

# EDITORIAL

We begin this issue with a study of the intellectual influence on the Australian and New Zealand labour movement of Thomas Carlyle, already well known for his impact in Britain but unexplored regarding the local movement. Carlyle's life spanned the period of Australian colonisation and settlement and ended just before the first labour parties were founded. Alexander Jordan has explored the labour press to evaluate the intellectual culture of the Australasian movement and has found that Carlyle's influence was considerable. Like Carlyle, many of the labour activists here were Scots. They were inspired by his ideas, drew on his cultural authority, and used the rhetoric and language he employed – of ethics, the nobility of work, constructive political thought and social criticism. This is a fitting discussion to introduce our issue, which canvasses aspects of the labour movement in the twentieth century.

One of the biggest legacies of the nineteenth century was the divisive idea of race underpinning labour organisations. Two of our articles examine initiatives taken to overcome racism. First, Cybèle Locke gives us a New Zealand example of a particular union, the Northern Drivers Union, which implemented an anti-racism policy in conjunction with the anti-apartheid movement in which Australian and New Zealand unions were early participants. The article emphasises the timing of this policy from 1960 onwards, and the co-operation between Māori rank-and-file unionists and Pākehā officials to extend anti-racism, as it shifted attention from South Africa to focus on local experience. This study enriches our knowledge of New Zealand's history and is a welcome contribution to our understanding of how unions grappled with racial issues.

In the second article on the theme of race, David Lee examines the Australian constitutional framework for the Whitlam Labor government's passage of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*, which Lee identifies as this country's first significant human rights legislation. In its use of the external affairs power granted to the Commonwealth in the constitution, the Whitlam government was part of a decades-long tradition of Australian Labor Party (ALP) judges and politicians who saw the potential of this constitutional power for legislating international agreements. Lee argues that doing so profoundly affected Australian law and the rights of Aboriginal people – an historical watershed captured by the marvellous photograph on the cover of this issue.

The next article also focuses on a Labor government, this time the Rudd–Gillard government of 2007–12, but it does so for an entirely different kind of study. Joshua Black's interest is political memoir writing and, seeking to

explain why so many memoirs have been published in Australia since the mid-1990s, he uses those of Labor cabinet members in a collective case study. He finds that political memoirs serve a purpose beyond simple self-interest: they are written in response to, and enabled by, particular political and market environments, and have usually been undertaken to correct hostile narratives from political opponents and media. That, in itself, is revealing.

Shifting attention to a cultural forum, and transcending the local and the national, the next article analyses antisemitism and anti-fascist ideas as they were presented in plays performed in branches of the New Theatre. Positioning it as a transnational left-wing theatre movement in keeping with its origins in the Workers Theatre Movement of England in the 1920s, and the New Theatre of the United States, authors Max Kaiser and Lisa Milner use the vehicle of theatre performance to show how pro-working-class ideas were presented to their audience. New Theatre plays were written by local and international Jewish writers with strong connections to Jewish culture and theatre. With support from left-wing trade unions and Communist Party affiliations, the emphasis on class struggle was combined with an exploration of values and themes of Jewish politics. The article sits well with the earlier articles pursuing anti-racism initiatives within the labour movement and connects with the one that follows, which explores the radical arm of welfare.

Philip Mendes takes as his subject the Victorian Coalition Against Poverty and Unemployment (CAPU), in the decade of the 1980s. This was an activist group made up of the unemployed, members of trade unions, churches, and key community welfare groups. He makes clear that CAPU was highly critical of both the ALP, which was in government federally, and the professional social welfare sector on grounds that accorded with conventional Marxist critiques. Yet, he argues, CAPU should not be seen as anti-welfare. Instead as an organisation it acted as the radical arm of the welfare lobby, seeking to shame governments into operationalising in practice their declared social justice principles. This article adds to our limited knowledge of political activism by the unemployed, an all-too-often overlooked group in labour history.

The next article takes us back to New Zealand in a study of the layering of memory in shaping accounts and understandings of contemporary events. Using oral histories from a town that was originally dependent on a single industry, the authors – Fiona Hurd and Suzette Dyer – have identified the enduring effect of the town's founding principles of paternalism and welfare capitalism in the community's current stories of downsizing and redundancy. This is a method for bringing into view the lingering legacies in communities of past industrial histories as they meet with new ways of living, working and organising. It adds to our knowledge of labouring communities confronting change.

We finish the issue with an article that takes engineering as a case study to consider institutional changes across the twentieth century. Hannah Forsyth and Michael P. R. Pearson track the shift in occupation structure from the early twentieth century, when professions like engineering gave working-class tradespeople, such as motor mechanics, new opportunities to move into professional employment. These pathways narrowed in later decades as educational norms were standardised and professional knowledge became more complex. From the 1960s, the growth of middle-class unions along with the increased share of education undertaken by universities, made it more difficult for the working class to move from the trades to a profession. As these changes also enabled class solidarity among professionals to grow, and fostered strategies to win rights, gains were made at the expense of working-class interests. Engineering was no longer a vehicle for social mobility.

This is a salutary note on which to conclude. The future of work is a pressing question and tracing these historical changes provides an opportunity to reflect on why it matters. We have kept the number of articles in this issue fewer to give more space to the large number of book reviews we have, an indication of the thriving publishing industry of labour history.

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