

AUSTRALIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE COMES OF AGE

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The bulk of radical social analysis in our academic institutions nowadays is done by a particular generation of intellectuals. The anti-war movement, the women's movement and a host of other interlocking campaigns of the late sixties and early seventies moulded this generation politically. With this historically narrow experience it presided over a "renaissance" of marxism and other radical social theory that, on the whole, denied the need for longer historical perspectives and dismissed the cautious and more painstaking works of their predecessors. Of the latter, those who could still find a market were only those with tales of working-class advances, heroism and spectacular breakthroughs. Such tales could be culled out to feed notions of an imminent overthrow of capitalism.

That events have proved these notions to be wide of the mark should not detract from the real and lasting intellectual gains of the new-left era. But it is time that we looked through its abstract theoretical sophistication, to the **static** quality of its class analysis and political theory. This project takes a giant step forward with the publication of Bob Connell and Terry Irving's *Class Structure in Australian History*(1) (hereafter *CSAH*).

To restore dynamism to class analysis Connell and Irving have written a history book. But even more than most histories written by socialists, this one aims to intervene in current problems of social analysis and social strategy. This, of course, makes it a better (rather than an illegitimate) history, although it never sinks to the triviality and nit-picking necessary to win the acceptance of orthodox historians. But the analytical themes breathe life into the narrative, helped along by photographs, drawings and a selection of letters and documents whereby working and living conditions and class outlooks, from the British invasion on, can be directly appreciated. And the scope of the book's bibliographic references makes it an invaluable resource.

For Connell and Irving, each class in a capitalist society forms part of a class structure, and it makes no sense to study a class in isolation.

This insight becomes all the more important in understanding the history of classes and the process of class formation. The success of a class in mobilising around its objectives depends partly on its ability to hinder rival classes mobilising around theirs. In showing how a successful ruling class checks working-class mobilisation, the authors make good use of existing theory on the techniques for hegemony: integration of labour leaders in the state, deflecting the labour movement into populist or liberal ideas of social progress, and providing non-working-class cadres to "represent" the labour movement in local councils and parliaments. When these techniques fail to subvert popular resistance, as they often have in Australian history, the state moves in with systematic violence.

In concentrating on class **mobilisation**, Connell and Irving seek to overcome a problem that plagues class analysis. One group of theorists (sometimes called "structuralists") can show how classes relate to one another in a full-blown capitalist society, but cannot account for how the relationships change, and so suggest that the class structure reproduces itself without essential change. Another group, particularly the "new labour historians", concentrate on one class' evolution, or self-formation, but the introduction of a notion of change here makes few links with the "intractabilities" of class structure. Some, above all Poulantzas, develop both aspects without overcoming the split between structure and history. Classes are located in structures, and they act in situations, but how these dissociated existences are to be brought together Poulantzas does not explain.

Connell and Irving suggest an interdependence that can forge the link between structure and situation. A class mobilises around economic and political objectives that are aimed at particular **transformations** in the structure, and its opponent class mobilises to obstruct these objectives and substitute its own. What the rival objectives are, and the opportunities available to each class to realise its programme, depends on

how the terrain offered by existing structural arrangements favours the one class or the other.

How the terrain of existing arrangements favours a particular class is not to be understood in a static sense. This terrain may have the capacity to generate the transformations sought by a class, and if so will also supply the impetus for the growth of that class and its organisations.⁽²⁾ As Marx once put it, capitalist production not only creates commodities and surplus-value, but capitalists and labourers as well. Connell and Irving would also want to add that it spawns companies, stock exchanges, chambers of commerce and so forth, the many forms of capitalist class organisation.

Capitalist society has two centrepieces. The first is private property, to exclude social interference from the distribution and management of wealth. The second is a "free" labour market which allows this wealth to expand without limit by enslaving the bulk of the population whom the institution of private property has already excluded from enjoyment and control of social resources.

The story of the Australian class structure thus begins with would-be capitalists fighting to impose private property and a capitalist labour market on a black and white-convict population, who were understandably hostile, and a group of "plantation capitalists" who frustrated the growth of a labour market. Thirty years' liberal use of musket, lash and gallows on the blacks and convicts, and political intrigue against the pastoralists cleared the decks for an infant, but now self-generating, colonial capitalism.

It is at this point, however, that capital's real problems begin. Blacks and convicts were extrinsic to capitalism and could be annihilated without penalty (or offence to bourgeois morality). The new class of wage labourers, on the other hand, was generated within the system, and indispensable to it. And workers resisted capitalist control over the labour process and capitalists' deciding the level of "market" wages, thus threatening both private property and the operation of the labour market. They also contested the state's championing of capitalist causes, and the class itself threatened to melt away in gold rushes, appropriation of new farmland, and independent crafts. Long periods of high employment underpinned the confidence and solidarity of working-class mobilisation, and made the Australian labour movement in the nineteenth century one of the world's most formidable. The issues it struggled over and its methods pointed in a collectivist direction.

Defence and maintenance of private property in Australia in these conditions proved difficult. On an international comparison, the Australian ruling class was in a weak position, too weak to rely on state repression and armed confrontation

alone. The subtle and complex development of class rule in Australia under these adverse circumstances, Connell and Irving suggest, laid the basis for the resilience and flexibility of conservatism in our own time. Their wide-ranging research unravels its many strands — use of the education system to implant sexist values and practices, ensnaring trade union leaders and labour politicians in the ideology of developmentalism and the rituals and rewards of state office, working up a powerful populist culture based on nationalism, racism and militarism, and so forth. Each made its contribution to obliterating consciousness of class and blunting the edge of working-class organisations.

The Australian ruling class and its state could not afford the hypocrisy of a claim to state passivity. Long after the establishment of colonial capitalism, the state was kept active nurturing it with economic assistance, resolution of policy dilemmas and internal conflict within the ruling class, breaking up working-class communities and imposing "law and order" in industrial relations. Instability constantly menaced the system and elements of the labour movement threatened to break out of the web of hegemony.

But so far the working-class challenge to class rule has been held off, albeit with nasty moments and heavy losses for the defenders at times. In accounting for the defeats of working-class mobilisation, Connell and Irving rely too heavily on the old culprits of economism, reformism and bourgeois ideology. They give numerous examples of rank-and-file struggles being sold out by industrial and political leaderships enmeshed in state procedure or intimacy with business interests. Social rebellion, such as the larrikin pushes, were quickly tamed by populist writers and incorporated into a bourgeois-defined Australianism. "The fact that the literary 'larrikins' ended up as good husbands and soldiers, thus accurately reflecting the importance of the family and militarism to bourgeois cultural containment, hardly encouraged the transformation of the pushes into a street army of the proletariat." (p. 191). In both situations, the authors suggest that, were it not for the reformist and cultural obstacles, these rebellions would have gone much further. But to what? We know from the book that the police and military resources of the state were more than enough to crush isolated and politically ill-prepared uprisings.

Theoretically and empirically, Connell and Irving's account of ruling-class mobilisation is probably the best produced here or overseas. Behind a conventional romanticism of grass-roots struggle and denunciation of reformism, however, lies a failure to equally systematically seek out the roots of working-class mobilisation in capitalist society. If the generative capacity of the ruling class lies in the accumulation of capital, wherein

lies working-class generative capacity, the springboard of its successful mobilisation?

The answer, I suggest, is stable full employment, what Engels called, more broadly, the destruction of competition among workers, which he saw as the destruction of the rule of property itself.⁽³⁾ Under conditions of full employment, capital loses the ability to inflict slumps and thus undermine living standards and labour organisations — the preconditions of a capitalist labour market. Trade-union membership tends to go up, as does electoral support for parties of labour. In the longer term, full employment proves incompatible with private control of investment and labour process, and the most recalcitrant economist and reformist labour leaders will be forced to accept socialisation as the only alternative to mass unemployment. For this reason, economism and reformism may not be the blind alleys the authors suggest, but temporary stages in working-class mobilisation towards more basic transformations. Stable full employment is the springboard in this process, not the whole solution: ruling-class hegemony must be overcome in all its aspects.

If this is true, two themes in the later history of the labour movement taken up in *CSAH* need further study. One is the demobilising role of arbitration on trade unions specifically. The authors correctly point out how arbitration tends to legitimate workers' loss of control of the labour process and integrate trade-union leaders into the state. But arbitration has other far-reaching effects, in fixating the trade-union movement in its pre-industrial structure, in calling forth a particular style of trade-union leadership and a typical organisation that suppresses both circulation of leaders and communication between rank-and-file and leaders. Related to this, the movement has never been able to play an independent role in wage formation, and has thus never formulated a coherent wage-policy, still less its own economic strategy. In short, arbitration has left the trade-union movement depoliticised and incapable of dragging the ALP back to class politics.

As Connell and Irving point out, the ALP itself is a pre-industrial survival, its ideological roots still embedded in late nineteenth-century populist radicalism, but a working-class party nonetheless, "a product of class mobilisation under hegemony" (p. 30). What role could it play (or have played) in more successful working-class mobilisation? The authors' suggestion seems to be: very little. Yet there was a time, during the second world war and in the immediate post-war reconstruction period, when the ALP came perilously close to pursuing its mummified "socialist objective". Connell and Irving show how Australian conservatism was in crisis, and the only danger to the ALP, at the height of its popularity, was that of being

outflanked by the Communist Party in the labour movement.

For the first time, the ALP began to face the implications of stable full employment ("a somewhat comprehensive socialisation of the investment function" as Keynes hinted darkly in the final chapter of *The General Theory of Employment Interest and Money*) and attempted to arm itself with the necessary constitutional powers and public control of the economy necessary to ensure its goal.⁽⁴⁾ Its later humiliating retreat does not justify the description of its post-war reconstruction plans in *CSAH* as "essentially defensive" and lacking an intention to take control of production as a whole (p. 285). Especially at the present time we need to take some care with this period, perhaps the most tragic missed opportunity in Australian labour history.

The above is not to suggest that the analysis of the labour movement's weakness in *CSAH* is weak. Given the recent spate of simplistic speculation by the social science establishment about "what's wrong with the ALP", I am in danger of damning this book with faint praise in saying that it is clearly superior to earlier writing in this area, Vere Gordon Childe perhaps excepted. Its account of the degenerating effects on the ALP of a particular style of local government politics (involving intimacy with local business, speculators and land sharks) and the constant seizure of high office in the party by people remote from working-class life in all respects, rounds off a complex and balanced analysis.

As befits the times, politically this is a sober and tough-minded book. The post-war renovation of bourgeois hegemony has taken its toll on labour mobilisation, especially at the political level. Its elements include suburbanisation, privatisation, the new economic dependence forged by hire-purchase and the influence of television. In the present period, many of the traditional resources of working-class mobilisation are ineffective or, as in the case of the working-class community, all but destroyed. But the authors conclude that, while classes and their conflict persist, bourgeois hegemony is never safe. The brutality of the Fraser regime illuminates a vital flaw in its management of that hegemony — its lack of any moral component. To make that vital flaw into a fatal one requires a socialist strategy for mass remobilisation and the discovery of new organisational resources to propel it.

In sum, *CSAH* is a landmark in social analysis, as well as in imaginative presentation. Don't miss it.

NOTES

1. R. W. Connell and T. H. Irving, *Class Structure in Australian History: Documents*,

Narrative and Argument (Longman, Melbourne, 1980) 378 pp.

2. Bob Connell develops the idea of marxism as a "generative theory" in "Logic and Politics in Theories of Class", *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 13, no. 3 (October 1977).
3. *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Panther, London, 1969), p. 245. For a

modern argument for this point, see Walter Korpi, *The Working Class in Welfare Capitalism* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1978).

4. See W. J. Waters, "Australian Labor's Full Employment Objective, 1942-5", *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 16, no. 1 (1970).

REVIEW

The German Revolution of 1918-19

John Perkins

The Ruhr and Revolution, by Jurgen Tampke, Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1978. Reviewed by John Perkins.

The abortive German revolution of 1918-19 has never attracted the attention its significance would appear to merit. In Weimar Germany the official attitude was a virtual conspiracy of silence, in which the events of the first winter after the World War were viewed as a momentary aberration from German traditions occasioned by the defeat. Under Hitler, the Revolution and the "November Criminals" achieved more prominence as objects of vilification. After 1945, in western Germany interest in the subject was limited until the later 1960s when members of the revolutionary student body were drawn to the ideas of Rosa Luxemburg. These appeared to offer a more appropriate model than those of Lenin, as did the experiences of more romantic although equally tragic figures such as Toller and Levine of the Munich Soviet. Only in the German Democratic Republic, where the KPD (Communist Party of Germany) that emerged from the revolution provides the event with the area of historical antecedence akin to the role of the equally abortive Revolution of 1848-49 in the Federal Republic, has the subject received considerable attention.

The works that have hitherto appeared present one or other of four interpretations of the Revolution. Firstly, there is what might be called the orthodox bourgeois or western

interpretation which favours the role of the Majority SPD in averting "Bolshevism" and blames the "putschist" approach of the Spartacists for the rapid recovery of the counter-revolutionary forces and for the absence of more throughgoing democratisation of the bureaucracy, judiciary, and military of the subsequent Weimar Republic. Secondly, there is the National Socialist interpretation which places the blame for the military collapse of 1918 on the "November Criminals". From the events of 1918-19, the Nazis drew the conclusion of the primacy of domestic policy. In other words, in contrast to Wilhelmian Germany where an aggressive foreign policy functioned as a means of subsuming domestic conflict, the aim in the Third Reich was to ensure a solid internal basis of unity for an expansionist foreign policy.

A third interpretation, first presented by Arthur Rosenbaerg in the early 1930s, is that the Revolution offered a chance of a third course between the limited social and political achievements of the Weimar Republic and a transformation along the lines of Soviet Russia. Unfortunately, however, this opportunity was missed by the Majority SPD leadership who, in allying themselves with the military leadership and the Free Corps (*Freikorps*), ensured the survival of the Reaction. Finally, to historians of the GDR the Revolution also amounted to a lost opportunity, which nevertheless demonstrates the possibilities of revolution in advanced industrial