Radical Intellectuals: an Unacknowledged Legislature?

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Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world
Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*

In his journal entry for 22 January 1836, Charles Darwin wrote of the colony of New South Wales: 'The whole population, poor and rich, are bent on acquiring wealth: amongst the higher orders, wool and sheep-grazing form the constant subject of conversation ... with such habits, and without intellectual pursuits, it can hardly fail to deteriorate.' Even at the time, Darwin's judgement was a little harsh. The colony's first privately owned newspaper, the *Australian*, had been founded in 1824, and its first library had been established in 1826. In 1830 Henry Savery's *Quintus Servinton* had become the first Australian novel, and in 1835 E. H. Thomas' *The Bandit of the Rhine* the first Australian play to be published in book form. The Sydney Theatre Royal had opened its doors in 1833 (and would close them again in 1838, let it be admitted). Far from deteriorating, as Darwin had anticipated, the colony's intellectual culture was to expand and grow. The Melbourne *Argus* was founded in 1846. The Universities of Sydney and Melbourne were inaugurated in 1852 and 1855 respectively.

By 1911, according to the Commonwealth Census, there were already, in the non-Aboriginal population, 5,843 priests and clergy; 2,771 authors, journalists and reporters; 297 university teachers; 30,304 other teachers; 4,764 artists, painters and sculptors, etc.; 9,453 musicians, composers, music teachers, etc.; 1,797 actors, actresses and circus performers; and 665 librarians. Seventy years later, the 1981 census discovered 11,029 priests and

clergy; 16,963 authors, journalists and related workers; 11,380 university teachers; 121,920 other post-primary teachers; 11,554 painters, sculptors and related artists; 8,524 musicians, vocalists and music teachers; 9,477 actors, announcers, dancers and related workers; and 6,529 professional librarians and archivists. Whatever other criticism might be levelled at the European settlement in Australia, as it entered its bicentennial decade, no one could deem it still devoid of intellectual pursuits.

Nonetheless, the word 'intellectual' has unfavourable connotations in Australian English. It does so for the good reason that it often smacks of élitism and for the bad reason that it excites suspicion amongst the opponents of reasoned social and political argument. 'Pseudo-intellectuals', 'so-called intellectuals', 'ratbag intellectuals', and the like, are typically seen as impractical schemers guilty of the presumption that they are more intelligent than the rest of humanity. It's worth noting, however, that for all his condescension towards the Australian colonists, these are not the senses in which Darwin himself used the term 'intellectual'. For him 'intellectual' meant more or less the same as 'intelligent'. This had been the word's dominant meaning from the fourteenth century until the early nineteenth. It was only in Darwin's own time that the word was first used to refer to a special kind of person, someone who 'thinks'. The problem with this usage should be obvious: we all think, and all our productive activities require the exercise of intelligence. Indeed, it is our capacity to think, amongst other things, that makes us human. To suggest that only intellectuals 'think' is to deny our common humanity.

There is, however, another, less élitist and even more modern sense of the term 'intellectual': an intellectual can be understood simply as someone who works at a particular type of job, that is, as someone whose business it is to produce or reproduce 'culture' in one way or another. Thus the word refers to all writers and journalists, actors and painters, priests and teachers, academics and publishers, no matter what their individual levels of 'intelligence' (whatever that means). It is this sense of the word that prompted my reference to the 1911 and 1981 censuses, and I will be using the word in this sense from now on.

The word 'radical', like 'intellectual', has a long and varied history. I use 'radical' here in its early nineteenth-century meaning, which became fashionable again in the 1950s and 1960s, as referring to any version of 'left-wing', socially critical politics. It should be stressed that the great movements of radical opinion have secured their support from much larger groups than the intelligentsia. The socialist movement at its most successful has drawn much of its strength from the working class, and the feminist movement from women of all classes and many professions.

It also needs to be stressed that for most of Australia's history its intellectuals have normally been conservative rather than radical in their politics. In the years before the First World War, the various Protestant clergies clearly played an overwhelmingly conservative social role. The Catholic church's Irish connection certainly led it to dissent from the British imperial politics of the main Protestant churches, and to move into an uneasy alliance with the newly formed Labor parties. But support for Irish republicanism and opposition to conscription during the First World War led neither Archbishop Mannix of Melbourne nor his clergy towards any wider radical sympathies.

School teaching, too, appears to have been an eminently conservative profession. One historian has observed of the pre-1917 school system that: 'The child who came to believe in the world of the *Commonwealth School Paper* would have been ready to die for his country and Empire, and aware that he might soon be called upon to make that sacrifice.' While it would be unwise to assume that all primary teachers shared the conservative social values of the curriculum they taught, it seems unlikely that many of them can have lived their professional life as a continuing lie.

The small pre-1914 university sector was organized around a similar British imperial conservatism. When G. A. Wood, professor of history at Sydney University, dared to criticize the British treatment of the Boers during the South African War, he was censured by the university senate. In 1925 when the poet Christopher Brennan's love affair with Violet Singer became public knowledge, he was dismissed from his teaching post in the university's German department, on grounds of adultery. It was Wood's main persecutor during the South African War, the then professor of Modern Literature, Mungo MacCallum, who as university vice-chancellor presided over Brennan's dismissal. In the meantime MacCallum had been president of the pro-conscription Universal Service League in 1915 and an executive member of the loyalist 'King's Men' in 1918. He became warden of the university in 1923, vice-chancellor in 1924, deputy chancellor in 1928 and chancellor in 1934. He was knighted in 1926. The system rewarded its own.

Yet there have been radical intellectuals. The skills that professional intellectuals routinely use at work – writing, public speaking, administration – are also essential for effective political

mobilization. Thus almost all radical movements have been obliged either to recruit members of the existing intelligentsia or to create entirely new intellectuals from within their own ranks. Magazines and newspapers provide the clearest instance of this affinity between intellectual life and radical politics. Since the early nineteenth century such publications have provided Australian intellectuals of all persuasions and inclinations with an absolutely vital means of circulating their cultural products. But radical movements, parties and sects have also used magazines and newspapers to disseminate their own more expressly political products. Skills learnt in the one arena are thus transferable to the other. It is hardly surprising then, that some intellectuals might become radicals, and some radicals intellectuals.

It is difficult to speak of political radicalism in Australia before the second third of the nineteenth century. Of course, both the Aborigines and the transported convicts sought to resist the new colonial order. But resistance is not radicalism. It is only in the middle of the century that radical democratic movements, such as those against transportation and in favour of suffrage reform, finally come into being. Peter Love discusses this early radicalism in the next volume of this history.

In almost all of these movements the typical intellectual figure was that of the middle-class professional who was also a radical journalist. The republican John Dunmore Lang, for example, was a Presbyterian minister (until he was deposed from the Christian ministry in 1842) and parliamentarian; but he also owned and edited the *Colonist* from 1835 to 1840, the *Colonial Observer* from 1841 to 1847 and the *Press* in 1851, and contributed regularly and prolifically to these and other newspapers. His sometime disciple Daniel Deniehy was a lawyer and parliamentarian; but he was also a contributor to the *People's Advocate* and *Freeman's Journal*, owned and edited the *Southern Cross* during 1859–60 and edited the *Victorian* from 1862 to 1864.

As the century proceeded, the three major forms of political radicalism that were to influence twentieth-century Australian history began to take shape in socialism, feminism, and nationalism. Several chapters in the fourth volume of this history discuss these movements in detail. My main concern here is to trace the roles that radical intellectuals played within these movements.

The last two decades of the nineteenth century represent the point at which an emergent radical politics first found organizational expression. Much of the intellectual and moral power of this late nineteenth-century Australian radicalism arose from a

style of polemic that neatly elided long-term ideals with more immediately practicable political objectives. Feminists sought to challenge the general subordination of woman to man; they also wanted female suffrage. Socialists hoped to create a classless society; they also wanted a united Labor party. Nationalists dreamt of a republic without imperial titles; they also wanted a single federal government for the whole of Australia. The central function of the radical intellectual was to connect immediate objective to long-term ideal, in a rhetoric that could inspire both idealism and practical action.

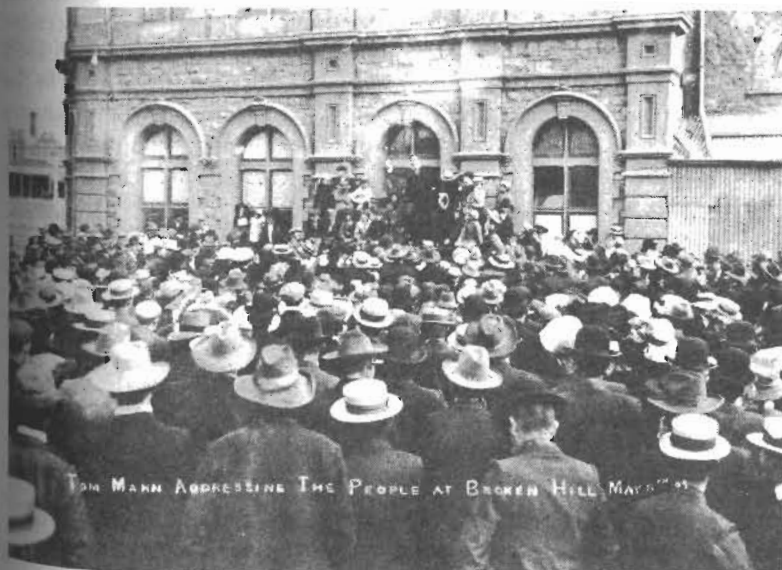
In this work, the typical radical intellectual figure became that of the professional printer-journalist. W. R. Winspear, a coalminer by origin, established himself from 1887 as printer and editor of the *Radical*, the first Australian socialist newspaper. Though his printing business failed during the 1890s depression, he looked to journalism as a profession for the rest of his life: in his last years he worked for the local Bankstown newspaper. Louisa Lawson had written for the *Mudgee Independent* and had co-edited the *Republican* before founding the commercially successful feminist newspaper *Dawn* in 1888. Catherine Spence, Australia's first woman political candidate, wrote regularly for the *South Australian Register* and the *Adelaide Observer*, and from the 1880s onwards earned her living as a writer. William Lane, by far the most influential of the early socialist (and nationalist) agitators, had worked as a printer and journalist in the U.S.A. before embarking for Australia. Here he edited the radical nationalist *Boomerang* from 1887, and the Queensland labour movement's *Worker* from 1890 to 1892. His journalism outlasted his radicalism: in 1900 he became leader writer, and in 1913 editor, of the conservative *New Zealand Herald*. J. F. Archibald had been apprenticed as a printer and had worked as a journalist on the Melbourne *Echo* and *Daily Telegraph* and the Sydney *Evening News* before founding in 1880 the most important of the radical nationalist publications, the *Bulletin*. A. G. Stephens, the *Bulletin's* literary editor from 1896 to 1906, was yet another apprentice printer, who had previously worked as a journalist on the *Gympie Miner*, the *Boomerang* and the Cairns *Argus*. The radical nationalist poet Henry Lawson contributed to the *Republican*, the *Worker* and the *Bulletin*, and was briefly employed on the journalistic staff of the *Boomerang*. The socialist poet Bernard O'Dowd was actually a state public servant by profession. But he too wrote for the *Bulletin*, and from 1897 onwards he produced and edited the weekly *Tocsin*, which became the Victorian *Labor Call* in 1906.

Catherine Helen Spence

The early twentieth century witnessed a decline in the Australian radical movements, partly as a result of their own immediate successes. Patriarchy persisted, but female suffrage had been won by 1908. Capitalism persisted, but Labor parties had been created in all states by 1903. Australia remained an imperial dominion, but in 1901 federation had been achieved. Both socialist and feminist agitators continued to press for their more long-term goals, but the mainstream of Australian radical politics coalesced around an increasingly conservative Labor Party. However, they weren't entirely marginalized. Vida Goldstein, the president of the feminist Women's Federal Political Association, polled well when she

stood as an independent woman candidate for the Senate in 1910 and for the House of Representatives in 1913 and 1914. And the new Victorian Socialist Party (V.S.P.), launched by Tom Mann in 1905, claimed 2,000 members in Melbourne alone within a couple of years.

If socialist and feminist radicalism continued to represent a significant but limited force, radical nationalism, by contrast, disappeared as an independent presence in Australian political life. Partly, this was a direct consequence of the growing strength of the A.L.P. and of the way in which nationalism became incorporated into Labor ideology. But the decline in radical nationalism also represented a real shift towards pro-imperial sentiment in Australia. From the beginning, Australian radical nationalism had been characterized by a strident racism. The *Bulletin* represented its authentic voice when it opposed the 'cheap Chinaman' and the 'cheap nigger'. In 1905, the Japanese victory in the Russo-Japanese War sent shock waves through the whole of Australian society. Racist fears of a successful Asiatic military power played a crucial role in bringing about a renewed subordination of Australian nationalism to British imperialism. Australian nationalists increasingly looked, not to an independent anti-British republic, but to the need for imperial protection against Japan. Hence the



Tom Mann in 1909

enthusiastic support for the empire during the First World War, shared by the Fisher Labor government, and by William Lane and Henry Lawson.

But the war also provided socialists and feminists with a renewed opportunity to expand and develop their political influence. Almost all Australian socialist organizations opposed the war from the very beginning, and one in particular, the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.), played a vital role in general anti-war agitation and in the campaign against conscription. In July 1915, Tom Barker, the I.W.W.'s most effective public agitator, was fined £50 for publishing an anti-recruiting poster; in May 1916 he was sentenced to twelve months jail under the War Precautions Act for publishing a Syd Nicholls anti-war cartoon. Two of the V.S.P.'s leading agitators, R.S. Ross and F.J. Riley, were central figures in the main anti-war coalition, the Australian Peace Alliance.

The women's movement split over the war. Vida Goldstein, who had become chairperson of the Australian Peace Alliance in 1914, led its radical wing into the new Women's Peace Army (W.P.A.), which she helped to found in 1915. The W.P.A. issued an anti-war 'Special Appeal by Women to Women'. So effective was Cecilia John's song 'I didn't raise my son to be a soldier' that it was banned under the War Precautions Act. Socialists, feminists, pacifists and Catholics banded together to defeat two successive conscription referenda in 1916 and 1917. In 1916 the A.L.P. itself split over conscription. The I.W.W. played a significant role in the general strike that paralysed much of New South Wales industry in 1917. The Women's Peace Army gave the strike its enthusiastic support, and one of its leaders, Adela Pankhurst, was jailed for her part in pro-strike agitation.

The war years represent the second great wave of radical agitation in Australia. Once again, radical agitation sought to combine ultimate ideals and immediate objectives. Once again, that combination was effected by radical intellectuals. Once again, too, the characteristic radical intellectual figure was that of the professional journalist. Tom Barker was full-time editor of the I.W.W.'s weekly newspaper *Direct Action*; R.S. Ross was full-time editor of the V.S.P.'s weekly *Socialist* (which had originally been edited by Tom Mann); Vida Goldstein was owner-editor first of the *Woman's Sphere*, then of the *Woman Voter*; Adela Pankhurst edited the V.S.P. children's magazine, *Dawn*; the indefatigable Bob Winspear edited the Australian Socialist Party's *International Socialist* up until the 1916 conscription referendum campaign.

Adela Pankhurst about 1917

For some it was political activity itself that transformed them into journalists: just as Winspear was by trade a miner, Tom Barker had worked as a farm labourer and tram conductor before being swept up into the full-time leadership of the I.W.W. But R.S. Ross, for example, was a professional journalist who had worked on the *Barrier Truth* and the Queensland *Worker* before moving to the *Socialist*, and would later own and edit *Ross's Monthly*. Whatever route had been taken to journalism, it remained the dominant profession of the radical intellectual.

One further parallel needs to be drawn between wartime radicalism and that of the 1890s: in the aftermath of its successes, the movement collapsed quite suddenly. In part, this was a result of the degree of state repression directed against the I.W.W. But the radicals' immediate successes, in defeating conscription, and in moving the A.L.P. to the left, were also ultimately important in detracting from their larger aspirations.

The 1920s saw an extraordinary collapse in radical political activity. The decade also witnessed three significant departures from Australia's shores. In 1921 Vere Gordon Childe, whose involvement in anti-war activity had cost him his tutorship at Sydney University, left for England. In 1926 the young Jack Lindsay, ambitious to establish himself as a poet, followed suit. Two years later, Christina Stead set sail. Childe and Lindsay would become Australia's two most distinguished Marxist scholars. Childe would occupy chairs of prehistoric archeology at the universities of Edinburgh and London, and would be awarded honorary doctorates by Harvard and by Pennsylvania State University. Lindsay would acquire a formidable reputation as translator, classical scholar, biographer, novelist and critic, and would be awarded the Soviet Badge of Honour. Stead would combine radical politics with a literary career of considerable distinction, and would eventually receive the Patrick White Award. All three were exiles for most of their working lives: Childe until his retirement in 1957, Stead until 1974 and Lindsay permanently. Later generations of Australian radical intellectuals would learn to travel similar paths.

The 1920s, however, also marked the founding of the Communist Party of Australia, the organization that would dominate Australian radical politics from the 1930s until the 1960s. The Communist Party's novelty consisted above all in its status as the *sole* representative of Australian radicalism to the left of the A.L.P. For three decades virtually all non-Labor radical intellectuals were either Communist Party members or fellow-travellers or, at the very least, found their activity necessarily directed towards and

linked with that of the Communist Party.

This was an almost unmitigated disaster for feminism. Almost all of the major Australian women writers of the 1930s were influenced by both feminism and socialism. But as the decade proceeded, their feminist interests became subordinated to the demands of Communist Party membership or fellow-travelling. Katharine Susannah Prichard had been a founder-member of the Communist Party, Jean Devanny joined in 1929, and Betty Roland in 1935. Eleanor Dark, Marjorie Barnard and Flora Eldershaw, Dymphna Cusack and Kylie Tennant were all involved in the Movement Against War and Fascism and in the Fellowship of Australian Writers, both of which were Communist Party front organizations. So too was the literary critic, Nettie Palmer, whose daughter Aileen served in Spain as a nurse with the International Brigade. Jean Devanny's political career illustrates the problem in extreme form. A dedicated activist in the 1930s, she was expelled from the party in 1942 because of her feminist sexual politics. She was reinstated and guaranteed retrospective 'continuity of membership' in 1944, resigned in 1950, but nonetheless continued virtually until her death in 1962 to seek party approval for her work.

For Australian socialism, the Communist achievement represented a more ambiguous legacy. On the one hand, the party's authoritarian discipline was frequently directed at those questions of cultural policy that vitally concerned the radical intelligentsia itself. On the other, the extent of party organization permitted the creation of a whole range of alternative cultural institutions capable of sustaining an often very vital radical culture. The party maintained its own press: the national *Workers' Weekly*, which became *Tribune* in 1939; the *Guardian* in Victoria; the Queensland *Guardian*; the *Red Star* in Perth; and a number of union and front organization publications. *Communist Review*, the party's theoretical monthly, was launched in 1934. The Workers' Art Clubs and the School of Modern Writers in Sydney, and the Writers' League in Melbourne, were Communist-inspired initiatives. So too was the New Theatre, founded in Sydney in 1932 and in Melbourne in 1936.

In 1943 the party launched *Australian New Writing*, edited by Prichard, George Farwell and Bernard Smith. Farwell would later proceed to a career as prolific author, broadcaster and freelance journalist. Smith would later become Director of the Power Institute of Fine Arts, and Professor of Contemporary Art at the University of Sydney. Realist Writers' Groups were established in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, and a Studio of Realist Art in

Sydney. Frank Hardy's *Power without Glory*, almost certainly the most influential novel ever written by an Australian Communist, was first published in Melbourne in 1950. Even as late as 1952, when the political mood had swung sharply against the Communist Party, the Melbourne Realist Writers' Group was still able to initiate a new journal, the *Realist Writer*. Edited by Bill Wannan, and later by Stephen Murray-Smith, it eventually became *Overland*. The same year witnessed the founding of the Australasian Book Society. Prominent Communist or fellow-travelling intellectuals also included the painter Noel Counihan and writers Alan Marshall, John Morrison, Judah Waten, Eric Lambert, Jack Beasley, Dorothy Hewett, Ralph de Boissiere, Helen Palmer, David Martin, Vic Williams and Mona Brand.

Between an international, imperial conservatism on the one hand, and an international, pro-Soviet radicalism on the other, there remained little room for Australian radical nationalism in the 1930s. But in 1936 P. R. Stephensen published *The Foundations of Culture in Australia*, an essay that rehearsed many earlier radical nationalist themes. Its nationalism was cultural rather than political, however, and it represented an isolated personal voice rather than a community of opinion such as had sustained the *Bulletin*. Stephensen himself went on to found the semi-fascist Australia First Movement. His arrest and internment as a possible enemy sympathizer during the Second World War made it clear in retrospect just how socially isolated 1930s radical nationalism had been. Stephensen did nonetheless exercise some influence on the poet Rex Ingamells, whose *Conditional Culture*, published in 1938, provided the inspiration for the nationalist Jindyworobak movement. But again, Jindyworobak politics took a mainly cultural form, and Ingamells too flirted with the Australia First movement.

The A.L.P.'s return to government in 1941 made it possible to redefine the Second World War as a national people's war rather than a British imperial war. Thus a more viable form of radical nationalist politics again became possible. The A.L.P. itself, and the Curtin and Chifley governments, provided radical nationalism with its central political medium during the 1940s. As an intellectual current, however, 1940s nationalism had a more specific location: firstly, around the group associated with the Department of Postwar Reconstruction, notably H. V. Evatt, H. C. Coombs and Lloyd Ross; and secondly, around the journal *Meanjin* (originally *Meanjin Papers*). *Meanjin* was edited by Clem Christesen, and had been founded in Brisbane in 1940, but moved to Melbourne in 1945. Its prominent contributors were to include Marjorie Bar-

nard, Nettie Palmer and the poet Judith Wright; historians Brian Fitzpatrick, Russel Ward and, later, Geoffrey Serle; A. A. Phillips, whose 'The Cultural Cringe' was first published in *Meanjin* in 1950; and Vance Palmer, the novelist, critic and man of letters, who was appointed chairman of the Commonwealth Literary Fund by the Labor government in 1947.

During and immediately after the war, radical nationalist and Communist aspirations focused on the prospects for an A.L.P.-led 'Reconstruction' of Australian society. But the onset of the Cold War, the consequent rift between Labor and the Communists, and finally conservative victory in the 1949 federal elections, put an end to such hopes.

The collapse of 1940s radicalism was significantly different from that of the radicalisms of the 1890s and of the First World War years. Whereas the earlier radicalisms had been undermined by the force of their own successes, this later radicalism had independently achieved nothing of any permanent political significance, despite its apparent numerical strength. Its achievements were not its own, but those of the Labor government. And, so far as the Communists were concerned, its prestige was not its own but that of the Soviet Union. Precisely because 1940s radicalism had been so closely identified with the national war effort, with the practicalities of state regulation of a war economy, and with post-war plans for a state-directed Reconstruction, Labor's defeat at the polls delivered a body-blow to radicalism itself. And precisely because non-Labor radicalism had been so closely identified with the Soviet Union, the Cold War ideology of the 1950s was able to redefine radicalism as treason.

If the general history of 1940s radicalism differed from that of earlier radicalisms, so too did both the social function and the social composition of the radical intelligentsia. Unlike the earlier radical journalists, the radical intelligentsia of the 1940s acquired neither a distinctive social role nor a characteristic profession. Rather, its members sought to align their already existing intellectual skills, whatever they might be, to the political needs of the moment. Thus poets, painters and playwrights sought to produce radical poetry, painting and plays, and historians, critics and economists radical history, criticism and economics. Radicalism here meant simply the injection of a new, politically radical content into already established, conventional cultural forms and social roles. It is hardly surprising, then, that the intellectual careers begun in the 1930s and 1940s very often out-lasted the political commitments they had originally accompanied.

The social composition of the 1940s radical intelligentsia was thus diverse. This is clearly true of the nationalists: Evatt was a lawyer and Coombs an economist; Christesen and Fitzpatrick were journalists; Ward and Serle became academics; Nettie and Vance Palmer and Judith Wright were professional writers; Phillips and Eldershaw were teachers; Barnard a librarian. Many of the Communist and fellow-travelling intellectuals were drawn from a similar range of professions: Prichard had worked as a teacher and a journalist before becoming a full-time writer and political activist; Cusack, Williams, Waten and Helen Palmer also worked as teachers; Roland, Wannan and Martin were professional journalists; Counihan was a newspaper cartoonist; Brand a social worker; Smith and Murray-Smith became academics; Marshall had been an accountant; Dark and Lambert were professional writers.

But the Communist Party also functioned as a vehicle for working-class political and cultural aspirations: Hardy was a labourer and seaman before trying his hand as a journalist and writer; Farwell a waterside-worker; Beasley a fitter; de Boissiere a car-assembly worker; Devanny was a working-class battler; and Hewett, though from a middle-class background, worked as a factory-hand before returning to university at the age of thirty-seven, eventually becoming a tutor and later still a professional writer.

The 1950s were endured as a long, slow agony by the organized Australian left. The central experience of the decade for the left was that of the continuing political impotence of the A.L.P. and the decline and disintegration of the Communist Party. Labor lurched from electoral disaster to electoral disaster, while Communist Party membership fell drastically. The 1950s was also, however, the decade in which the fate of the radical intelligentsia first became disentangled from that of the wider radical movement. Whatever the dismal histories of the Labor and Communist parties, the 1950s and 1960s were a period of remarkable achievement, both individual and collective, for the radical intelligentsia. Vance Palmer's *Legend of the Nineties* was published in 1954, Fitzpatrick's *The Australian Commonwealth* in 1956, Ward's *The Australian Legend* and Phillips' *The Australian Tradition* both in 1958.

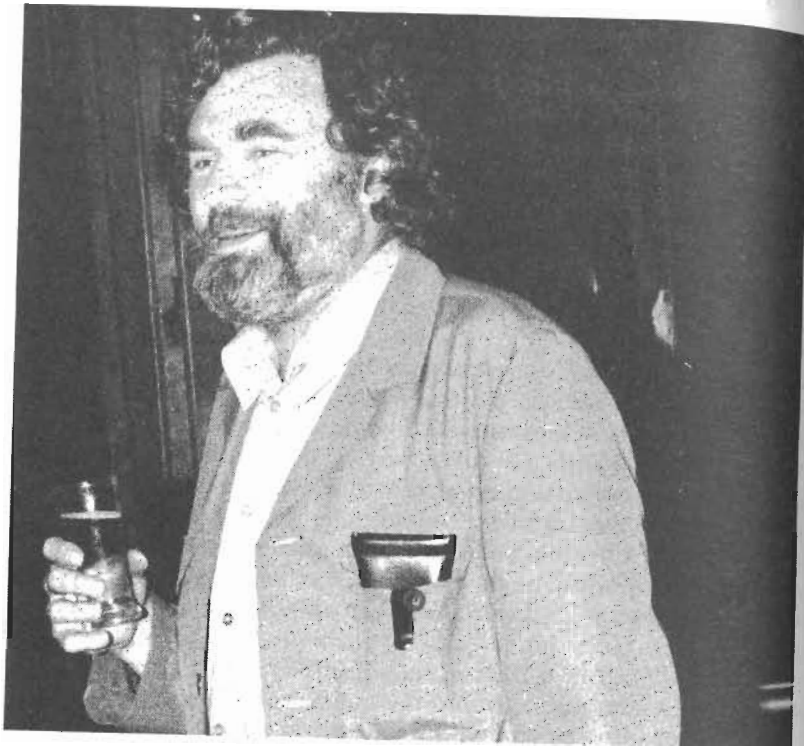
The suppression of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 prompted widespread defections from the Communist Party. Amongst these were Helen Palmer, Murray-Smith, Martin, and two aspirant historians, Ian Turner and Robin Gollan. In 1957, Helen

Palmer founded the 'independent socialist' journal *Outlook*. Gollan's *Radical and Working Class Politics* was published in 1960, and two years later he and others founded the Canberra-based journal *Labour History*. In 1963, a group of Melbourne Communist and ex-Communist intellectuals began to publish *Arena*, a 'Marxist journal of criticism and discussion'. In 1965 Turner published his *Industrial Labour and Politics*.

Three quite distinct intellectual trends can be observed at work here. Firstly, the older radical nationalism of the *Meanjin* intellectuals had finally borne fruit in a number of significant works of cultural criticism. Secondly, a younger group of ex-Communist activists, now working as academic labour historians, were busily forging a new radical nationalist historiography. Thirdly, the *Arena* group was attempting to formulate not so much a radical nationalism as a radically revisionist version of Marxism. The so-called '*Arena* thesis' suggested that the intelligentsia rather than the industrial working class would be the main force for conscious social change. *Arena*'s central achievement was to identify the newly forming academic intelligentsia as the real social basis for a newly emergent radicalism. That identification had been repressed by both the cultural critics and the labour historians, whose versions of radical nationalism sought to mythologize, respectively, the bush working class and the urban proletariat.

It is from this moment in the late 1950s and early 1960s when the A.L.P. seemed doomed to permanent opposition, when the Communist experiment seemed finally exposed as both morally bankrupt and historically irrelevant, and when the university system grew at an unprecedented pace, that we can trace the increasing academicization of the radical intelligentsia. Neither the Communists nor earlier generations of nationalists, socialists and feminists had ever achieved much success within the academy. The way in which the Communist Party hauled out Bernard Smith on almost every conceivable 'intellectual' occasion suggests an acute shortage of available party academics.

But from the late 1950s onwards radicalism, and especially radical nationalism, became relatively permanent fixtures within Australian academic life. Ward was appointed to a lectureship in 1957, and to a chair in 1967, in History at the University of New England, eventually becoming deputy vice-chancellor in 1982. Serle became senior lecturer in 1961 and reader in 1963 in History at Monash University. Turner became senior lecturer in 1964 and associate professor in 1969, again in History at Monash. Gollan worked in History at the Australian National University



Ian Turner at a party in October 1973.

from 1953 onwards, and became a professor in 1976. Even the *Arena* group, though far less successful within the academic career structure than either the radical nationalist cultural critics or the labour historians, found eventual acceptance within higher education. The two main authors of the *Arena* thesis, Geoff Sharp and Doug White, hold senior lectureships at Melbourne and La Trobe universities respectively. Thus the university system came to provide the radical intelligentsia with a relatively safe base from which to criticize the conservatism of the wider Australian society.

This intellectual radicalism might well have remained confined to the higher reaches of higher education had it not been for the Menzies government's decision in 1965 to commit Australian troops to Vietnam. The 'Sixties' – understood as a political and cultural event rather than as a chronological measure – began with that decision and ended ten years later with the dismissal of the Whitlam Labor government. The 'Sixties' is, of course, a loose catch-all phrase referring to a number of quite distinct elements:

a burgeoning youth culture (at its crudest, sex and drugs and rock-and-roll); the rebirth of an independent women's movement; an unprecedented wave of working-class industrial militancy; a heightening of popular political expectations that precipitated the A.L.P. into government in 1972. Centrally, however, the 'Sixties' meant the war in Vietnam and the world-wide protest movement in opposition to it.

The anti-war movement was never merely a student movement. Nonetheless, the university campuses were perhaps the single most important centre of anti-war sentiment and organization. The universities provided a distinctly receptive and sympathetic social milieu for the developing 'New Left', for 'second-wave feminism', and for the new-look Whitlamite Labor Party. The anti-war radicals organized themselves in A.L.P.-sponsored groups such as the Vietnam Day Committee and the Youth Campaign Against Conscription. But as the anti-war movement developed, so too did new forms of radical politics.

The socialist wing of the movement was influenced variously by libertarianism, Maoism, Trotskyism and the western Marxism busily being imported into the English-speaking world by the British journal *New Left Review*. The Communist Party redirected its newspaper *Tribune* towards the campuses; and its theoretical journal was relaunched as *Australian Left Review* in the summer of 1966/67. *Australian Left Review* published Alastair Davidson's early work on the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, which provided an important Australian introduction to one of the key western Marxist thinkers.

The main vehicle for the politics of the New Left was provided, however, by the student press itself, by *National U*, *Lot's Wife*, *Farrago*, *Honi Soit* and *Tharunka*. In 1970, the Trotskyist-inclined Socialist Youth Alliance, which published *Direct Action*, was founded in Sydney, and the Maoist-inclined Worker-Student Alliance in Melbourne. New socialist 'parties', and newspapers produced with the skills learnt on the student press, followed in quick succession. In 1972 a new 'revolutionary Marxist journal', *Intervention*, was launched in Melbourne by a group of young graduate students much impressed by the work of the French philosopher Louis Althusser. At this stage, the New Left remained determinedly internationalist in its politics. By far the most influential of the various New Left writings, Humphrey McQueen's *A New Britannia*, first published in 1970, was precisely an indictment of the Old Left's radicalism for its complicity with both racism and nationalism.

Second-wave feminism also drew much of its support and inspiration from the campus milieu. This was true of both the more militant Women's Liberation groups and the more moderate Women's Electoral Lobby. Techniques first acquired in student journalism were put to work to produce *Mejane* in 1971, *Refractory Girl* in the summer of 1972–3, *Scarlet Woman*, *Womanspeak* and *Hecate* all in 1975. In 1971, Germaine Greer, an Australian feminist teaching in England since 1967, published *The Female Eunuch*, which became one of the international women's movement's key texts. Anne Summers, a founder member of the *Refractory Girl* collective, teaching at the University of Sydney, published her *Damned Whores and God's Police* in 1975. The same year witnessed the publication by Penguin of a collection of essays edited by Jan Mercer entitled *The Other Half: Women in Australian Society*. Like the New Left, second-wave feminists saw themselves very much as part of an international and internationalist political movement. At least one other Australian feminist, Dale Spender, would later repeat Greer's success in the international movement.

Radical nationalist ideas were taken up mainly by the Labor Party itself. In opposition, the A.L.P. left attempted to define the Vietnam War as an 'American' war; in government, after 1972, the party sought not only to 'buy back the farm' from foreign ownership, but also to promote a national 'cultural renaissance' centred in particular on the cinema industry. From 1973, however, the Maoists too began to adopt an increasingly nationalist position, arguing the need for a struggle for 'independence and socialism'. Ironically, McQueen had himself been converted to Maoist nationalism: hence the tortuous retractions in the introduction to the 1975 edition of *A New Britannia*.

Campus radicalism, both socialist and feminist, clearly stood at some distance from the A.L.P. for much of the sixties. The title of *From Tweedledum to Tweedledee: the New Labor Government in Australia* published in 1974 by two Maoist-inclined lecturers in Politics at the University of Adelaide, Robert Catley and Bruce McFarlane, speaks for itself. There can be little doubt, nonetheless, that the radical nationalism of the early 1960s and the later Sixties radicalism both had some considerable impact on the A.L.P., forcing it firstly to the left, and secondly into government. Nor can there be much doubt that the Whitlam government really did implement a number of the key elements in the radical programme: Australian withdrawal from Vietnam; the abolition of conscription and a general amnesty for draft dodgers; equal pay for women, initially in the public service, and later in theory

across the work-force; an injection of funds into both higher education and the culture industries. Certainly, when the Governor-General eventually dismissed the Labor government, the radical intelligentsia had little doubt as to where its loyalties and interests lay.

The transformation of the universities from relatively secluded centres of learning into sites of real political conflict, and of successful radical political mobilization, seemed to confirm the importance of the academic intelligentsia's social role. The older generation of radical academics also provided the younger generation of student radicals with peculiarly accessible role models. Whilst a great many radicals hoped to take 'the revolution' off campus, a great many others aspired to promotion within the academy, from student radical to radical academic. In a number of university departments, Politics at Monash and Adelaide, Economics, Philosophy and English at Sydney, History at Monash and the A.N.U., Sociology at Flinders and, later, Macquarie, radicals had acquired real influence and hence some real powers of academic patronage. In the year of the Whitlam government's election, John Playford, a lecturer in Politics at Adelaide, and Doug Kirsner, a philosophy graduate and tutor from Melbourne University, co-edited *Australian Capitalism: Towards a Socialist Critique*. In the year of its dismissal, Ted Wheelwright and Ken Buckley, associate professors of Economics and Economic History respectively at the University of Sydney, published the first volume in a series of *Essays in the Political Economy of Australian Capitalism*. The (overwhelmingly male) contributors to the two books are, in effect, the Sixties radicals who took honours in socialism, and their teachers.

As with the radicalisms of the 1890s and the First World War, the very success of the Sixties movement was in part its undoing. The fall of the Whitlam government compounded the problem, however. On the one hand, it inspired renewed loyalties to the defeated Labor Party. On the other, it produced a more general fear of the rightward drift in Australian society and this, in turn, encouraged the left to lower its own political expectations. The problem was further compounded by the movement's astonishingly narrow social base. Sooner or later most students complete their studies; and most find it simply impractical to continue to live the life of an off-campus activist. Former student radicals graduated into a whole range of 'middle-class' professions – teaching, the public service, social work, and librarianship – where they have subsequently helped to provide white-collar unionism with

the little industrial militancy it possesses. But those who continued to be actively engaged in the process of radical cultural creation were overwhelmingly concentrated in higher and further education, and in a few related areas such as union or government sponsored research work. What remained on campus, then, was an academic rather than a student radicalism, increasingly isolated from any wider audience.

Just as in the late 1950s and early 1960s, so too in the late 1970s and in the 1980s, the fate of the radical intelligentsia became divorced from that of any broader radical movement. To a remarkable extent, radical academia simply went ahead with its collective and individual career plans. In 1976 an abortive general strike failed to dissuade the new conservative government from dismantling Medibank; it was also the year in which Bruce McFarlane was appointed Professor of Politics at Adelaide and Bob Connell, a radical from Flinders, Professor of Sociology at Macquarie. But three main political options seem to have been available to the radical intelligentsia: a much closer relationship to the radical nationalism of the Labor left; a retreat into the splendid isolation of a purely theoretical radicalism; and a turn to the Green politics of the new environmentalist movements. Socialists and feminists opted for all three.

The Labor nationalist option was that chosen by both McFarlane and Connell. Such a project clearly underlies Connell's *Ruling Class, Ruling Culture* published in 1977; and also much of the work of the Australian Political Economy Movement, which launched the *Journal of Australian Political Economy* in the same year. In 1980 Connell and the historian Terry Irving produced their *Class Structure in Australian History*. Also in 1980, Penguin published *Australia and World Capitalism*, a collection of essays edited by Ted Wheelwright, Greg Crough, another Sydney economist, and Ted Wilshire, a research officer with the metalworkers' union, which included contributions by both Connell and McFarlane. A successor volume, Crough and Wheelwright's *Australia: A Client State* brought out by Penguin in 1982, restated the radical nationalist case in the bluntest of terms. McQueen's later work, though clearly more radical in intent, and also more distant from the preoccupations of the academy (McQueen abandoned an academic career to become a professional writer), nonetheless shares the assumptions of an essentially radical nationalist world view. Even the historian Stuart Macintyre, one of the founder-editors of *Intervention* and one-time scourge of Old Left historiography, produced in his 1985 *Winners and Losers* a partial rehabilitation and

reformulation of an earlier radical nationalist progressivism.

A loosely defined radical nationalism also became part of the commonsense background assumptions of the new academic disciplines in the making in the newer universities, and more especially in the colleges: women's studies, Australian studies, and cultural studies (to this list we could easily add the older, but nonetheless still expanding discipline of sociology). Each of these subjects was disproportionately staffed by former student radicals (women's studies almost entirely by feminists), and each was unusually preoccupied with the, at least potentially nationalist, theme of the peculiarities and particularities of the Australian experience. Three of Allen & Unwin's more successful publishing ventures of the 1980s, the 'Studies in Society', 'Australian Cultural Studies' and the 'Australian Experience' series, were clearly aimed at this market. The magazine *Australian Society*, launched in 1982, has aimed to canvass essentially similar themes to a similar audience with similar commercial success.

If the A.L.P. and radical nationalism represented the single most popular option available to the radical intelligentsia, a second option was provided by the lure of theory. Academic radicalism, understood as an engagement with a particular type of theoretically innovative academic work, rather than with any more expressly political concerns, fitted in well with the normal work practices of the universities and, to a lesser extent, the colleges. A series of mainly French-inspired intellectual fashions – structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, and French (as opposed to Anglo-American) feminism – enabled a part of the academic intelligentsia to sustain the illusion of its own continuing radicalism by speaking to its collective self in the arcane dialects of a radical theory increasingly bereft of any possible political practice. This was the direction taken by *Intervention* after its move to Sydney in 1980. It was also the main direction taken by *Thesis Eleven*, a 'journal of socialist scholarship', launched from the Department of Politics at Monash University in 1980 by Alastair Davidson, soon to be promoted to Reader, and two of his postgraduate students. *Australian Feminist Studies*, founded in 1985 under the editorship of Susan Magarey, Director of the University of Adelaide's Research Centre for Women's Studies, and Susan Sheridan, Lecturer in Humanities at Deakin University, seemed to offer every prospect of becoming the central theoretical journal of an emergent academic feminism. The Perth-based *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies*, relaunched as the international journal *Cultural Studies* in 1987, aspired to a similar pre-eminence in its own chosen area of theory.

The third available option, that of Green politics, was clearly the most activist. In the years after the fall of the Whitlam government, the Movement Against Uranium Mining (M.A.U.M.) and Friends of the Earth (F.O.E.), came to provide the only really effective mobilizing centre for any kind of radical opposition to the new conservatism. In 1976, F.O.E. converted its internal newsletter *Chain Reaction* into a much more polished and professional magazine aimed at a wider audience. People for Nuclear Disarmament (P.N.D.), founded in Melbourne in 1981, organized the largest political demonstration held in the city since the Vietnam War. In 1984 the Victorian Association for Peace Studies relaunched its journal *Peace Studies* in magazine format. Very professionally produced, with the assistance of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Science at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, the magazine was awarded the United Nations Association Media Peace Prize for that year. In the same year, conservationist opposition to the Tasmanian Liberal government's plans to dam the Franklin River had a substantial, and perhaps decisive, effect on the outcome of the federal election. Green issues were taken up by the A.C.T.U., by the Australian Democrats, by the short-lived Nuclear Disarmament Party (one of whose candidates was elected to the Senate), and by the A.L.P. in opposition if not in government.

Socialists and feminists were able to point to capitalism and patriarchy as the ultimate sources of environmental despoliation and nuclear madness, and both could find reasonably sympathetic audiences within the Green movement. But Green concerns were nonetheless both new and distinct. The Green movement's social base, like that of the movement against the Vietnam War, extended into the more radical unions and the more progressive fragments of the business classes (Dick Smith, for example), but remained centred on the cultural work-force: priests, teachers, artists, musicians (notably Midnight Oil's Peter Garrett) and academics. Again radical academics assumed a role disproportionate to their numbers (although it is worth recalling from the 1981 census that there are more university academics than either priests or musicians). Jim Falk, a former Monash student activist, now Associate Professor of History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Wollongong, published his extremely influential *Taking Australia off the Map* in 1983. Jo Camilleri, Senior Lecturer in Politics at La Trobe University, and author of *The State and Nuclear Power* (1984), was the first and most successful convener of P.N.D. in Victoria. Here, however, the presence of a wider

movement imposed some sort of political discipline on radical academia. Green academics appeared able to engage with the real world, with real politics, and with non-academic activists in a more effective collaboration than any practised by Labor nationalists or radical theorists. The impetus that developed behind Green politics in the early 1980s spent itself, though, in the middle years of the decade. Nuclear disarmers and environmentalists alike had ultimately relied on the A.L.P. to implement their programmes. Neither seemed able to construct a politically adequate response to the implacable conservatism of the Labor federal and state governments of the 1980s. The retreat into academic peace studies seemed almost predictable.

The Hawke federal Labor government, elected in 1983 and re-elected in 1984 and 1987, and the Labor state governments that accompanied it in New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia and South Australia, presented the radical intelligentsia with a novel set of complex political and moral problems. Just as in the First World War, so too in the 1980s many Labor parliamentarians shared the social background and the political experiences of the radical intelligentsia. Just as in the First World War, so too in the 1980s the Labor parliamentarians were nonetheless far to the right of extra-parliamentary radicalism. Haunted by the possibility of a repetition of the Whitlam experience, the new Labor governments resisted virtually all radical initiative in domestic or foreign policy.

Unlike the First World War Labor governments, however, 1980s Laborism carefully avoided direct confrontation with the radical left, let alone any attempt at repression. The Hawke Labor Party's strategy was to concede as little as possible to radicalism, but to co-opt as many radicals as possible into an expanding network of political patronage and dependency. Thus, for example, equal opportunity legislation, at both federal and state levels, achieved little for the majority of women; but it did create a salaried profession of Equal Opportunity officers disproportionately recruited from amongst former feminist activists. Australian foreign policy was as closely locked into the American alliance, and into the U.S.A.'s nuclear strategy, under Labor as under previous conservative governments; but Labor federal and state governments did fund research and teaching in peace studies. Government sponsorship of Australian studies, the subject of a federal inquiry and a compulsory school subject under the proposed Victorian Certificate of Education, represented yet another project in which the erstwhile radical intelligentsia had very clear vested

material interests. The Labor governments of the 1980s had certainly not brought social reforms; they had, however, apparently bought the social reformers. Doubtless the radical intelligentsia displays no greater capacity for venality or hypocrisy than do other social groups. But, as a group, it is both small and articulate; its articulacy has provided Labor with an incentive to silence it, its size with the possibility that such silence might be purchased relatively cheaply.

The radical intelligentsia of the mid 1980s was almost certainly larger and more comfortable than any that had previously existed in Australia: university professors were tenured for life and in 1987 were paid around $60,000 a year. But for all its size and its economic security, it was quite incapable of mounting any kind of radical challenge to the A.L.P. This ineffectuality arose in part from the intelligentsia's isolation within higher education, and in part from its ultimate dependency on continued government patronage of the education system and the culture industries.

Of the three major versions of intellectual radicalism – socialism, feminism and nationalism – only the latter seemed to have any real influence on Labor policy. But Labor radical nationalism was a great deal more nationalist than radical. This is hardly surprising. For nationalism could only retain a genuinely radical content as long as Australia continued to be a British colony. Once federation had been achieved, nationalism became a fundamentally conservative social cement, by which subordinate groups were persuaded into the belief that they share some common identity with their oppressors and exploiters. This is not to suggest that the radical intelligentsia's commitments to nationalism were mere self-delusion. Quite the contrary. Nationalist ideologies were first invented and propagated by professional intellectuals, and of all the classes and groups in our society intellectuals have the most to gain from nationalism. Nationalism functions as a kind of cultural tariff, protecting home-grown intellectual products from foreign competition. As a belief system, nationalism is of little direct material value to any of the major groups in contemporary society (although its implied general conservatism does tend to buttress each and every aspect of the social status quo). It is of very real value, however, to intellectuals confronted by overseas competitors. Given that Australia shares a common language with the United States and Britain, two major centres of export-oriented cultural production, its intelligentsia seems highly likely to continue in its attempts to secure such tariffs, very probably in the name of 'anti-imperialism'.

Socialism seems today to be the least healthy of our three radicalisms. Historically, socialist theories were of two main forms: those which hoped to replace capitalism from below by the rule of the working class; and those which hoped to replace it from above by the government of experts. It was the first of these two versions that made of socialism an enormously influential popular political belief on a world scale in the years before the First World War. But it was the latter version, in either its Fabian or its Communist variant, that tended to appeal to the more professionalized, in other words the more expert, sections of the intelligentsia. The Australian radical intelligentsia no longer appears to believe either in its own capacity for government or in that of the working class (indeed, many 'socialist' intellectuals dispute the very existence of a working class). Doubtless the socialist intelligentsia will continue to produce elegant works of social theory and empirically rich studies in people's history. But if a socialist politics is ever to be reconstructed in Australia, then it will almost certainly have to be done from outside the intelligentsia.

Contemporary Australian feminism manages to sustain an almost plausible radical social purpose. The feminist intelligentsia participates, at least residually, in the same kind of oppression as other women. The increasing professionalism of Equal Opportunity officialdom and feminist academia suggests, however, that feminism too may decline into self-serving social irrelevance. In the early 1980s it seemed possible that the Green option might re-mobilize and re-moralize radical academia, both socialist and feminist, for here were general issues of human survival which impinged on the life fates of everyone. Even here, though, the habitual academic response to political problems came to the fore: that of creating and securing funding for research centres and teaching courses.

It is difficult to predict the future with any degree of certainty, but we can surely say this. If the inequalities of race, class and gender that exist in Australia and the even more horrific inequalities that exist internationally are ever to be reduced, let alone eliminated, then that will not be brought about by specialist groups of radical intellectuals. Rather, it will be achieved by the efforts of those masses of people who themselves pay the price, in human misery and suffering, for the continued existence of structured social inequality. Professional intellectuals might be of some assistance. But the intelligentsia's development into a significantly privileged new class within late capitalist society makes it unsuitable for the role it has taken upon itself, that of guarantor of the

values of liberty and equality, fraternity and sisterhood. If the tree of liberty is to be tended here in Australia, it will require firmer hands than these.