

# Jeff Goldhar's socialist legacy

**Janey Stone**

**on behalf of Jeff Goldhar Project trustees:  
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When life-long socialist Jeff Goldhar died in 1997, he left a bequest. Set up at the end of 1998, the Jeff Goldhar Project is now celebrating 10 years of activities.

Jeff became politically active in the 1960s, attending demonstrations against the Vietnam War and as an active member of the Labour Club at Melbourne University. While in the UK in the early 1970s he joined the International Socialists (now Socialist Workers Party), and on his return to Melbourne, became a member of the fledgling Australian organisation, Socialist Workers Action Group.

Jeff was diagnosed with a terminal illness in the mid-1990s. He wanted to leave a bequest to 'allow us to bring our history and ideas to those receptive to them'.



'When I was told that there was nothing that could be done for me, that there were no proven remedies left in the medicine cabinet, the future—well, there was none—no dreams, no plans, just live for today—even hour by hour

'I would think about the past and how our history was disappearing. We have a proud history ... I'd like our history to be remembered. I'd like our ideas to be available.'

Jeff hoped that his bequest would contribute to this by producing an income to help with cost of research and publication: 'Well, it's a bit of a dream, but it could work.

Jeff's dream has been realised. In 10 years we have published seven books and three other publications, provided funding for four Australian and eight international speakers and an anti-militarism conference, and assisted with several activities promoting activism in Indonesia.

The first activity of the Project in 1998 was to publish *Rebel women*, which has sold steadily over 10 years and been reprinted twice. Focusing on women as militants, activists in their own right, the book covers a range of times and places, from Broken Hill, to women's struggles during the Depression, through World War I, equal pay in the 1970s to the famous 1986 Victorian nurses' strike.

This book was very much in the spirit of the purpose of Jeff's bequest. Labour history tends to emphasise official structures of the unions and the ALP. On the other hand, feminist histories tend to focus on the divisions between men and women. *Rebel women* provides an inspirational account of action from below.

'They called us brazen hussies ... it was unheard of ... the coalfields women didn't take long to cotton on ... basically they were fighters.'

The Project has also published books on the Builders Labourers Federation, Iraq, class struggle in colonial Australia and the Eureka rebellion.

Socialism is internationalist by nature, so international solidarity has been an important part of our work. At the time the Project began operating, an important struggle was nearing its peak, as the Indonesian people set about overthrowing the Suharto dictatorship. In the aftermath, many new people were drawn to left-wing ideas. The Project supported the translation of basic socialist materials into Indonesian, involvement in a left-wing conference near Jakarta, and some modest computer facilities to help left activists get their ideas out to a wider audience.

Given Australia's geographical isolation, visits by international speakers are also crucial. Speakers came from many countries, including Thailand, Korea, South Africa, the US, Italy and France. For me personally, hearing Hanan Aruri, a Palestinian woman activist in 2007, was a highlight.

Because many of the books have sold well, the Project has been able to continue for longer than originally anticipated. Several new publication projects are under consideration, including a history of gay liberation in Australia, World War II and the upturn of the 1960s. Jeff's dream of helping our history be remembered continues.