CHAPTER 11

The Syndicalist Tradition

Although much of the B.L.F.'s activity during the early seventies was reminiscent of earlier syndicalist practice in Europe, Britain and North America, the most interesting comparison is with Australia's own brand of syndicalism, the Industrial Workers of the World (Australian Administration).

When discussing the place of the N.S.W. Builders Labourers within the syndicalist tradition, questions arise as to the correctness of syndicalist theory on such issues as the role of the revolutionary party. Although this problem will be touched on during this chapter, the question of the place of trade unions in revolutionary theory will be canvassed more thoroughly in chapter 12.

I especially wish to elaborate upon the practical function of B.L.F. ideology and its relation to the Syndicalist tradition. That is, I want to discuss, not what system of ideas motivated the B.L.F. leadership, but how they conceptualised these ideas and how they went about transferring them to the rank and file.

B.L.F. ideology, like most syndicalist thought, was never enshrined in manifestos, draft programs or even charters and preambles. Moreover, although the ideology of the B.L.F. was influenced greatly by the C.P.A. it was by no means identical to that of the Party. In fact, it could be said that the B.L.F.'s activities influenced C.P.A. thinking as much as the Party's ideology affected the B.L.F.[1]

B.L.F. ideology was never systematised in the way a political party seeks to set down, in written form, its principles and strategy in order to attract new adherents. For the Union and the party have different aims, and therefore different methods. Like all parties the C.P.A. found it necessary to elaborate its ideology in order to distinguish itself from its rivals and to gain and maintain a membership. The B.L.F. on the other hand needed only to educate its existing members. Its members were not the literati or "organic intellectuals" much prized by the vanguard parties, but unskilled workers, mostly uneducated, occasionally illiterate and often unable to read or speak English. The written word was simply an inappropriate tool in the circumstances. Not only were the members unaccustomed to the written word but the leaders themselves felt uncomfortable in print. The Union operated on the principle that

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1 See chapter 10.

all organising work, including the production of pamphlets and the editing of the journal be carried out by ordinary B.Ls and not by appointed "research officers" as is generally the case in other unions. This brought about a situation where written work was largely neglected.[2]

But in a membership of 11,000 largely concentrated in the Central Business District, the lack of written material was not a serious failing and in fact probably contributed to the internal democracy of the Union in that it did not draw distinctions between leaders and the led. It is much easier to stand up and refute an official's argument at a job-site meeting than it is to write a detailed criticism of his latest article. Yet B.L.F. theory, although ad hoc in nature, was quite extensive, both in its treatment of complex issues and in the number of issues with which it dealt. Sufficient remains in the form of written material, such as Federal Council agenda items, green ban pamphlets, Executive Minites and so on, to augment the memories of public speeches, television appearances, strike meetings and indeed the inevitable pub conversations. B.L.F. ideology emerges from all these sources as a coherent world view.

An atmosphere was generated whereby certain reactions in given situations were expected and the "goods" were inevitably delivered. Bob Pringle talks about the time he produced a press statement about a particular event only to discover that Jack Mundey, hundreds of miles away, belonging to a different party, and a product of different social forces, had produced much the same statement, almost to the last word. Differences among the leaders were very rare and, given the emphasis on "fighting it out on the job" and "taking it back to the members", differences between the rank and file and the leadership were also rare.

Above all, the Union ideology was most appropriately judged in its practical application. As Rushton observed of the Australian Wobblies "the significance of I.W.W. ideology lay not in its content but in its function...Activity was paramount; ideology served to rationalise what was fundamentally a non-rational movement".[3] Menashe goes further when he claims that "political work cannot be divorced from...social theory".[4]

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2 Ralph Kelly (Interview: 13 December 1977) recalls the difficulty he had in extracting promised articles for the journal from officials. He actually blames much of the lack of communication during Federal Intervention on the failure of the Builders Labourer to appear regularly during the seventies.

3 P.J. Rushton, "The Revolutionary Theory of the Industrial Workers of the World in Australia", Historical Studies, October 1972, p.433. I would argue with Rushton's belief that the I.W.W. was a "non-rational" movement.

4 Louis Menashe, "Vladimir Ilyich Bakunin: An Essay on Lenin", Socialist Revolution, 1974, p.15.

What the B.L.F. attempted and achieved was systematic and logical within their own belief structure. The fact that their beliefs remained, in themselves, unsystematised and even disorderly was a function of the extreme pressure under which they operated. Mick Tubbs, a C.P.A. observer, explains:

> ...often it wasn't so much the leadership itself pushing ideas as people inside and outside pushing them into the next step. The situation developed its own internal dynamics. It was difficult to find a period for consolidation.5

Not for the B.L.F. leaders the long years in prison or exile that produced classical syndicalism's weighty political and social tracts. Often Mundey had not the time even to read and check the weekly Minutes.

However, the fundamental belief of the leaders in the need to overcome bourgeois ideology was in no way hampered by their reliance on the spoken rather than the written word. In delineating the difference in outcome and intention of the written and spoken word Lenin has pointed out that propaganda, which was chiefly the printed word,[6] provided a revolutionary explanation of the social system "whether that be done in a form intelligible to individuals or to broad masses" whereas agitation, chiefly the spoken word, entailed the calling upon of the masses to undertake definite concrete actions.[7] Plekhanov further defined it thus:

> A propagandist presents many ideas to one or a few persons; an agitator presents only one or a few ideas, but he presents them to a mass of people.8

A thorough examination of B.L.F. ideology illustrates the extent to which a "revolutionary explanation of the social system" was propounded. Just as the Western Federation of Miners, forerunners of the American I.W.W. proclaimed that:

> ...capitalism...was indivisible...if Wall St. was the enemy, so was the Colorado Springs Mining Exchange; if John D. Rockefeller was to be fought so was John Hays Hammond, the Western Mining entrepreneur.9

So did Mundey, Owens and Pringle explain the relationship between "hot" foreign investment and rampant over-development in the Central Business District. The link-ups and analyses, the generalising from the particular

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5 Interview: Mick Tubbs, 26 October 1977.
6 V.I. Lenin, What is to be Done?, p.67.
7 Ibid., p.66.
8 Plekhanov, cited in ibid., p.66.
9 Melvyn Dubofsky, We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World, p.59.

that Lenin felt was so important for a true revolutionary consciousness was repeated often, not in the journal but at stop-work meetings and job delegates committees throughout Sydney.

Why was it so successful? First of all, the main ideologues of the B.L.F., chiefly Mundey, Owens, Pringle, Hogan, Cook, Hadfield, Pires, David, Rix and Olive were all competent and even accomplished speakers. They were honest in their approach to fellow workers; able to admit ignorance or even error, a quality much admired by Australian workers. Without the binding dogma of a vanguard party to impede them they found, like the I.W.W. before them, that their philosophy was "sufficiently vague and flexible to allow a good deal of doctrinal variation. This enabled them to maintain a decentralised organic unity with a minimal tendency to fragment".[10]

In fact a description of archetypal syndicalist Tom Mann could just as easily fit Jack Mundey:

> Enthusiasm, rhetoric and ceasless energy; an unsectarian unsystematic, eclectic thinker capable of an extraordinary range of responses; above all else an agitator...11

The lack of dogmatism was a welcome relief to the many workers in the building industry wearied by the recent sectarian upheavals of the "Maoist" and "Stalinist" splits. There was something about the B.L.F. leadership's use of commonplace terminology, that set them apart from the sectarian dogmatists of previous years. Much of their language as well as their ideology was derived from the "new left" influences of the late sixties. Phrases such as "participatory democracy" and "principled stands" were often used. They shared a general notion of what constituted a "good person". Regardless of party affiliations this "good person" would react correctly in a given situation. Part of what constituted a "good person" was total honesty. When Joe Owens was asked whether he was a communist he would answer: "Christ yes. Didn't you know?" He believed that one of the problems of the old Communist Party was the way they "deviously projected themselves as democrats rather than communists".

> I say I'm a democrat and a communist...one of the biggest things is openness...one of the best things you can possibly have.12

However to speak of "vague" or "unsystematic" beliefs does not imply that their ideas were not strongly held or were poorly thought out. For instance, although none of the three leaders could provide well

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10 Rushton, op.cit., p.433.
11 James Hinton, The First Shop Stewards' Movement, p.277.
12 Interview: Joe Owens, 4 April 1978.

defined descriptions of what constituted "middle class" or "working class" status in Australia,[13] all three demonstrated a clear understanding of exploitation and surplus value. For instance Joe Owens on the question of class, explained: "...a couple of friendly subbies [sub-contractors] I know around town employ me and make $2.50 an hour out of my work - that's class conflict".[14]

Similarly although both Owens and Mundey had little knowledge of revolutionary theory and shared with the C.P.A. a certain confusion about communist pluralism, both had well-formed views about the role of a revolutionary organisation. Thus Mundey emphasised during a discussion on revolutionary strategy:

> No organisation can do it [achieve revolution] of itself - thus this craziness about vanguard parties having all the knowledge...Union struggles can play the biggest part.15

Along with their openness was an almost missionary zeal for education. As with the Australian Wobblies they believed that part of the trade union movement's obligation was to educate the class and like the Wobblies they criticised trade unionism for failing to promote class consciousness:

> ...the capitalist system can not be challenged TILL WE UNDERSTAND... This will surely take place when the conscious workers successfully explain capitalism with all its ramifications to the conjured and deluded workers...Explain till our class becomes class conscious...16

Bob Pringle echoed the Wobblies: "Any worker will come to a better position when you explain how the system exploits him - you just have to argue it out with him".[17]

Certainly much of the B.L.F.'s supposed vagueness is typical of syndicalism in general. Sorel's belief that somehow the violent revolutionary overthrow of society had a purifying value of its own[18] was as indeterminate as was the B.Ls' belief that "going about things the right way would produce the right result".[19]

The criticism that Sorel said very little about what would happen after the revolution[20] is a standard attack on both anarchists and syndicalists. However there is little evidence that the tentative

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13 Interviews: Jack Mundey, Joe Owens, Bob Pringle.
14 Interview: Joe Owens, 4 April 1978.
15 Interview: Jack Mundey, 3 April 1978.
16 "The Class War", Direct Action, 12 May 1917.
17 Interview: Bob Pringle, 8 March 1978.
18 G. Sorel, Materiaux d'une theorie du proletariat (Paris 1918), p.199. Cited in James Joll, The Anarchists, p.211.
19 Interview: Bob Pringle, 8 March 1978.
20 James Joll, The Anarchists, p.211.

solutions hinted at by the B.Ls were any more vague in formulation than were those offered by "vanguard" parties operating within Australia at the time.[21]

One thing the B.L.F. had in abundance was a belief in their own destiny and an ultimate belief in working class power. Sorel describes this phenomenon as the power of the myth in politics: "They (myths) are not descriptions of things...but expressions of will".[22] And further:

> Myths must be judged as a means of acting on the present; any discussion on the method of applying them practically to the course of history is meaningless.23

Joll believed that this myth "the mystical belief in the ultimate triumph of one's cause, one's will to victory - is kept alive and propagated by an elite".[24] He believed this task was performed among the workers' movement of the twentieth century by the militant syndicalists. Certainly it would be no exaggeration to claim that in Australia of the early seventies the "elite" that maintained the "myth" of the ultimate power of working class struggle was the N.S.W. B.L.F.

Just as the Wobblies and early European syndicalists inspired workers and raised revolutionary morale by direct action and "propaganda by the deed" at a time when socialist parties throughout the world were floundering around in sectarian and intellectual crises; so did the N.S.W. B.L.F. restore militant workers belief in the power of struggle at the point of production at a time when social democratic and reformist ideology was saturating the labour movement as a whole. The small victories gained by workers as a result of the 1972 Labor Party electoral success and the economic boom being experienced in the early seventies had lulled many previously militant workers into a quiescent state. Only the B.L.F.'s explorations of new trade union territory and their insistence on control over the social product of their labour was a continual foretaste of further seizure of power for the class.

To some extent Sorel's theory that those organisations inspired by an irrational belief in their own destiny and mission, and not those based on intellectual constructions and rational analysis are the ones that survive in history and are the causes that triumph,[25] can be

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21 See chapter 10.
22 G. Sorel, Reflections on Violence, p.46.
23 Ibid., p.180.
24 Joll, op.cit., p.210.
25 G. Sorel, De eglise et de l'etat, pp.31-32. Cited in James Joll, The Anarchists, p.210.

vindicated by the way the B.L.F. succeeded beyond the expectations of the most optimistic cadres of revolutionary organisations. The fear that "this time they had gone too far" was often expressed by their supporters, even within the ranks of the C.P.A.[26] Their own messianic vision of a better world[27] (largely brought about by their own actions, in particular the green bans) meant that they often triumphed in tactically desperate situations. The fact that their belief was irrational and that their chances of success were minimal in a non-revolutionary trade union situation was irrelevant both to themselves and to the thousands of workers they inspired to believe in their dreams. Their message was almost their own victory. "What went on in the workers' minds was a revolution in itself"[28] argued Bob Pringle.

Rushton maintains that:

> The significance of IWW ideology lay not in its content but in its function. Doctrine did not provide them with a consistent philosophic basis for action. Activity was paramount; ideology served to rationalize what was fundamentally a non-rational movement.29

While not agreeing entirely that the B.L.F., or even the Wobblies were an "essentially non-rational movement" it is indeed true that the B.L.F. continually exemplified its ideology through actions rather than words. But as Holton points out: "...the seemingly atheoretical stance of many syndicalists should not be interpreted as unsystematic militancy but rather as a manifestation of 'ouvrierism'".[30] He believed that syndicalist movements labelled as amorphous or spontaneous displayed a far more coherent structure of aims and methods than seemed apparent at first sight:[31]

> Whilst most syndicalists rejected the idea of "theorising" as an abstract exercise, they were very keen to develop "theory" in another form, that is through the generalised experience of working men and women living under capitalism.32

Ouvrierism involved the rejection of intervention by outside experts and an exclusive reliance on mass working class experience and action. Even the working class militants like Haywood or Mann only represented the national leadership of a popular movement "absorbing the energies and aspirations of large numbers of unsung activists at the rank-and-file

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26 Interview: Judy Mundey, 13 March 1978.
27 Rushton, op.cit., p.432 refers to the Wobblies' "certainty of their own leading role in the impending cataclysm".
28 Interview: Bob Pringle, 8 March 1978.
29 Rushton, op.cit., p.433.
30 Bob Holton, British Syndicalism 1900-1914: Myths and Realities, p.21.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid., p.19.

level".[33] What better description of the B.L.F. leadership could be written? With their anti-intellectual, aggressively proletarian stance and their reliance on the rank and file to "continually pull us into line" (a phrase used by both Mundey and Pringle), the B.L.F. displayed all those characteristics of British syndicalism which Holton describes as "far more a movement of Bill Joneses on the firing line than of theorists like Sorel".[34]

Spriano believes that the "fundamental experience" of the workers during the Turin factory occupations of 1920 showed "what energies can be generated by a working class which does not restrict itself to a corporate struggle but tackles a whole society..."[35] Those two aspects of B.L.F. ideology which most challenged society as a whole were both born out of the struggle itself. Green bans arose out of a historic series of events unrelated to vanguard party or abstract theory,[36] and limited tenure of office evolved out of the fertile imagination of Jack Mundey who claims that:

> The driving force that made me suggest limited tenure was my own experience of seeing modern, contemporary unionism and seeing the need for some inbuilt guarantee for limiting power and having inbuilt renewal.37

Similarly, Mundey's belief in the efficacy of the general strike "at certain times" and his argument that the general strike would not be really possible without true revolutionary consciousness on the part of the majority of workers, echoes the views of Rosa Luxemburg, yet he emphatically denied with a laugh, that he "ever read Rosa".[38] Such anti-intellectualism was rampant amongst the leadership and struck a chord among the members. Seamus Gill, an organiser, when asked about Lenin's view that revolutionary consciousness had to be brought to the workers from outside replied merely "bollocks".[39] Tom Hogan, one of the few officials who ever admitted to reading Marx described his experience thus:

> He [Jack Demsey - a B.L.F. member of the C.P.A.] gave me Volume I of Capital and he underlined what he thought was the most important part of Karl Marx. I read about forty pages of it. I thought "Shit this is good stuff, I don't know what he's saying." It didn't influence me at all - it just convinced me that I was a dunce... Having gone through it at Party study groups later I realised that

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33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
35 Paolo Spriano, The Occupation of the Factories: Italy 1920, p.19.
36 See chapter 10.
37 Interview: Jack Mundey, 3 April 1978.
38 Ibid.
39 Interview: Seamus Gill, 28 December 1977.

> he hadn't understood it either - he'd underlined all the most irrelevant parts.40

This story illustrates two points about B.L.F. anti-intellectualism. Firstly, the humour and self-deprecation which the B.L.F. so often displayed and utilised skilfully is evident. Michael Schneider and Klaus Mehnert speak of the importance of humour in political education and that

> quite a few students who went into the factories behaved as if they were martyrs for the entire working class...This masochism for the Left by petty-bourgeois intellectuals, which banishes all humour from political work, is but the reaction of their suppressed class arrogance.41

Certainly the B.L.F. held in benign contempt the more dogmatic and serious members of the left-wing political sects that hung around their fringes. This contempt was typically displayed when, during Intervention, a young student Maoist attempted to address a group of staunchly loyal state B.L.F. members. They had physically ejected other Federal organisers from their site but for the student they contented themselves with nailing his briefcase to the floor while he was occupied in speaking. This tale was told with great glee in the pubs for weeks afterwards.

The Hogan story also neatly encapsulates B.L.F. lack of respect for knowledge and erudition. Their demeanour displayed little of the feelings of inadequacy that Sennett and Cobb found among American workers when confronted with academic interviewers.[42] The ease with which Mundey, Owens and Pringle confronted, and in fact overwhelmed, academic audiences was obvious.

This disrespect for intellectuals is of course a powerful strain within the syndicalist tradition. The Australian Wobblies referred to "Spittoon philosophers and blowhards".

> One D.A. [Direct Action] in the hands of a man who has paid for it will do more good than fourteen philosophers discussing the referenda and Michael Bakunin.43

The American Wobblies held similar views. According to Dubofsky: "In the final analysis, ideological disputation remained a form of academic nitpicking to most Wobblies...it sought to motivate the disinherited, not to satisfy the ideologue".[44]

To the European syndicalists such as Sorel, Halevy, Pelloutier and

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40 Interview: Tom Hogan, 28 October 1977.
41 Michael Schneider quoted in Klaus Mehnert, Twilight of the Young, p.108.
42 Richard Sennett & Jonathan Cobb, The Hidden Injuries of Class, p.37.
43 Direct Action, 15 January 1915.
44 Dubofsky, op.cit., p.170.

Pouget, anti-intellectualism was an important part of their doctrine. Sorel's bitter attacks on intellectuals, rationalists and bourgeois politicians were liberally scattered throughout his writings. Hector Bejar, a Peruvian revolutionary, encapsulates this extreme ouvrierist position when he writes:

> Discipline, warm affection, and modesty are not always characteristics of young students and politicians; the self-centredness of intellectuals repulses simple people.45

However, it would be wrong to ascribe anti-intellectualism only to syndicalist movements. Socialist parties had their problems too. Spriano accuses the P.S.I. in its early years of being "ouvrierist and primitively anti-middle-class and anti-intellectual in character".[46] Trotsky himself agreed with French workers' complaints that the French Communist Party contained too many petty-bourgeois intellectuals. He believed that further work was required to establish the proletarian character of the party.[47]

The difference of course is that anti-intellectualism amongst syndicalists is considered healthy and constructive whereas socialist and communist parties like to play down anti-intellectual strains within their ranks. The B.L.F. falls squarely within the syndicalist tradition on this count.

Another way in which B.L.F. expression of their ideology differed from "old left" practice was their reluctance to use jargon and revolutionary terminology which they felt their membership would be unlikely to relate to or understand. Rushton records the Australian I.W.W. as being similarly opposed to jargon. Direct Action accused Karl Marx of introducing "such a complexity of unnecessary terms that he lost himself and all his followers in the forest of terms he created".[48] Cohn-Bendit, during his anarcho-syndicalist period made a similar criticism. He claimed that Marx's writings in their present form constituted a closed book to most of the working class. He did not believe that this meant they could not be understood once they were translated into simple language.[49] This is exactly the way the B.L.F. leadership

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45 Quoted in F.R. Allemann, Macht und Ohnmacht der Guerilla, Munich 1974, p.209, cited in Mehnert, op.cit., p.109.

46 Spriano, op.cit., p.12.

47 Leon Trotsky, "The Anarcho-Syndicalist Prejudices Again!", Moscow, May 8, 1923 in Leon Trotsky on the Trade Unions, p.14.

48 Direct Action, 23 June 1917, cited in Rushton, op.cit., p.437.

49 Daniel and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit, Obsolete Communism: The Left Wing Alternative, p.14.

tackled their mission. Never once did terms such as "hegemony" or "surplus value" pass their lips but the ideas involved were simply and effectively explained.

The way in which the expression of ideology delineates and even alters the ideology itself is a subject I will not embark upon here but it is interesting to note the views of Menashe who applauded the "new left's" criticisms of "attempts to impose the politics and style of another epoch...on today's realities". He quotes veteran anarchist Bookchin "who is old enough to recognise how 'all the old crap of the thirties is coming back again'".[50] Although Mundey is critical of Bookchin's views on post-scarcity anarchism[51] he certainly coincides with him in criticism of Stalinist terminology. Both Owens and Mundey believe that the C.P.A. was held back until the "split" by outworn and old-fashioned dogma.

Many revolutionary writers have warned of the dangers inherent in strict adherence to dogma, but revolutionary parties have continued to fall into the same errors. Moshe Lewin points out that even Lenin, in emphasising the need to reject outworn dogmas, implicitly warned against dogmas being made out of his own theories.[52] The I.W.W.,particularly awake to those problems, believed that former revolutionary movements had failed because of too great a concern for "perpetuating particular dogmas" and emphasised that they must profit from past experience. This sort of flexibility and lack of official party direction was very apparent among the B.Ls and reacted strongly in their favour. Mundey often repeated his view that the C.P.A. "no longer bowed at the alter of Moscow or Peking" and felt quite free to espouse his own particular views on the Australian road to socialism, which were quite frequently not strictly Party-line at all. But given that he was their most prominent spokesperson at the time and certainly their most popular member and most effective recruiter, little attempt was made to modify or alter his semi-anarchistic, populist views.

The favourable reaction that Mundey and the other B.L.F. ideologues received was due to this mixture of humour, anti-intellectualism, clarity, honesty, flexibility and, above all, the fact that they were

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50 Menashe, op.cit., p.11.
51 Interview: Jack Mundey, 20 June 1978.
52 Moshe Lewin, Lenin's Last Struggle, pp.110-111.

never dull.[53] The B.L.F. campaigns which included posters, pamphlets, graffiti, balloons, sit-ins, picnics, demonstrations, Green Ban balls, crane occupations and a host of other imaginative tactics displayed both inventiveness and vigour.

Another point about B.L.F. propaganda was that it was never specifically Marxist. Marx, Engels and Lenin were never mentioned in any of the B.L.F. pamphlets and discussions. Although many of their views were straight Marxist or Marxist-influenced they were never acknowledged as such. Possibly, because of the anti-intellectualism rampant within the C.P.A. at the time, they were not aware that many of their pub conversations with Party members were based on Marxist views. In this respect they differed greatly from the Wobblies, particularly the Australian branch. The centrality of Marxist economics to their doctrine was continually stressed by the I.W.W. and in fact they believed they were the true heirs of Marx.[54] Even Rushton acknowledges the hero-worship that the Wobblies accorded to Marx.[55]

In contrast, Mundey, when questioned about his attitude to Marx merely criticised Capital for not taking into account the finite nature of the world's resources, and added somewhat patronisingly that he "could understand the way Marx didn't understand".[56]

Perhaps the most important similarity that the B.L.F. shared with the Wobblies was the fact that lack of theoretical sophistication did not detract from the import of their message. Dubofsky claims that:

> ...although I.W.W. theory added little or nothing to Marxism and continental syndicalism...it did have a dream of a better America where poverty - material and spiritual - would be erased and where all men, regardless of nationality or color, would walk free and equal.

He applauds the I.W.W. for trying "in their own way" to grapple with issues that "still plague the nation in a more sophisticated

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53 Lenin warns against dullness in one of his more quixotic attacks on the "intellectuals" of Rabocheye Dyelo who produced pamphlets and articles "which very often - pardon our frankness - are rather dull". He advocated "vivid exposures" of government activity and warned against the dangers of repetition in propaganda." V.I. Lenin, What is to be Done?, pp.73 and 74.

54 Verity Burgmann, "Directing the Action: The Politics of the I.W.W. in Australia", International Socialist, No. 9, makes a convincing argument for regarding the I.W.W. as Marxists rather than anarcho-syndicalists as they are generally categorised. I see the distinction as false because much of what critics have perceived as anti-Marxist in Syndicalism is based more on sectarianism than on fact.

55 Rushton, op.cit., p.437.

56 Interview: Jack Mundey, 3 April 1978.

knowledgeable, and prosperous era".[57]

This messianic, almost spiritual quality of the I.W.W. message is also described by James Jones in From Here to Eternity: "They called themselves materialist-economists but what they really were was a religion...they were welded together by a vision we don't possess".[58] Compare this description with the closing lines from Green Bans by Sydney journalist Peter Manning:

> The Mundeys and the Pringles and the Owens and the rest of the BLs' leadership and the rank-and-file have effected one of those rare shifts in public thinking that occurs only a few times in a life-time. Maybe they were madhatters and larrikins - a true Australian tradition - but, by God, there's many a Sydney resident who will remember them with love.59

One of the reasons that the Wobbly and B.L.F. missions became so popular was the essentially "home-brewed" nature of the message. Perhaps it was important that Manning should refer to the B.L.F. leadership as "larrikins". What is more Australian than a larrikin? For that matter what is more within the Australian tradition than a militant labourers' union with an ex-Rugby league star from the Atherton tablelands at its helm?[60]

The B.L.F. was a very Australian organisation. They suffered from none of the problems of integrating ideas from other cultures that other militant unions had encountered in previous times. The idea of "green bans" and Union activity around environmental issues was a truly home grown concept. Opponents of the B.L.F. leadership could never trade upon xenophobic suspicions of alien creeds.[61] Even the C.P.A. as the Union's major influence was seen to be moving away from its previous adherence to the Soviet line. It is perhaps fortunate for the Union that the C.P.A. was going through its most intensely independent phase during the early seventies. This independent nationalist (but not chauvinist) stance of the Mundey leadership was definitely to its

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57 Dubofsky, op.cit., p.xii.
58 Cited in Dubofsky, op.cit., p.x.
59 Marion Hardman and Peter Manning, Green Bans, final page (pages unnumbered).
60 Brian Fitzpatrick enlarges upon this theme in his writings.
61 Even the British eventually came to be considered unacceptably foreign to militant sections of the Australian labour movement. When old socialist and ex-Wobbly Donald Grant was photographed in evening dress beside the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester, the scornful comments from the labour press contained as much dismay at Grant's un-Australian act as at his role as class traitor. Socialist Comment and Review, Sydney, 1 June 1945.

advantage in its clashes with its only serious internal opposition, the Maoists, who were centred on the Metropole job-site.

The bonding of workers into an ethical and emotional union is obviously necessary for concerted action to develop. Engels wrote in 1893:

> I am strongly inclined to believe that the fatal hour of capitalism will have struck as soon as a native American working class will have replaced a working class composed in its majority by foreign immigrants.62

Although there was a large percentage of migrants within the B.L.F. the leadership was almost exclusively Australian-born and the ethos of the industry was very definitely Australian. Perhaps certain sections of the industry such as excavation (Greeks), concreting (Italians) and steel fixing (Finns) might have developed non-Australian characteristics[63] but the short length of time that workers remained in these areas and the general mobility of all building workers probably ensured a good indoctrination into white male Australian attitudes by the industry as a whole.

The B.L.F. was, in the eyes of its members a very Australian organisation, with values and attitudes, perhaps a little more honed than the average union, but certainly a product of the Australian class struggle and not a learned response from another country.

This fact was vitally important in the way the membership responded to the increasingly radical ideas put before them by the leadership.

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62 Quoted in Norman Pollack, The Populist Response to Industrial America, p.84.

63 This is obviously an area which deserves to be studied in greater depth. However language difficulties and the mobility of the labourers in these areas (see Introduction) has made this impossible.