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Imagining Class in Australian History

There are no comprehensive typologies of the concept of ‘class’ in Australia. Some of the more substantive books on class contain a literature review section at the beginning, but they typically have their own chosen theory/theories and proceed to use these to analyse something concrete. Meta-analysis is exceedingly rare, and owing to their historical orientation, only performed by those connected with Marxism. The most significant research in this area has been conducted by Rick Kuhn, who divides class analysis into two camps: ‘populist’ and ‘Marxist’. This chapter attempts to develop a map of the key types of, and concepts within, ‘class analysis’ in Australia through to the 1960s. Kuhn’s history is taken as a starting point, which is expanded up with reference to Raymond Williams’ *Keywords* and other etymological sources of the meaning of ‘class’ in Australia. The history that I offer here is not exhaustive; the ‘middle class’, in particular, represents a parallel, divergent cosmology on the subject. Organising the conceptual history of this tradition would be a significant tangent for the present book, and thus, I have opted to set this task aside for the moment. Instead, I centre the present discussion on ‘populism’ and the history thereof, which I believe

is the most overlooked source of class imagery in Australia, and the key to understanding some of the problems with contemporary analysis.

This chapter frames Kuhn's exploration of the topic with three key problems: the first is the difference between Kuhn's definition of 'populism' and those employed by Peter Love and Margaret Canovan. The second is a discussion of the proletarian story in Marx's theory of class, suggesting that the elements of Marx's own work are closer to populism than Kuhn accounts for. Third, this chapter evaluates the complex place of 'Marxism' within the intellectual orbit of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) through 'Lance' Sharkey, E.W. Campbell and Russel Ward's *The Australian Legend*.

This chapter does not provide a comprehensive history of the relevant actors or organisations, such as the CPA and Australian Labor Party (ALP). The point is to test and expand Kuhn's conceptual categories before applying them to the New Left period in this chapter. The gaps between Kuhn's definitions and the imagination of labour populism also suggest the utility of a genuinely historical class analysis, in contrast to the existing traditions within Sociology, as discussed in Chap. 7. While the history of 'class' discourse in Australia confirms Kuhn's distinction between 'Populism' and 'Marxism' as its key intellectual traditions, this chapter concludes that Kuhn's definition of the terms remains problematic. Nevertheless, with some modification they provide a useful framework for discussing the relationship between class imaginaries throughout Australian history.

The discourse of social identities and institutions as 'imagined' is introduced here in response to Kuhn's arguments. The concept of social imaginaries invokes, but does not systemically engage with, the work of Benedict Anderson and Cornelius Castoriadis. I have specifically avoided the promotion of a new meta-theory of 'class' which is beholden to a particular theorist; this risks another repetition of the cycle of singular, reductive methodologies for class analysis. Instead, I attempt to gesture towards new methodologies for the study of class by triangulating between kinds of language, such as 'imagination' or 'story'. Other potentially useful discourses are elaborated on towards the end of Chap. 7. The point of this is to identify problematic approaches to class and to suggest ways of thinking around them, not to create a theory which can be mechanically applied as a replacement for Marx, Weber or Bourdieu.

The emphasis of this chapter, as with the book in general, lands within a critical register. The content follows the key actors, discourses and their problems: from Kuhn through to Marx, an etymology of the discourse of ‘class’, some of the classic labour populist and Marxist—populist texts.

Rick Kuhn’s History of Class Analysis: Populism and Marxism

The most comprehensive research on class analysis in Australian history was conducted during the dying years of class analysis in Australia by Kuhn: the first volume (co-edited with Tom O’Lincoln) *Class & Conflict in Australia* (1996) was published in the same year that *The Death of Class* (1996) attempted to bury the concept. *Class & Conflict in Australia* along with its second incarnation as *Class and Struggle in Australia* (2005a) and the unpublished working document ‘The History of Class Analysis in Australia’ (2005c) are, despite their brevity, the most useful starting points for organising the imagination of ‘class’ in Australia. This chapter draws from each of Kuhn’s texts as part of a single argument.

Kuhn divides class analysis in Australia into two traditions: populism and Marxism. This risks overgeneralisation as a categorical, more than a historical, distinction: most class literature draws on both populism and Marxism. However, as a theoretical polarisation, Kuhn’s categories help to distinguish the most significant division over class imagination in Australian history. According to Kuhn:

Populists concede that there are important divisions within Australia and sometimes use the language of class. They counterpose an imagined community of ‘the people’, generally very hazily defined, to a small and powerful elite. (Kuhn 2005b: 13)

This approach is linked with the critique of ‘money power’ within the labour movement and the CPA’s identification of ‘foreign-influenced monopolists and “rich families” as Australia’s main problem’ (Kuhn 2005b: 13). There is a danger in over-stressing the role of the ‘elite’ in

populist imagery here: populism can just as easily be directed against the imagined threat of poor migrants and refugees (Kuhn 2005b: 14). Kuhn notes this when distinguishing between left and right populism:

While left populism, associated with the institutions of the labour movement, has obscured Australia's class structure it has sometimes also mobilised people along class lines and justified working class struggles. That has not been the case for right wing populism. Like racism, it has redirected resentment and frustration, generated by the experience of exploitation or oppression, away from the class that benefits from the established order. (Kuhn 2005b: 13)

Kuhn criticises right populism because it identifies the class enemy as anyone *except* the true enemy (the capitalist class):

It has targeted groups who bear little or no responsibility for the operation of Australian capitalism. Robert Menzies, the Liberal Prime Minister from 1949 until 1965 claimed to be championing the interests of a 'middle class' he identified as 'the forgotten people' against the forces of socialism. Stimulated by the success of Pauline Hanson who voiced a more radical right wing populism, John Howard spoke for the 'battlers' who were being pushed around by know-it-all 'elites'. Labor leader Mark Latham's appeal to 'the aspirational classes' had a similar resonance. (Kuhn 2005b: 14)

Kuhn cites texts which blame sections of the capitalist class, rather than the logic of capital itself, as part of the left 'populist' tradition. This includes 'money power' theories, 'which blamed the banks for the suffering of ordinary people' between 1890 and the 1930s (Kuhn 1996: 147) as well as the focus on financial cliques during the 'Popular front' period (Kuhn 1996: 148–149). Kuhn traces a line between these theories and the study of foreign capital by Ted Wheelwright and Brian Fitzpatrick in the 1950s and 1960s (1996: 149). Kuhn's criteria for 'populism' are any imagination of class which is not centred on the logical opposition of capital and labour; the inclusion of 'progressive' capitalists as part of the 'people' is damning evidence of the CPA's deviation from Marxism (Kuhn 1996: 148).

In Kuhn's first definition of populism, the distinction between the 'people' and the 'elite' is a key. However, Kuhn makes a further analytical point: that '*the common ground* [between Left and Right variants] *is that populism locates the main class division not between capital and labour, but in divisions within the capitalist class* [emphasis in original]' (Kuhn 1996: 146). This is perhaps the key defining feature of populism from the perspective of Marxism, which presumes the objective reality of a specific set of class structures. Populism, in this sense, becomes any imagination of class which identifies the wrong class enemy, or which includes those associated with capital on the side of the 'working class'. If this is a convenient way of categorising populism from the perspective of Marxism, it is certainly *not* how populists themselves have imagined class.

The idea that class is 'imagined' requires some clarification. It is important to first differentiate imagination from illusion and idealism. Kuhn conflates these terms when invoking Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, which was first published in 1983, as a critique of right populism:

Some such ideologies and the activities that go along with them create 'imagined communities' and illusory social contradictions, between people understood to members of such a community and those deemed to be outside it. (Kuhn 2005b: 9)

However, Anderson's argument was that a sense of national identity could not be the simple product of shared material experiences, since most of the national community could not have physically met each other. Anderson argues that therefore such identities must be *imagined*:

[The nation] is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. (Anderson 2006: 6)

Benedict Anderson cites Ernest Gellner's point that 'Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it *invents* nations where

they do not exist' (Anderson 2006: 6). This is the spirit in which Kuhn invokes the concept of imagining. However, Anderson criticises Gellner:

The drawback to this formulation, however, is that Gellner is so anxious to show that nationalism masquerades under false pretences that he assimilates 'invention' to 'fabrication' and 'falsity', rather than to 'imagining' and 'creation'. In this way he implies that 'true' communities exist which can be advantageously juxtaposed to nations. (Anderson 2006: 6)

Anderson even links this argument to 'class', in that: 'we may today think of the French aristocracy of the *ancien régime* as a class; but surely it was imagined this way only very late' (Anderson 2006: 6–7).

Anderson is here pointing beyond a crude materialist determination of consciousness which is in some ways similar to Castoriadis' *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1987). In both Anderson and Castoriadis, the construction of meaning depends on the imagination and presupposes a subjectivity of meaning; no identity is any more or less 'illusory' than any other. This is the most illuminating approach to take to class and class consciousness as well, as long as the implication is one of meaning-making rather than illusion.

An Etymology of the Term 'Class'

Raymond Williams' *Keywords* (1976) is an excellent source of conceptual histories and their popular etymologies. It traces their different, and sometimes contradictory, meanings over time. The root of 'class' is the Roman *classis*, which referred to social divisions according to property ownership. This entered English usage as 'class' in the late sixteenth century (Williams 1976: 51). However, the term came to be used as a general synonym for 'group' or 'category' as well as one specifically identifying social division. Prior to the nineteenth century, older terms for social division such as 'rank', 'order', 'estate' and 'degree' were used more frequently than 'class' (Williams 1976: 52). Williams argues that 'class' in the 'modern social sense' with 'relatively fixed names for particular classes' was a product of the period 1770–1840 (Williams 1976: 51). In

this period, 'class' became dominant along with the idea of social divisions as made rather than simply inherited; the 'metaphors of standing, stepping and arranging in rows, [sic] belong to a society in which position was determined by birth' (Williams 1976: 52).

This was the period of the French political and British industrial revolutions. It saw the rise of the self-defined working-class movement of Chartism in England and immediately preceded Marx's theorisation of class. The Australian colonies were also forming, and the emergence of a mass labour movement with significant influence on national identity followed.

The populist origins of the concept of the 'productive' and 'working classes' are significant. In opposition to an earlier celebration of the 'people' as 'middle class' (Williams 1976: 53), between the 1790s and 1830s 'class' came to distinguish the 'productive or useful classes' which was a 'potent term against the aristocracy' (Williams 1976: 54). This latter usage saw an association between the 'self-conscious **middle classes** and the quite different people who by the end of this period would describe themselves as the **working classes**' who both 'adopted the descriptions **useful** or **productive classes**, in distinction from and in opposition to the *privileged* or the *idle*' (Williams 1976: 54).

There is 'overlap' between much class terminology, such as the 'middle and industrious classes' and the 'poor and working classes' (Williams 1976: 54). Williams argues that 'the term **working classes**, originally assigned by others, was eventually taken over and used as proudly as **middle classes** had been' from the 1830s [emphasis in original] (1976: 55). Williams notes that the concept of the 'middle' classes 'implied hierarchy and therefore implied **lower class**' (1976: 55), while 'working' class 'implied productive or useful activity, which would leave all who were not **working class** unproductive and useless' [emphasis in original] (Williams 1976: 55). The result was a confusion, whereby 'working class' is defined in opposition to the idle, while the 'middle class' is defined by its occupation of a space in between other classes.

Williams argues that the binary definition of class 'operated alongside tripartite groupings' such as upper/middle/lower, 'landlords, capitalists and landlords' and even in Marx's 'wage-labourers, capitalists and landlords' (Williams 1976: 58). This is further complicated by Marx's

eclectic use of 'class' to refer to both categories and social formations (Williams 1976: 58–59). Williams concludes with the 'basic range' of meanings of the term class: first, as an objective 'group' of either an economic or social kind; second, as 'rank' or relative social position; third, as 'formation' in the sense of a 'perceived economic relationship' or 'social, political and cultural organization' (Williams 1976: 59).

What is significant here is that the binary concept of the 'working class' (or proletariat) implies a populist narrative. The working class is defined in opposition to the 'unproductive and useless' (Williams 1976: 55). The roots of the term suggest some of the features of Australian labour populist narratives. There is an implied romanticisation of *physical* production in rejecting the 'unproductive and useless'.

This romantic image also lends itself to masculine stereotypes, which came into focus while choosing a cover for this book; How could I represent the 'working class'? Is it a coincidence that despite Marx's formal notion that wage-labour is not limited to any specific sector of the economy, its classic and enduring images all revolve around male physical power? Bush labour, mining, industrial production lines, construction work all easily identifiable as 'working class', even where the latter own their business, technically being petit-bourgeois. I considered sketching each of the above for the cover, and then, I wondered where the images of women were: Are there *any* that would invoke clear recognition in the reader that she was 'working class'? Despite their feminisation, high rates of unionisation and significant industrial actions, nurses and teachers do not tap into the cultural psyche of 'class' in the way that male brawn does. Perhaps this has something to do with the fact that they are caring professions, often state-funded by taxing private industry. Perhaps it has something to do with the fact that they now require higher education, which places them suspiciously close to the 'middle class'. In either case, there appears to be a connection between the particular kind of masculine populism that emerged in the colonies during the 1890s and contemporary images of class, which I will return to throughout this book (and which, I am sure, is not limited to the Australian discourse).

As Williams suggested, there are significant differences between binary and tripartite (or stratified) concepts of class. This argument

is elaborated in Chap. 7, but it is worth explaining its basic contours before diving into the genesis of classed imaginations in Australia. In contrast to the above populist imagery, theories based on stratified hierarchical categories suggest a fundamentally different imagination of class relations. They are based on series of distinctions, like layers of sand in a jar: they sit on top of one another, but have no necessary relationships between each other. Further, the distinctions are necessarily somewhat arbitrary, as they represent the given researcher's sense of the upper income level that should constitute, for instance, the 'middle class'. Another researcher might have split it into three categories of 'lower', 'middle' and 'upper'; the differences are relatively minor and subjective, from the perspective of the researcher. As Connell and Irving note, stratified and binary theories sometimes converge, because categories themselves can have a certain gravity; i.e., ownership or non-ownership of capital may also produce significant disparities of wealth with a gulf in-between, showing up in both Marxist and Weberian accounts. Nevertheless, the ways that class is imagined are very distinct.

Populists, by comparison, regularly invoke the metaphor of an opposition between a host and its parasite. This summarises what is distinctive about binary theories. Binary and stratified hierarchies are not just differences of quantity: one is a kind of conflict theory, and the other is a study of unequal social groups without any particular relationships between them. This division is also replicated between later Marxist (focusing on the binary) and Weberian (the hierarchical) sociologies of class (despite the eclectic coexistence of the two within Marx's work). For Marxists, the rich are enriched by their exploitation of the working class; what unites workers across a diverse array of income levels and industries is their common exploitation. This is why, I think, Marxism and populism have mixed together more than they have with Weberian theories, which have no such concept of exploitation. Stratificationists can find as much interest in the income difference between two categories of wage-labour as they do between wage-labour and capital; for both populism and Marxism, this is both a theoretical problem and a moral one. With this in mind, the genesis of 'class' imagery in Australia can be seen to be primarily generated by the populist imagination and secondarily as modified by Marxists, as outlined below.

The Concept of 'Class' in Australia

Little research has been conducted on the emergence of class discourse in Australia as such. Very brief etymologies exist, such as Connell and Irving's reflection that:

There was once a usage of 'class' that confined it to the top groups in a hierarchy, when 'the classes' were contrasted with 'the masses'. An echo of this survives in the adjective 'classy'. (Connell and Irving 1992: 3)

According to Connell and Irving, 'usage gradually settled on a particular set of characteristics: prestige, power, wealth, income, location in the labour market' (Connell and Irving 1992: 2). One definition of the term 'class' is embodied in the myth of egalitarianism. This myth contends that there are 'no serious social divisions' in Australia (Pietsch 2005: 22). This is based on a comparison between life in the colonies and Britain. Sam Pietsch argues that:

To some degree the very visible aspects of social rank found in countries such as Britain are lacking in Australia. Nonetheless, inequalities of various sorts have always been present in white Australia. (Pietsch 2005: 22)

The 'myth' of egalitarianism was a response to relatively low levels of social polarisation. For the Department of External Affairs, this was a selling point for life in Australia (Kuhn 1996: 145). Powerful narratives of class nevertheless developed.

Understanding the meaning of 'class' in Australia requires starting with labour populism, which coalesced during the 1890s. Kuhn circumvents the existing literature on populism by using 'populist' as if it simply meant 'people-ist', shorthand for the concept of 'the people'. While this is the root of the term 'populism', the concept 'the people' in Australia has acquired a historically specific sense of meaning. For this reason, engaging with the study of populism, rather than invoking the term as an unproblematic extension of 'the people', is necessary to understand its significance.

The best re-narration of labour populism, Peter Love's *Labour and the Money Power* (1984), is built on the work of Margaret Canovan. Canovan typologises populisms primarily through a study of the American and Russian varieties (1981). Canovan argues that the search for the 'essence' of populism is misleading. Canovan divides the existing general literature on populism into two broad categories: agrarian populism and political populism (1981). While these two categories could be further problematised, Canovan argued that they were using the same term, populism, to describe basically different subjects of research. None of Canovan's typology of political populisms, which include 'populist dictatorship', 'populist democracy', 'reactionary populism' and 'politicians' populism', clearly address its usage in Australian labour populism (Canovan 1981: 13).

Complementing Canovan's work, Love's project was 'to develop a model of Australian Labor populism' (Love 1984: 1). Love argues that populist movements are not 'independent', but rather 'they occur as part of wider social processes from which they derive their meaning' (Love 1984: 4). Michael Leach has also situated the working-class identities of the early Queensland labour movement within broader political discourses (2001: 194–195).

Love draws from Russian and American case studies to develop his model of populist ideology, which seems to partly contradict his own focus on a distinctly Australian theory. The main connection, however, is that American populist ideas were 'introduced directly into the labour movement during the critical period of class mobilization in Australia' (Love 1984: 4). The early Labor parties were initially described by the *Hummer* as the United Australian People's Party, and there was 'a strong body of opinion in favour of calling [the United Labor Party of Victoria] the "People's Party"; both names echoing the People's Party in the USA' (Love 1984: 9–10).

Frank Bongiorno has also written about the Victorian Labor Party, or the *People's Party*. Bongiorno argues that rather than the Labor Party being a populist party,

A version of populism influenced the party's formulation of political alternatives. The strength of the populist strand also highlights the inadequacy

- although not the redundancy - of class as a tool for understanding social and political identity. Labour discourse, with its emphasis on the virtue of productive labour, appealed to a sense of working-class identity among manual workers; yet a similar formulation, in certain contexts, buttressed Labor's efforts to build a broad alliance that included farmers, clerks, housewives and business people. (1996: 190)

This passage weaves between rejecting the concept of class and defining it in reductionist terms by repositioning its *meaning*. Speaking of the 'Victorian labour movement's version of populism', Bongiorno argues that:

Perhaps its salient feature was the belief that social relations among the 'productive' sections of the community were naturally harmonious. With the elimination of the wealthy landlord, the rentier and the middleman, harmony and prosperity would be restored to society. In this way, populism was a link between the Labor Party and the tradition of working-class liberalism stretching back to the middle of the nineteenth century. (Bongiorno 1996: 190)

Labourists were distinct in that they inherited 'the old radical populist idea of a union of the productive and enlightened classes against class privilege' along with stressing 'labour's independent political role' (Bongiorno 1996: 5). They nevertheless redefined the concept of the 'people' in class terms. According to Bongiorno, 'Labor sought to legitimate a version of social reality that constituted "the people" as productive men, with their wives and families annexed as dependants' (1996: 6). It is important to note that through this process, both the concept of the 'people' and the 'working class' were imagined in masculine terms: while the categories used by labour activists and leaders, such as 'the "masses", the "people", the "producers", the "democrats" and, increasingly from the 1880s, to "labour" or the "workers"' were 'purported to be gender-neutral, in fact the constituencies envisaged were invariably masculine' (1996: 7). Whether this is described simply as 'populism', 'labourism' or more specifically 'labour populism', the historical development of this narrative has shaped the imagination of class in Australia.

The opposition of the ‘people’ and the ‘elite’ has generated a double-sided mythology: a demonology of the enemy as well as the romanticisation of their antithesis, the people. Love argues:

If the troubles that beset the people were the work of malicious conspirators, it was clear that there was nothing inherently wrong with their community and its collective traditions. (Love 1984: 7)

Thus, populists have a tendency to ‘see their troubles as the result of a conscious conspiracy on the part of wicked men’ (Love 1984: 6). In the case of American populism, Love argues:

If it could be established that the system was manipulated by cunning men, its effects could be understood in terms of deliberate human action. For farmers who knew more about evil than social process this provided an intelligible explanation as well as a focus for their resentment. Conspiracy theories were a logical extension of the basic proposition that there was virtue in the familiar, and peril – if not evil – in the unknown. (Love 1984: 6)

‘The “Shylock” stereotype of the sinister Jew’ could similarly be borrowed from existing prejudices in the Christian tradition to fit into this image (Love 1984: 8). Whichever stereotype ‘evil’ took, its antithesis could be found not only in the ‘people’, but more concretely in the victory of their champion: a charismatic leader which would ‘usher in the populist millennium’ (Love 1984: 9). It is worth being cautious about drawing distant historical comparisons, but there are striking similarities between this vision and Donald Trump’s campaign to ‘make America great again’ by ‘draining the swamp’ of American politics—including his personal triumph over ‘crooked Hilary’. Whether or not the apparent use of a star on a poster alleging corruption was intended to imply the star of David, it is no surprise that it was viewed as such; the whole campaign echoes the sentiments of nineteenth-century populism. If that narrative was strong enough to reverberate throughout American political life ever since, then perhaps Australian labour populism, which was the first enduring basis for Australian national identity itself, also deserves more attention.

While not necessarily religious, this form of politics adapted religious themes. In particular, Millenarianism became 'a secular equivalent to the religious cycle of sin, death and resurrection' in which society underwent a process of 'moral regeneration' (Love 1984: 7). This was the substance of Edward Bellamy's utopian classic *Looking Backward* (1888), which had considerable influence in Australia; William Lane even established a Bellamy society in Brisbane (Love 1984: 7, 10). Bellamy was seen as emblematic of the values of the working-class movement for the future. Other socialists, however, focused on the apocalypse that believed would precede the utopia. The *Worker*, for instance, alluded to the monument of corpses in Ignatius Donnelly's (1890) novel *Caesar's Column* when they declared 'that the political corpses of Parkes and many others will serve no other purpose than as a monument to Labor's victory at the polls' (Love 1984: 13).

The political influence of these novels in cohering sentiment and imagination is significant, and it underlines the importance of story in the formation of class politics. They were widely read by labourers in the colonies, including key labour movement organisers. These politics were not born of raw economic circumstances. Rather, they cohered around people who understood their lives and the future of the colonies through a shared vision, which was articulated by these texts. Gareth Stedman Jones argues that working-class interests are formed through political discourse (1983: 19–22). This is crucial to understanding the more intense political conflict. However, the spark of inspiration, and an imagination set alight, is the foundation for even the rational discussion of political demands. Raymond Williams' concept of 'structures of feeling' is here instructive: he argues that literature precedes formal knowledge and political theory, as it grapples with emergent shifts in sentiment which are yet to find articulation. The novels of this period, the rhetoric of labour movement newspapers and poets such as Banjo Patterson and William Lane, helped to give voice to and to cohere an emerging populist sense of national identity. This identity would later take the form of detailed political programs within the ALP and other socialist groups.

I have drawn heavily from Peter Love, but in doing so there is some danger in over-emphasising the influence of American Populism at the

expense of the British. These ideas were ultimately articulated through the Labor Party, rather than a People's Party. They were articulated by unions and unionists, rather than farmers, even if those unionists were often influenced by the American IWW. Australian Labour Populism borrows from both the American and British discourses, while fitting neither image clearly. Its ethos is centred on itinerant bush workers. They were rural, but not sedentary; unionist, but not industrial. Their irreverence was a virtue (Ward 1978: 17). Ward's *The Australian Legend* (1978 [1958]) describes this story and remains perhaps the most prominent labour populist text; it is discussed towards the end of this chapter. However, Ward's immediate intellectual context was the milieu around the CPA during the 1940s. It is necessary to outline the discourse of Marxism, both in general and within the CPA before exploring how Ward articulated the populist story within this framework. Marxism in Australia is a core part of the story of the labour movement and its understanding of class, just as the novels of Bellamy and Donnelly are part of the story of Australian Communism.

Marx's Theory of 'Class'

A 'Marxist' theory of class has been the main rival to populism. Kuhn argues that 'Marxism' interprets class divisions as caused by the *irreconcilable* opposition between the bourgeoisie and proletariat (Kuhn 1996: 152). Other social cleavages are secondary to this real, central and irreconcilable class division. This does not mean that divisions of gender and ethnicity are considered to be any less morally important or urgent. Rather, class is given analytic priority because it is seen as the *cause* of all other divisions. Kuhn uses authors, such as Winspear and Watson, as early examples of Marxism because they use a worker/boss binary, rather than because of their formal political affiliations (1996: 153–154; 2005c). This is Kuhn's definition of the Marxist category of class analysis, which means that it does not necessarily limit itself to people who saw themselves as Marxists; in principle, anyone that identifies the fundamental social cleavage as between an exploited working class and their employers can be regarded as 'Marxist'. Many of those

who see themselves as Marxists are, conversely, included in the 'populist' category. Kuhn is here talking about conceptual logics and their underlying narratives, rather than self-description.

Kuhn therefore avoids the problem of self-described Marxists in the CPA by pointing to their imagination of class distinctions as between the Australian people and an elite, rather than international labour versus global and local capital, a decidedly un-Marxist position, according to Kuhn's types of class analysis. Wherever Communists seek alliances with 'progressive' capitalists, they have forgotten the fundamental contradiction between boss and worker. They are therefore populist:

Marxists develop class analysis as a weapon in the working class's struggle for its own emancipation. This tradition emphasises the role of relations of production in shaping class interests. It recognises the existence of politically significant divisions in the ruling class, but does not seek alliances with supposedly 'progressive' sections of capital, because it understands that the antagonism between workers and bosses is fundamentally irreconcilable. (Kuhn 2005b: 8)

By 'Marxism', then, Kuhn is invoking a specific lineage of thought within Marx's work which has been taken up and elaborated on by his colleague Frederick Engels, as well as subsequent generations of Marxists such as V.I. Lenin and Georg Lukács. This form of Marxism sees itself as simply articulating the interests of the working class, rather than imposing an external ideology on them. That said, especially in the case of Lukács, the working class is a concept or a potential, more than it is an actually existing social group. He articulates their interests, but these interests have not been politically formulated, and they depend on an agreement with Lukács own value system.

When this approach is used to analyse something concrete, such as the politics of the Australian labour movement, the author has to choose between representing the self-constituted politics of the working-class and Marxist theory itself. The bulk of working-class consciousness and practice in Australian history—and therefore its self-perceived 'interests'—have been at odds with the expectations that Marxists have placed upon them. The kind of Marxism that Kuhn believes represents

the interests of the working class has, in fact, always been committed to a specific understanding of humanist philosophy. When it identifies this philosophy with the natural interests of the working class, however, it unavoidably makes a value judgement as to what constitutes 'true' and 'false' class consciousness. Insofar as the labour movement is not Marxist, in the sense of a worker/boss analytic binary, it is by definition not truly self-aware.

One problem with the neat division between a populist and Marxist imagination of class that Kuhn proposes is that Marx himself has a certain populist morality built into his categories. Marx developed a distinctive imagination of class relations during the same period that a populist sense of 'class' was emerging in the antipodean colonies. This work was exploratory, and care should be taken not to overstate the extent to which Marx had a singular 'theory' of class: his terminology shifted over time, which sometimes contradicted his own previous definitions. One of Marx's concepts of 'class' followed the common usage of the nineteenth century, as 'a synonym for faction or group' (McLellan 1971: 155). However, this is not the use of the term 'class' that has come to be known as 'Marxist'. According to David McLellan, the 'two chief criteria' for Marx are the 'relationship to the prevailing mode of production and a group's consciousness of itself as a class with its attendant political organisation' (McLellan 1971: 156). It is important to note that the latter criterion is imagined as an expression of the former, rather than an independent factor. Marx's analysis begins with group relations to production and interprets class consciousness as the *subjective* realisation of *objectively* existing relationships.

Marx and Engels place the opposition of class interests at the heart of all social change and cultural life. In the *Communist Manifesto*, they argue that 'the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles' (Marx and Engels 1952: 45). 'Capitalism' is the last in a long succession of class societies:

In the earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank... The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has

but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones... Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinctive feature: it has simplified the class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat. (Marx and Engels 1952: 46–47)

These two classes are mutually constitutive:

In proportion as the bourgeoisie, *i.e.*, capital, is developed, in the same proportion is the proletariat, the modern working class, developed – a class of labourers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital. (Marx and Engels 1952: 56)

The link between the proletariat and bourgeoisie is that the latter can only exist on the basis of exploiting the former. Marx and Engels argued that class relationships were rooted in the exploitation of surplus value: the ruling class ruled because it was able to extract the productive surplus from the productive classes. Class interests were not simply *different* interests; they were *fundamentally opposed* interests. Ruling classes fed off the labour of their subordinates.

The binary opposition between an exploiting ruling class and good proletarians parallels the discourse of ‘class’ in populism, as well as the earlier, religious sense of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ that both draw from. One difference between Marxism and populism here is that the ‘good’ is associated specifically with the project of socialism, rather than being an inherent quality of the ‘people’ per se. More importantly, Marx and Engels are distinguished in that they pitch their normative social philosophy as a scientific economic theory, rather than as a moral argument. In this way, Marx and Engels were famously able to describe workers as the ‘grave-diggers’ of the bourgeoisie, as if it was a simple fact of history (Marx and Engels 1952: 66).

If the proletarian story of Marxism parallels the normative moral imagination of populism, it can nevertheless be distinguished on at least two grounds: the first being its teleology of history, for which the

workers are responsible for carrying the historical progress of humanity as a whole to the next level; the second being the way that its normative and teleological stories are rationalised through economic theory.

The second factor, the rationalisation of the teleology, was crucial for the coherence and legitimacy of Marx's theory. He therefore attempted to concretise his political philosophy within an empirical economic theory. The problem that he faced was developing a measurement of exploitation for the free market system. Unlike previous modes of production, where exploitation was transparent and open, labourers within the capitalist system did not simply owe a portion of their production to their masters. Labour was now bought and sold at its value on the market, in the same manner as all other commodities were: according to the supply and demand of the market. While individual employers might have underpaid their workers, Marx was convinced that the very system of the free market itself was exploitative.

In *Capital*, Marx elaborated on his analysis of the way in which these class relationships were perpetuated within the capitalist economy. To this end, he developed his Labour Theory of Value (LTV), which was inspired by Adam Smith and David Ricardo (Marx and Engels 1968: 25). In contrast to economic theories which depended on the law of supply and demand, Marx argued that the use values of commodities were so different that they could not be traded for one another, except according to the one quality they bore in common: how much time another person had to spend to produce it (Marx 1990 [1867]: 126–130). According to Marx, all other conditions being equal, the only basis for human trade are the exchange of socially necessary labour time and its equivalence in the form of money (Marx 1990 [1867]: 128–129; 162–163). This determines a commodity's 'exchange' value (Marx 1990 [1867]: 126–129).

The consequence is that, for Marx, only human labour (variable capital) produces new value; machinery and other forms of productive technology (constant capital) do not (Marx 1990 [1867]: 317). A commodity, once produced, simply *contains* the amount of socially necessary labour time it took to be produced. A worker's ability to work or 'labour power', however, is a special kind of commodity. Its value is determined like any other commodity, by the amount of socially necessary

labour time required to produce it (which in this case is the workers' means of subsistence) (Marx 1990 [1867]: 324–325; 340). However, once bought, labour power can produce *more* socially necessary labour time than it took to be produced in the first place; a worker can produce more than it took to reproduce themselves (Marx 1990 [1867]: 300–301, 324, 340). The difference between the cost of reproducing the worker and the product of the worker's labour is, for Marx, the source of surplus value (Marx 1990 [1867]: 300–301, 327–329). This is also the source of exploitation: Marx argued that 'what distinguishes the various economic formations of society', such as 'slave-labour' and 'wage-labour' societies, 'is the form in which this surplus labour is in each case extorted from the immediate producer, the worker' (Marx 1990 [1867]: 325). This economic theory therefore identifies two polarities of class within capitalism: the capitalist and the worker, which are positioned as simply the latest, and last, form of historically exploitative relationships (Marx 1990 [1867]: 325).

There has been debate over whether a two-class or a three-class model of class is appropriate for Marxism (Draper 1978: 288). Erik Olin Wright has developed more complex maps of class locations. Wright questions the validity of polarised concepts of 'class' and its implications for terms such as the 'middle class': what does it mean to be in the 'middle' of a 'relation'? (1985: 50; 1997: xxvii). Wright instead situates contradictory 'class locations' within the binary framework of the 'basic classes' of any given mode of production, such as capitalism (1989: 24, 26).

This is a mediation of Marx and Engels' assessment that the logic of capitalism pushes all members of society into one 'camp' or the other, although it does not break from the idea that there are only two true sets of class interests: bourgeois and proletarian (Marx and Engels 1952: 46–47). All classes within capitalism are understood by Marx in terms of their relationship to the central process of exploitation. This is true even for the 'petty-bourgeoisie', which is distinguished from the bourgeoisie mainly because it lives off its own labour and property, rather than exploiting others (Draper 1978: 289). Marx's analysis here was imagined as a *scientific* study of capitalism, which could divorce the socialist movement from utopianism by finding its philosophy rationally *justified* in the actual workings of society.

Marx's narrative of the proletariat welds two theories together: first, that the economic category of wage-labour is objectively exploited and therefore has an objective interest in communism; second, that there is the potential for this objective interest to be realised as working-class consciousness. These two theories correspond to the division between 'class' and 'class consciousness' as well as the concept of the class 'in itself' and 'for itself'. It is worth pointing out that the distinction between a class 'in itself' and one 'for itself' never appeared in Marx's work as such. This paraphrase is based on a passage from *The Poverty of Philosophy* which counterposed a class 'against capital' with its later state as a class 'for itself' (Marx and Engels 1976: 211). Andrew argues that this only describes a 'negative unity against capitalist exploitation' (Andrew 1990: 273). Nevertheless, the terms have stuck because they articulate a logical distinction between the objective and subjective elements of Marx's philosophy. Marx differentiates between a class defined by their 'common situation' and 'common interests' and their 'struggle' in which they become 'united' and constitute themselves as a 'class'. The distinction is between a class as defined by wage-labour and a politically organised working class, the category and the formation (Williams 1976: 58–59). The class 'against capital' and the class 'for itself' are simply two moments in the development of the one social actor.

These two aspects of the definition of the working class are the dual logics or dual justifications for Marx's theory of the proletariat. The proletariat is *objectively* defined by its labour for capital, such that if it was no longer employed and exploited, it would not make sense to speak of it as a 'working class'. However, the fact of this exploitation—according to the LTV—means that the working class must also by definition carry a set of objective class interests in ending that exploitation, which can be subjectively realised as consciousness. These two propositions are distinct, but they are also inseparable; in order for Marx's theory to be validated, the proletariat must be able to be demonstrated as both *objectively exploited* and as carrying objective class interests which can, potentially, be realised as class consciousness. If either of these points were to be invalidated, Marx's theory of the proletariat would become untenable.

Marx's use of the term 'proletariat' is not consistent or exact (McCarthy 1978: 71). Nevertheless, there is a recurring sense in

which the proletariat is pushed towards revolutionary activity. In the *Manifesto*, Marx and Engels argued that the victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie was ‘inevitable’ (1952: 66). Similarly, in *The Holy Family* Marx and Engels argued that:

It is not a question of what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat, at the moment *regards* as its aim. It is a question of *what the proletariat is*, and what, in accordance with this *being*, it will historically be compelled to do. Its aim and historical action is visibly and irrevocably foreshadowed in its life situation as well as in the whole organization of bourgeois society today. (Marx and Engels 1975: 37)

Georg Lukács elaborated on this argument in *History and Class Consciousness* (1971 [1919–1923]). For Lukács, this was a metaphysical wonder: history had given birth to a class whose objective interests were equal to the interests of humanity as a whole. The proletariat was the ‘identical subject-object of history’ (1971: 148–149, 197; Lopez 2014).

The legitimacy of this argument has, for those outside the tradition of Lukács, depended on the notion that Marx’s class categories were developed out of a close study of economics. This is how the French Communist Louis Althusser (1969: 34–35) could imagine a fundamental break between the early ‘ideological’ Marx and the ‘scientific’ Marx, which was ‘mature’ (1969: 34–35). Political economists that identify with Althusser have seen themselves as contributing to the latter tradition, as discussed in Chap. 5. The problem here is that the category of the ‘proletariat’ which is necessarily central to *all* Marxist research is a *product* of the earlier phase of Marx’s work. Marx imagined the ‘proletariat’ to be the solution to the problems facing modern society *before* his later works rationalised this conclusion through political economy. Marx first began to articulate his concept of the revolutionary proletariat as early as 1843, while he ‘knew virtually nothing of economics’ and had ‘not yet formulated his materialist conception of history’ (McCarthy 1978: 3). André Gorz concludes that:

Marx’s theory of the proletariat is not based upon either empirical observation of class conflict or practical involvement in proletarian struggle’ because the practical activity of workers was separate to what they ‘*are*’,

and what they *'are'* can only be identified by Marx himself. (Gorz 1982: 16–17)

The modern use of the term 'proletariat' by Schapper originally referred to everyone who where not 'idlers' (Draper 1978: 33). Despite the later attempt by Marx to narrow the term to a specific economic definition, its 'honorific aura' lingers in Marxist literature (Draper 1978: 33–34). This aura has its roots in the older populist imaginations of class. It implies a similar moral status to the concept of the 'working class': the hard workers.

The economic theory of *Capital* has, therefore, been fundamental to Marx's ability to rationalise a proletarian story, which echoes populist sentiment and integrates it into a Hegelian conception of historical progress, a teleological imagination that was not out of place in its context of apocalyptic and utopian historical projections of the future. Indeed, there might even be a syncretism here with the perpetual expectations of crisis and collapse in Marx and Lukács' work (see Gilbert 2016), as well as in subsequent Leninist politics. In this sense, the key distinction between the narrative of the Marxist proletarian story and that of the populist narrative of 'class', is precisely which social groups fall into the category of the 'people', or the 'proletariat', and which fall into that of the 'elite' or the 'ruling class'. It is only with theories, such as the LTV, that Marx could legitimise sentiment that would otherwise seem outlandishly populist; he could literally describe capital as a vampire, which 'lives only by sucking living labour'; according to Marx, the capitalist here 'is only capital personified. His soul is the soul of capital' (Marx 1990 [1867]: 342). Marx wrote with rhetorical flourishes to communicate his point, but what I hope to illustrate here is just how narrative-driven this nominally 'scientific' economic theory is. Althusser regards the above to be part of Marx's 'scientific' work, because its rests on the notion that there is a demonstrable and objective economic foundation to these kind of sentiments.

Hegelian Marxists, such as Lukács, have distinguished their brand of class analysis by a similar presumed objectivity. Here, capital is stripped of the malicious agency it carries in the populist tradition because its subjectivity is confused. Only the proletariat, or its 'standpoint', can

truly see and transform society (Lukács 1971: 149). Lukács carries the presumed objectivity of this stance:

The self-understanding of the proletariat is therefore simultaneously the objective understanding of the nature of society. When the proletariat furthers its own class-aims it simultaneously achieves the conscious realisation of the - objective - aims of society, aims which would inevitably remain abstract possibilities and objective frontiers but for this conscious intervention. (Lukács 1971: 149)

In this way, both Hegelian and anti-Hegelian Marxists, including Lukács and Althusser, could imagine themselves as fundamentally distinct from populists, while reproducing very similar content, as if being objective.

Separation between the logics of the story and its rationalisation therefore poses a serious problem for Marxism. If the working class does not respond to its immediate economic 'interests' by adopting Marxism, if they need socialism to be brought to them 'from without' (Lenin 1988 [1902]: 98), then in what sense is Marxism an expression of their interests? These must be the 'interests' that they are not aware of. If they are not aware of these interests, which are supposed to coincide with universal human interests, then what makes the proletariat special? Timothy McCarthy argues that this tension, between the 'universalism of the proletariat mission and the particularity of its social base', is not resolved (McCarthy 1978: 53). McCarthy explains that:

To abandon the universalist view of the proletarian mission would deprive Marxism of its implicit ethical basis; to make explicit the universalist premises would endanger the distinctively class character of the movement. (McCarthy 1978: 53)

This tension makes its way into class imagery through a conflation between the imaginaries and cultures of *specific* classes and broader philosophical imaginaries. From historical materialism, Marxist class theory takes the assumption that *all* culture is the expression of a material

interest. From Marx and Engels' proletarian universalism, all *socialist* culture is associated with the working class, and its opposite is either 'bourgeois' or the residue of previous class societies. Wherever class 'interests' diverge from consciousness, Marxists have to either explain this false consciousness or else acknowledge that their rationalisation for class disguises a subjective, normative project. They are caught in a bind: acknowledge the normative basis of their project and lose their claim to objective rational truth, or continue to believe that they represent the interests of people that do not agree with them.

To summarise the argument so far, Kuhn is correct in that there is a broad category of class imagination which can meaningfully be termed 'Marxist'. This is characterised by a conviction that the opposition between capital and labour is the true source of class division. However, Kuhn does not identify the narrative dimensions of this theory, which have a mixed heritage with populist sentiments that he seeks to define them against. Both aspects, the moral narrative of the working class, *and* its economic rationalisation, are core aspects of Marxist class analysis. One cannot survive without the other. The various traditions of Marxism which have focused on one or the other side of Marxism, the story (E.P. Thompson) or the scientist rationalisation (Althusser), are discussed throughout this book. The 'historical' class analysis of Thompson, Connell and Irving (Chap. 4) cannot distance itself completely from its reliance on implied economic logics, while the 'scientific' Marxism of Althusser and Australian political economy (Chap. 5) continue to imply a binary moral narrative. What is implicit in Kuhn's work is that when he writes 'working class', he is imagining socialism, egalitarianism and human progress; when he describes the 'bourgeoisie', he is envisioning conservatism, reaction, exploitation and oppression. Even dry economic definitions carry along with them the imagined significance of Marx's political project as a whole.

One objection to the argument presented here has been foreshadowed by Andrew Metcalfe. This argument holds that there are two traditions of thought within Marx (Metcalfe 1987: 79), which are slightly different to the rational/narrative distinction that I have drawn. For Metcalfe, one Marx sees the structures of capitalism as inevitably

leading to a singular revolutionary working class being the question of what the proletariat 'is', in terms of its essential nature (Marx and Engels 1975: 37). The other can be identified in Marx's aphorism that:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past'. (Marx and Engels 1968 [1852]: 97)

Metcalf, following E.P. Thompson, is most interested in the latter Marx. Metcalf rejects the Althusserian notion of 'people as the bearers of structure', although he is also careful not to reduce the debate to a contest between Thompson and Althusser, which neglects the contributions of many other authors (Metcalf 1987: 79). Metcalf argues that there is a constant tension within Marxism between the objectivist and historical traditions (Metcalf 1987: 79).

The problem with this argument is that Marx's notion of historical agency is contradicted by his theory of class. There is no logical room for 'freedom', creativity or agency within Marx's existing theory of class. Indeed, quite the opposite is true: the proletariat is an essentialised actor which brings about the possibility of freedom only with its victory. Marx's categories of working class and capitalist class are concepts with essential natures. Marx's historical explanations are rooted in a philosophy of humans as fundamentally determined by their own labour. Marx's critique of class society is that it limits the freedom and potential of labour, and that this can only be solved through revolution. The very point about the essentially unfree nature of capitalist society means that contemporary social relationships cannot be understood as creatively generated. Human agency is, for the time being, unidirectional: to achieve historical progress or to regress. It may be vastly free under socialism, but contemporary social structures and practices can be explained through essential class interests which are determined by material history. The fact that Marx was *interested* in the concept of freedom does not in itself mean that he offered a theory of class which acknowledged its creative construction.

Metcalfé's two Marx's do exist, but the theorist of freedom needs to escape the rationalisation/narrative bind in order to become realised. At this point, it would be difficult to call them a Marxist in any meaningful sense of the word, unless Lukács (1971) was correct in arguing that a person can reject all of Marx's actual theses in toto and remain a Marxist. Marx's abstract sentiment on freedom remains useful inspiration, but in order to get there, class analysts would have to drop the pretence of scientific objectivity and recognise their project as a creative and imaginative one. If they are also interested in understanding history, they would have to be able to understand the internal logic of rival philosophies, which means treating them as in principle neither correct nor incorrect. Metcalfé, to his credit, offered the possibility of advancing Australian Marxism significantly in this direction, as discussed in Chap. 6. For the present chapter, however, it is a moot point; as the major traditions of Marxism in Australia developed, they did so in relation to the existing populist traditions. These fused with the narrative dimensions of Marxism and became something quite distinctive. Noting the distinctive contours of this is important, because it cannot be inferred from the logic of Marxism in general, or that of the Stalinist Comintern which guided them. It is also the second key period in the formation of popular understandings of 'class' in Australia, after that of the labour populist 1890s.

Marxism in Australia: Imagining 'Class' in the CPA

Complicating a distinction between Marxism and populism is the fact that former has rarely appeared as a clear alternative in Australia. Marx's theory of class represented one way of imagining class which had, by the time of its arrival in Australia, already become mixed with others. Purists and dissidents existed in small numbers, but a major clarification of Marx's theory and its applicability to Australia did not occur until the period of the New Left. By this point, Marxism had been institutionalised in a range of left parties in Australia for over half a century.

The history of class imagination in Australia has been one of Marxist-influenced populism and populist-influenced Marxism engaging in discussion about a presumed common subject, with very little self-awareness until the revival of self-critique in the late 1950s and 1960s.

Marx's writing on class came to Australia in heavily mediated form. When Marxism first entered the Australian socialist movement during the 1890s, it was mixed with the Syndicalism of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and other philosophies (Marks 2011: 28–29). The labour movement of the 1890s was a melting pot for ideas as diverse as Bellamy and Donnelly's 'Fabianism and Christian socialism, labourism and syndicalism, anarchism and Henry George's single tax' (Love 1984: 14). Marx's imagination of class already had some parallels in the local labour movement, which Kuhn describes as 'Marxist'. The first of these was in 1890:

Sydney unionist James Watson argued that Henry George's land tax 'would not stop the capitalist from grinding his workmen down to starvation wages, it would not shorten the hours of labour, for we cannot all live by tilling the soil'. (Kuhn 2005c)

Kuhn also cites Winspear's *Economic Warfare* (1915) as having developed the most 'sustained' Marxist analysis to date:

Once in office Labor politicians 'commenced to babble about representing all classes, while... playing to the ignorant of their own followers and soothing the prejudices of the bourgeoisie'. In fact, Winspear argued, capitalists could benefit from Labor's ability to attract worker support for policies contrary to working class interests. (Kuhn 2005c)

The appeal of Marxism was limited during the early years of the First World War. The Russian Revolution of October 1917 raised the status of *revolutionary* Marxism, which was then imagined in opposition to other theories of class and politics.

Davidson argues that Australian socialists and members of the ALP did not know who Lenin was before Bolsheviks took power in Russia (1969a: 6). For example, Tom Barker, a leader of the IWW, had never

heard of Trotsky or Lenin, despite having organised support for the February Revolution (Davidson 1969a: 6). Davidson concludes that:

It was not knowledge of the principles of bolshevism which made Australian socialists hail the revolution. It appealed to them as a millenarian solution to the current ills of capitalist society. (Davidson 1969a: 6)

Indeed, 'the Australian socialist parties and the IWW each saw the revolution as an endorsement of its own policy and theory' (Davidson 1969a: 6–7). Bolshevism found an audience in Australia on the basis of a pre-existing tradition of radical labour populism, not the logical deduction of class antinomies from the study of capital.

The Communist Party of Australia (CPA) was eventually formed by twenty-six men and women in 1920, which was less than half the number invited to the founding meeting (Davidson 1969a: 3). Despite its initially small size and influence, this party forever changed the discourse of 'class' and socialism. Thereafter, the conflict between the unionist and parliamentary wings of the labour movement would be understood through the language of the world socialist movement: between reformism (also 'social chauvinism' or 'opportunism') and revolutionary Marxism. E.W. Campbell, a leader of the CPA, interpreted the war years as a revelation. Just as the Bolsheviks formed the Third International in response to the betrayal of the social democratic Second International, so too the CPA was a response to the bourgeois ideology of the ALP:

It took the war crisis to reveal that the whole [Labor] party, Federal and State, was permeated with opportunism, completely dominated by bourgeois ideology and utterly subservient to the interests of Australian capitalism. The first imperialist world war provided a real test for working class parties throughout the world. Only the Bolshevik Party of Russia proved capable of meeting this test and emerging from it with flying colours. All of the other parties in the international labor movement succumbed in one way or another to the war fever and became parties of social-chauvinism, taking the side of their own ruling class against the interests of the working class. The Australian Labor Party was no exception to the general rule. (Campbell 1945: 60)

The ALP was thus interpreted as the Australian equivalent of reformist parties across Europe. If this was true, then it followed that the Australian working class would need a Communist Party if it was to overthrow capitalism; indeed, they could imagine themselves as the Australian Bolsheviks and dream of an Australian October.

After reframing world history in terms outlined by the Bolsheviks, previous decades of Australian history were similarly reappraised by the CPA. The thought of two of its leaders, Lawrence ('Lance') Sharkey and E.W. Campbell, is illustrative. Campbell presents a history of the labour movement as a kind of pre-history of the Communist Party. A linear narrative is drawn between the arrival of trade unionism in the 1850s and its eventual realisation in the form of the CPA in 1920. The labour movement had been 'given the opportunity to thoroughly test the two extremes of Reformism and Revolutionary Syndicalism', which 'proved equally barren' (Campbell 1945: 106). Campbell cites Sharkey's argument that it was only with the ultimate formation of the CPA that 'Australian workers started to find the true path to their emancipation, i.e., along the lines of the theory and practice of Marxism-Leninism' (Campbell 1945: 107). Sharkey narrates the history of the labour movement and its various ideological defects as leading to Communism:

The formation of the Communist Party (October 30, 1920) was one of the decisive revolutionary acts of the Australian working class. The formation of the Communist Party in Australia was the outcome of the experience of the working class gleaned in the struggles and growth of the labor movement from 1890 to 1920. (Sharkey 1944: 17)

Sharkey positions the foundation of the CPA simultaneously as organically Australian *and* a conscious product of 'the working class'. Its Australian character is complicated by the fact that the whole concept of the party was imported from Russia. Imagining the actions of twenty-six people, all of whom were already radical activists within the Industrial IWW, as 'one of the decisive revolutionary acts of the Australian working class' suggests that very few members of the working class need to be involved in their own liberation. Sharkey explains the world-historic significance of this act:

The formation of the Communist Party represented the victory of Marxism-Leninism over various petty-bourgeois-pacifist “Socialist” theories (Victorian Socialist Party, “Peaceful Revolution,” “Fabianism,” etc). At last the Australian workers started to find the true path to their emancipation, i.e. along the lines of the theory and practice of Marxism-Leninism, embodied in the Communist Party. The formation of the Communist Party was therefore one of the historical milestones on the road of the Australian working class toward its liberation. (Sharkey 1944: 17)

The Bolsheviks had proven that the political organisation of a small number of people could have world-historic implications. However, projecting the *agency* for the formation of the CP onto the ‘working class’ was more than a stretch; this working class at no point in its history supported the party in anything nearing a majority. The image of the CPA is that of an *avatar* for the *idea* of a class.

The translation of local Australian conflicts into the discourse of the world socialist movement carried with it a danger of expecting Australian classes to mirror their imagined European counterparts. Despite their affiliation to the Communist International (Comintern), and indeed the latter’s selection of the leadership of the CPA, Australian Communism was more than an extension of Moscow’s foreign policy. Stuart Macintyre has given a compelling account of the tension between official discourse and the everyday activity of the CPA. Macintyre argues that Communism was ‘a form of politics more closely controlled than any other’, in which stenographers recorded verbatim transcriptions of all proceedings. Nevertheless, within the formal acceptance of Moscow’s policy turns, differences can be gleaned from ‘subtle shifts in emphasis’ (Macintyre 1998: 8). The everyday practice of the party extended from the ‘working class’:

Into a whole range of emancipatory projects: the abolition of sexual inequality, freedom for Aborigines and all other colonised peoples, the removal of the White Australia policy and full acceptance of national minorities were just some of them. (Macintyre 1998: 4)

This broader ‘emancipatory project’ was further complicated during the 1940s, when the party attracted a substantial influx of ‘middle-class’

professionals (Davison 2012: 433). Critical intellectual work of all varieties became associated with the CPA:

For three decades virtually all non-Labor radical intellectuals were either Communist Party members or fellow-travellers or, at the very least, found their activity necessarily directed towards and linked with that of the Communist Party. (Milner 1988: 268–269)

The party retained a number of influential supporters from working-class backgrounds, such as Frank Hardy, the author of *Power without Glory* (Hardy 1972 [1950]; Milner 1988: 272). However, in addition, the party now carried wealthy individuals who had been educated at elite boarding schools (e.g., Russell Ward). Through the politics of the CPA and its political vision, dissident intellectuals that would otherwise be part of the establishment came to support the labour movement. Dogmatic support for the political line from Moscow became a *redemptive* cause for the privileged as well as the dispossessed. Class populism had already been a meaning-making practice within the labour movement, as well as for Australian nationalists. Now, class was imagined by those on the outside as well, by intellectuals such as Russell Ward who could then project their vision back through history onto ‘the working class’.

Marx had also imputed his hopes for world history to the consciousness of workers. The difference here was that fellow travellers of the CPA, such as Ward, were searching for a national identity as much as for human emancipation. This fits with changes in Soviet foreign policy, which started to break from internationalist theory and move towards nationalism and the ‘Popular Front’ against Nazism (Davison 2012: 429, 438). The most significant outcome of this period, in terms of its consequences for the New Left, was the articulation of nationalist sentiments about the labour movement *through the language of Marxism*.

Russell Ward’s *the Australian Legend*

Russell Ward joined the CPA during the 1940s. Although he had formally left the party before publishing *The Australian Legend* in 1958, he remained in the intellectual orbit of the party. Ward’s project was

to ‘trace and explain the development of [the Australian] national mystique’ (1978: 15).¹ Ward argued that this mystique, self-image or identity could not be understood as a product of the character of the ‘average’ Australian, or their material conditions. Urban life had, as Ward clarified in a subsequent edition of the text, more influence on Australian history than rural life (1978: 11). What was interesting for Ward was that the former has had ‘remarkably little influence on the growth of our national self-image’ (Ward 1978: 11). The most important factor, according to Ward, is how the ‘typical’ Australian was *imagined* to be. Ward famously summarised this stereotype:

According to the myth the ‘typical Australian’ is a practical man, rough and ready in his manners and quick to decry any appearance of affectation in others. He is a great improviser, ever willing ‘to have a go’ at anything, but willing too to be content with a task done in a way that is ‘near enough’. Though capable of great exertion in an emergency, he normally feels no impulse to work hard without good cause. He swears hard and consistently, gambles heavily and often, and drinks deeply on occasion. Though he is ‘the world’s best confidence man’, he is usually taciturn rather than talkative, one who endures stoically rather than one who acts busily. He is a ‘hard case’, sceptical about the value of religion and of intellectual and cultural pursuits generally. (Ward 1978: 16–17)

Ward describes a work ethic and sense of masculinity which is recognisable as an Australian stereotype. ‘He’ is also proudly itinerant, ‘highly suspect if he should chance to gather much moss’ (Ward 1978: 17). The image is one of a rough, materialistic and anti-intellectual physical labourer. The ‘hard case’ aspect of this is important for later concepts of the working class, especially with regard to the ‘intellectual and cultural pursuits’; as Clark (1986 [1963]: 213) notes, ‘Labor has traditionally suspected “intellectuals as representatives of the class enemy”’.

Ward does not reduce the legend to ‘class’ alone, but with the possible exception of the nomadic aspect of this myth, Ward has depicted an enduring stereotype of Australian working-class consciousness. Ward continues:

He believes that Jack is not only as good as his master but, at least in principle, probably a good deal better, and so he is a great 'knocker' of eminent people unless, as in the case of his sporting heroes, they are distinguished by physical prowess. He is a fiercely independent person who hates officiousness and authority, especially when these qualities are embodied in military officers and policemen. Yet he is very hospitable and, above all, will stick to his mates through thick and thin, even if he thinks they may be in the wrong. (Ward 1978: 17)

This image is not only 'classed', but also distinctly populist: the common national culture is imagined in opposition to elites ('eminent people' and authorities) and defined by a love of mateship and physical prowess, the antinomy of intellectual individualism. The history of the labour movement specifically is suggested in the use of language: 'No epithet in his vocabulary is more completely damning than "scab", unless it be "pimp" used in its peculiarly Australasian slang meaning of "informer"' (Ward 1978: 17). 'Scab' is a unionist term for a strike-breaker, while 'pimp' in this sense is to betray the common people by informing on them to the authorities. This valorisation of early labour movement culture helps, I think, to contextualise 'bogan' subculture, which is simultaneously demeaned and exalted. Repudiating high culture and loving the ways of the 'legend' can be seen as very good things.

Ward's *Legend* re-articulated labour populism as Australian national culture, in a highly sympathetic light. Others such as Serle, Turner, Gollan and Fitzpatrick contributed to this project and were collectively described by McQueen as 'legenders' (1986: 1). While Ward did not argue that the 'legend' represented the realities of Australian life, and in fact the point of the book was to explore the 'mystique' which was quite distinct from this, he nevertheless became associated with seeing them in this way. Through the collective efforts of the 'legenders', Australians came to be imagined as proto-socialist. This work was loosely associated with the CPA, and indeed, the party could be imagined in the role of leading the *national* struggle as well as the workers' struggle more specifically. The changing role of 'nationalism' for the Soviets dovetailed with this development.

Graeme Davison (2012) has shed light on this period of Communist history through the study of nationalism. Davison notes that the CPA had originally seen the Second World War as an imperialist adventure. That changed when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union:

Defence of the Soviet Fatherland, rather than internationalism and pacifism, became the theme of Soviet policy. Stalin made folklore a key feature of his campaign to mobilise the Russian people during the Great Patriotic War, even contriving the composition of new songs in the folk idiom... Folklore was on its way to becoming the lingua franca of international Communism... At Moscow's call, Australia's Communists rallied to the national cause. (Davison 2012: 439)

The *Communist Review* came to openly promote patriotism as a Communist value (Davison 2012: 438–439), which was a radical departure from the internationalist premise of the Third International. The author of *Industrial Labour and Politics* (1965), Ian Turner, later reflected that he and his peers had found along with the war that ‘militant democracy was not only a function of the international labor movement but was deep-rooted in Australian popular history ... that comrade had much in common with mate’ (Davison 2012: 446). Davison contextualises the *Legend* within European nationalist literature, following Anthony Smith by dividing theories of nationalism into two camps: modernists and primordialists (Davison 2012: 434). Davison argues that modernists, such as Hobsbawm and Anderson, ‘see the modern nation as something new, a product of the European Enlightenment’ (Davison 2012: 435). By contrast, German philosophers Herder and Fichte:

Portrayed the nation as a manifestation of the most ancient and primitive of human ties to one's native soil and family... As a natural creation, its origins lay deep in the past, in a time beyond history. Its purest expression was found in the legends, songs, dances and folkways of the peasantry, those who lived closest to the native soil and whose way of life was least corrupted by the cosmopolitan outlook of the urban elite. (Davison 2012: 435)

Ward's search for the roots of Australian culture in the 'nomad tribe' is classified alongside Herder and Fichte's 'primordialism'. Davison is interested in Ward's linking of the frontiersman and the 'noble savage': 'Both were guileless, yet not gullible, sons of "nature", whose physical and moral excellence is held up to readers, "corrupted" by the artificialities of a sophisticated society' (Davison 2012: 435). In this sense, the *primordial* roots of Australian culture are, for Ward, working class. Labour populism could become the new 'noble savage' myth: that which saves us from the horrors of capitalism and modernity. This narration of class is very different from the logic of Marx's economic formulations, although it has certain emotive parallels to the proletarian story: both ascribe metaphysical significance to the social being of wage-labourers. Ward's quest, however, was more 'a search for the nation's soul' (Davison 2012: 451) than Marx's project of discovering the laws of capitalism.

Like Marx, Ward was born into privilege and spent his life searching for answers to the philosophical questions of his time; like Marx, he imagined the problems and solutions in terms of class. Also like Marx, Ward created an image of the 'working class' which was projected onto them: in a discussion with Davison, Ward insisted that 'you don't actually have to *be* a workingman to see life from his point of view' (Davison 2012: 432). Ward's labour populism here is reminiscent of Lukács' (1971) theory of consciousness; both imagine the worker as an abstract, essential form of consciousness, and attempt to see from this perspective. The difference between Marx, Lukács and the 'legenders', is what this 'point of view' was. For Ward, it was a socialist ethos which was inscribed on the people by their cultural heritage, or perhaps the very earth itself. Marx and Lukács (1971), on the other hand, insisted that workers' socialism (or its potential) was the product of the logic of material interests at the point of production.

The Australian Legend dominated the discussion of Australian national identity until the New Left emerged at the end of the 1960s. This history justifies, to a certain degree, Kuhn's characterisation of the CPA intellectuals as 'populist' rather than 'Marxist'. The CPA and its fellow-travelling 'legenders' effectively annexed the labour populist imagination of 'class', after which the traditions of populism and Marxism were woven into a single discourse. In retrospect, Robin Gollan argued that the CPA:

Had sought to assimilate itself as nearly as possible to the traditional Australian labour movement. Communist union officials, except for issues involving the Soviet Union or Soviet interests, were hard to distinguish in their words and actions from other union officials...In the 1940s the Communist Party had set out to lead the labour movement. But by 1955 it was clear that any triumphs which it had had (to vary the words of J.K. Galbraith) reveal many of the characteristics of Jonah's triumph over the whale. (Gollan 1975: 284)

The relationship between the CPA, the existing tradition of labour populism and the philosophy of the Stalinist bureaucracy in Russia fundamentally transformed the content of its Marxism. Tom O'Lincoln characterises Stalin's theory of 'socialism in one country' as a transformation of the revolution 'into its opposite by the pressures of political and economic reality', which led internationally to the 'subordination of the Communist Parties to the national interest of the Soviet bureaucracy' (O'Lincoln 1985: 12–13). Insofar as the CPA articulated nationalist populism through the language of Marx, the party and its fellow travellers had transformed the substance of its Marxism into a new kind of populist discourse. That said, the language and the formal policies mattered: despite their patriotism, the CPA was committed in principle to the world family of Communist internationalism; despite the ambiguities of their class politics during the 'popular front' period, where class alliances with the bourgeoisie became desirable, the CPA still published *Capital* as its rigid economic orthodoxy. As much as the CPA became populist in spirit, therefore, it also tied that spirit to distinctly Marxist concepts and terminology.

Conclusion

Kuhn's definition of populism suggests that its adoption by Left-nationalists marks a fundamental departure from Marxist philosophy. In a sense, this is correct: an orientation towards international wage-labour is replaced by one towards the productive 'people'. This distinction is meaningful. However, it also overlooks the populist normative content of Marx's proletarian story. This common normative content makes the two discourses of 'class' more similar than has been previously

acknowledged, as both romanticise physical productivity against exploitation by a bourgeois 'elite'. The major point of departure between Marxism and populism came when the concept of 'class' became a *nationalist* discourse.

Dividing the core class imaginaries of Australian history into 'populist' and 'Marxist' categories is a useful starting point. However, the two categories cannot be separated as sharply as Kuhn suggests. Both Marx and labour populists share an imagination of the productive people exploited by an elite; the difference being that the former rationalises this into an economic science, in which the 'people' become the concept of the 'proletariat'. The main institution of Marxism in Australia until the late 1960s, the CPA and its affiliates, complicated this further by turning Marxism into a specifically *nationalist* labour populism. For these reasons, Marx's work can be distinguished from the 'populism' of the CPA on two grounds: Marx's internationalism and his particular economic rationalisation of the proletarian story.

The sense of class as the opposition of capital and labour, which has been described by Kuhn as 'Marxist' class analysis, conceptually includes pre-Marxist radicalism in Australia. It is also *exclusive* of the major 'Marxist' party, the CPA, for a large portion of its history. Describing it as 'Marxist' is therefore somewhat problematic. However, Marx elaborated this line of thought more coherently than any other socialist and has become identified with this form of class imagination even where it is not derived from his thought.

The main organisational terms for the literature on class in Australia are therefore 'populism' and 'Marxism', although they remain limiting. This bifurcated typology is sufficient only as a starting point. In Kuhn's usage, 'Marxism' refers to the portrayal of the Australian working class as a proletariat. By implication, Marxism also includes the various connected bodies of theory which support and elaborate on this notion of the proletariat: in economics, a theory such as the LTV; in politics and culture, the relevant concepts include a theory of 'hegemony' and 'class consciousness'. For the purposes of this book, 'Marxism' is defined roughly following Kuhn's usage, although it should be remembered that there are many self-described Marxists that do not quite fit this definition, as well as contradictory ideas within Marx's work itself.

Similarly, for Kuhn, labour populism is used to describe imagination of the 'working class' as the true Australian 'people'; those who inscribe the nation with its virtue and who are opposed by parasitic, alien elites and their corrupted lackeys. This book uses 'populism' and 'labour populism' in this way, although the former term also has a wider usage.

While the analysis of 'class' described above has been characterised by Kuhn as 'populism', it has also been described as labourism (albeit with caveats, including that it should not imply a 'settled ideology or a single political language' for the Labor Party):

An important strand of Labor belief has been the idea that labour is the basis of civilisation: the working classes (and often small farmers and other independent producers) are the only genuine 'wealth producers', and deserve a larger share of the fruits of their industry. Laborites maintained a distinction between the idle and the industrious, and explained the poverty of the many as an outcome of the parasitic behaviour of a wealthy, powerful and privileged minority. (Bongiorno 1996: 5)

In this book, I refer to this imagination of class as 'labour populism', or simply 'populism' for the sake of brevity, although it is neither synonymous with populism in the more general sense (which can refer to a number of political traditions centred on a concept of the 'people'), nor political Labourism (which ambiguously refers to the culture, the political ideology, or a specific brand of within the labour movement or the Labor Party (Beilharz 1994: 36–38). What I am interested in is the main current of populism within the labour movement as it relates to the imagination of 'class'. It is this narrative which has, I think, informed the common sense understanding of 'class' since the 1890s in which its main rival, Marxism, has often confronted and been interpreted through.

Finally, 'Marxism' has not been the only rival socialism to labour populism in Australia. A number of philosophies of socialism can be identified, such as Fabianism and Christian socialism (Mathews 1993: 75, 39). Each of these narratives carries different implications for the imagination of 'class'. A comprehensive typology, or phenomenology, of

the concept of 'class' in Australia may find a simple distinction between 'populist' and 'Marxist' varieties problematic. Nevertheless, these categories roughly articulate the two main types of 'class' narratives in Australian history; they are, therefore, a useful place to begin.

The major point of conflict between Marxism and labour populism has been the question of who are included in the 'good' and 'bad' binary social categories. For labour populism, the 'productive' people might include certain capitalists and others. If 'the people' are reimagined as exclusively workers, however, the Marxist and populist visions are similar, with the exception of the latter's nationalist political implications. The above passage suggests a Communist vision, if only the category of the 'productive' is interpreted as 'proletarians': with the empowerment of the productive and the elimination of the 'wealthy landlord, the rentier and the middleman' [and we might add, the capitalist], 'harmony and prosperity would be restored to society' (Bongiorno 1996: 190). In this sense, the key distinction between the proletarian story within Marxism and populist narrative of 'class' is which social groups are conceptualised within the category of the 'people' or the 'proletariat', and which are imagined as part of the 'elite' or the 'ruling class'.

There is more to the Marxist imagination of class than the proletarian story. Marxism also contains a historical materialist methodology and a theory of capital accumulation, which logically precedes the concrete description of 'the working class'. Nevertheless, these theories have often served as a rationalisation for the proletarian story, which had already appeared in Marx's earlier works before they were elaborated in detail. Marx's proletarianism, which borrows heavily from the same pool of mythology as labour populism, is an essential and indispensable foundation for Marx's economics and his categories of class.

There are three reasons for dividing the imagination of 'class' here into Marxist and populist/labour populist camps. The first is that a narrative of this division has already been established, or partly established by the New Left and Kuhn, and requires some testing, in other words, to problematise the neat distinction between these categories. The second reason is that these categories approximate the main distinctions already made by those imagining class in Australian history themselves.

The question of whether the working class was a national class against foreign capital, or an international class against 'capital' itself, has been a key political division within the labour movement. Third, and consequently, class analysts have often eclectically borrowed from both traditions to varying degrees and with varying self-descriptions. If these categories are limited, they at least offer a rough framework for positioning ideas, such as the CPA of the 1940s, which borrowed heavily from the nationalist element of populism while calling it 'Marxism', and similarly the New Left, which borrowed the moral binary of populism under the banner of 'Marxism', to be used against the nationalism of the CPA, which was re-badged as 'populist'.

For the purposes of this book, these terminological distinctions are used to make the point that the imagination as well as the formal language of 'class' is necessary to make sense of its meanings in Australian history, and that following such a path suggests that 'class' is best approached as contingent, meaningful practices rather than essences and ideal types. This book is not intended to be a history of the labour movement, its politics or even a comprehensive narrative of the many stories of class in Australian history; this would be both unnecessary to substantiate the central arguments of this book and, I think, impossible to do justice to within the limited space available here.

The history of the concept of 'class' is important because it helps to explain the convoluted nature of the subsequent discourse. The mixture of imaginations and semantic confluences between Marxist and populist stories presented the New Left of the late 1960s with a problem: How could the study of 'class' in Australia be legitimated in the context of populist conspiracy theories of monopoly capital, Communist romanticisation of the Australian 'people' and the discourse of Marxism, which seemed to contradict both? Sorting out a coherent New Left theory of class which sustained the populist story through new rationalisations thus presented a significant challenge in its own right. This was further complicated by the need to legitimate these new class narratives within the emerging discipline of academic Sociology, which had redefined 'class' through Weber and Parsons, ignoring its existing meaning in Australian history entirely. As Marks has noted, the key feature of the New Left was its relationship to radical nationalism (Marks 2011: 21).

This is the direct result of the hegemony of the CPA perspective until that point in time. As discussed in this chapter, the New Left reacted against the patriotism and racism of the 'old Left'. They retained, however, the binary morality of labour populism that the CPA had absorbed. The interconnected duality of the populist and Marxist stories, therefore, are the key features of Australian class discourse until the period of the New Left; as elaborated in Chap. 7, they remain significant today. Exploring the place of populist and Marxist class imaginations between the New Left is the subject of the next chapter.

NOTE

1. Citations for *The Australian Legend* are taken from the illustrated edition of 1978.

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