

on the need to align Australia's defence with the United States rather than with Britain.

In terms of war finance, despite the reservations of the Bank of England and the British Treasury, in return for direct military support for Britain in Europe and the Middle East, Bruce secured agreements whereby Britain purchased all of Australia's wool and wheat and guaranteed, among other things, to maintain Australia's sterling balances in London at a surplus of £50 000 000. Public fixed-interest payments to foreign lenders fell by two-thirds between 1938-39 and 1945-46, Australia became a net creditor to Britain and the majority of Australia's public debt was held in Australia. All in all, the extent to which different classes, social strata and business groups in Australia and Britain were advantaged or disadvantaged by state-to-state imperial relations remains an open question.

Patrick Troy

**Accommodating Australians: Commonwealth
Government Involvement in Housing**

The Federation Press, Sydney, 2011, pp. 320, \$59.95

Reviewed by Frank Stilwell

Patrick Troy is a senior figure in Australian studies. For more than three decades he was a Fellow and then Director of the ANU's Urban Research Program, which was the nation's most important centre for research in this field and a seedbed for many of its researchers. He was also deputy head of the Whitlam Government's Department of Urban and Regional Development (DURD). His own writing has ranged over an array of urban problems and policy issues, usually with a strong emphasis on social equity and always concerned with understanding the historical dimension of how urban problems and policies have developed. Here he turns his personal experience, research skills and critical gaze on a central issue in Australian political economy – the seemingly perpetual and unresolved problem of providing adequate and affordable housing.

Accommodating Australians ought, in principle, to be less stressful than in most countries. The relatively small number of people relative to the usable land area, the nation's comparative overall affluence, its historical experience of state engagement in providing infrastructure and some distinctive institution-building experience (in fields such as inter-regional fiscal redistribution and industrial relations) should have stood us in good stead in dealing with this fundamental human right and social concern. However, as Troy emphasises, the practice has been recurrently disappointing. Housing remains inadequate and unaffordable for many; and government promises to address the problem through improving the supply, funding and allocation of public housing and/or subsidised private housing have recurrently not been realised in practice. Troy focuses on 'the rise and fall of public housing', tracing the story from the Commonwealth post-war reconstruction initiatives through to the current situation in which an inadequate public housing stock has become a welfare residual, effectively accessible only by those with officially-recognised multiple and special needs for state-provided accommodation.

The book compiles all of the relevant historical data, including statistics on dwelling completions and housing stock that the author extracted through archival research. It looks at the Commonwealth Housing Commission (CHC), the evolution of Commonwealth-State Housing Arrangements (CSHA) and the policy bias towards private home ownership that has been constructed to deliver and entrench benefits for the 'better off' (p. 4). It also includes illustrations showing the changing physical forms that housing has taken over the last seven decades – from little freestanding post-war cottages ('frugality sheathed in respectability'), to the high-rise tower block developments that peaked in the 1960s, and then on to mixed developments of walk-up flats and townhouses. Attention is also given to the distinctive Commonwealth housing interventions in Sydney's Glebe and Woollahra, which were landmark initiatives to restore terraced houses so that low-income residents would not be squeezed out from the gentrifying inner-city areas.

An interesting penultimate chapter in the book looks at housing in the broader context of town planning: this contains some particularly telling critiques, echoing Leonie Sandercock's earlier assessment that 'City planning in Australia...has failed to improve the welfare of our city dwellers' (quoted on p. 275). Troy's book similarly concludes, in relation to housing, that 'The accommodation of Australians is a story that

reveals there is no bi-partisan commitment to ensuring that there is equity of access to accommodation. In short, it is a story of policy failure' (p. 284).

This is a book that throws down the gauntlet to nation's political leaders, especially in the ALP, to try to recapture the practical commitment to public housing and the 'good city'. It provides a firm foundation for doing so by carefully documenting what has previously gone wrong and why. It is not always easy reading, because of the many twists and turns in the historical experience that the author documents, but it will surely stand the test of time as the definitive historical study of this important but perpetually frustrating field of public policy.

Patrick O'Leary and Peter Sheldon

Employer Power and Weakness: How Local and Global Factors Have Shaped Australia's Meat Industry and its Industrial Relations

Victorian Universities Regional Research Network Press,
Ballarat, 2012, pp. 222, \$29.95

Reviewed by Frank Stilwell

Processing fresh meat took an industrial character following the development of effective freezing technology in the 1860s. However, only since the Second World War has the Australian meat processing industry been a major exporting sector. Since then, global factors shaping demand and investment have interacted with local factors, such as the seasonal nature of livestock production, the geographical isolation of many of the regional processing centres, and local labour shortages. Working in abattoirs, producing and distributing fresh meat, is not everyone's first choice of employment; and there is a substantial proportion of itinerants in the workforce. Industrial relations considerations have frequently loomed large in the industry.

This monograph – originating as a PhD thesis written by the first-named author and supervised by the second – focuses particularly on how employers have sought to organise themselves in order to ensure their