

The When, Where, Why and How of *The Melbourne Partisan* Magazine

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Fitzroy

The Melbourne Partisan, three issues, April-November, 1965. Editors: Laurie Clancy and John Timlin. Contributors, Administration and Helpers: Anonymous, Jim Cairns MHR, Graham Cantieni, Jack Clancy, Laurie Clancy, Manning Clark, Richard N. Coe, Alan Cole, Robert Corcoran, Bruce Dawe, Hume Dow, Beatrice Faust, Raimond Gaita, Fr. J. Golden SJ, Geoff Goode, John Harris, Michael Johnson, Evan Jones, "Mick" Jordan, James Jupp, Tom Kramer, Sam Lipski, Jim Lisle, John Lloyd, Senator Frank McManus, Humphrey McQueen, Brian Matthews, Don Miller, Rex Mortimer, Bishop J. S. Moyes, Hank Nelson, Barry Oakley, Neil Phillips, Neil Phillipson, Rev. David Pope, John Powell, Mrs. L. Rabl, Sir Herbert Read, Virginia Sikorskis Geoff Sharp, John Timlin, Brian Toohey, Tom Truman, Ian Turner, Virginia Sikorskis, Chris Wallace-Crabbe, W.C. Wentworth, E.L. Wheelwright.

My association as co-publisher and co-editor of *The Melbourne Partisan* began after Laurie Clancy in the Melbourne University paper, *Farrago*, attempted to lay waste the censorship policies of the Menzies and Bolte governments. He wrote reviews under the *nom de plume* Horace A. Bridgfunt to discuss the many books then banned in Australia.

Paperbacks for review were dissected in Hawaii and separate pages mailed to Melbourne in dozens of envelopes. This beat the Customs Department but was too slow so I offered Laurie a solution. Working on the Melbourne waterfront repairing scales and aided by a knowledgeable wharfie mate, a denizen of that notorious Commo front, the International Bookshop, I could sneak through the gates with a few banned volumes.

Good idea till my ute was searched by a zealous and gimlet-eyed Customs officer who removed the following contraband: D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, J. P. Donleavy's *The Gingerman*, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and Jacob Broinowski's *The Western Intellectual Tradition*—the decoy on top of the pile.

I protested but was told the books were prohibited under the Act and would be examined with a view to prosecution by a responsible officer of the Customs Department. 'Well,' I said, 'how about the Broinowski?' He leered, anticipating a salacious afternoon, 'After we've read it mate.' He knew you can't tell a book by its cover.

Meanwhile my security clearance was reviewed and access to the docks curtailed. End of job. What to do? I rang Horace with the news and he immediately came up with a creative suggestion: 'Let's have a beer,' he said, 'at the Mayfair.' The name rang a bell—a watering hole adjacent to Melbourne University, a haven for students and a drinking perch in summer for bird watchers.

That meeting determined my new occupation: *Farrago's* unpaid correspondent for the Worker/Student Alliance, a partnership between me, the worker, and Laurie, the student. I

delved into the mysteries of various organizations like the Painters & Dockers and the Australian Workers Union. I learnt to speak through the corner of my mouth.

My anonymous reports appeared in *Farrago*. I cultivated a few informers, particularly Rocky Martin who also spoke out of the corner of his mouth. We met at a wharfie pub, The Great Britain, in Flinders Street, where we spoke comfortably standing side by side, the better to hear each other. He had been kicked out of the AWU by its legendary Secretary, Tom Dougherty, about whom he knew things which, he whispered, should be revealed.

I introduced Rocky to Laurie at the Mayfair in its beer garden. Our informer smoked lethal Temple Bar cigarettes, shook his head at what he called the long-haired poofers, gaped at the gorgeous girls, drank a dozen pots and told us ... secrets. Embezzlement and even murder, he suggested. We suddenly felt a magazine coming on, not a party, and decided to launch *The Melbourne Partisan*.

Naturally, we had no money so we took advice from Laurie's brother, Jack, who had placed bets for their dad with the local SP in Hampton—sometimes after the race had been run. He said the Sydney Opera House was funded by a lottery and perhaps we should do something similar.

After all, a magazine could also be art. It would include poetry for example: friends Evan Jones, Bruce Dawe, Chris Wallace-Crabbe and Vin Buckley had offered verse. I was wary of Vin who, in his cups, once accused me of 'taking' Laurie from the Church. However the Christian Brothers' College, St. Kilda had done that successfully years before we met.

So to work: numerous barbecues with barrels of beer were held and each week we had a raffle or two. Laurie's lawyer sister, Pat, worried that we didn't have a raffle license and would have worried more had she realised that each of the raffles was won by somebody named either Timlin or Clancy or an associate. The prize was reclaimed for the next raffle, thereby allowing all funds to go to *The Melbourne Partisan*.

Our star informer, our Deep Throat, Rocky, having learnt of the Clancy family's cricketing skills and connections, claimed prowess with the ball. A fast bowler he said. How fast? Lightning. Rocky stole some whites and studded boots from the wharf and arrived freshly minted as the Hampton Cricket Club's new Ray Lindwall. The match doubled as a fund-raising event for the magazine—barrels and barbecues were readied for the post-match booze-up and raffle.

The captain threw him the ball. Rubbing one side of it into his Brylcreamed mane, he paced out his run. The start, carefully marked with a new boot, was an astonishing 60 yards from the crease. The batsman trembled in fearful anticipation as Rocky began his run and hurtled towards him.

But the fags had taken their toll: breathless, his run petered out over the last ten yards and the ball lollypopped onto the turf to be belted for a six. So did the next ball and the next and the next.

The regular raffle prize was enhanced by Rocky's generous donation of nearly virgin cricket boots and creams.

A little suspicious now about his claims and revelations, we nonetheless persisted with more executive meetings and probing interviews in the Mayfair beer garden.

Mid the snap, crackle and pop of Temple Bar, a cigarette made from tobacco allegedly laden with saltpetre, too dangerous to advertise, its effect diluted by many foaming Fosters, Rocky confided misdeeds committed by the AWU Secretary. His wife, he whispered, had died in mysterious circumstances. In the bath! There were overtones of crime. Perhaps sex? We were on to something—a major scoop!

Our plans for the first issue of the magazine were hatched: I would attack Menzies' Vietnam policy; Brian Matthews, calling himself *Sniper*, would write about the censorship of *Oz* magazine; a Catholic insider, Bob Corcoran, would reveal the evil goings-on in B.A. Santamaria's *Movement*; John Harris's article would analyse the deficiencies of the Bolte/Menzies response to the Martin report on education; an insider journalist's critical examination of *The Australian* newspaper; Neil Phillipson's slash at the dubious practices of car dealer, Kevin Dennis; Jack Clancy's dismissal of *The Australian International News Review* magazine for being a CIA-type front and Graham Cantieni's review of trends in art education.

Poetry by Bruce Dawe, Evan Jones and Chris Wallace-Crabbe would be featured. Future issues would include a Manning Clark short story. Raimond Gaita, Jim Lisle, Jim Cairns, Hank Nelson, Barry Oakley and Beatrice Faust were contracted for subsequent issues and we were away.

Laurie decided to work with Rocky on the Tom Dougherty exposé for the second issue. Issue 1 featured a parody of an American flag on the cover: in place of some of the stars, in the middle of the stripes, sat a ringed Coca Cola bottle. This illustrated the lead article which attacked the banning by the Australian government of a US magazine called *Fact*. That publication drew attention to the globalised Coca Cola Corporation's war on teeth and, coincidentally, Communism. Coke—'the sublimated essence of all that America stands for.' Apart from the Reds, fluoride was the enemy! The Right has been ever thus.

Researching my Vietnam piece involved several visits to the US Consulate where the staff were very helpful: 'We have more information for you, Mr. Timlin, about North Vietnamese aggression.'

I was trying to get real figures directly from the Congressional record and reports—the so-called Blue Book and White Book. Perhaps the Consulate's belief that researchers could only be there to validate the US Government's position hardened my criticism?

There was disagreement about the strident cover and my article: not that Laurie supported the Vietnam War; far from it, but he thought the article's tenor might have ignored what would nowadays be called our Mission Statement published in the first edition: '... to think objectively and to write impartially, to preserve an awareness of other points of view and to maintain an attitude of inquiring skepticism.' I was too partisan for that and there was plenty of bluster from the Right which needed fact-based rebuttal.

With our first edition printed by the redoubtable Don McLean, we drove into Wangaratta, North-Eastern Victoria, in a battered Volkswagen Kombi, the rear weighed down by 300 copies of *The Melbourne Partisan*. From a few teaching mates of Jack Clancy, we heard that Wang was really an intellectual hot-bed screaming out for the sort of magazine we thought we had

created. We then plied the Melbourne suburban bookshops and newsagents and many took pity on us and stocked the magazine.

The first issue was a runaway success—that is, it ran away with our raffle money since the shops would not pay for two months. Another day, another raffle, though the re-circulated prize was getting a bit raffle-worn.

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By August we were again cashed up and the next issue featured a cover photo of Prime Minister Robert Menzies as the Statue of Liberty, an essay by Jim Cairns and Laurie's terrific article on 'Tiger Tom' Dougherty. In this he revealed that Dougherty had not accounted properly for a £60,000 shortfall from the strike-fund, while also dipping into an AWU subsidiary company for his housing loan at 1% interest. He had also spent heavily on litigation: £15,000 for a failed Privy Council appeal in another matter involving Cameron. This extravagance should have been a caution to us! If the history had been better known, it may also have saved Julia Gillard from criticism about the dubious venture into which her then boyfriend, an AWU official, had entered. Nice, this hindsight!

Tiger Tom's union adversaries, Clyde Cameron and his brother Don, with Jim Cairns, ordered 5000 copies of Laurie's article in the *Partisan* cover. These were bought and circulated to members of the AWU just before the union elections. Jubilant we, of course, adjourned to the Mayfair Hotel for an executive meeting.

We asked Jim Cairns MHR to obtain the transcript of the inquest into Mrs. Gwen Dougherty's death. Request denied—*Not in the public interest* said Neville Wran's NSW Labor Government. Clyde then asked Wran's Justice Minister for the transcript and specifically asked whether the body had been exhumed to determine the poisoning allegation. Same answer.

Laurie and I tried to find the officers who had assisted the Coroner. They surely would know how the lady died in her bath, what was said at the inquest and whether she was poisoned. We found one all right: a position had been created for the Sergeant assisting and he had become the caretaker of Tom Dougherty's AWU House. Dead end!

Meanwhile, yet another scoop was upon us. Excitement in the Carlton village and revolutionary zeal connected with changes in the affairs of the AWU delivered a missive of great consequence.

You'll recall that we were very involved with the AWU election through distribution of 5000 copies of Laurie's article to AWU members on the eve of the election of office-bearers.

At that time we were ignorant of litigation between Don Cameron, Clyde's brother, an AWU aspirant for the position of Secretary, and the incumbent, Tom Dougherty.

The case between the AWU and Don Cameron involved complex questions of the legitimacy of both membership entitlements and the rules of the Union. If Dougherty lost, the reform ticket was in and Don would certainly take charge of the powerful SA branch.

A person of minor note at the University sidled up to Laurie at the Mayfair and said he knew we were very interested in the AWU and certain unfortunate events which may have occurred in the bathroom at the Secretary's house.

There was a trial which dragged on for months while Don Cameron's application was adjudicated. In those proceedings the expiry of Mrs. Dougherty did not figure.

Our informant, a junior lawyer working in the Industrial Court, claimed prior knowledge of the verdict and thought it was negative for Don Cameron. He told us so and we could feel another scoop coming on.

Needing succour, we repaired to the Mayfair for another executive meeting and drank till clear-eyed or until the legendary 'Time Gentlemen Please' came over the loudspeaker. Apparently, women could keep going.

Not only were we intoxicated by alcohol but also by the prospect of another coup whereby *The Melbourne Partisan* would reveal, ahead of judgment, the proceedings of the Industrial Court.

We were aware that the judge, the late and well respected Justice Smithers, would not be enamored of our enterprise nor the disclosure made by a naïve associate.

Thus circumspect, we called Clyde and said the outlook was bleak. 'What do you mean?' he asked.

"We've been told Don's substantially lost the case."

An almost noisy silence.

"Are you sure? Anyone else know?"

"No, but we'd like to publish."

"Don't. Dangerous information. Wait till I call you."

Later that evening I saw Jim Cairns about an extremely important discovery I thought I had made about the Vietnam war: the great majority of Viet Cong prisoners taken by the US were from the South, thus tending to disprove the idea of a straight Sino/North Vietnamese invasion while reinforcing the notion of a country-wide, political, anti-imperialist revolution.

He was pleased with that part-vindication of his position. During the amiable cup of tea and biscuit time, I told him about our information concerning the AWU trial.

"Does anyone else know?"

"Well," I said, "only Clyde."

"What? You're real idiots; he's the last person."

'Pardon?' as I sipped the Robur and dunked another Gingerbread man while thinking that our scoop may have dissolved through supposing that Clyde and Jim were equal allies in our political quest. Wasn't everybody on the Left decent?

I hadn't comprehended réal politic and learned that Clyde, whose brother we had defended, had immediately contacted Crown Law and announced that a judge had compromised the Court by an improper and premature release of his verdict to the Press i.e. Laurie and me.

This, said our mate Clyde, brought the Court into such disrepute about his brother's case that a mistrial should be immediately announced and the Judge sent to somewhere like Nauru for extensive rehabilitation under a pile of guano to which the young lawyer was welcome to contribute.

Mr. Justice Smithers ordered an inquiry into these unfortunate events and quickly our informant confessed his loose lips had sunk ships.

The focus moved from Laurie to me since I was not a Melbourne University teacher but a supposed professional Left Wing agitator who, the judge later told me, echoing Vin Buckley's complaint, had seduced a decent scholarship boy from his true course.

My interview with Justice Smithers took some time to arrange since I was loath to give myself up to the several telephoned requests from the Commonwealth Police to contact the judge's office.

I moved from place to place on the run from the Feds. Plenty of beds in Carlton and Parkville and I rather enjoyed the notoriety while Laurie and I, heavily disguised, would meet at the Gresham Hotel, in preference to the Mayfair which was now swarming with eagle-eyed undercover Federal cops.

After a fortnight of tumbling into kapok mattresses and leaking waterbeds I surrendered to His Honour, Mr. Justice Smithers. Wearing best overalls and steel capped desert boots, I agreed with the judge in his office that Mr Clancy's brilliant career had been sullied by my malign politics. I apologised.

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The last *Melbourne Partisan* issue i.e. the third, was perhaps the best—Laurie wrote provocatively of the AWU's and Dougherty's failure to contest our allegations nor defend his union's striking members at the Mt. Isa dispute. The article was headed *The Tail of Tiger Tom*. The tributes by Hume Dow and E.L. Wheelwright for Brian Fitzpatrick, a significant supporter and personal idol to whose newsletter's quality we aspired, were wonderful and, of course, so was my trenchant analysis of Labour Minister Billy McMahon's new broadside at the waterside workers.

Richard N Coe's essay on Orwell; Beatrice Faust's breakthrough article, *Homophilia*; the extract from Barry Oakley's new novel, *Callaghan's Day*; Don Miller's assessment of Alan Davies' and Sol Encel's *Australian Society* and Brian Matthews' acerbic analysis as *Sniper* of the then sexually charged *King's Cross Whisper* gave us an issue as significant as anything *The Monthly* could produce nowadays.

But best of all, cutting to our original chase—the Left orientation—was the *Left Wing Forum* which inquired of various luminaries, academic and political, what the term Left Wing meant. The prize for best reply was won by MCC Jordan, better known as Mick Jordan, secretary of The Melbourne Trades Hall Council who responded in part:

'I am to advise you that this matter is a matter which will be placed before our Executive in due course and our attitude will then be determined.'

I remember how we laughed about Mick Jordan's definition of Left Wing. But he was strangely right to cavil and we would have been better for not gloating.

As silly as that answer seemed then, his reply was not dishonest but muted by caution. How much worse it must be now when politicians face a 24 hour onslaught from journalists and vicious on-line propagandists?

But our time was up. Solicitors for the AWU and Dougherty served writs for defamation on Laurie, me and the hapless printer, Don McLean, who would have been bankrupted by the action. We negotiated an apology and adjourned to the Mayfair for the wake which, in some ways, is still going on as I mourn for an exciting time and an old friend while contemplating a future to be scarred by the Oxford and Sydney University pugilist, Tony Abbott, while his second in the imagined neutral corner is Rupert Murdoch and his columnist clones.