

SA LABOUR HISTORY NEWS

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

Winter 2015



Ruth Russell talks to society members about 100 years of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.



At 7.30pm on Sunday 16 August 2015

Andrew Leigh

Shadow Assistant Treasurer

will address a Special General Meeting –Inequality and the Budget

At the Box Factory 59 Regent Street South, Adelaide

Enquiries: 8410 9796

For assistance with **transport** to and from the venue, please contact Greg Stevens on (08) 8379-7000

Labour history: celebration and inspiration

This issue of the newsletter celebrates the achievements of working women and men in its reports on the centenary of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom; May Day; women's suffrage; and the 8 Hour Day. Readers will be inspired by book reviews and articles on diverse leaders and thinkers.

Allison Murchie outlines the talk given by Ruth Russell at the Society's June meeting. Ruth spoke of the history of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, its achievements over 100 years and current revival. Allison also reports on this year's May Day dinner, at which Greg Combet spoke, and the invigorated May Day march on the following day. I give readers a peek at the 8 Hour Day museum collection workshop run after the march by History SA and the Society.

You may well be encouraged to read or re-read books reviewed. Greg Stevens examines the recently released biography of South Australia's first Labor Premier, *Tom Price: from stonecutter to Premier*. He notes its useful discussion of State politics as well as its thoughtful portrayal of Price and his contemporaries. Steve Acton explores economic inequality in his review of Thomas Picketty's *Capital in the 21st Century*. David Faber's article focuses on the changing politics of British socialist William Morris. He recommends the *Politics of William Morris* for those wanting to find out more about this interesting and creative man. Readers are also reminded of Jim Moss and his *Sound of Trumpets*, which remains the only comprehensive history of the labour movement in South Australia. A tribute by David celebrates the life of this labour stalwart.

The newsletter provides summaries of two recent public lectures on important aspects of labour history. David Faber reports on the lecture by Professor Phillip Paynton on 'The Great War conscription crisis on Yorke Peninsula'. I outline the presentation by Dr Ros Kidd 'Understanding and resolution', on the battle over stolen Aboriginal wages and government entitlements.

If you are concerned about economic policy and growing inequality, and would like more debate on these issues, come to the free public lecture organised by the Society Labour History on 16 August. It will feature federal Shadow Assistant Treasurer Andrew Leigh. Leigh's writing includes *Battlers and Billionaires* (2013) and *The Economics of Just About Everything* (2014). He is flying over from Canberra just for us. See you (and friends) there!

Jude Elton, President

The Eight-Hour Day A song by John Warner

Come all you workers and hear what I say,
They're trying to plunder the eight-hour day,
Won by our forbears in a bloody campaign.
So rise up and be in the struggle again.

Chorus:
So stand up united, let no one betray
Our right and our children's – the eight-hour day.

Individual contracts were made for the fool,
If business divides us then business can rule

If we let the government back what they say,
It's a twelve-hour shift and no penalty pay.

This system they're making's a ticket to hell,
working weekends and Christmas and New Year as well,
Business and government walk hand in fist
And it's only in union we can resist.

So come all you workers and fight this abuse,
Let overtime hours be our right to choose,
Fight to regain a fair penalty rate,
And grip like a bulldog the eight-hour day.

Ruth Russell – One Hundred Years of WILPF



For our June meeting we were delighted to have long time peace activist Ruth Russell talk to us about the history of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). During WWI the international suffragist network decided to act. Women met in the Peace Palace in The Hague, Netherlands on 25th-28th April 1915 and asked the question "What would women do differently?" They came up with their "Principles of Permanent Peace," and these were:

- Prevent war – as violence never solves the problem
- Take away the guns – disarmament, and
- Create an international forum where countries could mediate to resolve conflict

They met with heads of European States and US President Woodrow Wilson to promote their plan for permanent peace.



The women who met 100 years ago

At the same time in Australia the Women's Peace Army was formed under Vida Goldstein. Another group formed the Sisterhood of International Peace with 30 women, growing to 210 by 1916. Both groups had strong links with international suffragists. In 1919 the League of Nations was established based on the principles of these women's groups.

Australia's Eleanor Moore was the representative on the International Committee which met in Vienna and on her return to Australia the Sisterhood became the Australian section of WILPF. Throughout the 1920s the World Disarmament movement gathered strength and at the 1928 League of Nations Kellogg Pact 60 out of 68 nations agreed to settle disputes by peaceful means and disarm. WILPF women collected 12 million signatures around the world

that were presented at the Geneva Conference in 1932, but the world leaders could not agree to limit and reduce their armaments.

WILPF women restated their pacifist position and protested against large increases in, and profit from armament expenditure; they called on women to unite for peace, to ponder the waste and tragedy of war and to insist that alternative and sane methods be used for settling disputes in an effort to save civilisation from disaster.

The Adelaide Branch was formed in 1962 and campaigned about nuclear warfare and the Woomera Rocket Range. They held the first anti-Vietnam march in South Australia in 1966. They published the booklet "American Bases in Australia." Throughout Australia the branches continued their campaigns and in 1989 Sydney hosted the 24th International Congress. They campaigned, they demonstrated, they held vigils and were actively involved in the "Women, Peace and Security" campaign; they continued to work on "One Billion rising against violence".



Ruth in Geneva

Ruth recently attended the centenary celebrations in The Hague "Women's Power to Stop War" where women from around the world gathered, including 20 women from Australia. These included Leonie Ebert, Steph Key and Frances Bedford from Adelaide. Thank you Ruth, for your continuing commitment and hard work to the peace movement, in Australia and around the world.



Greg Stevens, Ruth Russell, Luke Heffernan, Jude Elton

Allison Murchie

Remember the 8 Hour Day?



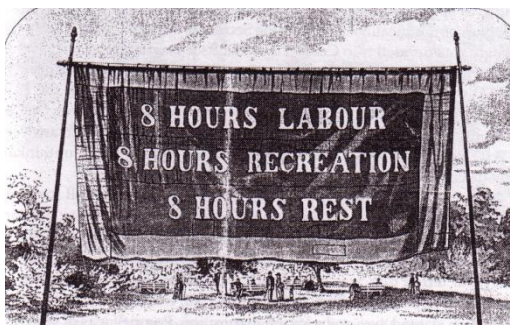
The Labour History Society joined with History SA to run a hands-on, free workshop featuring objects from the State History Collection during this year's History Festival. Timed to coincide with May Day celebrations, the workshop enabled people to come from the May Day march and spend an afternoon viewing up-close objects relating to winning and celebrating the 8 Hour Day in South Australia. Stories about these objects and the conditions under which workers laboured and organised at the time were woven into the discussion. Participants also heard about the criteria museums use for collecting and how objects are cared for once they become part of a collection.

Objects dated from 1873 to the mid-twentieth century. They included a writing slope or portable desk of rare Coromandel Ebony given to Amalgamated Society of Engineers official Lawrence Grayson by workers in 1873 in appreciation of his role in leading the campaign for the 8 Hour Day. Beautiful union ribbons from the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, some from unions long gone such as the Felt Hatters, were also seen up close. These colourful ribbons of satin, with gold and silver print and tassels, and featuring the 8 hour symbol of interwoven figure eights, were worn with great pride in labour parades in much the same way as service medals are worn today. Badges included two worn by members of the original 8 Hours Committee.

Winning the 8 Hour Day was a major achievement, celebrated with a public holiday from 1882. Trade union parades featuring banners and decorative floats were followed by union picnics and sports events in Adelaide and major country towns. Silver trophies awarded at sports events in Port Adelaide were among the objects on display at the workshop. They contrasted with the simple metal trunk used by the 8 Hour Celebration Committee to store its records and transport items to events.

Equipped with non-acid white cotton curators' gloves, workshop participants were able to handle most objects and take photos. Feedback was very positive. So look out for another event involving the Labour History Society in next years' History Festival, run all through the month of May. Send us your ideas. Suggestions to date include a labour history tour of significant places and an event at Port Adelaide.

Jude Elton



The Great War Conscription Crisis on Yorke Peninsula



Professor Phillip Paynton

Sponsored by the Dunstan Foundation and the Universities of Adelaide and Flinders, this fascinating lecture by international authority on the Cornish community Professor Phillip Paynton explored the complex divisions in a hitherto religiously, industrially and politically cohesive Methodist ethnicity occasioned by the conscription plebiscites in 1916 and 1917.

It has traditionally been assumed that the South Australian polity split along ideological lines, with the Right supporting conscription and the Left opposing it. In fact the case of the Copper Triangle region defined by Moonta, Wallaroo and Kadina would suggest that the Left fractured internally, with approximately 75% of the Labor vote there, of predominantly Australian born electors, opposing conscription. Methodist institutional leadership despite or perhaps because of its polemical turn of tongue had little influence over its diverse Wesleyan, Bible Christian and Primitive Methodist constituents. The crisis weakened the rapport between Methodism with its traditional moral authority and tendency towards social reform and official Labor. After the crisis had engaged and troubled the Labor grass roots it was harder to simply equate religion and politics in accord with a spiritually egalitarian ethos.

The industrial situation in the Triangle bore up opposition to conscription. Wartime demand for copper for munitions saw full employment in the region. Miners and smelters were skilled labour who felt they could better serve the war effort at their industrial posts rather than under arms in generic military service. This disposition was effectively reinforced by the industrial truce which applied during the war between labour and capital. The company led by the Methodist son of historic Moonta mine Captain Hancock struggled to preserve basic community cohesion around the war effort, constructing recreational facilities for example in keeping with a policy of paternalistic 'betterment' suggested by Methodism itself.

Opposition to conscription was decidedly voluntaristic and democratic, in keeping with Methodist tradition. Coerced military service was seen as un-Australian. So anti-conscriptionism in the Copper Triangle adhered in 1917 as in 1916 to a rhetorical stance against compulsion rather than evolving a critique of the War or the Empire, despite the escalating polemic from the conscriptionists. In the very midst of the controversy, the community raised £12,000 for the war effort.

The conscription debate effectively marked the end of an era, with the post-war drop in demand for copper causing the closure of the mines and local member and conscriptionist Labor leader John Verran, a former Premier and a man steeped in mining and Methodism, losing his seat.

David Faber

Dr Ros Kidd, 'Understanding & Resolution'
Inaugural University of South Australia Reconciliation Lecture, 28 May 2015



The inspiring inaugural UNISA reconciliation lecture was delivered by Dr Ros Kidd, a committed activist researcher from Queensland, who was instrumental in exposing the extent of wages stolen from Aboriginal workers by the Queensland government in particular. She continues to be an energetic campaigner in support of Aboriginal peoples' calls for just compensation. The lecture was presented by the Bob Hawke Prime Ministerial Centre and the David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research and attended by a packed audience.

Dr Kidd's lecture was wide-ranging, reflecting as she described it, 'her journey of understanding'. It commenced with a description of the controls exercised by the Queensland Government over Aboriginal peoples, especially their work and remuneration, and similar controls operating in other states and the Northern Territory through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She revealed the extent of wages underpayment and misappropriation of wages supposedly kept in trust for Aboriginal workers. She also noted the interception of Aboriginal finances via bank accounts, pensions and inheritances.

Dr Kidd went on to describe government responses to the overwhelming evidence of decades of theft and financial mismanagement, and the gross inadequacy of the reparation eventually offered. Her discussion of the campaign for just compensation included the 2006 Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee of Inquiry into Stolen Wages Nationally, which she was instrumental in securing. Not all jurisdictions were found to have appropriated Aboriginal wages to the same extent as Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. However, Aboriginal people from across Australia reported no payment and underpayment of wages and control of earnings for young people and mission/reserve residents at the very least. Ros Kidd ended her lecture with an outline of possible legal action that could be taken to enforce government accountability.

Publications by Dr Ros Kidd are highly recommended. They include: *The way we civilise* (1997), *Black lives, government lies* (2000) *Trustees on trial* (2006) and *Hard labour, stolen wages* (2007).

Jude Elton

Picketty, Capital & Inequality Today



Thomas Picketty's *Capital in the 21st century* was a best seller when it was published in English in 2014. This article will attempt to explain why. It complements the presentation that Andrew Leigh, formerly Professor of Economics at ANU and now MHR for Fraser and Assistant Shadow Treasurer will give to the Society later in the year. Andrew has written extensively on income inequality in Australia.

Piketty's central thesis is that inequality is growing and will continue to grow as a function of what he largely identifies as a return to inherited wealth. He substantiates this by a detailed examination of data from as far back as the 18th century in France and tax records in Britain and the US. His argument is encapsulated by the identity $r > g$ (where r is the rate of return on capital and g is the rate of economic growth). In other words as capital accumulates (r) and the rate of economic growth (g) slows, the inequality gap widens. Piketty has assembled a mountain of historical data to support his claims. The book took 10 years to write and he was assisted by a number of other economists.

In attempting to summarize key elements of the book, which covers nearly 700 pages and makes extensive use of tables and statistics, I have drawn extensively on the work of Paul Krugman, (Nobel laureate and Professor of Economics at Princeton University in the US) and numerous other reviewers.

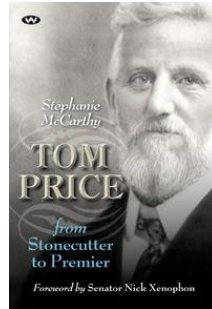
Picketty maintains that rising inequality is an outcome of what he calls "patrimonial capitalism". This is to say the unequal ownership of assets attracting income rather than mere income disparity as such, or, in a word, capital. This will lead to an ever greater accumulation of wealth which will result in the commanding heights of the economy being controlled by family dynasties rather than individuals. Piketty argues this is the result when r is greater than g . If he is right, there will be a redistribution of income away from labour towards the holders of capital. Conventional theory suggests that over the long run the stock of capital and total income grow at roughly the same rate. But as Krugman argues in his review of the book "one side can pull ahead for decades at a time". On the eve of WW1 Europe had accumulated capital six or seven times its income. For a brief period encompassing two world wars and a depression there was an enormous destruction of capital and thus a reduced ratio of capital to income. But by the 1970s this had changed and the capital ratio to income was rising again. However Picketty argues that the norm is growing inequality. This is consistent with the long run view of the data. As Krugman says the big story is about the 1% of income earners. In the US their share of income is back to what it was a century ago. Prior to the Great War they had a fifth of total income in both Britain and the US.

In summary, Picketty's work and use of data has shed new light on the economics of inequality. By explicitly identifying capital as an economic factor, he has harked back to an older tradition of political economy.

He calls for a progressive tax on capital. If he is right about capital accumulation and weakening growth, we risk seeing society dominated by a rich rentier class entirely separate from the rest of society. Perhaps we are seeing this already.

Steve Acton

Tom Price: from Stonecutter to Premier by Stephanie McCarthy (Wakefield Press)



Local author Stephanie McCarthy has written a most informative and lively biography of the life of Tom Price (1852-1909), who became the first Labor Premier of South Australia, and indeed the first long term Labor Premier anywhere in the British Empire. The writing of this well researched book is advantaged by the author's kinship with the Price family. This enabled her to access family memorabilia and folklore.

The book is conveniently structured by reference to Tom's early years (Chapters 1-3), his first 10 years in South Australia (Chapters 4-5), leading into his years in politics. Each year from 1894 to 1909 is then covered by a Chapter (6-20). There follows an extensive set of references and a very useful index.

Like a later Premier, Frank Walsh (1897-1968), Welsh born Tom was a stonemason before he became a politician. He was apprenticed to his alcoholic father at the age of nine. The family lived in the slums of Liverpool. Tom, his wife Annie and their then only son Jack migrated in 1883. They lived in a small cottage, built by Tom, in Hawthorn.

Tom was a Methodist, a Rechabite and a staunch Trade Unionist. He worked on the construction of Parliament House. Entering the House of Assembly as a United Labor Party (ULP) member in 1893, Tom explained that he believed "not in revolution, but in gradual process-indeed in the Fabian system of going slow..." Tom's speeches, of which there were many, were thoughtful, logical and well informed, however as the author points out, they were not without power and theatrical flair. In 1894 Tom, ably supported by Annie, was a key figure in the achievement of women's suffrage.

By 1899, Tom had been elected leader of the ULP and although tempted by the thought of entering Federal politics, remained in the State Parliament. In 1905, Tom became Premier. The ULP then held 15 seats, and the Liberal & Democratic Party, with 11 seats, agreed to form government with them. Despite his failing health, Tom proved to be an indefatigable and successful Premier, even winning important concessions from the Legislative Council, despite the ULP having only one member in that House.

However Tom's long term health issues were getting the better of him. He had suffered for years from haemorrhaging of the lungs, brought about by the absorption of dust from stone and marble. He passed away peacefully while still in office, aged 57 years. McCarthy movingly describes the funeral procession as thousands lined the route from the Price cottage to the Mitcham Cemetery.



Tom Price's funeral at Mitcham

Although Jim Moss claimed in *Sound of Trumpets* that Tom's 'strategy of...a little at a time' had in fact achieved very little, Mc Carthy asserts that had Tom demanded all or nothing from his Liberal coalition partner as well as the obdurate Upper House, it would have been highly likely that he would have obtained no concessions whatsoever.

This book should please its readers on three levels. First, for its detailed depiction and analysis of State politics at the turn of the century. Second, for the very personal way the author portrays Tom, Annie and the labour and union luminaries of that time. Third, and not least, Tom's qualities of courage, resourcefulness and good humour, coupled with his common-sense, warmth and empathy, which made him an exemplar of the true believers of that time.

Greg Stevens



A Woman's Place is in the House

On 18th December 1894 South Australia became the first democracy in the world to grant women the dual rights to vote and stand for election to Parliament. One hundred years later, as part of the celebrations, two suffrage tapestries were installed in the House of Assembly; the designer was Kay Lawrence who was asked to consider both the legislative role of Parliament as well as the efforts of the women and men who worked for suffrage.

The "Votes for Women" tapestry shows the events leading up to the reform and its celebrations. The woven basket shows the work of the Ngarrindjeri women of the lower River Murray; indigenous women won the right to vote in 1894 but lost it at federation in 1902 and did not regain it again until 1962. The petition is part of the 1894 petition presented to the House in which 11,600 signatures were collected. Portraits of the leaders of the campaign are featured, they were Catherine Helen Spence, Mary Lee and Elizabeth Webb Nicholls. A German bride's veil is included as an example of the diversity of the population, a crucifix for Christian ideals and a child's sampler to represent domestic tasks. A yellow ribbon runs through it as the symbol of suffragists.

The "Equal before the law" tapestry has images of the reforms that have helped to make women equal before the law. The background shows textiles made by women to show their skills and maturing roles; the grey patched quilt was made during the 1930s economic depression - made from remnants of worn out clothing stuffed inside a calico cover. Also depicted is the Guardianship of Infants Act 1940 which granted women equal rights in respect of their children; a newspaper clipping from 1923 records Aboriginal children of "mixed race" being taken away by state authorities. There is an image of Dame Roma Mitchell as an advocate for women's rights and as the first woman Supreme Court judge and Governor in Australia. Amendments to Criminal Law Consolidation Act on pregnancy and rape in marriage are represented. Reforms under the Sex Discrimination Act and the Equal Opportunity Act are represented by the apron showing the dual role of women as home-makers and full participants in our society.

The tapestries were commissioned by the SA Women's Suffrage Centenary Steering Committee and made by 20 volunteer weavers and thousands of South Australians who contributed by making a "pass."

Allison Murchie

Source: Parliament of South Australia



May Day Celebrations



Allison Murchie & Greg Combet

The 2015 May Day Dinner with a sold out attendance of 320 was eagerly awaited. As usual it was a full program. Each year the May Day Collective donates \$1,000 to a worthy group or individual and this year it went to SIMPLa – Stop Income Management in Playford; they are fighting attacks on workers and welfare recipients. The award was accepted by Pas Forgione. Each year the Spanner Award for long commitment to the spirit of May Day is awarded and this year went to Rod Parham, a well-known activist in Adelaide, particularly in the printing industry. Although it was a night of celebration it was also a time of concern for those suffering from the earthquake in Nepal. The May Day Collective donated \$1,000 and several unions matched this – after the bucket was passed around nearly \$7,000 was raised for APHEDA and the donation was accepted by Jan Schulz.

Greg Combet was our keynote speaker and spoke with passion of his time in the union movement. Greg played a central role in many of the biggest battles of our time, including the Waterfront dispute in 1998, the battle against James Hardie for asbestos victims and the collapse of Ansett. His time in the union movement was the best time of his life. The first union he worked for was the Waterside Workers (now Maritime Union of Australia). After serving as Secretary of the ACTU from 2000 to 2007 he was elected as the Member for Charlton in 2007 and joined the Rudd government; he was appointed as Parliamentary Secretary for Defence; in 2009 he was appointed Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change working with Penny Wong. In 2010 he became the Minister for Climate Change; He resigned from the Gillard government in 2013. Greg's talk reminded all of us why we got involved in the union movement and the good that can come from activism. Many people (including me!) took the opportunity to talk with Greg, including many he had worked with in unions and politics. Greg exemplifies commitment to working with and for the working class. It was a very successful evening for the May Day Collective and all those at the dinner.

For those who have not yet read high auto-biography "The Fights of My Life" I suggest you buy or borrow a copy – by the time you have finished it you will know a lot more about this extraordinary man who has given so much of himself to the workers of Australia.

The evening ended with a rousing rendition of "Solidarity Forever" led by Sally Biddle.

Solidarity Forever (abridged)

*When the union's inspiration through the workers blood shall run
There can be no power greater anywhere beneath the sun
Yet what force on earth is weaker than the feeble strength of one
For the union makes us strong*

Chorus

***Solidarity forever, solidarity forever
Solidarity forever
For the union makes us strong***

*They have taken untold millions that they never toiled to earn
But without our brain and muscle not a single wheel can turn
We can break the haughty power gain our freedom when we learn
That the union makes us strong*

Chorus

*In our hands is placed a power greater than their hoarded gold
Greater than the might of armies magnified a thousandfold
We can bring to birth a new world from the ashes of the old
For the union makes us strong*

Chorus



Sue Green & Ralph Clarke Vic Potticary & Sue Marks Marlene & Dennis Fenwick

The day after the dinner we gathered at the Parade Ground for the May Day march. There was a larger crowd than usual this year, many proudly waving trade union banners and in their union T-shirts. There was much anger in the community about the policies of the Abbott government and this was displayed on the many banners held aloft in the march. For some it was their first May Day march, others had been marching for decades. Previous issues or our newsletter have talked about the origins of May Day, but it is now more important than ever that you take to the streets and show your support for the rights of other workers and oppose the oppressive anti-worker legislation and policies of this government.

A BBQ and a few drinks at Light Square after the march gave us the chance to listen to a series of speakers led by Nadine Flood from the CPSU – she told us of the anger amongst her members and the proposed industrial action which was to start with the staff of Tax Office going on strike on the day of the Federal Budget.

Thanks to all those who participated at the dinner and the march – we will see you again next year.



David Faber



Jude Elton and Deb Nicholls



Joseph Scales and Allison Murchie

Allison Murchie, ASSLH and May Day Collective member

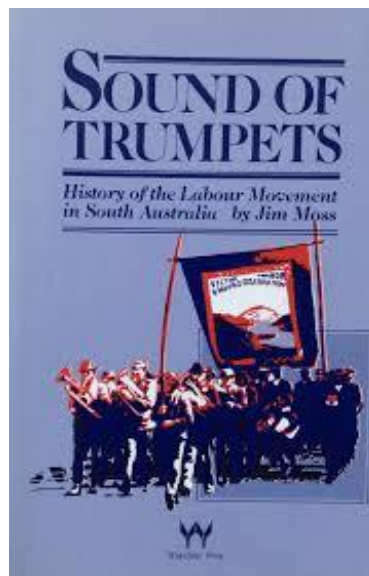
Jim Moss: labour historian and stalwart

Sound of trumpets, by Jim Moss and published in 1985, stands to this day as the only comprehensive history of the labour movement in South Australia. A labour of love, it involved wide-ranging research over more than a decade. This history, together with other publications on the history of the South Australian Communist Party, industrial relations and workers control, and monopoly capitalism, reflect his commitment to working people and radical social and economic change.

Jim Moss was born in Western Australia, where he started work as an apprentice in the metal trades at 15 years of age. Active in his trade union, Jim took part in his first strike in the late 1930s. Discharged from the RAAF on medical grounds, he worked on munitions and became a shop steward in Adelaide in the latter part of the Second World War.

Jim became a member of the Communist Party of Australia, speaking at factory gate meetings and at Speakers Corner in Botanic Park. He edited the South Australian *Tribune* (1946-51) and served as the secretary of the CPA in South Australia from 1963-73. Jim also stood as a CPA candidate in local government, state and federal elections into the late 1960s. Throughout his working life, Jim Moss was a passionate supporter of labour movement campaigns for improved living standards, democratic rights and world peace.

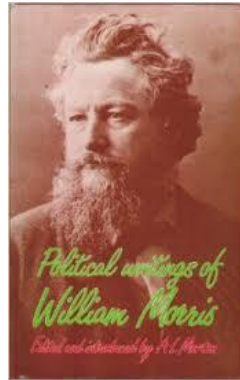
Jude Elton



Jim Moss

The grand old man
sat at my table and,
asking after my *Rubaiyat*,
recited Fitzgerald from memory,
drinking the cup of mortal life
like a Socrates.

The Marxism of William Morris



For the seminal British Socialist William Morris (1834-96), whose Socialism had evolved from Victorian Romanticism, Socialism was Marxism. But to understand his humanist critique of capitalism, which pre-dated the discovery of the manuscripts of the young Marx on alienation, we must retrace his evolution from cultural protestor against the squalor of early industrialism to socioeconomic and political analyst of the subordination of modern labour. Morris was born into comfortable circumstances and educated with some freedom at Marlborough School and Oxford. In 1857 the Pre-Raphaelite circle was engaged in decorating the new Oxford Union building with medievalist aesthetic murals. It was at this time he met and married Jane Burden. Matrimony led on to the building of the Red House at Bexley Heath, a milestone in English domestic architecture. Then the problem arose of how to furnish it appropriately. Morris found that capitalism produced only gross luxury goods and shoddy knock-offs for popular consumption. So he went rather successfully into business as a master craftsman producing quality goods under conditions of dignified, hedonistic labour. There were however limitations to this practical Pre-Raphaelite 'Holy War against the Age', for the high labour costs entailed involved niche marketing to the wealthy rather than mass production with its economies of scale. Morris was initially constrained to merely skirmishing with capitalism. Nevertheless he soon outgrew his success as a businessman and epic poet, developing an interest in Nordic saga which led to his seminal visit in 1871 to Iceland, where he encountered an egalitarian and relatively classless society. When he eventually encountered the available writings of Marx, his heart and mind were already prepared.

An important moment in his evolution towards Marxism came with his realisation as an anti-war activist of the Eastern Question Association that only the working class, despised by the bourgeoisie, had the socioeconomic clout to successfully oppose imperialist war. By 1883 his days as a radical liberal were behind him and he identified as a revolutionary social democrat. His search for authentic art had led to an historical analysis of exploitation and a recognition of the consequent need for class struggle as the only process through which class itself could be transcended and true liberty, equality and fraternity achieved. It was to be, he realised, no easy procession, as exemplified by the repression of peaceful protest in London on Bloody Sunday 1887 on which Morris reported in his Socialist League journal *The Commonwealth*. Appreciating the need for unity in the struggle to generate a socialist movement integrating mass and parliamentary action, the unsectarian Morris understood the unsustainable tension between Marxism and sterile Anarchist leftism. In this and so many other respects, Morris was a pioneer of a socialism which was indigenous to English speaking societies and remains relevant today, a precursor in this respect of Orwell. See *Political Writings of William Morris* International Publishers NY 1979

David Faber

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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Except where explicitly stated, news, commentary and discussion are provided for educational and information purposes and do not represent the official position of the Society

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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