# Red and Green: Towards a Cross-Fertilisation of Labour and Environmental History

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The three articles and research note in this thematic section explore intersections between labour history and environmental history, including productive alliances and tensions between the two. This introductory essay contextualises these studies by considering the nature of environmental history, its historiographical development, key contributions to the field in Australia and elsewhere, theoretical stances in the field, and what it is that environmental history can 'offer' labour history.

While labour history focuses upon the human face of labour, its emphasis has shifted over time. Early preoccupations with working class political histories and the development of the labour movement have been joined by an emphasis on the social and cultural development of working people, a broadening of interest from class to gender, race and ethnicity, and an increasing number of comparative and international studies. Through all of this, the working lives and politics of 'ordinary' people remain central. Environmental history, on the other hand, is the study of human interaction with the natural world over time. Its underlying premise is that humans shape their environment while the latter, in turn, shapes human activity. The introduction to this thematic asks: Is there a possible productive relationship between labour history and environmental history?

At first glance, labour history and environmental history might seem antithetical, with little sympathy or common ground between them. The history of organised labour, in particular, foregrounds material questions about adequate wages and safe workplaces (for workers) and profitability (for capital). The natural world is at most a backdrop to labour history, of no particular significance to the nature of class and other struggles. In contrast, histories of the environment focus on the natural world. While sociologically inclined environmental historians place much emphasis on the human beings who inhabit that world, they do so within a frame different from that which a labour historian would use; a frame that is unlikely to emphasise class and interrogate the nature of work.

However, there is more common ground than first meets the eye. Both labour history and environmental history deal with 'hidden histories'. For labour history, this means 'histories from below' of the struggle for better material conditions of subordinated *social groups*: the working class, women, Indigenous people and ethnic minorities. Environmental historians foreground previously ignored *natural processes*, interrogating the dynamic nature of the natural world and the way in which it is affected by and, in turn, affects human activity. Both are socially engaged forms of history, with utopian aims to expose unequal power relations and promote new social or environmental orders. This introductory contribution will argue that environmental history reminds labour historians that labour lives and works in ecosystems which are themselves affected by societal divisions such as class. An awareness of environmental history opens up new potential subject matter for labour historians and suggests theoretical approaches not often used in our field.

The initial impetus for this thematic section arose from a conference the Brisbane Labour History Association held in February 2010 where a mix of academic and activist papers was presented.1 The conference featured a number of prominent keynote speakers: Jack Mundey; Emeritus Professor Ian Lowe and Tony Maher, President of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Workers Union - Coal Mining Division (CFMEU). Those present subjected the conference title, 'Red, Green and in-between', to sustained analysis: what does it mean, and how can we get there as a society? The conference focussed on alliances between the union and environment movements – although this was by no means its only focus. The conference occurred post-Copenhagen, that 'grubby pact between the world's biggest emitters', 2 and was held in Queensland with its high economic dependency on black coal, which in tandem raise particularly salient issues. As this special issue was in production, the eruption of an Icelandic volcano threw the world into transportation chaos. Australia's global warming politics also came under sustained scrutiny from the community, with The Greens enjoying a surge in electoral support in the leadup to the 2010 Federal election. It felt like the right time and place to bring red and green together; to ask from a scholarly perspective, as well as an activist one: 'Labour history, environmental history: is there common ground between the two?' and 'If so, what mutually beneficial traffic can take place?'

## Red and Green in the Everyday

There are many ways in which red and green coalesce in a practical, everyday sense. The most obvious - for labour historians - is unions' involvement in environmental issues which, to date, has been limited and episodic. While unions, throughout their history, have campaigned on workplace health and safety, and related pollution issues, and were often involved in the growing conservation struggles of the 1960s, such as the fights over oil drilling on the Great Barrier Reef and Fraser Island sandmining, until recently they generally failed to develop a broader environmental agenda.3 The Builders' Labourers Federation Green Bans campaigning in the 1970s is a rare example of a union-driven environmental agenda with strong class dimensions, acknowledging that some of those class dimensions involved cross-class alliances, such as those with the residents of Hunters Hill regarding the protection of Kelly's Bush.<sup>4</sup> National unions like the CFMEU are currently attempting to come to terms with environmental issues,5 driven by government agendas regarding clean energy and climate change. The Australian Council of Trade Unions has launched a 'Clean Energy Jobs' initiative as well as the Union Climate Connectors program (in conjunction with nine affiliated unions and the Australian Conservation Foundation), and formed the Southern Cross Climate Coalition to lobby government and business about green issues.<sup>6</sup> However, the sustainability and the practical effects of CFMEU, ACTU and other union initiatives are yet to be seen. Since the World Trade Organization protests in Seattle in 1999, there has been discussion about the possibilities of wide-ranging alliances between workers and environmentalists that could reconfigure activism and politics. More sceptical reassessments have followed. While admittedly limited, these union initiatives respond to environmental problems such as global warming, and water quantity and quality. Unions' underlying concern is the desire to ensure that responses by governments and business to environmental problems are not at the expense of working people's jobs, wages and ways of life. Historically, however, rapid industrialisation was the vehicle for working class advancement. The union movement is continually caught between inherent contradictions. For example, opposing development that threatens wilderness places is likely to mean opposing the creation of new jobs and the CFMEU, for example, has faced this with respect to logging of old growth forests.<sup>9</sup>

There is a long history of direct action on environmental issues by working people outside of the formal labour movement but who identify strongly with local communities. 'The land' has meant much to movements of working people from the Diggers onwards, even if overt 'environmental' concerns were not at the forefront of people's imaginings until recently. 10 In the nineteenth century, agitation for the establishment of national parks was initially the preserve of enlightened middle-class activists concerned to popularise and protect the natural world. These movements led to the first National Park – Yellowstone – in the USA in 1872, the first Australian National Park (Royal Sydney) in 1879, and the establishment of the National Trust in the UK in 1895. 11 Yet there have also been episodes of mass working-class interaction with the environment. For example, the 1932 'mass trespass' in woodland areas in the UK12 led to the working class movement of 'rambling clubs', of which the Australian bushwalking movement is a counterpart. These two perspectives – the need to preserve the natural world and the right of ordinary people to enjoy this world – were the forerunners of the conservation movements of the late 1950s and 1960s.<sup>13</sup> By the late 1960s, 'conservation' and 'nature preservation' were viewed as staid and conservative cousins in a growing movement that covered broader interactions between human populations and the natural world, as well as issues of urban environments. In the 1970s 'environment' and 'ecology' became the terms used to describe the central concerns of a growing movement. 14 The 'modern' environment movement that arose during the 1970s has been central to environmental campaigns and has ensured that environmental issues remain on the public and political agenda. 15 It has been described as 'the most comprehensive and influential movement of our time'16 and as providing for 'post-industrial' society what the labour movement provided for industrial society. 17 Over the past four decades environment movement organisations have expanded in nature and scope to encompass many actors and organisations. Urban environmental issues have become prominent in the past few decades, encompassing the ways in which urban dwellers respond to and care for the nature on their doorsteps. This new focus on urban environments counters the tendency to see the environment as something pristine, wild and 'out there' 18 rather than the places in which people actually live and work.

Community-based environmental justice movements emerged from the environment movement in the 1980s – most strongly in the USA. <sup>19</sup> Environmentalists in some other developed countries and in the Third World have followed suit. <sup>20</sup> The environmental justice movement has an overt ideological focus, with activists arguing that environmental justice is meted out unevenly along race, class and other lines of social inequality. Environmental justice movements' agendas clearly overlap with previously mentioned union concerns about pollution and health and safety. While unions have sometimes been direct players in the environmental justice movement, more frequently the impetus has come from outside the formal labour movement.

New organisations and movements that do not fit neatly into the 'environmental movement' and 'green politics' boxes are beginning to emerge. Communities are responding to concerns about water, air and soil with bioregional strategies, including the so-called 'transition towns' initiative aimed at reducing energy consumption and creating more sustainable communities at a local level. <sup>21</sup> Such initiatives echo efforts throughout history to set up 'alternative' communities. This time, however, there is an additional edge to these initiatives due to the planet-wide challenges of climate change and 'peak oil' and what is to be done – or not done – about them.

The rise and consolidation – and sometimes the fall – of green political parties and the bureaucratisation of green issues illustrate the overlap (and tensions) between red and green. Everyday policy making, at least in Western democracies, now routinely recognises the environmental aspects of the location of new industries, even where green politics are not strong. Capital has responded to political and societal criticism of its treatment of the environment by a range of discursive and practical strategies around 'sustainability', creating the phenomena of green consumerism and green capitalism. Governments and business thus recognise 'green issues', albeit in limited and sporadic ways.

In sum, the human technologies that have come to the fore since 1945 – in a process one scholar has dubbed 'artificialisation' <sup>25</sup> – are turning our planet – its energy, its material and its water – upside down, and influencing all life forms, including we humans. Often quoted in the environmental history literature is C.S. Lewis's observation: 'What we call Man's power over nature turns out to be power exercised by some men over other men with Nature as its instrument'. <sup>26</sup> From a progressive political perspective, environmental problems and a widening social divide are inseparable issues. Top-down control of energy may disadvantage worker-citizens much more than the most extreme forms of neoliberal industrial relations regimes; carbon justice may become as significant an issue as wage justice.

This section has sketched some dimensions to the way in which 'the red and the green' intertwine and overlap in policy and practice. By taking 'a long view backward',<sup>27</sup> historians can offer contemporary policy makers and civil society actors significant additional insights. In adopting that long view, both labour *and* environmental history demand consideration.

#### Environmental History: Its Scope, Its Dilemmas and the Australian Scene

Environmental history has many definitions. Perhaps most simply it is 'the history of the mutual relations between humankind and the rest of nature'. <sup>28</sup> Environmental history does not leave humans out, but it expands the picture to:

take [in] *nature as an actor in history* as much as it takes *people as actors in nature*. It aims at a synthesis, although the weighting given to human or natural agency varies considerably between inquiries' [our emphasis].<sup>29</sup>

Nature in environmental history is both 'a physical setting' and 'a human invention'.<sup>30</sup> It can be material, cultural/intellectual or political in focus. The first – the material – emphasises physical issues, and concerns changes in the biological and physical environment and its impact on human societies. The second and third dimensions emphasise the formulation of nature as a 'human invention'. Cultural/intellectual

studies examine representations of the environment and nature in the arts and literature, paying attention to the social construction of nature by human beings. Political lines of enquiry explore the law and state policy regarding the environment.<sup>31</sup> Since the relations between the human species and its surroundings require an investigation of *social* relations and various *natural* relations (biological, chemical, physical), 'the scope of environmental history is, for all practical purposes, limitless'.<sup>32</sup> As Raymond Williams has observed: 'Nature ... is perhaps the most complex word in the language' so that '[a]ny full history of the uses of nature would be a history of a large part of human thought'.<sup>33</sup> Nature's time scale can be a brief moment or an eon: Ian Simmons's *Environmental History*<sup>34</sup> covers about 10,000 years of British environmental history. The methods used are those of both history and science and researchers need to become sufficiently fluent in the language of the natural sciences that are relevant to their work.<sup>35</sup>

Indigenous perspectives on the concept of 'nature' are especially salient in this context. The characterisation of 'wilderness' or 'untouched natural world' has been a central part of discourses on environmental history. Yet as Marcia Langton has pointed out, this characterisation is 'a symbol of colonial conquest and history'. <sup>36</sup> It both assumes *terra nullius*, and neglects the long association of Indigenous peoples with all parts of the landscape.

The genesis of 'modern' environmental history is not dissimilar to the genesis of 'new' labour history. The former dates from the 1970s, arising first in the USA as a new 'sub-discipline' within history.<sup>37</sup> It was seen by some as part of the expansion of New Left history, although others have disputed this.38 The popular ecology movement of the late 1960s and 1970s, epitomised by Rachel Carson's influential book, Silent Spring, published in 1962, certainly inspired and shaped environmental history.<sup>39</sup> Yet its intellectual forebears included both the American 'frontier historians' and the founders of the journal *Annales*. 40 In Australia environmental history emerged as a 'fairly inclusive, if somewhat diffuse' inter-disciplinary field of study, embracing geographers, naturalists and farmers. 41 Because of this diverse lineage, environmental history has particularly 'fuzzy and porous' borders; borders that overlap with historical geography, historical ecology and climate history, 42 with disease history, economic history, the history of science and technology, and subfields of social history including agrarian and urban histories.<sup>43</sup> Any natural locale is a subject for environmental history, including the forest, the garden, the beach and the suburb.44 Given the field's broad scope, it is unsurprising that environmental historians are forever highlighting 'new frontiers' in the field. A recent review mentions soils history, the environmental effects of human migration, and aquatically-based environmental history as 'subjects in need of researchers'.45 There are now some excellent monographs and edited collections which introduce the field.46 Like labour history, environmental history is a field with considerable border traffic with political, economic, social and cultural histories. This diffuseness is both a strength and a challenge, and throws up particular problems to which we shall return below.

Recent reviews of the field of environmental history have identified a range of dilemmas or sites of contestation. One theme is that there is 'declensionist' trend in much of the literature; that is, that the field's 'narratives are relentlessly depressing accounts of environmental destruction; just one damn decline after another' – although McNeill and Hughes, amongst others, now challenge this perspective.<sup>47</sup>

The 'problem of geographical scale' is identified as another theme; with the nation state being the wrong scale on which to operate for some regions such as Europe or South America. 48 Living on an island continent, Australian environmental historians can (and do) comfortably operate at both the continental and national scale. Some believe that environmental history pays insufficient attention to people. 49 It is true that large-scale environmental history may do so, but micro- and meso-environmental histories often foreground individuals<sup>50</sup> and many important works in the field have a strong social history flavour. There are fundamental, and irreconcilable, differences between environmental scholars who espouse anthropocentric positions,<sup>51</sup> in which human interests are central, and deep ecologists<sup>52</sup> who hold the philosophical position that humans should not be at the epicentre . A more moderate position is held by those who espouse ecocentrism,<sup>53</sup> namely that ecological problems should not be conceived with reference only to humans, but from that of the ecosystem as well. Finally, environmental history has been confined by 'the cultural constraints of western philosophies and colonial legacies', a problem that urgently needs to be addressed.54

Australian environmental history has been described as 'substantial, accessible and strong'55 in an unevenly developed field.56 It is said to focus on 'settler colonialism' and to be strongly influenced by the power of a harsh climate and geography, with 'little work on cities or on industrial themes'. 57 This is a contestable claim that we will explore later in the article. Geoffrey Bolton's 1981 Spoils and Spoilers was an early environmental work by an historian.<sup>58</sup> Other early works were authored by non-academics, including Eric Rolls,<sup>59</sup> a naturalist and farmer whose many works, including his history of the conquest - and destruction - of the Australian wilderness, A Million Wild Acres, influenced Australian environmental historians. 60 Significant recent book-length treatments of Australian environmental history are: Stephen Dovers' edited books; Tom Griffith's and Libby Robin's edited Ecology and Empire: Environmental History of Settler Societies; Robin's Defending the Little Desert and How a Continent Created a Nation; a recent social history The Salinity Crisis by Hugo Bekle and others; Ann Young's overview of Australian environmental history; Tim Bonyhady's monographs The Colonial Earth and Places Worth Keeping; and Sharon Beder's book, Global Spin (2002) on the reshaping by corporations of public opinion and political action regarding environmentalism.<sup>61</sup> The history of Australia's environment movement has been well-served by books by Hutton and Connors, Doyle, and Lines.<sup>62</sup> Tim Flannery, by training a zoologist and a serious scholar in the area of conservation and the environment, is Australia's best-known writer of popular works in the area, including The Future Eaters, The Weather Makers, and Now or Never: A Sustainable Future for Australia? 63 Some environmental histories, such as the innovative Desert Channels project, edited by Libby Robin with ecologist Christopher Dickman and artist Mandy Martin, defy categorisation. The project concerns the Channel Country and the Simpson Desert in south-western Queensland, and in addition to a book (due to be published late in 2010) it also involves art exhibitions, a CD and web-based materials.64 Historian and activist Jackie Huggins, of the Bidjara (Central Queensland) and Birri-Gubba Juru (North Queensland) peoples, has authored innovative, historically aware ethnographies of place that, like Desert Channels, defy categorisation but could be seen as environmental histories from an Indigenous perspective. 65 All these works are innovative, sociologically-aware environmental histories, illustrating McNeill's point about the strength, vibrancy and theoretical soundness of Australian environmental history research.

In Australia and elsewhere, formal academic networks support the field. The Australian and New Zealand Environmental History Network was established in 1997,<sup>66</sup> a decade after the US network but some time before the creation of the European equivalent.<sup>67</sup> The discussion network and clearing house for environmental information, H-Environment, is a vibrant part of H-NET, the Humanities and Social Sciences Online initiative supported by various organisations of environmental history academics.<sup>68</sup> Major English language journals are *Environmental History*, published in the USA since 1976, and *Environment and History*, published in the UK since 1995.<sup>69</sup> The journal *Capitalism*, *Nature*, *Socialism* is also worthy of mention. Given the breadth of their research interests, environmental historians in Australia tend to publish in an eclectic array of journals, including those in history, politics, sociology and humanities, as well as those in conservation, ecology and the various branches of the natural sciences. Australia does not have its own environmental history journal, in contrast to New Zealand which has had *Environment and Nature in New Zealand* since 2006.

#### **Environmental Theory**

Given the eclecticism of environmental history's subject matter and the field's interdisciplinarity, it is not surprising that environmental history draws from diverse theoretical viewpoints. Some scholars have suggested that environmental history does not significantly contribute to theoretical development,<sup>70</sup> nor respond to contemporary social science theory,<sup>71</sup> but rather undertakes the more modest task of 'challenge[ing] social theory to take nature more fully into account'.<sup>72</sup> There is not space in this essay to comprehensively explore this issue, but simply to sketch some of the theoretical viewpoints adopted by environmental historians that may be of interest to labour historians. They include social movement theory, political theory, eco-feminist and eco-Marxist thought, and labour geography.

Social movement theory provides a rich vein of conceptual and theoretical material, particularly for scholars of protest events and campaigns. This is an area of scholarship that is familiar to many labour historians, and provides analytical tools for exploring red-green activism. Mainstream political theory increasingly engages with environmental issues, putting forward an environmental (or green) political theory. Environmentally-inflected political theory is clearly useful for exploring such issues as the history of green parties. Environmental scholarship also uses gender analyses, with Val Plumwood's work on eco-feminism being a significant example. This draws on various trains of feminist thought, including socialist feminism, and challenging some of the dualisms (of woman/nature, culture/nature, 'civilised'/'primitive' and so forth). Eco-feminist approaches combine elements of feminist, political and ecological thinking, drawing connections between patriarchal structures that oppress women, and attitudes that lead to environmental damage and hinder women's access to and control of natural resources. Eco-feminism provides a lens for research focussing on environmental justice issues.

Marxist and neo-Marxist theory has strongly influenced some environmental historians, via *eco-Marxism*. Marx recognised that man was part of nature, and that alienation was two-fold: from one's body, and from the natural (that is, the 'external')

world. Hence, according to Marx, a new relationship needs to be established between people and nature to overcome this so-called 'metabolic rift'. While this strand in Marx's own work has typically been characterised as 'minor' or 'implicit', scholars such as Howard L. Parsons have analysed the more fundamental role that ecological thought played in the writings of Marx and Engels.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, left geographers and others have argued that Marxian political economy can be read in more productive ways.<sup>78</sup> This tradition was taken up in the 1970s by activists such as Barry Commoner.<sup>79</sup> Scholars such as Ted Benton,<sup>80</sup> Joan Martinez-Alier and colleagues<sup>81</sup> and James O'Connor<sup>82</sup> subsequently developed the green Marxian tradition into a green political economy which, amongst other fields of enquiry, has led to work by O'Connor and others on the moral status of non-human animals. John Bellamy Foster's writings synthesise Marxist theory and historical scholarship in a particularly accessible way.<sup>83</sup> Eco-Marxist theory can be used to analyse the responses by capital and the state to the 'ecological crisis', and to examine the contradictions of the labour process for abattoir workers, to give but two examples.

Labour geography provides strong common theoretical ground between labour and environmental history. For Gunther Peck, 'studying geographies of labor offers new energy for considering the manifold ways class identities have been forged beyond points of production, in the natural and built environments that have created and nurtured working-class people'. Labour geography is a tool increasingly familiar to labour historians that can help tease out the ways in which human work and nature are mutually constitutive, and how both capital and class (and increasingly, gender, race and ethnic) relations are transformed by nature and, in turn, may transform nature. Labour geography, in short, can help bring 'class' into environmental history by revitalising understandings of labour, both past and present, and can bring 'nature' into labour history.

Again, this is a sketch of trends and some sources from a much larger range, simply to give a flavour of some of the currents of 'green thought'. There are many other threads to the tapestry of environmental theory and here Hay's *A Companion to Environmental Thought* is a particularly useful guide.<sup>85</sup>

### Environmental History and Work: Labour History and the Environment

Is there a possible productive relationship between labour history and environmental history? A major recent review found that '[t]here remains little "nature" in labor history and few working-class subjects in environmental history'. <sup>86</sup> Their genealogies suggest why this might be the case. Labour history originated as a study of 'the transformation of "uncivilised" people ... into a disciplined and trained new workforce' in an industrialising and urbanising world where nature had to be 'subdued and dominated'. <sup>87</sup> As organised labour developed, material questions about living wages and safe workplaces (for the workers) and profitability (for capital) were foregrounded, relegating 'environmental initiatives into the background, out of direct view and attention'. <sup>88</sup> While a 'modern' environment movement – focused on a critique of industrialisation – developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s, an 'old' labour movement – focussed on a critique of capitalism – was entering a crisis spurred by the increasing hold of neoliberal ideologies. At times, the two movements were sharply in conflict on issues to do with 'jobs versus the environment'. Further, the labour movement mobilised around discourses of class, while the environment

movement is often said to be 'post-material', basing its strategies on identity politics, and strongly middle class.

However, the common ground between labour history and environmental history is somewhat broader than might be supposed. Firstly, labour history, to state the obvious, is not only about the history of the labour movement. In its newer versions, which are no longer now so 'new', it encompasses histories of working people outside formal labour institutions - and the full interests of workers are not necessarily captured by union agendas. Secondly, the labour movement has developed new identities and forms of action in recent years, the notion of class has become more complicated and, while some forms of environmental activism are the province of the middle classes, there is increasing recognition that this is not always the case. Both the labour movement and environmental organisations are attempting to regulate the two dominant processes of capital accumulation: control of labour power, and control of nature. Hence, as Taylor suggests, one could argue that social and environmental histories are 'fundamentally compatible and mutually reinforcing'. Both deal with 'hidden histories', 'uncover[ing] processes and long term changes which might otherwise remain invisible'.89 For labour history, this means 'histories from below' of subordinated social groups: the working class, women, Indigenous people and ethnic minorities; while environmental historians foreground previously ignored natural processes.

Environmental history does not fully take 'work' into account; at least, not as fully as labour historians might wish. A 'blind spot' in environmental history is the full consideration of the nature of work, workers' institutions (and extra-institutional concerns and activism), and the nature and prevalence of working landscapes. Part of the reason for this neglect may be that, in dealing with the undoubted complexities of the human-nature relationship, environmental historians ignore or de-emphasise other sources of complexity, including 'the subdivisions and conflicts that so interest social historians'.90 One of the few labour-aware scholars within the ranks of environmental historians, US scholar Richard White, takes environmental historians to task for three misconceptions relating to labour: equating productive work in nature with destruction; ignoring the ways in which work can be a means of 'knowing' nature; and sentimentalising and romanticising particular kinds of work – for example, peasant farming or Indigenous practices – as protecting nature from harm, without a broader acknowledgement of the work-nature interface. 91 Nature, in this view, becomes 'a paradise where we leave work behind'.92 White argues that this view ignores empirical realities, and has led to a myopic view amongst environmental historians. White himself places 'work' centre-stage in environmental history. He argues that much too narrow a view has been taken of the connections between work and the environment. If the work of park rangers, timber-cutters, farmers and workers in polluting industries is connected with the environment, so too is his own and other academics' work via the electricity that powers their computers.93 The service industry (such as child care, home cleaning) that supports work also has socio-political dimensions that connect to the environment and have class dimensions, something that White's work does not recognise. Several of the US environmental historians who have followed White have deployed class analysis, for instance in so-called 'frontier histories' of the American West. Lawrence Lipins in his labour and environmental history of the frontier94 places class at the centre of his analysis, tracing some of the shifting alliances and conflicts in early twentieth-century Oregon between commercial interests, farmers, and the middle class and working classes (urban and rural). By writing 'hybrid histories', scholars like Lipins provide a window for labour historians into environmental history.

Australian labour history has acknowledged the environment – sometimes foregrounding it and weaving it into the narrative, sometimes only in passing. Shirley Fitzgerald's Rising Damp: Sydney 1870-1890 (1987) links urban and economic development with the hardening of class divisions, skilfully and thoroughly teasing out both the labour history and environmental history aspects of her subject matter. The book opens by examining the nature of the urban space and its health perils, themes which are then carried through the book. Rising Damp is typical of some Australian social histories that do not proclaim their environmental history credentials, yet fall squarely within that territory. A few institutional union histories, of which Australia has produced many, deal in more than a cursory way with the nature of the environment and its interaction with labour processes and institutional development. John Merritt's *The Making of the AWU* (1986)<sup>95</sup> is a case in point here. A range of Australian labour historians have dealt with the politics of pollution and environmental hazards on the shop floor. 96 Historians have drawn links between home and work. For instance, several studies examine the class and gender impacts of lead contamination, and another explores Indigenous perspectives of environmental pollution.<sup>97</sup> Histories of mining link nature and labour in their discussion of the politics of working-class nature and working-class labour. There are many such examples in the Australasian Journal of Mining History and in Labour History, although frequently issues to do with 'nature' are de-emphasised. Historians using tools drawn from labour geography have created rich 'histories of the present' where the natural environment is more than a backdrop, including Bradon Ellem's work on the iron ore industry. 98 While many labour historians have focused their attention on the urban and industrial context of waged work, some focus on agricultural pursuits, with a few such studies specifically acknowledging the role of the environment. 99 Class- and race-inflected studies of the perception – individual and social – of 'country' have been conducted by Heather Goodall. 100 The Green Bans of the 1970s in Sydney have been particularly well addressed by a range of scholars and activists, including Jack Mundey, Verity Burgmann and Meredith Burgmann, and Greg Mallory. 101 Australian urban histories with an environmental edge are forging strong links between 'social, cultural and ecological perspectives', 102 as are some rural histories. A number of contributions in Jill Roe's edited collection Twentieth Century Sydney (1980) forge such links, as does Grace Karskens's The Rocks (1997), Andrea Gaynor's Harvest of the Suburbs (2006), Heather Goodall's work on the Georges River and George Main's Heartland (2005), an examination of environmental change in rural areas in southwestern New South Wales. 103 These and some other exceptions aside, however, it is generally true that in Australian labour history 'nonhuman nature' beyond the shop floor or workers' homes is largely absent from the story.

The three papers and research note in this thematic address aspects of this 'absence' by exploring some of the intersections between labour and the environment. The article by Heather Goodall and Allison Cadzow, and that of Janis Bailey both explore the creation of national parks. Goodall and Cadzow's article examines the creation in 1961 of Sydney's Georges River National Park (to face downgrading

and then eventual restoration of national park status in 1991), while Bailey's article considers the creation of the Lesueur National Park in Western Australia in 1992 (with the major period of campaigning being 1989-90 in order to oppose resources company CRA's plans to mine and to operate a power station in the region). Working people agitated for the Georges River park, the park shaping their identities and the working-class campaigners, in turn, defining bushland as a key part of their interests. A complex set of cross-class, rural-urban alliances campaigned for the Lesueur park, including local landholders, other residents, conservation groups and unions. In teasing out these two histories, Goodall, Cadzow and Bailey highlight the tensions and complexities of environmental campaigning, emphasising the complex nature of class interests and highlighting how 'nature' is both a landscape of work and of leisure. Joce Jesson's article analyses the formation and development of a 'living museum' in Auckland. A study of the preservation of Maori heritage and the dilemmas of exhibiting or re/presenting history, this article shows the dilemmas of attempting to keep alive a facility that gives a deep understanding of the natural and cultural heritage of Indigenous people. Tony Harris's research note very usefully summarises personal papers that he has placed in the State Library of NSW relating to the early history of the Sydney Greens in the 1980s, papers which of course are now open to other scholars to use.

#### Conclusion

The intersection between environmental history and labour history is fruitful territory. There are at least four ways in which this encounter is useful. Firstly, environmental history can expand labour historians' awareness of the range of topics that are 'on the agenda'; an agenda to which labour historians can bring their own sensibilities, and their own methodological and theoretical tools. The first section of this article highlights some of the salient issues here.. These include (but are not limited to) when and why labour movements might become actively involved in environmental campaigns, and when and why environmental issues might be pursued by non-institutional forms of working-class (and cross-class) activism. Secondly, the attention paid by environmental historians to the natural world suggests to labour historians that the environment should be seen as a force in its own right. While labour history is by definition an anthropocentric social science, the natural environment is more than simply a backdrop to class and other human struggles. Thirdly, labour historians may be inspired by ideas from environmental history and its theorists to approach 'old' topics – such as urban working class histories, histories of 'the bush', mining histories – with a fresh gaze from an environmental point of view, adopting new methods and theories. Lastly, there are lessons and new insights awaiting environmental historians who take a more detailed look at working class and labour movement history to elucidate further the complexities of the relationships between the natural and human spheres. As recently noted, 'not all global narratives are the same' and environmental histories may run the risk of obscuring 'the interactions between local, regional, and specific global processes by highlighting supposedly worldwide processes';104 labour history provides a useful antidote to such tendencies.

Becoming aware of environmental issues does not mean mitigating the significance of societal divisions such as class, gender, race and ethnicity; rather it

means adding a consideration of factors relating to the natural environment. Both labour history and environmental history are socially engaged forms of history, with aspirations to expose unequal power relations and promote new social orders. Labour historians and environmental historians can 'reinforce one another by attending to the social inequalities of environmental consumption' in which larger burdens are borne by those who can least afford it, 106 thus addressing material inequalities in both senses of the term, economic and environmental. Environmental history thus gives impetus to labour historians to 'green' their histories, to explore the past in ways that are more fully materialistic, in all senses of the word.

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#### **Endnotes**

- \* This article has been peer reviewed for Labour History by two anonymous referees, whom the authors thank for their useful and constructive feedback. We also acknowledge the input of Greg Mallory and Dale Jacobsen, co-organisers of the conference at which the articles in this thematic were presented.
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