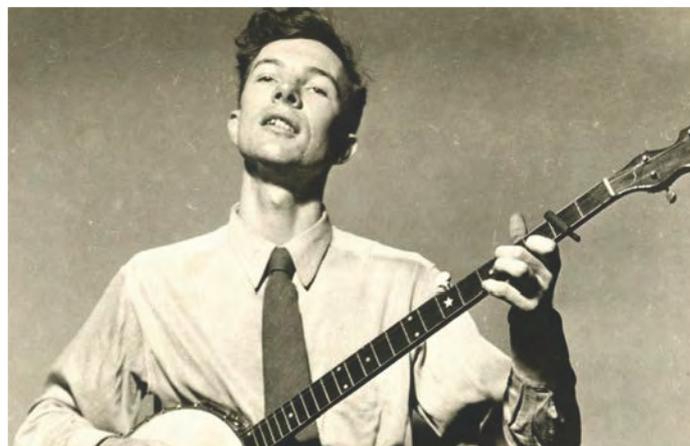
Two train stops later, I arrived in Cold Spring. Michael took me on an historical walking tour of this picturesque village, once redneck, now 'green'. Along the way, and afterwards over lunch, he provided me with invaluable insights into the Rosenberg-Sobell case, and its legacies. As is so often the case with face-to-face conversations, I learnt much that was not in the public domain. He confronted my ambivalence towards Sobell (based on examination of his personal papers) with: 'but Morty never ratted on my father'. This was true. Despite enormous pressure, and legal inducements, from the FBI and others to incriminate Julius, especially during his first two years (1952-3) in Alcatraz federal penitentiary, Sobell remained silent and did not confess until 2008.



Morton Sobell, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg in 1951.

The next stop after Cold Spring is Beacon, 100 kms north of New York City, the home of Pete Seeger, one of the 20th century's musical icons. Seeger opened the second Peekskill concert. Over the years, he performed at many of the concerts and rallies commemorating the Rosenbergs. (I attended, memorably, one of his concerts: his milestone 90th birthday concert at Madison Square Garden.) Seeger had been a close friend of Michael's adopted father, Abel Meeropol, who wrote the anti-lynching song 'Strange Fruit' in 1939 (named by *Time* magazine in 1999 as 'the song of the century'). In 1940, Meeropol, a schoolteacher, was

investigated by the Rapp-Coudert Committee, which in many respects foreshadowed the House Un-American Activities Committee. He perjured himself, denied he was a communist and kept his job. Pete Seeger also denied membership of the Communist Party despite the best efforts of the FBI to prove otherwise. He died in 2014, and his friends and neighbours, Annie and Michael Meeropol, attended his wake in Beacon.



A young Pete Seeger around the time of the Peekskill concert.

So this train line, which passes through four near-consecutive stations – Ossining, Peekskill, Cold Spring and Beacon – on its way to Poughkeepsie, holds some unexpectedly interlocking stories from America's Cold War history.

Corrections

In Frank Bongiorno's report 'Ken Inglis in History: A Laconic Colloquium', which was published in *Recorder* no. 288, it should have been mentioned that the authors of the paper 'Ken Inglis and the Stuart Affair' were Bob Wallace and Sue Wallace.

Due to an editorial intervention with *Recorder* no. 288, some words were omitted from the concluding paragraph of John Myrtle's review of *Hinterland* that altered John's assessment of the book. This has now been corrected and the full version of the book review can be found at <https://labourhistorymelbourne.org/2017/03/30/hinterland/>

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Commentary not attributed to an author is written by the editor.

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