

BOOK REVIEWS

Rowan Day, *Murder in Tottenham: Australia's First Political Assassination* (Sydney: Anchor Books Australia, 2015). pp. vi + 195. AU \$34.95 paper.

The little-known story of Tottenham in 1916 is symptomatic, according to Rowan Day, of "the darkness which blankets our understanding of rural Australia during this period" (2). Day argues that, while Sydney is more important than Tottenham in the story of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), ignoring the tales of individual country towns can distort our understanding of history. Certainly, it limits our understanding of the IWW. Day's book on "Australia's first political assassination" is a welcome addition to our collective comprehension of this significant movement in Australian labour history.

Tottenham is close to the geographical centre of New South Wales, a copper-mining town near Cobar. In the 1910s it was still in its infancy. That IWW Local No. 9 comprised new arrivals, from overseas and within Australia, suggests that the success of the IWW (the "Wobblies") in the district reflected a wider trend rather than unique circumstances in Tottenham. As Day stresses, they did not have time to be radicalised solely by local conditions, though local factors may have played a part. Tottenham did not have the old established "bunyip aristocracy" asserting a conservative influence on the community, as occurred in older country towns. Its industrial militants were nonetheless watched and harassed, especially those such as the Wobblies, who forcefully asserted that the working class and the employing class have nothing in common and who aspired to build One Big Union and create a new society within the shell of the old.

A 2015 book by Brigitte Studer, *The Transnational World of the Cominternians*, tells the stories of those who staffed the Communist International from 1919 to 1943. They led transnational lives and formed a cosmopolitan but closed and privileged world. The Tottenham Wobblies were peripatetic rebels of a vastly different kind, representative of a revolutionary syndicalist organisation composed disproportionately of dispossessed globetrotters from the ranks of the unskilled and semi-skilled transnational working classes. Their lives were far from closed and privileged.

Their tempers flared in tragic circumstances on 26 September 1916, goaded by the excessive repressive antics of local policeman George Duncan, bully and wowsler. As Wobbly Roly Farrell emphasised in one of his rabble-rousing speeches, "Nobody knows how a tortured brain will go if a man is dogged round and round." Day contends Duncan's shooting by Wobblies Roland Kennedy, Herbert Kennedy and Frank Franz at the Tottenham police station in an increasingly tempestuous environment is possibly the greatest demonstration in Australia of community tensions exploding into violence. Duncan and the Wobblies had diametrically opposed world views: Duncan, with thoughts of his brother fighting overseas, saw it as his duty to uphold the order that Roland and Herbert, whose brother Kevin was a Wobbly in the USA, saw as their duty to overthrow. "While the decision to pull the triggers was ultimately shaped by individuals, powerful, political, social and economic forces shaped the environment in which such an event was able to happen" (126).

Though state terrorism against working-class activists might be remorseless, individual terrorism in response is unethical and deeply unproductive, as Day's book clearly shows. In the case of the Tottenham Three, state terrorism continued by cold-blooded legal means in the executions of Roland Kennedy and Frank Franz, aided by the right-wing hysteria triggered by their killing of a policeman. That a Cabinet in the process of preparing an anti-capital punishment bill would endorse two hangings, one of which was of a Crown witness, shows this was a unique time in Australian history, according to Day. Franz had been told his life would be spared and his family given a £200 reward if he confessed and gave evidence for the Crown. Those who turned King's evidence in the case of the IWW "Sydney Twelve," framed on charges of arson, walked free, while the hangman awaited Franz and Roland Kennedy. The IWW paper *Direct Action* observed on 6 January 1917 that it was a sad, mad and bad thing to murder anyone – even a policeman: "But what about the hangman who committed two murders for nothing at all, but his blood money?" The IWW denounced individual terrorism as vehemently as it rejected capital punishment:

Those workers whose brains are so deranged by the system as not to know the difference between social war and individual spite, between social restitution and individual garrotting, are respectfully requested to first earn a stretch in gaol on their own responsibility, and on release to become agents for the police after the manner of their kind. The IWW needs their room for reasonable men.

Reflecting contemporary concerns in its unveiling of anti-authoritarian Aussie bush radicalism's disastrous encounter with transnational revolutionary industrial unionism, this book deserves attention.

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VERITY BURGMANN

Phillip Deery and Julie Kimber, eds, *Fighting Against War: Peace Activism in the Twentieth Century* (Melbourne: Leftbank Press, 2015). pp. 333. AU \$25.00 paper.

This book collects 15 of the papers presented at the 2015 national conference of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History (ASSLH) in Melbourne. The editors, in their thoughtful introduction, state that they chose papers that showed the efforts of those who "struggled to defend ordinary people against the disfiguring effects of pro-war policies." Their efforts are rarely acknowledged in the general histories of Australia, and of course our present day militarised ruling culture, heightened by state-sponsored commemorations of the WWI, ignores them completely. "It's time that changed," Phillip Deery and Julie Kimber declare.

The book begins strongly with Douglas Newton's chapter. As well as restating his ground-breaking argument that it is a myth that there was popular British support for war in 1914 (the anti-war forces were "simply overwhelmed by the speed of the crisis and the fait accompli of the government's sudden declaration of war"), he credits the international women's peace movement as the most stalwart of the forces in the anti-war coalition. These women remained united while the socialists,