

WILLIAM LANE, THE PROPHET OF SOCIALISM

The Tragic Paraguayan Experiment

[By J. B. HENDERSON]

(Read at a meeting of the Royal Historical Society of
Queensland on 27 June 1968.)

Today the name of William Lane is associated usually only with the ill-conceived though sincere and rather tragic experience of his so-called Communist experiment in Paraguay. It is true that the plan and its attempted implementation were almost entirely due to him and it is essential that the necessary conclusions be drawn from its failure.

Conclusions have been drawn — diametrically opposite conclusions.

Some hold that the failure of “New Australia” and later “Cosme” as the settlements were called show that Socialism and Communism are idle dreams incapable of realisation.

On the other hand, serious Socialists today, in common with some in Australia at the time, point to the failures as proof that Socialism cannot be built by running away from society into the primitive jungle but, being a higher form of society than capitalism, can only arise on the basis of the level of the given society.

Whatever conclusion we support, it is true to say that, viewed historically, viewed with the advantage of hindsight, that the ill-fated Paraguayan experiment should not be seen as William Lane’s only, nor indeed his main, contribution to the Labor movement. It did play its part, chiefly in the formulation of the political conclusions I have just mentioned.

Lane’s influence upon the Australian Labor movement did not end with his departure to Paraguay. Far from it, because he had left an imprint upon the movement that was to influence it for years to come. Some contend that that influence continues.

W. G. Spence, that great builder of Australian unionism from 1886 to 1917, says of Lane that he “framed the policy of the Queensland Labor movement.”

W. O. Lilley wrote:

“It was his magnificent writings in the early ‘Workers’ which touched the latent sentiment so strong in the Aus-

tralian bushman and which made the shearers and labourers' unions in the country districts such strong adherents of the paper as well as loyal supporters of Labor candidates in every subsequent fight. He was the man who controlled the strings of the movement and fired the courage of the actors in the lawless scenes that followed."

St. Ledger declares:

"When future historians ever undertake the task of of the phenomenon of Australian Socialism, Lane's writings in the 'Worker' will be found the forces from which all further and subsequent explorations must begin."

Lloyd Ross, from whose book, "*William Lane and the Australian Labour Movement*," these quotations are taken, correctly points out that St. Ledger tends to exaggerate the personal influence of Lane and ignore the social conditions.

William Lane was born at Bristol on 6 September 1861; he had three brothers and two sisters. One of the brothers, Ernie Lane, became famous in the Queensland Labor movement, especially for his writings under the name of Jack Cade. I got to know Ernie Lane and had many talks with him at his home in Dauphin Terrace, Highgate Hill.

It was here that he wrote his book "*Dawn to Dusk*" and the following quote from this book will give some indication of the early childhood environment of the Lane brothers:

"Reverting to my childhood and early training, unlike some, I have no Chartist or rebel ancestors or traditional progressive background. The youngest of five brothers, William was the eldest, I was steeped to the neck in idolatrous worship of Church and State, British infallibility, and justice, and shuddered with childish horror at the mere thought of radicalism and Atheism; the two bogies of those days. Our father had emerged from a peasant environment in Ireland to that of a humble member of the petty bourgeoisie; and that was the orbit round which the whole family revolved in glamorous abasement. Disraeli and Queen Victoria were our god and goddess, while Gladstone and John Morley symbolised all that was evil and destructive. Socialism, to us and millions of others, in the seventies of last century, was utterly unknown."

William Lane arrived in Brisbane in 1885 at the age of twenty-four. His brother Ernie had arrived the previous year. Ernie was then fifteen.

BACKGROUND OF HARDSHIP AND POVERTY

Their mother died after a life of struggle, of hardship and

poverty not unconnected with the drinking of her husband. Legend has it that William's life-long abstention from and great hostility to drink was the result of a promise to his mother. It is clear that his chivalry and practical sympathy for women throughout his lifetime was in no small way the result of her unhappy life.

He had a good education for a lad in his position, passing the Oxford preliminary examination before he was 14 years of age and he retained a great love of the classics.

His first published piece of writing was in defence of a painting by Lady Butler which professional critics had attacked. It appeared in the "*Bristol Times and Mirror*."

At the age of 16, two years after his mother's death, Will left for America. It is typical of him that though out of sympathy with his father, he continued to support him throughout his life. It was during his wanderings through U.S. and Canada working at various jobs that William Lane's desires to improve the social conditions of working people, especially women, crystallised.

It was in Canada that he came to journalism—printer's devil, compositor and then reporter. Here he married a Miss Annie Macquarie, beginning a lifetime of married happiness.

Upon learning that his brother John was leaving England to join Ernie in Brisbane, William and his wife returned to England and with John sailed for Australia in the "*Quetta*."

Ernie had nominated them as immigrants.

Lloyd Ross states that William's books included Adam Smith's "*Wealth of Nations*," Ricardo's "*Principles*,"¹ Karl Marx's "*Capital*," Henry George's "*Progress and Poverty*"² and Gromlund's "*Co-operative Commonwealth*."

NOT INFLUENCED BY MARX

Subsequent events prove that Marx had little if any influence on Lane. Marx was the implacable enemy of Utopianism and Lane was essentially a Utopian.

However, as far as I am aware, the English translation of "*Capital*" was not published until 1887, two years after

1. David Ricardo (1772-1823), published in 1817 "*The Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*." It is the work on which his reputation as an economist chiefly rests. It is not a complete treatise on political economy, but it is basically a discussion of some of the principal factors of the science, e.g. value, wages, rent, etc.

2. Henry George (1839-1897), American author and political economist, wrote *Our Land and Land Policy* in 1871, and in 1879 appeared his most celebrated work, *Progress and Poverty*, in which he promulgated the theory that to the increase in economic rent and land values is due the lack of increase in wages and interest which the increased productive power of modern times should have ensured. He proposed the levying of a tax on land so as to appropriate economic rent to public uses, and the abolition of all taxes falling upon industry and thrift. He lectured in Great Britain, Ireland and Australia.—Ed.

Lane arrived in Australia, and he was unable to read Russian or German, the only languages in which it had appeared up to that time. Indeed, the second volume of "*Capital*" was first published (in German) in 1885, the year of Lane's arrival in Australia.

It appears certain that Ross is in error here and that Lane had not read "*Capital*." Marxist literature was a rarity in Australia in the formative years of the Labor movement, and it is clear that it is erroneous to identify the Paraguay experiment with the teachings of Marx.

The third volume was published in 1894, a year after Lane had arrived in Paraguay.

While other Marxist works may have come his way, a reasonable conclusion to draw from his writings and actions is that he was not a Marxist and indeed in many ways was fundamentally in opposition.

His first job in Queensland was to report a dance for "*Figaro*," a society weekly. The story has it that his wife pawned her wedding ring to buy his ticket of admission and when paid for the article he was able to redeem the pledge.

INFLUENCE AS JOURNALIST

His rise in the journalistic world of Queensland was meteoric. His influence soon became remarkable throughout Australia.

He contributed to most leading newspapers but chiefly for the Brisbane "*Courier*" for which he reported on a variety of topics.

He loved to write. It was very much compulsive. His interests were wide. Whatever touched the lives of the people was a fit topic for his pen. He wrote quickly and well. As "Lucinda Sharp," he contributed a weekly letter to "*Figaro*" where, dressed in feminine and fancy garb, thought-provoking matter was expounded for women readers.

As Parliamentary commentator for the "*Telegraph*," he came into touch with the politicians of the day. Then, as editorial writer for the "*Courier*" he quickly absorbed the popular ideas of the period. Later, as Labor writer for the "*Evening Observer*" he began to alter the ideas, held both by workers and employers. (Lloyd Ross's "*William Lane and the Australian Labor Movement*.")

For the "*Leader*," a religious weekly, he wrote a series of articles, "*Round the Churches*," dealing with each denomination in turn.

His articles under the pen-name of "*Sketcher*," which he contributed to the Brisbane "*Observer*" on poverty, squalor

and vice in the city, lifted him to the forefront of public appreciation.

His story on the conditions of prisons in Brisbane, to obtain which he posed as a drunkard so as to be arrested, is well known. In this, he had the assistance of a progressive merchant who had taken a leading part in the early closing campaign. The merchant's name has lived on in Brisbane as Finney. The fact that Lane was shown to be a life-long non-drinker added spice to the story.

There appears little doubt that his writings for the "*Observer*" attracted the attention of, and began to influence, the Labor movement.

His "*Labor Notes*" brought him into contact with labour and so helped him form his political ideas.

It appears that from this period he began to devote himself to seeking remedies for the wrongs he saw as well as exposure of those wrongs which he had concentrated upon in the past.

Earlier I have indicated that Lane did not have a profound knowledge of socialist theory. In fact, he wished to avoid challenging vested interests.

He wrote in the "*Observer*" that great reforms are "*evolved not evoked*"; that "*future generations*" will slowly secure control of the machinery of production and distribution; "*until civilisation is thus ripe, it is wisest, as well as best, to have fair and honest dealings between employers and employed.*"

ESSENCE OF GRADUALISM

Here is the very essence of gradualism, and when events showed, as they did, that gradualism was not evolving in the direction hoped for by Lane, then for him it was quite logical that he should lead his followers into the wilderness to build the Utopia he had dreamed of.

In September 1885, the Brisbane Trades and Labor Council was formed and Sir Timothy Coghlan³ claims that it was mainly through Lane's influence.

I do not think this claim can be substantiated as, according to his brother Ernie's book, that was the year that William arrived in Australia. True, he lost no time in throwing himself into activity, but there is ample evidence to show that

3. Sir Timothy Augustine Coghlan (1856-1926), economist and statistician, published in 1918 in four volumes his most important book, *Labour and Industry in Australia from the First Settlement in 1788 to the Establishment of the Commonwealth in 1901*. It is a history, not of the Labor Movement, nor of Australia, but of labour; it is especially valuable for its information about the prices of commodities and the consequent effect on the social life of the people.

unionism was well developed in Brisbane long before William Lane's arrival.

Be that as it may, there can be no doubt that it would have met with Lane's approval.

THE ANTI-CHINESE LEAGUE

In particular, the Anti-Chinese League set up by the Trades and Labor Council must have delighted him. On this, he was quite fanatical and completely irrational. His pronouncements on the coloured question were devoid of "all sense of equality, internationalism, decency and respect for science."

Here are two samples from the "*Observer*":

"What could we expect from the Chinese but contamination, what could we dream of getting from the hordes of the East in all its loathsome nakedness and shame? Is it a recommendation to us that a Chinese is rich, if, under the protection of his roof, Sodom and Gomorrah are put to blush, sanitation ignored and decency denied."

and again:

"The coolie is a cur, a poltroon, a miserable tinker of a sailor whose only commendation is that he is cheap and reliable. . . . The blacks in our plantations, the lascars on our coasts, the Chinese in our towns and on our squatterages all threaten the life of white Australia. Unless Australia is to be white, what does it matter to us what becomes of it?"

Towards the Australian aborigine he adopted a rather different attitude. He took a sentimental approach to them, opposing discrimination or separation of both aboriginal and half-caste children in the schools.

However, I can find no evidence of his advocacy of equality in other fields.

In justification of Lane's standpoint on the colour question, it is sometimes pointed out that Chinese labour was threatening the living standards of other Australian workers.

To some extent this was true, but as a Socialist one would have thought that Lane's task would have been to work to raise the living standards of the Chinese who were ignorant of the role they were being compelled to play.

This obsession of Lane's was to find expression in Paraguay with his hostility towards any association between the single men of the colony and the native inhabitants.

ADVOCATED TRADE UNION FEDERATION

It is of interest to note that Lane advocated that kindred trade unions should be federated into four great subdivisions

—marine, printing, building, and ironworking federations.

Over the past few years steps have been taken to bring this about and today at least three of these subdivisions are fairly well advanced.

And in all his preaching to the unions his campaign against drink never ceases. For example:

“It isn’t so much what drink does, it is what it prevents. It isn’t the money wasted, the sorrow directly caused, the direct humiliation of the boozy workman and the sotted drunk. Labor should be noble and holy, should be filled with happy homes, laughing children and smooth-faced wives, and freed from the slavery that now lingers around it. Only men who think, can help make it that, and no man can drink and think too. Make England or Australia a nation of teetotallers and in fifty years the social problem will be solved for ever.”

Lane, who attended no trade union meetings, nevertheless exercised a considerable influence on the Labor movement through the columns of the “*Observer*.” Most prominent trade union officials were numbered among his friends and many brought their problems to him.

It was largely as a result of his advocacy that the Trades and Labor Council published a scheme for State-aided land settlement. Seventy delegates from seventeen organisations attended a meeting convened to consider and support these proposals.

Seymour, Chairman of the Trades and Labor Council, was President. R. Roe of the Grammar School, C. A. Feilberg⁴ of the “*Courier*” and A. Walker of the Trades and Labor Council, were Vice-Presidents. The size of the holdings was to be 80 acres. The men, provided with rations and tools by the Government, were to live together in village groups and to work under the supervision of Government officials.

FORERUNNER OF PARAGUAY

Was this scheme—largely the brainchild of Lane—a forerunner of New Australia in Paraguay? Again, largely through the influence of Lane’s articles under the name of “*Sketcher*,” the trade union movement was moving towards political organisation and in 1887 various organisations merged to form the Workers’ Political Reform Association.

Ross states of this period, that Lane exercised “an enormous influence on trade unionism.” He had a most fascinating personality, one that influenced all with whom he came

4. Carl Feilberg was Editor of the *Brisbane Courier* from 1883 to 1887.—Ed.

in contact, and this included many far removed from the Labor movement.

STARTED THE "BOOMERANG"

In 1887, only two years after his arrival in Australia, having already won recognition as a brilliant and influential journalist, he, together with a compositor friend, Alfred Walker, started the "*Boomerang*." For a time he continued to write for other papers, but he had made his great decision—had made his choice—henceforth he would devote himself to labour. He was still only 26 years of age.

It was in this year too that he formed a "Bellamy" society based on Bellamy's teachings in his book "*Looking Backward*."⁵ The meetings were held on the closed-in balcony of George Marchant's hop beer shop in Bowen Street.

The "*Boomerang*" circulation increased to beyond 9,000, but it was boycotted by advertisers because of its advocacy of Labor ideas, and it was sold to Gresley Lukin, a businessman and journalist.⁶

Henry Lawson had been a regular contributor to its columns and he records the death of the paper in his well known poem "*The Cambaroora Star*":

"Oft I sat and smoked beside him in the list'ning hours of
 night,
 When the shadows from the corners seemed to gather
 round the light—
 When his weary, aching fingers, closing stiffly round the
 pen,
 Wrote defiant truth in language that could touch the hearts
 of men—
 Wrote until his eyelids shuddered—wrote until the East
 was grey.
 Wrote the stern and awful lessons that were taught him in
 his day;
 And they knew that he was honest, and they read his
 smallest par,
 For I think the digger's Bible was the Cambaroora 'Star'."

The "Star" was of course the "Boomerang."

5. Edward Bellamy, American author and Socialist, wrote *Looking Backward* in 1886, a prevision of social conditions in the year 2000.

6. Gresley Lukin (1840-1916) was one of the owners of the *Brisbane Courier* in 1873, but severed his connection with the *Courier* in December 1880. Lukin was editor-in-chief and managing director. After selling his newspaper interests he lived for some time in Sydney, but returned to Brisbane to take over the *Boomerang*. Associated with him was J. G. Drake, and sub-editor on the staff was A. G. Stephens, the man who later (September 1894) created the famous Red Page of the *Sydney Bulletin*.—Ed.

MENTOR OF LAWSON

Speaking of Lawson, it is fitting that we should here point out that Lane was his mentor and inspirer.

Ross says (p. 21), "William Lane, as an editor, was responsible for the publication of some of Lawson's work. But he was more than a patron to the poet—he was indeed an inspiration."

I agree with this. If one examines Lawson's writings side by side with a study of Lane, it becomes clear that the latter's ideas are finding expression in the works of the poet. In addition, there is the same note of sadness to be found in Lane's prose and Lawson's poems.

Lawson's politics were the politics of Lane, expressing the sufferings of the working people, compassion for the lowly and the vague and blurred outline of the future society.

Both were visionaries, but Lane's vision was coupled with a verve and drive that were missing in Lawson.

Lane was not only a magnificent agitator and propagandist, but a gifted organiser. What he lacked was a down-to-earth conception of reality, a profound knowledge of the dynamics of society.

Lawson wept at the passing of the "*Boomerang*"; Lane sought more effective means of keeping a Labor paper alive and influential. He evolved the idea of a Labor paper under union ownership and control with a regular flow of finance from the unions as part of the members' contributions.

FOUNDING OF THE "WORKER"

At one stroke he would solve the financial problems that had plagued the "*Boomerang*," and at the same time link the new paper with the mass of trade union members as their own.

Lane discussed the idea with several union leaders and on 9 December 1889 a meeting was held in the Maritime Hall, where representatives from various organisations met to discuss the establishment of the paper. The meeting agreed; grants of money were obtained, and a Board of Trustees established. Workers throughout Queensland were enthusiastic in their support. The Queensland Shearers' Union forwarded £30, being the initiation fee for 3,000 members.

When applications were called for an Editor in February 1890, a circulation of 12,000 was already guaranteed. Truly a remarkable achievement in the space of two months! The first meeting of the Board was held on 14 February 1890. G. Casey was Chairman, C. Seymour, Secretary, and A. Hinchcliffe, Treasurer. The Editor had a seat on the Board but no vote.

Lane was appointed temporary editor on three months' trial as required by the scheme of co-operation. He had given up an income of \$600 a year as a free lance journalist to take over the editor's position at £3 a week, the same wage as the lowest paid compositor.

This surely underlines the sincerity of the man.

The proposed name had been "*Swagman*," but this met with some opposition in the field, especially at Blackall, and finally the new child was christened the "*Worker*." It first appeared in March 1890, on Eight Hour Day. Lane was 28 years of age.

The "*Worker*" still continues in Queensland with members of the A.W.U. paying for the paper in their union contributions. Whether it continues in the same vein as the early issues is not for us to discuss here, but it must be regarded as a monument to the memory of William Lane, its creator.

During its lifetime it has exercised, in one way or another, considerable influence upon the political life of the State and so on the lives of the people of Queensland.

LANE'S LINK WITH QUEENSLAND

The life of William Lane is inextricably linked with the history of Queensland. Lane wrote the editorials under the name of "John Miller" and the paper pulsed with the burning issues of the day. He wrote a novel, "*Working Man's Paradise*," the money from which he gave to pay the expenses of unionists during the shearers' strike.

I cannot say that I am enthusiastic about "*Working Man's Paradise*" as a work of literature, but it does give some idea of the great intensity of Lane in his feelings for the underdog; and it appears to have had an enthusiastic reception.

But to return to the "*Worker*." From its first issue, it began to serialise Bellamy's "Looking Backward," a book that exercised great influence upon the Labor movement of the day. Lane once said it was to the Labor movement what "*Uncle Tom's Cabin*" was to slavery.

Lane could have been right but not, I fear, in the way he intended.

First issued as a monthly at 3d. for its 16 pages, it spoke in Lane's enthusiastic way of "State Aid for Land Settlement"; "conditions of women at work"; a worker calendar; a page of pars entitled "In the Workers' World"; "The Gospel of Organisation"; draft schemes of "Australian Labour Federation."

From all parts of Australia bushmen sent in pars.

It started with a capital of £100 and a subscription approaching 13,000. This figure soon jumped to 20,000 when the miners and railwaymen joined the company.

The first copy was bought in the street by a 17-year-old apprentice in the printing trade.

IMMEDIATE SUCCESS

The paper's success was immediate and its influence most powerful. Through its columns Lane guided the Labor movement. Its message reached not only the workers of the city but beyond to the bush workers, who were to become the main source of recruits for his rapidly growing army of supporters.

Lane wrote and preached, formed debating societies and reading clubs, issued pamphlets in great numbers. And he organised the diverse activities into a channel of protest against the existing conditions.

He won powerful adherents by the power of his personality—as a few years earlier he had won Sir Samuel Griffith to write a straight-out Socialist article for the "*Boomerang*" under the title of "Wealth and Want." Lloyd Ross, the principal biographer of Lane, writes:

"One man stirred the Australian bushman as he never was stirred again. One man living in the city was able to link the energy of the bushman with that of the intellectual so that for a while nobody could resist their pressure."

Such was the magnetism of this small man, 5ft. 6in., lame since childhood, who peered out into the world and into his vision of the future through thick-lensed glasses.

His brother Ernie once told me that after a lifetime in the Labor movement he had never heard a propagandist who could win an audience like his brother Will, as he called him. The workers called him "Billy."

SHEARERS' DISCONTENT

Lane's message fell on the fertile soil of the shearers' discontent. W. G. Spence⁷ wrote that unionism "came bringing salvation from years of tyranny."

It was during this period that the spirit of mateship that already existed extended to the idea that a man's mateship,

7. William Guthrie Spence (1846-1926), Labour leader and politician. He was president of the Amalgamated Shearers' Union from its inception in 1886 until 1893. He was a conspicuous figure in the maritime strike of 1890 and the Queensland shearers' strike of 1891. In 1894 he became general secretary of the Australian Workers' Union. In 1898 he was elected to the N.S.W. Legislative Assembly as member for Cobarr and in 1901 he was elected to the Commonwealth House of Representatives for Darling, holding that seat until 1917. He was Postmaster-General in the third Fisher Ministry from September 1914 to October 1915, and Vice-President of the Executive Council in the Hughes Ministry from November 1916 to February 1917. With Hughes and others he was expelled from the Labor Party on the issue of conscription, the introduction of which he advocated. He was a Nationalist candidate at the general election of 1917 and was defeated, but returned for Darwin (Tas.) at a by-election in the following June. He retired from that seat in 1919. He was the author of two books, *Australia's Awakening* and *The History of the A.W.U.*—Ed.

his character in fact, was judged on the basis of whether he stood by the union or went against it.

We are all familiar with Lawson's poem, written years after, where he says he doesn't care whether the cause is right or wrong—he is too old "to rat."

I am not going to go into detail about the shearers' strike that dominated the Labor scene in the 90's, but merely wish to point out that Lane was the inspiration of the strike, their guide and counsellor. Nor need we examine the reasons for its failure.

LABOR IN POLITICS

One conclusion was drawn by Lane and that was that Labor must work to win political power in Parliament. In 1892, one of the strike leaders, T. J. Ryan, stood for Parliament for the seat of Barcoo on a straight-out policy of opposition to the squatters. He won the seat. He is not to be confused with the T. J. Ryan who later became the Labor Premier of Queensland. The previous year, 1891, the Labor Party had won 37 seats in the New South Wales Parliament and Lane was jubilant.

But faction fights broke out among the newly elected New South Wales members, pledges were broken and the erstwhile militants became, in Lane's view, merely seat-warmers intent on serving their own selfish interests. Lane became disheartened and somewhat disillusioned, but his determination to find another way to build his Utopia grew apace.

REPELLED BY VIOLENCE

Lane was repelled at the idea of winning by violence; his faith in political action had been shattered. He saw one way to success—start again. Lane called to the thousands who had learned to trust him and the answer was overwhelming. He called on them to leave all the sin, suffering and sickness behind them.

"Come out from this hateful life, the life that is full of unspoken misery, of heart-sickening longing, of evil habits growing with the years of sin and slavery that lead to nothing but death. Come together in all unselfishness to trust each other, and to be free! To live simply, to work hardy; to win, not the gold that poisons but the home that saves! To be true husband to one woman, to be happy father of healthy children, to be true friend of every mate, who grips hand for the well-being of all."

HIS GUIDING THEORY

In this rather melodramatic statement Lane reveals his real guiding theory. This is a wicked world, therefore let us

turn our backs on it and start afresh with pure people in an unsullied environment.

It is clear from the evidence available that the idea of a colony had been present in Lane's mind for some time. (Fifty Barcaldine strikers had formed a co-operative settlement at the Alice River.)

In 1890 Lane told Spence his ideas. Spence urged him not to go outside Australia. Spence applied for land near Wilcannia. Lands Minister Copeland was agreeable to a co-operative colony in New South Wales, but the Minister was over-ruled on a technical point. Lane then tried Western Australia. Meanwhile Walker sent word from South America a month before the committee was set up in November that land was available.

Lane was Chairman, T. J. Ryan and Arthur Rae were Vice-Chairmen (Ryan had been chairman of a Strike Committee and Rae was a member of Parliament in New South Wales). Head, the Treasurer, was Secretary of the Wagga Shearers' Union, and the Secretary was Cumming, President of the Brisbane District Council of the Labor Federation. A. Walker, the agent, was Secretary of the old Trades and Labor Council and Business Manager of "*Boomerang*." Spence, while wishing the movement success, did not join. He stayed in Australia.

"WRITE HISTORY ON ROCKS OF THE ANDES"

Lane felt inspired. He practised and wrote: "Those who seek to change the world must first of all show the world that change is possible." "We will write the history of the world on the rocks of the Andes," he wrote.†

He would succeed where Robert Owen and others had failed.

Why? He idealised Queensland workers and bushmen—"Those tall straight men," he cried. "They are the finest men in the world. Give me those men and the right kind of women for them—and I will do anything with them."

The support was breathtaking—£30,000 was paid into the Association in a short time—£60 was the minimum.

Homes were sold up, shops were sold at a loss, selectors left their selections. Tradesmen paid £400 to £1,500. John Lane, a teacher, joined.

Ernie did not have £60. He had to wait till later. Applications came from England and English residents living in India, and a Manitoba group.

†Robert Owen (1771-1858), British Socialist reformer, was manager of a cotton mill at New Lanark, which he conducted on Socialist and profit-sharing principles. In 1825 he established the Socialist Colony of New Harmony, U.S.A., practising common ownership of property, which ended in failure.—Ed.

LETTER FROM SIR CHARLES LILLEY

A letter written to Lane by Sir Charles Lilley, Retiring Chief Justice, said:

“With regard to your Paraguayan plans, you know I do not wish to see emigration from Australia of so many of our most useful citizens and bushmen. That I do not like them leaving us is the best evidence I can give that they are a desirable lot of people for any country in which they may settle. I have watched the working-class movement for the past thirty-five years, and would gladly see my countrymen engaged heart and soul in self-culture and self-elevation. The workers for hundreds of years have had the heavier burden of our life; and no plan should be left untried to make a fairer distribution of life’s labor and enjoyment. I am heartily in accord with every aspiration, with every form of effort sincerely intended for, and wisely directed towards, the amelioration of the social life of all classes, and more especially of those who most need our help, that is, the ignorant; the untrained and the poor. I believe you are honestly hoping to realise a better social condition for those whom you are leading. I hope you will succeed, and I am sure no country on the face of the globe need fear to extend to you and your brethren the most unreserved hospitality. This is my belief; and, if I do not like your taking so many of our good men, I nevertheless most heartily wish you success in your new home. Believe me, yours very truly—(signed) Charles Lilley.”

Momentum came from economic distress of the period.

On 19 January 1892 a telegram was received from Walker, Saunders and Leck as follows:

“Found splendid land in Paraguay, well-watered and timbered. Government grant secured for forty leagues in latitude 27 degrees south. Arrangement made as agreed. Saunders returning home.”

This report was published in the *New Australia Journal* on 8 April.

THE “NEW AUSTRALIA” SETTLEMENT

Site of the New Australia Settlement was 130 miles from Ascunson, capital of Paraguay, near Villa Rica, fifteen miles from the railway. The river was navigable for boats and rafts right up to the settlement. The Government of Paraguay agreed to free entrance to everything brought by the settlers; no customs duties for ten years; free railway transport to the nearest point of the settlement. The Association promised to settle 800 families on the land in four years.

Registered office of the New Australia Settlement Association Company was Amy Street, Brisbane, Lane's private address.

Constitution of the Association issued by Lane consisted of a statement of principles and ten articles:

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

"Every member of the Association has voluntarily and with full understanding made the following declaration:

WHEREAS—

So long as one depends upon another for leave to work and so long as the selfishness induced by the uncertainty of living prevents mankind from seeing that it is best for all to insure one another against all possibility of social degradation, true liberty and happiness are impossible; and

WHEREAS—

The weakness, ignorance and doubts of society at large is the great barrier in the way of the establishment of such true Social Order as will ensure to every citizen security against want and opportunity to develop to the fullest the faculties evolving in humanity;

THEREFORE—

It is desirable and imperative that by a community wherein all labour in common for the common good actual proof shall be given under conditions which render it impossible for one to tyrannise over another, and which declare the first duty of each to be the well-being of all and the sole duty of all to be the well-being of each, men and women can live in comfort, happiness, intelligence and orderliness unknown in a society where none can be sure today that they or their children will not starve tomorrow.

With this end in view, an Association of workers is hereby instituted, and the accompanying basis for co-operative organisation and articles of association agreed upon, the signatories intending and expecting to migrate to another country there to devote to the movement their possessions and their best endeavours.

PRODUCTION—

OWNERSHIP by the community of all the means of production-in-exchange and distribution.

CONDUCT by the community of all production-in-exchange and distribution.

SUPERINTENDENCE by the community of all labour-saving co-operations.

ALLOTMENT—

MAINTENANCE by the community of children under the guardianship of parents.

MAINTENANCE by the community of all sanitary and educational establishments.

SAVING by the community of all capital needed by the community.

DIVISION of remaining wealth production among all adult members of the community equally, without regard to sex, age, office or physical or mental capacity.

AUTHORITY—

The following authority and regulations shall be observed between the members of the community:

BALLOT VOTE of all adult members to be supreme authority.
 DIRECTOR, elected by two-thirds majority of general ballot, to be sole executive authority, advised by Board of Superintendents.

SUPERINTENDENTS, elected by two-thirds majority of ballot, to be sole departmental authorities, subject to director.

REGULATIONS—

REGULATIONS affecting the community at large to be confirmed by a two-thirds majority of all adult members.

DEPARTMENTAL REGULATIONS to be confirmed by a majority of all adult members interested.

ALL REGULATIONS to be submitted annually for continuation or rejection.

DISPUTES arising between the community and any member or members to be decided in equity by an arbitrator mutually agreed upon between the communal authority and the member or members interested.

DISPUTES arising between members to be decided in equity by an arbitrator mutually agreed upon by them.

DISMISSAL from the community, for persistent or unpardonable offence against the well-being of the community, to be decreed only by a five-sixth majority of all adult members.

ELECTIONS—

ALL OFFICES to be vacated annually and whenever occupants cease to retain the confidence of their constituents.

INDIVIDUALITY—

THE INDIVIDUALITY of every member in thought, religion, speech, and leisure, and in all matters whatsoever whereby the individuality of others is not affected is to be held inviolable.

SEX EQUALITY—

THE SEXES to be recognised as equally entitled to full membership.

RELIGION—

RELIGION not to be officially recognised by the community.

AMENDMENT—

Amendment of this basis for co-operative organisations to be made only by a two-thirds majority of all adult members."

There were two Boards of Trustees—one to go to Paraguay—one to remain in Australia.

Active organising began at the end of August 1892.

Lane was aged 31, his wife aged 29, and there were four children—Nellie (10), Charlie (6), Hazel (4), Donald (6 months). On 9 November 1892 the journal "*New Australia*" was published at Wagga to win support for the venture. The headquarters was moved from Brisbane to Wagga, and then to Sydney as the centre of activity changed. Lane resigned as Editor of the "*Worker*."

RECRUITS POUR IN

By December, 600 persons had enrolled. "The Pioneers" expected to sail early in the year. Recruits continued to pour in. Symbolically May Day was first chosen as departure

day, but there were delays, to the end of May and then later.

The *Sydney Bulletin* published an account of the first contingent:

“The New Australian contingent contains the best material for such an experiment the world could furnish perhaps. The work that lies in front of them, provided they are allowed to go squarely at it, and it proves to be worth doing, is just the sort they have been used to. There are few town dwellers among the first batch, and the majority of those who are now rolling their swags in Queensland and South Australia with a view to the second, are of the bush. They have been trained in the task of settlement. Tank-sinkers, shearers, bush carpenters, station hands, with artisans used to the rough and tumble life of Australia will not be easily knocked out.”

The “*Royal Tar*” was purchased on 16 May 1893, the price being £1,200 (some say £1,620). The *Royal Tar* had been a cargo ship in the South American timber trade. The vessel had to be refitted, which caused more delay. At the camp in Balmain 2,000 people were crowded into ten houses, and dissension developed. These were the first signs of division. Despite this, some Balmain neighbours joined.

The press generally deplored the withdrawal of such a body of fine men from Australia and ran “scare” stories of the horrors of the American jungle.

At last all was ready. At a meeting in the Sydney Domain, on the Sunday before sailing, a crowd of 10,000 were present. J. C. Watson, the Labor Prime Minister, was in the chair. Speakers were W. A. Holman, Arthur Rae, and W. G. Spence.

The “*Royal Tar*” sailed on the morning of 17 July 1893, just 75 years ago.

MARY GILMORE DESCRIBES DEPARTURE

Mary Gilmore’s description in the “*Worker*” was as follows:

“The deck was crowded. Ringing cheers sounded all along the waterfront. In the crowd were union pioneers like Spence, Sleath, and Head. The banner carried the motto, ‘*Each for all, and all for each.*’ Aloft in one of the lifeboats stood William Lane, his pale face worn with work and worry, aglow with a sweet unselfish joy. The dream of four years was fulfilling itself. The crowd was eager to believe that the new voyage of discovery would bring gladness and a renewed hope in mankind’s future. Three cheers were given for ‘*Freedom, Lane and Paraguay.*’ As the vessel sailed from sight, there was not an eye that did not glisten, not an eye that was not moist.”

Mary Gilmore went to Paraguay on a later trip.

Petty squabbles broke out on board. Monotony led to irritability, and Lane was blamed for trivial grievances.

Monte Video was a welcome sight when the "*Royal Tar*" arrived on 13 September, after a journey of about nine weeks. Some went ashore without permission and came back "under the influence," although there was an agreement that there should not be any drinking. This led to altercation, and some blows were exchanged. On 15 September the pioneers transhipped to "*Rio Parana*" and sailed for Ascension. They were again transhipped because of the shallow water to the "*Pollux*," and finally reached the site of New Australia on 4 October. Foundation Day was 11 October 1893.

The Paraguayan authorities were friendly and helpful.

Lane cabled Australia: "Ascension December 13. The titles to fifty leagues (225,000 acres) signed and registered today. The Paraguayan Government is very friendly towards us."

FRICION AND DISCONTENT

Many visualised their new home as outlined in Bellamy's "*Looking Backward*"; they forgot the long struggle that would be needed to establish the settlement.

Labour trouble arose immediately, and there was much discontent.

An elected committee advised the elected chairmen of the various departments—cooking, building, stock, agriculture, transport and school.

Lane was entrusted by the Paraguayan Government with the powers of a magistrate, and administrator of a separate district. The colony was free from the control of local magistrates. Lane's powers were immense. The Rules of Association were unalterable until 500 settlers had been settled. This furnished him with powers of expulsion.

All worked hard and long, but discontent still grew.

The first to leave the colony was a hard-working shearer. He was followed soon by others. A friend of Lane's was accused of having sexual associations with the native inhabitants. Lane was accused of sheltering him instead of dealing with him as provided in the rules. This, true or not, shattered the colony.

Just before Christmas 1893, three single men returned intoxicated from a visit to a native village. Lane expelled them. They refused to leave. Lane refused them a ballot, and called in a body of Paraguayan soldiers. The three men were driven out. Others followed them.

DEVELOPMENT OF FACTIONS

Lane had been under months of terrific strain. His reaction was understandable, though disastrous. Factions developed—85 people left the settlement in a body. Married members were allowed £5, single £3/15/-, with which to return to Australia.

The Paraguayan Government housed and fed the majority of the seceders for three weeks. The Government offered them (but not the three expelled persons) grants of land and did everything to get them to stay on individualistic lines.

New Australia had failed! Recruiting continued in Australia. One hundred persons were enrolled in four weeks by one organiser in New South Wales.

Departure of the second contingent was fixed for 15 November, but a cable was received stating: "Delay all women for six months. Send bushmen with all possible despatch."

Two hundred bushmen left in the "*Royal Tar*" on 31 December 1893—this time from Adelaide. Upon their arrival, new dissensions broke out.

Finally, Gilbert Casey, an old friend of Lane's, led the insurgents against him.

LANE RESIGNS

Lane decided on a clean break. He resigned and decided to live on part of the land, "Codas." This was agreed to by the leaders but the general body disagreed. With a small proportion of implements and a few head of cattle, 45 adults and 12 children followed Lane into the wilderness. New Australia dragged on, but was rapidly disintegrating. Beginning in 1897, a final division of assets was made among members of New Australia.

The Australian press was jubilant.

THE COSME SETTLEMENT

The determined and uncompromising followed Lane to Cosme, but the Government in Paraguay refused them a grant of land. Lane had to buy land privately for £400—£100 down and instalments of £100.

To obtain food and tools, private trinkets and other possessions were sold. They arrived at Cosme in July 1894. Mary Gilmore was one of the number. Working ten hours a day for six months, they at last cleared and planted a small plot with beans and maize.

Two babies were born in tents before the houses were built—Cosma Lane, daughter of John Lane, was the first.

They lived hard but not altogether unhappily. Crops grew well, houses were built.

“These notes fixed their successes and set their plans. As they began to win a secure food supply, they felt the need to consolidate their gains, and so they decided to publish a monthly journal. In January 1895, through the columns of this newly-found journal, “*Cosme Monthly*,” they issued a six-monthly report of their progress, like a group of refugees, delaying for a short time to count their numbers, panting beneath a signpost. There were 39 men, nine women and twelve children. Six pounds per head was all the capital they had to find livestock (including cattle, working bullocks and horses), tools, machinery, seed and food. In six months, as regards food, they had become self-supporting. First-class leather had been made. All the colonists wore boots made from colony-made leather. They had built a saw-pit, a large carpenter’s shop, and a bootmaker’s shop. All kinds of wood and leather work were being produced. A school had been opened in August.”

The Paraguayan Government was pleased, and returned £100 to the Cosme colonists.

On 25 June 1896 the Government paid the balance of purchase money on the land and the land was extended another league. A condition was that 72 families be settled within two years.

A FAVOURABLE REPORT

No one could have been more enthusiastic than was the British Consul in his regular reports about Cosme. He wrote:

“The most successful colonists in Paraguay are the Italians, Germans and Swiss. The Englishman cannot adapt himself to his surroundings with the same facility as an Italian or German, and he lacks their patience. In a very short time he becomes dissatisfied with his position and prospects, and then either takes to drinking and loafing or, having wisely come to the conclusion that he can after all do better in a British colony, leaves the country.”

In Paraguay, he admitted, the English colonists were the worst of the Europeans; in Cosme there was a notable exception to this opinion.

“These men are nearly all of them Australians,” he continued, “and teetotallers without exception. . . . For over two years they have laboured with praiseworthy energy and extraordinary perseverance, and their efforts, so far, have been crowned with success. . . .” All foodstuffs required were produced in the colony, the surplus being sold outside, and the money used to purchase such necessities as salt,

clothes, lamp oil, medicines and cattle. The colony had its own school and library. *"Without doubt it is one of the most, if not the most, orderly and best conducted colony in Paraguay,"* he concluded.

There was a library of 2,000 books as well as files of papers and magazines.

THE FAILURE OF COSME

Why did Cosme fail? John Lane gives the answer:

- Some found the place too individualistic.
- They could not stand restraint.
- They could not abide by a majority decision.
- Single men left to get married, promising to return.
- Married men left because their wives were discontented.
- Physical strain.

In 1895 Lane fell ill of a recurring malady. He left for England on a recruiting trip in September 1896. Recruits from England arrived in Cosme, but nine left after a month. This was the final reason why Lane left. Cosme was free of debt. Lane left Cosme on 2 August 1899.

On his return to Australia he became editor of the Sydney "Worker," but the zest had gone out of him. He was editor for only a few months in 1900.

Those who left Cosme claimed a refund. Lane voluntarily set himself the obligation of paying them, and he was still doing this at his death.

THE LAST DISMAL CHAPTER

After the departure of Lane, the colony fell apart. In February 1899, the central authority was abolished.

In 1901 John Lane came as organiser to Australia. He had no difficulty in getting recruits, and made a bicycle trip through Eastern Australia.

The new recruits left. Then John Lane left at the end of 1904. Ernie Lane accompanied him. This was the end of Cosme.

Ernie Lane returned to strenuous organising in Queensland. His home was "Cosme" in Dauphin Terrace, Highgate Hill, Brisbane.

John Lane returned to teaching. William went to New Zealand, where he became editor of the Conservative *"Auckland Herald."* He had given up his ideals, and refused to talk about his experiences. He died on 26 August 1917 at the age of 56. He had played a tremendous part in building the Australian Labor movement.