SA LABOUR HISTORY NEWS

Australian Society for the Study of Labour History (Adelaide Branch)

Spring 2016

Included in this Issue
Rhonda Sharp on the History of Superannuation - Our history of migrant labour - Vale Clare McCarty - The elephant in the room - Australia’s second chance book review - Tories limp back into office - Activist Corner - Ted Gnatenko Pt.2
Making History

We are all, individually and collectively, making history in one way or another. Our actions might not make the front pages but can help in many ways to make our home, street, workplace, broader community or world fairer and more humane. This issue of the Labour History Society newsletter features articles on several activists who have made a positive difference to the lives of others.

We mourn the recent loss of Clare McCarty and remember her contributions as a campaigner against fascism and racism, and as a teacher and unionist. Greg Stevens presents the second part of a tribute to Ted Gnatenko. He focuses on the State Industrial Court hearing on Ted’s claim of unfair dismissal, which led to the decision giving the right to reinstatement on the grounds of unfair dismissal to all workers. Allison Murchie recognises the continuing work of Andy Alcock in the first of a new series, Activists Corner. Andy’s unwavering commitment to independence for East Timor is particularly acknowledged. Allison also reminds us of the diverse backgrounds and experience of senior ACTU officials in a piece on Jennie George, Bill Kelty and Greg Combet.

Assumptions behind the current toxic environment affecting immigration and refugees are also tackled in this issue. In his article, union organiser Ben Reichstein challenges racist assumptions about early ‘Afghan’ cameleers. Ben examines the unionisation and industrial action of Muslim camel drivers in Western Australia in 1908. Steve Acton’s review of Australia’s Second Chance, by George Megalogenis, explores the links between immigration and Australia’s prosperity.

David Faber provides a stimulating piece on author Tim Winton’s recent writing on class and structural inequality in Australia. Tim’s criticism of class blindness in public debate on economic and social issues is very welcome. David also reflects on the outcome of the federal elections in Tories Limp Back Into Office.

A summary of Rhonda Sharp’s presentation to the Society on 19 June is included in this newsletter. In her talk, Rhonda traced of the development of superannuation and the aged pension in Australia. The impressive data that she has provided, and which will appear in a forthcoming book, clearly shows the extent of inequality structured into past and existing superannuation arrangements.

Finally don’t forget to read the Out & About section where Marlene Fenwick takes us to the Hindmarsh Fire and Folk Museum. Allison Murchie shares images from the Australian Workers Unions Annual dinner, where retiring Secretary Wayne Hanson was awarded Life Membership for his long, hard work on behalf of the union. We also thank Wayne for his contribution to the broader labour movement.

Jude Elton
Are we there yet? The evolution of superannuation policy in Australia

In her talk to the Labour History Society on 19th June, Rhonda Sharp, Adjunct Professor, Hawke Research Institute, University of South Australia took a hard look at the contribution of superannuation to ‘fair and adequate’ retirement incomes in Australia.

Rhonda noted that the earliest superannuation schemes were restricted to higher income, white collar workers in banks and colonial and state government civil servants. They were based on a male breadwinner model and intended as a reward to long-serving (male) employees. A means tested aged pension introduced by the Commonwealth Government in 1909 gave access to income in old age to many more workers, but also entrenched a highly unequal and gender-biased ‘2 pillar’ retirement incomes policy.

Through the first half of the twentieth century membership of superannuation schemes was available only to permanent employees, thus excluding blue collar workers and most women. Women lost permanent status and their superannuation upon marriage until 1966. Permanent female employees who did not marry received fewer benefits than their male counterparts. Women benefited from superannuation largely through their economic dependency on a husband who was a scheme member. Rhonda described women’s access to the aged pension at 60 rather than 65 years, as a ‘second prize’ for their inferior treatment under superannuation arrangements.

In her outline of changes to superannuation following the Second World War, Rhonda noted some trade union success in extending superannuation benefits to blue collar workers, particularly through salary packages. However, at the same time, the Commonwealth Government implemented highly regressive taxation concessions that served to maintain the class position of the better off in retirement. Women continued to be disadvantaged as superannuation benefits remained tied to a particular work pattern and their assumed dependent status.

Access to superannuation and retirement incomes remained highly unequal through the 1970s and early 1980s. The first national survey of superannuation coverage in 1974 showed that only 34% of the employed workforce were members of superannuation schemes (36% male and 15% female; 24% private sector and 58% public sector). By 1982 coverage had risen to 53%. The Whitlam Government attempted to improve the position of retired working people by linking the aged pension to 25% of average weekly earnings, but the measure was not legislated. The Fraser Government rejected the Hancock Superannuation Inquiry recommendation for a contributory universal pension system with an earnings
related supplement. Instead inequality was further entrenched with the abolition of the assets test on the aged pension.

The Hawke Keating years 1983-96 marked major shifts in superannuation policy. The first Prices & Incomes Accord between the Labor Government and the ACTU referred to a publically administered national superannuation scheme. However, Rhonda noted that this soon ‘gave way to private sector occupational superannuation in the form of award super’ involving trade-offs by workers. She reminded us that the 1986 national wage case decision required that a 3% productivity increase be paid as superannuation (rather than a wage increase) and phased in via collective bargaining. Award superannuation was followed by the 1992 Superannuation Guarantee Charge (SGC) where all employers were required to provide a set, minimum level of superannuation each year for each employee. Occupation-based superannuation was an integral part of economic restructuring and wages, savings and investment policies. By 1996 superannuation assets amounted to $245 billion or 37.9% of GDP. Over 80% of workers were members of superannuation schemes.

Subsequent changes to superannuation and taxation arrangements by the Howard-Costello Government included regressive measures. Treasurer Costello argued for greater ‘simplicity’ rather than the asserted ‘complexity’ of a fairer system. Superannuation benefits became largely tax free for the over 60s, benefiting the wealthy in particular.

Rhonda went on to show how the 2007-13 Rudd and Gillard Governments attempted to improve benefits and reduce inequality on both the superannuation and aged pension fronts. Labor proposed to increase the SGC from 9% to 12% by July 2018. The age pension was increased and superannuation regulations were strengthened.

Subsequent Abbott-Turnbull Governments have undermined these initiatives. In the 2014 budget the SGC was frozen at 9.5% and low income earners were required to pay extra tax on superannuation with the abolition of the Low Income Superannuation Contribution from 30 June 2017. Following community pressure, the Coalition included measures in the 2016 budget relating to the glaring inequalities in superannuation e.g. by lowering the caps on before tax or ‘concessional’ contributions and lowering the threshold for paying 30% tax on concessional contributions. A Low Income Tax Offset was proposed to replace the Low Income Guarantee Contribution when it ends in 2017. But Rhonda pointed out that these changes were minimal and failed to address fundamental disparities.

Outside of government other factors were also at work that undermined and continue to undermine retirement incomes. Rhonda noted the negative impact of part time and casual work, contracting, underemployment, the gender pay gap and women’s interrupted employment arising from child birth and rearing on the capacity of workers to obtain significant superannuation benefits. The table below shows the extent of inequality in superannuation wealth in Australia. In 2013-14 50% of Australian men had only $37,032 or less and 50% of women a miniscule $5,586 or less in superannuation upon which to draw in retirement. 10% of people aged 65 and over had no superannuation at all. Not surprisingly 80% of Australians continued to receive the aged pension.
### Inequality in superannuation wealth for Australians aged 65 and over, 2013-14

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<th>10th percentile</th>
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<td>All older men</td>
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<td>All older women</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$5,586</td>
<td>$610,090</td>
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<td>All older individuals</td>
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<td>$20,124</td>
<td>$694,067</td>
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Source: Estimates from ATO Sample File 2013-14 data on Member Contribution Statements in Austen and Sharp (2016 forthcoming)

Rhonda Sharp finally argued that successive governments have failed to address inequality and a lack of fairness in superannuation arising from fundamental structural issues in the workforce. The scheme is class based with ‘excessive tax subsidies at the top end and cost to the budget growing more rapidly than the cost of the aged pension’. By 2017 ‘the loss of federal government revenue from superannuation tax concessions is estimated to be the same as the cost of the aged pension (49 billion for the year)’. Rhonda concluded that ‘we have a long way to go’ to achieve a ‘fair and adequate’ retirement income system in Australia. ◆

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**Jude Elton**

Photos by Allison Murchie
Rethinking “Real Aussie”: Our history of migrant labour

In 1908, Muslim camel drivers from Central Asia shut down the road from Port Hedland to the Pilbara goldfields for more than a week. They blocked the road, scattered their camels into the desert and waited for their demands for fair rates to be met.

The Western Australian press reacted in a familiar way, with panic about Muslim migrants and lawless strikers, which read like articles from today’s Daily Telegraph. Media, police and scabs were mobilised to put the camel drivers in their place and to ensure the flow of commodity capitalism would continue. Business groups met in Fremantle to discuss how to crush the strikers even as white wage workers reportedly joined in the blockade.

‘We were crushed down through these erroneous reports, and compelled to submit,’ one camel driver wrote over a year later, ‘[but] we had the sympathy of the working class almost to a man.’

It was a dramatic confrontation of working people against capital and the state – one that continues to be ignored by the traditions of labour and radical history in Australia. Yet it’s a moment that the Left here should consider. Today, the history of the cameleers (or ‘Afghans’ as they were known then, though they came from an area that stretched from Afghanistan to what is now the most north-western part of India) is mostly used as a liberal lesson about multiculturalism. That is, the cameleers’ contribution to the federation’s economy becomes the premise for an enlarged, more inclusive nationalism.

Most recently, we saw this in Peter Drew’s ‘Aussie’ poster campaign, which depicted cameleer Monga Khan as a turbaned and moustachioed ‘Aussie’ with a history in this country of at least a century. Yet this message elides the conflict and contestation the camel drivers evoked at the time and the difficult position they found themselves in: Australia was a class-divided society coming to grips with its nascent nationalism and integration into the world market.

These cameleers came to Australia often on fixed contracts, many for only one to two years. Some stayed on, but the majority returned to parts of the British Raj or continued elsewhere. In Australia they were often in direct competition with white bullock teams in inland mining towns, who tended to secure the majority of the work. The cameleers faced discriminatory taxes and the condemnation of the Australian labour press. The media often argued for their exclusion and further immigration restrictions, employing both cultural and economic arguments that are familiar today.

White Australia’s rhetoric about ‘cheap coloured labour’ has obscured the history of struggle among the country’s migrant workers. Camel drivers from the recently pacified corner of the British Empire built unions in the Pilbara, the Esperance Goldfields and at Broken Hill –
either on their own or in shaky alliance with white unionists who were forced to confront the conflict between their rhetoric on White Australia and the reality of building workers' power on the ground. The issue of Afghan unionists and interracial organising became so contentious in the labour movement that the ALP’s first prime minister, Andrew Fisher, was forced to comment on the matter (he stuck to the party line on non-white migration, though stopped short of condemning the Broken Hill Branch of the Australian Carriers’ Union, with whom the Afghans were organising).

Of course, the Afghan cameleers were not united in their views on their temporary home in a new corner of the empire. Some appealed to the notions of British liberal rhetoric to be treated as equals amongst the queen’s subjects, some raged against the violence of imperialism and the chauvinism of Australian culture. The majority worked their time here without leaving a voice for posterity. We might try and fit them in as among the cast of peoples who first coalesced into ‘Aussies’, but they are also among the first migrants to experience exclusion and vilification from this newly consolidating national identity.

Just as this temporary migrant workforce was integral to the production of Australia’s key export commodities one hundred years ago, our whole system of food production today is based on a migrant workforce. There are the people who pick our fruit and vegetables for less than minimum wage: a combination of recent migrants from Southeast Asia building a permanent life here, so-called ‘working holiday’ visa holders here for a year or two from Taiwan and Hong Kong, Pacific Islanders here on a seasonal worker program funded through Australia’s aid budget, and those with no work rights whose vulnerability leaves them at the bottom of the heap. There are the massive Coles and Woolworths distribution centres, largely staffed by New Zealand citizens whose special immigration status lets them work as long as they want but gives no pathway to Australian political rights or social safety nets. Without these workers the shelves of grocery stores would be empty. In other words, our society’s very capacity to meet its metabolic needs and replenish itself would be in question.

Rather than appeal to the mythology of the ‘Aussie’, we must confront the inevitable logic of capitalism – that is, capitalism will always depend on the international flows of people to produce profit. The erection of modern border regimes in the nineteenth and early twentieth century did not limit booming international markets any more than the creation of the Australian Border Force interrupts what we term ‘globalisation’. Instead, immigration controls function to categorise people and limit their rights so as to better fulfil their economic function.

The camel drivers who blockaded the road from Port Hedland were instrumental in the economic development of Australia. They left a lasting legacy in the white and Aboriginal communities in which they resided. But let us acknowledge how contentious their presence was. That way they can be remembered not simply for their part in nation building, but also in Australia’s history of labour struggle and radical dissent. They can help us to acknowledge how deep the roots of today’s xenophobia and exploitation run. 

**Ben Reichstein**

Ben works as a union organiser in the fresh food and logistics industries. His honours thesis ‘Afghan Got Union Now’ studied the labour organising of Australia’s Muslim camel drivers.
Clare McCarty was born in Kettering England where her earliest memories were of working class factories. Her father was a leather dresser and she vividly remembered the smells of his workplace. As a child she was very aware of her Northampton dialect and at the age of 18 she practiced hard to get rid of it until she finally lost it. Clare saw this as a symbol of getting out of the working class. As a school child she had no expectations for her life. She had a happy childhood as an only child and was very active in a church youth group (although religion was not part of her culture). There were no books in her life. Aged 18 Clare moved to London to do a degree in English at the Institute of England and this is where she started to think and to be political. On qualifying she moved to Uganda at the age of 24 to teach and lived there for 5 years until the coup by Idi Amin. Here she learned about racism and exploitation.

On returning to London Clare met Douglas and they began their long and extremely happy life together. She said she was attracted to him at first sight and never looked back. Most Saturdays they went on anti-fascist marches, sometimes with up to 30,000 participating. They did this for 5 years. On these marches Clare was always well dressed to ensure that she did not get arrested. Her social life was a busy one involving drama productions, cinema, theatre, books, dances, pubs and parties. She enjoyed the music of the Beatles, Bob Dylan and Joni Mitchell. She was strongly influenced by the book “Animal Farm.”

In 1977 Clare and Douglas moved to Australia. He came from Sydney and was keen to return home. They were politically active together and committed to changing the world. Her first teaching contract was at The Parks School in Adelaide, but the real turning point was when they bought their house at Semaphore near the beach she came to love. After trying to get pregnant for 7 years Clare was told that she would never conceive. An upset stomach turned out to be the 4th month of her pregnancy with her daughter Rosa.

Clare was never out of work and loved to teach, believing that this was what she was born to do. Teaching and her union were the most satisfying aspects of her life after her family. She lived on adrenalin and loved the variety. At weekends the family went sailing and later they were into horse-riding and eventing. After several terms as Vice-President of SAIT (South Australian Institute of Teachers) Clare was elected President. This was a time of major change where she was successful in bringing about a major restructure. She also became the first woman President of the United Trades and Labour Council where she ensured that a high level of debate took
Clare was always well prepared for public speeches and rallies. She did a great job and was judged on her ability.

During her 30 year teaching career Clare worked at The Parks, Sturt College, Thebarton, Oaklands, Glenunga and Unley schools and in recent years at Flinders University running the first year course of Teaching and Educational Contexts for preparing future teachers. She stated how important it is for young people to be taught critical thinking and analytical skills through local, national and international topics and to be able to produce written and spoken content.

Clare was one of the key figures in the early years of the Greens in South Australia. She ran as a Greens candidate in 2004 and 2007 and on their Senate ticket in 2006 and as an Independent Education candidate in 1993 in the Legislative Council, which she nearly won.

She had a lifelong commitment to public education, trade unionism, emancipation of the working class and supporting progressive causes.

Her daughter Rosa was the light of her life and brought much joy to her and Douglas. In her eulogy Rosa titled her words as “Living with the legend.” She spoke of how they both did their PhD together in the same room at the same time. Clare’s legacy will live on through her. Their code phrase was FTB – “Fuck the bastards!”

At her recent funeral service there was considerable praise for Clare’s life’s work but the strength of love people had for her was overwhelming. These were some of the words people used in reflecting on Clare:

Caring; courageous; dynamic; dedicated; determined; puts people first; empowering; compassionate, iconic; detested racism; creative; strong; resilient; vivacious; vibrant, advocate; articulate; inspirational; a leader; funny; heroic; a born educator; lively; engaging; feisty; dignified; imaginative; and intelligent. One of her students Caleb Pattinson said that Clare had unprecedented respect from the entire university; she empowered students and inspired them to think critically and to believe in themselves. “Clare defined the quintessence of being an educator.”

The music played at Clare McCarty’s funeral included John Lennon’s Imagine and the “hymn” was Solidarity Forever, a fitting tribute to a magnificent comrade. She made a difference.

Our thoughts are with Douglas, Rosa and her many friends.
Vale Clare.◆

Allison Murchie
Sources: Oral History interview by Allison Murchie (held in State Library of South Australia); Greens S.A. e-brief on 30.6.16; Flinders University Empire Times; comments from friends as indicated. Photos are from Facebook.
The elephant in the room

An interesting thing has happened on the margins of the Australian literary market. A Summer 2013/14 essay by the renowned author Tim Winton has been bootlegged, circulating without attribution to the publisher, *The Monthly* magazine. It has in short been appropriated by the people in breach of copyright, or as the current terminology has it, ‘gone viral’. It concerns the C word, the concept that dare not speak its name in Capitalist society, class. Whilst homophobia and sexism are discussed to death as society labours to bring forth equal marriage and break glass ceilings, the fundamental inequality and injustice amongst which we live goes unmentioned and unmentionable. For to name it would be to denounce the status quo. So our monopolised mainstream press, a vested interest in that same status quo, does not report or comment on it. Whereas in centuries past class was routinely acknowledged, for example in Jane Austen’s marriage market, now it is studiously ignored in the media to diffuse the pretence, current since the long boom of the mid-20th century, that it is no longer there, superseded somehow by the faux equality of our limited, guided bourgeois democracy and the mal-distributed prosperity which before 1975 improved the lot of the masses and now favours the 1%.

Winton begins his adroit analysis on contemporary class culture and mores by reporting an incident when a Murdoch journalist pulled him up short and queried his natural use of the term. At first he wondered if he had said something rude or if the journalist was having an editorially inspired dig at him. But then he realised that she was just doing her job and interpreting the Zeitgeist. There had been a paradigm shift between his generation and hers. Where Winton’s generation had profited from the Whitlam dispensation to be the first generation in their families to attend university, she was a child of the neo-liberal regime which had reacted against ‘free’ tertiary education. The reporter simply was class blind and ignorant of socio-economic reality accordingly. Class for her was something that had died out in the 1950s.

Socio-economic quasi-corporate entities and the differentials of income, leisure-culture and power between them have been amongst the defining features of human history and endure to this day. Marx’s classical analysis of the historical origins of our contemporary society’s bifurcation between those who relatively have and those who have little enough is never explicitly referred to by Winton, although he must be aware of it. Yet it is a model tailor made for us, framed as it is in historical relativities, not eternal absolutes. Rather Winton addresses himself to today’s Australians, with an historical memory only two or three generations long. Autobiographically, Winton recounts his career as a talented, fortunate son of the old blue collar working class, who passed profitably though the bohemian varsity phase to strike it lucky as a creative writer. It is this original model of grand-parental class that Winton takes for
read as his point of reference in navigating the opportunities and insecurities of the ‘new’ more fluid class system of our own days, when so many, as John Lennon put it, think of themselves as ‘clever, and classless and free.’ Back in the day, when the working class reminded it’s aspiring children to remember where they came from, class was by contrast a taken for granted factor. Ours is a topsy-turvy world, ploughed up by economic and ideological forces, where tradies in Mac-mansions who may be suburban bogs can be better off financially than inner city professionals, due to factors like the now long gone mining boom, to the latter’s aggrieved and envious consternation and the defiance of traditional conceptions of status.

It is worth rehearsing these issues in Winton’s own lucid prose:

According to the new mores, any mention of structural social inequality is tantamount to a declaration of class warfare. Concerns about the distribution of wealth, education and health are difficult to raise in a public forum without needing to beat off the ghost of Stalin. The only form of political correctness the right will tolerate is the careful elision off class from public discourse, and this troubling discretion has become mainstream. It constitutes an ideological triumph for conservatives that even they must marvel at … Australia’s long tradition of egalitarianism was something people my age learnt about in school. I recall teachers … of indeterminate politics, who spoke of ‘the fair go’ with a reverence they usually only applied to Don Bradman or the myth of Anzac. Australia’s fairness was a source of pride, an article of faith. The nation of my childhood was not classless, however. The social distinctions were palpable and the subject of constant discussion.

Winton the essayist has done us all, and his working class roots, proud, by reminding us not only where we come from, but also how things stand. Things may have changed, yet when developments are punctually acknowledged, they have fundamentally also, as the French proverbially observe, stayed the same. Only a democratic revolution can dissolve the resilient inequities of class. Any pretence otherwise is but an ideological device to preserve them as the rich get richer and the poor get poorer as the tensions of the old order build and build and build. ♦

David Faber

Photos: State Library of Western Australia and the News Ltd (Australian)
Out and About

History Buffs – why not visit the Hindmarsh Fire & Folk Museum?

Both the Fire Station and adjoining Chapel are on the State Heritage Register and are well worth a visit. They are owned and run by the Hindmarsh Historical Society and a helpful, well-informed band of volunteers. There is a wealth of information on the working-class men and women of the 1880’s onwards and the businesses which once thrived in the Hindmarsh area. Along with a group of Muriel Matters Society members, Allison Murchie, Denis Fenwick and I attended at the Museum for the presentation by Frances Bedford MP of a framed collage of Muriel Matters’ exploits.

Marlene Fenwick

AWU Annual Dinner - Presentation of Life Membership to Wayne Hanson

2 Hindmarsh Place
HINDMARSH

Phone: 8296 1265

Open Wednesday 9.00 am to 12.00 noon and First and third Sunday of each month from 2.00 pm to 4.00 pm.
Australia’s Second Chance

George Megalogenis latest book *Australia’s Second Chance* is about the link between migration and Australia’s prosperity. His argument is that, fundamentally by having open markets and being open to the world by way of migration we are better off. Conversely those times when Australia cut itself off from the world we were poorer as a result or in his words “stagnant and divisive.” Apart from being a valuable historical account of migration Megalogenis provides a wealth of facts. How widely known is the assertion “that cuts to pensions and wages in Australia in the 1890s were as severe as the Greeks are being forced to accept in the 21st century.” Or that as a consequence of the Gold Rush in Victoria in the 1850’s Australia was richer than the US at a comparable time.

He provides a rich overview of life in the struggling colony, which almost did not survive due to London’s indifference. He argues that the seeds of Australian egalitarianism were sown at the time of settlement by the First Fleet. This came about because of the granting of land to convicts was mainly because there were not enough free settlers. The legacy of a penal colony was not shaken off until the 1830s. From the 1840’s till the Depression of 1890, Australian living standards were envied by the world. This was buttressed by the Gold Rush. At the same time in Victoria those Chinese who had come for gold found themselves victims to a rising xenophobia particularly from Diggers who resented them. Yet as the author says they were only a fraction of the British and Irish migrants who came for the same thing. He effectively documents how Australia benefited from an extensive migration program that ensured its prosperity. He also charts the beginnings of the White Australia policy and the economic detriment that followed, particularly in the period 1890 to 1939. He argues that as a consequence of the Great War (1914-18) Australia’s population loss was between 240-600,000. But successive governments (Hughes and Bruce) believed this could be remedied by British migration. Later, as Arthur Calwell continued his inflexibility against Asian migration community, attitudes were slowly changing and the White Australia policy was not rigidly enforced but fear of outsiders particularly from Asia still resonated.

The sentiments expressed by John Howard about asylum seekers could just have easily been uttered by Arthur Calwell many years earlier, such has been the constancy of Australian political debate.

*Second Chance* is not an economic history of Australia. Nor does it pretend to be. It makes almost no mention of the wool trade and its importance in our economic development. The author’s faith in global markets and neo liberalism should also be criticised. Nonetheless as an account of the importance of migration to Australia’s history this is a valuable contribution.

*Steve Acton*
Photo: Sydney Writer’s Festival newsletter.
Activist Corner

This is the first in a series of articles about our own activists – South Australians who have made a difference through their activism and commitment to strong social justice. If any of our readers would like to suggest people to be included here or to write an article please contact the newsletter committee at murchie52@hotmail.com.

Andy Alcock

Andy Alcock’s life defines activism. Throughout his life, he has been involved in struggles for peace, social justice, international solidarity and environmental responsibility.

He was born into a conservative, working class family. His mother was a trained nurse and his father a factory worker and later a house painter. Andy’s outlook on life changed in his early years because of the disadvantages suffered by Australia’s Aboriginal people and when Australian political leaders involved the country in the US war in Vietnam.

During his working life, he was a secondary school teacher, a union organiser for the Australian Education Union (AEU), an occupational health and safety officer for two state unions, the AEU and the PSA (Public Service Association). Andy also worked as a factory hand, store-person, driver, cook, painter, pharmaceutical dispenser, a federal public servant and as an Australian Volunteer teacher in Malaysia for 2 years. He has been involved in solidarity movements in many places – South Africa during the apartheid regime, the Philippines, Chile during the Pinochet regime, the Middle East and many more. Andy has been involved in justice issues with East Timor and West Papua for over 30 years.

One of his life’s highlights was to be in Dili, Timor Leste, on 20 May 2002 with his wife Cathy and several friends to celebrate the independence of the Democratic Republic of East Timor from the Indonesian military. Others highlights have included the liberation of Vietnam on 30 April 1975 and the release of Nelson Mandela and Xanana Gusmao from prison.

Andy has always believed that socialism is a necessity for human beings. The neoliberal and economic rationalist approach to administering the world’s nations with the promotion of extreme greed and selfishness has led to the situation where ordinary working people are exploited (especially in the developing world), two-thirds of the world’s population starves and the exploitation of the planet’s resources and unchecked pollution is threatening the earth’s health. He has never subscribed to
Stalinist socialism; to Andy socialism means that all people have the basic necessities in life plus those mentioned in the UN Declaration of Human Rights - socialism has a respect for human rights and the earth's environment. It means free education and health services for all, including effective prevention programs (especially for workers occupational, health, safety and welfare).

Andy was a member of the original Communist Party of Australia for 15 years and found it inspiring; it supported activities in the progressive social movement in Australia.

With his friend Bob Hanney Andy founded the Australia East Timor Friendship Association S.A. Inc. in 1975; this later became the Campaign for an Independent East Timor. Anyone who knows Andy is aware of the on-going work of this campaign and the sense of pride and achievement Andy felt at the independence celebrations in Dili in 2002. In August 2014 Andy was awarded the Ordem de Timor-Leste-Meddha (the medal of the Order of Timor Leste) by the President Taur Maran Ruak. Andrew was tireless in supporting the Timorese cause, especially for his work in Adelaide from 1975 to 2002 where he was in charge of Information and served the Timorese cause writing press releases and articles, giving interviews and making public speeches on several occasions. In 1992, he was part of the delegation "Peace Mission in Timor" who used the boat Lusitanio Expresso as a means of protest against the Massacre of Santa Cruz in 1991 and to mobilize public opinion to support the people of Timor-Leste. Andy also participated in the Asia Pacific Conference on East Timor in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in 1996 where all participants in the conference were arrested and deported, including three bishops and two Timorese nationals.

Andy continues to be a committed trade unionist and has devoted much of his working life as a union organiser with responsibility for occupational health and safety, ensuring the day to day safety of workers. He has been very active in the fight against asbestos. In recognition of his life's work and support for the solidarity of workers Andy was award the Spanner Award by the S.A. May Day collective. APHEDA’s motto of “Help to make life fair everywhere” sums up what the life of an activist is and well describes who Andy Alcock is.◆

Allison Murchie

Sources: andyalcock.org website; Breaking the Boundaries by Yvonne Allen and Joy Noble. Photos: Allison Murchie
Part 1 of this article was published in *SA Labour History News* Autumn 2016 and dealt with the sequence of legal proceedings which followed Ted’s dismissal from his employment with GMH.

Part 2 will examine the reasons for the decision of the SA Industrial Court when his application was finally heard and determined. Justice Brian Stanley, as he then was, first traversed the factual circumstances that led to the dismissal, and the evidence of the principal witnesses for the parties, including Ted’s evidence. The evidence relating to the stop work meeting itself was that the Chair of the meeting, Brian Mowbray, explained to the 1000 plus employees who attended that they needed to decide whether the meeting should be held on the southern lawn area where they were standing, or be moved to a location outside of the employer’s premises. After discussion the employees voted unanimously to continue the meeting where they were.

Stanley DP found that shortly after the meeting concluded, four senior company managers met and decided that Ted should be dismissed. However this decision would be delayed until “top officials interstate” confirmed that decision. No other action other than dismissal was discussed by them. Later that same day, Ted was summarily dismissed for misconduct. The next morning a deputation headed by AMWU Organiser Bob Pointer attempted to meet with local management to discuss Ted’s reinstatement. They were rebuffed, and informed that the decision to dismiss was taken “at the highest level”.

Stanley DP made a number of findings regarding the holding of meetings of union members on GMH’s premises prior to Ted’s dismissal. He found that unauthorised meetings had frequently been held on company premises; that the company had prior knowledge of some of them; that many such meetings were advertised on union noticeboards; that Ted had assisted in the organisation of many of those meetings; and that Ted and other shop stewards on some occasions had been told they had not sought or obtained permission to hold them. Next he found that GMH had never previously taken disciplinary action against Ted or any other shop steward because they had participated in or organised any such unauthorised meeting.

Stanley DP expressed the view that “if a practice has grown up whereby the company has tolerated breaches of the award provisions in relation to the calling and holding of unauthorised meetings on the premises ...., it would not suddenly and without adequate notice to the shop stewards and the union officials concerned decide to rigidly adhere to and enforce the provisions of the award.”

After considering various decided cases concerning harsh, unjust or unreasonable dismissals, he stated that “before the Court will interfere with the employer’s right to dismiss an employee, it must be satisfied that intervention is necessary to protect an employee against an unfair or unjust exercise of the employer’s right of dismissal.”
He pointed out that Ted, along with at least 50 other shop stewards had participated in the decision to call an unauthorised meeting on company property. He “took cognizance of the fact that he (Ted) was merely implementing a decision made at a combined meeting of the shop stewards.”

In assessing the reasons for the termination, Stanley DP asked, rhetorically, why the company had not issued a warning to Mowbray and others who had taken an active part in the calling or holding of the mass meeting. He also asked why the company did not approach any of the Union officials from the Vehicle Builders Union or the Federated Engine Drivers and Firemens Association to ascertain whether they were intending to request the holding of a meeting on company property.

His Honour then stated “… it seems to me that any employee of the respondent company upon being acquainted with the facts that I have found, might well believe that Gnatenko was being made a scapegoat by the company for his actions…” He noted that of the 50 shop stewards who had made the decision to call the meeting and had in so doing breached the provisions of the Award, “only Gnatenko’s actions were called into question by the company and only he received punishment.” He went on to consider whether there was any other remedy available to the company and whether that remedy was contemplated.

His Honour found that Clause 35(b)(v) of the Award did provide a more appropriate remedy in that it allowed the company to refuse to recognise Ted as the senior shop steward (subject to review by the Commission). He found that such a remedy was never considered.

In summary he found that the company’s action in singling out and punishing Ted for the holding of the mass meeting, which was a collective decision of the shop stewards of several unions, was harsh, unjust or unreasonable, and “could not by any fair minded person be regarded as justifiable.” Ted sought the remedy of reinstatement to his former decision as a toolmaker. This was opposed by the company. Reinstatement was awarded on the basis that there was no evidence that as a toolmaker his conduct generally and adherence to the award provisions in particular was other than reasonable over a long period of time. So it was that Ted returned shortly thereafter to his toolmaker’s bench. After a short period of time he resigned to take up again his position of Education Officer at the AMWU.

Elliot Johnston QC together with Robyn Layton of counsel ably represented Ted throughout all of the legal proceedings detailed in these articles.

Greg Stevens
Photo courtesy Fernando Concalves
Where did they come from?  
Backgrounds to ACTU National Office Bearers

Traditionally union leaders in blue collar unions had come from the ranks and had no experience of university; they were disproportionately tradespeople or had only basic qualifications. In white collar unions there was a much larger proportion of officials with university degrees, a reflection of their membership. In both cases traditional leaders were personally representative of their membership. This changed in the 1970s when it was much more likely that union officials would be university qualified. Ted Gnatenkno commented about the changing times:

“The ACTU thought that by having people with academic backgrounds they could match wits with the government … But it was very demoralising, because the union membership did not see those people as their people. They were either seen as neutral or as closer to the employers because their English was different, their background was different. Rightly or wrongly, that was how it was.”

Jennie George qualified as a teacher at Sydney University in 1969 with a BA, DipEd and taught at secondary schools for 5 years. In 1973 she was elected to the full-time position of welfare officer of the NSW Teachers Federation, then as President and General Secretary in 1979. In 1983 she was elected to the ACTU Executive, to Vice President in 1987, Assistant Secretary in 1991 and President in 1996. She was the National Director of TUTA (Trade Union Training Authority) from 1989-1991. In 2001 Jenni was elected as the ALP member for the federal seat of Throsby which she held until her retirement in 2010.

Bill Kelty gained a BEc from La Trobe University in 1969 and in 1970 was appointed to the position of Industrial Officer in the Storeman and Packers Union. By 1974 he was appointed to the position of research officer at the ACTU and in 1977 was elected as Assistant Secretary.

In 1983 Bill was elected as ACTU Secretary and stayed in the position until 2000 when he resigned and was appointed as a Director of Linfox. He was one of the authors of the Accord with the federal ALP government. He was a Commissioner of the AFL from 1998.
Greg Combet studied at Sydney University achieving a Bachelor of Mining Engineering, a BEc and a Diploma in Labour Relations and Law. He spent a year in the mining industry and then 4 years as a research officer for various Non Government Organisations. In 1987 he was appointed as Industrial Officer with the Waterside Workers Federation and in 1993 as ACTU Senior Industrial Officer. In 1996 he was elected as ACTU Assistant Secretary and then ACTU Secretary in 1999. Over his time at the ACTU, Combet co-ordinated many union campaigns, including the 'Cavalcade to Canberra' of 19 August 1996, an anti-Howard Government protest, which ended with breakaway protesters attacking Parliament House. He rose to further prominence during the 1998 Australian waterfront dispute. Greg also participated in campaigns to secure entitlements and compensation for the staff of the collapsed airline Ansett Australia and asbestos victims of the James Hardie company. Greg led the campaign against the Howard Government's Work Choices industrial relations law changes. On being elected to Parliament in 2007 he was immediately appointed Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Procurement in the First Rudd Ministry on 3 December 2007. Greg Combet served as Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change, when Penny Wong was the Minister. Combet was the Minister for Climate Change, Industry and Innovation in the Second Gillard Ministry before announcing his resignation from the Ministry on 26 June 2013 following Gillard's defeat in a leadership ballot. He is now the Director of the Chifley Research Centre.

Allison Murchie

Tories Limp Back into Office

Now the numbers are in, garnished with some silly media commentary on how long it took to count the preferences in the Senate ballot, as if the voice of the people were not worth listening to attentively. It is not as if caretaker arrangements have fallen apart in the last month.

If the report of 4 August in mass Murdoch’s government gazette The Australian is anything to go by, the administration may not only have a bare majority in the House of Representatives, it may also muster sufficient conservatives to ram its union busting legislation, which is at the core of its low wage micro-economic program, through a Joint Sitting of both Houses of Parliament. Perhaps Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull’s apparently mad triggering of a Double Dissolution, which has dealt the fractious, racist and populist One Nation Party back into politics, was not as crazy as it seemed. Neo-liberal ideology drives this government, and not without great risk to the government and the nation. The last time a government was returned with a reduced majority in the House but the numbers in a Joint Sitting was in the Whitlam era year of 1974: politics was incandescent, and led on to a monarchist coup in 1975. Things are bound to give in the next parliament, which may not reach full term accordingly.

Let us pass in review the pressures these wafer thin House and Senate majorities will be under. A union movement with its back to the wall will fight like fury, drawing on every socio-economic ally, to repel Star Chamber measures directed against those twin Flagships of the working class the Maritime Union of Australia and the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union of Australia, now in the process of amalgamating. Never in history has a standing judicial commission been instituted to suppress a single industrial organisation. Such a measure offends the notion of equality before the law, and as such may even be unconstitutional. It certainly offends the national ethos of A Fair Go.

Union campaigning in this election cut back the Government’s majority significantly, in keeping with the like effect of similar campaigns at recent polls. In 1929 and 2007 Tory Prime Ministers lost their seats because the people were not prepared to see the labour movement victimised to a point where it could not perform its historic role of defending national living standards. A parliamentary vote will not be the end of a battle royal. All this a Government fractured between Neo-conservatives and Neo-liberals must sustain, whilst insisting upon but hesitating to bring on a social culture war referendum over the human rights of sexual minorities to marry. Both as a Climate Change Rationalist and a Republican, Turnbull will attract opprobrium from One Nation allies and his own back bench, whilst convincing no-one with his milk and water small ‘l’ liberalism, howsoever aligned with South Australia’s Xenophon Independents in the Senate, who will not want to be too associated with this administration’s dubious destiny.
As a century ago in the Conscription Referendum, South Australia was a battle ground State. To think we lost the talented Green Senator Robert Simms, and retained, at the last gasp, ‘Family First’ low wage union basher and sectarian Bob Day! Talk about irrationality. One urban ecologist I door-knocked refused to vote Green because she hated marriage so much that equal love appalled her. She voted Independent. Interesting times.◆

The 2016 Coalition Government

David Faber

Photos: Wikimedia Commons

ABCC

The Australian Building and Construction Commission was introduced by the Howard Government to stop building unions from being able to effectively fight for their members’ wages and conditions, and ensure they worked in a safe workplace. The ABCC was abolished by the Gillard Government and replaced by the Fair Work Building Commission. When Tony Abbott was elected as Prime Minister in 2013 he put Nigel Hadgkiss (previous Deputy Director of FWBC) in charge and revived the use of its coercive powers; he re-introduced the ABCC legislation into Parliament with even more powers, as well as a Building Code’ He effectively launched war against Australian workers. The bills did not get through the Senate and Malcolm Turnbull used them as his trigger to call a double dissolution of Parliament earlier this year. It did not rate a mention during his election campaign. His target is to destroy the CFMEU (Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union). Follow their campaign on www.standupspeakoutcomehome.org.au/abcc-explained.◆

Allison Murchie
Source: CFMEU
Aims and Objectives

The Australian Society for the Study of Labour History was founded in 1961 to study "the working class situation … and social history in the fullest sense." The Society aims not only to encourage teaching and research in labour history but also the preservation of the records of working people and the labour movement. It desires to make history a vital part of popular consciousness, a matter for reflection and debate, at a time when it is under attack from prominent conservative intellectuals.

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Meetings are usually held at the Box Factory in Regent Street South, Adelaide and are advertised in the newsletter, by email and by post to members and friends. Admission is free and all are welcome.
This newsletter is a publication of the Adelaide Branch of the ASSLH. It is not affiliated to the Australian Labor Party or any other political party. Members are encouraged to make contributions to this newsletter.
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