Arnold Schwarzenegger's power over the media is immense and seemingly all-embracing. A journalist from a major Pulitzer prize-winning American newspaper was told, 'If you mention the book, you will never get an interview with Arnold again.' The journalist subsequently did mention the book in a column item. When the paper applied to interview Arnold for Total Recall a few months later, they were informed, 'Arnold will not give you an interview because you wrote about the book.'

'The book' in question is Arnold: The Unauthorised Biography of Arnold Schwarzenegger by Arnold admirer/fearer Wendy Leigh; it's just come out in Sphere paperback.

Leigh's task was daunting, yet she comes out of it well: without passing any final judgment on Arnold (apart from the judgments inherent in noting that he refuses to discuss—or even admit to—his use of steroids early in his career and his father's Nazi past) she paints a picture of a complex man who, with nothing but determination, built himself up to become his own dream image. And they said his name was too long to fit on a cinema hoarding!

Arnold Schwarzenegger is so easy to ridicule—especially if you're not an adolescent male with the normal adolescent quota of power/domination fantasies to get out of your system—that it's almost as easy to forget how powerful and, in a sense, dangerous, he is. Total control is the Schwarzenegger credo: and after learning to control himself (totally: to 'perfection', almost to self-imposed freakdom), the highest-paid actor in the world, each feed off the other's power aura. It's a humbling battle of the vibes.

As Arnold bettered himself physically—working his way through gyms and competitions, from Austria to Britain to the US—he learned the cruel tricks of the bodybuilding set. Psychological games and bravado helped him outfox competitors and win the Mr Olympia title umpteen times, finally quitting after a 1980 comeback win at the Sydney Opera House (a good place for devotion to perfection) where he was booed and derided by an unconfident audience.

Of course, for Arnie bodybuilding was only a means to an end—and you can't keep it up forever. Film was the medium on which Arnold planned to make his mark. And it is his movie persona which endures: one cannot help putting him 'up there' with Michael Jackson as one of the two weirdest cultural icons of the 80s and 90s. For though we constantly deride the mass media for the way it appears to embrace whitebread, bland non-talents, Michael and Arnold are almost too weird to exist in the real world, and not just because they're obliteratingly famous. Both have recreated themselves as monsters, albeit friendly ones. Arnold is to many people an ideal concept. And, of course, it might seem just like sour grapes when a nine stone weakling like myself derides Arnold's glorious physique, but what else can you say? The guy has loser written all over him. He's terrified.

That's not all he is. He's charming to a fault, funny and gracious (unless he has to be gracious about losing something; that he will not allow himself to be). He's also a stern Republican and a chum of George Bush. Imagine! The humble Austrian and the President of the USA, each feeding off the other's power aura. It's a humbling battle of the vibes.

The movies, however, are where Arnold truly shines. As it happens, he really does appear to be getting better at acting (though one might wonder how he possibly couldn't, after over 20 years in the business). Most recently, Kindergarten Cop, Total Recall and Terminator 2 have emerged as complete and utter Arnie 'vehicles', made with Schwarzenegger and his regular audience in mind.

It's all honest and above board: Arnold is happy to tell us what he's up to next and his audience seems to like the way he'll never spring any surprises on them. Twins was a calculated ploy to get Arnie out of monosyllabic action characters and into (maudlin) comedy. After Twins, Arnold consolidated his position with the sci-fi, ultra-SFX Total Recall. Then it was back to comedy with Kindergarten Cop, which got a mixed reaction despite the rather delightful idea of huge Schwarzenegger trampling all over pre-schoolers like a sensitive elephant in a butterfly house. Terminator 2 followed: one of the biggest-grossing movies of all time—and don't you forget it. Arnold proved himself ever-adaptable, ever-eager to
Jeff Shaw.

Inside the BLF foibles and worse which had a tale full of drama, irony, human properly chronicled. Yet it is a 1970s and 1980s has never been Labourers Federation in the political life of the era.

This book has been produced by a former full-time official of the BLF who has become a strong critic of the union leader. This was naive and inexplicable somersaults between maoism: a view that militant workersinations of guerrilla warfare.

Brian Boyd argues that the 1986 deregistration of the BLF—facilitated by unique, radical legislation of the federal Labor government—was both avoidable and unnecessary. He maintains that the ‘united front’ forged by Gallagher with the Master Builders Association in the mid-1970s to remove Jack Mundey’s leadership of the NSW BLF—and to eliminate its trial-blazing environmental campaigns—was the genesis of the eventual lethal coalition against the national leadership, leading to the recruitment of the BLF membership by other unions in NSW, Victoria and the ACT in the late 1980s.

As Boyd shows, Gallagher’s misuse of militant industrial tactics was a wholly misguided attempt to thwart criminal proceedings brought against him alleging corruption. This self-interest displayed itself in the otherwise inexplicable somersaults between calls for industrial peace, and declarations of guerrilla warfare.

Gallagher’s strategy may have stemmed from some form of primitive maoism: a view that militant workers could, by their pressure on employers, sway the Crown (the capitalist state) to drop criminal charges against a union leader. This was naive and futile. The Victorian government of John Cain had established an independent prosecuting authority, the DPP. It took the view that it would have been absolutely wrong for politicians to intervene in an ‘arms-length’ process. In any event, it would have been politically suicidal for the Labor government to have done so. The charges—based upon Gallagher’s construction of a beach house using employers’ resources, allegedly extracted by threat—had a momentum which was unstoppable. For the BLF leadership to jeopardise the union’s existence in some quixotic endeavour to keep Norm out of jail was both unfair to the membership and folly for the organisation.

In other ways, too, the BLF leadership emerges discredited from this account: the naked alliance with employers to destroy Mundey’s position and to keep him unemployed for years; the disastrous theory of glorious defeat (in 1986, Gallagher was arguing that “if they hang us” it would serve a historical purpose in ‘educating’ the progressive union movement); the bizarre sectarianism of seeing John Halfpenny’s defeat for the Senate in 1987 as a victory, marred only (in Gallagher’s worldview) by the return of the Hawke government.

Yet, while it serves a useful purpose, I regret to say that this is not a very good book. It is basically a patchy public record. In fairness, it is worth noting that it does incorporate some BLF minutes and internal memoranda of interest. But it provides no real insight into the psychology of Gallagher and his supporters. To what extent was some genuine ideology important? What was the role of the maoists—and, in particular, Melbourne barrister Ted Hill—in determining tactics? What were the internal conflicts in strategic decision-making? How did the BLF secretary’s supporters view his undoubtedly receipt of significant employer largesse? These questions are not satisfactorily dealt with. Indeed, in relation to some of them, greater insight is obtainable from Mundey’s 1981 book, Green Bans and Beyond.

The full story is yet to be told. Perhaps one close observer, Dr Meredith Burgmann, who has forsaken the tranquility of academic life for Labor politics, may yet find the time to produce a deeper analysis.

JEFF SHAW is a NSW shadow minister, and editor of the journal Labor Forum.

Norman is an Island


The tragic, labyrinthine rise and fall of the Builders Labourers Federation in the 1970s and 1980s has never been properly chronicled. Yet it is a tale full of drama, irony, human foibles and worse which had a substantial impact upon Australian industrial and political life of the era.

This book has been produced by a former full-time official of the BLF who has become a strong critic of the role of the federation’s general secretary, Norm Gallagher, in leading the union to virtual destruction.

Brian Boyd argues that the 1986 deregistration of the BLF—facilitated by unique, radical legislation of the federal Labor government—was both avoidable and unnecessary. He maintains that the ‘united front’ forged by Gallagher with the Master Builders Association in the mid-1970s to remove Jack Mundey’s leadership of the NSW BLF—and to eliminate its trial-blazing environmental campaigns—was the genesis of the eventual lethal coalition against the national leadership, leading to the recruitment of the BLF membership by other unions in NSW, Victoria and the ACT in the late 1980s.

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