7. Working Parties: Recollections of the South Australian Working Party

John Tregenza

At the very beginning, 1960 to 1961, before I came back to Adelaide, Douglas Pike himself seems to have played an important role in the establishment of the SA Working Party and was probably responsible for the appointment of his good friend Harold Finnis as chairman—a position Finnis held through the first 14 years or so of the working party's life. Finnis much admired *Paradise of Dissent* and would have almost unquestioningly supported Pike's suggestions for the first two volumes. Gerald Fischer says that he remembers Douglas coming in to the South Australian Archives (he is not sure whether this was before or after he became general editor) and going through every card in the distinctive Biographical Index, which had been compiled by George Pitt and then John McLellan. He also remembers Douglas saying that it was unequalled in Australia as a resource of its kind and regretting that it did not have counterparts elsewhere.

For the period up to 1850, we were, therefore, rather unexercised as a working party because Douglas had thoroughly prepared the ground, and because Sir Grenfell Price, who might have contested Pike's and Finnis's views, never (at least after I joined the working party in 1963) attended meetings, although year after year he was sent agendas and minutes and continued to be listed as a member in the first three published volumes. John Playford, who succeeded Finnis as chairman in 1975, has just drawn my attention to the pages in Colin Kerr's biography of Grenfell Price, which describe the towering row that Price and Pike had over the former's article on George Fife Angas, which led to Price abandoning any claim to the article he had revised, and also articles submitted on Charles Sturt and Governor Hindmarsh, and withdrawing his offer to write on John Howard Angus. Evidently, Price resigned from the working party, but his resignation was not accepted—hence the anomaly. The published articles on George Fife Angas and John Hindmarsh are unsigned and cite books by both Price and Pike.

John Tregenza (1931–99) was a member of the SA Working Party from 1963 to 1990 and wrote four *ADB* entries

State Library of South Australia, 1980, B63412

Harold Finnis was a public service administrator and chair of the SA Working Party, 1959–75

State Library of South Australia, n.d.

In Grenfell Price's absence it was very much a Finnis working party at the time I joined it in 1963. Finnis was well over six feet tall, a hale and authoritative seventy-four, with a deep, carrying voice and the aura of a decided member of the Adelaide establishment for several decades past, president of the Pioneers' Association, president of the Historical Division of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia (SA branch), chairman of the Botanic Gardens Board, member of the Board of the Public Library and member of the Adelaide Club. He was a courtly man. Pat Stretton, who stood in for Ken Inglis for a couple of meetings in 1961, when she was still Pat Gibson and a tutor in the history department, vividly remembers him asking her permission to remove his coat when the temperature was about 40°C. His most memorable and often used phrase as chairman was 'But does he *measure up*?' When he decided that the explorer Horricks did *not* measure up that was fatal to Horricks' chances of inclusion.

As I recollect, we selected names by a series of stages. The editorial office in Canberra drew up a basic list of names for consideration with the barest of biographical details, drawing on the valuable Biographical Register that Laurie Fitzhardinge had been building up at the ANU, supplemented in South Australia's case at least by, I imagine, Douglas Pike's own additions, including names selected from the Biographical Index in the South Australian Archives. The working party would go through this list and make amendments. It would then be circulated (via the editorial office probably) to individuals and societies and institutions for further suggestions. These would then be considered and the Working Party would reduce the number of names to the quota allowed for South Australia according to the size of the population in the relevant era. We would also recommend lengths of articles and names of authors.

As time passed, and I became involved in supervising honours and postgraduate theses in the history department at Adelaide, I was able to make a more positive contribution in recommending names of people whose importance had only recently been revealed by the new research of students and also authors. When Jim Main (senior lecturer, 1966, and reader, 1967–84, in history at Flinders University) joined the working party, he was able to tap the research at Flinders in the same way. In the Finnis era we all agreed that we should value originality and innovation as distinct from wealth and established position in the community as criteria for determining inclusion and length of articles.

A significant change in the working party took place when Finnis retired in 1975. He was replaced as chairman with John Playford. Several new members joined the working party—including Ron Gibbs, a teacher, author of a good one-volume history of South Australia for schools, and first president of the new Historical Society of South Australia (then in his thirties); and Helen Jones, who was beginning a PhD thesis on the emancipation of women in South Australia.

This reconstituted working party went through the preliminary lists prepared by the Finnis working party for the 1891–1939 period and made some substantial changes. Ironically, one of the major changes was to reduce the numbers of Labor politicians and union leaders. The Finnis list had incorporated many Labor names suggested years before by John Playford himself in a letter he had written in response to a circulated preliminary list.

South Australian Working Party, 2013. Left to right: Prue McDonald, Paul Sendziuk, Roger André, Bernard Whimpress, Peter Howell (chair), David Hilliard, Catherine Kevin, Bernard O’Neil, Peter Donovan, Judith Raftery

Photographer: Chris Thomson, ADB archives.

At that time Playford was positively to the left in his politics. When he became chairman of the working party he had moved to the ‘right of centre’ and now persuasively argued against many of the names he had formerly recommended. (He has just reminded me of this in a telephone call.) Finnis, although by no means a Labor man, had made a point of trying to be even-handed with political inclusions. The new working party also disagreed with the Finnis working party’s weighting on clergy—especially Lutheran clergy—Finnis holding a strong conviction that the Lutherans’ significance in South Australia was out of all proportion to their numbers.

These perceptions and weightings changed with time, new research, and a new and younger membership.

John Tregenza was a member of the SA Working Party between 1963 and 1986 and was a ‘living witness’ with Harold Finnis (chair of the SA Working Party, 1959–75) to the National Committee meetings of 1960.

John Tregenza to Keith Hancock (29 June 1986), box 69, Q31, ADBA, ANUA.