Labour Intellectuals in Australia: Modes, Traditions, Generations, Transformations*

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SUMMARY: The article begins with a discussion of labour intellectuals as knowledge producers in labour institutions, and of the labour public in which this distinctive kind of intellectual emerges, drawing on our previously published work. Next we construct a typology of three "modes" of the labour intellectual that were proclaimed and remade from the 1890s (the "movement" the "representational", and the "revolutionary"), and identify the broad historical processes (certification, polarization, and contraction) of the labour public. In a case study comparing the 1890s and 1920s we demonstrate how successive generations of labour intellectuals combined elements of these ideal types in different ways to develop traditions of intellectual work. The article concludes with a sketch of the labour public after the crisis of the 1920s. It considers the rise of the "militant" intellectual in the 1930s, the role of publicists, planners and experts in the 1940s, the skill of "generalship" in the polarized 1940s and 1950s, the failure to meet the challenge of the new social movements in the 1970s, and the decline of the agitational, movement-identified intellectual.

Australians have often been described as an anti-intellectual people – almost as often as the labour movement has itself been dubbed with this dreaded sobriquet. The Australian labour movement would therefore appear to be a doubly marginal location for the thinker – an anti-intellectual fragment of an anti-intellectual culture.

Appearances are not always deceptive. "Bookworms" and "long-haired university professors" have been frequent objects of ridicule within the Australian labour movement,[1] as have "profound philosophers" and "sociological students".[2] The intellectual has been depicted as snobbish,[3]

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1. Jack T. Lang, *I Remember* (Katoomba, 1980, 1st edn 1956), pp. 133–134.
2. "Ame Perdue", "A Plea for the Practical", *Ross's Monthly*, 3:35 (1 October 1918), p. 9.
3. S.A. Rosa, "'Intelligentsia' and Snobs", *Common Cause*, 5 June 1924, p. 6.

petty, self-seeking,[4] unreliable,[5] and unable to grasp "the importance of unionism".[6]

This is only one current of labour-movement debate, however. Many of those most critical of "intellectuals" have been most conscious of the value of the literary and the scholastic. Books have been described as "mental food", as "meaty", and as "stuffed with meat".[7] Knowledge has been sought as a means to "immensely increase" the "efficiency" of political struggle.[8] The Communist Party proudly claimed that its possession of "theory" made it a uniquely powerful institution.[9] The leaders of the Labor Party were known to lament their failure to develop their own breed of experts, and their consequent reliance on "competent and trained advisers who have been advisers to other governments".[10]

The labour movement has been replete with educators, readers, advocates, stirrers, brokers, editors, writers, painters, theorists, leaders, and thinkers. How should these varied members of the labour movement be understood? We argue that they are intellectuals of a special kind: "labour intellectuals".

LABOUR INTELLECTUALS: THEORY AND HISTORY

All members of the labour movement have the capacity to be intellectuals, but only some members fulfil this function. Labour intellectuals are distinguishable from other participants in the labour movement because they produce knowledge and manipulate symbols. They edit the journals; speak at the stumps; form the arguments; frame the legislation; plan the strategies.

They are distinguishable from other kinds of intellectuals because they work within the institutions of the labour movement. They are employed in trade unions, labour councils, socialist parties, radical bookstores, labour parties, newspapers, and working-class educational institutions. Together, these organizations form a specific arena of talk and argument –

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4. Frank Hardy to John Morrison, n.d. [1958], *John Morrison Papers*, National Library of Australia, Canberra [hereafter NLA], MS 4165, box 2, folder 13.
5. Stuart Macintyre, *The Reds: The Communist Party of Australia from Origins to Illegality* (Sydney, 1998), pp. 325, 387, 409.
6. Daniel De Leon, "The 'Intellectual'", *One Big Union Herald* (Melbourne), 1 March 1924.
7. D.C., "Readers' Opinions of 'Ross's'", *Ross's Monthly*, 1:5, 1 April 1916, p. 8; Tom Tunnecliffe, "Among the Books", *ibid.*, 5:49, 13 December 1919, p. 16; "Printer's Ink", *ibid.*, 5:56, 10 July 1920, p. 7.
8. "Left Book Club", *Australian Left News*, 1:2 (December 1938), p. 3.
9. "Elder", "Dialectics and Everyday Life", *Communist Review*, 15 (October 1942), p. 9.
10. John Curtin, "Federal Executive Meeting", 24 January 1944, Australian Labor Party Papers, NLA MS 4985, box 2, p. 6.

a "labour public".[11] The labour public is a space of withdrawal from wider society and organization to change it. It is where members of the movement discuss what they share in common, how to comprehend their collective situation, and how it might be changed. It is also a space where activists plan agitational activities that address, challenge, and convert members of outside groups and alternative networks.[12] The "labour public" is a space with its own, highly particular opportunities and tensions. It constitutes a milieu in which a distinctive kind of intellectual emerges.

In his recent book, *Between Culture and Politics*, Ron Eyerman has persuasively argued that the intellectual is "an emergent role constructed by actors out of cultural traditions in historical contexts".[13] To put it more simply, "the intellectual" is not an identity handed down in an unchanging fashion. Intellectuals create their own identities by drawing on the cultural materials passed on by those who went before, and by remaking them to meet new challenges and perform new tasks. They do this in a specific time and place.

The emergence of a labour public created a new context for intellectual work. Labour activists responded to this environment in a range of ways, however. Specifically, we have identified three "modes" of the labour intellectual that were proclaimed and remade from the 1890s. In the next section of the article we present these three modes as ideal types, and we explain their key dimensions and most important differences. In the following section we use these modes to explain how traditions of the labour intellectual were established in the 1890s and then reconstructed in the 1920s. This is a detailed case of the remaking of the labour intellectual that has gone on throughout the twentieth century. The article closes by moving back to the macro. It chronicles the broad transformations and reformulations of the labour intellectual over the last 100 years.

Before we begin, a few cautions. Our approach is distinctive. This is not a study of great ideas and great thinkers. Many of the intellectuals that we discuss wrote only derivative and occasional pamphlets, or proclaimed idiosyncratic and long-discarded theories. They were leaders as well as writers or artists. They possessed no higher morality. Neither is this a study of intellectuals and the class structure. We do not attempt to place

11. For a more detailed definition of "the labour intellectual", and its relationship to theories of the intellectual and the public sphere, see Terry Irving and Sean Scalmer, "Australian Labour Intellectuals: An Introduction", *Labour History*, 77 (1999), pp. 1–10.

12 This account of "withdrawal" and "agitation" is a characteristic of all "counter-publics", as argued by Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy", in Craig Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA, 1992), p. 124.

13. Ron Eyerman, *Between Culture and Politics: Intellectuals in Modern Society* (Cambridge, 1994), p. ix.

"intellectuals" in a special kind of sociological slot. We do not grant intellectuals a magical kind of agency in the process of historical change. Finally, this is not a study of the intellectual milieu. We do not aspire simply to describe the institutional world in which thinkers and artists moved. Our aims are wider. We use two distinctive concepts to organize our account: the "labour public", and the "labour intellectual". We hope to demonstrate that these concepts open a new window on labour-movement politics and culture in Australia. We further hope to encourage others to ponder their application in their own studies of labour, class, culture, and change.

THE THREE MODES OF THE LABOUR INTELLECTUAL

The labour public was not created as a smooth or homogeneous space. It was born of conflict with employers and government, and fractious argument over how the powerful should be opposed. Contention was the norm. Building up new institutions was a hard, conflictual enterprise. There were divisions over the roles of "intellectual" and "class" (and over how these very categories should best be understood). There were angry battles over how to win a new kind of world. Rival theorists clashed for supremacy. How can we make sense of this rowdy, energetic, messy world? We suggest the Weberian strategy of the "ideal type". From the 1890s, Australian labour intellectuals can be thought of as adhering to one of three ideal types. We call them: movement intellectuals, representational intellectuals, and revolutionary intellectuals. The three modes are sustained by comparison across five dimensions. These dimensions flow directly from our understanding of the labour intellectual. First, labour intellectuals are located in labour-movement organizations. Second, as intellectuals, they address an audience or constituency of labour-movement supporters. Third, this process of address involves the construction of a relationship. Fourth, a principal role emerges from their conception of the mission of the labour public, and their understanding of its relation to liberal society. Finally, a secondary role emerges as labour intellectuals create knowledge out of the experience of working-class life.

The *movement mode* is a tradition of voluntary submission to and identification with the labour movement as a force for social and moral improvement. Intellectual work is mainly carried out in the movement press and in educational efforts, some in organized classes, others informally on street corners. Somewhat apart from the cut and thrust of deal-making and number-crunching, such intellectuals are relatively detached from the careers of political parties and sects. They value unity among all those who are attracted to labour's banner, whether they are communist, socialist, one-big-unionist, or more timid reformist.

Just as the party runs second to the movement, so the "intellectual" role

Table 1. *Modes of intellectual labour*

	Movement	Representational	Revolutionary
Principal location	Press; education	Labor Party; trade unions; government	Revolutionary parties
Constituency	"Movement"	Party members; union members; electorate	Class
Relationship with constituency	Identification	Representation	Leadership
Primary task	Awakening	Balancing	Disciplining
Secondary task: experience-knowledge transformations	Articulation (voice as a method of moral action)	Translation (into liberal discourse for action in the dominant public)	Reinterpretation (for revolutionary action)

is itself downplayed. Because intellectuals in this mode idealize oneness with the movement, they are careful not to privilege tasks usually defined as "intellectual" (for example, writing) over other tasks (for example, leading strikes). Editors such as Bob Ross often performed the role of coordinator, encouraging others to move to politically neglected areas, passing on recent arguments, and publicizing meetings.[14] Even when they do perform the tasks of writing and speaking, such activists do not see themselves as remakers of the working class. On the contrary, they are simply ciphers for the movement's true nature, as in Henry Boote's novel, *The Human Ladder*: "It was the first time he had ever spoken in public, but the words came from his lips without effort; he did not seem be speaking himself at all, but to be the instrument of some dominating spirit, stronger than his own will."[15] According to this view, the working class does not need to be remade. Workers are already strong. They need only understanding to grasp their own liberation.[16] Poets, journalists, and lecturers give voice to the experience of wage-earners, in the belief that intrinsic to them are virtues of cooperation, solidarity, and productivity. Once these values are fully expressed, the workers will then regenerate a corrupt society. The principal role of the intellectual is simply to awaken the movement to this potential for social reconstruction.

14. For example, note Percy J. Trainer's response to Bob Ross's earlier entreaties: Letter 7 October 1918, Australian Archives [hereafter AA], Victoria, CIS 95/1, Intelligence Reports, file 169/49–55.

15. Henry Boote, *The Human Ladder: An Australian Story of Our Own Time* (Sydney, 1920), p. 24.

16. *Idem*, "A New Power has Arisen", in n.a., *Fifty Years of Labour* (Sydney, 1940), p. 47.

The *representational mode* arises from the institution-building aspect of the movement, the consequent need to safeguard institutional needs, and to mediate interests between the movement and the organizations of the state. Intellectuals in this tradition are found in the trade unions and their peak bodies, in the Labor Party, and in state and quasi-state organizations (parliaments, local government councils, judicial and regulatory bodies). Their constituency is not so much "the movement" (to which they nonetheless appeal for legitimacy from time to time) but the members of the party or union branch, or the labour voters, whom they seek to represent. As representatives they occupy a different position to ordinary members; a separation occurs between the intellectual and the movement. Nonetheless, their principal role is to confirm the existence of the movement in its own terms and as a constituent of civil society. They deploy skills such as bargaining and negotiation, and they provide the movement with expert knowledge about politics. This is a knowledge of *Realpolitik*. It has no time for the philosophy school.[17] It is a "practical knowledge" of how to draft legislation;[18] how to explain the workings of Arbitration and Factory Acts;[19] and how to safeguard the numbers in the quest for power.

Standing somewhat apart from the common member of the movement, intellectuals in this tradition must strike a balance between the demands of the liberal state and the hopes of the rank and file. The mediating intellectual walks a fine line. As V.G. Childe famously argued, sometimes the balance struck is a kind of betrayal, as the new representatives learn of the delights of office: the ministerial motor car, the gold pass for the state's railways, and so on.[20] But if "ratting" is always possible, the role of the representative has remained important since the 1890s. Such intellectuals remake working-class experience, and translate it into a claim for recognition in the wider polity. They hammer out compromises and "sell them" to their members. Buttressed by their access to powerful institutions, such intellectuals have become increasingly important over the career of the labour movement.

The *revolutionary mode* takes the separation of the intellectual from the movement a step further. Revolutionary intellectuals imagine themselves possessed of a special knowledge: about human nature, politics, language, and history, that is essential if the working class is to realize its potential to

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17. Lang, *I Remember*, p. 134.
18. A good early example is the deputation that waited upon the premier in pursuit of the eight-hour day. See "Minutes", 8-Hour Day Committee, 26th Meeting, 20 September 1899, Victorian Trades Hall Council, 1/7/1–1/7/3, Melbourne University Archives.
19. An early example is a report of an address to the Ballarat Eight Hours Dinner, in which the Factory Acts legislation was explained. See *ibid*., 21st meeting, 28 June 1899.
20. V.G. Childe, *How Labour Governs: A Study of Workers' Representation in Australia* (Melbourne, 1964 , 1st edn 1923), p. 31.

remake society. Although revolutionary intellectuals may be found in the trade unions and the Labor Party, their claim to special knowledge leads them to locate themselves in special, revolutionary organizations, to publish revolutionary journals, and to embrace revolutionary forms of struggle.

Their constituency is the working class. However, that class is understood to be deficient in a number of quite fundamental ways. It is in spiritual bondage to bourgeois culture.[21] It currently lacks "intellectual penetration".[22] It needs to be *led through organization* by an outside, revolutionary force. The Communist Party of Australia thought of itself as the organizational general staff of the working class.[23] It provided the "organizational guarantee" that correct policy would be pursued.[24] In the course of revolutionary organization, working-class experience can be reinterpreted. It is in this process that political change becomes possible.

The setting in which labour intellectuals created their traditions of work was the labour movement's public. At the broadest level, the labour public was marked by three historical processes:

- *Certification*: recognition by the state. This provided parts of the labour movement with institutional security. It thereby provided opportunities for intellectual work within the representational mode, for example in the state-based systems of arbitration, and in the parliamentary politics of the Labor Party.
- *Polarization*: increasing space between political opponents. This fostered greater competition among labour-movement institutions and intellectuals. It sharpened the differences between the representational and revolutionary modes of work and undercut the career of the "movement intellectual", who emphasized pan-institutional unity.
- *Contraction*: the shrinking of the labour movement and of its public. This promised to undermine the capacity for any kind of labour intellectual work. Its effect was historically selective, however. Movement intellectuals, mostly employed in the press and education, were the first to face stress. Revolutionary intellectuals survived for longer in small, enclosed institutions. Representative intellectuals gained continued support from the institutions of the bourgeois public sphere. But denied the support of a vibrant labour public and without the presence of movement and revolutionary intellectuals, the representative mode of intellectual work faced transformation, too.

These broad historical processes did not unfold in a smooth or sequential fashion. On the contrary, they interacted in a messy and uneven way –

21. Valerian Poliansky, "The Banner of the 'Prolet-Cult'", *The Plebs*, 13:1 (1921), p. 3.
22. n.a., "Human Factor", *The Communist*, 1 July 1921.
23. n.a., *Handbook for Tutors* (Sydney, 1944), p. 4.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

variously promoted or countered by social and economic changes, and by the rise and fall of individual careers. The increasing dominance of the representational tradition was by no means assured.

FROM IDEAL TYPE TO HISTORICAL RECOMBINATION: THE GENERATIONS OF 1890 AND 1920

In practice, labour intellectuals have not adhered strictly to one of the three modes. On the contrary, each generation of intellectuals has drawn upon these modes in different ways – combining them as traditions and improvising new tasks in the quest for political efficacy. This remaking of the labour intellectual can be demonstrated most clearly by comparing the generation of the 1890s, when the labour public emerged, and that of 1920, when its discursive underpinning was in crisis.

The first labour public

The labour public emerged in the mobilizing moment of working-class formation.[25] At the end of the 1880s and the beginning of the 1890s, workers were swept up by a wave of organizing, both local and intercolonial. There were bitter and unsuccessful strikes in the 1890s to defend the right to organize. Then, as the impact of economic depression undercut these defensive struggles, the labour movement fought within its own ranks to create a political force that was both controlled by the movement and capable of claiming the right to rule on its behalf. This first labour public was, therefore, dominated by discussions of class and democracy, and the first labour intellectuals were agitators and translators of labour's claims for the wider public. Movement intellectuals were pre-eminent. Expressing the catch-cries of the time, the socialist historian, story-writer and journalist, William Astley, told the workers: "organize, organize", and "be true to yourselves".[26]

The institutions of the labour movement provided resources for a labour public and the space within which an audience could be constructed. By the 1880s the trade unions, especially the "new unions" of the unskilled and the trades and labour councils in the cities and main towns, were comfortable discussing political as well as industrial issues. In fact, the Sydney Trades and Labor Council, covering about two-thirds of Sydney's

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25. There is a very large literature on the formation of the Australian working-class and labour movement, much of it not recent. We draw particularly on Ray Markey, *The Making of the Labor Party in New South Wales 1880–1900* (Sydney, 1988), and G. Patmore, *Australian Labour History* (Melbourne, 1991).

26. Terry Irving, "William Astley (Price Warung) and the Invention of the Labor Party", in Bradley Bowden and John Kellett (eds), *Transforming Labour: Work, Workers, Struggle and Change* (Brisbane, 2003), pp. 177–183.

unionists, provided (in Ray Markey's words) a class leadership of an unprecedented kind during the maritime strike of 1890.[27]

At a national level a series of intercolonial conferences led in 1891 to the project of an Australian Labor Federation. Participating alongside unionists in these discussions was an assortment of radicals from the socialist and single tax leagues, democratic clubs, secularist associations, and protest organizations for the unemployed that also multiplied in these years.[28] Intellectuals drawn from these organizations were crucially involved as writers and editors of labour and radical newspapers, where much of this discussion took place. More than eighty were published for the first time in the decade beginning in 1888.[29] The labour press was an important vehicle for widening the audience for labour ideas, as were the constituency organizations of the labour parties that emerged with such startling speed and electoral success in four colonies in 1891–1892.

If the labour values of solidarity and cooperation were the fruit of class-based experience, their meaning was the product of intellectual work. Thus, the slogans reproduced by Astley ("organize", and "be true to yourselves") distilled for workers the idea of class as something actively political and counter-hegemonic. In fact, labour intellectuals were involved in "dialogical contests", as Marc Steinberg has called them, in which the dominant, bourgeois meaning of political terms was challenged and remade.[30] "The people" came to be understood as "the workers", or the "wage-earners"; "manly independence" became "manly defence of labour's rights"; and "justice" became the distributive concept of "fairness". By far the most important example of labour's reconstructions, however, was the movement's new understanding of democracy. Famously referred to as "labour's novel theory of democracy" by Gordon Childe (a labour intellectual of the next generation) it changed the idea of parliament in bourgeois democracy from a chamber of representatives to a chamber of delegates. In liberal theory the basis of parliamentary representation was the distribution of equal citizens in constituencies of similar size; in labour's theory the basis became the movement itself, organized by constituencies to control its parliamentary delegates.[31]

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27. Markey, *Making of the Labor Party*, p. 157.
28. Bruce Scates, *A New Australia: Citizenship, Radicalism and the First Republic* (Melbourne, 1997).
29. Figures calculated from H.J. Gibbney (compiler), *Labour in Print: A Guide to the People Who Created a Labor Press in Australia between 1850 and 1939* (Canberra, 1975).
30. Marc Steinberg, *Fighting Words: Working Class Formation, Collective Action, and Discourse in Early Nineteenth-Century England* (Ithaca, NY, 1999), pp. 1–22.
31. Childe, *How Labour Governs*, chs 2 and 3; for an earlier account see "Price Warung" (William Astley), *Labor in Politics – The Conference of November 1893:A Criticism and an Appeal* (Sydney, 1893).

As an exercise in mobilization and constructing a new political constituency, the formation of the labour public required two main agitational skills: writing/editing, and speaking. Labour papers at this time fell fairly evenly into three categories, those associated with trade unions or labour councils, those that arose from political or ideological commitment, and those that combined a regional focus with labour politics. The categories sometimes overlapped, and labour journalists moved easily from one arm of the press to another, developing their skills and spreading labour's message, especially in country towns. For William Lane, whose reputation was established while editing *The Boomerang* and *The Worker* in Brisbane, amateur journalists, no matter how willing, would not serve the purpose. Congratulating William Astley when he became editor of *The Australian Workman* in Sydney, Lane wrote that, "it is always a pleasing thing to see genuine pressmen going into labour papers, because it is only by meeting skill by skill that the influence of the capitalistic press can be overcome". Journalists and editors had a special status in the movement, because as Lane insisted theirs was a craft based on technical knowledge and "versatility of the pen".[32]

In general, speaking was a more democratic form of agitation than writing. The training of speakers was, however, taken seriously by trade unions and political associations, for there were many public spaces to be claimed for labour. Some were claimed as arenas for the right of free speech (the Yarra Bank in Melbourne, the Domain in Sydney, etc.), others as sites where working men and women could be attracted from their homes or pubs, usually on a Saturday evening. During campaigns the speakers would often lead the crowd on a march to a site symbolic of bourgeois power, such as the parliament building or town hall. Speaking in public places was inherently contentious, and by the early twentieth century governments were regulating open-air agitation. Negotiation about where and when labour agitation would be permitted became another task required of labour intellectuals.[33]

Movement democracy: the representational tradition emerges

The formation of the labour moment was the historic moment that left its mark on the first generation of labour intellectuals. However, their experience was not simply that of the men and women facing hostile employers, governments, and public opinion in the "great strikes of the 1890s". Producing knowledge for and about the movement placed labour

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32. Willam Lane to "My Dear Price Warung", 11 February 1893, Astley Papers, Mitchell Library (Sydney), [hereafter ML], MSS 250, box 1.
33. Terry Irving and Lucy Taksa (compilers), *Places, Protests and Memorabilia: The Labour Heritage Register of New South Wales* (Sydney, 2003), pp. 72–73, and throughout the database on the Sydney labour precinct.

intellectuals in a field of struggle, but it was an intellectual field formed by the dynamics of the movement. The first line of tension emerged from the structure of the movement as it adjusted to the creation of a political party. How would the relationship between unions and party organizations be formulated and managed? The second emerged from the structure of the state that the movement sought to enter. When labour candidates were elected, how should they relate to existing party groupings in parliament? And should they enter governing coalitions? The third emerged from the structure of the public sphere. Should the labour press concentrate on building a counter-public for labour, or should it reach outside the movement for support? How should the movement frame its collectivism to appeal to a community with a highly developed sense of individualism?

In the early 1890s there was a struggle to ensure that the men elected to represent labour would carry out the will of the movement, as decided by the annual conference of the extraparliamentary party. Specifically this was to be achieved by subjecting the parliamentarians to the discipline of the pledge and caucus. It was made perfectly clear by proponents of this disciplinary system that labour politicians did not represent an interest – union members – but the "mass", or "the democracy", organized through the movement, which therefore had a moral right to expect compliance from its "delegates" in parliament.[34] Intending to shift the balance to the extraparliamentary organization, it was men from the electoral leagues and the radical fringe of the movement – such as Astley, Lane, William Holman, and William Morris Hughes – who fought for this outcome. Trade-union leaders who could not adapt were told to leave the movement,[35] but the populist leaders of the rural Australian Shearers' (later Workers') Union, seeing an opportunity to advance their control of the movement, readily embraced the new machinery of movement democracy.[36]

In the process of establishing "labour's novel theory of democracy", the movement tradition of the labour intellectual began to retreat, and the role of agitator was subsumed in a new role for the labour intellectual. Representational tasks increased, and labour intellectuals increasingly took up the identity of a *balancer* or *mediator* of forces, and *translator* of ideas. Labour intellectuals had to get down from "the stump", and leave the newspaper office in order to perfect new skills, such as leading deputations to politicians, explaining legislation in union meetings, and engaging in the parliamentary process of making legislation. The minority position of the labour parties in the colonial parliaments led to the adoption of the tactic of "support in return for concessions", which was a major impetus to the

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34. For a discussion of this struggle see Irving, "William Astley".
35. Astley, *Labor in Politics*.
36. Markey, *Making of the Labor Party*, ch. 6.

development of the balancing/mediating role. However, the technical and specific aspects of parliamentary negotiations had no legitimacy in themselves. On the contrary, they were understood as intrinsic to the quest for labour's advance. In a lecture in 1896, William Morris Hughes vigorously defended the skills of parliamentary work as an integral part of the movement's purpose, and as an important way to achieve reforms for the working class.[37]

But if mediation worked between labour and the bourgeois state, it was also required between the unions and the party. When unionism was weak, as it was at the end of the 1890s, labour intellectuals had to look for ways to strengthen it, even to the point of intervening in the industrial arena to form or re-form unions.[38] An iconic moment of mediation occurred when Hughes re-formed the Sydney Wharf Labourers' Union in 1899. On stage was the conservative premier, in the body of the hall the waterside workers who dominated Hughes's electorate, and in between, at the podium, was Hughes, demonstrating to the workers his power over the Lyne government, and to the government his power over the workers on the waterfront.[39]

The translating aspect of the new role was applied to the task of public relations, in its precise sense of reassuring the bourgeois public about the formation of a labour public, and the labour public about the need to influence the dominant public. In the relationships between the labour and the dominant public there was necessarily suspicion on one side and fear on the other, and labour intellectuals had to negotiate this stand-off if the movement was to succeed. Labour parliamentarians who made any impression were, of course, able to do this. Hughes, once again, was exemplary in this role. Between 1907 and 1911 he wrote a weekly column for the *Daily Telegraph*, which was intended, according to his biographer, to expose labour doctrine and policies to the bourgeoisie as "reasonable, natural, and indeed inevitable".[40] In these columns, which were so popular that the Worker Trustees reprinted them as *The Case for Labor* in 1910,[41] Hughes ridiculed other socialists who advocated the general strike, or revolution, or the introduction of socialism by a legislative declaration. Reiterating a point that he had first expressed in 1891, he insisted that

37. Cited in L.F. Fitzhardinge, *William Morris Hughes – A Political Biography, vol. 1: "That Fiery Particle" 1862–1914* (Sydney, 1964), pp. 50, 60.
38. Examples of unions re-formed by intellectuals at this time include the Sydney Wharf Labourers' (by Hughes), the Newcastle Wharf Labourers' (socialist H.E. Holland), the Tailoresses' Union (Holland?), Storemen's Union (Hughes), Trolley, Drayman and Carters' Union (Hughes), and the Waterside Workers' Federation, the first national committee of which contained only one person connected with the industry and only one non-politician! See Fitzhardinge, *William Morris Hughes*, pp. 108–109.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 207.
41. W.M. Hughes, *The Case for Labor* (Sydney, 1970, first publ. 1910).

socialism would not be built on coercion but on persuasion.[42] All reform had to be achieved "along constitutional lines by educating the people".[43] Hughes's skill as translator was to reveal the capacity of the idea of state socialism to reassure the bourgeoisie without weakening its pulse in the movement.

1920: crisis

The modes of the labour intellectual were closely connected with the health of the labour public and its successful political mobilization. By 1920, the faith of Hughes and others was facing a kind of stress. Both the strategy of labour politics and the intellectuals that formulated it were embroiled in a crisis. In the section below, we consider, first, the dimensions of the crisis, and second, its implications for the history of the labour intellectual.

In 1920, the editor of *The Worker*, Henry Boote, published a novel, *The Human Ladder: An Australian Story of Our Time*, whose central character, Ezra Hardy, uses the labour movement to climb out of his class. In Boote's words, "This is the story of a Labor renegade; of one who belonged to the working class and was false to the working class."[44] Hardy is depicted as an 1890s generation labour intellectual, comfortable in both the movement and the representative traditions. But eventually he came "to love expression rather than the thing expressed", and his passage from idealism to betrayal began.[45]

In fact, by 1920 the culture of the labour movement no longer thought of defection from its ranks as exceptional. In Gordon Childe's *How Labour Governs* (1923) the index has an entry for "Rats. *See* Treachery".[46] Among the "rats" were very prominent Labor leaders indeed, including the Prime Minister, W.M. Hughes, and the Premier of New South Wales, W.A. Holman, who were expelled in 1916 for supporting compulsory overseas military service.[47] The split over conscription caused the largest exodus of members from the party, but there were many less dramatic defections and expulsions. William Kidston resigned from the Queensland party over the socialist objective of 1905. George Beeby, a New South Wales parliamentarian, resigned in 1912 over Labor's lack of constitutional radicalism. William Higgs, MHR from Queensland, was expelled in 1919 for opposing the Federal Conference decision on Hughes's constitutional proposals. On

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42. *Democrat*, 5 December 1891.
43. Hughes, *The Case for Labor*, p. 99.
44. Boote, *The Human Ladder*, p. 125.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
46. Childe, *How Labour Governs*, p. 192.
47. George Black was also expelled at this time, as was New South Wales's first Labor Premier, James McGowen.

the Left of the party there were also "rats". The One-Big-Union leaders were expelled from the New South Wales party when they attempted to impose their model of unionism on the movement in 1919.

These expulsions were not simply moral lapses. Democracy as practised in the movement was obviously flawed. It produced conformity and mediocrity in its loyal representatives but repelled or expelled those who resented its discipline. Moreover, as unions and Labor governments after 1910 squared off to confront each other, there were manifestly two wings where there should have been a single movement.

Gordon Childe, who had returned from Oxford in 1917 a socialist and a pacifist, was well placed to observe and interpret these signs of breakdown. He was forced to seek employment through the movement after being victimized for his politics on three occasions by university officials in Sydney and Brisbane. *How Labour Governs – A Study of Workers' Representation in Australia*, as its title suggests, was expressly concerned with Labor's approach to representative government and its failures. Childe showed in embarrassing detail how "the middle-class atmosphere of Parliament" corrupted the working-class representative, how ministers could subvert caucus by judiciously bestowing favours, and how a cabinet could stare down a recalcitrant caucus by threatening to dissolve the house and force an election. In addition, the very possibility of getting into parliament began to undermine the power of the extra-parliamentary executive to speak for the movement, a fact Childe summarized in the index to his book as "abusing politicians as a way of securing seats". Labour's system of control from below, Childe concluded, was necessary, and it had maintained the party's identity, but its other effects were pernicious. It left workers "enervated by spoon-feeding from labour ministries", and Labor governments under no pressure to act either for workers as a class or for the movement's ideal – the socialist state.[48]

The crisis was felt on four fronts. First, there was electoral retreat. The conscription split left only Queensland with a Labor government, and in the other states the party struggled to win office until the mid-1920s. In the federal sphere, Labor lost five elections in a row. Second, the trade-union movement was divided. Unionists were disillusioned that the Labor governments formed since 1910 had not created jobs, improved working conditions, and controlled prices. Strikes increased, culminating in the General Strike of 1917, which, after its defeat, left the union movement "crippled", and the working class in New South Wales experiencing "a period of distress and starvation that had not been paralleled in their generation".[49] In this situation, many unionists turned away from arbitration and small exclusive unions. Amalgamation of unions, leading

48. Childe, *How Labour Governs*,, p. 55, and chs 2 and 3.
49. *Ibid.*, pp. 160–161.

(so the radicals hoped) to "one big union", was advocated by the proponents of the "newer unionism". Significantly, they spoke of extending democracy to the workplace, especially in the state enterprises. Third, there were seriously argued challenges to state socialism, in the form of guild socialism, syndicalism, and Leninism. Out of this ferment the Communist Party of Australia was formed in 1920. Fourth, in this situation of disarray Labor's opponents saw an opportunity. The use of wartime censorship and political repression against the Left, the mobilization of strike-breakers in the 1917 General Strike, and the organized terror of the "Red Flag" riots after the war, all indicated that ruling class circles were taking the offensive. Australia had become a "divided society" again.[50]

What did this crisis mean for labour intellectuals? First, it produced a new self-awareness about the intellectual role.

Labour intellectuals and the masses

For as long as labour's "novel theory of democracy" was widely accepted, labour intellectuals had no reason to agonize about their role. They assumed that the movement articulated the interest of the workers, and that its "intellectual" representatives acted as delegates. The crisis that the second generation experienced forced them to face some awkward truths about their relationship to the labour movement. Confronted by the movement's structural and ideological divisions, it was obvious that the production of knowledge in the movement was crucial, and that the labour intellectuals who produced knowledge about the working class and its world were by that very process distant from the working class. Should this be acknowledged, or suppressed? And how should labour intellectuals, their ranks now supplemented by middle-class, university-trained recruits – members of the traditional intelligentsia – understand the role of intellectuals generally?

In 1920, the labour newspaper in Broken Hill, *The Barrier Daily Truth*, asked the question: "Who are the working class?" The answer revealed much about the development of intellectual–worker relations. One view was put by George Sorel, who had written that: "intellectuals are a select body, which has adopted the mission of thinking for the thoughtless masses". But how could "intellectuals" think for others, when they were not workers themselves? *The Barrier Daily* defended Sorel against the charge that, as a philosopher and intellectual, he could have no conception of the working class. After all, the paper asserted, the socialist movement was itself "an intellectual and moral elite".

50. The phrase is borrowed from Marilyn Lake, *The Divided Society: Tasmania During World War I* (Melbourne, 1975).

But here, again, a difficulty arose. How could the proletariat be certain that socialist intellectuals, especially those trained by the bourgeoisie, were not serving their *own* interests instead of those of the workers? In fact, the *Daily* had no satisfactory answer. It simply postulated a kind of conversion effect: those who "passed over" into the movement would be true to its aims. This had been true of Marx, Engels, Lafargue, Luxemburg, De Leon, Liebknecht, Lenin, Kropotkin, Bakunin, and Arturo Giovanniti. It would remain so.[51] But such arguments could not satisfy for long. From at least 1910, a new kind of self-consciousness was evident among labour intellectuals, as they attempted to come to grips with the emerging crisis. It was in this year that R.S. Ross wrote a long, two-part review of Gustave Le Bon's *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*.[52]

Ross's engagement with the text was shaped by his own concern with the role of labour intellectuals. Certainly, as a fervent socialist, Ross was repelled by the elitist politics of Le Bon and his proud affiliation with the ruling class. At the same time, though, Ross remained fascinated by the book's insights into democratic politics. As he read on, Ross became uncomfortably aware that some of his fellow labour intellectuals were themselves manipulators of crowds, especially during elections. Should this be condemned? Once reaction had organized the mob, it was too late to hope for the transformative force of education. Moreover, although such education required labour intellectuals to identify with the people, the truth was that they were set apart because of their desire to impart knowledge. Perhaps labour intellectuals had more in common with the French antidemocrat than they would like. Sadly, Ross concluded, "one reads [Le Bon] as one would read a character sketch of oneself".

Ross was by no means alone. Labour intellectuals picked guiltily at the issue of their relationship to the workers over the 1920s. This was especially so whenever conservatives made a mass appeal to fear, and the labour movement showed itself to be less radical and adventurous than its leading activists had hoped. The story was the same in 1917, during the anticonscription campaign; in 1919, during the Red Flag riots; in 1923, during the police strike in Melbourne; and in the 1925 election campaign when S.M. Bruce, the conservative prime minister, exploited a widespread fear of communism.

One response to their ambivalence was simply to reject the workers, and to cry out at the failures of the class. In 1919, Gordon Childe lamented that the electorate was afraid of socialism – nothing but "bone-headed".[53] In the same year, Leon Villiers – the Melbourne tramways union leader and

51. "Who Are the Working Class?", *Barrier Daily Truth*, 2 September 1920, p. 3.
52. *Barrier Daily Truth*, 15 and 19 March, 1910.
53. V.G. Childe to Reg Byrne, 14 March 1919, Meanjin Archives, in University of Melbourne Archives.

labour poet – whinged about the capitalist aspirations of the backward workers, and celebrated the labour agitator as an intellectual:

> *With voice subjective to a power intense,*
> *And mind a dictionary of teeming sense,*
> *He cavilled at a stolid, dull content,*
> *And told the gospel of enlightenment.*[54]

However, it was communists who were perhaps most associated with this view. Certainly, many communist intellectuals in private expressed a genuine disdain for the masses. Earsman for example, in a letter to a Melbourne comrade, described his agitation in Sydney during the iron trades lockout of 1920 as "doping the slave" in order to produce a seizure of the workshops.[55] His partner, Christian Jollie Smith, also had no time for "the Australian wage-plug, whether Communist or not. He likes lots of tuppeny hapenny facks about his petty reformism. And its damn hard to get anything else in to his head."[56]

If the workers were really so backward, it followed that intellectuals needed to take up a more directive, less supportive role. Perhaps a new kind of political intervention was required – a revolutionary intervention.

From the masses to the proletariat: the Communist Party and the revolutionary mode

The establishment of the Communist Party involved the clearest moment in the promulgation of the revolutionary mode of intellectual work. While revolutionaries had previously existed, this perspective had never before been expressed with such clarity and power. The new party, as *The Communist* stated in 1921, believed that the "principles upon which the world's proletariat base their action were not formulated by the average worker". As a result, leading the workers "could only be done by those workers who were endowed with a greater power of intellectual penetration than the average worker possessed".[57]

"Those workers" composed the Communist Party. In fact, in a descriptive sense, the Communist Party in the early 1920s might almost be said to be a party of labour intellectuals. Of the twenty-six attending the inaugural conference in 1920, the most prominent were intellectuals. Three were editors of labour journals and four were frequent contributors, and another four had published pamphlets. Two were university graduates.

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54. L.J. Villiers, *The War on the Workers* (Melbourne, 1919).
55. W.P. Earsman to Secretary, Victorian Labor College, 11 September 1920, University of Melbourne Archives, Victorian Labour College Papers, folder marked 1920.
56. Christian Jollie Smith to Esmonde Higgins, 2 May 1922, ML, E.M. Higgins papers, MSS 740/11/169.
57. "The Human Factor", *The Communist*, 1 July 1921.

There is no doubt too that the Communist Party saw its role, especially in these years of diminishing militancy, as intellectual. This appears not only in its stress on educating its members and on the written and spoken word, but also in its approach to the rest of the labour movement. The role of the Communist Party in "the struggle" was to win others towards the revolutionary road, and to isolate those who were cowards or traitors to the working class. How were they to do this?

At times, it was almost as if the struggle was between teams of intellectuals. The power of criticism was paramount. Because communists believed that the "system of capitalism does not rest on force alone; [but] is deeply rooted in the ideology of the masses", nonrevolutionary labour intellectuals had to be converted, and bourgeois intellectuals repelled. It was in the battle of ideas that the class war would be won. Thus, the role of the Communist Party was to be one of ceaseless criticism.[58]

However, the path of revolution was not the only response to crisis. While the Communist Party became an important new presence, the dominant mode of intellectual work remained the representational.

Reshaping the representational tradition of the labour intellectual

In many ways, the crisis of 1920 offered greater opportunities for representational work. The movement was divided. At the same time, the society was divided, as conflict between militant trade unionists and an aggressive ruling class reached a higher peak. As a result, the skills of mediation were more necessary than ever. With the aim of reconciliation in the movement and wider society, labour intellectuals found themselves "representing" the interests of the movement as a whole while they interpreted the ideas of each wing of the movement to the other, and of each contending class in society to the other.

Historical examples are multiple: at the height of the fight between the industrialists and the parliamentarians, Childe lobbied both sides to avoid a split in the movement by arguing that both wings had separate but complementary roles.[59] He attributed the Queensland government's defence of freedom of speech and the press to the work of men like his friend T.C. Witherby, the director of tutorial classes at the University of Queensland, who "was able freely to state the views of the workers to the professional classes".[60] Looking to emphasize the importance of this role, Childe sometimes felt that it had not been fully recognized. He mourned

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58. *Ibid*; also *The Australian Communist*, 11 March and 12 August 1921.
59. Childe to Reg Byrne, 14 March 1919, Meanjin Archives, University of Melbourne. Childe had also joined trade-union officials in deputations to the governments of NSW and Queensland about the rights of "political" prisoners.
60. Childe, speech to the WEA conference, Brisbane, *Daily Standard*, 25 March 1919.

the want of "publicists like the Webbs or the Coles to mediate between bourgeois and proletarian thought" in Australia.[61]

Childe need not have been so pessimistic, though. The mediating role, and its reconciling purpose, was also projected in proposals at this time for joint consultation between workers and employers. Modelled on the British Whitley Councils, they were set up in only a small number of industries, including the NSW Railways, because union militants condemned them as a management ruse to sideline unions.[62] However, when New South Wales Labor was re-elected in 1920, workers' participation in the management of state enterprises was part of its program. Although its status as a minority government meant nothing eventuated, the support from the rank and file and from labour intellectuals was noticeable.[63] In Melbourne, the Y Club demonstrated its mediatory propensity by intervening in the fraught industrial politics of the move towards one big union.[64]

Alongside such tasks of mediation, additional skills were also added to the representational arsenal. In an environment of uncertainty and of faith in scientific knowledge, *research* became the new watchword. In Brisbane the Workers' School of Social Science set up a research committee on trade unionism in 1919.[65] In Sydney, a labour information and research committee was set up under the auspices of the Trades and Labour Council, and began publishing a monthly review in 1921.[66] When the All-Australian Trade Union Congress met in June 1921 to discuss the objectives of the movement, it decided that one of the means of achieving socialization would be through the work of research bureaux, and A.C. Willis, the Ruskin College-trained secretary of the NSW miners' union, followed up by lobbying the trades and labour councils of the states to extend their support for research.[67] The bureaux were justified as both a defensive measure, to support, as Willis said, the coming struggle on wages and hours with the employers, and also to provide knowledge that would help carry the movement to its next stage, the struggle for control of industry.[68]

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61. Childe's review of G.K. Heydon, *Wage-Slavery* (London, 1924), *Plebs*, July 1924, p. 288.
62. Greg Patmore, "Employee Representation Plans in North America and Australia, 1915–35: An Employer Response to Workplace Democracy", unpublished paper, delivered at Holme Conference Centre, University of Sydney, 1 June 2001.
63. Terry Irving, "Early Views of Industrial Democracy: Australia, 1914–1921", unpublished paper delivered at Holme Conference Centre, University of Sydney, 1 June 2001.
64. Constance Lamour, "The Y Club and the One Big Union", *Labour History*, 19 (November 1970), pp. 26–36.
65. *Daily Standard*, 6 May 1919, p. 6.
66. *The Communist*, 17 June 1921.
67. *Common Cause*, 15 July 1921.
68. *Ibid.*, 28 July 1922; on "control" as an object of research see *The Communist*, 17 June 1921 and *Common Cause*, 15 July 1921.

The representational credentials of such work were obvious, and there was a detectable orientation towards state organizations and policy. The director of the Sydney research bureau, E.R. Voigt, represented the interests of labour at the 1922 Economic Conference.[69] Voigt's proposal for social insurance, which would have passed the burden on to employers, was developed with the present contours of the class struggle in mind. He also contemplated an ensemble of state-planning bodies for a socialist government.[70] Voigt later instigated the establishment of the "wireless committee" by the NSW Trades and Labour Council, which led to its purchase of radio station 2KY in Sydney in 1925. Radio was the new medium for propaganda, he said, and labour had to engage in this modern political technique, the manipulation of knowledge for a mass audience, if it were to defeat the trusts and win government.[71]

Research, planning, and modern mass communication were thus inserted into the representative tradition of the labour intellectual. At the same time a complementary development was providing a source for the experts who would perform these tasks. During the war, a section of the university-trained intelligentsia was radicalized by the issues of nationalism, voluntarism (in relation to military service), and political liberty. They began to participate in the labour public, attracted by the movement's suspicion of imperialism, its abhorrence of compulsion, and resistance to censorship.

Journals and organizations appeared to cater for the dialogue between the cultural elite and labour intellectuals. At the universities, public questions societies challenged the professors by bringing labour intellectuals on to campus to discuss these issues. *Fellowship* began in 1914 as the voice of Frederick Sinclaire's Free Religious Fellowship in Melbourne, but by 1916 had broadened its content to appeal to supporters of a national culture, intellectual liberty, and guild socialism. The last number appeared in 1922. In Sydney, the *New Outlook* in 1922–1923 published contributions from labour intellectuals (R.S. Ross, E. Voigt, Frank Anstey), guild socialists, and followers of the latest progressive intellectual concerns.[72] Ross, recently returned from New Zealand and out of sympathy with his Victorian Socialist Party friends, started *Ross's Magazine of Protest, Personality and Progress*, in an effort to sweep into one journal all the counterpublicists of the time. First appearing in 1915, and lasting until 1924, it was highly influential in radical circles.

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69. *Labor Daily*, 12 March 1925 (Higgins); *Labor Daily Supplement*, 12 December 1925 (Voigt).
70. A.C. Willis, *Social Insurance* (Sydney, 1926); Voigt may have written this – his ideas are discussed in ch. 4.
71. E.R. Voigt, "Wireless: Its Worth to Workers", *Labor Daily Supplement*, 19 December 1925.
72. M. Roe, "*The New Outlook*", in P. Gathercole, T. Irving, and G. Melleuish (eds), *Childe and Australia: Archaeology, Politics and Ideas* (St Lucia, QLD, 1995), pp. 51–66.

The same impulse led in 1921 to a proposal to set up a publicly-funded news service.[73] It was to be run by an "editorial commission" appointed by government but free from political control. The list of thirty-three names included prominent Labor politicians (Ted Theodore, John Curtin, Frank Anstey, Frank Tudor, etc.), labour journalists (Boote, R.S. Ross), middle-class intellectuals from the peace movement (Eleanor Moore), feminism (Cecilia John), the WEA (Meredith Atkinson), and religious dissent (Frederick Sinclaire, Charles Strong), and even a prominent communist trade unionist (Jack Howie). Aware of the concentration of ownership and conservative slant of the press, and affronted by government censorship during the war, their real concern was that "untrue news" in a period "of widespread social unrest" would be "a grave irritant to society". They hoped to insert "a truthful, reliable and accurate news service", providing unbiased knowledge and information, and thus create "the necessary basis for public opinion".[74]

The most organized and sustained attempt to develop this dialogue in the labour public was the Melbourne-based Y Club.[75] Among its prominent members were Frederick Sinclaire, Guido Baracchi (foundation member of the Communist Party in 1920), R.S. Ross, Frank Anstey MHR, H. Scott Bennett (a leading rationalist), Bob Fraser (printer of labour literature, including *The Socialist*), Frank Hyett (railway-union official), Frank Wilmot (the poet "Furnley Maurice"), Alf Foster (the first secretary, later a judge), and A.E. Houston. Apart from the regular papers delivered by members at club meetings, which were to be published in *The Socialist*, Sinclaire undertook to edit a history of the effects of the war on Australia from a working-class viewpoint, Houston planned a "socialist dictionary of terms", and a list of fifteen pamphlets was drawn up and authors assigned. For busy professionals this was an unrealistic program, but papers were delivered and published, and several pamphlets appeared, the most interesting by Houston ("Radix"), whose *Ability and Labor*, a commentary on the ideas of the US antidemocratic theorist, W.H. Mallock, linked Australian socialists to an international debate about classes and the labour theory of value.[76]

73. "A National Newspaper", reprint of proposal, *The Australian Communist*, 22 April 1921.
74. The proposal was not received well in some labour circles. See "Telling 'the People' the Truth", *The Australian Communist*, 22 April 1921.
75. Lamour, "The Y Club and the One Big Union"; Frederick Macartney, *Proof Against Failure* (Sydney, 1967), pp. 78–79; A.W. Foster to F. Sinclaire, 29 October 1918 (contains publishing proposals of the Y Club), intercepted by censor; Australian Archives, Victoria, CIS, 95/1 Intelligence Reports, file 169/49–55.
76. "Radix", *Ability and Labour*, Ross's Book Service (Melbourne, 1918).

Conclusion: crisis and change

Clearly, the crisis of 1920 had provoked important changes in the labour public and the labour intellectual. The three "modes" of the labour intellectual did not exist as clear, unchanging identities. On the contrary, they were closer to "traditions" – constantly remade and re-imagined in the context of changing events and challenges. In the teeth of a crisis, the revolutionary mode found its home in a powerful new institution, while the representational mode came to emphasize the skills of mediation and the virtues of research and publicity. The movement tradition seemed to lose its force. New connections were formed between "intellectuals" from middle-class backgrounds, and from the working class. Change was in the air. As we shall see, all of these changes were to have significant consequences for the later shape of the labour intellectual.

TRANSFORMATIONS

The history of labour intellectuals did not end with the generation of 1920. Labour institutions survived as sources of employment and direction; the labour public persisted as a place of debate and contest; intellectuals continued to claim new roles and to establish new identities. In the following section we provide an historical sketch of the labour intellectual over the rest of the twentieth century. It is just a sketch, and it moves over the historical terrain faster than our earlier discussion. We focus especially on how the health of the labour public variously sustained and denied the movement, representative, and revolutionary modes of intellectual work.

The 1920s and 1930s involved an assault on the representational mode, especially in the most populous state of New South Wales. The catalyst here was the failure of representation: the ruthless manipulation of the NSW Party by Jack Lang's "inner group". Lang used the movement's own democratic machinery to deny democracy. This produced a vapid proceduralism, and temporarily discredited the representational tradition of intellectual work.

The "movement mode" of work was reconstructed in opposition to Lang's manoeuvres. Between 1930 and 1932 the old slogan of "socialism in our time" was revived, as "socialization units" were set up in Labor Party branches and in trade unions. Led by intellectuals, many of them university graduates, the campaign was genuinely popular. It attracted many workers beyond the party, reaching them by street and factory-gate meetings, pamphlets, periodicals, and research and educational activities.[77] The units almost captured control of the Labor Party before they were

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77. Bede Nairn, *The "Big Fella": Jack Lang and the Australian Labor Party, 1891–1949* (Melbourne, 1986). On the socialization units, see Robert Cooksey, *Lang and Socialism: A Study in the Great Depression* (Canberra, 1976).

successfully suppressed by Lang's machine. Despite this defeat, the activities around the socialization units demonstrated the continued viability of a kind of intellectual work that identified its constituency as "the movement". They revived "movement intellectuals", and thereby offered a legacy later grasped during the "popular front" campaigns against fascism and war at the end of the 1930s.

As a new generation of intellectuals claimed a kind of movement identity, so the revolutionary tradition also gathered strength. The Great Depression transformed intellectual work in the Communist Party. The aggressive militancy of the party in the early 1930s, associated with the "class-against-class" strategy of the Comintern after 1928, allowed a new kind of labour intellectual to emerge. This was the communist militant. The birth of the "militant" was associated with the development of a new organizing strategy by Australian communists: the militant minority movement.[78] Such "militants" were defined by employment in the party apparatus, by flexibility (required to follow the zig-zags of the party line), by skills in organization and articulation, and by political and cultural knowledge.

The scope for such work was genuinely wide. The Communist Party's growth from the early 1930s was accompanied by the expansion of a cluster of "fraternal organizations". Specially targeted were the unemployed workers and the trade unions, but resources were also made available to promote the Soviet Union and defend its interests through peace movements. Among the new activities of the party in its "militant minority" phase were the Workers' Art Clubs, set up in 1931, forerunners of the New Theatres and writers' leagues of the popular-front period.[79] By 1944, these fronts had expanded so much that Brian Fitzpatrick felt that the Communist Party had become the major cultural force within the labour movement.[80]

Work within the revolutionary mode was structured by tight discipline. The sphere of activity of such intellectuals was limited by the marginality of the party in the labour movement, and even more by the notion that Marxist ("working-class") truth had to be protected from dilution. All party cadres were expected to be capable of inserting the party's

78. The "minority movement" strategy began earlier than the Comintern's "third period", but in Australia at least, because of the peculiar position of the ACTU and the Sydney Labor Council as affiliates of the RILU, it was not possible to endorse it in a major way until 1929. See Stuart Macintyre, *The Reds*, ch. 8.
79. Connie Healy, *Defiance: Political Theatre in Brisbane, 1930–1962* (Mt Nebo, QLD, 2000), ch. 1.
80. Brian Fitzpatrick, *A Short History of the Australian Labor Movement* (Melbourne, 1968, reprint of the 1944 2nd edn), p. 251.

knowledge into the working class. In consequence, those that had special cultural or intellectual skills sometimes felt unappreciated.[81]

In the 1940s, however, this developing challenge to the representational mode was checked. The formation of a federal Labor government during World War II restored the possibilities of this path. As the country was mobilized for total war, labour intellectuals responded as publicists, planners, and experts.[82] Erstwhile union militants were drawn into the process of balancing "movement" and state interests.[83] Even the Communist Party, growing with enthusiasm as the Red Army fought the Nazi advance, tended at this point to moderate its intellectual style. The communist militant was joined by the class-conscious patriot. Communist intellectuals became the foremost proponents of the idea that Australian culture was working-class.[84]

The corollary of these developments was that labour's oppositional ethos lost ground to the pull of state action. The citadels of "movement" work were lost. Labour educators now spread the faith in national or military institutions, rather than as participants in specifically workers' education.[85] The last labour daily newspaper in a capital city closed in 1941. Many questioned whether trade unions now remained the spearhead of social change.[86] Representational work flourished.

As the 1940s crossed into the 1950s, the polarization of the movement reached new heights. The contest between the shadowy Catholic "movement" and the Communist Party produced a decade of internecine battles within the unions and the Labor Party.[87] In these battles, the skill of "generalship" became vital.[88] The intellectual aspects of leadership were

81. Carole Ferrier, *Jean Devanny: Romantic Revolutionary* (Melbourne, 1999), ch. 5.

82. For detailed discussion of this process, see Sean Scalmer, "The Career of Class: Intellectuals and the Labour Movement in Australia, 1942–56", (Ph.D., Department of Government, University of Sydney, 1997). A specific example is the case of Lloyd Ross; see Stephen Holt, *A Veritable Dynamo: Lloyd Ross and Australian Labour 1901–1987* (St Lucia, QLD, 1996), ch. 8.

83. Margo Beasley, *Wharfies: A History of the Waterside Workers' Federation of Australia* (Sydney, 1996), p.115.

84. Communist patriotism first appeared in the 1930s popular-front movement. See Macintyre, *The Reds*, pp. 316–318; for the 1940s and 1950s see Boris Frankel, *From the Prophets Deserts Come: The Struggle to Reshape Australian Political Culture* (Melbourne, 1992), ch. 1; J. Docker, "Culture, Society and the Communist Party", in Ann Curthoys and John Merritt (eds), *Australia's First Cold War: vol. 1 1945–1953*, (Sydney, 1984), pp. 183–212.

85. Derek Whitelock, *The Great Tradition: A History of Adult Education in Australia* (St Lucia, QLD, 1974), ch. 7; Ken Dallas to Esmonde Higgins, 11 August 1944, ML, E.M. Higgins Papers, MSS 740, vol. 13, f. 133.

86. Bob to Esmonde Higgins, September 1943, *ibid*. f. 83.

87. Bob Corcoran, "The Manifold Causes of the Labor Split", in Peter Love and Paul Strangio (eds), *Arguing the Cold War* (Melbourne, 2001), pp. 91–100.

88. For "generalship" in the leadership of social movements, see Alan Johnson, "Leadership and Historical Materialism: Reading Christopher Hill", paper presented at "Making Social Movements: The British Marxist Historians and the Study of Social Movements" conference at Edge

downgraded by the need to "get the numbers", ensure loyalty, and outwit the other side.

How did polarization effect labour intellectuals at this time? It narrowed their options. The advance of the Communist Party was checked, and the revolutionary path became both less attractive and less tenable. At the same time, the extent of conflict meant that labour intellectuals were now unable to express their commitment to the "labour movement" as a whole without aligning themselves with labour (and against communism) or with communism (and against labour). Intellectual production became increasingly strategic and institutionally-bound. The agitational, movement-identified intellectual became almost impossible to construct. Moreover, as Labor was voted from government, federally in 1949 and then in most states after the party split in 1954, the skills of balancing movement interests and extending the boundaries of the labour public rusted away. The idea of a state-based socialist program decayed.[89] The revolutionary, movement, and representational modes were all therefore threatened in different ways at around the same time.

In the period of the late 1950s and 1960s, a genuine crisis loomed. Changes to the postwar class structure, seen in the effects of migration on employment patterns, suburbanization, full employment, and the growth of the mass media of television, all produced a challenging set of experiences for the working class.[90] If labour was to continue as a working-class mobilization, then these experiences urgently needed to be translated into labour discourse. However, a polarized and enervated labour public provided no effective intellectual space from which to launch such a project.

This crisis was first masked and then redoubled by the new political mobilizations of the 1960s. Students, women, indigenous peoples, lesbians, gays, and environmental activists all claimed their place in the political sun.[91] This masked the decline in the labour public, as the Communist Party attracted new recruits and as the Whitlam Labor government translated some of their demands into legislation.[92] Ultimately, however, the new social movements disrupted rather than strengthened the labour

Hill College of Higher Education, 26–28 June 2002. See also Colin Barker, Alan Johnson, and Michael Lavalette (eds), *Leadership and Social Movements* (Manchester, 2001).

89. Bradon Ellem (ed.), *The Great Labour Movement Split in New South Wales: Inside Stories* (Sydney, 1998).

90. John Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties: Private Sentiment and Political Culture in Menzies' Australia* (Sydney, 2000), particularly part 2.

91. The history of these movements is narrated in Verity Burgmann, *Power, Profit and Protest: Australian Social Movements and Globalisation* (Sydney, 2003).

92. On the Communist Party, see David McKnight (ed.), *Moving Left: The Future of Socialism in Australia* (Sydney [etc.], 1986). On the Labor Party, see Gough Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government, 1972–1975* (Ringwood, VIC, 1985), chs 13–15; Graham Richardson, *Whatever It Takes* (Sydney, 1994), ch. 16.

movement. The quest for recognition and justice often required mobilization against the labour movement in order to redress past neglect and to assert a newly-independent identity.[93] The institutions of the new social movements tended to be outside the labour movement. As a result, the place of the labour public within the wider public sphere was further downgraded over the 1970s and 1980s.

As labour's public contracted, some labour intellectuals switched allegiance – attracted to the opportunities offered by the new movements. Those that remained within labour institutions had to be content with a narrower scope. The Communist Party was formally disbanded in 1991. The unions and the Labor Party responded to their marginalization with greater professionalization and bargaining.[94] Lingering cultural expression of labour's identity tended overwhelmingly to rely on funding from Labor governments, rather than on the questing confidence of a new world.[95]

What was left of the labour intellectual? The movement tradition was moribund and almost forgotten. The revolutionary tradition was restricted to a rump of small, mostly Trotskyite parties. Labour intellectuals were almost exclusively employed in consolidated institutions. They were "suits" (as old-timers derisively dubbed them), who had more in common with career politicians from "the other side", than with their own predecessors within the labour movement.[96] The earlier roles of agitator, mediator, militant, and general no longer existed as intellectual identities. The novel context of a labour public and a labour intellectual had practically disappeared.

Is the Australian case unique? Are these traditions and identities present in other national contexts? How and when does the process of re-making and re-imagining of intellectual traditions and identities occur? To answer these questions we need comparative research. In this paper we have deliberately stepped away from the study of socialist ideas and of socialist intellectuals as bearers of a revolutionary tradition in the labour movement. We hope our paper will stimulate comparative research from a different perspective, one that deals with labour publics, labour intellectuals, and their mutual transformations.

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93. This is detailed in Sean Scalmer, *Dissent Events: Protest, the Media and the Political Gimmick in Australia* (Sydney, 2002), ch. 3.
94. Kevin McDonald, "After the Labour Movement: Strategic Unionism, Investment, and New Social Conflicts", *Thesis Eleven*, 20 (1988), pp. 30–50.
95. For example, through the Art and Working Life projects, funded by the Australia Council in the 1980s.
96. On the rise of experts, see James Walter, *Ministers' Minders: Personal Advisers in National Government* (Melbourne, 1986); S. Scalmer and Terry Irving, "The Rise of the Modern Labour Technocrat: Intellectual Labour and the Transformation of the Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union, 1973–85", *Labour History*, 77 (November 1999), pp. 64–82.