

# LABOUR HISTORY NEWS

Labour History Society (South Australia) Incorporated

**Spring 2018**



State Library of SA, B5993, Flooded tents occupied by the unemployed, along the River Torrens, behind the Zoological Gardens, 1931. The Adelaide City Council ordered the removal of the tents in 1938.

## Included in this Issue

**Thanks Jude Elton, Welcome Doug Melvin, It's Time, Doc Evatt, Ken Bridge and Don Jarrett, a selection of poetry and Songs of Struggle.**

Welcome the first Labour History News in what is a new era for the South Australian Branch with the stepping down of Jude Elton as President and the retirement from the Executive Committee of long-term committee members Steve Action and Greg Stevens and the welcoming of Ken Bridge to the committee.

The members of the Executive Committee are looking forward to working with society members to ensure that we continue to follow the creative path laid down by Jude and other members of the Executive.

To follow this we invite society members to participate in providing articles for the Labour History News and suggesting what they would like to see covered in forthcoming editions. We also invite comments on this edition.

One of the most significant events over the past couple of months has been the launch by the Anti-Poverty Network SA the 'its Time to raise the Newstart Allowance' campaign. An article on the launch, which was attended by quite a few LHS members, is included in this issue.

I am sure that members will find the article by Ken Bridge "Compare the Pair" in which he talks about his career and background compared to long-term LHS member and renowned author Don Jarrett very interesting.

David Faber adds his flavour to this edition by an in depth article 'Evatt: A brilliant, First Rate Madness?'

We hope you enjoy the other articles included in this edition as well as the major ones highlighted above.

Doug Melvin  
President SA Branch

## **Jude – many happy memories**

The Labour History Society (SA) wishes to say a very big and heartfelt THANK YOU to Jude Elton for her leadership as our President. She has given generously of her time, experience, expertise and ideas in making the Society a progressive and thought provoking organisation under her leadership.

I wanted to say a few words about Jude Elton's contribution to our branch so I asked the Executive Committee and here are a few of their comments:

"Under Jude's leadership the Society in SA has stabilized and grown in intellectual stature."

"She leaves behind a solid legacy to her successor in the presidency. In office she has been meticulously well organised and professional in her dealings. She will remain a respected elder of the Labour History movement."

"A sad loss without Jude at the helm for all concerned."

"What Jude has done in her few years to Labour History Society (SA) Inc.:- Leadership, the name change, increased membership individually and for organisations, introduction of the web site, a Labour History scholarship programme, administration correctness, large attendances at general meetings."

"Jude has made SA Labour History financially and historically viable again as well as strengthening our standing in Australia. What an achievement and very much appreciated."

"When Gary Lockwood decided not to stand as our President again due to ill health, the Committee had a discussion around who could be the best person to be his replacement. None of us felt either sufficiently motivated or suited to the role.

Three or four names of current members were brought forward including Jude.

As the then Vice President I asked the Committee which one of those they favoured, to enable me to approach that person first.

The Committee were unanimous! They all wanted Jude to take on the job.

She did take a bit of persuading before she agreed.

And what an inspired choice she was.

When I now look back at how much the SA Branch has achieved under her leadership, I can say with confidence that we can go forward with the momentum we have and take on fresh challenges in the future.

Thank you so much Jude for all that you have done for Labour History!"



Receiving the 2017 May Day Spanner award from Sally McManus With scholarship winner Rachel Harris



With friends and colleagues at Labour History public meetings

**Allison Murchie**

Photos courtesy of Allison Murchie



## Who is Doug Melvin?

I thought I would take this opportunity, as incoming President of the SA Branch of the Labor History Society, to provide a little background to my involvement in the labour movement.

But firstly may I say what a privilege it is to be elected President of the Society and to offer my thanks to Jude for all the work that she has put into the Society over the years and to wish her well in very well deserved 'time out.'

I would also like to thank two retiring executive members, Steve Action and Greg Stevens for their contributions to the Executive Committee and the Branch in general over many years and we look forward to their continued support at Branch meetings

I was born in London and came to Australia in December 1969 as one of the last of the 'ten pound POMS'. In the early 1960's I was elected as the youngest ever workplace delegate for the Central London District of the telecommunication section of the GPO. A position I held until I came to Australia.



I join the Warrnambool (Victoria) branch of the ALP in early 1971 and held various branch positions. In 1973 I was elected as assistant secretary of the South West Victoria Trades and Labor Council and helped unionise the Warrnambool gas depot after contacting the Gas Employees Industrial Union.

In 1976 after the birth of our second child Katie (Karl our first was born in 1973) we moved to Millicent and back to my original trade in telecommunication. I was elected the Australian Postal and Telecommunications Union (APTU) delegate.

In 1980 having moved to Mount Gambier, the APTU asked me if I would like to attend a 2 week live-in TUTA course at Wodonga. I accepted with glee given that I had attended many TUTA courses starting from my days in Warrnambool. In that same year I was elected secretary of the South East Trades and Labor Council and naturally continued my ALP activities. In 1981 the late Senator Geoff McLaren asked me to work fulltime for him and establish a Mount Gambier office for him (he was based in Murray Bridge), another opportunity too good to miss.

Having worked closely with the party and trade unions while based in Mt Gambier, in 1983 Jack Wright asked me if I would like to join his Ministerial staff in Adelaide as in a newly created role of Industrial Liaison Officer. I served in this position for 7 years working with Jack, Frank Blevins and Bob Gregory. In 1990 the Bannon Government established the Government Agencies Review Group (GARG) to reduce government spending and I was asked if I would join it to handle the IR aspects of the review. When GARG had completed its work I had a couple of years as manager of IR policy in the State Government before, in 1995, taking up the position of Director Of International Industrial Relations with DIR in Canberra. After the Howard government took to using the chain saw on DIR, it was time for change and my partner Aileen won a position in the Education Department in Fiji.

So after three years of living and working in Fiji, including working for the Fiji Nurses Union, I joined AusAID and remained with the agency until I retired in 2013. Aileen and I moved back to Adelaide in August 2016.

**Doug Melvin**

## It's Time to Increase Newstart



The Choir led by Eileen Darley

On 30 June The Newstart Choir launched the Anti-Poverty Network SA (APNSA) campaign, with a wonderful rendition of the newly reworked ALP's 1972 anthem It's Time, for a raise to the Newstart allowance of \$100 a week.

Around 100 activists attended the launch and it was MC'd by the independent State Member for Florey, Francis Bedford.

Newstart is \$273 per week - less than \$40 per day - and has not been raised in real terms since 1994. It is \$160 per week below the poverty line and \$178 per week below the pension. A number of speakers addressed the launch including a young unemployed person who was born since the last Newstart Allowance raise in real terms. The other unemployed speaker was a mature age woman. Both recounted what it is like to try and live on \$40 a day, how the unemployed are forced to attend job interviews, but of travel expenses come out the daily allowance and the fact that it is very difficult to afford the type of clothing that one is expected to wear for an interview.

Their food intake was described as a nightmare often living on rice and bread and the absolute delight it was just occasionally to go out and have a coffee with friends.

It was pointed out that the campaign launch came at a time when there is unprecedented support for an increase, among business organisations, welfare groups, trade unions, and local governments, and even former PM, John Howard. Last month, an Essential Media poll found two thirds of Australians support an increase.



The choir and supporters



Speaker Jamie Newlyn and Anti-Poverty coordinator Pas Forgione

It seems the only people who are happy to see Australia's living in such poverty are the Federal Government and the opposition ALP who will not commit to a Newstart raise if elected at the next election.

If members want to hear the choir sing the It's Time theme then go to the APNSA website and follow the link.

**Doug Melvin**

Photos courtesy Allison Murchie

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## **IT'S TIME TO RAISE NEWSTART!!**

Performed for the first time at  
'Campaign Launch: It's Time To  
Raise Newstart', on Saturday  
June 30th.

Keep an eye out for the official  
campaign film clip, which will be  
released sometime in July!!

"It's time for freedom  
It's time for movement  
It's time to begin  
Yes, It's Time

It's Time for changing  
Not deckchair re-arranging  
It's Time to begin  
Yes, It's Time

It's Time for proving  
Not slick manoeuvrin  
It's Time to begin  
Yes, It's Time

It's Time for poor folk  
Not for rich folk  
To screw poor folk  
Yes, It's Time

It's Time for children  
Out of poverty  
This Time for real Bob  
Yes, It's Time

(Time Oz Labor )

For better wages

Has been for ages  
Yes, It's Time

Time for Newstart  
To give a real start  
One hundred more a week start  
Yes, It's Time

Time for real jobs  
Not starve or kill jobs  
It's Time to begin  
Yes, It's Time

Time to stand up  
For what you say you stand for  
It's Time to begin  
Yes, It's Time

Time for shelter  
Not market helter-skelter  
It's Time to prove  
Yes, It's Time

Time for Newstart  
To give a real start  
One hundred more a week start  
Yes, It's Time"

*\*Huge thank you to the Born On  
Monday Choir. Impossible  
without you.*



## My Song” Harry Belafonte

I have just finished reading the biography of Harry Belafonte. He worked closely with Martin Luther King Jnr. and when talking about him said, “The worthiest causes, he often told me, were never popular at first. Cowardice asks the question, ‘Is it safe?’ Expedience asks the question, ‘Is it politic?’ And vanity asks the question, ‘Is it popular?’ but conscience asks the question, ‘Is it right?’ As Martin knew, there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither politic nor popular, because conscience tells him he must.

He also said, “I’m more concerned about doing a good job than about longevity. Ultimately it isn’t important how long you live. The important thing is how well you live.” This is a lesson in life that today’s politicians seem to have forgotten.

**Allison Murchie**

**Source: “My Song” Harry Belafonte. Published 11.10.2011. Pages 157-159**

### Evatt: A Brilliant, First Rate Madness?

In the Winter 2017 issue of *SA Labour News*, reviewing John Murphy’s 2016 life of Evatt, which goes too close to damning him with faint praise and dour reservations, I alluded to the question which

perplexed the great man’s friends and has always attracted vicious commentary from his enemies: was this brilliant, eccentric public intellectual entirely sane?



The simple answer I have come to, after much consideration, is that he was neither more nor less insane than his great contemporaries Winston Churchill and John Curtin, both of whom are known to have struggled mightily with the bipolar affective disorder manic depression. WS Churchill’s struggle with ‘the black dog’ of depression is legendary. As to his manic tendencies, General Ismay, an admirer, remarked that Churchill had a hundred ideas a day, ten of which were good. Churchill’s illustrious lineal military ancestor, the 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Marlborough, was manically

energetic.

Biographer David Day simply records [*John Curtin: a life* Harper Collins Sydney 1999/2000 p123] that Curtin was subject to bipolar disorder. But Day paradoxically does not draw extensive implications of pervasive manic depression for Curtin’s life and career, perhaps concerned to keep at bay reductively psychological interpretations of Curtin’s work. Nevertheless, Curtin’s famous battle with the bottle was complicated by the fact that self-medication with alcohol was not all that counter-indicated in the era prior to the discovery of the therapeutic properties of lithium by another Australian, Dr John Cade, in 1949. The aristocratic Churchill artfully self-medicated with French champagne & diluted whiskey.

Justifying this biographical diagnosis, I think, lays the basis for a deeper appreciation of Evatt’s achievement, just as appreciation of the nervous condition of Churchill and Curtin, both strong wartime leaders, reinforces their standing. Evatt then, I am contending, was a great Australian who

was likewise manic depressive, and recognizing this clears up a good deal of enigma, confusion and malice surrounding his figure. That all three served the public greatly while bearing the burden of this illness, having perverse benefits in terms of intellect, creativity and leadership, is all the more remarkable in that they did so primarily prior to the discovery of the therapeutic properties of lithium for the management of mania. [For masterly psychiatric discussion of this creativity theme as it regards political leadership, see Nassir Ghaemi *A First-Rate Madness* Penguin New York 2011]

The historian Geoffrey Bolton has noted that Evatt 'attracted more than the average politician's share of vicious rumour' during his career. [Evatt, Herbert Vere (1894-1965) *Australian Dictionary of Biography* Vol.14 MUP 1996 p110.] During the Cold War, Catholic Church circles decided to ventilate a whispering campaign to the dismissive effect that 'Evatt is mad'. [Kylie Tennant *Evatt: Politics & Justice* Angus & Robertson Sydney 1970/81 p313-4.] Tennant p1 considered that Evatt was a genius, disliked as such by the merely talented just as much as madness is disliked and stigmatized. This is doubly significant for our thesis, given the romantic saw that geniuses are mad. Even some of his trusted colleagues in the legal profession were ill disposed towards him. Indeed, though-out his career, his protective wife Mary Alice had to remind Evatt, who could be over-trusting as well as notoriously suspicious, that not all his colleagues were well disposed. A convinced meritocrat, Evatt was highly inclined to presume probity and integrity in the talented, not always a justified assumption. It was a weakness exploited by those who despised his heterodox eccentricity and open mindedness.

For example, in late July 1943, the UK ambassador in Washington, Viscount Halifax, an appeaser who had been exiled from the British War Cabinet by Churchill once it was politically safe to do so, wired London 'an Important...Personal & Secret' report concerning an unofficial visit he had received from the Australian Minister to Washington, Sir Owen Dixon. Dixon was a former fellow justice of the High Court with Evatt. Dixon had been anxious like Evatt to stand down from the bench to do war work, but only accepted Curtin's invitation to succeed RG Casey in Washington in April 1942 on condition that he report directly to the Prime Minister, rather than Evatt as Foreign Minister, whom he disliked as being too political. This was precisely the reason conservatives such as Dixon's former pupil Menzies had condemned Evatt's resignation from the Court to stand for parliament for the Labor Party.

Dixon went out of his way to speak unofficially to Halifax, 'personally and "off the record"', abusing the status of his office to authorize his private views. Dixon 'feared what might be the American reactions to the fall of Mussolini' in early July 1943. The specific risk he foresaw was of leniency towards the new democratic, constitutionally monarchist Italian government, as a function of the large Italian American constituency in the US. Backstabbing his Foreign Minister, Dixon 'trusted that consultation with Australia [as a constituent Dominion of the British Commonwealth] would be with Curtin as Prime Minister...and not with Evatt...Curtin still counted for something and some misgivings were felt in Australia concerning Evatt.' Dixon's lifelong views were ethnocentric not to say racist; he offered as an objective fact the personal opinion that 'the Australians [had] traditionally hated the Italians and their experiences in Libya had taught them to despise them.' [See PRISEC R6908 Viscount Halifax No3383 26 July 1943 FROM WASHINGTON TO FOREIGN OFFICE (My copy obtained from the archive of the Istituto Nazionale per la Storia del Movimento della Liberazione in Italia, Milan] Document 6909-FO 371/37263a File 242. There is related material in FO 371/37274 File 319)]

Clearly Evatt was felt by Dixon to be unreliable in this regard, a multiculturalist ahead of his time. Evatt's subsequent career as an art lover and in respect of the peace treaty with Italy bore out Dixon's misgivings: Dixon died uncomfortable with the multicultural evolution of Australia. In the Evatt collection in the Flinders Central Library Special Collections there are papers on Italian Socialism and the UN mediated peace treaty with Italy which have bearing on these questions.

Indeed, Dixon was not alone amongst Evatt's former judicial colleagues who saw Evatt as unsound by conservative criteria. There were those on the High Court bench who had not known what to make of a strange new species of man who loved modern art and the music of Fats Waller. [Tennant *Evatt...* op cit p75]

The so called 'security community' has been a hot bed of denigration of Evatt's sanity and loyalty to his country, doubling down historically on its victimization of him in life. Paul Monk, 'a former senior intelligence analyst', has impugned the loyalty, acumen and sanity of 'the half-mad Evatt.' [See 'Moles in ASIO: A sinister spy story' *Australian Rationalist* Rationalist Society of Australia Vol.105 Winter 2017] A more extensive attack has been mounted by Andrew Campbell, 'a former intelligence analyst at the Office of National Assessments' in the right wing *National Observer*; Issue No.73 of Winter 2007. Campbell represents Evatt as a rag bag of psychiatric symptoms trawled from the DSM-IV diagnostic manual, whereas in Issue No.75 he represents Evatt as succubus to a foreign power. As the Honourable Michael Kirby AC has written, it is incredible that one of the great achievers of Australian history, hailed by the *Times Literary Supplement* as 'the most fascinating figure in the Australian labour movement since Billy Hughes' [Tennant *Evatt...* op cit, endpapers.] could be dismissed in this wholesale way. [Kirby-Faber 23 February 2018] Campbell's pseudo-clinical diatribe is so detailed it merits rebuttal.

At its core it is bedeviled by contradiction. One of the many syndromes Campbell 'diagnoses' in Evatt is Narcissistic Personality Disorder. [Campbell op cit Council for the National Interest p29] This afflicts wannabe aspirants to talent. Yet Evatt's achievements were real, not imaginary, and his self-image was accordingly well grounded. Moreover Campbell contradicts himself again by accurately quoting Kirby to the centrally pertinent effect that 'there is more than a hint of a bi-polar disorder in Evatt's make up.' [Ibid p28] Rather than a Narcissist lacking in substance, Evatt was a genuinely talented personality suffering from episodic flights of affective fancy which carried his wits away from him, as when he tragically extemporized his reference to co-respondence with Molotov regarding Soviet espionage in Australia during the Petrov Affair.

The historian owes the historical public a brief but none too autobiographical account of his or her perspective, if for no other reason than to own the bee in his bonnet, without which the historian, as EH Carr confessed, is a dead dog devoid of historical insight and interest. [EH Carr *What is History?* Penguin London 1961/70 p23] I first came upon the figure of Evatt as an enthusiastic young Whitlamite, made aware by Laurie Oakes that Whitlam's father was an Evatt admirer who had served him as Permanent Secretary of the Attorney General's Department. Clearly not all Evatt's long-suffering subordinates were antagonists. I asked the first historian in my young life, my adoptive father Cyril William 'Bill' Clements, about Evatt. Bill was an intelligent man of the people, who had voluntarily suspended his secondary education to go working. His reply was very definite. 'Evatt was too intelligent. People couldn't understand him.' There may have been some truth in this remark. Yet Evatt had it in him in peak moments to be a supreme communicator, as during his Bondi speech, which alerted via national radio the Australian people to the threat that Menzies anti-communism represented to what Evatt, very much a man of his time and place, conceived of as 'British justice.' The Murphy thesis that Evatt was too much the rationalist lawyer to be any good as a politician is clearly a gross overstatement at best. Let us conclude then this study of Evatt in the happy moment of his greatest service to his country, the Referendum campaign against the Communist Party Dissolution Act. Evatt with Whitlam was the greatest Opposition leader the nation has been fortunate to have had at her service. Puisse Campbell, [Ibid p29] he was highly qualified to be the best Prime Minister we never had.

**David Faber**

Photo: Public Domain

## **Songs of Struggle and Labour History**

Songs of struggle have been with us since our ancestors crawled out of the swamp. Throughout the history of person kind (or not so kind) there have been songs of struggle. The voice of the oppressed has never and hopefully will never be quiet or silenced.

The role that music has played in the history of workers and women's rights, the role and rights of unionism and therefore, labour history, has possibly not had the exposure that it rightfully should have gained. Although British Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm does reference music and art and its influence in the struggles for equality, peace and rights of the masses in his book *Age of Extremes*.

Before radio, television and even telephones were available to the masses, town criers, word of mouth and simple folk music was the main way of communicating news on what was happening both locally local and in wider society.

One of the early songs about how the industrial revolution was changing the work place and work methods is the classic song *Peg and Awe* that talks about the changing face of shoe making at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Many of the early British songs of struggle were lost to the masses until the resurgence of the British folk music scene in the late 1950's early 1960's. The likes of Ewen MacColl, Peggy Seeger, Shirley Collins, Bert Jansch, and bands such as Steeleye Span and Fairport Convention brought back the forgotten songs of struggle and introduced new ones.

However, it was in the USA where many songs of struggle developed. In 1909 the International Workers of the World Union (better known as the Wobblies) released 'The Little Red Song Book'. The book was a collection of poems set to traditional hymns with the aim to spread the Wobblies message around the world.

The music of the Wobblies had a major influence on future generations especially people like Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger and later, the early songs of Bob Dylan, Phil Ochs, Dave Van Ronk, Jane Baez and legion of other singers that fed into the 1960's years of protest.

The Ballad of Joe Hill (a Wobblie union leader found guilty of a trumped up charge of murder and shot by a firing squad in November 1915) was first recorded in 1936 by Earl Robinson. However, while both Woody Guthrie and Phil Ochs had written songs about Joe Hill it was only after the Woodstock concert when Joan Baez sung it that the story of Joe Hill became known to the masses. This led to a new generation of people starting to be interested in songs of struggle. Of course as the 1960's progressed and the anti Vietnam War movement throughout the world started to grow, songs of protest and struggle started to reach out across music and cultural boundaries.

With the influence of what is known as the British invasion of popular music in the US, bands like the Rolling Stones, the Animals etc. were bringing black blues music to the white population. And of course blues came from the slave songs of struggle. But that is another story. Black artists were becoming recognised and being played on air. People like Josh White, Leadbelly, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee while not necessarily singing about workers and union struggles, their music, along with countless others were influencing the masses to understand more about inequality, racism, exploitation of workers of all cultures.

With the mass production of records, songs of struggles from the 1930's, 40's, and 50's were being released. Radio stations started to play songs of Guthrie, Seeger, Dylan, and Ochs. Record companies started to realise that there was gold in these songs.

Across the big pond the folk revival, the skiffle music of people like Lonnie Donegan and the blues explosion were bringing songs of struggle to the masses.

After the Vietnam War there seems to be a reduction in new songs of struggle until the Red Wedge exploded on the British music scene as a reaction to Thatcherism. Of course Bill Bragg led the charge with songs of struggle against the Fascist Machine of Thatcher.

Returning to the main subject of labour struggles, the Smithsonian Folkways record label released a few years ago a CD of 27 Classic Labour Songs. The CD has many songs about the struggle of miners, of unionist fights against the bosses thugs.

It includes a very rare recording of Paul Robeson singing Joe Hill, the original version of Which Side Are You On by Florence Reeves, Seeger's version of Casey-Jones (Union Scab), Union Maid and the still relevant today in Queensland Mines, Havel Dickens Black Lung and finishes with a rousing version of Joe Glazer singing Solidarity Forever.

The CD or download is still available from the Smithsonian Folkways site.

Above there is reference to the Wobblies 'Little Red Song Book' there is a 4 CD box set available called 'The Little Red Box of Protest Songs' which includes many songs of struggle by artists mentioned above.

In future LHS Newsletters I will include a couple of reviews of struggle music recordings.

**Doug Melvin**



## **Vale Jennifer Mary Cotter in Colmer 1945-2018, a Working Class Heroine**

Jenny, as she was universally known in her adopted Australia, was a Welsh coal miner's daughter from the Taff Valley. She never forgot where she came from and was always proud to be Welsh and working class. She always espoused sound Socialist values of justice and equity. A wild Welsh woman at heart, she was always a credit to her creed and her people.

She won admission to the Grammar School and graduated to a cadetship at *The Pontypridd Observer*. She admired the syndicated columns of the Australian journalist John Pilger, which *The Observer* published. She loved journalism but gave it up to leave for love and the bright lights of Swinging London. In London she was obliged to give up her first born daughter, but raised two more with love and courage. Her emigration to Australia was very much with their best interests in the forefront of her mind.

In Australia she began nursing, and what began as work became a vocation and outlet for her practical acumen and sense of professionalism. After completing her hospital training, she nursed for over a decade in Aboriginal Australia, seeing the North and West of the continent and winning much love and admiration for her empathy and ability. After her return to Adelaide, she took a degree in Adult Education from the University of South Australia. She was a distinction student who was always inconsolably anxious as to whether or not she would pass. She went on and taught at TAFE various nursing subjects including pharmacology, legal studies and cultural awareness, particularly concerning Aboriginal patients. She was an inspired and inspiring teacher. She worked as long as she could after reaching retirement age.

After a lifetime of work, she found retirement underwhelming, and bravely battled late onset depression due to ageing. Familiar with the status of Aboriginal elders in traditional Australia, she pined somewhat for appreciation, and never quite found an active role for herself in retirement. Now all struggle is over, and she rests in peace in the hearts of those who knew her and had the wisdom to love her.

I had the privilege of being an intimate friend for 40 years. I cannot praise her too highly. For years I have rung her almost daily and discussed work, world affairs, national politics, life, love and literature with her. I used to buy books to read myself and lend to her. We were agreed that if we ruled the world, it could not be worse governed than it presently is. She left behind her a wealth of happy memories.

**David Faber**

## **Vale Kirsty Boden**

The late Kirsty Boden, Registered Nurse, has been recognized with a well-deserved Commendation For Bravery. She died during a terrorist attack on London Bridge on 3 June 2017, rallying to the sound of disturbance. Her professionalism above and beyond the call of duty was that of a skilled worker, trained to care for others. Her pride in her work and sense of vocation are mirrored in the community recognition she has posthumously received.

**David Faber**

## **“Compare the pair” – escalators, Snakes & Ladders and social mobility**



Don and Ken at a recent meeting of Labour History Society

For some time, I have been editing a few slim volumes of Don Jarrett's memoir (*Stories of a Reluctant Radical*) which trace his multifaceted career against the odds in both blue- and white-collar jobs, together with his experience as an activist for workers' rights and social justice. Now in the final stages the project I've started to think about my own history, and I am struck by how a comparison of our histories begins to look like the difference between an escalator and a game of Snakes & Ladders.

Unlike Don's story, my own reads like a typical 'Boomer' career: an uneventful progression through school, Teachers College and Uni followed by five years high school teaching, and 25 years in various teachers colleges and SA universities. Besides being an example of the limited and somewhat circular career of many teachers that Don derides in his memoir, what is also noticeable is the apparent ease of my educational and career progress – nothing seemed to get in its way. A recommendation from our church minister (a well-known radio and newspaper commentator) ensured my acceptance into teachers college, and in the post-war population boom teaching jobs were guaranteed. Similarly, my lecturing career coincided with the expansion of tertiary education, and was at each stage facilitated by ex-colleagues already working in the sector – usually a letter expressing my interest in a position was all that was needed.

Don's career, on the other hand, was challenged at every point by hostile social forces: at school he was harassed by teachers and fellow students because of his Communist family links (which included a brother-in-law who was State Secretary of the CPA), and this pattern extended to his early career. During his electrical apprenticeship in Port Augusta Don was bullied as a 'Commo', so left for Adelaide and started a PMG technical traineeship. Soon bored, he transferred to the GPO, but a promising career in the Personnel Branch there mysteriously came to a halt after a visit by the Postal Investigation Branch, and he was transferred to a suburban post office, where he ended up as a 'postie' delivering mail on a push-bike. Don soon resigned and got a job with the Elder Smith pastoral firm (thanks to a word from an influential uncle) but after five years he left this thriving career after a surprise visit from the big bosses and a mistaken allegation of theft. Don had a second go in the Post Office, but his ambition to become a 3<sup>rd</sup> Division clerical officer came to a halt via a trumped up charge and conviction of theft – thanks to right-wing Catholic 'spies' in the public service who tipped off ASIO. Frustrated and depressed, Don's explored unskilled jobs in Port Adelaide but

his early attempts were blocked at every turn by an employer network clearly prejudiced against his CPA connections. Nevertheless, he persisted and after a decade or so in the metal trades - interrupted by a study trip to Russia and several months as an organiser for the CPA - Don emerged with skills as a welder and also as in workplace negotiation for workers' rights. Meanwhile he had pursued study in his spare time, and following a full-time matriculation year in the early 1970s he gained a BA and teaching diploma at Adelaide Uni, (thanks in part to Whitlam's free tertiary education policy in 1973) and spent two decades as a high school teacher.

Don and I are of similar age so we grew up during the same historical periods - the aftermath of the Depression, WW2, the post-war boom, and decades of conservative politics interrupted only by Dunstan and then Whitlam. Furthermore, there are striking similarities in our personal backgrounds. Firstly, both our families held firmly to similar principles of social justice and the importance of public benefit. Don's father was an active supporter of the CPA in Port Augusta and had a strong concern for the underdogs of society - from aborigines to alcoholics - and was also an active promoter of community activities as secretary of the Port Augusta swimming club and the railway employees' social club. Similarly, my own family had a strong commitment to social justice, and through their links with the Port Adelaide Central Methodist Mission were closely involved in its provision of aged care, homeless housing, free health clinic services as well as a wide range of social activities for local adults and children.

Secondly, in each case our fathers came from similarly disrupted working class backgrounds. Don's grandfather Jonathon Bush Jarrett, the supervisor of a fettler gang on the railways, was killed in a shunting accident near Port Augusta in 1904. As a result, his 12-year son Charlie (Don's father) was sent off to board at a farm just out of Quorn, returning after two years to work in Port Augusta. His first job was in the Young & Gordon's store as a 'spud boy'; later jobs included farm work and driving cattle teams to the Quorn rail-head for transport to the docks at Port Augusta). In 1923 Charlie married Hilda Pearce and they moved to a small farm at Willochra, a district which had flourished following a few good seasons in the early 1920s. However, a series of droughts later in the decade forced Charlie to seek work elsewhere (he brought down two teams of horses to help level off West Beach for the planned airport, and later worked as a timekeeper on the East-West railway line). Further droughts in the early thirties forced him to surrender the Willochra farm altogether, and in 1935 Charlie took his growing family (Don & his twin brother were soon to be born) back to Port Augusta to look for work. He was offered a job in the Railways pay office, but his conservative brother Jack (who also worked for the Railways) advised management against it, and diminutive Charlie ended up as a 'striker' in the blacksmiths workshop, wielding a seven-pound hammer!

My father, Leonard (Len), also came from a disrupted working class background: my grandfather Alfred Bridge, a journeyman butcher, died on the floor of a London slaughter-room in 1907 (he slipped while carrying a beef carcass, so the story goes). With few prospects, my widowed grandmother Mary (Minnie) Bridge emigrated to Australia in 1908 with her four young children to join her sister Lizzie, whose husband George Thoms ran the Flagstaff Dining Rooms in Port Adelaide. When George moved to Gawler in 1911 to run the Mill Inn, Minnie launched out on her own, renting the recently de-licensed Paris Hotel in Port Adelaide as a boarding house - but gave it up a year later on doctor's orders. Minnie's children shared the load in those hard times: her 16 year old son Gilbert had worked since the family's arrival in Port Adelaide in 1908, while 12 year old Gordon got a job (on his uncle George's recommendation) lighting the street gaslights in Port Adelaide - he had to climb lamp-posts with a box of matches in his mouth and it is said he cried the first time because it was so difficult for him. Their sister Dorothy (our Aunt Dolly) did well at school, but left Woodville High after two years to help with the family finances by working in an office. All three of Minnie's sons entered the skilled trades: Gilbert and Gordon became a car mechanic and cabinet-maker respectively, while the youngest - Len, my father - went to the School of Mines Technical High School for two years,

then joined his older brother Gilbert as an apprentice fitter and turner at Gray Bros Engineering in Port Adelaide. In 1924 Len 'went bush' to help build Lock 10 on the Murray River at Wentworth, returning to Adelaide in 1927 to work at Holden's new assembly plant in Cheltenham. However, he must have lost that job with the onset of the Depression in 1929, since when he married my mother in 1932 (he was 30, she was 24) he is listed on the marriage certificate as a 'store-keeper' - in the grocery shop that my mother's family owned (see below).

**Thirdly**, our working class fathers married women who came from relatively 'comfortable' backgrounds. Don's mother Hilda (nee Pearce) came from a long-established farming family: her father had a property at Currency Creek 60km south of Adelaide but when the South Australian Government opened up land north of the Goyder Line in the 1870s, he established a sheep property in Gordon, a small township near Hawker. Hilda's brother Dave set up a sheep run in Willochra under the Soldier Settler Scheme after the Great War, selling it during the 1930s drought and moving to Melrose where he became quite prosperous thanks to the demand for wool during the Korean War. Hilda went to school until she was 14; she never worked in paid employment, but helped out at home until she married Charlie.

Similarly, my mother Dulcie (nee Cunningham) came from a relatively comfortable middle class background. Her grandfather Charles Courtenay Thomas was a Cornish miner who in the 1850s migrated to Burra, a small copper mining town in South Australia (a hotbed of Christian socialism at the time) later moving with his family to Port Adelaide to set up a grocery business in nearby Alberton, the 'store' referred to in my parents' marriage certificate. In 1905 his daughter Trissie (my grandmother) married Thomas Cunningham, a zealous scot who owned a fruit and vegetable business in Semaphore. Thus my mother came from a family that was well-resourced, with businesses and real estate in hand - a valuable reserve that helped to underpin my parents' grocery business in later decades (the manager of the family's bank branch was a member of the Port Adelaide church congregation, which made a permanent overdraft for the grocery business easier to negotiate!). And there were benefits in my family's close connection with the Port Adelaide Central Methodist Mission, the Director, Rev McCutcheon, providing personal support for my mother when she was left to run the grocery business during WW2 (she spent some time in the Church's 'rest home' in Mt Barker).

So given these similarities in our backgrounds, why did our careers (ie Don's and mine) differ so markedly – mine an escalator ride and Don's a game of Snakes and Ladders?

'Accidental' circumstances seem to have played an important part in both our lives. Thus, my teaching career coincided with expansions in both secondary and tertiary education. As for Don, Whitlam's brief reign led to the scrapping of university fees in 1973, which enabled him to qualify as a teacher - however his late entry into teaching (two decades after mine) coincided with a decline in school populations that may have compromised his career path.

With regard to other influential factors, I've tried to answer the question with reference to Bourdieu's categories of *economic, social & cultural capital* (roughly - what you own, who you know, what you know). In terms of *economic capital*, it is clear that my parents had the advantage of access to the financial and employment buffer that a family business and associated real estate offered, and also enabled them to send me and my siblings to a private school (our smart older sister earned a scholarship but the rest of us had to pay full fees!). In contrast, Don's parents had few such resources, after droughts forced them to walk off the Willochra farm in 1935 (although his Uncle Adam - his mother's brother - bequeathed the funds that enabled his parent's to retire in Adelaide).

As for *social and cultural capital*, our family's close relationship to a mainstream church and its membership was consistently useful in terms of networks, experience and support - there were glowing references for me and my siblings when needed: our applications for entrance scholarships for school and, later, for nursing (my sister), theological college (my brother) and teachers college (me). And we also 'inherited' his car, a magnificent 1938 Oldsmobile. In contrast, while during the long Cold War period Don and his family would have got personal support and an important sense of political identity from their links with the CPA (including legal advice from the celebrated Communist lawyer Elliott Johnston) but these same links also meant he faced constant personal harassment and frustration from individuals and social forces hostile to that Communism.

Another aspect of *cultural capital* might well deserve more attention than space permits - the striking difference between the 'class' dynamic of our parents' marriages. My father married into my mother's middle class family, which meant employment during the Depression years - but at the cost of his status as a skilled tradesman (except during his return to work in the Holdens workshops during WW2). In Don's case, conversely, it was his mother who married into his father's working class family, with no impact on Charlie's work status, and little impact on his patriarchal attitudes - he was quite authoritarian early in their marriage, and was also quite caustic about Don's 'bourgeois' interest in studying French and playing the piano.

Finally, I can't help noticing that my own career goals were simply the expected ones for the time (the easy option for youths from my social class was to enter the teaching profession) and my progress was quite unproblematic - but hence my mettle has never been tested. In contrast, Don's goals at all stages of his life were ones that he set for himself, and in dealing with the oppositional forces, he developed a fierce determination to achieve those goals, and an equally fierce commitment to social justice. Maybe there is something to be said for character-building effect of the refiner's fire!

## Ken Bridge

Photo by Allison Murchie

Ref: Pierre Bourdieu (1986) *The Forms of Capital*

<<https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/fr/bourdieu-forms-capital.htm>>

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**Questions from a worker who reads**  
**By Bertolt Brecht**



Who built Thebes of the seven gates?  
In the books you will find the name of kings.  
Did the kings haul up the lumps of rock?  
And Babylon, many times demolished.  
Who raised it up so many times? In what houses  
Of gold-glittering Lima did the builders live?  
Where, the evening that the Wall of China was finished  
Did the masons go? Great Rome  
Is full of triumphal arches. Who erected them? Over whom  
Did the Caesars triumph? Had Byzantium, much praised in song,  
Only palaces for its inhabitants? Even in fabled Atlantis  
The night the ocean engulfed it  
The drowning still bawled for their slaves.  
The young Alexander conquered India.  
Was he alone?  
Caesar beat the Gauls.  
Did he not have even a cook with him?  
Philip of Spain wept when his armada  
Went down. Was he the only one to weep?  
Frederick the Second won the Seven Years' War. Who  
Else won it?  
Every page a victory.  
Who cooked the feast for the victors?  
Every ten years a great man.  
Who paid the bill?  
So many reports.  
So many questions.

Photo: Wikimedia Commons. Thanks to Jude Elton for providing this wonderful poem.

# Remember when

From the collection of the State Library of South Australia, kindly provided with their permission.

From the glass slides collection of William Charles Brooker, taken in SA in 1920



## 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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#### 2018-2019

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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 South Australian 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.

General enquiries can be made to the President

