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## Larry Petrie (1859-1901) - Australian Revolutionist?

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Lawrence (Larry) D. Petrie (Larry de Petrie) (b. 1859, d. 1901) was a warm hearted, warm blooded man eager to match his life with his beliefs, impatient for change, and prepared to coax destiny along with direct action. He participated in the formation of the most significant radical groups in Melbourne and Sydney in the period 1889 - 1893, and in a number of other not so radical, but also important, organisations of the time. He was a participant in the *New Australia* experiment and throughout a turbulent life seems to have retained the respect and affection of most who knew him. He wrote little about himself, and most information comes from recollections of people who associated politically with him.

W.G. Spence recalls:

"Petrie was a man of good education and it was stated that he had an uncle, a Scotch baronet, though Larry never referred to him; but was proud of an ancestor who cut off his thumb to avoid being taken for a soldier by the press gang."

Jack Andrews:

"I met him first at the Melbourne Anarchists Club. He was also known as George Frederick Howard ..... the name Howard adopted in deference to the wishes of a relative ..... in Scotland to whom he had to look, when disabled in a carriage accident for financial assistance. Later he found it convenient for the purpose of breaking through the boycott which was being applied against agitators. In fact, outside of the movement and of his circle of old acquaintances it was the name by which he was known, and nothing could be further from the truth than the impression that in travelling on the 'Aramac' he assumed a fictitious name, Howard, as a disguise for the occasion." (This was claimed at the trial. See below.)

"I have known many rebels," said Ernie Lane in *Dawn to Dusk*, "but Petrie, generous to an unbelievable extent, was in the super-class. (He) used to sing in a good, baritone voice The

Marseillaise to gather a good crowd around him .... Raising his only arm when he sang 'to arms, my citizens' was always good for a laugh ..... In the Domain, on street corners and all the time Petrie passionately called on the workers of Sydney to take up arms and man the barricades. He would at the slightest provocation sing the Marseillaise, his eyes flashing, and his black moustache bristling. Both the cynical crowd and the police looked on Petrie as a joke, and he was allowed to go on with his revolutionary outpourings." (It will be argued elsewhere that Lane is mistaken in his sanguine view of the relationship between Petrie and the authorities). "Yet", continues Lane, "this wild rebel was appointed as Australian Workers Union (AWU) Secretary-Organiser in Sydney, and even then the AWU was certainly not a revolutionary body."

## **Beliefs:**

"..... We see fraud and oppression practised by means of the law as well as by breaking it, and in fact on a larger and more serious scale. But why should the words of a statute or precedent be permitted to sanctify and give privilege to wrong? The Anarchists simply contended that public opinion especially when trained to a higher moral standard than that of mere 'legality' would be a truer guide than any set of laws and should be relied on instead of enactments which can be twisted into means of oppression." This was Petrie's Anarchism. He believed that an armed revolt for the emancipation of the workers and the regaining of the land and wealth now monopolised by a few, was a matter of necessity. He was also in



opposition to the majority of members of the Club in being a Communist. They advocated "to each according to his works" rent, profit and interest being, not works, but robberies, but Petrie was too warm hearted to form a social ideal based on accounts and arithmetic, however equitable, and for him the vital principle was "from each according to his capacity, to each according to his needs", which he not only preached for the future but made the everyday principle of his private life doing his best to help friends and strangers in need, as well as the movementt, at any cost of self-sacrifice.

Petrie himself wrote in the 'Liberator' of 26 February 1888:

"There seems to be a general belief that we are opposed to all Governments. Certainly we are opposed to all existing forms of government. But you see, the only government we know is a mixture of subjection, roguery and robbery. Governments of today govern the people whereas our government is a government of the people, for the people ..... We are credited with a passion for destruction but I should like our opponents to note what we would destroy - theft, slavery, misery and starvation of body and mind. The doctrine of Anarchism is almost identical with the doctrine of advanced Socialism, what some people call, Scientific Socialism ....."

Kenafick comments,

"This (last) is a statement that might well be disputed by both Anarchists and Scientific Socialists; and in fact, Petrie himself seemed to have little clear realisation of theoretical differences, for in May 1889, he helped to launch in Melbourne, the organisation of the Knights of Labor which ..... was neither anarchist nor Scientific Socialist and in July 1889 he also helped to found the Social Democratic League, whose objectives were so mild that they supplied the bulk of the Labor Party's platform when it was founded in 1891."

Kenafick himself equates Communist Anarchism with the last and logical stage of Marxian Socialism, but it is clear that Petrie seems less concerned with ideological purity than with helping into being organisations that might just push on the work of social reform. It is in this light that the apparent conflict between Andrew's:

"the non-State Socialists Left" (when Rosa and supporters altered the constitution of the Socialist League to turn it into the milder Social Democratic Federation)

and Kenafick's above statement that:

"Petrie helped the SDF into operation"

should be seen. Petrie was the sort of person who would remain agreeable to both sides of a dispute within the camp of what he would call socialism. The conflict will however bear further research, especially in the area of Petrie's and Rosa's relations with one another.

Petrie continued:

"..... Life without Equality and Fraternity is a lie as black as hell. And where is the government in the world where they are supreme? Nowhere. And they are only possible under the conditions of Socialism ..... Anarchists would govern by conscience although they might use and advocate force to ensure an earlier emancipation of Mankind."

## **Personal History:**

I have no information about Petrie's arrival in Australia. He describes the earliest part of his history this way:

".... When I was born, in 1859, the doctor declared I couldn't live. I was supposed to die, mother gave in and I was named George Frederick Augustus Howard Carlyle Petrie ....." Later his mother christened him Lawrence ....."

"My arm I lost ..... (through a quarry) accident ..... shunting metal trucks for W. Loud of Albert Park, Melbourne. On that occasion I also had my ribs crushed ....." and a leg broken. The doctor wanted to amputate his leg, but Larry refused, left the hospital and with the aid of a lady friend saved the leg but the arm withered.

This probably occurred in the late 1880's.

Petrie is apparently a late-comer to the Melbourne Anarchist Club (MAC), as Sam Rosa is, leading debates on 9th June 1888 on 'Anarchy', on 10 August 1888 'the Chinese', on 3rd November 1888 ("Individualism" the topic) and 8th December 1888 ("Equity"). He spoke frequently at the Queen's Wharf and 'travelled' in tea taking the opportunity to talk with his customers about social change, especially women in slum areas and prostitutes 'for whom he had great sympathy.'

Andrews again:

"One of the founders of the first Socialist League, a broadly constituted body which was established when the Anarchist Club had decayed through internal dissension and tendencies to dogmatism ..... Petrie in this new role helped organise meetings outside the Golden Fleece Hotel, (Russell Street, Melbourne). The group did good propaganda work until the constitution was changed by the State Socialist group led by S.A. Rosa." The non-State Socialists dropped out at this point. "Petrie was also instrumental in forming Melbourne's Knights of Labour and endeavoured, without success, to institute a Six-Hours Movement."

The period 1890 - 1893 is of vital importance in considering Petrie's anarchism, but there are still numerous gaps. It is possible that he came to Sydney on the demise of the MAC, possibly with [Jack Andrews](#) and helped organise the conspiratorial group which met for a period near where the southern end of the Harbour Bridge is now and which was broken up by a police raid or raids. He drifted to country NSW where, at Berry Jerry Station, in a fight with a non-unionist, his withered arm was broken again and "through the meanness and anti-union spirit of the squatter who refused him a vehicle" Larry had to ride a horse (lent by the shearers who bought it from a passing traveller) 35 miles to Wagga Hospital. A major operation was performed, the bone removed from the shoulder joint and since he had nothing else with which to thank his nurse, Petrie presented his 'angel' with the bone.

*The Hummer* records in early 1892 show that Petrie was doing 'good work' for the Wagga Branch of the General Laborers Union and 'Is down along the Corowa - Culcairn Line this week'. He later came to Sydney where he roomed with Ernie Lane, and worked with Rose Summerfield as secretary of the GLU. He is recorded as being at the Australian Socialist League (ASL) May Day meeting in Sydney and organising 'the women workers of Sydney, a good number of whom are joining the Women's Division of the AWU'.

Besides 'soap-boxing' from May to September 1892, he debated the relative merits of socialism and 'Georgism' with Bob McCook, a Henry George supporter, in the columns of *The Hummer* and the (*Sydney*) *Worker*.

When the GLU shifted Head Office to Sydney and became the AWU, Petrie's services were 'no longer required' and he went to the country with a mate, the latter doing odd jobs, sharpening saws, etc, while Petrie secured the customers. Petrie indicates that little if any work was found so he returned to Sydney, where he was engaged by the AWU. Thus, in September 1892, he donated as Organising Secretary for the AWU, a gold ring to the Union Prisoners Assistance Fund to be raffled.

### **Conspiracies and Direct Action:**

"Unemployment and strike demonstrations were often held at Queen's Statue and attempts to march on Parliament House were invariably repulsed by strong bodies of police." (*Dawn to Dusk*, p.42.)

The *Sydney Morning Herald* report of the May Day Demonstration (May 2, 1892), (led into with sensationalist cable items from France on bomb 'outrages' and alleged threats), is headed 'Revolutionary Speeches'. Included is the text of a motion moved by Petrie as Organising Secretary of the GLU:

"That this meeting affirms the resolution carried at the International Labor Congress at Paris in the year 1889, viz, that on the first day of May the workers should hold a demonstration to show the solidity (sic) of labour throughout the world."

The report then paraphrases what Petrie said in support of the motion:

"At that present moment there were over 2,000,000 workers in France celebrating that day and they were being assisted by the women. It was the universal love for principles of socialism they would assist in hurrying on revolution, which, although not apparently a bloody revolution, was such because the workers were bleeding through the hardships to which they had been subjected by the capitalists."

Ernie Lane says that Petrie was of French ancestry on his father's side and accordingly had a supreme contempt for the stolid British worker whom he considered a slave. On one occasion when [William Lane](#) (influential labour journalist) was in Sydney, he and Petrie argued about the virtues (the militancy) of British and French workes. Lane said, "Anyway, if you believe in revolution why don't you put it into practice ..... go down George Street (Sydney's main street) and build a little barricade of your own?"

Petrie, according to Ernie Lane replied, "I will, I will. Within a year I will be in jail." (I don't know whether this is a comment on the efficacy as well as the need for direct action or not.)

Ernie Lane describes how he and Petrie used to multigraph, in the AWU office, leaflets and appeals to the workers, generally strikers, to take their courage in their hands and storm the capitalist stronghold. At night they used to paste these appeals around Sydney. [Jack Andrews](#), Robert Beattie, [Arthur Desmond](#) and Joseph Schellenberg are others whose involvement in these nocturnal activities can so far be definitely established. Press notices provide the wording of some of the pamphlets:

1. "The following revolutionary document was distributed in the Sydney domain on Sunday last by somebody who evidently aspires to be an Australian Ravachol:-

**Men of Australia !!**

**Why do we work and sweat and force ourselves into premature graves, that our masters may revel in blind luxury and pass their lives in idleness and splendour? We toil, not for ourselves, but for them, and while our children grow into slaves and lackeys, their children get all the riches of the earth, riches that are produced by our labour.**

**Fellow Workers Arise !!**

**Let us throw off our vile apathy, hurl defiance at our robber landlords, and throw in our lot with those who are fighting for Justice! The cursed robbers that grind us down laugh at our woes and prostitute our daughters. They are heartless, and when cold want comes home to us, they help our starving families by throwing a little charity at them, even as they would at a 'mongrel - yea, look upon us as mongrels. They despise us, and would not save us from damnation if it touched their interest in the least.**

**Agitate ! Organise ! Revolt !**

**Justice demands it for the sake of your wives and children.**

**Long live the Social Revolution !**

2. "A Ravacholist, on paper, pasted on the Sydney wharves during the seamen's strike some manifestos to show Australian capitalists that like causes are going to breed like effects either side of the Line."
3. "Here is another blood and thunder circular with the red flag stuck glaringly in the centre, which has been distributed in Sydney. Lots of smoke may mean some fire:-

**"No. 2 Leaflet - Fellow workers: Again we urge you to rise from your apathy and fight hard for justice. Force, and force only, can strike fear into the hearts of our oppressors. Moral suasion and constitutional reform?**

**- One is still-born, the other an abortion. Not the ballot box but the rifle and the -- alone can free us from our degrading slavery. Remember Broken Hill. Behold the force lawless law oppresses us with! !Prepare for the Revolution! Seize arms - buy arms. But not afraid! Be men! and organise ! Agitate ! Revolt !"**

4. "The Queens' Statue, Chancery Square, Sydney is garnished with yellow placards running:

**"Anarchy is Liberty / Read 'News from Nowhere'"**.

I'm prepared to accept that these are the Lane-Petrie - etc. pamphlets. The question then becomes whether Petrie was prepared to practise what he preached. And if he was, and did, did he act alone or as part of a group? If part of a group, which group, and who were the other members of it?

Kenafick speculates that the strike years of the '90's brought out Petrie's excitability and produced a more violent attitude than he had in Melbourne. I'm inclined to the reverse of this

idea, namely that the use of the strike was a sign that the moderates were already in the ascendancy, that the time had already passed when direct action could have been expected to produce significant change. For [Andrews](#), Petrie was, in his Melbourne days, already an 'ardent revolutionist'. In Melbourne the Anarchist Club's the logical place to look for plots and conspiracies, but in [David Andrade](#)'s hands it was always excessively open and moderate. (See biog.) Not that this rules out secret plots. It would appear in fact that the Club split over precisely this question, in the wake of the Haymarket affair. This is discussed elsewhere. At the moment I have no definite information to link Petrie with a 'gunpowder plot' before he reached Sydney.

In this context, the [Knights of Labor](#) is intriguing. Originally a secret industrial organisation of garment-cutters in the USA, its secret rituals and structure paralleled the Lodges which were spreading rapidly at the time. It may have been the conspiratorial nature of the K of L which appealed, or it may be a sign of the consciousness of the times.

In any event, I'm sure the following will bear closer scrutiny. The seal attached to the copy of *Secret Work and Instructions* for the K of L held in the Mitchell Library, Sydney, has:

a circle containing an outline of the Americas overprinted 'AK the 9th' and an equilateral triangle. Outside this is a 5 - sided figure shaped rather like a letter-box. Outside this is a circle inscribed 'Prytaneum North America, Jan 1st, 1878'. Around that is a 6 - sided figure, then a circle inscribed, "That is the most perfect government in which an injury to one is the concern of all", then come the points of a 5 - pointed star.



There are no references in the text to sabotage, violence or industrial action. (See also p. 136, *Labor's Pioneering Days*).

In the Sydney of the strike period conspiratorial groups were doubtless widespread. In one such group Petrie is listed along with Ernie Lane, Ralph Baynham, (described as a 'revolutionary anarchist') Sousa, and 'enthusiastic' Rose Summerfield. The fictionalised group William Lane describes in *Workingman's Paradise* is probably based on this group but the characters are composites drawing on, as well as those already named, Henry Lawson, Mary Gilmore, refugees from the Paris Commune and Mazzini's Italy, the Rose Soleys, Phil May, E.J. Brady and Lane himself.

The Active Service Brigade is the most likely group to have produced the above pamphlets but in its early days, 1892 say, it was not a very coherent group at all. Later, Ernie Lane appears not to have been associated and neither was Petrie. A further section will deal with the ASB in detail.

Mary Gilmore, first woman member of the AWU and a member of its Executive provided insights into her views on direct action when she told (*National Times*, May 6 - 11 1974) of an earlier unsuccessful attempt to blow up Circular Quay involving Petrie. No date is given, but it's probably 1892.

"In the early movement there were those who advocated violence. I was against it, yet even the violent trusted me and so I was told by poor Larry Petrie that he had planted a bomb in the outfall vent on the righthand side of Circular Quay to blow up the shipping and that part of the Quay. I told W.G. Spence. 'The fools', he exclaimed, 'they will have the Red Coats out on us'.

It was arranged that I, J. C. Watson and Arthur Rae were to go to the Quay ..... My part was to walk along in front of the Customs House till opposite the spot, and then leave, so that I would not be implicated if arrests followed.

When it came to dark the men met at the sewer, and Arthur being the small one, had to crawl in and get the bomb. When he came out with (it) and stood up, white-faced and shaking, he said, "I never knew before why God made me so small but I know now."

After telling Ernie Lane he was off to blow up a non-union ship, Petrie booked a passage on the S.S. 'Aramac'. On board at midnight on 27 July near the entrance to Moreton Bay there was a tremendous explosion in the forecabin. "The funny thing was" said Petrie some years later, "that the moment the bomb went off my first and only thought was to save people's lives." Fortunately there was no need to save anyone. A pillar of flame shot through the roof of the cabin and two women nearby were slightly injured. Petrie's presence on deck immediately afterwards, especially since the companionway was blocked with debris, aroused suspicion, his 'fake' name did also, and he was arrested as soon as the ship berthed and charged with attempted murder.

Some of the significance of this explosion can be seen from the uses to which it was put. The *Sydney Morning Herald* editorialised on the 4th August 1893 that:

"..... The *Aramac* explosion makes the eighth trouble on board ship within almost as many days. The *Burrumbeet* and the Sydney dynamite incidents ..... then came an extra-ordinary accident between the *Ellingamite* and the *Guilding Star*, the latter vessel foundering .... Next the wreck ..... of the steamer *Hilda* ..... and the blow up of the barque *Argo* in Sydney Harbour are occurrences the origin of which continue to be regarded by many persons with grave misgivings; and latterly the sinking of the steamer *Franklin* at Townsville, and the accident to the *Corea*. Such a Chapter of maritime disasters is probably unparalleled in Australian shipping history within the same short period."

Attempting to set the scene, a week earlier the same paper had said;

"..... In some circles it (the *Aramac* explosion) is held to be the death-knell of unionism in the colonies." (p.5, 31 July 1893).

Petrie was well-known to both Henry Lawson and Mary Gilmore was probably a good friend but his 'case' was additionally important to them. Dame Mary tells of writing a poem about an incident in Petrie's bush career while he was in jail, on suspicion of blowing up the '*Aramac*'. This poem begins "The crows kep' flyin' up, boys!" and is the poem, according to the authoress (*Adelaide Register*, August 30, 1924) that Lawson was so affected by that he came to her house in City Road, "with a trembling lip". In his hand, he held the cutting he had torn from *The Worker*, 9 Sept., 1893). "You have beaten me on my own ground ..... there isn't room for both of us. One of us must give up ....." Although Lawson wished to give up for her, after a protracted argument, complicated by their emotional regard for each other, she finally convinced him that she would give up the style and content for him, but she also prevailed on him at this time to "cease writing revolution, and write Australia". Whatever else may be said about the reminiscence, Dame Mary had the wrong ship (she says *The Warrego*) and the wrong year (1890). Professor Roderick in his *The Formative Years of Henry Lawson*, where he says Lawson met Petrie at Leigh House, repeats the above story, but elsewhere in the same article refers to the boat as the '*Aramac*' and provides the correct date of July 1893. Sylvia Lawson repeats the story in her biography of Mary Gilmore and provides many of the words.

Lawson, for his part, quotes the poem as 'an (anonymous) old bush song' in *The Hero of Dingo Scrubs* the plot of which bears marked resemblance to that of the poem.

The Government Analyst's report said that he examined tin and hair found at the scene (of the *Aramac* explosion) and 'found a soapy looking substance which proved to be gelatine dynamite.' A second parcel showed traces of tar as of a fuse. Gelatine dynamite consisted of gun cotton and nitroglycerine, also nitrate of potash and wood meal.

According to *The Bulletin* of 2nd September 1893, p.8 (with Petrie 's photo) "So far, the suspicions against the accused seem chiefly to rest on some wild, bilious remarks he made months ago in Sydney against 'double breasted parasites' and an expressed yearning for explosives, in order 'to make an example of some of the plutocrats'."

Arthur Rae, Ernie Lane and others raised money for his defence and engaged as solicitor Marshall Lyle, who if not a committed member (Ernie says he was a member) had certainly attended Anarchist Club meetings in Melbourne, probably was Andrews' contact with the Criminological Society and was known for his progressive views. He also wrote that he thought Petrie wouldn't hurt a fly. At the police court hearing Petrie claimed he was in his bunk at the time of the explosion. He was committed for trial.

"All the prosecution needed was evidence of where Petrie had obtained the explosives," according to J.D (an anonymous contributor to *Tocsin*) "..... All the detectives seemed to be able to do was to go around the Sydney explosives stores and ask who had bought dynamite. As if a real anarchist would buy dynamite while Government blasting operations were in progress in half a dozen Sydney suburbs, and the storeman in charge o'nights could be enticed to an adjacent corner hostelry for a much needed drink." Despite constant postponements, apparently the best the government could come up with was a man called Fitzpatrick who was prepared to swear Petrie had offered him bribes for dynamite. Arthur

Rae got wind of this, was able to show the Attorney-General that Fitzpatrick must be lying, threatened a public exposure of police malpractice, so the Attorney-General filed a No-True Bill and Petrie was discharged.

Whilst in jail Larry told those in charge that if the Premier of Queensland would come to see him he, Larry, would tell him who was responsible for the blowing up of the *Aramac*. The Premier was told and he visited the gaol and interviewed Larry who told him that it was he (the Premier) and his colleagues in the Queensland Parliament who were responsible. By their attitude towards the working classes and their tyranny generally they drove men to anarchy, etc.

The (*Brisbane*) *Worker* editorialised that the evidence available in the *Aramac* explosion pointed 'to a put up job'. It then went on to quote Petrie, as interviewed on his release:

"I know absolutely nothing of the cause of the explosion .... I was astonished to hear that a tin cannister was found in my trunk. I had at no time either in my trunk or luggage anything of the kind, or any explosive. Had I such a thing I would not be at liberty today ....."

"Fitzpatrick I know ..... He was recommended to me by Mr. T. Houghton, MLA, as a useful man to whom I might give credit books for the purpose of enrolling men in the GLU ..... Fitzpatrick appeared glad to take the books, and enrolled several members. I cannot think what possessed him to fabricate such a story ..... unless it (was a large reward).

"My one arm should show them that I couldn't carry about heavy explosives without being detected by some person ....."

"I consider myself badly treated by authorities ....." not by gaol warders he said, but by prison officials who tried fear, bribery (250 pounds and a free pardon) to get evidence implicating someone. He was in solitary for 4 weeks, fed only on bread and water, and when he complained he was put in with a 'forger' who urged him to accept the bribe, (Petrie thought him a detective) and allowed other food if he paid for it. He complained again, he was moved to another gaol and his treatment improved. All told he was in prison 10 weeks and Andrews says his health was damaged as a result.

The article concludes with a letter from Marshall Lyle (Melbourne, Aug. 15, 1893). It says in part, after declaring belief in Petrie's innocence, "Your work among the outcasts and the poor in Melbourne was well known to me, and indeed to all interested in philanthropic work. .... anything I can do for you I gladly will...."

It is significant that Active Service Brigade (ASB) leaflets begin appearing in Brisbane upon Petrie's release. They are reported in New Zealand and in the (*Brisbane*) *Worker* of November 25, 1893, which reprints a pamphlet from the *Brisbane Courier*:-

**"Bushmen, mates, whose joyless lives excite the sympathy of all true men, let me address you. The squatter kings, callous and brutal, intend to try to reduce your wages from the beginning of 1894 .... (moral suasion a fraud - continues -**

**BJ) ..... you must strike - and with a 'little devil' make it uncomfortable for the squatter or his manager to live in the bush ..... How are you to do it? You know how. One man can do the work if he likes. It is not necessary to have a million. But do not take too many into your confidence ..... Finally, avoid injuring innocent people .....**  
**By Order, Active Service Brigade, Queensland, 9th November, 1893."**

The (*Brisbane*) *Worker* comments, that this suggestion is no surprise since the squatters' methods of blacklisting, victimising and the unjust reference system have intimidated men from combining openly and there is nothing left for some men but secret organisation ..... The (*Brisbane*) *Worker* advises the *Courier* and others to 'discourage grinding of poor, etc, in order to discourage Ravachol - type people from appearing.

Andrews later provided, in Petrie's defence, some further background:

"As told in the *Tocsin* about a year ago, there had been for some months a capitalistic move to create a dynamite scare for financial reasons, and certain agitators had received warning, confidentially, that they would be the ones upon whom the guilt of what was to be done would be thrown when "it would not be Chicago, this time, but Sydney". It was ascertained that Petrie was one of these probable victims and he was implored to be cautious, lest he should be led into some compromising action, for which he was hot-headed and bold enough, but he laughed at the forebodings. (The methods of the enemy were two; they worked by pimps, and by fizzes or agent provocateurs. A pimp creates actual circumstantial evidence of a kind that will appear to corroborate a false accusation intended to be made. Thus, the Frenchman, a detective's employee who endeavoured on the pretence that he had made an invention which he wanted to place on the market, but did not know the English names of the chemicals, to get from me a recipe for an explosive in my handwriting was a pimp; whilst he who seeks to induce or inspire someone to really do something, with a view to arresting him for it, is a fizzle, or, if the object is less the arrest of the person doing the deed than to create a pretext for general repressive measures, an agent provocateur). About 7 months later came this *Aramac* case."

Andrews then describes Petrie's defence and goes on "and as 3 or 4 people made precisely similar overtures to members of the ASB, Petrie's version bears the hallmark of exact truth ....."

"The last time I saw him was just prior to the *Royal Tar's* (second) departure." Andrews was just out of gaol after 3 months' sentence for not having the 'correct' information on his [Handbook of Anarchy](#), and Petrie said to him as parting words, "You see, it's better to be prosecuted for something." This could be taken to mean he did blow up the *Aramac* but Jack Andrews sees it otherwise "..... as meaning that a serious charge cannot be so readily dealt with in a prejudiced manner, with out fair trial, or made the means of a prosecuting conviction as a trivial and technical one. He made no statement whatever as to what had occurred on the *Aramac* .... it could have been him, perhaps provoked by agent provocateurs or perhaps he didn't want to remove suspicion from himself because that would have meant someone else." Andrews' strenuous attempts to disassociate Petrie from the explosion are very interesting, as, if there is any substance to the police reports of secret organisational

documents speaking of murder, etc. (see [Andrews](#) biography) he is the person most centrally involved. In the *Tocsin* of June 27, 1901, to J.D., he says,

"We could name (the agent provocateurs) if it would do any good; suffice it however to say that Desmond showed that some sixty thousand pounds of secret service money had been already expended in Sydney some time before the *Aramac* affair. As to the latter we know positively of half-a-dozen or so attempts to egg various other people on to use dynamite, three attempts to manufacture false charges of using it by means of artfully contrived misleading appearances, and one case of a wilfully false accusation being laid for the purpose of getting rewarded with a Government billet, whilst a couple of petty explosions that occurred on shipboard were attributed by public opinion to the shipowners themselves. Petrie may have had 'something' to do with the *Aramac* explosion, but if so the primary moral responsibility was elsewhere and there are serious reasons for believing that his physical responsibility was, at any rate, much less than you suppose."

J.D. had also contended that Petrie naturally lost many friends by his "posed connection with the outrage but this seems doubtful. It's clear from constant references in the labor press that he was a well-known and respected figure and that this regard preceded him to North America. Macarthur of the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, San Francisco, in his 'American Letter' for the *Australian Workman*, September 22, 1894 says "Larry Petrie not yet arrived, when he does I will do all I can for him." Judging from his letters Petrie was good friends with Mrs Cameron, Mary Gilmore's mother and in one letter he implies that she gave him a fortune-telling before he left Sydney. Souter recalls him singing 'con brio' in the McNaught's parlour at Hunter's Hill (Sydney) the song "The Men of the New Australia" written in 1893 by Mary Cameron (Gilmore) and A.E. Mason-Beatty. Petrie says he received a warm invitation from *Cosme* to join them when on his way there and there is no reason to dispute he received just that. He clearly retained Spence's affection and that of Sam Smith, Seamen's Union official.

According to J.D. he reckoned on losing friends ..... "If the ship had gone down, so would I; then my friends could only have shown their disapproval by refusing to wear mourning. I daresay my wraith would not have wept therefore."

J. D. appears to have the final say on the *Aramac* explosion, however. "He long afterwards calmly told (the writer) ..... that he expected the vessel to become a total wreck, but that the bomb (if it was a bomb) had partially failed because of the absence of weight on its top side."

Petrie came out of gaol approximately 11 October, 1893. Andrews again, "After this Petrie came to Melbourne where he had hard times with poverty and ill-health. He wandered about for a while and eventually made arrangements to join New Australia.

## **New Australia - An Anarchist Utopia?**

That three of the above press reports of 'Anarchist' handbills appeared in the (*Brisbane*) *Worker* is just one of the links of this philosophy to William Lane. He had by mid-1892 resigned as editor to co-ordinate the *New Australia*, a settlement in Paraguay, but was still contributing items. *Working Man's Paradise*, published early in 1892, shows Lane's belief that anarchism is the noblest social philosophy of all, and through the novel's philosopher, Geisner, he relates his belief that society may have to go through a period of State Socialism

to achieve the higher ideal of Communist Anarchism. Geisner is a refugee from the Paris Commune (Lloyd Ross says the father of one of Lane's friends was such a refugee - Kenafick chapter 9, p. xxvii). He has the following conversation with the hero Ned (partly based on Lawson, according to Kenafick) beginning by telling Ned 'Where The Evil Lies' and contrasting State Socialism to 'anarchical communism' based upon 'voluntarism and opposed to force whether of governments or otherwise'.

Ned: **"Then Anarchists aren't wicked men?"**

Geisner: **"The Anarchist ideal is the highest and noblest of all human ideals. I cannot conceive of a good man who does not recognise that when he once understands it. The Anarchical Communists simply seek that men should live in peace and concord, of their own better nature. without being forced, doing harm to no one, and being harmed by no one. Of course the blind revolt against oppressive and unjust laws and tyrannical governments has become associated with Anarchy, but those who abuse it simply don't know what they do. Anarchical Communism, that is, men working as mates and sharing with one another of their own free will is the highest conceivable form of Socialism in industry."**

Ned: **"Are you an Anarchist?"**

Geisner: **"No. I recognise their ideal, understand that it is the only natural condition for a community of general intelligence and fair moral health, and look to the time when it will be instituted. I freely admit it is the only form of Socialism possible among the Socialists. But the world is full of mentally and morally and socially diseased people who, I believe, must go through the school of State Socialism before, as a great mass, they are true Socialists, and fit for voluntary Socialism."**

It is interesting to note that Mary Gilmore (used to model the heroine Nelly) wrote to Kenafick saying that 'the whole book is true and of historical value as Lane transcribed our conversations as well as those of others'. It is also interesting to note that Kenafick's equation of ultimate Socialism with Communist-Anarchism parallels that of Lane though Kenafick says Lane's knowledge of Marx is minimal and probably hadn't penetrated. Kenafick of course is the author of *Marx and Bakunin* and was very widely read in Socialist literature, in French as well as English. Just before Lane resigned the editorship to co-ordinate *New Australia*, the (*Brisbane*) *Worker* began to publish '*The Communist Manifesto*'.

It is reasonable to speculate that Lane had an anarchist utopia in mind when thinking of and planning *New Australia*. Note that Petrie, Robert Beattie (see biog.), the two Lanes, Mary Gilmore and Rose Summerfield all went to *New Australia*. (Henry Lawson wanted to go, but as with Ernie Lane in 1893, had no money for the fare, and thought of stowing away.) A number of writers on *New Australia* have referred to the major ideological conflict in the settlement as being between a group they call anarchists and others.

Because of anarchists' anti-State view, the Paraguayan settlement is also important as showing the appearance of disillusion among certain more aware activists about the efficacy of the parliamentary road to social justice. Just as the labour movement and attempts to have labour representatives in the legislatures are part of a world wide phenomenon, the disillusion

is also expressed at the same time in Australia as elsewhere. In Australia, just as the *Royal Tar* leaves for Paraguay, [David Andrade](#) leaves Melbourne for the Dandenongs to effect his communal utopianism (approximately 85 other groups in Victoria alone) while numerous other settlements are attempted around Australia including a remnant of the Barcardine shearers' camp which is settled near the Alice River. Significantly, Lawson goes to New Zealand and [Jack Andrews](#) tries the hermit life on Bombira Hill.

Not all the disillusioned thought as Petrie did. In the same issue of the (*Brisbane*) *Worker* that carries Petrie's donation of a ring for a raffle, Gilbert Casey, later to lead a secession from the *New Australia* settlement, blasts the proponents of physical force:-

"Physical force, bah! It is the greatest jobbery, the most stupendous tommyrot imaginable. The men who talk revolution are in many cases the cowards who dare not call their own ... if they have not the heart to do that which is near them and easy, is it likely that they will be courageous enough to do that which is hard ....."

Whether this difference of opinion has any significance for events in South America is again speculation. Petrie describes Casey as having 'become quite an anarchist' in a letter to Spence, 4 August 1899. In any event no glory accrues to anarchism even should *New Australia* be validly claimed as an anarchist colony; the colony failed, Lane capitulated and hardly practised anarchist theory in any case.

Petrie travelled to Honolulu on the 'Royal Tar's' charter voyage (carrying coal) in 1894 and arrived in time to join (unsuccessfully) in a revolution, but escaped arrest and worked his way to San Francisco. Sam Smith, Secretary of the Seamen's Union had given him letters of introduction and these helped him to some extent, in both San Francisco and New York, but his own spirit was what counted. Riding the rattler, 'packed in among the merchandise on freight trucks and hairbreadth escapes from heavily booted and irate railway conductors were just some of the hazards of travel on the North American continent of the time. In a letter enclosing Petrie's to Spence because Larry had no money for a stamp to Australia, Macarthur said Petrie stayed some months in San Francisco .....

"working hard at odd jobs (including selling shoe laces in the street - J. D. ). He made a good impression upon the trade unionists in this locality as a man of courage and sincerity.

..... Since he left San Francisco he has tramped across the country, footsore, cold and hungry, a great part of the time, to say nothing of the indignities of tramp ordinances in some places. He has had a terrible time of it that only a man of his indomitable grit could have withstood."

In New Orleans he was befriended by a church sexton and his family, and in New York after being hassled by non-unionists and the authorities and appealing to Spence for help, he obtained a berth on a ship going south.

In September, 1896, he was able to write to Spence from *Cosme*;

"Communism is alright ..... I do not mean to say that we are perfect but I do say that I have not felt mad with anyone except myself since my arrival."

He rapidly became part of the work and social activities, e.g., he lectured to the Literary and Social Union on Fiji and Hawaii.

Mary Gilmore at this time was equally optimistic about the settlement but for her, Petrie, Rose Summerfield and many others, the charm didn't last. Fittingly, the point of contention was authority. Letters from many of the participants clearly show that the people disillusioned with William Lane expected a more democratic form of decision-making, in other words libertarian-communism.

When New Australia divided and William Lane and his supporters began again at *Cosme*, ostensibly over the expulsion of Sims and Pinder(?) for drinking in 1899(?), Petrie sided with the Gilbert Casey (?) group. He kept on good terms with some *Cosme* people, often being mentioned in *Cosme News*. He wrote letters to Australian friends which are among the most telling criticisms of the experiment:

"Whiffs of dogma, stacks of selfishness, yards of words, and absolutely no liberty" was how he described *Cosme* in 1898.

"Therefore as my ideas and the ways of *Cosme* did not harmonise I got." His opinion of William Lane was even worse. "He is a madman" wrote Petrie to W.G. Spence, "a knave seized with the madness of ambition, overpowered with a sense of the divinity of himself and his mission, and for that he will barter truth, justice and the whole world plus the handful of bigots he terms the faithful. I believe everybody can perceive how shamefully he betrays his friends, cheerfully leaving them to bear a burden of reproach which he at least should share." Although "all the cream of the movement" had gone, he felt confident after a few months there that "time and a gradual increase of population will find us nearer our old ideals than all the law and compelled communism of *Cosme* will ever achieve."

J. D. concluded his reminiscences this way:

"Two years' communism was more than enough for the restless firebrand, and he went out into the world again. He got a situation as railway watchman at Villa Rica, and expected to shortly have enough money saved to take unto himself 'with my one remaining arm', a soft-eyed Paraguayan wife. 'I am now,' he wrote quite recently, 'Senor Lorenzo de Petrie, and am almost persuaded to become an individualist. But I guess I'll be a one-winged angel first.' He probably guessed correctly."

One day in March, 1901, he jumped onto the line to push a child out of the path of an on-coming train and was killed himself. His body was claimed by Mrs. Rose Cadogan (Summerfield).

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