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# Labour and youth - one reader's discoveries

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When I first visited the Archives of Business and Labour (the Noel Butlin Archives Centre), a student climbing club was using its rocky facade on Acton Underhill as a scrambling pitch - the Noel Butlin Archives Centre is full of surprises. My area of research covers trade union and labour movement youth policy in eastern Australia 1920-1940, so the NBAC seemed a logical place to start.

To find out how the trade unions and ALP viewed juvenile labour in the inter-war period, I first spent three months wading through volumes of union journals spanning a range of industries in three states. As a collection of attitudes, I found that the germs of a labour movement youth policy existed in the 1920s, although it only began to take shape in practical terms at the end of the 1930s. My initial research also revealed that although young people were usually unorganised, they put up a fight to improve their working conditions. In the years immediately before and after the Depression, when 'lollipop capitalists' literally filled their factories with 14, 15 and 16 year olds, there is evidence of frequent youth strikes - a previously ignored aspect of industrial relations' history.

For anyone researching 'the dawn of rebel youth' in Australia, the Noel Butlin Archives Centre contains a number of essential items. Most editions of the Sydney publication The Young Communist (1922-23) and its successor the The Young Worker (1931-36) can be found in the James Normington Rawling collection. Two editions of Labor Youth (1926-27), an ambitious journal published by the Victorian Labor Guild of Youth, are available, together with some copies of Proletariat (1932-35), the magazine of the Melbourne University Labour Club.

The Archives also holds the single issue of Strife (1931), intended by its 19 year old editor, Judah Waten, as an Australian version of the American left-wing literary journal New Masses.

My recurring visits to the Noel Butlin Archives Centre now resemble guerilla raids, but even brief periods there are rewarding. I recently used the AEU monthly journal and report and found the divisional organiser's comments in each issue a valuable source for piecing together the union's attitude towards apprenticeship between the wars.

As a former factory worker who arrived at a PhD scholarship via more fusty institutions in Northern Ireland, York and London, I find the air of accessibility and friendliness that the Noel Butlin Archives Centre exudes a stimulating alternative!