Industrial Song and Poetry in Australia: An Introduction

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ABSTRACT: This makes a comparison of approaches and ideas about lyrical material associated with working life in an industrial society. Folklorists were wary of embracing much of this material until the 1930s, and have been arguing about it ever since. Can the definition of folk song proposed by Cecil Sharp a century ago be broadened enough to include this newer breed of song and poetry or do terms such as industrial song and 'laborlore' better meet our purpose?

Links Across the Pacific

What have Banjo Paterson and the American John Lomax got in common? One answer is that, in their own countries, a century ago, they pioneered the collection and publication of songs from itinerant workers—*Old Bush Songs* (Paterson, 1905) from bush workers in Australia and *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* (Lomax, 1911) from cowboys in America. Folklorists at the time were in the main concerned with songs from a distant past. Cecil Sharp, the English folk song collector, in his *English Folk Song: Some Conclusions* (Sharp, 1907) proposed a definition of folk song as 'the product of a relatively stable rural community, as directly transmitted from one singer to the next and as uninfluenced by sets of printed verse.' The hundreds of singers Sharp collected from knew a thousand or more tunes which he considered different enough from the other popular musics of the time to become a treasure trove, as indeed they have.

And So To George Korson

Folklorists since those times know much more about the connections and cross fertilisation between these old songs and printed material than the early collector did or could have. A decade after Sharp's collecting sweep for old English ballads—122 songs and 323 tunes (Campbell and Sharp, 1917) - in the Appalachian Mountains, a young journalist, George Korson (Korson, 1924), decided to collect the songs of the anthracite miners many of whom he'd come to admire from his work as a reporter. His collection was initially published in nine fortnightly instalments in the *United Mine Workers Journal*, starting in 1926. The collection

appeared in parallel with studies from other industries including timber, maritime, mills and railways. There were also collections of songs of the labour movement, including those of the singingest of unions the *Industrial Workers of the World* (I.W.W.).

Korson's first book, *Songs and Ballads of the Anthracite Miners* (1927), was later expanded for *Minstrels in the Mine Patch* (1938). In his foreword to the 1964 reprint of the latter, Archie Green writes of Korson:

> His greatness lies in his mastery of a vital area in American industrial tradition … The major impulse for English antiquariens and literary specialist has been to rescue rural folkways from the corrosive onslaught of the Industrial Revolution.' (Korson, 1964, p. iii)

Through the 1930s and 1940s a number of American folklorists including Benjamin Botkin, Charles Seeger and Alan Lomax were involved in a reassessment of folk song that would allow the embracing of the industrial songs that Korson and others were collecting. Botkin took the opportunity presented by dismissive reviews of Korson's work to reassess the state of folklore itself:

> But it is not only because coal miners' songs are new that folklorists write like this. It is also because folklore is old and tired. There is dust on our fiddles, and it smells not of the colleries but of the libraries. It is time that folksong scholars stopped thinking of folksong in terms of the English and Scottish ballads. It is time that they did a little more digging in the rock. Then they might understand what the miner sings about when he says:
>
> And while he was working
> For those that he loved,
> The boulder
> that crush'd him,
> It came from above.[1]

Undoubtedly the 1930s Depression and the Second World War, the war against fascism, led to much questioning of dusty attitudes and views. A.L. Lloyd in Britain had published his industrial song collection and study *Come All Ye Bold Miners* (1952). Lloyd and Ewan MacColl recorded collections, both together and separately, that covered very broad folkloric material, *Australian Bush Songs*, *English Drinking Songs*, *The Shuttle and Cage*, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, *English Street Songs*, *The Singing Sailor*, *Fourpence a Day: British Industrial Folk Songs*, *The Iron Muse: A Panorama of Industrial Folk Music* and *Gamblers and Sporting Blades*. MacColl, Peggy Seeger and Charles

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1 B.A. Botkin, 'Dust on the Folklorists', *The Journal of American Folklore*, 57, no. 224 (April–June 1944), p. 139.

Parker embarked on their hugely ambitious and innovative *Radio Ballads* (Cox, 2008) series including *The Ballad of Jonn Axton*, *Singing the Fishing*, *The Big Hewer* and *Song of a Road*.

The folk song revival in Britain and Australia burst into new life with industrial folk song as part and parcel. Lloyd saw industrial folk song as a continuation of the classic rural folk song. His entry on *Folk Music* in *The Encylopaedia Brittanica* (1965, p. 523) included a paragraph on industrial folk song and the concluding chapter in his influential *Folk Song in England* (Lloyd, 1967) was titled *The Industrial Songs*. Post-war American collections include John Greenway's *American Song of Protest* (1953), *Songs of Work and Freedom* by Edith Fowke and Joe Glazer (1961), *Hard Hitting Songs for Hard-Hit People* (1967) a book conceived by Alan Lomax, Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger in the 1940s and held up for over 20 years by the cold war hysteria of the times.

Archie Green

With his background as a Journeyman Shipwright, Archie Green turned to folklore and invented the term laborlore to better describe the culture associated with workers in many industries. His book, *Only a Miner: Studies in Recorded Coal-Mining Songs* (1972), launched the University of Illinois's series Music in American Life, a series that continues today. Italian scholar Alessandro Portelli has also studied industrial song both in the mining region of Harlan County Kentucky and his home town of Terni in Italy. In his collection of essays *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (1990) Portelli writes that he is concerned with

> the interplay of traditional cultures and industrialization—the uses of traditional culture by working people to make themselves at home in a world they built but, to a large extent, they did not choose to make. (1990, p. xiii)

Similarly, Roy Palmer in Britain wrote a series of studies including *The Painful Plow* (1973), *Poverty Knock* (1974) and *The Sound of History: Songs & Social Comment* (1988).

The Builders Labourers Songbook (1975), Therese Radic's *Songs of Australian Working Life* (1989) and Waren Fahey's *The Balls of Bob Menzies* (1989) are important collections of Australian industrial song. Also important are the books and recordings of Australian songwriters and poets, many from the folk revival community, who have contributed so much to the store of such songs.

Some Australian Examples

For this essay I am referring a broad scope of lyrical material that has been categorised in many ways with terms like 'convict ballad', 'bush song', 'Wobbly song', 'workers' song', 'traditional song', 'protest song', 'vernacular song', 'labour song', and so on—and not limiting examples to a tradition where the author has been long forgotten or a tradition unaffected by printed text or sound recordings. It is, rather, a tradition of dissenting or descriptive lyrical material written or used by working people through the industrial history of Australia. Thus the poem, *For the Company Under Ground*, was composed in 1839 by Francis MacNamara, Frank the Poet, an Irish convict, apparently with mining experience, who had arrived in Sydney on the ship *Eliza* in 1832. Assigned to the *Australian Agricultural Company* in 1836 first as shepherd along the Peel River, and then as a miner to the Company's Newcastle coal mines, MacNamara made his refusal to work in the mines quite clear in a series of striking stanzas including:

> When the man in the moon to Moreton Bay,
> Is sent in shackles bound
> MacNamara shall work that day
> For the Company underground.
>
> When cows in lieu of milk yield tea,
> And all lost treasures are found,
> MacNamara shall work that day
> For the Company underground.
>
> When the Australian Co's heaviest dray
> Is drawn 80 miles by a hound,
> MacNamara shall work that day
> For the Company underground.
>
> When Christmas falls on the 1st of May
> And O'Connell's King of England crown'd,
> MacNamara shall work that day
> For the Company underground.

According to the *Australian Dictionary of Biography Online*[2] the last record we have of MacNamara is, 'an appearance in 1861 at the Mudgee goldfields in New South Wales where he made a genealogy for a local innkeeper and an illuminated copy of Burns's 'Man Was Made To Mourn' '. However, a recent National Library of Australia online search of newspapers reveals that 1861 was the year of his death:

> *The Maitland Mercury & Hunter River General Advertiser*, Saturday 7 September 1861 p.6

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2 <http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/AS10315b.htm> [accessed 23 January 2010].

> 'MUDGEE.
>
> (from the *Western Post*, August 31.)
>
> Sudden Death. - An inquest was held on the 30th, before the coroner for the district, on the body of Francis McNamara, better known as 'Frank the Poet.' It appeared that McNamara was a digger at Pipe Clay Creek. He had lately complained of a pain in the shoulder, and had been spitting blood. The medical evidence was to the effect that he had died from cold and inanition; and they returned a verdict according to that evidence.'

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'The Murrumbidgee Shearer' is an example of an early song describing as it does gold mining, fossicking, shearing and an itinerant working life.

> I've coasted on the Barwon, low down the Darling, too,
> I've been on the Murrumbidgee, and out on the Paroo;
> I've been on all the diggings, boys, from famous Ballarat;
> I've loafed upon the Lachlan and fossicked Lambing Flat.
>
> Oh, yes, my jolly dandies, I've done it on the cross.
> Although I carry bluey now, I've sweated many a horse.
> I've helped to ease the escort of many's the ounce of gold;
> The traps have often chased me, more times than can be told.
>
> Oh, yes, the traps have chased me, been frightened of their stripes
> They never could have caught me, they feared my cure for gripes.
> And well they knew I carried it, which they had often seen
> A-glistening in my flipper, chaps, a patent pill machine.

And so the song is resonant of assured individual defiance and the self-reliance of the bush worker. This ethos recurs throughout the 1800s as permanent trade unions began to organise and evolve. The stand of miners at Eureka in 1854 gave the country an early 'workers of the world unite' oath with 'We swear by the Southern Cross to stand truly by each other and fight to defend our rights and liberties'.[3] In his 2005 book *The Great Australian Goldrush & Eureka Stockade* Bob Walshe argues the importance of the Eureka rising in the struggle for democracy

> Amazingly, a victory is plucked within days from a defeat, as public opinion across Victoria, and most tellingly in Melbourne, swings overwhelmingly behind the diggers. Eureka has provoked a popular movement that will not only achieve goldfield reforms and release the prisoners but will confront the Governor and squatting interests with demands for political democracy. (Walshe, 2005, p. 50).

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3 This oath would be revived three generations later in 1937 in Port Kembla, when waterside workers refused to load BHP pig-iron, onto a British freighter bound for Japan, in protest at the Japanese invasion of Northern China.

As Hugh Anderson has shown in *The Mounted Butchers* (2004), local newspapers such as the *Bendigo Advertiser* and the *Ballarat Times* carried a number of songs and poems contemporary with Eureka. In every generation since then, poets and songwriters have commemorated the Eureka Stockade amounting to over forty items from seventeen authors. (http://eurekasydney.com/songs.html)

The old bush songs of the shearers, drovers, bullockies, fencers, stockmen, boundary riders, cane cutters and sleeper cutters describe the work and times. The bush workers' legendary loyalty to unionism is closely connected to the reality of rural industry as an export industry. Rural work was industrialised. The first attempt to organise the shearers and other workers in the industry was made as early as August 1854. A Trades Hall was being planned in Melbourne in 1856 and the *Trades and Labor Council of Sydney* was formed in 1871. What was happening in the cities was followed up in the bush the *Australian Shearers' Union* being formed in April 1886.

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The Shores of Botany Bay, another song from that period, was collected by John Meredith from Duke Tritton who heard it while busking in Sydney in the late 1890s. Tritton later wrote the final verse. I would ague that the song's references to manual work, the navvy, the brickie, and the digger of gold, place it firmly within the genre of industrial folk song. Tritton's final verse is a folkloric change that introduces the union policy of the eight hour day to the song, a policy first implemented by Sydney stonemasons in October 1855.

Oh I'm on my way down to the quay
Where a big ship now does lay
For to take a gang of navvies
I was told to engage
But I thought I would call in for a while
Before I went away
For to take a trip in an emigrant ship
To the shores of Botany Bay.

Chorus
Farewell to your bricks and mortar
Farewell to your dirty lime
Farewell to your gangway and gang planks
And to hell with your overtime
For the good ship Rag o' Muffin
Is lying at the quay
For to take old Pat with a shovel on his back
To the shores of Botany Bay

The best years of our life we spend
At working on the docks

Building mighty wharves and quays
Of earth and ballast rocks
Our pensions keep our lives secure
But I'll not rue the day
When I take a trip on an emigrant ship
To the shores of Botany Bay

For the boss came up this morning
And he said 'Well Pat hello
If you do not mix that mortar fast
Be sure you'll have to go'
Of course he did insult me
I demanded of my pay
And I told him straight I was going to emigrate
To the shores of Botany Bay

And when I reach Australia
I'll go and look for gold
Sure there's plenty there for the digging
Or so I have been told
Or I might go back into my trade
Eight hundred bricks I'll lay
In an eight hour day for eight bob pay
On the shores of Botany Bay

The Eight Hour Day

The eight hour day had been union policy since the 1850s. Then, a century after the fall of the Bastille, on 14 July 1889 the International Socialistic Congress of Working Men met in Paris. The Congress passed a resolution that proposed May Day, a day of workers' celebration, with the aim to push for legislation that would make the eight hour day the standard across the globe. The first large May Day demonstration in Australia took place in Barcaldine in Queensland during the 1891 Shearers Strike. For the occasion Henry Lawson wrote his poem *Freedom on the Wallaby*. The following May Day he wrote *The Old Rebel Flag in the Rear*. In the Brisbane Worker on 18th April 1891, the editor William Lane published *The Struggle in the West*:

There's a struggle going on in the West, boys,
A battle for Freedom and Right
Though Tyranny's raising his crest, boys,
We'll conquer or die in the fight.
They may take from the hands that are free
The ballot that backs up his claim
May land us in prison but, see boys,
They never shall win at the game.

They have sent to the plains of the West, boys,
The Gatling the Nordenfeldt too.
It seems that we must be suppressed boys,
Says Price 'Lay them out and fire low'.

The soldiers and troopers are here
To shoot down the men of their class,
Grim heroes with rifle and spear boys,
To charge on a weaponless mass.

So be true to yourself in the West, boys,
Be staunch to your mates and your class.
The 'Brag' of the squatters we'll test boys
By the power of the Union 'Hold Fast'.
Let them hunt up the scum of the South
Bring outcasts too wretched to name
We'll give it to them straight from our mouths boys
They never shall win at the game.

As industrialisation and unionism grow, so do industrial disputes and an interesting [early] miners' song has recently come to light. In this example as we know the author and the date as it was published on 3 October 1855 in the *Illawarra Mercury*. The author was Melinda Kendall (Henry Kendall's mother).

The Colliers' Strike Song

Come all ye jolly colliers, and colliers' wives as well,
And listen to my ditty, for the truth I mean to tell;
It's of a colliers' wage dispute, is the burden of my song;
I mean to cheer you up, if it won't detain you long.
For masters they are grumbling, in country and in town,
They want to starve poor miners, by cutting wages down;
But if you stick together, and every one be true,
You are sure to be triumphant singing cock-a-doodle-doo.

The miners of Mount Kembla, oh! loudly how they shout
Against this drop of ten percent, they're right without a doubt;
In this happy, glorious country, man is treated like a Turk,
Where the masters get the profit, and the miners get the work.
We only want fair wages, we only want fair play,
We know we ought to have a good dinner every day;
But what are we to do when the butcher he comes round,
If we let our masters drop two shillings in the pound.

I would have you stick together, and have a good go in,
Be true to one another, and I'm sure you're bound to win;
Though money is so valuable and so is labour, too
The working man is worth whatever he may do.
And I hope that every woman will tell her husband too;
She will do her very best to help him to keep true;
They will be sure to raise the wine, and make the masters say
'The devil's in the women, for they never will give way.'

Kendall's song borrows its chorus from a ballad about a food riot in Rochdale in England a century before, a clear evidence of a dissenting tradition.

And the I.W.W.

In 1905 the I.W.W. was founded in Chicago and 1909 saw the publication of *Songs of the Industrial Workers of the World* a booklet that soon became widely known as *The Little Red Songbook*. In continuous print since 1909, the number of songs grew and changed with each of the 37 editions published up to the present day. The best known Australian I.W.W. song is *Bump Me Into Parliament,* written in Melbourne by Bill Casey.[4] (Burgmann, 1995, pp. 114-115)

Come listen all kind friends of mine
I want to move a motion
To make an Eldorado here,
I've got a bonza notion.

Chorus
Bump me into parliament
Bounce me any way at all
Bang me into parliament
On next election day

Some very wealthy friends I know
Declare I am most clever
While some can talk for an hour or so
Why I can talk for ever

I know the Arbitration Act,
As a sailor knows his riggins
So if you want a small advance
I'll talk to Justice Higgins.

I think the worker and the boss
Should keep their present stations
So I will surely pass a bill
'Industrial Relations'.

So bump them into parliament
Bounce them any way at all
Bung them into parliament
Don't let the Court decay.

The Conciliation and Arbitration Act 1904 was assented to on 15 December 1904 and in 1907 Justice H.B. Higgins, whom Casey refers to in his song, set a 'fair and reasonable' minimum wage for unskilled workers of seven shillings a day.

The I.W.W. grew in numbers as it vigorously joined the anti-war and anti-conscription movement in Australia. 'Let Those Who Own Australia Do the Fighting' wrote Tom Barker in the I.W.W. paper, *Direct Action*,

4 *Bump Me Into Parliament* was first published in the Sydney I.W.W. newspaper in 1915.

of 22 August 1914. 'Put the wealthiest in the front ranks; the middle class next; follow these with politicians, lawyers, sky pilots and judges ... workers have no quarrel with Austria, Germany or Japan. The workers in those countries are as ruthlessly robbed and exploited as the worker in Australia.' (Burgmann, 1995, p. 183) 'when Prime Minister Hughes addressed a lunch-time meeting from the post office steps in Brisbane, Wobblies decided to 'count the bastard out' and, by the time they reached ten, the crowd had joined in so loudly Hughes could not continue to speak. By November 1916, Prime Minister Hughes was complaining that the I.W.W. was 'largely responsible for the present attitude of organised labour, industrially and politically, towards the war'.' (p. 185)

In 1917 in an attempt to break a strike the NSW government billeted an alternative workforce at Taronga Zoo in Sydney. *The New Exhibits*, a poem by R.J. Cassidy, was published in *The Worker*, the journal of the Australian Workers Union (A.W.U.). In this extract the animals describe the nature of their new companions:

> The Fox he wunk a knowing wink, peculiarly a seer's,
> 'Oh they,' he said, 'are what are called, the rural volunteers.'
> And curious folk they are at best, the cussedest of all,
> God gave them legs and yet how strange, they each prefer to crawl.
>
> God gave them eyes with which to see, but bitter facts remind,
> My comprehension stubbornly, that most of them are blind.
> God gave them each a brain to use, but this you wouldn't guess,
> They get their thinking done for them, by bulging bellies press.
>
> 'God gave to them a backbone each (but right against their wish) -
> They much prefer to emulate the spineless jelly-fish!
> God gave them strength with which to help the weak who call for aid
> It was, I think, the one mistake that ever heaven made!'
>
> 'I thank you much,' the monkey said, 'I felt most strangely queer,
> As though impelled to vomiting, whenever they came near.
> It isn't fair to our good name, to either fox or ape,
> So when the night enfolds the zoo, I'm making my escape.'

Meanwhile in the trenches in Messine in France Dan Sheehan, an Australian soldier, was remembering life back home and posted 'The Sleeper Cutters Camp' home, only to have it banned by the military censors:

> My sole address at present is a battlefield in France
> If it's ever going to alter there is only just a chance
> To dodge the 'Jerry' rifles and the shrapnel flying around
> I've burrowed like a bunny to a funkhole in the ground.
> The floor is just a puddle and the roof lets in the damp
> I wish I was in Aussie where the Sleeper Cutters' camp.

> The tea is foul and bitter like an ancient witch's brew
> The bread is sour and scanty and you ought to see the stew
> The 'Lootenant' that is leading is a leery kind of coot
> We always call 'im 'Mr', so plain 'Bill' would never suit.
> I'd sell my chance of Heaven for five minutes with the scamp
> Where the red bull's chewing nut grass near the Sleeper Cutters' Camp.
>
> If another war is starting, I'll hang out with the 'jibs',
> Not much in being a hero with a bayonet 'tween your ribs—
> Hard fighting for the Froggies pushing Huns across the Rhine
> They can take Alsace and Flanders and Normandy for mine.
> All I'm needing is a pozzie, where ground is not too damp
> 'Neath azure skies of Aussie—just a Sleeper Cutters' camp.
>
> Here, sitting in a dug-out, with a rifle on my knees—
> I fancy I am back there once again among the trees—
> With long-lost friends I'm chatting by the camp fire's ruddy glow
> Where we boiled the old black billy in days of long ago...
> The signal comes to ' Fall-in'.
> I can hear the diggers tramp—
> Farewell, perhaps forever to the Sleeper Cutters' camp....

The Rothbury Incident

A dozen years later, on Thursday 14 February 1929, the mine employers of the Rothbury mine in NSW gave their 9,750 employees 14 days notice, that they should accept the following new conditions:

> A wage reduction of 12 and a half per cent on the contract rates, one shilling a day on the 'day wage' rate; all Lodges must give the colliery managers the right to hire and fire without regard to seniority; all Lodges must agree to discontinue pit-top meetings and pit stoppages.[5]

The miners refused to accept these terms, and on Saturday 2 March 1929, all miners were locked out of their employment. In December 2009 the Bavin State Government organised 400 police to shepherd in scab labour to re-open the mine. At dawn on 16 December, the locked-out miners marched to the gates of the colliery led by a pipe band in traditional union fashion. They were set upon by police baton charge, and then came under police fire as they retreated. A sixteen year old miner, Norman Brown, was killed and many miners were injured. More than 7000 miners attended Norman Brown's funeral in his home town of Greta, NSW. *A Sad Day on the Coalfields (Tragedy At Rothbury)* was written and sung by fellow miner, Roger Grant, at the funeral:

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5 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rothbury_Riot> [accessed 2 April 2010].

There were sounds of sobs and crying as the daylight floods the sky,
The hour of life has vanished and the long night passes by,
I lift my eyes to heaven and in tears I'll call her son,
Who was taken from his mother by the crack of someone's gun.

Yes, in the hour of sorrow there's one thing I can't conceal,
For my heart is always longing and my thoughts will often steal
Across the bush to Rothbury whose surface leaves a track
To the boys who went on picket and the boy who'll never come back.

There was music at the graveside and in grief the mourners stood,
Still the wind a hymn was humming with the trees upon the hill,
The sun was shining brightly on sad friends from every town,
And the minister started praying for our dead pal Norman Brown.

Yes, in the hour of sorrow there's one thing I can't conceal,
For my heart is always longing and my thoughts will often steal
Across the bush to Rothbury whose surface leaves a track
To the boys who went on picket and the boy who'll never come back.

Later songs commemorating Norman Brown include *The Ballad of Norman Brown* by Dorothy Hewett (1950s), *And the Country Knows the Rest* by Graham Seal (1975) and *Rothbury* by Maurie Mulheron (1984). Those authors were all involved in the Australian folk song revival.

Coal miners in Britain and the USA seem to have a tradition whereby a fellow miner becomes the industry′s bard. Tommy Armstrong became one for the Durham miners in the late eighteen hundreds, while in the Alabama in the 1930s it was the black miner Uncle George Jones. In Australia, it could argued it was Jock Graham who published *Blood on the Coal* (1946), a collection of his songs and poems. The collection's title is also that of his best known poem:

You've learned to know the miner—the 'black' man, the 'slack' man.
But come with me below ground and amid the sweat and stress,
And watch him at his hard work, his drill work, his skilled work,
See for yourself his true life before you read your press.

Come down and breathe the dank air, the foul air, the rank air;
Fill up your lungs with coal dust, disease dust, for proof;
Come down and see the 'slave' man, the cave man, the brave man
Risk life to save his mate's life beneath a falling roof.

Learn of the grim disasters, the churned up, the burned up:
Go seek the mining churchyards and count the growing roll;
Weigh justice then, so feted, so treated, and meted
Against the dark stain spreading, the blood upon the coal.

You'll see conditions slipping, through tricking, pin-pricking;
The guilt with which he's burdened you'll place where it belongs;
And you will be a just man, a fair man, a rare man,
If you'll raise coal production by righting miners' wrongs.

A contemporary of Graham was the mysterious poet Ernest Antony. Merv Lilley, songwriter, poet, novelist, cane cutter, merchant seaman, 'lawn mower' and union delegate, describes piecing together Antony's *The Hungry Mile* (1930) in his 2001 novel *The Channels*: (Lilley, p. 120)

> Jack Long had heard fragments of this poem around Queensland ports, bars, as an itinerant toiler; it may have been those fragments that at last drew him toward the centre of things. There was no such thing as a bad poem about working conditions, there were ironic poems that fought to scan and rhyme, and they were poems that spoke about men's lives when no other words of praise and sympathy and recognition were around to reflect their lives, if not on stone, then in words.

Historian Rowan Cahill and the Maritime Union of Australia (M.U.A.) have recently republished Antony's collection of poems *The Hungry Mile and other Poems*, first issued in Sydney in 1930. Folklorist Peter Parkhill and poet Denis Kevans had both unearthed Antony's book in the State Library of NSW back in the 1970s, but only one poem from it had ever been republished: *The Hungry Mile*. In his introduction to the 2008 edition, Cahill writes about Antony:

> A trade unionist, Ernest participated in strikes, gained a reputation for being a militant, was variously blacklisted for his involvements, and contributed poetry to labour movement publications. During the 1930s he was one of the many men who tramped Sydney's Hungry Mile in search of work. World War II saw him employed as a bridge and wharf carpenter for the duration, and he was prominent in associated trade union work. (p. 6).

Antony was in many ways one of Russel Ward's 'typical Australians'. The final poem in his own book is the self reflective *Of The Things I Know I Sing*: (Antony, 1930, p. 39)

> Wherefore this hate and satire, and this bitter irony
> That is running through these verses? Is it this you ask of me;
> Go search along the highways, the hungry tucker tracks,
> In the huts of the cane-cutters, and the dirty cocky's shacks.
>
> The shearing sheds and mining camps and god-forgotten spots,
> Where for the sake of profit man toils and sweats and rots;
> Go, search the filthy alleys where the night pariahs hunt,
> Go and learn the vile conditions of your city's waterfront.
>
> Go, and better still, go hungry through the city's profit mills,
> Go tramping, broke and thirsting, o'er the burning plains and hills;
> Go and learn of the discomfort of a bed of grass or sand.
> Go shivering in the winter, and perhaps you'll understand.

Go and try to ease your hunger on Salvation Army stew,
And the question you are asking will then be answered by you;
All the bitterness and hatred out of vile conditions spring,
Well, I know those vile conditions—of the things I know I sing.

Cahill's research also brought to light *Anzac 1944*, Antony's scathing attack on jingo politicians, echoing the I.W.W. tradition:

Yes, you'll remember Anzac and the men who died for you,
The fighting fools who fought to forge their wage slave chains anew.
How often have you told us that their glory shall not fade?
How often have you gloated o'er the sacrifice they made.

While you boasted loud of freedom and your famed democracy,
You schemed to cheat the orphans of far off Gallipoli.
You remember! You remember each year for just a day,
Sons of Anzac and the Anzacs—in a superficial way.

While we heard your voices choking with sentimental slime,
There were things that we remembered, we'll remind you of sometime.
We remember 'the depression' and the aftermath of war,
The doles queues and starvation in the 'world worth fighting for'.

While you weave a wondrous future of a world grown good and wise,
We are not the least forgetting all the trickery and lies.
Nor shall we be forgetting who owes to whom the debt,
Oh, yes, we will remember—when you're trying to forget.

And the Folk Revival

The Australian folk revival like its counterparts elsewhere brought the old songs and ballads to new life, indeed it ensured they are sung more today than they ever could have been when they were made. There has been a continual debate about whether such songs whose authors and origins are often known can be considered folk songs. What can be demonstrated is that a good number of them can fit rather well with our understanding of industrial folk song. One of the features of the folk revival has been the creation of contemporary songs about contemporary life. There has also been a desire to revisit the past and where songs are missing create new ones to fill the gaps. A good example is *The Ballad of 1891*, written in 1950 and partly as an experiment by Helen Palmer, to explore whether the old ballad style would find a modern audience.

It did so almost as soon as it was written, becoming a key song in the popular *New Theatre* folk musical *Reedy River*. Today it is in the repertory of every union choir in the country.

Oh, Billy Lane was with them, his words were like a flame
The flag of blue above them, they spoke Eureka's name
'Tomorrow,' said the squatters, 'they'll find it does not pay
We're bringing up free labourers to get the clip away'.

> ‘Tomorrow,’ said the shearers, ‘they may not be so keen
> We can mount three thousand horses, to show them what we mean’
> ‘Then we'll pack the west with troopers, from Bourke to Charters Towers
> You can have your fill of speeches but the final strength is ours’.
>
> To trial at Rockhampton the fourteen men were brought
> The judge had got his orders, the squatters owned the court
> But for every one that's sentenced, ten thousand won't forget
> Where they jail a man for striking, it's a rich man's country yet.
>
> * *

Poetry and song are not divided by some impervious wall, indeed poetry often becomes song. This is strikingly the case with Lawson; the second edition of Chris Kempster's *The Songs of Henry Lawson* (2008) reveals that over 140 Lawson poems now have tunes, most of them composed since the folk revival began, or since 1949 when Kempster gave Lawson's *Reedy River* a much beloved tune. It was the success of songs like these that encouraged the folk revival singers to try to create their own songs. This was particularly the case in the Vietnam War period which coincided with a newly confident Aboriginal rights movement and a vigorous equal pay campaign. At the same time in the folk song movement and among historians there was a growing awareness of industrial folk songs.

The folklorist Edgar Waters contributed an overview titled *Industrial Folk Song* for the journal *Labour History* in 1964. He writes:

> Early in the 1950s A.L. Lloyd made a collection of songs from miners in the United Kingdom and published some of them. He remarked to me a little later that he had discovered after publication that Sharp had recorded many of the songs fifty years before. But Sharp had been content to leave his records in manuscript, presumably because he did not consider the songs of coal miners to be folk songs. Historians may leave the argument over definitions to the folklorists (who waste a lot of time arguing over definitions): the important thing is that increasing numbers of scholars, in a number of countries, are engaged in collecting and studying what they are pleased to call industrial folk song. The songs which they are uncovering are potentially as valuable for historians concerned with industrial workers as the songs of Australian pastoral workers for Ward.[6]

The publication *Australian Tradition,* edited by folklorist and oral historian Wendy Lowenstein from 1965 to 1975, became a repository for both the old and the new songs of the revival. In 1969 *The Vietnam*

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6 *Labour History*, 7 (Nov, 1964), p. 59.

Songbook (New York), a book of protest songs from 'the American and international protest movements', included eight songs from Australia. Its editors, Irwin Silber and Barbara Dane, acknowledge that 'Wendy Lowenstein sent us all of the Australian songs in the book.' (Dane and Silber, 1979, p. 10). The authors of the eight Australian songs included Gary Shearston, Glen Tomassetti, Clem Parkinson, Ken Mansell and Don Henderson, all well-known singer/songwriters in the folk song movement at the time. One of Don Henderson's songs was *The Boonaroo* which was included with a quote from the *Australian* newspaper 'March 2, 1967: A Navy crew took control of the Vietnam supply ship Boonaroo last night on orders from the Federal Government. The takeover followed the refusal of merchant seamen to sail her to Vietnam with a war cargo of bombs and detonators'. (p. 154)

> Is there food and is there store
> to feed the hungry, clothe the poor?
> In this world their number isn't few.
> In her cargo would you find
> any way for one mankind,
> sailing on the Boonaroo.
>
> Is there bandage by the reel?
> Is there medicine to heal?
> Christ knows, there's healing work to do.
> In her cargo would you find
> any way for one mankind,
> sailing on the Boonaroo?
>
> Would the hull be filled with material to build,
> perhaps a bridge for a world that's split in two?
> In her cargo would you find
> any way for one mankind,
> sailing on the Boonaroo?
>
> Or jam packed in the hold,
> is there grief and death untold
> and asked ‘Why?’ have to answer true.
> In her cargo would you find
> any way for one mankind,
> sailing on the Boonaroo?

At a concert in New York in 2003 celebrating *The Vietnam Songbook* and protesting against the looming Iraq War the American singer Dan Zanes would sing *The Boonaroo*.

And So To A Reflection

I would argue that there is a relatively unacknowledged tradition here of lyrical material that reports a changing society, and one coming from those most affected by the changes—a tradition that reports on

industrialisation in all its variety. Some industries seem to have more written about them than others. The construction industry, the mining industry, the waterfront, transport particularly ships and railways all have numerous examples. We have seen that George Korsons's pioneering collection of American miners' songs found a welcoming home in the miners' union journal. In Australia a number of unions have a tradition of sponsoring song competitions. At the 2010 Illawarra Folk Festival the winning entry (there were 30 entries) of the Rail Bus and Tram Union (RTBU) railway song and poem competition was announced. It was John Hospodaryk's song *Don't Close the Depot Down.*

> Two thousand trucks across the Great Divide,
> Two thousand truckloads of fuel that will ride
> Upon the road when there's a train that can bring it safely to your town,
> Safely to, safely to your town.
> So all I ask of you is don't you, don't you close that depot down,
> Don't you close, don't you close that depot down.
>
> We gotta let that rolling stock stay upon the rail,
> It's rolled a hundred years, it has never failed.
> Don't wanna see them trucks crowdin' up the whole highway,
> Whole, whole, whole highway,
> So all I ask of you is don't you, don't you take that train away,
> Don't you take that, take that train away.
>
> Carbon footprints are truckin' up 'n' down the road,
> Up 'n' down, up 'n' down the road.
> One of these days one of them rigs you know is bound to explode,
> How can we bear such a heavy load!
>
> They're layin' off the workers, I heard it on the news,
> 'Cos private contractors is what they wanna use,
> You know we gotta get together, people, spread the news all around,
> All around, spread the word around.
> We must demand that they don't, they don't close that depot down,
> They must not close, close that depot down.

* *

Where do we get our understanding of people's lives from if we ignore the songs they make or adopt as their own? We can find in some of these industrial songs a wealth of intimate knowledge of ways to civilise the industrial monster. Sailors who when they ship out 'take on the vastness of the sea', protesting building workers who 'stole the street with their marching feet, placards high above their ears', the itinerant bush worker musing 'was I to lift my hat to him? was I his bloody dog? I left his scabby station at the old jig jog', the out-of-work foundry worker in the depression looking across from his 'island in a river' and watching as 'the mighty BPH / poured pollution on the water / poured the lead of misery / with its smoke as black as Hades / rolling hungry to the sea', the

miner advising his many critics to 'see for yourself his true life before you read your press' or the nurses who so recently demonstrated outside NSW State Parliament singing 'Bob the Premier! Can he fix it? Yes he can!'

We need to keep collecting these songs to discover why people wrote them, learnt them, why they sang or recited them and why their viewpoint is so often at odds with those dished up daily in our media. My final example is the tail end of a 1998 poem, *The Telephone Tree*, by Wendy Lowenstein, a poem she wrote while researching a new section, *MUA Here To Stay*, for an updated edition of her oral history of the Melbourne waterside *Under the Hook*: (Lowenstein, 1998, p. 211)

> Quickening, the tree sprouts buds,
> flowers, tendrils, weaves a net,
> trawls seas and docks,
> Brings an Indonesian wharfie
> and another from LA
> A Japanese bloke yet,
> to say, hold the line,
> Hands off the MUA.
> On the tree,
> burgeoning flowers of solidarity,
> thorny twigs of resistance,
> strong stems of disobedience
> and seeds of victory.
> Alight with love,
> strong in struggle,
> two old women (with comrades)
> the next and
> not-to-be-forgotten day
> defeat black cargo,
> turn a train away.

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[Eds: Also see the obituary for Archie Green, this Number, pp. 6-8.]