

**Labor's Red October:**  
**A Study of the Adoption of the ALP**  
**Socialist Objective**

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## **Abstract**

In 1921 the Australian Labor Party enshrined in its National Constitution the objective of socialising the means of industry, production, distribution, and exchange. Despite attracting periodic attention during moments of Labor ‘soul-searching’ over the last century, the circumstances of the objective’s adoption have remained contested. The scholarship has only examined its design and introduction in passing, almost universally dismissing its notability and significance.

The central aim of this thesis is to provide a concentrated account of how and why the socialisation objective was added to the Labor platform. It will explore the context from which the objective originated, the audience to whom it was addressed and the practical effects it was intended to have. In the process, the thesis will argue that the significance of Labor’s commitment to socialisation in 1921 has been unduly maligned.

The objective’s adoption expressed major transformations in the political thought of the Australian left over the preceding decades. The study will demonstrate its significance for how the labour movement saw its place in history, imagined its political subject and defined its ultimate purpose. By advancing our understanding of what the adoption of the 1921 objective meant in its time, I propose we can come to recognise it as a significant milestone in Australian political history.

## Declaration

I hereby declare that, except where it is otherwise acknowledged in the text, this thesis represents my own original work. All versions of the submitted thesis (regardless of submission type) are identical.

This thesis did not require human ethics research approval.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Oscar Kaspi-Crutchett". The signature is written in a cursive style with large, flowing loops and flourishes.

Oscar Kaspi-Crutchett

31 October 2022

## Acknowledgements

In completing this thesis, I have many people to thank. First and foremost is my supervisor, Professor Frank Bongiorno. In the second semester of 2022, I enrolled in his Australian political history course, in which one of the assigned essay questions asked: ‘How did the Labor Party seek to civilise capitalism between 1891-1929?’ All of the research I have conducted this year, and my interest in the period of study, originated here.

During one of our early meetings, Professor Bongiorno and I had a conversation which came to be a major influence on me throughout the process of writing this thesis: ‘Write democratically,’ he advised, among other things, ‘make it a conversation.’ Through his supervision, I have been given invaluable access to a model of rigorous, socially-engaged scholarship which speaks to and not around its subjects. It is with tremendous gratitude that I thank him for the generosity with which he has shared his time and wisdom this year. It has been a great privilege.

I have also to thank the many individuals in my life who, while I dived into 1921, kept me afloat during 2023. There are too many to list here, but I extend warm appreciations to Elizabeth, Isabel, Lucy, Leon, Nel and Olivia in particular. It would not have been possible to complete this project without your support.

To my parents, I thank you for encouraging me throughout this year and throughout my life. You are both my greatest inspirations.

Finally, I would like to thank W.J. Manning. In the process of my research, I discovered a great-great-grandfather who lived through the troubled years of my study. William Manning was a campaigner against conscription, disseminator of progressive literature, founder of the Midland Trades Hall, and activist for the ALP and Communist Party. To Manning, and to all those he represents, I am thankful. We walk through a world shaped by your efforts, sheltered by the rights you won for us.

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## Notes

### *Note on the use of pseudonyms*

During the period of study, certain labour journalists evaded censorship by writing under false names. This includes Ernest Lane, who wrote under ‘Jack Cade’ and Bob Ross, who wrote under ‘Max Argent.’ When authors have done this, I provide in the footnotes their real name followed by the printed pseudonym in square brackets.

### *Note on the names of unions*

In the post-war labour movement, Australian unions went through a great deal of ideological evolution which was reflected in the frequent changing of their names. This paper will refer to the miners’ union as the ‘Miners’ Federation’ throughout. It was officially called the Amalgamated Miners Association from 1874-1916, the Australasian Coal and Shale Employees Federation from 1916-1919 and the Workers Industrial Union of Australia (Mining Department) from 1919-1921.

## Abbreviations

AATUC – All-Australian Trade Union Congress

ALP – Australian Labor Party

ARU – Australian Railways Union

AWU – Australian Workers Union

CPL – Commonwealth Parliamentary Library

IWW – Industrial Workers of the World

MLA – Member of the Legislative Assembly

MP – Member of Parliament (House of Representatives)

NAA – National Archives of Australia

NBAC – Noel Butlin Archives Centre, The Australian National University

NLA – National Library of Australia

NSW – New South Wales

NZ – New Zealand

OBU – One Big Union

SEC – Supreme Economic Council

VSP – Victorian Socialist Party

# Introduction:

## The Unsettled Years

Practically everything the All-Australasian Trade Union Congress did was ‘big’ but the biggest thing it did centred around the Socialisation of Industry... It is not unlikely that it will come to be seen as one of those turning-points in history which makes all things new.<sup>1</sup>

In 1965 Ian Turner wrote that ‘the labour movement is the institutional method by which the masses transform from passive to active elements in society, from weights to be pushed around to social levers in their own right.’<sup>2</sup> In the years following World War One, the politics of the Australian labour movement was radical to a degree it had not been before and has not been since.<sup>3</sup> At the highest levels of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and the trade union movement, activists, leaders, and intellectuals imagined a future in which the organised working class would not only be a social lever, but the fundamental architects of public life – ‘capable of controlling the functions of civilisation.’<sup>4</sup> This was a unique moment in Australia’s political history— as Peter Love judged, it was ‘the closest [Australian labour] has ever been to making an unqualified declaration

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<sup>1</sup> Bell Grath, ‘The Socialisation Scheme – What the Trade Union Congress is After,’ *Worker*, 4 August 1921, 5.

<sup>2</sup> Ian Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics: The Dynamics of the Labour Movement in Eastern Australia 1900-1921* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1979, [1965]), xvii.

<sup>3</sup> Frank Farrell, *International Socialism and Australian Labour, The Left in Australia 1919-1939* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1975), 370; Brian McKinlay, *A Documentary History of the Australian Labor Movement: 1850-1979* (Richmond: Drummond Ltd, 1979), 89; Frank Farrell, ‘Socialism, Internationalism, and the Australian Labour Movement,’ *Labour / Le Travail* 15 (1985): 125-38.

<sup>4</sup> Henry Boote, ‘THE AWU AND THE ONE BIG UNION,’ *Australian Worker*, 23 January 1919, 3.

that it would be better to abolish capitalism outright rather than try to reform it progressively.<sup>5</sup>

If one artefact remains from this eruptive episode in the national past, it is the ALP's socialist, or socialisation, objective. Over two conferences in June and October 1921, the labour movement's political and industrial leaders devised a plan for national reconstruction on socialist lines. The outcome of this bold exercise of political imagination was the socialisation objective: a window into Australian labourism at its most assertive point. Propelled by an extraordinarily active rank and file and a broader set of radicalising conditions, the socialisation objective committed Labor to abolishing private enterprise: 'The socialisation of industry, production, distribution and exchange' through the transference of all economic assets to worker-elected councils organised by industry.<sup>6</sup> Despite repeated qualifications, amendments and occasional attempts at its removal in the decades since, the core phraseology of the objective has survived for over a century as one of the first articles in the ALP National Constitution. It remains, if only in-principle, Labor's official *raison d'être*.

In this thesis, I will provide the adoption of the socialisation objective with the concentrated analysis it has hitherto evaded in historiography. My central aim is to achieve a more systematic understanding of what this political statement meant as a milestone in Australian political history: the specific context from which it was derived, the audience to which it was addressed, and

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Love, *Labour and the Money Power: Australian Labour Populism 1890-1950* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1984), 74.

<sup>6</sup> Australian Labor Party, *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party* (Brisbane), October 1921, CPL: 1340111, i.

the ends it aimed to achieve. This study will ask what ‘socialisation’ meant to the labour movement in 1921 and the extent to which the ALP was meaningfully committed to this idea. Previous attempts to analyse these questions have yielded wildly diverse and, at times, irreconcilable findings.<sup>7</sup> To the extent that it has received scholarly attention, the socialisation objective has seldom been an object of study in its own right. The events of 1921 have been dispersed across broader histories of the early ALP and Australian labour movement – engagement with the objective itself often being purely descriptive or limited to its employment as an argumentative device: that is, as a proxy for authors to communicate their assessment of Labor’s socialist credentials more generally.<sup>8</sup>

This study will make no interventions into such wider questions. My scope will be confined to the objective itself and the factors necessary for interpreting its meaning as a political statement. By closely examining the symbols, languages, and assumptions of this unique and generative moment in Australian history, I recover a richer comprehension of its significance – a more complete appreciation of the objective’s causes, aspirations and intended practical effects as a major intervention into the nation’s political life. In so doing, the thesis counterbalances what has been a prevailing tendency towards dismissal in existing historiography– rescuing from obscurity what was and

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<sup>7</sup> Bruce O’Meagher, ‘Introduction,’ in *The Socialist Objective: Labor and Socialism*, ed. Bruce O’Meagher (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1983), 13.

<sup>8</sup> Humphrey McQueen, ‘Glory without Power,’ in *Australian Capitalism: Towards a Socialist Critique*, eds. John Playford and Douglas Kirsner (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger 1972) 360; RS Parker, ‘The ALP and Parliamentary Government,’ in *Labor: Directions for the Eighties*, ed. Jane North and Patrick Weller (Sydney: Ian Novak Publishing Company, 1980), 50; Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 225.

remains an important episode in working-class politics on the Australian continent.

## **Australian Labour Politics in 1921**

Before detailing my research methodology and the dominant historiographies to which this study responds, it may be useful to begin by outlining the key features of Australian labour politics in the period of study. Five qualities stand out as especially important for understanding the movement's texture after 1918: disenchantment with parliamentary politics, unparalleled industrial militancy, wide ideological diversity, political repression, and strong incentives for unity. These are themes to which I will return throughout the thesis as they have proven fundamental to answering its central questions.

First, pervasive in the labour movement after 1918 was a cynicism towards the ALP political elite and the institutions it inhabited – ‘a disintegration of parliament ... in the eyes of the public.’<sup>9</sup> This was a sentiment which had accrued for over a decade among unionists, party members and backbench MPs—significantly accelerated by the defection of several dozen state and federal Labor politicians over conscription in 1916-17.<sup>10</sup> The conscription split

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<sup>9</sup> Brian McKinlay, *A Century of Struggle: The A.L.P. A Centenary History* (Blackburn, Victoria: Collins Dove, 1988), 68; Patrick O'Farrell, ‘The Russian Revolution and the Labour Movements of Australia and New Zealand, 1917–1922,’ *International Review of Social History* 8, no. 2 (1963): 178; Vere Gordon Childe, *How Labour Governs: A Study of Workers' Representation in Australia*, second ed. (Melbourne University Press, 1965, [1923]), 91.

<sup>10</sup> Robin Gollan, *The Coalminers of New South Wales 1860-1960* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1963), 137; Childe, *How Labour Governs*, 25; Ross McMullin, *The Light on the Hill: The Australian Labor Party, 1891-1991* (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1991), 127.

epitomised what many labour intellectuals believed to be an increasing tendency of senior politicians to behave in ways ‘plainly contrary to the Labour theory of self-government’: disregarding the supremacy of the National Conference, abandoning major election promises, ignoring the ‘sacred platform,’ and generally pursuant to ‘opportunism, vote-catching and the fetish of leadership.’<sup>11</sup> For many of its advocates, the socialisation objective was an attempt to force the ALP establishment to act on its stated principles: ‘It is not enough for the politician to go out and advocate socialisation. The influence of the mass [must] force it upon them.’<sup>12</sup>

Widespread frustration with the ALP parliamentary elite created space for new political formations to emerge.<sup>13</sup> The post-war years heralded great diversity in the labour movement’s ideological and organisational structures – with a highly-energised base, weary of prior approaches, receptive to a range of new political models.<sup>14</sup> International events such as the Russian Revolution and the factory takeovers of post-war Europe gave ‘vital impulse to radical idealism,’ elevating Marxists, syndicalists and guild socialists.<sup>15</sup> A multiplying number of labour journals, colleges, clubs and newspapers gave voice to these ideas and

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<sup>11</sup> Childe, *How Labour Governs*, 25; O’Farrell, ‘The Russian Revolution,’ 178.

<sup>12</sup> All-Australian Trades Union Conference, *Official report of the All-Australian Trades Union Conference held at Trades Hall, Melbourne June 20th to 25th, 1921* (Melbourne: Labor Call Print, 1921), NLA, 6.

<sup>13</sup> Miriam Dixson, ‘The First Communist ‘United Front’ in Australia,’ *Labour History*, no. 10 (1966): 20-31.

<sup>14</sup> Miriam Dixson, ‘Reformists and revolutionaries: an interpretation of the relations between the Socialists and the mass labor organisations in New South Wales 1919-27,’ PhD, Australian National University, 1963, 23.

<sup>15</sup> O’Farrell, ‘The Russian Revolution,’ 192; Liam Byrne, ‘Visions of the Future: Political Labour’s Temporality and Socialist Objectives in Britain and Australia, 1918-21,’ *Historical Research* 93, no. 261 (2020): 517; Terry Irving, ‘Socialism, Working-Class Mobilisation and the Origins of the Labor Party,’ in *The Socialist Objective: Labor and Socialism*, ed. Bruce O’Meagher (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1983), 42.

encouraged their entry into politics either through or against the ALP.<sup>16</sup> Labor lost its near monopoly on working-class political representation with the foundation of the breakaway Industrial Socialist Labor Party in New South Wales in 1919 and the Communist Party in 1920 – both attracting the support of several important unions.<sup>17</sup> The period's ascendant radicalism is also demonstrated by its unsurpassed level of industrial militancy.<sup>18</sup> Between 1919 and 1921 industrial disputes were not only record-breaking in their frequency, but also in the number of workers they involved. In 1919 six million working days were lost to strikes.<sup>19</sup> Over half of Australian workers were unionised and attendance at union meetings was outstandingly high in these years.<sup>20</sup> Industrial actions were often industry-wide, months long, and highly politicised. As the year 1921 opened, even Australia's oldest and most moderate unions were plagued by internal militants agitating for more aggressive tactics in both politics and the workplace.<sup>21</sup>

These interconnected developments were all encouraged by a parallel radicalisation on Australia's political right. During the Great War, there emerged for the first time a mass base for conservative politics.<sup>22</sup> The labour movement faced unprecedented repression from a trifecta of state, private and vigilante

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<sup>16</sup> Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 229.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Adams, 'The Annihilation of the ILP: The Third Industrial Labor Party and the Sturt Vacancy,' *Labour History*, no. 105 (2013): 79-92; Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 206.

<sup>18</sup> Dixon, 'Revolutionaries and Reformists,' 189; D.W. Oxnam, 'The Incidence of Strikes in Australia,' in *Australian Labour Relations Readings*, ed. J. E. Ford and G.W. Isaac (Melbourne: Sun Books, 1971), 25.

<sup>19</sup> Ian Turner. *In Union is Strength: A History of Trade Unions in Australia, 1788-1974* (West Melbourne: Thomas Nelson, 1976), 70.

<sup>20</sup> Dixon, 'Revolutionaries and Reformists,' 124;

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-48.

<sup>22</sup> Raewyn Connell and Terry Irving, *Class Structure in Australian History* (Melbourne, Longman Cheshire, 1980), 212.

actors – sometimes working in extra-legal co-operation with one another.<sup>23</sup> Such incidents as the passage of the *War Precautions Act* in 1914, the crushing of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in 1917 and the Sydney Domain Riots of 1921 suggested, to some labourites, ‘the emergence of an open bourgeoisie dictatorship,’ – the movement seeming to face an expanded arsenal of increasingly blunt repressive threats.<sup>24</sup> By 1921 this was an important contributor to a ‘convergent pressure’ across the movement – a sense that if labour remained divided ‘in a very short time they would be easy prey for their opponents.’<sup>25</sup>

It was in this context that the ALP convened the All-Australian Trade Union Congress (AATUC) in June 1921. According to the invitations, the Congress was tasked with devising for Labor an industrial policy around which the broader movement could unite. It was ‘described in ALP circles as the most important conference in their party history.’<sup>26</sup> The AATUC developed an extensive program for the socialisation of the economy which tied together a

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<sup>23</sup> Humphrey McQueen, ‘Shoot the Bolshevik! Hang the Profiteer: Reconstructing Australian Capitalism, 1918-21,’ in *Essays in the Political Economy of Australian Capitalism*, ed. E.L. Buckley and K. Wheelright (Sydney: Australia and New Zealand Book Co., 1978), 185-206; Gollan, *The Coalminers of New South Wales*, 154; Childe, *How Labour Governs*, 44; Ernest Lane, *Dawn to Dusk: Reminiscences of a Rebel* (Brisbane, William Brooks & Co, 1939), 175; Frank Cain, ‘The Industrial Workers of the World Aspects of Its Suppression in Australia 1916-1919,’ *Labour History*, no. 42 (1982): 54-62; Terry King, ‘The Tarring and Feathering of J. K. McDougall: “Dirty Tricks” in the 1919 Federal Election,’ *Labour History*, no. 45 (1983): 54-67.

<sup>24</sup> Humphrey McQueen, ‘Shoot the Bolshevik!’ 188; Raymond Evans, *The Red Flag Riots: A Study of Intolerance* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1988), 22-25.

<sup>25</sup> *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 12.

<sup>26</sup> Patrick Weller (ed.), *Caucus Minutes: Minutes of the Meetings of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party, Volume 2, 1914-1932* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1975), 55; Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 217. *Daily Telegraph*, ‘Thirteen! Council of Action, Federal Conference Parting of the Ways,’ 10 October 1921, 5.

litany of radical innovations in movement thought over the preceding years.<sup>27</sup> Its final report endorsed a combination of ‘revolutionary industrial and political action’ to abolish capitalist ownership of the means of production ‘whether privately or through the state.’<sup>28</sup> The resolutions of the AATUC were sent to the Labor Party for ratification at its Federal Conference in October. It was the verdict of the Communist leader Jock Garden that more had been accomplished ‘than the most sanguine of the militants expected.’<sup>29</sup>

Figure 1: A Group of Delegates at the AAATUC, *Official Report*, Labor Call Print, Melbourne, June 20th-25th 1921, 1.



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<sup>27</sup> *Official Report of the All-Australian Trades Union Conference*, 9; E.J. Holloway, ‘Unity - A Great Achievement,’ *Labor Call*, 7 July 1921, 6; *Labor Call*, ‘Congress Notes,’ 30 July 1921, 4; Jock Garden, ‘Industrial Notes,’ *Communist*, 8 July 1921, 6; *Worker*, ‘Great Work Done. President Riordan Well Pleased. The Tactics of Tory Critics,’ 30 June 1921, 19.

<sup>28</sup> *All-Australian Trades Union Conference, Official Report*, 9.

<sup>29</sup> John Smith Garden, ‘The All-Australian Union Congress,’ *Proletarian Review*, 7 August 1921, 7.

Figure 2: Delegates to the Federal Labor Conference, source: Joe Harris, *The Bitter Fight: a Pictorial History of the Australian Labor Movement* (St. Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1970), 288.



The Federal ALP Conference convened on 10 October 1921 at the Brisbane Trades Hall to consider the program devised by the unions. The resolutions were contested extensively before being incorporated into the party constitution in a vote of 22-10.<sup>30</sup> References to ‘revolutionary action’ were removed, and some resolutions were amended, but the core features of the AATUC’s report were accepted as designed.<sup>31</sup> Then, in a feat of bureaucratic ingenuity, a moderate-dominated committee led by Queensland Premier E.G. ‘Red Ted’ Theodore was able to keep the socialisation initiative out of the party’s ‘fighting-platform’ – its immediate policy programme.<sup>32</sup> Maurice Blackburn, a Federal MP from Victoria, also secured an optional addendum to

<sup>30</sup> *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australia Labor Party*, 30.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, i; Albert Charles Willis, ‘ALP CONVENTION: STATEMENT BY COUNCIL OF ACTION,’ *Westralian Worker*, 25 November 1921, 2.

<sup>32</sup> Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 225.

the objective which stipulated that the party would not interfere with ‘socially useful’ private businesses.<sup>33</sup> Unbeknownst to the ALP and industrial left at the time, these two events became the basis for both contemporary Labor politicians and future historians to write off the socialisation programme as a notable shift in party ideology. Labor lost the next three federal elections and, in 1927, it removed from the objective its statement of methods.<sup>34</sup> The extensive plans, and genuine enthusiasms, for Australia’s ‘Industrial Republic’ faded into memory – leaving only their now ambiguous war-cry ‘the socialisation of industry, production, distribution and exchange.’

## **Interpretations**

Scholarly interpretations of these events can be roughly organised into three dominant categories – the sabotage interpretation, the symbolic interpretation, and the strategic interpretation. As previously mentioned, assessments of the socialisation objective have often functioned to express wider positions on the relationship between Labor and socialism. The ‘sabotage interpretation,’ for example, coheres with the position of the Old Left labour historians – which includes scholars such as Ian Turner, Lloyd Ross, Robin Gollan and Brian Fitzpatrick.<sup>35</sup> The Old Left, broadly speaking, was an activist-academic tradition

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> O’Meagher, ‘Introduction,’ 10.

<sup>35</sup> Simon David Booth, ‘Picturing Politics: Cartoons of Melbourne’s Labour Press 1890-1919,’ PhD Thesis, University of Melbourne, 2008, 11, 62; Henry Paternoster, ‘Questioning the Legacy of Class Structure in Australian History: An Australian “Historical” Class Analysis?’ *Labour History*, no. 111 (2016): 107-113.

which tended to frame Australian history as fundamentally, in Fitzpatrick's words, 'a struggle between an organised rich and an organised poor' – sometimes evaluating the 'maturity' of periods or persons according to their consciousness of this struggle.<sup>36</sup> The historians concerned had often been members of the Communist Party, or at least supportive of it. The 'sabotage' interpretation of the objective is exemplified in Turner's 1965 study – which assessed socialisation as a sincere and radical effort by the industrial left doomed for sabotage by its misreading of class conditions.<sup>37</sup> Although the party machine played a critical role, this was the 'even more far-reaching' cause of the objective's defeat.<sup>38</sup> In Turner's words, the industrial left 'were leaders without an army ... support for militant industrial action was one thing, support for revolutionary politics another.'<sup>39</sup> The failure of its advocates to make this distinction meant the socialisation programme would inescapably be 'changed [from] a socialist tiger to a sacred cow.'<sup>40</sup> Even without the Blackburn addendum, Turner argues, it lacked the necessary class conditions to become a political reality: revolutionary ideas were widespread, what was missing was the revolutionary ferment which alone could transform them into actions, and from there into movements, institutions and a new social order.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Brian Fitzpatrick, *A Short History of the Australian Labour Movement* (Melbourne: Rawson's Bookshop), 11; Lloyd Ross, 'Socialism and Australian Labour,' *Australian Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (1950): 21-35.

<sup>37</sup> Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 217-226.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

The symbolic interpretation of the objective differs from this position by arguing that socialisation was never intended to be realised to begin with. This interpretation corresponds to the more academic liberal-pluralist tradition of historiography as well as the works of non-Marxist ‘orthodox’ scholars such as W.K. Hancock, D.W. Rawson, James Jupp, R.S. Parker, and L.F. Crisp. These historians have tended to view Labor’s commitment to parliamentary democracy as ‘nullify[ing] any effective commitment to socialism in any but the loosest sense of the word.’<sup>42</sup> Consequently, they have interpreted the socialisation objective as a purely symbolic gesture – a tokenistic idol that ‘could mean all things to all men,’ communicated in a language that ‘except among the small forces of the revolutionary left ... was largely meaningless by 1921.’<sup>43</sup> In these traditions, the history of the ALP is often considered in terms of a perpetual interplay between a collectivist ‘energetic minority’ and a reformist, ‘sensible majority.’<sup>44</sup> Labor is seen as hosting a variety of competing interest groups and influences, with socialism occupying no greater a role than, for example, radical liberalism, populism, or nationalism.<sup>45</sup> Their interpretations of 1921 have flowed from this overarching routine of analysis: its significance, if it has any at all, is only as a momentary aberration from Labor’s typical approach – ‘when

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<sup>42</sup> Graham Freudenberg, ‘Bede Nairn and the Official History,’ in *Bede Nairn and Labor History: Labor History Essays Volume Three* (Marrickville: Pluto Press and the NSW Branch of the Australian Labor Party, Marrickville, 1991), 15.

<sup>43</sup> O’Farrell, ‘The Russian Revolution,’ 194; D.W. Rawson, *Labor in Vain? A Survey of the Australian Labor Party* (Croydon, Victoria: Longmans of Australia, 1966) 67; Peter Love, *Labour and the Money Power: Australian Labour Populism 1890-1950* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1984) 72-75; Tony Bramston, ‘The Albatross of Labor’s Socialist Objective,’ *Australian Quarterly* 74, no. 4 (2002): 27-32.

<sup>44</sup> W.K. Hancock, *Australia* (Brisbane: Ernest Benn Ltd. Australasian Publishing Co., 1966, [1945]), 171.

<sup>45</sup> O’Meagher, ‘Introduction,’ 13; Jupp, *Party Politics*, 145-7.

delegates' sentimentality overtook their practicality' – and socialism was given a brief, strictly symbolic, place in the sun.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, the 'strategic' interpretation of the objective is concentrated among the New Left and radical-Marxist scholars such as Humphrey McQueen, John Playford, Robert Catley, Bruce MacFarlane and Richard Gordon. This tradition, with some exceptions, has tended to argue that 'the ALP is not and never has been a socialist party' – defined instead by its class collaborationism, technocratic reformism, populist appeals, racism, masculinism and capitulation to liberal-capitalist institutions.<sup>47</sup> In its basic substance, it ironically resembles the Labor right/liberal pluralist approach, but it bemoans where the other commends. The history of the Labor Party is the history of an organisational machine designed to 'repel or absorb proletarian protest' – with the socialisation objective being interpreted accordingly.<sup>48</sup> When these scholars have written about 1921, they have argued that it 'represented no turning point but merely the re-integration of [Labor's] troublesome left' – one of countless cases where the ALP employed 'verbal acrobatics' to stifle the development of a truly

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<sup>46</sup> RS Parker, 'The ALP and Parliamentary Government,' 50.

<sup>47</sup> For relevant examples of this tradition in Australian labour historiography, see: Robert Catley and Bruce MacFarlane, 'The ALP: Socialism in a Bourgeois Society?,' in *Critical Essays in Australian Politics*, ed. Graeme Duncan (Port Melbourne: Edward Arnold, 1978), 81; John Playford and Douglas Kirsner, 'Who Rules Australia,' in *Australian Capitalism: Towards a Socialist Critique* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), 123-124; Stuart Macintyre, 'Paradise Lost: Conditions for the Workers 1900-1950,' *Bulletin of the Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies* 2, no. 2 (1989): 62-71; Ann Curthoys and Andrew Markus, *Who Are Our Enemies?: Racism and the Australian Working Class* (Neutral Bay: Hale & Iremonger in association with the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, 1978); E.W. Campbell, *History of the Australian Labour Movement: A Marxist Interpretation* (Sydney: Communist Party of Australia, 1945).

<sup>48</sup> O'Meagher, 'Introduction,' 17; McQueen, 'Glory without Power,' 355-61; Robert Catley and Bruce MacFarlane, *From Tweedledum to Tweedledee: The New Labor Government in Australia, a Critique of Its Social Model* (Sydney: Australia and New Zealand Book Co. 1974).

revolutionary movement.<sup>49</sup> This was ‘a trap to neuter working-class resistance’ – not the indicator of a leftward shift, but of Labor’s attempt to contain it.<sup>50</sup> As with the liberal-pluralists, both the historical significance and political sincerity of the socialisation program is denied.

Although these traditions arrive here from different routes, all essentially reach the same basic finding: that Labor’s adoption of the 1921 objective cannot represent an assertive, substantive socialist project in ascendancy. Dissension from this view is very sparse in existing accounts but has emerged occasionally, such as in Terry Irving’s work since the early 1980s, and in the recent writing of Liam Byrne.<sup>51</sup> As Byrne astutely summarises, ‘since Turner’s 1965 study, the import of the objective has been consistently maligned by scholarship which has explicitly denied its significance, ignored the period of its acceptance, or overlooked it altogether.’<sup>52</sup> With the partial exception of the Old Left, studies of the objective have been led by interpretative traditions which either deny or understate the significance of socialism in ALP theory and practice.<sup>53</sup> This has been observed by Terry Irving – one of the few historians who has articulated a defence of the objective’s significance.<sup>54</sup> Irving notes that conservative, labour and Marxist historians have all contributed to an orthodoxy in which ‘socialist ideas (never movements) are foreign gems easily ejected’ in Australian labour politics.<sup>55</sup> This orthodoxy has narrowed our understanding of the socialisation

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<sup>49</sup> McQueen, ‘Glory Without Power,’ 360.

<sup>50</sup> Irving, ‘Origins of the Labor Party,’ 42.

<sup>51</sup> Liam Byrne, *Becoming John Curtin and James Scullin. The Making of the Modern Labor Party* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2020), 144-56.

<sup>52</sup> Byrne, ‘Visions of the Future,’ 507.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 506.

<sup>54</sup> Irving, ‘the Origins of the Labor Party,’ 42.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

program by assuming its ‘sole significance ... was of its function inside the party.’<sup>56</sup> Irving suggests the necessity of a broader conception of these events and their implications for the entire labour movement – and it is here that my thesis makes its contribution.

## **Research Methodology**

In this thesis, I treat the events of 1921 as a specific, rather than incidental, object of inquiry. I will not use the socialisation objective to tell a broader story about Labor and socialism, but focus intensively on the specific languages, symbols, assumptions, and experiences through which the objective was brought into being. I closely consider contemporary accounts of its significance – which, it should be noted, diverge from those given in the dominant historiography.<sup>57</sup> In the labour press and the unions, the objective’s adoption was heralded by all from *The Communist* to the AWU’s *Australian Worker* as a notable, even momentous, reorientation in party ideology: ‘a magnificent advance in the direction of a militant, class-conscious, working class movement.’<sup>58</sup> In liberal

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>57</sup> The *Brisbane Courier*, for example, would later argue in 1922 that the ‘Red Objective’ was reason for Australian conservatives to take close note of how Fascist Italy was able to crush communist groups, and see if similar methods could be applied domestically: *Brisbane Courier*, ‘Council of Action at Work,’ 2 November 1922, 4.

<sup>58</sup> Henry Boote, ‘What of the Brisbane Conference?’ *Australian Worker*, 20 October 1921, 3; MH Ellis *The Garden Path: The Story of the Saturation of the Australian Labour Movement by Communism*, (Sydney: The Land Newspaper Ltd., 1949), 61-70. There was criticism, however, from some of the movement’s most extreme sections. For a contemporary far-left critique of the objective see: Ray Averitt, ‘The Labor Bleeders Congress, A.L.P. Endeavouring to get a Fresh Hold,’ *The International Communist*, 25 June 1921, 1; *The International Communist*, ‘A.L.P. APOLOGISTS – Their Low Tactics,’ 16 July 1921, 1. For more supportive views from those in the movement’s mainstream and left wings see: *Proletarian Review*, ‘The All-Australian Trade

and conservative newspapers it was met with an almost hysterical acrimony – ‘The shadow of revolution grows more distinct,’ ‘The labour movement of Australia [has become] an extreme communist movement ... the happy hunting ground of every class of fanatic,’ ‘the death of old Labor is upon us.’<sup>59</sup> The thesis will take seriously how the adoption of the socialisation objective was analysed in its time, exploring the reasoning of these claims to broaden our conception of this event.

The thesis will be organised into three chapters, each applying a novel framework aimed at enriching our understanding of the socialisation objective’s meaning, function, and significance. My research structure is guided by the assertion of intellectual historian Quentin Skinner that political statements have no essential meaning beyond their context, audience and use.<sup>60</sup> Skinner’s methodology for the history of ideas emphasises the importance of a historical agent’s specific linguistic choices and how these relate to their context: encouraging us to ask why, of all the ways a historical text could have plausibly

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Union Congress,’ 7 July 1921, 2-4; John Smith Garden, ‘The All-Australian Union Congress,’ *Proletarian Review*, 7 August 1921, 7; Ernest Lane [Jack Cade], ‘Labor’s New Policy – Two Fundamental Principles,’ *Daily Standard*, 18 October 1921, 3; RS Ross [Max Argent], ‘Making the New World in Australia, an Argument for the Congress Scheme,’ *Labor Call*, 21 July 1921, 1; *Westralian Worker*, ‘Comments on the Big Congress, Delegates Emphasise Value of Decisions, Widespread Enthusiasm,’ 15 July 1921, 1; *The Socialist* ‘Lecture by R.S. Ross on the Union Conference,’ 5 Aug 1921, 1; *Daily Standard*, ‘Not Like Others. Recent Labor Congress, Lecture by T. Moroney,’ 27 July 1921, 3; *Daily Standard*, ‘DELEGATES DELIGHTED – NEW ERA OPENED,’ 25 June 1921, 7.

<sup>59</sup> For conservative and liberal responses to the development and passage of the socialist objective, see: *The Argus*, ‘Labour Extremists,’ 5 October 1921, 11; *Daily Mail*, ‘Labor’s Crisis,’ 13 October 1921, 6; *The Daily Telegraph*, ‘Thirteen! Council of Action, Federal Conference Parting of the Ways,’ 10 October 1921, 5. *Smith’s Weekly*, ‘Revolutionary Threat of the Reds - Labour at the Parting of the Ways,’ 18 June 1921, 1; *The Sun*, ‘Industrial Labour,’ 2 September 1921, 8; *Barrier Miner*, ‘Notes and Comments,’ 30 June 1921, 2.

<sup>60</sup> Quentin Skinner, ‘Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,’ *History and Theory* 8, no. 1 (1969): 48.

articulated itself, it figures in the specific language or terminology that it did. In the first chapter, I employ the concept of historical consciousness to account for the objective's context. I will examine the various ways in which the post-war labour movement orientated itself in historical time – that is, how it narrativized its past, described its present, and forecasted its future.<sup>61</sup> I draw on primary texts from labour intellectuals and politicians such as William Spence's *Australia's Awakening* and Frank Anstey's *Red Europe* to trace evolutions in historical consciousness preceding and during the objective debate – paying close attention to the pivotal role of the Great War in upending Labor's prior discourses on political time.<sup>62</sup> The key finding of this chapter is that the adoption of the objective was motivated by a sense of historical acceleration: a pressure on the ALP to formally recognise that the pre-1914 world was over, and that its associated habits, expectations, and methodologies had become untenable.

In the second chapter, I seek to ascertain the objective's imagined audience by applying the concept of political subjectivity. I propose two competing models of the labour subject, 'the people' and 'the proletariat,' positing that the debates over socialisation functioned to contest this critical tension in party identity. Here, I will focus my analysis on labour cartoons, propaganda, and public speech, observing how these were used to promote various models of labour political consciousness. Competing labour

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<sup>61</sup> Jörn Rüsen, 'Historical Consciousness: Narrative Structure, Moral Function, and Ontogenetic Development,' in *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, ed. Peter Seixas, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 2004), 4.

<sup>62</sup> William Guthrie Spence, *Australia's Awakening: Thirty Years in the Life of an Australian Agitator* (Sydney: The Worker Trustees, 1909); Frank Anstey, *Red Europe* (Melbourne: Fraser & Jenkinson, 1919).

subjectivities, I demonstrate, played a pivotal role in how the socialisation debate unfolded and underline its significance. In adopting the objective, Labor was consolidating a process of self-re-evaluation which had implications for how it imagined class politics, race, gender, and nationality. The significance of 1921 is as an incident of a political party coming to terms with a rapidly transforming audience –a new discourse about who ‘Labor’ was, and who it should be.

In the final chapter, I discern the objective’s use – what it intended to achieve as a political statement. Although these will be referenced throughout the study, here my research will concentrate most intensively on the proceedings of the June and October conferences. I identify the major lines of debate, the intended use of labour objectives prior to 1921, and the possible reasons for us to approach the socialisation program as a different type of political statement altogether. The aim of this chapter is twofold: to ascertain what intentions the union congress had in designing the objective such as it did and to assess the degree to which these intentions were correctly interpreted by the Federal Labor Conference in October. By identifying the intent behind the socialisation program, I contest its assumed insignificance. The objective was designed to be a concrete and transformative project, and Labor leaders understood this when they adopted it. It demands recognition as a notable turning-point for working-class politics in Australia.

Historian of the British Labour Party H.M. Drucker has discussed the existence of two competing impulses in labour politics: the corporatist and the

hegemonic.<sup>63</sup> The corporatist ethos reflects a defensive form of labour politics – an organisation seeking to protect itself and its values from a hostile world. The hegemonic ethos, usually non-existent in parliamentary labour parties, reflects a ‘revolutionary will to dominate.’<sup>64</sup> Hegemonic labour aims at social transformation and institutional upheaval. It aspires to situate the perceived interests of the working class at the very centre of how society is organised.

If this thesis makes one contribution to the scholarship on Labor’s intellectual and political history, it is that the 1921 objective represented a genuine, if brief, ‘hegemonic turn’ in the thought and strategy of the Australian Labor Party. It expressed a series of revolutions in the broader movement’s self-conception: its perceived place in history, its subjective identity, and the ultimate aim of its political practice. For thirty years Labor had aspired to afford the workers some level of protection against exploitation. Now, its most powerful figures were contemplating the abolition of the exploiter itself.

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<sup>63</sup> H.M. Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos in the Labour Party* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1979), 1-12; H.M. Drucker, *Political Uses of Ideology* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1974), 7.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

# Chapter 1:

## A New Historical Consciousness

Those who followed the proceedings of the recent All-Australian Trade Union Congress must have seen before their astonished eyes the signs and signals of a remarkable stampede of the old thought before the onrush of the new.<sup>65</sup>

To its contemporary critics and supporters alike, the socialisation objective marked a dramatic revision of where Labor placed itself in history. Since foundation, the party had trusted in three instincts to orient itself in political time: optimism, gradualism, and restraint. Through the traumatic loss of certainty and hope that was the Great War, Labor was compelled to revise these fundamental understandings about its mission. The socialisation objective was the ALP's attempt to come to terms with a transformed political world, recognise its place within it, and articulate the new goals of the organised working class. As one of its advocates stated in 1921: 'the Labor Party had done a lot, but ... a new spirit was in the world to-day and [we] had to recognise it was in existence.'<sup>66</sup>

Political movements both make and inherit history. They inescapably use the past to understand the present and anticipate the future. 'Historical consciousness' refers to the myriad ways in which conceptions of time guide a movement's beliefs and actions.<sup>67</sup> It helps define the frontiers of the feasible; a

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<sup>65</sup> *Westralian Worker*, 'A Plan for the Transition,' 12 August 1921, 5.

<sup>66</sup> *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 27.

<sup>67</sup> Clark and Peck, 'Contemplating' 2; Rösen, 'Historical Consciousness,' 63-85.

movement's sense of what is possible at a given moment. When the Australian Labor Party adopted the socialisation objective it was inaugurating a new historical consciousness: a formal re-orientation of where it believed the Australian working class stood in relation to history itself. This chapter will use the concept of historical consciousness to ascertain the objective's significance. Due to the relative novelty of this concept, prior accounts of the ALP have generally, although not without exception, approached the objective without a strong appreciation for this dimension.<sup>68</sup> When it has not been ignored, the objective has been framed as a factional skirmish, strategic manoeuvre, or aberrative convulsion.<sup>69</sup> These interpretations often treat the objective as an expression of the intense disharmony in the post-war movement. A focus on historical consciousness suggests inverse conclusions. By centring labour discourses related to time, the socialist objective can reveal fundamental commonalities in the movement's political thought after World War One: expressed, above all, by a sense that time was accelerating, and the future had arrived. These were, undoubtedly, years of unparalleled diversity in the labour public sphere – competing frameworks included parliamentary socialism, revolutionary socialism, labourism, progressive liberalism, nationalism, guild socialism, syndicalism, communism, and populism. However, when it came to historical consciousness a striking unity is evidenced. Through this convergence

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<sup>68</sup> The concept of historical consciousness emerged in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a point of interest for both postcolonial and holocaust scholars: Clark, 'Contemplating,' 2.

<sup>69</sup> Byrne, 'Visions of the Future,' 503-25; Rawson, *Labor in Vain*, 67; Crisp, *The Federal Australian Labor Party 1901-1950*, 280; Humphrey McQueen, 'Glory without Power,' 360; RS Parker, 'The ALP and Parliamentary Government,' 50; George Healey, *A.L.P. The Story of the Labor Party* (Brisbane: Jacaranda Press, 1955), 80-90.

in perceptions of time, the unusual alliances which heralded the socialist objective were realised, and Labor's historical mission was fundamentally changed.

## **Part One: Historical Consciousness in Australian Labour 1891-1914**

In its first decades, Labor's historical consciousness flowed inseparably from 'lessons' derived from the defeat of the 1890-94 strikes. The failed strike wave was a critical juncture for the movement – shaping its understood historical destiny for over a generation. It predicated labour's entry into parliament as a distinct entity with three political instincts: optimism, gradualism, and restraint. Labor's pre-war historical consciousness trusted in parliamentary reformism, emphasised ideological moderation, and anticipated class conflict in Australia to gradually but inevitably resolve. Critical to our purposes, this was a theory of history that considered any elaborated, binding socialist programme either unnecessary or ahead of its time.

The Great War did not so much overturn this historical consciousness as transform Australia's perceived place within it. The lessons offered by 1890-94 appeared to have 'failed in the test of mighty events' – outliving their purpose in an unrecognisable world.<sup>70</sup> It became unclear for many in the movement whether socialism was, indeed, still 'ahead of its time,' triggering an explosion of political imagination which culminated in the socialisation program.

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<sup>70</sup> Henry Boote, 'What of the Brisbane Conference?' *Australian Worker*, 20 October 1921, 3.

First, Labor's pre-war historical consciousness advocated a concentrated focus on parliamentary representation and legislative reform. This would require pragmatism and patience: labour gradualism. The 1890-94 strike wave was experienced as a chaotic eruption of class antagonism in which state instruments were brutally deployed on the side of employers. In its aftermath, leading unions concluded that Australian labourites had to re-evaluate their strategy.<sup>71</sup> Ecstatic lunges aimed at direct concessions from the employers would only fail, they concluded, without the complement of careful parliamentary initiative. To secure for the workers an adequate portion of national wealth, the state would have to be 'made neutral' in industrial conflict through steadily electing Labor members, holding the balance of power, and eventually, forming a Labor government in its own right.<sup>72</sup> In essence, this was an acceptance that 'you can never get to the top of the ladder unless you climb rung by rung.'<sup>73</sup> Although labour leaders spoke in plain terms about potential obstacles, especially the 'money power' of financial institutions, Peter Love observes how these were often imagined as small 'predatory cliques' that 'could be swept aside by the

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<sup>71</sup> 'Report of the Sydney Defence Committee,' quoted in; R. Noel Ebbels, *The Australian Labour Movement 1850-1907: Extracts from Contemporary Documents*, ed. L. G. Churchward (Sydney: Australasian Book Society, 1960), 150-52; *Worker*, 'The Failure of the Great Strike,' 1 November 1890, 1; 'Report of the General Secretary to the 5<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Australasian Shearers Union, 1891,' quoted in: Ebbels, *Labour Movement 1850-1907*, 152-143.

<sup>72</sup> James Leighton and Raymond Markey, 'Class and Labour: The British Labour Party and the Australian Labor Party Compared,' *Labour History*, no. 90 (2006): 27. Liverpool University Press; *Worker*, 'Australia for the Australian Workman,' 2 October 1897, 6; *Report of the Sydney Defence Committee* quoted in: Ebbels, *Labour Movement 1850-1907*, 150-52; Childe, *How Labour Governs*, 5-10; Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 21.

<sup>73</sup> *Report of the Debate between Mr. Arthur Griffith, M.L.A. [representing the Labor Party] and Jas. O. Moroney [representing the Socialist Labor Party]*, Sydney, 1909, Leaflet, Mitchell Library, 4-15, quoted in: McKinlay, *Documentary History of the Australian Labor Movement*, 48.

popular will expressed through the political process.’<sup>74</sup> With the gradual instruments provided by Australian constitutionalism, mainstream labour trusted that such foes as monopolies, banks, unelected upper houses, entrenched landowners, and abusive employers could be defeated or contained.

Relatedly, pre-war Labor was idealistic about the long-term potentials of parliamentary reform. This is the first component of ‘labour optimism.’ Labor’s early political leaders sincerely believed in the ability of parliament, sooner or later, to realise the socialist ideal. Although they broadly accepted that ‘you can’t revolutionise society in four or five years,’ and shared the view of early AWU National President, William Spence, that decades were ahead before socialisation would be anything more than an ‘abstract proposition,’ – forbearance coexisted with a strong streak of optimism about Australian democracy.<sup>75</sup> The achievements of parliamentary action were often assumed to be both irreversible and inevitably helpful for Australia’s ‘evolutionary’ development towards an as-yet-undefined socialism: imagined as a society of mateship, co-operation, and human kindness, in contrast with a brutal and competitive capitalism.<sup>76</sup> This optimistic pursuit of a nebulous socialism, its leaders often argued, is what distinguished Labor from its competitors. It was

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<sup>74</sup> William Guthrie Spence, ‘To the Workers of Queensland,’ *Worker*, 10 March 1894, 2; Peter Love, *Labour and the Money Power*, 35.

<sup>75</sup> *Worker*, 14 November 1896, 3; William Guthrie Spence, *Australia’s Awakening: Thirty Years in the Life of an Australian Agitator* (Sydney: Worker Trustees, 1909), 381; D.J. Murphy ‘Queensland,’ in *Labor in Politics: The State Labor Parties in Australia 1880-1920*, ed. D. J. Murphy (St. Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1975), 142; *The Advertiser*, ‘The Labor Party and Strikes: Mr. Verran on Syndicalism – Revolutionary Socialism No Good,’ 10 May 1912, 7; J.W. Gregory, ‘The Labor Party and its Ideals,’ *Labor Call*, Melbourne, 25 Jul 1907, 6.

<sup>76</sup> Farrell, *International Socialism and Australian Labour*, iv-vi.

not its policies but its inspired commitment to a ‘gradual but nevertheless complete and permanent change’ which set Labor apart.<sup>77</sup>

The second component of labour optimism was an expectation of gradual class conciliation.<sup>78</sup> Neutralising the state and securing progressive reforms, it was hoped, would improve general prosperity, and erode the preconditions for interclass hostility. This was encouraged by how, especially after Federation, Australian workers were some of the best re-numerated and legally-protected in the world.<sup>79</sup> The 1907 Harvester Judgement secured the concept of a national living wage for male breadwinners, and industrial arbitration provided formal channels to mediate workplace disputes. In 1910 Australia elected the world’s first national working-class-dominated Government. The pre-war Labor mainstream saw Australia’s future as a bright one— in which imperial legacies and brute force would give way to sympathetic human reason in directing political life. Labor’s policies were imagined, in this context, as ‘preparatory to the introduction of bigger things,’ as Spence wrote, or as prominent writer Henry Boote said, ‘steppingstones’ – although towards what Labor was stepping remained largely open-ended.<sup>80</sup>

Finally, the pre-war historical consciousness also valued political restraint. There prevailed an assumption that ‘the leaders [of the Labour movement] are ahead of the people,’ causing a broad recalcitrance towards

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<sup>77</sup> Spence, *Australia’s Awakening*, 357.

<sup>78</sup> Gregory, ‘The Labor Party and its Ideals,’ 6.

<sup>79</sup> Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 2.

<sup>80</sup> Spence, *Australia’s Awakening*, 381; Henry Boote, ‘The Aim of the Labour Movement,’ *The Tocsin*, 14 November 1901, 3.

ideological excess.<sup>81</sup> The movement's late-nineteenth-century political, industrial, and intellectual leaders such as William Lane, Albert Hinchcliffe, William Spence and Billy Hughes all considered socialism 'unconscious' or latent among Australian workers: 'The labour movement is socialistic, but the great bulk of its adherents are not yet socialists. There is a long way to travel.'<sup>82</sup> It would therefore be inappropriate to 'befuddle' supporters with grandiose theorising. As early ALP leader Chris Watson cautioned in 1896, 'the man who comes forward to fight the workers' battle will find his bitterest opponents among the men he's fighting for.'<sup>83</sup> Labor had to be concerned, *for the time being*, with ameliorating the day-to-day ordeals of wage-earners through factory legislation, an eight-hour day, pensions, universal white suffrage, workers compensation, tax reform and state banks.<sup>84</sup> Even the Labor-left generally agreed that the workers were 'not ready' for socialism if it was defined as rapid social transformation.<sup>85</sup> As one Queensland activist warned in 1907, even if society was inevitably 'drifting towards socialism ... that does not mean we want it. Our grandchildren may. We want our present needs attended to.'<sup>86</sup>

In these years, it was not that socialism was substantively rejected so much as dismissed as ahead of its time. As early as 1904, however, it was openly acknowledged that this may not always be the case: 'the time must come when

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<sup>81</sup> Spence, *Australia's Awakening*, 378-81.

<sup>82</sup> *Report of the Sydney Defence Committee*, quoted in: Ebbels, *Labour Movement 1850-1907*, 150-52; Spence, *Australia's Awakening*, 378; William Morris (Billy) Hughes, *The Case for Labor* (Sydney: The Worker Trustees, 1910); William Lane, *The Workingman's Paradise: An Australian Labour Novel* (Sydney: Edwards, Dunlop and Co., 1892).

<sup>83</sup> *Worker*, 14 November 1896, 3.

<sup>84</sup> Henry Boote. *Worker*, 5 January 1901; Boote, 'The Aim of the Labour Movement,' 3.

<sup>85</sup> *The Advertiser*, 'Revolutionary Socialism No Good,' 7.

<sup>86</sup> *The North Western Advocate and the Emu Bay Times*, 'Queensland's Defeat of Labor,' 14 February 1907, 3.

palliatives will cease to satisfy, and the party will enter a revolutionary stage’ – but this was described on a timescale of decades or even centuries.<sup>87</sup> Only once extensive reforms had been secured would it be necessary to articulate any program of worker self-government. As Verity Burgmann and other labour historians have shown, this assumption was not ubiquitous – and was energetically challenged by usually socialist minorities within and outside Labor.<sup>88</sup> What made the Great War so transformative for Labor’s historical consciousness was that its impacts harmonised with what had been, hitherto, these marginal critiques from the left. War foresaw declining living standards, reduced faith in parliamentary politics, an emboldened ‘money power,’ and the brutalisation of class conflict. Together, these developments cultivated a sense that time was accelerating – that Labor needed to re-assess its place in the unfolding of history.

## **Part Two: Four Challenges to Gradualism, Optimism and Restraint**

The first wartime challenge to Labor’s early historical consciousness was a marked decline in living standards. In 1921 Australian capitalism increasingly

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<sup>87</sup> *Worker*, ‘The Editorial Mill,’ 16 April 1904, 2.

<sup>88</sup> RS Ross, *Barrier Truth*, 6 March 1903: ‘I see no fundamental remedy for the cruel inequities and injustices of the commercial competitive system than collectivism ... the nationalisation of capital’; Verity Burgmann, *In Our Time: Socialism and the Rise of Labor, 1885-1905* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1985), 69-90, 173-192; Brian McKinlay, *The ALP: A Short History* (Richmond: Heinemann Publishers Australia, 1981), 27.

struggled to guarantee a decent livelihood for workers.<sup>89</sup> The unemployment rate was 12%, the cost of living had increased by 30% since 1919, while real wages had stagnated for a decade.<sup>90</sup> Before the war, the *Perth Truth* noted, an ‘industrious and persistent person could be fairly certain to make good livelihood for themselves.’ In 1921 many felt they could hope only for sustenance and survival.<sup>91</sup> Billy Hughes’ repudiation of the 1920 Royal Commission into the Basic Wage, which revealed thousands of families in destitution, had not been forgiven nor forgotten.<sup>92</sup> Relative to 1914, workers were now losing significantly more industrial disputes and when they won, it appeared more challenging to translate ‘victories’ into improved conditions (see Figure 3, below).<sup>93</sup> The *Industrial Peace Act* 1920 and the *Commonwealth Arbitration Act* 1920 limited the ability of the Arbitration Court to reduce working hours, while allowing it to terminate agreements, prosecute strike organisers, and alter awards before their expiry.<sup>94</sup> This drove the Court’s nominally pro-worker President,

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<sup>89</sup> Even Arthur Rickard, President of the elite ‘Millions Club,’ a pro-immigration lobby, stated that ‘the conditions of the workers are far from satisfactory’ and that there was ‘no use’ in denying this reality. He also said existing reforms have been to the advantage of capital and not labour. The Millions Club was attended by leading businesspeople and right-wing politicians: *Daily Examiner*, ‘On Wrong Lines,’ 2 June 1920, 4.

<sup>90</sup> Ian Turner, *In Union is Strength: A History of Trade Unions in Australia, 1788-1974* (West Melbourne, Thomas Nelson Australia, 1976), 70; Douglas Copland, ‘The Economic Situation in Australia, 1918-23,’ *The Economic Journal* 34, no. 133 (1924): 32.

<sup>91</sup> *Truth* (Perth), ‘A new power,’ 30 July 1921, 1.

<sup>92</sup> Henry Boote, ‘MACHINATIONS OF A SECRET CIRCLE,’ *Australian Worker*, 2 June 1921, 3: ‘The basic wage declared by the Federal Commission is ignored by the whole employing class, and by the Government that appointed the Commission and promised to abide by its findings. Evidence given at the inquiry shows that thousands of Australian families are living in absolute penury, unable to provide themselves with the barest necessities of existence.’

<sup>93</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Labour Report No. 13, 1922: Chapter 14 – Industrial Disputes*, 6101.0 (Melbourne, 1922), 152: In 1915, 81,292 workers were involved in a dispute and 44,200 had an outcome in favour of workers (54%). In 1921, 165,101 workers were in a dispute and only 24,200 of these had an outcome in favour (15%).

<sup>94</sup> Humphrey McQueen, ‘Shoot the Bolshevik!’ 195.

Justice H.B. Higgins, who had introduced the Harvester Judgement of 1907, to resign in 1921.<sup>95</sup> Higgins's departure is an apt symbol for how labour intellectuals must have seen history recalibrating for them. Capitalism, it seemed, was only becoming more ruthless.

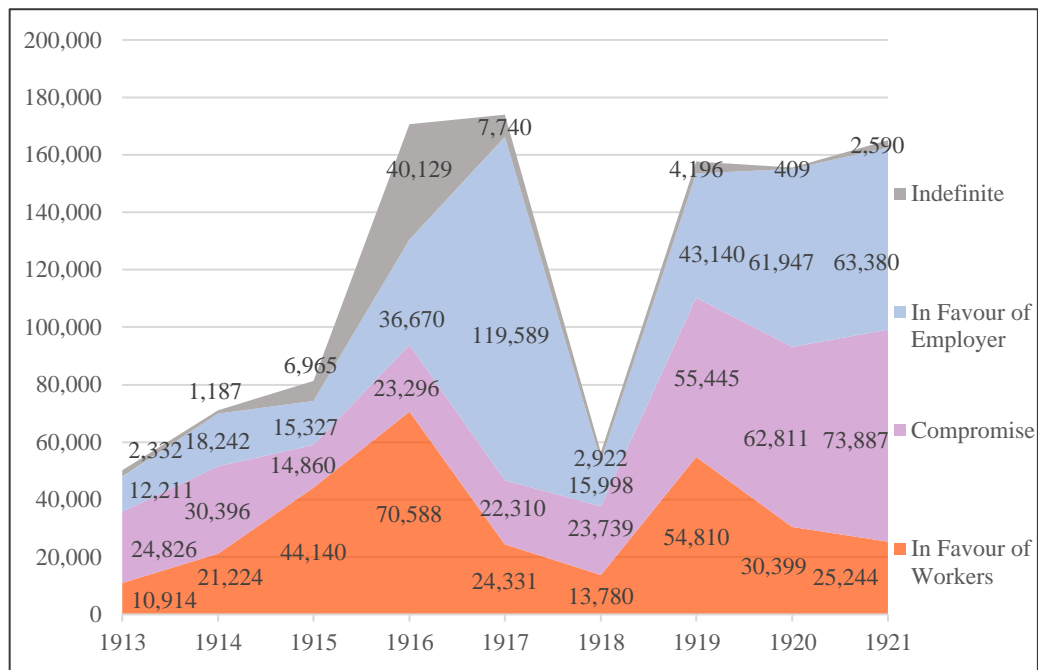


Figure 3: Workers Involved in Industrial Dispute by Outcome 1913-1921. Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Labour Report No.13, 1922: Chapter 14 – Industrial Disputes*, 6101.0 (Melbourne, 1922), 152.

The failure of economic conditions to improve after armistice intensified labour's discontents.<sup>96</sup> Alexander McCallum, Director of the *Westralian Worker* and WA AWU official, declared in a March 1921 speech to voters: 'the workers of this and other countries were promised immediately after the war that there would be a new world for the masses.'<sup>97</sup> In February Frank Anstey, left-wing

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> McKinlay, *A Century of Struggle*, 46; Gollan, *The Coalminers of New South Wales*, 158.

<sup>97</sup> *Westralian Worker*, 'Mr. McCallum's Speech to Sth. Fremantle Electors,' 4 March 1921, 2.

Labor MP and intellectual, recently returned from his travels in revolutionary Europe, described the world the workers found instead: ‘Unemployment is growing, wages are sinking into insignificance, starvation is stalking abroad. These are the trophies of war for the working class.’<sup>98</sup> Labour intellectuals and leaders did not merely fear this would provoke supporters to abandon the pre-war theory of change. In increasing number, they themselves reassessed the utility of their inherited assumptions. As Bob Ross, 1921 conference delegate and Victorian Socialist Party leader summarised: ‘we have to get somewhere more rapidly than violent revolution can ... the new objective [has] been brought about because it [is] considered time ... to erect a new edifice, to construct a new society.’<sup>99</sup>

The second challenge to Labor’s pre-war historical consciousness was a reduced faith in parliamentary politics – and with this, the value of labour gradualism. Through the war, it no longer appeared self-evident that electing reformist politicians would move Australia to any classless ideal even incrementally. This seemed to verify the cynical warnings of the far left issued at the onset of the 1910 Fisher Labor Government.<sup>100</sup> Not only had Labor’s accomplishments proved reversible but were now feared to be solidifying rather than undermining the capitalist system.<sup>101</sup> A double-majority ALP Government elected in 1914 failed to prevent hard-won union victories from being reversed

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<sup>98</sup> *The Socialist*, ‘Lecture at Socialist Hall,’ 25 February 1921, 2.

<sup>99</sup> *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 7. The VSP was an ‘entryist’ socialist group intimately connected to the Labor-left, especially in Victoria: Ian Turner, ‘Socialist Political Tactics, 1900-1920,’ *Bulletin of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History*, no. 2 (1962): 10.

<sup>100</sup> Harry Holland, ‘The Labor Party’s Victory,’ *The International Socialist*, 22 October 1910, 2.

<sup>101</sup> *Labor Call*, ‘Their Relation to the Labor Objective,’ 30 June 1921, 11.

and living standards from deteriorating as the war unfolded. Labor had experienced innumerable political defections and disappointments before, but none compared to the 1916-17 split. Twenty-four federal MPs joined Billy Hughes to ally with liberals and conservatives in support of conscription and Labor lost power in Australia's most populous state and nationally overnight.<sup>102</sup> Labor representation across Australian parliaments stalled, declined, and plateaued - as did its primary vote (see Figures 4 and 5, below). For many on the left, war seemed to confirm the longstanding critique of syndicalists, communists and revolutionary socialists that the capitalists did not have a political party – they had a state, which they could use to ensure that ‘the interests of the workers [are] continuously sabotaged ... by their parliamentary leaders.’<sup>103</sup> This placed both the logic and motivations of labour gradualism under suspicion, suggesting that capitalism was unassailable by party-politics as they knew it.

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<sup>102</sup> Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 117; Childe, *How Labour Governs*, 49-53.

<sup>103</sup> *The Sun*, ‘Industrial Labour,’ 2 September 1921, 8.

Figure 4: ALP Primary Vote in State and Federal Elections 1900-1921, source: AEC

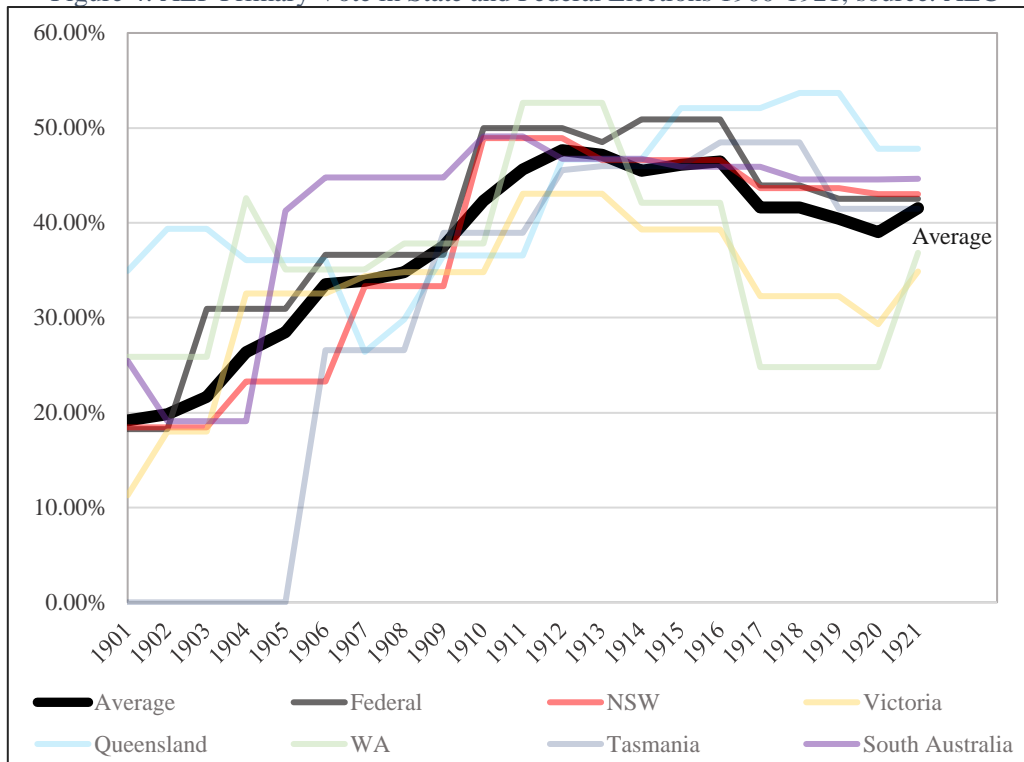
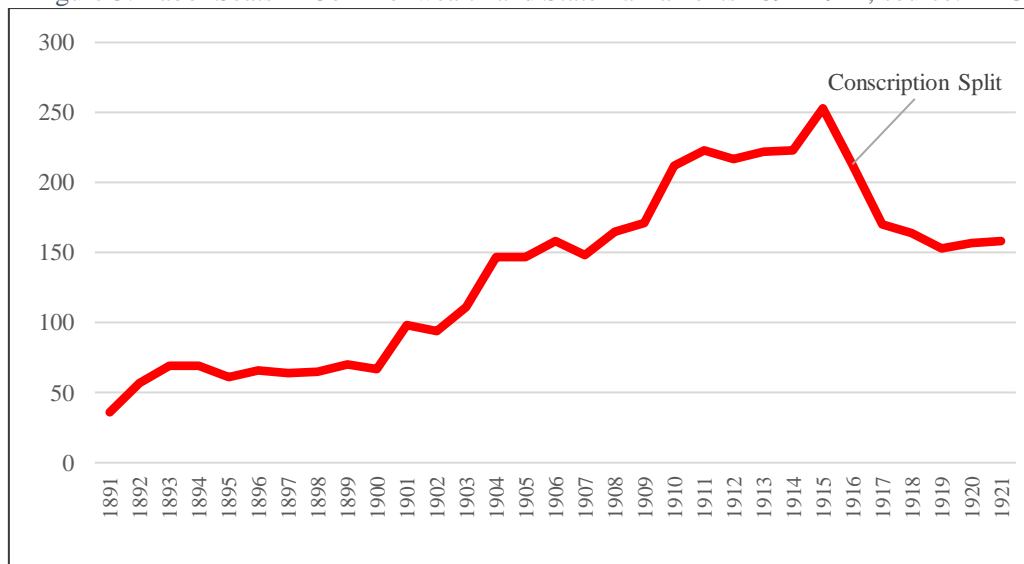


Figure 5: Labor Seats in Commonwealth and State Parliaments 1891-1921, source: AEC



During the war it also became unclear whether the Labor leadership still ideologically outpaced its constituents, interrogating the value of their continued restraint. War proliferated industrial and political militancy amongst Australian

workers – demonstrated by a surge in union membership, spontaneous industrial actions, and widespread sympathy for the fate and rhetoric, if not the actual program, of the anarcho-syndicalist IWW.<sup>104</sup> Global experiments in worker-ownership between 1917-1920 meant Labor suddenly appeared no longer in the historical vanguard but ‘in fact, lagging behind.’<sup>105</sup> Ross, in his columns in *Labor Call* and *The Socialist*, declared that ‘Laborites have become tired of compromises and feeble reforms. What they want can only be achieved by Revolution ... a sudden and radical change.’<sup>106</sup> Again, Labor leaders did not simply fear that current events would spur doubts among supporters towards their conventional approaches. They had, especially on the Labor-left, abundant doubts of their own: ‘all over the world the capitalist system is breaking down’ and if something drastic were not done, the ‘revolution by force which we are trying to avoid’ would eventuate.<sup>107</sup>

In any case, recent federal elections in 1917 and 1919 were emphatic defeats for the ALP. Setting aside all theoretical reinterpretations, parliamentary politics in 1921 offered scant practical hope for alleviating heightened conditions of distress. The few federal ALP politicians who remained – there was but one Labor Senator after 1919 – were dominated by a belligerent right.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Dixon, ‘Reformists and Revolutionaries,’ 61-62, 116-119; McKinlay, *A Documentary History of the Australian Labor Movement*, 613; Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 86-93.

<sup>105</sup> *Westralian Worker*, ‘Mr. McCallum's Speech,’ 2.

<sup>106</sup> *Labor Call*, ‘Revolution – What is it?’ 14 July 1921, 6.

<sup>107</sup> James Scullin, quoted in: Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 225; Liam Byrne, *Becoming John Curtin and James Scullin*, 152; Victorian Socialist Party connected MPs played a major role in securing alternative, further left approaches in 1921, including Ross, EF Russell, John Curtin, EJ Holloway, Frank Anstey: McMullin, *The Light on the Hill*, 69.

<sup>108</sup> In an extraordinary incident in 1920, the Nationalists permanently expelled from parliament WA Labor MP Hugh Mahon, former Cabinet minister, for criticising ‘this bloody and accursed empire’ in a speech outside the House, see: *The Argus*, ‘DISLOYALISTS AND EMPIRE: MR MAHON'S OUTBURST,’ 10 November 1920, 11.

Patient faith in parliament appeared politically naïve, and workers turned to union-based theories of change such as the One Big Union movement, sympathetic striking, and even, if limitedly, industrial sabotage. Humphrey McQueen has argued the socialist objective was Labor's attempt to placate new attitudes to parliamentarianism amongst the base.<sup>109</sup> However, this underestimates the extent of Labor's post-war conceptual crisis. The leadership and intelligentsia were equally at a loss as to how they could continue to trust in parliament to achieve Labor's goals when it seemed unable to defend even its immediate interests.<sup>110</sup> As Timothy Moroney, Queensland General-Secretary of the Australian Railways Union, stated in July 1921, 'political Labor had realised its own ineptitude, hence the conference.'<sup>111</sup>

The third challenge for Labour's pre-war conception of historical time was extensive financial intervention in Australian politics – an emboldened 'money power.' This sabotaged the aspirations of post-war Labor governments, and deeply strained the movement's patient optimism. When describing the sentiment of 1921, W.J. Riordan, President of the Queensland AWU recounted: 'There seemed to be a feeling that the Labor Movement is ... throttled by the money power and that nothing but a complete social change would be of any lasting benefit.'<sup>112</sup> Australia took on enormous debt to fight and recover from

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<sup>109</sup> McQueen, 'Glory Without Power,' 360.

<sup>110</sup> *Labor Call*, 'Revolution – What is it?' 6; Childe, *How Labour Governs*, 114.

<sup>111</sup> *Daily Standard*. 'ALL-AUSTRALIAN CONGRESS POLICY,' 19 August 1921, 3; *Daily Standard*, 'Not Like Others. Recent Labor Congress. Lecture by T. Moroney,' 27 July 1921, 3.

<sup>112</sup> *Worker*, 'GREAT WORK DONE. President Riordan Well Pleased. The Tactics of Tory Critics,' 30 June 1921, 19.

war, heightening its vulnerability to financialised political pressure.<sup>113</sup> A bad harvest in 1919-1920 depleted Australia's already slumping total production and global recession saw a collapse in export prices.<sup>114</sup> In 1920 the United Kingdom refused to extend Australia's repayment deadlines.<sup>115</sup> Interest rates on Commonwealth debts increased to 6% and debt repayment became a national anxiety.<sup>116</sup>

Australia's entanglement with global finance intensified the labour movement's long-held anxieties about the conspiratorial 'money power.'<sup>117</sup> What changed in 1921 was their faith in evolutionary reform in confronting it. Notable here is Frank Anstey's 1917 book *The Kingdom of Shylock*, labour's most elaborate analysis of the money power yet.<sup>118</sup> It asserted organised money as an almost demonic entity with near-unlimited political influence – 'men come back armless, legless, maimed and shattered ... Money comes back fatter than it went.'<sup>119</sup> A 'capital strike' against the moderate-dominated Queensland Labor

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<sup>113</sup> In 1921 the Commonwealth borrowed £48,501,390: Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Yearbook Australia No. 15, 1922*, 1301.0, (Melbourne, 1922), 665.

<sup>114</sup> Copland, 'The Economic Situation,' 39; Index of real production reduced from 1000 in 1913-4 to 917 in 1920-1921, 48; David Meredith and Barrie Dyster, *Australia in the Global Economy. Continuity and Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 94-99.

<sup>115</sup> Kosmas Tsokhas, 'A Pound of Flesh: War Debts and Anglo-Australian Relations, 1919-1932,' *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 38, no. 1 (1992): 12-26.

<sup>116</sup> *Yearbook Australia No. 15, 1922*, 929; Copland. 'The Economic Situation,' 36-37.

<sup>117</sup> McQueen, 'Glory Without Power,' 366-370; 'A Great Leader.' *Truth*, 14 August 1921, 9; Boote asserted that a bond-holding oligarchy, in 1921, 'governed the entire capitalistic interests of [the] continent,' and Anstey concurred that that it controlled public opinion through ownership of every Australian newspaper. Henry Boote, 'MACHINATIONS OF A SECRET CIRCLE,' 3; *Daily Herald* 'Money Power, Oligarchy of the Banks, Lecture by Mr. Anstey, MHR,' 13 December 1920, 5.

<sup>118</sup> Frank Anstey, *The Kingdom of Shylock* (Melbourne: Labor Call Print, 1917). A recurrent theme in labour cartoons of the period was also the politician, even the nation itself, as a puppet controlled by foreign banks. Love, *Labour and the Money Power*, 60, 88.

<sup>119</sup> Cited in: Nick Dryenfurth, "'Conscription is Not Abhorrent to Laborites and Socialists": Revisiting the Australian Labour Movement's Attitude towards Military Conscription during World War I,' *Labour History*, 103, (2012): 146; influence of *The Kingdom of Shylock*

Government also raised the salience of ‘financial oligarchy.’<sup>120</sup> In 1920 London financiers demanded Queensland repeal legislation on unemployment payments, land taxes, public insurance, and public tramways – threatening to withdraw vital credit.<sup>121</sup> In June 1921 the Director of the Queensland National Bank warned that ‘London Financiers ... were carefully watching the trend of public opinion in Australia,’ and specifically, the 1921 labour conferences.<sup>122</sup> Such open financial intervention ‘added fuel’ to post-war radicalism and the movement’s sense of a darkening future.<sup>123</sup> In September 1921, the labour press widely asserted that the NSW Labor Government’s land reforms were also being obstructed by London creditors, concluding: ‘We have self-government only when ... the autocratic Money Power of England likes.’<sup>124</sup>

Aggressive financial interventions helped render mainstream what had hitherto been a specifically far-left view of private banks: that they required political obliteration – not merely a competing public bank, but the total socialisation of the credit system. In 1921 even senior Labor-right figures who opposed the objective supported this position.<sup>125</sup> Jock Garden, a leader of the

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demonstrated in: *Westralian Worker*, ‘A System that Produces Swindlers,’ 10 December 1920, 4; *The Socialist*, ‘Books That Count,’ 13 May 1921, 4; *Worker*, ‘Opened Eyes,’ 10 February 1921, 22; *Labor Call*, ‘The Unseen Grip,’ 6 October 1921, 6; Donald Cameron, ‘Money Power,’ *The Socialist*, 25 March 1921, 1.

<sup>120</sup> Bernard Attard, Lecture, ‘How to organise a ‘capital strike’: The British Australasian Society and the Queensland government, 1899–1924,’ *The British Australasian Society and Queensland*, 1-24: [The British Australasian Society and the Queensland government](#)

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 18; Love, *Labour and the Money Power*, 78-83; *Daily Standard*, ‘Tory Rule Through Money Power,’ 20 August 1920, 4.

<sup>122</sup> *The Brisbane Courier*, ‘Mr. Theodore’s Mock Heroics,’ 30 June 1921, 6; *Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser*, ‘Queensland’s Needs,’ 1 July 1921, 2.

<sup>123</sup> Love, *Labour and the Money Power*, 81, 83.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>125</sup> Such as Queensland Deputy Premier William McCormack: *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 14.

Communist Party, saw this as the objective's prime motivator: 'the vital thing that was proposed was to capture financial control from the capitalistic class.'<sup>126</sup>

The final challenge for Labor's pre-1914 historical consciousness was a marked brutalisation of class conflict. This traumatically dispelled the future mainstream Labor had anticipated for itself— giving credence to previously fringe assertions of class warfare as both inevitable and irreconcilable. As aforementioned, historical consciousness involves using the past to speculate about the future. Before 1914, Labor could reflect on decades of welfare, wage, and industrial reforms to anticipate continued class conciliation. In 1921 the recent past encouraged opposite conclusions.

During the war, Labor's strategy of patient restraint came to be seen as exploited by capital. An increasingly aggressive ruling class, especially from the 1917 Great Strike, enforced unprecedented industrial discipline and political repression.<sup>127</sup> This crackdown on the labour movement exceeded in scope and severity even what had been experienced in the 1890s. The *War Precautions Act* 1914 and *Unlawful Associations Act* 1916 banned the red flag, 'statements of disloyalty' and any utterance 'likely to cause disaffection' to his Majesty.<sup>128</sup> Robert Garran, the Solicitor-General, reflected that 'soon ... John Citizen was hardly able to lift a finger without coming under the penumbra of some technical offence.'<sup>129</sup> Correspondence between labour activists was indiscriminately

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<sup>126</sup> *All-Australian Trade Union Congress, Official Report*, 11.

<sup>127</sup> Louise O'Shea, 'When the Australian ruling class embraced fascism,' *Marxist Left Review* 13, Summer 2017.

<sup>128</sup> McQueen, 'Shoot the Bolshevik!' 188.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

intercepted.<sup>130</sup> Labour publications were scrutinised by military censors whose judgements could be arbitrary and harsh.<sup>131</sup> Sometimes, almost the entire text would be redacted or distorted to antithesis.<sup>132</sup> The military raided the homes of labour journalists including Bob Ross and Ernie Lane.<sup>133</sup> Blacklists of militant workers were enforced by police even when they had no legal authorisation.<sup>134</sup> In a time of profound economic hardship, blacklisting could be ruinous for a working-class family.<sup>135</sup> It was, to quote Robin Gollan, ‘open season for vindictive informers.’<sup>136</sup> Prominent labour activists were jailed, including three of the most pivotal advocates for the socialisation objective: Bob Ross, Albert Willis, General Secretary of the Miners’ Federation, and John Curtin, editor of

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<sup>130</sup> Childe, *How Labour Governs*, 44; Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 188-89, Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*, 173-175; ‘Letter from the Investigation Branch, Attorney General Department to QLD Customs and Excise Office,’ 21 September 1921, NAA: BP343/34, 6; ‘Queensland Censor’s Secret Reports (QF) June – July 1918’ NAA: BP4/2, QF101-201, 36940; ‘Censor’s Intelligence Reports [entitled Brief Summary of Information Disclosing Suspicious Actions], ‘Extracts of intercepted correspondence between trade unionists and other socialist organisations and individuals,’ 8 May - 23 August 1917, NAA: MP95/1, 167/13/23, 12996706.

<sup>131</sup> The anti-conscription poem ‘*Blood Vote*’ was permitted in NSW but banned from publication in Queensland, for example: Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*, 173.

<sup>132</sup> Bertha Walker, *Solidarity Forever! A Part Story of the Life and Times of Percy Laidler - the First Quarter of a Century* (Melbourne, The National Press, 1972), 103.

<sup>133</sup> Edgar Ross, *These Things Shall Be! Bob Ross, Socialist Pioneer - His Life and Times: A Case Study* (West Ryde: Mulavon Publishing, 1988), 112; Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*, 175. Some prominent labour intellectuals saw Australian workers as facing the most uninhibited repression in the democratic world. French, German, British and American authorities had to disclose, with a stamp or symbol, when they modified left-wing literature. Not so in the Commonwealth: Anstey, *Red Europe*, 114.

<sup>134</sup> Gollan, *The Coalminers of New South Wales*, 154; Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 157.

<sup>135</sup> Denis Kevans. ‘Ted Roach – From Pig Iron Hero To Long Bay Gaol A Wharfie’s Life,’ ed. Sophia Kevans and Australian Society for the Study of Labour History (2021), 35; Gollan, *The Coalminers of New South Wales*, 151-154.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

the *Westralian Worker*.<sup>137</sup> In 1917 Ross was the first Australian to be jailed for flying the red flag – his cell had a direct view of the gallows.<sup>138</sup>

Peacetime foresaw only further escalations. Alongside pro-employer industrial reforms, wartime ‘emergency’ powers were extended. Infrequent but widely-publicised anti-labour political violence also took place.<sup>139</sup> In 1919 police fired on unarmed labour demonstrators on at least four occasions. Most incidents involved striking workers, whose deaths, such as that of Fremantle dockworker Tom Edwards, were heavily memorialised – his funeral in May 1919 bringing Perth to a standstill.<sup>140</sup> The offices of the *Daily Standard* in Brisbane continued to be raided by military police and right-wing vigilantes after 1918.<sup>141</sup> Collusion, often legally dubious, between employers and public authorities also persisted.<sup>142</sup> Herbert Brookes, prominent businessman and President of the Board of Trade, hired spies to infiltrate the Melbourne Trades Hall and other left-wing groups, claiming to have an informant on every meeting of the ‘red flag marches,’ held in Brisbane March 1919.<sup>143</sup> Brookes shared his

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<sup>137</sup> *The North Western Advocate and the Emu Bay Times*, ‘Union Secretary Arrested,’ 13 December 1916, 3; Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 152.

<sup>138</sup> Ross, *These Things Shall Be*, 94-96.

<sup>139</sup> McQueen, ‘Shoot the Bolshevik!’ 189.

<sup>140</sup> 23-26 March– Brisbane, ‘red flag riots’ (19 injuries by bayonet or bludging in a single day of the several weeks) 4 May, – Fremantle ‘bloody Sunday’, Tom Edwards killed, 50 men injured including 26 police. 29 June – Townsville, police fire on striking meatworkers, seven injured, 21 July – Melbourne peace anniversary riot. James O’Connor shot by police; For more on the aftermath of some of these events, see: Robert Bollard, ‘Fremantle in Slow Motion: Winning Back the Melbourne Waterfront, 1919,’ *Labour History*, no. 97 (2009): 123-36.

<sup>141</sup> From March 1919, they were kept under armed guard, following gunfire and rioting by a right-wing mob. Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*, 171-73; Walker, *Solidarity Forever*, 157; Kevin Windle, ‘“A Crude Orgy of Drunken Violence”: A Russian Account of the Brisbane “Red Flag Riots” of 1919,’ *Labour History*, no. 99 (2010): 168-177. The ‘demonstration’ included a man beaten and forced to sing ‘God Save the King’ for leaving his hat on during the National Anthem.

<sup>142</sup> *Labor Call*, ‘Trading and Financial Extremists have captured the government,’ 24 February 1921, 4.

<sup>143</sup> McQueen, ‘Shoot the Bolshevik!’ 189.

intelligence with Queensland Police Commissioner, Frederic Urquhart, who spearheaded an infamous crackdown of police, returned soldiers and vigilantes against radicals and Russian émigrés known as the red flag riots. Dozens of unionists were publicly humiliated, seriously injured and driven from the city bounds.<sup>144</sup> It is difficult to overstate how incompatible these events were with Labor's prior expectations of the future, and the political assumptions built around them.

Figure 6: Brisbane Demonstrators, May 1919, source: Joe Harris, *Pictorial History of the Labor Movement*, 268.



By 1920 lethal violence was still not a regular feature of Australian politics – but it had passed from an abnormal convulsion to something both sides of the picket-line were planning for. McCallum's 1921 speech, previously quoted, warned that conservative governments 'endeavoured to suppress industrial unrest ... by use of bullets and bayonets.'<sup>145</sup> In August 1920 the NSW

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<sup>144</sup> Evans, *The Red Flag Riots*, 22-25. The Red Flag Riots were cited in a lot of speeches and pamphlets through to 1921, indicating lasting effect on the movement's outlook: Joe Harris, *The Bitter Fight: a Pictorial History of the Australian Labor Movement* (St. Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1970), 268.

<sup>145</sup> *Westralian Worker* 'Mr. McCallum's Speech,' 2: 'The industrial situation today was so very delicate that the least mistake by some hothead ... might light the flames of something beyond

Labour Council noted the army was asking veterans about their disabilities and wondered whether this was to mobilise a force ‘to fight the working classes in Australia.’<sup>146</sup> Indeed, the potential for civil conflict was under serious consideration at the highest levels. In March 1921 Hughes sought advice from the Solicitor-General on mobilising an auxiliary citizen force to crush unruly strikers.<sup>147</sup> Section 51 of the *Defence Act*, it was advised, could be interpreted to allow this if there was sufficient disorder.<sup>148</sup> The advice was forwarded to the Minister of Defence, the Military Board, the Defence Department, and all Military District Commanders in Australia.<sup>149</sup> Setting aside its actual incidence, the mere fear of escalating class warfare could not square with labour’s pre-war theory of history. These conditions suggested the onset of a new political age – one in which the ‘militarists,’ ‘financial oligarchs,’ and ‘self-seeking politicians’ were eager to turn an intolerable present into labour’s new future.

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the power of the Government or any of us.;

Communists at the AATUC declared ‘[we] want an armed proletariat’: *Barrier Miner*, ‘Notes and Comments,’ 30 June 1921, 2.

<sup>146</sup> *The Argus*, ‘Labour Extremists,’ 7 August 1920, 21.

<sup>147</sup> ‘Industrial Difficulties and Disturbances,’ NAA: A3934, SC449/12, 36, 66; ‘Outbreak of Domestic Violence. Use of Military Forces. Powers of Commonwealth,’ NAA: A3934, SC26/1.

<sup>148</sup> ‘Outbreak of Domestic Violence. Use of Military Forces. Powers of Commonwealth,’ NAA: A3932, SC26/1.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

### Part Three: Living in the Future



Figure 7: *Worker*, Brisbane, 6 January 1921,

By 1921, so eroded were the assumptions supporting gradualism, restraint, and optimism that a sweeping reassessment of political feasibility occurred across the labour movement. Claims were developed which would have been previously unutterable, most importantly, that perhaps socialism could be, even *had to be*, both legally and suddenly realised – to quote Ross, ‘social

reconstruction CAN [sic] be both constitutional, peaceful and likewise speedy.’<sup>150</sup> Up to this point, the assumed choice was between rapid revolution and gradualist reform. The new historical consciousness imagined a third choice: ‘constitutional socialisation,’ where ‘the act of nationalisation, plus industrial control ... could be done tomorrow given the mandate,’ with parliamentary competition superseded by a Supreme Economic Council elected by workers.<sup>151</sup> It was a compelling proposal for, by now, even the ALP National President E.J. Holloway openly warned the party’s existing program ‘risked becoming obsolete,’ given ‘the mental revolution which [has] taken place.’<sup>152</sup> History, unimaginably to an earlier generation, risked leaving Labor behind. Time seemed to be accelerating.

The decisions Labor made in 1921 cannot be separated from how the party saw its immediate past and its likely future. Turner describes the movement as anticipating, in this year specifically, ‘an unprecedented reduction of the standard of living and social status of workers.’<sup>153</sup> The possibility that Labor may fail to adapt to the new political world was widely discussed: ‘if paralysed by loyalty to its past ... when the melting pot is emptied you will have to look for Labor in the dross that remains.’<sup>154</sup> Holloway, in April 1921, described the

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<sup>150</sup> RS Ross [Max Argent], ‘Making the New World in Australia: An Argument for the Congress Scheme,’ *Labor Call*, 21 July 1921, 1.

<sup>151</sup> *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 26; Bell Grath, ‘Labor’s New Path to Power,’ *Worker*, 17 November 1921, 5.

<sup>152</sup> *Westralian Worker*, ‘Labor’s Great Parliament: President Holloway’s Address,’ 24 June 1921, 6.

<sup>153</sup> New South Wales Labour Council, *Annual Report*, 31 December 1921, 27 quoted in: Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 211.

<sup>154</sup> Henry Boote, ‘What of the Brisbane Conference?’ *Australian Worker*, 20 October 1921, 3.

stakes bluntly: ‘The June Conference ... let it be to you as it is to me – the life or death of the Australian labour movement.’<sup>155</sup>

After the war, labour was divided politically, intellectually, and organisationally. Politically, it fractured between the ALP, the Communists, the breakaway Industrial Socialist Labor Party in NSW and countless extra-parliamentary groups. Intellectually, it spanned a litany of related but conflicting left-wing theories disseminated in various journals and ‘labour colleges’ recently set up around the country.<sup>156</sup> Organisationally, strategic resources were wrestled between by rival groups in the urban labour councils, the Labor Party and the AWU – whose relationships with each other were fluid and unstable as factional alliances formed and deteriorated.<sup>157</sup> In these conditions, unity dethroned pragmatism as the claimant need of the hour and the movement’s wings opened to difficult compromise.

After the economic downturn of 1920 especially, the movement converged around the pursuit of ‘a united front against capitalism.’<sup>158</sup> Here we arrive at the socialisation objective’s immediate trigger: to solidify the movement in anticipation of a hazardous future. It was an initiative thoroughly

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<sup>155</sup> *Labor Call*, ‘June’s Great Congress, Labor Press Opinions of Its Importance and Work,’ 2 June 1921, 11.

<sup>156</sup> The highly-influential, hard-left and anti-Labor scholarly journal *Proletarian Review* was established in 1920, for example: Robin Gollan, *Revolutionaries and Reformists: Communism and the Australian Labour Movement 1920-1955* (Canberra: ANU Press, 1975), 3; Labour Colleges of various kinds were established in Melbourne, Brisbane, Broken Hill, Kalgoorlie and Sydney: Helen Bourke, ‘Worker Education and Social Inquiry in Australia 1913-1929’, PhD Thesis, University of Adelaide 1981, 23-51; W.P. Earsman, *The Proletariat and Education*, Melbourne: Andrade’s, 1920): [www.reasoninrevolt.net.au/objects/pdf/a000418.pdf](http://www.reasoninrevolt.net.au/objects/pdf/a000418.pdf); A.T. Brodney, ‘The Aims and Early History of the Victorian Labor College’, *Victorian Labor College*, Jubilee 1917-1967, Melbourne, 1967, 11-13.

<sup>157</sup> *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 11.

<sup>158</sup> Dixson, ‘Reformists and revolutionaries,’ 50.

entangled in the movement's renovated historical consciousness. The AATUC has been dismissed as a 'gathering of all the militants,' but leading moderates participated with a conciliatory and cooperative attitude.<sup>159</sup> Most of them either supported socialisation, or, as John Barnes from the Victorian AWU did, simply asserted that other issues were more important.<sup>160</sup> The AWU National President, Arthur Blakeley, was elected to the Congress's 'Council of Action' tasked with enforcing its recommendations.<sup>161</sup> The obligation for unity, inferred from a sense that history had accelerated, affected even leading communists – who from March 1921 began to minimise their differences with the broader movement.<sup>162</sup> 'The theory of a Communist is not a dogma, but a manual of action,' Garden wrote in July, 'to fear a compromise with the Left wing of the Labor Party is really laughable.'<sup>163</sup> Ross McMullin identifies the pursuit of unity as decisive in the adoption of the socialisation objective.<sup>164</sup> This imperative, it appears, could only have come from an overlapping sense between different groupings and tendencies of where the movement believed it had been, where it currently was, and where, if nothing changed, it would likely find itself.

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<sup>159</sup> Jack Lang, *I Remember* (Sydney: Invincible Press, 1956), 139. Byrne, 'Visions of the Future,' 519; <sup>159</sup> Dixon, 'Reformists and revolutionaries,' 50.

<sup>160</sup> Byrne, *Becoming John Curtin and James Scullin*, 148.

<sup>161</sup> *All-Australian Trade Union Congress, Official Report*, 22.

<sup>162</sup> Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 212; Stuart Macintyre, 'Dealing with Moscow: The Comintern and the Early History of the Communist Party of Australia,' *Labour History*, no. 67 (1994): 128–43; Stuart Macintyre, *The Reds: The Communist Party of Australia, from Origins to Illegality* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1998).

<sup>163</sup> John Smith Garden, 'Industrial Notes,' *Communist*, 8 July 1921, 6.

<sup>164</sup> Ross McMullin, *The Light on the Hill: The Australian Labor Party, 1891-1991* (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1991), 127.

## Conclusion

A focus on Labor's shifting historical consciousness suggests that the Great War accelerated what had been its existing, if usually implicit, roadmap for how history would unfold. To use H.M. Drucker's distinction, applied in his analysis of British Labour: the times had changed such that socialism needed to move from a Labor *ethic* to a Labor *doctrine* – from a guiding ideal to a specific program; from an animating tradition to a formally articulated ideology.<sup>165</sup> Labor's reforms had always been imagined as working to some general end, but in a context where liberal capitalism appeared extremely unstable, it suddenly became necessary to define what this end would be. Labor reformism was never abandoned, but its meaning and function had fundamentally changed: 'we have no objection to having the claws of the tiger trimmed preparatory to ... slaying him outright.'<sup>166</sup>

Even in 1921, it remained contested whether the socialist objective was still anything more than a distant ideal. Labour unity was not unlimited. In public debates, some communists still asserted that any overthrow of capitalism would require a direct seizure of power.<sup>167</sup> From the rump of the labour right, came furious allegations that 'they were being asked to vote to discredit the whole methods of the party for 20 years.'<sup>168</sup> Nevertheless, a critical mass of Labourites

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<sup>165</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos in the Labour Party*, 1-25.

<sup>166</sup> *Westralian Worker*, 'Reform or Revolution!' 4.

<sup>167</sup> *The Communist*, 'Ross-Glynn Debate,' 28 October 1921, 5.

<sup>168</sup> *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 11; *Daily Mail*, 'Labor's Crisis,' 6; *Worker*, 'Labor's Great Conference,' 27 October 1921, 17.

had come to see Australia's place in history such that it demanded they contemplate what it would mean to transcend parliamentary progressivism.

The socialisation objective does not form a regular factional struggle or a change in Labor's political costume. It was a deeply serious attempt to find Labor's place in a new historical age. It passed because of overarching understandings of the implications of this new age for the organised working class. This shared historical consciousness allowed the socialist objective to be rationalised, across major ideological differences, as a necessary innovation. For the communists, it was a 'distinct move toward the proletariat ... [that] it is our duty to support.'<sup>169</sup> For the socialist left, it was a revitalisation of Labor's political orientation, 'without which [we] would have nothing more to do with the Labor Party.'<sup>170</sup> For most moderates, it was a difficult concession, born from a recognition that even they could no longer assert the exclusive validity of old methods.<sup>171</sup> Socialism, it was briefly agreed, might no longer sit on the horizon. It could be imminent, meaning Labor's 'divine flame ... that gives meaning to [its] every struggle' had finally to be imagined in full form.<sup>172</sup> This was only possible because the 'socialist moment' had been *expected* to come – at least implicitly– for over a generation of labour discourse. What surprised even the senior ranks of the ALP was just how soon 'the future' had arrived.

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<sup>169</sup> John Smith Garden, 'Industrial Notes,' *The Communist*, 7 July 1921, 6.

<sup>170</sup> Lane, 'Labor's New Policy,' 3.

<sup>171</sup> Byrne, 'Visions of the Future,' 519.

<sup>172</sup> *Labor Call*, 'Their Relation to the Labor Objective,' 11.

## Chapter 2:

### From the People to the Proletariat

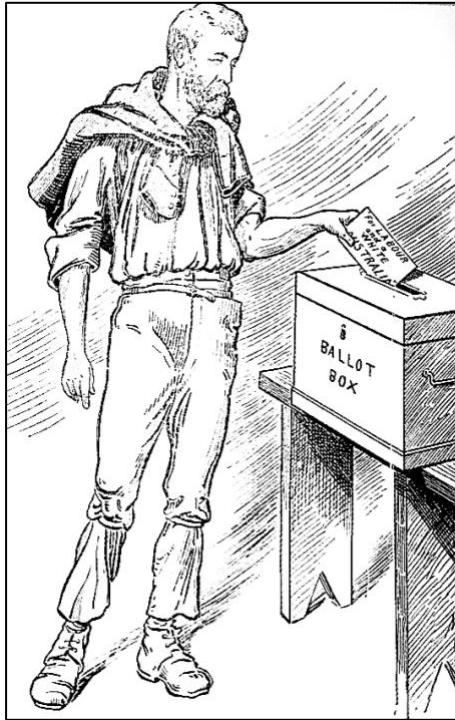


Figure 8: *Worker*, Brisbane, 30 March 1900



Figure 9: *Worker*, Brisbane, 8 July 1920

To understand the socialisation objective, we must understand who it was for. In this chapter, I deploy the concept of political subjectivity to examine how Labor imagined its audience in 1921 – tracing how these imaginations shaped the objective’s form and contestation. As with historical consciousness, the value of this concept is in how it suggests an underlying logic to the period’s myriad discourses. Post-war labour has been characterised by its byzantine networks of cross-cutting, ever-reshaping loyalties, factions, and dogmas. Centring subjectivity allows for the era’s thought to be appreciated with a more systematic clarity. Competing imaginaries of the Labor subject formed a connective tissue

tying together seemingly unrelated arguments for and against the objective – conditioning how labour intellectuals designed policies, communicated ideas, and waged political competition. Perhaps more than any other consideration, these imagined audiences motivated the positions taken during 1921. This is one way the year’s significance in Australian political history can be recognised: as Labor’s attempt to define who it *was and should be* in politics for.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Labor straddled two answers to this question – two ways of imagining its political subject, each symbolised by the cartoons above. I refer to them as ‘the people’ and ‘the proletariat.’ These subjective models were not hardened archetypes, but clouds of associated concepts that often found themselves in each other’s company. For thirty years, they coexisted in the movement’s discourse and institutions. The ‘people’ was a populist imagination of Labor’s subject – a moral community of white Australian producers with a practical and conciliatory approach to class conflict: exemplified by the rural bush worker, experienced craftsman, small entrepreneur, or skilled labourer. The archetypal ‘people’ are depicted in Figure 8, above: a respectable and physically impressive working man, perhaps old enough to have supported a family, casting a ballot marked ‘for Labour and a White Australia.’ The ‘proletarian’ model of Labor’s subject had its basis in material class-interests, expressed by militant industrial unionism and radical political education: exemplified by the single-male industrial worker, the miner, rail-worker, unskilled labourer, or dockworker. The idealised ‘proletarian’ is depicted in Figure 9: a young industrial worker with a globe in his palm – armed not with a ballot paper but the tools of his trade. These subjectivities served as

both ideals to be emulated and as instructive frameworks for how Labor should govern. In 1921 they appeared finely-balanced and increasingly irreconcilable.<sup>173</sup> The debate over socialisation functioned as an arena for contesting this crisis in party theory, ethos, and identity.

Both subjectivities had an almost impenetrably masculine basis: the male bread-winner pursuing a single-family wage. By destabilising their key assumptions, labour women forced recognition as political subjects on their terms. As Miriam Dixson observed, the post-war rank and file, including women, was remarkably active.<sup>174</sup> No man, clique or doctrine dominated the movement, creating space for innovations that extended to political re-imaginings of gender. In 1921, as Labor contested who it spoke to and for, we find women playing a critical and diverse role, acting as both advocates and opponents to the party's fateful turn that year: from the people to the proletariat.

## **Part One: The Good of the Whole Community**

Between 1891-1914, the dominant conception of Labor's subject was 'the people.' 'The people,' like any political subjectivity, were constructed through the iteration of symbols: 'icons around which a politicised collective identity can emerge.'<sup>175</sup> In the symbolic order of early Labor, 'the people' were represented

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<sup>173</sup> Irving, 'the Origins of the Labor Party,' 40.

<sup>174</sup> Dixson, 'Reformists and Revolutionaries,' 4.

<sup>175</sup> The Australian Labor Party formed at a time when the cartoon was becoming a very important medium for political discourse. Cartoons were a key part of how early labour identity was communicated and constructed: 'cartoonists reiterated shared values and interpreted new events to an audience who, it was assumed, understood the language and found support for their belief.' June Senyard, *Labor in Cartoons: Cartoons of the Australian Labor Party in Victoria 1891-1990*

by an independent, respectable, and productive man: a battler, a citizen, and a patriot.<sup>176</sup> He was most often what we might now call middle-aged – suggesting his political sobriety and provider role. His class origins were ambiguous, but his work was always dignified – often pictured with the tools of a skilled trade or romanticised instruments of pastoral life. He was identifiably Australian either through his dress or bush setting. He was always white. These symbols are important because they reveal the central traditions associated with this political identity: producerism, racial-nationalism, practicality, and class-conciliation. The persistent influence of this subjective ideal played an important role during 1921. For labour moderates, ‘the people’ acted as a common reference-point for claims against the socialisation objective: the symbolic terrain from which they could assert its radical discordance with the movement’s traditions.

Labor’s ‘people’ were defined as producers in opposition to parasites, less often workers in opposition to bosses.<sup>177</sup> Labor producerism often took a populist form – an imagined moral community situated against a lecherous, morally-inferior elite.<sup>178</sup> Producer and parasite did not correlate to production and non-production in any objective sense. ‘The people’ included all ‘useful

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(Hyland House, South Yarra, 1991), 1; See also: Murray Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964), quoted in: Simon David Booth, ‘Picturing Politics: Cartoons of Melbourne’s Labour Press 1890-1919,’ PhD Thesis, University of Melbourne, 2008: 11, 209.

<sup>176</sup> Booth ‘Picturing Politics,’ 31-39; Nick Dyrenfurth, “‘A Political ... as Well as a Propagandist Movement’”: Cultural Politics and the Rise of Fisher Labor,’ *Labour History*, no. 102 (2012): 12-17.

<sup>177</sup> Love, *Labour and the Money Power*, 12-25.

<sup>178</sup> Jan-Werner Muller, *What is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 12; Daniel Martinez HoSang and Joseph E. Lowndes, *Producers, Parasites, Patriots: Race and the New Right-Wing Politics of Precarity* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2019), 25.

members of society,’ ‘anyone disposed to think of themselves as a battler or a dinkum aussie,’ – labourers, small farmers, settlers, shopkeepers, entrepreneurs, and even professionals, all imagined having common interests against big business, big finance, foreign governments and state despotisms – ‘loafers,’ ‘parasites’ and ‘elites.’<sup>179</sup> Early Labor saw its success as dependent on its capacity to surpass its specifically working-class constituency.<sup>180</sup> Populist-producerism provided a language for this.<sup>181</sup> As the 1905 Federal Conference Report summarised: Labor represents ‘every interest in Australia ... except the interest of the parasitic classes.’<sup>182</sup>

Resistance to the socialisation objective was often framed in terms of its incongruence with this supra-class view of Labor identity. Moderates situated it in a context of increased union dominance over party rhetoric and institutions – a continual drift from a ‘peoples’ to a ‘workers’ party which alienated key support groups. One of Theodore’s first arguments against social ownership at the Federal Conference was to ask: ‘what about the worker who might exploit his own Labor? He might have a farm or a mine of his own.’<sup>183</sup> Some moderate

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<sup>179</sup> Irving, ‘The Roots of Parliamentary Socialism,’ 97; Farrell, ‘Socialism, Internationalism,’ 126. As is often the case in populist movements, the archetypal ‘parasite’ in early Labor iconography was a racialised caricature of the banker – a vampire literally ‘leeching’ off the producers, ‘an enemy who embodied the worst of human motivations: Love, *Labour and the Money Power*, 61-65; McQueen, ‘Glory Without Power,’ 365. The ‘parasitic banker’ was often racialised as Jewish, especially following the Great Strikes of 1890-94, see: Rodney Goutman, ‘Was it ever so? Anti-Semitism in Australia 1860-1950,’ *Humanities Research* 12, no. 1, (2005): 59.

<sup>180</sup> McQueen, ‘Glory without Power,’ 345-76.

<sup>181</sup> Dyrenfurth, ‘Cultural Politics,’ 15; See also: Nick Dyrenfurth, *Heroes & Villains: the Rise and fall of the Early Australian Labor Party* (North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2011).

<sup>182</sup> Quoted in: McQueen ‘Glory Without Power,’ 351.

<sup>183</sup> *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 7-8.

Labor writers, by this point a minority, went even further, warning ‘Labor should know no class distinction ... [and] weld all useful members of society into one union of brotherhood.’<sup>184</sup> The radical commitment to socialisation, they argued, would narrow Labor’s representative claim, and risk its regression to the crossbench or permanent minority.<sup>185</sup>

An important dimension of early Labor producerism was its national emphasis. For those who regarded Labor’s subject as ‘the people,’ ‘the word Labor is synonymous with Australian.’ The party speaks for ‘the only Class which is not a Class. Representing the Body as Whole ... it is the Nation.’<sup>186</sup> Early election platforms advocated a trifecta of racial exclusivity, working-class prosperity, and nation-building— framed as inseparable components of a unitary agenda: ‘the cultivation of an Australian sentiment.’<sup>187</sup> If Labor claimed to speak for the honest white Australian, these were the policies it believed it had to promote.<sup>188</sup> The socialisation objective was seen by many moderates as undermining this national foundation for Labor’s identity. It would impose a guiding ideal on the ALP which made little, if any, reference to anything

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<sup>184</sup> *Australian Worker*, ‘Just a Word,’ 5.

<sup>185</sup> *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 28, 19.

<sup>186</sup> *Australian Worker*, 23 March 1901, quoted in: Dyrenfurth, ‘Cultural Politics,’ 26. William Lane, a major influence on early Labor thought, considered the white collective to be the most important unit for Australian political life – not the working class, see: Verity Burgmann, ‘Racism, Socialism, and the Labour Movement, 1887-1917,’ *Labour History*, no. 47 (1984): 39.

<sup>187</sup> Dyrenfurth, ‘Cultural Politics,’ 24; McQueen ‘Glory Without Power’ 348-50; Stuart Macintyre, ‘Paradise Lost: Conditions for the Workers 1900-1950,’ *Bulletin of the Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies* 2, no. 2 (1989): 67; So central was ‘being Australian’ to the party’s early self-understanding that, in 1908, it became one of the world’s only social-democratic parties to adopt a national prefix. Dyrenfurth, ‘Cultural Politics,’ 26. The party had previously been called ‘The Commonwealth Labor Party.’

<sup>188</sup> Julia Martinez, ‘Questioning ‘White Australia’: Unionism and “Coloured” Labour, 1911-37,’ *Labour History*, no. 76 (1999): 1–7.

specifically Australian – a radical break from how Labor had engaged with political life until this point. It was a foreign import, Theodore argued, ‘saturated with ideals and dogmas that did not belong to Australia.’<sup>189</sup>

For Labor moderates, ‘the people’s’ inherently Australian quality meant they were pragmatists deeply averse to the abstraction of ‘old-world’ ideology.<sup>190</sup> Consequently, a key component of Labor identity in this framework was ‘being practical.’<sup>191</sup> Guiding texts such as Lawrence Gronlund’s *Cooperative Commonwealth* framed socialism as ‘no Utopia [but] taking human nature as it is and existing institutions as they are ... to their logical conclusions.’<sup>192</sup> In populist subjectivities, correct policies are assumed to derive from the subject’s easily-discerned common sense and lived experience.<sup>193</sup> Labor populism was no exception. As we have seen in Chapter 1, a certain distance from doctrine was held to be the ‘Australian,’ and therefore the Labor, way of doing politics: ‘[we are] practical men ... [who] put forward such proposals as will improve conditions.’<sup>194</sup> Moderates carried this disposition into

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<sup>189</sup> *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 25-26.

<sup>190</sup> Nick Dyrenfurth and Marian Quartly, ‘Fat Man vs. “The People”: Labour Intellectuals and the Making of Oppositional Identities, 1890-1901,’ *Labour History*, no. 92 (2007): 36.

<sup>191</sup> Sean Scalmer, ‘Being Practical in Early and Contemporary Labor Politics: A Labourist Critique,’ *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 43, no. 28 (2008): 301-11.

<sup>192</sup> Quoted in: Ernest Blackwell, ‘The Effects of the Strike,’ *Centennial Magazine*, September 1890, 89; Laurence Gronlund, *The Co-Operative Commonwealth: An Exposition of Modern Socialism* (London: William Reeves, 1884). Other themes in influential texts for pre-war labour and radical circles included a celebration of agrarian life, utopian or romanticist motifs, nationalism, spirituality and Christian socialism, and producerist-populist arguments: Edward Bellamy, *Equality* (Boston: D. Appleton & Co., 1897); Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward 2000-1887* (Boston: Ticknor & Co, 1888); Henry George, *Progress and Poverty, An Inquiry into the Cause of Industrial Depressions and of Increase of Want with Increase of Wealth: The Remedy* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1879).

<sup>193</sup> Muller, ‘*What is Populism*,’ 12; Macintyre, ‘Paradise Lost,’ 64.

<sup>194</sup> Spence, *Australia’s Awakening*, 378.

the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As NSW Premier, John Storey, said in 1920: the notion of winning Government to implement revolutionary change ‘never occurs to the Labour man in Australia.’<sup>195</sup> The socialisation objective was, by this perspective, arcane theorising incompatible with the party’s practical approach. As Jack Lang reflected in later years, ‘only dreamers, book-worms and the long-haired University professors, who skirted on the fringe of the Labor Party ... cared about the ultimate structure of society and its institutions.’<sup>196</sup> Contemporary labour moderates shared his view: ‘hitch your wagon to a star,’ they warned, but remember ‘the people’ want Labor to do something for them today.<sup>197</sup> The objective’s endorsement of a Supreme Economic Council was held to be especially offensive to Labor pragmatism – a Bolshevik derivative, Labor-right leader J.H. Catts declared it was ‘absolutely impracticable ... [and] would not meet the temperament and conditions of Australia.’<sup>198</sup>

Finally, ‘the people’ entailed for Labor a conciliatory approach to class politics. The party did not seek to abolish private ownership or wage labour, but ‘to inculcate into the community a better spirit, to do the honest thing, and not to take the other fellow down.’<sup>199</sup> In populism, the interests of the productive community are assumed to be naturally harmonious.<sup>200</sup> Labor’s purpose,

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<sup>195</sup> Quoted in: McQueen, ‘Glory Without Power,’ 346.

<sup>196</sup> Jack Lang, *I Remember* (Sydney: Invincible Press, 1956), 134.

<sup>197</sup> *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 26.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>200</sup> Frank Bongiorno, *The People’s Party: Victorian Labor and the Radical Tradition 1875-1914* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1996), 190.

therefore, is to remove artificial barriers to general prosperity.<sup>201</sup> The party's mission is national development unencumbered by parasitism or social disruption: a white nation which rewards merit and insulates itself from instability. Through a 'system of interlocking checks-and-balances,' Labor populists and moderates hoped to realise the community's latent potential for harmony: compulsory arbitration, regulation, state investment, national defence, immigration control and welfare initiatives.<sup>202</sup> All of these expressed what Macintyre called 'a belief that the market could be made subject to ethical constraint' – the very idea the objective set itself against.<sup>203</sup> Senior moderates saw socialisation as an attempt to abrogate the party's conciliatory ambitions in favour of class struggle.<sup>204</sup> By adopting such an objective, the party would be directed 'into channels it had never progressed,' risking a split from which it may never recover.<sup>205</sup>

## **Part Two: The Proletarian Alternative**

Two days before the AATUC convened in June 1921, Henry Boote wrote the following in his column for the *Australian Worker*:

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<sup>201</sup> The Victorian Labor Party's first objective (1891): 'to secure for *all classes* such legislation as will advance their interests,' quoted in: McKinlay, *A Documentary History of the Australian Labor Movement*, 11.

<sup>202</sup> Francis Castles, *Australian Public Policy and Economic Vulnerability: A Comparative Study and Historical Perspective* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1988), 93; Terry Irving, 'Labourism: A Political Genealogy,' *Labour History*, no. 66 (1994): 2-9.

<sup>203</sup> Macintyre, 'Paradise Lost,' 65-66; *All-Australian Trade Union Congress, Official Report*, 9.

<sup>204</sup> As its proposed preamble said, 'there can be no peace, no end to hunger or want ... until Capitalism is abolished.' See: *All-Australian Trade Union Congress, Official Report*, 34.

<sup>205</sup> *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 26.

The good of the community as a whole is exactly what the Congress will NOT [sic] aim to secure...Its deliberations will have one end in view continually and one end *only* – THE WELFARE OF THE WORKERS. Why should it be otherwise?<sup>206</sup>

Labor's 'existential dilemma' during its first decades was what Terry Irving called the constituency problem: whether the party should represent those other than the workers. As Humphrey McQueen put it: did labour have any right to rule by, of and for itself?<sup>207</sup> This is where all the differences between 'the people' and 'the proletariat' models can be traced. The populist tradition argued that labour could not rule alone and had to form a party which represented workers in their capacity as members of the productive super-majority. Proletarian subjectivity derived from the opposite claim: labour *could* govern alone, capturing the state as Labor's exclusive constituent. This was the impetus of 'proletarian' labour identity and, for many of its supporters, the 1921 objective: obliterating the conceptual distinction between labour and Labor.

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<sup>206</sup> Henry Boote, 'The Good of the Whole Community,' *Australian Worker*, 23 June 1921, 3.

<sup>207</sup> Irving, 'The Roots of Parliamentary Socialism,' 97; McQueen, 'Glory without Power,' 348; Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 21; Gollan, *The Coalminers of New South Wales*, 158; Dyrenfurth, 'Cultural Politics,' 14.

Figure 10: *Worker*, 1 Aug 1918, 1.



Like ‘the people,’ proletarian subjectivity composed an entire system of interrelated discourses, symbols, and heuristics. It was not merely a set of new political strategies, but an alternative conception of party identity. To claim labour could rule alone was to dispute the party’s generative assumption since 1891. Consequently, proletarian subjectivity was conjured through symbols

noticeably divergent from those of labour populism – as is apparent in Figure 10 above. The allegorical ‘proletarian’ was often much younger than the symbolic ‘people,’ suggesting ‘liberation from the past ... potential new strength,’ and perhaps, having nothing to lose but one’s chains.<sup>208</sup> He was more muscular and combative in his presentation.<sup>209</sup> Rarely a skilled craftsman and never an entrepreneur, the proletarian icon was either semi-naked or in the unmistakable garb of an industrial worker.<sup>210</sup> Instead of the distinctly Australian bush landscape, he typically inhabited an urban setting which could have stood for any modern capitalist city.<sup>211</sup> These symbolic innovations display the fundamentals of proletarian labour identity: economism, post-nationalism, political radicalism, and industrial militancy – all expressed, indeed exalted, in the socialisation objective.

Proletarian subjectivity begins with economism. Economism, as defined by Marxist-feminist scholar Nancy Fraser, is the belief that economic arrangements are the paradigm cause and expression of social injustice.<sup>212</sup> It implies that all political activity is an expression of economic interests, and that political identity is pre-determined by a subject’s relationship to production.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Marian Quartly, ‘Making Working-Class Heroes: Labor Cartoonists and the Australian Worker, 1903-1916,’ *Labour History*, no. 89 (2005): 165, 173.

<sup>209</sup> From 1910, the Victorian Socialist Party began to depict figures in its cartoons with this noticeable aggression: Bongiorno, *People’s Party*, 194; Booth ‘Picturing Politics,’ 39, 68.

<sup>210</sup> Booth, ‘Picturing Politics,’ 68; Quartly, ‘Making Heroes,’ 173.

<sup>211</sup> Booth, ‘Picturing Politics,’ 146. This was not only metaphorical, but a direct reference to the urbanisation and industrialisation of the Australian working class over the preceding decades. For an overview of the changes in occupation, see: Australian Bureau of Statistics, ‘Part XVII: Occupations,’ in *Census for the Commonwealth of Australia Taken for the Night between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> of April 1921*, 2111.0, 1207-1491.

<sup>212</sup> Nancy Fraser, ‘Feminism, Capitalism And The Cunning Of History,’ *New Left Review* 56, no. 97 (2009): 105.

<sup>213</sup> Childe, *How Labour Governs*, 153-156: For a non-labour account of the gradual development of an economist consciousness see: R.F. Irvine, ‘The Evolution of Wages,’ *Sunday Times*, 20

Towards 1921, labour discourses increasingly invoked economist principles – asserting the incompatible interests of workers and capitalists as the defining feature of political life. This ‘dogma of economic determinism,’ placed no trust in ‘pity, gratitude, loyalty, or sentiments.’<sup>214</sup> Labor was held to have no reliable executor but the class-conscious worker, who sidelines their ‘chimerical’ affinities to nation, race or craft.<sup>215</sup> As one communist delegate to the AATUC put it: ‘Economic conditions are what will determine what is going to be the constitution of any party that is going to function in the future.’<sup>216</sup> The socialisation program can be read as an emphatic endorsement of this principle.<sup>217</sup> It aspired to an undilutedly proletarian movement in control of its leaders and committed to inaugurating a workers’ state. This has been called ‘the labour theory of democracy,’ and through the Supreme Economic Council, it

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March 1921, 5: Labour realised ‘1.That labor, unless fully organised, could not expect a square deal ... 2.That it could not count on reasonable security ... 3.That under the existing system, the control of industry had come entirely in the ownership of property, capital and credit 4.That ... all they could count upon was so much purchasing power. The amount of it was uncertain 5. That working men were not partners in industry ; they were merely a troublesome cost of production 6.That however much science improved the machinery and technique of production, the share of labor in improvement was problematical ...7.That, in short, the whole system was the negation of democracy and that this fact accounted failure of political democracy’

<sup>214</sup> Childe, *How Labour Governs*, 71; *Daily Standard*, ‘ALL-AUSTRALIAN CONGRESS POLICY,’ 19 August 1921, 3.

<sup>215</sup> For example, at the AWU conference of 1918, Queensland Vice-President Ernest Lane, later a pivotal advocate for the objective, moved to ‘eliminate’ from the Labor Party all members who did not belong to a union, quoted in: Childe, *How Labour Governs*, 71; *Australian Worker*, ‘Solidarity,’ 9 October 1919, 17; *Daily Standard*, ‘Internationalism: Workers Learning a Lesson, Maoriland Labor’s Declaration,’ 4 October 1920, 3.

<sup>216</sup> *All-Australian Trade Union Congress, Official Report*, 6.

<sup>217</sup> J. Kean: No man would have a title to organised society unless that title rested on Labor, *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Part*, 25.

was what the 1921 objective intended to achieve: ‘A socialised state [will] only have regard to those who did the work.’<sup>218</sup>

Proletarian economism necessarily de-emphasised nationality in its conception of labour identity. In the populist mode, claims are addressed to the *Australian* worker. We can think of the ‘proletarian’ audience, by way of contrast, as being the worker *in Australia*. This was an important difference: the subject’s outlook is not seen as deriving from some Australian ‘essence.’ Australia merely acts as the localised arena for global class struggle. Any sentimental attachment to the ‘Australian way of doing things’ is exchanged for sober analysis of how to achieve socialism under actual conditions.<sup>219</sup> This did not mean blankly importing foreign methodologies: ‘conditions here and [in Russia] are not parallel which leads [us] to reject entirely and absolutely Bolshevik theories,’ Bob Ross said in defending the objective.<sup>220</sup> Instead, Australia’s particularities are framed as something to be carefully *overcome* rather than essentialised and *identified with*. The ultimate goal – the classless ideal – would look similar everywhere. There just had to be ‘an Australian road to socialism.’<sup>221</sup>

Proletarian labourism stridently emphasised how global forces shaped Australian political conditions.<sup>222</sup> Supporters of socialisation invoked

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<sup>218</sup> *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 25, 11; Irving, ‘The Roots of Parliamentary Socialism,’ 97-109.

<sup>219</sup> Ross [Max Argent], ‘Making the New World in Australia,’ 1.

<sup>220</sup> *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 31.

<sup>221</sup> Quoted in: Edgar Ross, *The Russian Revolution – Its Impact on Australia* (Sydney: Socialist Party of Australia, 1972), 29.

<sup>222</sup> *Daily Herald*, ‘Class Consciousness, The New Patriotism, Labor’s Road to Power,’ 12 Jan 1920, 2; *Northern Standard*, ‘Make Way for the Young Men,’ 2 December 1921, 1; *Daily*

international events as bearing strong instructive value.<sup>223</sup> From 1918, rebellions, general strikes or organised mutinies occurred in Russia, Italy, Finland, Ireland, Germany, Hungary, the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Japan, and China. For those in the labour movement who no longer considered 'being Australian' the foundation of their politics, these events loomed large.<sup>224</sup> They 'revealed even to the unthinking' that the working class faced an enemy which 'recognises no boundaries, no country, no race.'<sup>225</sup> As Ernie Lane wrote in November 1920: 'Australian workers know they ...[cannot] hold aloof and ignore the events of other lands.'<sup>226</sup> Labor socialists argued that international events suggested revolution in Australia would be inevitable, the only question being 'whether it would be ... peaceful or bloody.'<sup>227</sup> The socialisation objective, they contended, was Labor's opportunity to lead Australia into the global red dawn, a 'complete abandoning of [its] old childish policy of insularity.'<sup>228</sup>

The proletarian subject also expressed a different understanding of race compared to the essentially white 'people.' Race, like nationality, was

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*Standard*, 'Internationalism: Workers Learning a Lesson, Maoriland Labor's Declaration,' 4 October 1920, 3; *Daily Standard*, 'Solidarity and Sectarianism,' 26 January 1921, 5.

<sup>223</sup> Scullin: the capitalist system [is] crumbling and the world's events pointed to the end being accelerated, *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 28, 13, 17, 18.

<sup>224</sup> *Daily Standard*, 'Spirit of May Day: International Significance, Working Class Unity,' 29 April 1921, 5; Terry Irving, *The Fatal Lure of Politics: The Life and Thought of Vere Gordon Child* (Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2020) 201-203.

<sup>225</sup> *Daily Herald*, 'Class Consciousness, The New Patriotism,' 4.

<sup>226</sup> *Daily Standard* 'A Mistaken Policy: National Labourism,' 19 November 1920, 3.

<sup>227</sup> *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 28.

<sup>228</sup> *Daily Standard*, 'A Mistaken Policy: National Labourism,' 3, see also: *Daily Standard*, 'Solidarity and Sectarianism,' 5; *Young Witness*, 'Flags Mr Holloways Opinion of them,' 11 June 1921, 1.

understood to have implications for labour politics without forming the basis of its mission. Non-white immigration, Labor socialists believed, would obstruct emancipation by undercutting wages and inflaming social divisions.<sup>229</sup> Australian whiteness had to be defended strictly on this basis.<sup>230</sup> To attempt racial equality before achieving socialism would sabotage both.<sup>231</sup> The proletarian subject, to quote a widely-published speech by Anstey, had to recognise that ‘the Government ... protect[s] itself behind the wall of sectarian prejudices or racial hatreds.’<sup>232</sup> Inciting racial hatred, many socialists warned, would only highlight ‘artificial barriers’ in lieu of class-interests.<sup>233</sup> Liam Byrne encapsulates this racial ideology by summarising John Curtin’s editorial position at the *Westralian Worker*: ‘Once socialism had been won, they [the races] could embrace each other as equals.’<sup>234</sup> Until that point, immigration restriction was necessary to protect the workers’ existing victories.<sup>235</sup>

In de-centring white Australian identity, labour proletarianism also distanced from the ‘pragmatism’ so closely associated with it. Economism holds

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<sup>229</sup> Liam Byrne, ‘Coolies or Comrades? Labor Socialism and the Contradictions of Internationalism, 1909–22,’ *Labour History*, no. 113 (2017): 159-167.

<sup>230</sup> Childe, *How Labour Governs*, 85; *Worker*, ‘Points for Propagandists,’ 16 October 1919, 1; For similar sentiments on the socialist left see also: *The Socialist*, ‘Sunday Night Meeting at the Socialist Hall, Lecture by Mrs Bella Lavender,’ 23 September 1921, 1.

<sup>231</sup> Ross argued this in a debate with Amelia Lambrick, a long-standing socialist critic of the White Australia Policy. For a full transcript, see: *The Socialist*, ‘White Australia, A Great Debate,’ 12 September 1919, 2.

<sup>232</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, ‘Disloyalty: Mr Anstey Riddles Hughes. A Brilliant Speech in the Federal House,’ 25 November 1920, 15.

<sup>233</sup> *Australian Worker*, ‘Solidarity,’ 9 October 1919, 17; *Daily Herald*, ‘Racial Purity Declared an Illusion,’ 13 December 1921, 2; A debate was held in Perth on ‘racial marriages,’ in early 1920. The only side given publication in the *Westralian Worker* report was the anti-racist side, which was implied to have won over the audience. Curtin was editor at the time, see: *Westralian Worker*, ‘Social Democratic League, Notes and Comments,’ 20 February 1920, 6.

<sup>234</sup> Byrne, ‘Coolies or Comrades?’ 167.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*

that class interests exist independently of their subjective awareness.<sup>236</sup> Therefore, the workers' immediate concerns and experiences are not necessarily seen as a sufficient basis from which to derive policy. They are, to quote Anstey, vulnerable to 'mass hypnotism' and 'disillusionment.'<sup>237</sup> This can only be prevented with 'constant and intensive education in their class interest.'<sup>238</sup> For the entire post-war left, such political education was seen as essential: 'break[ing] down the Capitalist mentality of the workers and build[ing] up a Labor mentality.'<sup>239</sup> In introducing the socialisation objective at the AATUC, delegate E.F. Russell immediately cited its potential to accelerate this process, to 'educate the working man in the real ideals ... of the Labor movement.'<sup>240</sup>

The organisations pivotal to the objective's adoption were almost all investors in radical political education.<sup>241</sup> In January 1920 the Miners' Federation developed a curriculum of 'working-class economics and philosophy' and in November 1920 funded the creation of a Labour College.<sup>242</sup> The militant-controlled NSW Labour Council and Melbourne Trades Hall both financed Labour Colleges in 1919, as did the Victorian Railways Union in 1917.<sup>243</sup> Politically educating the working class was central to near-all theories

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<sup>236</sup> Henry Paternoster, 'Questioning the Legacy of Class Structure in Australian History: An Australian 'Historical' Class Analysis?' *Labour History*, no. 111 (2016): 104.

<sup>237</sup> Anstey, *Red Europe*, 111, 185.

<sup>238</sup> *The International Socialist*, 'Manifesto of the Australian Socialist Party,' 10 January 1920, 3.

<sup>239</sup> *The Communist*, 'The Ross-Glynn Debate,' 28 October 1921, 5. R.S. Ross quoted.

<sup>240</sup> *All-Australian Trade Union Congress, Official Report*, 5.

<sup>241</sup> 'Minute Book, 24 Oct 1917 - 27 Oct 1922,' Australasian Coal and Shale Employees' Federation, Edgar Ross Collection, NBAC: E165/2/1, 241.

<sup>242</sup> *Common Cause*, 27 January 1920; *Common Cause*, 17 November 1920; *Common Cause*, 2 June 1921 – Quoted in: Gollan, *The Coal Miners of New South Wales*, 159-63.

<sup>243</sup> Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 204; Labor Colleges were established in Melbourne, Broken Hill, Kalgoorlie and Sydney: Helen Bourke. *Worker Education and Social Inquiry in Australia 1913-1929*, PhD Thesis, University of Adelaide, 1981, 23-51; W.P. Earsman, *The Proletariat and Education*. (Melbourne: Andrade's, 1920); A.T. Brodney, 'The Aims and Early

of change advocated on the contemporary left.<sup>244</sup> The objective, in their view, would advance Labor's 'duty to educate the working class,' or as Lane put it: its duty 'to lead the people and not wait to be pushed.'<sup>245</sup> It was not a coincidence that Labor's commitment to establish a national daily newspaper and a national bureau to educate the workers coincided with its commitment to socialisation.<sup>246</sup> Both educative instruments were part of a wider aspiration of Labor socialists to bring into reality their ideal – a politically radicalised and theoretically armed workers' movement.

Finally, the proletarian subject approached class conflict with a combination of militant ambition and surgical discipline – referred to at the time as 'scientific socialism.' For the proletarian labourite, class conciliation was out of the question, but so too was violent revolt.<sup>247</sup> Scientific socialism meant rejecting these in favour of a militant, highly-centralised form of industrial unionism epitomised in the One Big Union (OBU) movement.<sup>248</sup> The scientific socialist worker conducts industrial action only with the consent and guidance

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History of the Victorian Labor College', *Victorian Labor College*, Jubilee 1917-1967 (Melbourne, 1967): 11-13.

<sup>244</sup> One Big Union Leaflet from the Workers' Industrial Union of Australia, Signed by Jock Garden, Molesworth Collection, Set 243, Item 1, dated August 1919, Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW; Anstey, *Red Europe*, 185; Dixson, 'Reformists and Revolutionaries,' 28; There is, however, a notable exception in the IWW and its intellectual descendants - who were sceptical about whether 'the inert mass of unorganised boneheads' could be radicalised, and instead saw a revolutionary vanguard as the most practical way to overthrow capitalism. See: Childe, *How Labour Governs*, 160.

<sup>245</sup> *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 18, 27.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid, 38. The New South Wales Labor Council (under the Secretaryship of communist Jock Garden) had long urged for such a bureau to be established: Australasian Coal and Shale Employees' Federation, Edgar Ross Collection. 'Minute Book, 24 Oct 1917 – 27 Oct 1922,' NBAC: E165/2/1, 237.

<sup>247</sup> *Westralian Worker*, 'Labor's Great Parliament,' 6; *Labor News* 'Big All-Australian Congress' 26 June 1921, 2.

<sup>248</sup> Dixson, 'Reformists and Revolutionaries,' 18.

of the union executive.<sup>249</sup> Two experiences motivated this approach to class struggle. First, there was the failed 1917 Great Strike – characterised by widespread but disorganised industrial activity and crushed by unparalleled retributions from the state and employers: ‘the whole working class of Sydney experienced a period of distress and actual starvation which had not been paralleled in their generation.’<sup>250</sup> Occurring simultaneously was the pulverisation of the revolutionary IWW – its newspaper banned, members jailed, leaders deported, and existence prohibited by an Act of Parliament.<sup>251</sup>

These events rendered the revolutionary-spontaneous path to socialism profoundly discredited for most labourites, even as key IWW rhetoric and ideas – notably industrial over craft unionism – became more popular.<sup>252</sup> Beginning in 1917, the internal structures of Australia’s largest unions began a process of centralisation which reached its climax in 1921.<sup>253</sup> In August 1918 a major conference was held to advocate the formation of One Big Union. In 1919 the Miners’ Federation adopted a constitution which gave the Central Council tight control over financing, lockouts, and strike funds.<sup>254</sup> In 1921 this constitution

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 18, 13; *Labor News* ‘Big All-Australian Congress,’ 2; McKinlay, *A Documentary History of the Australian Labor Movement*, 89, 613.

<sup>250</sup> Childe, *How Labour Governs*, 185.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 130; Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 186; Cain, ‘The IWW, Aspects of its Suppression,’ 54-62; 2nd Military District Intelligence Reports (other suspicious actions) on the IWW [Industrial Workers of the World, aka ‘Wobblies’], NAA: MP95/1, 2MD, 1745926.

<sup>252</sup> Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 135; Miriam Dixon, ‘The First Communist “United Front” in Australia,’ *Labour History*, no. 10 (1966): 20.

<sup>253</sup> Scott Stephenson, ‘Oligarchy contested and interconnected: The New South Wales Labor Party and the trade unions from 1910 to 1939,’ PhD Thesis, Australian National University, 2017, 56, 154.

<sup>254</sup> *Common Cause*, 19 March 1920 quoted in; Gollan, *The Coal Miners of New South Wales*, 164; ‘Rules and Constitution of the Workers’ Industrial Union of Australia (Mining Department), Australasian Coal and Shale Employees’ Federation, Edgar Ross Collection, NBAC: E165/1/2.

became the fundamental charter of the Australasian Workers Union: a newly-established federation including the AWU, the Miners, the Railways Union, Seamen, Meatworkers and Waterside Workers intended to form the nucleus of the One Big Union. Its preamble was the socialisation objective.<sup>255</sup>

The socialisation objective was intimately tied to the scientific socialist approach to class warfare: characterised by organisational discipline, industrial unionism and support for the OBU.<sup>256</sup> As one of its advocates at the AATUC said, ‘An autocracy must be set up [within the labour movement] to force the working class to stick to anything that was in their interests.’<sup>257</sup> Its proximity to these ideas on industrial organisation was key to its passage: these were approaches at least rhetorically endorsed by the newly-founded Communist Party, the militant industrialists, the Labor-left and, by 1921, even a sizeable portion of union moderates.<sup>258</sup> Grounding the objective in this language cultivated its broad support from sections which were otherwise highly divergent.

It should be qualified that the people/proletariat dichotomy was not entirely stable throughout 1921. Some on the hard-left, including communists, still framed arguments as appeals to ‘the people.’<sup>259</sup> Many a socialist advanced

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<sup>255</sup> Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 212; Dixon, ‘Reformists and Revolutionaries,’ 18; Gollan, *The Coal Miners of New South Wales*, 164.

<sup>256</sup> Robert Samuel Ross, ‘What Next? Building the Industrial State (Australian Labor’s Next Step),’ *Ross’s Monthly Magazine of Protest, Personality and Progress for Thinkers and the Unafraid*, July 1921, 3-14; RS Ross [Max Argent], ‘Making the New World in Australia’ an Argument for the Congress Scheme’ 3; *Labor Call*, ‘June’s Great Congress, Labor Press Opinions of Its Importance and Work,’ 2 June 1921, 11.

<sup>257</sup> *All-Australian Trade Union Congress, Official Report*, 17. P. Rasmussen quoted.

<sup>258</sup> Dixon, ‘Reformists and Revolutionaries,’ 13.

<sup>259</sup> *Barrier Miner*, ‘Notes and Comments,’ 30 June 1921, 2; McQueen, ‘Glory without Power,’ 366; *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 27.

a plainly racist case for White Australia.<sup>260</sup> Similarly, otherwise populist-inclined organisations such as the AWU expressed periodic, if limited, interest in industrial unionism, internationalism and political education.<sup>261</sup> Labour intellectuals combined and made overtures to both subjective traditions and were influenced by theories which rejected the dichotomy entirely. Guild socialism, for example, was both inclusive of the entire community and revolutionary in its aims.<sup>262</sup> Described by its leading British theoretician G.D.H. Cole as a ‘reconciliation’ of syndicalism and state socialism, it advocated for all productive assets to be leased to industrial ‘guilds’ elected by workers, managers and administrators.<sup>263</sup> Guild socialism occupied a prominent but uncertain place in the 1921 contest over Labor’s identity – cited as an influence by the objective’s supporters and detractors alike.<sup>264</sup> Similar to ‘proletarian’ labour identity, it considered the industrially organised working class to be ‘the pivot on which the whole social system swings,’ and aspired to abolish private ownership.<sup>265</sup> However, it was also deeply suspicious of the bureaucratic state, promoting pluralism, local initiative, and community-level autonomy.<sup>266</sup> Guild

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<sup>260</sup> Graeme Osborne, ‘A Socialist Dilemma,’ *Labour History*, no. 35 (1978): 112-28; Adela Pankhurst, ‘A Word of Protest,’ *Australian Worker*, 16 February 1920, 6; *The Socialist*, ‘White Australia, A Great Debate,’ 12 September 1919, 2; Byrne, ‘Coolies or Comrades,’ 169; *Labor Call*, 30 August 1917, 8.

<sup>261</sup> Scott Stephenson, ‘Oligarchy Contested,’ 56.

<sup>262</sup> *Daily Standard*, ‘Guild Socialism,’ 24 February 1921, 3; *The Socialist*, ‘The Policy of Guild Socialism,’ 29 July 1921, 2; *Worker*, ‘Nationalisation for Industrial Self-Government,’ 11 August 1921, 5.

<sup>263</sup> George Douglas Howard Cole, *The World of Labour: A Discussion on the Future of Trade Unionism* (London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd, 1914), 362.

<sup>264</sup> A.C. Willis, Vere Gordon Childe, Maurice Blackburn, and RS Ross – for example.

<sup>265</sup> David Blaazer, ‘Guild Socialism and the Historians,’ *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 44 (1998): 7.

<sup>266</sup> Blaazer, ‘Guild Socialism,’ 6; *Daily Standard*, ‘The Trend Towards Socialism,’ 27 August 1921, 6; *Truth*, ‘The Evolution of Modern Socialism,’ 29 May 1921, 6.

socialist phraseology left a strong imprint on the objective – notably in its call for nationalised industries to be managed by ‘boards elected by the whole community.’<sup>267</sup>

In sum, although the ‘people’ and ‘proletariat’ responses to the constituency problem set formative patterns in labour thought, they were not wholly deterministic. These were not tightly-defined warring camps so much as competing magnetisms. The greatest challenge to their stability, however, came from labour women, whose interventions challenged the often-unstated assumptions framing both Labor’s political life and the debate over socialisation.

### **Part Three: Labour Women**

The historiography has been prone, at times, to imagine labour history as a conflict between organised men.<sup>268</sup> The engagement of women has often been framed in terms of its ‘contribution’ to the existing project of male labourism. The socialisation debate demonstrates their more dynamic role as independent public agents – producers of their own ideas and representative claims.<sup>269</sup> Both ‘the people’ and ‘the proletariat’ models struggled to recognise women as subjects rather than objects of labour politics. This section will examine the

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<sup>267</sup> Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 220, 225; *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 8; Bell Grath, ‘The Supreme Economic Council,’ *Worker*, 24 November 1921, 5.

<sup>268</sup> Marilyn Lake, ‘The Independence of Women and the Brotherhood of Man: Debates in the Labour Movement over Equal Pay and Motherhood Endowment in the 1920s,’ *Labour History*, no. 63 (1992): 2; Marilyn Lake, ‘The Politics of Respectability: Identifying the Masculinist Context,’ *Historical Studies*, 22, no. 86 (1986): 124-7.

<sup>269</sup> Lake, ‘The Independence of Women,’ 2.

strategies women employed to resist this exclusion and how these interacted with the socialisation debate.

Masculinism transcended both the ‘populist’ and ‘proletarian’ labour identities. Both held men as the primary subject of politics and appealed to masculine identity to arouse political consciousness.<sup>270</sup> Feminist labour historians such as Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake have demonstrated the status of the male breadwinner as the movement’s assumed absolute and neutral type – while women were, to use Simone de Beauvoir’s terminology, ‘defined by a limiting criteria ... [by] peculiarities that imprison her in her subjecthood.’<sup>271</sup> Sex-equality was formally supported in both labour traditions, but took a leading role in neither.<sup>272</sup> Female candidates received meagre support from party executives. Women’s working conditions were given secondary importance due to the assumption that she would have a husband receiving a family wage.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Miriam Dixson, *The Real Matilda: Woman and Identity; 1788 to the Present*, (Sydney: UNSW Press, 1999), 229; Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The Definitive History of Australian Feminism*, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1999), 56, 72; Michael Leach, ‘Discourses of Identity in Australian Socialism and Labourism, 1887-1901,’ PhD Thesis, University of Queensland, 2001, 162-3; Michael Leach, “‘Manly, True and White’: Masculine Identity and Australian Socialism,” in *Politics of Identity in Australia*, ed. Geoffrey Stokes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 63-77; Macintyre, ‘Social Democracy in Australia,’ 4.

<sup>271</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (London: Penguin, 1972, [1949],) 53; Lake, *Getting Equal*, 56, 38, 76, 72; Joy Damousi, *Women Come Rally: Socialism, Communism and Gender in Australia 1890-1955* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994). For an example of this othering of labour women in implicit form, see: *Labor Call*, ‘Labor Women,’ 7 April 1921, 6: this article from the Victorian Labor Party (Political Labor Council) also deployed misogynistic language against ‘Tory Females:’ ‘Labor women are loyal to their men. Labor men are loyal to their women. ... Tory females want social distinction. They pursue titles, fawn on princes, grovel to Government House. Her imitators are parasites, whores of the dollar. ‘Concubines of Capital.’

<sup>272</sup> *Woman Voter*, ‘Woman in Life,’ 18 December 1919, 3: the woman question ... is tacitly ignored by the man-press, Capitalistic and Socialistic alike ... insofar as one can gauge an attitude that expresses itself only by silence.’

<sup>273</sup> Raelene Frances, ‘Authentic Leaders: Women and Leadership in Australian Unions before World War II,’ *Labour History*, no. 104 (2013): 13-14.

Visual depictions of ‘Labor’ were usually masculine.<sup>274</sup> Women in labour iconography were often rendered passive – embodiments of some ideal. They were ‘calls to action but not active themselves:’<sup>275</sup> ‘happiness’ ‘truth’ and ‘unity’ were often allegorical women (see Figure 11, below) but the figures actually realising these ideals was overwhelmingly a man.

Figure 11: *Worker*, 13 October 1921, 1.



The war experience provided opportunities for women to assert their independent subjecthood. The anti-conscription campaign saw many leave the

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<sup>274</sup> Frances, ‘Authentic Leaders,’ 21; Booth, ‘Picturing Politics,’ 72.

<sup>275</sup> Booth, ‘Picturing Politics,’ 171.

domestic sphere to take part in a political movement for the first time.<sup>276</sup> As Joan Wallach Scott has noted, political upheavals, especially conflict, often initiate deep revisions to the social construction of gender.<sup>277</sup> In the symbolic order of wartime Australia, masculinity, warriorhood, and militarism were correlated values.<sup>278</sup> Femininity, alternatively, was particularised by compassion, hesitancy, and restraint.<sup>279</sup> This proved an asset for labour women in the post-war years, when one of labour's few uniting points was opposition to militarism. Women who opposed conscription emphasised their 'inherently loving' nature as a much-needed counterbalance to the politics of male aggression. The deep association of masculinity and militarism allowed labour women to assert their value as public agents who could 'put an end to the reign of brute force.'<sup>280</sup> In the bloody aftermath of war, there was openness amongst some labour men to this idea – that 'women's heart and women's institution will ... be big factors in sorting out the sorry mess into which the he-male of species have ... gotten ourselves into.'<sup>281</sup> This extended beyond militarism into broader questions of

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<sup>276</sup> Walker, *Solidarity Forever*, 107, 111.

<sup>277</sup> Joan W. Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,' *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1071-73.

<sup>278</sup> Raewyn Connell, 'Masculinity, Violence and War,' in *War/Masculinity*, ed. Paul Patton and Ross Poole, (Sydney: Intervention, 1985), 4-10; Richard White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity, 1788-1980* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1981), 125-130.

<sup>279</sup> Joy Damousi, 'Socialist Women and Gendered Space: The Anti-Conscription and Anti-War Campaigns of 1914-1918,' *Labour History*, no. 60 (1991): 2, 14; For a broader account of gendered constructions of working women in Australia, see: Margaret Bevege, Margaret James and Carmel Shute, *Worth Her Salt. Women at Work in Australia* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1982).

<sup>280</sup> *Woman Voter*, [Kathleen Hotson] 25 May 1916, 3; Damousi, 'Socialist Women,' 2, 14. Catherine Marshall, a Labor columnist for Adelaide's *Daily Herald*, argued that 'men ... accept the dominance of brute force as inevitable ... [that change] can only be brought about by fighting ... the women's point of view, applied to politics, would introduce a new valuation': 'The Future of Women in Politics,' *Daily Herald*, 19 May 1916, 8.

<sup>281</sup> *Daily Standard*, 'The Daily Mirror,' 14 March 1921, 4.

how ‘women’s instincts’ could inform Australia’s transition beyond competitive capitalism.<sup>282</sup>

As a result of these wartime shifts, post-war labour women aimed, in increasing number, to achieve recognition under the movement’s dominant subjectivities. Kate Dwyer was an influential moderate Labor activist who sought recognition under the populist model. This presented specific challenges and opportunities. For one, its expansive definition of what constituted a ‘producer’ appeared more capable of incorporating women. As *Labor Call* asked in May 1920: ‘When we define Labor as embracing all those people who do useful work, whom do we include? The housewife ... is often a cook, dressmaker, and laundry worker ... Is she or is she not essential to society?’<sup>283</sup> Dwyer argued against the socialisation objective because it expressed a refusal to recognise such unwaged social contributions primarily made by women. Its Supreme Economic Council, she pointed out, would exclude non-workers (that is, most women) from the political process. Dwyer sought to incorporate into labour identity what Lake has called ‘maternal citizenship’: ‘the discursive construction of the mother as a rights-bearing political subject.’<sup>284</sup> This cohered neatly not only with ‘the people’s’ embracing definition of ‘productiveness,’ but also with its racial-nationalism. Labour women under this model could frame their reproductive capacities as an important political function – front-line

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<sup>282</sup> *Daily Herald*, ‘The Future of Women in Politics,’ 19 May 1916, 8.

<sup>283</sup> *Labor Call*, ‘What is Labor?’ 17 June 1920, 7.

<sup>284</sup> Lake, *Getting Equal*, 71; Lake, ‘The Independence of Women,’ 17. In 1921 Dwyer secured a commitment by the Federal ALP to the motherhood endowment ‘as an individual right ... not associated in any way with the economic circumstances of the husband or father.’ See: *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 32.

defenders of genetic purity, the only people ‘standing in the way of cross-breeding.’<sup>285</sup> The socialisation objective, through its firmly industrial conception of labour identity, and its relative ambivalence on racial purity, threatened to erase such contributions made beyond the workplace.

‘The people’s’ alleged practicality also provided recognitional opportunities for women. Appeals to the precedence of lived experience allowed them to claim ownership over important political terrain – especially child welfare and the cost-of-living. Groups such as the Melbourne Women’s Union and the Brisbane Labor Women’s Vigilance Organisation argued that their members had the most intimate knowledge of the inflation crisis because women largely did the shopping: ‘it is [precisely] because ... a woman’s interest still centres in the family that she is forced to take a position in public affairs.’<sup>286</sup> Appealing to the pragmatic elements of labour identity allowed women to politicise their gendered roles – the direct experience provided by motherhood constituted an obligation to enter public affairs: ‘a duty that women owed to their children.’<sup>287</sup>

‘The people’ were also detached from the highly-centralised model of labour organising advocated by labour proletarians and encoded in the socialisation objective. This had benefits for women’s independent political expression. Amalgamation into highly-centralised industrial unions threatened the decisional power of women’s unions which were typically small and craft-

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<sup>285</sup> Osborne, ‘A Socialist Dilemma,’ 116.

<sup>286</sup> *Worker*, ‘Woman’s Ways,’ 22 April 1920, 20; These organisations investigated excessive pricing and, at times, secured significant reductions for staple household goods.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*

based.<sup>288</sup> It is not a coincidence, therefore, that prominent labour women including Dwyer had ‘little sympathy [for] the new unionism,’ regarding it a threat to their independent political expression and their recognition as labour subjects.<sup>289</sup>

Proletarian subjectivity posed its own challenges and entry-points for women’s recognition. Even after a wartime surge in labour-force participation, most women did not have paid jobs let alone a union membership. Women on the socialist left faced pressure to repudiate feminism as a ‘bourgeois devotion’ which privileged sex-difference over class.<sup>290</sup> This left them with three possible strategies to claim proletarian subjecthood: advocating socialist politics as the means to women’s true political agency, situating working-class women as ‘a class of their own,’ and asserting sex-equality as fundamental to socialism. Through these discourses, many women on the labour left were able to see in the socialisation program an opportunity for their advancement.

First, socialist women pursuing recognition as proletarian subjects often applied class analysis to gender relations – asserting working-class women as an economic subject constituted by their own real and distinct interests. Transposing ideas about worker exploitation on to women’s dependence on their husbands, the ‘women of our class,’ they argued, did not only experience class

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<sup>288</sup> When women were reserved special representation on male-dominated executives, for instance in the 1920 amalgamation of the Printing Industry Employees Union, they were often significantly under-represented. ‘Letters between Louisa Cross and Arthur Leovold, September–October 1920,’ Printers Industry Employees of Australia Files, NBAC, N69, Z482, quoted in: Frances, ‘Authentic Leadership,’ 13.

<sup>289</sup> Childe, *How Labour Governs*, 175.

<sup>290</sup> Lake, *Getting Equal*, 13, 56; Letters between Louisa Cross and Arthur Leovold, September–October 1920, Printing Industry Employees Union Correspondence Files, NBAC: N69, Z482, quoted in: Frances, ‘Authentic Leadership,’ 13; Melanie Nolan, ‘Sex or Class? The Politics of the Earliest Equal Pay Campaign in Victoria,’ *Labour History*, no. 61 (1991): 101-22.

through their husband's exploitation, but doubly, from his control over her.<sup>291</sup> Often invoked in these assertions was Engels' adage that 'where man is once a slave, women is twice a slave ... to the master class and [to] her husband.'<sup>292</sup> Marriage under capitalism was itself a class relationship and an especially precarious one. The entire family experienced the exploitation of the breadwinner but unlike him, they could not strike, re-skill or contest the unspoken division of household labour. Women were not an accessory to class conditions but, therefore, a subject for whom they were most inescapable. The society imagined in the socialisation program would transform their lives too, laying the groundwork for partnerships of choice and not necessity.

Second, women on the left pursued recognition by situating sex-equality as central to the socialist project. While usually disclaiming the 'feminist' label, they maintained that '[t]he inequality starting at the home doorstep goes on to the workshop.'<sup>293</sup> Gendered prejudice, alongside racial, national and craft divisions, were framed as part of capitalism's supporting moral architecture.<sup>294</sup> Socialist women such as poet Lesbia Keogh (Harford) argued that capitalist gender ideals made women docile, encouraging them to 'prattle of work and pleasure, of last week's picnic' instead of taking up a role as 'comrades for [their] dawnstruck boys.'<sup>295</sup> The sooner women were freed the 'accepted belief in

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<sup>291</sup> Lake, 'The Independence of Women,' 17; Marilyn Lake, 'State Socialism for Australian Mothers: Andrew Fisher's Radical Maternalism in Its International and Local Contexts,' *Labour History*, no. 102 (2012): 58.

<sup>292</sup> *Woman Voter*, 'Woman in Life,' 3.

<sup>293</sup> *Woman Voter*, 'Woman in Life,' 3.

<sup>294</sup> *Daily Standard*, 'Women and Labor, Russian Example,' 7 September 1920, 3; *Woman Voter*, 'Woman in Life,' 3: 'Where men can demand that their vanities are pandered to, they argued, 'the effect on the moral nature of each sex [is] injurious.'

<sup>295</sup> Quoted in: Frances, 'Authentic Leadership,' 22.

[their] inferiority', the sooner 'bourgeois inspired immorality' could be confronted and 'the sooner will Labor reach its ultimate goal.'<sup>296</sup>

Katharine Susannah Prichard, the novelist who signed herself under her married name of Katharine Throssell in the labour press, was a notable left-wing writer and activist who sought recognition under the proletarian model. A founding member of the WA Communist Party in 1920, and a close observer of the socialisation debate in 1921, Throssell, like many women on the labour left, adopted the language of class struggle as a means to 'soar above the everyday and domestic minutiae' and see herself as an agent of social transformation.<sup>297</sup> She encouraged women to understand their oppression as inseparable from capitalist exploitation: a 'system which uses men, women and children as raw material to extract wealth from.'<sup>298</sup> Women's instincts had been manipulated, she argued, towards the fruitless endeavours of philanthropy and volunteering. Only by advocating socialist reconstruction could their political engagement have any real meaning:

Kindly unselfish women have devoted themselves to what is called  
child welfare work. But their energies ... are poured into a colossal

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<sup>296</sup> *Daily Standard*, 'Equality of Women, Opposition of Employers,' 20 May 1920, 3. Damousi ('Socialist Women,' 6) has argued that the 'political language of socialist women was a male discourse' as it targeted capitalism more so than patriarchy. However, it is noteworthy how persistently their critique of capital was tied to one of the symbolic order of gender, see: *Woman Voter*, 'Woman in Life,' 3. Women have as little to hope for from men as the workmen from the middle classes ... The first step is for woman to do her own thinking; to accept nothing unexamined ... Just as in Socialism, one has to be a rebel to the old order first before [grasping] the formulated new Damousi, 'Socialist Women,' 6.

<sup>297</sup> Frances, 'Authentic Leadership,' 23; Nathan Hobby, *The Red Witch: A Biography of Katharine Susannah Prichard* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2022), 179-183.

<sup>298</sup> Katharine Susannah Throssell, 'Mrs. Throssell on Child Welfare: The Organised Futility of Charity,' *Westralian Worker*, 9 September 1921, 5.

sieve. Nothing they do, under the system, can be of real value ...  
The best way to work for the welfare of children is to study ... how  
the system which creates slums, unemployment, disease and war  
may be overthrown.<sup>299</sup>

Throssell lauded the socialisation objective as a ‘realisation of the failure of the reformist patchwork’ – a patchwork in which women especially, she argued, had invested false hopes.<sup>300</sup> In her words, it ‘decisively lifted the Labor movement of Australia from the rut of eternal compromise with capitalism.’<sup>301</sup> In so doing, it could realise the full potential of both men and women’s political activity.

## **Conclusion**

On initial observation, the unsettled character of post-war labour politics appears to resist systematic analysis. The sheer volume of influences, imaginaries, and iconographies in circulation during these years baffled even its contemporaries. Labor’s ideological stadium had so broadened that party coherence stretched to its limit. So uncertain was the ALP leadership of the party’s unifying purpose, that it called a conference of the unions, the AATUC, to provide an answer. For all the contradiction that answer contained, it was perhaps clearest on one position: Labor’s only future was as a workers’ party.

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid. It should also be noted how this statement makes reference to political education – a central feature of labour proletarianism as we have seen.

<sup>300</sup> Katharine Susannah Throssell, ‘Mrs. Throssell’s Comment’ 6.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

For the industrial left, the socialisation objective was Labor's chance to formally recognise the untenability of 'the people' as its subject. War and austerity had shattered the community consensus – there was no longer any unified 'people' to speak of. Class struggle, global and domestic, was unfurling at such intensity that Labor had to affirm unequivocally on which side it stood. To say it stood 'for everyone' was no longer enough. For many labour moderates, the objective was an attempt to nullify Labor's founding myths – that it could be above class, above politics even – the advocate of the good people, the moral and hardworking, in a young and vulnerable nation.

We should take seriously the intensity with which many ALP moderates resisted its adoption. As Theodore argued, 'the resolutions moved, and the meanings given to them, were leading to the complete destruction of the Labor Movement in Australia.'<sup>302</sup> For Labor leaders like him, the socialisation program really did threaten the symbolic death of that party born in 1891 and its replacement by an unrecognisable other. The objective debate was a proxy for existential questions about who the party existed to serve. This was a struggle, at least in part, over who the Labor Party was, fought with symbols as its weapon – the party objective itself being chief among these.

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<sup>302</sup> *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 26.

# Chapter 3

## Intention, Interpretation and Significance

By putting the demand for a New Social Order characterised by community ownership and democratic management in the forefront of Labor's fighting platform, Congress ended one epoch and commenced another.<sup>303</sup>

On 18 October 1921 the Federal Conference of the Australian Labor Party voted to make its objective the socialisation of industry, production, distribution, and exchange.<sup>304</sup> In this thesis, I have argued for the historical significance of this moment, demonstrating its expression of major transformations in Australian labour thought. In its language and methodology, the objective testified to new conceptions of the labour subject, and new estimations of where that subject stood in the unfolding of history. However, the significance of the 1921 objective is not only in how it embodied broader changes, but also in its constructive purpose – in what it intended to achieve at the point of adoption. In this chapter, I consider the immediate political circumstances from which the socialisation program emerged and what real, substantive effects it was intended to have on these – what its authors were, practically speaking, hoping to accomplish, and

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<sup>303</sup> *Westralian Worker*, 'Essentials Specified by All-Unions Congress. Socialised Industry as Fighting Plank. Unionism and Parliament to be the Nerve Centres of the Social Transformation,' 8 July 1921, 1.

<sup>304</sup> *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 28.

intending to communicate. In so doing, I find that the significance of this program lies also in what it reveals about the unparalleled heights of post-war labour's political aspirations.

To identify what adopting the socialisation objective was intended to achieve, I will conduct an analysis in three parts: considering its formative circumstances from 1920, its design by the trade unions in June 1921, and its interpretation by the Labor Conference in October. First, I examine the immediate political atmosphere of which the objective was a product. I will take as an illustrative incident the Sydney riots of 7 May 1921, which reveal many of the key pressures and incentives facing labour leaders as they went on to debate socialisation later that year. Next, I consider how the socialisation objective was designed by the All-Australian Trade Union Congress in June 1921, arguing that the Congress's most important contribution was to give socialisation a mandate and a means –transforming the intended function of party objectives until this point. Finally, I consider how the ALP Federal Conference interpreted the AATUC's resolutions – and what it believed it was doing by adopting them. I posit that the socialisation objective was affirmed to demonstrate Labor's ideological 'maturation' on several dimensions, its revised approach to parliamentary politics, and its commitment to labour unity. The key finding of this chapter is that Labor in 1921 was not 'paying lip service to a vague and remote god.'<sup>305</sup> Adopting the socialisation program had an earthly function: shaped by real political circumstances and tangibly responsive to these. This was labour's effort to 'sum up the experiences of a decade' and translate them into a

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<sup>305</sup> O'Farrell, 'The Russian Revolution,' 194.

plan of *action*.<sup>306</sup> To quote Ian Turner, by 1921 ‘the most vigorous and the least dogmatic of the revolutionaries had found themselves, almost without knowing it, in positions of great influence.’ Their revolutionary dreaming, in this moment, ‘seemed to take on a new reality.’<sup>307</sup> The aim of this chapter is to explore the reality contained within labour’s post-war dreams.

## Part One: Formative Circumstances

On 19 October 1920 the ALP Federal Executive unanimously resolved to convene a congress of the unions to devise a ‘bold and comprehensive’ industrial policy for the party.<sup>308</sup> Australian labour politics at this point was both embittered and radical. As we have seen, a broad spectrum of its leadership, intellectuals and membership was open to ideas which had only recently been considered extreme.<sup>309</sup> The union movement was in an ‘unusually aroused and combative frame of mind,’ articulating critiques of capitalism which were sharper and more expansive than they had been before the war.<sup>310</sup> Labour

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<sup>306</sup> Irving, ‘Origins of the Labor Party,’ 42.

<sup>307</sup> Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 234.

<sup>308</sup> Patrick Weller (ed.), *Caucus Minutes: Minutes of the Meetings of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party, Volume 2, 1914-1932*, (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1975), 55.

<sup>309</sup> Dixson, ‘Reformists and Revolutionaries,’ 60; At the New South Wales Labour Council, unionists convened under banners which read ‘long live the workers republic,’ and ‘long live the revolutionary proletariat’. *The Argus*, ‘Labour Extremists,’ 5 October 1921, 11.

<sup>310</sup> Dixson, ‘Reformists and Revolutionaries,’ 121; McKinlay, *A Documentary History of the Australian Labor Movement*, 613; For an example of the heated tone of industrial disputes in these years, see the following leaflet handed out in Perth, July 1921: ‘Workers of the West! THE CAPITALISTS OF AUSTRALIA ARE PLANNING TO REDUCE YOUR WAGES ... Loyalist associations with SECRET EXECUTIVES and SPIES to hunt down militant workers have been formed.... Prepare for an attack ... Force your leaders to ACT and kick out the hesitants,’ *The Communist*, ‘Strike Scabs and Mass Demonstrations,’ 8 July 1921, 5.

discourses and propaganda attributed conditions of distress to an irredeemable barbarism inherent to capitalism. The period was also, however, characterised by a certain bleakness – its radicalism bearing little triumphalism or exuberance. The early 1920s were defined by an ‘inward-turning greyness of spirit’ – the labour movement facing industrial defeat and electoral stagnation.<sup>311</sup> Rising unemployment undermined workers’ bargaining power and major disputes were lost in the shipping and mining industries.<sup>312</sup> With the movement unfocused by internal strife and ideological vacillation, its adversaries appeared well-positioned to consolidate their hegemony.

Muriel Heagney was a labour activist who met with working-class leaders across Australia during her work for the 1920 Royal Commission on the Basic Wage ‘and the thing that had impressed on her was the absence of a central idea whereupon to fix the movement.’<sup>313</sup> One incident in particular illustrates this dynamic and its implications. On 8 May 1921, 150,000 ‘loyalists’ demonstrated in the Sydney Domain against the reported burning of a Union Jack at May Day processions.<sup>314</sup> Three different labour meetings were taking place at the time – led by the Socialist Labor Party, the Communist Party, and the returned soldiers’ section of the ALP.<sup>315</sup> Divided into their various sects, the labour organisations were driven out. First, Ernest Judd of the Socialist Labor

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<sup>311</sup> Ross McMullin, *The Light on the Hill: The Australian Labor Party, 1891-1991* (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1991), 127; Childe, *How Labour Governs*, 114.

<sup>312</sup> Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 211; Dixon, ‘Revolutionaries and Reformists,’ 122.

<sup>313</sup> *All-Australian Trade Union Congress, Official Report*, Labor Call Print: Melbourne, June 1921, 12.

<sup>314</sup> *The Sydney Morning Herald*, ‘Memorable Scenes, Red Flag Burnt, Disloyalists Silenced,’ 9 May 1921, 9; *The Daily Telegraph*, ‘The Rally to the Flag,’ 9 May 1921, 4.

<sup>315</sup> *The Sydney Morning Herald*, ‘Memorable Scenes’ 9; *The Daily Telegraph*, ‘The Rally to the Flag,’ 4.

Party was shouted down and ordered to sing 'Rule Britannia,' before being crushed by a stampede of 'loyalists' and sustaining serious injuries. Judd was arrested as onlookers called for police to throw him into the harbour.<sup>316</sup> The 'loyalists' then advanced to the communist meeting. Vastly outnumbered, Garden and his supporters were expelled or detained, the speaking platform smashed 'into splinters.'<sup>317</sup> Finally, the 'loyalists' moved to the ALP returned soldiers' section meeting, where several Labor MLAs were in attendance. Fearful of the fate which met the others, ALP officials, such as C. H. Murphy MLA, 'denounced the encouragement of anti-British and anti-Australian sentiments.' However, when Murphy asserted 'loyalty was not the privilege of the opponents of labour,' an uproar ensued.<sup>318</sup> The crowd broke through the police garrison, ripped down ALP banners and stormed the stage. A 'loyalist' protester climbed on to the roof of a nearby vehicle, and pulled out a red flag, intending to burn it. He was thrown to the ground when others confused him for a socialist. More labourites were then arrested. The 'loyalists' remained undispersed until very late in the evening when hundreds of police officers were deployed to remove them. In the aftermath, the communists discussed forming a 'red army' to protect themselves.<sup>319</sup> The AWU Sydney Construction Branch called on the unions to form a troop of bodyguards and denounced the police's one-sided response. No loyalists were arrested. Two days later, Edward Reid,

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<sup>316</sup>*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 'Casualties,' 9 May 1921, 9.

<sup>317</sup>*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 'Communists – An Angry Audience,' 9 May 1921, 9.

<sup>318</sup> *Worker*, 'Sequel to Domain Riot,' 26 May 1921, 19; *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 'Enthusiastic Loyalists,' 16 May 1921, 10.

<sup>319</sup> *Worker*, 'Sequel to Domain Riot,' 19.

Mayor of Manly, declared that ‘if there was no law to prevent people from flying the red flag, then people should take the law into their own hands.’<sup>320</sup>

The incident is illustrative for a number of reasons. It demonstrates, for one, the intensity of political competition in post-war Australia – the onset of crude and occasionally violent attempts to suppress labour activism. It also exhibits how the ALP’s moderate postures were not sparing it from the mistreatment of the far-left. Adequate protection from the state, many labour activists had also come to feel, could not be counted on – even if the state had a Labor government at its helm as NSW did at the time. The ‘loyalists’ demonstrators included prominent figures in business, the community and the armed forces.<sup>321</sup> Labour was defensive and divided, paying an increasingly steep price for the bitter factionalism which beset it during wartime and had only worsened since.

In 1920-21, figures across the movement’s rival strands began to feel awakened to shared conditions of distress. As we saw in Chapter 1, they imagined the future with increasing anxiety.<sup>322</sup> Post-war austerity had diluted revolutionary purism and radicalised the moderate impulse.<sup>323</sup> Labour leaders and intellectuals increasingly believed that a powerful, joint intervention would

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<sup>320</sup> *The Sydney Morning Herald*, ‘Memorable Scenes,’ 9.

<sup>321</sup> *The Sydney Morning Herald*, ‘Memorable Scenes,’ 9; *The Daily Telegraph*, ‘The Rally to the Flag,’ 9 May 1921, 4; Speeches were given by Lieutenant-General Edmund Herring, Brigadier-General John McGlynn, and E.M. McDonald, National President of the Returned Soldiers’ League.

<sup>322</sup> *All-Australian Trade Union Congress, Official Report*, 21: Communist A. McPherson quoted: ‘There must be a unified working-class political party from one end of Australia to the other. The problems facing the working-class in the not-distant future were going to be grave. In order to secure unity, let them thrust aside their political views on political economy.’

<sup>323</sup> Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 186.

be necessary to turn around the movement's prospects. As *Proletarian Review* wrote in April 1921:

The workers now lie in the slough of a great industrial depression ... vain [is] the hope of an improvement in their lot by the methods of everyday struggle ... the conditions are now ripe for the workers to pass... to the broad field of revolutionary political action.<sup>324</sup>

## **Part Two: Designing the Objective – The June Congress**

In late 1920, twenty-thousand invitations were distributed by Labor's state executives inviting workers' organisations to attend a major congress that would design the party's new industrial policy.<sup>325</sup> 'All shades and phases of unionistic thought' were declared welcome, encouraged to speak 'with unrestricted frankness.'<sup>326</sup> The labour press buzzed with speculation as to who would participate and what resolutions would be reached.<sup>327</sup> When the AATUC finally convened at the Melbourne Trades Hall on 20 June 1921, E.J. Holloway immediately specified its remit: 'We [the ALP Federal Executive] want an

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<sup>324</sup> Guido Baracchi, *Proletarian Review*, Melbourne, April 1921, quoted in: Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 210.

<sup>325</sup> Weller (ed.), *Caucus Minutes*, 55; *Labor News*, 'Big All-Australian Congress,' 2.

<sup>326</sup> Weller (ed.), *Caucus Minutes*, 55.

<sup>327</sup> The last time the unions had been nationally assembled was to resolve Labor's position on conscription in 1916, see: Australian Labor Party, *Report of proceedings of the special commonwealth conference called to deal with matters arising out of the conscription issue*, Melbourne, 4 December 1916, CPL: 1340080.

*ultimatum* ... to know what the mental state of the Australian labor movement really is ... *Tell us what you want and we will do it* (my emphasis).’<sup>328</sup>

It is necessary to pause over the significance of this assembly. In 1921 no central body existed to formally represent the views of the whole Australian union movement.<sup>329</sup> The Congress reportedly represented over 700,000 workers, ‘the full spectrum of labour opinion’, and, as the *Australian Worker* put it, held ‘the opportunity to say exactly what they want.’<sup>330</sup> This fact alone ‘marked [it] out ... as the most important in the history of the working class in this country.’<sup>331</sup> Neither moderates nor militants wanted to squander the political capital it provided – ‘if we are simply going to pass a resolution, we are wasting our time.’<sup>332</sup> Taking stock of the movement’s precarious state, delegates exhibited ‘a sincere desire to accomplish something great’ – to reimagine Labor’s reason to exist.<sup>333</sup>

Before 1921 many attempts had been made to change the Federal ALP objective, few of which succeeded.<sup>334</sup> The first federal objective was introduced in 1905 – adapted from the existing NSW Labor objective, which was the most moderate of all the state branches.<sup>335</sup> Labor’s 1905 objective called for ‘the creation of an Australian sentiment based upon the maintenance of racial purity

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<sup>328</sup> *Westralian Worker*, ‘Labor’s Great Parliament,’ 6.

<sup>329</sup> Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 103.

<sup>330</sup> *Australian Worker*, ‘Next Month’s Great Event,’ Sydney, 26 May 1921, 5; Byrne, *Becoming John Curtin and James Scullin*, 147.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*; Byrne, ‘Visions of the Future,’ 517.

<sup>332</sup> *All-Australian Trade Union Congress, Official Report*, 8.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, 8, 12, 21.

<sup>334</sup> O’Meagher, ‘Introduction,’ 7; The party substituted ‘racial purity’ with ‘the maintenance of a White Australia’ in 1908 and in 1919 added the ‘emancipation of human labour from all forms of exploitation’ in 1919, see *Official Report of Proceedings of the Eighth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 23 June 1919, 1.

<sup>335</sup> Farrell, *International Socialism and Australian Labour*, 8.

and the development ... of an enlightened and self-reliant community' as well as collective ownership of monopolies through extending the functions of the State.<sup>336</sup> Early party objectives had a primarily inspirational purpose. They functioned as Labor's 'light on the hill,' as Ben Chifley would later call the party's vision – a locus of aspiration for stimulating hope in the Labor project.<sup>337</sup> The 'fighting platform,' meanwhile, set the actual focus of its immediate activity. As horizontal mission statements, early objectives were brief and open to interpretation: versatile enough to maintain relevance across election cycles.<sup>338</sup> They distinguished Labor's political identity from its rivals, embedding 'an identity based on anticipation of a better future.'<sup>339</sup> As Henry Boote said in 1913, the objective was 'the essence of the movement,' its symbolic nexus.<sup>340</sup>

Early objectives, then, were not designed with a view to literal implementation. These were guiding frameworks through which policy could be developed, interpreted, and rationalised. Their core vision was expected to loosely inform how Labor politicians responded to the day-to-day tasks of

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<sup>336</sup> In full: 1. The creation of an Australian sentiment based upon the maintenance of racial purity and the development in Australia of an enlightened and self-reliant community; 2. The securing of the full results of their industry to all producers by the collective ownership of monopolies and the extension of the industrial and economic functions of the State and Municipality: Australian Labor Party, *Third Commonwealth Political Labour Conference Official Report of Proceedings*, Commonwealth Political Labour Conference, Brisbane, 1905, NLA: 1431256.

<sup>337</sup> Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 2, 54.

<sup>338</sup> Farrell, *International Socialism and Australian Labour*, 126.

<sup>339</sup> Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos*, 1, 7; Drucker, *Political Uses of Ideology*, 26. Drucker is referring to the UK Labour objective in this source, but it exercised an almost identical role in Australia also; *Daily Standard*, 'The Coming Convention: Labor's Principles,' 22 February 1916, 4.

<sup>340</sup> Henry Boote, 'Why they Hate Labor,' *Worker*, 12 June 1913, 17.

administration.<sup>341</sup> The objective explained the higher value of Labor's political engagement: the ultimate but remote end to which it exercised power.

The AATUC overturned this conception of the ALP objective's meaning and function. The historiography often mishandles the socialisation program by assuming it served a similar, incorporeal function to previous party objectives. This has encouraged conclusions that its adoption was not notable, the mere rephrasing of a platitude. In this section, I demonstrate how by providing socialisation with a mandate and a means, the AATUC developed a program with a much more binding, substantive, and immediate function.<sup>342</sup> The Congress sought to bring the Labor objective, and perhaps the Labor Party itself, 'back down to earth' – setting its focus on the implementation of a sweeping, but tangible, program.

First, the AATUC provided socialisation with an incomparable popular mandate. This was because it originated not in the Labor apparatus but directly from those who that apparatus so often claimed to speak for: Australia's industrial movement. The AATUC was described by both conservative and labour commentators as the most representative union congress in national history – 'Labour's Great Parliament.'<sup>343</sup> As George Healey would later remark, this was 'a who's who of the Labor politicians for the thirty years that followed.'<sup>344</sup> According to contemporaries, delegates at the Congress formed

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<sup>341</sup> Land reform, industrial regulation, public education, immigration control, defence spending – these were justified and reasoned with reference to the objective and its phraseology.

<sup>342</sup> *All-Australian Trade Union Congress, Official Report*, 8.

<sup>343</sup> *Westralian Worker*, 'Labor's Great Parliament,' 6; *Worker*, 'Labor's Great Conference,' 17; Full record of attendees available at *All-Australian Trade Union Congress, Official Report*, 3-4.

<sup>344</sup> Healey, *A.L.P.*, 78.

themselves into five rough ideological groupings.<sup>345</sup> These are described in Figure 12, below. A ‘sprawling, chaotic event,’ procedural order was initially difficult to maintain as anger at the ALP was vividly expressed.<sup>346</sup> Many unions were present whose representatives were estranged from the party, such as the Miners’ Federation – its delegates were reluctant even to attend, having broken from the ALP in 1919.<sup>347</sup> Upon the initiation of proceedings, far-left MP Michael Considine immediately deviated from the agenda paper, tabling a motion to denounce the parliamentary system.<sup>348</sup> The communists ‘assumed an air of aristocratic arrogance’ and were met with great suspicion from the Labor unionists – a sentiment duly reciprocated.<sup>349</sup> However, initial hesitations proved to be short lived. Over the course of the first few days, a view emerged that the unions had a great deal to gain by submitting to Labor a unanimous plan.<sup>350</sup> For the first time, Ross appealed, they were in a position to ‘ask the Labor Party to make the transformation of society’ their objective.<sup>351</sup> It was from here that the

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<sup>345</sup> Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 219; Guido Baracchi, *Proletarian Review*, 7 July 1921, Melbourne, 2; Jock Garden, *Proletarian Review*, 7 August 1921, 7.

<sup>346</sup> Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 220; Byrne, *Becoming John Curtin and James Scullin*, 147.

<sup>347</sup> Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 218; In internal meetings, the miners’ leaders said they left the ALP due to the ‘political cowardice of a few reactionaries who ... place the winning of seats before principle,’ see: ‘Minute Book, 24 Oct 1917 – 27 Oct 1922,’ Australasian Coal and Shale Employees’ Federation, Edgar Ross Collection, NBAC: E165/2/1, 91, 264.

<sup>348</sup> *All-Australian Trade Union Congress, Official Report*, 4: Considine’s motion called Parliament an ‘instrument of domination’ that should only be used by the labour movement as a ‘temporary weapon’ and a vehicle for ‘revolutionary propaganda.’

<sup>349</sup> Trades and Labour Council Minutes, General Meetings, 1 September 1921, quoted in: O’Farrell, *The Russian Revolution*, 194; *Official Report of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, Moscow, November 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> 1922*, English Edition, 231; ‘Congress Notes’ *Labor Call*, 30 July 1921, 4; Jock Garden, ‘Industrial Notes,’ *Communist*, 8 July 1921, 6; ‘Labor’s New Path to Power,’ *Worker*, Brisbane, 6.

<sup>350</sup> June’s Great Congress, Labor Press Opinions of Its Importance and Work,’ *Labor Call*, 2 June 1921, 11; ‘Mrs JW Hogarth – Congress Impressions’ *Westralian Worker*, Perth, 5 August 1921, 2.

<sup>351</sup> *All-Australian Trade Union Congress, Official Report*, 12.

AATUC began to speak more ‘forthrightly, and to an unexpected degree, in unison.’<sup>352</sup>

Figure 12: Ideological Blocs at the AATUC.

<i>Bloc</i>	<i>Delegate Share</i>	<i>Position on Objective</i>	<i>Key Figures</i>	<i>Key Unions</i>
Industrial socialists and Labor-left	40%~	Emphatic support	A.C. Willis, J.M. Baddeley, E.H. Lane, E.J. Holloway, R.S. Ross, T. Moroney, J. Curtin	Miners Federation, Australian Railways Union, Tramway Employees, Hotel Employees
Moderates	30%~	Hesitant support	A. Blakeley, P. Clarey, J. Barnes, W.J. Riordan, J. Scullin	Australian Workers Union, Shop Assistants, Municipal Employees
Communist Bloc	15%~	Support	J.S. Garden, A. Rutherford, M. Considine, P. Rasmussen	NSW Bricklayers Union, Sail Makers, Storemen and Packers
‘Orthodox Labourites’ Conservative unionists and the Labor right.	10%~	Oppose	J. Dooley, J. Barnes, F.W. Birrell, E.C. O’Dea.	Australian Workers Union, Clothing Trades, Blacksmiths, Printing Employees
Left-Communists	5%~	Oppose	J. Johnson, T. Walsh, J. Kilburn.	Seamen, Storeman and Packers

<sup>352</sup> Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 226; Byrne, *Becoming John Curtin and James Scullin*, 147.

The mandate for socialisation came from far and wide. Although the right-leaning AWU was the largest union represented at the Congress, many of its representatives were ‘willing to concede the necessity of radical change.’<sup>353</sup> With the AWU divided, the pivotal position rested with the Miners’ Federation, led by A.C. Willis. This proved decisive: ‘The coal-miners were there to do business,’ Willis told the assembly, ‘they were not prepared to waste their time in carrying pious resolutions for the purpose of doping the workers ... as [had been done] in the past.’<sup>354</sup> A guild socialist and ‘industrial militant of outstanding reputation,’ Willis was uniquely situated as a bridge between the AWU and the wider movement.<sup>355</sup> He led what Peter Love called ‘a broad coalition of radical opinion’ in favour of socialisation – including AWU progressives concentrated in Queensland, militant unions affiliated with the Sydney Trades Hall (the so-called ‘Trades Hall Reds’), the NSW (Jock) Garden Communists, the predominantly Victorian Labor-Left, the Barrier Miners, and a small number of radical craft unions.<sup>356</sup> When the socialist objective was finally tabled ‘there was no effective opposition ... it was carried on the voices.’<sup>357</sup> The moderate minority of traditional ALP, AWU and craft unionists, so ‘used to getting their own way,’ silently succumbed to the radical tide.<sup>358</sup> Subsequently, a Ways and

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<sup>353</sup> *All-Australian Trade Union Congress, Official Report*, 3-4; Byrne, ‘Visions of the Future,’ 519; W.J. Riordan Interview with the Queensland Worker, *Worker*, 30 June 1921, 5.

<sup>354</sup> *All-Australian Trade Union Congress, Official Report*, 9.

<sup>355</sup> Dixon, ‘Reformists and Revolutionaries,’ 46; Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 218; So important was his role in events that some commentators speculated that their outcome would hinge largely on him and his abilities’: ‘Revolutionary Threat of the Reds,’ *Smiths Weekly*, 18 June 1921, 1.

<sup>356</sup> Love, *Labour and the Money Power*, 83.

<sup>357</sup> Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 218; *All-Australian Trade Union Congress, Official Report*, 5.

<sup>358</sup> Byrne, *Becoming John Curtin and James Scullin*, 146; Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 219.

Means Committee was elected to devise a report that would define the objective's means and methods – the contours of Australia's road to socialism.<sup>359</sup> Delegates 'grandly rose to the unique occasion,' Ross later reflected, 'it was seen, as if across a lightning-lit sky ... the responsibilities of the gathering and of the pregnant hour. And they made history.'<sup>360</sup>

The scale of this initial mandate was vast, transcending what had been defining ideological cleavages in the post-war left. To rebuke its resolutions would be a profound embarrassment and probably fatal to the unity of the ALP itself.<sup>361</sup> Not only was it the Labor politicians who had pleaded for the unions to convene in the first place, but they were now subject to the 'sword of re-convocation.'<sup>362</sup> Should Labor refuse to adopt the Congress recommendations, leading unions threatened to reconvene and hold talks for the formation of a new workers' party – as had happened in NSW in 1919.<sup>363</sup> This made the mandate for socialisation, to a degree, enforceable. As W.J. Riordan remarked at AATUC's adjournment: 'I cannot see how the ALP can do other than adopt the resolutions passed.'<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> *All-Australian Trade Union Congress, Official Report*, 7-9; Members elected to the Ways and Means Committee (i.e. the authors of the socialisation program) included: James Scullin (Victorian AWU), Robert Samuel Ross (VSP/ALP), Frank Anstey (ALP, Victorian Labor), John Smith Garden (Communist), John Curtin (Timber Workers, ALP), Timothy Moroney (Queensland General-Secretary) Australian Railways Union), Blakely (AWU, National President), Holland (NZ Labor), E.F. Russell (Victorian Agricultural Implement Makers' Union) McCallum (Western Australian AWU, ALP Executive), Barnes (Victorian AWU) and Willis (General Secretary, Miners Federation).

<sup>360</sup> Ross, 'New Birth for the New Era,' 1.

<sup>361</sup> 'Next Month's Great Event,' *Australian Worker*, Sydney, 26 May 1921, 5.

<sup>362</sup> Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 222.

<sup>363</sup> *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 12.

<sup>364</sup> W.J. Riordan Interview with the Queensland Worker, *Worker*, 30 June 1921, 5. Most Labor moderates in October recognised this mandate, and accordingly criticised the socialisation program with caution. Just two years earlier, during the 1919 split, J.H. Catts emphatically

The significance of this mandate lies not only in its scope, but also in its subject. It would be one thing for the Congress to endorse a single sentence flexible to interpretation – but the AATUC achieved more than this. After passing the initial objective, Congress elaborated it into a nine-point policy agenda depicted in Figure 13, below. Congress’s decision to prescribe these means should weigh heavily in our view of its intentions.<sup>365</sup> Prior to 1921, party objectives made only the vaguest suggestions as to how they could be realised.<sup>366</sup> This perhaps reflected a greater confidence in Labor politicians to faithfully interpret the party mission, sorely tested as it was at times. This trust had utterly depleted by 1921.<sup>367</sup> Wary of being ‘pigeon-holed’ by future administrations, as Lane put it, the Congress prescribed an extensive statement of methods which would, in Willis’ words, ‘make the next ten years a transition to socialism.’<sup>368</sup>

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castigated a similar objective proposed for NSW Labor. Now, he prefaced his opposition by claiming ‘wherever possible, [I] am going to accept the resolutions from congress:’ *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 24.

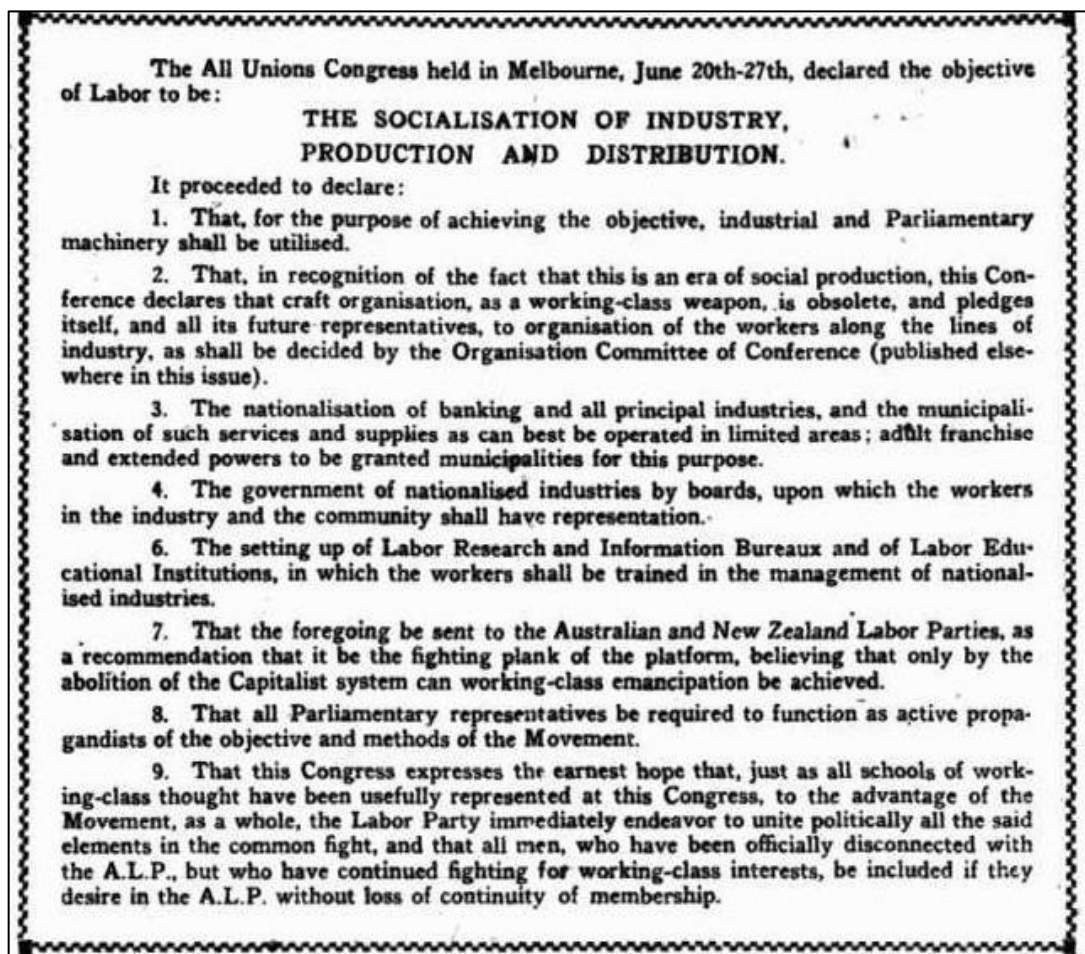
<sup>365</sup> *All-Australian Trade Union Congress, Official Report*, 12.

<sup>366</sup> With phrases such as ‘collective ownership’ and ‘extending the functions of the state’ in abundance.

<sup>367</sup> Michael Hogan, ‘Template for a Labor Faction: The Industrial Section and the Industrial Vigilance Council of the NSW Labor Party 1916-19,’ *Labour History*, no. 96 (2009): 79-80; Childe, *How Labour Governs*, 11, 27, 114; O’Farrell, *The Russian Revolution*, 178; Gollan, *The Coalminers of New South Wales*, 144-147; Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 92, 198.

<sup>368</sup> It had as its eighth point that politicians would be required to function as ‘active propagandists’ for the AATUC’s plans. Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*, 253; Ross, *The Russian Revolution*, 35.

Figure 13: Statement of Means, *Westralian Worker*, "Essentials Specified" 8 July 1921, 1.



The inclusion of these methods demonstrates how the AATUC sought to ensure, as Byrne put it, ‘that the immediate actions of the party were led by this declaration of the future.’<sup>369</sup> The AATUC sought to collapse Labor’s broader ideals with its immediate activity – literally making the party objective and the fighting-platform one and the same.<sup>370</sup> The hour had arrived in which ‘the Real and Ideal need [no longer] be separated.’<sup>371</sup> For many years, the party had toyed with the question of nationalisation and socialisation, ‘now, for the first time in

<sup>369</sup> Byrne, ‘Visions of the Future,’ 520.

<sup>370</sup> *All-Australian Trade Union Congress, Official Report*, 12: ‘A line upon which men can fight,’ as Victorian Labor Leader G.M. ‘Mick’ Prendergast said in its defence.

<sup>371</sup> ‘The Future of Labor,’ *Labor Call*, Melbourne, 30 June 1921, 6.

history,' they had 'the foundations [for] ...the actual building, HERE AND NOW of the Industrial State.'<sup>372</sup> So adamant was the Congress about the 'proper interpretation' of its agenda that it deemed any misreading by the ALP of 'fundamental principles' as grounds for reconvoation.<sup>373</sup> Before the final vote, Holloway reminded delegates that, if endorsed by the Congress and ratified by Labor, the statement of means was 'to be given effect by Federal political action.'<sup>374</sup> It passed almost unanimously, there being only four votes against.<sup>375</sup>

After the full socialisation program was passed, Willis declared, amid cheers, that the Congress had produced scheme which, if implemented, spelled the end of Australian capitalism.<sup>376</sup> As delegates returned to their home states, lectures and debates were held across Australia with large audiences gathering to hear what the new objective meant for the movement.<sup>377</sup> A special conference was held in Victoria to build support for the program.<sup>378</sup> No objective had hitherto received such attention – for none had ever been formulated with such a sweeping mandate, detailed means, and immediate political function.<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>372</sup> *All-Australian Trade Union Congress, Official Report*, 12; Ross, 'New Birth for the New Era,' 1.

<sup>373</sup> *Westralian Worker*, 'A Plan for the Transition,' 12 August 1921, 5.

<sup>374</sup> *All-Australian Trade Union Congress, Official Report*, 18.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.

<sup>377</sup> *The Socialist*, 'Lecture by R.S. Ross on the Union Conference,' 1; *Daily Standard*, 'Not Like Others,' 3; *Telegraph*, 'What Socialisation Means. Revolution Explained – Rowdy Trades Hall Meeting,' 21 October 1921, 11; *Worker*, 'Great Work Done. President Riordan Well Pleased. The Tactics of Tory Critics,' 30 June 1921, 19.

<sup>378</sup> Byrne, *Becoming John Curtin and James Scullin*, 150.

<sup>379</sup> It is important to note, however, that while conservatives said the objective represented dangerous extremism, critiques from liberals and the Labor Right focussed more on its lack of detail, arguing it was impossible to implement. See: *Sydney Mail*, 'A NEW SOCIAL ORDER – Exit the Capitalist: Enter the Socialistic Boss,' 9 November 1921, 33.

## **Part Three: Interpreting the Objective – The October Conference**

The socialisation objective was designed by the June AATUC and interpreted by the October Federal Labor Conference. In the preceding section, I argued that the AATUC differentiated socialisation from prior objectives by intending it to have real effects on Labor’s political life. In this section, I will explore more deeply what those intended effects were – and how they were interpreted by Labor politicians when voting for socialisation at the October Conference.

When the Federal Labor Conference convened on 10 October 1921, it did not believe it had assembled to debate a set of symbols. For detractors and supporters alike, the AATUC resolutions were approached as ‘a revolution of policy,’ a ‘complete transformation’ of what the party stood for.<sup>380</sup> Although the AATUC’s plans received many interpretations, there existed a broad recognition of its key imperatives. Few delegates would have denied, as historians so often have, that the program constituted a serious attempt to foist on Labor a fiercely assertive set of socialist political goals. Three such goals were identified by Henry Boote, and these will set the structure of my analysis: demonstrating Labor’s ‘perception of vital things,’ recalibrating its relationship to parliament, and re-unifying the labour movement.<sup>381</sup> It was with these ends in mind that the Labor executive interpreted, contested, and eventually ratified socialisation.

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<sup>380</sup> *Worker*, ‘The Congress and Its Constituents,’ Brisbane, 14 July 1921, 5; Boote, ‘What of the Brisbane Conference?’ 3.

<sup>381</sup> Henry Boote, ‘What of the Boote Conference?’ 3.

First, delegates at the October Conference saw the proposed objective as asking Labor to recognise several shifts in movement ideology since 1914.<sup>382</sup> Many delegates believed Labor needed to demonstrate it could ‘outgrow’ exhausted strategies and inapplicable assumptions.<sup>383</sup> The objective gave the party an opportunity to publicly revise its stance on three key questions: industrial organisation, ‘state capitalism,’ and the parliamentary system.

First, adopting the objective would act as an endorsement of industrial unionism. Delegates at the AATUC made this explicit: ‘Craft organisation could not exist side by side with the political policy [we] have now adopted.’<sup>384</sup> How to organise Australian workers had been an open question since at least 1908, when initiatives for ‘closer unionism’ first won considerable support at the Melbourne Trades Hall.<sup>385</sup> Through the popularisation of the OBU movement, and the arbitration system’s encouragement of amalgamation, industrial unionism became prominent in labour thought during wartime– winning the support of the AWU by 1921.<sup>386</sup> Industrial unionism was central to the schools of thought of from which the objective and its means of implementation derived.<sup>387</sup> Adopting socialisation would, it was believed, decisively resolve Labor’s position on how unions should be organised. Although moderates were able to remove its declaration of craft unions as ‘obsolete,’ the final statement of

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<sup>382</sup> Farrell, *International Socialism and Australian Labour*, 370; McKinlay, *A Documentary History of the Australian Labour Movement*, 91.

<sup>383</sup> *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 3.

<sup>384</sup> *All-Australian Trade Union Congress, Official Report*, 16.

<sup>385</sup> Ian Turner, ‘Review of Ian Bedford’s ‘the One Big Union, 1918-1923,’ *Labour History*, no. 5 (1963): 67.

<sup>386</sup> Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 229.

<sup>387</sup> Dixson, ‘Reformists and Revolutionaries,’ 13.

methods still unequivocally endorsed the industrial model.<sup>388</sup> The objective's adoption marked a now-dominant view that craft unionism had become unviable for realising workers' emancipation.

Adopting the objective was also interpreted as a way for Labor to incorporate widespread critiques of 'state capitalism.'<sup>389</sup> At the AATUC, delegates argued that state ownership had 'no practical value to the working class.' Conditions in state-run industries 'were an absolute disgrace' – exposing workers to unique threats as demonstrated by the 1917 Railway Strike.<sup>390</sup> 'Even from the Labor Party's ... point of view,' Willis noted, nationalisation 'had lamentably and miserably failed.'<sup>391</sup> Some historians have argued that 'people [in 1921] had no idea what socialisation meant.'<sup>392</sup> However, judging by the proceedings, the Brisbane delegates agreed, if they could agree on anything, that ratifying socialisation would demote state ownership in the party's theory of change. This was not contested by either faction.<sup>393</sup> Labor socialists went to considerable lengths to explain how socialisation, based on worker self-management, meaningfully diverged from bureaucratic state ownership: 'The difference between [them] ... is not merely one of spelling, or even of interpretation; socialisation sets up an entirely new principle, ... one destined to

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<sup>388</sup> *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 29. Resistance to the objective, perhaps unsurprisingly, was thus concentrated in craft organisations such as the Printers, Bookbinders, and Amalgamated Carpenters.

<sup>389</sup> Henry Boote, 'What of the Brisbane Conference?' 3.

<sup>390</sup> *All-Australian Trade Union Congress, Official Report*, 6.

<sup>391</sup> *All-Australian Trade Union Congress, Official Report*, 8.

<sup>392</sup> Rawson, *Labor in Vain?* 67; O'Farrell, 'Russian Revolution,' 194; McQueen. 'Glory without Power,' 360; Parker, 'The ALP and Parliamentary Government,' 50.

<sup>393</sup> Irving, 'Origins of the Labor Party,' 42-43.

change the whole structure of society.’<sup>394</sup> To commit to it would mean endorsing ‘the handing over of industry to the workers themselves’ – and it was rejected or advocated by delegates on this basis.<sup>395</sup> Many Conference moderates were not ‘wholly hostile’ to these ideas.<sup>396</sup> James Scullin argued that experience had made it undeniable ‘there must be self-government [by workers]’ in all enterprise.<sup>397</sup> To pass the objective would make clear that Labor was, in Boote’s words, ready to ‘leave state socialism far in the rear.’<sup>398</sup>

The objective was also interpreted as revising Labor’s approach to parliamentary politics. The AATUC endorsed a nuanced but specific position on this much contested question. Politicalism, a contemporary term, held that the movement should concentrate its efforts on capturing parliamentary representation.<sup>399</sup> The socialisation programme can be understood not as anti-political, but as proposing what we might call a *qualified politicalism*. As diverse as their influences were, its authors shared a key principle: that for labour politics to work in a parliamentary regime, it requires a highly-energised mass base and an empowered industrial movement to propel it forward. Without these, its ideals

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<sup>394</sup> Bell Grath, ‘New Path to Power,’ 1; *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 7; Socialisation was a war cry ‘in vogue among powerful industrial elements’ around the world – deliberately intended to evoke the factory takeovers happening in Europe at the time: Irving, ‘Origins of the Labor Party,’ 42; Edgar Ross, *Russian Revolution*, 31.

<sup>395</sup> *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 8. For context on the influence of self-management in industry in global labour politics after World War One, see: Carter Goodrich and R.H. Tawney, *Frontiers of Control, A Study of British Workshop Politics* (London: Harcourt Bruce and Howe, 1920).

<sup>396</sup> Byrne, ‘Visions of the Future,’ 519.

<sup>397</sup> Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 223.

<sup>398</sup> Boote, ‘What of the Brisbane Conference?’ 3.

<sup>399</sup> Childe, *How Labour Governs*, 87; Pre-war Labor’s patient optimism, and its supra-class, pragmatic identity, were deeply suited to the politicalist approach – an almost *a priori* assumption of the importance of winning parliamentary representation for the organised working class.

would only go unrealised, proceed glacially, or be rendered ‘mutilated and ... unrecognisable’ by an unaccountable leadership.<sup>400</sup> Qualified politicalism held that Labor governments could not be trusted to bear fruit without consistent pressure from below. This is expressed in the program’s endorsement of a Supreme Economic Council – a third legislative chamber ‘with the industrialists as its constituents,’ ‘that would really take the place of the political Parliament [today].’<sup>401</sup> The AATUC resolutions were not devised or interpreted as abandoning electoral politics.<sup>402</sup> This was an attempt to radicalise electoralism, strictly defining the conditions necessary for its success – namely, (a) the organisation of workers into industrial unions that would (b) control their parliamentary representatives in order to (c) constitutionally annex key functions of the state and (d) oversee the management of economy.<sup>403</sup> This was still parliamentary socialism, but it placed critical emphasis on bringing both the Labor politician and the institutions they inhabited to heel before an assertive industrial base. To paraphrase Willis: parliament will only be trusted once the workers have drawn its teeth.<sup>404</sup>

Finally, the October Conference interpreted the objective’s function as a device to secure labour unity.<sup>405</sup> This was perhaps the objective’s highest end – both in how it was designed in June and interpreted in October. Unity was, to

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<sup>400</sup> *All-Australian Trade Union Congress, Official Report*, 19.

<sup>401</sup> *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 7-9, 24-25.

<sup>402</sup> Perhaps in bad faith, some right-moderates did frame it in this way, however.

<sup>403</sup> RS Ross [Max Argent], ‘Making the New World in Australia,’ 1; *Westralian Worker* ‘Comments on the Big Congress, Delegates Emphasise Value of Decisions, Widespread Enthusiasm,’ 15 July 1921, 1.

<sup>404</sup> *All-Australian Trade Union Congress, Official Report*, 10.

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*, 9, 18, 17; McMullin, *The Light on the Hill*, 127.

quote Holloway, the year's 'appointed task.'<sup>406</sup> The socialisation program, a critical mass at both assemblies came to believe, offered a foundation around which the movement could unite. There had been a split in the movement, 'and the motion gave them to opportunity to heal it.' Conservative, labour, and communist commentators all highlighted this as one of the objective's central motivations.<sup>407</sup>

This view of the objective as aimed at 'the ensuring of some measure of solidity among the workers,' as Arthur Blakeley put it, was pivotal to its acceptance. Not only was there widespread enthusiasm for the ideas it contained, but long-standing extreme-left critics declared 'if the party incorporates this proposal in its platform I will become a member.'<sup>408</sup> The fact they saw in socialisation reason to re-join the party should direct us to its significance. Indeed, even dominant historiography has not denied the objective's unifying properties.<sup>409</sup> As Willis said, in response to a left-communist critic, 'Mr. Kilburn made the remark that it was only window-dressing. Still, we had to put something in the window.'<sup>410</sup> In adopting the objective, Labor was 'putting on

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<sup>406</sup> *Labor Call*, 'Unity A Great Achievement,' 6.

<sup>407</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 June 1921, 8; *International Communist*, 'The Labor Bleeders Congress - A.L.P. Endeavouring to get a Fresh Hold,' 25 June 1921, 1; *Northern Miner*, 8 October 1921, 3.

<sup>408</sup> *All-Australian Trade Union Congress, Official Report*, 6.

<sup>409</sup> Crisp, *The Federal Australian Labor Party*, 280; McQueen, 'Glory without Power,' 360; RS Parker, 'The ALP and Parliamentary Government,' 50; Healey, *The Story of the Labor Party*, 80-90.

<sup>410</sup> *All-Australian Trade Union Congress, Official Report*, 14.

the window' a clear signal: '[we are] prepared to go a long way to get back the industrial support [we] have lost,' as one delegate from South Australia put it.<sup>411</sup>

Figure 14: *Westralian Worker*, "The Assembly," 1 April 1921, 1.



<sup>411</sup> *Northern Miner*, 8 October 1921, 3; *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 18.

The socialisation objective passed with the ancillary ‘Blackburn interpretation,’ an addendum which specified that the ALP would not seek to abolish private ownership where it was being used ‘in a socially useful manner and without exploitation.’<sup>412</sup> The historiography has given the Blackburn interpretation a towering role in evaluating 1921 – seeing in it conclusive proof that that the objective existed only on the plane of idealism, a ‘dead letter’ from the point of conception.<sup>413</sup> This reading has overstated the interpretation’s significance and overlooked its contemporary motivations. An avid guild socialist, Maurice Blackburn was no right-leaning moderate – although a Victorian MP himself, he said he ‘believed in the parliamentary machine very little’ and that workers would ‘never get freedom’ other than by controlling the means of production. The AATUC program, in his view, went too far in some respects while not going far enough in others.<sup>414</sup> Though he was ‘for the spirit’ of some of its proposals, he found the management of industry by boards, rather than workers directly, to be ‘a ridiculous proposal.’<sup>415</sup> The program was incoherent, he argued, simultaneously too Bolshevick and too liberal: ‘pure collectivism’ which threatened Labor’s democratic identity, while also a ‘pure palliative’ which did not extend direct ownership to the workers. It was, he said, indistinguishable from what ‘intelligent capitalistic parties’ were proposing in Britain and the United States.<sup>416</sup> On the last day of proceedings, after several

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<sup>412</sup> David Day, *Maurice Blackburn: Champion of the People* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2019), 114.

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid.*; Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, 226; Byrne, ‘Visions of the future,’ 507.

<sup>414</sup> *Official Report of Proceedings of the Ninth Commonwealth Conference of the Australian Labor Party*, 8, 18.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*, 8, 23.

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid.*

delegates had already left, Blackburn proposed his famous interpretation which passed in a 15-13 vote. As it was not supported by a majority of registered delegates, it was excluded from the party constitution – designated a mere ‘interpretation,’ and not, as often erroneously termed, an amendment.

Blackburn’s intentions here were more nuanced than has often been appreciated. He sought to radicalise AATUC’s program in some aspects while reeling it in in others. In any case, the failure of the interpretation to be encoded in the party constitution meant it was given little significance by contemporaries. As Willis declared after the Brisbane Conference: ‘all that was asked for was adopted ... even if slight verbal changes have been made.’<sup>417</sup> It was only in retrospect, and in the context of wider political and historiographical agendas, that the Blackburn formula came to loom so large.

## **Conclusion**

The decision by the Federal Labor Conference to adopt the objective is historically significant because of the degree to which delegates understood the radical implications of what they were doing. This was the climax of a generational watershed in how the movement was navigating political reality. It expressed the heightened ambitions of the militant unions and their advocates to not only situate themselves at the centre of the ALP but the nation’s constitutional arrangements. It has been my aim in this chapter to clarify three important points necessary to rescuing 1921 from further misrecognition and

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<sup>417</sup> Ibid., 29; *Westralian Worker*, ‘Council of Action Statement,’ 25 Nov 1921, 2.

neglect: how high the aspirations of the June Congress stood, how sincere the unions were in devising them, and how clearly they were recognised by the ALP in ratifying the industrialists' program. The epochal aspirations of the AATUC, I have found, were not lost in translation – Labor was under no illusions as to what it was endorsing. In October 1921 the ALP enshrined in its constitution a deeply radical program which would abolish capitalism under any working definition. Perhaps most importantly for evaluating the significance of this: the party, in making this decision, knew exactly what it was doing.

# Conclusion

## Reflections on Labour Theory

In the weeks between June and October 1921, three decades of change caught up with the Australian Labor Party and its formal structures. In unexpectedly speaking together, the unions had forced the party to confront existential questions in its political thought: the viability of reformism, the constituency problem, industrial organising, competing loyalties to class and nation and the ultimate purpose of the working-class entering political institutions under capitalism to begin with. In this thesis, I have argued for the significance of Labor's decision to adopt the socialisation program. It was an affirmation by the movement's highest institutions of what had only recently been minority, and deeply radical, tendencies.

Various factors have limited the full appreciation of this event in the scholarship. The first of these is the inevitable effect of hindsight. With the knowledge of what came after it, scholars have struggled to see in the socialisation objective a worthy object of study. From the positionality of the future, it has seemed all too obvious that Australia would never become 'a socialist, industrial republic' in the early 1920s. The departing expectation, thus, has often been that the socialisation programme *could not* have meant what it said – that its grand designs were never expected to be realised, that the program must have served some other, subtextual, function: a symbol, a strategy, a snare. Hindsight, in effect, has encouraged a refusal to read the objective in its own words and its own time.

Problems of hindsight have been compounded by the tendency of broader historiographical debates to intrude unhelpfully in reconstructions of 1921. Without significant investigation in its own right, the socialisation objective has proven liable to misrecognition. When scholars have understood the ALP bureaucracy as a saboteur, the objective is framed as a victim of leadership conservatism. When they have regarded the ALP as only sentimentally socialist, the objective is read as a platitude. When they consider the party a trap for working-class resistance, the objective is held to be an accomplice. The very familiarity of these narratives has perhaps obscured an essential alienness to the subject at hand – a particularity necessary to appreciate its significance. The socialisation objective was a product of, and a response to, a deeply unusual political climate for which one strains to find plausible comparison in Australian history. Reliance on established narratives about Labor’s ‘perennial’ relationship to socialism, whatever these have been, has caused its distinct meaning to pass by unperceived.

The final obstacle to the objective’s recognition in scholarship is the outsized role it has given to the Blackburn interpretation. In what few studies of the 1921 objective we have, the Blackburn interpretation is given an inflated significance – implied to have negated any of its radical intentions or historic notabilities. As I have argued in Chapter 3, this has proven a distortion. Throughout this thesis I have sought to counterbalance all three of these pervasive reflexes in the dominant historiography, which together, have narrowed our recognition of the objective’s significance in its time, and any significance that it might have for Labor now.

In 1911, the German-Italian sociologist Robert Michels proposed ‘the iron law of oligarchy’ – an inevitable tendency in social-democratic organisations to produce an elite class of decision-makers.<sup>418</sup> Michels’ prognosis has been a great influence on political science and labour history – the movement’s fundamental dynamic often seen as a struggle between its working-class rank and file and its entrenched, bourgeoisified leadership. In this thesis, I have explored the process by which an idea comes to be enshrined in the labour movement’s highest entity. What I have uncovered is not a dichotomous contest between labour oligarchs and working-class masses, but a multiplicity of relationships through which ideas are produced, modified, and interpreted. The labour movement has its followers, and it has its elites, but it has also a great number of intermediaries between the two: journalists, organisers, intellectuals, strategists, officials, delegates, propagandists, activists, branch presidents and shopfloor stewards. Each of these represents discrete points on a network, keepers of particular gates. It is through their complex interactions with one another, and the mass of organised workers below, that an idea will come to penetrate the movement’s structures.

World War One tore into a gulf what was already a gap between the political outlook of many senior Labor politicians and the broader system of organisations which put them in office. It took years for this conceptual crisis to become apparent in the Labor machinery – but by 1921 it had become

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<sup>418</sup> Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (New York: Hearst's International Library Company, 1915).

undeniable, and the party faced an insurmountable pressure to redefine its reason to exist.

The pivotal role and number of intermediaries in the labour movement is derived, perhaps, from the objects of its attention: conditions of exploitation experienced by massive sections of society. There existed in 1921 a well of exploited people with, and sometimes without, the direct experience, but with the confidence, to themselves become intermediary actors in the movement's network— as writers, activists, organisers, or delegates. By virtue of its focus, the labour movement had the capacity to produce institutional structures which could resist oligarchy.

If the adoption of the socialisation objective has any significance for labour politics today, it is perhaps here that we find it. It is an example of the labour theory of democracy in action – a time when the movement absorbed and elevated multitudes of exploited people, its institutions pulsating with their demands. Many of the key organisations behind the socialisation objective have survived into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. By comparison with 1921 we may recognise not only their relative dormancy, but the possibility of an enduring, if latent, potential. The problem of exploitation has not been resolved, even if it has become most apparent in new sites. The persistence of such exploitation reminds us of the potential of the labour movement's embedded promise: to have organisation without oligarchy, power without corruption, a system of politics which induces exploited people to trace on the horizon the faint outlines of a transformed world – urging them to lunge ahead and pull it closer.

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