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Abstract

We wrote *Class Structure in Australian History* in a period of heightened social struggle. It grew out of collaborative research projects at Sydney's Free U in the late 1960s. The book was distinctive in both emphasising the socialist tradition of class analysis and trying to find new paths for it. Its first edition was ignored by mass media, and often mis-interpreted in professional journals. Nevertheless it circulated widely and has continued to be a point of reference for progressive scholarship. Its method tried to carry forward the Free U project of democratic knowledge making, linking documents with analysis and inviting shared interpretation. Its theory emphasised the reality of classes as historical formations, and the importance of understanding class structure as a whole, on both points reacting against influential frameworks of the time. Looking back, CSAH appears uncertain in its approach to race and gender, and inadequate in its handling of coloniality; it was written in isolation from similar projects in other parts of the postcolonial world. Yet its approach still has value in understanding the changing dynamics of class on a world scale, the class relations of the neoliberal era in Australia, and the current configuration of power in Australia.

Keywords

writing, scholars, re, thinking, radicals, class, history, australian, structure

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Scholars and Radicals: Writing and Re-thinking *Class Structure in Australian History*

Terry Irving and Raewyn Connell

Keynote address to Historical Materialism Australasia conference, Sydney, July 2015, reflecting on the 35th anniversary of *CSAH*.

Abstract

We wrote *Class Structure in Australian History (CSAH)* in a period of heightened social struggle. It grew out of collaborative research projects at Sydney's Free U in the late 1960s. The book was one among a generation of New Left writing by young intellectuals, distinctive in both emphasising the socialist tradition of class analysis and trying to find new paths for it. On its first publication it was ignored by mass media, and often mis-interpreted in professional journals. Nevertheless it circulated widely and has continued to be a point of reference for progressive scholarship. Its method tried to carry forward the Free U project of democratic knowledge making, linking documents with analysis and inviting shared interpretation. Its theory emphasised the reality of classes as historical formations, and the importance of understanding class structure as a whole, on both points reacting against influential frameworks of the time. Looking back, *CSAH* appears uncertain in its approach to race and gender, and inadequate in its handling of coloniality; it was written in isolation from similar projects in other parts of the postcolonial world. Yet its approach still has value in understanding the changing dynamics of class on a world scale, the class relations of the neoliberal era in Australia, and the current configuration of power in Australian society.

1. Origins

CSAH was produced in a time of capitalist turbulence. We wrote it in the 1970s, watching the victory of the Vietnamese people, the descent of world capitalism into a decade of low growth, the unrecognized beginnings of neoliberalism, and the continuation of the popular struggles that had begun in the 1960s. In Australia, working class struggles opened the way for action by other progressive movements.

In 1969, led by left-wing unions, a million workers took part in an unofficial national strike when the state gaoled Clarrie O'Shea for refusing to pay fines imposed on his union of tramway workers in Victoria. The strike effectively killed the use of the penal powers in the arbitration acts, opening five years of union militancy not seen since the campaigns for wage justice after the Second

World War. Strikes reached an all time high in 1974, and between 1968 and 1974 the wages share of national income increased by almost 10%.¹

Political interventions of a more radical kind followed. There were “work-ins” where the socialist idea of workers’ control was rediscovered. Progressive unionism invented the green bans. Labour women went on the offensive, renewing the campaign for equal pay that had begun in the 1920s. Following favourable decisions of the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission, the ratio of female to male earnings rose faster in Australia than anywhere else in the world in the 1970s.

Black activists set up a tent embassy in front of the Parliament; anti-apartheid campaigners disrupted the Springbok tour; the peace movement persuaded the Labor Party and trade unions to place bans on uranium mining and oppose nuclear testing in the Pacific; and students took to the streets in a national strike against the Fraser Government’s intention to reintroduce university fees.²

* * *

We met in 1967 at the University of Sydney as members of a group of radical students and staff setting up a Free University. Disillusioned by the failures of teaching and learning in “the mass university”, and despairing of reforming its undemocratic structures, we determined to confront it with a small, radical alternative. We would break down the barriers between students and staff, between disciplines, and most importantly, if practice were to be applied as the test of truth, between our pursuit of knowledge and our political lives. We took inspiration from the free universities of the European and North American New Left, the older radical tradition of independent working class education, and the broad tradition of progressive education, at that time gaining traction in

¹ Australian Council of Trade Unions, *A Shrinking Slice of the Pie*, The Working Australia Papers, No. 1 of 2013: 7; Tom Bramble, “Is There a Labour Aristocracy?” *Marxist Left Review* 4 (Winter 2012), <http://marxistleftreview.org/index.php/no4-winter-2012/81-is-there-a-labour-aristocracy-in-australia>, retrieved 4 July 2015.

² Among many studies dealing with the trade unions, the left, and the campaigns of the 1970s we have relied on: Brad Bowden, “The Rise and Decline of Australian Unionism”, *Labour History* 100 (May 2011): 68; Tom O’Lincoln, *Years of Rage – Social Conflicts in the Fraser Era* (Melbourne: Bookmark, 1993); Meredith Burgmann and Verity Burgmann, *Green Bans, Red Union – Environmental Activism and the New South Wales Builders Labourers’ Federation*, (Sydney: UNSW Press, 1998); Verity Burgmann, Ray Jureidini and Meredith Burgmann, ‘Doing Without the Boss – Workers’ Control Experiments in the 1970s’, *Labour History*, 103, November 2012. The relationship of new and old in the left was not always positive. Sean Scalmer’s *Dissent Events – Protest, The Media and the Political Gimmick in Australia* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2002) shows the disruptive impact of new issues and forms of protest on the left.

Australia's famously bureaucratic school systems. Everybody, we believed, could be a knowledge producer.³

But what kind of knowledge would the Free U produce? Although our project was initially an extension of campus radicalism it also attracted independent thinkers and labour movement activists. The knowledge that we were seeking was not just *university* knowledge, tied up with existing academic disciplines. It was knowledge beyond those forms, especially knowledge that would be useful for movements of social liberation and socialism. It was *movement* knowledge, and that included knowledge of the class basis of inequality.

We were part of the New Left that developed in Australia at the end of the 1960s.⁴ Today, in a political world that has seen the rise and fall of the new social movements and the eclipse of organized labour, it is important to recall that the Australian New Left emerged when the working class movement was organizationally mature and increasingly militant. Connections made in the anti-war movement continued through the 1970s, the socialist left (in unions, Marxist groups and the ALP left) providing ideas, leadership and resources not only for militant workers but also for the peace movement, the women's movement, gay liberation, Black Power, and environmentalism.

In turn, activists from those movements often looked to the labour movement for assistance, and often pursued their goals through labour organizations. For example, the largest gathering of Australian second wave feminists was the Women and Labour Conference of 1978, which attracted over 1000 participants.⁵ From such links in other areas of struggle emerged a common concern with what were later called the "intersections" of class, gender and race. It was these interactions that made the New Left a political force, and gave political colour to its ideology. The New Left was broadly socialist, and for socialists, class analysis and the theory of the labour movement were central.

In a rented house just off the main campus of the University of Sydney we began our experiment, and it worked. We organized the programme as an assemblage of self-managed study-and-research groups, on any topic that a group of members wanted to investigate. Among the courses that justified our challenge to the mass university was one called "Class and Power". It generated several path-breaking projects: a bibliography of stratification in Australia published in the country's only sociological journal; a chapter in Henry Mayer's widely read

³ Terry Irving, "The triumph of green hearts over sere': reflections on student radicalism at Sydney University in the 1910s and the 1960s", http://radicalsydney.blogspot.com.au/p/the-triumph-of-green-hearts-over-sere_27.html, retrieved 26 July, 2015

⁴ Raewyn Connell, "'Ours is in Colour': The New Left of the Sixties, Forty Years On", published on *Overland* website, 12 November 2008, at http://web.overland.org.au/?page_id=553.

⁵ Rosemary Pringle and others, "'Women and Labour Conference", *Australian Left Review*, 1.65 (1978): 12-21.

text for students of political science; an analysis of business elites which became a chapter in Raewyn's *Ruling Class, Ruling Culture* (later rated the "most influential" book in Australian sociology); and a documentary collection on class in Australia.⁶ It was these projects, but especially the documents, that gave us the idea for the methodology of *CSAH*. In March 1971 we signed a contract with Longman Cheshire (a locally-based publisher that had been partly acquired by the British firm) to produce a "Documentary History of Class in Australia".

In 1974 a draft of the first chapter circulated among radical scholars. To build on the interest it aroused we organized Class Analysis Conferences each year from 1975 to 1977. Continuing our counter-public experience in the Free U, we deliberately avoided university locations in Sydney and planned for gatherings that were informal, non-hierarchical and small-ish. Participants came from interstate and Papua New Guinea. Most came from academic settings, but by the second conference we were able to hold two workshops with trade union activists on working class media and the changing spatial aspect of working class Sydney. The scholarly papers were eclectic, but there were some strong themes: the history of class in Australia, ideology and left cultural practice, Marxist philosophy, and increasingly, radical political economy. Collections of the papers were placed in the major libraries, and a Class Analysis Newsletter circulated between conferences.

These developments were not simply expressions of intellectual trends. It was noticeable that the academic participants were coming out of continuing campaigns to democratize the universities and introduce radical courses into their departments. In this political context of academic struggle and reflection our thinking about the book continued to focus on connecting scholarly methods with radical purpose.

Other scholars were doing the same, and by the time *CSAH* appeared there was already a crowded field of books and articles carving out intellectual space for the New Left. There were studies of the left's break with Stalinism: Rowan Cahill and Warren Osmond writing on the New Left, and Alastair Davidson on the Communist Party. Humphrey McQueen exposed the damage done to the early labour movement by chauvinist nationalism and racism. The surge of working

⁶ Mary Ancich, Raewyn Connell, John Fisher and Maureen Kolff, "A Descriptive Bibliography of Published Research and Writing on Social Stratification in Australia, 1946-1967", *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, 5.1 (1969): 48-76, and 5.2: 128-152; Raewyn Connell and Terry Irving, "Yes, Virginia, There Is a Ruling Class", in *Australian Politics, a Third Reader*, eds, H. Mayer and H. Nelson, (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1973), 31-47; Raewyn Connell, "The Structure of the Ruling Class", in her *Ruling Class, Ruling Culture: Studies of Conflict, Power and Hegemony in Australian Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 39-59.

class militancy and the election of the Whitlam Government encouraged the Labour History Society to issue a series of special publications. Second wave feminism produced general histories of settler-Australian patriarchy by Anne Summers and Miriam Dixson, while more detailed historiography by Ann Curthoys, Susan Eade, and Beverley Kingston connected feminist issues with women's work. Dennis Altman wrote an important statement of the ideology of sexual liberation for the emerging gay movement.⁷

Our orientation was to the labour movement and to its socialist tradition of class analysis, a strand of the New Left often forgotten by later commentators. But what was socialist class analysis? Each of us had taken different paths to arrive at the realization that it needed renovation, not just revival.

Terry had soaked up ideas about the ruling class, the history of the labour movement, and class struggle as a child of working-class Communist parents. At university, however, as a student of modern history, he became increasingly aware of the gap between the Communist Party's schematic and mechanical Marxism and the complicated relations between classes and class fractions revealed in the historical writings of Marx and Engels.

There were four steps in his path. In 1964 he bought a copy of Edward Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, and discovered the idea of class formation, specifically the working class making itself across a broad front of struggles, cultural as well as economic. With its help he was able to see beyond the lifeless formula of economic base and dependent superstructure. In 1965 he bought a copy of Louis Hartz's *The Founding of New Societies*. The controversy aroused by it made him think about the relationship of parts and wholes, and about the dynamic of class relations in 'whole' societies. (Needless to say he rejected the idea that Australia, as a "fragment" of Europe, had a frozen class structure.) He began to think structurally, a process strengthened by his reading of Raewyn's writings in the early 70s.

Then in 1968 he discovered Gramsci through Alastair Davidson's articles in *Australian Left Review*. The concept of hegemony seemed particularly apposite in

⁷ Rowan Cahill, *Notes on the New Left in Australia* (Sydney: Australian Marxist Research Foundation, 1969); Richard Gordon, ed., *The Australian New Left – Critical Essays and Strategy* (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1970); Alastair Davidson, *The Communist Party of Australia* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1969); Hunphrey McQueen, *A New Britannia – An Argument Concerning the Social Origins of Australian Radicalism and Nationalism* (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books Australia, 1970); Anne Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police: the Colonization of Women in Australia* (Melbourne: Allen Lane, 1975); Miriam Dixson, *The Real Matilda: Women and Identity in Australia, 1788-1975* (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books Australia, 1976); Ann Curthoys, Susan Eade and Peter Spearitt, eds, *Women at work* (Canberra: Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, 1975); Beverley Kingston, *My Wife, My Daughter, and Poor Mary Ann – Women and Work in Australia* (Melbourne: Thomas Nelson (Australia), 1975); Dennis Altman, *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1972).

Australia where the ruling class's use of force against the working class was less obvious in our history than the working class's embrace of the ruling ideology of liberalism. Step four was taken after reading the book edited in 1969 by Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner on *Populism: Its Meaning and National Characteristics*. Although it did not discuss Australia, it enabled him to pick out the populist strand in Australian radicalism, and to identify its expression in the Communist Party's laughable slogan of the time, 'the people versus the monopolists'. Dissatisfaction with its "impoverished Marxism" (to use Rick Kuhn's phrase for Communist party theory)⁸ pushed his thinking back to the contradictions of capitalist production, to capitalism as a changing system of social power, and to the structure of class relationships.

Raewyn came to the project along a different path. With a family background in the professional bourgeoisie, and undergraduate years spent in a ruling-class college, Raewyn had no contact with working-class organizations until joining the ALP in the mid-1960s and meeting union activists there. Her politics came out of books (Bertrand Russell, George Orwell, Paul Goodman), a current of progressive Anglicanism, and a vehement anti-Menzies consensus in her immediate family. Trained in the empiricist humanism of the University of Melbourne's history school, which was explicitly anti-marxist, and Melbourne's psychology school, which was more interested in theory and field research, Raewyn absorbed a respect for precise knowledge, but felt she was being trained to know more and more about less and less. She turned towards sociology in a search for relevance in a world that seemed to be going up in flames. Literally, as the American military at the time were dropping more and more napalm on Vietnamese villages.

However the kind of sociology then being created in Australia was, in its treatment of class, an uninspiring outpost of US functionalism and stratificationism that supported, at best, a mild statist reformism.⁹ A radical alternative was needed. In a 1970 review of Davies and Encel's textbook *Australian Society*, Raewyn formulated principles of method: study social relationships, not attributes of individuals; push the analysis of the patterns in relationships out to the social wholes of which they are part; and grapple with practical questions arising in an actual society, so that theory "in giving understanding of wholes ... makes possible a practice directed to wholes".¹⁰ She learnt from Terry to think about the collective choices for a new social order made possible by structural change. All that was what Raewyn looked for as she

⁸ Rick Kuhn, "Class Analysis and the Left in Australian History", in *Class and Conflict in Australia*, eds, Rick Kuhn and Tom O'Lincoln (Melbourne: Longman, 1996), 158.

⁹ Raewyn Connell, "Setting Sail: The Making of Sociology in Australia, 1955-75", *Journal of Sociology*, 51.2 (2015): 354-369.

¹⁰ Raewyn Connell, Review of A.F. Davies and S. Encel, eds, *Australian Society*, and S. Encel, *Equality and Authority*, in *Politics*, 5.2 (1970): 201-5.

became involved in the labour movement and new left in the second half of the 1960s; and it was central to the project of *CSAH*.

2. Publication and reception

We delivered the manuscript to the publishers in July 1978, expecting the book to appear reasonably quickly. But there was an unexpected hitch. The publishers had evidently become anxious about their own contract and without consulting us sent the whole manuscript out for review. They chose a reviewer who had recently arrived in the country from a career in the metropole, and knew little about Australian history. This reviewer sent in a highly unfavourable report, criticising us for not following the lead of certain American publications. It took a tense round of negotiation before the publishers accepted that we colonials knew what we were doing, and the actual production of the book could go ahead. Even then there were many delays as we argued with the publisher about the length and plan of the book, the suggestions of an intrusive sub-editor, and who would pay for permissions.

When the book did come out, in the time of the Fraser government, it was not reviewed in the mass media. Despite that, it sold well. We don't have an exact figure, but estimate that around 12,000 copies were sold, over the years *CSAH* was in print. For a serious intellectual book, published only in Australia and therefore not supported by publicity in the metropole, that is a relatively wide distribution. There was a second edition, enlarged and with a new first chapter written by Raewyn, published in 1992.

The reviews in magazines and academic journals gradually came in, and we were keen to see how mainstream historians would respond to the book. The answer was with condescension. It was apparent that empiricism, the dominant mode of historical analysis in the profession, could not distinguish between writing the history of society as a structured whole and writing "general history" that wandered across all terrains to arrive at intuitive summaries. So there were many reviews that addressed *CSAH* as an example of general history. This was a genre rarely attempted except by the doyens of the profession. How then could two young upstarts, who as one reviewer pointed out, although trained in history were now writing from academic positions in sociology and political science, dare to compete with the likes of Ernest Scott, Keith Hancock, R.M. Crawford, and Manning Clark?

Accordingly, empiricist reviewers had a wonderful time warning readers about what was missing from our book, such as dates, economic statistics, election results, influential men, minor parties and so on. As we left out most of what a general history ought to contain, why did it not occur to them that we were not writing in this genre?

An alternative theme running through the reviews was that we should be judged as historians of class in Australia, that is, as contributors to a more *specialised* field than general history. As one reviewer wrote, our title should have been "A History of Class Structure in Australia" This at least was a plausible

interpretation of the words in the book's title, although it still misrepresented its content.

This failure of understanding created a category of criticism that implied that our book should contain everything then known about classes in Australia. We were criticised for ignoring the middle class, the white-collar workers, the technical intelligentsia, the farmers, and every other social group with an economic connection you can think of. Some reviewers, more perceptively, wanted to know how the structures of gender and race intersected with class relations – issues that were more visible, and better understood, when the book was published than when it was first planned.

But for most reviewers their thinking was not structural but dimensional. They thought of classes as discrete; they wanted us to measure them, to arrange them in a hierarchy, as strata; to define their boundaries and essential criteria; to identify their internal divisions. Few reviewers took note of our argument in the first chapter about capitalism as a system that gave rise to class dynamics, and about the historical logic of class analysis. Fundamentally, they misunderstood our aim: that we did not set out to write a class-focused history of Australia but to conduct an historical analysis of how class relations structured its history, an analysis of the working of class structure *in* Australian history.

There were of course reviewers who hated the book for its political intent. These could be simply abusive. One of them, in the CIA-funded *Quadrant*, describing the book's five chapters as "an enema and four operations on the mind", suggested that if we wanted to overthrow capitalism we should hurl the book at a capitalist from three metres.¹¹ Such high-powered criticism was also found in the reviews by some revolutionaries. The book, they said, was a complete failure theoretically: it was un-dialectical; it ignored the capitalist mode of production. Confusingly, it was either un-Marxist or it would make the most vulgar of Marxists blush; and if it was meant to reach out to dissenting intellectuals it would be a flop.¹²

So who were its readers? On campuses it was a best seller on Communist bookstalls. At Sydney's Nimrod Theatre in 1982, a quote from it appeared in the program for Gordon's Graham's "Demolition Job": "Ignoring the effects of ruling class power leads ... to a position of political passivity". It was quoted in Helen Grace's award-winning feminist film of 1983, "Serious Undertakings". Trotskyist gadfly Bob Gould sold hundreds from his unsurpassed left-wing bookshop in Sydney. Terry recalls seeing a copy among the few possessions kept by a retired comrade in her tiny hostel room in the 1990s. One of the book's advance parties, sent out to provoke the intellectual enemy - the essay "Yes Virginia, There Is a Ruling Class" – was reprinted 4 times and became the inspiration for the

¹¹ G.P. Shaw, "A Bang as Big as 1789", *Quadrant*, 25.8 (1981): 43.

¹² Bill Martin in *Journal of Australian Studies*, 7 (1980): 99-100; Dave Clark, "Connell and Irving 2", *Labour History*, 40 (1981): 116-125; John Herouvim, "More Questions Raised than Answered", *Journal of Australian Studies*, 13 (1983): 78-88.

composer, Tamas Wells. In short, the political, cultural and intellectual left embraced the book. One enthusiastic reviewer saw it as the moment when Australian social science came of age.¹³

This was not the professional consensus; Bob Gould was right in noting how quickly academic historians dropped the book from their conversation.¹⁴ Yet there are over 450 citations of *CSAH* listed on Google Scholar, many more than most history books in Australia accumulate. There are thousands of references discoverable through a Google Advanced Search.

From these citations we can say something surprising: that, apart from a peak of interest in the late 1980s, the book is as much cited today as it has been over the last 35 years. It is interesting to consider why. The book never became faddish, or a source of buzzwords. It did not get exposure in mass media. In mainstream social science it can now be treated as an historical curiosity, a product of a period of unexpected intellectual radicalism best forgotten.

But the citations allow us to identify its users today. Many higher-degree theses, mostly by younger scholars, are making use of the book. The citations also show a solid body of researchers in political economy, labour history and cultural studies who connect the present with the past by referring to the book. There is also a wider group of “lone hands” in other subjects for whom the book validates their unconventional and sometimes unappreciated intellectual labour. It is very gratifying to know that there are many radicals whose work the book has underpinned with examples or justified with theory.

We think the explanation of this subterranean history is simply that the book has continued to meet a need. When class analysis is required in order to make sense of social power, of the history of ruling and being ruled, and of domination and resistance in Australia’s capitalist society, *CSAH* is still consulted. It seems that Tom Barnes and Damien Cahill are right in their conclusion that Marxist class analysis is a living tradition in Australian scholarship.¹⁵

3. The book’s method and theory

In its first edition, *CSAH* started with a programmatic introduction, continued with a thirty-page theoretical chapter – that alone made it unique in Australian historical writing – and then developed through four substantive chapters, based

¹³ Winton Higgins, “Australian Social Science Comes of Age”, *Australian Left Review* 75 (1980): 24-27.

¹⁴ Bob Gould, *Dumbing Down Australian History and its Teaching* (Sydney: self-published, 2000): 8-9 (pamphlet distributed at the June 2000 Labour History Conference, Sydney)

¹⁵ Tom Barnes and Damien Cahill, “Marxist Class Analysis: A Living Tradition in Australian Scholarship”, *Journal of Australian Political Economy*, 70 (2012): 47-69.

on what we thought was a new periodisation. Each substantive chapter offered an analytic narrative of class dynamics in the given period, detailed critical notes on sources and secondary literature, and a substantial collection of primary documents with notes linking them to the argument of the main text. Each chapter included pictures, and we treated these as visual documents, not just as illustrations, also tying them to the main argument.

In the second edition, to emphasise the continuity of class dynamics and to make the book easier to use in teaching, we organized the book differently: bringing the narratives together, making a separate section of the documents and bringing the pictures together as a visual essay. This made, perhaps, a more conventional text.

Like the “Class and Power” course (and Free U as a whole), the book’s pedagogy was democratic and radical. It was meant to encourage the reader to be her own historian, taking forward our critical engagement with the existing scholarship, and using the documents to extend and deepen her understanding of class.

Books of historical documents had become an increasingly popular tool of teaching, since Manning Clark’s *Select Documents in Australian History* was first published in 1950. But such books were either devoted to one topic (e.g. education), or were made up of disconnected fragments arranged by topics, after the fashion of the empiricism that dominated the teaching of both social science and history in Australia.

We treated our documents differently. We used the concepts of class analysis – such as the state, hegemony, and the labour market – and the kinds of dynamics revealed by class analysis - such as class mobilisation and organisation – in order to tie the documents into the analysis. We soon realized that we had to present the analysis as a narrative, and altered the contract accordingly. So, the purpose the documents would serve was twofold: to provide details to illuminate the narrative chapters that were necessarily quite general; and to convey the lived reality of class relations. This was intended as a rebuff to the abstractions of Althusserian theory that were gaining the attention of Australian Marxists at that time.

This does not mean that *CSAH* was anti-theoretical. Indeed, it had such a strong theoretical agenda that we took the step of opening the book with a rather indigestible chapter about theory, called “Class Analysis and History”. This opened with a declaration that summarizes what the New Left was about:

The subject of class analysis is social power: how it is organized, on the largest possible scale; how it is won and used, stabilised and overthrown; what its effects are in everyday life. (p. 1)

The first task of this chapter was to locate our project in opposition to the major schools of class theory current in the 1970s – marxist structuralism on the one hand (as represented by Althusser, Poulantzas, Carchedi, Wright etc.), and sociological stratificationism on the other, which usually treated class as an income, occupational or status hierarchy. We saw these two as rival variants of a

fundamentally ahistorical, categorical approach to society, which resulted in an indefensible abstraction from social reality:

Classes *are* real groups of flesh-and-blood people... We cannot get away from this without falling into a doctrine... in which real people become puppets in a cosmic ballet; and in which politics itself becomes *a priori*, the answers known before the problems arise. (p. 7)

In contrast, we insisted that classes were entirely real, brought into existence in history through specific processes of mobilization and struggle. This view brought us close to Edward Thompson, whose account of class formation had an immense influence in the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁶ But we were also critical of the indeterminacy in Thompson's formulations, the risk of a concept of class dissolving into fluency (as later happened in research influenced by Foucault). And we felt that Thompson's great book was methodologically incomplete, focussing as it did on one class. To us, the basic object of knowledge was not a class, but a *class structure* that reached across a whole society.

We therefore tried, in the most original though unfortunately also the most opaque part of the chapter, to show what it meant to understand the history of a class structure. We insisted that the analysis of situations and the analysis of structures could not be separated: indeed, understanding the dependence of situations on their historical conditions, within a temporal social process, was the basic task of structural analysis. Class analysis could never be *a priori*, it always in principle had to be empirically grounded and demonstrated. And what was created in history could be destroyed in history; no teleology, triumphalism, or narrative of progress was defensible.

What remained was to lay out the main concepts that the book would use. These were familiar enough: power, property and commodity production; labour market, class boundaries and the internal structure of a class; state, hegemony and crisis. We offered definitions and brief discussions of these ideas, so as not to interrupt the historical narrative in the later chapters.

Our account of this territory was broadly Gramscian. Though the book had a lot to say about industrial struggle, labour markets and economic change, we were to be criticized by some on the left for a lack of political economy. In a non-Gramscian vein, however, we wrapped up the chapter with a discussion of how our analysis could be refuted. We wanted to emphasise that class analysis was not made true by definition. It was vulnerable to testing, and the test was both intellectual and political: "to make sense of the historical evidence and lead to effective political action" (p. 25). *CSAH* the book was mainly about the first test; but it also pointed beyond itself, to the tests offered by the real world in the years to come.

¹⁶ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Gollancz, 1963).

4. And today...

Would we do it the same way now? Hardly. The historical situation we sketched at the beginning of this paper has changed, with the maturing of feminist and gay/lesbian movements, the changing shape of Aboriginal and ethnic politics, the decline of union density and militancy, and the transformation of the economy in the neoliberal era. The context in Australian university life changed too, with the rise of post-structuralist approaches in the human and social sciences, post-modernism in the humanities, and deepening management control of universities.¹⁷

In launching a project of this kind now, we would handle questions of race and gender differently. *CSAH* made a serious effort to be socially inclusive, recognizing the Aboriginal presence, including women's practices as well as men's, giving some recognition to children, telling the continental story not just the story of the South-East. Yet there is no doubt that the book's narrative is *mainly* about white adult men, and its theory is shaped the same way, revolving around the ideas white male theorists have had about white men's business.

Since the post-modern turn many scholars on the left have treated the oppressions of race, sexuality and gender as if they were more important than, even completely free from, class dynamics. We don't buy that. But we agree that class analysis needs to be re-thought in the light of the newer social movements and the social processes, inclusions and exclusions they have highlighted. A broad recognition of that need is shown by the current popularity of the idea of "intersectionality".

But in its usual formulations, intersectionality returns us to the historically static stratificationism that *CSAH* tried to transcend a generation ago - improved only by the simultaneous use of two or three systems of categorization which "intersect". We need, rather, an approach built on the idea of mutually constituting, interacting social dynamics. There is a pedigree for this approach, in the work of socialist feminists in the 1960s and 70s (for instance Heleith Saffioti and Juliet Mitchell), and the research on "racial formation" by radical scholars such as Michael Omi and Howard Winant.

But there is another dimension to this question. Looking now at the footnotes to the theoretical chapter, it is noticeable that we were discussing, almost without exception, the ideas of white male theorists *in Europe and the USA*. These good folk were, of course, writing about class society in Europe and the USA, specifically the global metropole, though they usually framed it as writing about "late capitalism", "advanced societies", or "developed economies".

This set up an unresolved tension in *CSAH*, because in the narrative chapters we were actually writing about something else: the class dynamics of a colony. Indeed, this was announced in the first paragraph of the first narrative chapter,

¹⁷ Raewyn Connell, "Love, Fear and Learning in the Market University", *Australian Universities Review*, 56.2 (2014): 56-63.

where we wrote about “the creation of a white society in Australia” (p. 31). *CSAH* clearly recognized the violence of colonization and the destruction of Aboriginal societies as preconditions for colonial class society. But it did not have the concept of settler colonialism as part of its theoretical equipment - a perspective that would treat settler/indigenous relations and the taking of land as formative for social structure, and formative in a continuing way. The book was written in ignorance of parallel intellectual projects in other parts of the postcolonial world, such as Cardoso and Faletto’s great work *Dependency and Development in Latin America* (first published in Spanish in 1969)¹⁸, or the intense debates about race and class in South Africa.

In writing about class formation in Australia, we were attempting to valorize local experience and activism without falling into Australian-legendry, the populist celebration of Australian uniqueness. We distanced ourselves from the tendency, common in both academic historiography and left-wing thought in the mid-century, to treat Australian events as a pale reflection of developments in the metropole, or as the product of straightforward domination by US and British capital (see, for instance, Wheelwright and Fitzpatrick’s 1965 polemic *The Highest Bidder: A Citizen’s Guide to Problems of Foreign Investment in Australia*). Consistent with the political purpose of the book, we wanted to show the dynamism and creativity of social process in this place.

But our approach had its costs. Although *CSAH* gave very clear recognition to the rise of industrial capital in the 20th century and the deep changes in class formation associated with it, we did not recognize Australian import replacement industrialization (IRI) as the development strategy that was also being adopted in other parts of the global periphery (powerfully advocated by CEPAL, the UN Economic Commission for Latin America, as well as by Samir Amin). Though in the second edition we commented on the more confrontational strategy being followed by the ruling class of the day, we did not recognize the shift of development strategy in the global periphery *away* from IRI towards comparative advantage in global markets, pioneered in Chile and Turkey, that was producing the neoliberal economic regime we have today.¹⁹

Despite its local focus and stress on local agency, *CSAH* conceptually was still an example of what Hountondji has called “extraversion”, being oriented to intellectual authority that comes from the global metropole.²⁰ Were we

¹⁸ English translation: Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto, *Dependency and Development in Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

¹⁹ Raewyn Connell and Nour Dados, “Where in the world does neoliberalism come from? The market agenda in southern perspective”, *Theory and Society*, 43.2 (2014): 117-138.

²⁰ Hountondji’s texts are hard to find outside Africa; for an outline see “Paulin Hountondji’s Postcolonial Sociology of Knowledge”, Chapter 8 in Raewyn Connell, *Confronting Equality*, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2011), 119-135.

attempting it today, we would do it in much closer engagement with research and conceptual debate in other colonial and post-colonial societies.

But we would certainly keep the book's distinctive approach to social dynamics, its concern with large-scale structure as historically constructed through complex and open-ended social struggles. The tasks of understanding "wholes", the structures of exploitation and oppression arising from capitalist production that now encompass the entire world, and developing practice directed to such "wholes", are as relevant to revolutionary activity today as in the 1970s.

There is a strong tendency in socialist thought to conceptualize these structures as tightly integrated systems, driven by an irresistible inner logic. One sees this kind of system theory, for instance, in the writing of both Samir Amin and David Harvey about contemporary neoliberalism.²¹ *CSAH* points in another direction for thinking about global capitalism. Rather than seeing neoliberal globalization as an emanation of an already-existing system, it would highlight the many-dimensional social dynamics *generating* new configurations of power and oppression on a transnational scale. Important among them are the attempts, ranging from neocolonial war to commodification of the Internet, made by emerging or threatened centres of power to *impose* system-like properties on global social and economic relations.

We would still emphasise the need for a historical approach to class dynamics in understanding contemporary Australia. The demobilization of the working class since the early 1970s is a striking fact, visible in the statistics of union membership and strike action, and with palpable results in the rising level of economic inequality. The right-wing hegemony of the last twenty years, despite growing inequality and structural unemployment among working-class youth, depended crucially on the revival of an old current of populist racism, now orchestrated around "border protection" and "war on terror". The ALP's utter submission to neoliberalism, and inability even to imagine a new economic strategy, has a lot to do with the limits of statist reformism that became evident once the IRI development strategy faltered – as it did, ironically, at the high point of Labor reformism in the Whitlam/Dunstan era.

At the same time the Australian ruling class has been profoundly re-structured, developing both new strengths and new vulnerabilities. Neoliberalism has expanded the mass of corporate capital, through privatisation of public sector agencies and deregulation moves that spread the boundaries of commodification. But in the drive for comparative advantage in global markets, there has been a sharp shift of power from industrial to mining capital (the re-structures of BHP leading the pack), with a historically new alliance of hard-right political leadership with transnational mining executives now in control of the central state.

²¹ Samir Amin, *The Implosion of Contemporary Capitalism*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2013) for his concept of 'generalized-monopoly capitalism' as 'an integrated system'; David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

However the “mining boom” is dependent on the strategies of regimes in east Asia, and no alternative development strategy has been created by Australian conservatives. Indeed, they have actively sabotaged alternatives (e.g. in the campaign against Rudd’s mining super-profits tax, and the sorry story of solar power). What they have done, successfully, is to cultivate a new clientele of small-scale businesses and entrepreneurial semi-professions in the service industries that were expanded by the wave of privatisations (a process now rampant in Australian higher education). A significant part of the conservative parties’ base is now provided by groups very different from the “small businesses” of earlier generations. They are dependent on the corporate economy but not part of its permanent workforce, insecure though sometimes very well paid, and directly connected to US corporate culture through the Internet.

Those are some of the issues to be pursued in taking the *CSAH* approach forward. Which we think is needed. The rhetoric of the “1%” has not struck root in Australia. Perhaps this shows the relative invisibility of our economic elites, but also shows the different shape of politics in a postcolonial context. An investigation not just of class, but of the dynamics of class structure, is part of the intellectual work needed for radical politics here and now.