Anarchism in Australia

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At least as early as the 1840s ("Australia" having only been settled by white Europeans in 1788), the term "anarchist" was used as a slander by conservatives against their political opponents; for example, by W. C. Wentworth against Henry Parkes and J. D. Lang for speaking in favor of Australian independence from Britain. This opportunistic blackening of reputations has continued to the present day. What has also continued is that Australian attempts to express the philosophy positively have reflected other countries' concerns or global rather than local issues.

For example, the first positive public expression of the philosophy was the Melbourne Anarchist Club (MAC) which, established in 1886, consciously reflected the Boston Anarchist Club's approach to strategy and philosophy, having a secretary, a chairperson, speakers' rules, and prepared papers which the public were invited to hear. The club was also a response to the 1884 call by the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions of the US and Canada for a celebration of May 1, 1886 as an expression of working-class solidarity. The first MAC meeting was held on that day at the instigation of Fred Upham from Rhode Island, the two Australian-born Andrade brothers, David and William, and three other discontented members of the Australasian Secular Association (ASA) based in Melbourne.

Australian labor activists had been involved in Eight Hour Day agitations since 1871 and in deliberately associating themselves with the overseas movement for May Day the MAC organizers exposed their lack of involvement in local labor politics and their vulnerability to the rise or fall of distant agendas. Their first meeting, of course, almost coincided with the Haymarket explosion in Chicago, and the longer and more colorfully that tragedy and its aftermath held world attention, the more difficult it was for less sensational views to be put.

In the absence of more detailed and considered research, it also seems reasonable to argue that the infamous arrests, mistrial, and execution of self-proclaimed anarchists for the explosion set the scene for the next century. Not only did short-term conflict between supporters of local Eight Hour Days and those in favor of the more international May Day approach bedevil labor politics for some years, but, in the long term, libertarianism of all forms has been greatly handicapped and on the defensive ever since. This comment can probably be made about much anarchist endeavor around the world, but the close identification of the MAC with "the Haymarket" has possibly had a longer-lasting and deeper negative impact. This is despite the fact that it was, during our own "Reign of Terror," a focal point for local agitators: "With one possible exception, the trial of the eight Chicago anarchists is the most dramatic in all labour history" (Lane 1939: 16).

In what was a period of great social upheaval, many well-known union leaders and labor spokespeople actually declared their support in the decade, 1886–96. But they had to do so from behind pseudonyms or in private. Years later they could publically acknowledge having being influenced by propagandists from the MAC, in particular by Jack Andrews, a major figure, who, among other things, believed he was the first anywhere to articulate a theory of communist-anarchism.

One of the earliest members of the MAC, Andrews had to overcome a severe stutter and depression brought on by a tormented childhood, an above-average intelligence, and a fragmented cultural background. He developed skills as an inventor, a poet, and a linguist, and was prepared to push his beliefs to the extremes of sleeping rough, refusing payment for work, and living off the land. Renouncing respectability, such as the yoke of collar and tie, and devoting himself entirely to "the cause," he impressed his comrades with his learning and sincerity, but was easily picked off by the authorities on trumped up charges when the police failed to involve him in sham dynamite plots. He gave up mass agitational work in 1895, but continued writing, including for

overseas journals such as *Freedom* and *Revolt*, and moving in labor circles, becoming editor of *Tocsin* in 1901. He died of consumption in 1903.

Under internal and external pressures, the MAC had by 1890 already fractured into "voluntary-communist," communist-anarchist, and individualist anarchist factions, the last specifically following Benjamin Tucker and other US writers.

Writer and publicist David Andrade, who wrote the club's constitution, developed what would be later called lifestyle anarchism. In the 1890s this meant vegetarianism and hydrotherapy and agitation against organized religion and medical interventions such as vaccination and fluoride. He left Melbourne for Gippsland, where he attempted self-sufficiency along the lines of a scheme he'd set out in his book *The Melbourne Riots* (1892). In 1895 his family lost everything in a bushfire. Andrade succumbed to the loss and was institutionalized, where he died in 1929.

Perhaps the best known of all labor organizers in the period when the Australian Labor Party was born, 1890–5, William Lane, brother of Ernie, came to Australia from England in the 1880s. He quickly established himself as a journalist, and as editor of the *Brisbane Worker*, "John Miller," he espoused libertarian communism under the guise of "mateship" and "cooperation." Disillusioned with labor politics and convinced useful gains could not be made, he left the paper in 1892. After producing a documentary novel *Working Man's Paradise*, he helped galvanize a mass emigration of hundreds of labor stalwarts in 1893 to Paraguay. "New Australia" foundered on a lack of preparation and over his leadership, which was veering to the authoritarian. In the early twentieth century he edited a conservative newspaper in New Zealand in which he opposed all labor-based initiatives.

John "Chummy" Fleming was a local agitator attracted to the MAC but never seduced by it. He initiated the first May Day procession in Melbourne, in 1892, and in later years felt that it was his, even when the organizers, political laborites, told him he was not wanted. With a cow bell and his black flag he would start well ahead, slowing down gradually until it appeared he was leading the march. Among Emma Goldman's correspondents, he continued to speak, rain, hail, or shine, in public parks until his death in the 1950s.

Its international focus and the conservative, even authoritarian nature of Australian society has meant that between that "revolutionary" period and the 1970s "youth movements" anarchism has been kept alive only by individuals or small scattered groups, a number of whom have been part of the continued emigration flow from Europe. Few have been researched in detail – a selection follows:

- A Spanish-language bulletin produced in Innisfail, Queensland by cane cutters and described as "the best anarchist newspaper produced at the time anywhere in the world" deserves mention here, with an Italian-language anti-fascist newspaper, *Il Risveglio*, produced in 1927 in Sydney.

- A school, "Koornong," which flourished from 1939 to 1948 is just one of numerous examples of efforts for libertarian education.

- The Kleber-Claux family, from France, who energized the nudist movement in Sydney and elsewhere in the 1930s and 1940s and established one of the first communes in north Queensland.

- Harvey Buttonshaw, from Victoria, went to Spain to fight with the Syndicalists in 1936, and told George Orwell to pull his head in, or he'd get shot, just before exactly that happened. He is among the group shown on the front cover of Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia.*

- K. J. Kenafick campaigned for world peace largely on his own in the 1940s and 1950s, but did not live long enough to meet John Zube who articulated a theory he called Panarchy, or anarchism for peace, in the 1960s through to the 1990s.

- English gay man and anti-fascist refugee from Nazi retribution, John Olday developed a cabaret, "Immortal Clown," for his Café La Boheme in 1959 Sydney. His LP record "Roses and Gallows" might have been picked up by the Sydney Libertarians who made a splash from the late 1950s into the 1960s, but they were more interested in free love, personal freedom, and betting systems.

- Australia also provided a haven for Bulgarian, Spanish, Italian, and other European anarchists after World War II, Bulgaria being one of the few places where an anarchist government held office for a period between the retreating Nazis and the Soviets. Some of these were instrumental in setting up the long-running Jura Bookshop in Sydney in the 1970s, from which Red Fern Black Rose was a subsequent breakaway. Again, the split was largely between syndicalist and "lifestyle" anarchisms.

The Sydney Libertarians, or The Push as they were locally known, were survived by Germaine Greer, Clive James, Wendy Bacon, and Frank Moorhouse among others, who went on to establish themselves in the "alternative" 1970s and beyond.

In the mid-1970s, Alternative Canberra, instigated by Bob James, helped organize "Confests" (a combination of conference and festival) after Graeme Dunstan and others 'liberated' Nimbin on the north coast of New South Wales. The Anarcho-Surrealist Insurrectionary Feminists (ASIF) was a South Australian group which developed political street theater to insist that theoretical gender equivalence among anarchists was not good enough; Pio and his sister Thalia were Greek-born performance poets; Vince Ruiz was involved with Melbourne's Free Legal Service and the Free Store movement; *Digger, Living Daylights*, and *Nation Review* were important magazines to emerge from the ferment.

With the major events of the 1960s and 1970s so heavily influenced by overseas anarchists, local libertarians, in addition to those mentioned, were able to generate sufficient strength "down under" to again attempt broad-scale, formal organization. In particular, Andrew Giles-Peters, an academic at La Trobe University (Melbourne) fought to have local anarchists come to serious grips with Bakunin and Marxist politics within a Federation of Australian Anarchists format which produced a series of documents. Annual conferences that he, Brian Laver, Drew Hutton, and others organized in the early 1970s were sometimes disrupted by Spontaneists, including Peter McGregor, who went on to become a one-man team stirring many national and international issues.

Community Radio was an important libertarian channel for numerous grouplets and individuals as feminism and green thinking in all their forms took hold. The not-so-green Libertarian Workers group in Melbourne, led by medico Joe Toscano, has since been a major force. He was instrumental in attempting exorcism of the "Haymarket effect" in May 1986 with the Australian

Anarchist Centenary Celebrations. Held over four days and nights, it brought locals and international visitors together but failed in its long-term purposes, perhaps for the same reasons that William Lane failed.

SEE ALSO: Anarchism ; Anarchosyndicalism ; Haymarket Tragedy

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