UK-Australian Labour History Conference

Neville Kirk
Manchester Metropolitan University

This international conference, the first of its kind to be organized in the UK, was held at the Manchester Metropolitan University and the International Centre for Labour Studies, the University of Manchester, on July 16–18, 2003. The conference organizers were Neville Kirk, MMU, on behalf of the Society for the Study of Labour History, Anne Morrow, on behalf of the International Centre for Labour Studies, and Greg Patmore, University of Sydney, for the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History. The aim was to bring together invited speakers in order to advance our knowledge and understanding of the labor history of Britain and Australia. Feedback received by the organizers suggests that this aim was successfully realized. However, attendance on the part of British colleagues was somewhat disappointing, perhaps a reflection of the minority interest among British labor historians in comparative history.

The conference is part of a wider and developing UK-Australian Labour History Project which broadly follows the work undertaken by Greg Kealey and Greg Patmore and their Australian and Canadian labor history colleagues. Papers presented to the Australian-Canadian Labour History conference, held at the University of Sydney in December 1988, provided the basis for the publication, in 1990, of *Canadian and Australian Labour History: Towards a Comparative Perspective,* edited by Kealey and Patmore. Further collaboration led to the publication in 1996 of *Australia and Canada: Labour Compared*, a special joint issue of *Labour/Le Travail 38 and Labour History* 71, also edited by Kealey and Patmore. Apart from two papers, the essays in the special issue were "jointly written by teams consisting of Australian and Canadian labour historians" on explicitly comparative themes. The production of joint essays on comparative themes, but this time with reference to Australia and Britain, is also the ultimate aim of the UK-Australian Labour History Project.

This aim is to be realized by means of three stages. The Manchester conference comprised the first stage. Their papers circulated in advance, the invited speakers from Australia, Britain, and the USA were asked to bring their expertise to bear upon a relevant subject area, mostly but not in all cases, from a *national* perspective. For example, Keith Gildart and Harry Knowles were paired on the subject of labour historiography, with the former covering the UK and the latter Australia. Similarly, the area of race was interrogated by Julia Martinez for Australia and Ken Lunn for the UK, while Karen Hunt, on the one hand, and Raelene Frances and Bruce Scates, on the other, addressed the issue of gender in, respectively, the UK and Australia. Other pairs and teams explored the areas of comparative history, labor archives, cooperative societies, trade unions, friendly societies, management and labor, labor and the state, labor and

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politics (labor and communist parties, the Cold War), volunteer labor, labor intellectuals and issues in working-class culture. The exception to the nationally-based general rule was provided by Paul Pickering, Tony Taylor, and Neville Kirk who, in their session on "Comparative Perspectives," explored the nature and impact of the ideas of, respectively, the Chartists, Henry George and pro- and antimonarchists, in the two countries. The papers were grouped into three strands: Historiography, Archives, and Comparative Perspectives; Institutions and Cultures; and The Political Economy of Labour.

While it is anticipated that the strand headings will provide the organizational framework for a planned book of comparative essays, the predominantly nationally-based papers presented at the conference will be transformed into genuinely comparative UK and Australian essays for inclusion in the same book. For example, Gildart and Knowles will jointly write, on the basis of their separate conference papers, a single piece which explores and attempts to explain key developments and similarities and differences in the labor historiography of the UK and Australia. The other pairs and teams will adhere to this format. This second stage of the project is currently in progress. The third and final stage, to be undertaken from the summer of 2004 onwards is for the editors, Kirk and Patmore, to prepare the essays for publication and to write a joint introduction which explains the origins and development of the project and which gives coherence to the book's many parts.

In sum, we have set ourselves an ambitious task. If successfully fulfilled, it will, in the manner of the pioneering Canadian-Australian project, further advance, and hopefully stimulate increased interest in, cross-national labor and social history. It will, hopefully, also spark off similar undertakings elsewhere in the world. These, in turn, could eventually lead labor historians in several countries to pool their efforts to explore the theme of "globalization from below." However, in the meantime we must keep our feet on the floor in order successfully to complete our immediate and more limited project.

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