

# A NEW BRITANNIA

Humphrey McQueen

UQP

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*For my mother and father  
in loving memory*

*'My true name is Labour, though priests  
call me Christ.'*

Victor Daley



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## Preface to the Fourth Edition

*A New Britannia* deserves to be read as a statement of its time. In the late 1960s, the mood was established by the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China, the Tet Offensive in Vietnam, the May Days in France, the Prague Spring and the O'Shea strike. At its best, and its worst, this is a book with the wind in its sails.

The first edition appeared late in 1970. In 1975, a second reprint let me correct a few more errors. A new 'Introduction' stressed that the book was an account of the Australian Labor Party. Changes to the text were minimal. In 1985, Penguin Books decided on an illustrated edition, which required resetting the text. Again, any temptation to rewrite was resisted. Almost all the nearly one thousand adjustments were stylistic, with the aim of clarifying views held in 1970. Footnoted information was taken into the text. Additions to the chapters on 'Japs', 'Socialists' and 'Laborites' strengthened the intention of investigating the Labor Party.

Rather than recast the argument in 1986, I added an 'Afterword', sketching my understanding of Laborism and racism in the context of monopolising capitals ('Lenin's Imperialism'). In proposing a research strategy, the 'Afterword' remained faithful to the argumentative spirit, if not the descriptive tone, of the original. That 'Afterword' has been expanded for this edition, principally by bringing the analysis up



to the globalised present. In 1986, I quipped that, by then, I knew too much to write *A New Britannia* but not enough to rewrite it. Today, I see how it could be rewritten. A schema is set out in the revised 'Afterword'. Surveying the materials from a different perspective, my 1996 biography of Tom Roberts could have been subtitled *The making of the Australian petit-bourgeoisie*.

Meanwhile, the historical profession has suffered a loss of nerve in its scope and scale. No doctoral student today would be allowed to attempt the expanses of Russel Ward or Robin Gollan. More than ever, students are directed to topics that could hardly matter less in a tiny patch covering less than a decade. Meanwhile, the effort to enrich class analysis with gender and ethnicity has ended up by jettisoning concern with state power and capital accumulation. For example, *Australian Historical Studies* escaped from politics as the view from Government House verandahs to slump into an anti-quarianism masquerading as post-modern.

Humphrey McQueen  
Canberra

1 January 2004

## Historians

I do not believe that this re-writing will come from the Universities, though they will greatly assist the work of the creative writer. It will not come from the Universities, because they, instead of being the fiercest critics of the bankrupt liberal ideal, are its most persistent defenders. Then too they have been made afraid by the angry men of today with their talk about 'corrupters of youth'.

C. M. H. Clark, 1956

The Australian legend consists of two interwoven themes: radicalism and nationalism. In the minds of their devotees, these concepts were projected into 'socialism' and 'anti-imperialism'. Nineteenth-century Australia was seen as a spawning ground for all that is politically democratic, socially equalitarian and economically cooperative, while our nationalism is anti-imperialist and anti-militarist. According to this view, an arch of Australian rebelliousness stretched from the convicts to the anti-conscription victories of 1916–17, buttressed at strategic points by the Eureka stockade and the Barcardine shearers.

The legenders included Russel Ward, Geoffrey Serle, Ian Turner, and to a lesser extent Robin Gollan and Brian Fitzpatrick. None of these historians would object to being described as socialist; some welcomed the title Marxist, as I do. The difference between us is that for them socialism had become a thing of the past, something to lament, and, lamenting,