

W.E. MURPHY'S MANUSCRIPTS AS SOURCES FOR AUSTRALIAN SOCIAL HISTORY

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Over the last ten years, Australian historians have shown an increasing interest in the making of an Australian working class. Robin Gollan's *Radical and Working Class Politics* was first published in 1960; Ian Turner's *Industrial Labour and Politics* in 1965; and Brian Fitzpatrick's *Short History of the Australian Labor Movement* was republished in 1969. In between, and since, others have written some scores of articles and theses and published half a dozen books on working class institutions, especially the labour councils and the trade unions.

It is probably no accident that interest in the formation of a working class has increased in the last ten years. The Labor Party failed to win any of the Federal elections of the fifties, and in the sixties began to lose control of state parliaments as well. After the invasion of Hungary, the Australian Communist Party lost a large proportion of its members and involved itself in continuous squabbling over 'revisionism'. The number of Australian trade unionists continued to increase, but the proportion of employees who were trade unionists began to decline, and traditional trade union resistance to capitalist incentives began to weaken. For the first time in half a century, some historians began to question assumptions they had made about an Australian working class. Was there one? If so, what were its characteristics? How did these evolve? Were they enduring, or temporary? Has there been 'class conflict', which in some sense was inevitable?

It was with these questions that Fitzpatrick's *Short History of the Australian Labor Movement* and Gollan's *Radical and Working Class Politics* were concerned. They found their answers mainly in sources of two kinds: in the records of the parliaments and the courts, where representatives of labor parties and trade unions worked within the institutions the State had created; and in the records of bodies made up of trade union delegations, like Intercolonial Conferences and strike committees. In the last few years, historians have begun to ask the same big questions about smaller organizations, notably the trade unions. In doing so, they have uncovered sources not previously available and raised a host of new questions about the nature of social class, and the working class in particular. The answers they have so far given suggest important refinements of the answers that *A Short History of the Australian Labor Movement* and *Radical and Working Class Politics* have offered.

It is in this connection that the manuscripts of W.E. Murphy are particularly important. Murphy's manuscripts provide sources different again from most of those more recently used by historians in their investigation of the working class. They do include a good deal of formal record: the minutes, reports, accounts and balance sheets of some large and quite well-known organizations like the Melbourne Trades Hall Committee. But they also include much material that offers comment on authorized version: correspondence, notes for the preparation of cases, personal defences, handbills and pamphlets, manuscript histories of labour organizations, and handwritten agreements between employers and employees on wages, hours and working conditions.

William Emmett Murphy was born in Dublin in 1841. He served his time as a cabinetmaker's apprentice and arrived in Melbourne in 1865. He joined the Cabinet Makers' Society, and immediately involved himself in its affairs. By the seventies, he was its Chairman, and delegate to the Trades Hall Committee. His interest however extended beyond the narrow limits the Committee set to trade union politics. He became a very active member of the Anti-Chinese League, and a Councillor of Graham Berry's Protection and Reform Association. When in 1882 the issues posed by the Factories and Shops Commission compelled the Committee to decide whether or not it would enter 'politics', Murphy was very much on the side of those who urged the Committee to enlarge its activities. He moved the motion that established the Melbourne Trades Hall Council as a body for whose new purposes the old Committee's powers had been 'revised . . . amended . . . and extended'; and he became the Council's first Secretary.

He held this post until August 1887. In that time, he managed every major issue that the Council involved itself in. He organized the Tailoresses' Union during the sewing girls' strike of 1882, and became its first secretary. He negotiated for the Seamen's Union in a multitude of disputes with the ship owners and worked almost continually at organizing railway unions. In 1886, he succeeded in having the strike of the wharf labourers referred to private arbitration, where he argued so effectively that Professor Kernot awarded them the eight hour day. He became a member of the Chamber of Manufacturers, and negotiated with the newly-formed Employers' Union to establish a voluntary Board of Conciliation. He organized the Intercolonial Trade Union Conference of 1884, moved successfully for the establishment of a Parliamentary Committee, became a member of it, and stood – unsuccessfully – for North Melbourne in 1886.

This seems to have caused him some trouble with his Council, and in 1887 he was dismissed as Secretary (in his absence) on charges that amounted to alleged defalcation. For a while he concentrated on his Building Society business, which he had formed with the Council's approval a little earlier, and stood again for North Melbourne in 1889, losing this time by a few votes only. By then he had returned to Council as a delegate, and he regained enough of its confidence for it to appoint him as Secretary of the Finance and Control Committee in the Maritime Strike of August 1890.

After the Maritime Strike, Murphy organized no more trade unions and managed no more strikes, but he continued for some time to lecture and write on labour politics. He had long been interested in the 'mental and moral improvement of the working classes', and in the early eighties helped establish Ormond College. In 1888 he contributed several chapters to the *History of Labour and Machinery in All Lands . . .*, and in 1896 published his *History of the Eight Hour Day*. This seems to have marked the end of his public career.

Set 308 of the uncatalogued manuscripts of the Mitchell Library contains manuscripts which document Murphy's principal actions and interests between 1860 and 1896. They also contain records of societies and committees which antedate Murphy's membership of them. The list that follows sets out the principal records in which social historians are at present most likely to be interested. The Mitchell catalogue lists each box of unsorted documents as an 'item'.

TRADES HALL AND LITERARY INSTITUTE COMMITTEE

- Minute Books, 1858-1870 (In items one and two)
- Minutes of Committee appointed to make arrangements for the delivery of lectures in the Hall, 1860 (In items two and three)
- Rough Minute Books, 1877-1885 (In item three)

EIGHT HOURS ANNIVERSARY COMMITTEE

- Minute Book, 1859-64 (In item five)

OPERATIVES BOARD OF TRADE

- Minute Book, 1858-1860 (In item two)

VICTORIAN EIGHT HOURS LABOUR LEAGUE

- Minute Book, 1858-60 (In item two)

BOOTMAKERS' LOCK-OUT, 1884-85

- Cash Book, 1884-85 (In item four)
- Finance Committee; Minute Book, 1884-85 (In item four)
- Balance Sheet, 1885 (In item eight)

HISTORICAL MANUSCRIPTS

- Handwritten MSS: 'Historical Studies of Trade Unionism and Trade Unionists', by 'One Who Knows' (In item four)
- Handwritten MSS: 'A History of Labour in Tasmania' (In item seven)
- Memoranda . . . on Mr Stephen's career (In item seven)
- Brief History of Sydney Trades Hall (In item seven)
- History of Working Men's College (In item seven)
- Biography of W. Trenwith (In item seven)
- Address to Benjamin Douglass (In item seven)
- History of Engine Drivers' and Firemen's Association, South Australia (In item seven)

'Reminiscences', by W.E. Murphy	(In item seven)
Biography of F.H. Bromley	(In item seven)
Classified Schedule of Trades Disputes, 1882-94	(In item seven)
History of the Amalgamated Miners' Association	(In item seven)
Notes on labour events, 1883, 1884, 1885	(in item seven)

PAMPHLETS

A.T. Best: 'Essay on the Eight Hours Question', Melbourne, 1857	(In item seven)
Victorian Operative Stonemasons' Society: Report of Committee appointed to Inquire into the Origin of the Eight Hours Movement, Melbourne, 1884)	(In item seven)

NATIONAL REFORM AND PROTECTION LEAGUE

Third Annual Report, 1878	(In item seven)
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VOLUNTARY ARBITRATION

Notes on private arbitration on trade disputes, especially maritime disputes	(In item seven)
Letter from the Employers Union on the failure of voluntary arbitration in the Ironworkers' Dispute, 1888	(In item nine)

WHARFLABOURERS' STRIKE, 1885-86

Summary of events and comment	(In item seven)
Letters and telegrams	(In item eight)
Handwritten draft of arbitrated agreement	(In item eight)

ANTI-CHINESE LEAGUE

Minute Books, 1878-1885	(In item eight)
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PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

Election Manifestos, 1892	(In item eight)
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Speeches of Beazley and Hancock, Collingwood, 1892	(In item eight)
Appeal to Electors of Collingwood, 1891	(In item eight)
Note to Murphy from the Victorian Women's Suffrage League	(In item eight)
Report of the Parliamentary Committee to the Intercolonial Trade Union Conference, 1886	(In item eight)
Election Returns, 1886	(In item ten)

MARITIME STRIKE

Appeal to Unionists, Balance Sheet and Report of the Committee on the Federation of Labour	(In item eight)
Balance sheet of the Finance and Control Committee	(In item eight)
Report of the Finance and Control Committee	(In item nine)
Printed correspondence on	(In item nine)
Invitation to Ladies' Bazaar, Athenaeum Hall, in aid of victims of	(In item nine)
Written correspondence	(In item nine)

CO-OPERATION

Prospectus and Plans for the Australian Workers' Co-operative Irrigation Colony at Mildura, 1890	(In item eight)
Balance Sheets, Union Co-operative Wood Mill, Homewood, and Union Brickyard, Brunswick	(In item eight)
Share Certificate, Melbourne Boot and Shoemakers' Co-operative Society, 1886	(In item eight)
Letter from Homewood	(In item nine)

BOOKS OF NEWSPAPER CUTTINGS ON TRADE UNIONS, STRIKES AND VOLUNTARY ARBITRATION

1884-1886	(In item ten)
1887-1888	(In item eleven)