Douglas Evelyn Darby, MP: Anti-Communist Internationalist in the Antipodes

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The conservative politician, Douglas Darby’s long service to the extreme Right in Australia spanned almost the entirety of the Cold War. Darby’s reputation as a powerful advocate of right-wing causes from strikebreaking to Captive Nations and the war in Vietnam was unsurpassed. Despite this advocacy, a study of Darby’s political career suggests that he remained largely isolated and powerless on the Right.

Throughout the Cold War, Douglas Evelyn Darby, Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) for Manly in the New South Wales parliament, was accorded especial prominence in the journals of the Left. His efforts to denounce socialism, break strikes, attack the labour movement, organise pro-fascist Eastern European émigrés, support Australia’s military commitment to the Vietnam War and to champion Taiwan, established Darby’s reputation as a powerful right-wing ideologue. Was this reputation deserved? How much power and authority did Darby exert on the Right?

This paper will examine Douglas Darby’s political engagement. Although it takes the form of a biographical sketch, the paper emphasises Darby’s extra-parliamentary embrace of anti-communism and other Cold War right-wing causes.

Born in London in 1910, Darby’s parents were a major political influence. Darby remembered when ‘aged 3 years he stood by while his father, Percy, addressed crowds in Hyde Park on the vote for women’. He described his parents as ‘Liberals of the Asquith type – no, more radical than the Asquithians. My mother was secretary of a branch of the Shop Assistants’ Union and there met my father’. While both of his parents associated with the suffragette movement, neither were socialists. In an unpublished autobiography Darby recalled:

They were both radicals believing in the dignity of man and private enterprise but in controls for the exploitation either by the capitalist or upstart dictator on the other hand. In other words, I would say that politically my family background was a hatred of exploitation and I think I share it.

Having trained at Portsmouth Teachers College and while still a youth, Darby found a job as second steward and galley hand on a P&O liner bound for Australia. The experience later allowed him to claim, ‘Australian crews have a reputation as a lot of lead swingers’. Disembarking at Sydney, he sought out the Reverend Albert Rivett with a letter of introduction from a family friend. Rivett introduced Darby to Judge Albert Piddington. Darby found his new acquaintances disappointing. Both Piddington and Rivett, he found, ‘opposed conservatism, snobbery’, colonialism and the British domination of Australia and ‘saw socialism as the answer’. Both Rivett and Piddington were, in fact, liberal reformers. The former attempted to alleviate the sufferings of the poor throughout his life, opposed the Boer War and was a vigorous critic of conscription in 1916 and 1917. The latter was constantly
drawn to radical causes. Appointed by Premier J.T. Lang in 1925 as an industrial commissioner, Piddington sought to raise wages and living standards and was a strong advocate of child endowment. Piddington believed the rich should be taxed heavily to pay for such measures.

Darby’s meeting with Rivett and Piddington led him to narrow his own liberal views. His Asquithian liberalism clashed with that of these older antipodean liberals. After completing a ‘one year short course’ at Sydney Teachers College, the young English migrant was sent to a one-teacher bush school at Bannister near Crookwell, in the southern tablelands of New South Wales.

Darby remembered his brief period in the countryside fondly. In part it influenced him to later advocate Bathurst as the rightful capital of New South Wales. In 1934, he returned to Sydney where he taught at Mosman Public School and completed a Bachelor of Economics at Sydney University on a part-time basis. Darby’s experiences of the Great Depression in Crookwell or comfortable Mosman were uneventful. As his notes on this period attest, the study of economics never led him to question the workings of capitalism.

When Nazi Germany overran much of Western Europe in 1940, Darby attempted to enlist in the Second Australian Imperial Force. He was rejected because of myopia. Earlier, on the Australia Day weekend, 1940, Darby attended an Institute of Political Science conference in Canberra. During a debate about the European conflict, ‘Lloyd Ross and other members of the Left Book Club demanded that Australia should not participate in war while wage earners were exploited by capitalism’. Repulsed by their adherence to the Soviet Union’s position on the war, Darby argued that ‘the bushfire of Nazism was sweeping across the world’.

Whether it was this encounter with left-wing intellectuals which confirmed Darby’s growing detestation of socialism or communism is unknown. Perhaps of greater import for Darby was to meet at the conference Richard Thompson, a United Australia Party Member of the New South Wales Legislative Council (MLC). In 1945, Thompson supported Darby’s nomination as the Liberal Party candidate for Manly in the New South Wales State election.

Although declared unfit for military service, in October 1940 Darby was seconded from primary teaching to the Youth Section of the Federal Department of Labour and Industry to work as a vocational officer. With his homeland gripped by war, Darby founded the British Orphans’ Adoption Society (BOAS). This ‘sought to bring British war orphans to Australia for legal adoption’. From June 1940 to January 1941, the Society sent 2,000 pounds in weight of warm clothing to England. Dame Enid Lyons, the widow of former Prime Minister Joseph Lyons, Professor F.A. Bland, Darby’s economics professor at Sydney University, and Sir Arthur Rickard, owner of Sydney’s largest real estate company, became BOAS patrons.

In 1945, BOAS became a member of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Association (UNRRA). Darby and his wife applied for positions with UNRRA but were unsuccessful. After his marriage in 1942, Darby moved to the Sydney beachside suburb of Manly where, in 1945, he won the local seat for the Liberal Party. The details of his political apprenticeship in the area between 1942 and 1945 are not known. More than likely, Thompson and the influential patrons of BOAS helped advance Darby’s parliamentary aspirations.

Representing Prime Minister Menzies’ ‘forgotten people’ in post-war Manly, Darby proved a strong advocate for his middle-class seaside constituency. Darby’s
proselytising of extreme-right doctrines also became a hallmark of his career, though little is known about what drew him to these more controversial causes.\textsuperscript{15}

Darby’s oscillations to the extreme Right are best placed in context by R.W. Connell and Florence Gould in their 1967 study:

> When we speak of the ‘extreme Right’ … we do not refer to a group of people whose ideas and actions are wholly alien to the political beliefs of most Australians. We mean, rather, that their political opinions on certain important topics are at the extreme of a spectrum: that they share much of their outlook with many moderate conservatives but hold certain tenets – particularly opposition to communism – with an unusual intensity, and have formed special groups outside the major parties to express this. We do not mean that they reject the dominant institutional structure of Australian society or contemplate violence against it.\textsuperscript{16}

Darby’s inherited liberalism, which guided his parliamentary career, was abandoned ‘with an unusual intensity’ when he opposed manifestations of communism. His anti-communism led him to support groups of an extremist character.\textsuperscript{17}

Unlike other middle class liberal intellectuals who, after World War II, joined or became politicians in the newly formed Liberal Party, Douglas Darby did not merely pontificate about the evils of communism. A man of action, Darby responded vigorously to communism’s subversion of Australian capitalism. Strikes by trade unions, he saw, as acts of communist treachery. Darby would not countenance the view that the waves of strikes in the early post-war period reflected legitimate industrial demands by workers who sought to reduce working hours and increase wages after the jobless years of the 1930s Depression and the long hours, speed-ups and fixed wages of the war years.\textsuperscript{18} In the eyes of Douglas Darby MLA, post-war industrial militancy was communist aggression.

A year after winning the Manly seat for the Liberal Party, Darby attempted to break a 24-hour tram and bus strike in his electorate. Darby saw the Tramways Union as part of Labor’s ‘servile state’. Although perturbed by the poor pay and deplorable working conditions of the striking employees, Darby reasoned that they were misled by an intolerable union bureaucracy. He believed ‘all would be better served if privately operated bus services operated in the Manly area’. Darby offered his ‘sympathy to the dragooned transport workers’ as he ‘organised emergency transport from Manly Wharf for the whole Manly-Warringah area’.\textsuperscript{19}

There was a gratifying response. Lorries were lent, as were cars and removal vans – despite petrol rationing. It was a principle that nobody made money from the strike. ‘Emergency’ vehicles charged bus fares. The surplus was given to charity. On the day of the strike, surrounded by his helpers at Manly Wharf and wearing a pith helmet, Darby directed the emergency transport pool. While a group of strikers denounced him as a ‘strike breaker’, most commuters supported Darby’s efforts.\textsuperscript{20}

Another one-day bus and tram strike in January 1947 brought Darby’s Manly Emergency Services Committee into operation. Commuters held up destination cards while tourists on holiday observed. A large number of Darby’s volunteers were reputedly graziers on holidays. A lorry load of communists from Sydney arrived at Manly Wharf to confront Darby. He was punched and his assailant arrested. At Spit Hill, Mosman, the slogan, ‘Darby Scabs Again’, was painted in tar.\textsuperscript{21}
Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, seven public transport strikes occurred in Sydney. During each strike, Darby organised volunteers to weaken its effectiveness in Manly. Darby claimed that the strikes were examples of a co-ordinated strategy of communist subversion. He sympathised with ‘honest bus employees’ who were duped or bullied into going on strike.  

Organising to break strikes won Darby approval in his electorate and among his parliamentary colleagues. He was prepared to act against the enemy within – communism. Darby’s preoccupation with the communist menace and the success of his ‘interventions’ in the New South Wales transport strikes of 1946 and 1947 emboldened him to mount ‘Operation Potato’.

In March 1947, after 6,000 Sydney waterside workers ‘refused to convert to a 53 hour week’ but demanded instead an eight-hour day, shipping companies tied up all ships in Sydney harbour. The wharves had voted in two secret ballots and at a stop work meeting for the eight-hour day. The Stevedoring Commission ordered the wharf labourers to work 11-hour shifts because of the glut of cargo. At the time, the port of Sydney did not have the equipment for speedy cargo handling.

The Commission threatened to suspend indefinitely wharves who refused to work the compulsory three hours overtime. Food bound for England lay rotting in the holds of ships. Darby interpreted this dispute as industrial sabotage engineered by communists. In his view,

the waterfront with its communist controlled union could wreak more national and international damage there than elsewhere, the casual nature of employment and the concentration of men made NSW waterside workers an easy target for Communist agitators.

Informed of an unloaded ship full of rotting Tasmanian potatoes destined for England, Darby, with the Liberal MLCS, Arthur Bridges and Richard Thompson, met at Manly Council Chambers to plan ‘Operation Potato’. Three days later, on 19 March 1947, Darby and his Liberal colleagues set up a rostrum with a loudspeaker in the Sydney Domain. They called for volunteers to unload the food ships under police protection. As the crowd gathered, a group of seamen and wharves attacked the speakers and their supporters. The police arrested 17 unionists who were charged under the Crimes Act with unlawful assembly and offensive behaviour. Darby’s views of communism’s ‘basher gangs’ were confirmed by the Domain Riot. He believed ‘the incident put me well in the public eye and made sure I was on a Communist list for early liquidation’.

Three days after the Domain encounter the maritime strike ended. Two weeks after the strike, the 1947 State election was held. Darby was returned with an increased majority. In the gathering hysteria of the Cold War, Darby had begun to make his mark as an anti-communist. At a rally of 4,000 people in Wellington, New South Wales in September 1947, a motion was carried unanimously that the Chifley government not proceed with its proposal to nationalise trading banks without the permission of the people through a referendum. The principal speaker at the rally, Douglas Darby, was cheered when he called upon the Governor General, W.J. McKell (an ex-Labor Premier of New South Wales) to dissolve parliament on the issue. In October 1947 Darby returned to the Domain to attack Russia and communism in Australia. He accused the Chifley Labor government of a lack of leadership in
its fight against communism. Darby called for ‘all Communists to be put behind bars’.28

Secure in his position as a parliamentarian and admired for his anti-communist, anti-working class activism, Darby sailed to England as a galley hand aboard a cargo steamer in June 1948. A friend who was a shipping line executive secured the job for the politician. At sea, Darby reflected upon his life. He was a ‘convinced Liberal not a capitalist. Socialists believe they have found the truth whereas Liberals recognise that mere mortals only grope’.29 If these thoughts were less than profound, he also believed that he understood ‘the common man’ because he had ‘worked his passage on a ship’.30 Darby’s need to be in touch with working-class life occurred only once again. In November and December of 1951, he worked incognito as a second class machinist in a friend’s spring factory at Mascot. These short periods of paid manual labour allowed Darby to claim a life long empathy with working people.31 Interviewed on his return to Australia in December 1948, after a two-month hitchhiking tour through England, France, Holland and Germany, Darby proclaimed that he ‘was proud to be British’, and stated ‘the average Briton hates socialism. The Attlee government can socialise industries but not the people’.32

Divisions within the New South Wales Liberal Party and its acrimonious relations with the Country Party ensured the dominance of Labor governments in Macquarie Street until the mid-1960s. These 20 years of enforced opposition not only destroyed Darby’s ambitions of Liberal Party leadership,33 but also provided him with the time and opportunity to pursue the extreme-right politics of ‘special groups outside the major parties’.34

Although it had been rumoured that Darby would contest the federal seat of Mackellar in the 1949 election, the Liberal Party’s endorsed candidate was William Charles Wentworth. Darby and Wentworth became close political allies. Apart from representing Sydney’s northern beaches in State and Commonwealth parliaments respectively, they shared a reverence for an Anglo-Australian culture and a remorseless hatred of communism in all of its guises. Darby and Wentworth were the principal speakers at a protest meeting at the end of the coal strike in August 1949 on the Corso, Manly. Employing sentiments more recently advanced by Prime Minister John Howard, Darby condemned the strike as:

*the greatest tragedy Australia had suffered short of war. When the working man realises that the Liberal Party is a working man’s party which will give justice and opportunity for all, guard our rights and privileges, he will abandon the Socialist Labor Party.*35

In Darby’s estimation the coal strike was ‘Communist blackmail of the highest order’. As the strike ran its course, with fellow volunteers, Darby had organised the sale of wood to Manly housewives. Men willing to work in the mines urged him to form a volunteer force of coalminers.36

In the first years of the Cold War, Darby believed that the ‘Free World’ was threatened ‘by Soviet Communist tyranny and its agents worldwide’.37 His anti-communism, unlike others of the Australian extreme Right, was not focused solely on Australia. His friendship with Wentworth and a less parochial view of global politics propelled Darby on his course of extreme-right internationalism. In May 1949, Darby called for a ‘British Covenant because there was more slaves in the world
than ever before. The slaves in the new continent Sovietska outnumber those that were in America or Czarist Russia’.38

On Australia Day 1953 in Sydney, the Joint Baltic Committee formed the United Council of Migrants from behind the Iron Curtain. Among the ‘Old Australians’ appointed advisory members of the Council were Douglas Darby, W.C. Wentworth and Colonel J.M. Prentice, a journalist and former Military Intelligence officer. After the 1956 Hungarian Uprising, the Council joined with other East European organisations within Australia, often led by anti-communist extremist émigrés, to form the Captive Nations Council. Political scientist John Playford, suggests that the politicians were ignorant of East European developments in the inter-war and wartime periods. The communist pamphleteer, Dave Davies, on the other hand, argues that the likes of senior Liberal Party figures William McMahon, Ivor Greenwood, Hubert Opperman, Dr Malcolm McKay, W.C. Wentworth, and Douglas Darby, ‘a New South Wales State member who often claims to represent the Premier, Mr Askin’, ‘knew of the fascist activities but never denounced its organisations in Australia for what they are – a nazi force’.39

Even if these Liberal parliamentarians did not enquire into the political past of these extreme-right organisations and individuals, they were willing to endorse a shared anti-communist outlook during the Cold War. Whether Darby knew of the fascist past of those in Captive Nations cannot be gauged. Their anti-communist enthusiasm as ‘victims of Soviet dictatorship’ won them unwavering support from the Manly MLA. After the Soviet occupation of Hungary, Darby waited with Wentworth at Mascot Airport to meet the first Hungarian refugees who ‘found freedom’ in Australia. Darby reconstituted the BOAS as the Hungarian Child Care Committee, which, with the United Nations, arranged for the reception and care of refugee children.40

Darby’s interest in the affairs of Captive Nations deepened as he pursued a more independent position in the increasingly fractious State Liberal Opposition. He railed against juvenile hooliganism, demanded the introduction of daylight saving, advocated the abolition of poker machines, opposed the fluoridization of Sydney’s water supply, and campaigned for the development of Bathurst as the new capital of New South Wales. Once considered a possible future leader of the State Liberal Party, Darby was ignored by the power brokers in the party room.

In 1965, Darby was dis-endorsed as the Liberal candidate for Manly. With guile and vigour, Darby successfully contested the 1965 State election as an independent Liberal. His campaign relied upon

a network throughout the electorate where each suburban block was a cell, with at least one strong Darby supporter ... who had received some small personal favour from their benevolent local leader.41

Amongst Darby’s ‘strong supporters’ were his Worshipful brothers of the Empress of India Masonic Lodge, including local worthies, Harry South, Norman Ely and Hector Coghlan.42

A strong female Darby supporter was Joyce Lamm (nee Poznik), the secretary of the Polish Free Settlers Association, a foundation organisation of the Captive Nations Council. Mrs Lamm’s reception rooms at ‘Sunning’, Fairlight were not only used as the headquarters of the ‘Darby for Manly’ campaign but also ‘hosted the
annual gathering of the leaders of Captive Nations’. Another prominent supporter was an Ashfield resident, Lyenko Urbanchich, the secretary of the Agency for Free Slovenia, also an organisation within the Captive Nations Council.

While Darby’s campaign material emphasised his advocacy of private bus and ferry services from Manly to Sydney, the widening of the Spit Bridge and other local issues, wider political commitments were not neglected. The 1947 Domain Riot was recalled, as was his support for W.C. Wentworth’s entry into Commonwealth parliament, leadership in the anti-communist referendum, assistance to the Hungarian victims of communism, and his devoted friendship to many national groups representing countries enslaved by communism.

Darby ran an unbeatable campaign as a local member. The people of Manly sent him back term after term to represent them in parliament. The parliamentary Liberal Party learned to tolerate Darby’s ‘eccentric enthusiasms’ because they could not remove him electorally. Such a measure of independence allowed Darby to devote his political energies to the extra-parliamentary politics of the extreme Right.

From 1960, Taiwan became another of Darby’s extreme-right causes. The former Balmain Trotskyist and Sydney barrister, Kenneth Gee, who had visited Taiwan with W.C. Wentworth and Wilfred Kent-Hughes in May 1960, invited Darby to become a founding member of the Australia-Free China Association. In December 1960, Darby accepted an invitation from Taipei to conduct a six-week study tour of Nationalist China. Before entering Taiwan, Darby ‘visited Hong Kong where he saw the refugee camps for Chinese who had fled the Communist Terror’.

Taiwan became Darby’s ‘embattled miracle of freedom’. It was ‘half the size of Tasmania with a population of 10 million … ignored by most of the Free World’. Taiwan was Darby’s ‘Two Percent, threatened by the ninety-eight per cent majority of Red China’. Farms, factories, universities, schools, hospitals, irrigation works, ship-building yards, coal mines, dams and fishing fleets, as well as naval and air force bases formed the itinerary of Darby’s tour. He believed that ‘Taiwan had solved the land question because land belonged to the tiller’. In contrast, ‘all were slaves in Communist China’. Darby neglected the economic exploitation and political repression of the Taiwanese ‘miracle’ under the Kuo Min-Tang and that its existence relied upon the military power of the United States.

The fate of ‘indomitable Taiwan’ and the Captive Nations behind the Iron Curtain during the 1960s lent Darby’s right-wing extremism an internationalist perspective. Prime Minister Menzies’ despatch of Australian military forces to the defence of South Vietnam in 1965 heightened Darby’s commitment to the Free World struggle against Communism. Although Darby strongly supported the Australian role in the American War in Vietnam, his energies were concentrated in advancing the cause of Captive Nations. The future state Liberal Party leader, Peter Collins, recalls Darby’s commitment to Australia’s defence policy when he, ‘as a student pollster for the Government Department at Sydney University called around to (the Darby) home’, after Darby won the Manly seat in the 1965 State election.

In July 1965, Captive Nations Week was celebrated in Sydney for the first time. His enthusiastic and continuous involvement culminated in Darby accepting the presidency of the New South Wales Captive Nations Council in 1968. Darby joined its ‘Old Australian’ patrons, senators Vincent Gair, Jack Kane, and Frank McManus of the Democratic Labor Party, W.C. Wentworth, E. Farley, J.C. Madison, Jim Cameron
and Tom Mead of the Liberal Party, as well as Henry Lawson’s biographer, Professor Colin Roderick of the University of Townsville, Sir Adrian Curlewis, a prominent judge and Dr C. Huxtable of Killara.52

With Douglas Darby in the lead, on 12 July 1968 1,000 people in traditional costumes from Eastern Europe marched in Sydney demanding that their captive nations be freed from Soviet dictatorship. During Captive Nations Week in July 1969, a ten-minute film on Captive Nations, written and narrated by Darby, was screened in the Lyceum Theatre, Sydney. On April Fools Day 1969, Darby released a self-financed booklet, ‘Lenin – Master or Monster?’ His lecture on Lenin at the Carslaw Theatre, Sydney University, was disrupted by student protesters whom Darby denounced as ‘agents of Communist terrorism’. On Captive Nations Day, 12 July 1969, before an assembled crowd of 1,000 participants, Darby delivered a speech on the evils of communism and laid a wreath at the Cenotaph in Martin Place in memory of the victims of communism.53

In 1970, as the New South Wales President of the Captive Nations Council, Darby was authorised by the Polish-Hungarian World Federation (Australian Branch) to be their Honorary Representative at the World Anti-Communist League (WACL) Conference in Tokyo. Never short of hyperbole, Darby reported to the conference that ‘Australia was convulsed by industrial turbulence motivated by Communists and those willing to be its tools. Their plan was to paralyse industry and commerce’.54 Darby’s elevation to this international body provided him with the recognition denied in his adopted homeland. Ku Ching-Kang, Honorary Chair and President of the WACL in January 1972, commended Darby’s efforts:

I’m especially glad to see that under your direction anti-Communist activities in Australia have contributed tremendously to heightening the vigilance of your people and government leaders against the subversive intrigues of Communists in Australia. I am pleased to know that you are willing to attend the next World Anti-Communist League conference in Mexico as guest speaker.55

After the Holt Coalition government officially recognised Taiwan in 1966, Darby’s efforts were redoubled in upholding the virtues of that ‘bastion of freedom’ threatened by Chinese communism.56 A lifetime love of cricket convinced Darby that the game would bridge the gap between Australia and Taiwan. In 1970 he organised a cricket tour by Taiwanese students to Australia. The Taiwanese played only one match in Sydney against a team of State parliamentarians captained by the right-arm, 60-year-old spinner, Douglas Evelyn Darby.57

As Denis Freney, a young Trotskyist teacher and resident of Manly, recalled, Darby launched a local fund to promote cricket in Taiwan. Darby argued, ‘Cricket made Britain great, and will make Taiwan great too’. According to Freney, ‘locals donated old cricket balls and bats for Darby’s crusade’. Freney confronted Darby on two occasions in Manly. Before the first ever teachers’ strike in New South Wales, Darby organised pensioners at the Manly Assembly Hall to staff local schools. With ten colleagues, Freney successfully intervened. Darby departed, fulminating about ‘traitorous, treacherous Communist teachers’. A fortnight later on the Corso, Manly, Freney and a group of 100 anti-conscription campaigners attempted to hold a rally. Darby, ‘who had the habit of wandering along the Corso on most Saturday mornings
to greet the locals like some patrician lord’, complained to the local police sergeant, who immediately arrested Freney as he raised the microphone to say, ‘The Salvation Army holds their rallies here every week. Why not us?’.

Later that year, Darby sponsored the formation of Taiwan’s first lifesaving association. The Queenscliff Surf Life-Saving Club, of which Darby was a patron, donated a life-boat to the Taiwanese association. A letter Darby received from the Taiwanese government in June 1970 stated that the lifeboat had been placed in a museum.

The advent of the Whitlam Labor government in late 1972 intensified Darby’s conviction that communism exercised a growing influence over Australia. Although winning office only by a handful of seats, Labor embarked on a program of reform which was interpreted as a fundamental assault on the sanctity of capital. The long post-war economic boom was to end in the 1973 Oil Crisis. The forces of the Right, both within parliament and beyond it, mobilised.

In the circles frequented by Douglas Darby, one of the Whitlam government’s more pernicious acts was its recognition of both the Peoples Republic of China and Soviet authority over the Baltic states. On Captive Nations Day, 12 July 1973, in Sydney, over 3,000 mainly middle-aged Eastern Europeans protested against Whitlam’s ‘betrayal’ of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Before the assembled crowd on the steps of the Sydney Town Hall, Darby thundered:

The so-called Australian government in Canberra betrayed the cause of the Captive Nations behind the Iron Curtain when, without any need to do so, it legally and officially recognised the Soviet claim and Russian occupation of the Baltic states – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The federal pro-Communist Labor government rendered this nation defenceless, proclaiming that we face no danger for at least 15 years and certainly not from China, which is not a naval power. Only a few weeks ago, newspaper stories from Hong Kong revealed that Red China had built up in secret what is now the world’s largest navy, larger than British and French navies combined.

Whitlam’s recognition of communist China strengthened Darby’s ardour for Taiwan. The *Manly Daily* published Darby’s poem, ‘Oil for the Lamps of Freedom’, which exalted Chiang Kai-Shek as ‘the defender of Taiwanese freedom’. After diplomatic links were severed with Taiwan by Whitlam, Darby was appointed Taiwan’s honorary consular representative in Australia. To assist Australians travelling to Taiwan, Darby, with Ted Lian, a Manly resident and the former Consul for the Republic of China in Sydney, formed the Taiwanese Travel Service. In December 1973 the Australia-Free China Society was founded, subsidised by both the Taiwanese Travel Service and the Taiwanese government. Darby was the editor and principal contributor of the fortnightly newsletter, *Australia-Free China News*. Throughout its 1974 and 1975 editions, Darby attacked Whitlam’s domestic and foreign policies as ‘Communist manoeuvres’. In contrast, Taiwan was seen as free of internal disorder, but ‘under threat of Red Chinese invasion’.

Although the promotion of Free China and his parliamentary duties took up much of Darby’s time during the Whitlam years, his personal papers indicate that he received personal correspondence and the publications from a variety of extreme right-wing groups, including the League of Rights, and the Workers Party of Lang
Hancock and Sinclair Hill. There exists no record of Darby’s written responses to these groups. To return to Connell and Gould’s words, Darby was opposed to communism with ‘an unusual intensity’ and found ‘social groups outside the major parties to express this’. Indeed he saw himself as a leader of a moral crusade. It is unknown whether Darby was an active participant in the 50 Club, a right-wing group within the Liberal Party, active in the 1960s and 1970s. His personal records hold their publications of this period, and his associations with this far-right grouping can be traced back to the 1966 Warringah bye-election.

With the League of Rights, Captive Nations, Friends of Freedom (supporters of the Vietnam War), in 1966 the extreme Right attempted to unseat the official Liberal Party candidate, Edward St John, a small ‘l’ liberal and president of the South African Defence and Aid Fund (which financially assisted the victims of apartheid). They denounced St John as a fellow traveller of the communists. Extreme right-wing émigrés from Eastern Europe, organised by Lyenko Urbanchich, a close personal friend of Douglas Darby, entered the Liberal Party. No longer were they ‘outside the major parties to express’ their views. Darby’s role in encouraging such developments within the New South Wales Liberal Party cannot be confirmed. His then status as an ‘independent Liberal’ left him powerless in terms of facilitating the rise of the so-called ‘war criminal right’ of the Liberal Party. On the other hand, it is difficult to imagine that Darby did not use any residual influence he may have commanded to assist Urbanchich and his colleagues.

In 1978, Douglas Darby retired from State parliament. His enthusiasm for extreme-right causes became more measured and genteel. During a three-month tour to the United Kingdom and the United States in 1983, Darby addressed the Anti-Communist Bloc of Nations (ABN) in London, and the Captive Nations Committee in Washington, DC. In late June 1981, the Fraser coalition government normalised relations with Taiwan, allowing Taiwanese officials to issue visas for Australian tourists. The Taiwan Travel Service and the Australia-Free China Society, no longer required by Taipei, were disbanded and received no further funding. Despite their closure, Darby remained committed to Free China.

Darby’s book, Trust the Two Percent, was published in London by the Centre for International Studies, which printed numerous anticommunist works by WACL members during the 1980s. Major Australian publishers refused to distribute the book, while Australian newspapers reputedly would not review it. The book contrasted Taiwan’s development with ‘the backwardness and servitude of Communist China’. The two per cent of Chinese living in Taiwan, ‘through their economic, political and social progress’, were seen by Darby as ‘the model for the emancipation of their compatriots on the Communist mainland’.

At the 1983 ABN conference, Darby criticised the absence of any reference to ‘the Captive Nations within the Soviet imperium in the New South Wales High School History Syllabus’. He left unfinished a manuscript which ‘exposed the Communist bias of high school history textbooks’. An autobiographical memoir, A Try for Manly, (the title an apparent allusion to the local rugby league football team) was completed eight months before his death in 1985, but never published.

Weeks before his death, in reply to a letter from his cousin, Rosemary Hadland, in Durban, South Africa, Darby wrote:
It’s quite clear from your letter that things are really serious. Marxism won victory after victory and has infiltrated into Christianity which should have nothing whatsoever to do with it. The Australian scene is not favourable. Our present Labor government is anti-South Africa and regards all South Africans as nasty people even fascists. The conservative Opposition are equally biased. I have no friends whatever in the federal parliament. My erstwhile conservative (they all call themselves ‘Liberals’) political colleagues regard me as a pro-fascist because I am anti-Communist and object to their support for pro-communist or pro-socialist education policies. Nevertheless, I will write an officially sponsored letter. There has been in the last few days an appreciable elasticity regarding migration. I really wish I could be of more encouragement. I have met a number of people from Rhodesia. All of them were able to set themselves up in some kind of business or purchase a family property – but most of them seem to have gone to Queensland.

Darby’s world seemed to be ending in a whimper. The causes he championed were being lost in a winter of discontent. How might Darby be seen in the history of the Australian extreme Right? His active political life in parliament and, as importantly, beyond it, lasted 30 years. He believed its precedents were to be found in the tradition of English liberalism, of Gladstone and Asquith. His lower-middle-class parents, London shop assistants, and supporters of the vote for women, passed on that tradition to their son. Darby’s arrival in Australia as a migrant on the eve of the Great Depression was fortuitous. He found work in the teaching profession as thousands of other Australians endured the Depression decade, without work and often without hope.

Darby’s assisted entry and rise in the reconstituted ranks of the Liberal Party was equally fortuitous. Instinctively, as a petit bourgeois politician in a comfortable seaside electorate, the concerns of his constituents became his own. Darby ‘tried’ for Manly. Nevertheless, his apparent earlier disdain for radical liberalism and the militancy of the organised labour movement in the immediate post-World War II period, easily led Darby into confrontation and collision. ‘Operation Potato’ in the Sydney Domain in April 1947 became a lasting badge of honour for the MLA from Manly, whatever its industrial outcome. Trade unionism and the Labor Party could be conflated easily into a catchall denunciation of communism. Darby saw his efforts to break numerous public transport strikes as both a community service and also active front line duty in the Cold War.

Like his colleague, W.C. Wentworth, Darby’s salvos against communism, international and domestic, allowed him to go beyond the parliamentary bounds where he found ‘special groups’ of the extreme Right in Captive Nations and later, Free China. Although Darby may have believed he was a leader, his parliamentary colleagues, even those who privately shared his views, did not. Darby’s Cold War for the far Right brought him controversy, but little power.

Throughout his long parliamentary career, Darby, as a middle-class moralist, never questioned the fundamental dynamics of Australian capitalism. He fulminated against some of its social ills, but saw it broadly as a natural condition of life. Communist enemies, in Darby’s worldview, were an easier quarry to pursue. Darby regarded himself as a transplanted Gladstone, the High Church Anglican liberal reformer, in the Australian Cold War. He thought his talents never found adequate
expression in the political arena. Nevertheless, even as they isolated him in his parliamentary career, his enthusiasm, dedication and moral rhetoric gave strength and movement to certain callings of the extreme Right.

By astute organising at the local level, Darby retained the Manly seat for 22 years. As a perennial back-bencher, overlooked by the party room and the Ash Street headquarters of the New South Wales Liberals, Darby could indulge his right-wing enthusiasms, without penalty or interruption. Even when Darby approved of the attempted ousting of Edward St John from the federal Liberal seat of Warringah in 1966 by right-wing forces, their anti-St John campaign coincided with the Holt government’s anger over St John’s insistence on a second Royal Commission into the HMAS Voyager disaster.75

Darby rose to prominence in the New South Wales Captive Nations Coalition when most other Liberal and Democratic Labor Party politicians were willing only to act as its patrons or attend its ceremonial dinners. Through his associations with Wentworth and other right-wing figures, Darby became the principal advocate of Taiwan in Australia. His enthusiasm for Taiwan and the Captive Nations of Eastern Europe revealed to Darby the international dimensions of the war against communism.

If most other Australian extreme-right individuals and organisations in the Cold War were insular and saw external forces acting on Australia, Darby looked outward to Taiwan and Eastern Europe, but overlooked the influence of Washington. Darby’s anticommunist internationalism brought him a form of belated prestige at WACL conferences towards the end of his life. But, as has been stated, it also led to his political isolation within Australia.

Despite his best efforts as an extreme-right Cold War warrior, Douglas Darby was remembered differently on the Left. With W.C. Wentworth, Darby, the ‘strike breaker’ and ‘scab recruiter’ was lampooned in Frank Hardy’s Outcasts of Foolgarah. Affluent, leafy ‘Foolgarah’, home of the ‘two-bob toffs’ was Warringah, where Darby and Wentworth look-alikes were its local political champions. When both of these worthies attempted, in Hardy’s satire, to break a dunny-carters strike, they ‘were covered in the stuff’.76 It was, perhaps, a fitting epitaph for Douglas Evelyn Darby.

Endnotes

* This paper has been peer-reviewed for Labour History by two anonymous referees.
2. Darby Family Papers, Douglas Evelyn Darby – Personal, box 14, Mitchell Library (ML) MSS 6164.
3. Ibid. The demise of Asquithian liberalism is recorded in G. Dangerfield, The Strange Death of Liberal England, Paladin, St Albans, 1983. Dangerfield explores only Liberalism’s grandees, not its followers or supporters, like Darby’s parents.
4. Darby Family Papers, box 14, ML MSS 6164.
5. Ibid., box 9, ML MSS 6164.
6. Ibid.
8. Darby Family Papers, box 9, ML MSS 6164.
9. Ibid., box 34, ML MSS 6164.
10. Ibid.
12. Darby Family Papers, box 9, ML MSS 6164.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
22. Darby, A Try for Manly, ch. 7, p.15
23. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Wellington Times, 8 September 1947, p. 1. The Wellington protest was one of the largest of country meetings called to defend the trading banks against Labor’s nationalisation plans, although it is not mentioned in A.L. May, The Battle of the Banks, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1968, pp. 18-40.
29. Darby Family Papers, box 9, ML MSS 6164.
31. Darby Family Papers, box 9, ML MSS 6164.
32. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. The Sun, 24 May 1949.
38. Ibid.
40. Darby Family Papers, box 34, ML MSS 6164.
42. Darby Family Papers, Masonic Matters, box 33, ML MSS 6164.
44. Ibid.
45. Darby Family Papers, Liberals in New South Wales, 1940-1976, box 14, ML MSS 6164.
49. Ibid.
52. Darby Family Papers, Captive Nations Council of New South Wales, 1954-1955, box 45, ML MSS 6164. Only Darby, of these politicians from the Liberal Party and the Democratic Labor Party, was a committed activist in Captive Nations. The few biographies and autobiographies of the other
parliamentarians make no mention of Captive Nations.

53. Darby Family Papers, Newspaper Cuttings (Personal and Political), box 31, ML MSS 6164.
57. Darby Family Papers, Cricket For Free China Committee, box 47, ML MSS 6164.
59. Darby Family Papers, Taiwan, box 50, ML MSS 6164.
61. Darby Family Papers, Newspaper Cuttings (Personal and Political), box 31, ML MSS 6164.
62. Darby Family Papers, The Taiwan Travel Service, box 52, ML MSS 6164; and The Australia-Free China Society, box 48, ML MSS 6164.
63. Ibid.
64. Denis Freney, Nazis Out of Uniform: the Dangers of Neo-Nazi Terrorism in Australia, Denis Freney, Sydney South, 2000, p. 31.
65. Ibid., p. 32.
68. Darby Family papers, box 34, ML MSS 6164; Scott Anderson and John Lee Anderson confirm that both the Anti-Communist Bloc of Nations and the Captive Nations Committee received funding from the Central Intelligence Agency and its Taiwanese equivalent during the first years of the Reagan Presidency. See Scott Anderson and John Lee Anderson, Inside the League, Dodd, Mead and Co., New York, 1986, pp. 35-38, and pp. 138-149.
69. Darby Family Papers, Taiwan, box 50, ML MSS 6164
70. Scott Anderson and John Lee Anderson believe that ‘Ray Cline, a former CIA station chief in Taiwan from 1958 and until 1962 and later deputy director of intelligence was responsible for channelling funds to the Centre for International Studies to publish anti-communist works during the 1980s’. Anderson and Anderson, Inside the League, pp. 174, 176.
72. The manuscript can be found in ibid.
73. Darby Family Papers, Personal, box 34, ML MSS 6164.
74. Peter Spearritt considers Darby’s optimistic recollection of the 1930s in a parliamentary debate about the Housing Commission. Darby believed that young country couples were attracted to the city by trade unionism which ‘permits a man to earn a great deal of money for very little effort’. The young couples were ‘shunted into Housing Commission flatettes where a decent, normal family life’ was impossible. Darby looked back to the 1930s for the solution to the housing question. ‘Government regulation must end, if a man had money in the 1930s and wanted to build a house, it was not long before he had a house to live in’. During the 1930s, ‘Darby had been a school teacher with a steady income: the plight of low-income earners was not his concern and he viewed with disdain the activities of the Housing Commission’. See Peter Spearritt, Sydney’s Century: a History, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2000, pp. 96-97.