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Lisa Milner
Southern Cross University

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best forgotten as they seem to get out of perspective when continually brought up and churned over'. As those pesky historians are wont to do.

Monash University **ANDREW MCKAY**

Lee Papas (ed.), *Staged Action: Six Plays from the American Workers' Theatre*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 2009. pp. xii + 290. $129.00 cloth, $44.95 paper.

Drama has been a popular choice when depicting the struggles of the working class. In Australia, the New Theatre was at the forefront of the activist drama movement, from 1932 to the present day. Basing its work on Lenin's exhortation to employ art as a weapon, it took its lead from the American workers' theatre movement, which, from the 1920s, proved to be a fruitful home for inspiring workers and writers to create socialist realist theatre, and to represent the struggles of workers in innovative ways. The movement was so popular that by the mid-1930s over 400 labour theatre companies had been established. Out of this artistic outpouring came works that were to have a lasting popularity, such as *Waiting for Lefty* by Clifford Odets.

Many other works are not so well known, and Lee Papa, Drama Professor at the College of Staten Island, has brought some of these together in the anthology *Staged Action: Six Plays from the American Workers' Theatre*. It is a valuable collection, which Papa hopes will rekindle interest in the genre. For the most part eclectic and inspirational, the plays are selected from a wealth of archival plays in manuscript form, noting a rarity of published plays (Australian readers note, though, that three of the six can be found in our libraries). After an introduction that provides very useful contextual information, the plays are arranged in three sections.

The first section brings together two shows that depict communities of jailed workers. *Processional* by John Howard Lawson is set in West Virginia in 1925, and employs an innovative and vibrant melange of drama, vaudeville, grotesquery and slapstick to depict a savage critique of western capitalism. The prominence of a jazz band led one contemporary critic to note it as a 'thoroughly American play' in its modernist depiction of striking miners organising from inside a jail, and the connections the play made between radical working-class action and the cultural dissidence of jazz music are particularly significant. In one prescient line that also reproduces the period's portrayals of race, Rastus Jolly dreams of 'a black future; mebbe the coons'll be kings, mebbe yet you see a black President a' the United States'. *Singing Jailbirds*, the next play in the collection, was written in 1928 by Upton Sinclair (the politically active American author best known for his 1906 novel *The Jungle*) after his experience of being arrested when he read the Bill of Rights at a maritime strike rally in Los Angeles. It concentrates on the experiences of an imprisoned and martyred IWW strike leader, and his community of jailed workers. Again, music and inspirational songs drawn from the IWW's *Little Red Songbook* form a large part of the performance, and the audience is encouraged to join in. The play was revived in Los Angeles this year as a musical extravaganza, showing that bringing new life to an old play can be entertaining.

The second section presents two plays that were written and produced from the resources of the US labour colleges in the 1920s. One of these, Brookwood Labor College, employed drama to realise the purpose of 'educating leaders for

a new society', as part of the 'increasing interest of the trade union movement in popularising and dramatising labour's problems and achievements through such agencies as motion pictures, pageantry, and dramas'. Bonchi Friedman, a Russian immigrant textile worker and student of Brookwood, wrote *The Miners* in 1926. Like *Processional*, it is set amongst the industrially turbulent mining area of West Virginia. Friedman employed an expressionistic, allegorical style of drama to tell her story of union leader Martha, who is killed in her struggle for the union. It is the most didactic and openly agitprop work in the collection. *Mill Shadows*, from Brookwood, dramatises a 1929 textile strike in North Carolina in which playwright Tom Tippett was active. In the four years of its production it played to over 30,000 people. Both the plays in this section highlight particularly the growing role of women in the labour movement.

The final two plays in the collection come from the Education Department of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, one of the largest unions in the USA at the time and a major force for progressive global labour co-operation. *In Union There is Strength*, written by Irwin Swedlow and Fannia Cohn, is a very simplistic one-act agitprop work. It contrasts with the final play of the collection, *Pins and Needles*. This 1937 musical revue was written by a team of writers from the workers' theatre movement, led by successful Broadway lyricist and composer Harold Rome. The work went on to become the longest running Broadway production for many years. A young Barbra Streisand, who had made her stage debut in another of Rome's work (*I Can Get It for You Wholesale*), starred in the play's 1962 revival. Along with the treatment of the serious issues of politics of the time and working conditions in the garment industry, the show satirises bosses and workers equally, and lampoons the workers' theatre movement. Rome said that 'I didn't realize that the big attraction was that the garment workers themselves were doing the show and singing to the audience, creating a rapport which is very rare in the theatre'.

Together these plays form an inspiring celebration of the lesser known works of the American workers' theatre movement. The information in the introduction to each section is important to place each play in its historical, political and cultural framework. It is a welcome addition to the history of activist culture and the power of drama to organise labour.

Southern Cross University **LISA MILNER**

John Cash and Joy Damousi, *Footy Passions*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2009. pp. 204. $34.95 paper.

The adjective 'beloved' has recently migrated from the cold masonry of tombstones to a rather different use in the newspaper obituary. Once upon a time the football club affiliation of the deceased would not have been a significant fact in an obituary – now their allegiance to an AFL team is usually noted, preceded by the omnipresent 'beloved'. 'Beloved Collingwood' (Damousi) or 'beloved Carlton' (Cash) is a formulation that recurs often in this book, one of the new breed of Australian Rules titles that seeks to capture the relationship between the fans and their 'beloved' clubs.

Melbourne is as notorious for its 'barrackers' (AFL fans) as Boston is for its 'kranks' (baseball fans). Both cities grew in the nineteenth century as sites of mass