

Interview with Laurie Aarons

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Jack Simpson was treasurer of the Australian Communist Party. He was more of my father's generation than mine. I was about 15 or 17 when I first met him. He was very gentle. Not what I would call an intellectual or brilliant. But absolutely honest. Scrupulous. He kept the financial records of the ACP perfectly, although the income and outgoings were not huge.

It is hard to recollect him now. My father used to visit him in the weekends. That was before he met and married Norma. They had a friend Dick Richardson. He was a very big man, 6 foot 3 inches tall. My father became interested, with Jack Simpson, in a pony. They named it Barnie W. I am not sure of the arrangements. The trainer kept telling them to keep up their investment and that the pony would soon win. It would race at Victoria Park and other pony tracks. But whilst my father and Jack Simpson were involved they won nothing. I remember the time when my father said to the trainer "Just bugger off". They severed connections with the trainer. And lo and behold the horse went on to win 14 races in a row, starting after that date. My brother Eric in his book *What's Left?* tells this story.

I had an impression that Jack Simpson received an income other than what the Party paid him. I suppose he was paid about 30 shillings a week salary. He was probably drawing his pension because he was a genuine war hero. He won the DCM and Military Medal in the First World War. The DCM was almost equivalent to the VC. But he was totally opposed to war, probably from what he had seen at Gallipoli and in France. My father liked him enormously. He would visit us most weekends.

The office of the ACP was at 695 George Street in a building known as the Green Coupon Building. Almost directly opposite was the Prince of Wales Hotel. During the War beer was rationed and the taps were only turned on between 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. Norma, Jack's future wife, was a cashier at the hotel. I assume that that is where they met. Ironically, the Green Coupon Building is now occupied by the Registrar in Lunacy or whatever the modern title is.

After Jack married Normie our family saw him less often but he was a person my father really liked. I made application to ASIO for the archive file of myself. I am sure there are records on him. The office of the ASIO is now in Canberra.

When the Communist Party was declared illegal early in the Second World War I had a little bootshop. My father's home and that of many other party members was raided at midnight, that being the usual time for raids to make sure we were home. But they never came to my home and I remember being insulted that I had been passed by. Later honour was saved when I found that they had gone to my former address. But when the Soviet Union entered the War and the party was made legal again, many Australians sympathetic to the Soviet struggle in Stalingrad joined the ACP. They were known as "Stalingrad communists". Jack Simpson had to manage the finances and the party grew quite large at that time. The

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newspaper *Tribune* was edited from the party headquarters and printed in Forest Lodge.

In my experience most of the people who were members of the party at that time were idealists. Some were not very likeable; but most were. Jack Simpson was an idealist. A gentle, honest man. I have very happy recollections of him. Like most working class people at the time he liked his beer and the horses. Heaven knows what would have happened if Barney M had come good when my father and Jack Simpson had an interest in it. Perhaps they would have become Randwick millionaires; but I do not think it would have shaken their faith in the ACP's role to build a more peaceful world and a better society.

I believe that Jack Simpson retired from the Party before he died. He was a true gentleman.