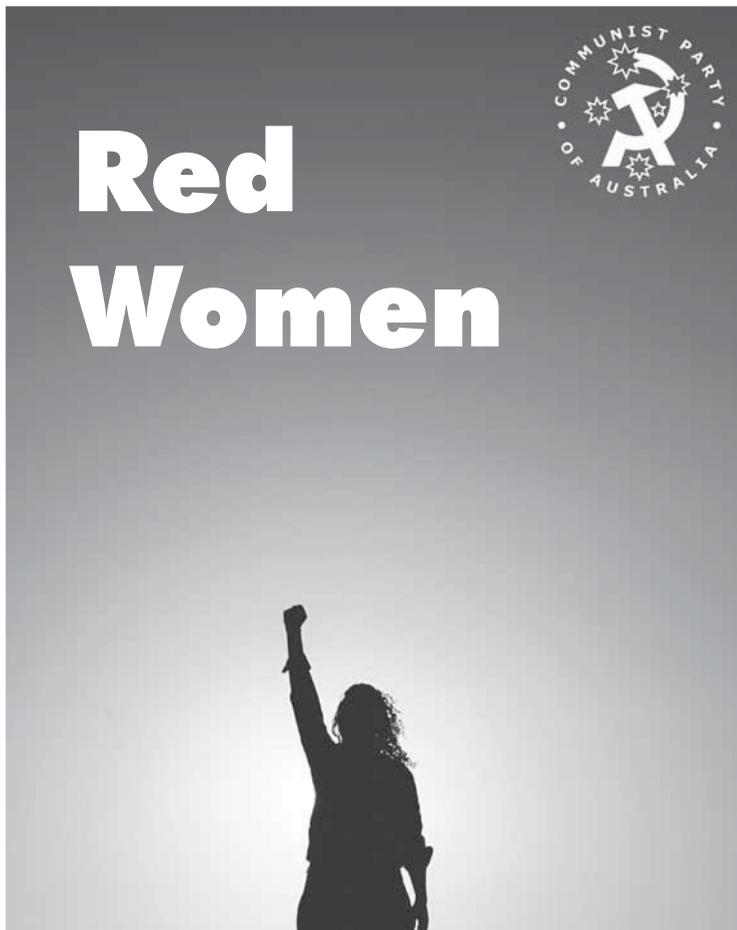


Red Women



**SHORT BIOGRAPHIES OF
SIX AUSTRALIAN WOMEN**

Australian Red Women

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Introduction

Mention revolutionary women, and names such as Clara Zetkin, Angela Davis, Vilma Lucila Espín and Nadezhda Krupskaya come to mind. But Australia has its own revolutionary history of women who led lives committed to the cause of peace, equality and socialism. Very few Australian labour history publications give voice to the many great revolutionary women in trade unions, the peace movement and the Communist Party. This is not an omission that solely relates to the labour movement but, has also been a problem with mainstream publications.

The Communist Party of Australia proudly presents the lives of six such Australian women who each has made or is making a contribution to the struggle in Australia and internationally. Their struggles take up issues such as peace, the environment, public housing, workers' rights, and social justice.

The biographies were entered into a competition organised as a contribution to the celebrations of the Centenary of the Communist Party of Australia.

The prize winners were:

First: Ron Hall for Katharine Susannah Prichard

Second: Eileen Whitehead for Hannah Middleton

Third: Romina Beitseen for Gwen Goedecke.

We hope you find this material of interest and share it with your comrades and friends.

Katharine Susannah Prichard

Author and fighter for social justice

By Ron Hall

In her small booklet, *Why I am a Communist* written in 1956, Katharine Susannah Prichard described the life experiences that led her to becoming a Communist, including her reinvigorating visit to the Soviet Union in 1933:

“[...] I met all sorts of men and women, happy friendly people who took me to their homes and told me about their work. They were working hard, but were proud of what they had accomplished in the tremendous industries, on collective farms, in the health and education services, in the theatres, recreation parks, children’s clubs and institutions for sport.”



Lending her formidable literary and public speaking reputation as well as her sense of justice to the Communist cause, Prichard wrote this pamphlet in 1956 because experience showed her that people knew “practically nothing about Communism.”

She explained that as a junior journalist she “saw the poverty and injustices people were living under in the slums of Melbourne.” Reports from the Anti-Sweating League revealed the exploitation of workers, especially young women, toiling long hours for low wages.

In so-called “Marvellous Melbourne,” she became all too aware of the class

struggle within Australian society in the early part of 20th Century. Again, in *Why I am a Communist*, Katharine wrote reflecting on the early days of the Cold War:

“Far from the filthy lanes and dreary warrens poverty-stricken men and women lived in, spread the beautiful homes and gardens of wealthy citizens.”

The harsh reality of life struck at an early age. As a nine-year-old child living in Tasmania she arrived home after a day in the bush with her brothers, she saw the family furniture being carted away and an auctioneer’s flag over the gate. Her father had lost his job as a poorly paid newspaper editor. Her father was ill and on moving to Melbourne her mother took in sewing to make ends meet. The family fortunes only improved when her father was able to find another editorial job.

Following in her father’s footsteps, Katharine embarked on a journalistic career in Melbourne where she finished her high school education and gained notable success with her writing.

As a voracious reader and a keen philosophically minded student, Katharine searched for a solution to the “poverty and injustices suffered by so many innocent people.”

As a young journalist her essential humanity was stirred when posted to London in 1908 on seeing poor children whose only toys were old bottles and dirty rags. This inspired her to suggest an “Empty Stocking Fund” which even gained the approval of the Queen and resulted in many slum-dwelling children having toys for some Christmases after.

As a nine-year-old child living in Tasmania she arrived home after a day in the bush with her brothers, she saw the family furniture being carted away and an auctioneer’s flag over the gate.

The First World War had a great impact on her consciousness. Not only were her two brothers involved as soldiers with the tragic loss of her brother, Alan, but the war also confirmed her pacifism as she witnessed first-hand the atrocities of this horrendous conflict on a visit to northern France. She wrote how this increased her “understanding of the crimes against humanity for which a system based on profit for a few individuals and suffering for the many [...]” was responsible.

In addition, England brought Katharine success as a journalist and the commencement of her career as a famous novelist. In 1915 she won a prize for her first novel *The Pioneers* which was based on her experiences as a governess in country Australia.

In 1908 on a visit to Paris, Katharine met some Russian political exiles who described their struggle for a better social system in their homeland which she felt at the time was a “hopeless dream.” But the news of the success of the Russian Revolution in 1917, which she described as “world shaking,” was a turning point in her life.

In her autobiography *Child of the Hurricane* she describes how the press vehemently opposed Lenin and Bolshevism and the theories of Marx and Engels. But for Katharine these ideas offered the only logical basis that she had come across for the “reorganisation of society.”

She commented with the following words:

“My mind was illuminated by the discovery. It was the answer to what I had been seeking: a satisfactory explanation of the wealth and power which controlled our lives – their origin, development, and how, in the process of social evolution, they could be directed towards the well-being of a majority of the people, so that poverty, disease, prostitution, superstition and war would be eliminated; peoples of the world would live in peace, and grow towards a perfecting of their existence on this earth.”

On return to Australia in 1919, Katharine settled in Perth with her war hero husband, Hugo “Jim” Throssell VC, at a time when two major industrial disputes were well under way – on the goldfields and on the waterfront, while a red flag was flying over Trades Hall. Hopes of a revolution rose, but they were soon dashed when a panicked conservative government had the gold miners arrested and transported to Perth for trial and mounted police attacked the wharfies’ barricades with one striker killed and seven arrested.

Katharine, as one of the first Marxists in Perth, was in demand as a public speaker. She was supported by her husband who, speaking at an Armistice Day ceremony, described the horror and misery of war and how this suffering led him to socialism. Spoken by a highly decorated soldier and son of a former respected premier of Western Australia, his “radical sentiments” had an impact, but this was short-lived. The formation of the Communist Party of Australia in 1920 offered a ray of hope and Katharine became a founding member.

Later she produced her most controversial work *Coonardoo*, which appeared in serial form in the *Bulletin* in 1928. The novel is set in north-western Western Australia at the time of early settlement with the appropriation of Aboriginal land and the accompanying subordination of Indigenous culture. In particular, Katharine brings to light the slave-like treatment of Aboriginal workers and particularly concubinage of Aboriginal women and the taboo subject of marriage or any form of sexual relations between Europeans and Aboriginals.

Despite all the controversy and the abuse directed at the author, Katharine was able to have *Coonardoo* published the following year. Her socialist conscience emboldened her to fight for women’s rights and particularly those of her Aboriginal sisters. Her writings focussed on class and race relations, highly controversial topics as she learned from her publication of *Coonardoo*. Katharine researched the material for her novels by experiencing life in the area where her novels were set.

In 1930 Prichard was instrumental in the formation of the Modern Women’s Club involving likeminded socialist thinkers. This initiative is often seen as a precursor of a feminist movement with such outcomes as the Women’s Electoral Lobby and working women’s centres. This is the period of the emergence of socialist realism in the arts which placed an emphasis on work-related themes rather those connected with sexuality for example.

After Hugo’s tragic death in 1933, while she was visiting the Soviet Union, Prichard threw herself into activism again. The 1930s was dominated by the Depression and the rise of Fascism. The visit to Australia of Egon Kisch, a highly educated progressive thinker and charismatic speaker, focused Katharine’s peace and anti-Fascist activities into solidarity and activism around supporting a fellow communist’s visit to her country in the face of relentless opposition from a reactionary federal government.

Ultimately, the conservatives were made to look foolish in the eyes of the

world because of the notorious “dictation test” along with the drama of Egon jumping ship literally onto the wharf at Port Melbourne and then travelling around the country speaking to enthusiastic crowds. Her solidarity extended even further to supporting the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War.

Katharine was a firm believer in Scientific Socialism which went beyond mere reforms of the Capitalist system but to working people having ownership of “the land, mines, factories, means of transport as well as the health, educational and cultural services required to fulfil their needs.”

In *Why I am a Communist* Katharine quotes Marx as saying: “Our theory is not dogma but a guide to action.” During the 1940s when the CPA numbers reached a threatening 20,000, the party was outlawed and individuals were persecuted and arrested for possessing Marxist literature.

In 1943, her activism drew Katharine to becoming a member of the CPA Central Committee and therefore a leading Australian communist.

Her commitment to peace won her the World Council’s Silver Medallion for Services to Peace in 1959. Katharine’s legacy remains in the form of a writers’ centre in her home and as a model of a committed communist.

Hannah Middleton

Fighter for land rights, peace and socialism

By Eileen Whitehead

Born in Preston, England, in 1942, and growing up in the very austere surroundings of London after World War Two, may well have produced the early and strong socio-political acumen which has influenced Dr Hannah Middleton. Her father, Alex, was a scientist for the National Coal Board, and her mother, Peggy, became a teacher after the war. It was a household where politics were constantly and passionately discussed and practised: Hannah accompanying her mother, when eight or nine, collecting signatures for the Stockholm Peace Appeal.



Aged sixteen, she was arrested during the “Committee of 100” civil disobedience campaigns and participated in the annual Aldermaston peace marches.

While serving on Greenwich Council, Middleton’s mother was elected Mayor and, because of her husband’s unavailability, chose Hannah to be Mayoress, which duties she fulfilled during 1960-61. Meanwhile, Hannah enrolled at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, also joining the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1962, where she worked in the Party’s international section.

As part of her course, she spent three months in northern Nigeria, practising the Hausa language, and studying the impact of colonialism on the language. After graduating in African Studies (BA Hons) in 1964, she had a variety of jobs, including a spell with the African Section of the British Broadcasting

Corporation in 1965. She spent time organising fund-raising concerts for medical aid to Vietnam, and later moved to the German Democratic Republic (GDR – East Germany), working there for three years until 1968 as a lecturer in English language and institutions at Humboldt University, Berlin.

In 1968 Hannah became a post-graduate scholar in social anthropology at Humboldt University, and between 1970 and 1971, carried out fieldwork in Australia, living for eleven months with the Gurindji people of the Northern Territory. In 1972 she presented her doctoral thesis, *The Land Rights and Civil Rights Campaign of the Gurindji at Wattie Creek*.

She emigrated to Australia permanently two years later and joined the Socialist Party of Australia (SPA) in 1974. She worked as a lecturer (later senior lecturer) in Sociology and Social Anthropology in the School of Sociology at the University of New South Wales until 1980.

Hannah left the university to become a full-time activist working for the SPA in 1980, when asked to become a journalist for its newspaper, *The Guardian*: becoming its editor in 1985 for three years. During this time she also served as Party Education Officer.

Hannah has always worked for world peace, and in 1986 was a founding member of the AABCC – Australian Anti-Bases Campaign Coalition – being its national spokesperson from 1988 until the present day. The AABCC is a national coalition of Australian organisations researching and producing information about, and campaigning against, the foreign military installations (primarily the 30 United States bases) on Australian soil.

Throughout her career, Hannah has passionately fought for peace, equality, justice, and socialism.

This involved her writing submissions to government enquiries, and various articles, leaflets, conference papers, etc. A protest at the US military facility at Nurrungar in South Australia in 1991 saw her arrested for a breach of the peace. She faced the same charge when arrested during the 1991 Stop AIDEX campaign against Australian involvement in the arms trade. Her work with the AABCC sought to develop relations between peace groups across the Asia-Pacific region, working with groups in Fiji, the Philippines, South Korea, Japan, and Kanaky.

1991 proved a busy year for Hannah as she was also involved in the “Bring the Frigates Home” coalition as the founder member and full-time worker, campaigning against the Gulf War. She worked tirelessly on the campaign against the US sanctions on Iraq and, during the actual invasion, was active in the leadership of the “Walk against the War” coalition, becoming the co-Convenor of the Sydney Peace and Justice Coalition.

1993 saw Hannah become the President of the SPA.

Hannah was again arrested in 1996 for occupying Prime Minister Keating’s office in an East Timor protest. In 2007 she organised for two activists from Hawaii to come to Australia for the Talisman Sabre war games protests and, in 2008, she was awarded the Quakers’ Donald Groom Fellowship for her submission to bring two indigenous Chamoru from Guam to Australia for a speaking tour.

Hannah worked as campaign manager for the Asbestos Diseases Foundation and was campaign officer for the Australian Lawyers Alliance for a number of years before becoming Executive Officer of the University of Sydney’s Sydney Peace Foundation from 2006 to 2012, when she retired from paid employment – but not political activity. The Foundation awards the Sydney Peace Prize, Australia’s only international prize for peace.

In 2009, after the death of the long-time General Secretary, Peter Symon, the CPA elected Hannah, as its first female General Secretary. Throughout her career, Hannah has passionately fought for peace, equality, justice, and socialism. In 2015, after Edward Snowden had “leaked” US National Security Agency intelligence, indicating the increased satellite communications surveillance capability amongst its Five Eyes partners, Hannah, with Denis Doherty, wrote a penetrating piece fully explaining the implications of Australia’s involvement in any future conflicts in our region due to the presence of the US spy base at Pine Gap.

Currently, Hannah also writes a bi-monthly newsletter distributed in

Sydney's inner west, in support and defence of public housing. Her innate concern for the working class has never abated and has seen many articles written over the years. Especially relevant in 2020 is her article "Racism in Australia," written for the *Australian Marxist Review* (Issue 37), in April 1997, epitomising her attitude towards the racism and inequality perpetuated in Australia up to the present day:

"Racism makes it possible for capitalism to sustain and continue its exploitation of the multinational working class in Australia and its original theft of the main means of production, the land, from its Aboriginal owners. The appeal of the corporate rich to the public to accept greater sacrifices is accompanied by a sharp increase in the use of racism as a weapon to divide and rule."

Her knowledge of the colonial history of Australia and her understanding of it from the indigenous viewpoint has seen her write many articles detailing the injustices suffered by both Aboriginal and Islander people and the Australian working class. She sees the two groups aligned in the same battle against political forces and multinational monopolies: one fighting to save their jobs and the other fighting for land and mineral rights.

Hannah has provided an unerring "finger" on the political pulse of this country for half a century and in her own words, believes:

"It is not sufficient to state the aim of establishing a socialist Australia. It will not just fall into our laps – it will have to be argued for, popularised, and fought for."

Gwen Goedecke

Tireless worker for local community

By Romina Beitseen

I first met the late Gwen Goedecke at one of the CPA October Revolution events in Melbourne. She got up and spoke about the importance of the October Revolution and why it should be celebrated. I was impressed and wanted to know more about this passionate and interesting speaker. I then got to know her better as a comrade when I became the secretary of the Campaign for International Cooperation and Disarmament (CICD) as Gwen attended every committee meeting.



Gwen Goedecke came from a tradition of strong, courageous women. In 1878, her French great-grandmother Catherine Matton, aged fifty-seven, sailed from France with three sons for bushland Bundaberg in Queensland. French Woman's Creek is named after her.

Gwen's maternal grandmother, Margaret Guerin, aged 18, sailed with sister Lizzy from the impoverished Irish village of Foynes to Melbourne. Margaret's daughter, Mary, married George, son of Catherine Matton, and Gwen was born to them in 1922, followed by brothers Reg and Bill.

In the early years the family lived with the Matton family in North Fitzroy where George's father ran a successful metal-manufacturing business. However, when Gwen was eight years old her parents separated. Her mother took the three children to live at her family home in Seddon (a suburb of Melbourne), where they were raised with Molly's Irish mother Margaret and her son Jack.

"Uncle Jack" became a de facto father to Gwen and her brothers. He was a

hardworking waterside worker with a love of learning and a strong sense of social justice. His stories of life, war, and hardship had a lasting impact on Gwen. Reading his union's paper, *The Maritime Worker*, kindled her interest in the international workers' movement.

The three children were schooled at St Augustine's Catholic School in Yarraville.

Gwen's interest in the peace movement drew the ire of the parish priest, who eventually abandoned her to the Devil after unsuccessfully lecturing her on the dangers of socialism. So began a lifetime's passionate devotion to the peace movement, left-wing politics, social justice, women's liberation, internationalism, and environmentalism. Her motivation came from experiences in living through World War II and hearing her parents' stories about World War I.

She was employed by advertising agent Val Morgan and was running a large office at his radio station 3KZ when she married Alan William Goedecke. They built a house in Rosanna and Gwen continued to work for peace and justice and equal opportunity for everyone.

Her husband became unsettled – this was not the woman he imagined would raise their children in the neat house they had built in the suburbs. He didn't want a political agitator; he wanted a housewife.

She would later quote Simone de Beauvoir: "I am too intelligent, too demanding and too resourceful for anyone to be able to take charge of me entirely."

She refused to relinquish her political life and took their three children – Ann, Pauline, and Allan – to repeat her own history by returning to the family home in Seddon.

She was a divorced, communist, single mother in 1950s Australia – each of those attributes considered a shocking disgrace at the time.

In the 1960s, Gwen's home in Footscray was the headquarters of the western suburbs branch of the Communist Party of Australia and was regularly filled with unionists and political speakers. A comrade, Les Courtney, referring to that period, said: "Gwen's contribution cannot be overstated. Gwen will be remembered for her work, honesty and not just for gender equality but for social change."

Gwen's contributions and achievements included being a member of the

Union of Australian Women from 1955; a member of the Victorian Peace Council; and the Campaign for International Cooperation and Disarmament (CICD). She worked in a variety of jobs that gave her knowledge and information about strategies to work for peace within the community.

She worked at the Victorian Peace Council, the Trade Union Clinic, the Catholic Family Welfare Bureau.

Gwen became the electorate secretary to Dr Jim Cairns, the federal Treasurer in the Whitlam government, and leader of the Vietnam Moratorium Movement.

She was delighted to receive a letter from the school principal telling her that her son had been suspended for joining the 100,000 people marching down Bourke Street in a moratorium demonstration. What the principal did not know was that Gwen had worked with Cairns to organise it. After retiring from this position, she became a councillor for the City of Sunshine for six years.

In 1972 she began a relationship with Jack Tighe, a bureaucrat in the Australian Navy. Soon Jack left the Navy and began work for Jim Cairns. Gwen bought a house in North Sunshine, where she and Jack lived intensely political lives for the next 40 years.

Gwen intensified her work fighting for women's issues and during 1975 was the driving force in forming the Sunshine International Women's Committee, of which she was secretary for the next 30 years. She was founding member and secretary of the Western Region Centre for Working Women.

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Gwen was the second female to be elected as a Councillor on the Sunshine City Council (1984-1987). She sat on the Western Region Commission Board (1987-1995) to support community ventures in the Western region. Jack also was elected Mayor of Sunshine during this period.

Her thirst for knowledge saw her take an arts degree at the age of seventy. Her thesis, "Poor Man's Arts Centre," was on the history of the Footscray Community Arts Centre which she helped to establish and manage. Her aim was to make art and culture available to the working-class families of the western suburbs.

Gwen was a founding member of the Footscray Historical Society and a member of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History.

She was the author of *Women of the West* – a survey of the needs of Sunshine's women and was a monthly broadcaster on 3CR from 1991 until she was eighty-eight.

Her awards include the Vida Goldstein Award 2002; the Centenary Medal for services to the community 2003; the Dame Phyllis Frost Woman of the Year award 2006; inclusion in the 2009 Victorian Honour Roll of Women; Trades Hall Council recognition of life-long contribution to the union movement 2012; the Eureka Australia Day Medal 2013; and inclusion on the Shilling Wall Honour Board at the Queen Victoria Women's Centre. She also received an award from the Women's Electoral Lobby for her strong commitment to the women's movement in the Western suburbs.

Gwen participated in many United Nations International Year of Women Conferences including those in Mexico, Nairobi, and Beijing. Gwen researched and wrote the 25-year history of the Footscray Community Arts Centre.

The following extract from the Shilling Wall entry 2013 gives some indication of the scope of Gwen's contribution: "Gwen has been an activist and a feminist all her life campaigning for women's advancement, equal pay, better childcare and greater representation for women at all levels of government, particularly local government, for more than 50 years."

She campaigned to save three elegant towers of the Queen Victoria Women's Hospital, to save the Bulk Store building (now Visy Hub) and the Sunshine Swimming Pool. She also campaigned tirelessly to have the Footscray Community Arts Centre building turned into an arts centre for the Western Region, for the greater community.

She attended the third International Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995 and afterwards she and a companion were unavoidably delayed getting to their flight home from Shanghai. Gwen, 73 years old, raced out on to the tarmac only to see the plane take off down the runway. She had no money left and the next flight was days away.

She turned to the officials who were trying to shepherd her off the runway and said: "This is an outrage!" She whipped out a letter of introduction from Ralph Willis, who was then Australian Treasurer. "Do you know who this man is?" she said, brandishing the letter. "Bring that plane back now."

Extraordinarily, thirty minutes later that plane returned. As she ascended the stairs on to the plane, with the pilot and crew standing on either side, bowing apologies, she said: "Thank you. I should think so."

In summary, Gwen fostered positive working partnerships that highlighted the awareness of women's issues and facilitated long-term change for women in the West. She tirelessly advocated to governments and worked cooperatively to achieve more services that have benefited all women, particularly in her local community, but also to the broader community. She knew that women had a special contribution to make to public life and could contribute significantly in the development of social reform on issues that affect women.

She was loved by many in Sunshine, was a mentor to many, and campaigned to make Sunshine a better place. She was an absolute dynamo and a special person. One of Sunshine's finest.

Gwen passed away on Saturday 14th May 2016, age ninety-two. The Victorian Trades Hall flag flew at half-mast in her honour.

The work and commitment of women like Gwen Goedecke must not be forgotten.

Beryl Miller

A fighter for peace and women's rights

By Romina Beitseen

I first met comrade Beryl Miller in late 1986 when I first came to Australia. I phoned the Socialist Party of Australia (SPA) to speak with them about my interest in joining the Party. Beryl answered the phone and invited me to come into the office for a chat/interview. The office was located in Elizabeth Street, Melbourne. There I met with Beryl, Alan Miller, and another executive member (unfortunately I can't remember his name).

They were very friendly and put me at ease, asked me why I was joining the Party, etc ...

At that time, Alan was the Victorian State Secretary of the Party, and Beryl was one of the executive members and the office coordinator.

Beryl and Alan used to conduct educational classes for members. The classes were highly effective. Beryl believed not only in theory but encouraged members to be active in the union movement and in their community as well.

Beryl and Alan would organise *Guardian* sales and had a stall in the city. Beryl used to take every opportunity to promote the Party and sell the *Guardian*.

My branch would produce flyers, and we used to go to suburbs letter-boxing



and door-knocking. I was very lucky to have been paired with Beryl during these events.

As time passed Beryl and Alan moved to Adelaide. We kept in contact and met up when they would come to Melbourne. We also travelled a number of times to visit them in Adelaide.

I learnt more about Beryl's life when I attended her 90th Birthday, which was celebrated at the Workers' Club in Adelaide on 11th September 2016.

The following information about Beryl's life is based on my personal memories, her family, research, and conversations with the remarkable Beryl:

Beryl was born on 9th September 1926 in Geelong, Victoria. Growing up during the Great Depression and seeing the deprivation associated with that crisis for workers and their families, Beryl needed little encouragement in opposing the Fascists during World War II. When she was 15, in 1941, she joined the Eureka Youth League (EYL), which was the young Communist movement in Australia. She was elected Secretary of the Moonee Ponds/Essendon branch.

Monthly dances were organised by the EYL during the War for the airmen stationed at the Essendon Aerodrome. She helped form the dance group that entertained servicemen at various locations as part of a concert party.

Beryl rode her bike to her first job at the Essendon Aerodrome in a secretarial role for the Department of Aircraft Production. Her next job was at the offices of the Amalgamated Engineering Union where she collected dues for the Clerks Union in her capacity as a shop steward.

She left this job when she married in Melbourne on 22nd May 1946, and relocated to Adelaide after a honeymoon on Kangaroo Island. Beryl's first child, Peter, was born in March 1947.

A job with Hannafords involved a move to Dimboola, Victoria. Diane, the second child, was born at the Dimboola Bush Nursing Hospital in February 1949.

It was in Dimboola that Beryl's interest in the welfare of others was again stirred into action. Noting that there was little for young people to do, she helped set up the YZ (Wise Head) Club. The club held regular concert parties in the town and outlying centres.

Witnessing the terrible devastation and destruction caused by the first and only use of atomic weapons (WMD) on civilian populations in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and recognising the urgency for world peace were big factors in Beryl's decision to join the Communist Party in 1952.

Paul, the third child, was born in September 1953.

Flo Edmonds invited Beryl to join the Union of Australian Women (UAW) in 1955, and she was soon elected as SA State Secretary, a position she held until 1978.

She attended the first National UAW Conference in Sydney in 1956 and was elected to the National Committee, a position she held until 1981. Beryl was the longest-serving member.

The first anti-nuclear testing street demonstration took place in the late 1950s where three UAW members – Beryl Miller, Irene Bell, and Doreen Marshall – wore aprons with slogans calling for an end to nuclear testing.

In 1957 she became the first woman elected to the South Australian CPA State Committee in the post-war period. There she organised Child Art Exhibitions in 1958 and 1959, and an International Children's Film Festival in 1960.

In the 1950s she visited workplaces and held public meetings on equal pay. In the 1960s she was very active in opposing Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War, particularly through the Save Our Sons movement.

Witnessing the terrible devastation and destruction caused by the first and only use of atomic weapons (WMD) on civilian populations in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and recognising the urgency for world peace were big factors in Beryl's decision to join the Communist Party in 1952.

The UAW formed the International Women's Day (IWD) Committee in order to coordinate the invitation for international women to take part in the day's celebrations. She was a member of the Association of Australian Dancers (The Wattle Dance Group) from 1952 to 1956 and an active member of the SA New Theatre, being the Treasurer from 1952-53.

In 1964 she attended the CPA's Congress as the first woman elected from South Australia. In the same year, she joined the first all-women's delegation to visit the Soviet Union. The delegation had another first for an Australian group when they visited Siberia.

Beryl met Alan through her work in the Communist Party. They were married in 1964. She was a founding member of the Socialist Party of Australia (SPA) which was formed in December 1971 and attended the 1971 conference which set up the SPA. As a member of the State Executive she attended and spoke at numerous Congresses. In both the SPA and CPA Beryl was always on the State Women's Committee.

In 1975 she studied in the Soviet Union. She was also a Councillor of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) from 1975-1980. In this role, she worked in the German Democratic Republic in 1975 to prepare for the World Conference of Women as part of the UN International Women's Year celebrations held in Berlin, German Democratic Republic (East Germany).

Her attendance at a meeting of the WIDF in Moscow and Tajikistan was a highlight of 1978.

In that year she moved to Sydney to work for the Central Committee; in 1982 the South Sydney branch of the SPA was formed, and she became Secretary. She worked with four factories and produced monthly bulletins and met with the workers regularly. She moved to Melbourne in 1985 and worked in the Party's State Committee Office and became Secretary of the Central Branch, active on the waterfront with maritime workers.

The UAW and its members were in the forefront of many campaigns: including the banning of nuclear weapons and war toys; price control; the national petition for world peace; opposition to the Vietnam War; and conscription. They used aprons and shopping bags for their protest signs. Much of her work in the UAW was carried out in collaboration with the broader community, churches, unions, and other women's groups.

Beryl and Alan moved back to Adelaide in 1991. She was once again elected State Secretary until the organisation was wound down in 2005.

Working with MP Frances Bedford and her staff on the campaign to Save the Modbury Hospital and the creation of a Reconciliation Quilt has kept Beryl in touch with grassroots politics since her return to Adelaide in 1991.

Beryl's last overseas trip was in 1998 when she attended celebrations for the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) in Paris, France.

Alongside her political life is her family. A mother to three adult children she endured the heartbreak of the death of her eldest son, Peter, in 1995. The death of her lifelong companion and husband, Alan, has been softened by the loving relationship she shares with his son Ralph.

Beryl's 90th birthday celebration was an opportunity to celebrate Beryl's life and her achievements from the time she was only 15 years old. At the birthday celebrations we heard about Beryl's campaigns in the areas of: the Eureka Youth League at fifteen; joining the Communist Party of Australia in 1952; her involvement with the UAW, the WIDF, and the Australian Peace Committee; opposition to atomic testing; leaving the Communist Party to join the SPA; becoming a founding member of the SPA; and representing South Australia in 1964 when the Communist Party of Australia organised the first women's delegation to Russia.

Beryl was a champion in promoting and selling the Party's *Workers' Weekly paper*, *The Guardian*, wherever she could.

Albert Einstein said: "Only a life lived for others is a life worthwhile." Beryl has lived such a life as a revolutionary. Congratulations to her for reaching this milestone in good health, with wonderful memories, and time to relax and take it easy now.

Pauline Mitchell

60 years a working class and peace activist

By Romina Beitseen

I first met comrade Pauline Mitchell in late 1980s early 1990s at Palm Sunday Rallies and SPA, later CPA meetings.

I got to know her better when I joined the Campaign for International Cooperation and Disarmament (CICD) in mid/late 2011.

Pauline told me how she became politically involved with the Party and the peace movement when she moved to Melbourne from Alice Springs in the 1950s.

She also spoke about this on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the CICD, in 1999.

Pauline is recognised as the person who first alerted Australians to the establishment of the United States secret military intelligence base at Pine Gap.

In the 1950s Pauline lived in Alice Springs, working for the local paper, the *Centralian Advocate*. She noticed the arrival of US Air Force engineers who brought a large caravan bristling with electronic equipment, a caravan that was out of bounds to Australian government employees. US planes were landing at Alice Springs airport with high ranking military personnel and heavy equipment, tractors, and cranes on them. A friend told Pauline he was blindfolded one day and taken out to the US base to fix some equipment, then blindfolded and brought back to town again.



She realised that her taxes were funding armaments and she was particularly concerned as she witnessed the establishment of this secret US military intelligence base at Pine Gap.

When Pauline moved to Melbourne in the late 1950s, she could not find any reference in any local papers about the presence of an American military base in Australia. However, she got the story out through the Melbourne Unitarian Peace Memorial Church, and so became perhaps the first person to alert the Australian public to the establishment of the secret US base at Pine Gap.

Pauline at this time became active in the peace movement, Union of Australian Women (UAW) and the Melbourne Unitarian Peace Memorial Church. She was involved in the organisation of the founding conference of CICD and became a long time peace activist and organiser of this organisation.

The Australian and New Zealand Congress for International Co-operation and Disarmament, later known as the Congress for International Co-operation and Disarmament (CICD) was established at an International Peace Congress staged in Melbourne in 1959. It was set up to support the ideals of the World Congress for Disarmament and International Co-operation held in Stockholm in 1958.

The ANZCICD of 1959 was the broadest based peace congress up to that time and laid the foundation for an ongoing organisation tapping new avenues of support. Victoria had a long history of peace movements from the actions against conscription during the First World War, to the Council against War and Fascism before the Second World War. One such organisation, the

Pauline was one of those Communists who, despite the many struggles and strains, dedicated herself 100 percent to the people's cause for peace and social justice.

Victorian Peace Council, was instrumental in setting up CICD in 1959. It was disbanded soon after, leaving only its VPC Research and Information Centre in existence until 1964.

Since its inception in 1959, the CICD has actively campaigned for peace and disarmament, acting most notably as a co-ordinating facility for anti-Vietnam war protests, and rallies including the Vietnam Moratorium (1970-1972), Palm Sunday Peace Rallies, opposition to French Nuclear Testing (1990s) and for No Gulf Wars. Its members have also been active in campaigns against US bases in Australia including Pine Gap, Nurrungar, Omega, North West Cape, and anti-nuclear test protests.

CICD has played a leading role in Australian campaigns for peace and reconciliation of nations, and a number of other notable campaigns over many years. CICD also supports Abolition 2000, an international anti-nuclear movement campaigning for the abolition and banning of nuclear weapons.

CICD continues to be active around a variety of campaigns, including opposition to nuclear proliferation and weapons of mass destruction, support for humanitarian disarmament, the protection of free speech against surveillance and intimidation, and the promotion of democratic, sustainable trade policy.

Pauline co-presented the *Alternative News* each week on ABC Access Radio 3ZZ, together with Bruce McPhie, another dedicated CICD member and peace activist from about 1973 until the station was forcibly closed down by the new conservative government in 1975, and then the programme transferred to Community Radio 3CR. Bruce left in 1978, but Pauline continued the 15-minute program almost every single week for 37 years. Her radio program was popular because she was able to distil and convey often-complex political issues simply and from the people's perspective.

She produced a politically charged insightful radio program that detailed developments in the peace movement, community struggles, and international conflicts with a clear anti-imperialist perspective.

Listeners were presented with an up-to-date, clear explanation of the role of the military, human rights abuses, our foreign affairs acquiescence, US dictates and viciousness with her own form of satire.

Her love of the people drove a life of struggle against the war machine and the leaders who used it to subjugate them, and destroy life, security, and

freedom. She had the ability to clearly link war and conquest to its imperialist agenda. Such was her exceptional commitment and dedication, and through articles in the “Peace 2000” magazine of the Campaign for International Cooperation and Disarmament (CICD) which she also produced for very many years.

The *Alternative News* was re-launched in December 2013 and was dedicated to Pauline’s memory. The program has been presented on a weekly basis by Romina Beitseen and Andrew Irving and more recently with a number of new younger team members.

For over 50 years Pauline was a leading Party member, worker, peace organiser and for 16 years was secretary of CICD. Established in 1959, CICD is one of Australia’s longest serving peace organisations. Pauline was an influential leader and activist in the peace movement as well as being a political leader, maintaining the CICD’s strong working-class connections and anti-imperialist political line.

Pauline was a member of the old CPA and became a foundation member of the SPA, now the current CPA.

Pauline was one of those Communists who, despite the many struggles and strains, dedicated herself 100 percent to the people’s cause for peace and social justice.

She continued to work in the CICD office three or four days a week up until the age of 81. From mid to late 2011 she no longer was able to climb the stairs at Trades Hall in Melbourne. But even then, she continued to come into meetings and she always did the radio program.

Pauline’s final contribution was that she nominated to donate her body to Melbourne University.

For those of us who were fortunate to know her, we will always remember what a unique and special person Pauline was, a selfless and tireless activist who always worked for the good of all. Her commitment was admirable, inspiring, and unforgettable. Her passion for change was clear and she was a great communicator.

Pauline committed her life and so should we to a world of peace and social justice.

Joan Williams

1916-2008

Author, peace activist and fighter for women's rights

By Eileen Whitehead

When awarded the Order of Australia medal in 1996 Joan Williams accepted it on behalf of “her unrecognised sisters who serve the community”. So perhaps it is fitting she takes her place among other communist women in this Red Women Celebration to mark 100 years of the Communist Party of Australia.

Coming from the regions in Western Australia, Joan was born in Coolgardie in 1916. Growing up in Kendenup, Joan became politically active at a young age in the 1920s.

The secret of what motivated her along a path in activism is most likely archived among her many writings and poems. Did her political consciousness lead her into journalism or is that where it developed? Perhaps those who knew her well give us an inkling. She was described by one friend as a woman with a genuine interest in people, a great communicator and thinker knowing from a young age what was important in life and ahead of her time.

Whatever came first as a young journalist she surrounded herself with left-wing thinkers, other journalists, writers and artists. With an already developed political consciousness Joan found friend and mentor in Katharine Susannah Prichard and in 1938 founded the Modern Women's Club with her. They became lifelong friends with mutual respect of each other's work. In 1965



Katharine chose Joan to edit her book *On Strenuous Wings*, a collection of her works.

Out of her commitment to wanting to bring about social change, Joan joined the Communist Party of Australia in 1939. She quickly took up many struggles playing a leading role in firstly the West Australian political scene but also nationally and through her writings and poetry internationally. She did this under her pen name Justina Williams, writing short stories, historical works, poems, biography and autobiography.

As a political leader Joan was passionate about peace, social justice, equality, indigenous rights and protection of the environment. She was well recognised in her early activism as a champion for women's equality and maintained a lifelong commitment to it. Joan not only played a role but was a leader, founding a number of committees and movements.

She was a member of the International Women's Day committee, on the West Australian Council for Equal Pay and a founder of the Women's Electoral Lobby and also a member of the Union of Australian women. She stood up strongly against violence against women and for equal opportunity. She fought also for a woman's right to abortion going as far as describing her own experience in detail to thousands at a rally.

By the 1950s Joan showed her militancy around workers' rights forming a WA-based committee to support strike action; the Waterside Workers' Federation Women's Committee.

She was well recognised in her early activism as a champion for women's equality and maintained a lifelong commitment to it.

At the same time, she further ramped up her leadership of the environmental and peace movements campaigning for nuclear disarmament, against the presence of the US military base near Exmouth, for peace and against war. Her rage showed in her many writings and her poetry packed a punch. Her poem “Not in My name,” written during the first Iraq war in 1991, was adopted internationally and can still be heard being recited at peace rallies today.

She maintained the struggle for peace throughout her life and by 1980 was the Secretary of the Australian Peace Committee.

In her autobiography, Joan referring to a time in the '70s, gave a personal perspective to the working-class struggle and struggle for women's rights saying:

“A new generation had come into action and we who had struggled in the past were with them. Strangely, they knew little of the patient work, and the sacrifices of earlier workers for equality, who for years had been chipping away at male bastion.”

She noted, “... they eagerly learned of the struggles of the suffragettes in England, as if there had been nothing in between.”

Joan posed the question: “How was it that they knew of Alexandra Kollontai, but not of strong Australian women whose courage had opened doors to the unions and professions, the radical activists in whose steps we were treading today?” So, it is essential then that her story and those of other Red Women be told.

Her life took her from Coolgardie, Kendenup, Melbourne, Moscow, London and Albany and finally Perth where there is a park named in her honour to acknowledge her time as a Councillor from 1973-77. Joan married twice, firstly to fellow journalist Peter Thomas and later to fellow communist Vic Williams in 1946 and together they led the Perth branch of the CPA.

Joan Williams; a writer and journalist, a fighter for peace, social justice, workers' rights, women's rights, and Aboriginal rights; a mother, lover, daughter, a comrade.

Joan was a mentor to all in the WA branch, developing younger members to take on roles such as treasurer for the continuity of the Communist Party of Australia in Western Australia.

After her death in 2008 the CPAWA branch paid its respects to Joan as a true communist who dedicated her life to the working-class struggle.

A life well lived that should be an example for all of us who strive to bring about a better world.

Not in My Name

Not in my name,

My woman's name,

Not one drop of blood be shed for oil

That makes some billionaires and sets the Middle East aflame...

But in my name,

In every woman's name send home great armies

Of the black and dispossessed,

Warships and bombers turn around.

Peace in my name.

Justina Williams

Katharine Susannah Prichard

1883-1969

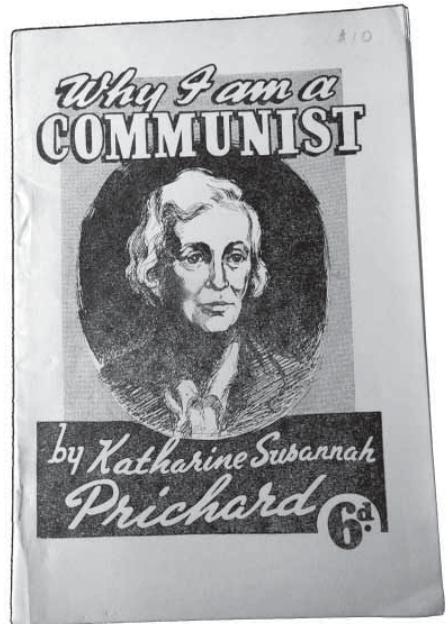
By Eileen Whitehead

The historical period in which Katharine Susannah Prichard grew up proved tumultuous politically. She was born in 1883 in Levuka, Fiji, where her father Tom worked as a newspaper editor: his ongoing search for work taking him and his family to Launceston and then Melbourne where he worked as editor of the *Sun* newspaper.

Her family was to experience hard times due to her father's uncertain employment and subsequent fits of depression, which she blamed on the social system. Even at a young age she was aware of the dichotomy of the social structures: extreme poverty on the one hand and obscene wealth on the other.

Although intellectually gifted, her family's poverty meant her brothers would benefit from further education while Katharine, who had gained University entrance, was forced to become a governess. Undeterred, she attended night lectures at the University of Melbourne studying, amongst other things, economics and the history and policy of the Australian Labor Party.

She also became interested in the Fabian Society of George Bernard Shaw and the Webbs; Guild Socialism; Syndicalism and the Anarchism of Kropotkin. Her philosophical reading led her away from Christianity to Rationalism and from Plato, Socrates and Epictetus to Buddhism, Theosophy and Christian Science.



Katharine's love of literature fed her lifelong habit of keeping journals, eventually leading to a successful literary career. She inherited a democratic, humanist tradition extended – through her plays and novels – by the complexities of the early twentieth century.

She had been horrified by life in the slums of Melbourne, and hearing stories reported by the Anti-Sweating League, of young women working long hours on high pressure machines for low wages. She learnt of women being forced to submit to sexual advances from bosses in order to take work home to earn an extra shilling making clothes. And her later novels and plays reflected these inequalities.

The death of her father from suicide in 1907, saw her leave to work in London, Paris and North America as a journalist. In 1913, she published a small collection of poetry, *Clovelly Verses* and in 1915, won £250 in Hodder & Stoughton's All-Empire novel competition, for *The Pioneers*, based on her Australian notebooks.

Both brothers served in the First World War and the loss of her elder brother, Alan, hardened her resolve to work for peace and “oppose political and economic intrigues which foster the barbarous insanity of war.”

The Russian Revolution introduced her to the theories of Marx and Engels: she had found her system of thought for reorganisation of the social system. Poverty, oppression and war had left a great impression on Katharine Susannah Prichard: she understood the importance of “mateship” and unionism to the working class and her work reflected this by perpetuating the distinctive Australian culture.

Injustice shaped her consciousness and, engrossed by the philosophy of Marx and influenced by the improvements the Bolshevik Revolution had gained for the Russian people, Katharine later helped found the Communist Party of Australia in 1920.

Her artistic inspiration constantly interacted with her political analysis of a rapidly changing Australia as could be seen in her novels and plays: always revealing the society in which she lived. Her first published writings had appeared in *New Idea* in 1903, which published *Bush Fires*, a prize-winning love story. However, in 1908, she wrote a semi-autobiographical children's novel, *The Wild Oats of Han*, not published until 1928. In it her resentment of poverty and the actual experience of her family having to sell their best furniture became the focus.

In 1916, while in London, she met Lieutenant Hugo (Jim) Throssell, VC and they later married in 1919, settling in Greenmount outside Perth, WA. Here Katharine established a labour study circle, before giving birth to son Ric Throssell in 1922.

Four years later, the publication of *Working Bullocks* secured her reputation – in the mould of Lawrence and Hardy – as a writer capable of revealing the essence of Australia. It dramatised the lives of timber workers in the Karri forests of the South West of WA, demonstrating the essence of the alienating process which denies working people the product of their labour: becoming the bullocks.

Katharine won the Triad Play Competition with her powerful political play, *Brumby Innes* in 1927, dealing with the issues of sexism, racism, class injustice and the rape of the environment. A more controversial novel *Coonardoo*, followed in 1929 – probably the first novel to humanise indigenous culture – dealing with the injustice of the attempted destruction of an entire people.

The 1920s were Katharine's most productive time when she wrote her most adventurous novels, stories and plays. At this time, as an active communist, she helped organise unemployed workers and left-wing women's groups. During the 1930s she actively campaigned to support the Spanish Republic and other socialist causes.

Many differences of opinion were had between her and other Communist writers such as Frank Hardy and Judah Leon Waten about applying socialist realism in Australian fiction. Also, her commitment to left-wing politics did not endear her to conservative social society dominating the Perth art scene at the time and, throughout her life, she endured a certain social exclusion. Her friends were other free-thinking intellectuals, also challenging social norms at the time.

While in the Soviet Union in 1933 collecting material for *The Real Russia*, a book-length polemical pamphlet, Katharine's husband committed suicide – as had many others during the Great Depression. His real estate business and other ventures had left the family in colossal debt.

On her return, Katharine became involved with the Movement Against War and Fascism (MAWF) founded that year. Prior to her trip she had written a draft of *Intimate Strangers*, in which the male character, Greg Blackwood, had suicided. Concerned that this might be construed as influencing Jim's suicide she altered the ending and deferred its publication until 1937.

During the 1930s, Katharine was an unremitting worker for the Communist Party, writing *Who Wants War* (1935), and agitprop plays such as *Women of Spain* (1937) and *Penalty Clause* (1940). With Jean Devanny, she set up the Writers' League in 1935 and was a founding member of the Western Australian branch of the Fellowship of Australian Writers. Her novel, *Moon of Desire* was written in 1941 aimed at Hollywood in an attempt to relieve her debts.

Renting out her cottage in 1942, Katharine moved to Sydney to be closer to her son, Ric, who was serving in the military, and allowing her to serve on the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Australia. After the war, she came close to selling the cottage to pay Jim's outstanding debts but, fortunately, a friend intervened and paid the debt for her.

During the war, Katharine wrote *Potch and Colour* (1944), and became co-editor of *Australian New Writing* (1943-46). Her major work however was her Goldfields Trilogy: *The Roaring Nineties* (1946), *Golden Miles* (1948) and *Winged Seeds* (1950).

They provide a substantial reconstruction of social and personal histories that, although set in the Goldfields from 1890 to 1946, reflected her political philosophy that no-one is immune from war, disease and the ruthless struggle for wealth and power which sweeps the mass of people into a maelstrom of economic and national crises. It shows her experience of the effect of war – the damage to her own husband shown in the character of Dick, returning broken and changed.

Winged Seeds continues with the next generation of the Gough family experiencing the threat of global events – the Depression followed by WW2.

Aged eighty-four, her last novel *Subtle Flame*, was published in 1967 with, once again, her humanity, compassion and reverence for life to the fore.

The torch of socialism is introduced by the grandson organising his fellow miners before another world war engulfs them.

Aged eighty-four, her last novel *Subtle Flame*, was published in 1967 with, once again, her humanity, compassion and reverence for life to the fore. Set in Melbourne towards the end of the Korean War and around the Peace Conference of 1959, it's a story about the inner meaning of life and the struggle of "man's" integrity and the influence of society.

Poignant in that it's about an Editor of an important Melbourne newspaper, considering her father had held the same position. The book is a passionate plea for world peace and is now considered an important social document.

Katharine Susannah Prichard died at her home in Greenmount in 1969 and her ashes were scattered in the surrounding hills. She pioneered the Australian novel as a viable art form. In a letter written to Vic Williams she had hoped her works would help people realise the future they could create for Australia. What would she make of that country today where inequality is even worse, where greed and materialism are gods and our government spends billions on armaments?

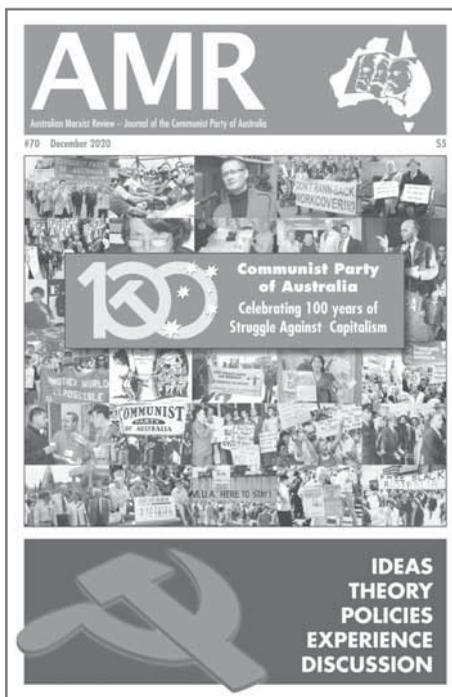


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