

that on no account should they bring "their sex war into the class war". But clearly the sex war smouldered on. The elimination of the CPA women's departments in the 1930s seems to have been the result of Comintern directives but also perhaps the outcome of a Melbourne textile struggle where, according to Jean Thompson in the *Communist Review*, there were "many weaknesses and wrong ideas ... particularly in [the women's] attitude to the men".

The history of women's experience in the Australian communist movement is instructive. Women entered the movement on

men's terms and were constrained to accept male priorities. At a time when much thought is being given to the formation of new parties and alliances on the left, it would seem to be imperative for feminists to be there at the beginning, when the goals and objectives are being set down. Perhaps then, concern with the relations of reproduction will be as integral to a socialist program and the relations of production, and the revolution at home might determine the agenda of the movement at large.

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## The Good Fight

Amirah Inglis, *Australians in the Spanish Civil War*. Allen & Unwin, 1987. \$19.95. Reviewed by Stuart Macintyre.

This is a book that should have been written earlier, and could not have been written much later. For the remaining veterans of the Spanish Civil War are passing on, and with them their memories. The volunteers who made up the English, Scottish, Welsh and numerous other national contingents have all been memorialised in book-length accounts, but the sixty-odd Australians (the fact that the exact number is not known testifies to their neglect) had not — until Amirah Inglis remedied the deficiency.

Her reasons for doing so go back to her childhood. As a girl she followed events in Spain through the letters of her uncle, who fought as a member of the Polish contingent. In 1938 she herself attended a meeting held in Melbourne to support the Spanish fight for democracy and freedom, and contributed her savings to the collection. In this book, written fifty years later, she sets out to tell the story and reserves judgment until she has done so; but

her sympathies are never wholly absent.

Why does the Spanish Civil War remain such a poignant memory for Amirah and so many others of her generation? The answer lies partly in the nature of the events in Spain and partly in their signal importance for those on the left caught up in a global struggle against fascism. As she explains in a preliminary sketch of the "Spanish background", the protracted struggle of Spanish workers and peasants to throw off a

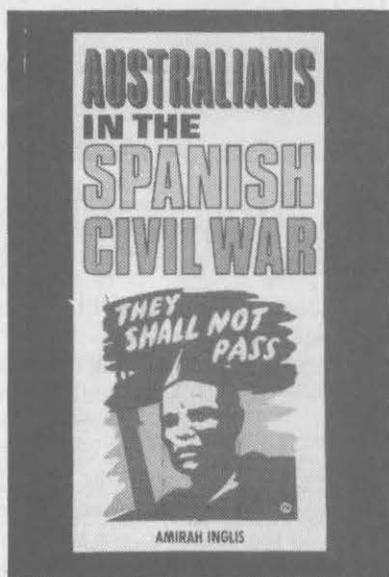
repressive and exploitative alliance of landowners, the Church and the army drew attention to the country. When the right refused to accept the democratic process and attempted to overthrow the republican government by force in 1936, Spain became the cockpit of the anti-fascist struggle.

For in contrast to the earlier triumph of the right in Italy, Germany and Austria, in Spain there was concerted and effective resistance. The open assistance that Mussolini and Hitler gave the rebels was answered by leftwing volunteers. It seemed to them that if the insurgents could be defeated, the wider ambitions of the fascists could be defeated also. Moreover, Spain excited the sympathy of a new generation of intellectuals, writers, artists and middle-class progressives for whom it was the first and formative international cause.

The book is organised in three parts — arguments within Australia over Spain; the fortunes of the Australians who went there; and their return.

In company with Britain and the other major powers, the Australian government maintained a policy of strict neutrality towards the civil war. The proclaimed intent was to minimise the threat to international peace by seeking, as far as possible, to ensure that all countries remained neutral. This meant turning a blind eye to the considerable and direct support that Germany and Italy gave the rebels, so in practice "strict neutrality" served the conservative preference for appeasing the dictators. But neutrality also found support within the labour movement from those who feared that Australia might again become involved in a European war.

These attitudes were by no means peculiar to Australia, but Inglis suggests that the Australian response to Spain was noticeably lukewarm. The level of international awareness was low, the paucity of news services marked. Only a minority of Australians felt strongly about Spain, and many of those (noticeably the groups of Mediterranean immigrants and



Jewish refugees) occupied a marginal place in Australian politics.

Those who took sides tended to do so, she shows, on the basis of established sympathies. Support for the republicans came chiefly from the left of the labour movement and the ranks of the middle-class progressives. Support for Franco's rebels came chiefly from devout Catholics. The picture that emerges from the first part of the book is of a narrow base of left activists, swamped in set-piece encounters by the Catholic activists. The celebrated debate at the University of Melbourne between Nettie Palmer, Jack Legge and Gerry O'Day, on the one hand, and Santamaria and two other zealots of the Church militant on the other, illustrates the pattern. Hundreds of Catholics turned up to stand and applaud the cry "Long Live Christ the King!"

Alongside these public displays, Inglis shows smaller support groups working by publicity, propaganda, and collection of funds to gather assistance for their side. Again, the Catholics raised the larger sums, but the Spanish Relief Committee kept up a remarkable level of activity for the republicans. One feature here is the prominence of women. It was a group of nurses who led the way in volunteering to serve in Spain; one of them, Mary Lowson, became the best-known publicist. And Nettie Palmer was the outstanding figure from outside the organised labour movement.

Inglis then turns to the volunteers. The backgrounds and motives of many are shadowy, since only a minority left any substantial record, but we see a wide variety of committed activists, idealists, wanderers and adventurers. She does not omit the single volunteer fighting on Franco's side, and his experiences provide an instructive contrast to those on the republican side.

The course of events, and the desperate, ultimately doomed, efforts to defend the republic form a backdrop to the activities of the Australians. Some fell out with their companions or were caught up in the tragic internal struggles within the republican ranks. Some died, some

were captured, some executed, some expelled. But the overwhelming impression is of their continuing attachment to the cause they served. Inglis then shows them returning to a country that cared little for their sacrifices, even though some were shortly to bear arms again in the Second World War.

The literature on Australian involvement in the Spanish Civil War is growing. Amirah Inglis' own edition of *Letters from Spain*, dealing with the particular

experiences of Lloyd Edmonds, is soon to be complemented by Judith Keene's edition of the diary of one of the nurses. But this fine history is likely to remain the standard general account of this important chapter in the left's involvement in international events.

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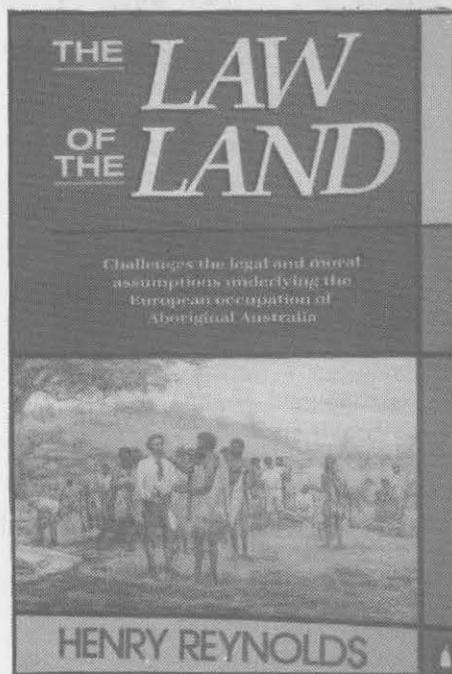
## Lie of the Land

Henry Reynolds, *The Law of the Land*, Penguin, 1987. \$12.95. Reviewed by Madeline Smith.

**Mining magnate Hugh Morgan recently grabbed the headlines of Darwin's Northern Territory News predicting Aboriginal urban terrorism. The Alice Springs Centralian Advocate reported him making some interesting statements concerning demands for recognition of Aboriginal Rights:**

"A sovereign nation does not sign treaties with its own citizens ... The legal term terra nullius had been turned into a term of derogatory abuse of our forefathers" ... Mr. Morgan said that the doctrine meant that "those who did inhabit it were at such a primitive state of development that no treaty with them was possible."

A read of Henry Reynolds' latest book *The Law of the Land* would quickly reveal the conflation of ideas in Mr. Morgan's reported opinions. Reynolds' book is the third in a series revealing the hidden history of Australia — the history of black-white relations. He rigorously examines the law surrounding the possession of Australia and finds it a mass of contradictory and inconsistent doctrines leaving



Australians with a legacy of unresolved injustice within the confines of our own legal system. As usual the work is based on impressively extensive research, as shown in the lengthy bibliography. Fortunately, in this study references and quotations are individually endnoted so the curious or sceptical can pursue Reynolds' findings.

Reynolds explains the concept of sovereignty, and distinguishes it from possession: