The Right of Labour to its Produce:
Producerism and Worker Politics, 1775-1930

By Harry Cole

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Acknowledgements

This thesis began life as an undergraduate essay written for an Australian history course taught by Associate Professor Andrew Moore at the University of Western Sydney. As a mature-age student who had arrived in Australia as an adult, it was Andrew’s classes that sparked an interest in the history of my adopted home.

The journey from the hot, dirty, noisy and heavy work of a ships’ engine-room and the equally hot, dirty, noisy and heavy work of the paper mill and brickworks to the more refined world of a PhD candidature in the Arts is not one I would have anticipated undertaking when I began my adult life as a marine engineering apprentice in the shadows of the now sadly derelict shipyards of North-east England way back in 1978. Thanks, in no particular order, for this transition must go to the staff and former staff of the University of Western Sydney’s ‘Macstart’ university preparation course, an excellent preparatory course unfortunately now discontinued. It was they who, with a high degree of professionalism, taught and encouraged the crucial academic skills of critical analysis and expressing oneself to someone with a hitherto rudimentary grounding in the English language. To Dr Drew Cottle as principal supervisor and whose advice was crucial to the interpretive framework of the study. To Associate Professor Andrew Moore as co-supervisor, and to Dr David Rollison who freely provided both encouragement and invaluable advice. Ultimately of course the arguments, conclusions, and errors in this work are my own.

Mention must also be given to those I spent many years working with in the metal trades—the fitters, welders and machinists who provide the backbone to what remains of Britain and Australia’s manufacturing industries. Men, and increasingly women, who work hard, take pride in a job well done and pursue what they believe to be rightly theirs with vigour. In many ways this is their history.
The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

Harry Cole
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## Abbreviations

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<td>AC</td>
<td>Australasian Chronicle</td>
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<td>AE</td>
<td>Australian Economist</td>
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<td>AEA</td>
<td>Australian Economic Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>Australian Labor Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>AR</td>
<td>Australian Radical (including the previous <em>Radical</em> of 1887)</td>
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<td>AW</td>
<td>Australian Workman</td>
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<tr>
<td>CJ</td>
<td>Commercial Journal</td>
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<tr>
<td>CL</td>
<td>Currency Lad</td>
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<tr>
<td>CoL</td>
<td>Cap of Liberty (G. Br)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPA</td>
<td>Communist Party of Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>LD</td>
<td>Low’s Directory of the City and District of Sydney (1847)</td>
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<td>LDm</td>
<td>London Democrat (G. Br)</td>
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<tr>
<td>HC</td>
<td>Hard Cash</td>
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<tr>
<td>HRNSW</td>
<td>Historical Records of New South Wales</td>
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<td>IN</td>
<td>Industrial News</td>
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<td>IWW</td>
<td>Industrial Workers of the World</td>
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<td>MoA</td>
<td>Making of America Collection</td>
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<td>MIA</td>
<td>Marxist Internet Archive</td>
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<td>MPA</td>
<td>Mutual Protection Association</td>
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<td>NO</td>
<td>New Order</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
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<td>NSWAO</td>
<td>New South Wales Archives Office</td>
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<td>NSWC</td>
<td>New South Wales Census</td>
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<td>NSWLA</td>
<td>New South Wales Legislative Assembly</td>
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<td>NSWLC</td>
<td>New South Wales Legislative Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>OBU</td>
<td>One Big Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td>People’s Advocate and New South Wales Vindicator</td>
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<td>PFP</td>
<td>Politics for the People (G. Br)</td>
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<td>PMG</td>
<td>Poor Man’s Guardian (G. Br)</td>
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<td>RCNSW</td>
<td>Returns of the Colony of New South Wales</td>
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<td>RCS</td>
<td>Royal Commission on Strikes (NSW 1891)</td>
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<td>SCCWC</td>
<td>Select Committee Report into the Conditions of the Working Classes of the Metropolis (1860)</td>
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<td>SCDML</td>
<td>Select Committee on the Petition From Distressed Mechanics and Labourers (1843)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SCMC</td>
<td>Select Committee on Monetary Confusion (1843)</td>
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<td>SG</td>
<td>Sydney Gazette</td>
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<td>SH</td>
<td>Sydney Herald</td>
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<td>SMH</td>
<td>Sydney Morning Herald</td>
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<td>SR</td>
<td>Sydney Record</td>
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<td>SRNSW</td>
<td>Statistical Register of New South Wales.</td>
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<td>WR</td>
<td>Weekly Register</td>
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A Note on Labour/Labor

The terms ‘labour’ and ‘Labor’ when used in the Australian context are more than just simple spelling conventions. Each has a distinct meaning. From quite early in the recorded history of the Australian labour movement the different spellings were used interchangeably with no significance attached to either. Often, as in the example of the People’s Advocate and Star of the 1840s and the Radical of the late 1880s, the two different spellings were occasionally to be found on the same page. By the late 1890s however the Americanised ‘Labor’ spelling had become dominant, and was officially adopted by the 1908 Commonwealth Labor Conference.

In keeping with Australian academic convention, this study uses ‘Labor’ solely to refer to the Australian Labor Party (ALP) in both state and federal incarnations prior to and post 1908. ‘Labour’, on the other hand, refers to the broader working-class movement and to working people as a whole, particularly when viewed in opposition to capital. Exception to this convention only occurs within quotations.
Abstract

Between 1775 and 1930 Anglo-American and Australian worker politics were centred on the belief that working people endured economic inequality through the unfair social division of wealth. Regardless of political affiliation, contemporary working-class radicals saw the solution to what was variously described as ‘the labour problem’, ‘the economic problem’, or ‘the social problem’ as the return of most or all of a nation’s wealth from those who had accumulated it to those that had originally produced it—a perspective described by North American historians as producerism.

Economic forces were at work during the above period that at once produced significantly more wealth than hitherto possible, yet at the same time saw that wealth concentrated and polarised. Money, seen as the potential to command human labour, became accumulated by the few and enabled them to purchase fine houses and generous quantities of food, clothing, and useful or ornamental objects. Producerism viewed this world from the standpoint of those engaged in the work necessary for the creation of those items and commodities. It confronted the social and economic paradox of a worker being unable to afford the commodity he or she produced, while those who apparently produced nothing had them in abundance.

The principal means of mobilising workers to the political action deemed necessary to solve the labour problem was the radical press and examination of many Australian, British or American radical sources from the period will reveal an underlying economic demand to popular political radicalism through the presence of the ‘producer’ or the ‘producing classes’ in its pages. Producerism thus connected many political and cultural aspects of a broad radical counter-hegemonic discourse to economic inequity. It did so through its pivotal axioms of the labour theory of value and the concepts of productive and unproductive labour. The core of this thesis is an exposition of this discourse of labour and although an Australian history, it could equally have been written using the British, American or Canadian example. Utilising the concept of producerism, it suggests that almost regardless of historical or political context, appeal to such sentiment was the essential means of galvanising workers and challenging the economic doctrines which helped maintain ruling-class
hegemony. What follows therefore is a social history of ideas and assumptions rather than of events or human actors.

Following sections on precursors in British and American sources, the study looks at producerism at two important junctures in the political and economic history of New South Wales: the 1840s, and the period 1890-1930. Both were times of severe or fluctuating economic conditions and political mobilisation. The first period witnessed a middle-class challenge for control of the state. It utilised a constitutional radicalism that enlisted the working classes through cautious use of producerist argument. These producerist references tended to be oblique and muted but nevertheless offer proof of its existence in the colony. The second was one of direct working-class challenge for state power, where producerism’s presence as the guiding force of worker politics was more obvious. Beginning in the depression of the 1890s it looks at how the radical literature associated with Australian socialism, syndicalism and labourism built cases for economic and social justice on producerist foundations. In this way it underlined worker politics until a precipitous post-1930 decline.
INTRODUCTION

Here is the whole affair. Here it is all. The food and drink and the raiment are taken away from those who labour and given to those who do not labour.¹

In 1966 the economist C. D. W. Goodwin briefly acknowledged the existence in nineteenth-century Australia of an economic doctrine based upon a very different interpretation of classical distribution theory in which the whole national product was attributed to the working classes. This doctrine declared that the capital which comprised the nation’s wealth was merely the embodiment of labour, and therefore the workers responsible for its creation had just claim to its proceeds. It was, according to Goodwin, the basis for the Australian labour movement’s demand for social reform, whether through revolutionary Marxism or state legislation.²

An earlier assessment of orthodox Australian economic history from J. A. La Nauze noted that no in-depth account of the economic philosophy of the Australian labour movement had been written. Referring to the fundamental principle behind all nineteenth-century workers’ movements that labour had the right to retain its produce, La Nauze offered no further analysis but suggested it might prove a fruitful avenue of research for labour historians.³ This gap remains unfilled. The same holds true for analysis beyond Australia. Despite British historian Asa Briggs’ 1967 comment that ‘the doctrine of the right of the labouring people to the whole produce of labour still need[ed] a more systematic examination than historians have given it’ and American historian Ronald Schultz’s surprise as late as 1990 that this ‘promising notion’ remained largely unexplored, no comprehensive work has been done in this area, nor does there seem to be any in train.⁴

Today’s Western capitalist society is one defined by consumption. It is a period of material abundance where modern production techniques have allowed most a limited share of society’s wealth, and a life of reasonable comfort, through

participation in the consumption of goods and services within the free market. As
might be expected of a consumer society with an efficient and seemingly boundless
productive capacity, economic theory gives precedence to consumption. Consumers
are encouraged to spend freely, while the prevailing neo-classical orthodoxy seeks to
best direct human economic activity to the aggregate demands of individual
consumers, at the same time minimising cost and maximising efficiency and profit.

By contrast the period 1775-1930 was one defined by production. Although
under the same capitalist free market regime as today, social emphasis was placed on
the production of commodities rather than their consumption. Unlike contemporary
consumer capitalism, consumption beyond basic necessity was limited to the rich
few, while among the masses material deprivation was commonplace. To maximise
the capital accumulation that could be directed to reinvestment under such conditions,
thrift was encouraged while extravagance met with social disapproval. Classical
economists like Adam Smith reinforced the primacy of production by arguing that a
greater national surplus could be accrued from production than the previous
mercantilist practice of attempting a positive trade balance through simple trading.
The wealth of nations stemmed from their capacity to produce. By the early
nineteenth century, manufacturing, defined by Patrick Colquhoun in 1814 as
productive human industry carried out by means of ‘ingenious machinery’, was seen
as the engine of a nation’s progress.

But within classical economics lay the seed of worker challenge. While Smith
had convincingly argued the bourgeois case for free market economics, his inquiry
into the social origins of wealth also pointed to the potentially socially divisive
labour theory of value and the associated concepts of productive and unproductive
labour. Here Smith unintentionally reinforced a much older popular contention that
productive labour alone was the foundation of society, and those thus engaged
sustained those who were not—a perspective described recently by North American
historians as producerism. Both Smith and (later) Ricardo acknowledged that the

5 As a system of social and economic relations, capitalism emerged over a significant time period and
its development was marked by several related phases that overlapped and co-existed with older social
formations. For convenience, and to avoid complexity, this study regards industrial capitalism (as
emergent from the mid 18th century) as the archetype. Its essential characteristic relevant to this study
was the replacement of craft production with the factory system and waged labour.
http://socserv.mcmaster.ca/econ/ugcm/3ll3/smith/wealth/wealbk04 (accessed 6 January 2005); P.
Mawman, 1814, p. 63.
process of creating value by converting raw materials into commodities had human labour at its core. But acknowledging productive activity as the cause of a nation’s wealth had the side-effect of reinforcing the workers’ belief in their own social utility, and thus, through the labour theory of value, both economists indirectly lent justification to workers’ demands for a greater share of the social wealth. In an age of reason and science, their inquiries gave scientific credence to a producerist assessment that in a previous era had relied on canonist economic morality. This thesis is a study of how that producerism influenced the worker politics of nineteenth-century New South Wales.

The main focus of this study is, therefore, on the role occupied by the labour theory of value in workers’ political movements. But despite the importance of the labour theory it is not an exercise in formal economic history. Instead it offers an examination of how a popular version of the theory, as expressed by a distinctly producerist political vocabulary, influenced worker politics. Comparison of British, American and Australian radicalism across the nineteenth century reveals a number of remarkably similar recurrent themes. The suggestion is that in providing the economic foundation to these themes, producerism offers another perspective on the study of the domestic politics of the period and places it within the broader Anglo-American popular opposition to established wealth and power. Producerism can be thus seen as the political expression of popular economics. The historical figure of ‘the producer’, a consistent feature of nineteenth-century worker radicalism, was productive human labour personified—a fundamentally economic representation. Through its recognition of the social and material value of the worker’s labour, producerism attached worker politics to the point of production.

Recent American and Canadian labour historiography argues that producerism determined how nineteenth-century artisans, productive manual labourers, small

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farmers, small manufacturers, and other petty producers responded to the existing economic and social order. Emerging from the point of production, it provided a bottom-up economic perspective which emphasised that human labour improved the land by cultivation, built the physical infrastructure and transformed raw materials into commodities; hence labour alone was responsible for the generation of all wealth. Its view of history was that nations and their wealth were not built by the great men that filled the history books, but by the sweat and toil of ordinary people in the workshop and field. More closely, though not exclusively, associated with the primary and secondary sectors of the economy than the tertiary, its division of society into producers and non-producers exerted a powerful influence over North American political and economic discourse.  

Rising to E. P. Thompson’s call for history from below, historians like Sean Wilentz, Bruce Laurie and Ronald Schultz used producerism in their assessment of American workers’ and small producers’ reaction to the advance of industrial capitalism. Their studies emphasised community and work; describing how producerism bound the cultural, communal, political, and economic lives of ordinary people together. This led Schultz, in perhaps the most comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon to date, to see it not as ideology but tradition; neither structured nor articulated through formal channels, but instead passed orally between generations and woven into the fabric of artisan life. Yet the lack of a formal structure or core text did not diminish its ideological power, for its values and assumptions animated

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popular political movements and formal worker ideologies across the English-speaking world.

The key figure in the history of producer radicalism was the artisan. It was British historians E. P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm that refocused historical interest on the artisan; Thompson largely through examination of their role in radical politics, and Hobsbawm their economic role as skilled labour. Both concluded that these skilled workers dominated working-class movements in the nineteenth century, and in so doing went against the previous twentieth-century left’s insistence that such movements were driven by the massed ranks of the semi-skilled and unskilled proletariat. ¹² Neither historian however offered any significant analysis of the economic philosophy that galvanised radical political activity, although both briefly acknowledged some salient features. Thompson for example referred to ‘an underlying set of assumptions’ that existed beneath the more formal ideologies. He also noted the radicals’ division of society into the ‘productive’ and ‘parasitic’ classes, but conceded that his concern with the sociology of the ideas took precedence over their identity. ¹³

In taking up Thompson’s challenge, British historians Iorwerth Prothero, Geoffrey Crossick and Gwyn Williams offered histories of artisan political life, both in the local and broader European context, including two important comparative histories of British and French artisan radicalism during the French revolution from Williams and Prothero. ¹⁴ Prothero’s Artisans and Politics narrowed down Thompson’s broad analysis to that of a specific trade—the shipwrights of early


nineteenth-century London and their radical leader John Gast. As the title suggested it was an examination of the critical role played by the artisan in nineteenth-century working-class politics. Like Thompson, and typical of these studies, it acknowledged some fundamental aspects of economic radicalism in passing, but concluded (albeit correctly), early in the work that radicals regarded the political power held by the ruling classes as the source of their economic privation. Consequently, again typically, Prothero focused on political and constitutional rather than economic radicalism. Clive Behagg’s *Politics and Production* took a more quantitative approach, but although the title promised a more economic interpretation, it too fell back into this tradition. In examining the relationship between political radicalism and the small producer in nineteenth-century Birmingham, Behagg made frequent reference to the point of production and demonstrated the close relationship between Chartism and the Birmingham trades.\(^\text{15}\) But like the other studies in this area it lacked an ideological explanation with which to fuse the radical politics to its economic foundation.

Ironically, given the groundbreaking work of Thompson and Hobsbawm, British historiography has since taken a different path and it is in America that a significant body of academic work has been devoted to artisan politics, community life and work practices. American ‘New Labor History’ is at the forefront of scholarly research in this area, and offers the best and most recent historical accounts. There are now many studies detailing the artisans of the major cities of nineteenth-century America and most incorporate producerism as a means of drawing the cultural, economic, and political aspects of artisan life together. They examine the crucial role played by artisan producerism in the radical politics that confronted both British oppression and the threat to their livelihood later posed by industrial capitalism.\(^\text{16}\)

Until now the producerism utilised in these studies has been constrained by their inherent localism. Despite both Laurie and Freyer taking a broader national

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perspective in their analyses, most are studies of urban mechanics rather than the producing classes as a whole and each tends to remain confined to the larger port cities of the United States’ eastern seaboard.\(^17\) This localism, and perhaps a continuing belief in American Exceptionalism from both within and outside the United States, has meant that despite both Schultz and Laurie’s acknowledgement of producerism as a feature of worker politics and culture beyond these geographic boundaries, it has not easily found a place outside of North American historiography.\(^18\) Yet with roots deep in the moral economy of medieval Europe, producerism also offered the same set of assumptions to nineteenth-century British and Australian working people.\(^19\)

In contrast to North American labour historians, much contemporary British historiography emphasises ‘language of class’. Largely under the influence of such historians as Gareth Steadman Jones, Patrick Joyce and James Vernon, it remains centred on language as an expression of cultural, political and constitutional struggle, or simply as a subject in its own right. A constitutional focus has typified many histories of British radicalism for good reason. Any examination of early British (and indeed Australian) radicalism will reveal that the principal remedy offered for worker grievances was constitutional change. For much of its history British popular radicalism fought to gain constitutional rights. Australian radicalism in the first half of the nineteenth century fought the same battle. By contrast their American counterpart sought to defend those already won from the threat posed by an increasingly influential and economically powerful capitalist class. Such a ‘linguistic turn’ might therefore seem more useful and relevant to the British attention on social relationships based upon power and emphasis of the political language devoted to expressing constitutional struggle.\(^20\)

\(^{17}\) Although the role of producerism in rural America has been explored by Catherine McNicol Stock it remains essentially a feature of urban study within American labour historiography. C. McNicol Stock, *Rural Radicals: Righteous Rage in the American Grain*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1996.


\(^{20}\) Gareth Stedman-Jones’ essay on Chartism offers a case in point. He suggested that Chartism was less the precursor to class-consciousness as seen by twentieth-century socialist teleology than a re-
It is, however, an approach that has been criticised from a materialist perspective for disregarding the fundamental reason for workers’ collective political action by separating political language from any economic base and rendering it free-floating. From this perspective, whether to overturn society by revolution or to merely reform its institutions, the primary purpose of workers’ political action was to change society in order to solve the labour question. Solve this, radicals and early socialists argued, and all other social wrongs would be remedied. The fundamental reason for bringing any workers’ political organisation into existence was, therefore, to elevate the economic and hence social conditions of labour. Whether worker politics sought to totally change society or merely reform its political institutions, the question remained—to what end other than to give political expression to worker’s economic demands?

While true that British and colonial working-class radicals existed within a political culture that had as its central feature the demand for both constitutional reform and full citizenship, it is equally true that underlining these struggles was the economic grievance that led to insistence on the return of the fruits of their labour. A British radical thus informed a meeting in Manchester in 1826 that the real purpose of parliamentary reform was ‘to secure to the labourer the fruits of his own labour’. The National Union of the Working Classes of late-1830s Britain could not have made this any clearer. Opening with the statement that ‘labour is the source of all wealth’, it declared its six-point Chartist political principles as ‘essential to our protection as working men…the only sure guarantees for the securing to us the proceeds of our labour’. The declaration was drafted by William Lovett, also responsible for drawing up the ‘People’s Charter’ of 1838, the foundation document expression of a much older political language. He rightly argued that the language of political radicalism had existed prior to Chartism, but also contended that Chartism’s history could not be written in terms of the social and economic grievances of which it had previously claimed to be the expression. G. Stedman Jones, Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-1982. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983.


23 Lovett, Life and Struggles, p. 59.
of Chartism. On the other side of the world, the *Guardian* of New South Wales declared that although political ferment had been the ‘grand instrument’ by which ‘all great popular concessions’ had been obtained:

> The agitation of the idle hand and empty stomach have been at the bottom of them all, and the leaders of the movements have only been the vehicles by which that agitation has been brought about...whatever the proposed political object might be, the real end to be arrived at by the artizan, even in the achievement of his political aim, is to improve his social and physical condition.\textsuperscript{24}

A half-century later the belief that all workers’ political concerns should ultimately resolve themselves into the labour question could still be found in the Australian labour press.\textsuperscript{25}

By focusing on the language of constitutionalism, the linguistic approach tends to neglect much of popular radicalism’s intensely economic sub-stratum; the very feature that tied it to the material concerns of its social base.\textsuperscript{26} But rather than being separated in this way, the political and economic aspects should be seen as essential to each other. As Paul Keen noted of the 1818 British *Gorgon*, it was a publication ‘distinguished by its insistence on the need to fuse the struggles against economic and political exploitation as two inextricably linked parts of the “double portion of oppression” burdening “the working man”’.\textsuperscript{27} It was not an isolated instance. Resistance framed in similar terms is found in many nineteenth-century radical publications. The 1844 New South Wales *Guardian*, to take an antipodean example, stated its founding principle as ‘the protection of the Working Classes against the injurious tendency of aristocratic ascendancy, not merely in a political, but in an economical point of view’.\textsuperscript{28}

As previously mentioned, prior to the ‘linguistic turn’ British studies of nineteenth-century artisan radicalism like those of Thompson and Prothero did touch the underlying economic assumptions.\textsuperscript{29} But it was Briggs who first described the

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\item \textsuperscript{24} *Guardian*, 20 April 1844.
\item \textsuperscript{25} *AW*, 1 November 1890.
\item \textsuperscript{26} One only has to read Lovett’s autobiography to get a sense of how almost all of Lovett’s political actions were driven by producerist economic grievances and notions of the social utility of the working man. Lovett, *Life and Struggles*, passim.
\item \textsuperscript{28} *Guardian*, 23 March 1844.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Thompson, *Making of*, pp. 832-87; Prothero, *Artisans and Politics*, pp. 83-98.
\end{itemize}
distinct political ‘language of class’ and its emphasis on the ‘producing classes’ within British radicalism, thereby drawing the economic question and its political expression together.\textsuperscript{30} The same approach was subsequently incorporated by Patricia Hollis into her definitive study of British radicalism’s ideology.\textsuperscript{31} Writing prior to the new American labour history, Hollis recognised the significance of both the labour theory of value, and the concept of productive and unproductive labour, to the broader radical ideology. Of equal importance was her inclusion of the criticisms of the labour theory by George Poulett Scrope, forerunner of the marginal school of economics. Nevertheless the Hollis study was confined to the British press of the 1830s and so neither examined its connection to working people, nor pointed out why the ideology was relevant to them. As with American labour historiography the same universal ideas were restricted by context, but alongside Schultz in America, Hollis remains the most comprehensive and insightful work in this area.

While acknowledging the existence of numerous workers’ collective identities, many of which were doubtless unconnected with economic concerns, this study contends that the precedence of the economic aspect within worker politics cannot be overlooked. It is thus predicated on the hypothesis that work as an economic activity remained the principal focus of workers’ lives historically, and that worker politics were not free-floating, but primarily tied to realising an ideal society based on a fair and equitable economic premise—in other words finding a solution to the labour question. It argues that when examining worker politics, political and socio-economic issues must be seen in relation to the point of production historically. It also incorporates Laurie’s argument that although the working-class radical political ideals of citizenship, republicanism and egalitarianism were held in common with radicals of other classes (and thus open to incorporation by those classes and disassociation from their working-class economic base), economic radicalism (producerism) belonged only to the workers, informing them that they were producers with their own distinct and separate interests.\textsuperscript{32}

The concept of producerism therefore allows the return of an economic dimension to the study of nineteenth-century worker politics missing from recent labour historiography’s focus on cultural or linguistic analysis. Any examination of

\textsuperscript{32} Laurie, \textit{Artisans}, p. 214.
the British, North American or Australian nineteenth-century radical print, both as the main means of animating worker opinion and as a reflection of contemporary political ideas and debate, reveals a medium dominated by the ubiquitous producerist social dichotomy of a society composed of producers and non-producers, the premise of labour as the source of all wealth, and demands for the return to labour of its produce. This is regardless of whether it be propaganda for Chartism, syndicalism, labourism, the single tax, or socialism. It provided a common economic perspective that tied worker politics of all types, in all three countries, to a common counter-hegemonic language. It demonstrated that producerism was less a competing ideology than an informal but fundamental underlying set of assumptions upon which all of these formal doctrines were raised. Often as hostile to each other as the ruling classes they all opposed, each of the above radical movements proposed their own means of remedying society’s political and economic inequalities. But beneath all sat producerism’s universal and powerful economic logic, owing something perhaps, as Christopher Lasch explained, to ‘the old folk wisdom of the dislike of those who get something for nothing’.

Part A examines producerism’s genesis, a necessary inclusion to provide background and context for its Australian incarnation. It is impossible to offer a firm time frame for its emergence, for as Schultz noted, popular tradition seldom asserted its presence in recorded history unless it disrupted elite rule. Nevertheless societies that emphasised commodity production, particularly those which acknowledged it as the driving force of human progress, almost certainly provided fertile ground for producerism to take root. While largely ignored by twentieth-century academics until the recent attention of American labour history, nineteenth-century analysis gave it greater significance. In the introduction to Anton Menger’s 1899 Right to the Whole Produce of Labour, orthodox British economist Herbert Foxwell’s critical evaluation of socialism clearly identified its first principle as the right of labour to retain its whole produce—in keeping with Menger’s title. Menger himself also detailed how

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33 As an example the (Australian) syndicalist Industrial News of 1 May 1921 wrote: ‘The workers are the producers of all wealth. They [the bosses] are the parasites’. A century earlier the radical (British) Gorgon of 8 August 1818 wrote in almost identical terms. Most socialist publications of the time like the Australian Radical contained similar producerist social analysis.

34 As a common language and set of ideas see Rubinstein, ‘British Radicalism’, pp. 339-73; Laurie, Artisans, p. 13.

35 Lasch, True and Only Heaven, p. 270.

distinction between the producing and non-producing classes permeated socialist doctrine and literature, in addition to describing the close connections between British and American socialism. The influence of radicals like Hodgskin, Gray, Owen, Cooper, Skidmore and Brownson are all detailed in the Menger study. Alongside the works of other ‘mechanic political economists’, as they were described by American radical Thomas Cooper, they demonstrated the powerful connection between popular radical politics and the labour theory of value. If, as Thompson suggested, Thomas Paine’s Right’s of Man was the foundation political text of nineteenth-century radicalism, then the works of these radicals were its foundation economic texts. The logic of their arguments, based on the labour theory of value and difficult to refute under the prevailing economic orthodoxy, remained worrisome to the ruling classes until the marginal revolution of the late nineteenth century shifted the cause of value from labour utilised in production to consumer demand.

Yet examining the influence of nineteenth-century producerism on British, North American and Australian radicalism is problematic. It wrestles with the inevitable difficulties that accompany comparative histories, particularly as it views its subject across a broad time frame. To suggest that the historical experience of widely different social movements, with all their local complexities, followed a common pattern regardless of time or place bears the stamp of both reductionism and anachronism. Context remains critical. Where, for example, the North American and Australian radicalism of the 1840s was largely based on the independent mutualism of the urban artisan and yeoman farmer, a rapidly industrialising Britain was witnessing the stirrings of early socialism. They are difficulties further compounded by employing a thematic approach in preference to one of chronology or geography.

Demonstrating Australian radicalism’s place within the broader Anglo-American context demands a wide-ranging analysis, but taking such a broad scope

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38 The best example is the work of John Bray, a compositor. In many important respects Bray’s work anticipated both Marx and Proudhon. J. F. Bray, Labour’s Wrongs and Labour’s Remedy; or, the Age of Might and the Age of Right. Leeds, David Green, 1839; Foxwell, ‘English School’ in Menger Right to the Whole Produce, pp. xlviii-xlvi, lvi-lvii, lxiii. For a concise biography of Bray see Lichtheim, Origins of Socialism, fn 14, Ch. 8. See also Briggs, ‘Language of “Class”’, esp. pp. 18-25.
may also lend many aspects a superficial appearance. In examining how producerism influenced the various strands of radical thought across three countries it encounters an extensive radical literature. It cannot therefore offer in-depth analysis of common features like the disdain for the tax-eater and capitalist, or the anti-lawyer, anti-priest sentiment common to all three countries, but instead attempts to tie them to its central theme. Nevertheless a producerist substratum is so apparent within all of these different historical contexts and movements that comparison is demanded, and it is hoped that the usefulness of demonstrating the continuity and extent of the ideas outweighs any contextual obstacles.

Having established producerism as the driving force of Anglophone radical politics, Parts B and C examine its presence in nineteenth-century New South Wales. They operate as case studies through which to demonstrate and explore producerism at different junctures of Australian history thereby avoiding the enormous task of demonstrating its presence across the century as a whole. Here Bob Connell and Terry Irving’s division of Australian history into economic periods provides a useful template.

Part B looks at the New South Wales of the 1840s, a period described by Connell and Irving as ‘the rise of the urban bourgeoisie’. It was a challenge that saw the colony’s urban middle classes utilise producerist themes in their construction of a ‘harmony of interest’ with the working classes. At this point the work delves into the culture and work practices of Sydney’s urban colonial artisans in an attempt to reveal the connection between producerism and the point of production, and establish a hitherto undescribed contemporary social base for the ideas. It is based upon the assumption that the existence within New South Wales of a significant body of urban mechanics of recent British origin and heritage, with similar work practices to those of their British and North American counterparts, would indicate the existence of similar political and cultural ideas and assumptions. Since the Thompson study it has become accepted history that the artisan, a skilled worker that made a living from a craft or trade, was the main channel for radical ideas at this time. 40 The most

40 Thompson, Making of...
politically aware of the free migrants arriving in colonial New South Wales, they were driven by the desire for ‘improvement’ through enhancement of their material conditions. In comparison to other workers they were better paid, more organised and politically active. Unlike the later nineteenth century there is a paucity of Australian historical analysis in this area, presumably in part because of a lack of primary source material. Arguing the existence of material conditions which may have lent themselves to a certain political perspective demands more than mere assertion; hence the necessity of trying to build a picture of what conditions may have been like at the point of production during the period. Unfortunately, because of a dearth of material, it has to remain a somewhat tentative connection, and one that has to rely to a significant extent on inferences drawn from the abovementioned British and North American works.

The tendency of the working classes to turn to politics only during times of economic privation and pursue more direct means of economic negotiation when times were good is one observed by both contemporaries and historians. As the political expression of worker economics, producerism therefore tended to appear at times of social tension. But for any working-class ideas to have social resonance presupposes enough working people to form some kind of collective ‘working class’. Radicalism and dissent doubtless existed in a convict colony which, from its beginnings, held many political enemies of the British state. The colony’s establishment coincided with a period of social crisis in Britain that witnessed numerous radicals transported to New South Wales including the ‘Scottish Martyrs’ of 1794, members of the Cato Street Conspiracy of 1820 and the Newport uprising of 1840. Some, like ‘Scottish Martyr’ Maurice Margarot, remained a continual thorn in the side of the colonial government. In addition, ideas circulating through some early radical newspapers were considered dangerous enough by Governor Ralph

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vol. 102, no. 403, 1987. Artisans were also referred to as mechanics, tradesmen or craftsmen. At a general level these were interchangeable terms that described skilled workers who had completed an apprenticeship. For a more detailed discussion of the semantics see Hobsbawm, ‘Artisan or Labour Aristocrat?’, pp. 356-8.


Darling to warrant the introduction of a stamp duty on the press in 1827-8. But radicalism and dissent in a penal colony do not equate to working-class radicalism.

Since white occupation, Australian economic life has been characterised by commodity production—the essential prerequisite for producerism’s existence. Within this context most Australian labour history sees the free economy, market relations, and a recognisable working class appear in the 1840s. Ken Buckley and Ted Wheelwright regarded the 1830s and ‘40s as the crucial, formative years of an Australian working class. This was a period when worker collective action began to take place through trade unions, petitions and demonstrations. Andrew Wells also saw the 1830s-60s as the critical period in the capitalist commodification of labour, and the beginning of the replication of a ‘free’ wage-earning class in Australia. Connell and Irving, however, argued that for a fully-fledged working class to exist in the truest Marxist sense there had to be a system of private property, market relations and industrial development, the latter not occurring until the last two decades of the century. Nevertheless they too acknowledged both a rudimentary worker organisation and a sufficiently developed worker consciousness for popular radicalism to emerge as a significant social force by 1840.

It is difficult to determine when producerism first appeared in New South Wales, although references to a distinct colonial ‘producing class’ were documented in 1840. Economic crisis was first confronted by a recognisable colonial working class during the depression of the 1840s. With market relations established and commerce and local manufacturing assuming increasing importance, the crisis was coincident with the beginning of a shift in state power away from the large land-

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49 *AC*, 1 October 1840. The *Australasian Chronicle* was published twice weekly, edited by William A. Duncan, and aimed at the colony’s Roman Catholics. Duncan himself was a former Presbyterian turned Catholic.
holder to urban commercial interests. A reformist radical populism supported by a brief but extensive radical press emerged, drawing on a largely urban middle and working-class social base. Through a ‘harmony of interest’ embodied within the concept of the ‘useful classes’ (as distinct from, but incorporating, the ‘producing classes’), it challenged a legislature dominated by large landholders and the British colonial administration, demanding universal suffrage and questioning the motives and capabilities of the ruling classes. It was a radicalism ultimately diffused by an increase in adult suffrage and the discovery of gold in the 1850s.

The period from 1890-1930 witnessed a re-emergence of producerism and is explored in Part C. Precipitated by economic depression, it is described by Connell and Irving as a time of ‘working class challenge’. Under the umbrella of a broad but ill-defined reformist socialism, the syndicalist successors to the mutualism associated with the old radicalism found competition for the support of workers with the statism, collectivism, and large-scale division of labour of the state socialists. Both were predicated on producers retaining full fruit of their labours: the former through industry-based producer collectives retaining the full value of their produce; the latter through state ownership of all production in the name of all producers and distribution according to need. Ultimately neither prevailed and working-class militancy, outgunned and deflated, was instead diverted into accepting not the whole produce of labour, but merely a fairer share through a practical accommodation of capitalism via the Labor Party.

Where the radicalism of the 1840s had incorporated significant elements of the tertiary sector, that of the 1890s was primarily, though not exclusively, built on the producerism of workers within the primary and secondary sectors of the economy. Unlike its earlier one-dimensional reformist incarnation, and despite the narrowing of its social base, through the new ideologies it assumed a more multi-faceted working-class challenge that continued to confront capitalism into the 1930s. Producerist sentiment was aggressively articulated in a burgeoning radical press through papers such as the Radical, the Australian Workman, Justice, the Hummer, Hard Cash, and

31 Connell and Irving, Class Structure, pp. 99-104.
33 For a more in-depth exposition of these arguments see Ibid, pp. 6, 39-45.
34 Ibid, p. 195.
35 Connell and Irving, Class Structure, pp. 126-70.
New Order. All challenged the established capitalist order and attempted to demolish any remaining ‘harmony of interest’ between employers and employed. As Robin Gollan pointed out, such ‘harmony’ had become increasingly difficult to maintain during the 1870s and ‘80s as the artisan founders of many manufacturing enterprises became men of means and found their interests increasingly divergent from those of their workers.

Australia’s confrontation between capital and labour took place against the backdrop of a revolution in orthodox economic doctrine that culminated in the ascendancy of marginal utility. From the 1870s onwards it became increasingly apparent that the labour theory was incapable of explaining an ever more complex economy, especially value placed on an object through consumer demand. Robert Owen’s practical experiment of pricing goods for sale based on the amount of labour utilised in their production had failed as early as 1834 when it encountered difficulty in comparing the value of different types of labour and other unforeseen additional costs associated with bringing goods to the point of sale. Utility theory explained both consumer demand and market pricing, and allowed formal economics to finally dismiss the labour theory altogether. In so doing it also conveniently bypassed labour’s supposed right to its whole produce where the previous wages-fund orthodoxy had invested much in its less than convincing public attempts to disprove it. Some advocates of state socialism, notably the British Fabians and European Revisionists, also seized upon marginal utility as a means of overcoming the labour theory’s tendency to syndicalism. Others such as Henry Myers Hyndman remained

57 For example, William McNamara wrote in the Radical of 1 May 1888 that the harmony of interest was a fallacy. As capital could only grow through the mechanism of surplus-value, in other words exploitation of the worker by the capitalist, capital and labour were antipathetic. Expecting labour and capital to work in harmony was like expecting the serpent and dove to fraternise.
58 R. Gollan, Radical and Working Class Politics: A Study of Eastern Australia 1850-1910. Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1960, p. 100. Behagg’s British study argued that under the increasing influence of industrialisation, the artisan-master was transformed into the petit-bourgeois small manufacturers—a ‘mirror image’ of the large-scale manufacturer. Behagg, Politics and Production, p. 6.
60 The wages-fund theory reluctantly acknowledged that value was created through productive labour, but contended that capital provided the original fund from which wages and materials were drawn. Menger, Right to the Whole Produce; Meek, Labor Theory of Value.
resolutely opposed. Ultimately however, the absence of any vaguely similar axioms provided little ground for argument, and public debate between the two theories was largely absent in either the radical or establishment press.

Quite how this theoretical struggle manifested itself in pragmatic Australia is also unclear. While its progress was briefly charted in Britain by Ronald Meek, evidence in formal Australian economic thought remains inconclusive despite studies of both economic history and the Fabian influence in Australia. There was little contemporary debate between value theories in Australia beyond occasional mention in the limited circulation Australian Economist, and there remains a lack of any definitive work on this aspect of Australian economic history. Edward Shann’s early Economic History of Australia made no mention. This was curious given that Shann was both an economist and Fabian (though later a conservative) who studied under Graham Wallas, and knew Alfred Marshall personally. More generally, his section on the Australian labour movement offered no description of the economic principle upon which it fought. This baffling omission in an economic history was also true of the economic histories of Brian Fitzpatrick and Dennis Grundy. La Nauze’s Political Economy in Australia was largely devoted to Jevons, Hearn and Syme, while Peter Groenewegen and Bruce McFarlane’s more recent offering focused on the contribution of individual orthodox economists and so, similarly, did not acknowledge this aspect of late nineteenth-century economics. A contemporary account of the 1890 Maritime Strike given by the Australian Economic Association’s Arthur Duckworth made mention of the economic theory behind the Australian labour movement, revealing the influence of the labour theory both directly and indirectly through W. G. Spence, Henry George, and the ‘socialistic’ basis of the strike to readers of the British Economic Journal. But despite oblique references to the workers being misguided or misled, Duckworth too did not introduce any serious theoretical debate. In Australia it seems, as in Britain, rather than engaging in public

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63 Meek, Labor Theory of Value, pp. 243-56.
65 La Nauze, Political Economy; Groenewegen, History.
debate, or loudly promoting itself as an alternative to the labour theory, marginal utility gained quiet universal acceptance as economic truth through commercially influenced or funded institutions such as the university economics faculties.\(^{67}\)

By the 1930s the once all-powerful producerist doctrine had decline almost to irrelevance. Reasons remain elusive,\(^{68}\) although a brief increase in worker affluence immediately prior to the drastic reversal of the Great Depression, a shift in the social focus from production to consumption and the associated switch in orthodox value theories, may all have combined to help render it irrelevant. With the ALP firmly established in the parliamentary democratic process the need to mobilise workers against the state was also removed. Moreover Bob Connell and Verity Burgmann have pointed to the subsequent infection of workers’ organisations with bureaucratic inertia and a taste for minor privilege.\(^{69}\) They repeated Vere Gordon Childe’s famous charge that the ALP began with ‘a band of inspired socialists, degenerated into a vast machine for capturing political power, but did not know how to use that power when attained except for the profit of individuals’.\(^{70}\) All of the above might have played a part in the quiet sidelining of this aggressively anti-privilege political language. More significantly perhaps, Connell also suggested that once the Labor Party and unions became entrenched, their newspapers, the movement’s principal means of disseminating and exchanging ideas, degenerated into house organs characterised by dullness and factional in-fighting. They gave up on information gathering and relied instead on the capitalist press for news, simply rewording conservative copy to a left perspective.\(^{71}\) Numbers dwindled, and by 1932 the remaining labour paper of any significance, the *World*, under the control of Frank Packer and with the complicity of

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\(^{67}\) Jack Lang offered the example of an (unnamed) associate of the large Myer retail chain funding the Faculty of Economics at the University of Melbourne. No further details were given. J. T. Lang, *The Great Bust: The Depression of the Thirties*. Katoomba, McNamara’s Books, 1962, p. 341. Whether university faculties were funded by business or not, the fact remains (as might be expected) that the relationship between the two was a close one. Goodwin noted the influence of the NSW Institute of Bankers and the Sydney Chamber of Commerce in establishing a faculty of economics at Sydney University and quoted R. F Irvine as stating that ‘the Chamber of Commerce took an active part in securing the establishment of a Department of Economics and Commerce at Sydney University’. Goodwin, *Economic Enquiry in Australia*, pp. 552-8.

\(^{68}\) This was also true of the same period in the United States according to Asher’s study of producerism in American steelworkers. Asher, ‘Producerism is Consciousness of Class’, pp. 62-6.


\(^{71}\) Connell, *Ruling Class*, p. 191.
E. G. ‘Red Ted’ Theodore, ceased publication and turned the presses of the Australian Workers’ Union, publisher of the aggressively proletarian *Hummer* and *Worker*, over to production of the *Australian Women’s Weekly*. The latter was a publication typical of those that popularised bourgeois values and gender stereotypes in order to foster and maintain the dominance of ruling-class ideas. It was the foundation of the aggressively anti-labour Packer press empire.\(^{72}\)

**Australian Labour Populism**

Although unacknowledged, the concept of producerism is not entirely absent from Australian labour historiography and its presence is often to be found in studies of Australian labour populism. The significance of a periodically emergent populist influence within a variety of Australian historical contexts has not escaped the attention of historians and other social theorists.\(^{73}\) It has, however, until recently proven difficult to interpret. In the absence of a relationship with any formal twentieth-century ideology, standard explanations represented it as having no coherent set of beliefs. It did not easily fit either the classical consensus or critical interpretation.\(^{74}\) The much cited Hofstadter example, or the Ionescu and Gellner compilation, tended to associate it with paranoia and conspiracy theories. In some ways both wore the legacy of a long-standing ruling-class proposition which saw only workers conspire to overturn civilised society, while at the same time scornfully dismissing popular suggestion that the rich and powerful might also conspire to maintain their wealth and power. Twentieth-century Marxists meanwhile regarded it as an alliance between class fragments that cut across class boundaries, but offered little explanation of what drew these fragments together.


In questioning how and why an American-type populism could emerge in a British colony populated almost entirely by émigré Britons, William Rubinstein’s comparative history suggested that the principal features of British, American and Australian populist radicalism held striking parallels. Rubinstein identified in Cobbett the same ideas and rhetoric as in American and Australian populists of some seventy years later, and through his description of those similarities became the first to place Australian labour populism within its broader context.\textsuperscript{75} Missing from Rubinstein’s argument, however, was recognition of the economic philosophy common to all three, and so like many explanations of populism and radicalism it remained unable to account for its attachment to any social base. Nevertheless his assessment ties with recent American labour history’s re-emphasis on the close links between American and British radicals and the suggestion that early nineteenth-century Anglo-American worker producerism be seen as a precursor to later labour populism.\textsuperscript{76}

A significant American populist influence on the Australian labour movement had earlier been recognised by the Australian ‘Old Left’s’ Russel Ward, and more so by Robin Gollan and Lloyd Churchward through Henry George, Edward Bellamy and Ignatius Donnelly.\textsuperscript{77} The Old Left however, constrained within a rigid Marxist interpretive framework was, as Ray Markey was to later point out, unable to offer suggestion as to why such populist ideas might take root in the Australian labour movement.\textsuperscript{78}

Both Connell and Irving, and Patrick Mullins, went beyond a narrative history of populism and attempted to define the concept in some meaningful historical and sociological way. Both studies took a broadly similar class-based critical approach. Connell and Irving’s examination of mid nineteenth-century ‘populist radicalism’ attributed it to a ‘complex pattern of formation of the class structure’. The

\textsuperscript{75} Rubinstein, ‘British Radicalism’, pp. 339-73.
\textsuperscript{76} Laurie, Artisans, pp. 66-72; Schultz, ‘Small Producer Tradition’, pp. 89-99; Lasch, True and Only Heaven, pp. 217, 222-5, 255; Sutton, Journeymen for Jesus, passim. The significance of these links had not escaped earlier analyses, for example Foxwell, ‘English School’, pp. Ivi-Ivii, lxxiii-lxxiv, lxxxvii-xc.
development of waged-labour under emergent capitalist relations—conditions where the classes were as yet not fully formed in the Marxist sense—saw the emergence of a popular radicalism based on ‘an agglomeration of people inside and outside the labour market’, with those inside further divided by the capital–labour relationship. Thus, they concluded, the early colonial radicalism ‘could not be constituted as a single movement by the operation of relationships within the basic capitalist institutions’, thereby demonstrating the difficulties associated with applying twentieth-century social models to earlier societal formations.\textsuperscript{79} Mullins’ study of Queensland populism also saw it as a feature of an underdeveloped or primary production-based economy. While acknowledging its non-class characteristics, Mullins nevertheless saw populism as a class alliance, or alliance between class fragments, the composition and political outlook of which was dependent on historical and/or geographical circumstance.\textsuperscript{80}

Peter Love offered a more sustained examination of labour populism between the 1890s and 1940s without delving into complex sociological analysis through his study of labour’s relationship with the banks.\textsuperscript{81} Like previous historians Love acknowledged the American influence on the Australian labour movement, but again while amply demonstrating the existence of this relationship, he was less able to explain why populist ideas such as ‘money power’ conspiracies found fertile ground in Australia. Having identified the labour movement’s basic assumption that ‘labour and raw materials were the source of all wealth’, by applying it solely to the money power theory Love fell short of recognising it as the movement’s universal economic premise and so missed the opportunity to demonstrate how, at a broader level, populist ideas that included money power conspiracies were anchored to their social base.\textsuperscript{82}

In addition, Stuart Svensen argued that Love paid too little attention to the activities of the banks themselves, and so failed to explain why they produced such animosity. Money power conspiracies, Svensen suggested, abounded within the labour movement because its members found difficulty in deciphering banking’s arcane language and had little or no access to bank and investment company records. The movement was therefore unable to determine the precise nature of the industry

\textsuperscript{80} Mullins, ‘Queensland’, p. 141.  
\textsuperscript{81} Love, \textit{Labour and the Money Power}.  
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid, p. 69.
or the extent to which it functioned: it recognised that banking abstracted wealth from workers but could neither observe nor fully explain the precise mechanism. Svensen’s primary research showed that in Queensland at least, British banks and investment companies were significant mortgage-holders, as well as owners of a number of sheep stations in the state, receiving up to three times as much in interest as was paid out in wages.  

Thus although the above writers have added to our knowledge and understanding of radical populism, they have been less successful in establishing a firm ideological connection between the working people, small-producers and members of the middle classes from which it drew support. Both Connell and Irving, and Mullins, demonstrated the difficulty of applying a fairly rigid left class-analysis to populism. It demanded the two classes be broken down into fragments, complicating the analysis and offering little description of any unifying factors beyond vague connections to petit-bourgeois independence and popular notions of freedom and democracy. Mullins and Michael Roe both acknowledged that populism remained difficult to explain using the standard twentieth-century Marxist or non-Marxist models.  

Both schools, as Lasch pointed out, were unable to account for the nineteenth-century labour movement’s interest in currency and land reform, religion, and temperance, ‘except as evidence of workers’ unfortunate susceptibility to middle-class ideologies’. Most Australian histories discuss the movement’s demands for a graduated tax on unimproved land, a commonwealth bank, a citizen defence force, and repudiation of the national debt, but tend to accept them as the purely political expression of popular democratic convictions and so fail to explain their deep-rooted economic origins. They also fail to explain why some sections of capital, notably manufacturing capital, were often tolerated and at times actively supported, while finance capital remained universally despised.

The point that seems to be missed, or perhaps presupposed, in many analyses is why working people might have held such populist political views. What lay beneath

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84 As does Rubinstein. ‘British Radicalism’, pp. 343-4.
85 Lasch, *True and Only Heaven*, p. 209. Lasch, it must be pointed out, was sympathetic to populism and critical of those who reproved: ‘The condescension and contempt with which so many historians look back on nineteenth-century populism implies that the twentieth century has somehow learned how to reconcile freedom and equality with the wage system, modern finance, and the corporate organization of economic life’ (p. 225).
the demands for political reform, the right to bear arms and a citizen defence force, or the dislike of lawyers, bankers and the established church? Why was it that worker politics across nineteenth-century Britain, North America and Australia, was repeatedly expressed in these same ways? The answer, it will be argued, can be traced back to the producerist notion that working people should retain the full fruits of their labour and not be forced to support others through their exertion. Seldom have working people engaged in any political activity that did not have an underlying economic motive. Their politics were tied to earning, securing, protecting and retaining as much of an often precarious income as possible. Living from week to week, or even day to day, throughout history the working classes have generally been too busy working, or looking for work, to engage in drawing-room philosophy. For most, the harsh economic reality of nineteenth-century life was that when work was scarce or wages driven down, dependents went hungry. ‘Idle’ bankers, capitalists and government sinecurists, it was believed, had abstracted wealth from productive workers historically. To radical workers’ resentment such appropriation was legitimised by law, enforced by police and standing armies, and justified by press and church.

Absent from most explanations of populism has been an effective means of tying the ideas and language to a social base, the world of work and the economics of working people. Producerism’s recognition of social utility through productive labour offers such a means while accounting for the inclusion of small producers and some middle-class elements. The economic basis of all significant worker movements in nineteenth-century Britain, America and Australia, it thus coalesces and simplifies an otherwise complex and apparently contradictory series of political discourses. Lasch emphasised the connection between producerism and American labour populism, describing as ‘populist ideology’ the conception that producers alone created new wealth while banking, credit, and commercial speculation merely recycled that already in existence. With the American influence on Australian labour recorded, producerism may offer another means of conceptualising Australian popular radicalism. Both were Anglo-Celtic settler societies, and both colonial Australia and antebellum America were dominated by pastoral, agricultural and mining interests, having a limited urban manufacturing sector confined largely to the

small workshop. Looking to America for an historical model may, therefore, prove equally as fruitful as looking to industrial Britain. Producerism is thus a concept that should find fertile ground.

The concept of producerism has not been entirely absent from Australian labour history, featuring in both Ray Markey and Frank Bongiorno’s studies of Australian labour populism. Both took labour populism on its own terms, focusing on how it affected the genesis of the New South Wales and Victorian branches of the Labor Party respectively. Both also acknowledged the similar ideological outlook of the urban craft-worker and rural small-holder. Markey recognized the concept of the producer, albeit in passing, prior to the publication of the bulk of the American producerist studies. The main strength of the Markey study however was its utilisation of an extensive quantitative research of both the rural and urban sectors to connect rural and urban industrial workers to populist ideology and thereby construct a constituency for labour populism and the Labor Party. But although Markey described the world of work and convincingly fixed it to a social base, and likewise identified key strands of populist thought and tied them to labour politicians and union leaders, drawing both together proved more difficult. In the absence of the concept of producerism he was unable to give the key strands of populist thought and language any significant economic connection to the point of production—the true point of origin of worker politics. He thus demonstrated the existence of a social base for populist ideas in New South Wales, but not why that social base may have held those ideas.

Bongiorno saw labour populism as a transitional phenomenon between the old nineteenth-century radicalism and labourism, noting that both shared a belief in an ideal moral economy within which the interests of the idle and industrious stood opposed. His was the first study of Australian labour history to fully acknowledge and develop what he termed the ‘producer ethic’, rather than simply mention it in

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passing. It was recognised as that crucial strand of labour belief, inherited from the old radical notion of an alliance of the productive and enlightened against class privilege, which held that the whole of society was based upon the productive labour of the working classes, the small farmer and other independent producers. Accordingly these, the true ‘wealth producers’, deserved a greater share of the fruits of their labour instead of having to give it up to a ‘parasitic’ wealthy and powerful minority. This, it was acknowledged, was the ideological basis of Australian labour populism. Bongiorno’s comprehensive linguistic scrutiny did much to reveal how Victorian Labor was able to appeal to a widespread populist sentiment in that state through utilising this producerist political language. The relevance of *The People’s Party* to this study therefore lies less in its historical narrative than in the demonstration not only of the existence of this popular sentiment, but on how its language was utilised by radicals in their construction of the Victorian Labor Party.\(^\text{90}\)

Thus both Markey and Bongiorno revealed the significance of ‘the producer’ within populist labour discourse. The moral worth of productive labour was likewise acknowledged. Missing from both, however, was any solid ideological connection to the point of production to explain why these ideas and assumptions were held by this particular constituency. Neither was any emphasis placed on fixing the ideas and language within their broader historical or geographical context—although it is acknowledged that both were primarily studies of labour populism within the context of the early Australian Labor Party, and not labour populism as an ideological formation *per se*. But in essence, all that was needed to complete both pictures was to give labour populism its historical and economic foundation. Nevertheless, acknowledged or otherwise, both detailed significant aspects of producerism as the fundamental underlying driving force for the construction of labour institutions. And while both represented labour populism in different geographical contexts, and used different methods of analysis, they were nonetheless complementary. Markey’s quantitative approach constructed a solid foundation for the New South Wales Labor Party’s populist base, while Bongiorno’s more linguistic methodology demonstrated how populist ideas and language were utilised in building support for the Victorian Labor Party.

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\(^{90}\) Bongiorno, *People’s Party*.  

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Some other Australian studies that emphasised nineteenth-century radical culture should also be acknowledged. These would include Graeme Davison’s examination of Sydney’s urban radical culture. A response to Russel Ward’s *Australian Legend*, Davison demonstrated the existence of a Sydney urban radical culture identical to that found in other major Anglo-American cities, and which bore the same hallmarks as the radicalism attributed by Ward to the early convicts, itinerant bush workers and miners. It featured the familiar radical secularism, republicanism, and land reform of a ‘transplanted artisan culture of late nineteenth century London’. In addition to challenging the Ward thesis—the standard interpretation of Australian radical culture of the preceding twenty years—the significance of the Davison study was in the recognition of the emigrant artisan as a carrier of radical culture and in proving an urban base for Australian radical ideas. Like many studies in this area however there was no reference to any consistent ideology despite pointing to several of popular radicalism’s key assumptions.91

Bruce Scates reaffirmed Davison’s thesis while offering a more in-depth insight into Australia’s late nineteenth-century radical culture. He too pointed to British radicalism as the taproot of this ‘powerful republican discourse’. Using the concept of hegemony as an interpretive framework, and the notion of citizenship as context, Scates argued that the world of late nineteenth-century radicalism was worthy of study as an oppositional culture in its own right. His examination of both the literature and the reading process indicated how ordinary people engaged with nineteenth-century radical theory, and went beyond the usual focus on leaders, key actors and organisations characteristic of most other studies. Scates’ work rested on those radicals outside of more formal labour politics, the anarchists, single-taxers and socialists. He argued that although relatively few in number their significance lay in their very existence, and their counter-hegemonic challenge that offered ‘an alternative vision of Australia’s future and past’.92

It was a successful attempt to move away from the standard ‘top-down’ feel of labour history and its usual narrative focus on the major political figures and institutions. Instead it delved into the often neglected grass-roots radical culture from which they drew support. Here was offered a rich description of a radical milieu

91 Davison, ‘Sydney and the Bush’.
where different ideas, personalities and institutions co-existed within cross-currents of class, gender and ethnicity, simultaneously complementing and competing with each other for the minds of others. This was the major strength of this important work. But like the other studies mentioned, Scates largely neglected the fundamental economic foundation to much of this radical culture despite making the critical observation that:

Every radical theorist, be they socialist, single taxer or anarchist, began with one common proposition: that labour alone created the wealth on which (so-called) civilisation was founded. The landlord, the capitalist, the state, all depended ultimately on the ‘producing’ classes.93

The latest addition to studies of mid nineteenth-century colonial radicalism is Terry Irving’s *Southern Tree of Liberty*. As an examination of constitutional rather than economic radicalism it brings the flavour of Part One of E. P. Thompson’s *Making of the English Working Class* to colonial New South Wales, giving an in-depth description of the key radicals, the significant radical publications of the period, and the working-class political culture of the time.94 Unfortunately the book only became available as this thesis was at the proof-reading stage, and so has had markedly less influence than it otherwise undoubtedly would have. Had this work been available sooner then in addition to saving many hours of research, some of the interpretations and the conclusions they led to in Part B may well have taken a slightly different path.

Finally Verity Burgmann’s *In Our Time* must also be acknowledged for its recognition of the role played by the labour theory of value in worker radicalism, albeit implicitly through Marx’s concept of surplus-value. It was the ‘conquest’ of surplus-value, according to Burgmann, that became the driving force of late nineteenth-century Australian socialism. Yet by claiming this fundamental tenet exclusively for socialism she appeared to exclude it as an economic foundation to other forms of worker radicalism. Furthermore despite establishing this crucial point early in the work, Burgmann subsequently devoted little space to it, mentioning it only briefly when returning to examine socialist ideology. As with the Scates study

93 Ibid, p. 65.
however, it needs to be acknowledged that theory was an important but secondary aspect of the work; the main purpose of which was to identify, record and analyse how social movements and organisations developed and interacted within themselves and wider society.  

**Interpretive Framework**

Be it the pre-capitalist or capitalist economy, producerism saw the working majority create all wealth, but lose it to the rich few that constituted the ruling classes. The social relations and methods of abstraction may have differed historically between the two, but the transfer of wealth remained consistent. Replacing the tax, tithe and tribute of the former with the profit, speculation and interest of the latter just as surely allowed the few to continue to rule in idleness and luxury while keeping the majority at subsistence levels. In either state of society accumulated wealth enabled a monopoly on state power, legitimising the methods of appropriation and ultimately backing them with state force. The preferred means of upholding the status quo was through the consent of the masses and maintaining social harmony and cohesion under conditions of economic inequality was achieved by convincing the masses that the state of society in which they lived was both normal and desirable. Through their advocates and propagandists the ruling classes sought to explain that be it ordained by God and tradition in pre-capitalist societies, or through science and political economy in capitalist societies, the relinquishment of wealth from working to ruling class was part of a natural and inevitable process that worked in the interest of society as a whole.

Producerist political language confronted this state of society with its own attitudes and assumptions. One of the most consistent aspects of producer radicalism was its recognition of a society based on economic inequality maintained through ‘force and fraud’. By challenging the status quo and viewing society in such a way,

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95 Burgmann, *In Our Time*.
96 The radical press frequently described the rich as those that ‘dressed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day’ (from Luke Ch. 10: v. 7).
98 For example, *PMG*, 26 July 1843. Hollis suggests that this ubiquitous radical phrase originally came from Godwin, however it also appears in Paine’s *Rights of Man*. Hollis, *Pauper Press*, p. 223; Thomas Paine, *Collected Writings*, Foner, E. (ed). New York, The Library of America, 1995, pp. 466-7. The same phrase was frequently used by William Lovett and the British Union of Working Classes and is to be found in the *Australian Radical* as late as 1887. A precursor to this view can be found in
producerism recognised the existence of groups in society with opposing economic interests, and so displayed a measure of consciousness of class and counter-hegemony. For the student of history and politics however, a method of analysis and interpretation is required. Some historians like Wilentz, and Lasch in particular, have suggested that producerism should be examined under its own terms rather than through existing left or right interpretations. But for the sake of objectivity, analysis of a particular perspective should not take place through itself. To do so means not to critically view its place in the wider social and historical context.

But before offering an interpretive framework, it is first necessary to digress and elaborate on the historical context of producerism’s two principle axioms. The labour theory of value and the concepts of productive and unproductive labour both emerged from pre-capitalist society, transcending the change from simple commodity production to modern industrial capitalism. With them were carried other associated producerist values and assumptions. By holding a presence in both types of economy it is apparent that producerism was not historically specific to capitalism. And while the period under study sits firmly within modern capitalism, the early colonial economies of Australia and antebellum America nevertheless retained significant simple commodity production. At the most fundamental level producerism argued that the value of any object bore direct relation to the labour embodied in it, hence ‘the producer’ was regarded as any person who engaged in ‘productive’ manual labour. Therefore, at first glance, regardless of whether within capitalist or pre-capitalist economic relations, the measure of value and definition of productive and unproductive labour appear simple: either human exertion created a material object that held value or it did not.

The basis of capitalism however, is not simple commodity production, but the production of surplus-value. Where simple commodity production expected only modest reward beyond a return on labour time and materials, capitalism demanded self-expanding surplus-value. Smith explained that the latter’s creation took place when the capitalist supplied ‘industrious people’ with materials and subsistence and


Schultz, ‘Small Producer Tradition’; Asher, ‘Producerism is Consciousness of Class’.

Lasch, True and Only Heaven, p. 205.


The concepts of productive and unproductive labour will be expanded below.
set them to work ‘in order to make a profit by the sale of their work, or by what their labour adds to the value of the materials’. Thus he argued that under capitalist conditions productive labour added value, and its exploitation was the ultimate source of surplus-value. But Smith was not consistent in his basis for value, for elsewhere he also resolved it into wages, rent and profit, and so switched from a labour theory to a ‘cost of production’ theory. And Smith’s analysis was further complicated by a definition of productive and unproductive labour that still relied on the simple distinction between the sort of labour which produced a storable commodity and that which provided an ephemeral service, a distinction associated with simple commodity production.

These inconsistencies in Smith’s analysis have led to much subsequent economic debate. His definitions of productive and unproductive labour contradicted his ‘cost of production’ value theory because the assertion that productive labour was the ultimate source of value stood contrary to the assertion that value could be resolved into wages, profit and rent. This ambiguity suggested that missing from Smith was a coherent perspective on the social relations of production. Such an absence meant he was unable to maintain a theoretical separation between production of surplus-value under capitalism and of basic value under simple commodity production. Therefore when examining the capital-labour exchange he saw productive labour as productive of profit for the capitalist,

104 Ibid, pp. 150-57.
106 Depending on whether Smith is interpreted as having generally held a labour theory of value or consigned it to a ‘rude’ state of society determines whether Smith is the forerunner of modern socialist economics or whether that dubious ‘honour’ should fall to Ricardo. John Henry for instance, argued that if Smith abandoned the labour theory in favour of a ‘cost-of-production theory’ which saw wages, profit and rent as the source of all value, then that would place him in the line that leads ultimately to Alfred Marshall and neo-classical economics. If however Smith held a labour theory of value, then the lineage is one to Ricardo, Marx and socialist economic theory. Most modern economists argue the case of the former, portraying Smith as the ‘father’ of neo-classical economics through cost-of-production theory. Henry however argues the latter case, adding strength to Belchem’s designation of the early socialists as ‘Smithian’ socialists. He (Henry) points out that Smith’s earlier critics—Say, Lauderdale, and Scrope—were unanimous in the belief that the labour theory of value was the basis of Smith’s work. J. F. Henry, ‘Adam Smith and the Theory of Value: Chapter Six Reconsidered’, *History of Economics Review*, no. 31, 2000, p. 10; Belchem, *Popular Radicalism*, p. 54. See also K. Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, Pt 1, Ch. 3. Marxist Internet Archive (MIA), http://www.marx.org/archive/marx/works/1863/theories-surplus-value/Ch_03.htm (accessed 1 August 2006).
107 Henry, ‘Adam Smith’.
but when examining commodity exchange he returned to simple commodity production, productive so long as the producer was able to earn a living.\(^{109}\)

Marx argued that wages, profit and rent were the three original sources of all *revenue* rather than of value. He agreed with Smith that the value of a commodity was determined by the labour embodied in it, but differed over definitions of productive and unproductive labour.\(^{110}\) He argued that under capitalist relations productive labour was that labour exchanged with capital to produce surplus-value, and therefore whether labour produced a tangible object or provided an ephemeral service was immaterial provided a profit was realised for the capitalist. Thus productive labour was defined as labour engaged to produce surplus-value in exchange for wages. Unproductive labour, on the other hand, was labour directly exchanged with revenue. It could be employed either by the labourer from wages, the capitalist through revenue derived from profit, or the landlord from rent, to provide a service directly to themselves. According to Marx’s definition, a tailor, under capitalist relations, employed by capital and paid wages to produce clothing for profit was ‘productive’, whereas the same tailor employed directly by a worker, capitalist or landlord to make them an item of clothing as a jobbing tailor was ‘unproductive’.\(^{111}\) Thus, as Ian Gough explained, labour outside the capitalist mode of production cannot be analysed in terms of Marx’s distinction between productive and unproductive labour.\(^{112}\)

For these reasons it is critical that both Marx and the classical economists’ analyses of determinants of value, and of productive and unproductive labour, be seen in their historical context, that is, under capitalist economic relations. Producerism, conversely, was a set of assumptions concerned with the creation and social distribution of wealth in all states of society, not just with the surplus-value of capitalism, and although it shared the labour theory of value with Smith, Ricardo and Marx, the relationship with respect to definitions of productive and unproductive labour was more tenuous. It is largely for these reasons that although a critical interpretation is required, a rigid Marxist analysis is rejected as a framework for this

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\(^{109}\) Ibid, p. 128.

\(^{110}\) Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, Pt 1, Ch. 3. Marx’s opponents naturally drew the opposite conclusion. See Henry, ‘Adam Smith’. For further discussion of Marx and Smith on value and productive labour see Gough, ‘Marx’s Theory of Productive and Unproductive Labour’ and Sinha’s ‘Productive/Unproductive Labour’.

\(^{111}\) Marx, *Theories of Surplus-value*, Ch. 4.

\(^{112}\) Gough, ‘Marx’s Theory of Productive and Unproductive Labour’, p. 54.
Nevertheless Marx’s work on labour-value features extensively, alongside that of other economists and their arguments over labour-value and productive labour. Having rejected a rigid Marxist framework, the problem that presents itself is how best to examine the cultural and political expressions of an economic phenomenon.

Before discussing this however, the thorny issue of class and its definition also presents itself. It too was historically specific, with social relations under capitalism different to those under pre-capitalist conditions. The internal logic of capitalism led Marx to ultimately resolve workers into a unified proletariat, a ‘working class’, and most analysts of the left have subsequently tended to view class from this perspective. But plainly there were working people before capitalism. The problem therefore is how to collectively describe the artisans, mechanics, labourers and agricultural workers in existence, both prior to, and within, capitalist relations, while maintaining a descriptive consistency through the period of transition from one state of society to the other. To do this, this study takes the simplistic and often imperfect method of classifying society into ruling and working classes. The term ‘working classes’ was used extensively in the nineteenth century to encompass both mechanics and labourers, and as Hobsbawm noted, although never a truly adequate descriptor, was one passed from pre-industrial craft production to industrial capitalism and generally accepted.  

Hegemony and Counter-hegemony

Connell used the concept of hegemony to explain capitalism’s dominance of Australian cultural and economic life. He argued that despite the nineteenth-century socialists’ belief in the certainty of capitalism’s demise, a major depression, two world wars, and the inclusion of the working class in the political process, capitalism was as productive, vigorous and well entrenched as ever through ruling-class hegemony. Formulated by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, hegemony offers a framework for interpreting the historical relationship between a dominant ruling-class culture and the challenge offered by a radical counter-culture. It describes how, with the ‘active consent’ of the subject classes, a ruling-class perspective on the


\[114\] Connell, Ruling Class, p. 205.

world is seen as the ‘natural order’ of things. Hegemony does not reduce complex social phenomena and interaction between social groupings to binary opposition, but instead acknowledges an intricate and continually changing relationship. And although recognising the inordinate influence of ruling-class hegemony, it also recognises its relationship with subversion and counter-hegemony. Gramsci rejected the economic determinism of the rigid Marxist base-superstructure model and gave increased significance to human agency. Nevertheless the economic influence on ideology remained important and the relationship between economic base and cultural superstructure was regarded as one of mutual reinforcement.

American historian T. J. Jackson Lears has suggested that the Gramsci model need not be historically specific, nor demand a rigid Marxist perspective be taken overall, but should able to stand outside the Marxist social critique. The application of hegemony to a variety of historical situations, he argued, might even serve to strengthen its theoretical credentials. It is thus useful to any examination of a relationship between a ruling class backed by state coercive power seeking to culturally legitimise the existing unequal distribution of wealth, and a subject class that is on occasion capable of challenge. Lears offered examples of several different contexts to which the Gramsci model could be applied including those ‘artisans, skilled workers, small farmers, and petty producers of all kinds’ engaged in a struggle against capitalism in nineteenth-century America. He argued that despite regional, ethnic, and occupational differences, through productive labour, and the labour theory of value, they shared sufficient social experience and common interest to develop a coherent social perspective. As a result they were able to form an ‘historical bloc’ based on a ‘producer ideology’. Given that the ‘producer ideology’ was not a peculiarly American phenomenon, it is suggested that Lears’ example may be equally valid for nineteenth-century Britain or Australia where artisans and other members of the ‘producing classes’ attempted to organise themselves along similar lines in response to ruling-class hegemony.

Gramsci saw hegemony maintained by a combination of consent and coercion through what he termed civil and political society. He argued that in perpetuating

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hegemony the ruling class gave preference to ideology by utilising the institutions of civil society such as the church, media and education system to promote ruling-class interests and values as both normal and in the interest of society as a whole. Ruling-class ideology pervaded language, ‘common sense’, religion and folklore through its agents (those Gramsci termed its ‘subalterns’), the teachers, priests, and journalists who administered language and culture, and so either consciously, or unconsciously, reinforced dominant cultural values. Hegemony was further maintained by members of the subject class being born into a world already characterised by ruling-class ideas. To the subject class it seemed the natural order. It remained so powerful that they often willingly participated in their own exploitation, to the point of actively defending the dominant culture against those that sought to change it for their benefit. But should there be any significant threat to this ideologically constructed social order, the institutions of ‘political society’, the law and instruments of state force, would be called on to maintain rule. Thus, both coercion and consent coexisted, and although state-sanctioned force was only relied on in times of exceptional social crisis its threat remained implicit, visible through a background element of lower-level day-to-day coercion via the legal system and the civilian police.

Another Gramscian concept, the individual’s ‘contradictory consciousness’, offered the possibility of counter-hegemony. Counter-hegemony appeared when contradiction within the individual between the world constructed by the dominant culture and their own experience as a worker became a collective realisation—often at times of social or economic crisis. It is here that the producerist explanation emerged. It offered a potentially counter-hegemonic discourse based on a different interpretation of how, and in whose interest, society was ordered. It also held out the possibility of a different society. The relationship between hegemony and counter-hegemony was complex and saw each accommodate aspects of the other to retain legitimacy. Ruling-class hegemony took account of, and co-opted, whatever it found useful. In this way the establishment media frequently used producerist concepts such as ‘useful toil’, ‘idleness’, and the ‘undeserving poor’ to instigate rivalries within the working classes, or to suggest common interest with sections of the ruling class, and so atomise and diffuse worker organisation. Depending on definition, the ‘useful toil’ of the producer could be divorced from radical worker politics and instead be identified with sections of the ruling class. The ‘hard-working employer’ was often depicted not as a ‘boss’, but working alongside his employees as a
producer of wealth. By contrast the full-time Labor Party member or union official who did no such work was open to portrayal as non-productive, or that most hackneyed oxymoron of the establishment press, the ‘union boss’.

Other methods might include the portrayal of one section of the working classes as less productive or useful to society, or receiving higher reward for less work, than others—a familiar strategy during a strike. The ruling-classes might also attempt to identify themselves with a ‘moderate majority’ of the working classes and the common good in opposition to other, more troublesome, workers. In this way those producerist attitudes useful to ruling-class hegemony were incorporated while others remained ignored, allowing the establishment media to open and exploit lines of fracture in working-class political organisations. Using the workers’ own language and social assumptions, it was relatively easy to point out that some members of the working classes were working less hard, were less useful to society, or were reaping greater reward than others. In the absence of any of these examples, working-class social disaffection could always be directed away from the idle rich to the ‘undeserving’ and ‘idle’ poor.

Although not a contemporary, Gramsci bore a useful similarity to how nineteenth-century radicals saw their world. Where Gramsci saw political and civil society administered by ruling-class subalterns, nineteenth-century radicals saw institutions of ‘force and fraud’ administered by ruling-class ‘hirelings’. Like Gramsci’s civil society, the institutions of fraud included the established church and the press. In the early part of the nineteenth century it was the clergy, according to radicals like Paine and British radical artisan William Lovett, that held the great bulk of the people ‘entranced’ through the ‘divine right of kings’ or ‘God’s natural order’, promising them everlasting happiness in the next world if they lived as slaves in this one.118 Later in the nineteenth century, as worker literacy increased, the press too began to assume a greater significance in maintaining ruling-class cultural and social dominance. Radical print consistently wrote of a social inequality perpetuated by the combination of force and fraud. It described how a government composed of members of the ruling classes and their hirelings ‘hoodwinked’ a ‘superstitious’ people and made laws to suit their own purposes. These were laws that legitimised

the economic exploitation of the producing classes. They operated through a legal system which favoured the former, and were ultimately enforced by a standing army or civilian police force.\textsuperscript{119}

The concept of hegemony was further refined by Raymond Williams. Williams’ model described how oppositional cultures had historically faced their own unique circumstances, yet drew on the ideas and language of previous cultures of resistance in confronting them. He argued that despite the complexity of Gramsci’s original model, hegemony was too often reduced to a singular, basic and static notion of superstructure, or even thought control, whereas the reality is complex and continuously contested and changing.\textsuperscript{120} He emphasised the totality of hegemony and detailed the depth to which hegemony is a truly \textit{lived} experience. It became the central and effective system of values and meanings within which human subjects lived their everyday lives. Its power lay in the ability to constitute reality.\textsuperscript{121}

It was within the dominant culture that society’s true and most easily verifiable tradition resided. It formed, as Williams pointed out, the ‘significant past’, an official version of the past that excluded some meanings and symbols, and reinterpreted and/or assumed others. Yet despite the overwhelming presence of ruling-class hegemony it could never totally dominate, as there were both alternative and oppositional cultures that offered different views—the latter directing challenges to ruling-class hegemony at various historical points. The Williams model is theoretically useful in that it recognised a dominant culture which, through hegemony, effectively ‘owned’ history and tradition, and which rejected or reinterpreted meanings and interpretations to suit its version. At the same time it acknowledges the presence of other histories and traditions some of which ran counter to the dominant culture. These oppositional cultures tended to remain submerged and largely ignored, but at various historical junctures emerged to present a significant counter-hegemonic challenge, facing new circumstances while drawing on and adapting pre-existing residual ideas that were a feature of previous counter-hegemonic challenges.

\textsuperscript{119} Such sentiment was still visible in the Australian radical press of the late nineteenth century, for example \textit{AR}, 23 July 1887.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid, p. 9.
The Radical Press

During the last quarter of the eighteenth century a surge in popular literacy levels across the English-speaking world was met with a corresponding increase in popular print media. A journey through the more radical journals, pamphlets, and other literature of the period will reveal the presence and perspective of the producer and the producing classes in its pages. Regardless of whether it demanded constitutional reform and citizenship, promoted early socialism, labourism, or any other ideology, throughout this period the radical press remained the main form of political mobilisation. It took producerism from the workshop and tavern into the wider public sphere where through more formal ideologies it could debate and challenge ruling-class hegemony. Producerism’s challenge to the prevailing social order was thus most visibly expressed in print and as a study of ideas and their historical trajectory, rather than of institutions and historical actors, one of the best methods of scrutiny is through the radical press.

As this is an account of how a specific economic perspective was expressed in print media, rather than of one of media studies or linguistics, space constraints limit an extensive exposition of the theoretical research into these fields of study. Print as the nineteenth century’s most significant cultural and political medium has already received Australian analysis.  

Dennis Cryle for example, drawing on Habermas, saw the colonial press as the dominant contemporary cultural industry, while Ann Curthoys and Julianne Schultz’s later culturalist perspective also saw it as a key element in Australian politics and popular culture, and the principal means of creating and reinforcing a community of readers with shared interests and perspectives.  

Despite the different approaches, both recognised print as the staple medium through which ideas were disseminated into wider popular culture. But in keeping with the methodology utilised by this study, Connell’s Gramscian explanation of Australian print media as both the main medium of public discussion,

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and the means through which ruling-class hegemony was maintained, is most useful.\textsuperscript{124}

The press was important to all sides of political debate, from the authority of government to the radical challenge and the many shades between. While even the mainstream colonial press could be critical of colonial governments and policies, the basic social assumptions of private property, public order and respectability, and class, gender and race relations within political culture, remained largely unquestioned.\textsuperscript{125} This was as true of the colonial radical press as its establishment counterpart, despite some notable exceptions.\textsuperscript{126} Some of the reasons for this will be explained below. Most New South Wales radical papers had a brief life-span. Challenges to ruling-class dominance are historically seldom well financed, and a lack of affluent proprietors or a subscriber base of sufficient size, and their frequent attachment to specific, often short-lived, objectives meant that they never had the consistency or wherewithal of their mainstream counterparts and most disappeared fairly quickly. As a result, the ideas they espoused had no continuity of expression and were unable to fix themselves culturally beyond their immediate constituency, demonstrating Connell’s truism that worker mobilisation has always taken place from a position of economic, cultural and political weakness.\textsuperscript{127}

The purpose of the radical press was not to maintain the status quo but to play the essential role in questioning and challenging it. As John Belchem noted, it had to construct an audience using a language which resonated with people’s material and other grievances while mobilising for change.\textsuperscript{128} According to the Sydney Dispatch of 1843 ‘popular political movements [were] designed and instigated by the popular press of those communities’—they were ‘the sinews of agitation’.\textsuperscript{129} Furthermore the radical press needed to maintain a readership by reflecting and engaging with its perspectives. It had to appeal to potential recruits, and had to act as a medium through which news and ideas could be disseminated. Importantly, most gave readers

\textsuperscript{124} Connell, \textit{Ruling Class}, pp. 6, 190-91.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid, p. 190.
\textsuperscript{126} One such notable exception in NSW was Winspear’s \textit{Radical}, (for example 18 June 1887). A later NSW publication from George Black, also titled \textit{The Radical}, devoted a regular column to ‘The Feminine Factor’ although this did not always challenge the abovementioned basic social assumptions. An instance of a woman correspondent writing from a producerist perspective is to be found in the 15 October 1904 issue.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid, pp. 6, 190-91; Cryle, \textit{Disreputable Profession}, pp. 1-16.
\textsuperscript{128} Belchem, \textit{Popular Radicalism}, pp. 6-7.
\textsuperscript{129} Dispatch, 16 December 1843.
the opportunity to publish letters or articles. Regardless of time or place its principal mechanism appeared to remain consistent. Firstly, producerist rhetoric sought to reach the readership through reliance on its touchstones of the labour theory of value and the morality and social usefulness of productive labour. It then sought to mobilise potential recruits against the ruling classes through comparison with their supposed idleness, immorality and greed.

In many histories the use of radical print as a principal source of information would demand a high degree of scepticism be employed when examining content, but in this study truthfulness of content is less important than the assumptions behind it. The more significant error would be in taking editorial perspective as an absolute reflection of the views of the wider audience. It cannot be assumed with any degree of certainty that these publications spoke for working people, indeed it is impossible to gauge just how widespread producerism itself was among the working classes. It cannot be said that producerism was the prevalent, let alone dominant, set of values and assumptions among working people, but what can be shown is that its presence was significant enough for much of the nineteenth-century radical press to utilise it in attempts to mobilise workers. The newspaper editors and other political actors did not exist in a vacuum. Ideas did not spontaneously emerge, but reflected human relations. As Marx pointed out in his critique of the early German socialists; theoretical writings did not evolve from ‘pure thought’, but from the practical needs and conditions of life of a particular class in a particular country. And as Thompson noted of Cobbett’s journalism; it was not one-way propaganda, but an informed dialogue between himself and his readership. Persuading potential recruits towards a certain political objective demanded appeal to popular opinion, adopting a language and ideology with resonance to those whose support was sought. Hence Australian union organiser W. G. Spence believed that readers preferred a paper which expressed ideas already ‘floating more or less vaguely in their own minds’.

But if, as this study suggests, those writing in producerist terms were trying to reach an inherent instinctive perspective within the worker, is there any evidence that such a perspective existed? The answer is yes, with certain qualifications. Although

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130 Marx, *German Ideology*, p. 79.
the main focus of this study is less on the audience demographic than the discourse itself, the crucial role played by the readership must be acknowledged. Letters written to both radical and establishment publications by ordinary Australian workers do exist, and many offered a producerist perspective. However those that did commit to writing such letters demonstrated a marked reluctance to identify either themselves or their occupations, and their numerical significance in terms of the wider working classes remained small. Unfortunately for students of Australian labour history, few nineteenth-century workers wrote autobiographies. Of those that did, fewer still included their own political opinion or the opinion of their peers. There are few records, certainly in nineteenth-century New South Wales, of ordinary people’s basic political assumptions. Instead they have to be inferred from the literature that spoke to them and the language it used. Thus the evidence provided by the radical press is particularly important in the Australian context, where there is an absence of any significant body of local working-class autobiographical sources and a real dearth of recorded popular political opinion at the level of the ordinary person. But it must be inferred, for reasons explained above, with due caution.

It must also be acknowledged that among the many shades of opinion within colonial worker politics there were doubtless significant numbers of conservative workers who, so long as they had sufficient income, were apparently happy with the status quo. Thus from the outset of this discussion two further points need clarification. Firstly, it does not assume the working classes of nineteenth-century New South Wales, or indeed anywhere else during the period, to have held a unified political perspective. Employers, for example, never had a problem recruiting strike-breakers and ‘free labour’, neither did the state in its recruitment of soldiers.

133 Valuable exceptions are those of nineteenth-century sawyer Alexander Harris and Sydney millwright Thomas Dobeson. According to Davison, Dobeson typified the ‘ambitious immigrant artisan’ who had looked forward to building up the industries of the colony. Class-conscious yet largely disconnected from formal politics his political beliefs ‘so far as they took as systemic form’ were essentially the inward-looking ‘defensive doctrines’ of ‘populism, protectionism and racism’. Davison argued against the temptation to dismiss his testimony as unrepresentative, but pointed out that studies of the much wider body of British worker autobiography suggested that his experiences could be considered as representative as any, a ‘valuable corrective’ to stereotypical conceptions of class. A. Harris, Settlers and Convicts: Recollections of Sixteen Years’ Labour in the Australian Backwoods. Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1969; T. Dobeson, Out of Work Again: The Autobiographical Narrative of Thomas Dobeson, 1885-1891. Clayton, Department of History, Monash University, 1990, esp. pp. 8-9, 18-19, 45.

134 This is a presupposition given that while radical workers have been the focus of many Australian historical studies, little or no attention has been paid to their conservative counterparts. It is inferred from the obvious disdain present in the radical press but has no quantitative basis.
policemen and special constables.\textsuperscript{135} Shades of opinion across the political spectrum existed within the working classes. Importantly for both the ruling classes and working-class radicals, alongside the mix of political opinion there also existed that large contested space that was working-class indecisiveness, ignorance and apathy which, although essentially apolitical, tended to default to ruling class ‘common sense’ simply because of an overwhelming cultural dominance. As the Webbs observed in Britain at the turn of the last century, ‘the active-minded minority sees itself submerged by the “apathetic mass”’.\textsuperscript{136} It was the bane of radicals throughout the period and frequently derided in the radical press. The ignorance of the working classes suited the ruling classes that perpetuated it, and it was far easier for them to maintain the status quo than it was for radicals with limited resources to try and overturn it. Secondly, in confronting the dominance of ruling-class perspectives and working-class inertia, radicals found themselves frustrated and, during periods of economic prosperity, almost marginalised.\textsuperscript{137} For much of the nineteenth century they remained the minority and perhaps, at least until the later decades, not even fully representative of their class. These further qualifications should also be borne in mind throughout.

This study therefore endeavours to add another dimension to the understanding of popular labour radicalism. It seeks to demonstrate the universality of its discourse across the nineteenth-century Anglophone world, using producerism to tie it to working people and the point of production. It also seeks to demonstrate that although different historical and geographic contexts might generate a distinct and specific worker politics, the same broad underlying producerist assumptions—as identified in nineteenth-century Australia by Markey, Bongiorno and Scates—remained. It argues that Australian radicalism, although adapted to peculiarly Australian conditions, was not the unique result of an amalgamation of influences drawn from convictism, the diggers and the bushman, although their influence in

\textsuperscript{135} For example during the 1890 Australian Maritime and Shearers’ strike, the Sydney Morning Herald reported that supplies of non-union labour needed to break the strike were ‘probably in excess of what was expected’. \textit{SMH}, 1 October 1890.


\textsuperscript{137} Connell and Irving caution against taking the views of radicals as an indication of a wider consciousness. ‘Articulate minorities’, they argued, ‘may be a poor guide to mass consciousness. What is not said, and what is presupposed, may be more important than what is spelt out’. Connell and Irving, \textit{Class Structure}, p. 17.
shaping its culture is not denied, but a local version of a much wider and older discourse. To date, while there has been ample acknowledgement of the role that the earlier radicalism played in the formation of the Australian labour movement, there has been little analysis of the genesis of its ideas, or, importantly, why working people may have held them. This study argues that these radical ideas can only be fully understood by looking at their connection to the point of production historically.

Chapter One outlines the artisan origins of producerism and acknowledges the crucial role played by artisan culture in radical politics. It argues that the intimate relationship between the artisan and the labour process connected the point of production to worker politics and that artisan mobility spread this political outlook across the Anglophone world. Chapter Two examines the labour theory of value. This theory, a cornerstone of producerism, attributed all wealth created by man to productive human labour carried out on nature’s raw materials. Chapter Three explains how the concepts of productive and unproductive labour, another cornerstone of producerism, further reinforced the social utility of those engaged in productive labour, while Chapters Four and Five then look at the social implications of this perspective by comparing those considered producers with those considered to be non-producers. They explore the conclusion—central to producer radicalism—that a non-productive ruling class existed by appropriating the wealth generated by productive labour. Social utility based upon productive labour formed the basis of worker opposition to the ruling classes, and is central to these two chapters. Chapter Six subsequently examines some of the mechanisms by which this social order was maintained and how this was criticised by radicals.

The rest of the study sees producerism in a colonial setting. In the absence of a significant body of scholarly work in the area, Chapter Seven seeks to describe a social base for producerist ideas in colonial New South Wales by building a picture of artisan production in the local economy. Given the broad cultural similarity across all of the trades, its approach is simplified by looking at colonial artisan work practice and culture using the example of the metal trades, and suggests how the labour process might be linked to radical politics. The following chapters focus on producerism’s political expression through constitutional struggle as part of an alliance with the middle classes that was supported by a radical press. Chapter Eight examines colonial producerism’s role as the narrative behind the vision of a producers’ utopia under the Southern Cross, while Chapters Nine and Ten focus on
political confrontation with the colonial administration and large land-holders that formed the ruling classes—the latter chapter during the depression of the 1840s. Chapter Eleven then explores some of the suggested means by which the ideal producers’ commonwealth should be protected. Here the germs of the protectionist and racist strands of the labour movement are exposed.

The remaining chapters revisit producerism in the 1890s and beyond. In contrast to the 1840s, this period has received significant attention from historians thereby removing the necessity of constructing a social base for the ideas. This allows the work to concentrate its focus on radical political ideas as expressed in the radical press. Chapter Twelve introduces the reader to producerism’s almost universal presence behind the various ideologies of the contemporary Australian labour movement and examines the role it played in galvanising worker action during the major strikes of the period. Chapter Thirteen looks at how the different economic perspectives that sat behind either side of the strike confronted each other, as well giving an exposition of some of the contemporary orthodox economic ideas and theories. Chapter Fourteen then looks at how popular economic debate in the radical press was dominated by producerism and producerist definitions of how society was ordered. Chapter Fifteen returns to the theme of hegemony explored in Chapter Six, situating it in an Australian context, while Chapter Sixteen revisits some of the material explored in Chapter Five, most notably the banks, again in an Australian setting. Finally, Chapter Seventeen looks at the decline of producerism and its eventual irrelevance to the Australian labour movement. Some reasons are suggested but remain somewhat speculative.
PART A. ORIGINS: BRITAIN AND NORTH AMERICA

Chapter 1
Artisan Radicalism and the Concept of the Producer

The labourer who tills the ground, and the artizan who plies the shuttle, who rears the building, who drives the plane, or handles the saw…are the real supporters of the state, the stamina of the nation.\(^1\)

Producerism was the means through which popular economics was translated into popular politics. It had no core text or complex analysis as a foundation, only the belief of working people that their labour generated all wealth. Its fundamental precepts; the labour theory of value, and the distinction between productive and unproductive labour, saw productive labour fix itself into a commodity and give its worth. This raised two key issues within economic debate that had important social and political implications. Firstly whether productive labour indeed implied these precepts, and secondly how such labour was to be defined. From these two important principles followed the obvious conclusion that if productive labour was the source of all wealth, then it had the right to retain its whole produce. These were the major issues that sat beneath radical politics and animated debate between radical and orthodox political economy across the nineteenth century. The labour theory of value, and the distinction between productive and unproductive labour, laid the foundations for a much wider ideological assault on the social structure and the political and cultural dominance of the ruling classes.

The idea that society’s wealth, infrastructure, and everything necessary for its well-being was produced by the raising of crops and livestock, the extraction of raw materials from the earth, and the fashioning of those materials into something with use-value was one common to the small workshops and independent small-holdings of pre-industrial Europe and North America. Although characteristic of the pre-industrial economy, it was a perspective that appeared equally applicable to capitalism.\(^2\) Under capitalist relations the early nineteenth-century radical London shipwright, John Gast, could still speak of a social order in which all wealth was

\(^1\) *PA*, 7 July 1849.


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created by ‘the mechanical, the manufacturing, and the agricultural part of the community’.\(^3\) It was a view frequently expressed within worker politics and the radical print media of nineteenth-century Britain, North America and Australia.\(^4\)

While the development of industrial capitalism saw producer radicalism expand to incorporate those among the broader working classes considered productive, for much of the nineteenth century the artisan was its main bearer. It is not suggested that artisans were representative of the working classes as a whole. Indeed they often displayed contempt for the classes below them. Nor is it suggested that they were the only politically active workers; simply that they were the most active and organised. Most workers were not artisans and remained outside of the exclusive artisan sub-culture, yet, as Hobsbawm noted, beyond this sub-culture artisans differed little culturally from the rest of the working class.\(^5\) In addition to the crucial role they played in radical politics, examining artisan culture and methods of production is also useful in that it opens a window into the processes that occurred at the point of production, and points to how the work process was tied to worker politics.

The objective of both capitalism and the simple commodity production of the artisan was the manufacture of useful or desirable items. Both based production on a series of processes that transformed basic materials into a finished product. But where capitalist production utilised the power-driven machinery and cheap unskilled labour of the factory, artisan production relied on the specialist hand-tools associated with each trade and the skills learned during apprenticeship.\(^6\) The small workshops of trades such as the tailor, shoemaker, clockmaker and blacksmith were close-knit, personal workplaces, where a master-craftsman worked alongside one or two journeymen and a like number of apprentices.\(^7\) Although of necessity some trades such as the shipwrights and rope-makers worked on a larger scale, most bore closer

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3 Gast’s first public speech, delivered in 1818, offers an example of this view of society. An extract is to be found in Prothero, Artisans and Politics, p. 98.
4 Laurie, Artisans, pp. 66-7; Schultz, ‘Small Producer Tradition’; Ferry, ‘Severing the Connections’. Other examples of the same categorisation of the productive classes can be found in Colquhoun and Gray. Colquhoun, Treatise, p. 109, 121; Hollis, Pauper Press, p. 226; Lichtheim, Origins of Socialism, pp. 129-30. The presence of this perspective in Australia will be described in detail below.
7 Schultz, ‘Small Producer Tradition’, p. 89. Markey, Making of the Labor Party, p. 3. The overwhelming male dominance of the trades during this period should be noted from the outset of this discussion. It is however beyond its scope to offer any analysis of this characteristic.
resemblance to a domestic household than a factory, with a shop front, workshop to the rear, and the master craftsman’s family living above the premises with the apprentices. It was around this intimacy with the point of production, the proximity to others of the same trade, the reflection on the social usefulness of the objects created, and the individual yet mutually dependent nature of this mode of production, that urban producerism coalesced.

Apprenticeship differentiated artisans from labourers. It was an institution legally preserved in Britain by the 1563 Statute of Artificers which allowed only those who had completed a full apprenticeship to practice a trade. A period of indenture to a master craftsman, up to seven years in some trades, saw a youth learn and practice the skills of the trade. At the same time a fierce craft loyalty, pride in the job, and the traditional artisan cultural values of sober industriousness and respectability were impressed upon them. On completion of the apprenticeship it was usual for the new mechanic to leave the employ of the master craftsman and take to the road as a ‘journeyman’ in a search for new opportunities. To assist the journeyman, many trades established a ‘house of call’, often a local tavern, where registered members of the trade could seek local employers or borrow small sums of money. The ultimate objective was to find employment with a master until enough money had been saved to start a small business. At this stage the mechanic became a fully independent master craftsman ready to employ a small number of apprentices and journeymen.

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8 Prothero, Artisans and Politics, p. 25.
9 Schultz, ‘Small Producer Tradition’, p. 90; Prothero, Artisans and Politics, pp. 31-2; Lane, Apprenticeship.
10 In keeping with the morals of artisan culture (and undoubtedly with an economic motive on the part of the master craftsman given the in loco parentis nature of the relationship between master and apprentice), apprentices were forbidden to visit taverns, playhouses, or other places of ill-repute; play games of chance; commit fornication, or enter matrimony during the period of indenture. This was the case across the Anglo-Celtic world, both historically and geographically. The language used in apprenticeship documents drawn from as far apart as 17th Century England, and 18th Century United States, through to late 19th Century Australia and New Zealand bears remarkable similarity and demonstrates the continuity and tenacity of artisan culture. For example the following apprenticeship indentures: J. Hitchcock (USA 1766). © Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association. http://www.americancenturies.mass.edu/collection/itempage.jsp?itemid=5782&img=0&level=advanced&transcription=1; D. Williams (GBr. 1847). Mitchell Library, ML DOC 2150; C. Davidson (NZ 1874). Mitchell Library - ML DOC 2055; S. Johns (S. Aust. 1878). F. P. Bowden Papers, 1878-1894. Mitchell Library - ML DOC 1025: FM3/747. Contained within all these documents, bulwarks of artisan culture spread across time and space, were identical moral constraints and behavioural expectations—cornerstones of ‘respectability’—with only the smallest of linguistic difference.
Common artisan traditions bound the many differing trades together. These included the closely linked ideals of independence, respectability, and the gaining of a competence. Although later considered an accommodation of bourgeois values, and as a consequence viewed with derision by the twentieth-century Left,\textsuperscript{12} they existed prior to the modern bourgeoisie.\textsuperscript{13} That they were values co-opted and reinforced by the bourgeoisie to legitimise their own discharge of any social obligation under nineteenth-century \textit{laissez-faire} capitalism is not, however, disputed. Independence, and the artisan ideal of the independent household, meant freedom from economic reliance on others. It was to be achieved through self-employment in the workshop and stood in contrast to the wage-slavery of the capitalist. Closely associated was respectability, that prudence and self-reliance which allowed a mechanic to provide for his family without the need to call on outside assistance. Of all the fears of the mechanic the greatest was to fall from respectability and to have to apply for charitable relief.\textsuperscript{14}

Gaining a competence was the artisan’s essential objective. The young Birmingham mechanic Henry Parkes, later to become Sir Henry Parkes, Premier of New South Wales, arrived in Sydney in 1839 hoping to achieve ‘respectability, if not a competence’.\textsuperscript{15} It was the capacity to remain comfortable, independent, and respectable into old age by achieving a measure of success as a master craftsman. Unchecked greed had no place in the ideal small-producer community, and the building of a modest competence bore no resemblance to the rapacity of the capitalist accumulator. Achieving it allowed the mechanic to maintain his family in reasonable comfort and provide for a modest retirement. It was the reward for a life’s work in one’s calling and service to the community.\textsuperscript{16}

Political radicalism accompanied artisan production and the role played by these skilled workers in organising working-class political movements across both the Anglo-Celtic world and early industrial Europe has been widely

\textsuperscript{12} This is a common misconception still held by many writers on the left. The most recent Australian example is to be found in J. Sparrow and J. Sparrow, \textit{Radical Melbourne: A Secret History}. Melbourne, Vulgar Press, 2001, p. 68.
\textsuperscript{14} Thompson, \textit{Making of}, p. 267. See also Dobeson, \textit{Out of Work Again}.
Self-taught in politics and economics, they remained sceptical of the world view constructed by the ideology of the ruling classes and demonstrated an ‘inherent disrespect’ for both the authority of the ruling classes and their experts and opinion-makers. The journeyman mechanic, taking to the road in the search for employment, was largely responsible for transplanting producerist ideas. They were archetypal British migrants, driven by self-help and improvement, taking their skills to wherever there might be a market. According to Prothero they were the least deferential and most organised part of the ‘middle sort of people’ that had been the main element in popular movements historically. They were ‘the backbone of the first workers’ movements everywhere’. A significant body of American research conducted by such historians as Eric Foner, Charles Olton, and Gary Nash have all examined and confirmed this role, noting the effect of artisan political radicalism in the United States and its agitation for independence from Britain.

Nineteenth-century London held the world’s largest artisan economy. The numerous trades associated with its position as the world’s foremost port existed alongside other industrial and domestic trades servicing the huge metropolitan population. Philadelphia, Baltimore and New York were significant sites of artisan production and Britain’s second city, Birmingham, also had a large and thriving artisan economy built upon the small workshops associated with the iron trades. As Thompson pointed out, these small workshops persisted far into the nineteenth century and made Birmingham ‘the metropolis of the small master’. All of the above cities were hotbeds of artisan political radicalism. Their artisan economies and political radicalism, with emphasis placed on the individual and individual or small-scale production, set them apart from the emerging industrial centres of Northern England such as Leeds and Manchester that were more receptive to

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19 Prothero, *Artisans and Politics*, p. 3; Leeson, *Travelling Brothers*.
socialist doctrine. 

Socialism fared little better among both skilled and unskilled Australian workers, who, after all, lived and worked under different social and economic conditions than the average factory worker of Northern England.

Early producer radicalism offered a fraternal utopia built by artisans and small farmers where the artisan ideal of the independent household would form the basic unit of production. The aristocratic landed estate would be replaced by the small-holder and artisans would produce goods for the local community. It offered an ideal harmonious community held together by bonds of egalitarian independence, mutual co-operation and reciprocal obligation, community, the soil and virtuous productive labour. In this ideal economy journeymen mechanics would be paid justly by their masters and have the real possibility of becoming masters themselves. Being masters would afford them their independence, respectability and competence. This was the alternative to the acquisitive individualism and wage-slavery of capitalism. Within these communities a mutually supporting market of small producers would develop, reaping the full rewards of their labour. It thus accepted the market as a place for the free exchange of goods, but only under a pricing regime fair to both producer and consumer. The market should be servant, not master. Leaving the market unregulated brought on the excesses of accumulation and monopoly associated with laissez-faire capitalism. It allowed the merchant to ruin the livelihood of the artisan by undercutting prices with cheap imports. It also allowed the greed and selfishness of the capitalist to fracture the community by putting workers into competition with each other simply to drive down labour costs, or undermine any sense of community altogether by replacing local workers with cheaper labour brought in from outside.

It was the early American republic that offered the artisan mode of production greatest freedom to develop. Free of monarchs and aristocratic overlords, the artisans of cities such as Philadelphia, Baltimore and New York—together with numerous small independent landholders—made antebellum America a thriving

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25 Schultz, ‘Small Producer Tradition’.
26 The *Sun* of 1843 devoted a number of issues to plans proposed by several squatters and their representatives to import ‘coolies’ from India in order to further depress the price of labour when there was already significant unemployment and lowered wages in the colony. (28 January 1843, 4 February 1843). At the same time in England, the Webbs detailed the actions of Lord Londonderry, who ‘in his dual capacity as mine owner and Lord Lieutenant of Durham County during the great strike of the miners in 1844…superintend[ed], as Lord Lieutenant, the wholesale eviction of the strikers from their homes, and their supersession by Irishmen specially imported from his Irish estates’. Webb, *History of*, p. 166.
community that shared a culture and values based on commonly held notions of community obligations. Cobbett wrote in 1816 that the average American labourer paid ten shillings in taxes each year. By contrast his British counterpart paid six pounds. Accordingly, an American journeyman or labourer was able to support his family well, and save between thirty and sixty pounds a year for illness and old age, whilst his British equivalent was considered lucky if he could feed and clothe his family. The new republic left an indelible impression on Australian John Dunmore Lang when he visited in 1840, changing him from conservative Malthusian Scots Presbyterian to a radical republican who believed he had witnessed Australia’s future.

In this society mechanics took an active role in community politics and independent, yet mutually dependent, producers drew together ancient craft practices, dissenting Protestantism and post-Revolutionary republicanism. It was, however, a community destined not to last in the face of capitalism and the liberalism and individualism of the large land-owner, merchant, banker and speculator.

Yet the relationship with capitalism was more complex and fluid than the above utopian ideal would suggest. Artisan radicalism both confronted and at times accommodated capitalism. Without doubt capitalism, increasingly less reliant on the master craftsman and more on the entrepreneur with little knowledge of a craft, drove many members of the older trades down to the role of labourer. And it was a refusal to accept the new role of waged labourer ascribed to them that animated much producer radicalism. Yet while all but destroying many trades and reducing their mechanics to wage-slavery, capitalism offered opportunity to others. The older trades may have been backward-looking and reactionary, referring to an imaginary ‘golden past’ without the capitalist to grind down the producer, but there

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30 Freyer, Producers Versus Capitalists.
31 Thompson, Making of, Prothero, Artisans and Politics; Laurie, Artisans; Lasch, True and Only Heaven, p. 212.
32 E. P. Thompson noted however that continual technological development tended to prove such opportunities short-lived. Thompson, Making of, pp. 270-73.
was also a sense among members of newer trades, such as the engineers, of looking forward to what human ingenuity and productive labour could accomplish. Capital, as an accumulation of wealth, could be put to use as the driving force of human progress and improvement. It need not necessarily imply the existence of the capitalist. Indeed, without the capitalist to take the lion’s share, wealth could be reinvested to multiply productive activity and thereby improve the human condition.

Producerism was thus intimately connected to the point of production. Whether it be the artisan small-producer or large-scale capitalist mode of production, it was at the point of production that skilled artisans, factory workers and other productive workers transformed raw materials of often minimal value at one end of the production process, into a more valuable finished article at the other. It was through a series of manual operations using knowledge, skill and dexterity, in conjunction with various tools or machinery to shape or alter physical properties, that all real wealth was believed to be created. Given the daily confrontation with the incontrovertible presence of the process, upon reflection any reasonably perceptive worker was open to the germ of contradictory consciousness through the conclusion that labour alone was responsible for the creation of wealth—that human labour, embodied in the object, gave it its worth.

Finished objects performed useful social functions or fulfilled practical or aesthetic needs. Alongside land improvement through agriculture they became part of the community’s assets. Producerism offered the means for factory workers, masons, carpenters, tailors, shoemakers, blacksmiths and all other trades to argue that it was through their labour that society, and the products and infrastructure that constituted its wealth, was built. Hence the term ‘producer’ implied creation, specifically wealth creation. It was much more than the mere labour associated with other contemporary descriptors such as ‘the working classes’, ‘the labouring classes’, ‘the toilers’, or the common but more functionary term ‘operative’. These productive workers believed themselves society’s most useful members. The labour of each productive individual, by converting the materials of nature into useful commodities or social infrastructure, added to the wealth of society at large and so formed the basis of society itself.33 This was the collective consciousness that

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33 Smith, *Wealth of Nations, Books I-III*, pp. 104-5. There are numerous examples from radical print that can also be found that illustrate this statement, for example from Britain: W. Benbow, *Great
formed the foundation of worker organisation and politics. Producerism therefore was not a passively received doctrine conceived in the abstract, but one actively constructed at the point of production by working people in the real world as they engaged with, and modified, physical objects through their daily labours. Expressed through its own distinct political language it tied worker politics to the point of production via the labour theory of value, the creation of wealth, and hence social utility. It bound worker politics to the point of production. The ‘producing classes’ did not simply work, but created all wealth. They were ‘the people’.  

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The Labour Theory of Value

There is no real wealth but the labour of man.¹

The labour theory of value was axiomatic to producer radicalism.² Effectively denying utility as the initial source of wealth, it emphasised man’s activity through production over his activity through use or exchange. Its basis was that the worth of any item was dependent upon the degree of human labour involved in its production. Demand and utility might under certain circumstances account for aspects of value, but not for the physical generation of wealth. Unlike productive activity, which took place in the physical world, they were abstract concepts. The word ‘value’, in this respect, is perhaps a misnomer and should be replaced by ‘wealth’. This is because although some convincing arguments could be raised against the idea of labour as the source of all value, they were less convincing against the idea of labour as the source of all wealth. Wealth had its own producerist definition as nature’s products modified by human exertion to fit them for human use or desire. A common view shared by the radical press, radical writers on political economy such as Hodgskin and Bray, and the orthodoxy of Smith, was the notion that if labour was embodied in material wealth, then wealth, and in particular capital, could be considered a store of past labour. Capital therefore, as stored-up previous labour, was a communal asset to be drawn upon and set to work productively to better the human condition.³ It was a fundamental agent of progress which should ensure that each generation lived better than its predecessor. It was not to be consumed in order to maintain the few in idle luxury.⁴

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⁴ Bray, Labour's Wrongs, pp. 46-7. Here Bray hints at the notion of productive and unproductive consumption almost 10 years before J. S. Mill's Principles of Political Economy (1848) to which it is more usually attributed. See also ‘H. R.’, ‘Essay on the Slow Progress of Mankind’, Southern Literary
Typical of a producerist perspective was Henry George’s influential late
nineteenth-century *Progress and Poverty*. In broad agreement with Smith, George
stated that the relative wealth of a nation depended upon the abundance or otherwise
of machinery, manufactured goods, infrastructure, agricultural and mineral products:

The common character of these things is that they consist of natural substances or
products which have been adapted by human labour to human use or gratification, their
value depending on the amount of labour which upon the average would be required to
produce things of like kind.\(^5\)

Wealth, according to this perspective, was not simply the possession of paper money
or promissory notes; neither could it be generated by speculation. An increase in the
value of bonds, mortgages and bank bills, or in land prices simply served to transfer
wealth from one party to another. Increases in uncultivated land value simply
increased the wealth of the landowner at the expense of the potential purchaser or
tenant; it did not increase the aggregate wealth of the nation. Bonds and paper money
likewise were not wealth, but claims against wealth, and the sovereign political
power could, with the stroke of a pen, cancel all debts and return the land to common
ownership without diminishing the nation’s aggregate wealth.\(^6\)

The labour theory of value, and the closely associated idea that property had its
origins in human labour, was one common to many Enlightenment figures from
Locke to Smith, Hume and Mill.\(^7\) Due to its oral and cultural rather than written
nature however, the popular producerist version is less easy to fix in time and place.
Schultz suggested twelfth-century precursors leading to a firm set of ideals emergent

\(^{5}\) *Messenger*, vol. 18, no. 7, 1852, p. 405. MoA. http://name.umdl.umich.edu/acf2679.0018.007

\(^{6}\) H. George, *Progress and Poverty: An Inquiry Into the Cause of Industrial Depressions and of
Increase of Want With Increase of Wealth*. London, Henry George Foundation, 1931, p. 32. For the
258-63; Churchward, *Australia and America*, p. 115, 121; Gollan, *Radical and Working Class
Calwell suggested that Clause 13 of the NSW Labor Electoral League owed more to George than
William Morris or Karl Marx. A. A. Calwell, *Be Just and Fear Not*. Melbourne, Lloyd O’Neil, 1972,

\(^{7}\) The idea is first recorded in Locke. In both Gooch and Hill there is the suggestion that Locke in turn
was influenced by the radicals of the English *Interregnum*—notably the Levellers and Winstanley’s
Ch. 5; G. P. Gooch, *English Democratic Ideas in the 17th Century*. New York, Harper & Row, 1959,
p. 302; C. Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution.*
in early-modern Britain, while Asher saw a definite written record in the pamphlets of mid-seventeenth-century British radical Gerrard Winstanley. George Lichtheim held that the role of the labour theory in the outlook of workers was of ‘respectable antiquity’. It is, however, outside the scope of this work to enter into a detailed discussion on the economic history of the labour theory of value beyond its immediate relevance—there are many specialised works available to the reader for this purpose. Nevertheless a brief summary may add clarity to what follows.

Nineteenth-century producerism most likely emerged from the medieval ‘moral economy’ within which, as Hobsbawm noted, the trades held their modest but respected place. Based on the teachings of the Catholic Church, the canonist view was that no conflict between ethics and economics existed in productive activity. God had provided the materials of nature for man’s use but ordained that productive labour be necessary to make them useful. Such labour was to be universal—man must make his bread ‘in the sweat of his brow’. Society needed useful items in order to function, and the labour required in their manufacture demanded reward as ‘the labourer is worthy of his hire’. It was morally right that the investment of an artisan’s youth in learning a trade, and his time and labour in the production of socially useful commodities, saw him reimbursed for raw materials plus a little extra towards his competence—that small reward which provided for his family and allowed him to keep a little aside for a modest retirement.

Thus in an age when most goods were produced and sold locally by small independent producers, canonist economics, after careful scrutiny of the medieval

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8 Schultz, ‘Small Producer Tradition’, pp. 89-90; Asher, ‘Producerism is Consciousness of Class’, pp. 53-4. It should be pointed out that Asher believed most artisans of the time did not share Winstanley’s views, given the paternalistic relationship between manual workers and the elites, and the economic reliance of the former upon the latter. It was not until the breakdown of these organic communities, he argued, that the adoption of producerism by the working classes became widespread.

9 Lichtheim, Origins of Socialism, p. 124. In John of Salisbury’s twelfth-century model of the political body ‘the feet’ consisted of ‘the peasants who always stick to the land, looking after the cultivated fields or plantings or pastures or flowers’, and ‘the many types of weaving and the mechanical arts, which pertain to wood, iron, bronze and the various metals’. The superior ranks, he wrote, ought to serve ‘those who erect, sustain and move forward the mass of the whole body [who] are justly owed shelter and support’. ‘Remove from the fittest body the aid of the feet; it does not proceed by its own power, but either crawls shamefully, uselessly and offensively on its hands or else is moved with the assistance of brute animals’. John of Salisbury, Policraticus, Nederman, C. J. (ed. & trans). Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, Book V, Ch.2. My thanks to David Rollison for this reference.

10 This and the following five paragraphs draw on three of these works: Beer, Early British Economics, pp. 15-59; Schumpeter, History of Economic Analysis, pp. 73-113; Meek, Labor Theory of Value, pp. 12-18.


12 Laurie, Artisans, p. 44; Schultz, ‘Small Producer Tradition’, p. 88, 127.
small-producer economy, accounted for the value of a commodity through the labour expended in its production. In addition, the tradesman was entitled to reimbursement for any cost outlay and a modest profit to feed his family and purchase essentials such as tools and materials. Such reward was subject to community agreement embodied in the notion of the ‘just price’.\(^\text{13}\)

Commerce, however, was far more conducive to sin. Max Beer suggested that as far back as Saxon England it was seen to hold the potential for *turpe lucrum* (dishonest gain) through buying cheap and selling dear. To maintain a ‘just price’ under canonist economics, exchange should be on the basis of equal value. Profit was gain without labour, and because the bible deemed human labour universal as punishment for the fall, unearned increment was condemned as sinful. But if commerce was considered at least potentially disreputable then a much greater degree of certainty existed in respect of money-lending at interest. It was usury and against the law of God and Nature. As W. R. Bisschop noted in his nineteenth-century study of English banking, public opinion, the canonists and the legislature were all, on the surface at least, fiercely opposed to usurious activity.\(^\text{14}\) Any lending of money should be done in a spirit of Christian brotherhood and in an absence of financial gain.

But the medieval church and government could not ignore the growth in towns through trade and commerce, and the conflict between ethics and the economics of commerce remained problematic. In an attempt to reconcile differences the canonists agreed that commerce, although potentially sinful, brought goods from afar and so provided for the wants and needs of men. Merchants took goods from where there was surplus to where there was demand and so brought producer and consumer together. They transported and stored those goods at their expense, ensuring that they arrived unspoiled, and so were entitled to fair reward for their endeavour. Should prices remain fair and equitable, then honest trading, in which the merchant engaged as far as possible in equal exchange, was morally permissible. By contrast, practices such as overcharging or hoarding to artificially raise prices were strictly frowned upon. To avoid community scorn the merchant should behave as a small producer and make a modest profit beyond initial outlay and transportation. Unearned

\(^{13}\) Thompson, *Making of*, pp. 259-96.

increment through unequal exchange was a divergence from the just price, and whether on the part of buyer or seller was morally condemned.\textsuperscript{15}

From the sixteenth century onwards international commerce increased markedly and saw a corresponding increase in the economic significance of the merchant. In this, the mercantilist era, the moral economy was afforded less relevance. Its price regulation broke down, to be replaced by the impersonal market price and its laws of supply and demand. The production cost of a commodity manufactured hundreds or thousands of miles distant, and myriad new and exotic goods, bore little relationship to those manufactured locally and made comparisons in labour value less meaningful. Distance thus gave traders the opportunity to circumvent the moral economy. Emphasis was placed on exchange, and so demand and utility assumed a greater significance in definitions of value. The independent producer, as owner of the means of production, was as yet unable to be exploited and the merchant’s unearned increment largely came through unequal exchange with the consumer.

It was during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that the labour theory of value re-assumed significance as the increase in manufacturing activity associated with early industrial capitalism reasserted value through production.\textsuperscript{16} But such re-emphasis did not mark a return to the moral economy and commerce retained importance, for as Marx pointed out, large-scale production aimed at distant markets had placed the total product into its hands.\textsuperscript{17} Early British political economy sought to explain both value through production and value through exchange, but concluded that labour was the source in the first instance. Throughout the nineteenth century the labour theory retained importance in the economic, political and cultural spheres, from the work of the classical economists Smith and Ricardo, the socialism of Owen and Marx, to Cobbett’s polemics and Shelley’s poetry.\textsuperscript{18} Smith’s opening sentence to the \textit{Wealth of Nations} stated that:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Food prices in particular were subject to community scrutiny and any deviation from the ‘fair price’ often led to rioting. For a seventeenth-century example see E. P. Thompson, ‘The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century’, \textit{Past and Present}, no. 50, 1971. Marx cites the writings of Martin Luther in this respect. Marx, \textit{Theories of Surplus Value, Addenda to Part III} (MIA), http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1863/theories-surplus-value/add3.htm (accessed 1 August 2006).
\item \textsuperscript{16} Meek, \textit{Labor Theory of Value}, pp. 18-24.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Marx, \textit{Capital Vol. 3}, p. 481.
\end{itemize}
The annual labour of every nation is the fund which originally supplies it with all the necessaries and conveniences of life which it annually consumes, and which consists always either in the immediate produce of that labour, or in what is purchased with that produce from other nations.\(^19\)

Ricardo later concluded that despite the exceptions which could always be found, value due to aesthetics or scarcity for example, in the first instance labour was the source of value. Thus the general rule that the greater the amount of labour needed to fashion a commodity, the greater was its value.\(^20\) Marx concurred, stating clearly in *Capital Volume 1* that, ‘the value of each commodity is determined by the quantity of labour expended on and materialised in it’.\(^21\)

In the formal sphere, the use of the labour theory of value by Smith and Ricardo in what were considered the foundation texts of nineteenth-century orthodox political economy presented an obvious dilemma to the ruling classes. It implied that the creation of a nation’s wealth had its origins in the labour of the working classes and so to accept either economist meant tacit acknowledgement of workers’ social importance. It was a subject to be treated with caution, for as Marx remarked, the ‘bourgeois economists instinctively saw, and rightly so, that it is very dangerous to stir too deeply the burning question of the origin of surplus-value’.\(^22\) Colquhoun’s *Treatise on the Wealth, Power, and Resources of the British Empire*, drawn upon by innumerable radical writers, had demonstrated the validity of Marx’s remark only too well.\(^23\)

Smith’s ‘cost of production’ explanation of value, and the ambiguity it generated when seen alongside his labour theory explanation of value, might have offered his successors an avenue that allowed justification of capitalist exploitation, but the popular labour theory was also lent unintended scientific legitimacy through his and Ricardo’s inquiries. The value theories they constructed, and demonstration of their validity via Colquhoun’s ‘political arithmetic’, bolstered the producerist perspective. Such early works were drawn upon by radicals to question the state of

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\(^{22}\) Ibid, p. 483.

\(^{23}\) Colquhoun, *Treatise*. The statistics gathered by Colquhoun found their way into many radical papers and ‘black books’ of early nineteenth-century Britain.
society and validate their own explanation of who generated its wealth and how it was distributed.

Charles Hall for example concluded from Smith, Grey’s treatise on income tax, and statements made by Pitt to parliament, that the worker only worked one hour a day for himself and the rest was spent toiling for the rich and powerful. He estimated in 1805 that the working classes comprised four-fifths of the British people, but received only one-eighth of the country’s wealth, the remainder appropriated by the rich as rent and profit.24 ‘The conclusion here given’, he wrote, ‘is inferred from premises and data which cannot be suspected; being furnished by people who had no design that such a conclusion should be drawn; and who probably would be sorry to find that such an inference could be made from them’.25 John Gray also believed the British producing classes created the annual sum of the nation’s wealth, but were dispossessed of four-fifths through rent on land and houses, interest on money, and profit made on labour. This was the basic and unjust economic feature of Gray’s contemporary society, and according to Gray the object of radical politics should be to return this wealth to its producer.26

Bray saw the successors to Smith and Ricardo—the political economists Say, Scrope, Nassau Senior, and Lauderdale—not as inquisitors of, but apologists for, the current state of his society. He argued that their work either stopped short of reaching its logical conclusion or engaged in casuistry to support the claims of the rich to the nation’s wealth by not revealing its true source. Their political economy, he argued, was born through the ‘necessity of supporting their pretensions to supremacy and wealth by stronger proof than mere assertion’.27 It lent these ‘pretensions’ a scientific basis in an age when science was the ultimate temporal authority. Like Hall, Bray too drew upon their principles, their own ‘established truths’, to ‘fight them on their own ground and with their own weapons’ and demonstrate labour’s right to its whole produce.28 The main orthodox source was Ricardo.

24 Hall, Effects of Civilization, pp. 116-29.
28 Bray, Labour’s Wrongs, p. 41.
Ricardo’s analysis of the relationship between value and labour theory left less room for ambiguity than Smith and was drawn on by many radicals to add scientific foundation to the notion that the producing classes should receive the full fruits of their toil. Foxwell stated that he was ‘more and more impressed with the far-reaching, disastrous consequences of the unfortunate colour given to economic teaching by Ricardo’. Foxwell demonstrated that many radicals like Thomas Hodgskin drew on both Ricardo and to a lesser extent Smith and so, through Hodgskin, did the New York school of socialists. Bray also drew on Ricardo, while Gray’s influence was more Smithian. The so-called early or utopian socialists, radicals on both sides of the Atlantic such as Hall, Bray, William Thompson, Robert Owen, Gray, Hodgskin, Thomas Skidmore and William Heighton, all drew on the labour theory to argue that value bore a direct relationship to the amount of human labour embodied in an object. But regardless of whether Smith or Ricardo (and it should be noted that Hall’s *Effects of Civilization* preceded Ricardo’s *Principles of Political Economy* by at least ten years) were responsible for the scientific foundations of modern socialist thought, they were foundations that still needed to have resonance with, and make sense in the lives of, working people.

Although thus given formal expression, a popular version of the labour theory had existed in the English-speaking world for many centuries. It was economics from below, the cornerstone of producerism. It enabled the early nineteenth-century (British) National Union of the Working Classes to confidently declare that ‘labour is the source of all wealth’. This ubiquitous statement was to be found as far apart as the preamble to the International Cigarmakers Union Constitution of New York (1864) and the New South Wales Labor Party Platform of 1891. Productive labour was seen as the cause of value, not simply its measure. While economists might argue whether value came from labour involved in production or through demand and utility, from the producers’ perspective wealth itself could only come from nature’s raw materials via human production. It remained both obvious and

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30 Ibid, p. lv-lvii, lxi, lxii, lxviii.
fundamental that wealth became generated at the point of production as human
labour transformed raw materials into commodities, and it followed that a society
based on the exchange of these commodities owed its existence to such productive
labour. Wealth could not simply be conjured up from the ether by abstract concepts
such as demand or utility; it required concrete human labour and raw materials.

The problem for the capitalist ruling classes was that the inquiries of Smith and
Ricardo unintentionally implied that it was not the ruling classes that were the most
socially useful, but those engaged in productive labour. Various economic theories
such as the Malthusian population theory, Ricardo’s ‘iron law of wages’, the wages-
fund theory, as well as the more general ‘harmony of interest’ all sought to justify
and reinforce the economic status quo in the interest of the rich, but could never be
entirely convincing to those who held a producerist perspective. As Marx noted, any
reliance on the labour theory of value, no matter how distant, was ‘dangerous’
political economy because in-depth inquiry into the origins of surplus-value was
likely to reveal its source in the productive labour of the worker. Even today the
‘dangerous’ aspect of Smith is passed over by modern writers on economics who
seek instead to promote him as father of the free market.34

For much of the nineteenth century, the wages-fund theory was used to counter
the labour theory. In 1879 George described the former as ‘the most fundamental and
apparently best settled [theorems] of current political economy…accepted as
axiomatic by all the great thinkers’.35 Wages-fund theorists conceded the
significance of productive labour, but argued that capital provided the original fund
from which productive activity was set in motion and from which workers wages
were drawn.36 The capitalist and worker were therefore mutually dependent and a
‘harmony of interest’ should exist between them. Taken in conjunction with
Malthusian population doctrine it justified and explained poverty among plenty. Like
most ruling-class arguments it was simple yet plausible. The wealthy capitalist, with
money to invest through prior abstinence, set up operations and advanced the worker
their wages each week from his capital. When capital was plentiful or labour scarce,
wages were high, but when capital was scarce or labour plentiful, wages were low.
Unfortunately the supposed tendency for the working-class population to increase

34 Henry, ‘Adam Smith’.
35 George, Progress and Poverty, p. 19.
36 A typical counterargument (in this instance from the IWW Sydney Local No.2’s Direct Action of 31
January 1914) was that ‘if Labour was not prior to Capital, where did Capital come from?’
exponentially while the produce of the land increased only incrementally meant that capital was always scarce relative to population, therefore it was no fault of the capitalist that wages were low. That most capitalists were extremely wealthy in comparison to workers was a truth passed over without explanation, and the contradiction between the capitalists’ obvious wealth and the abstinence that was part of the theory was likewise never explained.

Smith was not particularly useful to wages-fund proponents. Although he accepted that the capitalist advanced the worker his or her wages, he also stated that in reality the worker cost the capitalist nothing because both wages and profit were drawn from the increased value given to the commodity by the worker’s labour. Neither was Smith of use to the harmony of interest, stating that the interests of workman and master were by no means the same with ‘the former disposed to combine in order to raise, the latter in order to lower the wages of labour’. Radicals such as Hall also recognised that wages were the return to the worker of a small share of previously abstracted wealth. Later, and perhaps more influential than Hall, George saw wages-fund theory as a ‘fundamental error…the fruitful parent of a long series of errors, which vitiate most practical conclusions’. It was the basis of all the misconceptions of contemporary political economy. So important was it to George that he devoted the first four chapters of Book One of his Progress and Poverty to its refutation, while part of Chapter Three argued, like Smith, that wages were the return of wealth previously produced by labour.

Bray meanwhile had drawn a distinction between capital and the capitalist. He argued that capital, the unconsumed accumulation of past labour, was the essential communal fund through which productive labour was set into operation, but it was independent of, and so should not be identified with, any particular class or individual. ‘It is the capital, and not the capitalist, that is essential to the operations of the producer’, he wrote, ‘and there is as much difference between the two, as there is between the actual cargo and the bill of lading’. Capital was not private revenue to enable the idle consumption of luxuries, but was communal wealth to be set to

39 Hall, Effects of Civilization, pp. 100-103.
40 George, Progress and Poverty, p. 19.
41 Ibid, pp. 15-59.
productive work for national progress and social welfare. The consumption of luxuries might keep some in employment but contributed nothing to national improvement, unlike the production of socially useful items such as tools, machinery, railways and schools. Thus even consumption could be labelled productive or unproductive.\textsuperscript{44}

In many ways this aspect of producer radicalism demonstrated that it was just as often forward as backward-looking, and appeared as much a project of Enlightenment progressivism as the political economy it criticised. Every generation, wrote Bray, had the duty to leave the earth a richer place than the last, and productive labour was the only means. Every unproductive consumer simply served to diminish the wealth bequeathed to future generations. They squandered wealth that should be invested in progress and improvement and so were a drain on society.\textsuperscript{45} These were arguments and counter-arguments that, as will be shown below, frequently featured in the economic arguments of both the radical and establishment press.\textsuperscript{46}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{45} Bray, \textit{Labour's Wrongs}, pp. 46-7.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Hollis, \textit{Pauper Press}, pp. 220-58.
\end{itemize}
Chapter 3
Productive and Non-productive Labour

It would probably be difficult to point out any two words, respecting the proper use of which political economists have been more divided, than they have been concerning the two words productive and unproductive...\(^1\)

The other significant debate within nineteenth-century political economy with obvious consequences concerned definitions of productive and unproductive labour. Smith argued that of these two types of labour, only productive labour added value. Where unproductive labour—be it that of the menial servant, soldier or monarch—added nothing, productive labour fashioned raw materials into something with both use and value. Thus unlike unproductive labour, which perished at the very instance of its performance, productive labour fixed itself into a material object and left an ‘enduring object after the labour was past’\(^2\).

Like the popular labour theory of value, Smith’s analysis appeared not to be historically specific to capitalism. The Marxian definition of productive labour, however, was firmly situated within capitalist relations. Like Smith, Marx recognised the intrinsic link between value and labour and believed that under the capitalist mode of production productive labour alone generated surplus-value. But unlike Smith, it did not matter to Marx if it was labour utilised to produce a material object or an ephemeral service, whether labour was physical or mental; it was productive so long as it realised a profit for the capitalist. For Marx, therefore, productive labour was ‘the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in a human being, which he exercises whenever he produces a use-value of any description’. His critique of capitalism argued that ‘self-expanding value’—the basis of the capitalist system of social relations—was based on the expropriation of such labour to generate surplus-value (profit) and was therefore a system based on exploitation\(^3\).

By 1845 Friedrich Engels had already recorded the centralising tendency of industrial capitalism. It not only concentrated wealth and population but drew

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2 Smith, *Wealth of Nations, Books I-III*, p. 104, 429-431. cf. {Mill, 2000 #395}, pp. 56-65. Here Mill argued that although skill was not a material object, it had exchangeable value and therefore must be considered as wealth.
workers of many different trades together. As the production of surplus-value rather than simple commodity production, capitalism was based on self-expanding value rather than simple value replication, and so presented a different set of social and economic conditions to pre-capitalist artisan production. It was a difference critical to the social and economic position of the working classes. Far from making producerism irrelevant as artisan production inevitably declined, it held the potential to expand its definition. The increasing division of labour under the advance of capitalism blurred older distinctions between productive and unproductive labour and consequently made it potentially more relevant to greater numbers. It was obvious that in a textile mill for example the spinners and weavers were productive workers, but what of the firemen whose manual exertion kept the factory boiler and steam engine running and without which there would be no power to the looms? What of the engineers and millwrights whose skills and labour kept the engine and factory machinery working smoothly, or the labourers that packed and loaded?

Marx stated that as the co-operative character of the labour process became increasingly marked, so too the concept of productive labour and the productive labourer were necessarily extended. Taken individually, the labour of the fireman was not directly productive, but collectively as part of a workforce engaged in the production of surplus-value (as distinct from simple commodity production), it was. Capitalism therefore forced wider and more imprecise definitions of productive labour. To Marxists and capitalists both, productive labour meant any labour that produced wealth as surplus-value, whereas to the mechanics and artisans of the older trades, only those who produced wealth directly through working the land or with raw materials qualified.

The original producerist utopia had projected the vision of a mutualist commonwealth of small independent landholders supported by independent artisans. It came closest to fruition in antebellum America and was supposedly prevented from realisation in the British motherland by a corrupt monarchy and government acting in the interest of the aristocrats and corrupt placemen from which it drew its members. According to this perspective the system of parliamentary

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6 Laurie, *Artisans*, p. 66.
7 Freyer, *Producers Versus Capitalists*, pp. 4-5.
democracy was itself not at fault, but had become corrupted by greed, vested interest and a denial of universal suffrage. If the example held out by the early American Republic were to be followed then good government would be assured. In economic terms too it did not seek a radical overthrow of market relations, although it did not associate the market with capitalism and the wage system and demanded limits be placed on ‘monopoly’ and ‘accumulation’. In both political and economic terms it was inherently reformist rather than revolutionary in nature. It was only in the mid-1840s, as capitalism became entrenched, that this early model was questioned by those radicals that believed the source of the producing classes’ impoverishment was systemic rather than political.

Capitalism and the division of labour forced radicals to recognise that the mutualist utopia associated with simple commodity production was increasingly less relevant. If it were to have any meaning in the new economic reality, producerist mutualism would have to reconcile itself to the collectivism associated with the division of labour. One practical answer was not to look back to the golden age of artisan production that remained in the consciousness of many tradesmen, but to organise syndicalist worker collectives specific to each industry. Another strand of producerist thought, more forward-looking and collectively based, sought to combine semi-skilled production workers with the new trades associated with large-scale production. Of necessity it operated on a more collective basis and pointed towards a state socialist future. Despite their differences the two doctrines were both founded on the labour theory of value, the principle of productive labour and the view that all in society should do their share and be rewarded accordingly.

The initial premise was that labour had the right to its whole produce. ‘If labor produces all the wealth of a country, why should it not claim ownership’ asked the American shoe-makers collective, the Knights of St Crispin? Consequently, if labour was to be entitled to its whole produce then collective co-operation under the division of labour would see each worker receive a share of its exchange value equivalent to the work put in. This was the basis of syndicalist solution. It assumed a society based solely on productive labour and lent itself to organisation on an

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8 Hobsbawm, Artisan or Labour Aristocrat?, p. 362.
9 Laurie, Artisans; Schultz, ‘Small Producer Tradition’; Lasch, True and Only Heaven; Sutton, Journeymen for Jesus.
11 Cited in Lasch, True and Only Heaven, p. 213.
industry by industry basis. The entire produce would be divided among the workers, and unearned income (rent and interest) consequently impossible to obtain.\textsuperscript{12}

Another premise however, the basic human right of all to subsistence, rested on the principle that need and not productive labour alone should form the criteria for wealth distribution. This was the basis of the state socialist solution. Under this regime all would labour for the good of society. The state meanwhile would assume ownership of all production and distribute it according to need. State socialism’s basic and universal argument was that because labour was the source of all wealth and civilisation, the whole produce of labour belonged to all of society. Each should be able to draw on that produce in accordance with his reasonable needs, but in return should contribute by engaging in socially useful labour.\textsuperscript{13} Adequate provision was to be made for those unable to labour. In their own way both schools of thought sought to deny unearned income through profit and rent, and so both would rid society of the unproductive.\textsuperscript{14} These two strands of radical thought ultimately led into the two main traditions within the later radical movement: the former, with its focus on the producer and associations of producers, to syndicalism; the latter, with its focus on the consumer and associations of consumers such as the co-operative movement, to state socialism.\textsuperscript{15}

An increasingly sophisticated economy demanded that the ideologies founded on producerism accommodate an increasing number of workers not directly involved in production in order to appeal to the broader working classes. In addition to Marx’s more expansive definition of productive labour, one of the ways in which these ideologies attempted to reconcile distinctions between productive and unproductive labour was to introduce the concept of socially useful labour, ‘usefulness’ and ‘useful toil’. It was ‘the useful classes’ that formed ‘the people’. The concept of usefulness was somewhat fluid and could be extended to include the role of those employed in the distribution and retail of goods, those that ‘produced by brain’, or even, depending on historical circumstance, as far as members of the middle classes—‘by hands or by head’ as Cobbett stated.\textsuperscript{16} Colquhoun’s dispassionate analysis of the

\textsuperscript{12} Menger, \textit{Right to the Whole Produce}, pp. 7-8.
\textsuperscript{13} For example the Gotha Programme, cited in ibid, pp. 106-7
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, pp. 7-11, 57-8.
\textsuperscript{15} Webb, \textit{History of}, pp. 162, 335, 653-61, 705-16. It was this focus on the consumer that led Fabians like the Webbs to reject the labour theory in favour of marginal utility.
early nineteenth-century British economy, for example, agreed with Gast that wealth was generated by mining, manufacturing, handicraft employment and agricultural pursuits, but differed by including members of the middle classes involved in trade, commerce and navigation. But it was a definition never fully accepted. Gray for example argued that useful though the latter may be, they were ‘mere distributors of wealth’ and socially useful ‘only in sufficient number’. The truly productive members of society were those who ‘laboured with their own hands’, in either the cultivation of the earth itself, or in the appropriation and preparation of the produce of the earth to the uses of life. Every individual not so employed was a direct tax on those who were. Although the community’s wealth was increasing, at any given instant it was finite. Therefore the numbers of those involved in commerce and retail needed to remain in proportion to the number of agricultural and manufacturing workers. Should they grow too numerous and become too heavy a burden on the producers of all wealth, economic progress would halt. Nonetheless, even as ‘mere distributors of wealth’ they were of far more use to society than aristocrat and placeman—‘the numerous and expensive class of persons who have not even the pretension of utility’.

Producerism thus offered a basic definition of productive labour. It was, quite simply, that human activity which created wealth by transforming raw materials into an object with use-value. It was a definition that emerged from the pre-capitalist economic relations of simple commodity production and became part of a broader radical discourse which gave those working people directly engaged in productive labour their perceived social utility. It was a definition reinforced by Smith in his Wealth of Nations, yet as Marx demonstrated, it was one that proved inadequate under capitalist relations. Marx re-defined productive labour as that which realised surplus-value for the capitalist, thus expanding the concept to include those who indirectly contributed to the productive process, or even those employed to make a profit for the capitalist who would not have been considered productive under conditions of simple commodity production. The Marxian description thus expanded the concept and made it more inclusive, increasing its relevance to broader sections of the working population. Nevertheless earlier definitions lingered among

17 Colquhoun, Treatise, p. 63.
traditional ‘producers’ such as the artisan or agricultural worker and, as will be shown, debate over just who was and was not ‘productive’ continued into the twentieth century.
Chapter 4  
Producerism as a Discourse of Political Opposition:  
Producers and Non-producers

The sons of labour, the toiling millions, have in all ages been oppressed by the wealthy and non-productive classes.¹

Man could conceive an object in his imagination and then create it in the material world.² This was the productive capacity that set human beings apart from all other species and brought wealth into existence. Wealth was not something that existed apart from humankind, but a relationship through which the labour of the worker embodied in the item under production connected the materials of nature to the consumer. Nature had provided all the materials necessary for mankind’s existence, but they required human labour to make them useful.³ Labour-value, therefore, was no abstraction to be dehumanised and argued out of existence by economists or others far removed from the productive process. It held firm connection with the lives of ordinary folk and obvious social value. Henry Mayhew observed in 1851 that London’s artisans ‘contemplate their labours in relation to the whole framework of society’, viewing themselves not merely as workmen, but as an essential part of the nation.⁴ As Schultz pointed out, productive labour was never mere physical toil, but a useful, moral, social and economic act. It provided all of society’s needs and therefore a life of useful labour was a contribution to society’s well-being.⁵

By their own definition, in an economy based on the production and exchange of material goods, the producers of those goods were the most socially useful and should receive appropriate recognition. Early political economists such as Smith and Colquhoun bolstered this perceived social utility by suggesting that wealth generated by productive labour was the means by which nations became powerful.⁶ Colquhoun in particular held the view that it was by the increase or diminution of productive labour alone that states, kingdoms and empires flourished or decayed. Such labour

¹ PA, 9 June 1849.  
² This was a premise used by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*. Marx, *German Ideology*, p. 7. See also Marx, *Capital Vol. 1*, p. 174.  
⁵ Schultz, ‘Small Producer Tradition’, p. 87.  

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increased the wealth and resources of a nation, while conversely, the unproductive
drew on the wealth and resources for subsistence. While recognising the ‘usefulness’
of trade and commerce, in essence he agreed with Gray that if the unproductive drew
too heavily on these resources, or multiplied to a greater proportion than the
productive could support, then the nation must decline.⁷

Be it simple commodity production or the production of capitalist surplus-
value, if producers deemed themselves responsible for the material wealth that gave
society its prosperity, then their social opposites were those who produced nothing.
In contrast to critiques of society based on differences in material wealth, relative
social advantage, or ownership of the means of production, it was a critique based on
engagement or otherwise in some form of ‘useful work’ or ‘usefulness’ to the
community. Those with a perceived unwillingness or inability to engage in useful toil
were held in contempt. There was nothing intrinsically wrong with different levels of
payment for different kinds of labour, but accumulation of wealth through unearned
increment, unequal exchange, or taxation was to be condemned alongside the self-
inflicted poverty-through-idleness of the so-called ‘undeserving poor’.

‘Society at large consists only of two parties—those who work, and those who
do nothing’ wrote Bray.⁸ Bray’s truism pointed to a social division based on two
antagonistic groups—the ‘producing classes’ and the ‘idle classes’.⁹ It was the labour
of the former responsible for the well-being of society, and indeed its very existence.
By contrast the latter engaged in no such labour. They contributed nothing, but
instead, as an early British radical paper stated, ‘wax[ed] fat on the labour of the
people’ and so were a drain on society.¹⁰ This ‘great distinction between producers
and non-producers’, as Foxwell later put it, transcended all others and was, he
believed, the basis of socialism.¹¹ It retained currency throughout the century.

‘Producers and non-producers!’ declared Henry Robinson in the American Overland
Monthly of 1871, ‘here lies the great issue of the future, and the one paramount to, if
not including, all others’.¹² It was a conflict, he argued, inherent to all forms of social
organisation historically, because ‘one-half of the world [had always] been taxed to

⁷ Colquhoun, Treatise, p. 63, 106.
⁸ Bray, Labour’s Wrongs, p. 58.
⁹ Ibid, p. 23. This view of society was equally a feature of nineteenth-century American radicalism.
Lasch, True and Only Heaven, passim.
¹⁰ PFP, 1794 (precise date not given).
support a government composed of the other half’. Robinson also believed it the cause of all revolutions and ‘civil contentions’, including the contemporary struggle between capital and labour. Colquhoun’s extensive and comprehensive tables, covering most aspects of the early nineteenth-century British economy, detailed in money terms not only the wealth generated by the producing classes but also the enormous cost of maintaining the non-productive. At the time of publication it was revealed that productive labour created £292,555,147 worth of new wealth annually, of which the unproductive consumed £137,966,225. Of the latter figure, forty-two percent went to support the monarchy, nobility and gentry; twenty-five percent to the state, its armed services and pensioners; thirteen percent to the clergy, judiciary and public health; a further thirteen percent to education and other state services; and finally seven percent to the poor.

Taking wealth and power into account further divided the idle classes into rich and poor. Self-inflicted poverty through unwillingness to work saw an ‘undeserving poor’ and criminal class keep company in idleness and parasitism with the wealthy. Those at the top of the social scale, drawing on rent, profit or taxes, and those at the bottom, reliant on petty crime and public charity, differed only by degree. In this view of society the ‘virtuous’ producing classes were sandwiched between the idle but powerful rich and the lazy indigent but powerless poor. ‘H. R.’, writing in the American Southern Literary Messenger of 1852, saw in all countries idle nobility, privileged orders and the wealthy alongside ‘idle priests’, ‘idle beggars’, rogues, swindlers and gamblers, all of whom batten on the products of labour while producing nothing. Colquhoun likewise saw little difference between the rich who passed their lives in vice and idleness, dissipating wealth in gaming and debauchery, and an ‘idle class’ of paupers, prostitutes, vagrants, gipsies and criminals. The Australian Radical of 1888 saw no difference between ‘genteel drone’ and beggar

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13 Ibid.
18 Colquhoun, Treatise, pp. 106-7.
except in their pecuniary circumstance and methods of wasting time. Exceptions like widows and orphans, suffering through no fault of their own, could always be found, but also among the underclass there existed ‘exploiters’, ‘the “hardened and confirmed vice, little superior to felons,”’ ‘pampered at the public cost’. J. A. Reubert wrote that in the America of 1857:

The tax payers complain of heavy taxes, and are filled with feelings of bitterness towards the poor, as idlers, loafers, vagabonds, that might take care of themselves; the poor act not better; the world, they take for granted, owes them a living everywhere…the more worthy of the poor are overlooked, having too much delicacy and feeling of self-respect to apply for help, or to push themselves forward, while the impudent, those who have no vestige of modesty left, are generally the recipients of the gifts of the public.

This was a view that marked one possible point of departure between producerism’s disdain for the poor and Marxist concept of the reserve army of unemployed. But it is important to recognise that the so-called undeserving poor were not those unfortunates among the reserve army willing to work but unable to find it—after all, any member of the producing classes could descend into unemployment at the whim of an employer. Rather, they were Marx and Engels’ lumpenproletariat, the ‘dangerous class’ composed of ‘social scum’, that was more likely to act the part of a ‘bribed tool of reactionary intrigue’ than support any proletarian revolution.

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19 AR, 15 September 1888.
22 Marx explained the difference between the two as follows: ‘The phrase “labouring poor,” is found in English legislation from the moment when the class of wage labourers becomes noticeable. This term is used in opposition, on the one hand, to the “idle poor,” beggars etc., and on the other to those labourers who are still possessors of their own means of labour’. Marx, *Capital Vol. 1*, fn. p. 711.
23 K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*. New York, Signet Classics, 1998, p. 63. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, Marx described how Louis Bonaparte established a dictatorship with the support of the lumpenproletariat, the ‘refuse of all classes’. Both existed ‘at the expense of the labouring nation’. K. Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, Ch. 5. (MIA). http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch05.htm (accessed 24 October 2006). Australian union organiser W. G. Spence stated that strike-breakers were often recruited from the same class: ‘the great majority of scabs were notorious criminals…bullies and larrikins’. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported during the 1890 Australian Maritime Strike that ‘loafers’, the type of men that would never engage in real work, all hurried towards the centre of strike activity threatening to enrol as strikebreakers in order to be paid off by the unions. The Webbs described the same phenomenon in Britain. Spence, *Australia’s Awakening*, p. 178; *SMH*, 23 August 1890; Webb, *History of*, p. 404.
Obviously no friends of the producing classes, they formed a parasitic underclass, ready to rob or remain reliant on society’s charity.²⁴ The morally virtuous ‘producing classes’ thus stood in opposition to both the idle and profligate rich and the idle and dissolute poor.

Most producerist invective, however, was directed upward. The ‘idle poor’ while condemned for living in idleness on society’s charity, or on the proceeds of petty crime, held no power over the producing classes but were instead a mere pecuniary nuisance. As Colquhoun’s figures demonstrated, in terms of the wealth drawn from productive labour they were a minor irritant.²⁵ Consequently, however much they were to be condemned for living on society’s charity or the proceeds of petty crime, they took little space in producer rhetoric. In terms of power they remained irrelevant. Far from the ‘dangerous classes’, they were, the Sydney Bulletin suggested in 1882, ‘a parcel of wretched fools’ that did more harm to themselves than the wider community. It was crooked commercial and legal practice that was monstrous by comparison.²⁶ The poor, ‘idle’ or otherwise, did not use commerce or the power of law and state to their advantage. As a contributor to the Australian Economist of 1888 stated: ‘justice punishes the miserable pickpocket and garrotter, but there is no punishment for the criminals who may strangle a whole nation’.²⁷

Non-producers as a Ruling Class

It was the so-called ‘idle classes’—the monarchy, the aristocracy and landlords, stock-jobbers, monopolists, land speculators, lawyers, bankers, and bishops—that formed the ruling classes and their ‘hirelings’. Working people merely wanted to earn a living in peace, but as the American Henry Robinson stated, ‘monopoly gains its power for mischief from legislation’,²⁸ and it was because ruling-class extortion was believed carried out through state power that political redress was sought. The ‘producer’ was thus not simply a figure constructed to promote an economic and social role, but a political one that demanded radical reform to a corrupt system that

²⁶ Bulletin, 4 February 1882.
legitimised robbery on a massive scale. Working-class radicals only needed to look at who held reins of state power to conclude that it was through political power that their economic exploitation was maintained. Accordingly it was through political power that they sought to obtain the full fruits of their toil and their political rights as citizens.\textsuperscript{29}

But the rich and powerful were not merely the subjects of derision within producerist rhetoric. The methods by which they had acquired their wealth and power were scrutinised and explained. Attacked with colourful acrimony and caricature, they existed at the expense of the producing classes on unearned increment, by unequal exchange, or through simple extortion. ‘Our swineherds do not permit us to enjoy the produce of our hard labour’ wrote Hogs Wash of 1793, ‘they send their deputies to take a great part of it…while we are plundered to feed the whole, they grow fat on the choicest fruits of our labour’.\textsuperscript{30} Hall acknowledged in 1805 that:

\begin{quote}
The poor man produces by his labour almost every thing that the rich man eats, drinks, and wears; the house in which he lives; in short, nearly every thing he has or enjoys; for the land would produce few things without the labour of man.\textsuperscript{31}
\end{quote}

The rich man by contrast gave nothing in return. True, the rich man paid the poor man with money, but money was simply a token that represented labour previously extracted from him.\textsuperscript{32} Further, because the wealth of a nation was finite, the riches of the ruling classes had to be acquired at the expense of the producing classes.\textsuperscript{33} ‘All profit must come from labour’ wrote Bray, therefore ‘the gain of an idle class must necessarily be at the loss of an industrious class’.\textsuperscript{34} Through their control of the state the producer was ‘robbed’ of the proceeds of his or her labour:

\begin{quote}
People: And what labour do you perform in the society?
Privileged Class: None; we are not made to labour
People: How, then, have you acquired your wealth?
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{29} Prothero, \textit{Artisans and Politics}, pp. 78-80
\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Hogs Wash}, 26 October 1793. Both title and tone of this publication by Paine’s publisher Daniel Isaac Eaton were in response to Burke’s ‘swinish multitude’ jibe at the working classes.
\textsuperscript{31} Hall, \textit{Effects of Civilization}, p. 100.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid, p. 101.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid, pp. 91-4, 101, 197-8.
\textsuperscript{34} Bray, \textit{Labour's Wrongs}, p. 61, 67.
Privileged Class: By taking pains to govern you

People: To govern us! and is this what you call governing? We toil and you enjoy; we produce and you dissipate; wealth flows from us, and you absorb it.  

The (British) Gorgon of 1818 was typical in defining the ‘productive classes’ as ‘those who, by their labours increase the funds of the community, as husbandmen, mechanics, labourers, &c’. They stood in contrast to the ‘unproductive classes’, the ‘lawyers, parsons, and aristocrats’—the ‘idle consumers’ that ‘waste the produce of the country without giving any thing in return’. Once productive labour was regarded as the basis for social division, then questions followed about the usefulness of other members of society. Why was it that the monarch and the minions of the court; the footmen and ladies-in-waiting, the Keeper of the Great Seal, and the Commissioner for the King’s Paintings were ascribed a much higher social status and greater monetary rewards than the meagre return given to those who created the real wealth? What were unnecessary offices and titles but a means to obtain wealth and status without having to work? ‘When Adam delved and Eve span, where then was the gentleman?’ From John Ball’s famous fourteenth-century couplet to Justice of late nineteenth-century Australia, the English ‘gentleman’ was singled out for invective on this basis. Far from a ‘delightful product’ of nineteenth-century civilisation, he should instead be viewed with ‘detestation’, a ‘loafer and a parasite’ who subsisted on honest workers while sneering at their lack of refinement.

Thus producer radicalism viewed the so-called non-productive as idlers and parasites. Human beings were inherently productive. It was what set them apart from every other species. By implication the unproductive lacked this most essential human quality, and as a consequence could be excluded from ‘the people’, or even humanity itself. Views such as these were easily extended into indifference, a lack of tolerance, and prejudice. As Rubinstein has pointed out, radicalism had its dark side, and racism and anti-Semitism remained a consistent feature of nineteenth-century worker politics. With non-producers having no real purpose in society other than to consume the wealth generated by the producers, they were condemned as useless. A writer in the (British) Republican of 1825 was typical of many: ‘when I say people, I

35 *LDm*, 13 April 1839. The quote is from Volney.
37 *Justice*, 7 April 1894.
38 Rubinstein, ‘British Radicalism’.
mean they who are employed in useful labour. All beyond these form the scum and disease of human society and have no just claim to count as part of the people’. 39

“Useful” means a worker directly or indirectly assisting in the production of wealth’ wrote the Sydney-based Industrial News in 1922, almost a century later. ‘The exceptions are all those whose existence is of a parasitical nature, who neither directly nor indirectly assist in useful production’. 40

Ideologies built upon a producerist foundation tended to egalitarianism. Both the laws of nature and God demanded that man labour, and universal participation in productive labour would have a levelling effect by sweeping away social distinction. The solution to the inequality they saw all around them was simple: if the ‘idle classes’ were to engage in socially useful productive labour then all would stand equal through labour. Compelling the idle rich and idle poor to work would increase the annual products of industry and support many more families. 41 A parsimonious man might still become rich, but his wealth was the accumulation of his labour alone. Producers alone were the wealth creators and they were entitled to labour’s full reward. Hence the terms ‘producing classes’ and ‘idle classes’ were both loaded with obvious political and economic implications. The former suggested socially useful productive toil with those thus engaged forming the very basis of society. The latter implied a class of men and women who were believed to exist in idleness, making no contribution at all but living off the wealth generated by producers. They were the ‘parasites’, ‘drones’, ‘vampires’, or ‘tumours’ that sucked the life-blood from the productive classes, and whenever these descriptions appeared they reaffirmed this resentful economic sentiment.

The metaphor of the drone in particular was one that found consistent use in the radical press. Like all producerist political metaphors its origin was economic. Based upon the people’s labour theory of value, human society was analogous to the beehive. It was the labour of the industrious worker bees that built and defended the hive, collected the nectar, and produced the valuable honey. The drones meanwhile lived in idleness and luxury. They consumed but did not create. The analogy dated back at least to the sixteenth-century:

40 IN, 16 March, 1922.
The idle drone, that labours not at all,
Sucks up the sweet of honey from the bee:
Who worketh most, to their share least doth fall;
With due desert reward will never be.42

These words of the poet Edward deVere, written in 1573, were reiterated by Shelley in 1813:

Those gilded flies
That, basking in the sunshine of a court,
Fatten on corruption! what are they?
—The drones of the community; they feed
On the mechanic’s labour…43

The Gorgon contrasted the ‘labouring bees’ that were the ‘glory and prosperity of every state’, with the drones that were ‘the dregs of society’ existing only to consume. Paine had previously described the British aristocracy as a ‘seraglio of drones’—adding sexual immorality to the vices of the idle classes.44 Gast declared that the producing classes should remember that ‘those who arrogantly called themselves the higher orders’ owed their all to ‘the people whom they affected to despise’…[these] ‘haughty persons’ [were] ‘the mere drones of the hive’, [and it was] ‘the duty of the bees to drive these drones away’.45 Such imagery remained long within the working-class cultural milieu. Lovett in Britain described a labouring population that toiled incessantly to generate the wealth that enabled the ‘drones of society’ to live in idleness and vice.46 In the United States ‘H. R’. meanwhile described the idle rich as the ‘drones of society, consuming the fruits of labor without contributing in any way to the resources or the improvement of mankind’.47 Cobbett used ‘wasp’ in preference to ‘drone’ when describing the ‘banking aristocracy’ of the 1820s, but the sentiment was the same: ‘It stings while it devours; it punishes, while it starves the industrious Bee’ he wrote in 1821.48 A century on and twelve thousand

45 Prothero, Artisans and Politics, p. 98.
46 Lovett, Life and Struggles, p. 263.
miles distant from Cobbett, the Australian Federated Ironworkers’ *Ironworker* continued to denounce bankers as ‘money-lending drones’. 49

As Schultz noted, the morality of the nineteenth-century producing classes was firmly woven into the wider social fabric. Their values of equality, community and honest labour were an intrinsic part of western moral tradition. 50 In a society defined by commodity production, the non-productive could only exist on wealth exacted from the productive by some form of robbery. The means was unearned increment, unequal exchange, or outright criminal theft—the profit, rent, usury and taxation associated with one end of the social scale, or the charity and crime of the other. Harking back to the medieval economy and canonists, Gray stated that it was morally wrong for one man to exist on the labour of another. 51 Hall also condemned those who battened off of the labour of the poor through unequal exchange as immoral. 52 Bray wrote that human beings were created equal and had the same absolute wants. They were surrounded by all the materials necessary for life, but in their natural state these were unusable. They only became useful to man through the medium of human labour, therefore as the nature and the wants of humanity were alike, and none of the necessaries for life could be obtained without labour, it followed that all should work, all must be equal, and the raw material of all wealth—the earth—was the common property of all. 53

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49 *Ironworker*, August-October 1930.
52 Hall, *Effects of Civilization*, p. 50.
Chapter 5
Parasites upon the People’s Labour

Whether the visible head be Emperor, King, or President, there has always been associated with him a multitude of non-producers, the burden of whose support has planted the seed of revolution in all ages.¹

Popular social assessment based on the labour theory of value saw wealth originate in the labour of the producing classes, while the rich, made wealthy through profit, interest, taxation and rent, lived in opulence and idleness at their expense. The labour of working people had supported the rich and powerful historically.² Before capitalist profit became the principal instrument of exploitation, taxation was considered the principal means of enforced wealth abstraction. It was used to fill the inflated coffers of sinecurists and monarchs, or to build unnecessary standing armies for expensive foreign adventures and to subjugate the people at home. Winstanley believed that by using their ‘subtile wit’ the ‘oppressors’ positioned themselves into ‘places of Trust’. They used their position to force the people into paying money for ‘Publick use’, but ‘divided much of it into their private purses’.³ The producing classes maintained that taxes should be for the common weal, not to fatten and protect the idle classes, and such arguments remained a consistent feature of early Anglo-American producer radicalism.

Taxation was both direct and indirect. Direct taxation, drawn from assessable sources such as property values and income, was mainly paid by the rich. As the most visible means it gave foundation to the argument that the rich alone, as the only obvious taxpayers, should be represented in parliament. Less obvious were the indirect means of taxation, the consumption taxes, tariffs and duties that provided the bulk of state revenue. It was left to radicals to point out that hidden forms of taxation on life’s staples were the most excessive and fell hardest on the producing classes. They were seen as a means of redistributing wealth from the poor to the rich.⁴ ‘Indirect taxation is a fraud’, wrote the Australian Radical of 1887, ‘let the people

² Norton, History of Capital and Labour, Part VII, Ch. 1-6.
⁴ Prothero, Artisans and Politics, p. 77.
know what they have to pay, let them see where their money goes, and for what’.  

For the first half of the century British and Australian workers, the most heavily taxed members of society, were denied representation. The state raised taxes and distributed their benefits, but they were believed distributed to the wrong people. Taxation was believed the principal instrument of exploitation; thus the conclusion that only political reform would return wealth to its producers. The nexus between taxation and representation was inevitable while it was assumed that only through representation would the producing classes gain some control over the extent of their taxation and the direction of its revenue.

**Old Corruption**

Under the moral economy producers expected to receive from the consumer a socially negotiated just price that took into account the cost of materials and their efforts. But whatever nineteenth-century artisans may have argued in their fight against capitalism and the machine, there was never an artisan golden age. As Asher has noted, even in the early-modern world of Winstanley, the role of the producer and labourer remained, above all, to serve lord and master, just as in the middle ages. Taxes, tithes and rents transferred wealth from artisan, husbandman and labourer to priest, lord, king and placeman just as surely as profit and interest transferred it from worker to capitalist.

Early producerist invective assailed the monarchy and aristocracy it believed responsible for the oppression of free-born Englishmen over centuries past. It was the legacy of the ‘Norman Yoke’. Alongside the pensioners and placemen of the British court and government, their system of honorary titles and laws of primogeniture spawned ‘Old Corruption’. Primogeniture saw many second sons and subsequent children of the aristocracy recipients of government pensions and places. While the first-born son assumed ownership of the family land and title, siblings were forced to seek support elsewhere, and with manual labour out of the question they bought commissions as officers in the armed forces, assumed government commissions, or obtained land in the colonies. As a result land and position was denied to the children.

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5 AR, 12 March 1887.
7 Asher, ‘Producerism is Consciousness of Class’, pp. 53-4.
As idle parasites, the members of Old Corruption fed on the wealth created by the producing classes: the gentry and aristocracy through legitimised theft of the land and landlordism; the pensioners, placemen, corrupt political ‘boroughmongers’, court minions and monarch through drawing large reward from public taxes.  

American revolutionaries had charged the monarch with erecting ‘a multitude of new offices, and [sending] hither swarms of officers to harass our people, and eat out their substance’. In an open letter to the King, their English supporters declared that the colonists were being provoked beyond reason by having to toil, sweat and ‘run hazards’, only to be taxed and ‘mulct’:

To support the infamous Luxury of high pampered Lords, a rotten court, and your tribe of venal senators, Minions, Pimps and Parasites the Pests of Society.

In 1793, Politics for the People reminded its readers that ‘great numbers of the Nobility &c. have pensions [and] sinecure places…some of which amount to from 15 to 30,000 [pounds] a year’. ‘Whose labour produces the commodities out of which all this is paid?’ it asked. The Gorgon also pointed out in 1818 that wealth created through productive labour supported the ‘idle consumers’, the ‘worthless oligarchy’ and the ‘contemptible minority’ that made up the ruling classes. It reckoned the annual cost of sustaining the aristocracy, established church, public creditors and paupers, at £97,000,000 exclusive of expenditure on the standing army or public charities. It also asserted that huge additional sums were obtained through ‘cunning and fraud’ by other non-producers including the dissenting clergy and the legal profession. All were ‘legalised claims on the produce of the tiller of the ground, the labourer, and the mechanic’ and part of the ‘fraud, robbery, and spoliations practised upon the productive classes’.

In 1818 the annual income of a skilled British compositor was £87, while for Earls Liverpool and Bathurst it was £13,100 and £30,000 respectively. The hated

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10 Rubinstein, ‘End of “Old Corruption”’.
12 *Crisis*, 4 February 1775.
13 *PFP*, vol. 1, no. 12, 1793, fn. p. 169.
Viscount Castlereagh, always singled out for special scrutiny, had received £68,000 in the preceding two.\textsuperscript{15} Cobbett, whose political writings were premised on the producerist social dichotomy,\textsuperscript{16} often sent a poisonous barb in the direction of Old Corruption. He described with astonishment the social credentials of those receiving public pensions:

When I looked over these Lists (for there are forty-seven separate lists), I wondered who the People could be. The Brudenels, the Seymours, the Talbots, the Herberts, Finches, Wyndhams, Hays, Cockburns, Selwyns, &c. &c. But upon closer examination, I found the far greater part of all these broods of pensioners belonging, in one way or another, to the great families'.\textsuperscript{17}

Cobbett made great political capital from this kind of personal attack and was far from unique. One of the most significant, successful and enduring aspects of producerist rhetoric, regardless of time, place, or context, was its personification of social struggle—attacking people and policies rather than institutions and doctrine. In this way it popularised the political and economic fight by pointing to the human examples of greed and tyranny that the system permitted. It allowed ordinary people to relate them to their world without the need for an extensive grounding in political or economic theory. Colquhoun’s tables provided the source of many such attacks in the British radical press, as well as the appearance of various ‘black books’ describing who owned what. But for Paine, Bray and Marx, the fault was not that of individuals, however greedy and ruthless they might be, but was instead systemic. Corrupt government and ministers may come and go, but vice and extravagance remained. Both foundation and superstructure of government were bad, and no matter how it was propped up it would continually sink into ‘court government’.\textsuperscript{18}

All of these arguments were typical of the producerist logic behind late eighteenth-early nineteenth-century Anglo-American radicalism. They appeared at an anxious time for the British ruling classes. The loss of the American colonies and the example of the French Revolution bolstered radical protest, and saw ruling-class

\textsuperscript{15} Gorgon, 28 November, 19 December 1818. Keen, ibid, p. 226, 252.
\textsuperscript{16} For example: Two-Penny Trash, vol. 1, no.6, December 1830; vol. 2, no. 1, July 1831; vol. 3, no. 2, September 1831.
\textsuperscript{17} Cobbett, Two-Penny Trash, vol. 1, no. 5, November 1830.
\textsuperscript{18} Paine, Collected Writings, p. 646; Bray, Labour’s Wrongs, p. 91, 102; Marx, Capital Vol. 1, pp. 20-21.
hegemony challenged as producerist radicalism scrutinised the existing social and economic order, and the means by which the idle rich lived at the expense of the rest. The British state turned to coercion and commenced a wave of repression that included the imprisonment, transportation and execution of British radicals, the Two Acts of 1796, the repeated suspension of Habeas Corpus commencing 1817, and the Six Acts of 1819.

**Political Economy**

The argument that Old Corruption battened on the taxes extracted from ‘the useful classes’ was one politically expedient to a rising bourgeoisie. It was a means of uniting them with the workers as ‘the people’ while at the same time keeping the social focus off capitalist profit. This incarnation of ‘the people’ came to an end in Britain when the 1832 Reform Act granted the middle classes political representation but denied it to workers. Subsequently the concept, along with that of ‘the useful classes’, broke down as working-class radicals increasingly recognised that capitalism was responsible for abstracting most of the wealth that they produced. In the new era of social relations producerism bolstered a new anti-capitalism in which the labour theory of value assumed renewed importance.\(^\text{19}\)

Capitalist profit was based on the economic exploitation of the waged labourer, but the exploitation of waged-labour was not a recent phenomenon. Almost two centuries earlier, Winstanley concluded that working for wages supported the rule of one section of mankind over the others. Tyrants could only exist on the labour of the poor, he argued; therefore waged-labour was unrighteous because its consequence overturned God’s dictum that all men were created equal. Such tyranny could only be abolished by denying labour for hire.\(^\text{20}\) Although separated by two centuries and many thousands of miles, the American Knights of St Crispin likewise declared that the masses would ‘never be completely free from vassalage’ until they rejected the system of working for hire. Men that worked for wages remained ‘in the bonds of serfdom’.\(^\text{21}\) This might seem a tenuous link perhaps, but nonetheless it is one that demonstrates a remarkably similar perspective.

\(^{19}\) Hollis, *Pauper Press*, pp. 221-53.

\(^{20}\) Winstanley, ‘True Levellers’ Standard Advanced’.

\(^{21}\) Cited in Lasch, *True and Only Heaven*, p. 213.
To offer relevant social critique in an age of science and reason, radicals sought the same scientific credibility as their establishment opposites and so developed a radical political economy by re-emphasising the labour theory, using Smith and Ricardo to add credence to their assertions. As in times past, labour produced all wealth. But workers’ poverty, it was argued, was less a product of the taxation and political corruption associated with Old Corruption than the unequal exchange and unearned increment of capitalism. Yet as both Hollis and Belchem pointed out, at the popular level this new anti-capitalist radicalism did not displace its predecessor but instead reinforced it. Confronted with both middle classes and aristocracy, popular producerism adapted itself with remarkable ease simply because a new species of economic extortion did not mean the end of economic extortion itself. Added to the monarch and aristocrat, the pensioner and placeman, and the rest of the tax-eaters were the capitalist and middleman living by unequal exchange. The landed aristocracy were joined in their plunder of the producing classes by a capitalist ‘monied’ aristocracy.

Cobbett typically attacked both. Although he dismissed orthodox political economy, asserting that its doctrines were only received by ‘empty-headed dupes of Scotch Jews’, he nevertheless drew on the popular labour theory of value in his denunciations of both Old Corruption and the new money bankers and stock-jobbers of the ‘parasite’ city of London. The whole of society rested on productive labour, he argued, and without the journeyman and labourers would not exist. It was an argument he extended into his attacks on the economic principles of the despised Malthus. Far from nature’s harsh reality being responsible for the common labourer’s poverty, starvation and despair, it was the sustenance demanded by an over-abundance of idle non-producers. It was the pensioner and placeman, the children of the aristocracy—‘the vermin that suck our blood’—‘who live[d] in idleness out of the fruit of the working people’s labour’. It was they who extorted the

22 Hollis, Pauper Press, pp. 203-4; Belchem, Popular Radicalism, p. 54.
23 Cobbett, Opinions, p. 186.
24 Ibid, p. 186, 207, 279. Whilst Cobbett’s writings should not be treated as an authoritative source on the political economy of the period, particularly as Cobbett himself held total disdain for the subject, he was nevertheless widely read by working people and arguably, as E. P. Thompson suggested, reflected and played to popular opinion.
25 Cobbett, in a furious polemic against Malthus, pointed out that no law of nature bid a man starve in a land of plenty. Fencing off the land, putting it under private ownership, and preventing the poor from making use of it was not exercised through any law of nature but by the laws of man. Far from nature justifying any starvation, it permitted man to ignore human laws and take from the land the necessities of life should those who held the land refuse to share them. Ibid, pp. 187-95.
wealth created by the ‘producers of food, clothing, houses, ships, or other things necessary to man’ and drove them into poverty. The real surplus population therefore consisted not of working people, but of ‘idlers’. Pensioners such as the six children of the Earl of Lauderdale who each drew a pension of £100 per year from public taxes:

They do no work, they create nothing useful, they make come neither food nor raiment nor fuel nor bedding nor houses; therefore they may easily be too numerous; because they do not, like the working classes, create subsistence in proportion to their numbers; they draw their subsistence, or, rather, the exciseman draws it for them, out of the fruit of the labour of others.

It was not difficult to see why Lauderdale argued so strongly against the labour theory of value. Cobbett’s reversal of Malthus concluded that of those ‘who create useful things by their labour’, there could never too many, but of those who ‘create nothing useful’, there was in England a great surplus population, a population so great:

As to produce something very nearly approaching to general famine, as is the case at this moment in Ireland, whence the idlers bring away so much as to leave not a sufficiency even of the accursed root [potato] to keep the producing classes from starving.

Despite its obvious economic foundation, early popular political economy continued to explain exploitation as a function of ruling-class monopoly on political power. Political power enabled capitalists and middlemen to control distribution and exchange, thus forcing producers into giving up the wealth they generated for a fraction of its true worth. Hall’s analysis, like that of Winstanley, recognised that political power sprung from economic power. Having monopolised the land, the ruling classes were able to command the labour of the people and from the wealth thus generated assume the power to make laws over them. But Hall’s remained a typically Paineite and Spencean agrarian explanation of worker poverty and

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27 Ibid.
28 See Marx, Theories of Surplus Value, Ch. 4.
continued to look to political reform and land access to alleviate the conditions of workers.\textsuperscript{31}

By contrast the work of Bray, some forty years after Hall, demonstrated how the new so-called Ricardian socialist approach to political economy had reversed the notion of exploitation based on political power, and instead saw both as a function of the economic power of the capitalist.\textsuperscript{32} Bray anticipated Marx by recognising that the ‘self-expanding wealth’ of capitalism was based on the exploitation of labour through ‘unequal exchange’, both within the productive relationship between capitalist and worker, and in the sphere of distribution between capitalist and consumer. He argued that attempting to politically reform a social system based on unequal exchange was useless as it could not address the underlying economic cause of inequalities in wealth and power. ‘The great mass of the productive classes look to universal suffrage, or the institution of a republic, as the grand remedy for their wrongs’, he wrote, ‘but it has been shewn that these wrongs arise from a deeper source than form of government, and that they cannot be removed by any mere governmental change’.\textsuperscript{33} Like both Paine and Marx, Bray recognised that the fault was not that of individuals but of a social system based on unequal exchange. What was needed was not political reform, but a new society based on equitable economic principles.\textsuperscript{34}

Like all of the Ricardian socialists, Bray based his analysis on the labour theory of value. He believed that the fundamental basis of capitalism was the sale or exchange of the produce of labour for a greater sum than the labour originally cost. Because natural law deemed human labour universal it followed that one man could only evade this law at the expense of another. Furthermore, those who did not produce had nothing they could justly exchange. Under conditions of equal exchange a parsimonious man might become rich, but his riches were the results of his own labour and when he stopped working his hoard would shrink accordingly. It was only through the ‘accursed system of unequal exchange’ that wealth had a ‘procreative and apparently self-generating power’ through the exploitation of the labour of

\textsuperscript{31} Hollis, \textit{Pauper Press}, pp. 204-5; Belchem, \textit{Popular Radicalism}, pp. 54-5.
\textsuperscript{32} ‘Ricardian socialism’ so called because of its basis on the labour theory of value. While this study suggests that Ricardo merely formalised a value theory already in popular existence, for the sake of convenience it still makes use of the term.
\textsuperscript{33} Bray, \textit{Labour's Wrongs}, p. 52.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid, p. 54.
others. By these means the capitalist was ‘enabled not only to live in idleness, but to increase his store of wealth at the same time’. Hence unearned increment based on deception and ‘legalised robbery’ was the means by which ‘the capitalists and proprietors contrive[d] to fasten themselves upon the productive classes, and suck from them their whole substance’. And it was to unequal exchange that capitalism owed its existence. Drawing upon popular ideas that stretched back to the canonists’ *turpe lucrum*, Bray declared it a system that was morally unjust.

Scrutiny of orthodox political economy revealed that economists, as apologists for commerce, did little more than emphasise and legitimise the concept of unequal exchange through the pseudo-scientific obfuscation of what Bray called their ‘doctrines of inequality’. Radicals such as James Bronterre O’Brien described the capitalist middlemen that economists defended, as a ‘selfish…rapacious…huxtering race’. Such distrust of the middleman had deep taproots, stretching back to the early twelfth-century *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury and the Aristotelian ‘Fraud Committed in Buying and Selling’ of Thomas Aquinas. For Winstanley it was apparent that fortunes were made through unequal exchange by ‘oppressors’ who ‘by their covetous wit…have out-reached the plain-hearted in Buying and Selling, and thereby inriched themselves’.

Across the Atlantic, post civil-war Americans were warned that capitalists and middlemen were challenging Republican government. They were becoming ‘a moneyed “nobility” arrayed against the laboring and producing classes’, virtually exempt from taxation, and fast becoming the governing power. Meanwhile, again reminiscent of Winstanley, ‘those who produce[d] the wealth of the country [were] compelled to spend their strength and devote their lives to the business of adding to the wealth of their oppressors’. Horace Greeley, journeyman printer and founder of the *New York Tribune*, was scathing in his criticism. He pointed out that the social function of commerce was to bring the producer and consumer together, not enrich the middleman:

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36 Ibid, pp. 43, 48-51.
37 Ibid, p. 137.
38 *PMG*, 17 August 1833, as cited in Hollis, *Pauper Press*, p. 228.
40 Winstanley, ‘True Levellers’ Standard Advanced’.
They hold the producer in a servile dependence; they reduce to its lowest terms the wages of workmen; and they extort from the consumer without mercy.  

Unlike ‘the manufacturer and mechanic [who] belong to the class of productive laborers’, commerce added no value. Greeley held a low opinion of those thus engaged and wondered why they were deified:

They lie, cheat, and falsify products and they spoliate the public in a thousand modes, by exchange, brokerage, usury, bankruptcy; in short, they deceive in every way, and defraud at all seasons; yet commerce, in our corrupted societies, is the most certain way of arriving at fortune, honor, and distinction.

‘The chief end of a true Political Economy’, he wrote, should be the conversion of these ‘superfluous exchangers of products into actual producers of wealth’. The capitalist and middleman exploited through the mechanism of profit by paying the producer less than full value for their labour and retaining the difference. But others too lived on unearned increment. Stock-jobbers and land-speculators manipulated commodity and land prices to gain unearned increment, while bankers were despised as both usurers and currency speculators. In addition, the banker also took a cut through interest on the national debt paid for by taxes levied on the producing classes and the products of their industry, and through the depreciative tendency of paper money that producers were compelled by law to make use of in monetary transactions. As the century progressed the banker in particular came to be increasingly despised as the most powerful and cunning of the parasites, invoking moral condemnation of usury, and becoming transformed into the unrighteous wealth of mammon, or the sinister and shadowy ‘money power’. Cobbett’s ‘paper aristocrats’, the bankers and fundholders, the Barings and their despised ‘Pitt system’,

46 The definitive (and most robust) early critique was offered by Cobbett in his Paper Against Gold. W. Cobbett, Paper Against Gold; Or, The History And Mystery Of The Bank Of England, Of The Debt, Of The Stocks, Of The Sinking Fund, And All The Other Tricks And Contrivances, Carried On By The Means Of Paper Money. New York, John Doyle, 1834. This work was a collection of letters and manuscripts some of which were written as early as 1810.
joined the monarch and aristocrat as parasites in the producer lexicon, remaining there until producerism’s ultimate disappearance.

**Banking**

The capitalist and middleman have received ample attention from left historians as exploiters of the working classes. Much less has been given to the equally despised banks. But anti-bank sentiment featured strongly in most labour movements, including that of Australia. Dislike of banks and bankers went beyond usury as the oldest and most despised form of unearned increment. It incorporated a fear and distrust of their immense and ever increasing power. Given the importance attached to the banking industry by the later Australian labour movement, it is therefore worth briefly examining the producerist influence behind some of the radical arguments surrounding the modern banking system. Such examination may in part explain the genesis of this popular distrust and the so-called ‘crank’ populist solutions it generated, in addition to gaining an insight into broader resentment against speculative activity.

Modern banking rose to prominence alongside the large-scale capitalist manufacturing and agricultural activity that it financed. These large-scale operations effectively ended the small-producer economy, making both farming and manufacturing more capital intensive, at the same time increasing concentration of ownership. For these reasons alone it aroused much hostility among small producers. But the real essence of producerist animosity lay in the notion that banking was a means of obtaining immense wealth and influence without the trouble of labour. Banks were seen by radicals as parasite institutions. The capitalist may have lived immorally by unequal exchange, but the banks exchanged nothing. It was unearned increment pure and simple. Since wealth could only be created by labour, the immense wealth held by the banks must have somehow been obtained at the expense of working people. Colquhoun pointed out that the British banking system and its public credit had allowed the creditworthy to borrow money, begin manufacturing operations, and thereby greatly intensify the nation’s productive power. But although Colquhoun was drawn on extensively by radicals, this aspect of his work was ignored. Instead banking was met by an almost uniform radical

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47 Freyer, *Producers Versus Capitalists*, passim.
48 Colquhoun, *Treatise*, p. 79.
condemnation. ‘What does the productive labourer obtain for that portion of the produce of his industry which is annually taken from him by incomes obtained by the lenders of money?’ asked Gray—‘he obtains NOTHING!’

As the nineteenth century progressed, producer rhetoric saw banks and bankers become increasingly rich and politically powerful—ultimately assuming the form of the ‘money power’. The term described the combination of the economic and political power banks used to conjure up and legitimise ever more ingenious ways of gaining unearned increment. Abhorrence of the ‘money power’ was a common feature of Anglo-American radical literature. It was seen as a huge engine for the abstraction of wealth from the producing classes. Cobbett labelled it ‘a monster of consumption’. Fed by the national debt and the ability to control the issuance of money and credit, it spawned and supported a ‘paper aristocracy’—‘the most haughty, the most supercilious, the most conceited, and, at the same time, the most empty and mean that the world ever saw’. As Freyer has shown, the same description applied equally to the emerging bankers, speculators and big-money capitalists of antebellum America, complementing the suspicions of Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson.

One of the rights of the producing classes, as owners of the fruits of their labour, should have been the free exchange of the goods they produced. Money, as the means of exchange, should retain fixed value so that the relationship between the goods’ worth and the labour embodied in them remained constant. A given amount of labour should have fixed and perennial value and purchasing power, but inflation depreciated the value of wages and savings while deflation depreciated the value of


50 Cobbett, *Paper Against Gold*, passim (quotation from p. 5); Cobbett, *Opinions*, pp. 69-71, 259-82. Cobbett explained the ‘fraud’ of banking: A farmer holding £100 in gold to pay his workers instead offered them promissory notes to the same value while keeping the gold in a drawer. As a man of his word, the notes entered the local economy backed by the value of the gold and circulated as money themselves. The farmer soon realised that provided all of the note-holders did not demand their redemption at once, he was able to issue additional notes against the gold with reasonable confidence. In effect the farmer received extra goods and labour for nothing, paid for by the extra notes. Ultimately however the extra goods and labour were purchased with notes of depreciated value, for in the event of all note-holders demanding payment in specie the farmer would only be able to pay part of their supposed value. *Paper Against Gold*, p. 29.

labour’s produce. Any manipulation of currency value was, therefore, speculation upon men’s labour and offered the potential for unearned increment. It was immoral and to be condemned. 52

Giving the banks authority to issue paper money and legislating that it replace specie further reinforced their enormous economic and political power. The Gorgon believed that it encouraged ‘fallacious commercial speculation’ through ‘improvident advances to individuals without real property’. Such activities would be ‘to the great detriment and ruin of industrious tradesmen, and small capitalists’. 53 Handing over the power of issue to unelected banks restricted a government’s control over money supply, and hence fiscal policy. It placed the self-interest and profit-motive of these agents of capitalism at the centre of state power and thus turned democracy into a sham. William Berkey, an American, observed that ‘the masses toil day after day and year after year, seeking to secure a competency and scarcely succeed in obtaining subsistence’ because ‘the profits of labor flow in a steady stream into the hands of non-producers, who [were] engaged in manipulating money’. He regarded banking in the America of 1876 not just as ‘a diabolical scheme for robbing labor’, but the controlling interest in all national legislation and a ‘giant that threatened to devour the country’, undermine its free institutions and the liberty of its people. 54

Often reduced to the alien and sinister caricature of the ‘international shylock’, much anti-banker discourse carried both implicit and explicit anti-Semitism. 55 It was the schemes of the banker that formed the most intricate, cunning, and least obvious methods of extracting wealth from the producer. Transactions were supposedly carried out in semi-secrecy and shrouded in what Cobbett termed a ‘worse than Babylonish collection of names the mists in which we have so long been wandering, to the infinite amusement of those who invented [them]’. 56 Across the Atlantic Daniel Webster wrote that ‘there has never been devised by man a plan more specious by which labor could be robbed of the fruits of its toil than the banking

53 Ibid.
55 Rubinstein, ‘British Radicalism’, passim. Here Rubinstein details many instances of Cobbett’s anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism in its Australian context will be discussed briefly below.
system’. 57 Henry Carey meanwhile used the example of Nathan Mayer Rothschild as typical of ‘the speculators of every kind, in England, who live at the cost of the laborers of the world’. 58 In similar vein Bray wrote that:

Devise what he may, it is impossible for the ingenuity of man to create any instrument which will enable him to exercise such power over his fellow-man as he now obtains by means of the system of banking, or the creation and issue of money. This constitutes the great armoury from whence the capitalists derive all their weapons to fight with and conquer the working class. 59

Two main schools of radical thought offered both critique and solution. One relied on gold as the principal medium of exchange, the other on having government alone issue paper money backed solely by the assets of the nation. Both schools agreed that making money from worthless paper and placing issue into the hands of private bankers, or irresponsible government, would see them inevitably yield to the temptation of printing extra money that had no corresponding build-up of social assets behind it, thus cheapening its true value. 60 The extra printed money, although reduced in value by inflation, would pour into the coffers of the banks or government as unearned increment, but at the expense of the producing classes paid in a depreciated currency that gave them less reward for their labour. Workers would then have to fight employers, protected by repressive labour laws, to regain the value of their labour through higher wages.

The value of a mechanic’s competence would also be reduced. Using the notion that savings represented stored labour, the American Old Guard of 1864 argued that paper money robbed the people of the proceeds of their labour because the value of such stored labour would diminish over time. It was a ‘fraud on the

60 This had been demonstrated by the French experience of 1719-20 when a Scots economist, John Law, proposed a paper currency scheme with the currency’s value pegged to the national assets of France. It was brought undone in part when the Duke of Orleans printed huge extra sums of money in the absence of any corresponding build-up of assets. The flood of extra money fuelled frantic speculative activity in the notorious Mississippi scheme which subsequently collapsed, along with Law’s paper currency itself, when the true value of the widely inflated paper money was finally recognised.
producer’ by inflation.61 For the producing classes, money was the fruit of many years’ industry, the reward of labour for years of sweat and toil, a means of providing for the family and retirement. It was not to be an object of speculation or ‘trusted to the airy bubble of paper currency’.62

Supporters of specie such as Cobbett argued that gold held intrinsic worth, where paper money had to be bolstered by public confidence and fractional reserve legislation.63 Savings in gold rendered the individual free from government, where paper money forced dependency on government stability and bank solvency.64 But those that backed government issue of paper money saw the problem with gold as its scarcity, and believed the medium of exchange should be neither too scarce nor abundant. Both Bray and Berkey contended that there should always be enough money in circulation to ensure the functioning of an expanding economy, but that only elected governments should control its issuance. Both agreed that money should represent a nation’s wealth, and rather than being kept scarce, the full value of the nation’s wealth should be released as money into circulation. So long as it did not exceed this total it would increase exchange and consequently productive activity. Berkey argued that money was deliberately kept scarce by American banks modelled on the British banks of issue. The people had allowed the circulating medium of the land to be ‘given over to individuals and corporations to be used as a monopoly’. As a consequence they had to pay an exorbitant rate for a currency that fluctuated according to the whims of those who controlled it.65

Berkey was not unique in his opinion that the underhand operation of bankers, rather than fluctuations in supply and demand characteristic of the capitalist system as a whole, was responsible for cycles of boom and bust. As will be shown below, it was a view shared by Australia’s Frank Anstey.66 The belief was that by deliberately inflating credit and intensifying circulation, banks stimulated business until economic activity boomed and all seemed prosperous. But when they called in loans

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62 Lasch, True and Only Heaven, p. 179.
and tightened credit, buyers were less likely to have the means of purchase, and prices fell. Bankruptcies increased, speculators swooped on the unfortunate, and producers were told they had produced too much and were living too extravagantly. 67 ‘It is to the interests of the bankers and brokers that they [financial panics] should occur’, wrote Webster, ‘it is one of the specious methods by which these despotic and utterly useless knaves rob the producing, manufacturing, and mercantile classes of their honest earnings’. 68

**National Debt**

Cobbett believed the Napoleonic Wars responsible for creating an ‘upstart class of non-producers’ who lived upon the ‘funding system’ that was the interest on the huge debts raised to finance the war. 69 Governments borrowed money from the rich and powerful, to act in the interests of the rich and powerful, and repaid them with interest gained by taxing the producing classes. Because the principal was seldom repaid, interest payments continued in perpetuity, ever multiplying and gradually crushing the producer beneath increasing taxation. It was another means of extracting wealth from the productive and giving it to the idle and parasitic. Instead of being utilised in the production of better goods and infrastructure, or improving civilisation and refinement, it was wealth instead dissipated in war, idleness and vice. 70 All taxes, including those raised to pay the national debt, ultimately fell onto the producing classes, wrote Hall, ‘for with what else than that can the public levies be paid?’ 71 Because the government borrowed in the present but paid in the future, an increasing burden was placed on future generations. It was taxation without representation on generations yet to be born. 72

In addition, radical opinion viewed the national debt and paper money as a less publicly accountable means by which government could raise money, not for defence of the nation, but ‘unprincipled wars against liberty and knowledge’. 73 Or as the

Chartists’ Petition put it: ‘to fund cruel and expensive wars for the suppression of all liberty’.\textsuperscript{74} Governments embarked on wars funded by money borrowed from the banks, but while many workers made the ultimate sacrifice, banks and bondholders benefited from greater interest payments. Ordinary people gave their lives while the rich gave nothing, but instead took interest from the relatives and children of those who fought and died. The association between the banker and war profiteering in producer demonology was thus born.\textsuperscript{75} As Berkey angrily declared: ‘must man lose his life for his country, while money shall double its power out of the public misfortune? Away with such tyranny!’\textsuperscript{76} Banks profiteering from death would be revisited by Australia’s Frank Anstey during the Great War.

Producers thus demanded an end to the national debt.\textsuperscript{77} The \textit{Commonweal} wrote that the British people were under no obligation to the debt because they never sanctioned it nor recognised it. It was instituted under Old Corruption when parliamentary representation was a ‘sham’ and the people could not protest through public meeting or press. \textit{Habeas Corpus} had been suspended in 1794, 1795, 1798, and 1799 and again in 1800, 1803 and 1806, while the press too was gagged. This ‘funding system’, coupled with the whole system of usury and the profits of the Stock Exchange, was a ‘gross swindle, a gigantic scheme for the plunder of the workers’. It was another form of taxation without representation—a tyranny—and should be swept away.\textsuperscript{78}

Hence those calling themselves the productive classes believed that it was their labour that generated all of society’s wealth, yet they also believed that it was the non-productive that lived in opulence at their expense. It was an economic contradiction that had existed historically, with the rich and powerful ruling classes devising different means of abstracting wealth from productive workers according to social circumstances. Under conditions of simple commodity production, tithe, rent and taxation provided the means by which the priest, aristocrat, monarch and court government lived at the expense of productive labour. Capitalist production saw profit, speculation and interest added to the burden carried by labour, and the

\textsuperscript{76} Berkey, \textit{Money Question}, Appendix, pp. 6-7.
\textsuperscript{77} MacCoby, \textit{English Radical Tradition}, p. 136.
\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Commonweal}, reprinted in \textit{AR}, 19 May 1888.
capitalist, speculative stock-jobber and banker subsequently joined the prince, priest and peer in producer demonology. The latter were to feature more prominently in producerist discourse as the nineteenth century progressed and the agents of capitalism established themselves as the ruling class.
This is the worker, tattered and torn,
That of the result of his labour is shorn,
Producer of nine hundred millions of wealth
That he’s dispossessed of by force and stealth.¹

‘Fellow workmen, have you ever asked yourselves by what powerful spell the productive millions of Europe are held in subjection to a puny insignificant number of human beings?’ asked Lovett.² Thus radicals wondered how it was that a numerically small ruling class was able to rule over the millions and amass huge wealth without continual and excessive use of force. The conclusion, it appeared, was that ‘this monstrous state of things’ was established and maintained by holding the people in some kind of trance, somehow keeping them ‘bewitched’, or as Paine and (later) Benbow put it, ‘hoodwinked and held in superstitious ignorance’, such that the use of state power, although ever present, was seldom necessary.³

Hall saw a society where the wealthy few utilised their superior education and knowledge to delude, bribe, or compel the common people into giving up the fruits of their labour. The accumulation of the nation’s wealth into their hands gave them the means to become its legislators, and having gained legislative power they used it to render any challenge to the status quo illegal, enforcing it when necessary through state force.⁴ Their perspectives, perpetuated by what radicals contemptuously saw as the deceit of ‘priest-craft’ and lies and praise-making of a tame ‘hireling press’, dominated the wider culture. In conjunction with their control of the legislature, the land, the scriptures, money circulation, the judiciary and state force, they were able to monopolise the products of labour by force or deceit, tricking or forcing the producing classes into giving up the wealth they created. Against this combination of ‘force and fraud’, and the conservatism, ignorance and apathy of the masses upon which it was maintained, stood the critique of those radicalised through recognition of their true social situation. They employed the political language of producerism in

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¹ *Commonweal* (London), 29 November 1890, cited in AW, 10 January 1891.
² Lovett, *Life and Struggles*.
attempts to radicalise their peers, advancing visions of a commonwealth where all would stand equal through labour; where productive labour would receive both its full reward and a full and equal citizenship based on its value to the community.

From Winstanley to the Australian People’s Advocate, it was explained that this inequitable social system was the legacy of the ‘Norman Yoke’. It was a system of court government overseen by ‘force and fraud’ by which parasitic monarchs, court minions, members of the aristocracy and the established church batted on the wealth generated by the people. As late as 1887 the Australian Radical still saw the legacy of Norman treachery when it stated that ‘with few exceptions, Prince, Priest and Peer, have entered into a vast conspiracy against the people, by whose labors alone they are supported’. The Norman invasion—‘the blackest day in the history of England’—marked the end of a supposed idyllic Anglo-Saxon past where free-born Englishmen lived independently on the land, free of oppression. Such identification with England’s Saxon legacy was an integral part of early British radicalism and demonstrated radicals’ use of history for political purpose. In dividing the ‘Norman’ monarchy and aristocracy from the ‘Saxon’ common people, it portrayed the former and the system of government that represented it, as foreign to English liberty. The Norman invasion marked the imposition of a tyranny, and so legitimised radical challenge. The English aristocracy, proud that their blue-blooded ancestors arrived with the Conqueror, were not in fact English but the descendents of the ‘scum of Europe’ that accompanied the ‘Norman robber’ on his ‘freebooting expedition’. Their claims to the right of living ‘at the expense of the country’ were thus historically illegitimate.

The Norman system provided the model for all forms of oppressive rule. Its legacy was to be seen in any method of government that robbed and defrauded the producing classes. It mattered little which groups constituted the ruling class or whether society was capitalist or pre-capitalist. Its characteristic methods of ‘force and fraud’ and control of the land ensured that the same basic social structure remained in place. The People’s Advocate of late 1840s Australia could still describe the control of huge tracts of land by a few wealthy pastoralists as a ‘Norman’ system responsible for the artificial creation of a landless labouring class whereby men were

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3 Winstanley, ‘New-yeers Gift’, PA, 16 Dec 1848.
4 AR, 16 April 1887, cf. Norton, History of Capital and Labour, p. 490 which described the Norman invasion in a positive light.
5 AR, 16 April 1887.
forced to give up their labour to others. Similarly in the America of the 1830s radical mechanic Thomas Skidmore regarded the government of his country as increasingly approaching the old model. It was, he wrote, ‘organized upon such unjust and unequal principles as were established in England by William the Conquerer [sic], and as have prevailed there ever since’.9

The Church
Prior to cheap print and popular literacy, the main agency of the fraud perpetuated on the producing classes was the spell cast by the church and its ‘priestcraft’—a realisation that led to a powerful strand of anticlericalism within the radical tradition. The term ‘priest-craft’ referred to priests setting themselves up as intermediaries between the people and God and erecting a hegemony on that basis. By supporting the ruling classes, priests in return were allowed a share of the wealth expropriated by the levy of tax and tithe on the producing classes. As ‘the tools and the fellow conspirators of the parasite class’ they preached acquiescence to the people in return for a life of idleness and luxury. According to ‘Spartacus’ in correspondence with the Cap of Liberty, it was impossible to separate religion from despotism as each could not exist without the other. The former legitimised the latter in return for a share of the spoils. As with many producerist themes, an early seed was to be found in the writings of Winstanley. In addition to frequently using the theme of righteous labour to attack landlord, monopoly and merchant, he also used it against priest and lawyer as agents of ‘the kingly power’. He described how the clergy had legitimised monarchical rule through the divine right of kings in the immediate aftermath of the Norman invasion:

William the Conqueror promised, That if the Clergie would preach him up, so that the people might be bewitched, so as to receive him to be Gods Anointed over them, he would give them the Tenths of the Lands increase yearly and they did it, and he made

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8 This perspective remained a feature of the Advocate from inception to demise. References to it are too numerous to record. To cite one example, PA, 16 December 1848.
9 Cited in Wilentz, Chants Democratic, p. 194.
12 Hollis, Pauper Press, p. 207.
Paine too later recognised that although the British monarchy was founded upon the sword of William the Conqueror, it did not rely on force alone but on the majority being ‘hoodwinked and held in superstitious ignorance’.\(^\text{15}\) From the moment the Conqueror imposed government by kings on the English people, the principle of the ‘divine right of kings’ was preached by the Church and thus ‘united fraud to force’. ‘The key of St Peter, and the key of the Treasury, became quartered on one another, and the wondering cheated multitude worshipped the invention’.\(^\text{16}\) Priests, according to Paine, instead of legitimising the difference between rich and poor should employ their time in rendering the general condition of man less miserable.\(^\text{17}\)

But while despising ‘priest-craft’, producerist rhetoric did not necessarily deny the existence of God. Many radicals instead turned to either Deism or dissenting Protestantism and frequently drew on the authority of the bible. If, ‘in the sweat of his brow’, the producer created the commodities upon which society depended, then those who did no such work yet consumed those commodities were to be condemned as the ‘lilies of the field who toil not’. They were the poor Lazarus to Dives the rich man who ‘dressed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day’.\(^\text{18}\) Even God was engaged in virtuous labour. ‘The people have a saying’, wrote Benjamin Franklin, ‘that God Almighty is himself a mechanic, the greatest in the universe; and he is respected and admired more for the variety, ingenuity, and utility of his handiworks, than for the antiquity of his family’.\(^\text{19}\) Jesus of Nazareth was a humble artisan, a carpenter like his father Joseph. It was one of the great ironies of history that within huge gilded edifices, lavish ceremonies overseen by bishops in opulent ceremonial gowns, preached, in Christ’s name, subservience to the very people that Christ himself despised—the rich, the money-changers and the scribes.

The foundation text for this perspective was undoubtedly Paine’s *Age of Reason*. For Paine, all religions were ‘human inventions set up to terrify and enslave

\(^{14}\) Winstanley, ‘New-yeers Gift’.
\(^{15}\) Paine, *Collected Writings*, p. 615.
\(^{16}\) Ibid, p. 466.
\(^{17}\) The example of the Bishop of Llandaff was cited by Paine. Ibid, pp. 396-7.
\(^{18}\) Genesis 3: 19; Matthew 26: 28; Luke 16: 19.
mankind, and monopolize power and profit’. Priest-craft, according to Paine, was founded on the lies and hypocrisy of men who professed beliefs to which they did not subscribe. In becoming priests for the sake of personal gain they prepared themselves for the commission of every other crime. Priest-craft therefore began with a perjury. Christianity was ‘a religion of pomp and revenue in pretended imitation of a person whose life was humility and poverty’. Jesus Christ taught ‘the most excellent morality, and the equality of man’. He also taught against the ‘corruptions and avarice’ of the Jewish priests which brought upon him the ‘hatred and vengeance of the whole order of priesthood’. He was a threat to both the Jewish priesthood and the Roman government, and so ‘between the two, this virtuous reformer and revolutionist lost his life’. 

It was the priest responsible for preaching the maintenance of the status quo, who blessed the flags of war and invoked the deity for success. It was the priest that blessed social inequality, and the theft of wealth from the producing classes to maintain the idle rich, as God’s will. And it was the priest that lived in idleness through the labour of the people on tithes collected for him by the ruling power. Chartists complained that ‘upwards of £9,000,000 per annum [was] annually abstracted to maintain a church establishment from which they principally dissent[ed]’. ‘Who, but the people’ wrote Lovett, ‘toil from birth till death…to support these idle few in all their oppressions and debaucheries…[yet] bow before the hireling priest who impiously declares that God has ordained it!’

The Press
Samuel Smiles wrote that newspapers were the literature of the great bulk of the people. They were to his contemporary society ‘what the preacher was some two or three hundred years ago’. But advance of popular literacy did not mean an end to priest-craft’s role in the maintenance of ruling-class hegemony, for as agents of fraud and deception the two complemented each other. Hall wrote that ‘authors and

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23 Ibid, p. 671.
27 Cited in *Star*, 23 March 1844.
preachers frequently inculcate[d] to the poor, in their writings and sermons, contentment and submission to the dispensations of Providence...thus attributing the works of man to the beneficent Creator’. It was a doctrine that ‘would suit every kind of oppression and tyranny’ and served to justify the abstraction of wealth from the labourer. 28 Smiles also regarded a free press as the bulwark of liberty, while noting that ‘the greatest in rank and title do not disdain to avail themselves of its columns, for the purpose of influencing public opinion’. 29 It was the truth behind this latter observation that invoked the scrutiny of radicals. ‘With few honest exceptions’, wrote Lovett, ‘that surest guarantee of liberty, the Press’, was used by the ruling classes to maintain their wealth and power instead of performing its ‘sacred office’ in ‘developing truth, and extirpating the errors of mankind’. It was to the shame of preachers, teachers, and learned men that they used their ‘sacred calling’ to ‘plead eloquently against the foibles of the poor, but shrink from exposing vice in high stations’. 30

The Gorgon had a lesser regard for the press than Smiles. It was part of the ‘hireling crew’ that daily poured out unprincipled abuse onto ‘the most valuable and useful part of the community’ while informing them that it was their duty to ‘obey their masters’. 31 The Times was ‘cowardly and unprincipled’ in its hypocrisy—exemplified in its call for workers’ combinations to be crushed while recommending masters ‘stand by each other’. 32 The Sydney Sun of 1843 shared a similar view of the Times’ antipodean equivalent, the Sydney Morning Herald—a ‘disgraceful, prostituted and venal hireling press’ that served only the colony’s ‘pseudo-aristocratic faction’. 33 Both in Britain and the colonies, radicals saw the established press as an instrument of fraud, a means of reinforcing ruling-class hegemony. It published false statements, and unfair and partial accounts of wages, prices and conditions, to deliberately mislead the public and turn opinion against workers. 34 According to the Gorgon, none of the daily papers acted with any degree of fairness to the working classes, but it was the Times that did ‘infinitely more mischief to sound principles and the public cause, than the most notoriously-paid tool of

28 Hall, Effects of Civilization, esp. p. 28, 47.
29 Cited in Star, 23 March 1844.
33 Sun, 6 May 1843.
Corruption’. Principle, justice and consistency were all prostituted to pecuniary gain. ‘Hypocritical zeal’ in promoting religion and morality provided admirable topics for ‘duping English credulity’ and the Times had ‘attained a respectability and distinction, far exceeding that of any other public paper’ in their dexterous management. The paper ‘personified everything that is odious in our execrable system’.  

Lovett wrote that members of the National Union of the Working Classes, having maintained the right of the ‘toiling millions’ to a share in the Government of the country that they were ‘enriching by their labours’, called forth, ‘both from the Whig and Tory press, the bitterest feelings of hostility against them’. They were denounced as ‘destructives, revolutionists, pickpockets, and incendiaries’ that threatened property, law and order. Edward Gibbon Wakefield and his brother contributed ‘in no small degree to incense the public against them’ by publishing a pamphlet entitled ‘Householders in danger from the Populace’, in which thieves and radicals were classed together as a threat to property.

The press was also guilty of maintaining the status quo at home by whipping up nationalism and war fever against outside enemies. Using the ‘high-swelling cant of “individual glory” and “national honour,”’ the ‘din and dazzle’ of preparation for war intoxicated the unreflecting, allowing the rulers to deflect the public mind from social and political improvement to the prospect of foreign battles. Yet the interest of the working classes—the right to the full fruits of their labour—was universal and workers of all countries should have no quarrel. Lovett implored workers of all nations to reflect on their situation: ‘fellow producers of wealth’, he wrote, ‘seeing that our oppressors are thus united, why should not we, too, have our bond of brotherhood and holy alliance?”

The Law
Alongside the priest and press, the lawyer too was distrusted and despised in producerist rhetoric. This sentiment can be seen in the writings of Winstanley, and an anti-lawyer history among the labouring and producing classes is probably as old as

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36 Lovett, Life and Struggles, p. 58.  
38 Ibid, p. 250.  
39 Ibid, p. 130.
the law itself. From a producerist perspective the law was akin to the moral economy, a simple matter of right and wrong based upon the laws of nature and God’s commandments. It questioned the role or social usefulness of the lawyer. Communal acceptance of right and wrong based on the commandments of God should be enough to determine whether a person had done wrong or had a case to answer. In theory a person who had been wronged, or charged as an alleged wrongdoer in some way, should be able to face a jury of his or her peers and have any case heard in plain English so that all could understand. Justice should be both swift and transparent.40

But lawyers acted as intermediaries between the people and the law, extorting money for justice, just as the parson and the established church denied ordinary people access to God. Like priests, lawyers placed themselves between true justice and the people. Through extortionate fees, laws framed in obfuscating legal jargon, and convoluted court procedures, lawyers filled their pockets at the expense of true justice. Only the rich and powerful could afford to engage in legal action without the prospect of total ruin; hence the lawyer not only denied justice to the ordinary citizen, but in effect served wealth and power. Politics for the People noted that tradesmen or labourers owed fifty or a hundred pounds through several small debts would inevitably be ruined by lawyers’ fees when seeking redress through the courts, despite winning a verdict.41 A century and a half earlier, Winstanley had declared that whores and lawyers both picked men’s pockets and ‘he that goes to the law shall die a beggar’. Their art was ‘the bane and miserie of the world’:

a Nurserie of Idleness, luxurie, and cheating, the only enemie of Christ the King of righteousness; for though it pretend justice, yet the Judges and Law-Officers, buy and sell Justice for money, and wipes their mouths like Solomon’s whore, and says it is my calling, and never are troubled at it.42

But as greedy, unscrupulous and unproductive as lawyers might be, the true reasons for producerist antipathy towards them was the crucial role they played in a legal system that legitimised and enforced the abstraction of wealth from the productive to the non-productive. The law had more to do with the extortion of wealth and the maintenance of hegemony than right or wrong. Like the parson, the

40 Ibid, p. 172.
41 PFP, 23. November 1793.
42 Ibid.
lawyer was seen as a hireling of the ruling class, perpetrating fraud through the ‘mysticism of legislation’ that was ‘expensive and unjust’, and riddled with ‘technical and perplexing absurdities’.\textsuperscript{43} Such characteristics effectively allowed the legal system to become the tool of the ruling classes. Barristers, solicitors and attorneys were persons whose prosperity depend[ed] on the obscurity and intricacy of the laws, and who s[ought] to perpetuate the interests of ‘their order’ by rendering them so abstruse and voluminous that ‘none but law conjurers like themselves shall understand them’.\textsuperscript{44} Their social upbringing invariably meant sympathy with ruling class perspectives.\textsuperscript{45} The \textit{Gorgon} used the example of the landholders of Tiverton who had entered into a combination to set the wages of the local tradesmen and labourers to demonstrate the class hypocrisy of the legal fraternity. How was it that those who signed the resolution were not hanged or transported? it asked. If combinations were said by a judge of the Old Bailey to be a ‘crime worse that many kinds of felony’, why were the ‘respectable’ landholders of Tiverton permitted to escape censure or punishment? The answer was obvious: the law favoured the rich, ‘making that conduct just in the one case, which it punishes with relentless severity in the other’. It served as proof positive that the law of England was not the same for all men. All along, the people had been ‘deceived and defrauded by artful Lawyers, who have cajoled us into a belief that the law is the same for the poor man as for the rich man’.\textsuperscript{46}

Contrary to the interest of the community, lawyers were not interested in the perfection of laws, but their imperfection. The ‘greater their absurdity, contradiction, and perplexity’, the greater their gains.\textsuperscript{47} ‘Pettifogging’ attorneys were to be found throughout the entire discourse from the British \textit{Politics for the People} of 1793 to the Australian \textit{Ironworker} of 1928. Miller described anti-lawyer sentiment among the lower classes of pre-revolutionary America, while in 1891 the Sydney \textit{Bulletin} suggested ‘that the lawyer—as one among the great assemblage of evil parasites—should be abolished so utterly that no-one shall ever find him again’.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{43} Lovett, \textit{Life and Struggles}, p. 172, 222.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid, p. 83.
\textsuperscript{45} Ebbels, \textit{Australian Labour Movement}, p. 169.
\textsuperscript{47} Gorgon, 9 January 1819. Keen, ibid, p. 275.
Standing Armies

A standing army has been defined as ‘a military force that is permanently embodied and kept “standing,” even in times of peace’. Objections to such a force, and an English antipathy towards the professional soldier, had existed since the end of the sixteenth century. Although of contrary opinion, Smith acknowledged that those of ‘republican principles’ associated the standing army with loss of liberty historically, exemplified by Caesar’s destruction of the Roman republic. Alongside the associated demand for the right of free men to bear arms, anti-standing army sentiment was a consistent radical theme for over two centuries, from the arguments of Moyle and Jefferson to Cobbett and numerous radical papers such as Hog’s Wash, Politics for the People, The Cap of Liberty, and the Australian Radical. There were two fundamental and closely connected objections to a standing army: one based on the producerist belief that it was the instrument of enforcing economic inequality; the other on the threat posed to the liberty of the subject.

In any unjust society where most of the wealth generated by the producing classes found its way into the pockets of the idle rich, radicals saw the standing army as the ultimate means of enforcing compliance. Its soldiers were the tools of tyranny—the ‘hired braves who defend the tyrant’s throne’. Under its umbrella sheltered a coterie of parasites living on unearned increment. Should the fraud generated by a lying press, deceitful parsons, and obfuscating lawyers not convincingly justify such a corrupt system, and hegemony be called into question, reliance was placed on the standing army to maintain the existing order. Peterloo, Haymarket, Homestead, and Eureka, reminded radicals of how wealth and power utilised state force against its own citizens to the advantage of the rich and powerful.

50 Thompson, Making of, p. 88; Schwoerer, ‘No Standing Armies!’; pp. 19-71; Prothero, Artisans and Politics, p. 91, 209.
51 A. Smith, The Wealth of Nations, Book 5, Ch. 1.
53 Shelley, ‘Notes to Queen Mab’.
Gaol, transportation or death was the ultimate penalty for questioning the system or refusal to pay. Sanctioned by a state that acted in the interests of the ruling classes, the standing army bolstered the economic exploitation of its own people.

In 1717 an anonymous British writer stated that ‘in all Ages and Parts of the World, a Standing Army has been the neverending Instrument of enslaving a Nation’. In its place radicals demanded a citizen militia modelled along Swiss lines to defend the commonwealth. Less costly than a standing army, it was less likely to engage in overseas military adventurism or enforce tyranny at home; neither would producers be faced with the prospect of paying taxes to support the means of their own enslavement. Unlike professional soldiers in remote barracks, a citizen militia was comprised of the people, and part of the fabric of the local community. Every free man should bear arms and be under obligation to defend the commonwealth not just from invasion, but domestic usurpation and tyranny. The London Democrat thus argued a ‘clear and superabundant demonstration of the right of all Englishmen to carry arms, and to use them for their protection against political, clerical, or any other robbers’.

Among the many curses associated with a standing army listed by radical English Whigs John Trenchard and Walter Moyle was that it encouraged passive obedience and was used to enforce the collection of revenues. Recognising that ‘every man [had] the right to what he can acquire by his labour and industry’, Trenchard and Moyle used the classics to demonstrate the historical lesson that a standing army always had the potential to crush individual liberty, and because ‘most Men do as much mischief as lay in their power’, there would surely come a time when a British monarch would do the same.

Yet the ideas of Moyle and Trenchard were never intended to apply to the working classes. Their citizen militia was to consist of, and be controlled by, men of property only. Nevertheless workers argued for the same rights. Their historical precedent was the Saxon fyrd—a citizen militia that demanded every able-bodied man arm himself and be ready to defend the community. It gave radicals a historical

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55 For example: Moyle, Second Part of an Argument, p. 194; AW, 16 February 1895.
56 LDm, 20 April 1839.
57 Moyle, Second Part of an Argument, pp. 156-7, 186. Though the author is shown as Moyle, it is understood that Trenchard was the major contributor. The knowledge of the Classics however was Moyle’s. See Schwoerer, ‘No Standing Armies!’, pp. 175-6.
precedent, a true English precedent, to carry arms.\textsuperscript{59} Just because the Norman invader, now the wealthy aristocratic overlord, had disarmed the English common man did not mean that the right had been lost, merely that it had been usurped. At the time of the French Revolution, John Baxter, an artisan, completed an eight-hundred page history of England to derive the right of armed resistance from Saxon precedent.\textsuperscript{60} ‘Old Hubert’, writing in \textit{Hog’s Wash} of 1793, stated that the Saxon King Alfred chose ‘rather than introduce the curse of a standing army, to put arms of peace and defence into the hands of all his subjects’.\textsuperscript{61} Cobbett too could see no reason for a standing army to be maintained in time of peace. England could exist without one, ‘as well as it did formerly for more than a thousand years’.\textsuperscript{62} According to the \textit{Cap of Liberty}, Peterloo had demonstrated the necessity of reclaiming the Englishman’s right to bear arms through a Bill of Rights that would return the right as a means to prevent tyranny in government.\textsuperscript{63}

Across the Atlantic the pre-Revolutionary American colonists had long complained of arbitrary taxation and the excessive use of force and intimidation in its gathering. In 1689 New Englanders charged Sir Edmund Andross with revenue raising ‘in a most illegal and arbitrary way, without any consent of the people’. They declared that in many instances no sooner had land been hewn from a wilderness and made productive then men acting in the king’s name confiscated it from its rightful possessors in order to enjoy its produce.\textsuperscript{64} The American Declaration of Independence charged the British monarch with maintaining a standing army for the purpose of intimidating the colonists, and demonstrated early American dislike of standing armies to an equal or even greater extent than their British brethren. As Schwoerer has demonstrated, such sentiment was reinforced by the ready availability of Trenchard, Moyle and other radical anti-standing army Whig writers in the colonies such that it became ‘a basic assumption of almost every political leader’. Its legacy is still to be found in the constitutions of many of the thirteen original states

\textsuperscript{59} Radicals were much less likely to assert the presence of the professional housecarls.
\textsuperscript{60} Williams, \textit{Artisans and Sans-Culottes}, p. 73.
\textsuperscript{61} Morison, \textit{American Revolution}, p. 159; \textit{Hog’s Wash}, 13 October 1793.
\textsuperscript{62} Cobbett, \textit{Two-Penny Trash}, vol. 3, no. 2, September 1831.
along with the associated right of free men to bear arms. Virginia, New Hampshire
and North Carolina all state in similar terms that:

A well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the
people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed; and, as standing armies in time of
peace are dangerous to liberty, they shall not be maintained, and the military shall be
kept under strict subordination to, and governed by, the civil power.\footnote{North Carolina State Constitution, Article I, Declaration of Rights, Section 30. See also New
Hampshire State Constitution, Bill of Rights, Articles 24 and 25; Constitution of Virginia, Article I,
Section 13.}

The New Hampshire State Constitution also still maintains that ‘the doctrine of
nonresistance against arbitrary power, and oppression, is absurd and slavish’.\footnote{New Hampshire State Constitution, Bill of Rights, Article 10.}

In 1829, proximity to the urban poor and the fear of crime and disorder led the
British middle classes to pressure Prime Minister Robert Peel into establishing

Unarmed, the functions of this civilian organisation were not only to detect and prevent crime, but to maintain public order. These two functions posed a dilemma for radicals, for while keeping the crime carried out by the despised underclass under some sort of control was considered a useful social function, the same police were also responsible for the breaking-up of political demonstrations and strikes. In 1833 Peel sought to alleviate fears of a gendarmerie in the French stamp by introducing policing at a local community level, aimed at cultivating policing by consent.\footnote{M. Finnane, \textit{Police and Government: Histories of Policing in Australia}. Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 9, 14.}

By being unarmed and promoted as part of the community, the police presented a less obvious face of state force than the standing army, making it a less visible means of oppression.

Nevertheless the introduction of a civilian police force was not one that
endeared itself to radicals. The standing army remained in close proximity and radicals believed the two operated in tandem. The Chartists’ National Petition of 1842 described both an ‘unconstitutional police force’ that prevented ‘due exercise of the people’s rights’, and a ‘vast unconstitutional army upheld at public expense to intimidate the millions’.\footnote{MacCoby, \textit{English Radical Tradition}, p. 137.}
all free men should be allowed to bear arms. Drawing on the historical precedent of the *fyrd*, he argued that a police force and a standing army were not needed to defend the community or maintain order if the universal rights for arming the people were restored. From his perspective, both organisations were in existence solely to oppress the people, encourage a climate of passivity, and maintain the status quo. Four million working men were more than capable of defending the country against any foreign assailant, and Lovett contemptuously wondered how they had allowed a few ‘domestic oppressors’ to ‘enslave and degrade’ them. Why had they disregarded and forgotten the constitutional right to bear arms bequeathed them by their ancestors, ‘till one after another they have been robbed of their rights, and have submitted to be awed into silence by the bludgeons of policemen’?\(^{70}\)

**Apathy**

Yet drones and parasites such as the banker, monarch, or aristocrat, were only able to rule with the active consent, or at least resigned acceptance and apathy of the majority of workers. Such apathy, according to Bray, led workers to rely on men of other classes to champion their cause instead of considering their position and devising their own remedies. These men, of different class perspectives and prejudices, proved ‘weak champions and blind guides’.\(^{71}\) Consequently little changed historically. Lovett believed that the font of ruling-class power lay in the workers’ ignorance.\(^{72}\) It was an ignorance and apathy that so frustrated Paine that he could ‘scarcely avoid disgust at those who are thus imposed on’.\(^{73}\) A ‘fraud and deception has been practiced on them for many years past by knaves, whores, and rogues’ wrote ‘Philopatris’, a correspondent to the *London Democrat*, yet still:

> The productive classes of this country have tamely and quietly submitted to be taxed, slaved, and bullied out of their natural rights, without ever making one grand effort to extricate themselves from the friends who have been feeding on their industry.\(^{74}\)

According to Bray, there were many among the working classes who ‘still think, as they have been taught to think’, that the idle rich were a blessing to the community

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\(^{72}\) Lovett, *Life and Struggles*, p. 130.
\(^{73}\) Paine, *Collected Writings*, p. 467.
\(^{74}\) LDm, 8 June 1839.
because they spent substantial sums on servants, idle pursuits and luxuries, and so increased trade and employment. He remained as contemptuous as Paine:

> It is sickening and pitiable to hear such exclamations as these come from the very same despised and oppressed beings from whom the money was originally taken!—who thus manifest an almost idiotic joy at beholding a wholesale plunderer squander away their money!—money produced by their toil and deprivation!\(^{75}\)

Like Paine and Winstanley before, and many radicals after, Lovett’s answer was that ‘the “altar and the throne” formed the magic spell’, and the fault lay firmly with ‘the ignorance and prejudices of the masses…the slaves of priests and nobles, and blind instruments of the wealth and title-hunting minions of despotism’.\(^{76}\) Were a worker to sit and reflect on his or her social position, that the social hierarchy was maintained on both fraud and force would become obvious. But the ‘giddy, unreflecting people’, instead of questioning fitness for office, bowed before royalty, admired the splendid show of folly and ‘swelled the slavish chain of flatterers’. It was the people themselves whose cringing moulded the tyrant, whose labours erected the ‘citadels and fortifications of despotism’ and upheld the profligacy of courts. It was the people who gloried in the means which kept them slaves.\(^{77}\) It was from the people that despots drew the ranks of the standing army that helped enslave labour and keep their brother slaves in awe. The people themselves ‘formed the warlike phalanx round their tyrants’ thrones, and glory in the privilege to wear their slavish trappings, and at some minion’s bidding drench the land with blood’.\(^{78}\)

**The Land**

The final aspect of producerism that needs to be acknowledged is the part it played in the relationship between radical politics and the land. It is an aspect particularly visible in the Australian context where access to the land of a huge and sparsely populated continent was strictly regulated by the British government. Such was the importance of land to producer radicalism that it demands study in its own right, and cannot possibly be addressed adequately in a work which focuses largely on producerism’s urban incarnation. From Winstanley, Paine and Thomas Spence,

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\(^{75}\) Bray, *Labour's Wrongs*, p. 87.

\(^{76}\) Lovett, *Life and Struggles*, p. 385.

\(^{77}\) Ibid, p. 126.

\(^{78}\) Ibid.
through to the radicals of nineteenth-century Australia, land was important not just for ownership in itself, nor in making it productive for the benefit of all and to increase the wealth of the nation, but crucially because it was recognised that denial of land forced men into wage-slavery and the service of others. Access to land was thus seen as a means of escaping oppression and reliance. Monopolising the land also allowed the ruling classes to monopolise the means of producing food, and the store of all the raw materials that were the basis of all wealth. 79 Such views placed land and land reform alongside producerist critiques of Old Corruption and political economy as the third major strand of nineteenth-century radicalism. 80

Early-modern radicals like Winstanley declared that the oppression of the rulers was supported by a system that denied men use of the land, and thereby forced them into the unrighteous labour of wage-slavery. He blamed William the Conqueror and the Norman Yoke for the miserable condition of the ordinary Englishman. Feudal overlords monopolised the land and forced Englishmen into bondage. That it was land acquired under the conquest by murder and theft put landlords in contravention of the seventh and eighth commandments. 81 Like Winstanley, both Paine and Hall regarded the appropriation of the land by the few, contrary to the Creator’s intention, as the initial cause of the misfortune of the poor—Paine again looking to the Norman Yoke when placing blame. 82

In the Australian colonies denying the people access to land was viewed as a ruling-class conspiracy designed to artificially create a working class. It was a conspiracy proven by the Wakefield proposal to keep colonial land prices artificially high and thereby force new arrivals to work as labourers. 83 But in New South Wales Wakefield’s plan was pre-empted by a land grab by the rich and powerful—many the second sons of the English aristocracy. Having taken control of large tracts of land

79 Bray, Labour’s Wrongs, p. 28.
81 Winstanley, ‘New-yeers Gift’. The view of the Earth as a common treasury for all mankind appeared frequently in radical literature, for example Bray, Labour’s Wrongs, p. 28.
82 Paine, Collected Writings, pp. 396-413; Hall, Effects of Civilization, pp. 107-10. Marx wrote that primitive accumulation—the necessary precursor to capitalism—had been achieved by the forcible expulsion of the independent peasantry from the land and the denial of access to the commons. Marx, Capital Vol. 1, pp. 667-716.
83 According to Capt. M. C. O’Donnell, a large NSW landholder, the object of the ‘Wakefield system’ was to ‘produce in a new country, the artificial state of the old; to transplant from an old country, the people, and to place them in precisely the same situation as they were at home’. NSWLC, Select Committee on Crown Land Sales Act, 1843. O’Donnell’s admission was made in the context of a split between the British colonial administration and Australian pastoralists over control of both the land and the legislature in which the landholders sought to blame the British alone for the conditions of Australian workers.
they threw it open to pasture, or left it uncultivated in the hope of gaining higher prices as the value of land rose. The social effect of this locking up of the land was much the same as the Wakefield plan—a replication of the British social system in the colony. Leaving land unimproved or idle for speculative purposes denied its productive use, and was morally reprehensible when families were in want of food. The land issue remained fundamental to producerism even if most urban mechanics had no intention of farming it. When the (British) *Poor Man’s Guardian* of 1847 wrote that land lying idle through its monopoly by the few should be made productive through ‘the small proprietary system’ it pointed to a popular sentiment that was echoed in its Australian counterparts.  

**Assessment**

The producing classes believed that they were the bedrock of a society and economy based on the production and exchange of material goods. Yet although they created all wealth by producing items of social and material value, they received very little by way of reward for their toil. Most of the wealth they created was abstracted by the idle parasitic classes through profit, interest, taxation, speculation and rent. It was a social and economic order that began with denial of land to the people, was maintained by the deception of the established church and establishment newspapers, legitimised through the state and its laws and ultimately enforced by a standing army or civilian police force. Monarch and aristocrat, capitalist and landlord, priest and politician, lawyer and banker, all were responsible in one way or another for the abstraction of wealth from the producing classes and legitimisation of the processes by which it was carried out. Producerism provided the economic aspect of the radical challenge to ruling-class hegemony by those that recognised how, why, and in whose interest the social and economic order was maintained. The basis of most industrial or political action by nineteenth-century workers, it had as its ultimate objective the retention of the fruits of their labour.

But although producerism provided the economic basis for many recognisable features of nineteenth-century political radicalism—the calls for land reform, disestablishment of the church, abolition of the monarchy and aristocracy,

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84 *PMG*, 4 December 1847. The issue of land was a constant feature of the Australian radical press, for example: *CL*, 13 April 1833; *AC*, 8 December 1840; *WR*, 19 August 1843; *PA*, 9 December 1848. As a feature of Australian radicalism the issue of the land in its Australian context is discussed briefly below.
unnecessary government places, and currency reform—its early tendency was to focus on institutions and personalities rather than the wider system of social relations. According to the *Gorgon*, the master springs of corruption, ‘for the sake of which the whole machine may be said to live and move’, were the aristocracy and the upper echelons of the law and church. The parsons, police, magistrates and tax-gatherers, in the employ of the former, became the ‘active journeymen of corruption’ opposed to the interest of the ‘productive classes’.  

Cobbett and the *Gorgon* exemplified attacks on the tax-eaters of Old Corruption, were adept at personalising such issues, and provided the framework for a populist obloquy that continued into the twentieth century. Bray on the other hand, like Marx, argued against personalising these wrongs. He claimed they were systemic in origin, and that greedy or corrupt individuals were not cause, but effect. Yet despite these differences, both schools of thought remained premised on the labour theory of value, and demonstrate how producerism was successfully able to adapt itself to confront a social hierarchy based on economic inequity in any form of society based on commodity production.

Producerism thus raised questions over the legitimacy of rule by the unproductive and the means of wealth appropriation that supported such rulers. It had for centuries, or as Marx, Engels, and Robinson suggested, since time immemorial, sought independence and freedom from monopoly and extortion and to cast off the rule of parasitic elites. Its modern incarnation, emerging from the small workshops and landholdings that characterised pre-industrial production, was an idealised system of social relations based on a plebeian moral economy that oversaw a measure of economic equality, reciprocal obligation between master and man, craftsman and customer, and citizen and community. The producer’s property was his labour. The right to the whole product of his labour was his, as was the right to freely exchange those products.

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86 According to Bray, ‘it must never be forgotten by the working class, when reviewing their wrongs and devising remedies, that their warfare is not against men, but against a system—that they are fighting not against the capitalists, as individuals, nor against capital itself, but against the present mode of applying capital—against that system which gives to irresponsible individuals the power of grinding masses of labour between masses of capital’. Bray, *Labour’s Wrongs*, p. 102. See also p. 91.


88 Schultz, ‘Small Producer Tradition’.

89 Though the language used was apparently exclusive to the male gender, as Foxwell notes, the early English socialists were champions of the rights of women and equality of the sexes. Foxwell, ‘English School’, fn p. xlvi.
The language of producerism, although long part of working people’s cultural milieu, only really began to be recorded as the radical press began to establish itself in the first half of the nineteenth century.\(^{90}\) Earlier publications, such as *The Crisis* of 1775, demonstrated some aspects of producerist rhetoric when attacking parasitic kings and courtiers, but it made little or no mention of the economic struggles of working people. The same could be said of Paine’s writings. But by 1793 *Hog’s Wash*, published by Paine’s British publisher Daniel Eaton in response to the British ruling-class oppression of local Jacobins and Burke’s ‘swinish multitude’ jibe at the masses, saw producerist rhetoric more immediately apparent. It continually demonstrated such a producerist perspective in its pillorying of tax-eating placemen, the monarchy and its courtiers, accumulators, lawyers, paper-money jobbers and the standing army.\(^{91}\)

A producerist perspective characterised both the (British) *Reasoner* of 1808 and *Gorgon* of 1818. By the time radical British mechanic William Benbow suggested a general strike to the ‘plundered fellow sufferers’ of the ‘productive classes’ in 1830, it was commonplace in British radical publications.\(^{92}\) The producerist social dichotomy also typified the Chartist *London Democrat*, and the Owenite *Poor Man’s Guardian* of the 1830s and ‘40s; indeed these radical papers serve as examples of the many that could be almost chosen at random to illustrate producerism’s presence. Across the Atlantic, according to Bruce Laurie, it was radical mechanic William Heighton who ‘breathed life into [the] abstract categories of “producer” and “nonproducer”’.\(^{93}\) Although as Schultz has shown, here too its basic assumptions already held a firm presence in a strong and politically charged artisan culture.\(^{94}\)

By the third decade of the nineteenth century the various strands of producerism had solidified into a universal set of assumptions recognisable to British, American, and Australian radicals. They were republican, anti-clerical, anti-capitalist, and demanded independence from wage-slavery through land for the people.\(^{95}\) There

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\(^{91}\) For example, *Hog’s Wash*, September, 13 October, 26 October, 2 November 1793.


\(^{93}\) Laurie, *Artisans*, p. 68.

\(^{94}\) Schultz, ‘Small Producer Tradition’; *Republic of Labor*.

\(^{95}\) This anti-capitalism did not necessarily translate into an anti-market sentiment. Capitalism was identified with the monopolist, the accumulator and wage-slavery and not associated with an ideal market where exchange of commodities was based on communal notions of a just price.
was disdain for the capitalist accumulator, landlord, banker, aristocrat, and the holders of unnecessary offices and titles. They were parasites upon the labour of producing classes, supposedly living on unearned increment or unequal exchange. Priests, lawyers, the establishment press and the standing army furnished a particular abhorrence as hirelings that maintained this unfair social order. A letter written by ‘Democrat’ and published in the *London Democrat* of 1839 typified this perspective. It wanted ‘to abolish the national debt, to abolish all sinecures, all unnecessary placemen, all undeserving pensioners, all hereditary distinctions, the law of primogeniture, the standing army, the monarchy, [and the] national church’, as well as all tithes and offerings.\(^96\) Such demands were to be found across the century in the radical literature of Britain, America and Australia. Behind them sat the labour theory of value and the notion that none of these so-called parasites were productive. These were the ideas and political attitudes that arrived in New South Wales with the artisans and other working migrants of the nineteenth century.

\(^{96}\) *LDm*, 4 May 1839.
PART B. 1840s NEW SOUTH WALES

Introduction

It is not proposed in this second part to offer any examination of the major political and economic events except where they relate to the presence of producerism; there are many works of Australian history available to the reader for that purpose.\(^1\) Important to this study are producerist interpretations of these events and the language it used to describe them. It tries to explain how political radicals—always in the minority—utilised producerism and its political language in attempts to mobilise the working classes and arouse them from supposed apathy and self interest.

By the middle of the nineteenth century the language of producerism was becoming apparent in the radical literature aimed at a New South Wales working readership. Assuming that the language had social resonance in speaking to urban artisans, small farmers and the small shopkeeper, its social base is made self-evident. It remains, however, to fix it to the point of production and thus draw out its full meaning\(^2\). In order to do this it is necessary to examine the relationship between the processes that occurred at the point of production, and how they may have been reflected in a broader social outlook. This requires taking a qualitative approach and briefly looking at community and work practices—in other words scrutinising what it was these workers actually did.

By engaging in a series of physical operations, workers at the point of production added value to the materials in front of them. On a wider scale their labour improved the conditions of the colony, increased its wealth, and contributed to its progress by increasing the social stock of useful and valuable items. This was the basis of their perceived social utility. The development of colonial steam power offers a good example of how, under the doctrine of progress, productive labour and

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\(^1\) The most recent of these works is Terry Irving’s *Southern Tree of Liberty*. Although relevant to this study, the book was published too late to have been incorporated into the work, and many of the events and actors listed in this, and the following three chapters, are described in greater detail therein.

\(^2\) Small shopkeepers and artisans were often the same people. Many urban artisan workplaces had shopfronts where trades like the shoe-maker and tailor displayed their products. Henry Parkes’ Hunter Street toyshop offered a typical example with Parkes making toys in the rear workshop while wife Clarinda attended the shop. Parkes also typified the Sydney radical activist. Part of a small but vociferous group of shopkeepers and radical artisans, they were ‘men of independence and ambition’ and firmly democratic principles. Martin, *Parkes*, pp. 46-99.
technical innovation led to an increasingly sophisticated colonial economy. The manufacture of complex machinery such as steam engines and their boilers demanded a high level of skill, literacy and numeracy from the engineers and millwrights who built and installed them. Manufacturing in the early New South Wales colonial economy was largely based on artisan work practice, and not much is known of these work practices in Australia. But given the similarity and close relationships between British and American artisans, their organisations, culture and ideas, and given Britain as the source of migration to both America and Australia, it seems reasonable to expect a broadly similar culture and set of work practices in the Australian context. Importantly, it is worth pointing out that for much of the first half of the nineteenth century many among the working classes of New South Wales were comparatively prosperous, and only really encountered the privation of their British counterparts during times of severe economic depression. Mechanics in particular arrived in the colony with the prospect of increased economic opportunity firmly in mind. Much of their radicalism did not emerge from poverty, but reflected a perceived denial of opportunity for advancement, or a fear of being driven into wage-slavery. Wages may have been high in the colony, but high wages were no palliative for a lack of economic independence.
Chapter 7
Building a Colonial Economy: Sydney’s Artisans, 1820-1860

A nation, whether it consumes its own products, or with them purchases from abroad, can have no more value than it produces. The supreme policy of every nation, therefore, is to develop the producing forces of its own country. What are they? The workingmen, the land, the mines, the machinery.¹

Michael Roe acknowledged that while doing much to set the tone of Australian life, the lives, work and opinions of nineteenth-century colonial urban workers have gone largely unrecorded.² Sydney’s early nineteenth-century artisans existed within the wider Anglo-American artisan culture, but have received less historical attention than their British and American counterparts. This is doubtless because they were comparatively few in number and left little personal record of their lives. Official records are also at best inconsistent, with many early documents containing personal information deliberately destroyed in an attempt to erase evidence of a convict past.³ The lives of these skilled workers were overshadowed by more exciting historical events such as transportation and convictism, the exploration of the island continent, the gold rushes, bushranging, and, at the end of the nineteenth century, the big strikes that were the genesis of the Australian Labor Party. By comparison the life and work of the early Sydney mechanic appears mundane and lacklustre. Industrial and economic histories, while acknowledging the significance of their efforts, have only mentioned them in passing.⁴ Such quantitative studies, by their nature, tend to abstract so-called labour power from the point of production and largely ignore its human dimension.

The main drawback with attempting such a history is, therefore, the dearth of early Australian urban worker opinion on social and political issues—there was no

¹ John Barnard Byles, quoted in Berkey, Money Question, p. 43.
³ This has been the source of much frustration for Australian historians, e.g., N. G. Butlin, Forming a Colonial Economy, Australia 1810-1850. Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 153.
colonial Mayhew or de Tocqueville. A few notable exceptions point only to the hated land legislation, and make no mention of either community or work practices. What remains is recorded in the early radical press where editors, writers, and letter writers engaged in public debate over such issues. Even here there was a marked reticence on the part of correspondents to identify themselves, others, or their trade, and letters were often written under pseudonym or simply as ‘a member of the working classes’. To this extent, of necessity there is a certain amount of reliance on inferences drawn from the Anglo-American and later Australian experience.

Like most major nineteenth-century cities, Sydney was a site of production and it was the independent mechanic, not the wealthy entrepreneur or joint-stock company, that laid the foundation for much of its productive industry. There were larger-scale urban manufacturing enterprises during the first decades of the nineteenth century that included sugar-refining, brewing and distilling, wool milling and flour-milling, but these establishments were few in number. Early Sydney was instead characterised by the small workshops of the craft-workers associated with the maritime and building industries, and of the household and domestic trades such as the shoemaker, tailor and furniture-maker.

The period also witnessed the rise of the ‘new’ metal trades in the colony. These were trades such as the millwright, engineer, boilermaker and machinist. Although initially few in number over the course of the century they would relegate the blacksmith, the mainstay of the ‘old’ metal trades, to the margins. The new trades demonstrated the technological advance of the colony, yet traditionally structured they carried artisan culture into the industrial age when many of older trades were being rendered obsolete by machine production. Economies of scale encouraged organisation of the metal trades along industrial capitalist lines in the large markets of Europe and North America. Australia however, distant from the

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7 *NSWC*, 1828.

major markets and with limited domestic demand, offered little scope for such industrial-scale production and with a few notable exceptions the small workshop remained the principal site of urban production throughout the nineteenth century.9

The Australian artisan was transplanted from an Anglo-American artisan culture with origins that stretched back into the middle-ages. Some were transported as convicts—victims of the repressive laws associated with early British capitalism. Most however were free settlers, seeking improved economic prospects or escape from the wage-slavery and destitution offered by capitalism in the old country.10 Traditionally part of the ‘uneasy class’ of artisans, small farmers and shopkeepers, and driven by the desire for material improvement, they held a confident belief in the role that their skills would play in the colony’s future. The same self-respect based on the social utility of their labour generated a disdain for the ‘ignorant itinerant labourer’ and “‘bunyip’ aristocracy of landlords’ they found on arrival.11 Australia was a land of potential that held the promise of a new commonwealth of small independent artisans and landholders.12 But the pastoralists that dominated early colonial economic and political life wanted cheap quiescent shepherds and farm labourers, not the radical and troublesome mechanics that were disembarking at Sydney Cove and who had no intention of working as cheap hired labour.

The First Colonial Mechanics
The first of Australia’s mechanics arrived as convicts with the First Fleet. They included shoemakers, carpenters, weavers, blacksmiths, stonemasons, bricklayers and shipwrights.13 Early accounts written by the colonial elite suggested that they were disreputable and unskilful. They were seen as unreliable, lazy, abusive and wilfully obstructive habitual criminals rather than victims of a harsh British penal code. It was a view applied to both convicts and free-settler mechanics by the wealthy pastoralists, and one that persisted beyond the period of convictism into the latter half of the nineteenth century.14 Their culture was supposedly one where

12 This utopia was most forcefully expressed in the early editions of the *PA*.
14 Hannibal Macarthur MLC, Esq. suggested that the mechanics of Sydney were both idle and negligent and did not work more than two or three days a week because of their high earnings. *AC*, 24 September 1840. Similar charges, made by other employers and their agents, were reasserted in
observance of ‘Saint Monday’ was common practice, and higher earnings bought more drink and leisure time instead of artisan respectability.\textsuperscript{15} Government taught ‘mechanics’ in the clothing and footwear trades were described as an idle and dissolute body of men who refused to work regularly.\textsuperscript{16} Alexander Thomson, the Colonial Assistant Surgeon, regarded many of the free-settler tradesmen just as unfavourably, describing them as ‘low mechanics’ and ‘very suspicious characters’—many of whom, given their way of life, had merely pre-empted their own imminent transportation.\textsuperscript{17}

But despite such portrayals, even the sceptical Thomson had to concede that a small number of free-settler and emancipated convict mechanics were ‘steady and reliable craftsmen’.\textsuperscript{18} Among the early metal trades, blacksmith Thomas Cozier arrived as a free settler in 1791, was granted land near Parramatta, and continued work at his forge for some forty years.\textsuperscript{19} Thomas Cooper, another blacksmith, received an absolute pardon after serving his sentence at the forge in the government lumberyard and employed several other smiths at his George Street forge by the late 1820s.\textsuperscript{20} A number of other self-employed ex-convicts in the metal trades included tinsmiths, gunsmiths and millwrights.\textsuperscript{21} William Adnum, a convict assigned to James Blanch’s George Street foundry as a brazier in the 1820s, received his conditional pardon in 1835 and opened a coppersmith and ironmongery store in George Street where he remained in business until at least 1857.\textsuperscript{22} In the maritime trades too, several ex-convict shipwrights found steady employment. James Stewart for example, an ex-convict sail-maker, maintained a business for some years at his Sussex Street premises.\textsuperscript{23}
The colony’s economic growth demanded skilled workers, particularly blacksmiths, wheelwrights, millwrights and those of the building trades. However opportunities, especially for millwrights, in Britain, Europe and America meant few took the long and difficult journey despite the high earnings offered. While there were many hundreds of so-called mechanics in the Sydney of 1828, most were poorly trained ex-convicts in the shoe-making and clothing trades, and the census for that year lists only eighteen millwrights, including one apprentice, in the entire colony. As a consequence there was increased demand for native-born apprentices and five of the colony’s millwrights and a third of its shipwrights and boat-builders were native-born. It also meant a continued reliance on imports. As private commerce increased at the end of the convict period so too did imports, and the big merchants of Sydney grew powerful within the urban economy, amassing significant wealth and local political influence.

Despite early technical and strategic difficulties, by the mid-1830s New South Wales was firmly in the process of transition from British gaol to market economy. Sydney had developed into a significant seaport with between thirty and fifty ships berthed on any given day and a small but thriving artisan economy. Alongside a prosperous whaling and sealing industry, it was common for up to one in five of the ships in port to undergo refit or repair, requiring the labour of proficient shipwrights, rope-makers, sail-makers and block and mast makers. In 1836 the Australian and Tasmanian Steam Conveyancing Company was confident enough in Sydney shipwrights to put out to tender a contract for the construction of a four hundred ton vessel to be powered by two imported seventy-five horsepower steam engines for the transport of passengers and freight between the city and Hobart.

The Sydney shipwrights were typical of artisan production—self-employed like James Powrie and John Coleman, or small master craftsmen like George Atherdon


25 S. Nicholas and P. R. Shergold, ‘Convict Workers’, in Nicholas, *Convict Workers, 70*. AC and PA both described Sydney politics being dominated by city merchants and the legislature of the colony as a whole by the pastoral interest, e.g., AC, 13 March 1840.


27 *CJ*, 16 April 1836.
and John Cunningham and their journeymen George Turner and George Thompson. Even the larger employers, such as shipbuilder Robert Cunningham and shipwright George Shukars, only employed a handful of mechanics.\textsuperscript{29} Most of these trades were at first concentrated in the Rocks area behind George Street and the wharves of Sydney Cove (now Circular Quay). However Sussex and Kent Streets, the westernmost streets of the early city, became increasingly important as the decade progressed. They faced the newer wharves of Darling Harbour, and like George Street ran the length of the city from north to south.\textsuperscript{30}

Although never on the scale of London, Birmingham, or Philadelphia, the economy of early Sydney nevertheless held much in common with these major cities as a site of both production and commerce. Advertisements placed in the \textit{Sydney Gazette}, the \textit{Sydney Herald}, and the \textit{Commercial Journal} reveal that the trades of the tailor, boot and shoemaker, cabinet-maker, saddler and wheelwright were well established in the colonial city in addition to those of the maritime, metal and building industries. The small size of the local economy offered ample opportunity for the master craftsmen and journeymen of the small workshop to carve a niche amid the imported goods and articles of the larger merchants. Some remained at the same location for many years and prospered—exemplified by Adnum’s copper and iron business. Others proved more ephemeral, disappearing in the major economic downturn of the 1840s.\textsuperscript{31}

George Street of the late 1820s and early 1830s was typical. The city’s main thoroughfare, it ran the two miles from Brickfield Hill in the south to Sydney Cove and Dawes Point in the north. Along its length was a mix of industrial, domestic and maritime trades and the numerous taverns that often doubled as landmarks.\textsuperscript{32} Here the iron foundries of both James Blanch and Richard Dawson stood among the many tailors, shoe and boot-makers, saddlers, wheelwrights and blacksmiths premises, as well as grocery stores, importing houses and banks.\textsuperscript{33} These were not the distant factories of today, separated from the community behind walls and gates, but opened out onto the street making productive activity firmly a part of the street scene and city culture. At its northern end stood Windmill Street, Cunningham’s shipyard and

\textsuperscript{29} NSWC, 1828. Information also from contemporary newspapers and journals.
\textsuperscript{30} For map see p. 132.
\textsuperscript{31} SMH, 3 January 1843.
\textsuperscript{32} Maclehose, \textit{Pictures of Sydney}, pp. 66-70.
\textsuperscript{33} NSWC, 1828; SH, 18 July 1831.
the maritime trades of The Rocks, to the west, Darling Harbour. The area between George Street in the east, and Sussex and Kent Streets in the west, thus formed the industrial centre of the early city. It held the numerous houses, small shops and workshops where master craftsmen, journeymen and labourer alike lived, worked and socialised.  

**From Forge to Foundry**

In close proximity to the maritime trades stood the workshops of the engineers, millwrights, and iron founders. Some were specific to the maritime industry, such as the anchor and ship-smiths close to the harbour in Kent and Windmill Streets. A few, like George Talbot of Windmill Street for example, specialised in the manufacture of whaling gear. Most of the metal trades however were more generalised, with engineers and founders casting anchors and undertaking ship-smiths’ work alongside millwork and even decorative ironwork. Of all the trades in the colony the metal trades were of increasing significance. The nineteenth century saw increased mechanisation in the mining, agricultural and pastoral industries and associated processing industries such as flour milling, tanneries, boiling down establishments and wool preparation shops. Such mechanised processes demanded skilled metalworkers in manufacture and maintenance. As wooden ships were replaced by those made of iron, the shipwright working in wood gave way to the boilermaker and iron plate. Similarly the development of the steam engine for ship’s propulsion ended the sail-making trade, and within a few decades the metal trades dominated both land and maritime industry.

Blacksmithing was the earliest metal trade in the colony and remained the dominant metal trade for many years. The early convict smiths worked at the forge and workshops of the government lumberyard and produced horseshoes, hinges, axe and hammerheads, and hand-mills for grinding flour. In the free economy the services of the blacksmith were demanded by rural settlers, both large and small, and

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34 Master-craftsmen often lived at their work premises. Such premises were advertised in *CJ*, 6 July 1835; *SH*, 16 February 1841. (*SH* became *SMH* on 1 August 1842).  
35 *CJ*, 3 March 1838; *LD*, 1847. Advertisements in *CJ*, *SH*, *SG* and others frequently stated that the local metal trades were prepared to engage in all types of work.  
37 Cobley, *Crimes of*, p. 159.  
by 1814 there were twenty-five free blacksmiths in the colony. In 1828 blacksmiths still significantly outnumbered all other colonial metal trades.\textsuperscript{39}

At this time there were only three engineers and eighteen millwrights, including one apprentice, in the entire colony.\textsuperscript{40} The early journeyman-engineers were all free settlers working for the few large-scale enterprises. Charles Sommers was the engineer at the Darling Mills in Parramatta and William Lowe maintained the twenty horsepower steam engine at Thomas Barker’s Sussex Street flour mill. Robert Cooper’s Sydney distillery also employed its own engineer.\textsuperscript{41} Of the journeyman-millwrights, most were employed by John Smith of George Street, an important figure in the early metal trades. All of Smith’s millwrights were either free settlers or like John Dight, Henry Hough, George Neal, Daniel Richards, and the apprentice James Watson, Sydney-born.\textsuperscript{42} Of the other free-settler millwrights, Henry Faulkner was employed by John Ford of George Street, Alexander Dyers worked alongside Lowe at Barker’s mill, and John Gamble with Sommers at the Darling Mills. The few others were employed in the country districts.

Brassfounding was the other significant metal trade of the early period, with eleven members of the trade in Sydney. Its products were relatively small and included hinges and handles for furniture, domestic water taps, small bells, and lamp bodies. Pitt Street, east of, and parallel to George Street was the centre of early brassfounding in the city, and its workshops were typical of artisan production where master craftsmen and journeymen worked in small one or two man operations. Men such as Thomas Gardner and James Rainey worked on their own account, while Thomas Smart, Richard James and Martin Short employed the journeymen John Bolus, Richard Wilson and John and William Cook. Unfortunately, like many others, they left no account of their lives and little else is known of them.\textsuperscript{43}

In 1821 James Blanch established the colony’s first commercially run iron foundry in George Street and, using cheaper pig iron, cast such household items as railings, stove bodies and domestic fire grates.\textsuperscript{44} Until then ironware had been limited

\textsuperscript{39} Walsh, ‘Manufacturing’, p. 259; Baxter, \textit{General Muster; NSW}, 1828.
\textsuperscript{40} \textit{NSWC}, 1828.
\textsuperscript{41} \textit{NSWC}, 1828. Barker’s engine: \textit{CJ}, 4 February 1836.
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{NSWC}, 1828.
\textsuperscript{43} \textit{NSWC}, 1828.
to imports or that produced by the forge-work of local blacksmiths. The casting process enabled comparatively higher rates of production at lower cost than blacksmith-made items, but because the two types of iron held different material characteristics, and were therefore suited to different applications, Blanch’s products served more as import replacements than direct competition to the local smiths. Other Sydney foundries were soon established in response to increasing demand from the city’s nascent engineering industry. Blanch increased his product range. William Bourne established his ‘Phoenix Iron and Brass Foundry’. By 1835 Robert Cunningham’s shipbuilding firm in George Street had also expanded into iron and brass foundry work, and made the bold claim that at a cost of between 3d and 4d per pound for iron and 1s 4d to 1s 6d for brass, it was ‘able to perform any size of castings required in the Colony’ to the equal of any produced in England. Another early foundry, Castle and Dawson’s George Street ‘Australian Brass & Ironfoundry’ stated it too could cast brass and iron at any weight and manufacture ship chain, anchors and cable, and cast iron verandas and balconies.

**Early Materials**

Cast iron from the Sydney foundries was not suitable for all applications. Although extremely strong under compression it was brittle under bending and extension, and being fairly soft it lacked the ability to hold a sharp edge. These material properties made it unusable for the making of many tools or machine components. Prior to modern steelmaking processes these items were made from wrought iron, which was stronger, more malleable, could be shaped and welded by hammering at red heat, but was considerably more expensive. Wrought iron is usually associated with decorative ironwork, but before modern steelmaking its main application was industrial. There was a significant wrought iron industry in Birmingham and the surrounding ‘Black Country’ of England which produced 1,500,000 tons annually by the 1850s. It was manufactured in many common sections including round (at one-eighth to five and one-half inches diameter), square (at one-eighth to four and one-half inches square), flat and hexagon. It was also graded from the base Crown or

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45 *Monitor*, 18 February 1828; *CJ*, 6 July 1835.  
46 *SH*, 22 February 1836.  
Merchant grade through to Best (B), Best Best (BB), and Best Best Best (BBB)—the latter used in applications that demanded safety such as boiler plates and hoist chains.50

Wrought iron however lacked any hardening ability and was therefore of limited use in tools or machinery subject to wear and abrasion, or in edge tools where a cutting edge was required to be kept sharp. Historically this was overcome by case-hardening, a process whereby the working part of an iron tool or implement was heated red and dipped into powdered charcoal; thus raising the carbon content of the surface layers. The increased carbon content saw a corresponding increase in hardness, but it was soon lost when the tool was re-sharpened.51 Although case-hardening was cheap and easily performed by the local blacksmith, it was largely replaced over the course of the eighteenth century by specialist steels produced in a Sheffield-based commercial process known as cementation. The ‘blister steel’ produced in this process was considerably harder than wrought iron but the increased production time, labour, and energy requirements, made it more expensive. An even higher grade of tool steel, known as shear (or sheer) steel was obtained by reheating and re-rolling blister steel but was priced higher still.52

In the absence of any colonial blast furnace or significant wrought ironworks in the period, wrought iron and specialist steels, like other base materials, were mostly imported from Britain.53 It is difficult to determine exact amounts and characteristics however, due to the practice of listing imported iron of all descriptions under the generic term ‘iron’, or ‘assorted iron’ on ship’s manifests. In 1828 these imports totalled 792 tons. They rose to a peak of some 3,500 tons by 1840 as the colonial economy surged ahead, but subsequently declined to 1,300 tons in the depressed mid 1840s.54

Advertisements in the Sydney papers indicate the ready availability of iron, wrought iron and specialist steel by the 1830s. In the late 1820s MacDonald’s of George Street was advertising round, flat and bar iron at £20 per ton. Both Woolley’s


51 For modern practice see Schlenker, Materials Science, pp. 242-4.


53 The first (unsuccessful) attempt at iron smelting was made in 1848 at Mittagong, NSW. H. Hughes, The Australian Iron and Steel Industry, 1848-1962. Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1964, pp. 2-7. Other raw materials were also imported. Linge, Industrial Awakening, p. 91.

54 RCNSW, 1828; 1840; 1845. Iron imports into Melbourne were insignificant at this time.
Birmingham and Sheffield House of King Street, and Beilby’s ironmongery store in George Street, offered blister, shear and spring steel, boiler plate, and various grades and shapes of wrought iron to the blacksmiths and engineers of Sydney.\textsuperscript{55} Two other George Street firms, Iredale’s, and Levick and Younger, also imported spring steel and rod, flat, square and round iron in various sizes. Iredale’s in particular had been importing English and Swedish iron since the mid 1820s; the Swedish product being especially sought after as its low phosphorous content produced premium quality tool steel.\textsuperscript{56} Hoop iron for cooperage was also available in gauge sizes from most of the city’s ironmongers. On a larger scale, Castle and Dawson’s foundry stocked two hundred tons of iron, including bolt iron from one-half to two inches diameter, square iron from one-half to three inches, boiler plate in thicknesses up to three-eighths of an inch, sheet iron, pig iron and rod for making boiler rivets.\textsuperscript{57}

Beyond the city the emerging rural economy demanded tools. Rakes, hoes and other tools for working the soil, as well as edge tools such as scythes, sickles, reaping hooks, chaff-knives, and wool-shears, were among those in constant demand. While many were imported by ironmongers such as Woolley and Beilby, locally produced items also found buyers. The locally made tools had the advantage of ready availability, or availability at short notice, which promised an end to delays in production. Thus of necessity, the colonial economy encouraged local metal manufacturing. Although the blacksmith employed by larger pastoral leases had the skill to make such tools from case-hardened iron, those of higher quality remained the preserve of urban craftsmen.

McKinnon’s ‘Edge Tool Factory’ in Parramatta Street and McMillan’s the anchor and ship smiths of Windmill Street made such tools. In their workshops the tool’s basic form was forged from wrought iron and a thin strip of the more expensive blister steel or shear steel that was to form the cutting edge was then hammer-welded to it.\textsuperscript{58} When the tool had taken its final shape the working edge was hardened by heating red and quenching in whale oil. To reduce brittleness the tool was then tempered by being heated to a lower temperature and cooled under ambient

\textsuperscript{55} Monitor, 27 Apr, 3 December 1827; CJ, 6 July 1835; SH, 7 March 1836; Omnibus And Sydney Spectator, 2 October 1841; Examiner, 9 August 1845.
\textsuperscript{56} Monitor, 2 June 1826; SH, 10 October 1831; SH, 29 January 1836; CJ, 4 February 1836.
\textsuperscript{57} SH, 22 February 1836.
\textsuperscript{58} Gale, Iron and Steel, p. 19; CJ, 9 December 1840; LD, 1847.
Finally it was sharpened and honed to a cutting edge that remained good for many applications before resharpening. Such tools were the result of highly skilled manual operations and the extensive knowledge and experience of the craftsmen. While expensive, they withstood repeated sharpening and lasted many years.

Steam Power and the Birth of Colonial Engineering

In 1836 a milestone in Sydney’s engineering history was reached when Dingwall, Wilson and Mair, ‘Founders and Engineers’ of Clarence Street, successfully built the colony’s first steam engine. The *Sydney Gazette* recorded that it was manufactured ‘to a high standard of finish’ with all components cast and finished locally, and was used at J. T. Hughes’ premises in Pitt Street for the grinding of coffee, pepper and rice. The *Sydney Herald* described it as a ‘unique and elegant piece of Colonial machinery’. Its labour saving potential could, the paper reported, be put to many uses. At Hughes’ warehouse it was claimed to grind as much coffee in one hour as a man could in a day. Nonetheless it was only working at one fifth of its capacity and so had the potential to power several additional mills. Settlers from the outlying districts were urged by both papers to consider its use for the grinding of wheat or other applications to which its labour-saving potential might be suited.

Dingwall’s engine represented a major technological advance and seemed an answer to the colony’s perennial labour shortages. It meant that the power required for colonial industry could henceforth be manufactured locally. Prior to 1836 the colony’s few existing steam engines had been imported at great cost, the first in 1813 by the engineer John Dickson to power a flour mill. By the mid 1830s, colonial demand was sufficient for British engine manufacturers such as William Fox of

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60 *SG*, 28 January 1836. Sydney merchant and grocer John Terry Hughes became a victim of the depression of the 1840s. With debts of some £200,000 and assets of some £340,000, Hughes however was still left with the considerable fortune of £140,000. *Dispatch*, 18 November 1843.

61 *SH*, 8 February 1836.

62 Ibid.

63 *SH*, 8 February 1836; *SG*, 28 January 1836.

64 The engine still operated in 1836 under the ownership of Davies and Dodds. *SH*, 4 January 1836; *SG*, 19 January 1836; Walsh, ‘Manufacturing’, p. 246.
Clerkenwell (London) to advertise in the local press.\textsuperscript{65} It was a market which presented local engineers like Dingwall ample opportunity.

Although a small vertical single-horsepower engine, Dingwall’s machine demonstrated a high level of engineering skill for a young colony, and within a short period many larger engines were being built by Sydney’s engineering shops. It also demonstrated the degree to which materials technology in the colony had advanced. Different mechanical properties were required by the machine’s various components and most, including the piston, cylinder, slide-valve and machine base would have been made from locally produced cast iron, while the bearings would have been made from locally cast bronze and brass. The only parts demanding manufacture from expensive high quality imported iron and steel would have been those subject to harsher mechanical stresses like the piston rod, connecting rod, and slide-valve rod.\textsuperscript{66}

With no inventory of Dingwall’s foundry and workshop it is difficult to describe with any degree of certainty the nature of the work practices involved. Inferences however may be drawn from common practice. In the absence of any local blast furnace the foundry’s basic raw material, pig iron, would have been imported. After melting it was poured into moulds for the various components. Without the precise measurement of modern instrumentation it was a process that relied entirely on the founder’s skill and experience and gauged from the appearance of the molten iron. The other main foundry skill was that of the patternmaker. The pattern was a mould in reverse, a replica of the finished item made from wood. These were often highly intricate, and reliant upon the patternmaker’s knowledge of how molten metals behaved when poured. The two main considerations for mould design were that the metal must not solidify in the passages before the mould was fully filled, and allowance be made for contraction on cooling. Both founder and patternmaker also had to allow for adequate escape of hot air and the gases generated when the molten metal was poured. This could break a mould or leave gas bubbles in the solidified metal—a phenomenon known as ‘honeycombing’.\textsuperscript{67}

With the castings and other components for the engine cast and forged, highly skilled engineers had to finish and assemble them. Cylinder castings had to be bored.

\textsuperscript{65} SH, 8 February 1836.
\textsuperscript{66} Schlenker, \textit{Materials Science}, p. 225.
to an exact diameter and their dimensional accuracy maintained. This necessitated accurate machine tools and the skills and knowledge to operate them. Components such as bearing bushes, crankpins and piston rods were made to similar exacting standards for easy assembly and smooth running. High degrees of accuracy and standards of finish were demanded from the engineers manufacturing these steam engines. If running clearances between two components were too large they would wear rapidly. If too small they would seize under power or when hot. Knowledge of such ‘tolerances’ guided the engineers’ work. The fitting work was mostly carried out using files and bearing scrapers in conjunction with engineers’ blue. The process was a painstaking one, and still used today in prototypes or highly expensive hand-made machinery. Initially a thin coat of engineers’ blue was applied to one of the mating or bearing surfaces. The parts would then be assembled and run through their operation by hand. On dismantling, any high spots would be indicated by a removal of the blue from one surface and deposit on the other. Each high spot could then be removed by scraping and polishing until all were removed and the operation smooth, or the mating surfaces gas and liquid tight.

The millwrights installed both the engine and the machinery being driven by it into the factory or mill. This process was also highly skilled and painstaking, and millwrights, like engineers, worked to close tolerances. In most nineteenth-century industrial applications it was usual for power from a main engine to be carried via overhead transmission shaft to various locations within the factory or mill. Belts and drive pulleys made the final connection between transmission shaft and machine. To prevent stress on bearings and power shafts—and a consequent loss of power and/or damage to parts—angular and parallel misalignment between these components had to be kept to a minimum. The millwright had to hoist heavy components into position before carrying out these skilled operations, and often difficulty was compounded by working in confined spaces or at considerable heights.

Dingwall’s early lead did not last. In September 1836 John Struth, an emigrant Scots engineer and millwright formerly employed at Barker’s flour mill as a journeyman engineer, established a workshop in Sussex Street near his former employer’s premises. Struth manufactured and repaired high and low pressure steam

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68 No workshop records are available for this period but machine tools were available. Lathes were advertised in the SH of 21 January 1831 and CJ, 6 July 1835.

69 Until the advent of laser-alignment, modern engineering practice still required three to four hours to align such components. J. Piotrowski, Shaft Alignment Handbook. New York, Marcel Dekker, 1986.
engines and their boilers for marine or land use. He also advertised his intention to make hydraulic pumps and presses, flour mill machinery, grain elevators, and thrashing and winnowing machines. High pressure engines built on a larger scale demanded the best materials available and high level design and construction skills. Components were to fit closely together, as a poorly fitting piston, piston-rod seal, or steam slide-valve would lose steam pressure and render the engine highly inefficient. Components that fitted too closely however would seize when they became hot as the different metals used in the engine’s construction expanded at different rates. The boilers associated with high pressure engines also required high levels of skill in their manufacture. As Struth would later become all too aware, the danger of explosion demanded close attention be paid to their design. Materials such as high quality BBB iron plate and high quality rivets were essential in their construction.

Simpler machinery such as hydraulic presses also operated at high pressure and pistons, cylinders and seals needed to be made to high degrees of accuracy. In a hydraulic press cylinder the smallest leak made the machine incapable of holding the high working pressure and thus inoperable.

The colonial metal trades prospered before 1840 and within four years of Dingwall’s first engine there were four steam engine manufacturers in Sydney listed in the Colonial Returns. Assorted iron imports increased rapidly, and business was good for engineers like Struth. A year after commencing his business he had moved to bigger premises at Wilson’s Wharf in Sussex Street. By late 1839 he moved to even larger premises, ‘Struth’s Wharf’, at the junction of Sussex Street and King Street. Within ten years of his establishment, and despite the depression of the 1840s, Struth’s foundry and forge demanded 400 tons of coal a year. He employed a number of journeyman-engineers, millwrights and labourers and was a pillar of Sydney’s early metal trades until his retirement due to ill-health in 1854.

By 1840 most of the city’s engineering establishments of the period were located in the Sussex and Kent Street areas, close to the new and larger wharves of Darling Harbour that were gradually superseding Sydney Cove as the focus of

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70 SH, 22 September 1836; SMH, 15 January 1886.
72 RCNSW, 1840
73 NSWLC, Select Committee on Coal, 1847.
74 CJ, 20 September 1837; AC, 14 January 1840; SMH, 15 January 1886.
**Fig. 1:** Some industrial sites of early Sydney (c. 1840-50).

**Fig. 2:** Struth’s Wharf 1847.
shipping operations. These included William Bourne’s ‘Phoenix Iron and Brass Foundry’ and William Orr’s engineering workshop and store, both of which had been established in 1834. In 1842 George Russell opened an engine works in Sussex Street, and others included John Taylor’s ‘Victoria Foundry’ and Young and Mather of nearby Goulburn Street (later of Bathurst Street).\footnote{GH, 21 June 1841; Russell, ‘Sir Peter Nicol Russell’, 134; LD,1847.} Within a decade of Dingwall’s first engine, even the smaller workshops like that of Rogers, McVey and Buller, ‘Millwrights, Engineers, Boilermakers and Ship-smiths’ of Kent Street, claimed to have had the capacity to engage in iron work for ships, engines, and mills to the largest dimensions, and produce steam engines of every description, while the Australian Sugar Company had the confidence to place an order for ten thousand iron moulds with colonial foundries.\footnote{Sun, 4 February 1843; Sentinel, 8 January 1845.}

### Artisan Respectability and the Metal Trades

In May 1840 the committee of a meeting attended by both the employers and workmen of Sydney’s metal trades announced an ‘immense advance’ through the increasing demand for steam machinery in the colonies.\footnote{AC, 27 March 1840. Committee consisted of Robert Russell (Snr. Chairman), David Dingwall (Chairman), C. M. Crighton, and Messrs McKurrow, Marshall, Sommerville and Holden.} It also concluded that ‘taking into consideration the improvements made in Steam Machinery, and the great influx of Mechanics, [it was] expedient that some measures should be adopted to protect the interest of the employer and employed’.\footnote{AC, 27 March 1840.} The measures included the establishment of a house of call at the Old King George the Third public house in Clarence Street, where employers and employed could meet for ‘the dispatch of business’, and the keeping of a ‘Registry Book’ of employers requiring workmen, and mechanics employment, on the premises. Crucially, ‘no mechanic [would be] recommended by the Committee unless they are satisfied they are of good character, and competent to fulfil the engagement with their employers’.\footnote{AC, 19 May 1840.}

Although such standards upheld the employers’ interests, they also sought to best ‘promote the profession in Australia’ as well as advance both the trade and the colony at large. Craft took precedence over any class consideration and a ‘harmony of interest’ within the trade was reflected in the committee’s statement that ‘obligations between the employers and employed [were] reciprocal, so in like
proportion must be the benefit resulting from a union between them’. Artisan values were reflected through its ‘code of laws’, which would ensure not only the morality, sobriety, and respectability of its membership, but the social standing, respectability and reliability of the trade itself. It was in the interest of all in the trade to provide a high standard of workmanship and character given the ‘increased demand for our art and labour’ it stated.\(^{80}\)

It is also noteworthy that the maritime and engineering industries of early Sydney were dominated by Scots Presbyterians. Charles Crighton and David Dingwall of the above engineers’ committee were both active members of the Kirk, as was John Struth. On his death in 1886, Struth left the Kirk the sum of £1000, in addition to many previous donations.\(^{81}\) Other active members included John Taylor, the engineer and founder; Robert Cunningham, the shipbuilder and engineer; the edge tool makers McKinnon and McMillan; and the engineers William Orr, Arthur Tracy, James Watson, John Fyfe and John Burke. Among the maritime trades were David Anderson, George Turner, James Bloodsworth, William Carter, John Robinson, John Redgrave, Alexander Stark and Robert White. All of these active members were either master craftsmen or journeymen.\(^{82}\)

Such evidence suggests that among the maritime and metal trades at least, the image of the idle and drunken overpaid Sydney mechanic, the ‘dram-drinking mechanics and illiterate blockheads’,\(^{83}\) perpetuated by the landowning ruling elite was unfounded, and one perpetuated to maintain existing class relations. ‘It is all a calumny and slander against the working people’ stated the engineer John Garrod White in evidence to the 1860 Committee on the Unemployed.\(^{84}\) The Calvinist values of Presbyterianism—asceticism, devotion to one’s calling in life, self-help, thrift and economic independence—closely reflected those of artisan culture. Struth for example ‘was characterized by independence of mind, self-reliance [and] energy’, and ‘pursued his calling with pious diligence’. Few Presbyterians were transported as convicts.\(^{85}\) They were sober, industrious people who eschewed profligacy,

\(^{80}\) AC, 19 May 1840.
\(^{81}\) SMH, 15 January 1886. Struth’s long retirement was characterised by philanthropy.
\(^{82}\) Dingwall, Struth, and others mentioned signed a petition to the NSW Legislative Council. NSWLC, Petition of the Presbyterians of New South Wales. January 1842.
\(^{83}\) AC, 29 September 1840.
\(^{84}\) NSWLA, SCCWC, 1860, Minutes of Evidence, p. 1329.
drunkenness and idleness. Their worldly success was attributed to God’s blessing for a lifetime of hard work and self-denial. The Kirk’s influence saw Colquhoun’s stereotypical working Scot a literate, religious, moral, parsimonious and industrious person, whereas his English counterpart was far more liable to moral corruption.  

Yet adherence to evangelical and non-Episcopal Protestantism should not imply quiescence. Presbyterianism in the colony was born in conflict with Governor Sir Thomas Brisbane, and was characterised by internal squabbling, a refusal to worship under the same roof as the city’s Roman Catholics, and a disapproval of state funding of religion by many members. Presbyterian Scots workers, and descendents such as W. G. Spence, also figured strongly in the development of Australian unionism later in the century. A lifelong Presbyterian ‘intelligently alive to all questions of social, public, and religious interest’, Struth ‘did not mix much in politics or public business’ but instead operated through donations to various causes. James Maclehose, an optician and umbrella-maker of Hunter Street and fellow Scots Presbyterian, was less reticent. In his self-published 1839 Pictures of Sydney, ostensibly a guide book for the visitor, he could not resist the opportunity to attack the British Government’s colonial land policy as ‘a very great evil’ and ‘a monstrous violation of the principles of public finance’. Maclehose was proud of the progress of his adopted home, but was at the same time critical of its government. And although it cannot be said with any degree of certainty that the opinions of Maclehose represented those of his class, comparison with Parkes, that other more prolific (though not Presbyterian) colonial artisan, at least suggest it likely. The similar views of the Presbyterian minister J. D. Lang, a vociferous radical and republican, are a matter of historical record, but Lang cannot be said to represent the artisan. The relationship between the colonial metal trades, artisan radicalism and

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86 Colquhoun, Treatise, p. 121.
90 SMH, 15 January 1886; Telegraph, 15 January 1886.
91 Maclehose, Pictures of Sydney, p. 10. Maclehose also signed the Petition of Presbyterians. It is unfortunate that as a mechanic he offered no description of work practices in the book.
92 Baker, ‘Lang’.
religion was a complex one, and needs to be acknowledged. It is, however, beyond the scope of this study to examine it further.

1840 and Beyond: Development and Consolidation

By 1841 there were forty-one land-based steam engines in the colony with an aggregate of four hundred and seventy-one horsepower. Of most were in flour mills, including the largest colonial-built land engine of twelve horsepower operating at Teal’s flour mill, Windsor. Several smaller engines were also put to use driving the machinery of the local engineering establishments. Both John Struth and William Bourne possessed colonial-made two horsepower engines, Blanch’s foundry had a four horsepower and Dawson’s a six horsepower colonial-built engine respectively. Marine engines built in the colony were much larger. In 1841 a sixty horsepower engine was under construction for the steamship Maitland and two of twenty horsepower for the Aphrasia. Work on two twenty-five horsepower engines (one for a dredging machine) and another of sixteen horsepower had also been commenced. Orders were on the books for several more including a sixteen, a twenty-five, three thirty and two twenty horsepower engines, but as the Herald noted ‘from a scarcity of mechanics none of them will be completed this year’.

The Herald recognised the importance of steam power for its readership of large pastoralists and settlers. It informed them that colonial workshops were capable of producing engines up to sixty horsepower and boilers of any size, but bemoaned the lack of skilled engineers in the colony and the inevitable delays in production this led to. The steam engine was an answer to worker discipline, the high cost of the workers’ wages, and apparent labour shortages in the country districts. Calculating that each horsepower replaced the labour of more than six men, and hence the aggregate power of the colony’s steam engines approximated to three thousand, it stressed that ‘given the present urgent demand for labour the power of the steam-engines in the colony is a matter of considerable importance’. Unbeknown to the Herald, in the depression that was shortly to follow, demand for both labour and engines was to swiftly evaporate.

93 SH, 2 April 1841.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid.
97 Ibid.
Another development that was to have far-reaching implications for the trade took place in 1841 when Peter Nicol Russell (later Sir P. N. Russell) took over James Blanch’s workshop and foundry in George Street. Blanch had recently died, and his business included both iron and brass founding in addition to ship-smith’s and coppersmith’s work. When Russell purchased the foundry at auction, it was a typical artisan small workshop run by a master, two or three journeymen and a similar number of apprentices. Described as ‘one of the oldest and best establishments of the trade’, it swiftly resumed business. Trading as the Sydney Foundry it manufactured ship winches, pumps and windlasses, kitchen ranges, laundry stoves, fire-gratings, cast-iron balconies and palisades, and in early 1843 cast the boundary markers for the different wards of the city.

Russell’s acquisition presented a different future for the metal trades of Sydney. Although inevitable that market competition would eventually force the small master to adopt capitalist methods, Russell represented a new kind of larger scale, more acquisitive owner. By 1875, what was once Blanch’s small foundry had become Sydney’s largest engineering works, employing over a thousand workers. It encompassed a large waterfront area at Darling Harbour, and a warehouse and works that went from George Street through to York Street. With its demand for profitable return, it typified the emergent capitalist industrial workplace where innovation took second place to workplace organisation, discipline and efficiency. It also marked a move away from the artisan relations of the workshop. Russell was not a sympathetic employer, and unlike the small master craftsman-employer, had little in common with the workers, choosing not to work alongside them but to instead employ a works manager. In 1861 the works was closed for six weeks by a strike, and in 1875, after continual labour problems, Russell shut the works permanently in a fit of ideological pique—putting over a thousand men out of work and causing much distress in the trade.

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98 The Russell brothers were originally from Kirkcaldy, Scotland. They held a significant presence in the nineteenth-century Sydney metal industries. See Russell, ‘Sir Peter Nicol Russell’.
99 Sun, 1 April, 6 May 1843; Russell, ‘Sir Peter Nicol Russell’, p. 133.
100 Russell, ‘Sir Peter Nicol Russell’, p. 133, 136, 139.
101 Ibid; D. G. Laws and G. Wilson, Jacob Garrard. Sarasota, D. G. Laws, 2002, p. 50, 60; Buckley & Wheelwright, No Paradise for Workers, p. 69; K. D. Buckley, The Amalgamated Engineers in Australia, 1852-1920. Canberra, Australian National University, Department of Economic History, Research School of Social Sciences, 1970, pp. 43, 45-9. Contrary to P. H. Russell (pp. 138-9) Buckley (Amalgamated Engineers, p. 17) argued that the closure of the works had less to do with the eight-hour day than the realisation of assets for retirement.
The early 1840s had seen a fall in economic activity and a decline in the demand for mechanics and labourers. It heralded a full-blown depression which ravaged the maritime and building trades in particular.\textsuperscript{102} Initially the metal trades remained unaffected, with the demand for skilled labour exceeding supply and a seemingly permanent shortage of skilled mechanics. The shortage initially exacerbated stagnation; however a lack of orders and purchasers unable to fulfil their contractual obligations soon became apparent.\textsuperscript{103} Between 1835 and 1840 the number of factories of all types in New South Wales had increased from eighty-two to one hundred, but they swiftly dropped back to fifty-nine that year.\textsuperscript{104} In April 1841 William Bourne still advertised for millwrights, pattern-makers and smiths, but ominously at the same time William Orr of Sussex Street was trying to sell two engines as the intended buyers were unable to make payment. By 1843 both Russell Brothers and Bourne found themselves encumbered with expensive machinery lying uncompleted through lack of mechanics or broken contracts. Along with Dawson, they declared themselves insolvent.\textsuperscript{105}

The 1840s were a period of consolidation for Sydney’s metal trades. In the early 1830s millwrights and engineers undertook diverse engineering jobs, but as opportunities increased they diversified and specialised. The depression, which continued for much of the 1840s, subsequently forced the more inefficient out of business. Nevertheless many local workshops survived and even expanded. The millwright John Smith, for instance, moved from George Street to Sussex Street and turned to specialising in flour-making machinery and the manufacture of wire webbing. One of Smith’s former journeyman millwrights, the locally-born Henry Hough, capitalised on opportunities presented by steam-powered flour milling and left Smith’s employ to pursue milling full time.\textsuperscript{106} In 1846, after seven years at his Sussex Street premises, Orr purchased more ‘extensive and commodious premises’—the former Grose’s Wharf at the western end of Bathurst Street where he continued to ‘manufacture marine and land engines and all other machinery’.\textsuperscript{107} Struth maintained

\textsuperscript{102} In 1842 sixteen ship carpenters and boatbuilders declared themselves insolvent. Likewise fifteen builders and stonemasons, and four engineers. SMH, 3 January 1843.
\textsuperscript{103} SH, 2 April 1841.
\textsuperscript{104} Figures taken from a later assessment in SRNSW, 1865, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{105} SH, 2 April 1841; SMH, 3 January 1843; Russell, ‘Sir Peter Nicol Russell’, pp. 133-34; WR, 12 August 1843; Linge, \textit{Industrial Awakening}, pp. 92-5.
\textsuperscript{106} In 1847 Hough was producing flour both at Sussex Street and Waverley. LD, 1847.
\textsuperscript{107} LD, 1847.
his extensive workshops in Sussex Street, and despite the collapse of their Macquarie Place engineering business, the Russell brothers’ George Street foundry and Sussex Street engineering and boiler-making works survived.\(^\text{108}\)

Other survivors included Dingwall and Mair; Taylor’s Victoria Foundry; McLaren and Smith’s Newtown Foundry; and the works of both Young and Mather, and Rogers and Buller.\(^\text{109}\) By the late 1850s, a resurgent economy, the gold rush and the coming of the railways to Australia saw fifty-four engineers in Sydney, twelve foundries and eleven boiler-making workshops. Other specialist metal trades had also started to appear. These included the machinists’ workshops of John Chapman and Brothers, Drinkwater and Lee, and Storey and Ashton, and the machine toolmaker Charles Wood.\(^\text{110}\) Such specialist engineering services indicate a viable modern engineering industry in the city.

**Summary**

It has only been possible to present a sketch of Sydney’s early metal trades. In common with most of the city’s early mechanics they left little record of their lives, and with the exception of listings in trade directories, advertisements in local newspapers, census entries and the occasional mention in church records, little is known of their activities. What is known of their efforts however demonstrates a high level of skill, given the constraints under which they operated. Trades such as the millwright and engineer demanded a proficient working knowledge of mathematics and a high degree of accuracy in measurement and practice.\(^\text{111}\) Indicator diagrams of the type taken from Barker’s engine in 1860 are still used to calculate the power of modern engines.\(^\text{112}\) Dingwall, Struth, and their journeymen, were producing such machinery by the second half of the 1830s. Perhaps less refined than its European or American counterpart, such machinery was nevertheless at the forefront of Victorian technological development.

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\(^{109}\) *LD*, 1847.


Fig. 3: Early colonial steam engine. Believed manufactured at Russell Brothers Engine Works, Sussex Street, c.1845. (Picture Courtesy of Turon Technology Museum, Sofala, NSW).

Fig. 4: Indicator diagram taken from Thomas Barker’s flour-mill engine, c. 1860. (Picture courtesy of University of Sydney, Thomas Barker Papers).
With the exception of some specialised steels, these engines and their boilers were manufactured in their entirety by a handful of engineers in a remote colony with an official (white) population of 113,000.\textsuperscript{113} Almost all were small-scale enterprises or partnerships between independent craftsmen. Such small firms were often fluid and based on the exigencies of a small and fluctuating local market. The engineering firm of Rogers, McVey and Buller was typical. In late 1846, two years after first advertising the services provided by their Kent Street workshop, the boilermaker Andrew McVey returned to self-employment, and the partnership continued in new premises in nearby Gas Street as Rogers and Buller.\textsuperscript{114}

Struth and Dawson, although larger employers, perhaps even early ‘entrepreneurs’, were still master craftsmen that worked alongside their men. There was a unity of purpose—a ‘harmony of interest’—between master, journeyman and labourer, and it seemed that the opportunity for independence and a modest competence was still within reach for most of the trade’s mechanics. P. N. Russell, the capitalist, remained the exception. Struth offers the example of the successful journeyman engineer and millwright; a man who never sought fortune or political influence but devoted his life to his trade, and in the process helped establish a modern engineering industry in the colony. Having achieved pecuniary success through his work, he then gave most of his fortune away. The fact that such men were able to complete specialised engineering projects indicates the presence of a significant body of morally upright, highly skilled, literate and numerate people in the colony.

At a wider level the metal trades offer an example of the skill levels involved in craft production of any kind. Although such skills fostered fierce craft parochialism, each trade existed within a wider community of small-scale and diverse urban producers. As will be discussed, it formed an idealistic relationship with the small agricultural producer’s efforts to improve the productivity of the land. Through their producerist perspective both believed with certainty that their labour laid the foundations for Australia’s future. The cities of Australia and their streets and suburbs might be named after members of the British and colonial ruling elite, but it was the labour of such artisans as David Dingwall, John Struth, John Taylor and Donald McKinnon and their mechanics and labourers that were the true source of the

\textsuperscript{113} Butlin, Colonial Economy, p. 34.
\textsuperscript{114} Sentinel, 8 January 1845; LD, 1847.
colony’s wealth, stature and progress. It was a view that stood in contrast to the backward-looking colonial pseudo-aristocracy who were using their wealth and power to monopolise the land and turn Australia into a giant sheep-pen. ‘If a country has neither manufactures nor agriculture’ stated the Scots-born carpenter William Robertson in 1860, ‘it cannot be expected to prosper’.\footnote{NSWLA, SCCWC, 1860, Minutes of Evidence, p. 1409.} It was views such as this that were reflected in the colony’s radical politics.
Chapter 8
Australian Utopia: a Producer’s Commonwealth under the Southern Cross

Our object is the growth of a great nation, of which our prosperity is to form a part,—not to pamper a small faction who would appropriate the whole continent to their uses. ¹

This and the following three chapters set out to demonstrate the presence of a producerist perspective among the working people of 1840s colonial New South Wales. The overall conclusion drawn is that while such a presence indeed existed by the 1840s, its political impact was tempered by the influence of middle-class radicals who channelled working-class radicalism into their struggle for democracy and political reform. Before analysis of this mid-century producerism it is therefore first necessary to provide context by briefly describing the economic and political dynamics of a struggle for wealth, power and control of the state between the mercantile and commercial middle classes and the large landholders that took place during the first half of the nineteenth century. ²

From a purely producerist perspective, politics could be described as the struggle between different social groups for relative economic advantage. But in New South Wales, as elsewhere, politics was a broader, more complex and multifaceted affair, with the differing political and economic objectives of the various groups involved overlaid by religious and other affiliations, prejudices and differences of opinion. Nevertheless most opinion of how the new country should develop and how its land and resources should be utilised tended to crystallise around three main economic concepts: the pastoralism of the established landowners and squatters, the entrepot economy of the city merchants, and the producerism of the urban mechanics and rural small-holders.

Even the radical People’s Advocate reluctantly admitted that wool dominated the early New South Wales economy and its export formed the main source of

¹ WR, 26 August 1843.
² There is ample literature on the subject of the development of capitalism and class relations in Australia. This study takes the work of Buckley and Wheelwright, Wells, and Connell and Irving as its central references. It is from these works that the following paragraphs are drawn. Buckley & Wheelwright, No Paradise for Workers; Wells, Constructing Capitalism; Connell and Irving, Class Structure in Australian History.
The wealth and status of the wool-growers gave them political power which they shared with the British colonial administrators. The politically active among the rest of colonial society believed this power allowed them to monopolise the land, perpetuate the exclusion of the producing classes, and so reinforce wool’s dominance. The conservative pastoralists in turn argued that they were the colony’s main producers, that their activities generated the colony’s wealth by bringing in foreign currency and attracting further investment. The wool that they produced fed the insatiable mills of Northern England and returned significant profits to the colony. Consequently they believed it was their interests that should maintain priority and the state should primarily serve their interest. To maintain exports and competitiveness in this pastoral economy it was essential to have cheap labour and a free-trade environment where costs and tariffs on imported machinery were minimised or non-existent.

The city merchants on the other hand worked on the economic principle of comparative advantage. They bought cheap and sold dear. They were the middlemen that profited through the import of goods and manufactured items. They rose to prominence in local city politics, and with the big city lawyers, bankers and entrepreneurs formed a liberal urban bourgeoisie. While they shared self interest and a belief in the free-market economy with the pastoralist, their interests lay in the greater opportunity provided by expansion of the free economy rather than the limited opportunities and demand provided by a sparsely populated pastoral economy. Politically the two remained at loggerheads, and economic differences between sections of the urban bourgeoisie and the working classes were set aside in the interest of the former’s challenge for control of the state.

Finally there were the manufacturing, agricultural and working sections of the community. These ‘producing classes’ maintained that they could erect a self-sustaining local economy by utilising productive manual labour to increase the colony’s assets. Their perspective saw Australia confronting the choice of either becoming a fully developed nation in its own right or remaining little more than a sheep-run serviced by cheap imports. It offered progress through local manufacture

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1 PA, 6 January 1849; Connell and Irving, *Class Structure*, p. 66. Pastoralism, especially in its guise as the squattting system, described the raising of sheep for wool through what the *People’s Advocate* of 30 December 1854 described as ‘the licensed occupation of extensive tracts of Waste Land at a mere nominal yearly rent’. Another early feature was its use of cheap, government-assigned, convict labour.

rather than the stasis of wool-growing or simple importation. More protectionist than
the pastoralists and merchants, it was a belief that the colony would be best served by
developing a productive capacity sufficient for its eventual economic self-sufficiency.
Local distiller and ‘friend of the working classes’ Robert ‘Old Bob’ Cooper thus
offered himself as a candidate for the Legislative Council on the basis of supporting
any measure that would encourage colonial manufacture, while advertisements to
this effect placed by local tradesmen urged colonists to ‘Advance Australia’ and,
‘Encourage Colonial Manufacture’. Greater independence, a sense of nationhood,
and higher standing within the British Empire, or even outside of it if necessary,
would only be achieved through a viable mixed economy with a degree of self-
sufficiency.

The colony’s principal means of advancement would be through the activities
of the urban manufacturing sector. The investment of capital in manufacturing rather
than wool production would advance the colony’s technological capabilities, reduce
its reliance on imports, and so positively affect its trade balance. In the event of war
it would not have to rely on others for essential goods and machinery. The radical
Star demanded that capital be invested in productive enterprise and not sit in lethargy
or remain content to pursue ‘the old beaten track’ of wool growing. Ten years later
the Advocate too declared that capital be set to productive use in the employment of
the ‘labourer and artizan’ through the erection of buildings and improvements,
establishment of manufacture, and the development of the colony’s resources. Turning over the colony’s huge tracts of unimproved land to agricultural production
would ensure self-sufficiency in food and other commodities at the same time
stimulating demand for the development of infrastructure. This was how the wealth
of nations was built.

Migrants seeking the opportunity for the independence and competence that
was increasingly denied them under the wage-slavery of British industrial capitalism
brought this outlook with them to New South Wales. It drew on long-standing
traditions of community, moral and mutual obligation, and independence yet
interdependence. It stood in contrast to both the conservatism and liberal
individualism of those that constituted the upper echelons of New South Wales

5 Sun, 15 April, 20 May 1843; Guardian, 27 April 1844.
6 CL, 15 September 1832.
7 Star, 1 March 1845; PA, 28 October 1854.
The producers’ community was fixed to the soil, self-sufficient, often inward-looking and characterised by mutualism. Any attempt at building such a community would be threatened if, driven by self-interest and greed, some sought to bring in outsiders as cheap labour. Looking to America, they hoped to erect a similar but uniquely Australian version of the ‘Great Republic’. Conveniently overlooking American slavery, they pictured a similar white ‘commonwealth of labour’ under the Southern Cross; free from transported or coloured slave labour, grasping aristocrats, middlemen, placemen, and other hangers-on. It was an ideal commonwealth where the fruits of their labour would remain their own.

If early America provided the model for a producers’ utopia, then Britain was its dystopia. America was the land where ‘the worn out exclusive systems of the old world’ were absent. A man needed very little money to become a ‘landed proprietor’, and as a result ‘almost everyone is independent of the will and favour of another for subsistence’. It was a visit to the United States in 1840 that changed Australia’s J. D. Lang from Malthusian conservative to its most well-known early radical republican. The well-fed, well-ordered communities of small farmers and urban mechanics imbued with a sense of civic pride and responsibility that Lang observed in the early United States contrasted sharply with the overcrowding, squalor and misery of contemporary Britain. Like America, Australia was a vast and empty land with enormous potential, and the remainder of Lang’s life was defined by his ambition to bring the British workman and Australian continent together on the American example.

In America producerism provided a bulwark against the challenge to republican principles from the increasing political power of American capitalism, whereas in New South Wales it bolstered demands that government provide the

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8 See for example Martin, Parkes, pp. 99-100.
9 CL, 8 December 1832; New South Wales Magazine, January 1843; PA, 16 December 1848. This was a somewhat naïve and romantic view of American life. By the time the Advocate was offering such descriptions they were already outdated. In the America of the late 1840s the best land had long since been taken. What was left was considered an option of last resort to the urban mechanics of the Eastern seaboard—to be taken only in hard times. For those that knew, ‘the horrors of wilderness life’ held little appeal. Wilentz, Chants Democratic, p. 341.
10 Baker, ‘Lang’, ‘I think if we had a good administration of the public lands, such as the American system, for the last ten years, the people would have been in a much better position now’. Statement given by William Cox of Parramatta in evidence to the Select Committee on the Conditions of the Working Classes in Sydney (1860). Cox’s opinion was common to many of the mechanics that gave evidence including engineer John Garrod White; George Brown, a master builder; Edward James, a tailor and William Robertson, a carpenter. The People’s Advocate often referred to the American example. See also Dobeson, Out of Work Again, p. 19.
necessary conditions for the establishment of a small-producer economy. During the
depression of the 1840s a local blacksmith was typical in believing that ‘working
tradespeople’ would be greatly assisted if the government encouraged agriculture. Not only
would it ‘increase the produce of the country’ but would keep men employed in the manufacture of tools. He also argued the case for local iron smelting, believing an abundance of local ore: ‘it would be an advantage to work our own metal’ he told legislators, ‘it would give employment to a great many men’. In a letter to the Sun, ‘Simon Simple’ argued that only by encouraging local manufacture would the mechanics and labourers of the colony be employed. All should endeavour to purchase locally produced articles, even if of a lower quality than imports, to maintain employment and retain wealth in the colony.

In representing the opinions of these tradesmen, the Star demanded that government encourage the development of the colony’s vast resources through industry and agriculture. It would both provide work and increase the wealth of the country at large. Scrutiny revealed that of the list of imported goods many could be made locally. Sugar and flax could be readily cultivated, colonial tobacco had the potential to rival that of America, the Australian bush had the castor oil plant in abundance and its earth was filled with valuable ores. Goods need not be imported, and wealth thereby sent from the colony, when these imports could be replaced with locally produced items and the colony’s revenue increased. Australian sugar should be equal to imported sugar, locally produced wine and brandy the equal of the French and Portuguese. There was no reason why glass, cloth and linen could not be made in the colony. Were it the case then Sydney would be alive to the sound of the artisan working his trade instead of his wandering dejectedly through the streets looking for menial employment and acting as a burden on the community.

But such demands fell on deaf ears, and the colonial government dominated by British administrators and wool-growers continued to obstruct the development of a small-producer economy by denying cheap land to free settlers. Wool-growers in particular demanded the British government facilitate the immigration of quiescent agricultural labourers, not free settlers and radical mechanics. The Currency Lad of

11 SCDML, p. 20.
12 Sun, 20 May, 1843.
1832 demanded to know how Australia was to progress if all its productive workers were forced wool-gathering into the interior as demanded by the pastoralists. In a true democracy any legislature unwilling to instigate the wishes of the majority would see its members replaced by those more sympathetic, but in the New South Wales of the 1840s such remedy was blocked by the property qualification on voting rights.

**Land for the People**

Land, and the independence it offered, was an important deciding factor in the ultimate destination of the British migrant. Although a land of much promise, free-settler migration to Australia remained inconsistent chiefly because the colonial land regulations effectively denied land to the ordinary migrant by maintaining artificially high prices. Cheaper rates of passage, a less daunting voyage, and the promise of free access to land instead saw most British migrants head to America. There the mechanic could achieve his independence through the subsistence offered by ownership of a small farm, supplement his income through his craft, and build his competence. According to the *Advocate* a thousand migrants a day arrived in New York and immediately struck out for ‘a farm, a homestead, and independence’—impossible in Australia under the current land regulations. Mrs Chisholm might speak of the Macarthur's as good masters, and of the good wages available in the colony, the Boyds and their British agents also—but what of the land that ‘every emigrant to America expects’?

The issue of access to land was a crucial strand of producer radicalism and deemed essential to the establishment of a productive commonwealth. The small farmer would improve the land through cultivation and provide urban manufacturers and mechanics with both food and a market for their products. It would foster a proud and productive community fixed to the soil. But instead of building a powerful ‘republic of labour’ founded on the ambition and productive endeavour of the

14 CL, 15 September 1832; SCDML, passim.
15 As Marx pointed out, so far as British legislators were concerned the free market did not extend to land prices. Thus while the wages of the workmen were subject to ‘the sacred law of supply and demand’, the artificially high price of the land that the workmen sought to acquire violated that same sacred law. Marx, *Capital Vol. 1*, pp. 722-3.
16 Laurie, ‘Master Mechanics and the Market’, p. 53. This ‘bi-employment’ was acknowledged by Marx as one of the principal reasons for the absence of capitalist relations in the early American Republic. Marx, *Capital Vol. 1*, pp. 719-20.
17 PA, 16 December 1848.
producing classes, the ruling classes of New South Wales sought instead to reduce
the migrant to a waged-labourer in a plantation-type economy. 18 Denying men access
to the land and the means to provide for themselves meant that they were crowded
into the cities, driving down urban wages and creating conditions of poverty, disease
and wretchedness. In place of a proud and productive commonwealth there would
stand a replica of the old country, complete with aristocrat and placeman.

Like America, Australia held out the promise of land and a producers’ republic
if only the parasites of the old world could be denied a foothold. But on arrival
migrants were confronted with a land-owning elite that was already firmly
entrenched and in the process of acquiring ever more land. Through murder and theft
the ‘bunyip aristocracy’ had gained huge tracts of land in Australia under the so-
called squatting system. 19 The waste lands of Australia, supposedly the common
property of the whole British people, were ‘monopolized by the few’. 20 Huge areas
beyond government boundaries were fenced off and cleared, the indigenous peoples
driven out, shot or poisoned, and the land turned over to pastoral activity. 21 The
‘squattocracy’ responsible subsequently assumed control of the colonial legislature
through property qualification, while the producing classes had little say in the
running of the colony. 22 Migrants and locally-born alike were governed by new ‘land
lords’, who by disreputable means had seized the land ‘which belonged to the
people’ and ‘by force, by fraud and by stratagem everywhere reduced the masses to

18 The idea of a ‘republic of labour’ is explored in Schultz, Republic of Labor. A number of pointers to
the idea appear in early British radical papers. Politics for the People for example reprinted ‘A Song
for Mechanics’:
Come muster my lads, your mechanical tools,
Your saws and your axes, your hammers and rules,
Bring your mallets and planes, your level and line,
And plenty of pins of American pine.
For our roof we will raise, and our song still shall be
A government firm, and our citizens free…’ PFP, vol. 2, no. 5, 1794.
Another example, ‘The Happiness of America’ linked labour, the soil and independence:
The active swain, who turns the fertile soil,
Whilst health and manly vigour crown his toil,
Enjoys what thrones of monarchs can’t impart’
Peace, independence, and a joyous heart’. PFP, vol. 2, no. 12, 1794.
19 PA, 9 December, 16 December 1848, 6 January 1849. The Advocate (30 December 1854) described
the squatting system as ‘the licensed occupation of extensive tracts of Waste Land for pastoral
purposes at a mere nominal yearly rent’.
20 PA, 30 December 1854. Australia’s Aborigines remained invisible to the Advocate.
21 AC, 14 January 1840, 18 February 1840; Sun, 6 May 1843; WR, 16 September 1843; Bulletin, 19
June 1880.
22 PA, 13 January 1849. For left historical analysis see: Connell and Irving, Class Structure, pp. 32-
107; Wells, Constructing Capitalism, pp. 12-81.
the condition of serfs’, while the hated laws of primogeniture saw colonial offices filled by the useless second sons of the British aristocracy. 23

In the early 1830s a visiting French sea captain could therefore write of ‘a crowd of nobles, the younger sons of the most illustrious families, of Great Britain’, who had obtained vast tracts of land, or were ‘the principal employés of the Government’, taking the lead in society, and occupying ‘the same relative position, as that held by their families in England’. 24 It seemed that the outmoded systems of the old world were being replicated in the new. When the London Times suggested that British institutions be planted in the Australia of 1848, the Advocate scornfully suggested that by ‘British institutions’ the Times meant ‘a landed aristocracy’. In the Advocate’s opinion Australia was to provide a colonial refuge for a useless aristocracy because Canada, although a sparsely populated British colony like Australia, was neighbour to the ‘great republic’ and so it would be far too dangerous to impose upon Canadians ‘the worn out exclusive systems of the old world.’ There was already apprehension that under the existing legislature and its land laws, pastoralist leaseholders would gain immense landholdings far easier than ‘did the followers of the Norman William the estates of the Saxons’; hence, declared the Advocate, ‘in new-born Australia is to be renewed one of the worst characteristics of a past and imperfect civilisation, that which arose by the tyranny of the sword, and has been perpetuated through the ignorance of the people’. 25 The Norman Yoke was to be reimposed under the Australian sun.

According to the Weekly Register there was too much squatting and not enough colonisation. The squatters, although looked on by their apologists as ‘pioneers of civilization’ and ‘large contributors to Colonial wealth’, were seen by radicals such as the paper’s editor William Duncan as ‘reckless and unprincipled scramblers after wealth’ whose views on the public lands stood at odds with social justice. 26 ‘Squatting beyond the boundaries has proved to be a brutalizing occupation’, he wrote. The squatter, although of polished appearance and refined manners-about-town, was, behind the Cambridge-educated veneer of refinement and civilisation, a person whose views on the indigenous peoples would ‘make a

23 PA, 9 December 1848, 6 January 1849, 23 December 1854.
24 New South Wales Magazine, January 1843.
25 PA, 16 December 1848.
26 WR, 16 September 1843. For Duncan see, M. Payten. William Augustine Duncan, 1811-1885, a Biography of an Australian Reformer. MA, University of New South Wales, 1965.
Christian shudder’. The ‘outrages’ that they perpetrated beyond the boundaries were both frequent and ferocious, and the murders committed ‘cry to heaven for redress, if not the abolition of the entire system’. Their cruelty brought ‘shame and disgrace’, and ‘may yet bring heavy judgements against the Colony’.27 Three years earlier, Duncan had responded to the Herald’s call for Aboriginal extermination with ‘indignation and horror’.28 Along with another radical, James McEachern, he was one of the few newspaper editors of the early period sympathetic to the indigenous peoples. This was a subject upon which most others remained almost totally silent.29

It appeared obvious to many that denial of land by the British Colonial Office at the behest of a pastoralist-dominated New South Wales Legislative Council was responsible for the artificial creation of a labouring class in the colony. Denying migrants land forced them to labour for others. In 1848 the Advocate called for the colonists to recognise that it was the land regulations that were a disincentive for free migrants.30 A contemporary mechanic, Alexander Harris, also observed that the colony’s land regulations suited only the large landholding upper classes ‘from whom the legislators of the colony are drawn’.31 They thus ‘coercively construct an immensely larger labouring class than otherwise would exist in the colony’ he wrote.32 It was a view shared by J. D. Lang. In a letter to the Advocate written in 1854, he stated that the mechanics of Sydney still displayed the tendency to overly frequent the tavern and held no sense of civic pride or responsibility—but they were not to blame. Harking back to his American visit, he attributed the drunkenness and apathy not to any defect of character or morals on the part of the mechanic, but instead to the denial of land to the people. Both he and Harris argued that were land grants made available then not just the mechanic, but the labouring classes of Sydney generally, would have greater incentive to ignore the tavern.33 As the Advocate stated, ‘the price of land must be reduced to its real value’ and given over to the people.34

27 Ibid.
28 AC, 18 February 1840.
30 PA, 16 December 1848.
31 Harris, Settlers and Convicts, p. 224.
32 Ibid.
34 PA, 9 December 1848.
It was both an absurdity and an injustice that a land filled with nature’s gifts and riches should remain in the hands of a few ‘lords of the soil’ while the masses were left to earn their bread through ‘unceasing toil’ argued the Advocate. In the old country and Ireland this great social evil was the result of the ‘wicked, unnatural and unholy’ laws of primogeniture. The operation of this social device saw the first sons of the aristocracy inherit the entire estate of the father and the subsequent male children, according to the Advocate, ‘cast upon the state’ to be provided for through government places, the army, navy or church. The effect was to concentrate the ownership of the land in a few hands, while simultaneously denying the professions to the ‘sons of the people’. Thus to accommodate these ‘idle and worthless candidates…places are created, systems adopted, and taxes imposed, which would otherwise be altogether unnecessary’. In Australia the Crown Land Regulations were equally as ‘wicked’ and ‘oppressive’ and had the same effect. The squatters, while not holding the land in fee simple, nevertheless had it locked up for many years, thus retaining a monopoly on a land ‘wrongfully taken from the people to whom it belongs, and however urgent may be their necessities, it cannot be opened to them’. The only solution was to abolish the squatting system, reduce the price of land to its real value, and allow the man of small means to become a ‘proprietor of the soil’.

Radical papers such as the Advocate believed first and foremost in land reform as a remedy for the economic gloom of the 1840s. A community of small agriculturalists supported by local artisans and mechanics would enable self-sufficiency and guarantee full employment. If men could not obtain the employment to provide them with food for themselves and their families, then they should be given the means to cultivate the waste lands. Land should be improved, not left lying idle while men starved. Speculation in land locked up both land and capital, both of which should be put to productive endeavour. Driving up land prices through speculation caused the community as a whole and the working classes in particular to suffer materially. Rent, and as a consequence every article of consumption, was increased in price. An earlier incarnation of the Star, the Sun, suggested that those holding large areas of uncultivated land should be compelled to either employ

35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
38 PA, 28 October 1854.
starving immigrants to clear and cultivate it, or be taxed on such ‘idle and 
unprofitable land’. Such a scheme would increase the agricultural produce of the 
colony and therefore its overall wealth and well-being. Trade would increase and the 
colony would become prosperous and independent, and rest on foundations so firm 
that ‘the evil machinations of the whole tribe of land-sharks, speculators, and 
monopolists’ would be unable to shake it.  

Australia was a vast and empty land with boundless potential for productive 
activity and the generation of wealth, and sitting behind calls for the taxation of 
uncultivated land was the producerist notion that it should be put to work. Minerals 
and other raw materials should be extracted and put to productive use. Land put to 
aricultural use required development and thereby increased its overall value to the 
community. On both counts, land made productive was a contribution to progress. Its 
utility in feeding the people and in providing the raw materials for local industry 
would reduce the demand for imports and contribute to the wealth and well-being of 
the whole. Wealth would remain in the colony and be spread equitably, not be 
transferred to British merchants and manufacturers or accumulate in the pockets of 
the pastoralist. Leaving huge tracts of land idle or as sheep-runs benefited only the 
speculator and rich pastoralist.  

Making the land productive was a theme continually re-emphasised. Subsequent issues of the Sun demanded ‘the imposition of a tax upon waste 
land…land left lying in an unprofitable and unproductive state’, while a 
correspondent, ‘Z’, concurred, adding that the revenue from such a land tax could be 
used to open up the interior by improving the infrastructure. The interior could then 
be filled with industrious families, the cultivation of the vine, olive, and mulberry 
encouraged, and, most importantly, ‘raise up a respectable middle-class [to] 
counteract the immense political influence of our great flockmasters and would-be

39 Sun, 25 February 1843. It is interesting to note that this sentiment, particularly with respect to the 
notion of a tax on uncultivated land, preceded the work of Henry George by several decades. The core 
of the George thesis was that land improvement through building and cultivation rightly enabled the 
owner to claim an increase in the value of his land. However land value that increased without 
 improvement, purely by some form of association with the nearby more productive or valuable land, 
enabled the owner to live on unearned increment. Land speculators inhibited development by 
purchasing land and then leaving it lying, waiting to profit as the surrounding land was developed and 
subsequently increased in value. Taxing this unearned increment would force those who wanted to 
make a profit away from land speculation into the financing of more socially useful productive 
enterprises, while releasing the land to development. It was remarkably similar to the view of the 
Australian radical papers of the 1840s. George, Progress and Poverty.

40 AC, 8 December 1840.

41 Sun, 11 March 1843.
The Advocate too saw land reform as a means to independence, but it also emphasised it as a means through which the producer would keep the fruits of his toil. Australia held enormous potential for progress. In ridding it of its land regulations and reducing the price of land to its true value, the vast wastes of the country would be populated by thousands of small farmers cultivating all manner of crops. The land would consequently be improved, its resources developed, and the ‘grasping’ ‘aristocratic’ and ‘unproductive’ overlords denied the means of abstracting its wealth. Australia would advance and no longer rely for its existence on one commodity. It would be self-sufficient in basic foodstuffs. Urban manufacturing would be encouraged through demand for tools and add to the colony’s collective wealth while full employment would replace the current misery. ‘Let the system of small farms be everywhere encouraged’, it declared in 1849, ‘and then the mechanic and artizan will have nothing to complain of’.  

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42 Sun, 4 March 1843.  
43 PA, 16 December 1848.  
44 PA, 6 January 1849.
Chapter 9

‘The People’ and a ‘Harmony of Interest’

The People, the working bees of the social hive, must have those rights restored to them which for long and weary ages have been withheld.¹

As mentioned above, the early colonial economy was defined by pastoralism—the turning over of vast tracts of land for the production of wool for export. Labour was initially cheap, being provided by government in the form of convict assignment. It was essentially a plantation-type economy with forced labour servicing the large estates of the flockmasters. A Legislative Council set up in 1823 was dominated by the British colonial administration, but when enlarged in 1842, saw the pastoral interest steadily assert ascendency through its increasing economic influence. Yet it was a ruling class divided. The British governor George Gipps and several key members of the colonial administration often displayed sympathy to liberal reform, where the pastoral interest remained steadfastly opposed.² From the 1820s the embryonic working and middle classes, whose numbers increased steadily through immigration, had also laid the foundations of a growing free local economy. By the 1840s the urban merchants, professionals, and the few larger manufacturers associated with this free economy had begun to dominate Sydney’s urban politics and felt able to challenge for control of the state. It was a challenge that needed the popular support of the working classes, and although according to Hume most chose not to participate in formal politics, they were prepared to trade political support for the promise of improved economic opportunity.³

To mobilise for change, middle-class colonial radicals sought to convince the working classes that they had common enemies and that union would be in the economic interest of both.⁴ This was achieved through promoting the doctrine of the ‘harmony (or ‘community’) of interest’ alongside the wider populist concept of ‘the

¹ PA, 21 July 1849.
² On his departure for Britain at the end of his term as governor, Gipps was described by the Sydney Morning Herald as the worst in the colony’s history. As the organ of the large landholder its focus of attack was on his interpretation and administration of the Crown Lands Act. It welcomed the arrival of his successor Charles FitzRoy, while warning him not to behave in a similar fashion. SMH, 13 July 1846.
⁴ For more in-depth analysis of this union see Irving, Southern Tree of Liberty, pp. 200-216.
people’. The ‘harmony of interest’ was common across the Anglo-Celtic world. It held that both worker and employer shared a common interest in human progress through useful endeavour, and that the prosperity or ruin of each was dependent on the other. At a time when the social and geographic differences between the typical artisan-manufacturer and his mechanics remained small, such harmony was easy to maintain. ‘The people’ as a social construct further sought to unite middle-class commercial and mercantile interests with small farmers, shop-keepers and local manufacturers, and the working-class mechanics and labourers as the populist ‘useful classes’ that stood against the ‘parasitic’ ruling classes. ‘One of the IDLERS of June 1849’ described them in a letter to the Advocate as:

Those who have invented new improvements in agriculture, who have made roads and cut canals, to whose wisdom we are indebted for the knowledge of gas and steam, who have built steam engines and steamships, laid down railroads connecting city to city, the greatest producers of national wealth. 

Radical artisans featured prominently in local politics alongside the middle classes and many, such as Parkes, continued to regard co-operation between the two as the key to reform and progress. Parkes, strongly influenced by Chartism and the Birmingham Political Union, had arrived in Sydney in 1839 from the radical hotbed of Birmingham—the ‘metropolis of the small master’. Like London and the cities of the American eastern seaboard it was a centre of artisan production and of strong independent radical heritage. Driven by the traditional artisan desire for self-improvement he sought the opportunities offered by a new land and within a short space of his arrival he had immersed himself in local radical politics, writing for Duncan’s Australasian Chronicle and Edward Hawksley’s People’s Advocate. Another mechanic, London-born upholsterer Benjamin Sutherland, also figured prominently in early colonial radical politics, helping form the Mutual Protection Association (MPA) and editing its mouthpiece, the Guardian.

5 A well known proponent was the American H. C. Carey (1793-1879).
6 Connell and Irving note the importance of the doctrine of ‘progress’ in the context of urban Australian artisan radicalism. Connell and Irving, Class Structure, p. 67.
7 PA, 24 August 1850. The ‘idlers of June 1849’ referred to those attending a demonstration by the middle and working classes against the re-introduction of transportation—those that the ruling classes believed should have been working instead of protesting.
8 The MPA was formed on the 5th September 1843, and by mid-November of that year had 439 fully paid-up members plus many others unpaid. The majority were mechanics and labourers, however there were a sizeable number of urban employers—representing at least one-third of the committee—
Although on the surface the central issue was universal franchise, essentially it was one of middle-class challenge for control of the state. Within the class coalition constructed to this end, middle-class dominance saw most radical rhetoric assume a largely political character aimed at constitutional reform, while the potentially divisive workers’ producerism remained subdued, threatening as it was to the more fragile economic aspects of the relationship. Producerism as a popular form of economic analysis could be introduced by the radical press in support of the middle-class challenge, but as the most potent form of challenge to ruling-class hegemony it needed to be used with caution. Its economic principles could just as easily be turned against many sections of the middle class, hence the early focus on land and taxation rather than profit. Instead, working-class attention was diverted into other less worrisome concerns. Seizing on worker anxiety over the threat to jobs, wages and conditions from cheap labour, or demanding the provision of public works to reduce unemployment, provided more useful focal points for the mobilisation of the workers than notions surrounding the ‘productive classes’. To this end many prominent urban middle-class radicals busied themselves in organising workers’ meetings and petitions against transportation or the importation of cheap Asian or British pauper labour.

Early colonial radicalism remained framed in terms of Old Corruption, where aristocrat and placeman fattened at the expense of socially useful productive labour. For this reason the large land-holding pastoralists, as both employers and members of the ruling class, received most invective from the radical press. Described in typical Anglo-American radical rhetoric as an ‘overbearing oligarchy’, a ‘haughty aristocracy’, or the specifically Australian ‘Botany Bay-’, ‘bunyip-’, or ‘pseudo-aristocracy’, like their British counterparts they were seen as a collection of idle and useless drones that monopolised both the land and political power for profit and self-advantage. But despite a sometimes vigorous critique there was no challenge offered to either the economic or social structure, or indeed the system of parliamentary government. It was more a case of replacing the interests of one group with another rather than overhaul of the institutions themselves. Working-class radicals in

and a number of city councillors including Messrs. Taylor, Brown, Thurlow, Driver, Jenkins and Coyle. The Association’s stated aim was to watch over the interests of the working class, encourage colonial produce and manufactures, and send upright members to the Legislative and City Councils. Meetings were held weekly. SCDML, p. 6; WR, 23 September 1843.

particular failed to recognise that the emergent capitalist system of social relations itself was the cause of any lack of opportunity. They instead believed that their cause would be remedied through capture of the system. Like their British counterparts, Australian radical workers of the period were convinced by the middle classes that their exploitation was not systemic, but based on political exclusion. It was the absence of political power that stifled economic opportunity, and it would be through universal adult suffrage that the economic prosperity of both classes would emerge. It was a fairly easy conclusion to reach, given that the majority during the period were excluded from participating in political life, and visibly witnessed both the pastoral and British colonial interest use control of the state for personal aggrandisement.

Early analysis from the *Monitor* suggested that from the colony’s very inception the British government was intent on sending ‘bishops, curates, majors and lieutenants…in lieu of farmers, merchants and useful mechanics’, because the former were ‘fed by the government’ and ‘by their nature detest constitutional freedom’.  

Demands for democratic self-government in the interest of the people appeared early in the colony’s history, and although the Legislative Council was established in 1828, it could hardly be considered representative with members appointed by the governor from the landholding colonial elite. Expanding the Council in 1842 to include some directly elected members and the transfer of power to make colonial law and control revenues did little to increase popular democracy. Subject as it was to significant property qualification, in effect it only served to increase the power of the landed interest. It did indeed look like a colonial offshoot of Old Corruption.

To the chagrin of early radicals the pastoralists regarded universal suffrage as a threat to their interest and continually frustrated attempts at its introduction, while the colonial administration remained at best lukewarm. Radical opposition utilised an element of producerist rhetoric to reinforce the notion that both were using their position for self-aggrandisement at the expense of the people—locking up the land and denying it to the people, or drawing excessively on the public taxes. The radical republican and nationalist *Currency Lad* regarded the large wool-growers as ‘a set of men…whose interests clash with the interests of the people’, they were

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10 *Monitor*, 3 November 1826.

11 The sale of crown lands and the salaries of British administrators however remained under British control.
‘vampires…glutting their voracious appetite on our hearts’ blood…whose arrogance and influence are supported by our exertions’.\textsuperscript{12} It was infuriated when attempts to broaden colonial suffrage failed in the British Parliament through what it considered the ‘base, cowardly, and detestable machinations’ of the pastoralists’ and their London agents. The same charges were repeated in April 1836 by McEachern’s \textit{Commercial Journal} on the occasion of another petition to the British Parliament. Again the pastoralists were accused of using their position in the Legislative Council to monopolise political power in the colony, erecting a ‘factious oligarchy’ so odious that even direct autocratic rule by the Governor was preferable.\textsuperscript{13} The \textit{People’s Advocate} later wrote that this inevitably led to ‘class legislation’, because as long as the legislature remained in the hands of ‘a dastardly, overbearing, and greedy oligarchy’ engaged in ‘wholesale robbery of the public lands’ the people would never be properly represented.\textsuperscript{14}

The remaining opposition to full colonial democracy came from those British government ministers who, according to the \textit{Currency Lad}, did not want to see patronage of their ‘hungry dependents and favourites’ diminished. Paid for by colonial revenue, it was a colonial outpost of Old Corruption that displayed all of its familiar vices. These administrators, unaccountable to the people, were pictured to readers as ‘high-salaried foreigners…lolling in their coaches—rioting in the sweat of your brow’. It was a situation typical of taxation without representation, and British administrators were reminded of what had happened when such demands were ignored in America.\textsuperscript{15}

American government was cheap in comparison with the British colonies. As the \textit{Currency Lad} explained, it was a claim ‘worn out by frequent repetition’. In America the reward of office was honorary rather than fiscal, yet with the exception of the President, the Colonial Secretary of New South Wales received a higher salary than any member of the American government. Such placemen, so lavishly rewarded, were useless ‘drones’, ‘vampires’ and ‘tumours’ on the state. They ‘vied with each

\textsuperscript{12} CL, 24 November 1832. The failed petition, presented to the British Parliament by Henry Lytton Bulwer, is described in detail in a supplement to the same edition. The \textit{Currency Lad} was a short-lived and ‘robustly vulgar’ paper published by Horatio Wills, step-brother to Robert Howe. Its intention was to assert the rights of the native-born, particularly with respect to land grants and government office (11 May 1833). It had a circulation of 500. Walker, \textit{Newspaper Press}, p. 29.

\textsuperscript{13} CJ, 16 April 1836.

\textsuperscript{14} PA, 6 January 1849.

\textsuperscript{15} CL, 24 November 1832.
other in keeping a dazzling pageantry’ in their endeavour to support ‘imaginary
dignity and rank’. Such pomp and ceremony was paid for by taxing the colonists in a
manner little different to the taxation that was the source of misery and wretchedness
in the mother country.\footnote{CL, 17 November 1832.} Hence the \textit{Currency Lad} looked forward to the day when
mankind abolished monarchy, and ‘cheap and wise’ republican government assumed
its place.\footnote{CL, 20 October 1832.} Republican government would act in the interests of the people. It would
enact wise laws that would enable the people to retain the fruits of their labour
instead of giving them up in taxes to support idle drones.

Government revenue figures published by the \textit{Weekly Register} of August 1843
revealed that by far the largest source of taxation was indirect, and fell inordinately
on the working classes. These taxes on traded goods and the necessities of life
amounted to £238,204, in comparison to direct taxes of £39,576.\footnote{WR, 26 August 1843.} It led Duncan to
previously declare Australia the worst represented and highest taxed country on
earth.\footnote{AC, 21 January 1840.} The \textit{Monitor} had also pointed out that indirect consumption taxes were
largely invisible to the majority, and as a consequence colonists were unaware of
their immense amount or ruinous effects.\footnote{Monitor, 21 May 1828.} If the government were to tax the people
directly by sending tax collectors to their homes then they would comprehend the
true scale of the taxation, and the government would be forced to ‘discharge half the
drones in Sydney who now live on the people’s money’ and halve the salaries of the
remainder.\footnote{Monitor, 21 May 1828.} The \textit{Star} reminded its readers that an unrepresented people were a
highly taxed people. ‘They toil and sweat and bear the burthens of the country but
have neither voice nor control in the matter how the taxes raised by their industry
shall be appropriated’.\footnote{National Association Gazette, cited in The Star, 20 April 1844.} The disqualification of the ‘industrious classes’ from
holding office meant that the wealthy used political power to shift the ‘yoke of
taxation’ to the ‘overburdened workmen’ unopposed. Any examination of duties
imposed on essential articles of consumption would reveal this truth.\footnote{Star, 17 May 1845.} Such taxation
fell ‘oppressively and disproportionately on the poor’, wrote the \textit{Guardian}. It was a
scheme of indirect extortion’ by which wealth was abstracted from the workers to the benefit of the rulers.  

Early producerism was thus tempered by middle-class influence. To middle-class radicals it offered a double-edged sword. Charges of idleness and parasitism could be levelled against the large landholder but demanded caution, as they could equally be pointed to many among the middle classes, so holding the potential to fracture the harmony of interest. While many members of the middle classes, especially small ‘masters’ actively engaged in manufacturing, could be considered ‘producers’ alongside the mechanic and labourer, merchants and shopkeepers made less likely candidates. The connection between worker radicalism, producerism, and productive manual labour meant that there was always the potential to exclude a significant number of the middle classes. But with many urban professionals and members of the city council displaying sympathy and attending meetings of the working classes, and with several council members also members of MPA, early colonial producerism tended to remain subdued. Much of the political rhetoric of the period had a constitutional emphasis and was reluctant to utilise producerism’s economic component, but producerism was necessary to worker mobilisation. As will be shown below it turned to a somewhat codified form of the language. The obvious producerist language of British and American sources was largely replaced by more general and inclusive terms for mutual convenience. From the middle-class perspective the use of producer rhetoric threatened excessive working-class radicalism, while on the other hand, from the perspective of working-class radicals, over emphasis would risk alienating relatively wealthy and powerful allies.

It was here that Australia differed from the British motherland, for as Hollis has shown, in mid-1830s Britain the contest surrounding definitions of productive and unproductive members of society had largely been settled. Although middle-class writers had tried to broaden the productive category to include activities that supplemented productivity, or were considered useful but unproductive, as divisions between the two classes in the aftermath of the passing of the Reform Bill intensified, the producing classes effectively described only those engaged in productive manual labour. To the ‘Old Corruption’ of Paine and Cobbett, and the landlord of Spence and Hall, was added the ‘parasitic middleman-capitalist’ of Hodgskin, and O’Brien’s

24 Guardian, 23 March, 30 March 1844.
Such distinctions were not made in Australia until much later in the century.

Concern for the maintenance of the harmony of interest meant Sydney’s early radical papers were at best muted when it came to economic discussion. None advocated the workers’ right to the whole produce of their labour, nor, until the advent of the People’s Advocate, even that they receive a fairer share. Neither was there any public economic debate—both radicals and conservatives preferring to leave their brief references in the pages of their respective newspapers. In previous years debate on the subject had been suppressed among the lower orders, and engaging in street debate could prove an expensive endeavour as Thomas Baker discovered on a November day in 1831 when he was fined five shillings for ‘holding forth a mob in O’Connell-street, on political economy’. The report on Baker’s arrest in the court round-up pages of the Herald also hinted that he might have used his oratory as a cover for pick-pocketing, but no such charge was laid and was probably a slur by the paper. The fact that a ‘mob’ with an interest in the subject could be gathered no doubt furnished the ruling classes with evidence of subversive activities among the lower orders, and Baker’s arrest points to what Blair suggested was a robust Sydney street culture based on imported British radical tradition where newspapers and pamphlets were readily debated in public houses.

The ability of working people to hold any form of public debate or political meeting was curtailed by the lack of a large suitable venue and instead such matters were often discussed in the local tavern. However this allowed the ruling classes to associate political discussion with drunkenness and vulgar vice. It was a charge pressed into service by the ruling classes time and again to justify repressive class legislation and the denial of representation. Hence the image of the overpaid, idle and drunken Sydney mechanic persisted into the 1840s—well beyond the convict period.

The Australasian Chronicle of 1840 suggested that it was through the slur of drunkenness and immorality that the large landholders and their British representatives had portrayed Sydney’s mechanics and labourers as unworthy of any political representation to the British parliament. So-called evidence of such immorality, was ‘by the cunning of our “respectable” men, or rather, political

26 Hollis, Pauper Press, pp. 226-8.
27 SH, 7 November 1831.
grasping rogues, tortured into a false and infamous charge against thousands of highly worthy and truly respectable settlers…in order to accomplish the design of enslaving their country’.  

Meetings were sometimes held in the Mechanics School of Arts but came up against attempts to prevent its facilities being used for such purposes. Powerful and influential members of the Legislative Council, such as Charles Nicholson and Attorney General John Plunkett, although from opposite factions, maintained a cross-factional ruling-class unity when it came to using the school for the discussion of politics. Both disapproved, and sought to prevent it being used for political debate. Nicholson was on record as maintaining that in his seven years as secretary of the institution he had insisted on its avoidance, arguing that it went against the institution’s own constitution. He declared any political debating club in the colony a ‘public nuisance’ and thought it ‘very improper for young men to meet together to discuss such subjects’.  

Most recorded political opinion therefore remained confined to the pages of the radical press.

Reflecting the belief that political exclusion maintained economic exploitation, much of the radicalism in the pages of the colonial radical press expressed itself in the language of constitutional struggle. A somewhat muted producerist narrative that never truly revealed itself was nevertheless hinted at in such publications as the Monitor and Currency Lad, but there was no mention of a society divided into producers and non-producers until a brief appearance in Duncan’s Australasian Chronicle of 1840. This lack of presence existed despite the currency of the terms in Britain and America, the arrival of a significant number of British mechanics in the colony, and the presence of producerist language in the British and American radical sources that were frequently reprinted locally.

Edward Smith-Hall’s Monitor and Horatio Wills’ Currency Lad were both aimed at a readership of small-farmers, tradespeople and shopkeepers—those Blair suggested were unrepresented yet most encumbered by excise duties and excessive taxation.

The Monitor regularly attacked the British placemen of the colonial administration—‘the drones of Sydney’, ‘fatten[ing] on the people’s labour’ through

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30 AC, 28 January 1840.
31 Omnibus, 2 October 1841.
32 This influence can be seen in the titles of the Sun, Star, and Guardian, all of which had British namesakes. The Monitor also drew extensively on the works of Cobbett, Jefferson and Franklin.
invisible, indirect taxation on everyday essentials.\textsuperscript{34} The \textit{Currency Lad} offered similar description.\textsuperscript{35} It regarded the ‘middle orders of the people’ as the pillars of the state, and the ‘poor farmer and mechanic [as] the sinews of [Australia’s] strength’.\textsuperscript{36} They stood in contrast to the ‘avarice and grasping ambition’ of an ‘insolent and powerful aristocracy’.\textsuperscript{37} Although both papers drew on familiar radical themes and introduced an element of producerist rhetoric, they fell short of dividing society into producers and non-producers and no mention was made of redistributing the colony’s wealth. And although there was an undoubted undercurrent of economic grievance against the ruling classes, which as with most contemporary radical publications were described in terms of negative human characteristics such as greed and selfishness, the \textit{Currency Lad} admitted that it neither understood nor cared for the subject of political economy—leaving its main focus constitutional.\textsuperscript{38}

Even with the expansion of the colonial economy and consequent increase in the numbers of mechanics and labourers, Smith-Hall and Wills’ successors continued to infer producerism’s presence rather than point to a ‘producing class’ directly. Instead they incorporated the concept of social utility and referred to the ‘useful classes’, or ‘the people’. As social constructs they were both more difficult to define precisely and were more inclusive with more fluid boundaries, offering a more suitable frame of reference through which the colony’s middle and working classes could stand against the ‘aristocratic’ squattocracy and British placemen of the colonial administration. Depending on how social utility was defined, they enabled inclusion of the urban professionals and other members of the middle classes believed important to workers amelioration.\textsuperscript{39}

**The 1840 Masters and Servants Bill**

The first recorded mention of a colonial ‘producing class’ appeared in a campaign organised by the \textit{Australasian Chronicle} against the 1840 Masters and Servants Bill. This proposed legislation intended to formally criminalise breaches of contract, and its restriction to contracts under £30 made it obvious that it was a disciplinary

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Monitor}, 21 May 1828
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{CL}, 25 August, 15 September, 24 November 1832.
\textsuperscript{36} \textit{CL}, 8 December 1832.
\textsuperscript{37} \textit{CL}, 19 January, 16 March 1833.
\textsuperscript{38} \textit{CL}, 25 August, 15 September 1832.
\textsuperscript{39} NSWLC \textit{SCPDML}, p. 6; \textit{WR}, 5 August, 12 August 1843.
measure aimed at workers rather than one of breach of contract. Sections of the bill were printed and circulated among the city’s working classes, and a subsequent meeting saw a petition signed by a fifth of the colony’s workers presented to the Legislative Council. The bill’s proposal at a time when labour was both scarce and expensive demonstrated one of the great hypocrisies of the capitalist state. It showed that when labour was abundant, and the free labour market beneficial to the employer in terms of wage costs and discipline, laissez-faire should prevail; but when labour was scarce, expensive and ‘impertinent’, some kind of state intervention on the employer’s behalf was necessary.

Instrumental in the campaign against the Bill was William Duncan, and it was probably via the Chronicle’s printing press and its compositor Jabez Heydon, an important early radical and speaker at the above workers’ meeting, that the printed sections of the bill made their way into the hands of the workers. Predictably perhaps, given colonial radicalism’s political character and that a worker might be subject to arbitrary imprisonment on the ruling of a single magistrate, mobilisation against the bill took the traditional form of the free-born Briton’s fight against tyranny. Magna Carta and the rights contained therein of the freeman to trial before a jury of his peers was quoted.

The campaign began on Thursday 24th September, 1840, when the Chronicle reported to its readers that it had just read ‘one of the most extraordinary documents ever penned in a civilized country’. It detailed the section of most concern for its readers although the relevant section had already been printed and circulated among the city’s working classes:

(Abr.) Any artificer, manufacturer, journeyman, workman, shepherd, labourer, or other male servant engaged within the colony of New South Wales for any period of time

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40 AC, 24 September 1840. The Masters and Servants Acts were state-enforced methods of maintaining worker discipline that were most useful during times of labour scarcity. When labour was plentiful, employers preferred the discipline of the free market coupled with anti-combination and conspiracy legislation. See Connell and Irving, Class Structure, pp. 84-5. Connell and Irving also point to the work done by Adrian Merritt in this area: A. Merritt. The Development and Application of Masters and Servants Legislation in New South Wales, 1845-1930. PhD, Australian National University, 1981.

41 AC, 29 September 1840.

42 Connell and Irving, Class Structure, pp. 84-5. The capitalists’ and merchants’ freedom to set prices without the interference of the state on one hand, while on the other using the state to enact repressive labour laws to artificially restrict the price of labour was one recognised by the British Gorgon of 1818. Gorgon, 22 August 1818. Keen, Popular Radical Press, Vol. 3, pp. 117-18.

43 AC, 29 September 1840.

44 AC, 24 September 1840.
whatsoever, who shall absent himself during the customary time of serving, or shall refuse or neglect to work in a diligent manner, or shall return his work unfinished, is liable to be committed to hard labour for three months by one justice of the peace, on the oath of his master, or overseer, or their agent; and to forfeit all wages due to him at the time of such committal.\footnote{Servants and Labourers Bill (1840), abstract reprinted in AC, 26 September 1840.}

Thus wrote the \textit{Chronicle}, in the case of being ‘trepanned into a ruinous engagement with an avaricious employer’, (of which, it stated, there were ample in the colony) refusal to work in a diligent manner, or absence from work, meant an appearance before the magistrate and three months gaol or on the treadmill.\footnote{AC, 24 September 1840.} Other clauses stipulated that any ill-behaviour or misdemeanour towards an employer would result in appearance before a magistrate and a sentence of three months gaol, ‘without judge or jury’. A ‘free British subject who refuses to take off his hat for an upstart stock breeder’ was therefore likely to find himself in gaol. It was legislation that went beyond the fulfilment of contract, demanding a legally enforced obedience and deference from the working man to his so-called betters. The \textit{Chronicle} became the focal point for opposition. Over the ensuing days it described the bill and analysed its implications. It was pivotal to mobilisation against it.

Although ostensibly drawn up on the recommendations of the 1839 Police Committee as a response to the previous legislation’s lack of jurisdiction beyond the formal boundaries of the colony, the proposed new legislation bore all the hallmarks of the large landholder using the opportunity to introduce more punitive sentences. As Connell and Irving pointed out, prior to any serious organisation of the working classes, workers could only meaningfully register their protest by moving on; hence the stress in the new bill on the serving out of contracts.\footnote{Connell and Irving, \textit{Class Structure}, p. 62.} Moving on, although not criminalised under the existing law, was nevertheless a breach of civil contract; borne out by the number of advertisements in the Sydney press displaying the names of absconders and warning others not to employ them.\footnote{A common reason for moving on was workers recruited overseas discovering that the terms of their contracts were found to be less advantageous on arrival in the colony than they had been led to believe. For example: ‘CAUTION. Paul Fertig, a millwright, Phillip Keefer, a joiner, Karl Herlman, a carpenter, Natives of Germany, being under contract to serve me in their respective trade, in New South Wales, for six years, none of which are expired, and having refused to perform their contract, I caution all persons against employing them in any way without my authority, on pain of prosecution according to Act of Council. G. F. Gemmer, Office of Chambers & Thurlow, Pitt Street, Sydney.}
The colonial administration sought to distance itself from the bill. Both Gipps and the Anglican Bishop Broughton saw the role of government as arbiter between different groups for the good of the whole. Their organic view of society considered a ruling class necessary, but at the same time acknowledged that all classes had a social role to play. Along with other members of the colonial administration both were concerned over the implications for further immigration to the colony, casting doubt on whether ‘free and respectable industrious mechanics and labourers’ would wish to emigrate to such a repressive environment.\textsuperscript{49} The large landholders, although viewed as conservative, had no such sense of reciprocal obligation and instead favoured a more individualistic interpretation of conservatism, one of self-interest and minimal government intervention—except to their benefit. They entered into a purely exploitative relationship with the working classes.\textsuperscript{50} As the workers themselves recognised, the wool-grower would indeed have preferred convict or slave labour to the free man.

According to the \textit{Chronicle}, although a fine colony with excellent prospects, Australia groaned under the governance of ‘contemptible creatures, bloated with wealth...characterized by selfishness, tyranny, bigotry’ and total disdain for the interest of ‘a free people’. Even the governor was held to their dictates. They had continually thwarted any attempts to introduce wise and liberal government into the colony and had used their wealth, power and position to introduce ‘laws and customs fit only for the darkest ages of barbarism’\textsuperscript{51} The proposed legislation would discourage migrants at a high time of demand, for none would uproot and travel to the other side of the world only to be thrown into gaol ‘at the nod of an avaricious and tyrannical employer’.\textsuperscript{52} But then most of the radical press believed that what the large landowners really wanted was quiescent slave labour and a plantation system in the colony, not an active and independent productive citizenry.

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\textsuperscript{49} AC, 1 October 1840.

\textsuperscript{50} Parkes noted the difference between the English conservative and his Botany Bay counterpart: ‘The one, generally speaking, is a thorough gentleman, who fervently loves the institutions for which his fathers bled; the other is a downright blackguard, who hankers for the institutions under which the poor convict formerly bled for his father’. Cited in Martin, \textit{Parkes}, p. 100.

\textsuperscript{51} AC, 26 September 1840.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
To the *Chronicle* the class nature of the bill was obvious. Not only was it ‘destructive of public liberty’, it was a one-sided proposal: working people could be sent to the treadmill for their failure to keep to their part an agreement, but there was no clause in the bill for a justice of the peace to gaol an employer for failure to keep theirs. While it might prove an interesting spectacle to witness some of the colony’s ‘grandees and real merinos labouring upon the treadmill’, it was one that would never be seen.\(^{53}\) Not that it mattered a great deal were it the case, for most of the justices were either employers themselves or were from the same social background as the employers. Either way the result of an appearance was for the most part a foregone conclusion. Disputes between parties to an agreement were, so far as the *Chronicle* was aware, civil matters, and although admitting a less than perfect knowledge of English law, it believed that justices of the peace in England did not adjudicate on such matters.\(^{54}\) The *Herald*, however, disagreed, stating that even a cursory glance at English legislation revealed several instances of similar penalties, although it did agree that one magistrate alone should not have the power to gaol a free man, and suggested two. It argued that the ‘well behaved tradesmen and labourers of Sydney’ had nothing to fear from legislation aimed at that other ‘large body’ of workmen who ‘disgraced themselves by drunkenness, neglect of work, and other often disreputable conduct’. It accused the *Chronicle* of whipping up public hysteria against the bill by ‘frightening ignorant people’.\(^{55}\)

The tried and trusted political formula of introducing overly harsh legislation followed by softening amendments that gave the illusion of concession was at work. The original stipulation was punishment for the duration of six months which the amendment subsequently had reduced to three. The *Herald*, the voice of the large landholder, vindicated the bill on this basis, stating that ‘it was not too severe’ on the grounds that it had been ameliorated. This, the *Chronicle* observed, was absurd logic on the part of ‘the Tory organ’ given that no such draconian punishments had existed previously.\(^{56}\)

On Monday 28\(^{th}\) September, a meeting of the working classes took place at the Mechanics School of Arts to draw up a petition against the proposed legislation. A

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\(^{53}\) Ibid.
\(^{54}\) *AC*, 29 September 1840.
\(^{55}\) *SMH*, 28 September 1840.
\(^{56}\) *AC*, 29 September 1840.
It heard how old and outdated images of a colony teeming with vice and immorality were still being used to justify repressive laws against the working classes, when the arrival of ‘thirty thousand sons of freedom’ had long since rendered such portrayal irrelevant. They were incensed that they were still being described as ‘blackguards’ and their wives and daughters as ‘prostitutes and strumpets’ by the ruling classes and their press hirelings in order to justify a law ‘by which they were to receive the treatment which was due only to such characters’.

Speakers included Messrs Macbeath, Heydon, Belford, Pritchard, Dumble, McKelly, Pudney, Davis and Carruthers. Prominent Sydney barrister Richard Jones too made a brief appearance and contribution. He approved the bill’s introduction on the grounds that it would serve as a demonstration of ‘the utter incompetency of their current legislators’. Heydon (a radical associate of both Duncan and Parkes) declared that the working classes had been goaded into action by a ‘series of insults and oppressions’ including charges of idleness, debauchery and being overly remunerated, none of which were true. If the bill were introduced then New South Wales would never be a land of free men but return to its earlier incarnation as a penal colony; like the West Indies a land where landowners and masters were used to slave labour and the lash, and to whom the suffering of their fellow creatures was of little consequence. Pudney stated that the rights of free-born Britons were being trampled on, to which Carruthers added that to allow the bill to pass would be to present their necks for the purposes of receiving the yokes of their oppressors. Belford wanted the whole bill abolished, not just on principle, but because the justices would consistently favour the employers. Australian magistrates, he argued, were biased. Most were employers of labour themselves, and the majority were promoted to the rank by patronage and favour—not on merit. ‘What would the free citizens of America think of a colony whose legislators had proved themselves so industrious in their attempts to curtail its liberty?’ asked Dumble. The draft resolutions read that the bill was unsuitable to the current state of the colony, that it was open to frivolous and malicious complaint, that it would deter migrants, deprive the colony of independence and deny the humbler citizens common rights. Finally,

57 SMH, 28 September 1840.
58 Ibid.
attempts by the legislature itself to even consider such a bill proved the need for a fully representative assembly.\textsuperscript{59}

The resulting ‘mechanics’ petition’ containing some three thousand signatures, around a fifth of the colony’s workers, was presented to the Council by the Chief Justice after some initial procedural inconsistencies were cleared up. Gipps put it on record that it was not a government bill and was ‘one in which he had as little to do as any he had ever presented to the council; in fact he had had nothing to do with it’. The strongest supporter of its original draft was Hannibal Macarthur. During the debate, the Chief Justice stated that he could not give consent to a bill that made breach of contract a crime; neither could he agree to giving magistrates the power to summarily imprison free persons on indefinite and undefined charges. Bishop Broughton argued that a fine was sufficient, while the Edward Deas Thompson, the Colonial Secretary, declared that he had ‘always doubted the propriety of sentencing servants to hard labour in company with felons’. The Chief Justice was also concerned that word of such harsh punishments for breach of contract would get back to intending emigrants in Britain and the colony would thus be injured. With respect to the clause regarding insolence, the Chief Justice again stated that ‘the free, sober and honest mechanic would naturally feel indignant that he should be subjected to imprisonment on the treadmill, in company with felons, for some supposed ill-behaviour to his master or overseer’. While not dead, the bill and its amendments were effectively emasculated, and the \textit{Chronicle} wrote that despite opposition to such legislation on principle, it was nevertheless liable to fewer objections.\textsuperscript{60}

Although not a complete victory, the \textit{Chronicle} regarded it as a milestone in Australian history. It was the first time that public opinion had been acknowledged, that the ‘PEOPLE first manifested their existence among us’, and that the ‘productive classes’ refused to be enslaved. The first time that:

\begin{quote}
The real colonists, the real producers of wealth, first boldly informed the drones of the hive, the mere ‘fruges consumere nati’ that the latter were but drones, and that they were the men by whose labour and industry alone the colony would prosper.\textsuperscript{61}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{SMH}, 28 September 1840; \textit{AC}, 29 September 1840.  
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{SMH}, 1 October 1840; \textit{AC}, 1 October 1840.  
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{AC}, 1 October 1840.
This was a somewhat exaggerated claim perhaps, given that this victory of sorts was only gained through ruling-class division rather than the exercise of any real power on the part of the workers. But it demonstrated that concerted action by workers could have an effect significant enough to be considered a ‘Chartist rebellion’. Curiously however, prior to the above declaration, and indeed throughout the entire campaign, no reference was made to the ‘producing classes’ and no producerist sentiment alluded to despite it being a predominantly working-class concern. Certainly the issue was disciplinary rather than economic and as such was certain to be expressed politically, but this, the first reference to ‘the productive classes’ and ‘real producers of wealth’ in an Australian context, seems to have suddenly appeared from nowhere. Like the subsequent toast drunk to ‘the productive classes of the colony’ by workers grateful for Duncan’s efforts, it hints at a largely invisible undercurrent; a nascent, subterranean, primitive class-consciousness that divided the colony into the ‘producers of all wealth’ and ‘idle non-productive drones’. It was however a brief appearance and one not used by Duncan again either in the *Chronicle* or *Weekly Register*.

By pointing to a distinctive colonial ‘productive class’ and its social utility, Duncan was the first to record this early form of class-consciousness. It was subsequently developed by such newspapers as the *Guardian*, *Star*, and *Sun*, all of which ostensibly set out to represent the working classes, but within the context of union with the middle classes. All privileged middle-class respectability, despite the frequent use of colourful language by some, all played down any threat to the harmony of interest. Hence workers’ economic concerns expressed through trades’ unions met with greater ambivalence than political combination. In evidence before the Distressed Mechanics Committee of 1843 for example, Sutherland was keen to point out that the MPA was not a species of the former, but of the latter—a point reiterated in its mouthpiece the *Guardian*. While all forms of worker combination had as their basis ‘the one great ultimatum’, the economic motive of bettering the physical and social condition of those concerned, trades’ unions, as ‘the lowest and most selfish’, were the least desirable. Even so, while not condoned, they were still excused by the *Guardian* on the basis that were it not for the necessity of the

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62 Ibid.
63 *AC*, 26 December 1840.
64 *Star*, 1 March 1845.
workman combining to preserve ‘that reward for his labour’, they would not exist. They were the result of the oppression of men’s interests and the conditions that gave rise to them should be attacked before the unions themselves.\(^{65}\)

The *Guardian* sought to promote ‘the economic interests of local industry’.\(^{66}\) Although primarily aimed at a working-class base, its declared intention was to defend the rights and advance the interests of both working and middle classes. It argued an absence of a legitimate balance of power in the colony, advocating that it was ‘the duty of the Middle and Working classes to make common cause with each other, for their mutual protection against the oligarchical and oppressive ascendency of a dominant and oppressive aristocracy’.\(^{67}\) Using what was to later become the familiar city/country dichotomy as the basis for such alliance it argued that political dominance resided in the counties through the pastoralists, and the city as such remained unrepresented.\(^{68}\) The paper’s brand of constitutional radicalism encompassed ‘pure and rational liberty, based on the indefeasible right’s of man’ and the utilitarian notion of ‘“the greatest good to the greatest number.”’\(^{69}\) Like much radical propaganda of the time it saw the solution to economic grievance in increased suffrage. Its self-stated aim was to reduce the power of the aristocracy by increasing the franchise, thereby diluting their political influence. But although declaring itself an institution for the protection of the working classes both politically and economically,\(^{70}\) there was scant economic reference in its pages, and it neither suggested that the working classes were the producers of all wealth, nor demanded the return of labour’s produce.

Both the *Guardian* and MPA were the short-lived products of economic depression. The paper’s original editor, James McEachern, was a political idealist who used his position as editor to attack the pastoralists. A Presbyterian teacher brought to Australia by J. D. Lang, he was already the publisher of the successful *Commercial Journal*—a paper aimed at the urban tradesman, shopkeeper and merchant.\(^{71}\) As Blair noted, it seldom contained any editorial content, but when it did

\(^{65}\) *Guardian*, 20 April 1844. *Guardian* published for the MPA by James McEachern (March-October 1844) and Benjamin Sutherland (from October 1844).

\(^{66}\) *Guardian*, 16 March 1844.

\(^{67}\) *Guardian*, 16 March, 23 March 1844.

\(^{68}\) Ibid.

\(^{69}\) *Guardian*, 16 March 1844.

\(^{70}\) *Guardian*, 23 March 1844.

so it was ‘surprisingly radical’. He was soon replaced on the *Guardian* by the more pragmatic Sutherland who, in concern for the desperate economic plight of the workers and lack of government action during the depression of the 1840s, suspended his radical beliefs in the hope that by supporting the Pastoral Association in its fight with Gipps over land reform, prosperity would return. Supporting the squatters, according to both Thomas and Hume, proved a grave miscalculation on the part of Sutherland and the movement was fatally compromised when the middle-class support cultivated by McEachern appears to have been withdrawn. The *Star’s* contemporary account suggested that the Association’s members were too diffuse and there were too many conflicting interests for it to remain in existence for any length of time. It was an organisation ‘suited to a more settled order of things’.

Another leading print media figure of the 1840s was Edmund Mason. Less has been written of Mason than Duncan and Edward Hawksley, but Mason was an important contributor to Sydney’s early radicalism. His *Star* and its predecessor the *Sun* both focused on working-class betterment through the ideals and perspectives of the ‘middling sort’—the ‘respectable’ mechanic, small settler, shopkeeper and small trader—and both had a more producerist flavour than their antecedents. Like the *Guardian*, the Sydney-based *Sun* promoted union of the middle and working classes as ‘the people’, describing them in typically producerist terms as those by ‘the sweat of whose brow’ food was produced and materials indispensable to trade and art were extracted, who fashioned those materials into useful objects and transported those objects and materials, in fact ‘all who toil to produce and distribute the productions’. But just as importantly as a concession to the middle classes, ‘the people’ included all those ‘whose operations are turned to account by the community’. Opposed to them were the few ‘wrapped in mere enjoyment’, yet it was against these few that ‘the people’ were condemned to struggle for only a small portion of the fruits of their labour—the present condition of the people was one of slavery without end under a different name.

72 The *Commercial Journal* supported what it regarded as working-class interests (*CJ*, 2 January 1839). The paper had a circulation of 2600 and according to McEachern was to be found on the desk of every merchant, more than 200 inns and public houses, most shopkeepers and respectable residents of Sydney. See *CJ*, 7 February 1838, 9 February 1839, 21 Dec 1839. Also Blair, ‘Newspapers’, pp. 170, 175-6.


74 *Star*, 5 April, 31 May 1845.

75 *Sun*, 28 January 1843.
The radicalism of the *Sun* was frequently robust and vulgar despite its supposed middle-class respectability. Its reporting was characterised by typical producerist populism which reduced economic arguments to unpleasant human characteristics such as greed, describing the ruling classes with terms like ‘human vultures’ and ‘insatiate monsters of depravity’. Every action they took was driven by their greed. They had no qualms in sending their fellow men into ruin in order to ‘gratify their sordid ambition, and cursed lust for gold!’ Their members did not simply seek to bring indentured labour to work their estates, but ‘these would-be atrocious despots got up the Coolie scheme, and sought to inveigle from their native hills, their wives and families, these simple heathens to immolate on the altar of Mammon their God’. Meanwhile the *Herald*, ‘the avowed organ of this damnable faction…would trample in the dust the honourable mechanic, labourer and artizan and deprive him of his dearly-earned reward’. "We are sick and disgusted in contemplating the depravity of the faction, and the unprincipled venality of their disgraceful organ’ it wrote.76

According to the *Sun*, the ‘hireling press’, notably the *Herald*, used its influence and power on behalf of this pseudo-aristocratic faction to cramp the energies of the infant colonies by crippling its industrial and productive classes. The *Australian* too it described as being devoted to the Macarthur interest. The fact that the editor was a parson drew both taunts and contempt that drew on a radical tradition of dislike for both press and parson.77 The *Sun* was also the only Sydney paper to be barred from entering the chambers of the city council, which was regarded by one of its correspondents, ‘Quiz’, as ‘a tacit acknowledgement of its merit and utility’.78 Council proceedings were simply recorded second-hand under a column titled ‘Slangwangers’. Like the *Guardian* and *Star* it was avowedly non-sectarian and accused the *Herald* of being the organ of the Tory High Church, Lang’s *Observer* as that of non-Episcopal Protestantism, and the *Chronicle* of Catholicism.

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76 *Sun*, 18 March 1843.  
77 *Sun*, 6 May 1843. According to Walker, by this time the proprietors of the *Australian*, George Moss and the Rev. W. M. Hesketh were in the debt of James Macarthur to extent of some £2,600. Walker, *Newspaper Press*, pp. 34-35. A similar ‘milk-sop water gruel’ assessment of the *Australian*’s character was given in the *Currency Lad* of 11 May 1833.  
78 *Sun*, 11 February 1843.
Their squabbling and sectarianism was viewed with disgust as a diversion that factionalised the community.\(^79\)

A change of title from the *Sun* to the *Star* and a move from Pitt Street, Sydney to George Street, Parramatta seemed to mark a more proletarian shift in Mason’s editorials through the introduction of a stronger producerist theme into its pages. Nevertheless it continued to rely on the standard contemporary radical argument that both working and middle classes believed in good government and were oppressed and restricted by a common enemy which promoted social division thereby ‘to take from you the fruits of your labour.’\(^80\) This was particularly noticeable from early 1845 until a change of publisher and return of the paper to Sydney in September of that year. Written in a racier style, at one penny the *Star* was a third of the price of its more staid predecessor, making it the cheapest newspaper in the colony and accessible to a broad readership.\(^81\) Between reports on the activities of the Legislative Council and political editorials, Mason relied heavily on court round-ups for much of the paper’s weekly content. Frequently dotted with puns and other word-plays, his unique, robust, and often humorous writing style combined political comment and satire with sport and sensationalism, unlike the more staid Duncan and Sutherland or the truculent Hawksley.

In its brief Parramatta-based incarnation, the *Star* saw both productive and unproductive classes in colonial society, although it offered little explanation of these definitions beyond description of the latter as being composed of the large landholder and the ‘burdensome’ poor.\(^82\) The ‘pseudo-aristocracy’ devised ‘class legislation’ in the Legislative Council for profit and self-aggrandisement at ‘the expense of the working man’s capital, which is his labour—the “sweat of his brow.”’\(^83\) Like most radical publications of the time it retained a belief in middle and working-class union, tending not to view the middle classes as capitalists, but instead reserving that title for the pastoralist. The return of the *Star* to Sydney and a change of publisher to Benjamin Bailey witnessed an abrupt end to both Mason’s unique prose style and

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\(^79\) *Sun*, 1 April 1843. *Guardian*, 6 Apr 1844. The *Sentinel* of 1845, a Protestant paper published in Sydney by Robert Kitchen, was regarded with particular distaste in this respect. *Star*, 8 February 1845.

\(^80\) *Star*, 30 March 1844. This was taken from a reprint of Smiles.

\(^81\) By contrast the subscription only *Weekly Register* cost 6s 6d per quarter, the *Guardian* 6d per issue and the *People’s Advocate* 6d per issue.

\(^82\) *Star*, 15 February 1845.

\(^83\) *Star*, 25 January 1845.
any political content, the paper reduced simply to increasing reliance on court reports until its final issue some three months later.

The Weekly Register, established by Duncan on leaving the Australasian Chronicle for overzealous expression of his political opinions, was more reserved than either of Mason’s papers. Unlike the Catholic Chronicle it was supposedly a strictly secular publication, although Duncan continued to be recognized in the colony as a prominent Catholic. Duncan believed that the social role of the journalist should not be to act as a hireling mouthpiece for the rich and powerful, that they should not stand by and witness the interests of the many be sacrificed for the gain of the few, but to ‘examine and consider how every measure will effect the people and their posterity’. Although without doubt influenced by Cobbett, the Register was a somewhat loftier, more highly crafted, and fundamentally political publication with Duncan avoiding the emotive language and polemics of both Cobbett and his own colonial contemporaries. It concentrated on facts and sober informed comment rather than sensationalism and hyperbole. Duncan argued that the only journals of character existing in the colony described themselves as moderately conservative. There is no evidence to suggest that this comment was indirectly aimed at Mason, but the Register tended to take care and use caution in its pronouncements, analysis and language, where Mason was more volatile and unpredictable.

**Edward John Hawksley and the People’s Advocate**

The appearance of Hawksley’s People’s Advocate in 1848 marked a distinct change in the nature, language and attitude of Australian radical print. It appeared almost as the next logical step to Mason’s Star and was the first colonial paper to demand that the workers as producers of all wealth receive a fairer share of labour’s produce—proclaimed every week on its banner quote from Lamartine. Despite never having been a mechanic or labourer, Hawksley, a former Catholic teacher, was the colonial radical most sympathetic to the producerist perspective and recognized its usefulness...
in rallying worker support behind the broader radical cause.\(^87\) As noted above, despite drawing on producerist sentiment, direct and consistent references to the ‘producing classes’ had remained largely absent from the colonial radical press. Where the rhetoric had been employed in the papers of Mason and Duncan it had been at best intermittent, even if, as with Mason’s Star, it was at times used forcefully. The Advocate on the other hand assumed a more aggressive and continuous producerist tirade against the rich and powerful. So powerfully was the producerist economic truism that ‘labour is the source of all wealth’ articulated, and so frequent the reference made to the producing classes and their right to a fair share of the proceeds of their labour in the face of what it regarded as blatant class legislation enacted by the pastoralist-dominated New South Wales Colonial Government, that almost from the first issue there could be no doubt in the reader’s mind that colonial society was composed of producers and non-producers.\(^88\) It was the first time the language had been used in such a way in the colonial setting.

In common with its predecessors, content focused on the three familiar areas of contention—universal franchise and reform, access to land, and the restriction of immigration. But for the first time in the colony the Advocate introduced the ‘labour question’ into public debate. The ‘labour question’ was of ‘universal importance’: it was the question of ‘labour and its remuneration’ that affected ‘the whole family of Adam in every country of the world’.\(^89\) For this reason it was the first to suggest that the working classes of the colony should pay more attention to the subject of political economy, particularly given that its principles were being abused to their detriment. Careful examination of the subject would reveal to the ‘toiling masses’ that ‘the few’ were manipulating its principles to their advantage. Only a thorough knowledge of the subject would see ‘justice done to the wealth-producing millions’.\(^90\) Its second edition introduced the work of a Birmingham operative whose work attempted to enlighten workers on the subject.\(^91\) But although encouraging workers to familiarise themselves with the subject, beyond its banner and some rudimentary discussion, and


\(^88\) PA, 9 December 1848.

\(^89\) PA, 13 January 1849.

\(^90\) PA, 2 December 1848.

despite the promise offered in the early editions, Hawksley demonstrated little desire to use the columns of the Advocate to explain and counter the wider principles of orthodox political economy to his readership directly, preferring to direct his energies to the careful explanation of politics and the encouragement of workers’ education.

Nevertheless Hawksley did address the labour question through producerism and the Advocate was the first publication in the colony to view society entirely from the producerist perspective instead of merely referring to it. As a paper aimed firmly at the working classes—the ‘mechanic, artizan, tiller of the soil, maker of roads or builder of houses…the men by whose labour and ingenuity the social fabric is upheld’—it explicitly, rather than implicitly, underlined radical politics with the economics of the labour theory of value through its producerist perspective, giving Australian popular radicalism the assertiveness of its American and British counterparts.  

However despite its division of society into the productive and non-productive classes, the Advocate could not be considered an outpost of early colonial socialism for it only ever demanded the right of workers to a share in the profits of their industry, not the whole produce. Despite this, it left the readership in no doubt that although the working men were the ‘producers of food, the manufacturers of clothing, the builders of houses and ships and engines’ they were ‘compelled to work for others’. The interests of these, ‘the industrious classes’ of the colony, had for too long been overlooked, ‘the local Press having never heartily entered into a consideration of their importance and of their rights’. It was to these interests that the Advocate would attend.

Hawksley demanded political representation for the producing classes on the basis that it was their labour that had built the colony. Yet although influenced by the British Chartism that had emerged from post-1832 Reform Act Britain, and the disappointment of British workers with their subsequent betrayal by middle-class former allies, some minor misgivings aside it still retained confidence in the colonial middle classes as part of the radical alliance. This was in contrast to British radical

92 PA, 2 December 1848, 13 January 1849, 24 March 1849
93 PA, 24 March 1849.
94 PA, 3 February 1849.
95 PA, 2 December 1848.
96 The first edition of the Advocate stated that it would not neglect the cause of the commercial and mercantile classes of the colony, being ‘well satisfied’ that their interests were identical with the interest of the workman. Under the heading of ‘The Labour Question’ however, the tenth edition
papers. The *London Democrat* for example had warned ten years previously that ‘the producing classes’ should reject any middle-class support as they would ‘only pretend to aid the working classes, either in order to break up the movement, or to turn it to their advantage’. 97 Hawksley however remained hopeful that the British middle classes would eventually return their full support to the workers. 98 The British experience may have proven the middle classes unreliable allies, but the *Advocate* failed to offer its readers a clear and consistent position. It did not feel confident enough to disregard the colonial middle classes entirely. As Irving has noted, when the workingmen began to organise independently, Hawksley and other prominent colonial radicals publicly distanced themselves in the interest of maintaining the existing radical alliance. 99 Such contradictions were symptomatic of the beginnings of a fracture in the harmony of interest in the colony. They demonstrated the shortcomings of antipathy to the ruling classes being expressed as disdain for the ‘aristocracy’ of Old Corruption when addressing worker concerns more closely connected with the advance of bourgeois mercantile, commercial and industrial capitalism in the colony.

Previous observations by both Duncan and Sutherland that the economic interests of employers and workmen were opposed were amplified in the *Advocate*. 100 All pointed out that the very nature of human commerce meant that the buyers and sellers of labour power as a market commodity were antagonistic, and so perhaps unwittingly pointed to the inevitable collapse of the harmony of interest. Although aiming specifically at the large rural employer, Hawksley believed any mutual interest between employers and workers a myth. This was because ‘the tendency of modern civilisation has unfortunately been principally in a wrong direction, namely accumulation’:

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97 LDm, 13 April 1839.
100 AC, 23 April 1843; WR, 26 August 1843; *Guardian*, 30 March 1844.
The only object the employers of labour have in view is the reduction of wages, so as to enhance their scale of profits. They care not for the labouring man so long as they themselves can accumulate wealth.\footnote{PA, 7 July, 18 August 1849.}

These accumulators held the belief that the nation’s wealth was solely for their benefit and ‘the producer was beneath their notice’.\footnote{PA, 13 January 1849.} Depressing wages allowed ‘the working man no opportunity to acquire a competency’. Therefore it was his duty to resist by every lawful means in his power—‘his labour is his capital, and he has the right to make the most of it’.\footnote{PA, 30 December 1848.} Any notions that the interests of the workman and the ‘unproductive’ employer were one and the same, and that the one could not prosper without the other sharing that prosperity, were false. It was obvious that ‘the interests of the \textit{worker} and of the \textit{idler} must be opposed to each other’.\footnote{PA, 25 August 1849.} Previous experience should have proven to the working classes that a mutual interest might exist during the good times, but when the economy slowed or stalled, the same mutual interest quickly evaporated and the workers discharged and left to fend for themselves. Although this may only have happened once during their lifetimes, Hawksley suggested that the process was historic and ‘for the last two or three hundred years a species of antagonism has been going on between the unproductive and the productive masses’.\footnote{Ibid.}

Although a Catholic, Hawksley refuted the doctrine of passive obedience. To suggest that the contemporary status quo had been ordained by God, and that it was blasphemous to resist an ‘oppressive and tyrannical government’, was absurd.\footnote{PA, 16 December 1848.} He frequently emphasised the moral economy in his attacks on the ruling classes. Productive labour, when applied to the treasures of the Earth, was a blessing, bringing forth all things good; but when labour was exhausted and ground into the dust by others, it was a curse. God the producer had laboured in creation. Man, his masterpiece, was to labour for his glory alone—not the glory of other men. Labour was pronounced on all, and nowhere did the Creator say that most of mankind should labour for the right of a few to live in idle luxury. Justification for those same few to
drive down labour’s reward to subsistence level and place the fruits of its toil on the altar of Mammon did not come from the word of God.

Satan found mischief for idle hands, and this was especially true of ‘the lazy drones of the present day’. Idle through ‘the fruits of other men’s labour’, their heads continually plotted mischief in the halls of legislation. For this reason the Advocate focused on political reform. Universal franchise was demanded both as the political right of the free-born Briton, and on the economic basis that government should serve, rather than help exploit, ‘the mechanic, the labourer and the small settler’ that built society. Those ‘upon whose industry, skill and perseverance the framework of society is supported’ must be allowed to have a voice in government, for where suffrage was confined to a small section of society ‘there must be class legislation’ that would inevitably be used to extort wealth from the producer.\textsuperscript{107}

Like many early colonial radical papers, the Advocate had a millenarian feel to it.\textsuperscript{108} The paper appeared in late 1848—a tumultuous year in Europe. Given the enormous social upheaval and the rise of democracy everywhere, tyranny’s end was inevitable. The liberalism of the Enlightenment would release the workers from their chains and the doctrine of progress would put an end to darkness and ignorance. It was a fact beyond dispute, wrote Hawksley, that the rights and interests of producers had hitherto been ignored. But this was to change. ‘It is impossible to suppose’ he wrote, ‘that the old state of things, with regard to production and distribution, can much longer continue’.\textsuperscript{109} The old systems of government would be replaced by the new. Under the ‘new empire of right’, ‘the artizan, the mechanic, and the labourer’ would stand forth and not be down-trodden by the ‘idle, the assuming, and the unproductive aristocrat’.\textsuperscript{110} Soon no longer would the ‘idle and the dissolute, wallow in every luxury and squander in dissipation that they wring from the industrious bees of society…they cannot much longer “lord” it over the producers of all wealth’.\textsuperscript{111}

Thus the 1840s witnessed the colonial middle classes confront the colonial administration and large land-holders that held political power. This middle-class challenge for power in part demanded the support of the working classes and a class alliance was constructed upon what was termed the ‘harmony of interest’. The

\textsuperscript{107} PA, 13 January, 24 March, 26 May 1849.
\textsuperscript{108} The Advocate’s millenarianism has been noted by Messner. Messner, ‘Contesting Chartism’.
\textsuperscript{109} PA, 13 January 1849.
\textsuperscript{110} PA, 9 December 1848.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.
harmony of interest sought to identify common ground between the two classes by suggesting that both shared social utility as ‘the people’. Appeals were made to ‘the people’ through a radical press that relied on a producerist narrative to galvanise support against a ruling class portrayed as an antipodean outpost of Old Corruption. The depression of the 1840s threw this conflict into sharper relief and accelerated change as the radical press intensified its focus on the social division between the so-called useful and idle classes at a time of significant material deprivation. Yet the tone of this producerist language remained restrained lest it should undermine the class alliance by subjecting the apparent social utility of the middle classes to too much scrutiny. It was not until the introduction of Edward Hawksley’s *People’s Advocate* that it saw bolder use and some of the contradictions within the harmony of interest became exposed.
Chapter 10
Producerism and the 1840s Depression

Now is the time for speculative and dreaming or designing men. They relate their dreams and projects to the ignorant and credulous, dazzle them with golden visions, and set them maddening after shadows.¹

The 1840 Masters and Servants Bill aside, the economic crisis of the 1840s provided the first significant event to draw a producerist response from the colony’s radicals. Although there had been earlier periods of economic hardship, this was the first to seriously impact on the free colonial economy.² As the colonists would discover, under the logic of capitalism and its profit motive, slow and steady accrual of wealth had been replaced by periods of frantic activity followed by slackness. The crisis awakened Australian workers from their political indifference, and a number of radical periodicals appeared in response to the tougher economic times, questioning the actions and motives of the ruling classes. Most drew on a local producerist undercurrent reinforced by influences from Anglo-American popular radicalism.

The seeds of depression were sown during the period 1826-41—a time of ‘unexampled prosperity’.³ Once again it was the Australasian Chronicle in the forefront. In December 1840, amid intense economic activity and extensive encouragement of emigration to fill a seemingly endless demand for labour, its tone was one of caution. An excerpt from Washington Irving’s Great Mississippi Bubble published in the paper cautioned readers that previous manifestations of conspicuous consumption indicated a false prosperity that had diverted capital away from the productive enterprise that it should have funded, into speculation and opulence. The phrase ‘times of unexampled prosperity’, it warned, was portent for the inevitable crash.⁴ Australia’s unexampled prosperity had generated a large shortfall between imports and exports that in 1841 amounted to £2,000,000—a significant amount for a small colony.⁵ Although the capital goods needed to increase production comprised much of this deficit, an appreciable proportion funded substantial imports of luxury

¹ W. Irving, The Great Mississippi Bubble, extract cited in AC, 8 December 1840.
² Coghlan, Labour & Industry, Vol I; Wells, Constructing Capitalism, pp. 12-64; Connell and Irving, Class Structure, pp. 32-82; Butlin, Colonial Economy.
⁴ AC, 8 December 1840.
⁵ WR, 19 August 1843.
items such as fancy carriages, jewellery, and wines and spirits, all of which pointed to future problems.\textsuperscript{6} In a progressively unhealthy speculative environment driven by easy credit and a local system of finance that increasingly bore little relationship to the productive activity upon which it was supposedly based, disaster was inevitable.\textsuperscript{7}

Government action, and the arrival of twenty thousand migrants in 1841 compounded the problem.\textsuperscript{8} In a bid to encourage the development of land already sold, Gipps had been instructed by London to double its price. It was a measure supported by the \textit{Chronicle} which had consistently argued that the current land price and regulations favoured the squatter and discriminated against the small settler, leaving the country as ‘one vast run for sheep—a park for a few parvenus lordlings’\textsuperscript{9}. However the \textit{Chronicle} believed that the decision of Gipps not to apply the new price to land already advertised for sale was mistaken and warned of a speculative rush by ‘land-jobbers’.\textsuperscript{10} As predicted land prices indeed soared, as did government revenue which was deposited in local banks and drawn upon for credit to fund further speculative activity. British capital also continued to pour in but tended to fund commercial rather than productive enterprises, while the atmosphere of euphoria that pervaded the colony encouraged London merchants to send out speculative consignments in anticipation of quick returns.\textsuperscript{11} However the situation turned swiftly. The effects of two missed harvests through drought caused food prices to soar, while a tightness in the British money markets that had begun in mid-1840 was reflected in the colony’s money markets, and was compounded by government withdrawal of significant funds from local banks to fulfil bounty obligations.\textsuperscript{12}

Depression, when it came in 1841, was swift, and lingered until the close of the decade. Less than three years after his warning in the \textit{Chronicle}, Duncan was able to state:

\textsuperscript{7} Atlas, 30 November 1844; Coghlan, \textit{Labour & Industry, Vol I}, p. 473.
\textsuperscript{9} AC, 12 December 1840.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
We described in plain language the rottenness of the foundation of what was than believed to be an enduring prosperity, and we ventured, amid the scorn of our contemporaries, to predict the ruin which has since occurred.\textsuperscript{13}

Urban mechanics and labourers were thrown out of work almost immediately. Annual imports of British iron and steel, an indicator of urban manufacturing activity, having increased steadily to a peak in 1840 fell by two-thirds over the next five years.\textsuperscript{14} Every week saw the list of insolvents steadily increase. By 1843 conditions were so severe that in two days, and at short notice, twelve members of the MPA were able to record over a thousand unemployed Sydney mechanics and labourers, and more than twice the number of dependents. One family was in such a distressed condition that the children were eating potato peelings they had found in the street.\textsuperscript{15}

Those that could afford to left the colony. By November that year two hundred members of the colony’s fifteen thousand strong working classes had already left for Valparaiso and more were waiting to follow.\textsuperscript{16} Most were mechanics. Coghlan believed that between 1846 and 1851 Sydney lost two-thirds of its mechanics to California and South America for this reason.\textsuperscript{17} According to the Dispatch, such emigration was reprehensible and ‘should be exposed to public execration’.\textsuperscript{18} Valuable skills were being lost to the colony. A report in the Star of May 1845, however, revealed that Valparaiso was no earthly paradise for the mechanic but in reality a ‘filthy hole’. Emigrants from Sydney, it warned intending migrant mechanics, would gladly return given the chance.\textsuperscript{19}

When it became apparent that the depression was entrenched, the Legislative Council set up a Select Committee to investigate its causes. Evidence taken pointed firstly to a significant fall in British demand for colonial exports, and secondly, based upon easy credit, to a ‘wild spirit of speculation which pervaded all classes of the community…a speculative mania which, unhappily, was fostered and encouraged by the Banks and by the Government’.\textsuperscript{20} A former Bank Director commented to the committee that ‘the ignorance of Bank Directors, particularly of their duty to the

\textsuperscript{13} WR, 5 August 1843.
\textsuperscript{14} RCNSW, 1828; 1840; 1845.
\textsuperscript{15} SCDML, pp. 3-5.
\textsuperscript{16} SR, 7 October 1843; Dispatch, 4 November, 18 November 1843.
\textsuperscript{17} Coghlan, Labour & Industry, Vol I, 441.
\textsuperscript{18} Dispatch, 18 November 1843.
\textsuperscript{19} Star, 17 May 1845.
\textsuperscript{20} SCMC, p. 618.
shareholders, [was] almost incredible’.\(^{21}\) The atmosphere was one of ‘illusory anticipation of extraordinary returns from the investment of funds borrowed, chiefly from English capitalists, at an exorbitant rate of interest, and expended in what has ultimately proved ruinous speculations in land and stock’.\(^{22}\)

The *Dispatch* of November 1843 recorded that there had been over a thousand bankruptcies since new insolvency laws had been introduced.\(^{23}\) These new laws, introduced by Judge Burton and known as ‘Burton’s Purge’, were themselves blamed for causing an even steeper rise in the high numbers of bankruptcies. By facilitating the wiping off of debts and allowing the unprincipled to declare themselves insolvent, they were released from their obligations. The market was subsequently flooded with excess property, driving prices down further. The banks and major creditors, making up the ‘majority in value’, took precedence over the small traders and tradesmen that made up the ‘majority in number’, but it was the latter who as a consequence were the likeliest to follow into bankruptcy. The new law favoured the banks and the wealthy over the honest tradesman, and was thus morally reprehensible.\(^{24}\)

By 1843 an air of gloom had settled over the working classes of the colony. A common charge from the mechanics and labourers, repeated widely in the radical press, was that they were induced to come to Australia under false pretences by ‘bounty-jobbers’, although despite the evidence of several mechanics to the contrary, a select committee report found no evidence of this.\(^{25}\) According to the *Sun* of 1843, between sixty and eighty percent of the bounty immigrants that had recently arrived in the colony were mechanics from the manufacturing towns of Britain, falsely induced to come by the bounty-jobbers that had previously taken advantage of the demand for subsidised emigration.\(^{26}\) Such numbers were well beyond the capacity of the local economy to absorb them. The colony demanded agricultural labourers, but the *Sun* suggested that many urban mechanics were encouraged by bounty agents to falsify their credentials on the promise of an abundance of employment and opportunity. It was a fraud perpetrated by these agents purely to increase their own profits.\(^{27}\) The *Register* agreed, adding that in their clamour for labour many ‘leading

\(^{21}\) Ibid.  
\(^{22}\) *SCDML*, p. 2.  
\(^{23}\) *Dispatch*, 4 November 1843.  
\(^{24}\) AC, 12 August 1843, *Star*, 13 April 1844.  
\(^{25}\) *SCDML*, p. 2.  
\(^{26}\) *Sun*, 11 February 1843.  
\(^{27}\) Ibid.
colonists’, with the endorsement of the colonial government, put their names to the false promises of the bounty agents.\textsuperscript{28} True to form, the \textit{Dispatch} while ostensibly in agreement, also suggested that capitalists too had been subject to misrepresentation with respect to immigration, and indeed had the stronger case.\textsuperscript{29}

The \textit{Register} argued that the government, as party to such pledges, owed assistance to these migrants in addition to the fundamental humanitarian duty of preventing its subjects from starving.\textsuperscript{30} Government did eventually provide meagre assistance, but Sutherland cited the example of the builder contracted to erect the new government barracks, who, upon hearing of government relief payments of eighteen shillings a week being given to the poor, immediately adopted it as the new benchmark for wages and sought to engage mechanics at that rate even though the terms of his own contract had not been changed.\textsuperscript{31} The depression also offered ample opportunity for rural employers to deflate wages and enforce discipline. Having induced workers to leave the city with the promise of work, many found none available and concluded that they had been tricked in order to drive down the wages of those already employed. Robert Graham, an agent for the pastoralists of Moreton Bay, stated that there was a considerable demand for labour in the area. He noted that wages had been ‘excessive’ at £25 to £30 per annum and discipline problematic. However ‘a most marked change was discernable’ in the general behaviour of ‘excessively impudent and troublesome’ employees when a number of men engaged in Sydney at £10, £12, and £14 per annum arrived in the area.\textsuperscript{32}

\textbf{Depression and Sydney’s Mechanics}

The MPA organised a petition of mechanics and labourers demanding that public works be commenced to offer relief to the unemployed. In delivering it to the Legislative Council, J. D. Lang remarked that government mismanagement in the sale of lands and its misapplication of the proceeds was responsible for the current distress, and therefore it was duty bound to remedy it.\textsuperscript{33} The Council agreed to the setting up of the Select Committee on the Petition of the Distressed Mechanics and

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{WR}, 30 September 1843.
\item \textit{Dispatch}, 11 November 1843.
\item \textit{WR}, 30 September 1843.
\item \textit{SCDML}, p. 145.
\item \textit{SCDML}, p. 1. Graham’s evidence was typical and repeated by agents in the Hunter and South Coast regions of the state.
\item \textit{WR}, 23 September 1843; \textit{Dispatch}, 11 November 1843.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Labourers which heard evidence from the employers, mechanics and labourers, and
government administrators. But the whole Select Committee seemed to consist of a
litany of blame-shifting from those charged with the business of government and the
running of the economy of the colony onto the poor and powerless. It was not the
speculative activities of the loan-mongers, land-jobbers and bounty-jobbers, but the
workers’ lack of prudence, intemperance, and refusal to take work at any price that
was the cause of their misfortunes.\textsuperscript{34} Evidence heard before the Select Committee on
Immigration of the same year reinforced the views of both sides; all the employers,
police and government officers that appeared stated that there was plenty of work in
the country.\textsuperscript{35}

The evidence before these committees thus reflected the social and economic
relations of the colony, with the majority of rural employers and government men
arguing that there was plenty of work in the interior while the mechanics and
labourers maintained that unemployment was rife. Quarry labourer Joseph McLeod
revealed that although willing to work in the country for the minimum needed to feed
his family, a wife and five children were regarded as an added encumbrance to any
potential employer.\textsuperscript{36} The charge that many mechanics were out of work because
they were standing out for higher wages was denied, but artisan pride meant that they
were reticent to work as labourers or shepherds and only went labouring out of sheer
derperation. Unemployed carpenters James Grimes and William Crosby were of this
opinion. Crosby, then living off of his savings, stated his unwillingness to work as a
rural labourer ‘for I never did labouring work in my life’.\textsuperscript{37}

Payment in worthless money orders was rife. Agents such as Graham admitted
that workers were paid by cheque or order, but denied that there were any penalties
attached to cashing them.\textsuperscript{38} Workers argued to the contrary, suggesting that
unscrupulous employers paid in orders that, after journeys of hundreds of miles, were
found to be worthless in Sydney.\textsuperscript{39} The \textit{Guardian} reminded employers that ‘the
labourer is worthy of his hire’ and on moral grounds would publish the names of any

\textsuperscript{34} SCDML, passim.
\textsuperscript{35} NSWLC, \textit{Select Committee on Immigration}. 1843.
\textsuperscript{36} SCDML, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{37} SCDML, pp. 13-16. Coghlan recognises this phenomenon in 1860s, see Coghlan, \textit{Labour &
\textsuperscript{38} SCDML, pp. 1-2.
\textsuperscript{39} SCDML, p. 167. It was a charge repeated before the 1843 \textit{Select Committee on Immigration}.;
that engaged in the practice.\textsuperscript{40} As a result of such actions, stated one blacksmith, all confidence between employers and workmen was lost.\textsuperscript{41} A worker, ‘H.B’, described a common and well-documented complaint. In the Yass area ‘the roads thronged with persons looking for employment’, encouraged by employers in order to drive down the cost of local labour. The city press made ample comment on wages offered at £20 being refused, but there was good reason for their refusal. Due to distance, station employees were forced into purchasing their essentials from the property owner who charged such high prices that all the money found its way back to him. After a year’s labour at £20, all the workman had to show was a worthless money order for a few pounds, which, if he was lucky enough to get cashed at a pub or store, would be charged a commission and expected to spend up to fifty percent of the value in the premises.\textsuperscript{42}

A ‘middle class’ correspondent corroborated this. He stated that at Bosworth there were hundreds out of work in the district. The belief in the city that hands were wanted was absurd, and one generated by the landholders in order to replace those ‘who would not submit to the terms of the masters’. Not one employer in the district paid in cash, but in orders ‘drawn on this person or that person’, and if the workman was lucky enough to be able to get one cashed, then the charge was one of five percent plus the compulsion to take half the order’s value in goods at their prices; between one and eight hundred percent Sydney prices.\textsuperscript{43}

The \textit{Dispatch}, while apparently aimed at and appearing to sympathise with the working classes, always seemed to end up promoting the position of the capitalist class. It argued that the economic distress of the colony was not sectional but universal and applied equally to employer and employed alike: it was ‘not the choice, but the necessity of the former which compels them to reduce the wages of labor, or cease to employ it’.\textsuperscript{44} It took up a conciliatory position between the harder line of the \textit{Herald} and the radicalism of the MPA, which it indirectly accused of creating animosity between the classes.\textsuperscript{45} It also promoted the Windeyer plan to reduce the salaries of British administrators by turning attention, using traditional producerist ‘placemen’ rhetoric to the cost of government, noting that the administrators of the

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Guardian}, 30 March 1844.
\textsuperscript{41} \textit{SCDML}, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Guardian}, 23 March 1844.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Dispatch}, 4 November, 11 November 1843.
\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Dispatch}, 11 November 1843.
\end{footnotesize}
colony, drawing on taxes, were still receiving the same salaries even though the cost of living had been much reduced. At the same time it informed the workers that although they were suffering, the ‘better classes’ were suffering even more because they had lost more—a point laboured in the opening columns of its first three issues. Had the MPA urged employees to demand, hand in hand with employers, an end to the ‘salaried extravagance’ of the colonial administration then they might have much greater chance of success, and the money saved should then be directed to relief for the workers.

The paper further argued that to fight the economic malaise the employers of labour should be given the wherewithal to employ it. This was the only way by which the distress of the working classes would be alleviated—another point it continually laboured from issue to issue. Therefore rather than fight any measures to improve employers’ position as self-serving ‘class legislation’ the working man should, according to the Dispatch, commend them as a means of ending his own distress. This from a supposed workers’ paper. It essentially referred to another Windeyer plan—to alleviate the distress of the large land owner by offering government-funded interest relief on their mortgages. In an early version of ‘trickle-down’, the ‘better classes’ would not spend the money on luxuries but use it to employ the lower orders. The Atlas also placed the blame firmly on the British colonial administration, and particularly George Gipps. It was Gipps’ hostility to the squatters, the generators of the colony’s wealth, that was to blame. It was the evil of irresponsible government; its enormous civil list, the excessive burden of its police and gaols, and the surrender of territorial revenue to local legislature, that was to blame for the colony’s distress.

The View of the Radical Press

To the mechanics and labourers of Sydney and their advocates, the depression appeared to be brought on by events beyond their control—the non-productive speculation of old enemies such as the stock- and land-jobbers and bankers, whose activities, based on liberal credit, had artificially raised prices and promoted usury.

46 *SR*, 7 October 1843.
47 *Dispatch*, 11 November, 18 November 1843.
48 *Dispatch*, 18 November 1843.
49 *Atlas*, 30 November 1844.
50 *SCDML*, p. 8.
The few had made and lost enormous fortunes through speculation at the expense of the rest. It demonstrated what happened when an economy based on morally righteous and socially useful productive labour was abandoned in favour of the various forms of jobbery that sought to somehow generate wealth without the necessity of labour. Capital, as stored and accumulated human labour, should be applied to productive enterprise, not squandered in luxury or speculation.

The *Sun* blamed the ‘cupidity, avarice and mad speculating’ of the squatter class whose fortunes were made ‘in the sweat of the convict’s brow’.\(^{51}\) The *Sydney Record* partly attributed the depression to a self-deception brought about by ‘the indulgence of tale-tellers in highly coloured ideas’.\(^{52}\) The *Star* meanwhile reminded its readers of the time when settler and merchant feted their friends on champagne and extended their speculations ever further until ‘like the watery circles which he was wont to make in the days of his youth, they disappeared from his sight and ended in nothing’. Unfortunately the middling and lower orders had aped their ‘betters’ and played their part in the general ruin.\(^{53}\)

Some emphasised the moral dimension, regarding it as a judgement against colonial licentiousness. The *Record*, while recognising the role speculation played in the depression, argued that it was most likely the result of immorality and turpitude. Once productive labour, the curse of Adam, was abandoned so too was social morality—leading the populace towards the temptation of the devil. A colony living beyond its means by ‘extended credit, and its consequent inducements to extravagance’ had been led into drunkenness, immorality, and gambling both at the table and in joint-stock companies. Corruption and jobbery were commonplace. Squatters had abandoned their leases for the pleasures of the city, while mechanics and labourers too had abandoned honest labour. There was waste and idleness among all classes.\(^{54}\) The *Register* likewise suggested that among the middle and higher classes were many that had wasted their lives in ‘idleness and extravagance’, or worse, in the kind of speculative gambling that had brought on the current ‘punishments’.\(^{55}\) The only certain way forward was through a return to honest labour. Australia was a huge unexplored country with much fertile land and potentially

\(^{51}\) *Sun*, 29 April 1843.
\(^{52}\) *SR*, 14 October 1843. The Anglican *Record* was disliked by many radicals for its apparent sectarianism: *Star*, 30 March, 16 April 1844.
\(^{53}\) *Star*, 13 April 1844.
\(^{54}\) *SR*, 18 October 1843.
\(^{55}\) *WR*, 29 July 1843.
immense natural resources. ‘We have hitherto played with the dice. In the future we must take the spade; gold is to be found in the earth, but not in the air’ it wrote, warning legislators against any future enactments that would ‘set up a new system of kite-flying’.  

Government too had to take its share of the blame, however the Record stated that Gipps had been pressured by the employers’ ‘exaggerated complaints’ of labour shortages ‘to traffic in human flesh…inundating the country, and ruining its character by the degraded and useless beings they introduced into its operative community’.  

But if these mild producerist inferences were capable of at least questioning ruling-class interests, they could also be co-opted to reinforce them. When the first issue of the Guardian suggested that the interests of ‘the people’ were inimical with those of an ‘upstart aristocracy’, it brought a swift ‘harmony of interest’ retaliation from the Sydney Morning Herald. ‘In young colonies who are not working men?’ it demanded to know:

We have no peerage, no aristocracy: we are all working men…obliged to earn [our] bread by “the sweat of [our] faces”…the interests of employers and employed are in this country so closely identified with each other, so firmly bound together by mutual dependence, that any attempt to separate them must be injurious to both.

Dealers in such ‘catchpenny publications’ as the Guardian conjured up imaginary distinctions and grievances for their own knavish advantage. Suggesting that workers were ‘the only people’ and all others were ‘wealthy drones or haughty aristocrats’ divided the colony during its most difficult period, when there should be cooperation. It was ‘cruelty and wickedness of the most aggravated kind’. All in the colony were producers. According to the Atlas, between 1826 and ‘41 the colony had witnessed a growth in revenue, commerce and population ‘probably without parallel in the history of the world’. Population and imports had increased threefold, revenue sevenfold and exports tenfold. All were underpinned by the export of wool—the true source of the colony’s wealth.

56 WR, 5 August 1843.  
57 SR, 14 October 1843.  
58 Guardian, 16 March 1844.  
59 SMH, 21 March 1844.  
60 Ibid.  
Just who were the true producers in early colonial society was, therefore, contested space, and all sides of politics were prepared to identify with the concept as and when it suited. In the absence of any formal intellectual economic counterpoise to the labour theory of value, each side vied for recognition over who was the real producer. The second issue of the *Guardian* responded to the *Herald’s* above editorial with typical populist producer opprobrium against Old Corruption. The squattocracy were an ‘oligarchical’ and ‘oppressive tendency’—a ‘dominant and selfish aristocracy’ that had historically used political power in the ‘so-called representative Assembly’ to extract wealth by ‘legislating for the aggrandisement of their own interest’ at the expense of the rest of society. They unscrupulously legislated for their own profit and used public credit for their own relief. Despite the *Herald’s* retort, the workers’ own common-sense and experience had demonstrated the division of colonial society into separate classes with opposing economic interests and different social characteristics. Economically, the pseudo-aristocracy used the power of legislation to oppress, extort, and attempt to cheapen labour by bringing Indian workers into the local labour market. Socially they affected ‘overweening pride and exclusive pretensions’ and an ‘intolerant observance’ of class distinctions with which they sought to distinguish themselves from the rest of society.62

Producerism could also be used to fragment worker unity. The *Dispatch* attempted to divide rural workers from their urban counterparts and identify them with their employers, by arguing that the rural industries as a whole were the colony’s only true producers. The city was parasitic upon both rural worker and employer and the cause of the current ‘embarrassment’. It was in the city that the previous ‘artificial’ prosperity disguised the fact that there were too many mechanics to service the needs of those in the interior: ‘the weight of this 30 or 40,000 consumers is too heavy for the 120,000 producers, and has, in consequence, caused extravagance, and undue expenditure of capital’, it wrote.63 Nevertheless it agreed with some palliative measures for the relief of distress, such as public works, but believed that their success would be limited. It also lent conditional support to the

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63 *Dispatch*, 2 December 1843.
proposals to lease small farms at low cost to the unemployed family man as a means of subsistence.\textsuperscript{64}

By the mid 1840s it appeared obvious not only that the depression was entrenched, but it also seemed that the colony would never recover from the malaise. Neither the British administration nor the colonial elite had any apparent strategy or intent to alleviate the distress of the working classes, save some minor public works. The pastoralists’ remedy of returning their activities to profit through the introduction of cheap labour or by reduction in government expenditure held out no hope to the working classes. In the face of a government that sought only to ‘please and gratify the wealthy landholder or commercialist’, and the ‘heartless apathy’, and even outright denial it demonstrated with respect to the distress of the working classes, the \textit{Star} of May 1845 marked a break in the usual calls to government and legislature to take some kind of action, and suggested instead that the working classes combine ‘for the purposes of obtaining political power to ameliorate their condition’ themselves.\textsuperscript{65} Although there had been previous examples of working-class mobilisation, notably over the 1840 Masters and Servants Bill, transportation, and the importation of Indian labour, this was the first time that colonial workers were called upon to combine and take direct political action on their own account. The \textit{Star} believed that increasing tension between the pastoralists and the British administration over the squatting regulations meant a fracture of the ruling class was imminent, and the working classes should seize the opportunity to exert their influence and gain significant political concessions. It was an opportunity that, if missed, would render the working classes alone responsible for their further poverty and misery.\textsuperscript{66}

To encourage workers to this end, the \textit{Star} offered a brief social analysis of contemporary colonial society to show how political power was being used to economically exploit them. As in Britain the population of the colony was divided into two classes: a ruling class, whose political power depended on the possession of property, and a subject class with no such property. The rules that governed all were framed by the former without the consent of the latter; hence the ‘useful classes lie entirely at the mercy of the capitalists’ who used their political ascendency to ‘reduce

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{65} \textit{Star}, 5 April, 17 May 1845.
\textsuperscript{66} \textit{Star}, 10 May, 31 May 1845.
the remuneration of labour’. The artisan and labourer appeared powerless in the face of the ruling classes, but through timely ‘association’ could challenge the strong hand of the rich. According to the Star, power rested in the hands of the ‘capitalists’ through combination—a ‘tacit, indescribable and indefinite union’ that existed among the colony’s employers. ‘No sooner [was] the interest of any one class of vampire capitalists affected…then a combination [was] called into being to counteract [it]’. The working classes, it was suggested, ‘should take a useful lesson from the higher classes’, among whom many associations were formed to ultimately assure that power remained in their hands.

Although the laws against combination had been repealed in 1835, ruling-class antipathy remained. But, according to the Star, contrary to the so-called evils of workers’ combination as portrayed by the ruling classes and their hireling mouthpieces, from combination issued all things good. It was through combination that civilized life arose, that all things great were achieved, that all apparent impossibilities were reduced to easy tasks. Through the establishment of a workers’ collective association such as the (British) Birmingham Political Union, inequality, injustice, oppression and extortion would be reduced, and social distinction based on the ‘accidental’ accumulation of wealth thus levelled. Should the working classes combine in such a manner, popular pressure would ensure that their claims would receive greater attention in the legislature. The strength of the ‘productive classes’ would increase dramatically, and as no power existed that could successfully oppose a united people, concessions would inevitably follow. Henceforth the colony would ‘progress in power and riches’, as would the prosperity of the workers, and thus Australia would be advanced.

This was the first time in the colony that a such bold and radical suggestion had been mentioned in print, and Mason’s frequent referral to both ‘the productive classes’ and the ‘unproductive classes’, and the repeated suggestion that it was through the endeavour of the former that Australia would advance, was the first in the nearly five years since Duncan’s mobilisation of workers against the Masters and Servants Bill. Meetings and petitions against government bills or the introduction of cheap labour was one thing, but to suggest that the working classes combine to

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67 Star, 10 May 1845.
69 Star, 24 May 1845.
70 Star, 5 April, 24 May 1845.
challenge the political power of the ruling classes, albeit through democratic means, was quite another. In this, his political swansong before handing the Star over to Bailey and returning to Parramatta, Mason used the producerist social dichotomy and descriptions of ‘vampire capitalists’, to inject a note of class struggle into contemporary politics, and even if little direct action came of them they at least offer proof of the existence of the ideas in the New South Wales of the mid-1840s. What is surprising is that his call for such combination was apparently not significant enough to warrant editorial comment in the establishment press.71

But although these editorials were inflammatory in the contemporary context, Mason was keen to ensure that they did not go too far. While demonstrating the Chartist influence of the Birmingham Political Union, he stopped short of demanding universal suffrage regardless of property qualifications, instead suggesting the figure of £10. He remained cautious of alienating the middle classes, and still referred to action by the working classes and their ‘friends’. A £10 property qualification was ‘far beneath the rights of the people’, and ‘we would despise it as a final measure’, he wrote, but in respect of contemporary expediency its advantages were incalculable.72 It would politically animate an important and numerous class of voters ‘whose interest was closely connected with the prosperity of the productive classes’, and through whom the legislature might at last render social justice.73 The Star had pointed out the opportunity; henceforth it was up to the working classes.74

71 Ibid.
72 Star, 24 May 1845.
73 Star, 17 May 1845.
74 Star, 31 May 1845.
Chapter 11
Protecting the Commonwealth: Protectionism and Racism

These legislators of ours have studied their political economy among scourges and fetters. They appear to think that cheap labour is essential to public prosperity.¹

Protectionism

In a sardonic letter to the Guardian of 1844, a correspondent calling himself Jonathon Oldbuck wrote that in the ignorance of times past it was British practice to encourage domestic industry and agriculture by protective duties and found commerce on the barter of superfluous production. While such outdated practice still continued in the Americas and Continental Europe, fortunately for Britain and its Empire a new system had emerged. It was founded on the doctrine of cheapness to the consumer, saw commerce based on speculation, and enabled men to live upon their wits without the trouble of industry. Thankfully for New South Wales the current governor was a man of such principles, and the effect of these enlightened measures on workers was visible throughout the colony.² As might be expected, such producerist opposition to free trade and British political economy was received sympathetically by a paper whose principal economic objective was ‘to foster and encourage colonial produce and colonial manufacture as being essentially necessary to the permanent prosperity of the colony’.³

Concerns surrounding the threat to local production posed by imports had been expressed as early as 1832 when the Currency Lad reported an extensive importation of furniture from America. While not opposed to free trade with America as a general principle, indeed the paper admired America and its founding principles, it was a matter of degree. Taken to the extreme, such trade held the potential to drive a ‘respectable class of mechanics… into the country to erect barns and scoop hog-troughs’. For the sake of paying a penny less, it argued, the colony would be deprived of a ‘most useful body of mechanics… who by industry have acquired a

¹ WR, 26 August 1843.
² Guardian, 16 March 1844.
³ Guardian, 27 April 1844.
trade by which they support their families and maintain their respectability’. 4 Eleven years later a deputation consisting of Sutherland, soon to be involved in the formation of the MPA and himself an upholsterer, Annette McGee, Edward Hunt and John Hill, presented a memorial from the Cabinet-makers and Upholsterers of Sydney to the Governor demanding the ad valorem duty of fifteen percent imposed on American furniture be ‘strictly exacted’ for the same reason. 5

The example offered by the cabinet-makers and upholsterers served as a model for other depressed trades to seek similar assurances. By May of the same year, the Sun reported that given ‘a dearth of employment, and a superabundance of goods of all descriptions in the market’, several meetings had been held by those trades adversely affected by cheaper British imports. 6 But in rare a column devoted to political economy, the paper warned readers that petitioning the Governor for protection from overseas-produced articles would inevitably lead to calls from the large land-holder for a tariff on corn, allowing them to monopolise the grain market. 7

Less than a year later, free trade advocate, barrister, landowner and MLC Richard Windeyer proposed a tariff on corn imports. 8

The Guardian responded immediately by declaring it a ‘monstrous and bare-faced abuse of legislative power’, stating that any man who proposed taxing the necessities of life was ‘neither a lover of his country—or his kind’. 9 Such taxation fell ‘oppressively and disproportionately on the poor’, and was an abstraction of labour value from the workers—the extraction of wealth from one class to aggrandise another by ‘indirect and iniquitous extortion’. 10 It was typical of economic debate in the colony, where each publication used the subject of free trade and protection selectively to suit the views of its readership. While the large landholder demanded free trade in goods and labour but suggested protection for local growers—Roger Therry for example considered himself a free-trader yet pushed for a colonial ‘corn law’—radicals such as Sutherland demanded protection for colonial mechanics while opposing it on foodstuffs. 11

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4 CL, 15 September 1832.
5 Sun, 11 February 1843.
6 Predominantly the shoe and boot-making, and clothing and apparel trades. Sun, 20 May 1843.
7 Ibid.
8 Guardian, 30 March 1844.
9 Ibid.
10 Guardian, 23 March 1844, 30 March 1844, 6 April 1844.
11 Ibid.
Taken as a whole, therefore, the position of both radical and establishment press remained sectional and ideologically inconsistent. The Currency Lad had suggested that the colony’s mechanics be protected from cheap imports and also that a few extra pence on a bushel of wheat was a small price to pay for the development of local production.\(^\text{12}\) The Guardian on the other hand, in the midst of a depression and while advocating protectionist measures for urban mechanics, opposed agricultural protection which it believed would raise the cost of food to the city’s workers already suffering from the effects of the depression. Imposing a tariff on imported articles was one thing, but to tax one of life’s basic staples was quite another. By implication it suggested that while acceptable for large and small agricultural producer alike to face additional costs on tools and other manufactured items, the urban workers that would benefit from protective tariffs on manufactured items should not pay extra for the protection of local agriculture. What the paper found most deplorable was the fact that the strongest proponents of the proposed corn tariff were not Tories, but supposedly liberal Whigs such as Windeyer and Therry.\(^\text{13}\) Mason’s papers were somewhat more consistent. Although advocating import replacement whenever possible, they baulked at protectionism. All demonstrated the difficulty of adopting a position which suited the numerous and diverse economic interests of ‘the people’, and suggest that while the harmony of interest might well have served similar political objectives, economic interests were less easily reconciled.

**Immigration & Racism**

‘Picture then twenty or thirty of these quiet, peaceable, docile people, placed on an estate like “Lewinsbrook”’, read an advertisement in the Sydney Herald of June 1841.\(^\text{14}\) It anticipated the arrival of labourers from India, given a recent British decision to allow the free movement of labour between the colonies and dominions, and painted an idyllic picture of a country estate worked by an inexpensive and compliant workforce to potential investors. Labour shortages and high wages were to be a thing of the past—‘ere long labour will be cheap enough’ it declared.\(^\text{15}\)

\(^{12}\) CL, 25 August 1832.  
\(^{13}\) Guardian, 30 March 1944.  
\(^{14}\) SH, 25 June 1841.  
\(^{15}\) SH, 25 June 1841.
It is beyond the scope of this study to examine the complexities of broader working-class racism, and it does not suggest that worker racism sprung solely from competition within the labour market. The idea of a ‘White Australia’ that was crucial to the labour movement of the late nineteenth century encompassed far more than simply protection from cheap labour, and is a subject that has generated significant attention from labour historians in its own right.\textsuperscript{16} This study briefly examines the influence of producerism on the precursor to White Australia that began to become noticeable in New South Wales from the 1840s. It points to an increasingly highly developed producer class-consciousness that complemented and reinforced a nascent colonial race consciousness.

The idea of importing Indian labourers into the service of the wool-grower was not new, it had previously been attempted by George Nail in 1838.\textsuperscript{17} But under the economic difficulties of the 1840s it assumed a renewed significance.\textsuperscript{18} The wool-growers made no secret of their wish to import cheap labour into an already saturated labour market—the introduction of which was believed certain to erode wages and conditions. The same cheap foreign labour was also seen as the biggest threat to any prospective producers’ commonwealth. It was a demonstration of how the emergent capitalist system of social relations would undermine any sense of community. A strong and cohesive commonwealth with a thriving productive economy and an informed, politically aware and active body of mechanics and yeomanry, would, in theory at least, ensure an equitable spread of social wealth by presenting an economically strong united opposition to those who would undermine it for their own selfish ends. Cheap foreign labour would fracture and weaken this community, allowing the greedy and unscrupulous greater opportunity to appropriate and accumulate most of the colony’s wealth. It was the familiar tactic of introducing cheap, supposedly quiescent, foreign labour used by employers in Britain (and post-


\textsuperscript{17} SG, 8 May 1838.

\textsuperscript{18} By early 1842 the \textit{Examiner} reported many were facing ruin and clamouring for the revival of transportation. \textit{Examiner}, 2 April 1842.
Civil War America) to undermine solidarity, wages and conditions and maintain discipline.¹⁹

The Sun blamed the pastoralists for igniting the issue at a time when ‘hundreds of free mechanics were wandering about the streets of Sydney seeking employment of any kind in vain’.²⁰ News of the abovementioned British decision had encouraged the large landholders to petition the Governor demanding Indian labour be allowed into the colony. Their crude demands laid bare the economic basis of much labour-market racism. Through the Sydney Herald, the pastoralists claimed the price of labour as a proportion of the wool price too high, and because wool was the principal source of colonial wealth, the import of cheap labour should be a priority.²¹ A correspondent to the Herald suggested ten thousand Indian labourers be brought out for wool production so Australia might better compete with wool producers such as Spain, France and Russia, who were supposedly using cheaper labour. He suggested another ten thousand be brought out as agricultural labourers and more as mechanics.²²

Fears that the squattocracy were about to make true their threats saw the colony’s radicals take action. The Sun took the lead, its invective aimed firmly at the pastoralists and legislature rather than the Indian labourers themselves. It reminded readers that for the same reasons, and in the interests of the same class of men, the immigration fund had previously been ‘lavished on British paupers of the unproductive classes’. Drawn from the residuum of the major cities, instead of engaging in useful and productive work on arrival they became a burden to the colony—‘we remember well when three or four ship loads of live lumber of this description was pouring upon us weekly’ it wrote.²³ A meeting was held at the Sydney racecourse on 16 January 1843 with the object of preventing the import of Indian indentured labour into the colony. It was, according to the Sun, well attended by the mechanics and labourers of the colony—those that ‘ate their bread in the sweat of their brow’. Despite attempts by the friends of the flockmasters ‘to convince

¹⁹ The actions of Lord Londonderry have been noted above. In another example, employers attempted to undermine the Tyneside shipbuilding and engineering workers’ 1866 strike for a nine hour day by importing several hundred foreign workers—most of whom were subsequently induced to desert. Webb, History of, pp. 166, 314-16.
²⁰ Sun, 28 January 1843.
²¹ SH, 26 June 1841.
²² SH, 28 June 1841.
²³ Sun, 4 February 1843.
“the swinish multitude” of the folly of universal outcry against their introduction, the so-called ‘Coolie Petition’ was drawn up.  

These early attempts by the pastoral interest failed, but in 1844, with increased numbers in the Legislative Council, they again felt confident enough to re-visit the proposal. The *Guardian* reported that a committee on immigration had been set up and was about to recommend the import of Indian labour, the result of which would invariably be the ‘depreciation of labor’ and the ‘distress of the working classes’. ‘The supply of labor to this market should be regulated by an impartial and responsible government’ and bear relationship to proven demand, it wrote. It demonstrated that the current Legislative Council was little more than a ‘combination among landholders’ who sought to use their hold on political power to ‘inundate the labour market both from England and India’.

Displaying typical producerist contempt for the classes both above and below them, it was argued that although true that members of the British underclass and the indentured labour drawn from the British empire could be made productive, the fruits of their labour would go straight into the pockets of the squatter class. The wealth thus generated would build a plantation economy underpinned by virtual slave labour, not a commonwealth of free and independent producers. The very future of New South Wales was at stake according to one correspondent to the *Sun*. It marked a crisis—a watershed in the colony’s history—the end of any possibility of the ideal commonwealth. ‘Now is the time for us to stand or fall…if coolies are allowed to be imported, farewell to all hopes of prosperity to the colony, farewell to the hopes of the industrious artisan, mechanic, or operative, of any class…farewell to any further emigration from the mother country’. It advocated the election of a ‘no coolie’ candidate to the Legislative Council. In the event, public opinion, particularly during an election, was again such that the squattocracy’s third attempt to introduce indentured labour was dropped and ‘free-born Englishmen, Scotsmen, and Irishmen’

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24 *Sun*, 28 January 1843.
25 *Guardian*, 23 March 1844; NSWLC Select Committee on Immigration. 1843. The committee heard the familiar evidence from employers that there was still a demand for labour in the country districts.
26 *Guardian*, 30 March 1844.
27 *Sun*, 11 February 1843. The letter bore the hallmark of populist electioneering given the writer signed themselves as ‘No Coolie’. Its author was most likely the distiller and ‘friend of the working classes’ Robert ‘Old Bob’ Cooper who was standing as a ‘no coolie’ candidate in the Legislative Council election with the support of the *Sun*. 
no longer faced the prospect of having to compete in the labour market with ‘heathen slaves’.  

Having failed in their attempts to introduce Indian labourers, the pastoralists immediately tried to recommence large-scale immigration from Britain. The Legislative Council was again charged with blatantly using state power to its members’ own advantage. Their calls for immigration at a time of working-class adversity appear only to have been moderated by the objections of Lang and the intervention of the colonial administration. Both Lang and Charles Ebden stated that a good deal of economic hardship existed among the mechanics and labourers of the colony, while William Suttor too agreed that there was a superabundance of labour and men prepared to work at any wage. The colonial administration, through Deas Thompson and Plunkett, likewise disagreed. Thompson suggested that Nicholson’s figures of an average £25 to £30 a year plus rations were wildly inflated, and that the true figure for the district was more like £10, while Plunkett dismissed the idea of the return of transportation. The division between the two factions of the ruling class was increasingly obvious, and there seems little doubt that the pastoralists were keen to see the role of the colonial administration reduced in the areas of land and immigration legislation.

In putting a resolution to the Legislative Council that a committee be appointed to examine the feasibility of recommencing immigration, Charles Nicholson offered the enlightened contention that in ancient times colonies were formed by slave labour, and Australia’s period of greatest prosperity coincided with cheap forced labour. He stated that there was plenty of work available in the country districts, and had heard that labourers in the Port Phillip area were drinking champagne while their English and Scottish counterparts drew meagre subsistence from the soup kitchen. On the basis of these obvious lies he proposed funding renewed immigration by government borrowing. In supporting the motion, John Foster, referring to the colony’s middle and working classes, stated that he had no patience with people who held meetings at racecourses and engaged in complaints of low wages. They were enemies of the colony. Richard Windeyer also denied any hardship among the rural labourers,

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28 Sun, 25 February 1843.
29 WR, 19 August 1843.
30 Ibid.
31 Foster was referring to a meeting held by the middle and working classes and attended by most of the City Council that took place on Monday 7th August 1843. It drew up a petition to the Governor
while Wentworth considered wages too high and argued for the return of transportation on that basis.

In response, the Register wrote that ‘the great error these legislators have committed consists in their having mistaken their own personal interests for that of the nation’.\textsuperscript{32} It was class legislation. The paper denounced Wentworth, Windeyer, and particularly Nicholson. Any land fund under the control of the legislature was not to be appropriated by its members and used to reduce the wages of labour. They had forgotten that they were supposedly the representatives of the nation and not of the few individuals who owned sheep and land. The Register declared that it was not against immigration, on the contrary it desired immigration on a far larger scale than the squattocracy, but such immigration should be controlled at a rate at which the economy could absorb without deflating wages, and migrants should be the useful and productive mechanics, agricultural labourers and small farmers and, doubtless above all, British. Deflating wages was exactly what the likes of Wentworth and Windeyer wanted.\textsuperscript{33} The Register noted that the debate was occurring at the same time that a meeting of three thousand members of the working classes, hundreds of whom were idle and many starving, had met to petition the Governor to institute some measures of public relief, relief that was subsequently denied.\textsuperscript{34} Windeyer’s, Wentworth’s and Foster’s suggestion that wages of two shillings a day were too high was treated with scorn by the Register; after paying the capitalist ten shillings a week in rent for a ‘miserable apartment’ it wrote, he was left with two shillings with which to feed and clothe his family and educate his children.\textsuperscript{35}

Attempts by the pastoralists to re-introduce transportation or import cheap Asian labour continued throughout the 1840s. A column entitled ‘Protection for the Working Classes’ in the Star of 1845 reported to its readers a letter published by the Herald—‘that vile and mercenary sheet of insipidity, dullness, and venality’—prompting ‘the aristocracy of Botany Bay’ to import Indian labour under the threat of

\textsuperscript{32} WR, 26 August 1843.
\textsuperscript{33} WR, 28 August 1843.
\textsuperscript{34} WR, 19 August 1843.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
rising labour costs associated with the cessation of immigration.36 Rumours again appeared in 1849.37 All such measures were resisted as an attack on the producers’ commonwealth. ‘Recollect’, wrote Hawksley in response to the renewed efforts to re-introduce transportation in 1849, ‘that you are building up the foundations of an empire, you are establishing the institutions of a country, and that country is to be the home of your children and your children’s children’. The workers of the colony had to act for posterity, and, depending on the outcome of these struggles, Australia would either become a pleasant and habitable land or ‘a country fit only for the habitation of slaves’.38

Towards the end of the 1840s the source of potential cheap labour turned towards China and marked the beginnings of a shift away from anti-immigration rhetoric framed in simple class terms to a more sophisticated racist discourse. Once again the major influence was Hawksley. The arrival of one hundred and fifty Chinese in March 1849, and rumours of another three hundred, provoked the Advocate into a paroxysm of protest. Unlike Mason’s depiction of Indian labourers as passive slaves, ‘simple heathens’ enticed away from their native land by the cruel machinations of the squatter class, Hawksley portrayed the Chinese as rapacious economic rivals to both the working and middle classes. They were ‘cut-throat miscreants’, ‘the most accomplished thieves, adroit swindlers, and professed cheats that the world can produce’. These men were not Christians; they would ‘erect their heathenish temples’ and engage in their ‘devilish rites’. They cared little for Christian morality and would soon either be taking English wives or engaging in other vile and immoral practices. Any suggestion that they would labour while the white man superintended was absurd, for their ambition and voracious acquisitiveness was such that the tables would soon be turned.39 It was the germ of the racist anti-Chinese rhetoric that would remain a feature of the labour movement for the rest of the century and beyond.40

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36 *Star*, 1 February 1845.
37 PA, 3 March, 25 August 1849.
38 PA, 16 June 1849.
39 PA, 10 March 1849.
40 Remarkably similar anti-Chinese rhetoric existed in North America where they were also regarded as cheap, quiescent labour. In Canada, just as in California, they were accused of not contributing or making a commitment to the development of the country by undercutting the wages of white labour, working longer hours, refusing to bring their wives and sending their money out of the country. See, for example, R. Warburton, ‘Workingmen’s Protective Association, Victoria, B.C., 1878: Racism, Intersectionality and Status Politics’, *Labour/Le Travail*, no. 43, Spring 1999. These same
An entrenched fear of Chinese competition became endemic among Australian workers. Where the Indian threat was essentially perceived to be one to rural labourers, the Chinese were seen as just as much a threat to the urban mechanic and shopkeeper. Parkes later stated that he stood against Chinese immigration not because they were inferior to the white man, but because they were ‘a superior set of people. A nation of an old deep-rooted civilization’ who were capable of taking a great hold on the country.\textsuperscript{41} Yet in laying bare the economic basis of anti-Chinese racism both Parkes and Hawksley still relied heavily on the class rhetoric of producerism. The Chinese were expert in almost every calling and their imitative powers were proverbial; although never having seen a tradesman’s tools within a matter of weeks they could produce ‘satisfactory and workmanlike’ results and were content with much lower wages than their Australian counterparts. ‘How could European workmen compete with men like these?’ asked Hawksley. ‘Are our artizans and mechanics, who have expended years in learning a trade…to be put into competition with men like these?’\textsuperscript{42}

Although the Chinese might become ‘perfect pests to our society’, ‘the men who concocted this scheme’ were equally ‘infidels’ who cared little for religion and morality ‘so long as their own interest is served’. ‘What care the monsters who require the services of these creatures for religion, for morality, for free institutions?’ asked the \textit{Advocate}, when their sole purpose was ‘to acquire wealth and oppress the labouring man’.\textsuperscript{43} Such was the seriousness of the threat that it was one occasion when it was acceptable to work for reduced wages. ‘All white men, labourers or mechanics’ should boycott both the Chinese, the Coolies, and those that brought them. In the long term it was better to work for a lower-wage ‘no-Coolie master’ than a ‘Coolie employer’.\textsuperscript{44}

‘A Working Man’ wrote that were the rules of European political economy fearlessly and vigorously applied in New South Wales, then newspaper journalists

stereotypical perceptions were relied on by Hawksley, Parkes and (later) the \textit{Bulletin} and George Black. The \textit{Bulletin} launched an especially acrimonious tirade against the Chinese between 1880 and 1882 which constructed and utilised racist caricature based on Hawksley’s early stereotype, while Black, as Secretary and later President of the Anti-Chinese Immigration League, boasted that he had ‘made “John” the subject of many fiery diatribes’. G. Black, \textit{A History of the N.S.W. Political Labor Party From Its Conception Until 1917}. Sydney, Worker Trades Union Printery, c.1917, p. 16.

\textsuperscript{41} Cited in Lang, \textit{I Remember}, p. 33.

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{PA}, 3 March 1840.

\textsuperscript{43} \textit{PA}, 3 March, 10 Mar 1849.

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{PA}, 10 March 1849.
would hold up this ‘tolerated slavery’ to the ridicule of ‘an intelligent and industrious people’, and clarify that it had little to do with scarcity of labour, but was simply the ‘offspring’ of the demand for cheap convict labour.\footnote{PA, 28 July 1849.} Another correspondent remarked that as with recent attempts to reintroduce transportation, the same ‘vile faction’ that had obtained millions of acres for nothing by robbing the colony of its Crown Lands, also demanded the labour to service them for nothing. They intended to resurrect the slave-trade and the feudal system. These ‘enemies of civilization and industry’, having failed in their attempts to kidnap South Sea Islanders for similar purpose, proposed to fill the land with Chinese workers, utilise their labour to extract the wealth of ‘our land’, and proceed to London, Paris or Rome to spend ‘our money’. At the same time, albeit on a smaller scale, the Chinaman was in his own way just as ruthless, acquisitive and self-serving, caring little for commonwealth principles. Wherever they had been permitted to settle—Manila, Java, or Singapore—their business practices had pushed the natives aside, and by ‘penurious, scheming, swindling, cheating habits, had accumulated immense fortunes’. This was the fate that awaited Australia should they gain a foothold. Once again the colonies were at ‘an important crisis in [their] history’. Were the colonists going to fight for the future of the colony or ‘tamely submit’ to a group of men characterised by ‘public robbery, kidnapping, and outrage’?\footnote{PA, 3 March 1849.}

Thus the producerist seeds of working-class racism were sown early in the history of the colony largely as a response by working people to action taken by the pastoral interest. The fallacious cry of a lack of labour amid the worst unemployment the colony had seen reflected the true motive—their desire to pay a less than reasonable wage when wages were already insufficient to support a family. Indian coolies were simply wage deflators to be brought in by the large landowners to restore profits when many had overextended themselves by borrowing from the banks. According to the \textit{Guardian} it demonstrated to what degree a ‘gentry…almost universally in debt…to merchants and moneylenders at exorbitant interest’ would stoop. Bordering on insolvency had heightened their selfishness and indifference to others even further.\footnote{\textit{Guardian}, 23 March 1844.}
According to radical opinion, in the long term it would prove counterproductive. Reflecting on the actions of the Australian ruling classes throughout the nineteenth century and beyond, the *Bulletin* was to write in 1914 that it was the same large importers and large landowners that had continually sought to extinguish any chance of a producers’ commonwealth virtually from first settlement. It was through *their* actions historically, and *their* constant demand for cheap labour and cheap imports, that Australia had been denied a sturdy yeoman and artisan class—the true foundation of nationhood. It was through *their* locking up of the land, and *their* Masters and Servants Acts that the sturdy British migrant had set sail for New York rather than Sydney and so built the mighty American Republic. ‘If this country had been even half as anxious to import strong white artisans—men who would make goods here and help to carry the rifle and the public debt and the tax burden—as it has been to increase its imports of foreign goods’, it wrote, then it would not be in its current position of having to rely on Britain for its defence.  

### The Banks

Mid-nineteenth-century Australian producer radicalism tended to focus largely around the three main issues of constitutional reform, immigration and protectionism. Less producerist invective was aimed at the priest and lawyer than in the motherland, although much radical rhetoric still retained the flavour of ‘Old Corruption’, and continued to devote attention to the placemen of the British administration and the pseudo-aristocratic large land-holders. But the development of capitalist relations in the colony also threatened the commonwealth and saw the activities of the banks begin to come to the attention of the radical press by the early 1840s. Although restrained in comparison to the 1890s, it marked the genesis of the Australian labour movement’s preoccupation with the banking industry.

In February 1843 an astonished Mason announced ‘an alarming discovery—a frightful evil’, that of political interference by the banks. In a half-column of the *Sun* devoted to this new and disturbing phenomenon it was suggested such influence was far more dangerous and insidious that the usual political jobbery and obsequiousness of corrupt politicians because it lurked unseen and worked secretly to undermine constitutional freedom. The report came on the back of a warning by Gipps that ‘a

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director of a bank, under the present system, need only shew a member his bills, and then let the member vote against the wishes of that director, if he dare’.  

Gipps related how in America the banks ruled the states until General Jackson broke their influence. Australia faced a similar a dangerous influence that if left unchecked would require an Australian ‘Jackson’ to do the same.  

To the Sun this seemed a new development in the political affairs of the colony and one that struck at the heart of democracy itself. ‘Hitherto’, it wrote, ‘the most dangerous obstacle to democracy was the election of “government men”, ready to help the powers that be “subjugate and oppress the people”’. Here however, was an attempt to undermine democracy for which the colony was unprepared. ‘Where is the state physician who can prescribe a remedy, under existing conditions?’ it asked.

Although not a significant aspect of early colonial radicalism, the few attacks on the banks nevertheless displayed many of the characteristics of its later incarnation and so are worth noting. The Sun believed banking to be a fraud whose practitioners had behaved negligently, if not criminally, prior to the crash of 1841. Robert Cooper, the ‘friend of the working classes’, alluded to what was to become a recurring theme in Australian labour history—the dividends paid to British banks. Cooper demanded that at a time of economic depression interest rates be lowered because most of the dividends went to Britain. British stockholders were responsible for the abstraction of wealth from the colony to the amount of £200,000 annually, and this was wealth the community could ill-afford to lose under its then current impoverishment. Interest should bear a much closer relationship to contemporary profit, he argued. He also called for enactment to prevent usury and extortion by the fixing of a ceiling on interest rates, as some insolvents were paying up to forty percent to usurious ‘vipers’ for further loans during times of hardship. Even Cooper’s political opponents agreed that interest paid on deposits turned men into ‘drones’, causing them to hoard money instead of using it for productive purposes.

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49 Sun, 18 February 1843.  
50 Ibid.  
51 Ibid.  
52 Sun, 28 January 1843. The Sun repeated to its readers the familiar producerist tale of how bankers generated money from nothing but reputation and public confidence. Also Sun, 1 April, 6 May 1843; SCMDML, p. 2; SMC, passim.  
53 Sun, 20 May 1843.  
54 WR, 23 September 1843.
Apathy: The Enemy Within

Mechanics and labourers sought and often obtained higher rewards during the economic good times and were not unexpectedly reluctant to see those gains evaporate when times were harsher. This was as true of colonial New South Wales as anywhere. Yet most often only when direct economic measures failed did they turn to politics. The *Guardian* of 1844 wrote that during the time of ‘fallacious prosperity’ the working and middle classes seemed so infatuated in pursuing their selfish interests that they took little notice of politics and affairs of state. It was not until prosperity waned that they awoke from their apathy and began to take an active interest in the subject.\(^{55}\) Indeed the organisation behind the *Guardian*, the MPA, had only been formed because of unemployment.\(^{56}\)

The *Guardian* may have chided its middle and working-class readership for their wilful ignorance of politics, but it was not the first radical paper to bemoan worker apathy or self-interest.\(^{57}\) It was a regular complaint in radical publications regardless of origin.\(^{58}\) It was popular apathy that led a disillusioned Duncan to finally quit radical journalism and take up a government billet. Lang recognised that it led to the majority accepting what was written in the establishment press at face value, and as will be shown later, it featured strongly in the disappointment of the socialists and other radicals of the 1890s.\(^{59}\) The *Currency Lad*, of the previous decade offered similar complaints of apathy and self-interest, and argued that as long as the majority could ‘turn in the ready penny’ they appeared not to be troubled with other considerations. ‘We have little hope, till the present generation has passed away’ that things might change, it wrote.\(^{60}\) Hawksley too bemoaned worker apathy. ‘Why is it that amongst us there exists such an apathy on political subjects?’ he asked in one of his regular addresses to the working classes.\(^{61}\) The ‘fatal drawback to your own prosperity—to your own social advancement and physical comfort, is the apathy, the

\(^{55}\) *Guardian*, 16 March 1844.

\(^{56}\) *SCDML*, p. 6; *WR*, 23 September 1843.

\(^{57}\) *Guardian*, 16 March 1844.

\(^{58}\) In the final edition of the British *Black Dwarf* (1824), T. J. Wooler wrote that: ‘In ceasing his political labours, the Black Dwarf has to regret one mistake, and that is a serious one. He commenced writing under the idea that there was a PUBLIC in Britain, and that public devotedly attached to the cause of parliamentary reform. This, it is but candid to admit, was an error’. Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p. 23.


\(^{60}\) *CL*, 8 August, 8 December 1832.

\(^{61}\) *PA*, 7 July 1849.
indifference, with which you treat all subjects relating to your own immediate interests’ he continued in a later address devoted entirely to worker apathy.  

Radicals had thus consistently fought a battle on two mutually reinforcing fronts: the overwhelming cultural hegemony of the ruling classes and the apathy and inertia of the working classes. Hawksley in particular continually both encouraged and berated the workers on the subjects of politics and education:

I have often been pained to hear men exclaim, ‘what do I care about politics; I never bother my head about such nonsense’…men so debased are slaves and they deserve to be so. This is precisely the state to which the ‘money lords’ wish to see you reduced. ‘Ah!’ we may hear them exclaim, ‘John’s a very decent sort of a lad; he never goes to any of these political meetings, but just minds his own business and leaves the affairs of the nation to wiser heads than his own’.  

Hawksley believed that true democracy was only possible when the mass of the people saw their own social and material improvement tied to that of the common good. For him the major problem lay in a lack of sense of community in the colony. There was a lack of solidarity caused by poor social cohesion among the producing classes of New South Wales who were too isolated from each other and seldom met. Consequently they did not know each other and could never present a unified position on important social and political matters. ‘Without union we are nothing but united we are everything’ he wrote—the working classes needed to ‘get knowledge, become acquainted with each other, combine, and co-operate together’.  

As it was, the current situation presented ‘a state of things to which Australian employers of labour generally have no objection’.  

For Hawksley one answer lay in a public meeting-place. The people needed somewhere to meet and discuss important matters, and no such places existed. There were churches and theatres but these were inappropriate and objections would almost certainly be raised. The Mechanics School of Arts, which received state support through the taxes paid by the workers, was ‘a mere mockery’. It had got into ‘the hands of a clique, who are determined that “Mechanics” shall be the very last persons to have anything to do with its management’. There was also nowhere for the

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62 PA, 25 August 1849.  
63 PA, 9 June 1849.  
64 PA, 23 June, 25 October 1849.  
65 PA, 21 July 1849.
working classes to read or educate themselves. An Australian Subscription Library existed, but although happy to be supported by the taxes of the working man, was in the hands of a few who would be ‘horror-struck at the sight of a Labourer within their walls’. The remedy was the erection of a ‘People’s Hall’ with lending library. Such an edifice would befit the projected worker’s commonwealth. It would stand for future generations to educate themselves and avoid the ‘slavery’ of the present.\textsuperscript{66}

\textbf{Assessment}

It is difficult to pinpoint and assess when producerism first emerged in the colony. Some important aspects were apparent in Smith-Hall’s \textit{Monitor} of the 1820s and Wills’ \textit{Currency Lad} of the early 1830s. But while most early 1840s radical print drew on producerist perspectives they seemed reluctant to refer to it directly for reasons described. From the beginnings of white settlement in Australia there were those who engaged in physical labour and those who did not. At first it was forced labour, but that was soon complemented by free migrants. Denied land, many were forced to work for others in the so-called free economy and thereby witnessed the fruits of their labour disappear into the profit, rent and tax that supported the non-productive. It is here that the germ of class consciousness lies, but a consciousness based on engagement in productive labour, not ownership of the means of production.

It was the depression of the 1840s that threw producerism into some kind of relief. Even if the earlier radical papers were not entirely convincing, or like Duncan and Mason at best sporadic, Hawksley demonstrated that producerism’s early class consciousness was present in mid nineteenth-century Australia. He utilised the concept extensively in his attempts to politically mobilise the working classes, and part of the \textit{Advocate’s} resonance with its readership was built on the recognition that the colony’s producing classes—its mechanics, labourers and small farmers—shared common interests as productive citizens which stood them apart from others in society. On that basis it sold the idea of a utopian commonwealth built upon morally righteous productive labour.\textsuperscript{67} In contrast stood the big city merchants with their economy of comparative advantage and the plantation-type economy sought by the pastoralists that monopolised the land and political power. Both undermined the

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{67} \textit{PA}, 16 June 1849.
establishment of a small-producer community: one through cheap imports, the other through demands for cheap labour and denying ordinary folk access to the land.

The main focus of mid-century radicalism was constitutional reform, but producerism demanded more than just political reform. It demanded an economy that re-emphasised production over consumption and exchange, a return to universal human labour and the abolition of unearned increment. In short, it demanded a return to the moral economy. It was the hard work of the producing classes that generated the wealth of the colony, and the innovation of such men as Struth, Dingwall, and their mechanics, that was responsible for the colony’s progress—but it was the ‘idle’ squatter, landlord and placeman of the colonial administration that used profit, rent and taxation to extort that wealth and dissipate it in idleness and luxury. It was a system legitimised and enforced through a legislature within which those responsible for the production of all wealth were denied representation. In response, the producing classes demanded that their contribution to society be recognised and their economic livelihood be protected.

The productive classes of nineteenth-century New South Wales had to compete with capitalism, its cheapness, and the abundant low cost goods that threatened to undermine the establishment of local production and halt the advance of the colony. Capitalism threatened wages, conditions, artisan independence and competence. The productive classes also stood against the reproduction of the British class system in the colony, the construction of a labouring class, and dependence and poverty it brought with it. In its place they demanded land and government protection from external threats such as cheap imports and cheap labour. They received neither. Instead the colonial legislature offered a callous indifference to unemployment and the hypocrisy of a laissez-faire attitude towards freedom of contract under conditions of plentiful labour while intervening to introduce repressive labour laws at times of labour scarcity. Moreover the vociferous promotion of the free market on one hand while maintaining artificially high land prices on the other, constructed a ‘labouring class’ in a land where there should be independence.68 These were themes that continually surfaced in the radical press of the 1840s.

In the first half of the nineteenth century an alliance of the working and middle classes stood against a government dominated by the interests of large land-owners.

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68 J. D. Lang, letter to PA, 16 December 1854; Harris, Settlers and Convicts, p. 164.
But it also marked a time in the colony when, despite the apparent harmony of interest, the difference between all employers and employed was beginning to be recognised. It was a crucial distinction that was to have major repercussions and ultimately undermine this mutual interest as the internal contradictions between producers and non-producers, protection and free trade, and capital and labour made themselves more fully apparent.

By the 1880s state power had been transferred to the urban middle classes, leaving the working classes to fend for themselves. Nevertheless some aspects of the harmony of interest lingered on. Hobsbawm noted that in Britain, while mechanics strongly objected to the unproductive and parasitic middleman of capitalism, they demonstrated greater sympathy for working masters as members of the useful classes; it was unfortunate that such masters were at the same time capitalists, subject to the logic of capitalism. It was a division that had become apparent in the Britain of the 1820s—Thomas Hodgskin arguing that although both masters and journeymen were productive workers, the former were also capitalists or agents of capitalists, and so in this regard their respective interests stood opposed. Despite this, manufacturing capital, although guilty of sweating and exploitation, nevertheless offered employment and invested and superintended the production of useful objects and essential commodities. By contrast mercantile, rentier and finance capital lived on profit, rents, usury and speculation—abstractions from labour—yet produced nothing.

At this juncture in Australian history, producerism therefore did offer a limited class consciousness and, through the Advocate and to a lesser extent Mason’s Star, even a measure of counter-hegemonic discourse. Ultimately however, in the short term these grievances lost much of their significance when gold was discovered in 1851 and prosperity returned. The Advocate ceased publication in 1856 and producerism once again became submerged. Nevertheless in questioning the

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69 The transfer of power to the middle classes and the divergence of interest between the colonial middle and working classes is described in Connell and Irving, Class Structure, pp. 83-228.
72 An illustration of this dichotomy is given in Marx’s Class Struggles In France, 1848-50, esp. pp. 1-18, 77-81. Although a long way from nineteenth-century Australia, one of the ultimate historical implications of industrial capital’s appearance as ‘the linear descendent of “natural” artisan labour’, concrete and fixed in community and the soil, in opposition to abstract and placeless “parasitic” finance capital, is explored in M. Postone, ‘Anti-Semitism and National Socialism: Notes on the German Reaction to “Holocaust”’, New German Critique, vol. 19, no. 1, 1980.
harmony of interest and expounding producerist social division in so forceful a manner, Hawksley and Mason pointed to the basis of the next generation of Australian worker radicalism. Its salient features, particularly its basis on the labour theory of value, would be drawn upon again at the close of the century when a more serious challenge was posed to ruling-class hegemony and producerism resurfaced—this time without being tempered by the middle classes.
PART C. PRODUCERISM FROM THE 1890s-1930s

Chapter 12

The Working-class Challenge

Labor’s plan is to get rid of the middleman and all parasites, and to secure for those who work the full result of their industry.¹

The period 1890-1930 witnessed Australian labour’s attempt to gain control of the state.² It was an attempt made credible by the Australian labour movement’s ability to unite workers, small rural producers and other small producers behind a broadly populist agenda through the producerist rhetoric that was a feature of much of the burgeoning radical print of the period. The socialists, syndicalists and single-taxers that sheltered under the broad umbrella of the movement shared the labour theory of value and the concept of social utility with the Labor Party and trades’ unions to which populism is more commonly attributed. All of the major worker movements and ideologies draw upon producerist foundations in their attempts to challenge the economic credibility upon which ruling-class hegemony was built and maintained—it was the one constant amid a confusion of ideological factionalism. While retaining much of the language of its 1840s predecessor, the challenge posed by the producerism of the 1890s had shifted markedly from one based on economic morality, to one that increasingly looked to scientific political economy. It continued to unify labour against the ‘drones’ and ‘vampires’ of capital, but, as will be shown below, on scientific rather than the abovementioned moral principles of the 1840s.

The forty years prior to 1890 had witnessed significant change in Australian society. With the occupation of most of Australia’s useful land,³ and the end of craft production on any significant scale for many of the older trades, the ideal of independence looked increasingly distant, and wage-slavery the inevitable fate of the producing classes. It was also considered a period of economic boom.⁴ In terms of describing a social base for producerist ideas in the New South Wales of the 1890s, there is little that could be added to the many works already in existence that cover

¹ Spence, *Australia’s Awakening*, p. 474.
² Connell and Irving, *Class Structure*, pp. 126-70.
the period. Ray Markey’s extensive survey and analysis is particularly noteworthy in this regard. Suffice to say that between 1850 and 1900 the Australian economy was transformed beyond recognition. The population had grown six-fold and the subsequent increase in demand for engineered and consumer products laid the foundations for an industrial economy of sufficient size to warrant the introduction of large-scale local steel production. The work practices of urban industry reflected this change as larger-scale enterprises and their division of labour replaced artisan work practices—although as Markey, Macintyre and Frost all caution, small-scale capitalism and a significant number of independent producers remained important to the local economy. Nevertheless such change effectively sounded the death-knell for many of the smaller entrepreneurial Sydney engineering companies, many of whom, such as Dawson’s foundry, became incorporated into larger enterprises like Mort’s Dock.

It was a period of consolidation for capitalist production. Transport, crucial to a local economy still largely based on primary industry, saw the concentration of marine engineering in Sydney’s Pyrmont and Balmain areas, while in the western suburbs of Auburn, Newington and Granville, stood the large rail workshops of Hudson Brothers and George Ritchie—soon themselves to be incorporated into the even larger Clyde Engineering. It was not until the First World War cut off many manufactured imports that local manufacturing finally succeeded mercantile capitalism as the mainstay of the local economy, and marked a corresponding shift to state interventionism in industrial relations.

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6 Hughes, *Australian Iron and Steel*, p. 28.
8 Along with the Hudson Brothers’ rail workshops at Auburn, Mort’s was the largest of Sydney’s engineering employers—Russell’s having been wound up by the owner in 1875. The two enterprises demonstrated the different faces of capitalism. Unlike Russell and Hudson Brothers (the latter immortalised by Henry Lawson as the ‘Grinder Brothers’), T. S. Mort was considered a good employer who instilled much good feeling in the industrial relations of the time. See Russell, ‘Sir Peter Nicoll Russell’; B. Hardy, *Their Work Was Australian: The Story of the Hudson Family*. Sydney, Halstead Press, 1970; Laws, *Jacob Garrard*, p. 50, 60, 188.
integrated steelworks at Newcastle commence operation. Such developments meant that the days of the typical nineteenth-century industrial entrepreneur were numbered, and by the end of the 1920s Bertram Stevens, Treasurer of the New South Wales Bavin government, believed that the movement in industry towards the development of joint-stock enterprises had signalled the end of individual enterprise by men with small capital.\(^\text{10}\) This ominous process had already been noticed by Australian labour which saw the big corporations take on the role of ‘bulwark for the few against the many’, and become the ‘direct fountain of the power of a share-holding oligarchy against the masses’ that menaced ‘freedom and progress’.\(^\text{11}\)

These changes to the industrial landscape had a profound effect on how workers saw their ideal society. One of the major influences on the changed character of producerism was its response to the increasing division of labour, and the ease with which such division allowed manual operations to become transferred to machine production. Once the ‘mysteries’ of the old crafts had been analysed, quantified, and broken down into a series of small, repetitive operations, it was a simple matter to replicate them by machine. Power-driven machinery enabled such operations to be carried out at a significantly higher speed and on a much larger scale than possible by hand. The small independent craftsman, unable to compete with the economies of scale, cost, often higher quality, and sheer volume of output associated with such machine production, was driven out of business. He was replaced by cheaper semi-skilled machine operatives, often female or child labour.\(^\text{12}\) Under artisan production, the worker controlled the work process; in the factories production rates were controlled by the machine and company superintendents.\(^\text{13}\)

Increases in productive efficiency through the division of labour and machine production meant that the individual nature of craft labour, and its basis as the economic foundation of a just society, appeared increasingly anachronistic. Production by machine was a more collective process and had a tendency to level shop-floor hierarchies and socialise the productive process. Yet producerism did not disappear with the decline of independent craft production. Instead the ranks of the

\(^{10}\) Employers’ Review, 30 April 1929.


\(^{12}\) Dobeson cited an 1889 advertisement for ‘a boy to drive a steam hammer’. He also described the sacking of a boy at ‘So & So Brothers’ (possibly Hudson Brothers) after he had lost an arm in a planing machine. Dobeson, Out of Work Again, pp. 39, 85-6.

\(^{13}\) This is very much a simplified, and indeed contested account of what was a complex process. For more extensive surveys the reader is referred to the many histories of the labour process in Australia.
‘producing classes’ were swelled by industrial workers, the more radical of whom searched for a new utopia through collectivist ideologies. Their objective was an economically just society organised along either socialist or syndicalist lines.

In contrast to the reaction of some of the older trades, these more recently developed worker ideologies embraced the notion of progress—particularly material progress. Their ideal societies were still to be based on commodity production, but productive human labour would be universal and its products collectively owned and distributed. In the absence of those intermediaries that controlled production and abstracted wealth, the ‘people’ would produce for their common needs, ‘simply dividing the tasks for greater convenience’. Progress would be achieved through production, by adding to social wealth through innovation in productive activity. With productive labour the key to progress and its promise of social emancipation, the labour theory of value remained essential to workers’ movements. The ideologies of socialism and syndicalism promised workers retention of the entire produce of their labour, and the abolition of the idle classes as a consequence. This was a crucial difference in economic philosophy with the earlier radicalism that had merely demanded a fairer share. Another was the recognition that workers’ economic and political oppression was systemic. Unlike the earlier radicals who believed that political reform would somehow halt their economic exploitation, many late nineteenth-century labour activists recognised that it was the capitalist system itself which produced:

Rascally politicians, Parliamentary humbug, banking traps, Exchange jobbers, land, farm and household grabbers, jingo imperialists, shoddy lords and aristocrats, mining sharks, chambers of commerce boodlers, Joint Stock robbers, Shent per Shenters, abettors of starvation, manufacturers of prostitution and the criminal classes, multitudes of paupers, hypocritical Church organizations, and other ghastly plutocratic institutions.

During the Maritime and Shearers strike of 1890, E. Forsyth declared that the labour question would never be settled by legislative tinkering or the institution of boards of conciliation or arbitration, because trades’ unionism and strikes were merely a symptom. The only remedy lay in addressing the underlying cause by ‘giving the

14 Justice, 30 April 1894.
labourers an equal interest in the fruits of their labour to that enjoyed by the capitalist’ through the government assuming control of capital. For socialists and syndicalists in particular it was the capitalist system that was responsible for the unequal distribution of wealth; therefore it was capitalism that had to be overthrown.

The new labour radicalism was thus both collectivist and producerist. It looked to the recently evolved socialist and syndicalist doctrines, but drew heavily on pre-existing Australian radical culture, which in turn had been influenced by British radicalism, Chartism and trades’ unionism. The American populist influence also played a crucial role in the nascent Australian labour movement. The producerist flavour of American economic and political works easily found resonance with local sentiment. Henry George’s *Progress and Poverty* was highly influential among labour’s leaders, and acknowledged by W. G. Spence as an influence on Australia’s working-class mobilisation. The IWW and Knights of Labor established local branches and generated voluminous political literature, the influence of the former out of all proportion to its size, while at the popular level the producerist populism of fictional works like Ignatius Donnelly’s *Caesar’s Column* and Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* made socialist principles accessible to a broader working-class readership. Bellamy in particular was influential among Australian working-class readers. Described in the *Australian Economist* as an example of a ‘fanciful’ utopia, *Looking Backward* was cited before the 1891 Royal Commission on Strikes by the banker Sir Thomas Dibbs as a particular cause of workers’ ‘impertinence’.

Donnelly and Bellamy complemented each other and demonstrated the power of the popular novel in projecting political ideas. They offered two possible futures: one a dystopia where the logic of capitalism had led to a society polarised by the co-existence of extreme wealth and poverty, crime, subversion, oppression, and ultimately violent revolution; the other a socialist utopia achieved by evolution, where the state had finally assumed control of capitalist monopolies for the good of

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16 SMH, 15 September 1890.
18 RCS, Minutes of Evidence, p. 60.
all. Whether the future was to be that of Donnelly or Bellamy appeared to be in the hands of the workers. Of the two Bellamy was the more obviously producerist. His narrator admitted to having lived in luxury and ‘utter idleness’ on interest—a ‘species of tax in perpetuity upon the product of those engaged in industry’ that enabled ‘the shifting [of] the burdens of one’s support onto the shoulders of others’. In Bellamy’s twenty-first century utopia productive labour was universal, enormous wealth was generated by production made efficient through the division of labour, and there were no idle rich, standing armies, criminals and tax collectors, to draw upon it at the expense of the producers. Banking, advertising and insurance were unnecessary and so no longer removed potentially productive workers from the labour force. In short, ‘there are no idlers now, rich or poor,—no drones’. The 1880s had witnessed significant trades’ union recruitment, and talk of conflict between capital and labour held currency in Australian society. Matters finally came to a head with the Maritime and Shearers’ strike of July-October 1890 which drew in several other unions and came close to a general strike. Relentless repetition of the producerist social dichotomy in the radical press, its convincing argument that labour was the source of all wealth, and its ability to argue that the wealth generated by producers was being abstracted by those of questionable social utility, all threw doubt onto the social hierarchy. This despite Métin’s charge that in concerning itself solely with material questions Australian labour acted in the absence of ideology. Métin was of course referring to formal ideology and specifically European socialism, where Australian labour concerned itself with the practical solution to the economic question that was the foundation of all labour doctrine, including socialist doctrine, historically. W. G. Spence stated that demands for the return of all wealth to those who produced it was the driving force behind the labour movement and the 1890 strike. At a mass meeting called during the strike, and amid the cheers of unionists, George Herbert of the Coal Lumpers’ Union reminded his audience that ‘it was the masses of the people who produced...

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everything, and yet they retained the least of what they produced of any known specimen of animal in the world’. The single taxers came down on the side of the unionists for the same reasons, their chairman C. L. Garland (MLA) declaring that ‘those who did the labour of the world profited the least and those who did the least…enjoyed all the fruits that labour produced’.

From the other side meanwhile there was little by way of economic counter-argument. Instead the employers of labour and their advocates focused on ‘union tyranny’ and ‘arbitrary demands’ made against the employer. R. J. Stewart, a ‘considerable property-holder and one who has a stake in the country’, wrote to the *Herald* of a ‘gigantic wrong’ being perpetrated by ‘tyrannical trades’ unionism’. He believed it abhorrent that law-abiding citizens suffer pecuniary loss merely because a few men were ‘dissatisfied with the station in life in which it has pleased the Almighty in His wisdom to place them’. In reply, ‘Verax’ wrote that Stewart was typical of a sentiment which saw the most esteemed and reputable citizen as one who secured a comfortable existence for himself by taking the lion’s share of the wealth that they had no part in producing. Manual labour they considered degrading, while the worker was thought merely a machine entitled to nothing beyond the basic necessities needed to ‘continue the work of producing for others’. ‘Let him [Stewart] furnish a reply to the following question,—“why is it that those who produce least wealth own most, while those that produce most own least?”’

Stewart’s response, which he believed would be agreed upon by all ‘right-minded people’, was simple—it was the natural order of things ordained by God. In an attempt to reaffirm the wages-fund theory he argued that ‘to assert that labour is the producer of all wealth is to assert a fallacy’. Capital, he argued, was the greatest factor in production, constituting the fund from which wages were drawn. When wages were high there were insufficient funds to go round and only when wages were low would men find employment. Then abandoning science and reason altogether, he stated that it was why

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27 *SMH*, 1 September 1890.
28 *SMH*, 2 September 1890.
29 This was noted by Métin during his 1899 visit. Métin, *Socialism Without Doctrine*, p. 180.
30 *SMH*, 30 August 1890.
31 *SMH*, 1 September 1890.
32 *SMH*, 2 September 1890.
every God-fearing citizen must deplore the iniquitous conduct of the working classes in combining in a mutinous rebellion against those whom the Almighty, in His wisdom and for His own good purposes, has placed in a position of superiority and authority over them. I am sorely afraid that there is a widespread anti-religious feeling permeating the large mass of wage-earners of this and the adjoining colonies, and they have in consequence in a great measure lost the virtues of meekness and humility which should teach them to bear with resignation any ills and privations to which circumstances may subject them.33

Stewart’s letters were unusual in that although presenting a confused amalgam of political economy and divine providence, he at least offered some economic answers, even if they were unconvincing and belonged to a bygone era. For the most part economic argument from the employers’ side remained absent throughout the strike, despite intense public interest. While the freedom of employers to engage non-union labour, and to maintain worker discipline, was pushed to the fore, no convincing argument for maintenance of the economic status quo was made.34 When the state finally came down on the side of the employers, it seemed that the economic argument of the labour movement had weakened and undermined ruling-class ‘fraud’ to the extent that ‘force’ had become necessary.35 Any notions of the state as a neutral arbiter subsequently disappeared as troops and police were used to break strikes, and the courts used to gaol unionists for long periods on trumped-up or minor charges.36 The unions were crushed not by force of argument, but batons, rifles and lawyers. The strike mechanism having failed, workers turned to political activity, and within a short period there was a proliferation of labour newspapers and periodicals that offered various means of reuniting the producing classes with the fruits of their labour.

This second major period of radicalism witnessed the final demise of the broad middle/working class alliance that had confronted the large colonial landholder of the 1830s and ‘40s, and, for radicals at least, the harmony of interest was dead. As with the outbreak of the popular radicalism of the 1840s, the catalyst was economic

33 Ibid.
34 For example, SMH, 2 September, 3 September 1890. Union tyranny and injustice was also the central theme of an employers’ meeting held in the Centenary Hall, York Street, Sydney, for the purposes of forming an employer combination the Employers’ Defence Association of Australasia. SMH, 3 September 1890.
35 During the duration of the strike, letters to the Herald repeatedly called for state intervention.
36 Spence, Australia’s Awakening, pp. 111-26. Such action by the state was repeated in the Queensland shearsers’ strike of 1891 and recorded by Julian Stuart. Stuart, Part of the Glory, pp. 141-3.
depression, which at least one correspondent to the *Sydney Morning Herald* was more inclined to see as an opportunity for the Australian worker to indulge in his customary ‘pleasure and idleness’. With significant unemployment among skilled workers and correspondingly lower wages, privation once again focused workers’ attention onto the social division of wealth and radicals used the opportunity thus provided to win worker support. As prominent Labor figure Jack Lang noted, there was an increase in the numbers of political agitators and reformers, and a greater interest in politics generally. Every argument used by radicals in their attempts to mobilise members of the working classes met with counter-argument from those representing capital in the ideological contest for the minds of the majority. Apathy, fatalism and the genuine belief by many in the harmony of interest were at once reinforced and challenged. Nevertheless, it was a period when a genuine working-class challenge indeed looked possible, and ultimately the labour movement, justified by the labour theory of value, mobilised enough workers to gain significant concessions from the ruling classes.

Under the broad banner of ‘socialism’, various collectivist ideologies concerned themselves with the social question—how society’s wealth was to be shared fairly. All emphasised those that produced the wealth and had no place for the idle consumer, insisting that productive labour was to be universal. The somewhat nebulous Australian Socialist League (ASL) was typical. While resolving itself into the two significant strands of ‘modern socialism’ and ‘state socialism’, the social question remained foremost to both. Modern socialism was based on the right of labour to retain its whole produce. Taking on a de-centralised and syndicalist flavour, instead of the individual producer retaining the fruits of their toil, as was the ideal under artisan production, associations of producers specific to each industry would collectively control production. With each worker receiving a share of the entire produce commensurate with skill and effort, unearned increment and the existence of an idle class would be impossible. State socialism, on the other hand, was based on the right of all to subsistence. It was more centralised than modern socialism, with the state assuming control over production and distribution to ensure both an

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37 *SMH*, 8 August 1892.
equitable spread of society’s wealth and that the basic human needs of all were met.\textsuperscript{40}

Critics of socialism suggested an irreconcilable difference between the two ideals. The right to the whole produce of labour demanded that all wealth be retained by those involved in its production, whereas the right to subsistence demanded the state assume control of all wealth and direct it to the needs of the individual as consumer.\textsuperscript{41} The former rendered the existence of an idle class impossible, the latter, some argued, not necessarily so. As Foxwell put it:

\begin{quote}
The fact is that there is a radical contradiction between the equities of production and the equities of consumption. ‘To each according to his work’, ‘to each according to his needs’, are hopelessly inconsistent maxims, though each is plausible enough in itself.\textsuperscript{42}
\end{quote}

It was a contradiction perhaps responsible for tension within the ASL, for while the right to the whole produce (and Marxian surplus-value) was firmly based on the labour theory of value, the right to subsistence was consumer focused and demanded an alternative theory.\textsuperscript{43} It would be convenient to argue that this difference between the two schools of thought ultimately split the League, however most conflict within the early Australian socialist movement seemed to be centred on the modern socialists’ fear of the potential tyranny posed by a state bureaucracy, the resumption of capitalist monopolies by the state, and the continuation of wage-slavery under state socialism, rather than matters of economic theory.\textsuperscript{44} Yet almost all Australian socialism, regardless of creed, continued to rely on the labour theory of value in its confrontation with orthodox political economy and on producerist rhetoric in the propaganda attack on the ruling classes.

Foxwell and Menger were perhaps intentionally muddying the waters around socialism’s key economic arguments. They ignored the belief of both schools in universal human labour which would render it inevitable that all would become

\textsuperscript{40} AR, 12 November 1888; Burgmann, \textit{In Our Time}, pp. 39-45. See also Lang, \textit{I Remember}, pp. 133-8.
\textsuperscript{41} Menger, \textit{Right to the Whole Produce}, pp. 7-11.
\textsuperscript{42} Foxwell, ‘English School’, p. xlv.
\textsuperscript{43} Marx used the concept of surplus-value purely in his critique of capitalism. It found no place in the political economy of any utopia. Marx was not a utopian.
producers and so share all the wealth. In the absence of an idle class to appropriate the wealth, distinction between the right to subsistence and the right to the whole produce would become irrelevant as consumer and producer became one and the same. *Justice* argued that ‘as far as is compatible with the circumstances under which he toils, the Worker shall receive the full value of his labour’, but ‘he that can and will not work, “neither shall he eat”’. ⁴⁵ This, the paper pronounced, was to be through state control of the means of production, distribution, and exchange. ⁴⁶ It was also made clear in the ALP Platform of 1909, which declared the party’s intention to secure ‘the full results of their industry to all producers by the collective ownership of monopolies and the extension of the industrial and economic functions of the State and Municipality’. ⁴⁷

The *Hummer*, newspaper of the Australian Shearers’ Union (ASU), was less certain. It advocated the right of labour to its whole produce, but recognised the difficulties of distribution. The complexity inherent in modern production through the division of labour and ever-increasing use of machinery meant that a just estimate of each person’s contribution was impossible. The only fair, permanent and practical solution lay ‘in some system of collective ownership of the means of production and distribution’, although that ‘system’ remained undefined. ⁴⁸ Deliberate confounding it may be, but Foxwell and Menger drew attention to the difficulty of relying on one economic theory to criticise the social distribution of wealth under a given set of social conditions while looking to another to provide for its equitable distribution under different, utopian, social conditions.

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⁴⁵ *Justice*, 14 February, 24 February 1894.
⁴⁶ *Justice*, 17 March 1894.
⁴⁸ *Hummer*, 19 October 1891.
Chapter 13

Economic Worlds Collide

Capital assists labour in production, but labour not only creates capital, but gives it value, for without labour it would be of no value in a reproductive sense.¹

Early 1891, and in a microcosm of the drama that had previously been played out in the major confrontation between capital and labour that was the 1890 Maritime and Shearers’ strike, the Royal Commission on Strikes marked the collision of two totally different perspectives on economic life. On one side stood Andrew Garran, arch defender of capital, former editor of the conservative *Sydney Morning Herald*, lawyer, Legislative Council member, member of the Australian Economic Association and contributor to its journal, the *Australian Economist*. On the other, William Guthrie Spence, former miner, president of the Amalgamated Shearers’ Union, labour organiser, and at that stage of his life a man with no formal education. They were two men with radically different social backgrounds and of widely differing economic outlooks.²

The Commission—set up, as Svensen noted, less to look into the causes of the conflict than to prevent reoccurrence—soon fell into familiar partisan economic and class lines.³ Garran, as chairman, firmly identified the interests of the pastoralist and big employer with those of the state, using his chairmanship as an opportunity to lecture Spence rather than inquire into the causes of the strike in any meaningful way. As a lawyer and master in the art of the leading question, he asked Spence if he had considered the cost of the strikes to the country and whether it had been worthwhile to ‘tax’ it to the extent of six million sterling simply because one-sixth of its pastoralists refused to ‘conform to your rules’. His art was applied a great deal more sympathetically to employers, demonstrating that he had no intention of pursuing the role of neutral arbiter. Alexander Wilson, for example, was asked if being forced to

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² *RCS*, Minutes of Evidence, passim; Groenewegen, *History*, pp. 78-82.
deal with ‘tyrannical’ union labour had ‘destroyed the relation between master and servant’ and if it would cause ‘total destruction of your freedom as employers?’

But it was in the social distribution of wealth that the differences became most apparent. Spence stated directly to Garran that organised labour was ‘dealing with the economic side of the question more fully than we used to’, and as such ‘the idea that labour produces all the wealth of the world is one which is getting a very firm hold’. ‘The wealth produced by labour is not fairly divided’, he added, ‘there is an unfair division of the profits of labour at present…and men are seeking to see how this came about’. Garran chose not to counter Spence directly. To do so would give Spence the opportunity to engage in high-profile public debate over the social role of the labour theory and thereby put its economic perspective and argument on the public record and possibly inflame worker attitudes. Instead he waited until he had more sympathetic witnesses before him to whom he could address leading questions that might discredit the theory.

Garran hoped that the high-profile banker Thomas Dibbs would provide such opportunity. Dibbs, brother of State Premier George Dibbs, agreed that the skill of the employer was in large part responsible for the success of an enterprise, providing Garran with the chance to suggest that it at least partially disproved ‘the theory that all wealth is produced by the workmen’. The less obviously partisan Dibbs however preferred to reinforce the ‘harmony of interest’ and the wages-fund theory, suggesting the relationship between employer and workman was one of mutual dependence. Garran nevertheless persisted. ‘There is a largely diffused feeling that the workmen create the whole of the wealth of the colony’, he stated, ‘it may be erroneous, but the idea is widely held;—do you think they do?’ Dibbs stated that were it true then the workers’ demands were legitimate, but as success and skill in management (in Garran’s words) ‘tend[ed] to modify the doctrine that all wealth [was] created by the employed’, no social injustice was being perpetrated through which the colony’s workers were being defrauded of their share of the wealth.

Formal economics during the period were represented by the Australian Economic Association and its mouthpiece the Australian Economist. But to understand the ideological battle it is necessary to return to the debate taking place in Europe. For

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4 RCS, Minutes of Evidence, p. 60.
5 Ibid.
some sixty years prior to Garran and Spence’s clash, an ideological struggle between value theories had been taking place within economics. While not divesting the aristocracy of political power altogether, the British 1832 Reform Act marked the effective consolidation of middle-class control of the most advanced capitalist state. It provided the context for an increasing economic and political antagonism between the value theories of middle and working classes that radicals such as Marx believed had effectively sounded the death-knell of disinterested ‘scientific bourgeois economy’. In the social and political struggle against Old Corruption both capital and labour were considered productive and a harmony of interest promoted between the two classes. The economics of both Smith and Ricardo, while acknowledging contradictions, tended to lend support to this position. But Marx believed that the post-1832 middle classes paid increasing attention to the demands by the working classes for a fairer share of labour’s reward. Accordingly, the labour theory of value and the social usefulness of productive labour had become a threat:

It was thenceforth no longer a question, whether this theorem or that was true, but whether it was useful to capital or harmful, expedient or inexpedient, politically dangerous or not. In place of disinterested inquirers, there were hired prize-fighters; in place of genuine scientific research, the bad conscience and evil intent of apologetic.

Science was the ultimate authority behind Enlightenment progressivism. At its purest, findings based on verifiable observation gave definitive truth to any hypothesis that could be thus proven. Political economy however, although deemed a science, could not be tested and proven by Baconian scientific method. As the study of a potentially infinitely variable number of human transactions and relationships it could never be a finite ‘pure’ or ‘natural’ science. Its hypotheses could not be subjected to verification by strict scientific method, and so were contestable, with each side seeking to endorse its findings as scientific truth. Results based on statistical trends and probabilities were open to subjective interpretation and manipulation, and could be used to lend authority to the economic position of either. Both sides charged the other’s theories ‘unscientific’ while emphasising the ‘scientific’ credentials of their own.

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8 Marx, Capital Vol. 1, p. 25.
The economists of capital legitimised the contemporary socio-economic status quo through the wages-fund, or Malthusian subsistence theories, while the economists of labour sought to contest that position through the labour theory. Some radicals of the old school such as Cobbett dismissed the entire subject as ‘a heap of rubbishy paragraphs’, while Australia’s ‘Cinderella’ charged British political economy with being ‘a science based on the hypothesis that all the wealth produced by the workers should be given up to the idlers’. Others however, such as Bray, preferred a more prolonged engagement with the subject on its own ground, if only to prove that bourgeois political economy had merely replaced Old Corruption’s natural order ordained by God with a system of natural laws ordained by science. Despite numerous contradictions between God and science, it seemed that on one thing at least they agreed—that the workers’ should part with the wealth that they created and remain at the bottom of the social order.

There is little doubt that popular political economy based on the labour theory was of concern to the ruling classes. Across the Anglo-Celtic world and beyond, it seemed as if the working man, his social utility bolstered by the labour theory of value, was certain to overthrow wealth and privilege. In a letter to Lord Brougham written in 1832, James Mill warned of the ‘illicit, cheap publications, in which the doctrine of the right of the labouring people, who they say are the only producers, to all that is produced, is very generally preached’, and the ‘mad nonsense of our friend Hodgkin [sic] about the rights of the labourer to the whole produce of the country…These opinions, if they were to spread, would be the subversion of civilised society; worse than the overwhelming deluge of Huns and Tartars’. As ruling-class concern increased over the (albeit unintentional) legitimacy given to working-class radicals by Smith and Ricardo, and given the importance of those economists to the Marxist school, it was inevitable that there would be a search for an alternative that could ideologically undermine radicalism’s economic foundations by discrediting the labour theory of value.

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9 An abridged version of Proudhon’s critique of Malthus, and Malthus’ infamous paragraph stating that the law of nature bid a new-born of the poor starve (‘A man who is born into a world already possessed…’ deleted from the third and subsequent editions of his Principle of Population) was published in AR, 7 April 1888.
10 Cobbett, Opinions, p. 186; Cinderella, Money Versus Wealth. Sydney, H. T. Dunn, 1890, p. 6.
13 See the example provided by Hollis, Pauper Press, pp. 220-46.
Engels stated that all modern socialism was premised on bourgeois political economy—especially Ricardo.\textsuperscript{14} Ricardo’s work began with the labour theory of value and the assertion that the entire product of social labour was resolved into rent, profit and wages.\textsuperscript{15} Consequently Ricardian theory became the focus of sustained criticism from the later economists of capital such as Lauderdale and Nassau Senior.\textsuperscript{16} If, as prominent British establishment economist Herbert Foxwell explained, the idea that the labourer was the producer of all wealth remained axiomatic to nineteenth-century socialism, then the most effective way of undermining socialism was to discredit the labour theory of value, and Ricardo in particular, on a scientific basis.\textsuperscript{17}

Foxwell’s own extensive survey of early socialism paid careful attention to its economic basis. His scrutiny led him to a belief in ‘the far-reaching, disastrous consequences of the unfortunate colour given to economic teaching by Ricardo’.\textsuperscript{18} Ricardo and his popularisers stood as an example of the ‘extreme danger’ that arose from ‘the unscientific use of hypothesis in social speculations’, from the ‘failure to appreciate the limited application to actual affairs of a highly artificial and arbitrary analysis’. It was Ricardo, ‘by this imperfect presentation of economic doctrine, [that] did more than any intentionally socialist writer to sap the foundations of that form of society which he was trying to explain’.\textsuperscript{19} An Austrian law professor, Anton Menger, attacked the right of labour to its entire produce from a legalistic standpoint that nevertheless incorporated a sustained critique of Ricardian economics.\textsuperscript{20} According to Foxwell, Menger’s work demonstrated that ‘it was Ricardo’s crude generalisations which gave modern socialism its fancied scientific basis’.\textsuperscript{21} Another British establishment economist, William Stanley Jevons, also argued that Ricardo had given the whole course of economics a ‘wrong twist’. He had made it ‘unhistorical’ and ‘unrealistic’, and had caused it to lose its ‘scientific independence and become the tool of a political party’. Jevons, however, could likewise be charged with the appropriation

\textsuperscript{15} Ricardo, \textit{Principles}, Ch. 1.
\textsuperscript{16} For Marx’s critique of these economists see \textit{Theories of Surplus-Value}, Ch. 4.
\textsuperscript{17} Foxwell, ‘English School’, p. vi.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, p. xl.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, p. xli.
\textsuperscript{20} Menger, \textit{Right to the Whole Produce}. Anton Menger was the brother of Carl Menger, lawyer, political economist, private tutor to Archduke Rudolf von Habsburg, and founder of the Austrian School of Economics.
\textsuperscript{21} Foxwell, ‘English School’, p. xl.
of the scientific method to the benefit of the other ‘political party’ through his own equally unverifiable hypotheses.\textsuperscript{22}

It was an earlier critic of the labour theory, George Poulett Scrope, who had pointed the way towards a new economic theory and an answer to the labour theory—that of marginal utility. Marginal utility theory, as part of a systematic ruling-class offensive against the labour theory of value, was developed by Jevons, Carl Menger and the Frenchman Leon Walras, later refined by another Austrian, Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk, and incorporated into the work of Alfred Marshall. It is the basis of modern economics and focuses on consumer demand and preferences. In the 1870s Jevons, alarmed at the labour movement and the popularity of the ‘erroneous’ and ‘mischievous’ labour theory among the ‘lower orders’, argued that the primary focus of economics should be not placed on the social relationship between human beings in the sphere of production, but on the relationship between the individual consumer and the commodity.\textsuperscript{23} The focus of economics should henceforth inquire into how best to allocate resources to satisfy consumers’ desires.\textsuperscript{24} Unlike the wages-fund theory which remained anchored to productive activity and tacitly accepted that productive labour was responsible for the generation of wealth, utility theory, rather than being drawn into argument over the origin of wealth and its social division, simply circumvented it. According to the new economics, price analysis resolved itself into two component parts: supply being explained by the cost of production theory, demand by marginal utility. Labour, far from being the sole source of value, became simply one aspect of the cost of production. As Jevons was keen to point out, labour was ‘never the cause of value’, merely a ‘determining circumstance’ two steps from value—its wages were simply another cost to be factored into price.\textsuperscript{25}

Attacks on the labour theory of value were not the sole preserve of the establishment. The British Fabian socialists and the European Revisionists also rejected the labour theory in favour of marginal utility. The Fabians Sidney and Beatrice Webb were familiar with the works of Foxwell and Anton Menger, and held a close and influential connection with the European Revisionists through their leader

\textsuperscript{22} Cited in Ibid, p. xli.
\textsuperscript{23} Meek, \textit{Labor Theory of Value}, p. 248.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, p. 242.
Eduard Bernstein.\textsuperscript{26} George Bernard Shaw, leading Fabian and ‘convinced Jevonian’, confirmed that the economics of Fabianism were the economics of Jevons.\textsuperscript{27} The Society was rigidly opposed to the Marxist ideas of ‘class war, the economic interpretation of history… and above all the [labour] theory of value’.\textsuperscript{28}

The ideal Fabian society was to be based on the right of all mankind to subsistence; their ‘great principle’ being that industry and all the products of labour would be collectively owned and controlled by the community to this end.\textsuperscript{29} The socialist state would therefore represent the citizen not as a producer, but as a consumer. Through small municipal associations of consumers based on the Rochdale co-operative model it would distribute the products of state-controlled industry directed by consumer demand and the economics of marginal utility. But getting British workers to reject the labour theory, it seems, was no easy task. The Webbs, disappointed at the theory’s resilience and its tendency to syndicalism, stated that despite the ‘advance’ of state socialist doctrine among the British working classes they still clung to ‘an instinctive faith in Associations of Producers’. ‘Throughout the whole of the second half of the nineteenth century’, they wrote, ‘it was pathetic to see this faith struggling on’.\textsuperscript{30} The reappearance of the phenomenon under the guise of Guild Socialism further demonstrated this durability, but ‘as a scheme for placing production under the management of the producers [Guild Socialism] seems to me to be on the wrong lines’, wrote the Fabian Edward Pease, ‘the consumer as a citizen must necessarily decide what is to be produced for his needs’.\textsuperscript{31}

The only significant response to such attacks on the labour theory came from Henry Hyndman’s ‘Futility of Utility’. Principally a critique of Jevons and the other marginalists, it was essentially based on a reaffirmation of the labour theory that also took a swipe against Marshall. The article originally took the form of a lecture given

\textsuperscript{28} E. Pfeiffer, \textit{La Société Fabienne et le Mouvement Socialiste Anglais Contemporain} cited in Pease, \textit{Fabian Society}, p. 238.
\textsuperscript{29} Pease, \textit{Fabian Society}, pp. 236-7.
\textsuperscript{30} Webb, \textit{History of}, p. 653.
before the National Liberal Club, and although invitations to attend the lecture and subsequent discussion were afforded to proponents of utility such as Foxwell, Marshall, Phillip Wicksteed, and Sidney Webb, none chose to attend, or indeed respond. Once again the marked reluctance by the advocates of utility to openly debate value theory seemed apparent.

Hyndman suggested that society was in a period of economic and political transition based upon advances in the forces of production. It was critical therefore that the theoretical basis of economics was widely understood and public debate fostered; there was nothing to be gained by obscuring the differences between these ‘two diametrically opposed and incompatible [value] theories’. The high social standing of such economists as Jevons, Foxwell and Marshall, and their status as university professors, offered no proof that their theories were correct; merely that they were useful to the side of the argument that held economic and cultural dominance. Open debate should be ‘uninfluenced by mere authority, or great reputations on either side’.  

The basis of Hyndman’s argument was that utility theory was ‘merely an obscure way of restating the old supply and demand thesis of Lauderdale, Bastiat, and others’. Much of what Jevons had written was described as ‘nonsense’, ‘ridiculous conjectures and absurd assumptions’ peppered with contradiction. It was imperfect economic argument hidden behind ‘useless mathematical formulae’. Hyndman sneered at Jevons’ reduction of human happiness to algebraic expression, at his application of differential calculus to human desires and emotions. But most nonsensical of all, when his utility theory could offer no human explanation, was Jevons’ otherworldly sunspot explanation of the periodic commercial crises that afflicted capitalism. The true reasons for the theories of Jevons and Marshall, and the wall of mathematical obfuscation behind which they resided, appeared obvious to Hyndman. It was to avoid close examination of the true source of wealth and subsequent argument over its equitable distribution. Jevons never broke down and analysed the ‘cost of production’ itself, or indeed the ‘quantity of labour’. Instead he simply pre-supposed their existence.  

In so doing, this new bourgeois political economy was able to avoid the thorny issue of the origins of surplus-value.

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32 H. M. Hyndman, ‘Final Futility of Final Utility’, *Economics of Socialism*, (MIA).
33 Ibid.
By focusing on the aggregate demands of individual consumers, the new theory tended to individualise rather than socialise economic theory. Meek also suggested that its usefulness in opposing the labour theory of value was, given the increasing popularity of Marxist ideas, becoming increasingly urgent.\textsuperscript{34} Two of Carl Menger’s Austrian School disciples, Böhm-Bawerk and Friedrich von Wieser, were motivated by the recognition that in Germany ‘there has of late years been a widening acceptance of the labour theory’ and that many socialists were basing their ‘crusade against interest’ on Ricardo’s system.\textsuperscript{35} Marginal utility however did more than simply discredit the labour theory of value. It dismissed inquiry into the social origins of wealth as irrelevant, and economics subsequently largely ignored it. Divorced of any social aspect, the potentially ‘dangerous’ subject of political economy at Jevons’ suggestion became simply ‘economics’ and focused on the cost of production and the desires of the individual consumer.\textsuperscript{36}

While the labour theory of value remained a consistent feature of worker political economy throughout the nineteenth century, it appeared that in Australia the economists of capital, like their counterparts in Britain, Europe and America, changed theories to suit circumstance or expediency. The wages-subsistence theory, based on Malthusian population theory, had given way to the wages-fund theory, which in turn was supplanted by marginal utility and Marshallian economics.\textsuperscript{37} Not surprisingly from the workers’ perspective, despite their different theoretical approaches all placed the productive worker at the bottom of the social and economic hierarchy and justified the minimal reward of labour. The wages-subsistence theory fixed wages to the number of workers in the labour market, arguing the inevitability of wages remaining at subsistence levels through overpopulation and hence oversupply of labour. The wages-fund theory, which fixed wages to an unspecified proportion of capital available for their payment, was the standard theoretical reply of the ruling classes in the latter half of the nineteenth century to the labour theory. Noel Butlin suggested however that by 1888, faced with the previous experience of high colonial wages, contributors to the Australian Economist, especially those sympathetic to labour such as Worsfold and

\textsuperscript{34} Meek, \textit{Labor Theory of Value}, p. 249.
\textsuperscript{35} Cited in Ibid, p. 251.
\textsuperscript{36} Jevons, \textit{Political Economy}, preface to 2\textsuperscript{nd} edition, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{37} For an early critique of Malthusian and wages subsistence theory see Bray, \textit{Labour's Wrongs}, pp. 102-7.
Scott, tended to reject the wages-fund theory. The theory was refuted by both Marx and George, but on the other side of the debate it still made the occasional appearance as a rebuttal to the workers’ labour theory.

Occasional mention of the labour theory surfaced in the pages of the *Australian Economist*. It was always opposed, usually in general rather than theoretical terms. This was hardly surprising given the Economic Association’s membership. Despite the declaration that it existed ‘purely for scientific purposes’ and had ‘no political bias’, members of the Association were almost all defenders of capital—some to a greater degree than others. They represented a ‘who’s who’ of the upper echelons of Sydney’s commercial, legal and academic fraternity. The Association was, as Butlin pointed out, ‘the product of high boom in an extremely wealthy and elitist society’.

In addition to Garran and Duckworth, members included Richard Teece, Duckworth’s general manager at the Australian Mutual Provident Society and Fellow of the Institute of Actuaries; Walter Scott, Sydney University’s Professor of Classics; Alfred de Lissa, a lawyer and mathematician; William McMillan, president of the Chamber of Commerce; Reginald Black of the Bank of New South Wales and J. F. Walker of the Royal Bank of Queensland. Several members of the Fairfax family also contributed to later editions. Between them they presented a fairly broad cross-section of ruling-class perspectives.

At one end, sympathetic to labour, stood Scott and De Lissa who took a consensual if patronising approach, acknowledging workers’ frustration at

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39 *SMH*, 2 September 1890; Marx, *Capital Vol. 1*, pp. 570-73; Marx, *Theories of Surplus-Value*, pp. 425-7; George, *Progress and Poverty*, pp. 15-24, 38-60. Métin noted that as late as 1899 conservative newspapers still invoked the wages-fund theory on the rare occasion that economic argument was introduced to counter labour legislation despite its abandonment in Europe. Métin, *Socialism Without Doctrine*, p. 180. Even later, in 1914, the IWW’s *Direct Action* scornfully dismissed the Sydney *Sun’s* ‘Moonshine Economics’ which still referred to an apparent harmony of interest based upon the wages-fund theory. The suggestion from the *Sun’s* ‘economist’ was that the harder labour worked, the bigger the wage fund, and the greater the mutual benefit to both employer and employed. *Direct Action*, 1 August 1914.
unemployment and poverty while pointing out the errors of popular political economy. Archibald Forsyth and Thomas Roseby were more favourable still, Forsyth as a former digger, rope-maker and self-confessed Chartist, and Roseby in particular as a radical who, alongside Spence before the Commission on Strikes, acknowledged that the strikes were essentially over the social division of wealth. At the other end stood Garran, W. J. Hynes, and John Hurst Junior who demonstrated no such understanding, and outright hostility to labour and its popular economics. Hynes frequently placed blame for the high unemployment of the early 1890s firmly at the feet of organised labour. It was their actions, he claimed, that had frightened off British investment capital. State socialism was a foreign, revolutionary import, and any extension of the state for the benefit of the working classes was ‘spoonfeeding and dry-nursing’ the ‘protégés of the Trades and Labour Council’. Hurst concurred, adding that the unions sought to create a monopoly for their members, and by their injudicious actions in fixing high wage levels reduced the incentive for employers to hire, thereby pushing the remaining workers into forced idleness and poverty.

In a society that still emphasised production as the engine of progress, the debate over productive and unproductive labour and social division into producers and non-producers infiltrated every aspect of social, political and economic debate. Definitions of who in society were its true producers were common to all sides. It could be applied to any argument or debate. Scott, in his 1891 inaugural address as President of the Economic Association, stated that one of the functions of political economy was to the attempt to solve the ‘mischief’ of unemployment. But while an ardent critic of the labour theory of value, and hardly a holder of wider producerist values, Scott still held to a prevailing producerist view of society. Those without gainful employment he described as ‘the drones of the hive, who choose to live idly on the results of other men’s labour’. They were the wilfully incompetent; the ‘loafers and beggars, tramps and sundowners’; the gamblers and speculators in land, shares, or at the racecourse, and the ‘thieves and swindlers into which this class shades off by imperceptible degrees’. These were definitions remarkably similar to those of radical contemporary Robert Winspear of the socialist Australian Radical. Scott also acknowledged that

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43 RCS, p. 171.
47 AR, 15 September 1888.
there were those with legitimate reason not to work, the children, the old and the sick, but there were also those willing and able to work but unable to find it. It was, he believed, a class that ought not to exist, and the fact that it did so was one of the problems that the science needed to investigate and solve. 48

Scott also acknowledged the social usefulness of a man who produced greater wealth than he consumed, and so added to the wealth of the country. But unlike the popular radicals he did not believe in the zero-sum concept of wealth production: ‘the old error—not merely a popular error, for leaders of thought, from Aristotle to Ruskin, have been misled by it—that, in exchange, one man’s gain is necessarily another’s loss, and that it is impossible for both parties to profit by the transaction’. 49 W. H Chard, meanwhile, writing in the same journal, admitted that capitalism and its cycles of boom and bust often meant that honest and industrious workers were sometimes worse off than criminals, lunatics, and paupers, who ‘either live by vice or are kept in confinement and provided by the State with decent food, clothing, and shelter’. 50

In July 1888 an article appeared in the Australian Economist titled ‘Unproductive Consumption’. It was an article which revealed that familiar producerist themes remained firmly rooted in Australian radicalism post Hawksley. Drawing on J. S. Mill’s distinction between productive and unproductive consumption, author Martin Simmat wondered why there was little social analysis of production and consumption, and why ‘dishonest economists’ had studiously avoided the subject, thereby allowing the public to remain in ignorance of ‘the most vital question of social life and civilised society’. He himself had ‘for years past…vainly looked for public discussion and controversy on the subject’ and so used this opportunity to ‘set the ball rolling’. 51

The article began with a brief exposition on the objectivity of science. Science had truth as its fundamental objective regardless of personal or party interest; it was its very disinterestedness that gave it its moral power. But Simmat observed that political economy as the science of production and distribution of wealth was largely propagated by people of leisure or engaged in commercial pursuits, implying it served

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48 Scott, ‘Inaugural Address’.
49 AEA, ‘Discussion of “Surplus Labour Problem”’, p. 183; W. Scott, ‘The Economics of Consumption’, AE, vol. 2, no. 24, March 1892, in Butlin, Fitzgerald and Scott, Australian Economist, p. 204, cf. for example NO, 14 April 1894 which argued that to consume without producing was ‘robbing somebody’ no matter how legal the process may be.
that section of society. There were two types of political economist he argued: those that genuinely inquired into the subject, scrupulously applying the scientific method; and the ‘dishonest quacks’ who with sophistry, ‘insolent puffery’ and advertising, aided by ‘a shallow press and shallow thinkers’, pushed themselves to the fore at the expense of ‘the real heroes of science’. Unfortunately for both science and humanity, ‘the quack carries the day amidst public applause, and the truly great may be never heard of, or forgotten save by a select few’.  

Simmat’s article displayed all the characteristics of the producerist perspective. The crux was that the accumulation of wealth was vital to the future of society, but wealth had to be consumed in such a way as to stimulate further production and thereby advance the human condition. Similar to Bray he argued that capital was the communal fund of stored labour which should be used to advance human progress through investment in increased productive activity. It was not to be appropriated by the idle and wasted in the hedonistic consumption of useless luxuries. The argument was a familiar one that began with the producerist axiom that all labour which produced or facilitated the production of wealth was productive, but that the wealth produced was ‘appropriated from the producing classes’ through profit, interest and rent. Equal exchange between producer and consumer was not possible under capitalist social relations because standing between the two was the employer or middleman who used that position to extract profit. The mechanism of interest needed little explanation, while rent was the price paid to the landlord for the use of ‘appropriated’ land in production. All saw the wealth, for which the producer received little beyond that required for subsistence, become ‘the unearned increment of unproductive consumers…spent in idle luxury’.  

Taxation was another ‘form of appropriation of unearned wealth’. It was ‘wealth taken from the producing classes’ for the maintenance of government. Simmat argued that although ostensibly established to protect the populace and administer justice, government ranked alongside commerce and landlordism as ‘subtle systems for the exploitation of labour’. It was an institution used to provide those ‘unproductive consumers’ with no facility to make profit, draw rent or interest, with government places through which they could draw taxes. Other familiar targets for Simmat’s polemic included a ‘morally and intellectually degenerate royalty and aristocracy’ kept

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in splendour, and a standing army of ‘cut-throats’ with useless fortresses and weapons of destruction all maintained by taxation of ‘the producing classes’. In the event of war itself, the national debt would allow monies borrowed from the wealthy to be repaid with interest via the increased taxation of the producing classes through government bonds, so called, according to Simmat, because they ensured the ‘bondage of the producers’ far into the future.  

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The concept of unproductive consumption saw the behaviour of the wealthy draw particular vituperation. Indolent wealth, ‘producing nothing’, lived in dissipation and debauchery, and moreover its ‘nefarious conduct’ was protected by law. In broadly similar arguments to those which appeared in the aftermath of the speculative boom of the 1840s, Simmat argued in typical producerist terms that any tendency for society to fall into decadent consumption would mean the diversion of wealth away from productive enterprise, the end of progress, and the nation’s subsequent decline.  

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It was at such times that the productive classes that went hungry amid barns full of the fruits of their labour, and went homeless among the very houses that they had built. What would happen, he asked (using the Saint-Simonian example), if all the lawyers, aristocrats, merchants, priests and princes were removed from society? How would that compare to the loss of its scientists, artists, artisans, and skilled labourers?  

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But Simmat’s intent was not socialist. It was simply to suggest that by drawing excessively on the nation’s capital, its national store, the wealthy and non-productive halted the nation’s progress and reduced the wages fund, thereby driving the workers into poverty. The idle display of glittering diamonds and rustling silks, the gluttonous unproductive consumption of costly wines and dainty dishes, all came from rent, profit, interest or taxes, and were therefore taken from productive labour. The wealth-possessing classes had the duty to use that wealth as capital to invest in increased productive activity and so increase the nation’s wealth and its people’s well-being, but instead it was mostly ‘dissipated in senseless debauch and idle luxury’. Economists, instead of ‘fawning’ to the idle rich, should ‘loathe and despise an unproductive consumer, as they would loathe a parasite; and they should pay to despised labour and talent that respect which is their due’.  

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54 Ibid.
55 Ibid, p. 69.
56 Ibid, p. 67.
57 Ibid, p. 69.
In their critique of the article, several members of the Economic Association—either unintentionally or deliberately confusing wages with capital—argued that the unproductive consumption of the worker was not analysed. Enormous sums were spent by the working classes on intoxicating liquors which brought with them vast amounts of misery and unhappiness. In a similar vein came the charge that it also ignored the substantial sums wasted by the working classes on the horse-racing sweepstakes, along with one extraordinary claim that there was more extravagance and unproductive consumption among the poorer classes of society. It was also argued that government expenditure, including monies spent on standing armies and the production of war material provided much employment. Generally sympathetic, Scott nevertheless made the distinction between ‘unproductive’ and ‘useless’ consumption. Human exertions in the pursuit of advancing culture, education, and leisure, while ‘unproductive’ were nonetheless still socially useful, he maintained. Pointing towards an emergent social emphasis on consumption he believed all of mankind deserved a ‘measure of the superfluities of wealth beyond the simple necessaries of life’. It was the test of a civilisation that rather than being limited to the wealthy few, each of its members should be able to consume unproductively, yet not uselessly.58

But inasmuch as the article was intended to fire broad public debate on the role of production and consumption in Australian political economy, it failed. Instead, beyond the exclusive bounds of the Australian Economist—which it has to be acknowledged did engage in some occasional lively debate on the issue—the subject as a whole remained largely ignored by the wider establishment press, save for some rudimentary gainsaying, and the familiar producerist rhetoric and caricature of the radical press.59 The problem, as Marx had noted, was that any scientifically conducted inquiry into the origins of surplus-value could only conclude that it was the result of the workers’ productive labour. Consequently capitalist profit must be based on their exploitation. Simmat too recognised this, suggesting that the subject had brought truths to light that ‘threaten[ed] to shake the very foundations of society if once sufficiently


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comprehended by the productive classes’. He thus effectively answered his own initial question.

An attempt at putting the workers’ perspectives before the Economic Association was made by William Maston of the New South Wales Trades and Labour Council in late 1891. Maston however used most of his paper to engage in an out-dated polemic against machine production that stood contrary to the idea of progress. It was a backward-looking, disappointing and lacklustre attempt, although the use of typically producerist rhetoric in the cause of state socialism aroused a mixture of patronising sympathy and outright hostility from members of the Association. Discussion was lengthy and intense. Duckworth, typical of much of the criticism, stated that the paper, although thoughtful and earnest, lacked any scientific basis for its assertions. As might be expected, Garran’s critique was harsher, stating that it was ‘too declamatory’ and unscientific. It relied too heavily on imagination. But then his own work aside, Garran deemed any departure from rigid Baconian methodology irrelevant to political economy. ‘Disinterested’ economic science from Garran’s perspective, at least when it was not peering too closely into the origins of surplus-value, offered no hope for the worker—truly the ‘dismal science’. But as Scott suggested in his criticism of Garran, scientific method was only appropriate to the laws of matter and mechanical action. Human beings were on a higher plane and had inalienable rights that had preceded the existence of society. Hynes took the view that Maston had demonstrated the workers’ infection with false economic doctrines; that they were ‘not followers of sound orthodox economic reasoning on social, industrial, and political questions’. Recognising the presence of producerism among the workers, like many among the ruling classes and their supporters he displayed obvious apprehension. For this reason

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65 AEA, ‘Discussion of “Henry George and the Scientific Method”’, AE, vol. 2, no. 1, March 1890, in Butlin, Fitzgerald and Scott, Australian Economist, p. 19. Garran’s article was supported in a later article by W. G. Cameron. He stated that in recommending arguments about inalienable rights be dropped from scientific economics Garran was supported by ‘some of the most profound thinkers of the age’, including Jevons. AE, vol. 2, no. 3, May 1890, in Butlin, Fitzgerald and Scott, Australian Economist, p. 35.
he advocated ‘the great necessity’ of state-aided popular instruction into orthodox political economy. 66 He quoted Italian economist Luigi Cossa:

The competent instruction of labourers in Political Economy, imparted in a popular form, would secure to society the incalculable benefit of freedom from many crises and other dangers. It would form a rampart against those subversive doctrines which are too often published, and which find an easy access into the uncultivated minds and excitable fancies of the working classes. 67

How could the working man possibly become a competent legislator and manage affairs of state on the basis of flawed economic doctrine? 68

In Australia, the most popular and widespread vehicle for these ‘subversive doctrines’ was Henry George’s Progress and Poverty. But Australia had its own radical political economist in ‘Cinderella’. 69 ‘Cinderella’s’ Manual of Political Economy for Free Men was less a work of economic theory however than a polemic against British political economy and laissez-faire. 70 It attacked British political economy as a pseudo-scientific falsehood that justified greed and oppression—an obscurantist jargon that dehumanised and rendered abstract every aspect of the workers’ economic existence while hiding the true source of human wealth. The author’s preface threatened to examine the ‘imposing intellectual structure of English Political Economy’ and thence ‘crush [it] beneath my heel into the mire of eternal infamy’. The main body of the work however was disappointing in this regard. Although resembling the earlier work of British radicals such as Bray, it lacked any of Bray’s strength of argument, and tended to dismiss orthodox political economy in its entirety, rather than engage it in theoretical debate. Nonetheless it still contained several familiar themes important to producer radicalism.

The most obvious was its attachment to the labour theory of value. The first part of the work, the author stated, would, ‘without the assistance of any Political Economy…easily establish the simple proposition that all Wealth is produced by Labour’. Political economy itself recognised that the three factors involved in the production of wealth were land, capital and labour and that the cost of production

66 AEA, ‘Discussion of “Surplus Labour Problem”’, p. 175.
68 Ibid.
69 Groenewegen points to suggestions that a radical Methodist minister, Hugh Gilmore, may have been the author. Groenewegen, History, p. 23, fn 12.
resolved itself into rent, profit and wages. Land was a condition of production, capital its instrument, and labour a human being. One of the fundamental mistakes of orthodox political economy, according to the author, was to confuse land, a condition of production, with the so-called right of the landlord to rent. ‘This leap, from “land” to “landlord” is the strangest ever exhibited in the history of ratiocination and as a blunder second to none’, he declared. Accordingly the right of the landlord to rent, and indeed the right to ownership of the land itself, was one universally presupposed by political economists, and its basis was never explained. The landlord therefore was a ‘disturbing element arising from political arrangements’, and ‘if Rent is not Robbery then the English language is perfectly useless as a medium of thought’.

Attention was then turned to the capitalist. The capitalist owned both the instruments of production and the wages-fund that paid the labourer, but political economy never explained that the capitalist came to own them both through unequal exchange. To continue an exposition of Cinderella would be to simply restate all of the familiar producerist assumptions. The Landlord lent the land but made nothing, the capitalist lent the instrument but made nothing, while the labourer made everything. Society was divided into ‘Labourers and Non-Labourers—Workers and Idlers’, while speculators and money-lenders were attacked as non-productive and immoral. Beneath the arcane jargon of the British political economists, declared the author, lay the simple truth that ‘all wealth is produced by labour’. ‘English Political Economy’ therefore was ‘not even a Dismal Science…not even a Damned Science [but] in truth, Damned Ignorance’.

Occasionally real economic debate surfaced in the Legislative Assembly. The socialist Radical reported with astonishment that in July 1887 the ‘hitherto silent’ Nicholas Hawken suddenly expressed ‘ideas that had never before been voiced in that House’. In discussing a customs and duties bill, Hawken stated that regardless of where taxes were seen to come from, their ultimate source was the working-man. In the face of strong opposition from Dibbs, he argued that sound political economy demonstrated that workers paid all the taxes and that ‘at the risk of my political reputation, such as it is, the rich pay no taxes; they never did pay taxes, and they never will pay taxes’. Wealth could only be taxed when it moved from hand to hand and as

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71 Ibid, pp. 1, 14-17.
72 Ibid, pp. 18-19.
73 Ibid, pp. 2-4, 6, 31, 67, 94.
74 Nicholas Hawken: Member for Newtown 1887-91, Methodist produce merchant.
the workmen were the original producers of wealth, every subsequent movement was only taxing that already produced by them.\textsuperscript{75} It was the same argument put up by the \textit{Radical} itself when it stated that the only way a nation could make and maintain wealth was through work; hence, regardless of any intermediaries, those who worked paid all the nation’s taxes.\textsuperscript{76} George Black later stated to the Assembly that getting rid of profit and rent would increase wages such that ‘every man shall receive the full value of his labour—the full product of his labour’. With no landlord or middleman ‘you have a community in which every man who is able to labour gets the full product of his labour, and in which any man who is incompetent to earn anything can only be able to live as a pauper on the sufferance of the community’.\textsuperscript{77}

Taken as a whole however, economic debate in Australian ruling circles can perhaps be seen in one of two ways: either as a validation of Marx’s dictum that the establishment economists, as apologists for the ruling classes, sought not to inquire too deeply into the origins of surplus-value, or that there were simply not enough interested parties in the field to provide any significant ongoing discussion. Either way, public controversy surrounding the labour theory at the upper levels of society remained limited, despite the growing political awareness among workers through organisations such as the trades’ unions. The fact remains that the prominent presence of producerism and the labour theory across a broad spectrum of the radical press suggests the likelihood that Marx was correct. Engaging in wide public debate on the labour theory of value, beyond the limited readership of the \textit{Australian Economist}, would almost certainly be against the interest of the established order, and so it seems that an implicit silence was maintained on the subject. The labour theory of value remained the great unmentionable in public debate and polite society. Things were different at the popular level.

\textsuperscript{75} \textit{AR}, 2 July 1887.
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{AR}, 9 July 1887.
\textsuperscript{77} \textit{AW}, 24 October 1891.
Chapter 14

Popular Economic Debate

The class that will neither toil nor spin is the one that eats most and usurps the wealth of others.¹

During the long boom of 1860-90 producerist language had largely disappeared from the print media back into the unrecorded substratum of worker ideas. Even the appearance of the Sydney Bulletin in 1880 under J. F. Archibald’s editorship, the first significant re-appearance of popular radicalism since Hawksley, showed no consistent producerist sentiment in its early years. Occasional early editorials on land reform revealed that Australian radicalism continued to contest the ‘right’ of ‘the idle to appropriate the fruits of the industrious’, and that the fight against landlordism, although not recognised as such, was in fact a fight against this ‘vicious economic principle’.² But such references were infrequent. It was not until the economic crisis of the 1890s, and Archibald’s second stint as editor, that it began to feature more consistently in the paper’s perspective.

Towards the close of the 1880s a number of familiar producerist themes began to reassert themselves in popular radical publications as a burgeoning labour movement began to question the economic status quo. Within a few years this trickle had become a flood as economic depression intensified economic scrutiny and spawned an extensive radical press. The non-productive received harsher treatment from the Australian socialist press of the 1890s than from its 1840s precursor, although the language itself differed little. The personification of social and economic institutions, caricature and stereotyping continued. Terms such as ‘vampire’, ‘parasite’, ‘rent-robber’ and ‘interest blood-sucker’ were deemed particularly appropriate and used extensively in the labour press.³ Henry Lawson meanwhile reminded workers that:

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¹ AR, 12 March 1887.
² Bulletin, 17 September, 10 December 1881.
³ For example AW, 7 March 1891.
Our fathers toiled for bitter bread
While idlers thrived beside them.⁴

Also in contrast to the radicalism of the 1840s, the labour theory implicit in producerist sentiment permeated almost every aspect of the new radicalism. It remained the basis of value from union newspapers to Bellamy’s fictional twenty-first century utopia.⁵ Every mention of the term ‘producer’ reinforced the labour theory of value and the social value of productive labour among the readership. It drew social differences between the productive worker and the non-productive ‘idler’ into sharp relief, and was a guiding force for worker mobilisation towards social change.

It began in early 1887 with former coalminer Robert Winspear’s Newcastle-based, and unmistakably socialist, Radical. The paper immediately struck a chord with radical workers and within a year was available in Sydney, Broken Hill, Melbourne and Adelaide. The Queensland Boomerang followed shortly thereafter, while the widely read Sydney Bulletin took on an increasingly socialist flavour. The Radical (later the Australian Radical) displayed producerist rhetoric from the first issue and used it consistently throughout its brief lifetime. It remains probably the best example of a socialist paper based on producerist foundations. Through familiar terms like drone, parasite, and vampire, it condemned capitalists, placemen, landlords, bankers and monarchs. A letter to the Sydney Morning Herald attacking the coal miners of New South Wales, for example, drew a producerist response typical of the paper from the pen of contributor and well-known Sydney radical William McNamara. Vilifying the ‘men who produce the wealth’ which kept ‘such parasites in luxury’ was typical of a ‘knave[sh] tyrant’ who would stamp out all legitimate organisations of working men ‘for the sake of ‘plutocratic profits’, he wrote, and any newspaper that published such dross without adverse comment should be rigorously boycotted. Most miners were more intelligent and capable than ‘the rich dividend-drawers’ and ‘monopolising drones’ that ‘bask[ed] in idleness…He that will not work neither shall he eat’.⁶

⁵ Bellamy, Looking Backward, p. 136.
⁶ AR, 8 Sept, 1888.
The Radical relied on such invective and caricature to attack familiar enemies, the aristocracy of kings and lords, and the paper aristocracy of capitalism. It was opposed to Australia’s role in British imperialism; opposed all titles and distinctions; all expenditure for the purposes of war, including a standing army; aristocratic sinecures and pensions given to previously well-paid officials; the upper house, and ‘the present distribution of power among merchants, squatters, and lawyers, because labour should have the bulk of legislative power’. The paper even gave Queen Victoria’s jubilee a producerist slant, pointing out that ‘“God save the Queen” is sung with considerable lung power, but “God save the working classes” is never even squeaked on a barrel organ’. Yet how different in social utility were the two? ‘The one produces nothing but spends much; the other produces all and spends little’.  

Producerism’s re-emergence took place against a backdrop of a depression, which, like that of the 1840s was preceded by a boom period. Structural weaknesses in the economy were suggested by the Bulletin as early as 1882, some eight years before the final days of reckoning. Just as the Australian Chronicle of the 1840s had warned of impending disaster unless speculative activities were reined in and values returned to their true relationship with productive enterprise, so too the Bulletin article drew on all the familiar producerist critiques of nineteenth-century capitalism. Although providing little by way of substantive evidence, the paper argued that in the absence of significant manufacturing in New South Wales there were too many urban non-producers existing at the expense of the rural producer. Once again speculation and jobbery, fuelled by cheap credit and an influx of foreign capital, had replaced productive activity. Cheap imports had flooded in, undermining local producers and overturning the trade balance between imports and exports. It was, as contemporary observer Jack Lang later recalled, a period of ‘unexampled prosperity’.  

Yet if prosperity was continually rising and the people of New South Wales were getting richer every year while the number of true wealth producers remained largely static, then there must be some mysterious grand process at work. To the Bulletin it seemed magical, the colony was ‘becoming rich on nothing!’ Sober

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7 AR, 18 June 1887.
8 Ibid.
9 Bulletin, 15 July 1882; Lang, I Remember, pp. 11-12; Lang, Great Bust, pp. 5-6. Also Spence, Australia’s Awakening, pp. 362-76.
assessment however would surely reveal that real wealth could not appear from thin air. It had to be produced somehow. The paper’s self-admittedly ‘rough and ready’ analysis of the contemporary situation concluded that the apparent prosperity bore no relationship to the colony’s productive capacity and that it was under the spell of a ‘tulip mania’—its prosperity likely to vanish under a dose of realism. It was a restatement of the typical producerist critique of capitalism’s tendency to inflate values with cheap credit when times were good, increasing speculation such that imagined values bore no relationship to real worth until crash inevitably followed.  

The crash, when it did come in 1891, was swift. As it began to bite, and with social tension rising, the *Bulletin* and *Radical* opened the gates to a flood of early socialist literature in New South Wales. The *Australian Workman* had already been established in 1890 as the organ of the New South Wales Labor Defence Committee under a number of editors including Oswald Keating, W. G. Higgs, and George Black, and in 1891 the ASU began publishing the *Hammer* under the editorship of Arthur Rae and Walter Head. John Willard’s *New Order*, and the Active Service Brigade’s *Justice* both appeared in 1894, again using producerist expression to promote their version of early Australian socialism. Thenceforth producerism, in varying degrees, remained a feature of all forms of Australian worker politics until the early 1930s. All of its different ideological incarnations; socialism, labourism, syndicalism and the single-taxers attacked the ruling classes vociferously, using colourful polemics based on the labour theory of value that were equal to, and indeed often surpassed, their British and American counterparts.  

Like Hawksley’s *Advocate*, there was a millenarian tone to many of the new radical publications. Progress and the forward march of labour meant socialism was inevitable and conflict between capital and labour a world-wide phenomenon. ‘Socialism is in the air’ wrote McNamara in the *Radical*; despite ‘the ostriches of bourgeois economy’ and ‘the dealers in political jugglery’, a brighter day was dawning for the toiling masses as workers united in every part of the civilised world.  

The *Australian Workman* of 1890 wrote that ‘the workers want the reins of government [and] are federating in all lands with that object in view…The Federation is growing at a hurricane pace. Nothing can stop it…Pinkerton thugs [and]

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11 *AR*, 5 May 1888.
Gatling guns cannot deter the onward march of Labour’. As the movement gathered momentum, the new radical literature—more forthright and robust than its predecessors and more aggressively producerist and nationalist in tone—complemented labour’s aggressive Australian nationalism. It stood in contrast to what Jack Lang called the ‘cringing sycophancy’ of the conservatives towards imperial London.

One of the more striking differences between the radical press of the 1890s and its more staid counterpart of the 1840s was the use of cartoons, caricature and stereotype, and the absence of the ‘respectable’ perspective and moderating influence of the ‘middling sort’. Two stereotypes in particular were frequently to be found in the labour press. The top-hatted, cigar smoking ‘Mr Fat’ or ‘Fatman’ usually represented the local capitalist—the large urban manufacturer, ship or mill owner. Almost a figure of fun and of Bunteresque appearance, he was often depicted gorging on the produce of labour, the surplus-value extracted from the sweat and toil of the Australian worker. The second, with its obvious anti-Semitic connotations, was the more sinister ‘Shylock’—the international financier. The whole world was in debt to the international shylocks. They waxed fat on the death of every worker in industry and lived in opulence and luxury on interest and percentages while the workers lived in poverty. Their internationalism meant that they owed no allegiance to any nation or people but served only mammon. They plotted wars and extracted fat profits from workers sent to die on the battlefield. They abstracted huge sums from around the world and sent the money to Lombard Street or Wall Street where enormous wealth became concentrated and consolidated as ‘the money power’.

Behind this radicalism sat the labour theory of value. Writing in the Radical, McNamara described socialism as a ‘great movement for the economic emancipation of mankind’. An earlier editorial from Winspear proclaimed the ‘grand truths’ that all wealth was produced by labour and therefore labour should enjoy all wealth. By contrast, ‘our present miserable and unscientific system is based on a complete reversal of these great truths’. The view that society was composed of producers and non-producers remained axiomatic to its social analysis. On the first page of its first edition it demanded that the reward of labour be retained by labour instead of

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12 AW, 6 December 1890.
13 Lang, I Remember, p. 6.
14 AR, 24 December 1887.
15 AR, 28 May 1887.
Figs. 5 and 6: The two faces of capitalism. Above: The sinister Shylock with his alien accent lurks furtively inside his counting-house, rubbing his hands gleefully in anticipation of even greater riches wrought from the productive classes by ever-rising interest.

Below: The less discreet, top-hatted, cigar-smoking capitalist, in the guise of a sack of loot, grows ever fatter on the profits of war. (From Anstey’s *Kingdom of Shylock*, 1917).
being usurped by ‘the class that will neither toil nor spin’. Page one of the first edition of the Hummer also informed the reader that ‘we start with the assertion that every man, or woman either, is entitled to the whole produce of his or her labour’. New Order also pronounced that any man with a ‘pretence to knowledge of political economy’ knew the ‘great truth’ that ‘the wealth is produced by one class…and appropriated by another—the capitalists’. Furthermore idle consumption came at the expense of productive labour, for ‘if we don’t work and consume wealth, it’s evident we are robbing somebody, however legal the process may be’. It was upon this ‘great principle’, and the division of society into producers and non-producers, that the whole economic philosophy of the labour movement rested.

Unlike the previous generation of radical papers, the Radical devoted ample space to popular political economy from the pen of both Winspear and McNamara. Several articles under the headings of ‘Producers and Non-producers’ (the Bulletin used the same title for an article some four years later), ‘Rent, Interest & Profit (Surplus-value & Wage Slavery)’ or simply ‘Political Economy’ introduced readers to the subject without delving too deeply into the complex minutiae. Most were devoted to expounding the labour theory, reaffirming the workers’ social utility in comparison with the other classes via the categories of producer and non-producer, and in confuting the wages-fund theory. Winspear argued that the ‘old-worn-out Tory’ wages-fund theory was the political economy of the ‘non-producers’; the ‘useless’ monarch, the ‘profligate and idle’ aristocrat, the ‘rack-renting’ landlord and the capitalist ‘wire-puller’. The idea that the wages of the labourer were drawn from these non-producers had long since been dispelled along with ‘the divine right of kings’ and ‘the nobility of idleness’. It was the labourer that produced the riches of the non-producer, the latter ‘simply acting the part of a parasite’. The belief that ‘the rich non-producer found the wages for labor’ was ‘old political economy’.

A series of articles written by McNamara covered topics that included the nationalisation of the means of production, the introduction of machinery, the division of labour and the social role of the capitalist. He countered charges that socialism was backward-looking and wanted to halt progress, and that capital was responsible for human progress through the enormous increase in human

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16 AR, 12 March 1887.
17 NO, 14 April, 21 April 1894.
18 AR, 7 May 1887, 21 April, 11 August 1888.
productivity provided by the division of labour, machine production and the ability to reproduce itself, by stating that socialism had no quarrel with either of the two former advantages. The problem for socialists was that both were used to build monopolies for the few—monopolies that socialism intended to dismantle. Drawing on both Marx and Mill, capital, according to McNamara, was unable to reproduce itself but relied on ‘squeezing surplus-value out of labor’. It was wealth utilised to generate profit, but the wealth itself was the result of labour applied to material. Capital, like the land, should belong to all.19

According to McNamara, labour was the original and only source of wealth. Very few of the world’s rich had become rich through their own toil and skill. They became so by exploiting the labour of others through the extraction of surplus-value. ‘Heartless, money-grubbing Grab-alls’ such as Gould, Vanderbilt, Rothschild and Westminster produced nothing useful themselves, but amassed their colossal fortunes through speculation, usury, rent and profit-mongering. They were ‘economic parasite[s] of the worst kind’. Profit, the basic means of this extortion, was ‘simply the science of unequal exchange’. The value of an article was determined by the average amount of labour time expended in its production, but under capitalist relations the worker received a lesser value in wages than the true value of the article and was therefore defrauded of labour time. Put simply, it was ‘downright swindling’. But worse, it was swindling that, through ‘economic and political slavery’, allowed ‘pampered, purse-proud parasites’ to live in ‘idleness and luxury’, ‘fattening’ on the ‘labors of the many’.20

Producerism’s concept of socially useful productive labour also retained significance within Australian socialism alongside the belief in universal human labour. The Workman had declared that ‘socialism proposes to stop the wastes of society by having none of its members uselessly employed or idle, turning the army of non-producers into a brotherhood of useful workers’.21 Sydney radical John Dwyer identified the brotherhood as ‘the true makers of a nation's wealth and

19 AR, 21 April 1888. McNamara offered a condensed version of Marx’s ‘surplus-value’ in the 1 May 1888 edition of the Radical. The same article quoted from Annie Besant to describe how British capitalism reached its zenith—‘the most complete exploitation of the producers, the perfect triumph of the capitalist ideal of free contract and laissez-faire’—when ‘little children, at nominal wage, were worked from fifteen to sixteen hours a day’. Thus, wrote Marx, along with the exploitation of the American Negro, was the genesis of industrial capital. Marx, Capital Vol. 1, pp. 709-12.

20 AR, 21 April, 5 May 1888.

21 AW, 1 November 1890.
greatness’. ‘With their multitudes of brothers who sweat and toil for their daily bread’, they were

the men who go down into mines and wrench from the earth its treasures; who stand before the furnace and wield the ore into metal; who plough the land; who gather the fleece from the flocks; who tend the herds of cattle; who smite the rocks; who raise the mighty buildings that make our cities [and] who brave the storms of the seas and oceans.22

Yet these same producers remained at the bottom of the social ladder.

Conservatives countered by suggesting labour was common to all, regardless of social rank or occupation—that kings, bishops and placemen did their share and ‘cheerfully’ worked hard. These views were regarded by the Bulletin as ‘slush…idiotic drivel that premiers and bishops and other fossils are everlastingly inflicting on a suffering public with a sort of infantile delusion that they are making a valuable contribution to political economy’. It was an argument, according to the Bulletin, calculated to instil contentment in the ‘pampered dock labourer’ and his sixpence an hour while the Prince of Wales toiled ceaselessly through long nights against bad luck at the baccarat table.23

Alexander Johnson’s New Utopia, however, demonstrated the germ of what was to prove a more serious challenge to urban producerism when he claimed the role of producer exclusively for rural industry. Espousing a form of rural populism typical of the later Country Party, Johnson drew on the familiar city/country dichotomy first used by Cobbett in the 1820s and the Dispatch of 1840s New South Wales, to argue that the city was parasitic at the expense of the country. It was a view, according to Lionel Frost, that was widespread.24 Johnson argued that bad laws imposed a monstrous burden of taxation on the country districts, and the pastoral industry paid fifty times as much tax than the average.25 He also demanded free rail transport for rural producers and a single tax on the land to prevent speculation and it being left idle in the hands of absentee. Unproductive land injured the community. It

was the equivalent of withholding its product from those who needed it.\textsuperscript{26} Instead, at present he argued, land put to use was taxed via the commodities it produced.\textsuperscript{27}

Johnston believed that ‘manufacturers, graziers, farmers and miners [were] the only producers of wealth’, and some urban manufacturing aside, these were rural industries. The city on the other hand was mostly composed of ‘professional men, middlemen, clerks and labourers [who were] consumers only, not producers of wealth’.\textsuperscript{28} His definition of a producer was precise, if contentious with respect to the popular view:

\begin{quote}
The term ‘producer’…only applies to those whom produce belongs. I am aware that many authorities reckon among producers the Labourers employed in productive work, but erroneously, as I think, because the produce of their labour does not belong to them…Hence the meaning I attach to the term ‘producer’ is ‘the owner of the product of labour’, whoever it may be, who pays all the expenses of production and all the taxes on the product.\textsuperscript{29}
\end{quote}

The author believed that society, especially polite urban middle-class society, had distanced itself from productive enterprise. Consequently parents brought their children up to be lawyers and bank clerks, ‘the height of their ambition being reached when they are all safe in snug “Government billets”’. Instead of educating producers, they created consumers, ‘drones in the busy hive, living on the honey accumulated by others’.\textsuperscript{30}

But for the most part, contemporary producerism remained a workers’ perspective. Even among small groups such as the New England-based nationalist and socialist leaning Australian Federation Movement, there was an undercurrent of these ideas. Under its slogan ‘Unification—One Parliament for all of Australia!’ it demanded the total abolition of all state governments and the Parliamentary Upper House which it estimated would save £6,000,000 a year. As the ‘Australian Brotherhood’ and the ‘People’s Party’ it demanded ‘land for the People and not merely for Banks and Land Agents’ and the nationalisation of the sugar, tobacco and mining industries. It argued that one government for all Australia would get rid of

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid, pp. 44-9.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid, preface.
five hundred politicians, another five hundred ‘Upper House fossils’, six imported
Figureheads at an annual cost of some £100,000, six Agents-General at an annual
cost of £20,000, and ‘numerous other frills which are neither useful nor ornamental’.
In all, it estimated a saving of some £250,000 per year, ‘which would go to pay
Cohen some of the vast debt owing to him or for an Australian Navy’. Cost of
government was frequently criticised, and the charge that government, although paid
for by the producing majority, acted solely in the interest of the wealthy was made. It
was a charge that frequently appeared in the radical milieu, Simmat’s view has
already been recorded, while Haynes wrote that:

Millions of money have been raised in the past by the sale of the people’s land; millions
more through customs; and yet more on the people’s credit. Yet every year the [people] receive not dividends, but information that the colony’s finances are still in arrear. A
country is ever governed for the good of the governors, not of the governed; and these colonies are not an exception.  

The Federation Movement distributed pamphlets which urged readers to ‘think
Australian’ and consider if their future lay with ‘the Fat Men’ and the corporations
that told of socialism as the enemy. If the politicians that had gotten the country into
a debt of millions that demanded huge interest payments which would be a burden to
those as yet unborn, could be trusted. Or if the shopkeeper, who ‘considers himself a
cut above the man who grafts at manual labor’, and who always came down on the
side of the reactionaries, would make a suitable ally. All stood for class over mass
alongside the ‘Money Power’ and other ‘parasites of labor’. By contrast, the
democrat wanted ‘wage-earners and their families and others to enjoy a fair share of
the wealth which they almost alone produce’, instead of witnessing the millions toil
for ‘the few who toil not, neither do they spin’. Australia was now at a parting of the
ways, ‘it is for you to say under whom you will serve, the god of Liberty or
Mammon’.  

A major problem that both the labour theory and the idea of productive and
non-productive labour presented to the labour movement was its potential for
exclusivity. A fundamentalist approach would see several early radical publications

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33 Australian Federation Movement. Papers c. 1903-1908.
regard only those engaged in manual labour as productive and therefore worthy of representation by the movement. It divided those that worked for wages into the ‘horny-handed’ and the ‘soft-handed’, with the productive labour of the former supporting the non-productive ‘soft-handed’ clerk or accountant. To the *Bulletin* of 1881 the latter were ‘genteel loafers’ of the sort who sought to ‘consume victuals’ while avoiding any kind of useful employment. They sprang up like ‘useless weeds’ on civilisation, a kind of ‘human fungus’ that floated aimlessly on the surface of society.  

Ten years later, even in the midst of the worst depression in a generation, each producer in New South Wales still supported another ‘loafer’ in an office.  

Some radical papers, such as the *Australian Workman*, scornfully suggested that office clerks thought themselves a cut above manual workers—sufficient for many to enrol as strike-breakers and special constables during the maritime strike, for which they later received little thanks from the bosses. This despite the fact that most were worse off than skilled or organised labour. Jack Lang, recalling events as an observer, was of the opinion that when non-union wool was being carted from Darling Harbour to Circular Quay, it was protected from the strikers by large numbers of ‘special police’ who had been sworn in the night before from the Union Club and the insurance and wool offices. Edwin Brady of the Clerical and Mercantile Workers Association disagreed. He replied to these criticisms by stating that his organisation demonstrated the existence of at least one white-collar union. He agreed that while much work remained to be done in respect of organisation it was nonetheless slowly moving forward. ‘Your article is, I think, unnecessarily “rough” on the profession in general’, he wrote to the *Workman*, ‘although I am constrained to admit that there is room for improvement in that direction’.  

It would seem however that much of Brady’s early work in attempting to organise Sydney’s clerical workers was undertaken in vain. His efforts appeared to be hampered by members of his own profession who, when not acting as volunteer labour, busied themselves writing letters to the *Herald* during the strike complaining of the ‘grave distress [that] the selfish and reckless conduct of the union men [was] causing the middle classes, and especially the poorer class of clerks’. Clerks did not

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34 *Bulletin*, 12 November 1881.
35 *Bulletin*, 4 July 1891.
36 *AW*, 8 November, 22 November 1890.
38 *AW*, 6 December 1890.
‘combine or boycott’, and although they ‘earned less than half the wages of union men’ did not bring ‘brute force’ to bear on ‘a question which is purely one of supply and demand’.39 By that October the Workman was able to report that the clerks’ union, having peaked at a membership of one hundred and twenty—‘most of whom were non-financial’—had subsequently fallen into apathy and decline. Although workers themselves, they refused to acknowledge that obvious fact, and regarded unionism with ‘disfavour or contempt’. Their conditions were ‘infinitely worse’ than any of the skilled trades or organised workers, ‘yet they preferred during the last strike to officiate as special constables and blackleg on the wharves’. The Workman scoffed at the possibility of the clerks ever forming a viable union. Not only were they under the thumb of the capitalist, ‘content to fawn on his employer’, but they looked upon any work of a kind other than their own as degrading. ‘Taking him all in all’, it wrote, ‘the clerk is a spineless lot’.40

White-collar workers were deemed non-productive. While drawing their meagre reward from the labours of the productive, instead of solidarity they demonstrated contempt by acting as strike-breakers. Their actions in the 1890 strikes left a legacy of bitterness and division, and although eventually resolved, for labour purists productive manual labour remained the essential qualification for both membership and, most importantly, leadership of the labour movement. Some four years later Justice contemptuously saw among the many pushing themselves forward for high position in the party and movement an unusually large proportion of ‘soft-handed’ workers that included clerks, shop assistants, ex-parsons and others ‘who never pulled off a coat for a days graft in their lives’. ‘This kind of rubbish is not the material from which to frame a strong, honest, and determined Labour Party’ it wrote. If the ‘soft-handed’ approved of labour being represented they should unionise. As it was, they were invariably opposed to any struggle by the ‘horny-handed’ for better conditions. They instead saw themselves as a ‘superior class’, yet still condescended to come forward as labour candidates.41

39 SMH, 3 September 1890.
40 AW, 24 October 1891.
41 Justice, 28 April 1894.
Chapter 15

‘Force and Fraud’ at the Turn of the Century

The working classes are ‘dumb, driven cattle’ and are regarded as such, and when they dare think themselves anything else, they are branded as enemies to society.¹

The labour movement saw a colony ruled by the non-productive, ostensibly for their own economic advantage. According to the Radical, the legislature was composed of lawyers, land agents, and land company representatives. These legislators combined to form rings and made laws not in the interest of the people of the colony, but to their own advantage.² The Sydney Bulletin likewise declared that:

New South Wales and Victoria are both ruled by the useless non-producers of the two great capitals. They are governed by landlords, importers, lawyers, financiers, and bankers—in other words they are governed by men who were artificially created through foreign capital.³

Others so created were ‘brokers, merchants, shopkeepers, bookkeepers, hotel keepers, money lenders, betting-men and others who live on the community, yet add practically nothing to the national wealth’. Australia, it argued, could ill afford to maintain such parasites.⁴ None owed their existence to any form of nation-building productive enterprise; instead they lived on fees, rents and percentages and so squandered the capital that should be used to invest in Australia’s future. Yet the obvious fact that these people governed with what appeared to be the consent of the majority demonstrated a belief in wider society that they were hard-working and selflessly acting in the interests of the colony, and that the existing state of colonial society was both natural and desirable.

What was demanded of labour propaganda was an effective means of challenging this ruling-class hegemony. Labour would never have the wherewithal to overcome state coercive power, so any challenge must rely on mobilising mass opinion through argument. If ‘force’ could not be challenged then ‘fraud’ must be exposed and demolished. The main purpose behind ruling-class hegemony was to

¹ AR, 18 June 1887.
² Ibid.
³ Bulletin, 4 July 1891.
⁴ Ibid.
maintain the economic advantage enjoyed by the few. Attempting to demolish that hegemony while promoting an alternative demanded not just that the economic theories and theoreticians that justified the economic status quo be challenged, but also that the role of the ruling-class ‘hirelings’ who helped maintained it be exposed. As shown above, the main method of attacking the former was to use the political language of producerism to point out that although producing all wealth workers received little reward, while the non-productive became rich at their expense. Explaining how this unfair social system was maintained demanded highlighting the social role of the ruling-class hirelings—those Gramsci later termed the subaltern class.

Australian socialists such as Winspear were keenly aware of how ruling-class hegemony was maintained. Drawing on the old radical description of ‘force and fraud’, a series of articles published by Winspear resurrected the ‘Norman Yoke’ to demonstrate a vast and historic ‘conspiracy against the people’.⁵ Just as the Gorgon and Lovett had recognised the role of the lawyer, politician, priest and press in the maintenance of ruling-class wealth and power in the Britain of the 1820s and ‘30s, so Australian radicals such as Spence recognised that the struggle of Australian labour for its rightful reward had ‘all the powers of law and law-makers, of pulpit, press and platform’ against it.⁶ ‘Until recent years’, wrote John Norton, ‘journalist, parson, and politician combined to denounce trades unions and any other form of labour organisation as unlawful and immoral associations subversive of all law and order’ to this end. Agitation for the economic right of labour to its produce was considered a contravention of divine law, yet, hypocritically, the bible’s dictum that all men ‘earn their bread by the sweat of their brow’ was

...construed by this strange school of economics into proof positive that the Almighty intended everybody to labour but themselves...when Adam delved and Eve span, who then was the gentleman? was a query that never occurred to them except to be dismissed as a mere Jack Cadeism.⁷

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⁶ Spence, Australia’s Awakening, p. 12.
Figs. 7 & 8. (from Anstey’s Kingdom of Shylock and One Big Union respectively)

"SOMETHING WRONG"

The Worker: "After having built the whole of that city and everything in it, I don't own anything, not even a job. There's something wrong somewhere."

One Big Union, 1 March 1919.
It was in the promotion of ruling-class values and ideology, and in defence and justification of the economic status quo, that radicals believed the institutions of civil society acted. Religion, still significant in people’s lives, continued to play an important role. Producer radicalism had historically demonstrated little fondness for priestcraft: not only was the priest non-productive, living on tithes and donations, but their preaching reinforced ruling-class hegemony. At the very least they preached acquiescence, at worst blind obedience. Priestcraft was a burlesque on Jesus of Nazareth.8 ‘Christ was a man of the people, an artizan who fiercely denounced the enthroned plunderers of his day’, declared *Hard Cash*, but institutions set up in his name had corrupted his socialistic principles until they bore no resemblance to his original teachings.9 Anti-priest rhetoric was as much a part of the Australian radical tradition as of the British and American. It too despised the religion that served economic inequality and entrenched wealth and power.

Yet as Schultz, Sutton and Turkstra have demonstrated in the US and Canada, and Laffan’s study of Methodism and the Newcastle miners shows in Australia, religion also provided avenues through which the dominant ideology could be challenged.10 Like scientific political economy, biblical authority was open to selective quotation from either side. One of Australia’s most vociferous early radicals, and thorn in the side of the squattocracy, was the Presbyterian minister J. D. Lang. The 1840s radicals Duncan and Hawksley were both Catholics and the Catholic influence, particularly its focus on the moral economy, made itself readily apparent throughout their work. They had both demonstrated that religion could just as easily question or condemn wealth and power as justify it. In 1899 influential members of the Catholic Church still condemned capitalism as immoral, claiming that the ‘tyranny of capital’ lay in its power to ‘withdraw from proper circulation, without adequate reason, the necessaries of life, and to increase the want of countless numbers’.11 Also in the 1890s, some members of the Protestant clergy, notably Thomas Roseby and Phillip Moses, were firmly on the side of the workers. For the most part however, radicals failed to

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understand how priests could justify social inequality in the name of God—unless they were hypocritical and corrupt:

The Parson preached from the pulpit  
And pretty pictures he drew;  
He didn’t denounce the Sweater  
Who sat in the cushioned pew;  
For the Sweater owned the Parson  
And the Church and lands as well…  

Lawyers too lived up to their traditional role. Spence accepted their humbug and delay as a matter of fact, but more important was the role that the law played in attempting to crush the Australian union movement with harsh sentences and class-biased judges and magistrates. One of the great fallacies of mankind, according to Spence, was the notion that ‘all men are equal in the eye of the law’. The experience of thirty years had convinced him that only the capitalist class was wealthy enough to hire the ablest brains, and that the system itself was biased in their favour. In Bellamy’s socialist utopia there was no legal profession or law school. With equality of wealth, no private property beyond personal possessions, and without any buying and selling, ‘a central Congress and forty state legislatures, turning out some twenty thousand laws a year’ was irrelevant. It seemed absurd to Bellamy’s twenty-first century observer that the best intellect of every previous generation was devoted to understanding and expounding the interminable complexity of commercial and property law. ‘The law as a special science [was] obsolete. It was a system of casuistry which the elaborate artificiality of the old order of society absolutely required to interpret it’. The lawyer was frequently an object of abuse and derision in the Australian socialist press and the complaint was always the same: ‘under our present dispensation a poor man has as much chance of getting justice as a pig has of flying’, wrote Justice, ‘law and justice simply resolves itself into a matter of shekels’.

This is the lawyer—for shortness called “liar”  
No night-walker fouling her form in the mire  
But shines when compared with the pandering wretch

15 Justice, 24 February 1894.
The plunderer’s hack, the tyrant’s Jack Ketch
Who robs without risk, and cares not a straw,
For fair play and justice, but only for law…  

Like the lawyer, the establishment press as ever remained the tool of entrenched wealth and power. From the Star’s frequent attacks on the Herald as ‘an incurable excrecence on the face of nature’, the ‘prostituted organ’ of the ‘aristocracy of Botany Bay’, to George Black’s account of ‘the usual shower of abuse’ and ‘the suppressions, misrepresentations, and fictions’ of an ‘antagonistic press’, radicals across the century and beyond attacked a press that served only to defend wealth and power and keep the workers in subjection. Spence believed that the press ignored or condoned offences committed by capitalists, while exaggerating or even inventing those of unionists. His assessment of nineteenth-century Australian newspapers argued that the majority believed what was written so long as it did not conflict too strongly with their own opinions. But he pointed out that, of necessity, the established papers favoured the commercial classes, because newspapers were essentially money-making concerns that drew the bulk of their revenue from advertisements placed by these classes. This meant that they would inevitably display hostility to labour. All incoming news was filtered by the ring composed of the leading dailies and interpreted according to the policy of the owner, he argued. The conclusion was that the average person who depended on the newspapers for their education was misinformed and ‘would be better informed if he only read novels’.  

The existence of traditional Anglo-American radical antipathy to the standing army was to be found in Hawksley and remained consistent in late nineteenth-century Australian radicalism to the extent of the inclusion of a citizen defence force in the Labor Party platforms of the period. Along with the citizen-initiated referendum, the citizen militia was what defined a true democracy. Just as in 1849 when the police and army were used to intimidate those protesting against the re-introduction of transportation, the events of 1890 had proven the state only too willing to jump to the

16 AW, 10 January 1891.
17 Star, 1 February 1845.
19 Spence, Australia’s Awakening, p. 36.
21 PA, 24 February 1849; Spence, Australia’s Awakening, pp. 383-410.
22 The Workman held up the Swiss example. AW, 16 February 1895.
aid of employers and use the army and civilian police against strikers.²³ ‘Why are the Paddington Barracks still in existence, but to maintain in idleness an army of butchers, who, at the command of our lawyers and banking fraternity, will fall on the people with their terrible engines of war’ explained Phillip Moses in an 1894 lecture at Sydney’s Protestant Hall.²⁴ Adding insult to injury, the standing army and civilian police force—the enforcers of tyranny against the producing classes—were themselves maintained by taxes on the producer. An earlier lecture, given in 1891 at the same venue by H. Valentine Haynes, informed the audience that the ruling classes were inevitably the wealthier classes, and thus the military was ‘ever the arm and support of the rich’.²⁵ ‘Working men should be the last to countenance the creation of standing armies’ wrote the Radical of 1887, ‘when we consider what they are used for’. Citing the Lambton miner’s strike of 1879 it asked who had paid the cost of sending the army to break the strike, Thomas Croudace and the Lambton Coal Company or the people?²⁶ It was reason for the early Australian labour movement to adopt the familiar radical notion of an armed citizen militia in preference to a standing army.²⁷ According to the Ironworker of 1930, the police, army, navy, and law courts, all represented the ‘massed power’ of capitalism. All were fed, housed, and ‘overpaid…out of the sweat and labor of our class’. The state was under the control of the money power, and ‘their bailiffs and pawns, their tools and their flunkeys use the gun, the baton, the jail, and the scaffold to coerce, intimidate, and kill those who dare to challenge their power’.²⁸

**Apathy Revisited**

‘Labor is always short of something’, wrote the Ironworker of 1927. ‘One thing it is short of is the wealth it produces—and another thing it is short of is guts in not resenting the fact’.²⁹ The same apathy that finally led Duncan to reject the cause of the workers for a safe government billet in the 1840s, and earned the scorn of Hawksley in the 1850s, remained a familiar feature from the early days of labour organisation. Although not active consent, it nonetheless reinforced ruling-class hegemony. Spence

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²³ PA, 23 June 1849; Spence, *Australia’s Awakening*, passim. See also Irving, *Southern Tree of Liberty*.
²⁴ Justice, 24 March 1894.
²⁶ AR, 19 March 1887.
²⁸ *Ironworker*, August – October 1930.
²⁹ *Ironworker*, October 1927.
admitted to Garran in early 1891 that there was a great deal of apathy among workers and it was an uphill struggle to rouse them into improving their condition. He later recorded that it was slow work ‘getting right ideas knocked into the masses’, mostly because they were ‘so mentally lazy’ that they took their views ‘ready-made from a misleading Press’. Apathy was the reason that the conditions of the workers never changed suggested Phillip Moses, the minister who preached at the Castlereagh Street Protestant Hall. Within the workers were the sins of carelessness and blind indifference that allowed Government to tyrannise over the people, the Banks to rob the country wholesale, and their directors, who sit in the Parliament of the country, to retain their seats unchallenged. Similar criticism came from the opposite side. W. H Chard wrote in the *Australian Economist* that:

Many labourers are very unreasonable and do not trouble themselves to think about their relations to capital, or study any economic questions, until they feel some pinch of adversity, when they cry out loudly, and expect other people to immediately remedy everything for them.

Most labour figures confronted and castigated worker apathy at some stage of their political life. George Black wrote in 1917 that while the *Labor Daily* was struggling for its life, ‘the multitude’ was ‘more concerned about sport and scandal than about political propaganda and the newspaper advocacy of their cause and exposure of their grievances’. Twenty-five years earlier he voiced his despondency in private to William Astley when he wrote that ‘the ignorance, bigotry and stupidity of the workers seems almost to damn their cause to all time… I am strongly tempted to throw in the sponge & leave them to fight their own battles in future’. Union activist Julian Stuart admitted that like many young Australians he had, prior to joining the AWU, allowed sport to take up too much of his time: ‘I have wished at times that some portion of the energy and enthusiasm devoted to it might be diverted to our Labor activities’ he wrote. Jock Garden bemoaned the complacency of the workers, the ‘weak-minded ambitionless, spiritless apathy’ that continued to render their position

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30 RCS, p. 59.  
31 Spence, *Australia's Awakening*, p. 381.  
32 Justice, 23 March 1894; Lang, *I Remember*, p. 194.  
hopeless. Anstey meanwhile threw most of the blame for the condition of the working classes onto the workers themselves. He described the ‘great mob of reactionary workers who have no ideals, no spiritual outlook, no conception of a higher life, no sense of social duty; who are satisfied to be “Bosses’ Men” so long as they are well fed—and often, when they are not. These are the sustainers of the existing system’. It appeared that ruling-class hegemony was so powerfully entrenched within the minds of most workers that attempts to explain their situation was often met by hostility in defence of the very institutions that legitimised the extortion of their labour. From Jesus of Nazareth to the reformer of today, wrote Black, all have had ‘not only to fight the people’s enemies, but also those who they struggle for’. One Big Union’s fictional Henry Dubb was a typical portrayal of the working-class ‘bonehead’ who gathered his opinions and view of the world from the capitalist press and believed that the OBU acted contrary to the workers’ interest:

‘If you reads the “Erald” you’d see that the One Big Union crowd would down on the boss, and what would the likes of us do without them as gets us work, sir?’

To continue would be to labour the point, but as late as 1929 the ironworker Colin Tannock wrote that if the ordinary Labor voter would ‘throw off his apathy or his childish hero-worship of glib and plausible orators, and would use his brains to understand labor principles as well as the candidate, which is not asking for a very high level of intelligence, he would not make so many mistakes by voting the wrong man in as he does now’.

Thus the radical press sought to explain how the ruling classes maintained their wealth and power. It utilised producerist rhetoric and the producerist social dichotomy to point out that while the productive labour of the working classes generated all wealth and formed the strength of the nation, the workers themselves received little reward. As did their predecessors, late nineteenth-century radicals recognised an unfair social system maintained by ‘force and fraud’. They understood that the ‘fraud’ which oversaw the appropriation of the workers’ labour was

37 OBU, 1 September 1919.
38 Anstey, Money Power, p. 138.
39 Black to Astley, 28 February 1892.
40 OBU, 1 July 1919.
41 Ironworker, November, December 1928 – January 1929.
portrayed by the dominant culture as ‘natural’. It was ‘common sense’ or ‘the way of things’, maintained by ‘God’s natural order’ or ‘the laws of political economy’. Yet although these ruling-class explanations were questioned by the radical press, the task that it faced in demolishing this hegemony was almost overwhelming, carried out as it was from a position of cultural weakness. Radicals were confronted by working-class conservatism, ignorance, apathy and inertia, and recognised that these were the foundations upon which ruling-class hegemony was maintained. Consequently the workers were often castigated by radicals, many of whom bitterly declared that the workers themselves were responsible for the poor social conditions under which they lived.
Chapter 16
The Money Power

This is the banker, the lord of the dross,
Who lends to the boss, and lives by the loss,
That the worker sustains, who must pay the percent,
Of whatever the flint-hearted Shylock has lent.¹

One of the salient features of producer radicalism was its antagonism toward finance capital and the banks. In the first decades of the twentieth century it was an aspect taken up with gusto by two populist state ALP figures, Jack Lang of New South Wales and Frank Anstey of Victoria. Peter Love’s definitive study of the relationship between Australian labour populism and the ‘money power’ detailed the colourful language and imagery that the labour press used when attacking the banks. He argued that much of the labour movement’s opposition to banking was based on an elaborate, and often anti-Semitic, conspiracy theory that largely ignored the complexity of capitalism itself.² The crux of the labour’s antipathy was that banking was a non-productive, parasitic enterprise which, as Anstey put it, existed as ‘the nerve centre of predatory capitalism’. Nationalising the banks would cut this ‘capitalist nerve centre’ and see the power of the financiers removed. It would facilitate the slow but inevitable downfall of the capitalist system as a whole.³

Antagonism to finance was not unique to Australian labour populism but a feature of broader Anglo-American radicalism. However Australian labour’s antipathy to both the local banks and the moneylenders of London and New York was so powerful that a successful campaign enabled the ALP, when in power, to institute the Commonwealth Bank.⁴ Although a ‘people’s bank’ the Commonwealth Bank was nonetheless tempered by concessions to the wider conservative banking industry, demonstrated by first chief Denison Miller’s decision to keep interest on deposits and loans on par with the private sector.⁵ But according to Lang its status as the people’s bank was soon torpedoed when the Bruce-Page conservative

¹ AW, 10 January 1891.
⁵ Lang, Great Bust, p. 21.

government, on assumption of power, changed it from a ‘people’s bank’ into a ‘banker’s bank’. The subsequent fawning, supplication and capitulation to the ‘authority’ of new chairman Sir Robert Gibson by Federal Labor’s Scullin and Theodore on the ALP’s resumption of government, and their failure to return it to its founding principles, demonstrated the Labor leadership’s true sympathies and further reinforced the workers’ belief in money power conspiracies and the idea that government of either party was simply the tool of finance capital.⁶

As argued previously, from a producerist perspective, elaborate conspiracies aside, the fundamental loathing of the ‘money power’ came down to the simple issue of the abstraction of wealth from those that produced it to those that did not, and while neither Lang nor Anstey could be considered producerist in the strictest sense it was a sentiment they seemed keen to utilise. Interest, the effects of paper money inflation, and other ‘banking frauds’ were de-facto taxes paid to the idle rich by the producer and banking was portrayed as a means of robbing the producing classes on a scale hitherto unseen. Despite the veil of obfuscation that cloaked its operations, the end social result seemed obvious enough—those that produced all the wealth had very little, while the international financiers, responsible for producing nothing useful, were among the most wealthy and powerful figures in the world.

For labour, the banks represented capitalism at its most concentrated and refined and were the key to the domination of the ruling classes.⁷ In Australia it was the banks that exercised control over smaller capitalists such as the pastoralist, who in turn were forced to cut wages or turn to cheap Asian labour.⁸ In both the Australian and broader Anglo-American radical discourse, the banks, and in

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⁶ Ibid, pp. 43-6, 172-6, 275-82, 322-6, 364-7. Lang of course had his own axe to grind with the Federal Labor leadership. The bitterness and enmity that followed the implementation of the Lang Plan for a moratorium on foreign debt repayment in New South Wales, and his subsequent dismissal both as Premier and from the party, needs to be borne in mind when using Lang as a source. That is not to say however that his critical observations had no substance or popular support. A sympathetic Anstey remarked with bitter irony on his own party’s previous wartime ‘consultations’ with leading bankers. That their ‘sound finance’ was ‘born of the “advice” of the bitterest enemies of Labor and of everything for which the Labor movement stands’ angered Anstey. ‘Why not go to land monopolists for advice on a land policy? Why not go to the slum landlord for advice on housing?’ he suggested. ‘Why not consult sweaters on sweating, pickpockets on honesty, prostitutes on purity—and establish codes of virtue, honesty and decent standards of life, according to their ideas and their “advice”’. Anstey, Kingdom of Shylock, p. 42.


⁸ These were the people who, according to Svensen, in fighting off the selectors and converting their leases to freehold, had over-extended themselves. Svensen, Shearer’s War. See also Love, Labour and the Money Power, and the contemporary accounts of Spence and Stuart: Spence, Australia’s Awakening, pp. 96, 178-9; Stuart, Part of the Glory, p. 143.
particular in their incarnation as international finance, were painted as a sinister clique—the ‘money power’—that controlled the life-blood of industry, abstracted wealth from the producing classes and plotted their enslavement. National debts in particular were criticised as a means of imposing such slavery, although most critiques were simply variations of those found in Cobbett’s *Paper Against Gold*. The American William Berkey, to take one example of the many that could be quoted, wrote that the funding system—a method of bequeathing debt to posterity instituted by William of Orange—had created a powerful money aristocracy that used public debt to enslave the industrial classes by taxing future generations to pay interest on loans in the present. This ‘diabolical scheme for robbing labor’ threatened to undermine liberty and usurp the functions of government. The interests of money would constitute the interests of the nation and ‘the Shylocks will have the masses completely under their feet’. Berkey argued that all systems of national borrowing and bonds constituted a mortgage on the labour of generations unborn. Deferring payment of debt incurred in the present enabled the rulers to sell the wealth that future generations would create without asking their consent or returning to them the cash borrowed in their name. This was not only a violation of natural law, but of all law:

> For no code was ever framed that would allow a parent to mortgage the labor of his children, and his children's children, to pay the debts he had contracted. The child, whose labor is thus mortgaged before he is born, is enslaved.\(^9\)

It was taxation without representation.

The anti-Semitism associated with the producerist abhorrence of finance was a familiar underlying theme within Anglo-American radicalism, and the Australian socialism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was no different. *New Order, Justice* and the *Sydney Worker* all personified international finance through the caricatures of ‘Shylock’ and ‘Cohen’. ‘Cohen’ specifically represented the bankers of London and *their* national debt, and *New Order* almost appeared to take delight in detailing the large shipments of money bound for the ‘London Jews’ to its readers. John Dwyer and *Justice* meanwhile wrote of ‘blood-sucking Jews’ and the

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\(^{10}\) Ibid, p. 2.
These were views that entirely neglected the obvious fact that most of the key figures in international banking were not of Jewish origin, and indeed in the local setting labour radicals would have been hard pushed to find any prominent Jewish bankers. Much of the Australian labour movement’s anti-Semitism has been detailed by Love and little purpose would be served by its endless repetition, however it was an unpleasant aspect of late nineteenth-century producer radicalism that needs to be acknowledged.

Even so, such anti-Semitism should not be considered indicative of Australia as a whole, for as Rubinstein noted, by European standards there was little real anti-Semitism in Australia at the time, and the anti-Semitic hyperbole of the early labour movement remained largely directed at London and New York finance rather than the local Jewish population—the ‘International Jew’ rather than the Jewish people as a whole. Like many aspects of producer radicalism, the relationship with the Jewish people was far from one-dimensional, and this was reflected in the labour press. The Radical for example held a fierce antagonism to finance capital, yet anti-Semitism remained absent from its pages. Justice and New Order on the other hand made extensive use of anti-Semitic caricature when writing on the same subject.

Jews had played a significant role in labour movements across the Anglo-Celtic world: Samuel Gompers in the United States offers one example, while in Britain, Raphael Samuel’s study of the late nineteenth-early twentieth century underworld of East London told of the influence of Jewish anarchists and communists. Like any religious group, they remained represented across the social, political and economic spectrum. The Australian radicals of the 1840s were generally sympathetic and many Jewish artisans and shopkeepers in early Sydney were well respected. However the sentiment recorded by Colquhoun that Jews ‘exist chiefly by their wits, by living on

11 Justice, 7 April 1894; NO, 14 April, 5 May 1894; John Dwyer Papers.
13 Space constraints prevent a more in-depth analysis of the relationship between labour, particularly labour populism and producerism, and the Jewish people, who, like many others in society, were often seen through stereotype and caricature. This study offers no counterargument to such anti-Semitism. For this, the reader is referred to H. Rubinstein, The Jews in Australia: A Thematic History Volume One, 1788-1945. Melbourne, William Heinemann, 1991, esp. pp. 471-528, in which the author places Jewish Australians within the wider social and historical context. In addition see Love, Labour and the Money Power.
the industry of others’, educated in idleness and expert in fraud, was also one that arrived in Australia with the first Jewish convicts.\textsuperscript{15}

With or without the overt anti-Semitism the money power was attacked as the influence behind a giant conspiracy both in Australia and internationally. The \textit{Radical} declared that the ‘vampires of usury’ made all laws in all nations. The press ‘published their dictation’ while the pulpit was at their service. Morals deplored in the cottage were worshipped in the palace. The usurers plundered the productive classes of the world and enslaved nations with a national debt. Every country was mortgaged. Despite the huge increase in productive power of all civilised countries, and the consequent increase in national revenues, and despite the fact that they had been paid off many times over in interest, the debts remained, allowing the banking system to prey ‘on the vitals of the people like a huge vampire’.\textsuperscript{16} Military power, ostensibly to protect the nation from foreign invasion, oversaw the plunder of foreigners with whom the colony’s producing classes should have no quarrel. Hence New South Wales sent its sons to the Sudan, not to protect the nation, but ‘to fight the battle of the British money-lender and tax-gatherer and so oppress the poor Egyptian’.\textsuperscript{17} The same military might also be turned against the people should they question the ‘method of extortion’.\textsuperscript{18} Worst of all, reflecting Gipps’ concerns of some four decades previously, was the tendency of the banks to wield their enormous economic power to political ends. ‘There were men at the helm of the State’ wrote Winspear, presumably referring to Dibbs, ‘who openly declare themselves in favor of handing the country over to the usurers’.\textsuperscript{19}

McNamara stated that ‘by day and by night, the Interest-monger abstract[ed] the goods of the people’. According to his historical perspective, the ‘robber system’ known as rent was without doubt responsible across the ages for generating an army of ‘non-producers’. That a monarchy, aristocracy and plutocracy lived in luxury on the toil of the workers was certain. And that the profit-monger and speculator plundered both producer and consumer by buying and selling goods on the market that he never really possessed or worked for was obvious. But none were the equal of

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{AR}, 2 June 1888.
\textsuperscript{17} Valentine Haynes, \textit{Federation}, pp. 10-11.
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{AR}, 2 June 1888.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
interest when it came to extracting wealth from the producer. Interest enabled an ‘enormous horde of non-producers and have-alls’; stock, bond and debenture holders, mortgagees, brokers and money-lenders, to fatten on the sweat, blood and toil of ‘the producers of all wealth’. It was more dangerous than either profit or rent because it remained hidden. The landlord, ‘impudent highwayman’ as he was, robbed by daylight, whereas the usurer was a ‘midnight thief’ who stealthily robbed under cover of darkness.\(^\text{20}\)

Spence personalised Australia’s overseas debt by equating its annual cost to the Australian producer with that of feeding the family. He revealed that Australians collectively owed British bankers £407,290,000 demanding an annual interest payment of £18,102,500. Putting the number of primary producers and industrial workers at 959,339, and beginning from the assumption that ‘they have to produce the whole of the wealth which pays all the burdens’, he calculated that each had to pay over £16 ‘for the money-lender ere they get a loaf of bread for themselves or their dependents’. This almost equalled a contemporary estimate of £16 14s for the average annual cost of food per inhabitant.\(^\text{21}\)

But such analysis was selective. Australian governments of all persuasions were regular visitors to the London money markets. Loans thus raised were used to finance rail lines, bridges and other infrastructure. At least one contemporary British critique saw it as a case of British banks funding Australian socialism, pointing out that those governments were able to indulge in state interventionism, social experiment and reform through the use of British capital. Between them, it argued, Australasian governments, financial institutions and private firms had over the preceding thirty years, drawn upon £300,000,000 of foreign credit. It enabled beneficent government to bestow many social benefits such as free education upon the population and oversee protective tariffs, high wages and a shorter working day. State railways and ‘other so-called productive works’, supported by foreign capital, maintained high wages and a tight labour market which in turn impacted on private employers.\(^\text{22}\) Lang, who as Premier of New South Wales later threatened to suspend

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\(^{20}\) AR, 5 May 1888.

\(^{21}\) Spence, *Australia’s Awakening*, p. 359.


interest payments to overseas banks, demonstrated little reticence when it came to
borrowing money on the London and New York money markets to finance the
building of the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the electrification of the suburban
railway system—all the while reassuring potential lenders of the state’s
creditworthiness. But as the Radical had noted, substantial amounts of the
borrowed cash went into the pockets of the rich, and there was sufficient wealth at
home that could be put to productive use were it more accessible. Various labour
organisations demanded a state or national bank, backed by the credit of the nation,
that would offer cheap loans from within Australia and so release the nation from the
grip of the London money lord.

Under its banner, ‘Money Rules the World’, Hard Cash found grounds to
attack two traditional enemies at once by explaining that the familiar mechanism of
deceit by priestcraft was one means through which the rule of the money power was
perpetuated. A list was produced, detailing the investments of these ‘Mammon
Priests’ in the Bank of New South Wales and their per annum dividend of seventeen
and a half percent. As ever, priests were portrayed as living on unearned increment,
preaching acquiescence to the masses while battening on their labour. The money
power was thus legitimised through the preaching of Christianity to ‘the dull and
witless mob’ as ‘Mammon Priests…sold the Redeemer for a money bribe’:

[Australian priests] share in the profits of organized slavery and therefore preach, amid
the roll of organs, Obedience to the slaves. They are shareholders in Loan Companies,
investors in Banking hells organized for one purpose only—to transmute the sweat of
Christ’s brotherhood into Gold and Silver—into dividends and rents.25

Deceit was also aided by political corruption, with Members of Parliament
supposedly bought not with the crude mechanism of cash, but through ‘dividend-
paying shares in some ruffianly company organised to plunder the thoughtless and
hard working’. The media too played its part. The Fairfax family, proprietors of
Sydney’s main establishment newspaper, the Sydney Morning Herald, were,
according to Hard Cash, major shareholders in the Australian Joint Stock Bank, the

24 This was a constant theme of the Radical’s socialism. McNamara’s series of articles ‘Profit, Interest
and Rent’ of May 1888 offer as good an example as any.
26 HC, vol. 2, no. 1, 10 July 1893.
Bank of New South Wales, the Commercial Banking Company and the City Bank. ‘No wonder the people of New South Wales are deluded and robbed, when their daily mental pabulum of sophistry and lies is controlled by a family of wealthy, avaricious, and insatiable usurers’ it wrote.27

The most well known of Australia’s anti-banking labour populists was Frank Anstey. Although a Victorian Labor figure, Anstey’s views held considerable influence in New South Wales. Embittered by what he saw as modern capitalism’s greed and profiteering during the First World War, he set out to demonstrate war’s economic causes. His Money Power of 1921—a refinement of his 1917 Kingdom of Shylock that had been subject to wartime censorship—was a heartfelt expression of disgust at the war-profiteering of finance capital in particular to that end, and one which owed much to Werner Sombart’s Jews and Modern Capitalism.28 A wide-ranging polemic against the so-called parasitic activities of the banking industry along with a good measure of anti-Semitism, Anstey’s central motivation was the slaughter of a generation of Australian and British workers on the battlefields of Europe while fortunes were made through war loans and profiteering. The basis of his argument was identical to Berkey: ordinary citizens gave their lives in war, but the stay-at-home money-lenders gave nothing, instead lending their money at interest. That interest was later to be recouped from the productive activity of those workers that survived, and so vast was the debt that it would continue to have to be paid by the workers’ children. Thus it would place future generations into bondage. Anstey described these stay-at-home capitalists and money-lenders as ‘human bloodsuckers, who risk neither life nor limb nor penny, [but] wax[ed] fat on Armageddon’.29 It was a variation of the producer/non-producer dichotomy which saw workers fight and die while the stay-at-home rich amassed fortunes through interest on war bonds. Although adding little by way of ideas and explanation to previous expositions, a century on from Cobbett, and forty years after Berkey, the scale of industrial

27 HC, vol. 2, no. 2. See J. A. Ross, The Early Nineties, Sydney, 1933, pp. 7-10. In an indication of some of the rivalries within the labour movement, George Black stated that Arthur Desmond, the founder of Hard Cash, confessed to him that the main reason for its existence was its hope that the banks would buy its silence. Black, History of the NSW PLP, p. 28.
28 Anstey, Kingdom of Shylock; Money Power. It should be noted that the early Sombart, of which the above work was an example, was philo-Semitic. Anstey on the other hand used Sombart’s work to reinforce his anti-Semitic interpretation of the banking industry.
capitalist production, the profits, the scale of slaughter in war, and the money power itself had all assumed much larger proportion.

The money power was both the offspring of capitalism and its master. But where industrial capitalism was observable and understandable through its visible control of production, finance capital lurked ‘in vaults and banking chambers, masquerading its operations in language that mystifies or dazzles’. By holding the monopoly of the instruments of exchange it was ‘overlord of every other monopoly’ and by controlling the people’s savings through banks, trust and insurance companies, it controlled all credit.\(^\text{30}\) By using its control of credit it built up or destroyed. Either way, through interest or repossession, bull or bear speculation, it continued to extract wealth from labour. Through its power:

> It controls the daily press; finances the dope propaganda; wields an unseen sceptre over thrones; cabinets and populations; and is the dominant ‘behind the curtain’ power in the governments of modern States.
> Such is the modern ‘Money Power’\(^\text{31}\)

Anstey’s work drew upon many of producerism’s essential themes, and in return influenced Australian producerism’s final incarnation. The opening pages of *Shylock* referred to ‘the producer’ as an historical figure, terrorised by sword and spear into paying tribute to feudal baronage.\(^\text{32}\) The subsequent theme was that those who produced continued to pay tribute, but through the fraud of finance rather than the force of the sword. In a climate of popular distrust for bankers, and in true populist style, *Money Power* described the links between the various British and Australian companies and combines and the banks. It explained that through a web of companies, combines and banks, the Australian economy was controlled by the financiers. Through control of the people’s savings and giant profits they funded industrial projects, advanced or denied credit, and inflated or restricted the economy. They monopolised production by stealth, were a ‘price-raising conspiracy’; a ‘compact financial oligarchy’ built in ‘secrecy and silence’; a ‘Black Masonic Order’

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\(^{30}\) Anstey, *Money Power*, p. 18, cf. Cobbett, *Paper Against Gold*, pp. 36-7 and Bray, *Labour’s Wrongs*, pp. 144-54. Anstey quoted Commonwealth Bank Governor, Denison Miller: ‘Banking has its own language, not understood by the people, and not intended to be understood by them’ (p. 103). Anstey added that ‘this smoke screen of senseless words and phrases is not without utility. It protects the “Monopoly of the Instruments of Exchange” from popular comprehension and attack’ (p. 112).


\(^{32}\) Anstey, *Kingdom of Shylock*, p. v.
Figs. 9-12: Frank Anstey’s view of war profiteering
*(Kingdom of Shylock)*
of Plutocracy’, driven by a lust for power and plunder. It was the paradox of the age that ‘under the guise of the freest democracy the most odious oligarchy holds unbroken dominion’. 33

Introducing familiar producerist rhetoric, Anstey described banking as a ‘perpetual game of inflation and restriction’, where ‘colossal fortunes’ were made not by honest trade ‘but by financial trickery and market fakes, instruments of the spieler [and] tick-tacks of the racecourse’. It was ‘garbed in respectability, sheltered by the Law, and hosannahed by the Church’. 34 The wartime national debts of Britain and Australia were ‘the most gigantic swindle[s] of modern times’, robbery ‘on a larger scale than any recorded in history’—‘colossal scheme[s] for plundering the public while the attention of that public was rivetted on the German foe’. 35 Men might come back maimed and shattered, but money came back fatter than it went, ‘loaded with coupons, buttered with a perpetual lien on the toil of the fathers and mothers and sisters and brothers of the men who died, that the nation might live’. Where was the ““love of country” to those vampires who batten and grow rich on the rotting carcases of the world’s humanity?” 36 Interest on the debt would hang around the necks of the working classes like a millstone. They would become slaves to the money power in perpetuity. They and their unborn children would be doomed to unending toil simply to repay the banker. Popularising the debt by inviting all classes to participate simply reinforced and further legitimised the scheme:

The vultures of High Finance could tear off more in a few bites than a million flies, but this offer of general participation not only gave to the vultures an air of generosity, but it surrounded them with a multitude of petty partners, who felt they had a personal interest in buzzing in defence of the birds of prey. 37

Ninety years on from Shylock, sixty from the ALP’s final defeat by the banks, and in an era defined by consumerism, Anstey’s view of a parasitic finance capital as the engine of wider capitalist exploitation of the productive classes may seem strangely conspiratorial. From Cobbett’s early explanations of banks and bankers, to Berkey, and in the same vein as Donnelly’s fictional Caesar’s Column, it suggested

33 Anstey, Money Power, pp. 52-6.
36 Anstey, Kingdom of Shylock, p. 3.
37 Anstey, Money Power, p. 80.
a sinister clique that met in secret and plotted the inflation and deflation of the economy in order to make speculative fortunes, rather than arguing that the greedy and unscrupulous took advantage of the cyclical nature of modern capitalism.

But Anstey’s audience needs to be borne in mind, and his evidence and observations have never really been refuted empirically. Groenewegen and McFarlane’s orthodox economists’ view of him as a conspiracist crank is typical of how history appears to have judged him. There has been no attempt to disprove his work by critically evaluating his evidence or by theoretical argument. Instead it is met with glib dismissal, or in Groenewegen and McFarlane’s case, a reliance on the work of Love, which Svensen charged was based not on primary sources, but secondary source and analogy. Anstey offered his readers a summary of wartime banking operations, ‘stripped of all verbiage, gloss, glamor and mystification’, which included details of profits, dividends presented in tabular form and details of the operation and negotiation. He pointed out that in times of crisis governments were quite prepared to back the banks with the credit of the nation, but would never use the same credit to foster growth in times of peace, and that:

No Government on earth—not even a Labor Government—will guarantee the worker against loss from unemployment…But every Government no matter what its name…will take active steps to save the Money Bags from loss.

There is little doubt that Anstey regarded finance capital with deep suspicion and ultimately disgust. That his distaste was wrapped in emotive language and crude anti-Semitic caricature is also undeniable. But the basis of his polemic—that enormous profits generated by war loans were reaped by high finance while the sons of the working classes were slaughtered in the trenches—is not so easily dismissed when seen from the perspective of the audience to which these books were aimed. Given their brevity, Anstey’s Kingdom of Shylock and Money Power both gave comprehensive details of war loans raised by British and Australian governments, including relevant sums borrowed and interest rates paid. They also listed the names of all the key figures in the various companies, combines, banks and trusts. Yet while easily dismissed on the basis of his undeniable anti-Semitism, the specific

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39 Anstey, Money Power, pp. 36-51.
40 Anstey, Kingdom of Shylock, p. 20.
charges he raised against high finance by using such evidence were, and indeed remain, unaddressed. Anstey was writing from a producerist perspective within an economy still focused on production. Many of his contemporaries preferred to believe the word of a man whom they believed demonstrated genuine concern for his fellow workers over that of ruling-class hirelings that had made themselves rich by lying to protect entrenched wealth and power historically.41

41 Anstey was described by Jack Lang as ‘Australia’s Great Commoner’: one of the few politicians of either side that was prepared to put principle above expediency, and who never forgot the people that sent him to parliament. ‘Utterly sincere’, and never one to place his own career above the interests of ‘the people’, he resigned twice—as Minister of Health, and from the Labor Party itself. Both resignations were prompted by a belief that Labor was abandoning its fundamental principles. Anstey’s entry in the Australian Dictionary of Biography states that like many self-educated men of working-class stock his view of social injustice was a simplistic one—a condescending charge frequently levelled against working-class autodidacts. The suggestion is that working people are incapable of understanding their world or penetrating the veil of obfuscation and complexity behind which wealth and power reside. Anstey was a populist propagandist. The whole point of Labor’s populist propaganda was to strip away this complex and mystifying language to expose what lay behind in a way that could be easily understood by people too busy working to engage in complex social and economic analysis. As Anstey himself stated in Kingdom of Shylock, it was a ‘summary’ of much reading through dreary records and commission evidence (p. vii). Frank Anstey became Minister of Health and Repatriation in the Scullin Federal Government. Unlike many senior politicians of either side he left politics without amassing personal fortune or knighthood. Lang, Great Bust, pp. 110-14; I. Turner, ‘Anstey, Francis George (Frank) (1865 - 1940)’, Australian Dictionary of Biography, Online Edition, Copyright 2006, published by Australian National University, http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A070082b.htm (accessed 23 November 2006).
Chapter 17
Decline

However remote from the vulgar life and labor of the masses the doings recorded in our newspapers may seem…beneath the surface is the work of the masses.¹

The 1930s marked producerism’s last significant incarnation. Decline from the role of driving force of worker politics to relative insignificance was surprisingly swift given its dominance over the previous century and a half. But the preceding decades had witnessed the idealism of years past give way to the pragmatism of an organised Labor Party—the new dominant force in worker politics. As early as 1890 the New South Wales Labor platform stated support for any measure that would ‘secure for the wage-earner a fair and equitable return for his or her labour’.² While ostensibly a more practical and realistic platform for a gradualist reformism towards the socialist objective, it was effectively both an acceptance of waged-labour, and a return to earlier demands for a fairer share of labour’s produce rather than its whole sum. It stood in contrast to the more militant 1890 (Queensland) Australian Labor Federation platform, which demanded ‘the just division of among all citizens of the state of all wealth production, less only that part retained for public and common requirements’, and a similar declaration in the 1908 Commonwealth platform.³ Both the latter however proved to be largely rhetorical, and in practice all Labor governments, state and commonwealth, adopted a reformist programme, while the producerist rhetoric of the early movement was effectively dropped. Thus Métin charged that although a class party in appearance, the Labor Party in practice accepted private ownership and waged-labour.⁴

Although essential to the worker mobilisation necessary for the building of the Labor Party, producerism’s ultimate conclusion that the producer had the right to the whole produce of his or her labour was one that lent itself most forcefully to syndicalism and ‘modern’ socialism. While the ALP initially carried a strong producerist undercurrent, it became increasingly difficult to reconcile this conclusion with the pragmatism of building an organisation with a broad spectrum of working-

¹ Ironworker, August-October 1928.
² AW, 23 September 1890.
³ Spence, Australia’s Awakening, p. 407. For Spence’s discussion on this point see pp. 378-82.
⁴ Métin, Socialism Without Doctrine, p. 51.
class support, both productive and non-productive, and, given the accommodation of capitalism, justifying government within the bourgeois liberal-democratic framework. The paper that relied most on producerist language, the Radical, had disappeared in 1890 after Winspear and the ASL drifted apart ideologically.5 Other papers such as the Australian Workman had already reduced their reliance on its use post-1895, while New Order and the Active Service Brigade’s Justice had only ever made use of it infrequently.6 Its use had also largely fallen into obsolescence in the influential Sydney Bulletin by the turn of the century, and virtually disappeared with the change of editorship from J. F. Archibald to James Edmond. Instead the paper turned to an increasingly ugly racism in its defence of White Australia which saw the traditional producerist-influenced defensive racism associated with the labour market give way to theories of racial superiority and Watsonian notions of racial contamination.7 Even the preamble to the syndicalist IWW’s Direct Action of 1914 made no reference to labour’s right to its whole produce, nor to a social division between producers and non-producers, although it frequently spoke of the workers’ economic reliance on the ‘idle and useless parasites’.8

Producerism did not resurface to any significant extent until the 1920s, after the hiatus imposed by the First World War. Even then it lacked the forcefulness of its predecessor and remained restricted to those few ephemeral publications critical of the ALP, which themselves seemed less concerned with worker mobilisation than the political objectives of the identities behind them. Labor governments, both state and federal, had proved that in power Labor had little effect on capitalism, and indeed went as far as to take financial advice from conservative bankers. It gave ample ammunition to radicals both from within and outside the party. The most influential populist labour politicians of the time—Lang in New South Wales and Anstey in Victoria—both believed that the ALP had merely tinkered with nationalisation instead of going for the jugular by either nationalising the banks, or making the Commonwealth Bank the reserve and bank of issue as intended by King O’Malley and adopted by the Commonwealth Labor Platform of 1908. Capitalism was safe. Of Labor and the banks, a disillusioned Anstey wrote in 1921:

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6 For a critical appraisal of these and other labour papers see Walker, Newspaper Press, pp. 127-44.
7 For example Bulletin, 15 January 1914.
8 Direct Action, 31 January 1914.
Thus Labor can expend its energies upon nationalised fried fish shops and bakeries, while leaving untouched the nerve centres of capitalism, without which capitalism cannot exist, without which national reconstruction on any other than capitalist lines cannot take place.\textsuperscript{9}

As with previous expressions of producer radicalism, the catalyst was economic difficulty. While most of the 1920s were relatively prosperous, it was a prosperity based on the familiar Australian mechanism of cheap credit driving speculative activity and drawing in excessive imports—this despite economists expressing alarm at the amount of capital poured into unproductive ventures.\textsuperscript{10} No sooner did export prices fall than spiralling unemployment began, typified by the engineering and metals industries where employment fell from 108,000 in 1926-7 to 70,000 in 1931-2.\textsuperscript{11} Post-war inflation, coupled with the expectation of increased government social interventionism, exacerbated the crisis when it erupted as politicians, acting on the advice of bankers and economists, sought to combat it through deflationary measures, balanced budgets and ultimately reduced wages.\textsuperscript{12} Insufficient revenue meant that governments were unable to meet the welfare of the unemployed. This in turn led to drastic solutions such as the Lang Plan which, bolstered by producerist antipathy towards idle and parasitic bankers, sought to defer payment of interest on government loans until the crisis had eased. Interest on British bonds was seen as a drain on post-war reconstruction. From a producerist perspective it was money drawn from productive enterprise that should be channelled into further production and the general improvement of Australian workers instead of being abstracted into the palaces of wealthy British bondholders. Irrespective of how Australian society was constructed, so long as Britain remained a capitalist society the obligations to British financiers would remain. Under these conditions, those deemed unproductive or parasitic, particularly when seen to be living in luxury on unearned increment, came under particular and hostile scrutiny.

\textsuperscript{9} Anstey, \textit{Money Power}, p. 112. See also Lang, \textit{Great Bust}, pp. 14-47.


\textsuperscript{12} According to a producerist assessment from Lang, war was always inflationary because it was a ‘non-productive enterprise’. Money was ‘pumped into circulation for which there was no corresponding build-up of assets’. Lang, \textit{Great Bust}, p. 39.
As a nation in debt to London, Australia had little choice but to follow London’s prescription for curing the depression by increasing demand through depreciating costs—effectively wages. In effect it demonstrated the continued dominance of an economy based on production where the few wealthy consumers would be induced to greater consumption by reducing the cost of goods produced. Australian economists, with the exception of Robert Irvine, tended to agree with London’s deflationary prescription which made them all the more unpopular with labour. This was especially true post Niemeyer. As always they were seen as the mouthpieces of the bosses. The Federal Arbitration Court’s decision to reduce the minimum wage by ten percent, on the advice of economists introduced into proceedings by the employers, led to an increased loathing of economists by organised labour. According to Lang, the decision was also responsible for the creation of more Australian communists than ‘all the Moscow drivel’.

Nevertheless, despite the severe economic and social dislocation caused by the depression of the late 1920s, or the earlier disaffection with the ALP, producerist rhetoric was now the exception rather than the rule. It remained confined to small local splinter groups outside both the ALP and CPA and surprisingly it was also largely absent from the IWW’s Direct Action. Instead it seemed to be more a feature of rivalries and power struggles between key figures within the wider movement rather than worker mobilisation as a whole. Albert Willis’ syndicalist and IWW-influenced One Big Union (OBU), and Industrial Labor Party (ILP) offers some examples. According to Lang, Willis agitated for the adoption of the One Big Union at the ALP conference of 1919. Under his direction, and in partnership with J. S. (Jock) Garden, the syndicalist Workers’ Industrial Union of Australia published One

13 Australia was a debtor nation and the British bondholders ‘never permitted us to forget it’ wrote Lang. Ibid.
14 By contrast, Keynes suggested wages should be increased to stimulate demand, and under today’s consumerist regime demand is controlled by interest rates.
16 The Bank of England’s Sir Otto Niemeyer visited Australia in mid-1930. Niemeyer’s assessment was that Australia was living beyond its means and further deflationary measures (essentially reductions in wages, the dole, and pensions) were necessary to prevent Australia’s default on British loans. The Niemeyer visit has received ample attention from Australian historians and economists, for example: Love, Labour and the Money Power, pp. 91-107; Millmow, ‘Niemeyer’.
17 Lang, Great Bust, pp. 346-9. Lang argued that an impartial Court of Arbitration was a bulwark against communism in Australia. Loading it with political appointments, as the conservative Bruce-Page government had done, simply radicalised organised labour (pp. 345-6).
18 Lang, I Remember, p. 137.
Big Union to support Willis’ ambitions.\footnote{This led to conflict with the AWU which was also seeking to establish itself as one big union. See Childe, How Labour Governs, Ch.11, Ch. 12.} In seeking to generate a significant support base among manufacturing workers it turned to producerist rhetoric and an obvious enemy in the money power. Only One Big Union could counter the colossus of the ‘one big money power’, it editorialised, because the Labor Party and craft unions were too divided by petty squabbles and differing objectives. Anstey’s influence was obvious. The money power was ‘a combination of the most staunch international financiers’ who met in secret to plot, make war and peace, and otherwise conspire to ‘keep their financial machine working full speed, reaping in the harvest of golden coin robbed from the toiling masses’\footnote{\textit{OBU}, 1 May 1919.} It was a pandemic, ‘sweeping the whole world with its germs of self, greed and avarice’. ‘Upheld by idlers and parasites’, it obtained its ‘poisonous blood-stained gold’ through starvation, war and death.\footnote{Ibid.}

Having failed to achieve enough support within the party for his syndicalist objective, the former Welsh miner left the ALP to form the ILP. Its short-lived syndicalist \textit{Industrial News} again fell back on producerist rhetoric in an attempt to lure workers away from the ALP and attack its leadership. ‘Comrades! Why waste your money and your energies in affiliating with the ALP? The white ants of compromise have eaten into its platform until scarcely a sound plank is left’ it wrote.\footnote{\textit{IN}, 1 May 1921.} ‘Most of the heads of the Labor Party are as separated from the working-class as the two poles. In that anti-working-class party there are big brewers, wealthy manufacturers, publicans, petty-bourgeoisie, and rich men of leisure. In their hearts, as all parasites do, they despise the toiling masses’.\footnote{\textit{IN}, 16 March 1922.}

The paper offered a familiar analysis of the social structure, and retained a belief in the labour theory and a social division based on the concepts of usefulness and productive and non-productive labour. Thus it declared the workers ‘the producers of all wealth’, and the bosses ‘the parasites [that] enjoy[ed] all the luxuries of life without earning one cent’.\footnote{\textit{IN}, 1 May, 1921.} Useful members of society were those ‘directly or indirectly assisting in the production of wealth’. By contrast the useless were the ‘loafers and parasitical drones…who neither directly nor indirectly assist in useful...
production’. It was a language that the ALP had by now largely forgotten, and by using it, Willis perhaps hoped to capture support by reigniting populist producerism. He failed and, according to Lang, returned to the Labor Party while Garden turned to Moscow.

Despite the failure of Willis and Garden, as late as 1929 the language still clung to life, albeit at the margins. Federated Ironworkers’ Association (FIA) New South Wales Secretary Colin Tannock edited *The Ironworker*. Under its OBU- and IWW-influenced banner of ‘One Union—One Enemy’ and ‘Educate—Agitate—Organise’, it still recognised labour as the source of all wealth and devoted a good deal of analysis to demonstrating that the ruling classes only retained power through the abstraction of wealth from the producing class. It was one of the last bastions of producer rhetoric and spoke in a language that would have been recognisable to the radicals of a century earlier. The upper echelons of the labour movement may have quietly sidelined producerism, but the *Ironworker* demonstrated that at the level of the industrial worker it could still be relied upon to drive worker politics through demands they receive the full fruits of their labour.

Like most labour publications, the *Ironworker*, under the editorship of Tannock, vociferously attacked the money power and British bondholders during the late 1920s, although without much of the overt anti-Semitism of some of the earlier literature despite the obvious influence of Frank Anstey. It still saw society from a producerist perspective, however Tannock’s audience was concentrated and small. Nevertheless it was a remarkable publication for the time and is worthy of some analysis as one of the best and yet last examples of the producerist perspective recorded in New South Wales.

With almost every edition, between union business, and lighter items such as reprints of the IWW song ‘Casey Jones, the Union Scab’, came pages devoted to explaining political economy, or how the current social order allowed wealth to be taken from those that produced it and given to those who did not. Tannock, an OBU

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25 *IN*, 16 March 1922.
27 *Ironworker*, February-April 1929. Scottish by birth and son of a gasfitter, Tannock was both NSW State Secretary and President of the union from 1924 until 1955. He was also a Labor member of the NSWLC from 1931 until 1952.
supporter, also reinvoked the demonology of the banker and the ‘money power’, specifically British investment capital in the New South Wales railways and the interest it demanded. The *Ironworker* saw the ‘money power’ at the apex of the capitalist class and regarded the so-called ‘international shylocks’ and ‘money-lending drones’ as the purest form of exploiter—lounging in their ‘palatial offices in New York and London [with] centralized control of all capital’. Towards the end of 1930 a series of attacks were made on parliaments and politicians, describing the New South Wales Legislative Council (the state’s upper chamber) as ‘a parasite institution on the backs of the people’. Tannock invoked Ignatius Donnelly’s comment that a double-barrelled legislature prevented a government of the people—‘two chambers, two chances’, while politicians generally were ‘the lap dogs’ of the ‘useless, loafing, money-lending parasites’ who never worked.

Tannock’s syndicalist OBU sympathies were reflected in the pages of the *Ironworker*, where many articles were devoted to suggestions that craft unions were anachronistic in an age of machine production and division of labour; a view almost certain to put it at odds with the skilled metal trades. Instead, demonstrating the syndicalist and internationalist IWW influence, he proposed the combination of all metal trades into one industry-wide union as a constituent part of a wider union of international working classes, and through which the producers of all wealth would retain the whole fruits of their toil.

The *Ironworker* sought to educate its readership and make it aware of its place in the social structure. It did this because it believed that to receive the education of their masters amounted to little more than ‘the training of cattle that are broken to the yoke’. It attacked ruling-class hegemony, suggesting that a ‘moneyed clique’ had established puppet governments worldwide from which ‘the bosses’ professional politicians’ made a good living. So-called responsible government was responsible only to the capitalist class for the making and administration of capitalist laws. They

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28 Murray, *Ironworkers*, p. 27.
29 *Ironworker*, August-October 1930.
30 *Ironworker*, August-October 1930, November 1930-January 1931. This was somewhat ironic given that shortly thereafter Tannock himself became a member of the Legislative Council.
32 *Ironworker*, August-October 1928.
Fig. 13. Above: Regardless of the context the lawyer continued to be despised (Bulletin 1888).

Fig 14. Left: The Ironworker of 1930-31 reminds NSW Premier Jack Lang of his mandate to rid the state of its upper chamber. Beneath the perch of the upper chamber’s “vultures” lay the bones of blocked labor legislation.
were laws that perpetuated private ownership of the tools and means of production, distribution and exchange, and organised their protection.\textsuperscript{33}

The paper was one of the few remaining worker publications that offered members extensive instruction in popular political economy, with articles on the subject running to several pages. All were premised on the labour theory of value, and demonstrate that as late as 1931 the theory was still regarded as the basis of value in some quarters at the popular level. The purpose of these lessons was to point out how capitalism generated social inequalities by exploiting the productive worker. Accordingly, the foundation of all social life was the labour of the masses. Although an age of machine rather than strictly manual production, it was, nevertheless, not until the hand of labour was laid on the machine that it became productive. The machine was inert; by itself it had no ‘power, energy, [or] ability to produce wealth’. But although labour created wealth through the machine, and indeed created the machine itself, neither was the property of labour. Instead, both were owned by the capitalist class.\textsuperscript{34}

The \textit{Ironworker}’s view of the social structure remained one that would have been recognisable to a radical of one hundred years earlier:

\begin{quote}
We see our class, that produces all wealth, robbed of the fruits of its labour, and condemned to a life-long struggle to sustain animal existence, pressed by fear of starvation, living the drab existence of beasts of burden. And we see our taskmasters assume the form of imperious necessities, living on the produce of our labour, lives of leisure and culture, free from economic care and worry.\textsuperscript{35}
\end{quote}

All human beings required food, shelter and clothing, it wrote. Nature provided the necessary raw materials, but they had to be transformed by human labour. Such labour was righteous and should be universal. But some managed to live without engaging in this toil, and in so doing shifted the burden of their support onto others. The wealth that was product of men’s labour was not their own, but thrown upon the open market where money was required to access it. The money itself came from interest, profit, rent or wages and it was through the first three that the majority of

\begin{flushright}
33 Ibid.
34 \textit{Ironworker}, 1 January 1928.
35 Ibid.
\end{flushright}
wealth produced by the workers became abstracted into the hands of the non-producer.  

Less recognisable to early radicals was the tendency for profit to become transformed into interest or share dividends. It was explained that whereas in times past the entrepreneur tended to be the sole owner of an operation, a more recent development was the joint-stock company. In this contemporary form of business, day-to-day operations were overseen by managers and other officials, and those that put up the capital had little input on the running of the business, but instead simply waited for their dividend. In short, ‘the mass of profiteers in industry today are mere dividend-hunting shareholders in the many joint-stock companies’. Economists, rather than justifying such profiteering should devote their inquiries toward a fair social division of the wealth generated by the producer and the establishment of scientific laws to govern such distribution. These laws were not ‘something apart from men and the relations of men’, and were not cast-iron. Instead they should reflect the continually changing struggle between ‘those who live on Labor’ and those ‘who live by Labor’. 

The familiar ‘money power’ arguments expressed by Anstey were drawn on and the ‘International Shylock’ made frequent appearance. As an integral part of British capitalism, Australian capitalism was responsible for abstracting wealth from Australian producers and sending it to the international financiers that controlled the world’s mills, mines, railways, workshops and factories. These ‘money lending drones’ were the same ‘money gods’ who ‘by the opening and closing of their pocket-book create[d] booms or slumps, depression or prosperity’. Consequences such as unemployment were of little concern. While ‘bloated boss class economists’ dehumanised unemployment and rendered it down to ‘coldly considered’ mathematical formulae, to the worker it meant ‘a terrible nightmare of hunger, natural wants unsatisfied, desires thwarted and a life lived below even the animal scale’. The solution offered by ‘capitalist economists’ was the absurdity of charity,

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36 *Ironworker*, November, December 1930, January 1931.
37 Ibid.
38 *Ironworker*, August-October 1930.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
employment offices and unemployed insurance. Such invective demonstrated the disdain for orthodox economists that was a feature of the early labour movement.

In 1928 Tannock turned his attention to the New South Wales railways, arguing that an operating profit of £5,110,690 was only turned into a loss of £451,618 by the payment of £5,562,308 in interest to British investors. It demonstrated how this ‘gang of loafing parasites’—this ‘coterie of non-producing’ and ‘interest-grabbing parasites’—were kept in ‘idleness and luxury’ in ‘palatial mansions’ on ‘the blood of every railway worker killed in industry’. He predicted that to keep the moneylenders’ ‘big useless guts well lined with the necessities of life which they rob from the workers’ there would be demands from ‘their salaried agents, boss-class servants and overpaid mouthpieces of class privilege in Parliament’ that the so-called ‘loss’ be recouped by increasing worker’s rail fares and reducing rail workers wages.

Eighteen months later Tannock again railed against the further payment of interest by New South Wales railways to British bankers. Although the railways ran an operational profit, these huge interest payments meant an effective loss. It was the railway worker that suffered as the Bavin government looked for economies through the usual channels of reduced wages and sackings. Through the *Ironworker* he fulminated:

> During the last five years £24,789,567 has been paid in interest on railway loan expenditure in New South Wales to the idle useless moneylender. If it is good enough for the railway worker to go without his dinner owing to being kicked out of the workshops, surely it is good enough for the money-lending parasites to go without their blood money in the form of annual interest. At least, one works, and the other just as consistently never works. The unity between the Government bosses and their bosses’ government should be an eye-opener to the workers. They always stick to the non-producer.

It sounded typical of the wider sentiment that was to return the Lang government to power in New South Wales and lend support to his proposed moratorium on interest

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41 *Ironworker*, 1 January 1928.
42 Lang, *Great Bust*, pp. 340-42. In 1914, *Direct Action* attacked ‘University Professors’ as hirelings of capital for their defence of the wages-fund theory. ‘According to the weird theories of these “Professors of Political Economy”’, it wrote, ‘the more unpaid labour we are robbed of the more we are paid’. *Direct Action*, 1 August 1914.
43 *Ironworker*, 1 January 1928.
44 *Ironworker*, August-October 1929.
payment to overseas debt. As member for Auburn, a Sydney suburb with extensive rail workshops, Lang held a close relationship with railway workers. In the aftermath of the rail workers’ defeat in the 1917 strike, on first becoming Premier in 1925 he restored lost conditions and reinstated sacked workers. Beneficiaries included the engine driver Joseph Benedict Chifley and the fitter and turner John Joseph Cahill. In return eight hundred rail and tram workers gave Lang a dinner by way of thanks.45 Lang was also a fervent admirer of Frank Anstey, and received much support from the unions generally as the only politician who had not ‘sold out’ to the money power; this despite a later falling-out with the leadership of the Sydney Branch of the FIA as a part of wider power struggle.46

In 1930 Tannock returned to the subject of the New South Wales railways. Again the subject was the familiar one of interest payments to British bondholders. In order to justify a further wages cut, rail manager W. J. Cleary argued that the railways had been losing money for years. It was a charge countered by Tannock, again using the money power argument. Were it not for extortionate interest, he argued, the railways would have made a profit every year since 1855. Using data gathered by the Labor Research and Information Bureau, he demonstrated that the railways made a profit of £5,437,566, but interest and sinking fund charges totalling £6,476,952, turned it to loss of £1,039,386 which the capitalists and their mouthpieces demanded be recouped through further wage cuts and sackings.47

Using the methods of W. G. Spence, Tannock reminded workers that of every shilling they spent on a rail ticket, ‘fourpence went into the pocket of the money lord’. These enormous sums were leaving Australia, and the rulers and politicians, rather than acting like Australians in the interest of their own, instead looked after the interest of foreigners. The Ironworker demonstrated to its readership that Australia-wide the interest on rail debt amounted to £15,458,680. This was an enormous sum abstracted from the pockets of working-class passengers, and the sweat and toil of the rail-workers of the nation, while ‘the vultures’ of British high finance lounged in their palatial offices.48 Such was labour’s dislike of the money power. In common with the broader labour movement however, Tannock neglected to acknowledge that

45 Lang, I Remember, pp. 253-8. Chifley became Prime Minister of Australia in 1945. Cahill became Labor Premier of NSW.
46 Murray, Ironworkers, pp. 72-3, 91-2.
48 Ironworker, November, December 1930, January 1931.
without the loans made in good faith by British investors, there would be no railways. But in a sense it was a vestige of the moral economy. Investment in progress and the nation’s future should not be burdened with interest that allowed the money-lender to live in luxury on unearned increment. Instead it should be invested collectively through the state for the good of the whole. Besides which, in times of economic hardship it was morally right that wealthy foreign bondholders should forego these ‘huge sums’ to provide for the unfortunate at home. Forcing Australian workers to work harder for less pay to maintain extortionate interest payments to rich foreigners was not sharing the burden fairly.\footnote{Lang, \textit{Great Bust}, pp. 285-6.}

Notwithstanding Tannock’s diatribes, the presence of producerist rhetoric beyond the 1930s was less frequent. It is difficult to find one consistent reason, and indeed what follows is largely speculative. During the preceding decades it appeared that Australia’s home-grown socialism took second place to the pragmatism of obtaining as much as possible from capital through waged-labour and the parliamentary Labor Party. Events in Russia during 1917 offered another alternative. Asher’s American study suggested that it was producerism’s failure to suggest a single agenda—itself partly attributable to divisions based on skill, income and ethnicity—that made a common strategy for assuming wealth and power unachievable.\footnote{Asher, ‘Producerism is Consciousness of Class’, p. 65.} The numerous proposed solutions to the economic problem were often contradictory, and ultimately divisive and self-defeating. In Australia, power struggles between the ALP and ILP, the various syndicalist organisations such as the IWW and OBU, the trades unions, as well as between the reformist and revolutionary socialists, were all indicative of this failure to present capital with a united front. Syndicalism in particular, as the most ‘producerist’ of these ideologies, drew a hostile response from Fabian socialists, communists and the ALP alike. Splits resulted not just from ideological difference, but were the result of personal and factional power struggles within organisations which in turn led to further fragmentation. The ALP’s refusal, when in power, to institute fundamental structural change was also the cause of much dissatisfaction from the more radical. Even the IWW’s \textit{Direct Action}, which might reasonably have been expected to utilise producerist language in pursuit of its syndicalist social objective, never used the producerist social dichotomy, instead relying on the Marxist ‘class war’ rhetoric of
capital versus labour or bourgeois and proletarians. Although demanding the worker manage the whole product of his or her labour themselves rather than relying on a benevolent state, the paper nevertheless drew heavily on Marx and Marxian economics in explaining such terms as surplus-value and capital and the influence of Marx was apparent throughout the paper’s lifetime.  

Another possible reason was the increasing ideological dominance of the Soviet Communist influence in Australian workers’ movements. Churchward argued that the first two decades of the twentieth century coincided with the peak period of American influence on the Australian labour movement through the works of de Leon, London, Debs, and Trautmann. But there was little sympathy among the next generation—‘young family men’ of the depression—for the earlier American influenced socialism, and the American influence, underpinned as it was by producerist rhetoric, declined once the works of Lenin were introduced in 1920.  

Thereafter it was Lenin that provided the basis of militant labour’s attacks on its gradualist and reformist leaders. To take the 1930s FIA leadership as an example: Murray and White argued that the CPA alone was perceived to hold the key to progress through scientific socialism. After a period of vacillation between the earlier Australian socialist tradition and the Comintern, the CPA finally decided on the latter. In so doing they instituted a strict organisational hierarchy and switched emphasis away from local education and propaganda to carrying out Moscow’s instructions. One critique of the twentieth-century Left has further suggested that after the October Revolution, communist parties everywhere saw the capture of state power as an end in itself rather than a means to address the economic problem fairly with respect to both producers and consumers.

Outright hostility within Communist Party literature to the persistence of the producer was obvious. Lenin was resolutely clear in this respect, regarding it as a threat to the revolution. ‘The concept “producer”’, he wrote,

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31 For example, Direct Action, 31 January 1914.
32 Murray, Ironworkers, pp. 82-4, 107.
combines proletarians with semi-proletarians and small community producers, thus radically departing from the fundamental concept of the class struggle and from the fundamental demand that a precise distinction be drawn between classes.\textsuperscript{55}

In the case of the \textit{Ironworker}, sixteen years after the above quote from Lenin was penned, state issues were replaced by a national publication under the editorship of the Communist Ernie Thornton. Thornton never used producerist language. By November 1939 the \textit{Ironworker} had become a nationwide paper under Thornton’s watchful eye and Tannock’s infrequent contributions relied less on producerist rhetoric. Thereafter the language effectively disappeared. Much political comment and content also disappeared and the federal replacement remained more focused on day to day union activity. The ‘Working Class Education’ section of previous issues was redundant and the \textit{Ironworker} became just another factional union paper. An instrument of organisation rather than industrial political discussion and education, it was no longer felt necessary to explain to workers how they were exploited, but instead to simply direct them in whatever action was deemed necessary to alleviate that exploitation.

Parliamentary labourism in Australia also abandoned the language of the producer as the social gulf between the professional politicians and their working constituents quickly widened.\textsuperscript{56} As Lang suggested, the new politician became seduced and corrupted by power and quickly forgot his origins.\textsuperscript{57} Tannock wrote in the \textit{Ironworker} that what was needed from the chosen representatives of the Australian labour movement were courage and honesty of purpose. These were however ‘conspicuously lacking in the great majority of the members of the Labor Party in this and other States; hence the deplorable fact that intrigue, self-advancement, and in many cases open treason have been found where self-denying service was due’.\textsuperscript{58} Anstey wrote that ‘if a movement when it gets power does not function for the purposes for which it was created, if it deserts what it was pledged to defend, if it abandons principle after principle, then unity in action is valueless, and the hopes of men are an ever retreating mirage’.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{56} Childe, \textit{How Labour Governs}.  
\textsuperscript{57} Lang, \textit{I Remember}, p. 42.  
\textsuperscript{58} Ironworker, November, December 1928 – January 1929.  
\textsuperscript{59} Anstey, \textit{Money Power}, p. 74.
But the ALP was a party of pragmatism and so, perhaps most importantly, to fully include all members of the working classes in an increasingly sophisticated economy meant that the party was increasingly less able to rely on the assumptions of one section. Of necessity it had to look beyond the interests of the mining, industrial and agricultural sectors. This may have given added impetus to the shift away from the labour theory of value and labour’s right to its whole produce as part of the wider social shift towards consumerism. Labor’s reformism relied increasingly on the right to subsistence and was in part based on a supposed short-term acceptance of capitalism. As a consequence there appeared to be an implicit acceptance of waged-labour and rejection of the right of workers to the whole produce of their labour—one of producerism’s touchstones. Instead, as Asher noted of workers in the United States during the same period, labour rhetoric became channelled into demands for a greater share of the social wealth through consumption.\footnote{Asher, ‘Producerism is Consciousness of Class’, pp. 65-6.} White Australia saw to it that the threat posed by cheap foreign labour was minimised just as workers were becoming more affluent. Even before the Great Depression, Jock Garden was able to write in the IWW-influenced \textit{One Big Union} that the skilled worker had reached the stage where he almost made a decent livelihood and could even afford to indulge in an occasional luxury such as taking a day off or going to the theatre.\footnote{\textit{OBU}, 1 September 1919.} The social paradox of a worker being unable to afford the products of his or her industry seemed to be in the process of being solved.

As the main focus of people’s lives shifted from work to consumption, utility value challenged labour value—further divesting labour-power of its perceived role as the sole determinant of value.\footnote{C. Hamilton, ‘Economics in the Age of Consumer Capitalism’, \textit{Journal of Australian Political Economy}, no. 50, pp. 130-36.} The worker, it seemed, no longer created wealth, but simply worked in order to finance consumption. Producerism had become an anachronism. Some threads lingered but the language was subdued, absent, save the occasional letter.\footnote{\textit{Ironworker}, April 1940.} The exception, veteran Queensland Secretary Bob Taylor, backed the miners in their 1940 wartime strike, and demonstrated Anstey’s continued influence when reminding unionists that:

\begin{quote}
Whether there is a war on or not, the struggle of the mining unions is a just one. We must not stand idly by and allow the exploiting class while they roar their patriotic war
\end{quote}
cries, to grow fat on the profits that they extort from the blood and sweat of the workers. Do not let the Tory press influence your mind against the miners. Do not forget that the laborer is worthy of his hire, and that the very rich coal baron, when he died and went to hell, left his money to a High Court Judge.\(^{64}\)

‘Put Australia’s Idle Rich to Work!’ demanded another Taylor-authored article in the *Ironworker* of November 1940. According to the census of that year, 348,631 Australians, designated X89, were ‘without gainful occupation’. Another 19,649 were ‘persons of working age with independent means’:

While the producer of wealth sweats before the blast furnace or descends the Stygian darkness of the coalmine, his fellow Australian of lost province X89, this dweller in a narrow world of privilege and property, can sit back in comfortable idleness…For this comfort and idleness he will give thanks to anyone but the workers who produce the wealth for him… ‘Put the idle rich to work’ is the answering slogan of the worker, who knows this leisured class as the chief opponent of all his own efforts to get a little more leisure.\(^{65}\)

Shortly thereafter Taylor was replaced by the Communist Alex McDonald, signifying the total capture of the union by the Moscow-aligned CPA and the disappearance of producerist language from its pages entirely.\(^{66}\)

Finally there was the increasing dominance of marginal utility which largely went unchallenged by labour. While labour remained focused on production, the influence of the marginalist economists—coincident with a significant post-World War I improvement in mass production techniques—played a major role in shifting the social emphasis of twentieth-century economic life away from production towards consumption. The hiatus in producerism and popular political economy in the first decades of the new century had allowed utility theory to displace the wages-fund theory in orthodox economics almost unnoticed by the labour movement. The labour theory, so closely associated with the productive sphere of human economic activity, held little or no relevance to the activities of human beings as consumers. Labour’s reward through wages became simply another factor in the ‘cost of production’. Unless offset by improved productivity, demands for higher earnings

\(^{64}\) *Ironworker*, March 1940. The latter reference was to John ‘Baron’ Brown, and Commonwealth Chief Justice Sir Adrian Knox. See Lang, *I Remember*, p. 113.

\(^{65}\) *Ironworker*, November 1940.

acted against the interests of consumers as a whole by driving up the cost of production. Economics no longer concerned itself with solving the economic question or explaining social origins of wealth, if indeed it ever did, but on how best to direct production to suit the consumer. With the labour theory of value sidelined, the argument that labour had the right to its produce lost its foundation. And if labour did not produce all wealth then the movement had no moral or legal right to claim it.
The term producerism, although a recent one, describes a centuries-old informal ideology with a history of challenge to the hegemony of rulers. Asher found many of its ideas and assumptions in the writings of Winstanley as he explained the cause and actions of the Diggers of the English Commonwealth; Schultz suggested origins even further back in twelfth century Britain and Europe, while Beer and Lichtheim saw some aspects, notably the labour theory of value, stretch back to antiquity.\(^1\) Its nineteenth-century Anglo-Celtic incarnation was an essential feature in the lives of many of Britain’s working people and carried by migrants to its colonies and former colonies. Producerism linked the point of production to the wider social structure, giving those engaged in productive labour social worthiness and moral virtue. It provided worker politics with an economic logic regardless of what form those politics took. Acknowledged or otherwise, the work of Schultz, Wilentz and Laurie in America, Thompson, Hobsbawm, Briggs and Hollis in Britain, and Markey, Bongiorno and Scates in Australia have all demonstrated its universal presence in the nineteenth-century worker milieu.

Regardless of whether it was early radicalism or the later socialism and syndicalism; whether Britain, America or Australia, each variant of worker politics offered its unique means of finding utopia yet shared a common producerist foundation. There were at once local peculiarities and yet broad global similarities. These similarities allowed the example of the American Republic to reinforce the idea of a producers’ commonwealth in the radicalism of 1840s New South Wales, and American populist writers Ignatius Donnelly and Edward Bellamy to strike a chord with the Australian workers of the 1890s.\(^2\) Producerism gave the emergent Australian labour movement, from the earliest trades’ unions and the writing of Mason and Hawksley through to the genesis of the Labor Party, a powerful rhetorical tool that reached into workers’ productive identities, rekindling and focusing powerful emotions onto both new and centuries-old enemies—just as it had to British radicals, Chartists, and American Republicans.\(^3\)

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3 Thompson, *Making of*, pp. 103-5.
Whatever their formal political affiliations, those that numbered themselves among the productive classes believed they were confronted by a social system dominated and corrupted by robbers, liars and cheats who had historically perpetrated and perpetuated a colossal theft of labour and all its fruits through deceit and state coercion. In 1649 Winstanley proclaimed waged-labour a means of economically exploiting the ‘plain-hearted brethren’. It supported tyranny and was therefore unrighteous. Similarly, theft of labour to support an idle and parasitic monarch in 1775 differed little from theft of labour to support the idle and parasitic moneylender or capitalist of the 1920s. As Cobbett had stated in 1831, ‘of all the destructive things that can fall upon a nation; of all the horrid curses that can afflict it, none is equal to that of robbing productive labour of its reward, of taking from the industrious to give to the idle’. There may have been different utopias in the producerist schema, but if the tyranny supported by waged-labour, profit, interest, rent and taxation could be thrown off, and the parasites forced to shoulder their share of the burden, then all would stand equal as producers and reap the full reward of their toil. Chartist or socialist, be it delivered by Benbow in 1830s Britain, Robinson in 1870s America, or Spence in the Australia of 1909, the message was the same: ‘The few—the idle dronish few—will be forced to work as well as others, and every man’s share of the good things in life will be in proportion to his production of them’.

Producerism thus underlay worker alternatives to ruling-class organisation of society. It valued community, reciprocal obligations, the concept of ‘fair price’ above ‘market price’, and above all work, its social utility and moral righteousness. But the radicalism and socialism that it underpinned was that of the white Anglo-Celtic ‘productive’ male, although this was perhaps more a reflection of a male-dominated society rather than of producerism itself—which could perhaps, under different social circumstances, equally be applied to any productive human being regardless of race or sex. Producer radicalism also had its dark side. Its disdain for the socially less fortunate, its conspiracies, racism and anti-Semitism echoed strongly across time and space. It was not always coherent, and worked best by reducing complex social phenomena to simple analyses and caricature. While many among the more

4 Cobbett, *Two-Penny Trash*, vol. 1, no. 6, December 1830 (Cobbett’s italics).

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thoughtful of the labour movement recognised that the capitalist system itself was responsible for the unequal distribution of social wealth, as a propaganda exercise the producerist assumptions behind Australian labour populism continued to highlight the greed and avarice that drove the actions of evil and designing men, and in this sense it was no different to its overseas counterparts. But this was how it got its powerful message through to people too busy working to engage in complex debate. Its rhetorical power lay in its ability to reach the centre of a worker’s identity—their work—and through their work, their sense of social worth in comparison to idle others.

By the 1890s the language of producerism had become a significant feature of the Australian cultural and political landscape, having dominated the radical pamphlets, labour and socialist publications, populist political rhetoric and union newsletters aimed at Australian workers for nearly half a century. When One Big Union, as late as 1919, proclaimed that ‘united action is the only direct means by which the producers of the world will cast out the drones, the financial pirates, profiteers and parasites who smite humanity with all the plagues of Hell, war, starvation, disease and death’, it drew on centuries of Anglo-American worker tradition.6

Yet by the 1930s, as a political language, producerism’s heyday was past. Ultimately the mechanics of its abrupt demise remain baffling, but there appears to be a series of disconnected events which, when taken as a whole, contributed to its sudden irrelevance. The ALP offered a state-mediated compromise between capital and labour. Through arbitration, protection and immigration control it kept wages relatively high and for a time delivered Australian workers one of the highest standards of living in the world. Yet as demonstrated above, its position with respect to the workers’ right to the whole produce of their labour was never firmly cemented nor carried through with any conviction. As Jack Lang recorded, ‘it was no sooner adopted than it was forgotten’.7 The Labor press, the main means of worker mobilisation, having achieved the objective of building a mass support base for the party, largely abandoned its use of producerist rhetoric and soon disintegrated into factions more interested in political infighting than fighting the capitalist.

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6 OBU, 1 April 1919.
7 Lang, I Remember, p. 134.
Beyond its failure to deliver the fundamental producerist demand of the return of the whole produce of labour, the party failed also in many other producerist areas. A ‘people’s bank’, the Commonwealth Bank, was established by Labor, but soon fell into the hands of the banking fraternity under the conservative Bruce–Page government. The process was not reversed when Labor, under Scullin, returned to office. The national debt was not paid off and public borrowing continued. The standing army remained and a citizen militia never materialised—Hughes turning his early arguments for a citizen militia into a corrupted argument for conscription. The Governors General and other placemen still remained. In short, the measures that the Labor Party took did nothing to really reform the structure of Australian society. It was, to many, and not just socialists, an acceptance of capitalism and the recognition that perhaps the best the workers could hope for was a few extra crumbs from the bosses’ table.

But as a fairly broad populist coalition, early Labor politics was always a political balancing act. As Childe pointed out, virtually from inception the necessary inclusion of small farmers and other members of the petit bourgeoisie planted the seeds of internal conflict and division. And while petit bourgeois small farmers and small manufacturers almost certainly shared the producer ideology with manufacturing and mining workers, they were equally divided by divergent class interests. Perhaps also for the Labor Party producerism was simply too sectional, too closely associated with certain types of worker in the primary and secondary sectors of the economy. These were important sections certainly, but alone could not have provided the electoral support necessary for parliamentary representation. This was particularly significant when many rural workers and small producers were later lost to the Country Party, an organisation that played extensively on the producerist notion of a parasitic city supported by the productive country. To stand any chance of electoral success Labor had to embrace a much wider demographic, and that included the so-called non-productive. In an increasingly complex economy, strict producerist doctrine could not adequately account for the social utility of the increasing number of workers in the tertiary sector and their right to a share of the social wealth.

8 Childe, How Labour Governs, p. 54.
9 Graham, Country Parties, passim.
The Moscow-aligned CPA, the ALP’s only significant left-wing rival from the 1930s onward, seems to have been hostile to producerism. Their historical perspective argued, with good cause, that nineteenth-century capitalism had transformed the artisan small master into a member of the petit bourgeoisie while the mechanic had become part of the proletariat. Yet despite the Marxist belief that the petit bourgeoisie and proletariat should be class enemies, both held a common belief in the social utility of productive labour. Thus there always remained the potential for workers and small producers to be united under the populist umbrella of productive labour and social utility. This perhaps, along with the apparent tendency of producerism to syndicalism, threatened to undermine the strict divisional basis of the class struggle necessary for the Marxist dialectic. There is no evidence available locally to verify this, and it is a suggestion that can only be inferred from Lenin, whose hostility to the concept is a matter of record. It would appear unlikely that the Communists and sympathetic historians deliberately wrote producerism out of labour history to this end—as has been the charge levelled at them with respect to Guild Socialism—particularly given the reliance of Marxian surplus-value on the labour theory. But the example provided by the *Ironworker* does show how the economic theory that supported a producerist view of society was sidelined in order to devote greater attention to the CPA’s practical and organisational concerns. This process may well have been reflected in the subsequent histories of the movement. The Fabians on the other hand, influential in the British labour movement but perhaps less so in Australia, were less reticent in making their views with respect to syndicalism, the labour theory and marginal utility known.

Lastly, but perhaps most importantly, there is little doubt that value theory played a crucial role in producerism’s decline, and perhaps the biggest error made by proponents of all the producerist-based ideologies was their failure to address marginal utility. While debate between the labour theory and the wages-fund theory raged, and while the various left ideologies fought among themselves over how best to solve the economic problem, marginal utility assumed orthodoxy virtually unnoticed. Both its advocates, and those of the labour theory, refused, or at least seemed reluctant, to be drawn into the debate over the original source of all wealth—

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10 Blaazer, for example, argued that for much of the twentieth century the dominant state socialist historical tradition intentionally marginalised or wrote Guild Socialism out of labour history for its own political purposes. Blaazer, ‘Guild Socialism’.
but in any case such debate seemed increasingly anachronistic. Marginal utility was a
theory whose time had come. As productive techniques became increasingly
advanced and automated, and the human factor as part of the overall cost of a
manufactured item correspondingly decreased, the labour theory became less
convincing in its explanation of value. The early twentieth century also witnessed the
beginnings of a working-class disposable income, and the extension of consumption
to the whole of society. It was no longer the preserve of the wealthy few ‘idle
consumers’. Marx’s observation that the return of capitalist investment in production
depended largely on ‘the consuming power of the non-producing classes’, and was
restricted by the limited consumption of the masses through the poverty that was a
function of the iron law of wages, seemed increasingly less relevant.\footnote{Marx, \textit{Capital Vol. 3}, p. 484.} The economic
emphasis of society as a whole had shifted.

Throughout the nineteenth century many among the working classes felt
themselves exploited by the capitalist and other members of the ruling classes,
receiving very little in return for their efforts. They placed overwhelming emphasis
on such ideas as usefulness and productiveness. In this context producerism
legitimised their struggle for a greater share of the social wealth. Hawksley’s mid-
century millenarianism was typical of workers’ movements worldwide across the
latter half of the century. To them it seemed inevitable that those who produced all of
society’s wealth would, as they became more educated, demand control of all
production and eventually abolish the idle consumer. But the ordinary worker, when
no longer excluded from consumption, placed less emphasis on his or her productive
life. Mass production facilitated mass consumption, giving workers both a stake in
capitalism and the illusion that they had attained a greater share of the social wealth.
The forces of mass production, by reducing prices and increasing availability, created
a mass market of consumers, and it was through utility theory that these productive
forces could be best directed to serve the wants and needs of the individual consumer
through the mechanism of the market. Henceforth, in essence, labour’s struggle
became less one for control of the productive process and more of attaining greater
means to consume. But in abandoning producerism workers lost the economic
principle, common to many generations, that had underpinned all of their significant
ideologies. The labour movement lost its economic lodestar.
Capitalism was, and indeed remains, above all else an economic system. Any critique that is to be in any way meaningful has to criticise the economic theories that justify its continued existence. Marx, and many other radicals, devoted their lives to such an endeavour. It was the labour theory of value that underlined their critiques, and it is to the credit of the neo-classical economists that through marginal utility they were able to so thoroughly and effectively deflate a century of radicalism and leave the labour movements of Britain, America and Australia without a guiding economic doctrine of their own. Economists such as Jevons, Menger and Marshall, in divesting political economy of its political component had rendered it ‘safe’, and a century of radicalism premised on productive or useful labour and thrift was derailed by cheap consumer goods, a living wage and the eight-hour day.  

Utility theory remains economic orthodoxy under the guise of neo-classical economics. It emphasises man the consumer over man the producer and denies workers any legitimate claim to the produce of their labour. But with the end of producerism came the end of worker economics, leaving the discipline the unchallenged servant of capital. Robert Heilbroner, writing in the 1970s, was thus able to argue that although it should, modern economics did not concern itself with the politics or morality of the transfer of a surplus from one group to another. It simply focused on questions of allocation and efficiency. Like the religion of an earlier era, economics, a supposedly disinterested science, had become the tool of the rulers. By discrediting the labour theory of value it nullified not just Marx and his ilk, but the workers’ attachment to producerism and consequently the entire radical discourse.

Workers in the nineteenth century perhaps saw things more clearly than today. The hegemony of early capitalism stood on less firm foundations; the institutions of civil society less sophisticated. Arguments for maintaining the status quo were less complex, less obfuscating, and somehow less convincing. When producerism became coupled with the artisan autodidact’s thirst for knowledge, and the general rise in worker literacy and education, it seemed that a different society was

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achievable—a producers’ commonwealth built on either mutualist or collectivist foundations. But when economic philosophy is ceded to the other side so totally, when both sides of conventional politics utilise the same economic principles, there is no true opposition and worker politics fragments into single-issue, identity, or lifestyle politics. Perhaps the last word should be left to ‘Cinderella’, whose 1890 Australian critique of British political economy drew to a close by stating that:

As I began by affirming the preposition that—All Wealth is produced by Labour—so I close by denying that any cause other than Labour can produce Wealth. And if there be any other causal force of Wealth production inconceivable by me, I herewith challenge anyone in the world to tell the world what in the world it is.14

14 Cinderella, Cinderella, p. 95.
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