The announcement, on 19 March, 1920, of the philosophy of Australia's newest newspaper was unambiguous. It said:

Common Cause is born of the Working Class to fight the battle of the Workers. It has a Working Class outlook. It speaks the language of the toiling millions of the world.

Then, almost as an afterthought it added:

We speak the truth and what care we for kissing or for scorn ... while some faint gleamings we can see of Freedom's coming morn.¹

The words appeared in bold type above the Editorial in the first issue of Common Cause, the weekly publication of the Mining Department of the Workers' Industrial Union of Australia. They reflected a strident optimism felt by some of the more militant sections of organised labour at this time.

Certainly, to some, it appeared that a bold new world was in the making and that the brave new workers were on the move. The Russians had revolted; the Great War, having killed millions, had raised the consciousness of millions more and the Third International, founded in Moscow in 1919, provided an ideological walking frame for the first stumbling steps, one year later, of an Australian communist party. It was an energetic ideology, crisp and confident, which contended that the dictatorship of the proletariat was the only possible way to "liberate mankind from the horrors of capitalism."²

This Moscow-inspired theme perfectly mirrored some of the earlier views of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the "Wobblies".
They had insisted, even before The Great War, that "there would be no peace as long as want and hunger were found among millions of working people and the few who constituted the employing class had all the good things in life." They urged that the class struggle should continue until capitalism was abolished. This they believed should be effected at the hands of a vast and encompassing industrial union of workers whose members would embrace the proposition that an injury to one was a concern to all. Here, then, was the politics of the common cause.

It was, for many, an attractive proposition: the common people, striving for a common good — with perhaps just a touch of self-righteous iconoclasm and score-settling along the path to Utopia. In France, Italy, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States the Left-leaning strands of organised labour engaged in a passionate flirtation with communism. In Australia, that flirtation was nowhere more strident than within the Miners' Federation. By 1920 its leadership had subscribed to the concept of One Big Union for industrial workers, had adopted the "Wobblies'" policy of public ownership of all means of production, and had opted to establish its own weekly newspaper, Common Cause to educate the workers and castigate the capitalists.

Virulently anti-employer and stridently pro-communist, Common Cause would be absorbed into Labor Daily by the end of 1924. Eleven years later, in 1935, it was resurrected under the editorship of Edgar Ross, then as now a staunch supporter of the militant left. It remains in print today, regularly circulating to miners and their families as well as mining industry observers and investors around the world.

In the period up to 1924, Common Cause was not alone in championing communism and the virtue of revolutionary womanhood, and denouncing mainstream Australian political parties and their perceived mouthpieces in the popular press. Indeed the union press characterised the popular press as akin to a mind-warping narcotic, a habit-forming sedative hypnotic supplied to workers, at low cost, by conspiratorial capitalists. It, rather than religion, was cast in the role of opiate to the masses.

Common Cause was, however, singular in its exhaustive coverage of mine safety and coal mining-related disease, and in its endeavours to provide Australian coal miners with an international view of issues in their industry. Such coverage challenges a popular view — reported in the daily newspapers of the period — of coal miners as being politically unsophisticated, and ill-informed of the engineering and economic realities of their frequently physically unsafe workplace. John Fell, managing director of Commonwealth Oil Corporation, told
a Royal Commission inquiring into the coal industry in New South Wales that the majority of coal miners were dirty, drunken and irreligious. His views, reported in the Sydney *Sun* on 2 March, 1920, related to shale mining operation in the isolated Wolgan Valley. He asserted that "all the derelicts of Australia seemed to go to the Wolgan Valley" where only twelve adults of a population of 800 attended church each Sunday and where only fourteen out of 140 miners bathed regularly. He characterised troublemakers as single men who "strayed along with knapsacks on their backs, disseminated Utopian ideas, and preached the gospel of how to get rich quick."

The miners responded by noting it was hardly surprising so many workers drank and, given the sordid working environment provided by Fell, it was a miracle that the women had not also been driven to drink. They believed that the local church could well be converted into bath and change rooms for employees since "the prospect of a mansion in the sky obviously did not appeal to them." A suggestion by Fell that the chief instigator of discontent was an Englishman brought swift agreement from the miners. They observed that Fell was, himself, originally from England.

Industrial issues aside, an examination of *Common Cause*’s controversial first year of operation yields insights on worker education, White Australia, the forecast rise and threat of Japan as a Pacific Power, and the role of the publication in supporting an emerging communist party in Australia. It should also identify core beliefs which have remained with *Common Cause*. Many of those beliefs stemmed from a view, still expressed by some today, that workers in this industry were unique in their shared experiences. An editorial in the 26 May, 1922 maintained:

No section of the community should know the employing class better than the miners. No section had been lied about more flagrantly than the miners. No section has suffered more bitterly because of those lies.

Paradoxically, for a section of industrial labour which projected an image of mateship and egalitarianism, coal mining tasks have been subject to unbending demarcation lines until relatively recently. In most pits there have been scores of job classifications and rates of pay. Above ground there were surface youths, clippers, trappers and drivers. Underground there were day wage earners and contract workers, spare miners, wheelers, first class and second class shift men.

Despite this fragmentation, coal mining unionism was relatively well established on a district or regional basis by the 1870s. At various times and for varying periods there had been a Hunter River Coal Miners’ Mutual Protective Association, a Coal Miners’ Preservative
Association of Queensland, a Barrier Ranges Miners' Association, a Collie River District Miners' Association, a West Moreton District Miners' Association and many others. Before Federation there was growing interaction between individual mine lodges, districts, and regions. By 1908 the miners had formed their first national industrial union, the Coal and Shale Employees' Federation. Later, in 1913, this body was renamed The Australian Coal and Shale Employees' Federation. By 1918 the Federation formed itself into The Workers' Industrial Union of Australia (Mining Department). It was the forerunner of a failed move in 1920 to realise the cherished dream of the One Big Union for all.

Like its parent bodies, the Workers' Industrial Union of Australia adopted the preamble of the Industrial Workers of the World which had been influential in the development of the Western Federation of Miners, a revolutionary labour union in the United States. It states:

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace as long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people while the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life. Between these two classes a struggle must go on until all the toilers come together on the political, as well as on the industrial field, and take and hold of that which they produce through an economic organisation of the working class without affiliation with any political party.

The rapid gathering of wealth and the centering (sic) of the management of industries into fewer hands makes trade unions unable to cope with the ever-growing power of the employing class, because the trade unions foster a state of things which allows one set of workers to be pitted against another set of workers in the same industry, thereby helping to defeat one another in the wage war. The trade unions aid the employing class to mislead the workers into a belief that the working class have interests in common with their employers. These sad conditions can be changed and the interests of the working class upheld only by an organisation formed in such a way that all its members in any one industry, or in all industries if necessary, cease work whenever a strike or lockout is on ... thereby making an injury to one an injury to all.

Having defined their philosophical battleground, the miners set out the objects of their union in a detailed constitution which is little changed to this day. These broad objects were: improved working conditions and pay, greater union coverage in the workplace, preservation of jobs, the return of working class representatives to Parliament, and improved arbitration processes. Here is a bet each-way with the preamble encouraging revolutionary action and the constitution less radical and more conciliatory.
Significantly, the constitution decreed that:

In order to further ensure the better advocacy of the principles and rights of labour or for any other purpose which the Central Council (of the union) may deem proper, to support, own in whole or part, and/or subsidise any newspaper or any other publication advocating the cause of labour.9

This commitment to a worker-owned and operated press saw the miners simultaneously support the concept of their own newspaper as well as an ambitious Australian Workers' Union (AWU) plan for a string of labour dailies to be produced by an AWU company, Labor Papers Limited. Dismayed by a lack of union-wide co-operation in swiftly bringing the newspaper chain to fruition, the miners produced a trial issue of Common Cause in March 1920. It was not until July, 1921, that it began as a weekly newspaper, price threepence, and posted to members.

There is no satisfactory evidence to explain the delay between the trial issue and regular publication. It can only be conjectured that ideological differences — syndicalism versus socialism versus communism — dissipated energies and resources which could have been directed towards the development of Common Cause. These differences could well have been brought into focus by efforts to establish a communist party in Australia; by IWW adherents within the Mining Department; or simply from lack of access to printing presses and acceptable staff.

Some clues, however, are present on page eight of the trial issue. A single column story informs readers that:

The difficulties in producing this issue were great, due to having no staff and being largely dependent on honourary contributions. Whatever shortcomings this issue of Common Cause may possess, we ask that members overlook it.10

It then explained that the trial print was designed to give union members an idea of the importance of a newspaper in their struggles. On a note of cautious optimism, it suggested it could be six or eight weeks before the next issue was published as a weekly or fortnightly publication. This vagueness indicates a lack of forward planning, or budgetary allocation, for Common Cause. The first issue did, however, predict that it would be a bright, breezy, newsy paper of the working class, educating its readers on the global class struggle, fighting the battles of the workers, shining as a beacon for the new era. Notwithstanding the strenuous nature of the times, Common Cause would, it said, sail on the turbulent waters of class strife, ferrying the working class to a better age. This age would be marked by the establishment of an Industrial Socialist Commonwealth.
The tenor of the trial issue could best be characterised as pugnacious and uncompromising, signalling the tone of the paper to the present day. The initial editorial, after outlining the case for a workers’ press, vehemently attacked the established mass media as a vast conspiracy put in place to drug the masses. The popular press, it claimed, insinuated that workers’ leaders were fools while magnates were sensible and honest souls. The editorial declared that most press statements were lies which bolstered the financial and political fortunes of a capitalist class which grew wealthier by the day while workers were laid low by “mental poison gas.” This worker appraisal of the popular press was broadly accurate. Miners, according to the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 12 March 1922, epitomised those excesses by working on velvet, taking holidays, and forcing other workers into idleness at the slightest whim.

The allusions in that first editorial were overtly militaristic, stressing that:

Theory and tactics must be made clear to all. You (the worker) must know. It is not enough for your officials to know. How can you rule your own fighting force unless you train yourselves? If you don’t (train yourselves), the death of one leader may mean disaster. You must know what your enemies are doing. You need to cultivate a wider outlook ... The older, narrower view that took in only your own union must give way to a more effective fighting gaze that watches for attack along the whole front ... It will need the workers in all industries to build the big unified organisation capable of meeting united capital on equal terms.¹²

Such allusions recalled The Great War jargon and rhetoric which had become part of everyday language in Australia. In closing, the editorial told workers they knew they wanted a radical, fearless working class press with a working class outlook. Workers were also told they demanded a shattering of flimsy pretence and tinselled falsehood. Nothing but the truth, said *Common Cause*, was good enough for the great class that produced all wealth, nothing else would do!

In several respects that trial issue embraced the two Utopian fantasies of some unionists and most socialists in Australia following The Great War.¹³ They were the development of One Big Union, and government and administration by collectives of workers. In addition, the editorial implied a growing worker disenchantment with a Labor Party increasingly perceived to have degenerated into “a sad group of professional politicians.”¹⁴ Such perceptions are, at times, still quite audible today.

As well, the trial issue had snatches of rousing verse which warned any capitalist readers to beware the impending arrival of legions of hungry and angry workers. An inside page poem concluded:
Through the depths of the Devil's darkness, with the distant stars for light They are coming while you slumber, and they come with the might of right On a morrow, perhaps tomorrow, you will waken and see, and then You will hand the keys of the cities to the ranks of the Hungry Men.”

Throughout its existence, *Common Cause* has published poetry — much of it written by working coal miners. Perhaps the most notable was Scots migrant Jock Graham who arrived on the Australian coalfields during the 1920s. He wrote and published until the seventies, frequently using industrial struggles and accidents as his themes. In 1973 he penned an appreciation of *Common Cause* in which he championed the ideal of the One Big Union. That poem would not have been out of place in the issue of March 1920.

In his study *For Freedom and Dignity: Historical Agency and Class Structures in the Coalfields of NSW*, Andrew Metcalfe notes the role of verse as a dominant cultural form among English-speaking miners. He refers to Graham’s lifelong commitment to communism, reflected in the heroic Stakhanovite pace of his verse. Alas, Graham’s style is little more than a very obvious parody of Robert Burns whose work would have been drilled into Graham during his school years in Scotland.

**THE FIRST YEAR**

*Common Cause* commenced weekly publication on Friday, 15 July, 1921. It had been agreed that it would remain in existence until realisation of the dream of a chain of labour dailies. At that point, coal mining news and views would be absorbed into the new dailies as a supplement. Until then the weekly broadsheet would serve as gift-wrapping for a parcel of syndicalist and communist views, themselves an uneven mixture of naive hopes and recollections of bitter industrial experiences.

In his *History of the Miners' Federation of Australia* Edgar Ross, who joined a born-again *Common Cause* in 1935, claimed that the publication in the early 1920s reflected a movement of industrial labour towards the extreme left. In so doing it automatically revered the Russian people and their revolutionary leaders, eschewed imperialism and wars between nations (but not conflict between classes), championed internationalism, and resolved it had an obligation to provide workers with an awareness of formal Marxist economic and political philosophies and strategies. The first two editors of the weekly publication were Norman Freeberg (who changed his name to Freehill, possibly because of anti-German or anti-Jewish prejudice) and Samuel A. Rosa. Both Freeberg and Rosa were long-time social activists. Rosa reached communism via anarchism,
syndicalism, and socialism and is known to have celebrated the first international Labor Day, 1 May, 1890, with a small group of socialist friends in Melbourne. The name Rosa appears in early issues of Common Cause as Aunt Rosa, editor of a page reserved for women and children. Aunt Rosa may well have been Samuel Rosa, although this has not yet been established. The Aunt Rosa page was an amalgam of traditional money-saving hints, items on communist womanhood, health and literacy, and letters from children who sometimes designated themselves as Young Comrades. Several of those letters may have been ghost-written by parents but, more likely, were the work of the mysterious Aunt Rosa. Letters purporting to come from children aged between six and twelve, often spoke in informed and even erudite tones of capitalism, the class struggle, the sacrifices of miners, and the need for common folks to stick together.\textsuperscript{17}

The women and children’s page — which survives today as a children’s section — was one of several dedicated segments in each issue. The others attended to sport and official reports of union inspections of operating sites. Elsewhere, Common Cause covered an admirably broad range of subjects — the possibility of war in the Pacific, White Australia, nationalisation of the coal resource, capitalist conspiracies, ALP “betrayals”, the achievements of the Russian Revolution in the face of external interference, internal unrest, and widespread famine.

Having declared itself a class paper in its first issue as a weekly, Common Cause was keen to raise the consciousness of what it saw as backward elements among the rank and file. It stated its educative mission thus:

The advanced members owe a duty to the movement. Abuse is no argument. It is not fair to call a man a bonehead. That gets neither the movement nor the man anywhere. Discuss, explain, argue and lend papers, pamphlets and books. Always remember that there was once a time when most workers, now militant, were in the same stage.\textsuperscript{18}

The paper accepted it would be childish to believe every worker in an industry could be lifted to an advanced level, but a great majority could be made to understand the basic principles of the class struggle. Workers who already had a strong grip on the essentials of the movement had a pivotal role in helping their comrades who were unable to “uproot the poison plants of false ideas sown in their minds in young years.”\textsuperscript{19}

The emphasis on education owes much to foundation editor Freeberg, a sub-editor with the Brisbane Worker during 1919 and a forceful advocate for a worker-controlled Workers’ Educational Association. Regarded by the Australian military establishment as an
extremist, Freeberg was apparently widely known as an IWW supporter and as an associate of Bolsheviks. Scathing of universities in general and the University of Queensland in particular as saturated with bourgeois ideas — Freeberg was a most appropriate choice.

In his early editorials Freeberg suggested Marx was the ideal companion along the track to learning and leadership. Marx had supplied the compass which guided the labour movement scientifically along its path. As a consequence, organised labour held in its hands the key to the interpretation of history which would reveal the transient nature of capitalism. Freeberg insisted that capitalism had to go and it was up to the most “advanced” sections of the working class to stir into political activity the less advanced masses.

That editorial appeared under the heading “You can’t mend it; End it!” In the same issue Freeberg drew the attention of his readers to the sociological studies of Engels and Spencer. Obviously Freeberg and the Union believed that the workers, if encouraged and directed, would respond favourably to these revolutionary teachings. Posing the question “Are You Interested In The Growth and Progress of the Human Race”, the third issue of Common Cause devoted four of five inside page columns to a display advertisement for socialist pamphlets, propaganda pictures, The Worker Cookery Book, The Commonsense Cookery Book and The Presbyterian Cookery Book. Perhaps the drabness of Presbyterian cooking appealed to the sombre world view of the comrades. The advertisement also offered for sale works by Jack London, Upton Sinclair, Thomas Paine, Dr Marie Stopes, and the rip-roaring but moralistic cowboy thrillers of Zane Grey.

Other early issues encouraged worker support for history and economics classes held at the Labor College of New South Wales under the auspices of the State Labor Council. In a schoolmasterish tone it admonished:

Far too little attention is being paid to Labor Colleges and Workers’ Schools in the various capitals. Every thinking worker should hold it one of his duties to attend himself and get others to attend.

For all the fire and optimism of those first few issues there were ominous signs that support among the rank-and-file was less than unanimous. Several stories describing the favourable response of readers oscillated between the self-serving and the defensive. Much of the front page of issue four lauded editorial achievements to date and stressed the absolute need for continuing support. A prominently-featured story stressed that Common Cause was a journalistic youngster which had cast aside its swaddling clothes and would soon be recognised as a force in the Australian working-class movement.
Another story admitted there had been some criticism. It would accept criticism but not that inspired by reactionary and anti working class motives which were an undiluted evil which might even threaten the ability of the union to keep its “advanced” elements posted with the latest news and the latest developments in other countries and other industries.

This flurry of self-justification followed the issue of 19 August 1921, when Common Cause reported progress in efforts to establish the chain of Labor Dailies. Several letters in the following issues urged caution. ‘Ikon O’Klast’ on 30 September warned against trusting such a powerful weapon in the hands of incompetent and untrustworthy (ALP) turncoats who were nothing more than self-seeking fakers. The tone of that report on 19 August was quite petulant. While accepting the need for working-class dailies in Australia, Common Cause said, frankly:

We have no illusions about Labour Dailies ... we lose nothing by honesty, we gain nothing by subterfuge. These new dailies must not be merely considered as instruments for lifting opportunist politicians into soft jobs. They must be honestly working class all the time.

To its credit, Common Cause displayed a measure of that honesty, covering in the 9 September issue objections by some miners to levy to fund their weekly newspaper. Noting that the Daily Telegraph, Sydney, and the Sydney Morning Herald had reported a strike at Killingworth Colliery related to a protest over funding for Common Cause, Freeburg wrote that three miners — out of a membership of more than 20,000 — had, indeed, objected to paying a levy. The Sydney dailies, however, were liars as the strike was not because of the non-payment of a levy by three fellow members.

The same issue announced that Common Cause would be mailed to every member’s home. To that point, the newspaper had been distributed through local union lodges. As this would add to operating costs, it may have resulted from the deliberate non-distribution of the paper by some local lodge officials. Within that first year of publication, internal opposition to either the tone or the existence of Common Cause had become sufficiently obvious to force the union to a ballot on the continuation of the weekly.²⁴ Pete Thomas, a left-wing journalist, pamphleteer, and Editor of Common Cause from 1973 to 1979, wrote in The Coalminers of Queensland, that the national vote, held in 1922, was five-to-three in favour of continuation although in Queensland the margin was four-to-one in favour. It is evident that nationally the membership had strong reservations over the revolutionary course charted by Freeberg. There was even a suggestion by one reader in the issue of 17 February 1922 of attempts,
by unidentified persons, to sabotage the paper because of its strong working class advocacy.

Some months before the ballot, Freeberg presented his first half-yearly operating report to the Central Council of the union. Financially the performance had been encouraging with an income of £4185 9s. 2d. against costs and bad debt provisions of £4578 12s. 4d. thus sustaining a modest loss of £393. Printing costs were £3170 and £667 for wages and salaries. In the report he stressed:

I should like the members of the Council to understand that the paper is being run economically, the staff consisting of myself, a staff writer, and a cadet. Compared with other papers this is quite out of the ordinary... I (also) place on record an emphatic protest, which I appeal to the Council to support, against the actions of some district and lodge officials in consistently supplying the employers’ papers with information and reports, and giving them every assistance, and in just as consistently ignoring their own official paper.25

In his observation on the financially frugal day-to-day operation of the paper, Freeberg was most correct. The sheer volume of material contained in each issue of *Common Cause* indicates a substantial workload in the areas of writing original material, rewriting contributed material, copy editing and headline writing, proof reading and rudimentary page layout. In addition, the collection and placement of advertisements, collection of advertising revenue, and weekly distribution would have imposed heavy demands on staff. It is beyond doubt that Freeberg and his two full-time staff members, with occasional clerical assistance from two part-timers, were dedicated to their task and efficient in its execution. They were also catholic in their editorial interests.

In its attention to safety and industrial health issues *Common Cause* performed an essential service in raising the consciousness of members at the coal face. Almost from the outset it carried a weekly column, “News of the Industry”, which featured lengthy reports of safety inspections on individual pits with detailed information on working conditions, safety equipment, and safety precautions. Thus an inspection of the Wallsend Colliery by union official Sydney Price in August 1921 led to these observations:

The workmen were withdrawn on the day of our inspection owing to inflammable gas... and shots should not be fired when gas is present. The question of ventilation in this district needs attention (since) workmen are sent (in) to these pillars before any ventilation is arranged. Air should be the first consideration for the workmen. The question of timber... also needs attention, there being a large quantity of broken timber... which should be renewed. Not sufficient care is being taken
by those in control of this district. Nothing has been done regarding the removal of the manure heap on the surface from which fumes ... enter the downcast, detrimental to workmen employed at the bottom of the shaft.\textsuperscript{26}

This column also presented international safety news with regular coverage of mining fatalities in the United States and occasional items on working conditions in France and Germany. General articles such as "What The Worker Faces In Order That Profits Might Pile Up" drew a grim picture of the risks of coal mining:

The moment the miners step into the cage that is to take them down into the dark mine they put themselves within the reach of death in a thousand forms. What particular dark hole death may spring from no one knows. The dangers are so many that it would be quite impossible to mention them all.\textsuperscript{27}

That coverage was appropriate as it coincided with Freeberg's page one editorial, on 23 September, 1921, which described the Mount Mulligan coal mine disaster as the latest "grim, bloody milestone that marks the progress of the coal mining industry in Australia, a reminder that the worker pays in industry as in battle."\textsuperscript{28} Freeberg, in finest firebrand form, concluded:

And deep from the heart of every conscious member ... and from the heart of every fighter in the Movement swells a bitter malediction on the System which demands its human sacrifice ... And a little more grimness is added to the determination to hasten the day when human welfare shall be the guiding star of human effort ... when the sweat-stained golden god of profits shall be overthrown and human happiness placed on the throne to reign for all time.

*Common Cause* had an endless supply of news which inspired cartoons with the pointed message that the workers, having been exploited, were becoming restive. Often they were depicted as being crucified or sat on by John Bull characters. Here and there were workers arising to a new day, reaching out for a new sunrise. In both pictorial and written treatment, it made a strong connection between unsafe working conditions and cost cutting by employers. The paper observed "... workers are too cheap and, when worn out, can be replaced ... while machinery costs (big) money ... miners strip off every stitch of clothing possible and work until we are blinded by perspiration and continue to do so for hours daily among the effluvium of man and beast."\textsuperscript{29}

It fashioned a caustic response to suggestions reportedly made by Professor S. Lyle Cummins, Royal Institute of Public Health (England) that inhaled coal dust posed no health risks. Heavy with sarcasm it suggested coal mining was so healthy that armed guards were posted at pits to prevent capitalists from rushing underground
where coal miners were healthy and happy to wallow in clouds of coal dust.

While stopping short of declaring that paradise had been constructed in the new Russia, *Common Cause* claimed workers there were generally better off than those in the non-communist world and that the extent of famine in Russia had been exaggerated by a hostile British and North American press. It stated there was no truth in malicious reports that Russian women had been nationalised. It told readers that only those who were ignorant of Bolshevism would believe such stories. Readers were also advised to disregard reports that the Soviet Government was exaggerating the famine in order to obtain extra relief supplies and to claim greater credit for eventually overcoming it. Coincidentally, perhaps, readers of that issue were invited to subscribe for one penny per week to *The Communist*, billed as the Official Organ of the Communist Party of Australia. Meanwhile *Common Cause* would also advance that same proletarian struggle by supporting, at every opportunity, the cause of Communism and Russia. It carried claims that there was no unemployment in Russia; that illiteracy had fallen from 85 per cent to 25 per cent; that Lenin’s insomnia was caused by overwork and could be treated; and that Russia was attracting an increasing number of foreign workers who were happy to kill themselves with overwork in a good cause. One such worker wrote:

> Here in Moscow we have a comfortable six-room flat with hot water, central heating and electricity, all furnished to us by the Government. All persons who are doing recognised work get their lodgings through the Government ... (here) there is more law and order than any place I have ever been and there is also more widespread reconstruction.

but, in something of a contradiction, added:

> But the only people who can be happy in Russia are those who can make work take the place of luxury and personal comfort.

*Common Cause* gave an impression that in many parts of the new workers’ state there was no shortage of social infrastructure. Infant health clinics “equipped with all the latest conquests of science had been fitted out in Odessa”. Reprinted reports from the 26 November 1921 issue of *Pravda* applauded the efforts of Moscow workers running their factories as co-operative endeavours. The Siberian peasants were so happy with the system, said *Common Cause*, that they were paying their Produce Tax in advance and viewed their collective farms as grain factories and teaching institutions for farming people. Ordinary people were producing new inventions at the rate of four or five a week. In short, Communism was working in Russia and could work elsewhere but prejudice, ignorance, self-interest and misinformation would have to be overcome.
That prejudice was close to home for *Common Cause*. Colour-based immigration posed very real ideological questions. Noting that the White Australia policy was part and parcel of political life in Australia, the newspaper observed a deeply ingrained antagonism towards the “‘darker races’” which it suggested was on the wane among working people. Opposition to “‘darker races’” centred on their potential to depress working conditions and living standards. *Common Cause* offered a “scientific viewpoint”:

> Apart from economic fear there is now no antagonism between white and coloured workers. The workers of Australia ... are realising that just as all humans have a common origin, so all workers have a common social experience in that they are exploited by their employers ... the only ground of objection by the white unionist is the seeming willingness of the coloured worker to work for lower wages.

Alas, some weeks earlier *Common Cause* had headlined an article “Black Terror — Unspeakable Crimes Of Coloured Troops”. It reported that 35,000 black soldiers from French colonies occupying parts of the Rhine had caused much misery and thundered:

> when we consider that these half-trained soldiers, physically strong and well-developed animals dragged from their native land and exposed to all the demoralising influences of military life, it would be against all human experience to hope for any other result ... it therefore becomes necessary for the other Allies to keep a watchful eye upon this Black Army of occupation.

While restrained in its disdain of racism, its attitude towards the Australian Labor Party showed no such restraint. Under Freeberg, it exuded pure venom towards ALP politicians who enjoyed the life of the lotus eater. Theodore’s Queensland Labor Government was powerless to engineer change, and was violent and scurrilous in its attacks on workers. In New South Wales the ALP had thrown in its lot with the policies of the Nationalists, the Progressives, and the Tory press. The newspaper called for a purge of charlatans and frauds within a party which would either have to fall into line or come out openly as anti working class. Above all, there was a perception by “‘the men who tear down coal at the face, who shear, who work in the mills and the factories, and on steamers’” that the ALP had become unpardonably arrogant and aspired only to become the despotic master of those who supported it at the ballot box. Freeberg saw dark forces within Australian society being regimented into a White Guard and pointed out that in England the whole force of the capitalist state could be used at any moment of industrial or political turmoil. Australians had better be wary.

*Common Cause* believed in the possibility of another major armed conflict. The world would do well to watch Japan since that country
appeared to be menaced by the economic adventurism of the United States and Great Britain. The playground for that adventurism was China. Reporting on a visit by Bertrand Russell to China and Japan, it suggested he had found the Japanese in a very hysterical and neurotic state, similar to that of the Germans before The Great War.\(^41\) The same issue drew attention to a speech by General Sir Ian Hamilton to the London Press Club:

Better let the Japanese have the whole of China than have another war. If you are going to block up the safety valve of the Japanese (you) better put on your gas masks ... if by any mischance we were to have trouble with the Japanese they know quite well they could take Hongkong and the Philippines and it would take a long time to get them out.

The spectre of Japan being denied, by the then Great Powers, access to natural resources in China had been highlighted by Common Cause in December 1921, quoting International Communist:

Should war come it will be a commercial war, a war between the rival capitalistic interests and the stake will be the privilege of exploiting the world's undeveloped prize — undeveloped (mineral) fields.\(^42\)

The potential for war was not, however, limited to the Pacific region. Under the single column headline “War in 1924”, Common Cause informed its readers that no less a revolutionary leader than Leon Trotsky had said, at the Kremlin, that Great Britain was losing its position of world significance, that coal production there had fallen by 20 per cent, and that the pound sterling had been vanquished by the U.S. dollar. Trotsky appeared convinced that rivalry between the two nations would lead to a naval clash in 1924.\(^43\) Common Cause readers had been told in an earlier issue that English shipyards and general armaments works were humming with little less than war-time activity. Japanese shipyards, too, echoed with the roar and clatter of frenzied construction, and America had a colossal program to build for itself the biggest navy in the world. In sober tones, Common Cause considered war between Great Britain and the United States was inevitable.\(^44\) Without predicting the outcome, it foresaw the diminishing significance of Great Britain to Australia. It seemed to columnist “A.R”. that since the world’s financial centre was shifting from London to New York:

Australia will become an outpost of the United States and as nations, like individuals, are ever anxious that their debtors shall keep alive and well, we will secure a new and powerful protector in the Pacific ... bound to us by the golden principle of high interest (rates).\(^45\)

Many of those themes of the first 52 issues were pursued with equal vigour in the two years until the demise of the publication in 1924. Certainly the period merits continuing attention since the pages of
Common Cause offer another view of the lives and concerns of an economically and socially significant section of the Australian workforce. It provides a cameo of left-wing reportage of the Russian Revolution and the famines in that country. It was a vehicle for the propagandist skills of Freeberg, and played a role in bringing international and internationalist news and views to its readers.

Interestingly, some of the content in 1921/22, if not the style of delivery, will strike a familiar chord with Australians in general and Queenslanders in particular at the present time. For example, on 14 May, 1922 Common Cause reported the following expenses claims by elected officials: cigars, wine, stout and tips £37 15s; standard 5s. tip to drivers of hire vehicles; and £445 for painting private houses. The memory of the push towards the One Big Union is recalled in current issues of Common Cause through an inside page announcement that the paper is published by the United Mine Workers’ Division of the Construction, Forestry, and Mining Employees Union. Those recent issues report, too, the struggles of Albanian miners; health and safety in the coal industry; multiple deaths in German and Canadian mine accidents; and a latter-day White Guard reincarnated in the New Right and its camp followers from the ranks of the self-styled economically rational. In all this there is a powerful sense of deja-vu which encourages the inference that Common Cause and its readership are unchanged and unchanging. This inference is not correct.

The paper survived the 1922 ballot of members only to be buried in Labor Daily for 11 years from 1924. That lengthy disappearance, publicly attributed to a miners’ pledge to support a union movement daily newspaper, was in part a rank and file rejection of a revolutionary rallying cry that was inappropriate to conditions in Australia in the early 1920s. Clearly a publication out of touch with the sentiments of its readers will not survive. In publishing, as in politics, timing is of the essence and there is evidence that this message has been heeded by successive editors since the re-establishment of the paper in 1935.

The current editor, Mr Paddy Gorman, observed that the publication has an estimated readership of 70,000 from a monthly print run of 22,000 and has retained some of the optimism of the early 1920s:

Economic realities have, at times, curbed that optimism and the pace and extent of change in the workplace. Reality has prompted changes in approach on some issues. Safety is cultivated as an industrial issue rather than as a purely moral issue. Our consultative approach has also helped the restructuring of industry awards and this has, itself, aided a move towards a more consultative working environment. We continue to nurture a belief that change is possible although it must benefit
mineworkers and the community as well as employers. We continue to strive for the betterment of our members and the mining communities within the context of a more orderly and equitable coal sector and we hope that Common Cause is a force for the better."

Mr Gorman has also noted that since 1935 Common Cause has survived war-time censorship, major changes within the trade union movement, splits in the various radical left groupings within Australia, divisions within the ALP, the re-orientation of the coal industry from domestic demands to exports, and an able overall drift away from trade union membership. It has survived, he believes, because it contributed to the jobs and lives of its readers. Without that relevance it would not continue to survive.

ENDNOTES

5. Fisher op.cit. pp.34, 35, 40 and Ross, op.cit. discuss pay and job classification at length.
8. Fisher, Ross, op.cit., discuss the preamble and its influence on the thinking of organised labour within the mining sector.
9. Constitution of the Australasian Coal and Shale Employees' Federation. (Copy lodged with the Deputy Industrial Registrar), Melbourne, 8 September 1886.
10. CC 19 March 1920.
11. ibid.
12. ibid.
14. ibid, p55.
15. CC 19 March 1920.
17. CC 16 September 1921. The inclusion of a children's section was announced in issue No. 10. Letters from "Young Comrades" first appeared on 7 October 1921 and co-incided with a fund for relatives of the victims of the Mount Mulligan coal mine disaster.
18. CC Volume 1 No.1, 15 July 1921.
19. ibid.
21. CC 29 July 1921.
22. ibid p1.
23. ibid 5 August 1921.
25. *CC* 17 February 1922.
27. *CC* 23 September 1921 p5. An article attributed to Joseph Keating provides a most comprehensive and accurate account of, for example, frictional ignition, gas and dust explosions, and blast injuries.
28. *CC* 23 September 1921 pl. The Mount Mulligan disaster was covered extensively in daily newspapers of the period.
29. *CC* 7 October 1921.
32. ibid p5.
33. *CC* 12 August 1921 pl.
34. ibid p5.
36. *CC* 19 August 1921 p3. This article bears the initials "A.R." and may be the work either Arthur Rae, a staff member and former AWU activist who was a prime mover in the transition of that union's newspaper from the *Hummer* to the *Worker*, or Samuel A. Rosa, later to become editor. During this period Rosa was not on the payroll of *Common Cause*.
37. *CC* 2 September 1921 pl.
38. *CC* Volume 1 No.52 pl. Written by Freeberg, this article takes the form of an editorial which covers the five columns of page one. The editorial analyses the workings of the Second All Australia Trade Union Congress.
41. *CC* 3 March 1922 p5.
42. *CC* 23 December 1921 p9.
43. *CC* 18 November 1921 p5.
44. *CC* 29 July 1921 p4.
45. *CC* 18 November 1921 p5.
47. ibid.