Nourishing Labourist Culture: a report on a new left-wing writing and reading festival and a discussion of its antecedents

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1. The Leftwrites Making Space Festival

In early 1998, Graeme Sparkes put a proposal to the New International Bookshop (NIB) in Melbourne, that a committee be formed to investigate the possibilities of holding a broadly left-wing festival for readers and writers. Sparkes, a teacher of English as a second language at the Northern Metropolitan College of TAFE in Collingwood, was a shareholder in the NIB. That bookshop, which replaced the old CPA International Bookshop in Elizabeth Street, was underwritten by a large number of small 'shareholders' and though housed in the Melbourne Trades Hall, remains a somewhat precarious financial venture. Sparkes' initial desire to base the event around the bookshop and the Trades Hall, as centres of labourist and left-wing culture, remained important in the subsequent development and identity of this festival.

He was a member of a small writing group called 'Leftwrites', who met monthly at Trades Hall to discuss their work. The initial, informal festival committee was mostly comprised of members of this group (including a former and current secondary teacher and a retrenched tram driver), with a representative from the NIB. Paddy Garrity, manager of Union Promotions (essentially an unsalaried arts officer for Trades Hall), informed Ian Syson and myself at *Overland*, and I started going to the monthly meetings. Syson attended a meeting in mid 1998 and proposed the festival theme: 'Making Space'. This suggestion reflected Syson's ARC-funded research into twentieth century literary and political intellectuals of the labour movement and the concept of an alternative, labourist public sphere. Doug McQueen-Thompson from *Arena* magazine and Jeltje and Sjaak, poets and performers with substantial experience in community arts events, local festivals and alternative publishing, joined the organising group in the second half of 1998. Thea Calzoni, a writer with extensive experience in community arts theory and practice, joined in November 1998 (an article by Calzoni on community arts will appear in *overland* 156). Other stalwart members of the committee have been Angela Bove, who responded to a notice in the Victorian Writers' Centre newsletter *Write On*, Charles Spiteri, a student at Swinburne, and Phillip Edmonds, a writer and teacher of creative writing with a long history in small and alternative publishing. The make-up of the committee reflects the natural constituency of the festival.

By late 1998 the central political and philosophical bases of the festival were established. Extensive discussion had taken place over whether or not to have 'left' in the title of our association and festival. A continuing point of reference and contrast was the *Age* Melbourne Writers' Festival. It was felt that that event functioned for the most part as a publicity drive for the major publishers. Accordingly, writers were presented as objects of adulation (commodities) rather than as leaders of social dialogue. Writing itself, much praised as a thing of beauty or of skilled expertise, is often presented at events like the *Age* festival as the preserve of the uniquely skilled or artistically gifted, rather than as a means by which all people could improve their self-esteem and social skills. Shane Maloney had written in the *Age* that Melbourne Writers' Festivals inevitably attracted the entire female population of affluent Surrey Hills and Canterbury, and there remains a widespread sense that that festival caters largely for a middle-class, eastern suburbs audience.[1] These are the only people, publishers would have you believe, who read and purchase books.[2] The Leftwrites Making Space festival was therefore to be more inclusive and interactive than the Melbourne, and other glossily promoted Writers Festivals. The committee was keen to ensure for instance that readers as well as writers be included in the 'Making Space' title.

Though some members of the committee were more aware than others of the existing network of small and community readings, cultural events and nodes, it is fair to say that there was a broadly felt need on the committee, in spite of these existing alternatives, to create a festival that would provide a more conscious and general *opposition* to the cultural status quo. The committee saw the festival, from the beginning, as an attempt to reinvigorate labourist, working class and community culture.[3] When it first began meeting there was no real sense of the size of the final event but by late 1998, with a firm committee makeup and general philosophy, the plan was to contact 'name' writers willing to appear under a 'left' banner, and community groups to take part in community arts events. The ideal, more easily identified than achieved, is to reach across these two streams of events and bring them into dialogue. Charging no or very little entrance fee was also seen as a worthwhile way of distinguishing ourselves from the Melbourne Writers Festival and making our events more accessible to marginalised sections of the community.[4]

The committee began contacting writers and others, and I wrote an application for funding to the SEARCH foundation, with Paddy Garrity and Stuart Macintyre as referees. Calzoni had a brief meeting with Leigh Hubbard in late 1998 but neither he nor the Trades Hall could offer extensive infrastructural or other support at that stage. Following a meeting between myself and Steven Richardson, director of the 1999 Maribyrnong festival, the leftwrites committee accepted an offer from Richardson to hold our festival in loose association with the larger Maribyrnong event. Richardson made available office space and equipment, including computers, phone, fax, email and ordinary mail, he promised access to Maribyrnong festival publicity outlets and to liaise on our behalf with the proprietors of likely local venues. The focus in the industrial heartland of Melbourne also seemed to fit our broad goals. The alignment with the Maribyrnong festival, BigWest, gave leftwrites its organisational deadline: the festival would be held in mid to late November, 1999.

By January 1999, leftwrites had applied to become 'Leftwrites Incorporated', enabling democratically binding decisions and procedures. Virtually all of the writers we contacted responded with encouraging enthusiasm and general support for the festival idea (a rare exception, ironically, was Shane Maloney). Jeltje and Sjaak were connected to Collective Effort Press and a previously planned anthology of the work-poetry magazine *925* was co-opted into the Leftwrites program. *overland* and *Arena* were also committed to some participation from the beginning. Community groups and small publishers were contacted and were generally enthusiastic.

In March, I put a book proposal to Pluto Press: *Making Space: A Collection of Writings from the Inaugural Leftwrites Festival*. It was a detailed proposal that listed the many 'name' writers who had agreed to participate, but no reply was received. At an April meeting, some members of the committee expressed

concerns that the festival would come to be seen as purely a western suburbs event, or as a suburban rather than left-wing or labourist event. Accordingly, a branch of the leftwrites festival would over the next couple of months be established in the northern suburbs of Melbourne, in conjunction with the Darebin Council. The commitment of the committee to launch the festival at Trades Hall and to hold certain major events there, was also reaffirmed. At about this time the issue of payment of writers was also taking up considerable discussion time. At a meeting on 8 May it was decided that, given the fact that Leftwrites Incorporated had no financial resources of its own, any funding received would go to payment of Australian Society of Authors and Australian Writers Guild rates to writers and/or events decided upon by the committee. Further, Leftwrites Inc. could accept no responsibility for payment of other writers and participants, and that this financial situation be made public where possible. A motion was passed to pay equal rates to participants in future festivals if funding allows. When the issue of funding was resolved, I submitted an open-ended application for support to Clare Curran, the Arts Officer of the Australian Council of Trade Unions. After some time had elapsed I telephoned her office a number of times, was told she was not available and after leaving a number of messages gave up trying to speak to her.

Promotional and programming work was difficult between this time, when most of the writers and events had been contacted or planned, and the announcement of financial support. A second round of submission invitations was announced, advertising distributed, little response. As I'm writing this article, with the festival drawing near, new people are putting their hands up and wanting to participate. Given that this is our first festival and that we haven't had as high a profile as we might have liked, this is probably understandable. On a Tuesday evening, 11th May, a promotional evening was held at the Electrical Trades Union's 'Comrades Bar' in Carlton. This was followed in July by a fundraising evening at Doug Jordan's house in Kensington (a western suburb of Melbourne). Both events represented attempts to develop community and financial support for the festival, in not dissimilar ways to older methods of the organised left.

In late June, the Literature Fund notified the committee of a $2465 grant. This money was allocated to the travel, accomodation and performance costs of the poet Geoff Goodfellow, the fiction writer Christos Tsiolkas, the folklorist and labour songs website manager Mark Gregory, to Tricia Bowen, a writer and performance artist and Mammad Aidani, writer in residence at the Footscray Community Arts Centre. All of these people, in different ways, have and continue to stimulate and express the culture of working class and marginalised groups. It remains important however, that the events these writers are involved in actively facilitate and encourage dialogue with marginalised groups.[5] In early July the Reichstein Foundation notified Thea Calzoni of a $3000 grant to organise and conduct a writing workshop involving injured workers, with the ultimate aim of producing a booklet of these writings. In July and August members of the committee were working on an application for funding from the federal 2001 Heritage Trust, in order to take part in this nationally significant process of celebration and reflection, and to ensure the ongoing existence of Leftwrites. A second round of phone calls to writers and other participants went surprizingly smoothly and a BigWest advertising deadline of 16th August was met, forcing the timetable for events in the western suburbs into a more concrete shape. The next day, notification came from the SEARCH foundation that $3000 had been granted our festival. Priorities as I write include payment of a number of writers and performers who had agreed to participate for free, the launch (Rod Quantock is tragically unavailable), further active encouragement of

participation by members of the Aboriginal community, subsidisation of a marquee for a small publishers book fair and the establishment of a publicity drive, the production of some professional advertising material etc.

There are a number of interesting observations and questions that the experience of organising the Leftwrites Making Space festival raise. What has been particularly (and, to me, surprisingly) apparent is the sheer enthusiasm for and interest in the festival by writers ('name' and otherwise) and members of the public. The 'left' title does not seem to have put people off, and though it is difficult to point to concrete evidence of it, the confidence with which people have approached the festival asking to participate seems to have something to do with that adjective. The 'left' title indicates that this is not only a local festival, but a festival seeking to make connections between the various local cultural centres. Goodwill and co-operative spirit have been apparent on the Leftwrites committee itself and its sub-committees, where despite personal and political differences, people have shown up for weekend meeting after meeting and worked in their own time to build this progressive cultural festival. Without this dedication and energy nothing would be achieved. The Reichstein Foundation and SEARCH have recognised the need for the festival and although the seven-person Literature Fund board includes the conservatives Frank Devine, Patrick Morgan and Nicholas Hasluck,[6] for whatever reason they granted the entire amount requested.

It is also apparent, looking at the background of the festival, that the committee has attempted where possible to associate itself with the union movement and left-wing causes generally, rather than local councils or established community arts festivals, and that, equally, this association has not been easily made. The Australian Education Union was approached, offering an advertisement in their union publication but no further support. The Trades Hall was not able to offer infrastructural support and we will be paying for the use of the bar for the launch of the festival and of the 925 anthology.[7] We may get some promotional support from them and access to mailing lists. The ETU was approached with no response. It is true, as Leigh Hubbard explained to Calzoni, that the unions would look more favourably on projects that had already been organised and where the role of the union would be clearly defined. But having acknowledged this, the media arts officer of the ACTU, Clare Curran, did not even reply to a detailed funding proposal.[8]

Despite the clear desire of the committee to link up with organised labour, far greater support has come from federal and local government bodies and from philanthropic organisations. Without this support, the festival would have been much smaller and, I say optimistically, less successful. Thus there is a paradoxical situation where on the one hand people involved with promoting literature and culture at a grass-roots, community level, are expressing their dissatisfaction with government funding bodies and seeking a potentially more radical basis for their work, while on the other hand it is government rather than labour, that is supporting this very attempt.

In asking why there is this physical and communicative gulf between organised labour, community arts and left-wing writers, one is inevitably led into a consideration of the Leftwrites festival's historical antecedents. Although I am not aware of the breadth of responsibilities of the ACTU arts officer, and while I do not wish to downplay the community arts and activist experience of others on the Leftwrites committee (often far more substantial than my own), it needs to be asked why this group had to establish a left-wing writers' festival largely from scratch. Why was there no real equivalent to this festival, this attempt to draw community groups, small and alternative publishers, unions, writers groups, educationalists, writers and others into dialogue, already

existing and supported by the organised left?

The very fact that community arts are generally conducted at a local level makes it difficult to research, publicise or facilitate a dialogue between these grass roots developments. Practitioners necessarily feel a responsibility to their immediate community first and foremost. Nevertheless, this need for dialogue across communities is central. As Raymond Williams has noted, 'since our way of seeing things is literally our way of living, the process of communication is in fact the process of community: the sharing of common meanings, and thence common activities and purposes; the offering, reception and comparison of new meanings, leading to the tensions and achievements of growth and change'.[9] A further problem is the lack of a real, united or co-ordinated left-wing party or movement in Australia. Unions are over worked, under direct and indirect attack and facing complex problems of supra-national dimensions. But part of the answer might also lie in altered attitudes, within unions and left-wing groups, towards their own social role. In the letter from the SEARCH foundation granting Leftwrites Inc. a $3000 Denis Freney Memorial Scholarship, the co-ordinator Peter Murphy wrote: 'We felt that it is not a matter of principle for you to have no entrance fee and suggest that you seriously consider this to help with your budget. We also think there is no principle involved in applying for support from the Victorian Council for the Arts, though it may be unlikely that they would support you'. In some ways Murphy may well be right, but the Leftwrites committee was from its inception eager to offer its events at a very low price in order to break or weaken the association between writing and commodity. We saw this as the most tangible means of demonstrating that the purpose of writing and reading is not to make money, thereby suggesting that the real value of literature and culture cannot be bought, consumed or valued monetarily. We also felt that if our festival were not to become another local, single-issue or facile "next wave" event (the fringe festival in Melbourne had as a prize a couple of years ago a tie belonging to Jeff Kennett, for example), it needed a more radical financial basis than Arts Victoria. We are not against making money but do see a link between who is paying the bills and the nature of the final cultural product; which is to say too, we see a need to actively develop and protect labourist, left-wing and local culture from the ground up.

2. The history of community arts in Australia

Opinions differ as to the most historically accurate birth date of community arts in Australia. According to Sandy Kirby and David Watt, the modern community arts movement developed in concert with the social ferment of 1960s and 1970s struggles for race, gender and sexual equality.[10] However, just as the novelty of 1960s radicalism has been brought into question by examinations of earlier and subsequent political and cultural movements, so too has the history of community arts has been re-evaluated in these terms.[11] Ian Burn and Kirby[12] trace the community arts movement back to the various cultural institutions, often established by the Communist Party of Australia or trade unions, that gave voice to working-class culture throughout the twentieth century and before. Against this broad conception of community arts, Gay Hawkins[13] has argued that this can only be seen as an official, government initiated and supported phenomenon:

> Despite nostalgic claims that community art is the oldest and most essential form of cultural practice, the term had no real currency in Australia until it was invoked in Commonwealth cultural policy in the early 1970s. As difficult as it may be for many community artists to accept, community arts are an official invention.[14]

Andrew Milner has argued that the radical movements of the 1960s and early 1970s were progressively de-politicised

as they were moved within the aegis of "respectable" government-sponsored institutions such as universities and government boards.[15] This contention raises the possibility that progressive and radical politics can best be re-claimed by recovering a radical institutional base, yet Hawkins implies that genuine grass-roots support for working-class cultural expression had effectively died by the late 1960s and that government support for community arts filled this gap for its own, essentially conservative political reasons. She notes that despite taking steps to ensure something like equal access to (basically "high") cultural forms, the assumption that Culture and the elite arts have an inherent value tended to detract from the use of community arts for progressive social change.

Whose perspective on the origins of community arts is most accurate is open to dispute and is in part a question of perspective and semantics.[16] Though there is clearly a significant difference between government-funded and non government funded forms of community arts, it is equally clear that there are strong cultural and political parallels between these two developments. It is necessary to keep a perspective of the continuities *and* discontinuities over time. The important thing is not to say whether a period or movement existed or not ("romanticism", for instance, a term that was not actually used by the Romantics to describe themselves), but rather, in what sense it existed. "Community arts" is a thing, or things, but it is also a practice, something being made and remade.

Burn and Kirby outline a historical process by which organised labour wins important gains for working-class people, notably the eight hour day and improved wages and conditions, and comes to celebrate these achievements and rewards collectively and publicly:

> In 1912 in Melbourne, for instance, eleven thousand unionists marched carrying more than a hundred banners and watched by tens of thousands of spectators. Accompanied by bands often made up of union members, these marches invariably included highly decorated floats and trade displays, and finished up with political speeches, perhaps sporting events, a picnic or banquet.[17]

The Eight Hour movement signified the attainment, by workers, of leisure, recreational and educational time: 'The strong interest in sport in this country has been linked to the increase in leisure which allowed working people to both participate in and attend sporting events. But it also offered opportunities for intellectual advancement, to which the popularity of the slogan "Knowledge is Power" attests'.[18]

The development of labour media in the late nineteenth century marked a shift away from 'more ritualistic celebrations'.[19] After the demise of the labour dailies in the late 1930s, the labour movement was left without an effective media vehicle for public expression and the explosion in communications technology since the Second World War 'left behind the traditional media used by trade unions and made it increasingly difficult for unions to compete for control over how they are represented in the mass media'.[20] Following on from the Mechanics and related institutions formed in the nineteenth century, the Workers' Art Clubs, established in Melbourne, Sydney and elsewhere in the early 1930s, and later the Workers' Art Guild in Perth, were according to Burn and Kirby 'the first indication in Australia of radical artists and writers modelling their activities on international socialist cultural practices'.[21] Similar clubs had originated in the Soviet Union and Europe, and in North America. The clubs

> engaged in a wide range of activities, part activist and part educational. They conducted evening classes in banner, poster and placard-making and designing, in drawing, theatre, literature and public speaking. There were also social evenings, dances, film and slide nights, and lectures ... The annual May Day marches were much enhanced by the involvement of Workers' Art Club

members who painted posters and banners for the unions. In its first three years, the Sydney Workers' art Club had produced thirty different productions, including seven new Australian plays. These activities included agit-prop performances in club rooms, on the streets and at factory gates, as well as at Labor Party and Community Party branch meetings. When the Workers Art Clubs were disbanded in the mid 1930s, they were replaced by the New Theatre and the Writers League'.[22]

In Sydney during the second world war, Hayward Veal initiated a workers' art exhibition at his factory. Veal became the driving force behind the Encouragement of Art Movement (EAM), formed in 1944. He was president, Bernard Smith vice-president, and Howard Ashton (President, Royal art society) was patron: 'A multitude of exhibitions was [sic] held in workshops, offices, camps, factories and worksites throughout the country'.[23] It was widely believed that a 'new era' was dawning, write Burn and Kirby, 'in which the working class was going to participate, through the benefits of adult education for example, in the civilised life normally reserved for the affluent middle class'.[24] As the war approached its end,

> It was felt by other cultural groups that these achievements must not be allowed to disappear. The Central Cultural Council and the NSW Public Schools Teachers' Federation, for instance, organised a "People's Conference" to discuss how a permanent, mass cultural movement could be created through educational, industrial and community groups.[25]

The EAM merged with the Country Art Movement. In 1945 the Studio of Realist Artists (SORA) formed in Sydney, aligning itself with the EAM. The program of SORA had much in common with the Workers' Art Clubs: 'There were lectures and discussions, art classes, film screenings, musical evenings and parties; a lending library of books and art reproductions was established, regular bulletins and newsheets were produced, and exhibitions organised. Members painted May Day banners and helped in productions of the New Theatre'.[26] The Waterside Workers Federation film unit made a number of important films in the 1950s and supported the production of other visual and literary artistic products.

Functioning alongside the educational institutions established by unions and the CPA, these public, co-operative and essentially working-class events seem to me to fulfill the requirements for any historically sensitive definition of community arts. The EAM for instance, was the body that eventually became the Arts Council of Australia.[27] The fact that they may not have been government sponsored would not lead me to question the validity of the appellation "community arts", and might in fact indicate that these were more inclusive and representative forms of community arts than has come to be the norm in the post-Whitlam period. As Hawkins acknowledges, though 'the criteria of excellence and the national good were still at the heart of the Australia council's constitution … the addition (by the Whitlam government) of the terms "access and participation" did signify new justifications for arts funding and nowhere were these more strongly asserted than in the community arts program'.[28] In other words, community arts before and after the 1960s can only be distinguished from other forms of arts and arts funding by the prerequisites of "access and participation", by the challenge these concepts always pose to nationalist and elitist notions of artistic value. A "community arts" program that did not seek to encourage the active participation of community (not individuals) would face a credibility problem, and this inclusivity should remain the guiding principle when defining what is and is not community arts. Interestingly, this tension between localised arts and the nationalist and elitist justifications of arts funding is delicately avoided by the present Community and Cultural Development

Fund (CCDF), the latest manifestation of Whitlam's Community Arts and Development Committee (CADF). The website states the aims of the Fund as:

- to achieve an increase in locally determined arts and cultural development;
- encourage outstanding achievement in arts and cultural activity within the community context;
- encourage a diversity of cultural expression at the local, national and international level; and
- ensure that the artistic and social value of community cultural development is widely accepted.[29]

The language of "community", of common participation and local development, operates within a framework where "national excellence" is encouraged at all social levels. The concepts of "national good" and "excellence" are not brought into question.

Burn and Kirby look at explanations for the decline of labourist community arts in the postwar period, finding critical alternatives to the narrative of a 1960s *zeitgeist*: 'despite postwar funding for the arts, changing circumstances, in particular the onset of the Coldwar, led to a demise in widespread public interest in and support for workers' culture'.[30] Later they write that 'as post-war production geared up, there seemed a willingness to leave art up to the professionals, while anyone who had developed a strong interest took it up under retraining schemes'.[31] The workers' art activities of the 1940s failed to develop the necessary close relationships with unions that might have supported community arts when "work" and "art" returned to "normal" in postwar life.[32] Burn and Kirby note further that

> Cultural development is an extremely fragile matter and, once it has been wasted, cannot simply be legislated back into existence. It is perhaps an indication of the lingering impact of the Cold War that this workers' art movement and the community developments of the period have, until now, gone unrecorded and unresearched.[33]

They were writing in 1985, and with due recognition to Gay Hawkins' 1997 *From Nimbin to Mardi Gras: Constructing Community Arts*,[34] the situation has not been satisfactorily rectified.[35]

Part of the confusion and disagreement over the history of community arts stems from the amorphous nature of the term "community". Raymond Williams, responding to the same transformations in modern society and the shifting relations between "high" and "low" cultures that preoccupied the progressive Whitlam government, wrote of the term in 1979: 'One is never quite certain exactly to which formation the notion is referring. It was when I suddenly realized that no one ever used "community" in a hostile sense that I saw how dangerous it was'.[36] "Community" remains a term without a negative connotation in the Australian context. It seems to be used by governments, official organisations and others as a general term for a way of looking at the local and the individual rather than the nation and the mass. Thus the currency of the term "community" increases in proportion to the expanding control of globalised and globalising capital over local cultures.[37]

3. The Case of George Seelaf

George Seelaf is a particularly interesting figure in the history of Australian community arts because he was strongly involved in labourist and CPA cultural programs from the late 1940s, becoming from the late 1960s one of the driving forces in getting federal government support for the establishment of the Footscray Community Arts Centre (FCAC), still a centrepiece of the CCDF's operations. Seelaf had been an avid reader since his childhood in the

> Depression, developing an awareness of the importance of literature to working-class people and Australian society

generally.[38] As Victorian Secretary of the Australasian Meat Industry Employees' Union (AMIEU), he began paying writers to appear in the union's journal.[39] One of these was Frank Hardy, and Seelaf played a pivotal organisational role in the production of *Power Without Glory*.[40] Later, in the early 1950s, he was a founding member of the Australasian Book Society, a publishing company loosely associated with the CPA. Seelaf was one of the first people to see the need for unions to move beyond their campaigns for better wages and conditions, towards a more general concern with 'quality of life'. Paddy Garrity recalled Seelaf making this point to him in the John Curtin Hotel in the early 1970s.[41] Seelaf defined "quality of life" as 'art, education and culture'.[42] Garrity was to base his career as an arts officer and community arts organiser on the philosophy of Seelaf.[43] Seelaf was also a significant influence on people like Deborah Mills (who headed the Community Cultural Development Unit), and Wally Curran, who continued to involve the AMIEU in various cultural projects and served a term on the Australia Council.[44] On the other, non-labourist hand, Footscray Community Arts Centre continues to acknowledge its debt to Seelaf as the central figure in its establishment.[45]

Seelaf was the first Arts Officer for both the ACTU and Trades Hall, and is probably the central figure linking labourist and community arts. As such, and though there is not space to do so here, further research into Seelaf's career promises to reveal the ways that labourist cultural concerns transmogrified into the community arts principles and practice of the modern era.

Endnotes

1 Shane Maloney, 'Talking Books', *Age Metro*, 14 October 1996, p. 1.

2 See Mark Davis' inside account of the publishing industry in *Gangland*, especially chapter seven: 'Growing old gracefully: publishing the "generation of '68"', St Leonards, Allen and Unwin, 1997, pp. 140-154. Wendy Lowenstein has also talked about this class bias in publishing on a number of occasions in different forums.

3 See the statement of aims on the festival website: http://home.vicnet.net.au/~lwrites/

4 Nathan Hollier, 'Notes on Structure and Content of Alternative Festival for Readers and Writers', unpublished, 21 November 1998, appendix A.

5 See Nathan Hollier, 'Notes Towards a Festival Program', unpublished, 17 February 1999, appendix B.

6 I do not know (and haven't attempted to find out) about the personal histories or political persuasions of the other four board members: Sue Gough, John Collins, Sarah Day, Heather Nimmo.

7 As Garrity has made clear to the committee, Trades Hall is not in a financial position where it can ignore its own revenue raising needs.

8 As I pointed out in the application, the fact that a number of Australia's best and best-known writers were willing to appear under a Union banner would seem to be a fairly valuable opportunity.

9 Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1963, in David Watt, 'Interrogating "Community": Social Welfare v. Cultural democracy', in Vivienne Binns, ed., *Community and the Arts: History, Theory, Practice*, Leichhardt, Pluto Press, 1991, p. 61.

10 Sandy Kirby, 'An Historical Perspective on the Community Arts Movement', in Binns, ed., p. 19 and David Watt, 'Interrogating "Community"', in Binns, ed., p. 55.

11 Recent examples include Michelle Arrow, 'Written Out of History? The Disappearance of Australia's Women Playwrights', *overland* 155, pp. 46-50; and Mark Davis, *Gangland*, pp. 232-254.

12 Ian Burn and Sandy Kirby, 'Historical Sketch', in *Working Art: A Survey of Art in the Australian Labour Movement in*

the 1980s, Sydney, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1985, pp. 55-82; Burn and Kirby, 'The Artist in the Labour Movement', *Working Art: A Survey of Art in Australian Labour Movement in the 1980s*, in *Working Art*, pp. 83-96 and Kirby, 'An Historical Perspective on the Community Arts Movement', in Binns, ed., pp. 19-30.

13 Gay Hawkins, 'Reading Community Arts Policy: From Nimbin to the Gay Mardi Gras', in Binns, ed., *Community Arts*, pp. 45-53; and *From Nimbin to Mardi Gras*.

14 Hawkins, 'Reading Community Arts Policy', p. 45.

15 Andrew Milner, 'Radical Intellectuals: an Unacknowledged Legislature?', in Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee, eds., *Constructing a Culture: A People's History of Australia Since 1788*, Ringwood, Penguin, 1988, pp. 259-284.

16 Gwenyth Goedecke, who is writing a history of the Footscray Community Arts Centre, believes very strongly that it is mistaken to see community arts as a product of the Whitlam government but she notes on the other hand that without a co-ordinated salary and a persistent trickle of funds from Canberra, the FCAC project would almost certainly not have lasted. Nathan Hollier, telephone interview with Gwen Goedecke, 26 August 1999.

17 Burn and Kirby, 'Historical Sketch', p. 58.

18 Burn and Kirby, 'Historical Sketch', p. 59.

19 Burn and Kirby, 'Historical Sketch', p. 61.

20 Burn and Kirby, 'Historical Sketch', p. 65.

21 Burn and Kirby, 'Historical Sketch', p. 69.

22 Burn and Kirby, 'Historical Sketch', pp. 69-70.

23 Burn and Kirby, 'Historical Sketch', p. 71.

24 Burn and Kirby, 'Historical Sketch', p. 72.

25 Burn and Kirby, 'Historical Sketch', p. 72.

26 Burn and Kirby, 'Historical Sketch', p. 79.

27 Kirby, 'An Historical Perspective on the Community Arts Movement', in Binns, ed., p. 28.

28 Hawkins, 'Reading Community Arts Policy', p. 48.

29 See http://www.ozco.gov.au/, 26 August 1999.

30 Burn and Kirby, 'Historical Sketch', p. 77.

31 Burn and Kirby, 'Historical Sketch', p. 81.

32 Burn and Kirby, 'Historical Sketch', p. 81.

33 Burn and Kirby, 'Historical Sketch', p. 77.

34 St Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 1993.

35 Kirby was going to write a book on this topic but none are listed in Coolcat (the electronic catalogue cross-referenced to major Victorian libraries).

36 Williams, *Politics and Letters*, London, New Left Books, 1979, p. 119. On the over-determined nature of "community" see also the article by Watt in Binns, ed., *Community Arts*.

37 See Paul James, 'What is Life Like on Planet Nescafe? Globalization, the selling of nostalgia and the pleasures of consumption', *Arena Magazine* 5, 1993, pp. 30-34.

38 Jack Beasley, *Red Letter Days*, Sydney, Australasian Book Society, p. 134.

39 Beasley, *Red Letter Days*, p. 134.

40 See Frank Hardy, *The Hard Way* (1961), Port Melbourne, Mandarin in association with the Left Book Club, 1992, pp. 136-145.

41 Nathan Hollier, interview with Paddy Garrity, 11 August 1999.

42 Nathan Hollier interview, 11 August 1999.

43 Nathan Hollier interview, 11 August 1999, and see Paddy Garrity, 'Dockyard Daze: An Experiment with Art in Working Life in Williamstown Naval Dockyard 1983-1985', *Overland* 149, 1997, p. 39: 'Max Ogden from the Metalworkers and George Seelaf, from the Meatworkers … had convinced me that unions had to play a greater role than just fighting for wages and conditions. Unions, they argued, should be involved in the quality of life for workers and their families in the fields of art, education and culture.

Because of these philosophies, over the years I became involved in a wide variety of union and community arts activities'.

44 Kirby, 'An Historical Perspective on the Community Arts Movement', in Binns, ed., p. 28.

45 'When a tough old unionist called George Seelaf saved the elegant Henderson House from the bulldozers in the 1970s, he became the guardian angel of a budding arts movment that has survived to become on of the oldest and strongest community arts organisations in Australia', Mary Anne Reid, 'Footscray Community Arts Centre', in *Not a Puppet: Stories from the Frontier of Community Cultural Development*, Sydney, Australia Council, 1997, p. 43.

Appendix A

Notes on Structure and Content of Alternative Festival for Readers and Writers

Possible guiding principles for organising the festival, within the general theme of 'Making Space':

1. The speakers in the various sessions could be encouraged to consider writing in its many different social contexts. ie. There is not to be the assumption that 'the secret' of writing lies in the psychology and/or professional idiosyncracies of uniquely talented, creative people. Rather, an idea of writing is to be advanced in which the author is understood to be one of a number of necessary actors in the range of processes necessary for publication. The author is understood as a member of a reading and writing community, or culture.

    A discussion forum could easily reflect this understanding. Further, this understanding of the social nature of literary production would be evident in the wide range of people, involved at various professional levels in reading and writing, encouraged to attend and engage in discussion: educators, writers, publishers, booksellers, students, readers, librarians, printers and so on.

2. An understanding of 'cultural' rather than purely 'literary' literacy is to be advanced. Teaching people to read and write effectively is not in itself enough to equip members of society with the knowledge of and the skills to negotiate the generic conventions of the many public and private discourses in society. A quote from Paul Gillen states this concern clearly:

    Even setting aside the fact that many thousands leave school functionally illiterate, and that one in ten Australian adults cannot read or write English, mass literacy has not brought free and equal access to the written word. To be able to read anything – novels, official forms, letters, newspapers – requires specific training. Readers have to understand, not just the mechanics of alphabet, spelling, grammar and typographical conventions, but also the complex codes that distinguish fiction from technical instructions, bureaucratic language from satire, a poem from a postcard. Access to these codes is as unequally distributed as property or political power. The key struggle over the written word in Australia today is not about the ability to read and write in the obvious sense. It is about *if*, *what*, and *how*, people read and write ... Writing is classified into a bewildering number of separate categories. The creative is distinguished from the merely useful, the general from the specialist, fiction from non-fiction. Within these broad divisions are all kinds of smaller subdivisions: history, biography, economics, romance, fantasty, adventure and so on. The classifications are complex, and are constantly changing. No doubt they have their uses, for example in libraries. But their influence on the teaching of the written word is a different matter. They tend to fragment knowledge. They limit the range of what people read and write. Readers who make a bee-line for their favourite section in the library or bookshop are not likely to come across anything different and interesting

by accident. And writers are constantly tempted to stick to safe, acceptable forms.[45]

As well as the prospective speakers mentioned under theme 1, this second thematic principle would provide opportunities for discussion between members and representatives of the many different social and cultural groups that we hope will participate.

Nathan Hollier
21 November 1998

Appendix B

Notes towards a festival program

The 'Leftwrites' festival was formed to encourage interaction between those groups in the community who have traditionally found it difficult to gain access to public speech, and writers of various genres that have sympathy with them. A theme for what we hope is the inaugural festival has been chosen: 'Making Space'. This theme points towards a whole range of questions about access and equity that a festival like this needs to ask.

The motivation for the festival arises from a recognition that there are *systemic* social factors that mitigate against the adequate representation of various people in mainstream publishing and media circles. Without taking an oppositional attitude to the Melbourne Writers Festival, the Leftwrites committee feel that that event does not address or counteract this state of affairs to a sufficient degree. Authors are generally promoted in accordance with the desires of the major publishers, in ways that stress their difference from, rather than their commonality with, the reading public. The processes of writing and publishing are thereby lifted out of their social context, are presented as the preserve of the unique, skilled or talented few. In seeking to put writing and reading back into the community the Leftwrites festival wants to encourage awareness of the many ways that writing and reading are of value to all people. Reading and writing do not require the sanction of major publishers, or indeed, publication at all.

Some of the places where the festival organisers have gone in search of participants are:
  i)   Community groups
  ii) Small and alternative publishers
  iii) Unions
  iv) Writers' groups
  v)   Educationalists

Writers of fiction, drama, non-fiction and poetry have also expressed interest and the desire to participate.

There are other individuals and groups who may feel that they would like to participate, and of course they are welcome to do so. However, these five categories provide guiding principles by which events may be organised. Representatives from one, two or three of these categories could accompany writers of fiction, drama, poetry or non-fiction in a particular session. Such an approach is not only entertaining but encourages awareness of the ways that the desires of these groups to 'make space', in whatever sense, are connected with the literary and political desires of the participating writers.

Writers who have expressed interest:
  Olga Pavlinova (fiction)
  Wendy Lowenstein (oral history)
  Mark Davis (non-fiction)
  Foong-Ling Kong (non-fiction)
  Martin Flanagan (fiction and non-fiction)
  Barry Hill (poetry)
  Phil Edmonds (alternative publishing)
  Kath Fallon (author of *Working Hot*)
  Geoff Goodfellow (poetry)

Jack Hibberd (theatre)

Michelle Grossman (will talk on subjects related to Melbourne's west)

Paul Adams (Frank Hardy and Melbourne's west)

Christos Tsiolkas (fiction)

Mark Gregory (folklore and organiser of a 'unionsongs' website)

Also Phil Cleary, Paddy Garritty from Trades Hall; Mammad Aidani, Bernadette Fitzgerald and the Footscray Community Arts Centre contacts. Shane Maloney is happy to be contacted via his publisher.

There are also representatives of the small magazines from *Overland, Arena, Tirra Lirra, Dialogue, Meanjin* and others I'm sure will be interested in participating.

Am awaiting reply from Lisa Bellear.

Nathan Hollier, 17 February 1999