“It was a triumph of the human spirit”

PAT MACKIE

RED CAP: The Exhibition
19 July to 4 August 2007 @ the block
Presented by QUT Precincts
From the curators...

My initial contact with the Pat Mackie story began towards the end of 2006. I was approached by La Boîte Theatre Company and the Queensland Music Festival to conduct the preliminary research upon which the music theatre production, Red Cap, has consequently been built.

Developing Red Cap: The Exhibition as an adjunct to the production necessitated an even more erudite appraisal of the recently exhumed documentation, with a view to reframing the story through a contemporary ‘museum style’ curatorial aesthetic. Great care was taken to present and edit the magnitude of information available to us in a way that maintained impartiality and therefore showed every aspect of this multifarious dispute, whilst simultaneously creating a space for our audiences as visual consumers to negotiate the complexity of the material without becoming overwhelmed. To manifest such an experience for our potential viewers was nothing short of challenging.

It was a great privilege to work alongside Peter Lavery who has exceptional knowledge of, and a passion for, the Red Cap story. Peter also holds an intimate understanding of the structural and visual dynamics inherent within the exhibition precinct; his knowledge and expertise within this area very much dictated our approach to both the treatment and presentation of the archival content.

It took Peter and I six months of weekly meetings and constant interrogation of source material for us to begin to isolate with clarity and objectivity the distinct voices of our protagonists from the media frenzy that surrounded the events occurring in Mt Isa in 64/65. Also to reveal the undercurrents: the macro and the microcosmic forces at play on both the political and economic stage which served as the backdrop to this fractious, complex and polarised dispute. As researcher and as co-curator I have lived within this story for over a year. Ultimately, what I have walked away with from this experience, is an unerring and renewed faith in the human spirit.

Karin Mayer
Co-Curator

Major industrial disputes, from the Shearer’s Strike of 1891, to the Patrick’s Stevedore dispute of 1998 are defining events in our development as a working nation. The Mt Isa dispute of 1964/65 stands prominently among these as the most costly dispute in Australia’s history and as a watershed in the way industrial relations were conducted in Queensland. In a decade of turbulent social change the Mt Isa dispute can be seen as a microcosm of the battles between the parochial establishment and the voices of a new multi-cultural community.

There were several causes of the dispute, ranging from the immediate and tangible problem of inadequate showers for miners coming off shift, to speculative theories that the American parent company of MIM manipulated the dispute to drive up world copper prices. What seems certain is that the Queensland Government legislation of 1961 restricting the power of the Industrial Commission to grant wage increases made industrial action inevitable.

The course of a major industrial dispute is never a happy one, but like a war it can produce noble acts. The strength of the Mt Isa community in uniting to fight against all odds for what they believed to be right is one such story told to great effect in the La Boîte production which accompanies this exhibition. In Pat Mackie this polyglot community found a spokesman and an organiser who brought his own international experience and a strong democratic ethos to bear on the situation. Predictably the media demonised Mackie, and with increasing fury as the miners and their community remained steadfast against the coordinated but inept manoeuvrings of the Queensland Government, the Industrial Commission, the mine management, and the AWU hierarchy.

This exhibition explores key aspects of the dispute using the words and images of the media. In doing this we seek to reflect on the role of the media itself. We have used the exhibition space to create environments which suggest the scale of the press noise, and juxtapose this with the personal voice of Pat Mackie. We have searched far and wide to unearth the few examples of balanced reporting of the dispute and included these with handwritten testimony from community members to set the record straight.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My co-curator Karin Mayer has brought a wealth of information on Pat Mackie and the dispute to this project. Her link with the Red Cap production was invaluable and I have enjoyed working with her to tell Pat’s remarkable tale.

This exhibition has been a technical voyage of discovery as we sought to realise an encompassing environment to tell our story. The production team that has made this possible is: Nigel Oram, Monica Cairns, Alison Martin, Leon van de Graaff, Jason Zadkovich and Helen Green. Their commitment to the exhibition was unbounded and we thank them for it.

Thanks to Tony Hayes for providing access to Pat’s records, to Elizabeth Toberty from the ABC, and to David Peetz and Ross Fitzgerald.

Pat Mackie is now in his nineties and lives in a nursing home in Sydney. His achievements over a long life have been an inspiration to us throughout this project. During the dispute Pat met Elizabeth Vassilieff in Melbourne and she became his life partner. Elizabeth passed away on 28 June just three weeks before the opening of this exhibition.

This exhibition is dedicated to Elizabeth Vassilieff.

Peter Lavery
Co-Curator
**Police Fly In**

“Police sat in a car 24 hours a day in front of our house, and one morning Frank Alciati and Elio were sitting on our front veranda having coffee, and Frank went out and asked the police if they would like a cup of coffee, they took off fast but a few minutes later another car was there.”

**Faces of Pat**

Wearing his now famous baseball cap, Mr Mackie stepped into the ‘bull ring’. Shouts of “Good old Pat” and good-humoured comments of the “Vicious Criminal Is Back” were heard about the hotel.

**The Queensland Government**

Refusal to work contract would be a slap in the face for the Government, and the Government is likely to react with a chained mail fist.

**Powerbrokers and the people**

The theatre was packed. The miners booed and yelled down the AWU president, Mr G. Goding. He had to leave the hall. This was the third failure of the AWU State committee in recent weeks to pass on its feelings about the dispute to the miners. Mackie’s power was emphasised when as a man expelled from the AWU and dismissed by the mine management, he was able to walk into the meeting without opposition. He was cheered to the rafters.

**Women, unions and local business support miners**

Black-haired, attractive, humourous yet with a latent fire, Mrs. Colleen Bullen flew into Sydney from Mount Isa with a mission. “I’m here to tell as many people as I can what is happening up there,” she smiled – “I think it is as hard for news to get out as it is for us to get news in. The reason we were forced into militancy in Mt, Isa is that the time required it,” Colleen said.

“There is a time to fight and a time to run. This was the time to fight.”

The standing joke in town is that soon there will be more reporters than miners.

**Your Rights At Work**

Worth fighting for

ABC Statewide

September 1989

ABC Media Watch

1991

Powerbrokers and the people

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Throughout September Industrial Court hearings saw Mt Isa Mines (MIM) try unsuccessfully to get working for wages rather than contract declared as a strike.

24 AUG — Miners revert from contract to wages en masse

22 OCT — Mackie dismissed by MIM

13 NOV — M. I. M shuts down copper smelter

14 DEC — Government gives MIM the power to dismiss any miner

15 DEC — MIM sacks 230 miners and locks out entire workforce

23 NOV — Industrial Commission rules in favour of miners

24 DEC — Industrial Commission reverses earlier decision and awards ‘prosperity bonuses’ of £3 a week to miners

6 JAN — 10 day compulsory conference chaired by Commissioner Harvey begins

27 JAN — Sweeping ‘police state’ emergency legislation enacted

1 FEB — Emergency legislation revoked after threat of national general strike action

17 MAR — Police given wide powers to limit picketing

25 MAR — 660 Award employees had returned to work–100 police and 250 picketers

28 MAR — Mackie advises men to return to work

4 APR — Mackie leaves Mt. Isa

7 APR — Unions vote to return to work days 226 days after dispute began

Curated By
Prof. Peter Lavery and Karin Mayer

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