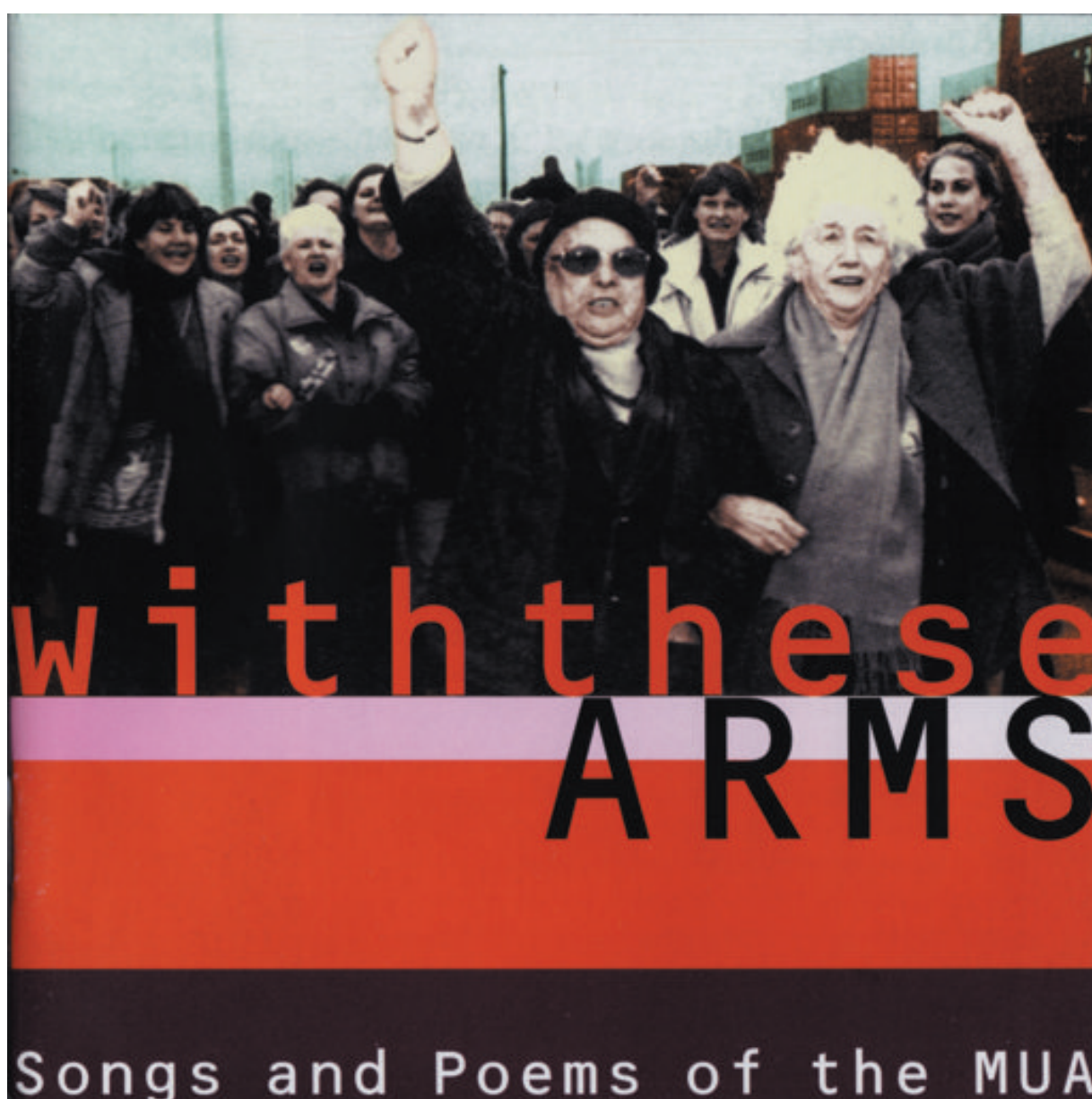


SIXTY YEARS OF AUSTRALIAN UNION SONGS

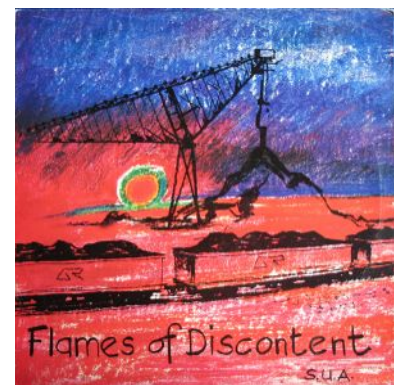
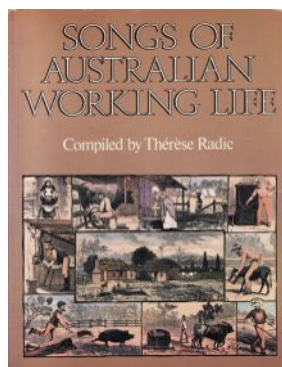
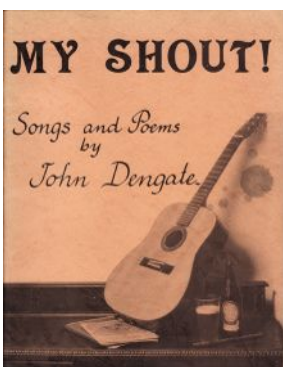
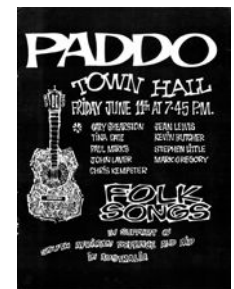
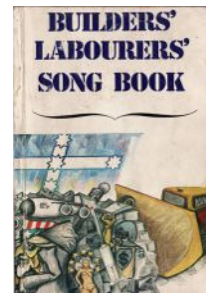
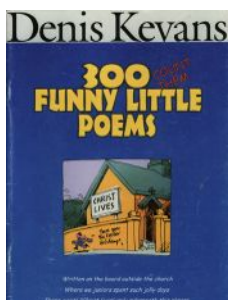
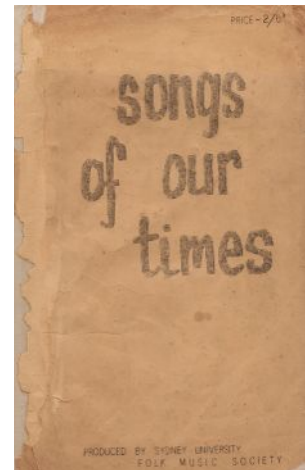
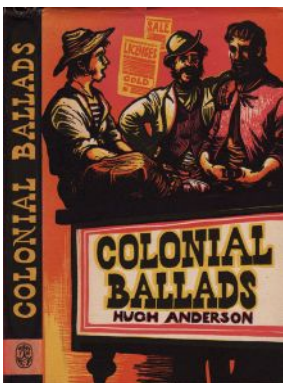
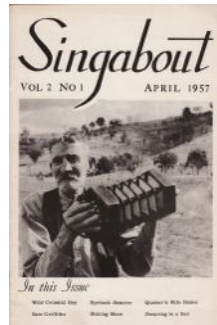
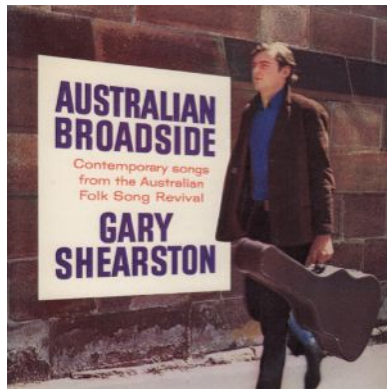
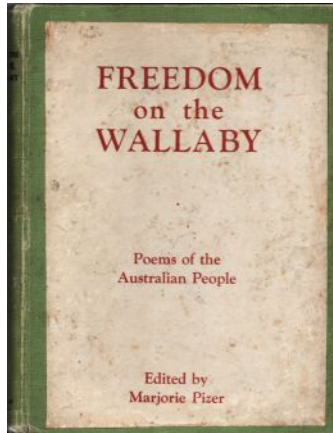
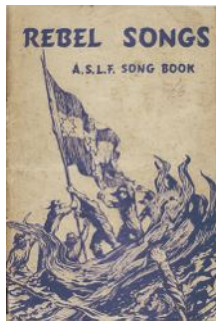
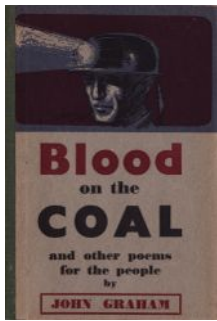
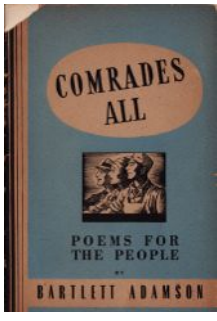
The Australian Folk Revival and
The Australian Labour Movement Since
The Second World War

Mark Gregory



CD design by Ruth Gregory 2003

Books, magazines, concerts and recordings



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CONTENTS

Summary	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Introduction	1
Chapter One The Australian Folk Revival and the Union Movement	5
Chapter Two Folk Song and Unions - Political Songs	23
Chapter Three Art and Working Life Program	37
Chapter Four MUA centenary CD and the Union Songs website	48
Chapter Five Rights at Work: Contemporary Song and Poetry	61
Chapter Six Conclusion	71
Bibliography	76
Discography	80
Websites cited	82

***Listen to MUA centenary CD tracks online at
<http://unionsong.com/wtatracks.html>***

SUMMARY

This thesis, *Sixty Years of Australian Union Songs*, comprises three parts: a CD - *With These Arms*, a website – *Union Songs*, and a critical review of union songs written in Australia over the past sixty years.

The thesis explores the relationship between the Australian folk revival and Australian Trade Unions. It provides a detailed study of events in the post war history of the union movement and the folk revival as evidence of a long relationship between them. Through a series of interviews with songwriters, and a discussion of folk revival magazines and folk song books, the thesis investigates the details of the connections between the two movements, and the social and political effects of these movements on changes that have occurred in Australia since the end of World War 2.

The thesis considers the political circumstances in which dissenting and partisan cultural work is often overlooked by cultural commentators and theorists. The thesis evaluates the short period of the Art and Working Life Program and its attempt to provide an alternative to the cultural policies of the dominant cultural traditions.

The creative components of this thesis, the CD *With These Arms* and the *Union Songs* website, together provide comprehensive examples of Australian union songs with extensive notes about the songwriters and the context in which the songs were written.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks go to my supervisors Dr. Denis Crowdy and Prof. Phil Hayward for the encouragement and advice that enabled me to present my research in this thesis. Thanks to fellow higher degree students of the Department of Music at Macquarie University who showed continued interest in my research and ideas over a period of four years.

Thanks to all the singers and songwriters who through email web and recorded interviews have answered so many of my questions and provided me with so much of my research material.

Thanks to the Maritime Union of Australia for encouraging me to produce their centenary CD *With These Arms*, and thanks to all the singers and copyright holders who gave so much to that project.

Thanks to all those in the folk movement who have encouraged me at workshops and festivals and helped me develop some of the themes of my work.

Thanks to a departed old mate, Chris Kempster, who encouraged my interest in folk and rebel music for over 40 years.

Thanks to my partner and fellow rebel, Maree Delofski, for her critical input and unshakable faith in my work.

INTRODUCTION: SIXTY YEARS OF AUSTRALIAN UNION SONGS

Unions have played a particular role in modern Australia. They have organised and campaigned on the basis that they have stake in the economy, the health and welfare system, the environment, education, safety at work, the peace movement, Aboriginal rights, the anti-apartheid movement, the equal pay and women's rights movement, and a number of other issues that have made them a special political force.

Over the last sixty years, Australian unions have also had a fruitful involvement with artistic creation in a wide range of cultural fields. In the decade following the Second World War these included; theatre (New Theatre), jazz (Eureka Hot Jazz Society, Graeme Bell Band), dance (Margaret Barr Dance-Drama Group), filmmaking (Waterside Workers' Film Unit), mural painting and banner design as well as poetry and song.

This thesis explores the relationship between the Australian labour movement and the Australian folk revival. I argue that this relationship accounts for the large number of Australian union songs written during the past sixty years. The early connection between radical unionism and the radical individuals who were at the forefront of the folk revival in Australia provides a useful starting point for a broader analysis of the way in which union songs have addressed the concerns of a significant community.

While the focus of this thesis is songs in the English language many dissenting and union songs belong to what folklorist Peter Parkhill refers to as "transplanted musical traditions"¹. Such songs came with, or have been written by, Australians whose original language is not English. A good example of a labour movement song written and sung in Greek can be heard on the pioneering LP produced by Peter Parkhill, *Cretan Traditional Music in Australia* (1984). The recording includes a ballad of twenty one couplets, *Today Black is the Sky*, written by Kon Tsoudalakis after the dismissal of the Whitlam government in 1975. In English translation it begins:

*Today, black is the sky, today black is the day
today a great event happened in Canberra.*

*It is Tuesday the eleventh of November
and the poet of the old Psiloritis writes again.*

*Those that he sees and listens to and those things which are taking place
right in this continent, in Australia, now.*

*Two wolves burst forth, two wolves enraged,
they ate the democracy elected by the people*

Therese Radic's *Songs of Australian Working Life* also surveys songs written in Spanish, Italian, Turkish and Macedonian (Radic, 1989:147 to 156) and Graeme Smith in *Singing Australian* wrote a section titled "Migrants and music". (Smith, 2005:144 to 147)

¹ In 2001 Parkhill produced the double CD *Transplanted Musical Traditions in Australia*

During the period under discussion unions played a leading role in some of the most critical events and changes in our post war history. These include Aboriginal rights and equality, opposition to Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War, equal pay for women, health and safety in the workplace, free training and education for all, a health insurance system embracing the whole population, protection of the natural and built environment, paid holidays and superannuation for all workers and opposition to Australia's involvement in the Iraq War. This list of causes has often put unions at the centre of programs for change and, usually, in opposition to conservative politics.

Another focus of the thesis is the way in which union songs are a largely hidden, yet highly resilient, part of Australian culture. For much of the period under investigation, unions have been under attack from conservative government, facing a variety of punitive laws that have culminated most recently in the Howard government's WorkChoices legislation that came into effect in 2006 with the urging and insistent lobbying of the most powerful groupings of corporations in our history.

The brief periods of Labor government provided some respite from conservative industrial relations legislation and also encouraged more focus on the culture and history of the Australian labour movement. Under Labor governments funding was provided for ambitious cultural initiatives such as the Art And Working Life Project through the Australia Council. The Art and Working Life Project began twenty years ago; in 2006 it is all but forgotten, underscoring a concern of this thesis about the way that cultural activity, including political songs and poems, associated with the labour movement has been buried or ignored.

During the past sixty years unions and their activities have attracted the attention of scores of songwriters and poets and have provided the subject matter for many hundreds of songs and poems. These cannot easily be understood without an understanding of the history of the Australian labour movement and the political context in which the songs and poems were written. As the folklorist John Greenway wrote in the introduction to *American folksongs of protest*: (Greenway 1960:10)

These are the struggle songs of the people. They are outbursts of bitterness, of hatred for the oppressor, of determination to endure hardships together and so fight for a better life. Whether they are ballads composed and sung by an individual, or rousing songs improvised on the picket line, they are imbued with the feeling of communality, or togetherness. They are songs of unity, and therefore most are songs of the union. To understand the area of protest out of which they grew, they should be read and sung with a history of organized labor open beside them, preferably a history which shows that American unionism was idealistic as well as practical that it was class conscious as well as job conscious, for economic protest is often synonymous with social protest ... unions have fought not only for better wages but also for an improvement in the social status of their members.

Historians Russel Ward and Ian Turner were early enthusiasts of the Australian folk revival. *The Australian Legend* (Ward, 1958) and *In Union Is Strength* (Turner, 1976) both offer valuable overviews of organised labour in Australia. Among the more specific histories are *Green Bans and Red Unions* by Meredith and Verity Burgmann (Burgmann and Burgmann, 1998), Greg

Mallory's *Uncharted Waters: social responsibility in Australian Trade Unions* (Mallory, 2005) and Wendy Lowenstein's *Weevils in the Flour* (Lowenstein, 1978). Books specific to the songs that are the subject of this thesis include the *Builders' Labourers' Song Book* (Unattributed, 1975) and Warren Fahey's *Ratbags and Rabblers* (Fahey, 2000). Gwenda Beed Davey and Graham Seal's broad overviews of the folk revival, *The Oxford Companion To Australian Folklore* (Beed Davey and Seal, 1993) and *A Guide To Australian Folklore* (Beed Davey and Seal, 2003) are also significant references. Ron Edwards' *The Big Book of Australian Folk Song* (Edwards, 1976) remains the largest and most comprehensive collection of Australian folk song.

An understanding of the development of the Australian folk revival is also important since most of the songs came from writers in that movement. The writers were workers in the broad sense that they worked for a living. They include teachers as well as wharfies, miners as well as librarians, all of them union members, some served an apprenticeship while others studied for higher degrees. The vernacular nature of the songs derives largely from an existing tradition of dissenting song and popular or bush poetry through the influence of the folk revival. Roy Palmer discusses a comparable situation in Britain in *The Sound of History*: (Palmer, 1988:29)

Many singer/ song-writers of recent years, consciously or otherwise, have chosen to follow the in the footsteps of Mather and Armstrong², though they have endeavoured, by using modern media, to reach a national audience. Like the ballad writers of the past, they cover 'the whole surface of man's life, political and social'. Unemployment, the environment, women's rights, Scots, Welsh and Irish nationalism, nuclear weapons, war and peace: most of the great issues of the day, as well as the ordinary details of everyday life, have been treated by contemporary song-writers ranging from the obscure to the famous ... These songs are unashamedly partisan. They reflect history, but seek to affect it; they chart human society, but also hope to change it for the better.

In *Music and Social Movements* (Eyerman and Jamison, 1998:164) the authors argue that partisan artists are in a position to both contribute to social change and to build tradition by connecting a collective heritage to the present:

It is through such individuals, in their role as and place as movement intellectuals, that culture and politics are creatively combined to produce social change. Social movements are the contexts, not merely the vehicles, of such change. It is within movement space that artists, singers, and songwriters uncover a new dimension to their work as they discover a new identity for themselves and for their art. In and through their role as activist-artist or activist-performer such individuals help constitute the cognitive praxis of social movements and at one and the same time revitalize and revise tradition, creating the possibility of transforming the wider, dominant culture.

My research into Australian union poetry and song for this thesis has resulted in a published CD, *With These Arms* and a website, *Union Songs*³. The CD is a

² Both authors were industrial workers writing songs during the 1800s

³ <http://unionsong.com/>, accessed 12 June 2006

collection of songs and poems associated historically with the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA). *With These Arms* was launched as part of the MUA centenary celebrations across the East coast cities of Australia.

With These Arms comprises twenty-two songs and poems that reflect the union's history. Some of this material had been previously published in magazines, union journals, and books. Some had been released as recordings. One poem dates back to 1930 and the two most recent songs were written in 2000 and 2002. Eleven of the songs and poems were written during the 1998 Patrick lockout⁴. They were performed on the picket lines and at support concerts and were part of the material I collected and published on the *Union Songs* website.

As Producer of *With These Arms* I researched and wrote the historical and performance notes and selected the final material. I also negotiated financial support from the MUA for the CD. The CD together with the Union Songs website constitutes the core of my thesis, and my research into the corpus of song and poetry associated with Australian unions provides a historical overview and contextual analysis. My research also includes a series of recorded interviews I conducted with singer/songwriters, whose work is represented on the CD, and who have contributed material to the Union Songs website.

Australian union songs written in the past half century have largely been composed by songwriters and poets associated with the Australian folk revival that began in the 1950s. The thesis will analyse the links between those involved in the early interest in Australian folk song and the radical unions and their activities.

Just over fifty years ago, in 1953, the folk revival was catalysed by a New Theatre performance of Dick Diamond's musical with a union theme: *Reedy River*. As a cultural event the play combined union history with old bush song and dance and with a new ballad written in the old style. The play symbolised an underground but popular aspect of unions and their culture.

The huge popularity of the production led to increased awareness of, and interest in, Australian folk song. In *Reedy River*, can be found the interconnectedness of the folk revival, theatre and union culture and militancy. It is from this key event that both the folk song revival and a renewed interest in the writing and performing of union songs can be traced.

⁴ Patrick, one half of the Australian ports duopoly, sacked its entire workforce at the start of the Easter holidays in 1998, with the support of the Howard government.

CHAPTER ONE THE AUSTRALIAN FOLK REVIVAL AND THE UNION MOVEMENT

This chapter focuses on the relationship between the folk revival and its links with the unions in the post war period. I review a series of publications, including the play *Reedy River*, that influenced the folk revival and stimulated more interest in union songs. Events that preceded the play and in many ways led to the play and the early relationships that were established between those interested in Australian folk song and political song and the radical unions are also explored. I examine the role of particular unions as well as the kinds of union activities that led to their becoming the subject matter of poems and songs. I review a selection of the poems and songs that were taken up by both the unions and the folk revivalists and the way the folk revival in Australia was influenced by international publications of protest and industrial song collections. I discuss the role of particular individual poets and songwriters and the influences on them of song and poetry from the US and Britain.

Many commentators on the folk revival in Australia consider the production of *Reedy River* as a significant event in its history, the most recent being Graeme Smith in *Singing Australian* (Smith, 2005:4). The play premiered at Melbourne's New Theatre in June 1953 and opened at New Theatre in Sydney in December 1953. The fiftieth anniversary souvenir New Theatre booklet describes its impact: (Milliss, 1982)

There is little doubt that Reedy River featuring the Bushwhackers Band and popularising songs like 'Click Go The Shears', 'My Old Black Billy', 'Eumerella Shore', 'Widgigoweera Joe' and many more gave the then infant Australian folk revival its most important impetus. An LP record of songs from the show sung by members of the Sydney production was issued by Diaphon and soon became a hit when played over a number of radio stations.

Prior to *Reedy River* a number of influential poems and songs about workers' struggles were published during the 1940s. In 1945 Bartlett Adamson, son of a miner, published a collection titled *Comrades All* (Adamson, 1945). In 1946 Adamson wrote *Strike For Indonesian Freedom* (Adamson, 1952:17) to celebrate a waterfront boycott that hampered Dutch troops from returning to Indonesia to claim back their old colony. The Dutch filmmaker Joris Ivens¹ made a documentary about this incident titled *Indonesia Calling*. The credits on the film reveal that the commentary was written by Catherine Duncan and spoken by Peter Finch and that the production company was the Waterside Workers' Federation. Significantly both Finch and Duncan were at that time members of New Theatre.

In 1946 the miner and poet, John (Jock) Graham, published a collection titled *Blood on the Coal*. The title poem was already well known among miners and was written as if to invite those who were always ready to condemn miners for their militancy to come down and see for themselves: (Graham, 1946:6)

*Come down and breathe the dank air, the foul air, the rank air,
Fill up your lungs with coal dust, disease dust, for proof;*

¹ <http://www.ivenens.nl/film46.htm>, accessed 06/06/2006

*Come down and see the slave man, the cave man, the brave man
Risk life to save his mate's life beneath a falling roof*

The collection shows that Graham also wrote songs such as *Marching to Freedom* to the tune *Waltzing Matilda* and *Australian Working-Class March* to the tune *Men of Harlech*. More of Graham's poems were given tunes when the folk revival got under way. His *Man of the Earth* had two tunes written for it: one when it was published in the first *Singabout* magazine² in 1956, and a more widely known tune written by folk singer Phyl Lobl which was recorded on *Man of the Earth* the first Larrikin LP in 1974.

Union poems and songs are often associated with a particular event and in that way they can become a lasting report or document, a way of preserving the event. May Day 1946 witnessed the beginning of the Aboriginal stockmen's strike in the Pilbara in Western Australia. This extraordinary event, commemorated in its sixtieth anniversary in WA this year, is considered to be one of the first strikes by Aboriginal workers in Australia. A young journalist, Dorothy Hewett, covered the strike, which was supported by many unions in WA and the rest of Australia, particularly the Fremantle Branch of the Seamen's Union. From her experience of the strike, Hewett wrote the poem *Clancy and Dooley and Don McLeod*³. This poem quickly spread around Australia through its printing and re-printing in union journals and Communist Party newspapers.

In his introduction to Dorothy Hewett and Merv Lilley's collection of poems *What About the People!* the writer Frank Hardy wrote of Hewett: (Hewett and Lilley, 1963:6)

I first heard of her when I read, in the immediate post-war years, a remarkable ballad "Clancy and Dooley and Don McLeod" which equalled anything Lawson and Paterson ever wrote and exceeded either of them in sheer poetic beauty.

Student songbooks provide evidence that students have had at various times an attachment to union and rebel songs. In 1947 two members of the Australian Student Labour Federation (ASLF), Edgar Waters in Sydney and Stephen Murray-Smith in Melbourne, edited a student songbook, *Rebel Songs* (Waters and Murray-Smith, 1947). The collection included union songs from Australia and around the world.

Waters and Murray-Smith were at that time members of the Australian Student Labour Federation. Both were later to play critical roles in Australian cultural and political spheres. Murray-Smith launched *Overland* a radical literary magazine (its subtitle: "Temper democratic, bias Australian") that continues to this day and Waters went on to become one of Australia's most respected folklorists.

The second edition (1953) of *Rebel Songs* contained 76 songs. Some of them, for example *Freedom on the Wallaby*, *Bump Me into Parliament*, John

² Singabout was published by the Sydney Bush Music Club from 1956 to 1967

³ Chris Kempster composed music for the poem in 2000

Manifold's *The Death of Ned Kelly* and Helen Palmer's *Ballad of Eureka* and *Ballad of 1891* were to become standards of both the folk revival and the labour movement. These were the songs sung by militant students, as well as members of the Eureka Youth League and Communist Party in the 1950s and 1960s.

Prior to the folk revival, published collections of Australian folksongs amounted really to several editions of just one book: Banjo Paterson's *Old Bush Songs* (Paterson, 1905), and it was not until 1950 that the first collection of Australian bush songs with musical notation was published. This appeared as a folio entitled *Old Australian Bush Ballads* with the aim: (Palmer, 1950:3)

to make a songbook that could be used in a popular way, thus preserving contact with the simple, democratic tradition of campfire and track that is one part of our inheritance

The authors of the collection was writer Vance Palmer working with the musician Margaret Sutherland. Palmer was a leading advocate of the cause of Australian literary nationalism. In his preface both his attitude to the songs and the nature of his literary nationalism are made explicit: (Palmer, 1950:3)

One noticeable thing about these ballads is the way they differ, in their point-of-view, from the formal published writing of the time. There is no self-conscious posturing for an audience overseas; no nostalgic hankering for a world left behind, but the voice of a people immersed in the work of the country and taking it for granted. They could bring in the names of local rivers or stations without apology. And they had no right-thinking public to consider when making their bushranging songs.

New songs and compilations

In 1951 when Doreen Jacobs set to music two new ballads, *The Ballad of Eureka* and *The Ballad of 1891*, an interesting experiment in songwriting in a traditional style occurred. The verses were written by Jacobs' friend Helen Palmer who was the daughter of Vance and Nettie Palmer and who had studied English ballads at university. Palmer later explained that she and Jacobs wrote the ballads as a test: "to see what could be done to fuse some of the elements of the ballad tradition with a contemporary musical context".⁴ The songs proved a success and Jacobs' Sydney choir *Unity Singers* added them to its repertoire. Jacobs had been a member of the *Workers Music Association* in Britain and made use of that experience in her work with *Unity Singers*. Among the choir's members at that time were Chris Kempster, John Meredith, Bill Berry, Alex Hood and Faith Bandler. Bandler went on to become a leading Aboriginal rights activist while all the others became key figures in the folk revival.

John Meredith, the most significant song collector of the revival, recalled the local activities in his Sydney suburb of Heathcote in an interview with folksinger Bobby Campbell⁵:

⁴ <http://members.optushome.com.au/spainter/Ballad.html>, accessed 06 June 2006

⁵ Campbell, B (1985) 'John Meredith speaks for himself', Stringybark & Greenhide

I was living in Heathcote and there was an organisation called the Defense of Australian Culture which was aimed at saving Australian culture from the inroads being made by imported American crap. They hit on the idea of having Australian social evenings where everything on the program was Australian. There would be poems read by Dorothy Hewett and somebody would sing some Australian songs, Faith Bandler would sing some Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island songs. Anyway we did one of these evenings down at Heathcote which was quite a success so we decided to do another one. For the second one I suggested to Brian Laughlin that we get together and do two or three Australian songs.

This provides another example of the kind of cross-fertilisation that existed between cultural/musical organizations on the left.

Another member of the British *Workers Music Association* was the English folklorist A.L.Lloyd. During World War 2 he had written a booklet *The Singing Englishman* published by the WMA (Lloyd, 1944). In this booklet, as Helen Palmer described it, "A.L.Lloyd had written of the militant popular origins of folksong"⁶. In 1952 Lloyd published a collection of mining songs *Come All Ye Bold Miners* (Lloyd, 1952). This work became a strong influence in British mining communities and particularly among young miners, many of them later becoming involved in the folk revival in Britain. It also had an influence in Australia, particularly through its exploration of industrial folksong, or the songs written and performed by industrial workers. Lloyd was becoming regarded as a very important folklorist internationally and was a driving force behind the post war British folk revival. In his youth he had worked as a station hand in NSW for about ten years in the 1920s and had learnt a number of bush songs at that time. For these reasons he was to have considerable influence on the Australian folk revival.⁷

Freedom on the Wallaby

Sydney poet Marjorie Pizer edited and published *Freedom on the Wallaby* in 1953, a collection of over 300 poems from the early convict days to the date of publication. My copy of this remarkable anthology has the library stamp, "Newcastle Trade Hall Council Workers Club", on the inside of its covers. Pizer described the purpose of the collection as: (Pizer, 1953:7)

not merely to display the poetry written in Australia, but to give adequate representation ... to the poetry of the Australian realist and democratic tradition, our 'basic literary tradition' and the principal and most distinctive influence in our literature. Written for the delight of the common reader, this is the poetry that is profoundly concerned with everyday life and problems of the common man.

She also wrote that the collection: (Pizer, 1953:12)

⁶ <http://members.optushome.com.au/spainter/Ballad.html>, accessed 06 June 2006

⁷ <http://folkstream.com/reviews/lloyd/>, accessed 08 June 2006

draws together the threads of popular history, the vicissitudes, the victories and the retreats, the struggle against the natural hurdles of drought, fire, flood and soil erosion and the man-made hazards of poverty, ignorance and exploitation.

Freedom on the Wallaby proved to be an important influence on the early poets and songwriters of the folk revival. Chris Kempster wrote a tune for *Nursery Rhyme*, a fierce anti-war poem from World War 1, written by Frank Wilmot (Furnley Maurice) with verses such as: (Pizer, 1953:128)

*One year, two year, three year, four,
Listen to the generals singing out for more!
Soon he'll be a soldier-boy, won't he be a toff.
Pretty little soldier, with his head blown off!*

Denis Kevans, the poet and influential folk revivalist who wrote hundreds of poems and songs over a period of 50 years, explained how difficult it could be for radical poetry to be heard or published in the Cold War atmosphere of the 1950s: (i/v with the author, 18 May 2004)

*Frank Hardy was one of the key people in this resistance, he was a little bit narrow on poetry as I review back, but in his struggle to preserve the great tradition of Australian left wing poetry ... Furnley Maurice and people like this who were anti-war, anti-imperialist and pro-people and pro-independence of Australia, no one's ever heard of them and yet he was an outstanding writer, Furnley Maurice. It was Marjory Pizer that put him in the book *Freedom on the Wallaby* and other writers ... I got a copy when I was about seventeen or eighteen.*

Folk Song Collection and Dissemination

Developments in recording technology in the immediate post war period influenced the work of folk song collectors. A number of collectors were encouraged by the possibilities offered by the new "luggable" tape recording machines and in NSW John Meredith bought a recorder to collect bush songs. To promote and disseminate the songs he recorded Meredith formed a small band called *The Bushwhackers*, the first Bush Band of the Australian folk revival.

Meredith has described his first tape recorder and some of the problems associated with it:⁸

Well in the 1950's whenever I wasn't collecting I was going bushwalking; before that I had been doing some running. I was very fit. Although the recorder weighed 40 pound, I had Paddy Palin make a pack for it. I could fling the recorder on my back ... Expense was another thing because money wasn't quite so available in those days. The cost of living was very much closer to the actual wages received. You had very little left over at the end of the week. When I first discovered tape recorders I had to go and pawn my camera to raise the deposit. it then took me two years to pay it off. This meant I was

⁸ Campbell, B (1985) 'John Meredith speaks for himself', *Stringybark & Greenhide*

putting away about a quarter of my wages to pay for the recorder. I could only afford a ticket to Mudgee or Lithgow about once a month. Then I also had to save up and buy a roll of tape. I think it was about six pounds for a roll of tape in those days. I would only have one hour of tape to do me for a weekend trip. I would only get the tunes on the tape, no biographical notes etc. I could not afford to waste a minute of tape.

Reedy River

The connection between the radical politics, union songs, and the development of the folk revival can also be seen in the career of Chris Kempster. In 1949 Kempster, a sixteen-year old apprentice electrician and member of the Eureka Youth League, wrote a tune for Henry Lawson's poem *Reedy River*. The song was immediately taken up by members of the League and found its way to Youth Festivals in Eastern Europe. Kempster's friend Bill Berry remembers hearing the song for the first time: (i/v with the author, 25 January 2004)

I was going up to the second floor in 40 Market Street⁹ and there was a landing on the first floor and run into Chris Kempster and he said "I've just written this tune to a Henry Lawson poem Reedy River," and he says that "I'm worried whether it came out of my head or whether it was something I heard before", the tune, and he knew I listened to a lot of music and so he sang it to me and I said "well I never heard a tune like that before", and I haven't heard one since either.

By 1953, as I have noted, the play *Reedy River* became a box office hit in Australia with the general public, and also became a source of inspiration to the early folk revival.

Palmer's *Ballad of 1891* and Kempster's *Reedy River*, along with a number of bush songs formed the basis of New Theatre's *Reedy River*, which was set in the 1890s shearers' strike. The play struck a chord with an audience dealing with the reality of the Menzies government attempts to curtail union rights and outlaw the Communist Party. The play opened first in Melbourne in June 1953, then in Sydney, Brisbane and other cities that had a branch of New Theatre. It was one of the first Australian plays to open in London, courtesy of New Theatre's sister theatre there, Unity Theatre. Significantly, the Sydney production of the play involved Meredith's *Bushwhackers*. Not only did the bush band play and sing, but members of the band were also cast as characters in the play. Kempster, a founder member of the *Bushwhackers*, told me: (i/v with the author, 9 September 2001)

When Reedy River practices were starting, rehearsals were starting, we were invited to come in and play some songs and through Johnny Meredith, mainly I think, we were actually invited to take part in the play if we wanted, so we did. I heard the readings of the play and was so fascinated that I wanted to be in it myself, and I think largely because I'd written the tune for Reedy River they said "Oh let the poor bugger in".

⁹ Communist Party and Eureka Youth League headquarters in Sydney

Colonial Ballads

Melbourne historian and folklorist Hugh Anderson, along with artist and art teacher Ron Edwards, published *Colonial Ballads*, the first large collection (72 songs) of bush songs with music (Anderson, 1955). The inclusion of musical notation made the book particularly important for the folk revival. The 1962 edition which added a few more songs (a total of 85 songs), referenced a dozen articles about Australian folk song written in journals like the *Bulletin*, *Meanjin*, *Overland*, *Quadrant* and the *Australasian Post*. It also included Anderson's review of writings about Australian folk song, an early attempt to consider what had been achieved in terms of publication of songs and what needed to be achieved in terms of analysis. Anderson has continued writing and publishing for over 50 years. He has produced a formidable number of titles including the most comprehensive book dealing with broadside ballads and convict transportation, *Farewell to Judges and Juries* (Anderson, 2000). Among the most important of his books are his edited transcriptions of interviews he recorded with the Victorian ballad singer Simon McDonald in *Time Out Of Mind* (Anderson, 1974) and his collaboration with John Meredith on what was to be volume one of Meredith's field collection *Folk Songs of Australia*. (Meredith and Anderson, 1967).

Australian folk song recordings

The growing popularity of folk song in Australia in the mid 1950s is evidenced by the fact that a 78rpm recording of *The Bushwhackers* performing *The Drover's Dream* sold 20,000 copies. The record was published by Wattle Films and Records, a company which was founded in 1954 by Peter Hamilton. Hamilton invited Edgar Waters, who was then in London, to join Wattle and Waters was mainly responsible for the early recordings. Wattle produced a number of important LPs of Australian folksong including field recordings such as *Australian Traditional Singers and Musicians in Victoria* and the first Australian record of protest and industrial song (albeit from the USA), *American Songs of Protest and Workin' on a Building*, both featuring the American folklorist John Greenway, who was on a study visit to Australia. Wattle also published two LPs of Australian bush songs sung by A.L.Lloyd, *Banks of the Condamine* in 1957 and *Across the Western Plains* in 1958. Wattle produced the first commercial recordings of Aboriginal music, didgeridoo and music from New Guinea. One of the last records from the label was *The Land Where The Crow Flies Backwards* a 33 rpm EP of the songs of the Aboriginal singer and songwriter Dougie Young (using field recordings of anthropologist Jeremy Beckett) in 1965. The Wattle catalogue shows the diverse musical interests of early members the folk revival.

The historian Russel Ward showed great interest in the folk revival from the start. In 1958 he published *The Australian Legend*, a history with many references to bush songs. In the foreword Ward makes clear his indebtedness to the old ballads: (Ward, 1958)

The book sprang initially from an interest in Australian folk ballads, the old 'anonymous' bush songs of the last century, but it grew naturally into a study of the life, outlook and influence of those who sang them. A few ballads and popular songs have been used as background material to help illustrate the

pastoral workers' ethos.

I have been helped by hundreds of men and women living all over Australia, and would like to acknowledge especially the aid of three old folk-singers, Mrs Mary Byrnes, Mr Joseph Cashmere and the late Mr John Henry Lee.

The Australian Legend, in its exploration of the origins and nature of the Australian character, places Australian itinerant workers at centre stage. Ward uses songs and stories to build his arguments about the 'home grown' nature of the Australian psyche and its importance for the historian.

The examples I have referred to above point to a confluence of interests central to my theme: radical politics, nationalism, unions, theatre, folk revival, history, filmmaking, poetry and a radical international outlook, all come together to provide the fertile cultural space in which hundreds of union songs would be written over the next half-century.

Collecting and discovering Australian songs

In NSW John Meredith collected over 1000 items that are conserved in the National Library as The Meredith Collection. Other collectors include Hugh Anderson, Edgar Waters, Norm O'Connor, Pat O'Connor, Wendy Lowenstein, Ron Edwards, Alan Scott, Bill Scott, John Manifold, Maryjean Officer, Stan Arthur and Bob Michel. Many of the collectors were members of the Communist Party of Australia, were active unionists, were involved the arts, were poets, writers, critics, actors, musicians. The field recordings they made, the songs they collected, and the rediscovery and collation of previously printed songs in the 1950s, dramatically broadened the national cultural landscape and the possible interpretations of it. Before *Reedy River* there were those who argued that Australian folk song was simply imported or derivative if it existed at all. As Graeme Smith reports in *Singing Australian* the success of play: "demolished the myth that Australia had no folk songs". (Smith, 2005:4)

The collectors' immediate concerns were to save what there was of the old. However it soon became clear that not only had the tradition not died out, but that newly written material offered proof that to some degree it was continuing. The impetus to write new songs based on the old tradition (now much better represented and understood) became irresistible. An example of this can be seen though the experience of the writer Merv Lilley. Lilley began to write poems while he was a seaman working on coastal ships. Discussing how he came to writing he reflected: (i/v with the author, 20 October 2003)

Well it took a long time. I always thought that poetry was something so special that it wasn't something I could write at all. And then one time in the Seamen's Journal a letter appeared from a man called John Meredith asking for anything that seamen had written that might be songs or poems. And I was a bit tickled by this. I thought this bloke must be professor or something, you know. I wrote a few things and they were quite facetious and funny, but I'd been cane cutting, I sent that in.

Then I joined a ship again and when I got to Sydney at Pyrmont, the Bush Music Club was there to meet me and took me up town for a beer. They also introduced me to the man who did illustrations for them. Then I began writing

stuff about ships and they were really chuffed about all this, and they'd go around singing things like "Give A Fair Go To The Young Bucko" and so on. I got a shake down at Meredith's place, and so I was with the Bush Music Club, there was John Meredith, there was Alan Scott, there was his wife also, there was Jack Barry and a few others.

Meredith's use of union journals to make contact with workers who wrote poems songs and stories illustrates the close connections at the time between the folk revival and the radical unions. He was instrumental in setting up the Sydney *Bush Music Club*, one of a number of folk organisations to be formed following the success of *Reedy River*. Meredith described the formation of the *Bushwhackers* and how that led to the *Bush Music Club*¹⁰:

We had these three instruments for what was our second performance; the accordion, the bush bass and the lagerphone. We strained our brains for weeks trying to think of a suitable name and we were going through Sidney Baker's book and came up with the Bushwhackers, spelt with a 'wh', the Aussie way, which means somebody who knocks about the bush. The American word 'Bushwacker' is a thug or a holdup man.

So we went along and played as the 'Bushwhackers' to thunderous applause and cries of "more" and so on ... There was somebody there that night from the Communist Party who was organising the Tribune Concert which was held every year in the Riverlea Theatre in Hurstville. They invited us to come along and perform, so we brushed up our three numbers. Harry Kay junior had joined us by this time playing the mouth organ; we met him through New Theatre ... Anyway we did the three numbers, the audience stood up and clapped and shouted "more" but we didn't know any more. We had to go back and do Botany Bay over again ... After that concert we got requests from everywhere to perform. We'd have been out seven nights a week if we'd accepted all engagements. The first dance we ever played at was for the Sergeants' mess at Ingleburn Army Camp.

Then Dixon from the Communist Party Arts Committee suggested we form some sort of a club where could teach people these songs and dances. We thought this was a great idea and Brian and I thought of all sorts of names until we finally came up with the Bush Music Club. It was October 1954 when we held the first meeting; I've still got a copy of the dodger advertising the inaugural meeting.

Reedy River, this new Australian political play, became a great success despite being deliberately ignored by press. The Cold War censorship encouraged by the Menzies government and a complicit media ensured that there was no Sydney Morning Herald, or Age mention of it let alone a review. As Kempster explained: (i/v with the author, 9 September 2001)

Reedy River was so successful though, that it was a big break. They got bigger audiences and we heard at the time that they broke the amateur record for the longest playing amateur show and there was at least one review in one of the daily papers but it was a very short review only a few lines and gave guarded praise and we were a bit disappointed. But it was pointed out to us we were bloody lucky to get even a mention. But that as far as I know was the only time it was mentioned despite the fact that it was probably one of the most

¹⁰ Campbell, B (1985) 'John Meredith speaks for himself', *Stringybark & Greenhide*

successful productions of its time and as such should have been praised and taken up by the press. So there was that massive blackout and despite its success it got very scant mention in the press.

In effect, it was an underground phenomenon that introduced hundreds of thousands of Australians to their hidden culture and history. Members of the audiences came back again and again and started to sing along with the songs they had learnt from the performances. In Sydney it broke all records for amateur theatre, in continuous production for close to a year, with astonishing audience numbers, particularly given the population at the time, as this extract from the fiftieth anniversary souvenir New Theatre booklet shows: (Milliss, 1982)

New Theatre groups in Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and later Newcastle, all mounted their own Reedy River productions which like Sydney and Melbourne, they performed not only in their normal venues but in numerous city, suburban and country halls. It is estimated that some 450,000 people saw these New Theatre performances of Reedy River and that 350,000 of these saw Sydney New Theatre productions. Publication of the play by Heinemann's has introduced it into schools where it is often put on by pupils.

As Kempster also recalled, the play increased demand for the *Bushwhackers* as performers elsewhere:¹¹

We toured to far off places, there was a reception or two and there were Sunday afternoon parties that we'd travel to all herded into an open backed truck. It became a sub-culture for us and the original Reedy River Songbook featured our photographs.

Songs and History

The 1950s was a time when Australian history was being re-evaluated and working people were being included into a picture that had previously been reserved for governors and explorers.

Marjorie Pizer wrote: (Pizer, 1952:12)

In preparing Freedom on the Wallaby we have sought our poetry not only in published volumes, but in all the many magazines, newspapers and journals, literary, religious and political, which we had reason to believe might be of value to us, and in manuscripts, old and new, from every part of the country.

Working people and their role in history - their culture and their organisations, the history and culture of the labour movement and unions, began to be regarded as worthy of study. Those interested in songs and history found an audience for songs written about past events alongside of the songs written by the participants in those events. The folk revival not only rediscovered and recovered the songs of the past but encouraged new writing about the old days as well, particularly about earlier struggles. Four years after Palmer's *Ballad of Eureka* was written the song was sung by the actor Leonard Teale as part of the centenary celebration of Eureka in Sydney. By the one hundred and fiftieth celebration of Eureka in 2004 over twenty more songs about

¹¹ <http://folkstream.com/reviews/revival/bushwhackers.html>, accessed 06 June 2006

Eureka had been written.¹² For the 2004 anniversary Anderson compiled *The Mounted Butchers: Some Songs & Poems of Eureka*, material that had been written between 1854 and 1856, and had remained hidden for 150 years. (Anderson, 2004)

Need for new songs

The folk revival and radical labour movement in Australia were both ready for new songs at the same time. Radical unions in particular had a history of publishing their members' poems, songs and stories in union journals as the Australian jazz pioneer Harry Stein, who was for a time assistant editor of *The Maritime Worker*, describes: (Stein, 1994:112)

There was no shortage of material for the paper. It came from all over Australia. The waterfront was full of colourful characters - talented writers, poets, artists, film-makers, champion athletes, boxers, weight-lifters and wrestlers. When wharfies knocked off work they would go to nearby pubs to talk about politics and sport and, above all, what was happening on the waterfront. Vic Williams, the West Australian wharfie and poet, captured the scene in the poem he sent us, 'Along the Waterfront'.

*I walked along the waterfront when I was 17,
And every ship was telling me
Of all I had not seen.
I've hunted through the red gums,
I've washed the dust for gold;
It's the fading wake of liners
That would not lose their hold.
The plains are laced with sheep pads,
The mountain tracks are steep,
It's our singing ringing waterfront
That will not let me sleep.*

Although poems like this were published in the journals of radical unions, the political atmosphere at the time was becoming ominous for the left, as Denis Kevans explained: (i/v with the author, 18 May 2004)

There was a decision about 1950 to counter popular poetry, to counter all the things of the left, their organisations, apart from extirpating the Communist Party itself with the 'Red Bill' and all the actions of the state which were used to extirpate, annihilate and destroy the organisation of the left, the Communist Party plus all the other organisations. But also their expression, not only to make it very difficult for that poetry to live, but also to say it was no bloody good, and the particular case was the anti-Henry Lawson campaign that they started. Lawson was no good, his poetry was reactionary, and he never wrote a song in his life. They said things like that, I heard them. Frank (Hardy) was part of the whole process of trying to keep left culture alive. His base was Melbourne at first, and one of his best mates was George Seelaf of the Meat Workers' union and George helped to finance popular poetry and competitions and to print them in his journal and to pay left wing writers.

Participants in the folk revival were becoming interested in songs that had a more directly urban content than the old bush songs. There were also a number of writers inclined and ready to fulfill that need. Describing their joint

¹² <http://eurekasdney.com/songs.html>, accessed 08 June 2006

collection of poems, *What About The People!*, Hewett and Lilley wrote: (Hewett and Lilley, 1963:8)

A poem is a SONG that comes from the people to be given back to the people. Work ... joy ... pain ... struggle ... achievement ... from these come the poems that are SONGS.

From these came the bush ballads of the 1890s, read in shearing shed, gold-mine and droving camp, by firelight and bush lantern. This is the origin of these poems ... with a difference!

We live in an industrialised country. The old slow rollicking rhythm of horse and itinerant worker has given way to the harsh, staccato, jazzy beat of jackhammer, train, plane, dock and mechanised mine ... a great mass of mechanised, organised labour. It is a harder, tougher rhythm, a tougher vocabulary for a working man who has grown up politically and industrially.

The fact that Australia had one of the world's most urban populations ensured that songs reflecting this would become a concern of the songwriters and performers of the folk revival. Like many others, Hewett and Lilley were influenced by the "jazzy beat" coming out of the United States. This was not official America with its McCarthyism, but another America: the New Deal voices of Leadbelly, Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger. American singers like these had defiantly resisted being silenced during the "witch hunts" in the United States and soon became heroes elsewhere. By 1960, seventeen years after its confiscation by the US government, Paul Robeson received his passport back and could travel. He came to Australia as part of his last world tour. He sang, by invitation of the building unions, to a lunchtime meeting of workers involved in the pioneering and technically exciting task of building the Opera House in Sydney.¹³

Industrial folklore

Folklorists involved in folk revivals in America and Britain discovered that industries like mining and textiles were sites of folklore and folk song. Earlier collectors had considered folk song a dying remnant of a disappearing past; indeed a major motivation for their work was to save what they could. They naturally concentrated on areas where the ways of work had changed the least. That is where they found the old ballads they treasured. Later collectors began to broaden their interest in song to include the industrial working class, its organisations, politics and culture.

The American folk song collector Alan Lomax together with singer/songwriters Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie teamed up in the 1940s to compile an ambitious collection of union and protest songs called *Hard Hitting Songs for Hard-Hit People*. This was a collection that no publisher would touch till 1967,

¹³ <http://folkstream.com/muse/robeson/>, accessed 08 June 2006

after the cold war thaw had begun. Lomax described how his contribution to the book originated: (Lomax, Guthrie and Seeger, 1967:336)

In the Washington of the New Deal there were many people, including the Roosevelts themselves, who wanted to know how the underprivileged people, how the people on the picket lines of America, felt about their times. In a sense we treasured these songs, because to us they were symbols of the fighting, democratic spirit of a whole sector of the population that is too often viewed as faceless, voiceless, supine and afraid. Aunt Molly Jackson, Ella Mae Wiggins, Woody Guthrie, John Handcox and the people they inspired were none of these things. They were courageous and genuine folk poets, who were as deeply involved in political and social change as any politician, union organizer or social critic.

When, in the Spring of 1937, I ransacked the files of Columbia, Victor and Decca record companies for anything that had a folk flavor, I found not only the early Blue Grass, not only urban blues tradition, I found scores of songs of protest and social comment by urban and country folk singers. Some of these recorded topical songs praised the new deal, some damned it; some recited the woes of the poor, some bitterly protested, - but, considered as a whole, they proved again that American topical folk song tradition was alive and productive.

In Britain, in his preface to his collection of industrial folk ballads, *Shuttle and Cage*, Ewan MacColl made the connection between industrial songs and traditional folk music: (MacColl, 1954)

The folklore of the industrial worker is still a largely unexplored field and this collection represents no more than a mere scratching at the surface. A comprehensive survey of our industrial folk-song requires the full collaboration of the Trade Union movement. Such a survey would, undoubtedly, enrich our traditional music.

In his notes to the 1963 LP *The Iron Muse: A Panorama of Industrial Folk Song*, A.L.Lloyd hinted at the possibility of songs being written that would add to the newly discovered tradition of industrial song:

It is true that most of these songs have only a limited circulation; it is also true that the circulation is widening. As yet the industrial community is only dimly aware of its own self-made cultural heritage; but that awareness is growing. This record, in a brief survey, presents but a few of the songs that working men and women have made out of their own lives. If it helps to make the songs wider known, good. If it inspires the making of new industrial songs, better still. The tradition is a fine one and worth perpetuating.

A few years later Lloyd in *Folk Song in England* (Lloyd, 1967) included a chapter on industrial song, where he expanded his views about the variety of workers songs and how they connect to earlier folk song traditions.

A recent study of the writing and performance of songs by US textile workers during their strike in 1934, reflects on their songs and their use of the then novel medium of radio to broadcast them: (Roscigno and Danahar, 2004:134)

In the case of southern textile workers, the new medium of radio reinforced a common culture, a critical interpretation of the world in which workers lived, and a forging of community ... What was broadcast, whether intended or not,

altered mill workers' perceptions of political opportunity and legitimated to the broader public their own culture, including, for a time, even oppositional elements of that culture. Indirectly, radio in the South also created new occupational space for, and a network of, traveling musicians. Many of these musicians were ex-mill hands, who spread information and similarity of experience in towns throughout the region.

The radio as a cultural and political conduit became especially potent in the years just before, and then during, the 1934 strike. Radio at the time was characterized by little political oversight and control, heterogeneous ownership patterns, a desire of programmers to appeal to their local audiences, and the realization by early political and cultural celebrities that this new medium could effectively touch forgotten populations. This autonomy, however, would not last much beyond the 1934 strikes. Corporate control and political oversight became more prevalent when teeth were given to the Communications Act of 1934. This legislation eventually led to the near saturation of local radio broadcasts by national network programming.

This analysis shows the critical importance of media diversity and local autonomy for the dissemination of workers' songs, or other dissenting views, something that contemporary singer/songwriters find themselves constantly dealing with.

Australian songwriters and industrial song

An early example of the new Australian songs with an industrial theme, written in a folk style was Don Henderson's *Put A Light In Every Country Window*. Written in 1960 it quickly entered the repertoire of the revival folksingers. Henderson wrote the song during his experience of working on the Snowy Scheme. The song places those who do the work at its centre, indeed, right in the first line:

*Miners tunnel to feed the fires at Wangi.
Others excavate the brown coal at Yallourn.
Turbine blades are yielding to the tumbling tons of Eildon
And the Snowy will be finished before long.*

Henderson, an admirer of Tex Morton and A.L.Lloyd, in a 1986 interview with Edgar Waters described writing the song after listening to a record of Woody Guthrie: (Henderson, 1994:4)

*This was what I had been looking for, a way of singing the sort of Australian music to a guitar backing that I like. Combining Morton, Guthrie and Lloyd, I'd be able to do it ... The first song I'd apply this new found Guthrie imagery to was one I had written while on the Snowy, called *Rural Electricity*, re-titled *Put A Light In Every Country Window* ... It was the song that first won me recognition as a writer.*

Union song recordings

Australian folk and union recordings of the 1960s indicate the interest in contemporary songs, new songs that were becoming an important part of the folk revival. In chronological order these were Daw Hood and (Marion) Henderson's *Oh Pay Me*, 1963 and *Basic Wage Dream*, 1964; *Ballad of Women*, 1964; Gary Shearston's *Songs of Our Time*, 1964 and *Australian*

Broadside, 1965; Don Henderson's *One Out*, 1965. Daw, Hood and Henderson was an early Sydney folk group consisting of jazz guitarist Chris Daw, folk revival pioneer Alex Hood and jazz and folk singer Marion Henderson. Shearston's *Australian Broadside* included six topical songs written by people who had been members of the Sydney Realist Writers, Mona Brand¹⁴, Denis Kevans, Dorothy Hewett, Kath Walker¹⁵.

Brisbane Realist Writers included John Manifold, Dorothy Hewett, Merv Lilley Don Henderson, Geoff Wills and Nancy Wills.

The Brisbane record company Union Songs published *The Ballad of Women* and Henderson's *One Out*. It was established by unionists headed by seaman Geoff Wills and a group called *Union Singers*. *Ballad of Women* was Union Songs first record, the costs raised by raffling a guitar built by Don Henderson. In 1965 the Trades Hall in Brisbane sent Wills and Henderson to Mount Isa during the historic miners' strike there, to sing and to write songs about the struggle. The record notes on the sleeve of the resulting Union Singers' recording *One Out* (1968) read:

These are the songs of industry. The songs of Australia in a day since that of the bullocky, bushranger and back block selector.

Don Henderson, who wrote the songs, is a guitar maker. He has been at other times a carpenter, a turner and fitter, a taxi driver, a farm labourer, a boat builder, a fruit picker and a lot of other things, but always he has been a songwriter.

Union Singers are a Brisbane group singing almost exclusively peace and industrial songs. To list their membership would be a very hard thing to do as it is rarely the same for more than one performance. When among a group's number are listed factory workers, seamen, farmers, building workers, fishermen, housewives, marine engineers – it is almost inconceivable that they could ever all be in the one spot at the one time. They can't be: one has to work and another takes their place. Union Singers go on.

The two union campaign records I have referred to, *Oh Pay Me* and *Basic Wage Dream*, were published by Blue and White Collar Records a label established by ACSPA (Australian Council of Salaried and Professional Associations). This is another early example that the folk revival and the union movement were working closely together.

ACSPA also sponsored the *Four Capitals Folk Song* tour of singers including Marion Henderson, Gary Shearston, led by veteran bushman, bush singer and unionist Duke Tritton. This concert tour was part of a Youth and Unions campaign. In the souvenir program the General Secretary of ACSPA, Rees Williams, wrote: "Today, the artist needs more and better patrons and people and their trade unions need more and better artists".

¹⁴ Mona Brand was New Theatre's most prolific playwright.

¹⁵ Aboriginal poet and activist who today is better known as Oodgeroo Noonuccal. See http://www.oodgeroo.qut.edu.au/oodgeroo_noonuccal/, accessed 09 June 2006

In an interview with Patricia Early for a Sydney radio program *Focus on Folk* broadcast on 13 November 2004 on 2MBS FM 102.5, Gary Shearston reminisced about the *Four Capitals Folk Song* tour and the ACSPA union leader who organised it:

... another great mentor was a man called John Baker, John was a unionist, he'd been the Postal Clerks and Telegraphists honorary secretary for umpteen years and then became full time secretary of that union. That sort of brought white collar workers into the Australian union system. The Clerks and Telegraphists started way back in 1875 I think. John started out as a telegraphist working on the line out of Adelaide, and he was the man who was instrumental and firm on the tiller of getting what was called the Four Capitals Tour together, and that was a great extravaganza, nothing like that had ever been done before. We went to all the major town halls of Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Newcastle, Adelaide.

Songs and Politics

As I have discussed, radical Australian unions had a history of encouraging their members to write songs, poems and short stories for publication in their journals. Lithgow miner and poet Jock Graham who wrote for the miners' weekly newspaper *Common Cause*¹⁶ through the 1930s is a good example. One of Graham's contemporaries was the wharfie poet Ernest Antony whose poem *The Hungry Mile* was published in the *Maritime Worker* and other Waterside Workers' Federation publications. Antony, who has almost been forgotten, published a collection of his poems in 1930 (Antony, 1930).

Several unions have a history of song competitions also, and the folk revival had the effect of encouraging these in the 1960s.

In his book *Who Wrote The Ballads*, John Manifold wrote of the 1964 Waterside Workers' Federation song competition: (Manifold, 1964:168)

By the time this book is in print we shall have heard who has won the "Folk Song Memorial Prize" offered by the Sydney branch of the Waterside Workers' Federation. The title of the award is misleading, since in fact the WWF is asking individual song-writers to compose songs on a given subject: "to reflect some phase or phases of Australian waterfront or shipping-port traditions or history", and with the further stipulation that "the music or tunes can be wholly or partly traditional, but special value will be placed on a new tune in the folksong tradition".

The nomenclature of the competition is all wrong, but the real aims are praiseworthy ... the WWF, in my opinion, is one of the unions with enough esprit de corps to need its own songs ... but is there any guarantee that the rank-and-file of the W.W.F. will endorse the panel's decision? Will anyone give me odds for or against the winning songs reaching the status of folksong among the wharfies themselves?

¹⁶ Common Cause is one of the oldest union journals in Australia, it was first published as a weekly in 1920 and is now published as a magazine every two months.

John Manifold, communist, poet, scholar, soldier, folk song collector and a member of the *Realist Writers* had been a member of the *Workers Music Association* while working in Britain. Though the winning songs of the competition he referred to might not have reached the status of folk song amongst wharfies, two of them were included among the songs selected for the centenary CD *With These Arms* in 2003. In my experience the MUA members have embraced this small collection as their own. Songs from the CD have been repurposed for the union's DVDs and one state branch has the songs as the music that plays on the phone while callers are waiting to be connected.

By the mid 1960s the Australian folk revival was entering its second decade and a number of its participants were beginning to review its course. In the single issue Sydney folk magazine *folk view* Edgar Waters wrote:¹⁷

Two decades after the end of the second world war, the folk revival movement has apparently become respectable ... It retains a left wing, or at least, a rebellious, tendency, supporting and supported by such movements as the campaign for nuclear disarmament, in Britain, and the campaign for equal rights for Negroes, in the United States. The desire to compete with pop music on its own ground, and the desire to use folk songs for - broadly speaking - political ends, both produce results which the scholar, and the lover of folk songs as they are sung by the folk, dislike and deplore (and the new protest songs are not in any sense folk songs). But the combination of these tendencies gives the present folk revival movement a vigour and impact on popular culture of a kind rarely found in earlier movements of this kind ... The present folk revival movement is distinguished by its desire to say something about our common lot - not the lot of peasants, or slaves on the plantations of the Old South - in common language.

In 1965 in his address to a meeting of the Folklore Society of Victoria held to celebrate the Society's tenth anniversary, Ian Turner enumerated the sources of interest in Australian folklore:¹⁸

First, in order of time, was nationalism - whether in the form of a nostalgic sentiment for an idyllic past, or of the search for a foundation on which to build a national culture. The concern of the nationalists was for the preservation of tradition and the development of an indigenous culture.

Secondly, there was radicalism. In Australia, most of those with folklore interests have had radical inclinations ... Indeed, one should expect this, for folklore concerns the culture and traditions of common people, and these are generally radical and democratic in spirit. No one writes folk songs about the directors of the BHP except to abuse them.

Thirdly, there was a musical line of interest - commonly from jazz, through blues and Negro folksong, to white American folksong (Ives, Guthrie, Seeger, the Almanacs) and other folksong, including Australian. The musical interest

¹⁷ Waters, E (1965) 'Folk Revivals', *folk view*

¹⁸ Turner, I (1966) 'Ten Years of Australian Folklore' *Australian Tradition*, v3n1 March

was in the folk sounds - although, because so much of Negro song was protest, it bordered on the radical.

The comment about an interest in jazz is significant. A number people interested in the discovery of Australian folk songs including Ian Turner and Edgar Waters were also interested in jazz. One of the most important folk clubs in Melbourne in the 1960s was Traynor's, run by jazz musician Frank Traynor. Australian jazz shared similar political beginnings with the folk revival. In Sydney jazz bands played in premises like the Iron Workers Union hall in George Street. Jazz scholar Bruce Johnson writes: (Johnson in Atkins, 2003:157)

The political left also had a long standing connection with the jazz scene, most conspicuously through the EYL, which in 1945 created the Hot Jazz Society.

Johnson describes the political attitudes of the precursor to annual jazz festivals in Australia, the first Australian Jazz Convention in 1946: (Johnson in Atkins, 2003:167,168)

It was for reform in the name of social justice and welfare, rather than conservative of traditional inequities ... It was broadly inclined against cultural engineering from the top down ... In terms of the international politics of the time it was anti-fascist; in terms of domestic politics it was left-leaning and democratic. Its spirit transcended class in its dissatisfaction with mass culture and forces of conservatism.

While unions were encouraging their members to send in songs and poems for their journals, folk singers and contemporary songwriters saw in union struggles the issues they wished to sing and write songs about. Many of the folk singers were union members, writing and singing rarely became their full time career. As a result they brought their understanding of union issues quite naturally to their art, not as onlookers and supporters but as participants.

The symbiosis of unions, left politics and the folk revival continues today, recordings like the MUA centenary CD and web collections like Union Songs are recent examples. The desire of songwriters and singers alike to "say something about our common lot in common language" is part of the strength of the folk revival and marks out a territory that continues to distinguish it from other popular musics.

The next chapter deals with political songwriting in the period where the Cold War thinking was receding and opposition to the Vietnam War was becoming a national movement.

CHAPTER TWO FOLKSONG AND UNIONS: POLITICAL SONGS

The magazine *Australian Tradition* began life as the Folk Lore Society of Victoria publication *Gumsuckers' Gazette*. From 1965 to 1975 it was the national folk magazine. In that ten years it published 37 issues the final one being a comprehensive index. Even the *Australian Tradition* printer had a history of involvement in the folk revival; Ted Thompson had played the part of "Thommo" in the first production of *Reedy River*. The editor of *Australian Tradition* for most of its issues was Wendy Lowenstein. The magazine published some 240 songs along with scholarly notes and a large number of reviews and articles. In the final index issue Lowenstein wrote¹:

The Australian folk revival has been the greatest success story in the resurgence of Australian culture over the last twenty years. When Ian Turner and I started the Folk Lore Society of Victoria in 1955 I knew only three Australian songs, The Wild Colonial Boy, Waltzing Matilda and Botany Bay. That was all! And most people with pretensions to culture thought that Australia had no folk song tradition at all! Today even the most ignorant know better. We've educated 'em. Australian songs are now part of every school child's cultural luggage.

Of the 240 songs published in *Australian Tradition* some 30 were political: peace songs, union songs, disaster songs, songs about work. There were also a number of articles about political and union songs, evidence of ongoing debate on that subject within the folk community. Titles included *Place of topical song, Union Singers Queensland, Thoughts on protest song writing in Australia, Australian protest songs – an echo?, Coal mining ballads, Australian political songs of the 60s and 70s, and The Politics of political songs.*

In one of her longest articles in *Australian Tradition* Lowenstein wrote about the historical connection between the folk revival, political radicalism and the unions:²

In the post World War II period there was an upsurge of Australian nationalism linked with a period of optimistic political radicalism, of left wing influence and activity throughout the community which was felt in cultural matters as in political life and the trade unions. The folk revival was part of this period.

This passage seems to be addressed to those who occasionally complained about the political songs in the magazine, clearly making the point that the way the revival started affected its early members' attitudes towards politics. In the same article Lowenstein described the particular role of New Theatre:

New Theatre, then Australia's most radical "little" theatre had a tradition of satirical revues and political song-writing and also made a specialty of

¹ Lowenstein, W (1975) 'The Last Editorial', *Australian Tradition* n37, December

² Lowenstein, W (1973) 'The Politics of Australian Folk Songs', *Australian Tradition* n33, December

producing Australian plays (in itself a revolutionary program at that time). In 1953 they produced Reedy River, an Australian musical based on the Queensland shearers' strike of 1891, written by Dick Diamond, a secretary of Actors' Equity in Melbourne.

Lowenstein made two points here, firstly that New Theatre was unique in Australia at that time in presenting Australian plays, secondly that the play *Reedy River* was written by a union organiser. She then made the argument about the relationship between the rediscovery and revival of bush songs and the kinds of songs contemporary songwriters were composing; a strong connection being the persistent rebellious sentiment. She ascribed this to the songwriters' horizons now including the urban worker as well as the Vietnam War:

It is true that we have not seen the emergence of an Australian popular song movement based on Australian bush songs and I think it unlikely that we will do so ... but the thread of class consciousness, of militancy, or anti-establishment thought and sentiment which runs through folk song has persisted until the present day, because alongside the revival and deeply influenced by it a group of contemporary songwriters has grown up, quite often having very pointed things to say about social issues. In the hands of these city songwriters the city worker has at last been seen as a subject for song (a welcome change from sheep, shearers, horses, little women left behind, and cattle) and urban themes have been explored. A significant burst of songwriting took place about the Vietnam War.

Judging by the later popularity of the songwriters whose political songs Lowenstein was writing about, to her words "alongside the revival and deeply influenced by it" we could add "and more and more recognised as a valuable part of it". Songwriters and poets such as Denis Kevans, Don Henderson, Eric Bogle, John Denge, Phyl Lobl, Clem Parkinson, Lyell Sayer, Bernard Carney, Colleen Burke, Harry Robertson, Glen Tomasetti, Alistair Hulett, Judy Small, Peter Hicks, John Warner and many others have become to be regarded as an important part of the Australian folk community. These contemporary songwriters are still "having very pointed things to say about social issues" and they still form a key part of a tradition of writing from the stance of the union movement. It is their work that constitutes the basis for the Union Songs web collection.

Vietnam War Protests

The involvement of singers and songwriters in the protest against the war in Vietnam in the lead up to the very large Moratorium demonstrations, coincided with a second "period of optimistic political radicalism". Another way of viewing this was as a growth in opposition to the Cold War, and the ending of the wave of hysteria about communism that had in part made conservative politics so successful at the ballot box. By the end of the 1950s the conservative agenda to ban the Communist Party of Australia was defeated both in the high court and in a referendum. Unions had been an important force in that battle as it was the communist and radical leadership of unions the conservatives had been determined to destroy in a strategy of weakening the whole labour movement. The Australian Labor Party had earlier been split

on this issue, as many of its leaders were quite keen to follow this particular conservative agenda.³

There is uproar at a Sydney meeting of the Australian Labor Party when radical trade unionists backed by the Communist Party stormed out after ALP members claimed Communist Party members should be outlawed and "fellow travellers" deported from Australia. The unionists, from the Iron Workers Union and the Building Workers Industrial Union, said they would disaffiliate their unions from the ALP.

One of the effects of the war in Vietnam was the building of a broad coalition to stop the war and to end Australia's involvement in it. Many of the folk revival songwriters wrote in protest at the war. Among the first was Denis Kevans with his poem *The Slouch of Vietnam*. New Theatre playwright Mona Brand, who, with her husband Len Fox, had taught English in Hanoi in the 1950s, wrote *Twenty Summers* a poem that Gary Shearston set to music on his LP *Australian Broadside*. Shearston wrote *Conscription Ramp*, Glen Tomasetti wrote *No!* and *Ballad of Bill White*, Don Henderson wrote *Draft Card Burner's Song*, *Boonaroo*, *The Won't-Leave-This-Lander* and *Bill White*, Clem Parkinson wrote *Kevin Conway*, Phyl Vinnicombe (later Phyl Lobl) wrote *Seasons of War* and *When Will the People*, Jim Allen wrote *Chessboard of Vietnam* and Lyell Sayer wrote *F111*. Most of these songs were first published in *Australian Tradition*. Subsequently eight Australian songs were chosen by the editors of the US book *The Vietnam Songbook* (Dane, 1969) with selected songs from many countries including Vietnam.⁴

Radical unions also played a big part in the Vietnam War protests, members of the Seamen's Union famously refusing to sail civilian supply vessels, the *Boonaroo* and the *Jeparit*, carrying war material to Vietnam. Some conservative unions remained in Cold War mindset but the broad labour movement eventually became opposed to the war. At one Labour Council of NSW meeting Pat Clancy, the secretary of the Building Workers Industrial Union, famously replied to a criticism that he was bringing up an irrelevant issue by tabling his union's resolution about Vietnam, saying "Peace is union business". This phrase became the title of a Henderson song. This is one of the reasons I have chosen to include peace songs under the broad umbrella of union songs, particularly in the online Union Songs collection.

Union Songs and Mount Isa

In the 1960s Radical unionism was also evident in the isolated town of Mount Isa with its huge copper mines. The Australian Workers Union, with its long history of close relationships to mine owners and governments, was the main union in town. Merv Lilley wrote a number of poems about his experiences in the mining town including *Lead Bonus* with its explicit reference to the AWU: (Hewlett and Lilley, 1953:39)

³ King, J (2006) 'On this day:1948', *Sydney Morning Herald* 14 June

⁴ At an anti Iraq War concert on March 2003 in Washington the anniversary of the songbook was celebrated with a number of the songs being sung including Henderson's song *Boonaroo*.

*The Company told miners, "You've all got the sack,
Unless you have docketts you'll never get back."*

*Then up jumped Jack Kelly and Eddie Heilbronne,
They said that the Company must keep us all on.*

*Jack Kelly's white hair floated out on the breeze,
The miners were cursing and buzzing like bees.*

*We struck for lead bonus that very same day,
We said we'll return when you're ready to pay.*

*We fought the weak union the A Double you you,
It made us feel sick what those traitors did do.*

In 1964 and 1965 there was a locally supported strike for better conditions in Mount Isa and the local AWU members became much more militant and their struggle attained national prominence. The rank and file elected leader Pat Mackie with his emblematic baseball cap, had to play cat and mouse with the Queensland police, and in one instance had to be smuggled back into the town. In his book *Mount Isa* he wrote: (Mackie, P 1989:207)

Friday 19 March 1964

Two hundred and fifty pickets turned out again.

... some diligent copper must have actually measured the distance and discovered that the Argent Hotel was only 2,400 feet away, 240 feet short of the distance required by the anti-picketing regulations. So, on this morning, police ordered all pickets to remove themselves from the Argent Hotel to Camooweal Street, which was 900 feet further away from the Company's property, and therefore safely over the distance.

*The police herded the remaining crowd of pickets through the streets. The pickets walked at a snail's pace. Ann Morriss put on a black mask and they were all singing the American Civil Rights workers' song *We Shall Overcome*.*

As Mrs Sylvia Viani was later to say: 'We were all singing "We shall not be moved". It seems funny now, because we were being moved. The police did not stop moving them until they were not half but one and a half miles from the mine gates.

While Mackie reports the songs he heard sung at a Mount Isa picket, he does not mention that Geoff Wills and Don Henderson, from the Brisbane group Union Singers, were in Mount Isa performing at support concerts and in Henderson's case writing new songs based on their experiences. The communist newspaper *Queensland Guardian* reported their visit:⁵

Their first performance, within hours of their early morning arrival from Brisbane, was at a meeting of the Disputes Committee. They got a great hand for their songs. That night, they performed to a highly enthusiastic audience at the weekly Women's Auxilliary meeting. So keen were the women that they set about arranging a function at the weekend, at which Don Henderson and Geoff Wills were to perform. On the Saturday night they were a star turn at

⁵ Unattributed (1965) 'Folk singers a big hit at Mt. Isa', *Queensland Guardian* 31 March

the Irish Club social. A highlight of the weekend was a Star Theatre concert, including Don Henderson and Geoff Wills and local performers. The Henderson-Wills repertoire grew during their stay, as they learnt about local happenings and turned these into sly verses which delighted the audiences.

Henderson wrote *Isa* celebrating the new militancy and confidence of the workers of the town, each verse of the song ending in variation of the phrase "we will make a town of Isa". His other *Isa* songs were *Talking Mount Isa* and *I Can Whisper* and he also added a verse to his earlier song *It's A Free World*: (Henderson, 1994:57)

*They're free up in Mt. Isa,
I know that much because,
I sang a song of freedom there
And a policeman said I was.
He said, "Every dog has his day."
I said, "I know that much."
He said, "You've got three minutes"
And looked down at his watch.*

Pete Seeger Visit

Mackie's reference to the use of songs in union struggle and the examples he cites point to the influence in Australia of US union songs and protest songs. *We Shall Not Be Moved* had long been part of the corpus of song adopted and adapted by the US labour movement since the New Deal era in the 1930s. The song had been adopted and localised by the radical movement in Australia, Britain, Canada (where it was also translated into French) and in South Africa where it was used by the early anti-apartheid movement. *We Shall Overcome* had a more complicated provenance, originally it was a hymn, then it was published in a US mine workers journal in 1905, adapted as a radical union song in the 1930s, adapted again by the civil rights movement in the 1960s and arrived in Australia in 1964 courtesy of the first Pete Seeger visit. Like Robeson before him, Seeger had been deprived of his passport in the United States because of his political views. The Pete Seeger visit was organised in Sydney by a range of organisations including trade unions, particularly John Baker from the white collar unions, the Bush Music Club and Sydney University Folk Music Society, of which I was a founder member. Seeger's Sydney concerts were held in the Sydney University Union Theatre.

Among the new songs Seeger introduced to Australian audiences and that were taken up by the folk revival singers were Malvina Reynold's *Little Boxes*, Bob Dylan's *Who Killed Davy Moore* and *Times They Are A Changin*, Tom Paxton's *Bottle of Wine* and many of his own including *Turn Turn Turn* and his version of the Cuban freedom song *Guantanamera*. This introduction to new radical songwriters lead in turn to an influx of their recordings. LP recordings became a major influence and source of fresh approaches to performance and radical song writing. Singer and songwriter, Ken Mansell, in Melbourne describes the influence of these recordings: (i/v with the author, 2 November 2003)

I'd been reading Singout⁶ And I'd been getting Pete Seeger's song books and listening to Dylan's lyrics and Dylan's records. All those, if you like, left wing influences are coming in on me, and I'm reading about the American Civil Rights struggle, I'm even writing songs, I wrote a song about the Ku Klux Klan, against the Ku Klux Klan. But I'm still not a radical, I'm basically just imitating, I don't feel it all that much inside. What completely and utterly revolutionised me, and I mean revolutionised, I don't say that lightly because I became a radical overnight, I was just outraged by the possibility that I could be conscripted to go to Vietnam. And I think that in the early months of 1965 I became radicalised in a way that would not have been possible if it hadn't been for conscription, because I knew it was going to get me.

Australian singers and songwriters were not only influenced by their US counterparts A similar influx of song was arriving from Britain again songwriting in the folk tradition associated with the folk revival there, particularly the songs of Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, both of whom had earlier connections to the Australian folk revival through their involvement in the Wattle recordings of bush songs featuring A.L.Lloyd, and were later to tour Australia with union support.

Folksingers under surveillance

ASIO, the Australian and Security Intelligence Organisation, spent much of its time spying on writers, unionists, radicals, peace activists and even, as it later transpired, Labor members of parliament⁷. ASIO also took an interest in folksingers who in turn returned the compliment with song. John Dengate's ASIO song includes the memorable alternating chorus: (Dengate, 1982:7)

*ASIO! where we photograph and file 'em!
ASIO! the political asylum*

*ASIO! from the arctic to the jungle
ASIO! We invariably bungle*

In the mid 1960s Henderson wrote two songs about political surveillance, *Ting-A-Ling* and *Someone Up There*: (Henderson, 1994:82)

*There is someone up there watching down on me
The signs are there and plain for all to see
He's never far away I'm reminded every day
That there's someone up there watching over me*

*The students mainly munched in a cheap cafe
So did the KGB and CIA
There were diners too from BOSS and DI6
And a bloke who ate his baked beans with chopsticks*

*I went down to Trade Hall to pay my dues
And was talking to a friend exchanging views*

⁶ Singout: US folk magazine was launched in 1950 and continues this day.

⁷ The 1972 Whitlam Government made this ironic detail public, ironic because it was a Labor government that had set ASIO up in the 1940s

*When a bowl of flowers crackled and it spat
And a voice said "Talk up please. The battery's flat"*

These verses make clear at least one connection between students and unions at the time. The war in Vietnam and the US Civil Rights movement had brought them much closer together. When students from Sydney University were arrested at a rally supporting US Civil Rights activists outside the US Consulate in Wynyard, unions such as the Teachers' Federation of NSW and the Waterside Workers' Federation organised the collection of defense funds to fight the cases in court. Assisting the defense team was then student leader and law student Michael Kirby (now Justice Kirby of the High Court).

As peace marches started to grow in size and scope the connections between students and workers and folk singers grew too. On a national demonstration to Parliament House in Canberra (Easter 1963), the Cavalcade to Canberra, part of the Sydney contingent spent ten days marching to Canberra singing and handing out leaflets through towns on the way. Many of the marchers, were students including the author. We were catered for by wharfies and seamen who set up camp each night on the way and made sure we were well protected. Arriving in Canberra we met the coach loads from Brisbane and Melbourne and other cities who had traveled to be part of the demonstration. There was virtually a national meeting of folk singers ready made. The songs we sang included songs of the US civil rights movement and the radical left like *We Shall Not Be Moved, Oh Mary Don't You Weep, Hold On, Solidarity Forever, The Banks of Marble* and *Study War No More*. There were also newer songs from the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament marches in Britain - *The Family of Man* and *H-Bombs Thunder* and the more radical songs from Scotland like *Ding Dong Dollar, Doon at Ardanaton* and the republican song *Scottish Breakaway*. In Canberra there was naturally a deal of song swapping. Demonstrators on the Brisbane coach had all learned Henderson's song *It's On* which rapidly became a favourite for the folk singers who hadn't heard it before. A large number of people who became important for the folk revival were on the demonstration: Ian White and Peter Dickie from Melbourne, Geoff Wills and Bill Berry from Brisbane, Jeannie Lewis, Mike Leyden and Kevin Butcher from Sydney.

The Women's movement

Edith Morgan, one of the two elderly women featured on the MUA CD cover, viewed the anti-war protests as a precursor to women playing a bigger role in Australian political life⁸:

I think one of the catalysts for women getting involved in issues was certainly the Vietnam war. We only have to look at some of our members of the Union of Australian Women who were arrested at a rally and charged with obstructing, I think there were six of them ... That rally led to quite an action out at Fairlea where they were imprisoned. Huge crowds were outside the prison. The women inside were supporting our women who were there. It was just wonderful. Then we all marched around to the Governor's place ... And those women, "Save Our Sons", would be there day after day after day.

⁸ <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~womenweb/sources/First%20Narratives/EdithMorgan.htm>,

accessed 4 October 2006

These things act as catalysts for political action and for justice.

The question of justice has always been important to me, all my life. I think that is my mother coming out in me. That is, fairness, seeing that no section of your community is suffering. Not that you can do much about it! But by being involved in certain campaigns, some of it may have some positive effects. Look at the things women in the Union of Australian Women (UAW) have done. They weren't allowed to march carrying placards in the 1950's, when carrying placards was banned, so they wrote the messages they wanted to get across on aprons and marched in single file so they couldn't be charged with obstruction, wearing the aprons!

The long struggle for women's equality and particularly for equal pay is explored in Zelda D'Aprano's book *Kath Williams: The Unions and the Fight for Equal Pay*. D'Aprano wrote: (D'Aprano, 2001,207)

The Case was scheduled for 1972 and over twenty unions and associations were actively involved in the claim. The Women's Liberation Movement (WLM), the UAW and the National Council of Women intervened in the Case. The WLM and UAW combined their efforts and women were asked to attend the hearings to show the male-dominated establishment that women were serious in their demands.

The WLM Newsletter proposed action activities for July and August to focus on the equal pay case and called on women to participate in the march, attend the case throughout the hearing and to wear Women's Liberation T-Shirts.

The Arbitration Commission hearing was set for July and August 1972 and women organised a series of public meetings, with pamphlets in a number of languages and posters to advance their case.

The WLM Equal Pay group, in conjunction with the UAW, issued a pamphlet in Italian, Greek and English for distribution at factories. The Case was to be held during the last week of July and folders were issued to groups, the priority for distribution being poorly paid women. Groups were advised to contact the Women's Liberation Centre for further supplies of folders.

The July 22 tram ride was a great success. About fifty women gathered at the City Square, and after handing out equal pay leaflets throughout the central shopping area they boarded the trams paying only a percentage of the fares. This action was repeated to highlight again the injustice of women paying full price for goods and services while obtaining only a percentage of the men's rate of pay

Folk singer Glen Tomasetti was involved in the preparations for the case and its opening as D'Aprano described: (D'Aprano, 2001,208)

Representatives of the women's movement marched with the unions on the opening day of the case, and, with her guitar in hand, Glen Tomasetti led the women gathered outside the Arbitration building in singing her famous song, 'Don't Be Too Polite Girls'. The sound of the women singing could be heard within the building and stopped the case.

Throughout the 1960s more newly written Australian songs became part of the folk revival repertoire, and many of these new songs reflected the causes

of the time: equal pay, Aboriginal rights, peace, working conditions, education for all. These campaigning songs began to be recorded too, first by unions for specific campaigns as in the pay campaigns of the early 1960s then by newly formed independent record companies like Peter Mann's *Score* in Melbourne, with recordings of Martyn Wyndham Read and Peter Dickie, Gordon McIntyre, Danny Spooner and Shayna Karlin, Declan Affley and Union Songs in Brisbane with the Union Singers and Margaret Kitamura, and the songs of Don Henderson. Phyl Lobl describes how she wrote her first songs: (i/v with the author, 11 June 2004)

I wrote Dark Eyed Daughter. It was written after the bus ride and the papers were full of it, the Freedom Ride⁹ and I was reading an account of that in the paper. I can still see the room, I can still see the paper on the bed and I can still feel anger I suppose it was. I was just so angry that I felt I've just got to write something it was a release of emotion I don't know whether it was just anger or emotion, empathy or probably a mixture. I don't think we ever do anything for just one reason. But it so came together that I'd been learning classical guitar, writing the nonsense words to the exercises, going to Glen's (Tomasetti) concert, being given those records and all those things going together and then out came Dark Eyed Daughter based a nursery rhyme and I don't know where I picked up the nursery rhyme that said "Mother may I go out to swim?/ yes my darling daughter/ hang your clothes on a hickory limb/ but don't go near the water." It says do this but don't do this.

But somehow that rhyme was the same thing that kids could go, they could be Aboriginal kids in the town but they couldn't go swimming, so darling daughter dark eyed daughter.

So that was how it all started, and then my first political song, I didn't call Dark Eyed Daughter a political song. It is of course but to me it wasn't it was a heart song. The first political song, I suppose I do see a difference between the heartfelt songs and the political songs, the first political song was about Henry Bolte's bridge, the King Street Bridge that cracked, and I found I could be funny.

Whitlam Labor Government Elected

With the end of the pro-war conservative government and the election of Labor federally in 1972 many new possibilities in Australia were opened up. The withdrawal of Australian troops from the Vietnam war, the recognition of China, the universal health care system, free tertiary education, the changed attitude of government to women and the settling of the Aboriginal claim on British absentee lessee Lord Vestey's land in Wattie Creek, all seismic reforms. There was a new attitude to culture too as government support for the arts became established through the Australian Council for the Arts. Wendy Lowenstein remarked on this particular change:¹⁰

⁹ University students led by Aboriginal student Charles Perkins, toured towns in NSW protesting about policies of segregation and discrimination against Aboriginals.

¹⁰ Lowenstein, W (1973), 'Editorial', *Australian Tradition* n33, December

Since the Council was set up by the Federal Labor Government real finance is available as opposed to token support. Truly the mechanics of the Council are far from perfect, but at least they are not oriented just towards the accepted arts. One can at last talk to the officers of the various boards and find people who are willing to listen and who are in a position to really help. People like myself, who have been accustomed to the (sometimes) polite disbelief of the cultivated men of the cultural establishment, can hardly believe their good fortune. In our field the Council for the Arts has already done more to assist in 18 months than all other Government agencies have done in all the years of their existence.

In 1974 Warren Fahey's Larrikin label began in Sydney. As I have noted earlier the first Larrikin release was an LP of Australian mining songs *Man of the Earth*. For twenty years Larrikin would be the most important label in the Australian folk world. It released recordings of Eric Bogle, Clem Parkinson and Lyell Sayer, Jeannie Lewis, Peggy Seeger and Ewan MacColl, John Dengate, Denis Kevans, Dave de Hugard, Phyl Lobl and many other songwriters and singers of the folk revival. In 1984 Larrikin released a recording of *Power at our fingertips*, centenary song of the United Trades and Labour Council of South Australia: (Burn, 1985:90)

*In the rush-hour panic we speed along,
Past graveyard shiftworkers heading home
And welfare wives carrying their lives
In shopping baskets with family ties.
As the kids get off and head from school
Past paperstands with the headline news,
Reads 'Unemployment Continues to Soar'
And 'Impending Threat of Nuclear War'.
What are we headed for – 1984?
Tell me where will this journey end?*

*And I say to myself – hang on, hold tight,
As we travel through the tunnel I can see the light,
Sweat on the face, fire on the lips,
Fear in our hearts, power at our fingertips.*

Larrikin also recorded the amplified folk band Redgum. Smith in *Singing Australian* describes the band forming in 1974 among a group of Adelaide University philosophy students influenced by their lecturer who had been involved in the anti Vietnam war movement (Smith, 2005). Redgum became popular with the growing republican movement of the time and their debut LP *If You Don't Fight You Lose* was released on Larrikin in 1978. (Smith, 2005:173)

At this stage Redgum's repertoire was uncompromisingly political, with vigorous condemnations of American imperialism's control of Australia, songs about the struggles of the blue-collar working class, migrants and other oppressed groups, and a tinge of class nostalgia. Lyrics counted for more than the music and they were incisive and entertaining.

With the addition of two professional musicians to the band and with an experienced producer, in 1982 Redgum produced an album that included their chart topping song *I was only 19*: (Smith, 2005:174)

The song restituted previously hostile left attitudes to Vietnam veterans, presenting them as victims rather than perpetrators of the war ... By the mid 1980s the band was drawing audiences as large as any rock band.

By 1982, the left was actively supporting Vietnam veterans in their campaigns for recognition. *I was only 19*, like Bogle's *The Band Played Waltzing Matilda*, was one of those anti-war songs as eagerly taken up by former soldiers as by campaigners for peace. Just as the Vietnam War strengthened union opposition to war, the 2003 Iraq War provoked unanimous union opposition and is the only war involving Australia that the Returned Soldiers' League (RSL) has publicly opposed, perhaps attesting to the effectiveness of these kinds of songs.

Green Ban Songs

Seamus Gill and Denis Kevans were both NSW Builders' Labourers' Federation (BLF) workers and organisers in the Green Ban period and together they wrote a song titled *Across the Western Suburbs* also known as *Under Concrete and Glass* to the tune of the bush song *Across the Western Plains*:

*Under concrete and glass, Sydney's disappearing fast
It's all gone for profit and for plunder
Though we really want to stay they keep driving us away
Now across the Western Suburbs we must wander*

One verse describes the near impossibility of a building worker owning his own house:

*Now I'm living in a box in the west suburban blocks
And the place is nearly driving me to tears, boys
Poorly planned and badly built and it's mortgaged to the hilt
But they say it will be mine in forty years, boys*

Another verse describes the disregard of the developer mentality towards inner city communities when it came to the dismantling of entire historic streets to build commercial office blocks:

*Now before the city's wrecked these developers must be checked
For it's plain to see they do not give a bugger
And we soon will see the day if these bandits have their way
We will all be driven out past Wagga Wagga*

Gill explained how the song was written (i/v with the author, 29 November 2003):

It was during that period that with help of Denis Kevans, I remember writing a song, he was saying why don't you write something. I had never written one before and I don't really describe myself as a songwriter ... I've written the odd one. I had some trouble with the chorus and we actually even went round to Chris Kempster and he said "Oh yes, the chorus is too complicated" which was true. It was sitting there, it was nearly finished and Denis said "when are you going to finish that?".

In the meantime in the course of one night .. people had been doing work-ins and not accepting the sack, and somehow it just clicked, the refusing the sack

and the Australian tune "Five and a Zac" so the tune of that in the course of one night I wrote that one "Refusing the Sack" which was a bit of fun as well, which then I suppose encouraged me to finish "Across the Western Suburbs". That was written for a moment at the time because we were actually on strike for a week, just attending the bans not for any wage increase at the time. Given that there was a handy existing song "Across the Western Ocean" or "Across the Western Plains" so there was a ready made tune because while I can write a few words a composer I am not.

Gill was involved as a union organiser and also as a singer in folk clubs:

My involvement started in Sydney with the Builders' Labourers' because here was a union that not only said things but did things and you could actually win. At the same time I gravitated towards the folk scene as well, as I had been interested in music in Ireland as well and singing, sometimes there was a little bit of overlap between the two scenes, not always though, sometimes I found that introducing some of my union friends to some of my folkie friends or vice versa it would be sort of "whose your mates?". Sometimes it was like standing with a foot each on two shaky step ladders.

He described the song's popularity both in the folk scene and in the union:

I was actually surprised at how well it was received, not only by the union people and the left politicians, some of who could be quite serious and perhaps artistically not the most imaginative or receptive, but also people around the folk scene as well. There was even a verse I'd cut out of it in an earlier draft and a group in Sydney sang that one as well. It got printed in the union journal and I think they put it in the inside cover of the award book as well. That and the fact that it got printed in the union journal means it's approved or approved of anyway.

With the success of the song Gill became more interested in the tradition of Australian union songs and described how they were used in union struggles:

I did then start looking for them and stated digging around myself. Some took a bit of finding but there were gems all over the place. Given at the time at pickets lines and demonstrations sometimes I'd be called across to sing so for self defense you needed a bit of a repertoire and of course it had to be stuff that was relevant as well. What I found very heartening was that the people whether they were on strike or demonstrating they were quite receptive to the songs and you sort of became asked. I remember onetime, there was a dispute up at Wyong, must have been 1974, some of the people had occupied a crane on the site and there were lots of supporters and a line of police as well. When I got there, there was a few of us came up from Sydney, we'd had phone call "can you come up and give us a hand", so through the night in between the updates, I was singing songs through the loudhailer, which went on for a few hours so I was glad I had enough, not all of them were topical or relevant.

Kevans, who had helped Gill write *Across the Western Suburbs*, wrote *The Greenban Fusiliers*, with its chorus describing the BLF marches up to the Master Builders Federation (MBA) offices in Broadway, Sydney and its first verse paying tribute to the women of Hunters Hill:

*Bulldozer blades made a lightning raid, coming in with a great big rush,
Moving in for the kill up at Hunter's hill, at beautiful Kelly's Bush,*

*But the local women lay in the bulldozer's way, to the bucking and the shuddering of the gears,
When their hands were raised the ones they praised were the Green Ban Fusiliers.*

Mick Fowler, jazz musician and Seamen's Union member, lived in a rented historic terrace earmarked for demolition in Victoria St., Kings Cross, Sydney. He and many of his neighbours took up the struggle to resist the eviction of tenants and stop the thugs employed by the developers to make the house uninhabitable from smashing the plumbing and destroying the electric wiring. Fowler wrote a Green Ban song to the tune of *Waltzing Matilda* called *Green Bans Forever* which he recorded with an impromptu jazz band Green Ban'd.

Later campaigns

The connection between song and struggle continues into the present. Alistair Hulett's band *Roaring Jack* had a considerable following in Sydney's rock pubs. (Smith, 2005:177) Hulett has described the political nature of his performance and songs in an interview with Nick Martin in 2002:¹¹

There's been a few struggles in Australia I'm very proud to have been involved in. There was a strike on Cockatoo Island back in the early 90s and we organised quite a few concerts and so forth and were able to build links with the workers ... What it did was politicise our audience which at the time were predominately young people unfamiliar with trade unionism and often hostile to it from an anarchist perspective. Bringing them into contact with organised labour was an educational process for us all. I think it was good for the people involved in the strike as well. It feels a bit grandiose to imagine as a political songwriter I'm actually able to shape history. I think it's the forces of organised labour which shape history. As a songwriter I stand on the sidelines and try to comment on it and celebrate it.

In 1996 Hulett contributed two of his songs to the CD *Union Is Strength*, produced by Geoff Francis and Peter Hicks. The then General President of the Mining Division of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU), John Maitland, observed on the CD jacket:

The CFMEU Mining Division is proud to be associated with the production of this collection of working class songs, dedicated to the members of the Weipa Branch of our union. The workers at Weipa fought a battle over the right of workers to belong to a union. It was an historic dispute which truly can be compared to the struggle which took place at the birth of unionism in this country and is an inspiration to us all.

This collection of songs draws from the strength of working class culture, both past and present. It shows that, historically, working people like those at Weipa have always found that in union there is strength.

Peter Hicks explained what it was like to be involved as a singer and songwriter with unions like the CFMEU in Sydney in the 1990s and which songs were the most successful: (i/v with the author, 12 December 2003)

¹¹ <http://unionsong.com/reviews/hulett/>, accessed 20 September 2006

I guess for me the most influential song that we've ever written for me the gut song is a song called 'One More Day Than Them', and I sang that recently up in Launceston where there'd been a meat workers picket line, and I sang it earlier this year in New Zealand at a forestry workers picket line, and in both instances people just drop whatever they're thinking about and just focus in on that song, because it's got a positive message and really tells the tale of what people are doing.

I'd go out to the picket and the songs that would connect, and one of the most important songs of any of them, was Joe Hill's 'Preacher and the Slave' and that song along with 'One More Day Than Them' they were the core songs that I could do in any situation

Over the years I've bumped into some really great situations, mainly through the influence of the CFMEU as the militant union in Sydney, the one that would provide me with opportunities to sing at functions and cough up a little bit of bread and CD sales or cassette sales at the time. They certainly have always respected and valued and it was certainly very important for me for ten years in Sydney, the CFMEU broader picture.

The labour movement and important writers and singers of the folk revival have worked together over many years and although the link between them remains a largely informal one it has survived though many changes. Unions have helped fund many recordings of union songs and supported a number of important books for example: *The Builders' Labourers' song book* (Unattributed, 1975), *Therese Radic's Songs of Australian working life* (Radic, 1989) and *Chris Kempster's Songs of Henry Lawson* (Kempster, 1989).

The next chapter describes a period of more formal connection between the labour movement and the folk revival, a period where funding became available through the Art and Working Life Program of the Australia Council.

CHAPTER THREE

ART AND WORKING LIFE PROGRAM

The resurgence of the Left which propelled Bob Hawke to power in the ACTU in 1970 led to a resurgence in arts activity, which parallels the movement of trade unions back into wider areas of social concern, reflected in the NSW branch of the BLF's Green Bans campaign in the early 70s, for example. At the administrative level, a Trade Union Council for the Arts was established in 1971, and Arts Officers were appointed at state level in South Australia and Victoria in 1975, in Western Australia in 1976 and in NSW in 1978, all with assistance towards salaries from the Community Arts Board. In 1980 the ACTU adopted an Arts and Recreation Policy and appointed an Arts Officer, Jean McLean, who initiated an Art in Working Life Conference in 1981.¹

The election of the Whitlam Labor Government in 1972 had a cultural as well as political impact. The Arts Council in particular broadened its support of music beyond the fields of ballet and opera and funding for those interested in folk music became available for the first time. The removal of Labor from federal government by the Governor General on 11 November 1975 may have been politically traumatic, but many of the Whitlam reforms remained in place, so that when the Hawke Labor Government was elected in 1981 the cultural reforms in particular were able to be built on until the demise of Labor federally in 1996. Under Hawke Australian unions had an opportunity to liaise closely with the Australia Council as the arts body was now called. This development in the relationship between arts and unions was dramatic enough to be commented on outside of Australia as in the following statement:

In September of 1982 the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) adopted a formal policy that integrated cultural work into union organizing, the Art and Working Life program. Although this effort collapsed when national politics gutted labor's influence, AWL policies and practices are important benchmarks in documenting and building labor culture.²

This quote from Berkeley University's online Institute of Industrial Relations Library points to the broad interest in the Art and Working Life Program set up by the Australia Council in 1982.

The Art and Working Life Program was designed to encourage a variety of workplace cultural activities. By 1991 the ACTU cultural policy declared:

Congress specifically supports the continuation and expansion of the Art and Working Life Program of the Australia Council. This program, through its union involvement, strives for the extension of cultural access and participation and with other Community Arts Programs and Multicultural Arts Programs represent the Council's commitment to break down the elitist nature of many art programs. This commitment is crucial to union support of the Council.³

Projects funded through the Art and Working Life Program built on an existing tradition of workplace cultural and social activity such as lunchtime concerts and

¹ Watt, D (1989) 'Melbourne Workers' Theatre', *Australasian Drama Studies* n14, April

² <http://www.iir.berkeley.edu/library/blg/culture.html>, accessed 29 July 2006

³ <http://actu.asn.au/papers/1991cultural/1991cultural.html>, accessed 22 July 2006

camera clubs. It is no accident that workplaces most keen on such activities were the larger highly unionised workplaces like railway workshops, factories, docks, building sites and mines. Some of these workplaces had many years or sometimes generations of experience of these activities. I have already mentioned the Waterside Workers' Film Unit and the role of New Theatre.

The Art and Working Life Program was able to involve a network of artists and musicians employed through union arts officers to encourage workplace cultural activity. A number of musical projects through the 1980s and early 1990s are worth noting.

Trains of Treasure

Railway worker and union delegate Brian Dunnett was actively involved in the cultural and political campaigns of his workplace. Writing about the project *Trains of Treasure* he describes how this important collection of Australian railway songs evolved: (email to the author, 1 August 2006)

The Combined Unions Shop Stewards Cultural Committee at Chullora Railway Workshops in Sydney was one of the most active groups who completed three projects over several years.

The first of these projects saw production of the musical stage play "Loco" this project was carried out with Side Track Theatre in 1983⁴.

During 1984 in conjunction with the NSW Labor Council they employed the songwriter Harry Robertson as an artist in residence in 1984 to mentor interested railway workers and hone their poetic and song writing skills.

*A number of the songs and poems from those he mentored and inspired at Chullora were featured in a collection of Australian Railway songs, *Trains of Treasure*, that followed as a separate project and was released in 1985.*

Robertson was an important figure in the folk revival, many of his songs dealt with his experience as a sea-going engineer on whaling ships or as a ship repair worker on the Brisbane River. He released an LP of his songs, *Whale Chasing Men*, in 1971. The record cover notes read:

The songs on this record are unique. They are the only collection of modern day whaling songs.

They are not only songs of great beauty – they are an accurate record of the men and ships of the whaling fleet – they are also the record of a very unique individual – Harry Robertson.

The collection of Australian railway songs Dunnett refers to, *Trains of Treasure*, became an integral part of the Trains of Treasure travelling exhibition (travelling by rail in a dedicated carriage), a series of twenty six panels depicting Australian railway history from the experience and viewpoint of the workers in the industry.

⁴ <http://railwaystory.com/loco/>, accessed 28 September 2006

Many of the songs and poems in the *Trains of Treasure* collection were discovered by Dunnett in a comprehensive search of railway union journals, and magazines. Other material was written for the exhibition by songwriter John Dengate, and the poet Denis Kevans, both important songwriters and folk revival activists. Kevans in particular spent many years researching the genre of popular poetry associated with the Australian labour movement: (i/v with the author, 18 May 2004)

A lot of these things are hidden in little magazines, like the little union journal, and it's hidden on page four in small type, or page fifteen, so you just have to be aware of that, but it's in there somewhere.

Kevans' song *Trains of Treasure* provided the title for the exhibition and the cassette collection, which was produced by filmmaker Russ Hermann and the author. It was also Kevans who urged Dunnett to continue his research into railway workers' songs. The pianist Roger Woodward (who occasionally performed in the giant locomotive shed for Chullora workers) and cultural historian Donald Horne launched the collection in Sydney in 1984. Twenty years on, the cassettes have been reissued as CDs in a third stage of this project which continues to tour Australia. *Trains of Treasure* has an accompanying website, *Australian Railway Story*⁵, designed and maintained by the author, which acts as both a promotional tool and a song collecting centre.

Song Projects

Strike a Light: Contemporary songs of Australian working life published in 1988, was another musical project supported by the Art and Working Life Program. One of the editors, Gillian Harrison, wrote in the foreword: (Harrison, 1988)

In 1985 the Victorian Trade Union Labour Day Celebration Committee initiated a Song Award, not only to encourage songwriting but to find out how many working men and women were still expressing the stories of their lives and issues, struggles and humour, in song.

The enthusiastic response from across Australia was overwhelming. Songs came from nurses and miners, shearers and factory hands, teachers, boiler-makers, banana pickers and people both in and out of work. Some were written by musicians who work with trade unions in workplaces, who use their musical skills to create exciting new material based on workers' experiences or to support union campaigns. Others come from the collaborative efforts of workers and artists involved in union music and theatre activities all over the country from Kingsbury to Chullora, from Pilbara to Perth.

Harrison was co-ordinator of the National Art and Working Life Music Project, based at the ACTU, and initiated many music activities for unions in workplaces around Australia. She established a collection of written and recorded songs from which the twenty four songs in the book were selected.

Pilbara Collection is another example of a song project funded by Art and Working Life. The book, published in 1985, contains over three hundred poems, songs and yarns collected from workers in the Pilbara in Western Australia.

⁵ <http://railwaystory.com/>, accessed 28 September 2006

Folksinger and songwriter Roger Montgomery who compiled the collection, wrote in the foreword: (Montgomery, 1985:5)

The Australian Folk Trust approached Art and Working Life, an organisation funded by the Music and Community Arts Board of The Australia Council. Funding was requested and granted to appoint a co-ordinator whose task it was to find out if Australia's workers were still writing of life's experiences as they did in those good old, bad old days of yesteryear.

A number of songs from the collection were released as a cassette titled *Rocks to Japan*.

Melbourne folksinger and songwriter, Lyell Sayer, was attached to the Metalworkers' Union (now the AMWU) which had a history of support for folk music. The union had funded the Larrikin double-album *Rebel Chorus* and organised tours by the Chilean group Inti Illimani as well as the duo Ewan McColl and Peggy Seeger.

The AMWU had also helped run folk music nights at the John Curtin Hotel in Carlton for several years at which Sayer had been a regular performer. His account of his experiences shows that many union officials were either too busy to involve themselves in his work or just not interested. In article for the folk magazine *Stringybark & Greenhide*⁶ he wrote:

Despite what the media and the Liberal Party says, trade unions, like most organisations, are basically very conservative bodies with solidly entrenched policies and practices. As the Art and Working Life Program was very much an untried initiative some resistance was to be expected from the conservatives within the union structure who saw the union's only legitimate role as dealing with 'bread and butter' issues - wages and conditions - as distinct from the view of the 'progressives' who favoured union involvement in a much broader range of social and cultural activities as well. Unfortunately, the opposing conservatives were very much in the ascendancy in this case which made things very difficult at times for dewy-eyed and innocent newcomer me!

The program coordinator was the painter and cartoonist Peter Dickie, who had been a well known performer around the Melbourne and Sydney folk scenes during the 1960s. Sayer was the only musician-songwriter involved in the Melbourne project but others included people with some formal arts training and expertise in painting and drawing, crafts, poster making, screen printing, sculpture, leadlighting, and photography. Sayer's experience was not entirely negative as he explains:⁷

⁶ Stringybark & Greenhide was a folk magazine that was published from 1981 to 1985

⁷ Sayer, L (1985) 'Art and Working Life: Confessions of a Union Folksinger, *Stringybark and*

Greenhide v6n1

Reactions overall varied greatly from factory to factory. In some places management totally refused access on principle although the workers were keen. In others management was most helpful but the workers indifferent ... In any case, I found some places worthwhile proceeding in and a gradual thaw in the attitudes of some organisers enabled me to start up lunchtime guitar classes in several workplaces as well as lunchtime films in another.

At the same time I was also regularly donning my 'artist in residence' hat and performing at various union functions.

I took part in some labour studies courses and even did my bit at stop work meetings and on picket lines. At the same time, on my own initiative, I began writing some songs (and a poem) on various current union concerns and campaigns which were added to my repertoire and went down very well with the rank and file. I managed to record these songs and poem and supplied a master tape to the union's national office with the possibility of them being put out on an EP record or cassette.

In her book, *The Essential Ewan MacColl Songbook*, Peggy Seeger writes about the Australian tour organised by the AMWU I have referred to before: (Seeger, 2001:250)

Our first tour to Australia in 1976 was sponsored by the Metalworkers' Union and it was the best-organised and most enjoyable tour of our whole professional life. Our second tour was the last one on which on which Ewan was a well man. It began in a rather bizarre manner. Laurie Carmichael, the dynamic secretary of the union, had phoned us in England asking if we could write a song about Joh Bjelke-Petersen, the infamous Premier of Queensland. We idly said Yes and forgot all about it in the bustle of preparing for the trip. Laurie didn't forget. He had assembled the press, the television cameras and the leadership of the union to greet us—there they were on the tarmac when the plane landed eager to hear the song. We said we weren't quite finished. We didn't add that it wasn't quite started either. But we promised it the next day. Jet-lagged and half asleep, I researched magazines and news articles at the home of our host, Warren Fahey, while Ewan grabbed twenty winks. Jet-lagged and half awake, he started the song while I sank into the other twenty. Totally exhausted, we finished it together.

The scope and success of the Art and Working Life Program is difficult to gauge but some idea is given in the preface of the catalogue that accompanied the Art Gallery of NSW 1985 exhibition *Working Art: A survey of art in the Australian Labour movement in the 1980s* where Deborah Mills, an officer of Community Arts Board, Australia Council, wrote: (Burn, 1985:6)

What we see here represents the resurgence of interest and involvement by the Australian trade union movement in cultural activity. This resurgence has been fuelled by the commitment and support of artists and the Australia Council.

A catalyst in this process has been the Art and Working Life Program of the Australia Council which has helped engender a renaissance in cultural production in the labour movement not seen since the period of the Curtin Government in the 1940s.

Mills pointed out that "in the last financial year, the Australia Council spent over \$900,000 on trade union-based arts activity". She went on to posit two levels of

mutual interdependence between artists and the union movement: (Burn, 1985:7)

What we are witness to is the pioneering of new work methods by artists, work methods that rely upon collaboration with so-called amateurs. We are moving away from a notion of individual authorship and towards an understanding of art or cultural production as an act of social collaboration.

Secondly, we are looking at the integration of cultural practice into the work of the union movement, where arts are not peripheral but a valued tool for dealing with the many facets of the challenges facing unions on the 1980s, and where unions recognise that their involvement in cultural production is central to their work.

The Art and Working Life Program is significant in terms of the Australia Council's policies and programs in that it recognises and seeks to support a culturally diverse and pluralist Australian society. As such, the program represents a real alternative to cultural policies and practice which represent dominant cultural traditions.

Singer/songwriter Phyl Lobl was appointed the folk music representative on the Australia Council. Lobl took up the position when folk music was in receipt of a grant of \$12,000 while other musics such as opera was in receipt of \$6 million: (i/v with the author, 11 June 2004)

A group of people got together and said we need to lobby to get someone on the Australia Council. The Australia Council said OK but it's got to be a woman because we've got a balance, so it had to be a woman and it had to be someone who's a performer, and it had to be someone who's in folk music and had some knowledge of it ... here was the challenge, here was the chance to do something for the cause. So I said "yes" not knowing how I was going to do it or what I was going to do but was willing to try ... When I went along the first thing I was asked to do was to define folk music and to give a paper to the Music Board ... Anyway I gave the paper and used that quote from Roger Covell that classical music is the celebration of skill and I said, "If that's so, then popular music is the celebration of marketing", and they all nodded wisely at that because they didn't like pop music either, and I said, "Folk music, that's the celebration of life", because to me that's what it is ... I sang the material, and I sang 'Humping Old Bluey Is A Stale Game' which is such a simple song and I knew goes to the heart, and 'Band Played Waltzing Matilda'. Anyway I did about three songs and that illustrated to them it didn't have to be a grand big thing, it could be just a little fragment, but it reflected the Australian experience, and that's what they needed to fund and they needed to fund the processes by which this would happen like festivals, because they didn't fund festivals. Anyway the first year I was on it went up to \$25,000, the next year it went up to \$60,000 or \$70,000 and the next year it went up to \$125,000, roughly.

The funding of folk festivals gave the folk revival an institutional basis to operate from for the first time, a third of a century after the revival had begun. Graeme Smith in *Singing Australian* evaluates the importance of festivals to the folk movement this way: (Smith:78)

Even in the episodic form of the festival, the folk movement still aspires to more general social relevance, as the custodian of modes of social relationship and of creativity on which society at large can draw. For folk activists the success of

the festival movement demonstrates the continuing relevance of the folk ideology.

By 2006 folk festivals took place in more than fifty locations, with an audience size of hundreds of thousands, instituting a festival circuit for local and overseas performers alike.

Howard Government Elected

The Art and Working Life Program was barely established when in 1996 the Howard coalition government was swept to power. The federal policy on the arts was definitely a return to what Mills described as "cultural policies and practice which represent dominant cultural traditions". (Burn, 1985:7)

A search in 2006 of the Australia Council for the Arts (as it now renamed) website reveals only one entry mentioning Art and Working Life⁸, while a similar search through Google finds one hundred and twenty references none of them part of the Australia Council website.

There have been dozens of songs written about the Howard government's and its policies. The industrial relations laws have been the subject of over twenty songs, while the number of songs about the treatment of refugees and of the Howard Government support for the invasion of Iraq is not far behind. Howard himself has also become the subject of a number of songs. Howard's determination that Australia should join the invasion of Iraq, in the face of strong public opposition, has resulted in a range of songs and two CDs, one from the folk community: *No Blood for Oil* (2003) and a double CD from rock musicians and hip hop artists: *Rock Against Howard* (2004).

The existence of such songs is routinely overlooked or ignored by commentators in the press who seem to believe that "there are no Australian protest songs today". The most recent example of this was Julia Baird's article *Right-on song* in the *Good Weekend* magazine:⁹

Perhaps we're simply not earnest or solemn enough to waste energy on people in positions of power, who Australians have always refused to tip their hats to - and, increasingly, expect little from.

Or do our angrier musicians just prefer to brandish their middle finger at "society" and "conformity" rather than to personalise it by attacking politicians or calling on our Prime Minister - who also led us to Iraq - to resign?

I still can't help but hanker for a bit of birdflipping from some of our more articulate musos. Not just for the fun and the spectacle but also in the faint hope that somehow, from the sweat, posturing and vanity of the public stage, a Pied Piper might emerge.

⁸ <http://www.ozco.gov.au/>, accessed 31 July 2006

⁹ Baird, J (2006) 'Right-on song', *Sydney Morning Herald* 10 June

Baird's claims were comprehensively rebutted by Tony Mitchell, a scholar of popular music, in an article in the *Age* newspaper:¹⁰

It's not just folk songs and parody pop songs that launch themselves into the political arena. Rock Against Howard is a double CD by Australian rock and hip hop artists, which, released in 2004, was compiled by Lindsay McDougall from Frenzal Rhomb and included tracks by a diverse bunch including Something for Kate, David Bridie, Even, Resin Dogs, Youth Group, TISM, Frenzal Rhomb and the Herd.

Another politically oriented music compilation is UnAustralian, a three-CD set released in 2003 by the Red Hot Green Black collective, a non-profit organisation that funds environmental and indigenous groups. Featuring Aboriginal artists Jimmy Little, Nokturnal, Stiff Gins, Saltwater Band, Kutcha Edwards and Native Rhyme Syndicate, UnAustralian also showcases blues and folk artists John Butler, who, like Xavier Rudd, tends to espouse an ecological, environmental perspective in his music. The Herd crop up here again, along with other politically oppositional groups like the Propaganda Klann.

Before you dismiss this run of music as niche or alternative, it's worth noting that in April the Hilltop Hoods became the first Australian hip hop group to go straight to number one in the ARIA charts - to the great embarrassment of ARIA, which didn't even have a link to the Hoods' Melbourne-based independent label Obese.

Political songs continue

The dismantling of the Australia Council's Art and Working Life Project does not seem to have curtailed the efforts of folksingers and songwriters to write and sing about issues raised in Australian workplaces, as I have mentioned before, their cultural work is rarely their career. Perhaps the long history of folksong and the continuing folk revival itself are the reason for this: (Smith, 2005:192)

Folk begins with the culture produced in face-to-face communities and passed on through oral traditions. The folk movement has always been engaged with culture that is close to everyday life and experience. This has given it a view of authenticity in cultural production that has been enormously influential, and been applied well beyond the communal cultural forms with which folk began. In particular, folk's idea of authenticity has interacted with romantic notions of the expressive individual. Folk pulls the exploration of individual experience towards its grounding in place and history: it provides for the self-expressive artist with a way of looking for a community.

Folklorist Graham Seal argued that folklore is a commonplace and unmediated factor in our lives and often remains hidden and that the hidden nature also derives from its being an unofficial mode of activity: (Seal, 1989:17)

Folklore operates beneath and outside the formal structures of language and society as an unlegitimated but necessary process. That process gives meaning to the lives of individuals within groups but also performs broader cultural functions of fundamental importance to the maintenance of social stability.

¹⁰ Mitchell, T (2006) 'The rappers are revolting' *Age* 1 July

The political nature of union songs and their social and functional purposes for the labour movement are part of the reason they remain unexplored and ignored, while the radical origins of the folk revival explain why that part of the music-making community is more at ease with them and more likely to explore and continue the tradition.

Michelle Arrow in *Upstaged*, her book about women playwrights and radical theatre in Australia, explains why literary criticism should pay more attention to political theatre: (Arrow, 2005:139)

Political writing can seem meaningless or strange outside the political climate that motivated it; however, when considered within its time, within the debate and the anger, or the hopes that generated it in the first place, it makes sense. In fact it provides a commentary on contemporary social and political events. Further, oppositional writing offers a window on the dissent of the past, and possibly offers models for the future. 'Classic' writing forms just one aspect of the cultural output of a period, and to ignore the ephemeral or the polemical distorts the picture of our cultural or theatrical past.

For much the same reasons I would argue that the Australian tradition of union songs, in our time emanating from the linked histories of the folk movement and radical unions, is worthy of our critical attention. One of the problems facing researchers in this field is that there are different kinds of unions with different philosophies or ideologies involved. Not every union has valued the cultural aspect of the movement for change. The crackdown on the left and its ostracism during the Cold War years effectively split the labour movement. In an interview in 1999 filmmaker, activist and historian John Hughes described the situation this way:¹¹

For the most part trade unions had been persuaded, by the Cold War, that their job was really to look after wages and conditions and that's what their focus was.

Some of the political attitudes inherited from the Cold War continued into the Hawke government years and in particular cases proved to be stifling as Hughes revealed:

*During the mid 1980s the ACTU commissioned the film *Amongst Equals* which is an interesting example of that. The film Tom Zubrycki made traces the history of trade union movement as a history of militant opposition. It's very stirring stuff, key points of crisis, talked about the successes, the victories and the failures and so on. The ACTU were just absolutely horrified that someone would want to portray the history of trade unionism in that way.*

Zubrycki's documentary *Amongst Equals* was never completed or released. In the same interview Hughes, recalls knowing nothing about the Waterside

¹¹ http://bonza.rmit.edu.au/essays/1999/andrea_maksimovic/John_Hughes_interview.php,

accessed 31 July 2006

Workers' Film Unit until an older friend told him of the pioneering nature of its work. Hughes observed:

There was a tendency in the independent film movement for people to imagine that they invented oppositional media, that somehow or other it had arisen spontaneously in 1968. In other words, the Cold War had generated a kind of amnesia about oppositional practice that preceded the social revolutions of the 60s. So it was important to recall that moment as a memory of the independent film movement that had been repressed, so that there could be the possibility of reconstructing the relationship between the industrial and cultural movements, because a lot of the stuff we were doing was issues-based, there was very little concrete connection with the trade union movement. It was all about individual issues and social movements.

This amnesia generated by the Cold War is remarked on in a number of recent studies. Michelle Arrow's research into early Australian women playwrights and their relationship with New Theatre uncovers the same 'forgetting' among the new generation of playwrights from the late 1960s who regarded themselves as the inventors of topical and political Australian theatre. The 'forgetting' is not confined to Australia and may not be without industrial consequences for academic researchers themselves as US literary scholar Cary Nelson suggests in his study of poetry of the American Left; *Revolutionary Memory*: (Nelson, 2003)

I cannot help but think that the exclusion of labor struggles from our sense of what is properly poetic is neither accidental nor without real consequences. As we move now more decisively into an era when higher education depends more and more heavily on exploited labor, we are often not only blind to the working conditions and rewards of graduate assistants, unemployed PhDs, and part time teachers; some tenured faculty are so outraged that their high pursuits should be interrupted by unseemly complaints from below. "Graduate students", one English professor at Yale sarcastically remarked recently, "have apparently decided to call themselves workers." Contempt for workers might be less easily mustered if we had sustained our awareness of their place in our literary history, if we had remembered that literariness had sustained labor throughout our history. As it is, the discipline's repression of the memory of labor poetry now promises the exploitation of untenurable, underpaid, underemployed academic workers ... the repression of these cultural memories was part of the general encapsulation and depoliticisation of the academy that took place under McCarthyism ... Yet as often happens, an increasingly exploitive work environment ... has opened a moment of opportunity in which we can recognise the historical basis of our present blindness.

Members of the folk revival in Australia are well acquainted with hidden songs that express views at odds with the dominant culture. The revival got its impetus from a concern that the old songs of the bush workers were dying out and needed to be rescued. Folk revivalists thought such songs were an important and unique part of Australian culture and found themselves having to battle against musical experts of the time who asserted that Australia was too young to have anything that might be considered a folk culture. An example of how destructive this ignorance could be was revealed in 2004 in an ABC Radio Hindsight interview with Wattle Records founder Peter Hamilton who had taken an innovative proposal to the ABC in the mid 1950s:¹²

¹² <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/history/hindsight/stories/s1157792.htm>, accessed 28 September 2006

The chairman of the ABC at that time was Sir Charles Boyer and I arranged a session with him and put to him that I thought it was an appropriate thing for Australian ABC to do what the BBC were doing in England and the Library of Congress were doing in America, that is that they had dedicated full time staff recording the folk music in England respectively and in America respectively and that was part of their charter to do that and they had a team of people and outdoor full facilities to go and visit old singers and collect material and subsequently have that aired. He was very interested in that and supportive of that as a concept but he had a music manager and he would need to consult him so he called him in to this meeting and he just said well in his view there was no Australian folk song and they were just popular songs that came from overseas and he then left the room and the chairman said well he would have to respect the views of his senior music authority and that was the end of that.

One of the successes of the Australian folk revival has been to encourage new writing based on the new interest in the rediscovered tradition. The radical nature of the venture fitted well with the revival of trade unions and their rebel aspirations for independent Australian economic development designed to benefit those who worked rather than those whose power and influence was associated with ownership.

The next chapter deals with the online collection Union Songs and the genesis and production of the MUA centenary CD 'With These Arms', and the growing importance of the internet for union song collection and dissemination.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CD *WITH THESE ARMS* AND UNION SONGS WEBSITE

Genesis of the project

In this chapter I describe how the CD *With These Arms* evolved from my collection of songs written during the 1998 Patrick dispute.¹ I review how the collection and dissemination of songs through email and a website led to a very effective feedback loop within the community supporting the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) during the dispute. The songs became an element of community support; the means of collection and distribution ensuring their speedy accessibility. I discuss the selection of songs and poems for the CD, particularly the way in which the selected material relates to the history of the maritime unions, and the connections between the authors and singers with those unions. I also discuss the evolution of the web as a vehicle for unions to communicate more effectively with their members and the wider community.

When the MUA celebrated its centenary in September 2002 I proposed to the union's federal office that I produce for them a prototype CD of songs collected during the 1998 "Patrick dispute" as a part of the celebration. This CD contained sixteen of the songs I had collected via email and the web during the 1998 Patrick Dispute.

In 1998 I had presented a paper titled *The MUA Muse: Songs and poems from the pickets* to the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM), based on my collection of songs and poems written at the time of the 1998 lockout. In that paper I wrote:²

I began to build my Union Songs web site at the start of 1997, after some months of rehearsal with Bill Berry for a Blue Mountains Folk Festival union songs workshop. We concentrated on Australian union songs as much as we could, an extensive seam dating back a century or so. Lawson and Paterson were there of course along with Tex Morton, Dorothy Hewett, Helen Palmer and Merv Lilly, so too were the more contemporary works by folk revival songwriters like Don Henderson, Harry Robertson and many more ...

I also hoped to be in a position to collect songs as they were being written. After Patrick sacked their workforce in a clandestine operation on April 7 that ... wish came true. From that time it seemed each week brought a new harvest of songs about the Maritime Union of Australia fight for reinstatement.

As I prepared the songs for the centenary CD I thought a selection of songs and poems linked with the union over most of its history, a CD celebrating the many political and industrial battles that made the MUA a particular force in Australian history and in the international union movement was appropriate.

The maritime unions have had a long association with the arts: particularly

¹ Patrick, the major Australian dock employer, illegally sacked its workforce on 7 April 1998 with the covert support of the Howard Government.

² <http://unionsong.com/reviews/muamuse.html>, accessed 11 June 2006

well-known is the Waterside Workers' Film Unit in the 1950s. The century the MUA was celebrating had seen Australian painters³, writers⁴, actors⁵, musicians⁶, filmmakers⁷, journalists and poets⁸ spend at least part of their working life as seamen, or as labourers on the waterfront. Lisa Milner in *Fighting Films*, her study of the Waterside Workers' Federation Film Unit, describes the degree to which union members were involved in all aspects of the unit's work by the filmmakers: (Milner, 2000:6)

As often as possible they involved wharfies as extras or helpers in their filmmaking, in documenting the lives of workers, their families and unions. They were commissioned to make works for other groups that likewise saw the emerging value of film as a political and educational tool, to be used alongside their newspapers and speeches. They released an issue of their own newsreel for screening throughout the country, and another film made by the Unit holds a certain pride of place in being the first trade union film ever to be screened on Australian television.

The maritime unions had a history of militancy and political action and their publications encouraged members to send in poems and stories for publication. In my research I had discovered more than 50 songs and poems to select from, written over a period spanning close to 100 years. The earliest was the widely known Australian wobbly song *Bump Me Into Parliament*, written by Bill Casey and first published by the IWW⁹ in Australia during the First World War. There was a direct link between the song and the maritime unions as Casey had later become Queensland Branch Secretary of the Seamen's Union of Australia. The most recent song was a 2002 ballad *Black Armband*, comprehensively detailing the effects of the economic and political policies of the Howard Government in the realms of education, Aboriginal reconciliation, workers rights, treatment of refugees, globalisation and war. *Black Armband* was written by Sydney historian and schoolteacher John Hospodaryk. Another Hospodaryk song, *Bucket O' Rust*, had won the 2001 MUA song competition. Songwriters and singers who had been seamen or wharfies included Harry Robertson and Merv Lilley, Declan Affley and Geoff Wills. Songwriters and singers like John Warner, Peter Hicks, John Dengate, Margaret Walters, Tim O'Brien, Chris Kempster, Maurie Mulheron and also the author, had long associations with unions and had all performed at the 1998 MUA support concerts and community picket lines. Writers Don Henderson, Dorothy Hewett, Wendy Lowenstein and Clem Parkinson also had long history of support for the MUA. These links gave the centenary collection of songs and poems a unique connection to the union and its history.

Song and other sources for the project

My research for material in print led me to a booklet of poems titled *What About The People!* by Dorothy Hewett and Merv Lilley (Hewett and Lilley,

³ Harry Read

⁴ John Morrison

⁵ Leonard Teale

⁶ Arnold Butcher

⁷ Jock Levy

⁸ Merv Lilley

⁹ Industrial Workers of the World whose members were popularly known as wobblies, and were renowned for their militant songs.

1963), the folk song magazine *Australian Tradition*¹⁰, Therese Radic's book *Songs of Australian Working Life* (Radic, 1989), Wendy Lowenstein and Tom Hills' oral history of the Melbourne wharfies, *Under The Hook* (Lowenstein and Hills, 1998) and Lilley's novel *The Channels*.

I obtained permission to use songs from three LPs dating from the 1960s to the 1970s: *Affley's Rake And Rambling Man* (1968), *Union Singers' One Out* (1968) and *Flames Of Discontent* (1979). I also obtained permission to use material from the Wobbly Radio CD *MayDay MayDay* (2002).

I recorded performances of Clem Parkinson, Maree Delofski, Chris Kempster, Alison Jones, John Dengate and myself on minidisc. Margaret Walters, John Warner, Maurie Mulheron, Peter Hicks, John Hospodaryk and Tim O'Brien provided me with their studio recordings on CD. Bill Berry and Tom Flood gave me a copy of their home recordings on minidisc.

My sister, Ruth Gregory from Graphics International in London, designed the CD and booklet using text and commentary that I had written and photographs I had selected from the extensive MUA photographic archives. In preparing the booklet and CD artwork we communicated mostly by email.

CD Funding and Launches

A legal contract was drawn up with the participants: songwriters, singers, designers and copyright owners to facilitate donation of their work to the project with 1000 CDs being produced. In return each participant in the project received five copies of the CD, and the possibility of the purchase of further copies at cost price.

The entire project took the form of a gift to the MUA. It was financed at cost price; no wages were paid. The MUA funded the production costs by requesting each of its branches to order and prepay for copies for later sale and distribution to members as a fundraiser.

Launches of the CD began in Katoomba in August 2003 with a concert organised by the Blue Mountains Unions Council. In September 2003 there was a launch at Illawarra Folk Festival at their South Coast Labour Council Concert. October 2003 saw a Brisbane launch at the Eighth Australian Labour History Conference and a Melbourne launch at Trades Hall. There was a Hobart launch in December 2003 at a hotel, The Trout. In Sydney in March 2004 the CD was launched at the Maritime Museum's Classic Boat Festival and at the 2004 MUA National Conference. In April 2004 in Canberra there was a final launch at the National Folk Festival.

Sales of the CD were such that three years after the launch the 1000 CDs produced were sold out.

About the Songs and Poems

The words of the songs and poems on *With These Arms* are attached as an

¹⁰ *Australian Tradition* (1961 - 1976) was mostly edited by Wendy Lowenstein

appendix to this thesis.

Right That Time

Sung by Maurie Mulheron with The Rattlers. Mulheron, a teacher and a member of the executive of the NSW Teachers' Federation, wrote this song in February 1998. It provides a snapshot of the MUA's political action over three generations. He wrote the song after hearing a radio attack on the union by the then Industrial Relations Minister Peter Reith. Mulheron has a long interest in songs of the labour movement and had written and performed in a very successful play, *One Word We*, a biography the American singer/songwriter Pete Seeger. The play had two successful seasons at New Theatre in Sydney, and was featured at the 2001 Woodford Folk Festival in Queensland.

The Hungry Mile

Written by radical poet Ernest Antony in 1930. The Hungry Mile was the end of Sussex Street that runs alongside the docks in the Rocks area of Sydney where workers lined up each day in the hope of being selected for a job for the day. Up until the 1940s, before job permanency, the Hungry Mile was well known to maritime workers, seamen and wharfies alike. It was also the scene of many bitter industrial struggles. Little is known about Ernest Antony although his poem *The Hungry Mile* appears in full in Merv Lilley's semi autobiographical novel *The Channels*, and in one passage Lilley explains how he pieced the poem together as he worked around the country: (Lilley, 2001:120)

Jack Long had heard fragments of this poem around Queensland ports, bars, as an itinerant toiler; it may have been those fragments that at last drew him toward the centre of things. There was no such thing as a bad poem about working conditions, there were ironic poems that fought to scan and rhyme, and they were poems that spoke about men's lives when no other words of praise and sympathy and recognition were around to reflect their lives, if not on stone, then on words. The words might turn into stone, but they would be precious stone. They would turn into the jewels of their lives, the only jewels they the workers would have to say, We have been here, along this way, this is our cavalcade of Herculean labour. We gave of our best, we were treated worse than animals by the class that uses us, our families were made less than nothing, they were non-existent because they weren't sweating in the holds of ships. Graziers would have to provide grass for growing herds of cattle, but shipowners, governments, provide nothing to eat for their labour force. Therein lies the demands for the basic rights of the producers of wealth: the right to share in wealth created by labour. To each according to his needs.

Ernest Antony, his poetry and the riddle of his obscurity, was raised when I interviewed the poet Denis Kevans: (i/v with the author, 18 May 2004)

There's a poet called Ernest Antony, he's definitely influenced by wobbly poetry, so hard hitting. I dug him up and started to set one of his poems and I made the mistake of saying to the librarian "This is a rare book" and the next time I went back I said "Where's Ernest" and she said "Oh, he's in the rare books now". He was locked up in a glass case!

More recently my research located a copy of Antony's booklet titled *The Hungry Mile And Other Poems* (Antony, 1930) in the National Library of Australia. The 40 page volume contains 33 poems demonstrating, as Kevans had told me, a wobbly influence. Tom Nelson's history of the Sydney

waterside, *A Century of A Union* (Nelson, 1972) prints the first verse of *The Hungry Mile* and attributes it to Antony, a wharfie. In his history, Nelson also uses the phrase 'slave pens by the sea' which is the title on one of Antony's poems. Antony's collection of poems suggests he was an itinerant worker, working in many parts of Australia, a shunter in Darwin, a camel driver, a wharfie, a seaman and a very political poet with a sharp pen for satire. He undoubtedly fits the description of a hidden Australian poet and his poems about the depression are a valuable contribution to our lyrical material of that period. In October 2006 the historian Rowan Cahill wrote 'Ernest Antony: A Forgotten Poet' for the Union Songs website, an article detailing what has recently been discovered about the poet.¹¹

In August 2006 the MUA and Unions NSW ran a campaign to rename that part of Sydney *The Hungry Mile*, in recognition of its industrial history. On 26 September 2006 the NSW Premier Morris Iemma announced that Hickson Road in Sydney is to be re-named *The Hungry Mile* in honour of maritime workers and their struggles during the depression¹².

Pig Iron Bob

Former school groundkeeper, Clem Parkinson wrote this song in 1964 and I recorded him singing it for the MUA CD in Melbourne in 1997. *Pig Iron Bob* is a good example of a song written to commemorate a past struggle. Wharfies refused to load pig iron onto the British freighter "The Dalfram" destined for Japan in November 1938 in Port Kembla, Wollongong as part of an international protest against the Japanese invasion of China. Community support was strong as is shown by this quote from the *Church Standard* December 1938: (Lockwood, 1987:194)

It is obvious that the action of the waterside workers commands great public support. Whatever may be the outcome the workers have displayed a commendable humanitarianism at no little sacrifice to themselves.

The Federal Attorney General at the time, Robert Menzies, tried to force the men back to work and earned himself the nick name, *Pig Iron Bob*.

Parkinson explained the background to the song: (i/v with the author, 11 November 2002)

My father was a waterside worker in his later years, he worked here in Melbourne and then he and my mother moved to the Central Coast of New South Wales, and he used to travel into Newcastle, he worked on the wharf there. He was a great admirer of Jim Healy, and then when the Waterside Workers' Federation had a competition for songs about the wharf, I think the rules were you had to submit three songs. So I wrote one about Jim Healy, I put John Morrison's short story the Judge and the Shipowner, you had to condense them to five verses, and the Pig Iron Song about the incident that happened in the late 30s.

¹¹ <http://unionsong.com/reviews/antony.html>, accessed 17 November 2006

¹² <http://www.mua.org.au/news/general/premier.html>, accessed 29 September 2006

With These Arms

Advertising copywriter Tim O'Brien wrote this song during the 1998 MUA struggle. It was issued on a CD as a press release and fund raiser for the MUA by the ACTU in Melbourne. O'Brien wrote this song from his experience on the community picket at Webb Dock in Melbourne. The song evokes the history of that 100 day picket, one verse alludes to the creation of a sculpture-like barricade constructed from the rail tracks leading to the dock. Another verse alludes to an attempt by police to surround and clear the picket only to find themselves caught between the picket and a demonstration of building workers coming in behind them.

Mick Carr, Secretary of the Brisbane Branch of the MUA, described the community support for the MUA in the 1998 struggle: (i/v with the author, 6 September 2003)

There was a sense of right and a sense of wrong and a sense of community justice that was being broken and breached by the Howard government. And they continue to do that today but in smarter ways where they attack workers and they attack the socially unfortunate and the unemployed and the single mothers and our indigenous communities. They attack them in a different way, a smarter way and a stealthier way. They took us head on, and I don't think they realised that they were taking on a hundred and thirty years of history of community support that wasn't going to stand by and see wrong done to workers who wanted no more than to go to work, and were sacked for no other reason than that they were members of a union.

The Birchgrove Park

Sung by Bill Berry who wrote the tune. Merv Lilley wrote the poem. The harmonica backing is by the writer Tom Flood, Lilley's son in law. The collier, *The Birchgrove Park*, sank off Avalon Beach, Sydney, in August 1956. Lilley wrote many poems about his life as a seaman, a miner and a cane cutter, a number of which have been set to music. Lilley's poems have been published in maritime workers' magazines, in *What About The People!* (Hewett and Lilley, 1963), in *Overland* and in folk magazines. Lilley described the origin of this song: (i/v with the author, 20 October 2003)

Nearly all my writing was done on ships, I did say in a letter to Stephen Murray-Smith, 'The shipping companies you know are paying me to write about them'. An old bloke passed one remark about The Birchgrove Park sinking. He said, 'That's the way all of the colliers have gone down', he says, 'They haven't battened down'. When they pour the coal in it's wherever it lands sort of business. There's all the boards that go across the top of the hatch and then tarpaulins, and the floods could go over it or whatever. If the stuff rolls she's tipping the ship sideways and then if the hatches are open or something, you fill her straight up and down she go.

The Telephone Tree

This poem was written by oral historian and folklorist Wendy Lowenstein during the 1998 struggle while she was interviewing pickets, organisers and community supporters for a chapter in her new edition of her book *Under The Hook*. Along with the poem Lowenstein emailed me her description of the telephone tree in action: (email to the author, 1 January 1999)

*Telephone trees were set up from the beginning, through unions and Leftlink.
You'd ring twenty people, they'd ring their twenty. The tree grew and grew.*

The poem's title refers to the key role mobile phones played in the MUA struggle especially in the rapid organisation and deployment of pickets.

Sailor Home from the Sea

The poem is by Dorothy Hewett who wrote it about her husband Merv Lilley, The tune is by Chris Kempster. The song was first published in Sydney University Folk Music Society's collection *Songs of Our Times* in 1965. Kempster and the author were responsible for the selection of the bulk of the songs for that book. The song was first recorded on Shearston's *Australian Broadside* (1965)

I Can't Abide

Former primary school teacher John Dengate wrote this parody of *Abide With Me* during the 1998 MUA struggle. Chris Kempster sang it to me over the phone and emailed me the words for the *Union Songs* collection. I also heard it sung by the Blue Mountains Trade Union Choir at a protest against the visit of Industrial Relations minister Peter Reith to the Blue Mountains in 1998. I recorded Dengate singing the song in his home in Sydney in 2003.

Boonaroo

Sung by seaman Geoff Wills and the *Union Singers*. Written by Don Henderson during the Vietnam War, it was recorded on *Union Singers' One Out* (1968). On March 2 1967 *The Australian* reported:¹³

A Navy crew took control of the Vietnam supply ship Boonaroo last night on orders from the Federal Government. The takeover followed the refusal of merchant seamen to sail her to Vietnam with a war cargo of bombs and detonators.

Boonaroo was one of eight Australian songs chosen for the 1969 collection *The Vietnam Songbook* (Dane, 1969) published in the United States. More recently it was chosen from the book and sung by Dan Zanes in early 2003 at a New York concert celebrating the book and protesting against the looming Iraq war.

Join the MUA

I wrote the new verses and chorus during the 1998 MUA struggle and sang it at an MUA benefit concert in Newtown. It is based on the famous *Which Side Are You On* written by Kentucky miner's wife Florence Reece in 1932 along with the chorus of Aunt Molly Jackson's 1930s ballad *Join the NMU*.

Ship Repairing Men

This song was written by seaman Harry Robertson. Declan Affley recorded it on his first LP *Rake and Rambling Man*. Affley had worked as a seaman and Robertson had worked as a sea-going engineer. The song was first published in *Tradition* (1970), *Australian Tradition* n22, May

Slimy Patrick's Scab

Singer/songwriter Peter Hicks wrote it with Geoff Francis during the 1998

¹³ Quoted in (1967) *Australian Tradition* n13, April

struggle. There is a long tradition in union songs of scabs going to hell where, quite often, even the devil finds it hard to accept them. Peter Hicks sang this song on MUA picket lines around Australia and at the 1998 Sydney May Day march, which rallied outside the Patrick docks on the Hungry Mile.

The Judge and the Shipowner

Clem Parkinson wrote this song in 1967 and it won second prize in that year's Waterside Workers' Federation song competition. The song is based on a short story of the same title written by the famous wharfie writer John Morrison. I recorded Parkinson singing the song on minidisc. (i/v with the author, 11 November 2002)

Justice Delayed

One of the many songs that nursery school teacher John Warner wrote during the 1998 dispute. As the MUA won in one court so the legal battle moved up finally reaching the highest court in Australia. This court battle was one of the factors that helped ruin the political career of minister Peter Reith against whom the MUA legal team brought charges of conspiracy.

The World's Best Judge

This poem was written by academic John Tomlinson and Penny Harrington during the 1998 struggle. It alludes to one of the judges that the Howard government selected to sit on the High Court and the fact that he was the only judge who opposed the final decision of the court in favour of the MUA.

The Fighting MUA

This song was written by the *Marxist Brothers* during the 1998 struggle. Appropriately the tune is *The Wild Colonial Boy*, one of Australia's earliest songs of struggle, a song that has been parodied many times over the years. The song was sent to me by email during the dispute for addition to the *Union Songs* collection. (email to the author, 28 April 1998)

Anti Fouling Roll

Merv Lilley entered the poem into the Waterside Workers' Federation song competition in 1967 where it took first prize. Bill Berry wrote the tune. It was published in (1967), *Australian Tradition* n14, September. The song is sung by Berry, again accompanied by Tom Flood on harmonica.

Bucket O' Rust

Teacher and historian John Hospodaryk won the MUA Song Writing Contest in 2001 with this song. It was recorded live by Alan Garfield for the *Australian Songwriters' Association* at Wax Lyrical, Bat and Ball Hotel, Surry Hills, NSW.

The Picket Line

Don Henderson wrote this song for the 1979 SUA LP *Flames of Discontent*. The Seamen's Union of Australia had a history of taking on corporate empires in this case the mining giant Utah. As Henderson puts it in the song:

*By might these men aren't daunted
Every time that they ship out
They're taking on the vastness of the sea.*

We Belong to the Union

Tim O'Brien wrote the song during the 1998 struggle. It was issued on CD by the ACTU, and was played on the 100,000 strong MUA victory march in Melbourne. I tracked it down after hearing a broadcast of the march on ABC radio and talking to the journalist who had compiled the news item. O'Brien emailed me words of the song. (email to the author, 23 May 1998)

Thirty Ton Line

Don Henderson wrote it for the Seamen's Union of Australia (SUA) LP *Flames of Discontent* released in 1979. After a period of research in Mackay Don reviewed the notes he had made and came across a list of tugs and line boats and discovered the line that seemed to him to sing itself which he used as a chorus: *Broadsound, Belyando, Nebo, Serina*.

Black Armband

Written and sung by John Hospodaryk. The song was an entrant in the 2002 Wobbly Radio union song competition and was selected for the *MayDay MayDay* CD. I first heard Hospodaryk sing it at a concert I helped organise in Katoomba.

CD Dedication

In June 2003 for the CD notes I wrote:

I can't think of another union in the world that has had so many songs written about it. Is to do with the constant travelling of sailors? or the multicultural mix of waterside workers? or the union's long history of active interest in Australian theatre, film, art and music?

Both the Seamen's Union and the Waterside Workers' Federation campaigned hard over the years for Aboriginal rights, have supported fellow unionists both at home and around the world, have been involved in the anti-colonial, anti-war and anti-apartheid movements ...

This CD reflects the great pride of MUA members in their union and their union's standing both within Australia and internationally. It stands as a tribute to an organisation that has played an extraordinary role in our history for over 100 years.

Collection and publishing Union Songs on the Web

In my 1998 IASPM paper, *The MUA Muse*, I concluded¹⁴:

The tradition of union songs is as old as unions themselves now approaching their third century. It borrows from the popular traditions of the broadside ballad and the folk song and the hymn. There is the sense of the expression of views and mores of a vibrant community, a culture. The means of collection and dissemination quite naturally include the latest technologies, the Internet and the World Wide Web. In my experience this introduces a new speed both in the collection of material from disparate sources and in getting the material out to an international audience.

¹⁴ <http://unionsong.com/reviews/muamuse.html>, accessed 30 October 2006

Five years later when the CD *With These Arms* was launched this conclusion prove to be correct in a number of ways; The *Union Songs* web collection had grown from 70 items to over 170 (by October 2006 it stood at more than 460 items); at the time of writing about 200 of the songs are Australian, the work over 120 song writers; my contention that the internet was not only a viable way of collecting contemporary songs but also a means of their speedy distribution to an international audience has certainly been born out by these developments.

'With These Arms' reviews and comments

In 2004 I received an email requesting a copy of the CD and alerting me to a review of it in the *Canberra Times*. (email to the author, 29 June 2004)

I read a review of this CD in the Canberra Times way back in February this year and kept it with the intention of trying to get a copy for my father who lives in Brisbane and is an old friend of both Don Henderson and Geoff Wills; also my grandfather, Ted Englart, was an official of the Qld WWF (Queensland Waterside Workers' Federation) way back when! It is now semester break, and I'm having a bit of a clean up and a sort-out; found the press cutting and am now ready to move!

The Canberra Times review read:

*With These Arms - Songs and Poems of the MUA (MUACDOO1)
THE MARITIME Union of Australia (and its predecessor the Waterside Workers' Federation) has had a long and continuing involvement with the arts.
The WWF had a very active film unit in the '50s, the Seamen's Union put out LPs in the '70s and the 1998 Patrick dispute was notable for lots of songs being written with singers at the forefront of the picket lines and demonstrations ... The songs on this CD are very much in the tradition of the creation of folk songs, performers reacting to political and social events in songs and verse, giving a fascinating documentation of this segment of radical union activity.*

A significant function of the use of email and the establishment of the *Union Songs* website was the development of an international audience. The songs from the Patrick dispute came to me by email and were immediately added to the collection. I informed other websites and some email lists of the new arrivals and this in turn led to me receiving encouraging responses and information about other songs or poems. Songwriters and poets were happy to send material as they wrote it so an effective feed back loop was established. When the CD was released the launches were publicised via the *Union Songs* and other websites and by email which also contained details of the MUA postal address for obtaining copies. The international nature of the feedback loop meant that responses to the CD could come from many places as these excerpts show.

Peter Hicks (Singer/songwriter: Pelberata, Tasmania)

The importance of music in working class politics cannot be over stressed... The number of musicians who appeared on the picket lines singing cheerful ditties to keep up the enthusiasm of the strikers and their supporters was fantastic. This CD is an essential part of preserving the history of working

class song and especially the songs from the proud tradition of the seamen and wharfies. Congratulations.

Meredith Lawrence (Melbourne, Victoria) wrote to me about how pleased Molly Hadfield and Edith Morgan were to get copies of the CD (I had chosen a photograph of them together on an MUA picket for the CD cover)

I am writing to thank you for the CDs. Molly was quite overcome when I gave them to her. She was absolutely dumbfounded that her photo could be on the front of a CD. Unfortunately she hasn't got a CD player but she was going to get her granddaughter to play it to her the next time she sees her and she is going to ask her family to give her a CD player for Christmas. She was so excited by it that she was just about jumping up and down. While Edith is not very with it anymore the nursing home that she is in has been playing the CD for residents and is displaying the cover next to her bed along with an article about Edith that was in the paper some time ago. I also want to thank you for sending me a copy. I appreciate it very much. It is a fantastic record of a very important struggle.

Pierre Fournier (Singer, Folklorist and Author: Montreal, Canada)

*What a journey through time. The heritage of the Maritime workers!
From strikes (With these arms, to ship repairing, passing through the struggles against wars (Pig Iron Bob, Boonaroo..) unto the struggle to build the union (We are the union), the travel is emotioning!
This CD is a beautiful tribute to the maritime workers!
Salutations combatives et amicales.*

Henk de Weerd (Radio producer: Adelaide, South Australia)

"With these Arms" gives us an overview of the past and recent struggles the MUA had to deal with. Some songs refer to the events of 1998, while others to pre Second World War events. The CD gives us a good view of the MUA past and present.

Steve Harvey (Union activist: Courtney, Canada)

Great songs and poems, some that instantly lodge in the heart. A record not only of the struggle and victory of 1998 but one that shows the historically radical, internationalist nature of the MUA. So history lesson, inspiration, and solid performances of excellent material - what more can be asked of one CD?

Tetsuro Tanaka (Singer, Composer and Human Rights activist: Tokyo, Japan)

*Many Japanese have forgotten what was done to Australians by the Japanese army, including my self.
The poems made me remember that we have to apologize not only Asian people but Australian people.*

John Hughes (Filmmaker: Melbourne, Victoria)

The disk really is a fine record of contemporary folk music I guess, and a great evocation of the MUA dispute. I liked 'the telephone tree' and 'the world's best judge' too, especially 'the telephone tree'.

Ron Edwards (Folklorist and Author: Cairns, Queensland)
Edwards, R (2006) 'Reviews', Australian Folklore Society Journal n57, October

This CD spreads itself over quite a few years, half the material was collected in 1998 but the rest goes back to the start of the folksong revival all those decades ago.

It was quite a shock to hear those long gone balladeers like Geoff Wills and Declan Affley, like stepping back in time, especially with songs like The Boonaroo which I had not heard since the later sixties. In fact it is an interesting who's-who of the folk music scene of those days with songs that range from one by Harry Robertson to a more recent one by Wendy Lowenstein, the first time I can recall Wendy drifting into verse.

Mark has made quite a study of this type of song over the years, and readers will remember articles by him that we have published over the years. Apart from the texts there is also some nice playing on the disk.

Union Songs website

As faster network connections and the ease of downloading sound files have become more common, new songs for the *Union Songs* website arrive by email more often with an MP3 sound file attached. Songs also arrive by post in the form of a CD for conversion to MP3. While on the website the words are very important, songs are naturally best 'heard' and highly compressed sound files offer an effective and economical way to make that possible. Sometimes just verse and chorus is enough, but usually the full song is presented. MP3 files also allow access to songs in any language, making an international collection much more possible.

The *Union Songs* website gained international attention in July 2000 winning the *USA Today* Hot Site award. At the same time it caught the attention of the *New York Times* technology section: Freierman, S (2000) 'Sites', *New York Times* 27 July

A collection of union songs from the 19th and 20th century, including classics like "Joe Hill," about an organizer framed for murder and executed in 1915, and more recent songs like "Canaries in the Mines," about workers exposed to toxic chemicals.

Since 2000 the *Union Songs* website has been archived by Pandora, an Australian archiving website that is described in the following way.¹⁵

The purpose of the PANDORA Archive is to collect and provide long-term access to selected online publications and web sites that are about Australia, are by an Australian author on a subject of social, political, cultural, religious, scientific or economic significance and relevance to Australia, or are by an Australian author of recognised authority and make a contribution to international knowledge.

¹⁵ <http://pandora.nla.gov.au/overview.html>, accessed 22 October 2006

Apart from its role in collecting and documenting new songs the *Union Songs* website has grown in other ways too. It includes a large number of articles and reviews, a comprehensive and up to date bibliography and discography. More recently it has the beginnings of a filmography, a listing of films of workers and union struggle. These lists are constantly updated, corrected and added to by feedback from interested visitors.

The accessibility of the web collection encourages songwriters and poets to quickly add their new material. The most recent example of this was in the Beaconsfield gold mine rescue in Tasmania which gained enormous global media attention. A few days after the rescue (7 May 2006), I was given permission by singer/songwriters Peter Hicks and Colin Buchanan to add their new songs to the collection. These two songs then became easily available for anyone searching Beaconsfield mine rescue. I regularly email authors for permission to add their songs to the collection, or for permission to reprint an article that comes to my attention.

The Union Songs website is also connected to the union supported web based radio station Radio LabourStart that broadcasts continuously from London with an archive of over 800 union songs in dozen or so languages along with regular union news items.¹⁶ A number of the new songs added to the Union Songs collection come from this connection. There is a similar connection with LabourStart TV¹⁷ streaming union produced video, documentary and news, with an archive of 265 items.

The founder and driving force behind the LabourStart web sites is Eric Lee who has for a number of years has persuaded unions to build their own web sites as an effective economic way of communicating with their members and making union views accessible to the wider community. LabourStart also provides the international labour movement with a powerful and effective email based means of ensuring that corporations and governments are regularly made aware of international concerns and solidarity¹⁸.

It is hard to overstate the importance of the Internet and email in the MUA CD project. The medium was constantly used for gathering material, for research, for communicating and liaising with the many parties involved in the CD and its production. The Internet was also critical in setting up and publicising the launches of the CD and enabling an important feedback loop between the public, the critics, and everyone involved in the project.

The next chapter provides a survey of songs that deal with the most pressing current concern the Australian labour movement, songs that deal with the dangers of the Howard government industrial relations laws.

¹⁶ <http://radio.labourstart.org/>, accessed 11 June 2006

¹⁷ <http://www.labourstart.org/tv/> accessed 11 June 2006

¹⁸ http://unionsong.com/reviews/online_action.html, accessed 10 November 2006

CHAPTER FIVE RIGHTS AT WORK: CONTEMPORARY SONG AND POETRY

*Harassment and bullying won't be tolerated in the workplace.
Whether behind your back or straight up to your face.
It's your place of work you should feel comfortable.
Treated fairly and respected as an equal.
Verbal abuse, threats or if you feel intimidated.
Violence and unreasonable criticism should not be taken.
Or being asked to do or wear things that are sexually discriminating.*

This hip hop song was written in 2006 by Doesa. It is one of two of her songs highlighted on the ACTU website for schools, Worksite¹. Worksite held a competition for young people to write new hip hop lyrics for a chance to have their work recorded by DJ Smitten and DJ Perplex and be made available online as a hip hop Worksite podcast.

Australian songs and poems about rights at work have a long history and it is not surprising that quite a number of them have been written during the decade of the Howard government. I have collected many of these on the Union Songs website and have grouped them in a special index page called "Australian songs dealing with IR laws".² The songs come from many writers, mostly associated with the folk movement. They include Eric Bogle, Phyl Lobl, Don Henderson, John Dengate, Jack Mancor, Bernard Carney, Peter Hicks, John Tomlinson and Wendy Lowenstein.

Eric Bogle, who has an international audience and was recently the subject of a New York Times article³, has written a song simply called *The Contract*, speaking in the voice of an experienced worker warning a newcomer about the dangers of individual contracts:

*So go and sign your contract son
I you think you stand to gain
But mind you read the small print first
Before you write your name
And then you'd better keep your fingers crossed
The bosses profits dinnea fall
For then a thousand bloody contracts
They wont save you from the dole*

*Bad old ways, bad old days
One begets the other
The struggles of the past, of the working class
You had to stick together
That our unity was our only key*

¹ <http://www.worksite.actu.asn.au/>, accessed 09 June 2006

² <http://unionsong.com/reviews/irlaws.html>, accessed 09 June 2006

³ Revkin, A (2005) 'After 34 Years, His Antiwar Song Is Still Not Out of Style', New York Times 5 November

*To unlock poverty's chains
While divide and rule was the bosses tool
And son that hasnae changed*

The Contract was written for the STUC (Scottish Trades Union Congress) Centenary CD *If It Wisnea For The Union* in 1996. It sums up union concerns about individual contracts. These concerns are based both on individual and institutional memory of past attempts to undermine unions and destroy the workplace conditions they negotiated.

The song writing duo Peter Hicks and Geoff Francis wrote *Hold That Line* in the mid 1990s and have updated it a number of times. It is a song designed for picket lines to keep spirits high and reinforce both the historical experience of gains won through struggle and the central importance of unity.

*Oh, we're standing here together,
One for all and all for one;
And we'll keep right on here standing
Till our victory we have won,
We're united in our struggle,
No, there's none us can divide
We'll yield nothing to the enemy
'Cos we've justice on our side.*

Hold That Line has been a favorite with Australian union choirs for more than ten years. Hicks explained how he and Geoff Francis began to write this kind of song: (i/v with the author, 12 December 2003)

When I met Geoff I was an aspiring musician influenced by Paul Kelly with songs of social justice and we got very interested in the roots of Paul Kelly's music and looking at Bob Dylan's stuff and from there we had a much stronger interest in the 1960s folk and were very much influenced by, that's where we met in the late 80s, when we started writing songs we were very much influenced by that 60s push of songs of social justice and freedom and civil rights, and at the time the Aboriginal deaths in custody was a really big issue and was really firing us up as a cause, but it was also after I'd been involved in the SEQEB dispute in Queensland as a budding radio journalist with Triple Z, that's where I got a little bit into politics, and Geoff had been involved in assisting the miners back in the UK in the mid 1980s.

Hold That Line has also recently been taken up in Canada: (email to the author, 16 October 2006)

We recently had a Canadian Union use the Hold That Line and If it Weren't for the Union on a "history of the union type DVD" which was a great honour.

Western Australian songwriter Bernard Carney wrote *Stand Together* in 1996. This song has also become a standard with union choirs around Australia and appears on a number of CDs. Again, it is designed for singing on demonstrations, rallies and picket lines at the same time reflecting on the purpose of the song.

*We will all stand together and sing a union song
We will all stand together and know that we belong
To the strength of the future*

*In a common working bond
Stand together and sing a union song*

Carney explained why he wrote the song: (email to the author, 04 May 1999)

The song was written in August 1996 during the second wave of changes to the West Australian Industrial Relations laws and has been sung at all the union rallies since. It's one of a series of songs written for the union campaign against the law changes and ended in the establishment of the Workers Embassy behind Parliament House in June 1997, which exists today as Solidarity Park.

The WA "second wave" was the trial run for the Howard government's 2006 IR Laws and particularly the AWAs (Australian Workplace Agreements or individual contracts)

Carney is an experienced songwriter who has often been commissioned to write satirical songs for television news and current affairs programs. Like many songwriters in the folk movement he will use tunes from popular songs as well as composing his own. Carney also wrote *Bye Bye Awards* (parody of *Bye Bye Blackbird*). The song focuses on, and satirises, WA's prototype anti-union legislation in its reprise.

*Pre-strike ballots sent to undermine me
If I refuse maybe they would fine me
I'm free to choose in this dispute
Choose these rates or get the boot
Unions Bye Bye*

Songs in opposition to Western Australian industrial laws have had a long history. Back in 1979 Don Henderson, living in Brisbane, wrote *Come to the Meeting*, evoking the tactics of the IWW or Wobbly actions early in the twentieth century when members would descend on a town and get arrested in such numbers that the jails overflowed. The song also expresses the conviction of many radical unionists that unjust law must be opposed and broken if necessary. Don Henderson recorded the song with a gospel setting and sent the cassette to the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) for use in their campaign. The union in this case ignored the song, the relationship between songwriter and union is one that can't necessarily be guaranteed.

*Well a law can't be respected
if you know the law is wrong
There's a meeting called to change it
are you going to come along?
Come to the meeting
Come to the meeting
We can change it, yes we can
Every woman, every man
Come to the meeting*

Another favourite song of Australian union choirs is *Bring out the Banners*, written by John Warner in 1997.

Bring out the banners once again,

*You union women, union men,
That all around may plainly see
The power of our unity.*

*Today, when those who rule divide,
We must be standing side by side,
Our rights were bought with tears and pain,
Bring out the banners once again.*

I had the experience of singing this song with John Warner and Margaret Walters at the early morning opening of the 2004 MUA National Conference where the assembled delegates eagerly joined in the chorus. Union conferences do not always begin with a song and it was heartening to see how eagerly it was taken up.

In 1982 Wendy Lowenstein and wharfie Tom Hills published *Under the Hook: Melbourne Waterside Workers Remember* (Lowenstein and Hills, 1982), an oral history of the Melbourne waterfront. Sixteen years later, visiting the East Swanson Dock picket during the 1998 dispute Lowenstein took the few remaining copies she had and offered them to the MUA for fundraising. Interestingly she was persuaded by the unionists to record interviews about the contemporary struggle. She republished the book with a new section dealing with the Patrick dispute under the heading *MUA here to stay!*. As a result of her experience and research Lowenstein wrote a poem, *The Telephone Tree* (Lowenstein, 1998:211)

*In the Union rooms
on the night the coppers came
the phones never stopped.
Extraordinary,
a working-class poem.
Wharfies, rally round the telly:
a footy game,
Melbourne versus Collingwood.
And the Magpies won,
against top brass.
A metaphor. Workers
knocking off the ruling class.*

Lowenstein's poem also refers to the high level of international support that the MUA pickets received.

*Quickening, the tree sprouts buds,
flowers, tendrils, weaves a net,
trawls seas and docks,
Brings an Indonesian wharfie
and another from LA
A Japanese bloke yet,
to say, hold the line,
Hands off the MUA.*

Throughout the dispute ships carrying cargo loaded by non-union labour in Australia found they were prevented from unloading in ports around the world, because dock workers everywhere so strongly supported the MUA's struggle to survive. In one case international solidarity forced the German

owned *Columbus Canada* to complete a circumnavigation of the globe before any unloading of the Australian goods on the vessel became possible.

At wharves around Australia folk singers, songwriters and poets joined the community on the MUA picket lines as entertainers and as recorders of events as the dispute unfolded. John Warner, in particular, wrote a number of songs sometimes on a daily basis, including *Penrhyn Road Picket*:

*We've faced the cold of the faceless thugs
With their batons, mace and savage dogs,
We've faced the boss's heart of ice
With his squalls of hate and his hail of lies.
For the Union's brought us tents and poles,
The miners brought us a hill of coal,
Carpenter's set up roof and wall,
And friends came in and they fed us all.*

Warner described the conditions that led him to write this atmospheric song: (email to the author, 09 May 1998)

A night of incredible weather in which the defeat of Patrick Stevedores and the Howard Government seemed to become more and more inevitable. Images stay with me of brilliant colours against darkness: orange and yellow safety suits and the little red glows of cigarettes, identifying working men without faces in a dark, temporary shelter; the immense cranes and veils of rain drifting through the spotlights. Like these symbols, solidarity and a family-like friendship blaze through the oppression.

In 2002 the Labour Council of NSW held a May Day song writing and performance competition through its web site *Wobbly Radio* and innovative project that had been set up to attract young independent bands looking for a way of airing their work.

The young winner of the competition was Swarmy G (Adam Dunn) with his rap song *Mayday Mayday*:

*Chorus
MAYDAY MAYDAY - solidarity's the only way
MAYDAY MAYDAY - It's about time we had our say
MAYDAY MAYDAY - we won't be held back no way
MAYDAY MAYDAY - our voices won't fade away
MAYDAY MAYDAY - solidarity's the only way
MAYDAY MAYDAY - It's about time we had our say
MAYDAY MAYDAY - we won't be held back no way
MAYDAY MAYDAY - our voices won't fade away.*

Another of the remarkable one hundred or so entries to the May Day song competition was *Black Armband* by Sydney historian John Hospodaryk, *Black Armband* is an epic, rocking summary of the Howard government attacks on unions, Aboriginal rights, education and the rights of the community in general.

The title of the song refers to the term "Black Armband view of history" that Australian historian Geoffrey Blainey coined in 1993.⁴ The term was both a response and a derogatory description of the pioneering work of historians such as Henry Reynolds. Reynolds in a series of books beginning with *The Other Side of The Frontier* (Reynolds, 1981) argued that there was a long history of violence and repression of Aboriginals in Australia. John Howard took up Blainey's term as a vindication of his government's refusal to apologise in any way for the role of past governments and institutions in this repression. Hospodaryk's song, *Black Armband*, contains the lines:

*Well I know what you stand for will shrivel up and die
We'll throw it overboard and that won't be a lie
But until that day I wear a black armband
In mourning for what you are doing right across the land
But until that day I wear a black armband
In mourning for what you are doing right across this
right across this right across this right across this land*

The line "We'll throw it overboard and that won't be a lie" refers to the November 2001 election campaign of the Howard government. The children overboard story hit the headlines in the following way:⁵

"A number of children have been thrown overboard, again with the intention of putting us under duress" Ruddock told a media conference on October 7, 2001. Prime Minister John Howard said on talkback radio "I can't comprehend how genuine refugees would throw their children overboard".

The military tried to correct the record but the federal government refused to hear. The federal government continued to claim that children were thrown overboard and used the issue to help them win another term in the federal election.

On November 8, just two days before the election the then Defense Minister, Peter Reith, released a video claiming it was proof that children had been thrown overboard. However, the video only showed a man standing at the railing on the boat holding a child. "Well, it did happen. The fact is children were thrown into the water," said the then Defense Minister, Peter Reith.

In 2003 the AMWU contacted me through the Union Songs website asking for a singer to entertain the picket at a Sydney factory that was insisting each worker must sign an individual AWA (Australian Workplace Agreement) rather than continue with their preferred collective bargaining. John Warner accepted the challenge. He not only sang at the picket line but also wrote a new song for the occasion, the *Morris McMahon Picket Shanty*.: (email to the author: 4 May 2003)

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_arm_band_theory_of_history, accessed 12 June 2006

⁵ http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Children_Overboard, accessed 28 October 2006

*Individual contracts don't suit you and me,
Stuff you, Morris McMahon,
We want an agreement in the AIRC
United we'll beat you, Morris McMahon.*

*Seven weeks we've been picketing outside these gates,
Stuff you, Morris McMahon,
We'll stay longer again with the help of our mates.
United we'll beat you, Morris McMahon.*

Warner's song was written to be quickly memorised with easily improvised as required. The tune is *Blow The Man Down*.

The IR laws continued to inspire new songs. In 2005 Brisbane industrial relations scholar and poet David Peetz wrote *You're Fired!* a parody of the theme song for the 1960s television series *Rawhide*. Using heavy irony the song exposes the way that the new IR laws make it much easier for employers to sack workers. The song also points out that the new laws enable employers to insist on an individual contract on the basis of "no contract no start".

*Rollin', rollin', rollin'
Keep them contracts rollin'
You don't wanna sign one?
You're fired!
You'll work in foulest weather
Do as I say - whatever!
Wishin' you had somewhere to hide.
Don't think of what you're missin',
One squeak and I'm dismissin',
Keep smiling or you'll find that you're fired!*

In 2006 the Howard government work place laws also attracted the attention of veteran Sydney folk singer and songwriter John Dengate. Dengate has been writing songs and poems for close to fifty years. He is a regular busker around Sydney and a performer at folk clubs and festivals around Australia. Responding to the new workplace situation, Dengate wrote *The Industrial Relations Laws* to the tune of an old bush song. Like many of Dengate's songs it has an engaging satiric quality.

*The industrial relations laws are good for you and me
They'll stimulate employment and foster industry
They'll make Australia wealthier I'm sure you'll all agree
The industrial relations laws are good for you and me*

*Johnny Howard told me and he is very wise
Johnny Howard told me and Johnny never lies
And I don't begrudge the millions they spent to advertise
We'll be more like America hooray you lucky guys*

*The industrial relations laws will light the road ahead
Scrap the regulations and trust the boss instead
Keep away from unions they're terrorists or reds
Now I'm off to see the doctor he's examining my head*

By 2006, the possibilities for song writing about the workplace were not limited to experienced songwriters. In August, the ACTU Worksite hip hop competition winner was announced; the winning song was *Day2day work*⁶, written by school students Matthew Condoluci, Scarlett Ryan, Catlin Silec and Lab Som.

*When I wake up in the morning, I look up in the sky
Then I ask the lord, why oh why
I have to go to work, when my boss is a jerk
I see it in his face, I see a great smirk
It may be because of my race, It may be cause my face
But whatever the case, I look inside
Knowing my hearts not in the right place
So let me tell you something, Mister Man
I'm gonna sing this to ya, and try to make my stand
Give me a good pay, or I'm on my way
If you want me here, then try to make me stay
My feet hurt from standing all day
Stupid people, minimum pay
Time slows down, about to stop
You gotta get me outta this shop
The saving grace, today's pay day
Things looking brighter, straight away*

HOOK

*You gotta step it up
Never give it up
Always gotta try
Don't let your spirit die
Just play it out
And you will see
Cause things will get better in time
Cause one day it'll be our time to shine*

While the political awareness among writers from the folk revival has long been recognised, writers and performers of other popular and vernacular musical forms have also often shown similar awareness. Paul Kelly, Kev Carmody, the Pigram Brothers, Midnight Oil, Shane Howard and Warumpi Band are well known examples. Tony Mitchell in a recent article about rappers and dissenting music in Australia points out:⁷

Many Australian hip hop fans have a degree of political awareness that might come as a surprise. The Elephant Traks website has had forum discussions of issues such as the Cronulla riots, West Papuan asylum seekers, the Koran, Labor party pre-selection, VSU, indigenous community abuse allegations in the Northern Territory, Gerard Henderson, Paul Sheehan, Piers Ackerman and Miranda Devine.

⁶ <http://www.worksite.actu.asn.au/>, accessed 12 September 2006

⁷ Mitchell, T (2006) 'The rappers are revolting' Age 1 July

The Herd's national tours have taken titles such as Coalition of the Illin and Rogue States, while Curse of Dialect employ music to embody a form of living multiculturalism. Curse's surreal "rainbow hip hop" samples ethnic folk music from around the world, and MCs Raceless, Vulk Makedonski, August 2 (the date of World Anglo-India Day), Atarungi and DJ Paso Bionic represent Maltese, Macedonian, Indian, Maori and Burmese cultural backgrounds.

Joelistics, the Eurasian-Australian MC from TZU, uses his lyrics to attack colonialism and demand an apology to Aborigines.

Just how nervous the Howard government has become by criticism of its Industrial Relations laws can be judged its response to a winning school play in the annual Rock Eisteddfod in Canberra in July 2006:⁸

Workplace Relations Minister Kevin Andrews said last night it was one thing for Calwell (Canberra high school) to educate students about current issues, "but it's another thing entirely for teachers to politically hijack a rock eisteddfod, which is designed to promote positive lifestyle messages for our youth".

"This is totally inappropriate, regardless of which side of politics is being targeted," he said, adding, it was "difficult to believe" students came up with the idea themselves.

The high school has vigorously defended its portrayal of the Howard Government's industrial relations laws, which swept its students to victory in the national capital's rock eisteddfod grand final.

On 23 September 2006 a forum and concert was organised by the Brisbane Labour History Association to celebrate the links between the labour movement and folk music. A number of new songs dealing with the new legislation were performed including Jack Mancor's *Spanner in the works*.⁹

*We ain't come too far from the days of the cave
now we're all just walkin' taklin' multi-national slaves
they charge us too much they pay us not enough
it's getting to where it's going and the going 'll be tough
They smash the unions and the public schools
this country's run by bigots and bludgers and fools
the squeeze on the poor is gettin' tighter
one mans terrorist is another's freedom fighter I know*

*but I know sometimes it might seem hard
but if we don't learn from history we wont get far
You gotta stand up to you're devil
and look him in the eye
Say come on man well I'll see you outside
your hurting all of the ones I love
so I'm gunna start to push
when it comes to the shove*

⁸ <http://bmuc.blogspot.com/2006/07/government-rocked-by-school-play.html>, accessed 20 July 2006

⁹ <http://jackmancor.com/music-4.html>, accessed 22 October 2006

*I know sometimes that it might hurt
but we gotta take a stand and throw a spanner in the works
throw a spanner in the works
throw a spanner in the works my friends*

The Australian tradition of writing and performing union songs is alive and well and provides a refreshing rebuttal to the constant claims in the media that the labour movement and its culture is out of touch and in terminal decline. Indeed there is a laconic confidence in these songs and poems. Hidden from history perhaps, censored by those who own and control the means of publicity certainly, ignored by advocates of this or that canon, Australian union songs, it seems, are not about to go away.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Our strategy should be not only to confront empire, but to lay siege to it. To deprive it of oxygen. To shame it. To mock it. With our art, our music, our literature, our stubbornness, our joy, our brilliance, our sheer relentlessness - and our ability to tell our own stories. Stories that are different from the ones we're being brainwashed to believe ... The corporate revolution will collapse if we refuse to buy what they are - their ideas, their version of history, their wars, their weapons, their notion of inevitability. Remember this: We be many and they be few. They need us more than we need them. Roy, A (2003) 'Confronting Empire', *Frontline* v20n3 February

Arundhati Roy, winner of the Sydney Peace Prize in 2004, highlights the importance of the cultural component of movements and campaigns. Roy rates the potency of culture as more valuable and longer lasting than anything that can be marketed. The traditions, aspirations and culture of unions and their community supporters have been evident for close to 200 years. It is a vital tradition largely ignored because it is so openly political, so grounded in the life experience of working women and men. The culture of that movement is an expression of its dissenting and oppositional view.

In *Music and Social Movements* Eyerman and Jamison offer an explanation of the success of songs in the 1960s protest movement in the US: (Eyerman and Jamison, 1998:122)

The "folk revival" brought ideas into popular songs; it was in the songs that the critique of mass culture - with its homogenizing tendencies, its environmentally destructive products, its dependence on war and weaponry - could be most effectively articulated. Along with the intimate connection with the collective identity of a rising generation, this intellectualizing encouraged the development of a new sort of folk music, a non-traditional, urban folk music, which easily admitted cultural and political criticism into its lyrical content.

The protest songs of the 1960s are best seen as direct descendants of the union songs of the 1930s. It is clear that folk revival singers and songwriters are at ease with an expanded concept of folk music that encompasses their new songs. The title song of the MUA CD, Tim O'Brien's *With These Arms*, prompted me to enquire about his reasons for writing it. He responded: (email to the author, 15 October 2003)

I once wanted to punch everything... now, my prime concern and motivation is rooted in a deeper and more profound thought: the key issue for humanity is 'just treatment for all'. 'Just treatment' does not allow exploitation of the environment, cannot conceive of racism, cannot tolerate war, cannot tolerate Australia's treatment of refugees, cannot sit by as big business bleeds workers and smashes small business, cannot remain silent in the face of injustice ... The people on the wharves were ordinary people choosing not to remain silent in the face of injustice. It was the unexpected ordinariness of the people in those amazing gatherings - and their willingness to engage in civil disobedience - that prompted my song "with these arms". "We Belong to the Union" I wrote simply as a good old-fashioned rallying cry.

I am astonished by how subservient and silent we have all become in the face of creeping globalism and the economic and social hegemony of big business. There is a 'cargo cult ' promise behind the new order which seems to be suckering Government, our fellow citizens, and, I have to say, many of our unions.

The argument that folk music creates community is not confined to folk musicians or historians. An interesting view about the dissenting capacities of folk music appeared in an article in the US religious magazine *Sojourners* (Hoven, M and Anderson, DE (1996) 'From the Church to the Union Hall', *Sojourners Magazine* v25n5, September-October)

Folk music, the music of the people, is a subversive music, whether it be the traditional Anglo-American ballad from the mountains and rural areas of the South or the rural blues-to-urban jazz continuum of the African-American tradition. It is subversive because it presents an alternative reality that sneaks through the cracks of the hegemonic culture in which most of us live and find our moral, aesthetic, and political values. The hegemonic, or dominant, culture is the conventional wisdom, the taken-for-grantedness of the world in which we live ... When this happens, an alternative, a subversive counterculture, develops as a critique of the dominant culture. It fills the gaps left by the hegemonic but also points to its transformation by including the hopes and aspirations of those left out.

This alternative culture seeks to use its expressive power to mobilize its constituency to nurture the solidarity that brings about spiritual and political change. Denied access to the "high" or dominant culture, the alternative culture draws on all the resources available to folks at the margin.

Some Australian unions are also acutely aware of the role of an alternative culture and the importance of introducing it to the next generation of members. In 2003 at the launch of the MUA CD in Brisbane Mick Carr, MUA South Queensland Branch Secretary, explained it this way: (i/v with the author 6 September 2003)

When we talk about music and poetry and theatre, we talk about the collective, of gathering, of people coming together. The world today, and certainly the world of John Howard and the world of imperialism, is the cult of individualism, to promote individualism not only in the workplace with Australian Workplace Agreements and individual contracts. It's exactly the opposite of what trade unions and the community support and community groups stand for and what theatre stands for, and what poetry stands for. Bringing people together, creating audience, creating collectivism and it's so important, creating song, having meetings, having debate, having discussions, exactly the opposite of what's being shoved down our throats everyday.

In their campaign against the new Industrial Relations legislation, Australian unions in have given their world view more prominence. In his 2006 speech to the National Press Club in Canberra, ACTU Secretary Greg Combet, emphasised and described Australian union values at a time when the government was promoting its own ideas about 'Australian values'¹:

¹ http://www.actu.asn.au/work_rights/news/files/Greg-Combet-NationalPressClub-13Sept2006-Final2.pdf, accessed 13 September 2006

We have different values, different beliefs, and a more positive vision for industrial relations, the economy and Australian society.

Unions don't want Australia to go down the US road. We don't want widening inequality and social dysfunction. We are opposed to the entrenchment of even more wealth and power at the top, and the increased alienation of working people from the decisions which affect their work and livelihoods.

We are fighting for a fairer and more just society, one where the benefits of economic prosperity are more fairly shared.

We are fighting to ensure that people have reasonable rights to mitigate the abuse of power by big business.

We are fighting for democratic rights and principles – to improve the quality of our democracy and society.

We believe that economic prosperity can be achieved in harmony with decent employment rights and the observance of democratic principles..

Unions, however, are functioning in a rapidly changing context. In a recent interview about his forthcoming book *The Little History of Australian Unionism* sociologist Sean Scalmer pondered the situation for unions in 2006, and the future possibilities:²

For much of the twentieth century, employers and governments accepted the legitimacy of unions. However, this appears to have changed over the last 15 years or so. Many employers and conservative politicians no longer accept that unions are a legitimate presence in Australian society ... The new legislation will make it much more difficult for unions to operate. The right to strike will be circumscribed; the ability of union officials to enter a workplace will be curtailed; the removal of 'unfair dismissal' protections will make it easier for hostile employers to victimise union members. However, this does not necessarily mean that unions will disappear. The union campaign against the legislation has been impressive; a large number of Australians continue to belong to unions; a larger number believe that unions play a vital role. Unions have resisted attacks in the past (and they do so in other countries, too). In this sense, the future of unionism is a story that still contains many possibilities.

This sense of “many possibilities” is reflected in the way the union struggle against the IR laws has been taken up by Australian songwriters and poets. By March 2006, over twenty new songs had been catalogued on the Union Songs website³, an impressive number in a relatively short period.

Starting in 1993, the Union Concert at the National Folk Festival in Canberra has been sponsored by the local branch of the CFMEU. Festival publicist Jan Nary writes in the 2005 festival catalogue:

"Folk music was one of the first tools in the working class struggle and that hasn't changed," says Glenn Parry, who is the Assistant Secretary of the CFMEU. "We're rapt about being involved with this Festival, it draws talent from all around the world and it's a real reflection of who we are now in

² <http://www.vulgar.com.au/scalmerqs.html>, accessed 19 May 2006

³ <http://unionsong.com/reviews/irlaws.html>, accessed 12 June 2006

Australia. Over the years you see the Festival brats grow into performers and Directors! and you know our cultural heritage is in good hands."

Long time organiser of the Union Concert, Seamus Gill, described its origins: (i/v with the author, 29 November 2003)

When I got involved with the National, it was decided that for it to survive it had to stay in one place and I was on the board of the Festival, there was Colin McJanet and myself and we knew some of the CFMEU people quite well. Initially they started with a small donation and we put on a union concert ... and they had some input into the program as well, who was on, and that has become a regular feature, they've actually been one of our major sponsors or contributors.

Not everybody is happy with there being a union concert and it was quite interesting in the year when the MUA dispute was going on in 1998, that was in the Budawang, the largest venue in the festival that holds comfortably 2000, that was actually packed, despite the fact that outside there were some members of the National Farmers Federation trying to hand out leaflets telling people not to go in as it was a union concert. That was the year, I'm not sure it was the best quality but it definitely had the largest audience and the most participation and it was actually really stirring.

At the beginning of the twentieth century union views, concerns and ideas were disseminated very effectively through songs and poems, particularly in pocket editions of the IWW songbook with its subtitle *To Fan the Flames of Discontent*, published in many countries including Australia. Throughout that century the union song tradition continued using every technological development in the recording and publishing industry from the '78' to the CD, from the radio to the internet. The Internet has made possible an unprecedented international reach and range of delivery. Websites, web radio and pod casting make it a powerful medium for songs that are still produced under the ethos of the old IWW saying, "beware the movement that sings". The cultural importance of songwriting and singing that the folk revival offers to the labour movement, a participatory cultural approach, is sometimes regarded as a do-it-yourself movement: (Eyerman and Jamison, 1998:109)

The social movements of the 1960s offered and practiced a new vision of participatory democracy, and that vision formed a central part of the cognitive praxis of the "folk revival." The play-it-yourself participatory approach to music that has subsequently fueled so many youth movements around the world reinvents something that took place in the early years of the 1960s.

Lisa Milner in *Fighting Films* has argued that the Waterside Workers' Film Unit was created precisely to give the union a voice during the Cold War era of tight control of political opinion. Like many commentators, she posits a new tightening of control in the media today: (Milner, 2003:137)

There are fewer independent voices in the media, and current circumstances are not moving towards a more critical and diverse mainstream media. There are, therefore, real reasons to resurrect the wharfie films from the cultural closet, to celebrate them and incorporate them into our history, and to link the struggles of the post-war era to political challenges that arise today.

The Australian labour movement has been an important element in most of

the popular pro-people campaigns in Australian history. It is difficult to imagine where popular consciousness of issues like the environment, education, health, equality for all and a world free from war might stand had it not been for such an actively engaged labour movement. The Howard government has decided, in the midst of environmental and global security crises, that it cannot coexist with such a powerful independent movement. Whether the government will prevail is hard to judge. History shows it has not been able to do so yet. Whether the labour movement will fully appreciate and employ the "sources of empowerment, education and consciousness raising" that the writers and singers of union songs can offer is also uncertain. But the resource certainly remains vigorous and my research suggests it will continue to grow.

Drawing together the fields of human rights, politics and music can activate voices that may otherwise remain silent; the labour movement has utilised this amalgam for generations. In *Rebel Music* Jazz scholar Ajay Hebel writes: (Hebel in Fischlin and Hebel, 2003:246)

Music as Alternative History, Music as Education, Music as Community, Music as Witness and Remembrance, Music as Hope, Music as Other Possible Futures: however we choose to understand the power, the force, of resistant sound, one of the great lessons of rebel musics resides in the acknowledgement that listeners need to share responsibility for developing and nurturing a more prevalent culture of rights ... music by itself offers no simple cure for monumental global suffering and injustice. What it can provide, though, is an opening, and opportunity, a vision, for a sorely needed new cultural paradigm.

The continuing relationship between the folk revival in Australia and the union movement accounts for the large number of Australian union songs written over the past sixty years. This relationship is largely an informal one that is dependent on the shared values and historical perspectives of the two movements, values that include the need to combat and redress abuses of power through collective action, building a sense of community and promoting the extension of democracy to ensure that workers and their organisations will not be deprived of influence in the key political social and economic matters of the day.

Australian union song and poetry continues to be written and recorded offering audiences critiques of the world as it is and visions of the world as it could be. Today's electronic technology provides a powerful means of collection and distribution of this resource. This is important for performance, for informing new work and for building a comprehensive anthology for continuing research.

The song and poetry that has resulted from this relationship constitutes a valuable and largely unexplored cultural resource. It provides a cogent alternative commentary to many important events in our national history and for that reason alone should not be ignored.

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