

# Fabricating a Steel City

Jesse Negro

BA major in Anthropology

Candidate for Master of Research in Anthropology

Department of Anthropology | Faculty of Arts | Macquarie  
University

Submission: 9<sup>th</sup> of October 2017

## **Table of Contents**

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Statement of Originality</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Introduction: Fabricating a Steel City</b>	<b>6</b>
i. Methods	11
ii. Literature	13
<b>Chapter 1: Rise and Fall of the Steel City</b>	<b>17</b>
i. Blast Furnaces	22
ii. Urban Ruins	28
<b>Chapter 2: Streets of Steel</b>	<b>32</b>
i. SOS	33
ii. Foreign Steel	37
iii. Community Engagement	41
<b>Chapter 3: Forged in Adversity</b>	<b>47</b>
i. Political Opposition	48
ii. Health and Environment	54
iii. Nostalgia of Steel and Exploitation	57
<b>Chapter 4: Future of the Steel City</b>	<b>62</b>
i. Dystopian City	62
ii. Understanding life without work	65
iii. Transitioning Economy	68
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>Appendix : Human Research Ethics Committee Approval</b>	<b>96</b>

## Abstract

The city and its urban environment have been largely under-theorised in the field of Anthropology. This thesis considers the theorisation of urban environments in a study of the steel industry in the Illawarra region. The economic profitability of the Port Kembla, or BlueScope, Steelworks has decreased over the past ten years and threatened with closure on multiple occasions. My research aims to investigate how policies directed towards the steel industry, and relationships between local, national and global processes, are shaping the Illawarra's urban environment. To address this question, this thesis investigates four processes: the rise and fall of the steel city, and the logics both for and against the production of steel at Port Kembla. It will consider the existence of local activism, particularly the 'save our steel' (or SOS) campaign, which has been instrumental in the creation of the steel protection bill. The negative attitudes towards the steel industry stem from environmental and health concerns as well as issues of exploitation. Finally, this thesis seeks to answer questions concerning the region's development in the future with or without steel, based on policy projections, case studies, and fears or hopes of my field participants.

## Statement of Originality

I, the candidate, affirm that this thesis is truly and entirely my original work. External materials used throughout the thesis have been referenced accordingly. For the purposes of this research I have obtained ethics approval (5201600771). This thesis has not been submitted for a higher degree at any other university or institution.

---

Signed: Jesse Negro

Date: 9/10/2017

## Acknowledgments

The last two years undertaking this research has been an incredible experience and I would like to thank Macquarie University for giving me the opportunity to undertake this incredible pioneering program.

Thank you to my supervisor Chris for assisting me throughout the learning experience of writing a thesis. It would not have been possible without your guidance and support across the last two years.

I would also like to extend this thanks to the Macquarie University Anthropology department for sparking my interest in the discipline and broadening my knowledge.

I thank my fellow students in the MRES program for making the experience even more enjoyable, always being prepared to give feedback and constantly challenging each other to improve our work.

There is another group of people whom I could not have completed this research without your help. Thank you to my research participant for being involved in my project and giving me wonderful insight into your lives.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends who have supported me through this endeavour.

## Introduction

### Fabricating a Steel City

The Kembla Disaster  
Dead! Dead! Dead!  
My God, can the news be true?  
Tell me, men, is my husband safe?  
And why is he not with you?  
Say, is he still in that dreadful mine,  
Where the passages reek with death,  
Where even the men who seek their mates,  
Fall back with a poisoned breath?  
Can he be there where the world is dark,  
Shut up in a living tomb,  
Awaiting the help that may not come,  
Yet manfully facing his doom?

John Plummer August 16th, 1902<sup>1</sup>

In 2013 Dr. Mitchell, a history lecturer at The University of Wollongong, brought Wollongong's dark side to life with a historical tour of the region showcasing the city's underbelly. Participants on the 'Dark Wollongong' tour said they felt shivers run up their collective spines as they stood in a windy gully on the Illawarra escarpment (shown in figure 1). They overlooked the site of the Mount Kembla coal mine that was so crucial in bringing the steel industry into the Illawarra. In 1902 there was an explosion in the mine that killed 96 people, making it the biggest industrial accident in Australian history. The cemetery where the victims of the disaster now rest was one of the fastest built in the world. The authorities wanted the bodies moved out of the mine

---

<sup>1</sup> Knox, "Once upon a place: writing the Illawarra," 224.

and out of mind as quickly as possible. A Royal Commission into the disaster yielded no results nor offered any compensation. Even other miners refused to contribute to the public benevolent fund established to help the 33 widows and 121 children left behind.<sup>2</sup>



Figure 1 – Lake Illawarra under the escarpment where the Mt Kembla coal mine was stationed.<sup>3</sup>

Ortner refers to ‘dark anthropology’, an emerging trend in the social sciences that advocates for consideration of the fate of humans amidst their conditions in the real world, focusing on harsher aspects such as power inequality, domination, and oppression.<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, as both a deliberate and accidental response to dark anthropology, other writers have produced a body of work that is concerned with what has been coined ‘anthropologies of the good’, including studies of resistance and activism. Traditionally resistance has been viewed romantically with a unified front or single hero as an oppositional response attempting to overthrow power and as such resistance has a lack of temporality and is viewed as a key event or series of events and not over a

---

<sup>2</sup> Wachsmuth, L, “Grim tour exposes Wollongong’s dark past,” *Illawarra Mercury*, July 15, 2013, accessed December 1, 2016, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/1637059/grim-tour-exposes-wollongongs-dark-past/>.

<sup>3</sup> Negro, *Illawarra Escarpment*.

<sup>4</sup> Ortner, “Dark Anthropology and its Others,” 47-48.

length of time.<sup>5</sup> Foucault critiques this view of resistance by discussing the complex relationship of power demonstrating that there is no place outside of power and there are multiple points of both dominance and resistance.<sup>6</sup> Studies of the urban environment have reinforced both sides of this contemporary anthropological debate, showcasing examples of both urban decline and resistance. An early example of this writing is evident in *Rusted Dreams* by Bensman and Lynch, which examines the resilience of the fight to save steelmaking in Chicago.<sup>7</sup> A more recent example is *Exit Zero: Family and Class in Postindustrial Chicago* by Walley.<sup>8</sup>

Studies of the urban environment have typically presented a number of city typologies, including the ethnic city, the globalised city, the divided city, and the industrial/de-industrialised city.<sup>9</sup> My thesis focuses here on the last of these images, the industrial/de-industrial city. One wonders whether there is an aesthetic dimension that has made this image of the city so popular in film and literature? Linkon refers to it as 'smoke stack nostalgia', which gives on to a sense of preservation of the history of the city.<sup>10</sup> Even though many industrial remains could be classified as ruins, the feelings of nostalgia they evoke remain evident. The world we live in has been intensively shaped by the industrial revolution. That epoch continues in some places and ends in others (where it began), leaving remnants of a time past to rust away.

---

<sup>5</sup> Abu-Lughod, "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power Through Bedouin Women," 41.

<sup>6</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 94.

<sup>7</sup> Bensman and Lynch, *Rusted Dreams*.

<sup>8</sup> Walley, *Exit Zero: Family and Class in Postindustrial Chicago*.

<sup>9</sup> Low, "The Anthropology of cities: Imagining and Theorizing the City," 383.

<sup>10</sup> Linkon, "Narrating past and future: Deindustrialized Landscapes as Resources," 40.



Much research on de-industrialisation has come from the disciplines of social science, economics, urban geography, and social history, with a number of contributions from anthropology. Examples here include *'Dealing with deindustrialization: adaptive resilience in American Midwestern Regions'*; *'Mud and Steel: The Imagination of Newcastle'* and *'Cities and the Wealth of Nations'*.<sup>11, 12, 13</sup> Despite these, Strangleman and Rhodes have argued that the social sciences have fallen behind other disciplines despite it producing a large body of literature on the de-industrial paradigm.<sup>14</sup> They argue that a multidisciplinary approach with varied methodology will yield greater results than a study in any single discipline, as deindustrialisation is such a multi-faceted topic.

In my thesis, I take up some of these concerns in a study of the steel industry in the Illawarra region. The Port Kembla or BlueScope Steelworks has been in operation since 1927 (shown in figure 2).



Figure 2 – The steelworks hard at work overlooking Port Kembla.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Cowell, *Dealing with deindustrialization: adaptive resilience in American Midwestern Regions*.

<sup>12</sup> Metcalfe, "Mud and Steel: The Imagination of Newcastle."

<sup>13</sup> Jacobs, *Cities and the Wealth of Nations*.

<sup>14</sup> Strangleman and Rhodes, "The 'New' Sociology of Deindustrialisation? Understanding Industrial Change," 411.

<sup>15</sup> Negro, *Steelworks*.

In the past ten years, however, its economic profitability has decreased, and its closure has been threatened on multiple occasions. This uncertainty has been mirrored in the lives of people that live and work in the Illawarra, with the economic decline of the industry producing social and physical impacts across the region. The aim of my research is to investigate how policies directed towards the steel industry, and relationships between local, national and global processes, are shaping the Illawarra's urban environment. This is a broad aim and to understand these different relationships I address a number of related questions: How does industry impact urban environments? How do policies and politics influence de-industrialisation? What are the social and economic impacts of industry? What does the future hold for de-industrialised urban environments?

In answering my research question, the thesis uses case studies from industrial communities incorporating social science and anthropological theory as well as field data from the Illawarra to build on the existing body of literature on de-industrializing regions. I have placed the major themes uncovered during fieldwork into three categories: the growth of an industrial economy; the fall of the steel industry; and the uncertain prospects of downsizing, subsidization or industrial renewal that points towards the future.

While the steel industry has been of major significance to the development of the whole Illawarra region I have focused primarily on the suburb of Port Kembla, as this is the main location of the BlueScope Steelworks and where the impact of de-industrialism is most evident. After the closure of Newcastle, Port Kembla is one of only two remaining steel manufacturers in Australia. The issues in Port Kembla are similar to those that affected Newcastle and are currently affecting Whyalla. There is evidence of overlapping themes between the cities such as urban decay, industry as a political space, and hope and anxiety regarding the future. Generally, research has been conducted after industrial closure, which is one gap my research addresses as BlueScope has remained open despite large-scale reductions in workforce and production.

## Methods

In conducting ethnographic fieldwork, my primary methodology has been participant observation, which involved joining activist rallies, going to dinner with steelworkers and spending time inside the fiery pit of the steelworks. An advantage of participant observation is the depth of social interactions and relationships that can be uncovered.<sup>16</sup> This advantage assists in understanding the complex relationships between the local community, the state, and global processes. Ortner and Abu-Lughod both argue that ethnography is the primary way anthropologists should be demonstrating the complex power relationships the field.<sup>17, 18</sup> Participant observation at times was quite difficult as there were many logistical constraints to being in an operating steelworks or participating in a political setting with people trying to do their jobs.

One general problem with participant observation is that it studies small groups that may not represent the whole issue.<sup>19</sup> To counteract these concerns, I used additional methods: the first being interviews, secondly using news archives, thirdly discourse analysis of social media, and finally simple observation. Participants were much easier to find when conducting interviews as they had a better understanding of the process and what was required of them. When thinking about the influence of the steelworks in the region its history is important as it demonstrates the significance of industrial demise. BlueScope has been operating for over 90 years, meaning many narratives from the early industrial epoch were difficult to uncover as a majority of informants were not born or had no memories of the era. Local history books and news archives provided the data needed for the historical component of my research. I

---

<sup>16</sup> May, *Social Research: issues, methods and processes*, 147.

<sup>17</sup> Ortner, "Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal," 175.

<sup>18</sup> Abu-Lughod, "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power Through Bedouin Women," 50.

<sup>19</sup> May, *Social Research: issues, methods and processes*, 170.

uncovered many fascinating stories and events that had been trapped in time and hope to share them with the community through this research.

News sources played a secondary role in the study as politicians who were unable to be interviewed often spoke on radio or television and were quoted in newspapers. Building on the use of secondary sources I conducted a discourse analysis of social media sites (Facebook and twitter) to gather more data on the local, state, federal and international politics of the steel industry. Following these posts also enabled me to see a range of responses from the local community, particularly through the activist page 'Save Our Steel Port Kembla' (SOS). Participants may act and respond differently in an online setting compared to a SOS rally or in a face-to-face interview, further demonstrating the complex nuances that can be uncovered through participant observation. The final method that was used in the field was simple observation. Here one concern of this research is to understand how de-industrial policies are physically impacting on the urban environment. I used several sites for observation: Wentworth Street, Port Kembla Beach, Port Kembla Coke Works, Sirrus building, Port Kembla train station and Port Kembla Harbour. I visited these sites on multiple occasions and at various times to capture the full environment and to avoid any potential bias.<sup>20</sup> Local histories, interviews, and participant observation revealed certain details about these spaces. Even in my brief time in the field, I witnessed renovations to buildings in Wentworth Street and the repair of fences backing onto industrial yards. Conversely I noticed trees and grass growing over pathways and into buildings that had long been abandoned. While observation only reveals a small part of the field, it is an important piece of the field work puzzle. Using multiple methodologies in a small thesis may seem ambitious, but each method has its limitations and benefits. A varied methodology allows my research to represent the whole issue providing access to data that would not be available only using participant observation and interviews.

---

<sup>20</sup> Kellehear, *The Unobtrusive Researcher: A Guide to Methods*.

## Literature

The Australian steel industry is facing massive challenges due to what is described as a global market failure.<sup>21</sup> Some experts expected the market to correct itself, but an oversupply of cheap foreign steel has prevented this.<sup>22</sup> Metcalfe has argued that Newcastle represents Australian archetypes that are deeply imbedded in our cultural unconscious.<sup>23</sup> If this is true then Wollongong, Newcastle's sister city and another steel town, must also represent typical Australian archetypes. These archetypes are symbolised in both the rise of heavy industry and the economic and social concerns that have been caused by de-industrialisation. If Wollongong can be viewed as representing typical Australians and typical industrialised regions around the world, there is a lot that can be learnt about these places' culture and politics. Research on the industrial era has taken place in Port Kembla with Erik Eklund's *Steel Town: The Making and Breaking of Port Kembla*.<sup>24</sup> The book sets out how, with the arrival of resources and heavy industry, Port Kembla changed from a rural district into an urban center. It outlines the supremacy of industrial society in post-war Australia, before turning to the decline of Port Kembla. Eklund is a social historian and argues that the history of Port Kembla highlights the local manifestation of important global forces, leading to his insight that industrial towns are places where local and global processes collide.<sup>25</sup> Eklund's argument aids in answering my overarching research aim on the way local, national and global processes directed at industry impacts urban environments.

Bluestone and Harrison are key figures in the de-industrial paradigm. One feature of their research was its examining of social and community factors

---

<sup>21</sup> Arrium Annual Report 2015.

<sup>22</sup> Arrium Annual Report 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Metcalfe, "Mud and Steel: The Imagination of Newcastle," 1-2.

<sup>24</sup> Eklund, *Steel Town: The Making and Breaking of Port Kembla*.

<sup>25</sup> Eklund, *Steel Town: The Making and Breaking of Port Kembla*, 3.

alongside economic and political considerations in industrial change.<sup>26</sup> The anthropology of de-industrialisation has differed from this approach in focusing on the consequences of the closure of a specific factory or the demise of an industry and the effects of this on the surrounding community.<sup>27</sup> Urban anthropology of deindustrialisation has moved in two directions. Firstly, it has examined the impact of plant closure on individuals. Secondly, it has sought to understand the role of the state in relation to corporate decisions that can be described as de-industrialising.<sup>28</sup> A more recent shift in the paradigm has been to analyse the causes and impacts of industrial closure from a broader perspective that combines these two approaches.<sup>29</sup> De-industrial processes constitute a web of complex relationships occurring at a local level and articulated with the broader economy and the state. To understand it, in this thesis I work back and forth between micro and macro levels. Newman supports this strategy by arguing that the deindustrialisation paradigm,

ultimately affects family life, the ways in which people age, the extent to which their communities remain intact or fall victim to outmigration, and the very nature of the urban dweller's worldview. In the most general sense, the research on deindustrialization turns the urban anthropologist toward the social problems side of our informants' lives, since many of the pathologies of city life can be traced to the effects of economic dislocation.<sup>30</sup>

Through conducting research in this manner, it is possible to understand the significance of the industry in the development of the local area while demonstrating

---

<sup>26</sup> Bluestone and Harrison, *The Deindustrialisation of America*.

<sup>27</sup> Lamphere, "Deindustrialization and Urban Anthropology: What The Future Holds," 260.

<sup>28</sup> Lamphere, "Deindustrialization and Urban Anthropology: What The Future Holds.," 264.

<sup>29</sup> Strangleman and Rhodes, "The 'New' Sociology of Deindustrialisation? Understanding Industrial Change," 414.

<sup>30</sup> Newman, "Urban Anthropology and The Deindustrialisation Paradigm," 15.

the impact of state and international policy on the industry. There is a growing body of American literature focused on the rust belt, a collection of de-industrialised cities in the mid-west of the country such as Detroit.<sup>31</sup> MacLennan's work on the auto industry between 1979 and 1983 provided a cultural analysis of political beliefs that shaped government policy in that period. These texts focus on the lives of those who have inherited the physical, economic and cultural landscapes of the rust belt. American cities that were built around large-scale manufacturing have experienced the loss of tens of thousands of jobs with heavy industries being replaced as the defining characteristic of the community. Issues such as unemployment, crime, vacant properties and empty lots emerge as cities and communities experience de-industrialisation. Along with rebuilding the economy, the major challenge involves redefining the urban identities of places that were heavily embedded into the primary industry of the city, whether they are mining, car manufacturing or steel production.<sup>32</sup>

The last two decades have demonstrated an evolution of industrialisation studies with the emergence of two important edited editions: *The International Review of Social History* and *Beyond the Ruins*.<sup>3334</sup> The key to these studies is their understanding that the de-industrialisation literature and paradigm must be aware of its social, cultural and political consequences. Cowie and Heathcott argue that the time is right

to widen the scope of the discussion beyond prototypical plant shutdowns, the immediate politics of employment policy, the tales of victimization, or the swell of industrial nostalgia. Rather, our goal is to rethink the chronology,

---

<sup>31</sup> MacLennan, "Political Response to Economic Loss: The Automotive Crisis of 1979-1982," 5-19.

<sup>32</sup> Linkon, "Narrating past and future: Deindustrialized Landscapes as Resources," 41.

<sup>33</sup> Altena and Van der Linden, "Preface," 1-2.

<sup>34</sup> Cowie and Heathcott, ed. *Beyond the Ruins*.

memory, spatial relations, culture and politics of what we have come to call “deindustrialization.”<sup>35</sup>

My thesis attempts to widen the scope of discussion on de-industrialisation using the Illawarra as an ethnographic case study. Firstly, chapter one examines the rise of the steel city, demonstrating the role the steelworks has played through the history of the Illawarra’s physical, social and economic development. Secondly, this chapter will show how the steel crisis of 2015 unfolded and the effects of the crisis on the community, including discussion of the negative impacts that de-industrialisation is having on the urban environment such as creating slums, economic instability, and social problems. Chapters two and three concentrate on the politics and activism fighting for and against the production of steel at Port Kembla, focusing on the ‘SOS’ campaign that has been instrumental in the creation and execution of the steel protection bill. By contrast, another group of locals possess shared critical motives concerning the steel industry, predominantly stemming from their environment and health concerns regarding the steel industry’s long history in the region. Knowing the community’s motives for being for or against the steel industry present the opportunity to discuss the future of the steel city. Chapter Four and the conclusion will address the question of the region’s development in the future with or without steel, based on policy projections, case studies from other cities around the world, and the fears or hopes of my field participants. While each chapter is aimed at answering a specific research objective, they are all linked through the illustration and analysis of the relationships between physical, social and economic processes in the Illawarra.

---

<sup>35</sup> Cowie and Heathcott, ed. *Beyond the Ruins*, 1-2.



## Chapter 1

### Rise and Fall of the Steel City

Our success comes from our people. We work in a safe and satisfying environment. We choose to treat each other with trust and respect and maintain a healthy balance between work and family life. Our experience, teamwork and ability to deliver steel inspired solutions are our most valued and rewarded strengths.

Our success relies on communities supporting our business and products. In turn, we care for the environment, create wealth, respect local values and encourage involvement. Our strength is in choosing to do what is right.<sup>36</sup>

The statement above from BlueScope Steel gestures to the role of the steelworks in supporting the Illawarra's community and history. This chapter demonstrates the significant role the steel industry has had in the development of the region. First, I illustrate key moments in the history of the steelworks' development in the region, demonstrating how this has translated into a working class 'steel culture' in the community. Two significant moments in the Illawarra's steel history were the relining of the No.5 Blast Furnace, and the shutdown of the No.6 Blast Furnace. These two events could not be more different, demonstrating a shift in Wollongong from a steel making force into a city in distress during the steel crisis, which threatens to destroy the Illawarra's steel industry. The significance of the steel industry and its physical, social and economic relationships is shown with ethnographic accounts from steelworkers, ex-steelworkers, and observations of the Illawarra's urban environment.

---

<sup>36</sup> "Our Bond."

The steelworks were the creation of The Broken Hill Propriety Company Limited (BHP), John Lysaght Pty Ltd and Australian Iron and Steel Limited. The Hoskins Family formed the Australian Steel and Iron Works in Port Kembla in 1928. Charles Hoskins who died two years earlier in 1926 was the first person in Australia to profitably make steel. In 1908 Charles took over the Lithgow steel plant of William Sanford Limited that had gone into liquidation. During the early 1920s Hoskins marked Port Kembla as an ideal location to build a steelworks, with its large deep-water harbor, high-quality coal deposits, coke ovens at adjacent Wongawilli as well as limestone deposits in neighboring Marulan and within two hours of Sydney. Port Kembla was a perfect location for the Australian Iron & Steelworks (AIS), which later became the BlueScope Steelworks.<sup>37</sup>

Despite Hoskins passing away before he could see steel produced from his Illawarra plant, his widow Emily commissioned the No. 1 blast furnace (also known as Emily by the workers) on August 29, 1928 (shown in figure 3).



Figure 3 – Blast Furnace No. 1 20 days it's before first blow in.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> Hagan and Lee, ed. *A history of work and community in Wollongong*.

<sup>38</sup> Hoogendoorn, *Port Kembla 1898 – 1998: World Class, Roadstead to Port – Celebrating the port's centenary service to the Illawarra*, 29.

The opening of Blast Furnace No.1 corresponded with the Great Depression and caused great financial difficulties for Australian Iron and Steel. BHP made an offer to buy all AIS ordinary shares, and the offer was accepted by the end of 1935. BHP provided the financial capital needed to expand the steel plant. Blast Furnace No.2 was completed in 1938 and while production in the Illawarra was less than in Newcastle, Port Kembla still made a significant contribution to the Australian armed forces during World War 2. After the war was over Port Kembla was selected over Newcastle as the site where BHP would build a hot strip mill, bringing innovative technology to Australia's steel making industry. In 1962 the Steelworks were expanded again with the process of electrolytic tinning introduced. Ten years later basic oxygen steelmaking was brought into Port Kembla, and Blast Furnaces 1 and 2 could not handle the workload alone leading to the commission of Blast Furnace No.5. Further technological advances and demand for efficiency led to the commission of Blast Furnace No.6 in 1996, replacing the two smaller less efficient furnaces.

BlueScope Steel and BHP became separate companies in 2002 when assets were split, and BHP merged with Anglo-African company Billiton to become BHP Billiton. The next seven years until 2009 yielded mixed results for BlueScope, instigating the need to update and modify Blast Furnace No.5 with the relining process aimed to improve efficiency, making Australian steel competitive once again in an international market. In 2011 production at the Steelworks was halved with the permanent closure of Blast Furnace No.6. Operating with only one blast furnace essentially removed Port Kembla steel from the export market. It has been speculated that if Blast Furnace No.5 had not undergone its multi-million-dollar renovation, it would have been shut down as well, meaning steel making at Port Kembla would have stopped altogether. Despite many adversities, 2.6 million tonnes of raw steel is still produced at Port Kembla every year. BlueScope is a world leader in a coating and painting technology that has led to products such as COLOURBOND that are used on roofs, fences and building frames all around Australia.

Steel and heavy industries are major markers and makers of development, transforming rural communities into urban centers and laborers into workers. The role of steel in the development of cities remains as crucial as ever. Even well-established cities such as neighbouring Sydney are constantly re-developing and re-shaping themselves to manage population changes and support community needs. These changes require the creation of new buildings, housing, transport, and other infrastructure that use thousands of tonnes of steel. This is why terms such as de-industrialisation have been criticised, given they imply the grand epoch of heavy industry is over.<sup>39</sup> Rather than the end of steel manufacture in massive production plants, there has been a change in the chain of supply, with global steel production now based more in Asia rather than in Europe, Britain, America, or Australia. This development places communities built on the production of steel under pressure both economically and socially. This is best summed up by a question I have encountered many times in the field from participants, radio and newspapers: “How do you separate BlueScope from the Wollongong community?”<sup>40</sup>

Through so much of the Illawarra’s history, the steel industry has been synonymous with the regional community. McIntyre’s poem *Mine* demonstrates how the steelworks, environment, and community are delicately intertwined:

the constant repetitive  
crashing and cracking  
of faraway waves  
in congruous tune with  
eight thousand padding  
booted footsteps, steady  
humming and buzz

---

<sup>39</sup> Rodrik, “Premature Deindustrialization,” 1-2.

<sup>40</sup> Humphries, G, “Time to look to the future,” *Illawarra Mercury*, August 24, 2016, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/4117026/time-to-look-to-the-future/?cs=300>.

of my steelworks.<sup>41</sup>

Eklund argues that Port Kembla is an urban environment that is unique in Australian where social life and politics were shaped by industrial society like nowhere else.<sup>42</sup> The centrality of steel in the Illawarra community was also embodied by the local rugby league team, the Illawarra Steelers. Bob Millward recalls how when the public was asked what the team should be called, the Steelers was the overwhelming response.<sup>43</sup> The steel industry has been the major employer and industry in the Illawarra, with the Steelworks employing 25,000 people in 1982 at the time of the Steelers' bid to join the National Rugby League competition. Despite the name, between 1982 and 1985 Steel was part of the team by name only. The Steelers did not have the finances to compete with wealthy Sydney rivals and by 1985 faced the prospect of being forced out the competition after just three seasons. The Steelworks, known as "the big Australian," stepped into save the Steelers and legitimise Illawarra's presence in Australia's premier rugby competition. Bob said, "we always said we didn't want to take Illawarra to the big league; we wanted to bring the big league to the Illawarra and BHP helped us do that."<sup>44</sup> The gratitude did not flow all one-way, with BHP's 25,000 employees having a stake in the Steeler's performance. According to Bob,

the big thing to come out of it was that Jerry Ellis and many other members of the management team used to say to us regularly that it gave their employees a sense of ownership. It was their team. Rugby league became their game.

---

<sup>41</sup> Knox, "Once upon a place: writing the Illawarra," 72.

<sup>42</sup> Eklund, *Steel Town: The Making and Breaking of Port Kembla*, 2.

<sup>43</sup> Jennings, M, "BHP gave Steelers strength," *Illawarra Mercury*, August 28, 2015, accessed January 4, 2017, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/3313429/bhp-gave-steelers-strength/>.

<sup>44</sup> Jennings, M, "BHP gave Steelers strength," *Illawarra Mercury*, August 28, 2015, accessed January 4, 2017, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/3313429/bhp-gave-steelers-strength/>.

They often used to say that it was a better Monday after the Steelers had won and production was up.<sup>45</sup>

It is ironic that after the Illawarra Steelers again found it hard to manage the financial demands of playing in the National Rugby League competition they merged with the Saint George Dragons. Quite often in literature steelworks have been anthropomorphised as dragons. In Fitzpatrick's *The Dragon Factories*, dragons lay underground disguised as smokestacks waiting for industrial fatalities to feed them. The image imagines the dual tension of safety and danger in the steelworks, as well as crystalizing the way they exploit or sacrifice their labor force to power the beast of capitalist economic production. Despite this negative imagery many Illawarra residents still consider the steel industry to be an important part of the community and their personal identity. My grandfather Angelo and Uncle Bob worked at BlueScope for over 40 years and still to this day refer to the Saint George Illawarra Dragons as the Steelers. Even when my cousins and I attempt to correct them, they ignore us. They had a personal stake in the team, and it reinforced their identity as steelworkers. Clearly, the closure of the steelworks will result in the community losing part of its identity. It begs the question: can the steel city remain if it no longer produces steel?

## Blast Furnaces

Steel production in the Illawarra has become so deeply embedded in the local culture that a co-dependency has developed. According to Bill Shorten (leader of the Australia Labor Party),

---

<sup>45</sup> Jennings, M, "BHP gave Steelers strength," *Illawarra Mercury*, August 28, 2015, accessed January 4, 2017, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/3313429/bhp-gave-steelers-strength/>.

there are 30,000 plus jobs directly reliant upon steel production in Australia, not just in the Illawarra but right throughout Australia. There are 100,000 of our fellow Australians, families, small businesses, who directly depend upon steel production and steel manufacturing and distribution.

One of these 30 000 is Michael Walters, who moved to Wollongong to study Materials Engineering at the University of Wollongong and complete the BlueScope Steel Cadet Program. In my interview with Mike, he recounts how the steel industry has contributed significantly to the Illawarra, bringing thousands of jobs from manual labor work to high end technical and research positions. The flow on effects and support services are huge with thousands of contractors employed as a direct result, all with various levels of technical services (e.g. Veolia, Shinagawa Refractories, Instrument Electricians, Pacific National Train services, Australian Steel Mill services, and a wide range of engineering and fabrication companies). Having such a wide range of employment needs requires a certain level of knowledge and skills that many other cities in Australia do not have.

Along with high standards of educating and training BlueScope has always sought to ensure that the steelworks are constantly improving with new equipment and technology. A significant part of the steelworks increasing its innovation has been through updating the blast furnaces. The relining of Blast furnace No. 5 at Port Kembla was designed to propel the steel industry forward by boosting productivity. The most critical phase of BlueScope Steel's No. 5 blast furnace reline began with the blow-in, which is a nervous time for all involved: the furnace needs to be 'nursed like a baby.' Peter Cross and Syd Webb were charged with this important task combining 103 years of steel making experience to relight the furnace. They described the process, saying:

We took the flame and lit a gas flare, then we put the gas flare through a peep sight and down through the boot pipe, through the tuyere to the burden and the fuel that's in there, that ignited it and we left it there while we went up and pushed the button that started pushing hot air in from the stoves. It will take about three days to gradually bring the furnace up to operating temperature.<sup>46</sup>

The relined No.5 blast furnace (shown in figure 4) was expected to help BlueScope blast off into a more profitable space after reporting a \$66 million loss in 2009.<sup>47</sup> Blast furnace No.5 is now more advanced and has a greater capacity.



Figure 4 – The No 5 Blast Furnace at Port Kembla closed for repairs. Ken Robertson.<sup>48</sup>

The major capital investment was expected to improve efficiency, increase BlueScope's global reputation for quality and set new production records. Syd Webb was the chief consultant on the initial core-design team and could not think of a better way to end a 51-year career, declaring that

---

<sup>46</sup> Robertson, *Port Kembla's No 5 blasts into new era*.

<sup>47</sup> Ellis, G, "Port Kembla's No 5 blasts into new era," *Illawarra Mercury*, August 19, 2009, accessed November 20, 2016, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/620829/port-kemblas-no-5-furnace-blasts-into-new-era/>.

<sup>48</sup> Paver, C, "Bluescope blast furnace undergoes repairs," December 4, 2012, accessed November 25, 2016, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/1162076/bluescope-blast-furnace-undergoes-repairs/>.



this is my swan song, I've worked on this furnace a fair bit over the years so this is very symbolic, I'm representing a whole line of iron makers who I knew very well but who aren't here now.<sup>49</sup>

A short two years later and the hope of boosted production and profits have faded. Blast furnace No.5 produces 2.6 million tons of steel a year, covering local market demand. Blast furnace No. 6 has been shut down. With what has been described as a global market failure, markets have been oversupplied with cheap steel, and the excess steel produced from blast furnace No. 6 was being sold at a loss. Mike recalled how in 2011 when it was announced that 1000 jobs were to be cut and several close friends of his in their mid-20's were made redundant, it was obvious that the company was not looking towards the future and was in survival mode. The hardest part of the closure for Mike was that

it was a really good place to work. The people were really good and the furnace was designed by local technical experts and suited our needs. I knew early after the decision was made to shut down the furnace that my job was safe, as I was a trainee and could easily be moved to another department.

The difficulty for Mike was seeing other workers who had families and whom had built the furnace being made redundant. Morale around the workplace was incredibly low and people began looking for new jobs before the furnace was drained and closed. Mike remembered three main events that occurred during the closure of the No. 6 blast furnace. Firstly,

---

<sup>49</sup> Ellis, G, "Port Kembla's No 5 blasts into new era," *Illawarra Mercury*, August 19, 2009, accessed November 20, 2016, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/620829/port-kemblas-no-5-furnace-blasts-into-new-era/>.

Wayne Phillips from the Australian Workers Union came around to talk to the workers. Everyone had their heads down and didn't want to talk. I usually don't like union people, but he was a comforting sight as he listened to the peoples' stories about how will they support their families, and people had put their heart and soul into the furnace when building it. Mike overheard one worker state that "he had helped build this furnace and it's the only furnace he was ever going to work at." I personally have permanently become a much more cynical person regarding big business, after hearing all the stories and the change to people's livelihoods.

The initial stages of Mike's recollection of the Blast Furnace No. 6 shutdown gave me an appreciation of the passion and devotion gone into blast furnace six and the steel industry. The second significant event for Mike was an interview he saw on Nine Local News with a metallurgy manager who stated, "that the shutdown had not affected any of the trainees." Mike continued to say,

This made me very angry, as it was hard to come to terms dealing with people who lost their jobs while I was secure and being able to empathise with them. She had obviously not talked to anyone involved in the process, or know what it's really like to talk to people who lost their jobs and livelihood that meant so much to them. Finally, speaking to the metallurgy manager when it was announced I asked about the method they were going to use to drain the furnace. He said the most labor intensive, but it takes months of preparation and fabrication to get specialised metal runners and drilling equipment to be able to empty the furnace in that way. We all knew something was going on with the business 6 months prior and people were nervous about their job security. It dawned on me that they had been preparing this for at least 6 months in secret. It felt terrible knowing that quite a few people knew what was going to happen before it all went down.

In my interview with Mike his anger towards BlueScope was evident, as he trusted them and he felt let down. Mollona noticed similar occurrences during his fieldwork in Sheffield, suggesting that trust can produce inequality and exploitation particularly for young lads starting their apprenticeships.<sup>50</sup> While the closure of blast furnace No.6 did slow the loss, BlueScope were not able to completely recover in the following years and were still leaking money. Port Kembla wasn't alone as Whyalla in South Australia was also losing money. These problems culminated with what was identified as 'The Australian Steel Crisis' in 2015. According to Dr. Martin O'Brien, an economist at Wollongong University, for those who lost their jobs in the crisis of 2015, the prospect of finding other work was significantly less than it was in 2012 when 1100 steelworkers were laid off. The unemployment rate for ex-BlueScope workers was 40 per cent.<sup>51</sup> O'Brien went on to say that in 2012 job losses were offset by the mining sector boom.<sup>52</sup> Now, with another significant round of job losses, a depressed local labor market, and the end of the mining boom, it is highly likely that the unemployment rates will be much worse. He would not be surprised to see over 50 per cent of the redundant workers remaining unemployed for a long duration.<sup>53</sup> The effects of the 2015 crisis combined with impacts of the 2011 downturn have dramatically transformed the Illawarra's urban environment, physically, socially and economically. Walking around the steelworks and the Port Kembla area reveals many negative impacts.

---

<sup>50</sup> Mollona, "Steel Lives: An Ethnography of Labour in Contemporary Sheffield," 274.

<sup>51</sup> Power, J, "Wollongong unites on campaign to buy local steel and Save Port Kembla's steelworks," *Sydney Morning Herald*, September 18, 2015, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.smh.com.au/business/wollongong-unites-on-campaign-to-buy-local-steel-and-save-port-kemblas-steelworks-20150918-gjpolx.html>.

<sup>52</sup> Power, J, "Wollongong unites on campaign to buy local steel and Save Port Kembla's steelworks," *Sydney Morning Herald*, September 18, 2015, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.smh.com.au/business/wollongong-unites-on-campaign-to-buy-local-steel-and-save-port-kemblas-steelworks-20150918-gjpolx.html>.

<sup>53</sup> Power, J, "Wollongong unites on campaign to buy local steel and Save Port Kembla's steelworks," *Sydney Morning Herald*, September 18, 2015, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.smh.com.au/business/wollongong-unites-on-campaign-to-buy-local-steel-and-save-port-kemblas-steelworks-20150918-gjpolx.html>.

## Urban Ruins

Behold the Port Kembla steelworks, a once-grand empire spanning 780 hectares. Once it was so large it was serviced by four railway stations running on the smell of an oily rag. Today the showcase gardens of the past are full of dandelions, and the murals depicting men busy at work are faded and covered with red dust.

On the morning of January 20<sup>th</sup> 2017, I drive through a set of large steel gates into the Port Kembla steelworks. I ignore the large red signs next to the gate stating 'no unauthorised access' in big bold letters. As I find my way into the visitor car park I notice more signs, neglected for years and now almost completely worn away and unreadable. The car park is surprisingly small for an establishment that once had over 20000 workers. When I stop the car, I expect to hear machines, trucks or trains but it is silent. I get out of the car and begin to walk around, noticing an old building behind me completely covered in trees and plants. Indeed, most of the gardens and grass are overgrown, partially obscuring the path to the Sirrus building where I am meeting John for coffee, a steelworker for 35 years. Workers in the Sirrus building mostly use the visitor car park, given the lack of guests since the workforce cuts.

On our tour around the steelworks in John's red Ford explorer, he showed me the car parks that used to be filled by workers vehicles. As well as empty car parks and roads John shows me multiple abandoned buildings. There is the general manager's house, a luxurious property including an indoor swimming pool. That now goes unoccupied as the general manager spends most of his time closer to major offices in Sydney, Melbourne, and Auckland. This building is well maintained probably due to the large expenditure originally spent upgrading the property. The next building on our tour is the first building John entered when he joined the steelworks 35 years ago. The small house structure that sat on the land before it was steelworks was used by the administration to conduct new interviews. Here was a building that was part-responsible for hiring most of the steelworks' 25000 workers during its peak. The building now has paint peeling, while tree branches cover the windows and the roof. John then shows me an office style building that is painted

pink. With no garden or surrounds it doesn't look too derelict, with signs from the last conference or event still visible through its glass doors. The other surprising thing driving through the steelworks is the amount of vacant land on the site as well as a number of buildings and vandalism (shown in figure 5).



Figure 5 - Urban Decay Port Kembla graffiti covered buildings, empty yards and smashed windows.<sup>54</sup>

John was hopeful some of the land and buildings could be repurposed and reserved for the community. He thought it unlikely that the steelworks would ever use these building again as even with the financial recovery on the stock market it is highly unlikely BlueScope Steel Illawarra would expand. As I drove away from the steelworks I ventured to the harbor and marine center. Similarly to BlueScope the surrounding yards and buildings are empty. Two large cargo ships sit moored to the harbor wharf. There is no movement or noise, just the waves crashing into the rock wall. Across at the private marina, a few fishermen fish from the rocks while another two reverse their boat down the slipway. The Marine Centre appears to be the perfect hybrid supporting industry and privatisation. Despite the lack of activity, the investment to the harbor has paid off, giving locals a high-quality facility for fishing while providing tourists with an idea of the Illawarra's culture. A short trip down the road and once again the view of Port Kembla begins to change: gone are the

---

<sup>54</sup> Negro, *Urban Ruins*. Image, 2017.

views of the natural environment or of bustling industry. Sheds sit empty, rusting, and in amongst them a narrow pothole filled road leads to the railway line.

Suddenly like magic, a diamond appears amongst the surrounding rocks. Million-dollar mansions line the coastline overlooking the ocean and Port Kembla beach. Even in the middle of the week with winter not far away the car park is full and the beach crowded. Port Kembla makes use of its greatest assets, and that is the natural environment with the beach and harbor (shown in figure 6).



Figure 6 - Port Kembla's harbor, marine centre and beach. Three gems amongst the steel and coal.<sup>55</sup>

The upgrades to the harbor marine center and to Port Kembla pool have only added to the value of the natural environment. The industrial backdrop to this natural beauty is aesthetically pleasing and it is easy to understand the feeling of smoke stack nostalgia throughout the community. According to Eklund, industrial societies created powerful national images that have caused stereotyping of industrial areas.<sup>56</sup> Despite the natural beauty, Australians who have never been to Port Kembla still carry a fifty-year-old image of a polluted industry wasteland with high rates of crime, low education standards, and in a general state of urban decay.

The steel industry has been critical to the development of the Illawarra region, providing thousands of job and livelihoods for generations. The process of de-

---

<sup>55</sup> Negro, *Hidden Paradise*.

<sup>56</sup> Eklund, *Steel Town: The Making and Breaking of Port Kembla*, 2-3.

industrialisation in the region has many driving forces, and they threaten to change an already fragile way of life for the Illawarra community. In response to these downturns, there have been attempts to regenerate the Illawarra region, particularly in Port Kembla. One major response has been an economic reform package from local and state government named the 'Steel Industry Protection Bill.' The 'Steel Protection Bill' calls for a buy local policy with 90% of Australian produced steel to be used in Australian government projects. The response to save the Australian Steel Industry is not only important for the Port Kembla community but for Australia as a whole.<sup>57</sup> There are fears for Australia's future regarding its military capacities and urban development, as with no steel production the nation would be at the mercy of foreign industry. The following chapter explores BlueScope's role in the political arena focusing on local activism and the development of the Steel Protection Bill, policies and global and local processes that are determining the Illawarra's future.

---

<sup>57</sup> Power, J, "Wollongong unites on campaign to buy local steel and Save Port Kembla's steelworks," *Sydney Morning Herald*, September 18, 2015, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.smh.com.au/business/wollongong-unites-on-campaign-to-buy-local-steel-and-save-port-kemblas-steelworks-20150918-gjpolx.html>.

## Chapter 2

### Streets of Steel

You miners around the Southern District  
Be re-united and join hand in hand;  
Stand up for your rights in fair equal terms -  
They're your employers, but ye are the men.

Long you have suffered the whip of Coercion -  
Crushed, persecuted by your fellow man -  
Shoulder to shoulder, when firmly united,  
You'll teach your employers ye are the men.

Where is the man that don't love his freedom,  
Tho' his lot has befallen to work in a mine,  
You are the men that bring light to the world -  
They're your employers, be ye are the men.

Up and be doing! no longer delay -  
Strive to accomplish the work that's begun,  
Keeping ahead the grand object in view -  
Altho' you are miners, you'll prove yourselves men.

David Murdoch, July 19<sup>th</sup>, 1888.<sup>58</sup>

The Illawarra has a long and proud industrial history, and fighting for workers' rights has always been an aspect of it. David Murdoch's poetry is just one example, as is the work of the Colliers who also wrote strike songs at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In more recent times Christine Wilkinson led the 'Beige Pants Rebellion,' becoming the first female steelworker at Port Kembla. Wilkinson was one

---

<sup>58</sup> Knox, "Once upon a place: writing the Illawarra," 216.



of a group of women who snuck into the steelworks with the help of several male steelworkers to complete an entire night shift, challenging the perception that women were unable to perform industrial jobs. The campaign and industrial relations battle went all the way to the high court, which the women eventually won during the 80s as part of the larger Jobs for Women Campaign.

In the late 80s and early 90s steelworkers and the community again stood together, this time to fight for health rights. The steel industry has always been associated with pollution, and adverse health impacts influencing the Illawarra were quite dramatic. A Government report in 1992 found that leukaemia diagnosis in Port Kembla was three to four times higher than rates across the region. Erik Eklund discusses the work of contemporary anti-pollution group Illawarra Residents Against Toxic Environments (IRATE) and their involvement in the Illawarra.<sup>59</sup> There were smaller environmental campaigns during the 1960s, instigated by the waterside workers but they never gained the momentum or results of later attempts. The industrial workers of the Illawarra have always had something to fight for – equality, fair wages, health, and safety – but now they are fighting to save the steelworks. Chapter 2 will discuss the Illawarra’s resistance to the steel crisis, focusing on the Save Our Steel activism campaign, the procurement of the Steel Industry Protection Bill and the role of government policy in the steel industry and the Illawarra’s future. Community engagement with the SOS campaign also demonstrates the social and economic impacts of the steel industry in the Illawarra.

## Save Our Steel

The fight against the current steel industry crisis began August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2015 when BlueScope suggested that the Port Kembla steelworks would be shut if 200 million dollars in savings couldn’t be found. On October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015, the workers took the first steps to save the steel industry by voting to keep the Port Kembla steelworks

---

<sup>59</sup> Eklund, *Steel Town: The Making and Breaking of Port Kembla*.

open, accepting pay cuts and wage freezes. The government responded in kind announcing 60 million dollars' worth of tax relief to ultimately save the steelworks. The community and government united again on March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016 when the Steel Industry Protection Bill introduced into the New South Wales upper house, and by August 25<sup>th</sup> the Steel Protection Bill entered the upper house with support from all minor political parties. The aim of the Steel Protection Bill is to ensure that 90 percent of the steel used in government infrastructure projects is made in Australia. The community continued to lobby for its support until early 2017 when the Steel Protection Bill returned to the Legislative Assembly for a vote. On that day crowds filled the streets of Wollongong, the air was still, and the sound of static poured from speakers that lined the roads. Everywhere there were men and women with red shirts reading SOS, holding red balloons. A speaker approached the microphone at the head of the crowd. As the speaker began to talk signs, banners and flags were lifted high into the air from the crowd.

It was here that I met Fred, a 94-year-old miner dedicated to help save the steel industry. Fred has been a part of many industrial strikes and rallies over the years (as a popular figure he had also been interviewed by local newspaper the *Illawarra Mercury*) and was at it again at the Save Our Steel rally. "I wouldn't miss that, I've been in every rally that's ever been on around the place in the last 60-odd years anyhow." The mining industry has always been quick to support the steel industry – Fred recalled the 1982 stay-in strike at Mount Keira's Kemira Colliery, where coal miners protested BHP's plan to cut 400 jobs:

The steelworks was always very close in the fights, in years gone by they've all stood together, shoulder-to-shoulder, we'll never stand by and watch them close down the steelworks because that'd be a disaster for everyone.

The Save Our Steel rally on September 19, 2016, saw 1000 people fill the lower end of Wollongong's Crown Street Mall. Negotiations between management and unions work at times, but for Fred, when labor stops and workers line the streets

with voices pouring through the windows, that's when real change occurs. Fred's years of activism experience and campaigning has taught him that,

When the workers are on the street that's where the fight is won, it's not just for show or anything; it's for determination and a desperation to sustain your jobs and workplaces that have been handed down for generations.<sup>60</sup>

The Australian Workers Union (AWU) and the Labour Council argued that the Save Our Steel rallies send a strong message to the government, to say that the community is prepared to mobilise on a plan to save the steel industry, as the community believes steel is critical to the future of the region.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, community action echoed loud and clear at a public meeting to "Save our Steelworks" on August 5, 2016. The Fairy Meadow's Fraternity Club was filled with hundreds of people voting for change in government policy to secure the future of steel making in Port Kembla and Australia. The vote called on all levels of government to that mandate federal and state infrastructure projects should use at least 50 percent Australian made steel. The meeting additionally asked for a steel summit involving steel producers, unions, and federal ministers to prevent the shutdown of steelmaking in Port Kembla. Australian Workers Union branch secretary Wayne Phillips said,

It would secure this city and this region for the future. I don't think people understand how serious it is if this place folds up. Unlike many other areas, we don't have growing or emerging industries to take over if the steelworks

---

<sup>60</sup> Pearson, A, "Meet Fred, the Illawarra's man of steel," *Illawarra Mercury*, October 4, 2015, accessed November 20, 2016, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/3399558/meet-fred-the-illawarras-man-of-steel/>.

<sup>61</sup> Public meeting calls for government to buy local steel to save Port Kembla steelworks, *Illawarra Mercury*, August 10, 2015, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/3269580/community-unites-for-steelworks/>.

finishes. The only thing that will grow here is unemployment and crime, and we just can't afford to let that happen.<sup>62</sup>

The rallies are supported not only by steelworkers or those whose livelihoods rely on the steel industry. The entire community has rallied in support of steel, evident not just in attendance at the rallies but on the 'Save Out Steel' (SOS) Facebook page with its posts, comments and likes supporting the Steel Protection Bill. The post below illustrates support from the health industry, recalling the Illawarra's nurses marching to defend the steel industry:

**Save Our Steel Port Kembla 4/11/16**

Hey Steelworkers, remember when our region's nurses took a stand to defend the steel industry and our jobs in the Illawarra?

Well, they need our help now to save Shellharbour Hospital from the Baird Government's plans to privatise it. The Rally is on at 12noon - 1 pm this Sunday at Benson Basin Shellharbour, cnr Wattle St, and Lake Entrance Rd.

Will you join us to save our Hospital?<sup>63</sup>

The community response to SOS continued with a group of businesses delivering a petition with 15,300 local signatures from butchers to painters. The petition was delivered to the NSW Government and asked for the immediate implementation of a local procurement policy.

---

<sup>62</sup> Public meeting calls for government to buy local steel to save Port Kembla steelworks, *Illawarra Mercury*, August 10, 2015, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/3269580/community-unites-for-steelworks/>.

<sup>63</sup> "Save Our Steel - Port Kembla."

## Foreign Steel

Policies similar to the proposed Steel Protection Bill are popular overseas and have started to gather momentum in Australia. Buy American is just one example of a procurement policy. The Victorian Labor Government also has a local steel policy for a significant level crossing project, while the Western Australian Liberal Government has specified 98 per cent of steel used on its East West road link project must be locally produced.<sup>64</sup> Policies such as these would have an immediate effect in the Illawarra with major upgrades to the South Coast railway line, Berry highway bypass and Albion Park highway pass currently underway or about to commence. Illawarra local and a project engineer with K&R Fabrications Ian Walters said, “it’s an absolute disgrace that taxpayer-funded projects were being built without a requirement to buy local”.<sup>65</sup> Imported steel has even been used in Illawarra projects, including the WIN Stadium and the Gerringong bypass.

The AWU accuses Chinese companies of being responsible for global oversupply by dumping cheap steel on the international market. ‘Dumping’ is a market process where producers sell product below cost in overseas markets. Steel dumping is regularly proposed as a reason for the market concerns that the steel industry is facing and is referenced in a report by Arrium, the owner of the Whyalla Steelworks in South Australia on the state of the Australian steel industry. In light of steel dumping from Asia, the Federal Government is facing calls to remove a special trade deal that allows China to dump cheap steel and aluminium in the Australian market. The Australian government recognised China as a ‘market economy’ in the lead-up to the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement, which came into effect December 2016. Australia is one of only three developed countries where China has market economy status making Australia an easy target for dumping steel.

---

<sup>64</sup> Power, J, “Wollongong unites on campaign to buy local steel and Save Port Kembla’s steelworks,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, September 18, 2015, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.smh.com.au/business/wollongong-unites-on-campaign-to-buy-local-steel-and-save-port-kemblas-steelworks-20150918-gjpolx.html>.

<sup>65</sup> Power, J, “Wollongong unites on campaign to buy local steel and Save Port Kembla’s steelworks,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, September 18, 2015, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.smh.com.au/business/wollongong-unites-on-campaign-to-buy-local-steel-and-save-port-kemblas-steelworks-20150918-gjpolx.html>.

The McKell Institute, a research centre dedicated to finding practical solutions to policy problems, has found the market economy status makes it harder to run anti-dumping cases. The call to review World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules on China's access to Australia's market comes as big steel producers BlueScope and Arrium struggle to compete in a world of too much cheap steel. AWU national secretary Scott McDine seized on the McKell study and pointed to major construction in central Sydney as evidence of the damage caused by steel and aluminium dumping. The Darling Harbour upgrades and convention center do not have a scrap of Australian made steel in the whole construction, according to McDine. Suggesting that steel used in the Darling harbour project and many other projects around Australia are using steel primarily from Korea and China, Mr. McDine said,

Australia needs to act on parts of the China accession protocol under WTO rules, which will expire at the end of the year, to prevent China's ability to dump products without paying appropriate duties. It seriously needs to be debated by Australia as an absolute necessity, and it needs to be done by the end of this year.<sup>66</sup>

Bill Shorten has made sure to voice his opinion on the steel dumping issues saying,

anyone thinks they can come to Australia and run around our laws and dump foreign manufactured steel in Australia. A Labor Government will make sure that our anti-dumping laws are enforced in a fast and aggressive manner.<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> Ryan, P, "China trade arrangements question over steel dumping," *ABC News*, September 28, 2016, accessed November 20, 2016, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-09-28/china-trade-arrangements-questioned-over-steel-dumping/7884026?pfmredir=sm>.

<sup>67</sup> Humphries, G, "Steel campaigners will take on govt MPs," *Illawarra Mercury*, August 26, 2016, accessed November 20, 2016, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/4122743/steel-campaigners-will-take-on-govt-mps/>.

While the most recent downfall of the Australian steel industry has been blamed primarily on oversupplied overseas markets, the first half of 2017 saw BlueScope's share price recover and profits margins increase. BlueScope's overseas investment has also been critical to the survival of the Port Kembla Steelworks. BlueScope Steel's decision to spend \$947 million gaining ownership of North America's most profitable steelworks just as United States authorities imposed punishing anti-dumping duties on steel imports from China delivered profit growth that is positioned to continue rising.

BlueScope CE Paul O'Malley described the anti-dumping policy in the United States as being on steroids compared to the laws currently in Australia.<sup>68</sup> The United States authorities closed off the US market to outsiders with their tough anti-dumping measures to combat excess production from China and other countries. Industry experts say US prices of the hot-rolled coil were at least US\$300 per tonne higher than those in mainland China at the end of June. BlueScope's North Star mill in Ohio which makes 2 million tonnes of steel annually for customers in the automotive and construction sectors generated a \$62 million increase in profits in the second half, compared with the first half of 2015-16.<sup>69</sup> Mr O'Malley said he still couldn't guarantee that the Port Kembla steelworks in NSW would remain open in the longer term despite the revival in BlueScope's fortunes proclaiming, "it's game on, not game over," but O'Malley also conceded that Port Kembla operations would need to deliver solid returns over an extended period against a backdrop of volatile global demand and pricing.<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> Evans, S. "BlueScope CEP says no guarantees Port Kembla will stay open." *Australian Financial Review*, August 22, 2016. <http://www.afr.com/business/manufacturing/bluescope-ceo-says-no-guarantees-port-kembla-will-stay-open-20160821-gqxnj7>.

<sup>69</sup> Evans, S. "BlueScope CEP says no guarantees Port Kembla will stay open." *Australian Financial Review*, August 22, 2016. <http://www.afr.com/business/manufacturing/bluescope-ceo-says-no-guarantees-port-kembla-will-stay-open-20160821-gqxnj7>.

<sup>70</sup> Evans, S. "BlueScope CEP says no guarantees Port Kembla will stay open." *Australian Financial Review*, August 22, 2016. <http://www.afr.com/business/manufacturing/bluescope-ceo-says-no-guarantees-port-kembla-will-stay-open-20160821-gqxnj7>.

Vaccaro, Harper, and Murray discuss how the economic mechanisms of capitalism affect actual places and people.<sup>71</sup> The principle motivation behind these mechanisms is the growth of profits through market expansion, establishing favourable terms of trade or through the reduction of costs. Anthropology has often discussed the impact of incorporation into a market on local communities. In the Illawarra, however, there is a process of the disconnection of a community from the market. The goal of their article is to create a framework to understand how places are affected by disinvestment after a period of capitalist integration.<sup>72</sup> The Australian steel industry is facing massive challenges due to what is described as a global market glut with its oversupply of inexpensive steel.<sup>73</sup> While it was expected the market could correct itself this has not happened due to oversupply coming from China.<sup>74</sup> The Australian steel industry is not alone, with these concerns affecting Europe and America as well. Bill Shorten made the promise on metal manufacturing in Australia that he and his Labor team will do everything they can do to make sure steel is made in Australia. Arguing that Australians have seen the car industry gone, and mining industry jobs in free-fall in the last three years, he said:

Enough's enough. Australians want a government in Canberra who will fight for Australian steel, and we are up for that fight. The question is not whether Australia should be making its own steel. Of course, we must. The question is what policies will secure our local industry's long-term future.<sup>75</sup>

Senator Carr, the Labor party's innovation and industry spokesman, added that:

---

<sup>71</sup> Vaccaro, Ismael, Harper, and Murray, "Ethnographies of Disconnection," 3.

<sup>72</sup> Vaccaro, Ismael, Harper, and Murray, "Ethnographies of Disconnection," 4.

<sup>73</sup> *Arrium Annual Report 2015*.

<sup>74</sup> *Arrium Annual Report 2015*.

<sup>75</sup> Pearson, A, "Senator Kim Carr writes for the Mercury about Labor's stance on steel," *Illawarra Mercury*, May 6, 2016, accessed November 20, 2016, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/3891287/we-cant-let-the-steel-industry-die/>.



If we want Australia to be a country that makes things, a country that generates the high-skill, high-wage jobs of the future, we cannot afford to let the steel industry in Wollongong and Whyalla die.<sup>76</sup>

The SOS activist campaign lobbied the Australian government at all levels to act and improve Australian steel manufacturing policy. Much of the challenging work involved getting government officials into meetings. Marching the streets and signing petitions were also critical in showing how much the steel industry means to people in the Illawarra. A key aspect of the community support has been through digital activism, allowing the community to be constantly updated on the progress of the Steel Protection Bill and voice their opinions. Having a digital space for the community to engage in activism also prevented the government being in complete control of the steel protection policy changes.

### Community Engagment

The SOS Facebook page has kept the community informed and given them a voice. The government has responded with the Steel Protection Bill, and by creating stricter dumping laws to correct an overcrowded market. Demonstrating the role digital activism has had in keeping the community informed and giving them a voice in the steel protection policy debate is the following post from November 2016. The post was started by the Save Our Steel Port Kembla Facebook page to describe the successful passing of steel procurement laws in the NSW upper house.

---

<sup>76</sup> Pearson, A, "Senator Kim Carr writes for the Mercury about Labor's stance on steel," *Illawarra Mercury*, May 6, 2016, accessed November 20, 2016, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/3891287/we-cant-let-the-steel-industry-die/>.

SOS 30/11/16

Save Our Steel Port Kembla: It was a long night in Canberra, but by the end of it, the Government was so desperate to pass its anti-worker ABCC laws that it capitulated on Government Procurement rules to advantage local industry and in particular steel! The new rules will come into effect from March 2017 and apply to all Government projects worth more than \$4m and require not just price but economic benefits to Australia and compliance with Australian Standards to be factored into all tender processes. Big steps are taken forward in our campaign to use Australian made steel for Australian projects!<sup>77</sup>

While the SOS post was attempting to frame the government positively, much of the community that responded to the post remained unsure of the state's true intent. The responses to this starting post were predominantly negative, suggesting that the government only introduced laws because they were forced to and that they care more about not offending foreign trading partners than securing local jobs despite the foreign products considered to be inferior by the Illawarra steelworkers. The posts below demonstrate the range of responses to the news the government would introduce procurement laws for steel in Australian infrastructure projects.

Mick Rampling: Great to get Government Procurement Laws in. It's a shame that we don't have governments willing to support Australian jobs and workers and they will only do so when they are blackmailed into it when they are hell bent on pushing through their backward ideological legislation.

Jason Hopkins: Its political correctness gone mad. Let's shoot ourselves in the foot, so we don't offend our trading partners. Duh.... What planet are we on?

Norma Wilson: One step forward, one step??

Justin Bensi: Then the government tries to shift the blame when the Chinese made steel power towers collapsed in the wind! When we make some of the worlds best steel. Just waiting for more government made infrastructure to collapse because of imported rubbish.

Dave Hunt: Yeah maybe but the ABCC is going to fuck over the unions, so there is very little advantage to the workers in the end.

---

<sup>77</sup> "Save Our Steel - Port Kembla."

Robert L Rudd: But they sold out other Aussie workers?

Save Our Steel Port Kembla: Yes the Feds want us to fight each other - but we won't fall for it. We will back each other in and remember who is pushing the ABCC - the Federal Government and Big Business not the workers.<sup>78</sup>

Community engagement with activism and government policy demonstrates that BlueScope is more than just a physical and economic space where steel is made and traded, but it is also a social and political space. This is not unique to the Illawarra and is also evident in other research on steel de-industrialization, as the following examples demonstrate. Mollona's work views steel factories in Sheffield as physical, economic and political spaces located between society and state.<sup>79</sup> Mollona argues that the state affects the politics of production in two ways: by determining the conditions whereby labour power is reproduced and by determining the conditions in which labour power is used on the production floor.<sup>80</sup> Politics of the Sheffield steel plants Mollona studies indicates the significant role the government can have over the production of steel and the workforce.

Potkonjak and Skokic's narratives of Croatia's unemployed ironworkers revealed their hopefulness for the future, but most of their hope resided in the action of external forces.<sup>81</sup> The Sisak ironworkers had little faith that the government would make policies allowing them to act regarding their futures. Potkonjak and Skokic argue that the passive level of hope expressed in the ironworker's narratives is a consequence of failing to 'transition' in Croatia.<sup>82</sup> It is often assumed that the causes of industrial closure and de-industrialisation are mostly economic with the industry

---

<sup>78</sup> "Save Our Steel - Port Kembla."

<sup>79</sup> Mollona, "Steel Lives: An Ethnography of Labour in Contemporary Sheffield," 2.

<sup>80</sup> Mollona, "Steel Lives: An Ethnography of Labour in Contemporary Sheffield," 15.

<sup>81</sup> Potkonjak & Skokic, "In the World of Iron and Steel: On the Ethnography of Work, Unemployment and Hope," 81-82.

<sup>82</sup> Potkonjak & Skokic, "In the World of Iron and Steel: On the Ethnography of Work, Unemployment and Hope," 81-82.

becoming obsolete or uncompetitive. Palma and Bluestone and Harrison go beyond these assumptions and investigate the underlying cause of de-industrialisation. Palma discusses four causes of deindustrialisation: the fourth he calls 'Dutch disease', which is concerned with the increased trade of commodities that reduce the need for local production in regions such as North America, Europe, and Australia.<sup>83</sup> Bluestone and Harrison argued that American industries were slowly killing their plants by failing to modernise equipment despite becoming less efficient. Businesses could make as much money from tax incentives as they could by producing products<sup>84</sup>. While at the time of writing Bluestone and Harrison's modernising machinery may have saved industries, modern machinery (while being more efficient for businesses and making a profit) also automate jobs causing the same negative impacts on the labor force. BlueScope was helped by Government tax incentives in October 2015 not to modernise equipment, but purely for the survival of the steelworks and to save 5000 local jobs. I asked John about the Government's role in saving the steel industry and he was sure the government would play a role in the future of the steel industry, saying,

it was a godsend when the state government reduced our taxes in 2015, because without that there was a good chance we would have been closed for good. The workers and owners were facing a do-or-die decision.

The owners of BlueScope Steel claimed they had to cut \$200 million a year from costs, which included 500 jobs. If BlueScope could not make these savings by its November board meeting, the entire steelworks would have closed, costing 5000 jobs on site. The Australian Workers' Union said a closure would have taken \$3.3 billion out of the local economy, costing at least 10,000 jobs, and threatening

---

<sup>83</sup> Palma, "De-industrialisation, 'Premature' De-industrialisation and the Dutch-disease," 8.

<sup>84</sup> Bluestone and Harrison, *The Deindustrialisation of America*, 7-9.

hundreds of local business, suppliers, and contractors.<sup>85</sup> The tax cuts were one measure that saved the steel industry. Workers were heavily involved in saving their steelworks by accepting pay cuts and wage freezes to help save the 200 million dollars required to keep the gates open.

The next step came with the procurement of The Steel Industry Protection Bill through the SOS campaign and backing of the local community. In late 2016 the Steel Protection Bill passed the NSW lower house and was seen as a great victory for the community. During campaigning, there was much debate about how much steel should be used and even what would be considered Australian made steel. The aim of the Steel Protection Bill is to ensure that Australian steel is used in infrastructure or public works constructed by or on behalf of public authorities. Meaning, in any Australian government project, 90 percent of the steel used must be made in a blast furnace or electric arc furnace located in Australia. This chapter has demonstrated the role politics and policy had in saving the steel industry in the Illawarra. Without government support the steelworks would have been closed in November 2016. In a best-case scenario it would have been still struggling to keep the gates open with no positive outlook for the future. Anti-dumping laws and the Steel Protection Bill have helped BlueScope run profitably over 2017 and provide hope for the future of steel production. The government cannot take all the credit as solid investments in overseas steel mills from BlueScope and the local community's efforts to get the Steel Protection Bill on the political agenda were also significant. The investment of BlueScope and the support of the local community also demonstrate the significant role industry plays on the social and economic lives of the Illawarra.

In sum, political activism worked towards saving the steel industry. But not everyone is in favour of Port Kembla's industrial footprint. While community support seemed overwhelmingly to favor the keeping of steel production in Port Kembla, the history of the region has shown that anti-industrial sentiments have

---

<sup>85</sup> Power, J, "Wollongong unites on campaign to buy local steel and Save Port Kembla's steelworks," *Sydney Morning Herald*, September 18, 2015, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.smh.com.au/business/wollongong-unites-on-campaign-to-buy-local-steel-and-save-port-kemblas-steelworks-20150918-gjpolx.html>.

always also existed. These sentiments have continued into the current Illawarra context with some politicians at all levels of government opposing the Steel Protection Bill. The victory of late 2016 was eroded in March 2017 when the Steel Industry Protection Bill failed to attain a vote in the Legislative Assembly and lapsed. The future of the bill and of the steel industry remain unclear, and as we will see in the next chapter, debates for and against the steelworks continue to boil.

## Chapter 3

### Forged Through Adversity

The Illawarra and Port Kembla have grown and prospered due to the development of heavy industry over the past century. However, a dark side lies underneath the Illawarra's growth and prestige as a steel manufacturer. Part of its underbelly involves high crime rates, drugs, prostitution, theft, environmental issues, health concerns, and exploitation of the industrial labour force. Linkon suggests that this is common in heavily industrialised areas in America such as Detroit, Michigan, Ohio, and Youngstown with a growing body of literature covering these topics.<sup>86</sup> While there is still a community push for the government to step in and save steel making in Port Kembla, many Illawarra people are resigned to the steelwork's fate while others will be happy to see the steelworks shutdown for good despite the suggestion closure would cause an economic catastrophe. In its mines, iron works, and copper smelters anti-industrial sentiment has existed in the Illawarra since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The term anti-industrial has been used here to represent the range of positions and logics of the community that seek the shutdown of the steelworks or critique the working operations of the industry. The range of anti-industrial positions in the community have been influenced by unfair pay, industrial accidents, environmental impacts, health concerns, economic instability, and the negative connotations of living in an industrial city. The following chapter analyses the opposition to the steel industry in the Illawarra, first focusing on politicians who are more interested in saving the government money than sustaining jobs in the Illawarra. Secondly, it will discuss the environmental and health issues that are of deep concern to many members of the community. Finally, I develop this anxiety over health and environmental issues as one that also concerns anger towards exploitation of the workforce.

---

<sup>86</sup> Linkon, "Narrating past and future: Deindustrialized Landscapes as Resources," 38.

## Political Opposition

During my time in the field I was immersed in the SOS movement that sought government industrial support. I interviewed community members and local media workers (the Illawarra Mercury has been critical of the development of the SOS campaign). My first exposure to the anti-industrial Illawarra forces came through state politics when a local MP refused to speak in support of the Steel Protection Bill. Community fears about the future of the Bill began to grow when not one government member turned up at a public meeting about steel in Wollongong. Then NSW Premier Mike Baird and Parliamentary Secretary Gareth Ward had been among the politicians invited to address The Future of Steel talk at Wollongong Art Gallery. In the local newspaper, Councillor Arthur Rorris argued that the lack of attendance spoke volumes about the fact that Liberal Party politicians didn't have any valid reason to oppose the bill: "No one was really confident enough to stand up and stand on their convictions on this because I think they know their arguments are very thin." While Arthur took this optimistically, thinking the save our steel movement was gaining the initiative, several politicians spoke out opposing The Steel Protection Bill.<sup>87</sup>

Despite the Illawarra being responsible for the Steel Protection Bill local Kiama MP Garth Ward failed to present the Bill to Parliament, and it was left to Kuringai MP Alister Henskens to do so. It left the Illawarra community asking where was Gareth Ward? Mr. Henskens (in Ward's place) said the government supported the state's steel industry but opposed the steel bill because it was not in the best interests of NSW, arguing that the bill would be completely unworkable in practice.<sup>88</sup> Mr. Ward wasn't in the chamber as he was meeting with the region's

---

<sup>87</sup> Humphries, G, "Confidence in the steel campaign," *Illawarra Mercury*, October 11, 2016, accessed March 3, 2017, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/4219702/confidence-in-the-steel-campaign/>.

<sup>88</sup> Pearson, A, "Ward talks health as steel bill introduced in NSW Parliament," *Illawarra Mercury*, February 16, 2017, accessed February 18, 2017, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/4472939/ward-talks-health-as-steel-bill-introduced-in-nsw-parliament/>



nurses and the health minister about the public-private partnership at Shellharbour Hospital at the time, but this failed to make the community any less forgiving.<sup>89</sup>

Mr. Henskens' statement appears to be contradictory, given he made no clear response to rework the Steel Protection Bill into something that might be more effectively used in practice. He attempted to cover up the government's lack of support of the Bill by saying they supported the steel industry. Liberal MP Peter Phelps was more open about his lack of support, arguing that if BlueScope Port Kembla is forced to close its gates for good, then so be it. Phelps spoke in the NSW upper house during a debate on the Steel Protection Bill. He argued that BlueScope has no responsibility to the local community or to the steel workers. The only responsibility for BlueScope is to make money, and the steelworks should close if they are unable to compete financially. Claiming that people say,

oh, the foreign steel is inferior, and ours is much better. Inferior for what? Better for whom? Why not let the market decide? The taxed public has a right to demand and every right to expect that the money will be used in the most efficient manner possible.<sup>90</sup>

Representing the Illawarra community and steelworkers that supported the Steel Protection Bill, South Coast Labour Council and steel campaigner Arthur Rorris addressed Garth Ward and the NSW government in an open letter, conveying his disgust and disappointment towards Ward.

Open Letter to Gareth Ward MP – Member for Kiama, Parliamentary Secretary for the Illawarra,

What Happened to Your Call for Steel Procurement Reform?

---

<sup>89</sup> Pearson, A, "Ward talks health as steel bill introduced in NSW Parliament," *Illawarra Mercury*, February 16, 2017, accessed February 18, 2017, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/4472939/ward-talks-health-as-steel-bill-introduced-in-nsw-parliament/>.

<sup>90</sup> Humphries, G, "Liberal MP says "so be it" if the Port Kembla steelworks was forced to close," *Illawarra Mercury*, June 28, 2016, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/3995923/so-be-it-if-port-kembla-closes-says-liberal-mp/>.

Dear Gareth,

I write openly and publicly to you to convey the disgust of steelworkers, industry figures and many others in our community that could not believe their ears when they heard the insults hurled towards our steel industry by members of the NSW Liberal Government.

To suggest as he did that the crisis facing the steel industry is due to the laziness and lack of productivity in the workforce suggests that he must have access to some 'alternative facts' to those that the BlueScope Steel CEO, the unions and the international steel industry leaders have been relying on. Or does the NSW Liberal Government really believe that the crisis of overproduction of steel and the international glut is just 'fake news'?

I know that you weren't there when Ryan Park, the Member for Keira moved the Steel Protection Bill in the House but are the ignorant, irrelevant and offensive rants of the Member for Kuringai the best the NSW Liberal Government can offer to oppose the Steel Protection Bill? A Bill that is so important to safeguarding the jobs of thousands of Illawarra workers and the economic future of our region?

I would hope Gareth that you don't share these extreme views from the ultra-right wing nutters in your party that seem to be calling the shots. I also expect that you not only publicly distance yourself from these offensive slurs on our region and our people but that you honour your commitment to address the procurement issue constructively and call an urgent meeting with the key stakeholders on this issue prior to any vote on the Steel Protection Bill.

Given your previous comments on this Bill we understand that you might not support it in its current form. Likewise you must appreciate our disappointment and anger that your Government can't protect jobs in the way that you do not seem to have a problem in protecting the interests of big business, banks and corporations. However, what will not go down well at all Gareth is if your Government shoots down this Bill without a Plan B, an alternative reform of procurement policy to ensure that our money buys our steel and supports local jobs.

I trust that you will give this matter some urgent consideration and your response would be appreciated.

Sincerely,

An open letter to Garth Ward wasn't the only response hurled at the local Kiama MP, with many disgusted steelers jumping on Facebook. The results ranged from rage and anger to pure disappointment from the local community. A sense of disappointment appears to be nothing new for the steelworkers of the Illawarra. When I asked John about the role of the government in preserving the steel industry he said that he felt disillusioned by the state, with many of the things they have promised not eventuating.

Despite winning the battle and gaining incredible support and momentum from the local community and from varying levels of government, the war is far from over with opposition and doubts over the of the bill beginning to surface. Labor senator Kim Carr says a mandated percentage of Australian steel use in government projects sounds tempting but “doesn't match the realities” of the industry. Although having to use a percentage of Australian steel in government projects would ensure the survival of the steelworks in both Port Kembla and Whyalla, it is likely that neither would be able to produce the increased demand of up to 90% of Australian made steel used in projects. The use of steel in local projects sounds good, and it is good that the government is doing something, but a minimum use of Australian steel in government projects is largely overvalued. Whyalla in South Australia produces 1 million tonnes of steel a year and the contract for the Navy they missed out on would have only been for 10,000 tonnes of steel. In that case there may be little value in the steel protection bill. The main challenge for Port Kembla is to be competitive in the international market, particularly in the Asia market where over 70% of world steel production is occurring.

Government opposition to the steel protection bill appeared to grow when it announced that 500 new train carriages, some that would be used on the South Coast

---

<sup>91</sup> Pearson, A, “Disgust of steelworkers’ aired in open letter to Liberal MP,” *Illawarra Mercury*, February 20, 2017, accessed February 20, 2017, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/4477889/disgust-of-steelworkers-aided-in-open-letter-to-liberal-mp/>.

railway line that runs directly into Port Kembla, would be built in South Korea, costing the Illawarra hundreds of jobs. The Illawarra had a tenderer, Stadler, prepared to deliver 600 jobs at Unanderra, assembling new train carriages and maintaining them, with hundreds of apprenticeships for local kids, giving the future workforce much-needed experience. Mr Foley New South Wales Labor Party leader said,

the Baird government is completely disinterested in supporting local manufacturing and local jobs, and the people of Wollongong should now be very, very clear that this is a government that doesn't care about jobs in this region, that this is a government that doesn't care about Wollongong and the Illawarra more broadly.<sup>92</sup>

The argument from the government was that their interest was in providing the taxpayer with the best possible deal, thus going with the cheaper overseas option. South Coast Labour Council secretary Arthur Rorris countered the New South Wales government's position by saying that,

going with a cheaper offer was not in the best interests of the Illawarra. It is fine for the government to sit up in Macquarie Street and say look, the taxpayer can get so much of a cheaper deal if we get it done overseas, but it's a false economy because every dollar that they save on these supposed cheaper contracts they lose three, four, five and tenfold in our local economy when local jobs are lost, when communities suffer because of these decisions.<sup>93</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup> Humphries, G, "New Illawarra trains to be built in Korea," *Illawarra Mercury*, August 18, 2016, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/4105369/new-illawarra-trains-to-be-built-in-korea/>.

<sup>93</sup> Humphries, G, "New Illawarra trains to be built in Korea," *Illawarra Mercury*, August 18, 2016, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/4105369/new-illawarra-trains-to-be-built-in-korea/>.

Despite the strong response from Arthur Rorris, it is clear that Gareth Ward's opposition to the steel industry is not an isolated position. Many community members, even former Steelers, agree with the lack of government response to save the steel industry. The Steel and mining industries will always have historical significance to the Illawarra, and many view this history with fondness. Nevertheless, the 'Dark Wollongong' historical tour demonstrates that the Illawarra's industrial past has been far from pristine, slowly rusting away. The Illawarra has been victim to several famous disasters and some less well known. I began this thesis by discussing the Mt Kembla mining disaster, but workers at the steelworks were also victims of an accident in its first week of operation.

Only one week after blast furnace No. 1 was officially placed into service, disaster struck at the plant. In early September 1928, a large quantity of molten metal ran down the works, and when it came into contact with water, it caused an explosion injuring several men. James Derris jumped into a tank of hot water and was admitted to Wollongong Hospital. Ernest Speechley was also hospitalised with burns to his left arm and back of his head. Gordon Anderson was also hospitalised with burns to both ankles and the back of his head. In all, 25 men suffered burns.<sup>94</sup> The explosion covered a large part of the rail line with molten steel, and the furnace was plated in one foot of thick molten ore. Even though many newspapers carried the report of the accident and the injuries sustained by the men, Mr. Burns, the secretary of Australian Iron and Steel, was quick to respond that in his view the reports were exaggerated, saying that the furnace had not been damaged in any way by the mishap which occurred after the molten metal had been released. The accident was caused by the derailment of the work's locomotive. This prevented the placing in position of the metal ladle before the furnace was tapped and two of the three men who had severe burns were back at work after a couple of days. Although members of the community may not remember this disaster, for the people afflicted

---

<sup>94</sup> Herben, C, "Steelworks forged by disaster," *Illawarra Mercury*, July 30, 2014, accessed December 1, 2016, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/2452020/steelworks-forged-by-disaster/>.

the scars of the numerous industrial accidents at Port Kembla have removed any nostalgia that was felt for the steelworks.

## Health and Environment

Many anti-industrialists in the Illawarra do not use selective market arguments to argue against the continuation of a steel industry in the region's future. In preparing for the future, there has been a push for the New South Wales Government to decontaminate residential properties and pockets of land in Port Kembla. Pollution has affected the community for decades, and more stringent restrictions on it did not occur until the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) in 1992.<sup>95</sup> In an interview with the EPA's Mr. Lamberton, I was told that for the environmental authority to insist on remediating residential properties, it would need to be established that the industry was giving rise to a particular health impact. Due to the amount of industries in the Illawarra, the copper smelter (shown in figure 7) and the steelworks, and other small industries, all blaming each other, no individual industry would take responsibility or action for environmental damage.



Figure 7 - Port Kembla Copper Stack, Angela Thompson.<sup>96</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup> Westley-Wise et al., "Investigation of a cluster of leukaemia in the Illawarra region of New South Wales, 1989-1996," 178.

<sup>96</sup> Thompson, *Port Kembla stack to stay upright for now*.

The council is resolved to develop health tips and advice on possible 'legacy' issues for property owners when they renovate or demolish buildings as the city moves forward in dealing with its industrial past by 'investing' in a cleaner, safer future.<sup>97</sup> Decades of pollution has left a legacy of contamination in the Illawarra. Residents who lived under the shadow of the Port Kembla Steelworks and Copper smelters have experienced negative health effects caused by the industrial emissions. According to a report and public health testing, the pollutants were found to have a detrimental impact on health, intelligence, academic success and employment outcomes.<sup>98, 99</sup> One of the many effected community members was Antonio, a migrant worker for BlueScope for 20 years.

I was invited to visit Antonio and his wife Sue in their apartment in Warrawong only five minutes from the steelworks. Antonio was unable to leave his apartment due to a recent bout of pneumonia and extreme shortness of breath. When I arrived at the Wentworth Street apartment, I rang the doorbell. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the curtains rattle and heard the door locks rattling. "Hold on," I heard Sue say from behind the door. After a few seconds of fumbling with locks the door finally opened. "Sorry," said Sue "there is a lot of break-ins around this area, we have to stay locked up like Fort Knox." Antonio was sitting in his brown reclining chair with a beer in one hand and his walking stick in the other as he tried to stand to greet me. We walked over to the kitchen table where we sat. From across the room, I could see half a dozen model wooden ships that Antonio had painstakingly built since his retirement. "I would like to build another one," he said when he noticed me gazing over towards them, "but I don't think I can do it anymore, I can barely get to the table."

---

<sup>97</sup> Marks, L, "Port Kembla: Renewed push for clean-up to protect community from contamination," *ABC News*, August 12, 2015, accessed February 25, 2017, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-08-12/renewed-push-for-contamination-clean-up-in-port-kembla/6682658>.

<sup>98</sup> Beder, "Precaution needed beyond legal requirements," 60.

<sup>99</sup> Westley-Wise et al., "Investigation of a cluster of leukaemia in the Illawarra region of New South Wales, 1989-1996," 178-180.

Antonio is an Italian migrant who has been in Australia for 66 years and who worked at the Steel Works when it was still known as Australian Iron and Steel for the best part of twenty years. I asked Antonio how he ended up in Australia and about his experience during and after his time at the Steel Works:

I was part of the Italian Navy during the second world war training as a fitter and turner. My job was to fix anything that was broken, I had drawings to go on, but we were short on parts and supplies, so we had to make do with what we had to keep the ships running. After the war, there was no work, no money in Italy. Some friends had already gone to Australia and had contracts at the steelworks. I got myself a two-year contract with Australian Iron and Steel and set sail for Australia in 1951. Three months by sea on the Neptunia. I was so sick by the end of it, I've never gone back on another ship. I came here with 24 other mates, and they are all gone now. Most of them all sick, dying from asbestosis. We all got sick from that place working in the furnaces. We had no choice; we weren't nationalised yet, we needed the money, and we didn't know we were getting sick until it was too late. I had to retire after 20 years because my health was deteriorating even back then I was struggling to breathe, I had cancer, and my back was going. By then I was married, had a house and two daughters, the money wasn't as important anymore, I was an Australian, I didn't have to leave. I'm glad I had two daughters because at the time no women worked at the steelworks. I stayed for as long as I did so they could go to university or do something better, not slowly killing themselves. The Wollongong post office was for sale, and with money I had stashed away, I bought it. The steelworks got me here, and everything has turned out pretty well but if I had known I would have tried to find another job sooner.

In my conversation with Antonio his 'anti-industrial' sentiment was clear. Nevertheless, although he rightly identified conditions at the steelworks for his



terrible health, in some way he still feels indebted to the steelworks as they were crucial in allowing him to leave war-ravaged Europe and build a new life in Australia. On the other hand, after noting the positive things the steelworks has provided for Antonio, he still wishes he had left earlier and hoped that no one in his family would ever have to work at BlueScope. Antonio understands that he made a sacrifice by working in such difficult and unhealthy conditions to save his children from the same fate. While Antonio's mortal health is a significant factor in his 'anti-industrial' attitudes, the role of labour exploitation, particularly of migrant workers has also played a significant part in his ambivalent perspective on the steel works. The next section will analyse how the Australian economy and its industries have exploited the labour force in the Illawarra.

### Nostalgia of Steel and Exploitation

Like everywhere in the world, the Australian economy has benefited from industrial companies' 'disregard' for the community and environmental health at Port Kembla for over a century. The NSW planning authority has been accused of giving consent to development approvals that prioritised jobs and economic investment over health and the environment, against the advice of the EPA. One example of this occurred in 1995 when Southern Copper closed claiming it could not keep up with the demands of the EPA. In April 1996, the planning department gave consent to a development application for the reopening of the smelter. A group of local residents (who would later form the group IRATE) questioned the legitimacy of the development consent given to Southern Copper.<sup>100</sup> Craig Lamberton, the director of hazardous incidents and environmental health at the EPA, said the environmental authority was opposed to many of the conditions approved by the planning office. Activists claimed that the NSW planning authority had essentially legalised the gassing of people. Documents revealed there were up to 4,000

---

<sup>100</sup> Eklund, *Steel Town: The Making and Breaking of Port Kembla*, 188.

exceedances of sulfur dioxide fumes in 1995 alone, and it was also acknowledged in Parliament that at least 20 per cent of children in Port Kembla were asthmatics.<sup>101</sup> However, the re-opening of the smelter went ahead, as profit, jobs and economic growth were considered more important to the region than the associated health concerns.

Robert, the son of a steelworker, the brother of a steelworker, and one-time steelworker himself, says that he will be happy one day when the steelworks is completely gone. We stood in the shadows near the Port Kembla leagues club on a Thursday afternoon, watching smoke pour from stacks only a few hundred meters in the distance:

I can't believe I wasted good years of my life there; it was terrible. Working long hours for minimal pay, there were accidents all the time, don't let anyone fool you, it wasn't a safe place to work. I remember when my father Allan died from lung illness in 2009 – we were clearing out his garage and my son Jamie found some old pictures of my father in his BlueScope uniform with all his mates outside Blast Furnace No.6 when it was commissioned. Jamie turned to me and said, 'I want to work there like Nonno' (Italian term for Grandfather). I snapped, I turned to him and said there is no way you are ever working there and wasting your life under a tin shed like Nonno. He could have done so much more with his life, but he sold his farm to work in the Steelworks for 40 years and when he retired and could have done what he wanted he got sick, and he couldn't do anything. BlueScope took the best years of his life away from him and even though it helped him provide for us I don't want that future for my son, I want something better, it's why I left after only a year at BlueScope. It has played a significant role in our past, and that hasn't always been a good thing, and I really hope it isn't part of the future.

---

<sup>101</sup> Marks, L, "Port Kembla: Renewed push for clean-up to protect community from contamination," *ABC News*, August 12, 2015, accessed February 25, 2017, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-08-12/renewed-push-for-contamination-clean-up-in-port-kembla/6682658>.

Robert and Antonio's anti-industrial sentiments share similarities, with both hoping that the steel industry is no longer a part of the Illawarra's future. Each know how men have 'wasted their lives' under a tin shed in the steelworks, and are determined that their own families will not have to risk their health to make a harsh living. The difference in Roberts' interview is that while he acknowledged that the steelworks helped provide for his family, he wished that it hadn't and that the steelworks had not taken such a significant role in the Illawarra. Antonio's view suggested that even though he doesn't want the steel industry to part of the future particularly for his family, he accepts that it is the only reason his wife, daughters, and grandchildren are able to live a comfortable lifestyle. In Mollona's work in Sheffield he notes that workers often unconsciously subscribe to their condition of exploitation.<sup>102</sup> In Mike's interview in Chapter One we see an echo of this claim, where he bemoans being a victim of trusting the steelworks. In Mollona, Potkonjak and Skokic, Jordan, Walley, Cowell and MacLennan's studies of industrial regions, the ability of the industry to make money is reliant on the exploitation of the workforce.<sup>103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108</sup>

Even poets of the Illawarra (i.e. Olroyd and Jurgensen) capture the shift towards a desire for a deindustrialised Wollongong echoing in the anti-industrialist movement. Port Kembla's inner harbour, which now loads giant cargo ships from the break of dawn to the black of night, was once known as Tom Thumb Lagoon. Now it is imagined as a polluted basin, the home of poisoned and poisonous fish.

---

<sup>102</sup> Mollona, "Steel Lives: An Ethnography of Labour in Contemporary Sheffield," 215.

<sup>103</sup> Mollona, "Steel Lives: An Ethnography of Labour in Contemporary Sheffield."

<sup>104</sup> Potkonjak, and Skokic, "In the World of Iron and Steel: On the Ethnography of Work, Unemployment and Hope."

<sup>105</sup> Jordan, "Neoliberalism Writ Large and Small."

<sup>106</sup> Walley, *Exit Zero: Family and Class in Postindustrial Chicago*.

<sup>107</sup> Cowell, *Dealing with deindustrialization: adaptive resilience in American Midwestern Regions*.

<sup>108</sup> MacLennan, "Political Response to Economic Loss: The Automotive Crisis of 1979-1982."

Jurgensen conveys these environmental impacts as beyond repair, leaving the Illawarra's environment in a hopeless situation. His *Wollongong: The Lagoon* describes the Illawarra as a poisoned beauty where the oceans are turned to still life, and the seagulls cannot find un-sewered to land on. 'POLLUTED DO NOT ENTER' signs create powerful images.<sup>109</sup> Early Illawarra writers described the industrial revolution as the progress of civilisation, but this belief has disappeared from Illawarra writers in the same way that large parts of the community no longer accept it.

Deb Westbury is described as prolific in her writing about industry and work in Wollongong, contributing to what Knox considers to be an anti-industrial manifesto.<sup>110</sup> *The Prince: Remembering Port Kembla and The Little Prince, The Tin Soldier, and The Happy Prince* are narratives of an exploited migrant work force and while it was written 30 years ago the sense of being an exploited workforce was still evident in my research participants who have both long retired and who are still working at BlueScope. "Many dreamless night-shifts in the iron inferno"<sup>111</sup> is a powerful image that demonstrates this exploitation: workers forced to work through the night and sleep through the day for low wages; not being able to see their families; facing severe conditions that caused health problems for many steelworkers. Even though these migrant workers had limited time with their families, it was for them that they worked in such difficult conditions: to put a roof over their family's heads, to put food on the table and to send their children to school, so that they wouldn't have to endure the same working conditions as they did. In the *Iron People*, the workforce is dehumanised, almost robotic in their habits of working in the steelworks. "They breathe iron filings"<sup>112</sup> serves as an image of a dehumanised and exploited workforce as well as highlighting the potential health impacts of working in the steelworks. These poems describe many steelworkers'

---

<sup>109</sup> Knox, "Once upon a place: writing the Illawarra," 61.

<sup>110</sup> Knox, "Once upon a place: writing the Illawarra," 61.

<sup>111</sup> Knox, "Once upon a place: writing the Illawarra," 61.

<sup>112</sup> Knox, "Once upon a place: writing the Illawarra," 64.

lives (such as Antonio) who developed illnesses caused by working in the steelworks and breathing in its toxins.

As the Illawarra slowly de-industrialises, its steel-making legacy will live on in more than just people's memories. It endures in the bodies of the workers' and the community. Remaining ever present in the city's skyline. This chapter has explored varieties of anti-industrial sentiment in the Illawarra, from both politicians and governments who are concerned with making money and using tax payers' money effectively to those who feel ambivalent about the steel industry for environmental, health or exploitation reasons. The following chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the future Illawarra based on case study material from cities around the world and on data from field participants.

## Chapter 4

### The Future of the Steel City

The previous chapters have focused on the historical significance of the Port Kembla Steelworks in the Illawarra region, on the steel crisis, on the fight to save the steel industry and on anti-industrial sentiment. They all lead to a discussion on the future of the Steel City and the role BlueScope steelworks will play in it. Chapter 4 investigates some of the possible futures of the Illawarra region, based on case study material of other communities and fieldwork.

In the previous chapter, I concluded by gesturing to the possibilities of a dystopian future in which the region suffers economically, socially and environmentally. Here I analyse how the workforce views their futures with or without the steel industry. The chapter also examines responses from around the world (and from the Illawarra) that have transformed their region from an industrial community into something different. One way this has been done is through developing new business opportunities such as tourism and renovating run-down spaces for new these businesses.

#### Dystopian City

"A great mass will shear of the face of the mountain and with the smallest of moans, will slide down into the sea."<sup>113</sup>

The line is from *The Tunnels Sequence*, depicting the future destruction of the Illawarra. This destruction is the result of the labyrinth of tunnels dug under both Mount Keira and Mount Kembla by industrial companies. *Premonitions* takes a similar stance on the future Illawarra's annihilation:

---

<sup>113</sup> Knox, "Once upon a place: writing the Illawarra," 65-66.

“There will be no sound, the birds will have gone, and the sun, having begun to rise, will lose faith and drop back, awkward, below the rising swell.”<sup>114</sup>

Both present a dystopian fantasy of industrial disasters. In his work Fitzpatrick describes the escarpment as a metaphorical wall, slowly torn by industry. Fitzpatrick tends to view the dystopia of an industrial city as the future while others such as Olroyd view the dystopia as current. It is hard to argue with Olroyd's perspective in which pollution is degrading the environment. Other writers such as Baker, Riddle, and Hull paint a dystopian image of the Illawarra in the present and future. Riddle depicts the crime-ridden suburb of Berkeley, economically depressed due to the decline of steel production. Despite the negative images, all three writers refer to the picturesque pockets of the environment such as Lake Illawarra, the beaches that line the coast from Scarborough to Kiama and the escarpment that forms a wall around the Illawarra.<sup>115</sup> These positive images of the environment are juxtaposed against the deep cuts into the mountain for the miners, smoke stacks that breath toxic gunk into the air and even the lake air tainted in its middle with poison. The Illawarra is littered with evidence of its industrial history, but not all writers feel the Illawarra's future is hopeless. Close and O'Connor both choose to focus on the positive images of untouched environmental pockets on the escarpment at Wombarra and the Minnamurra rainforest.

Although the Illawarra looking towards the future and developing new industries such as tourism, Ron Pretty uses his work to reveal a clash between the industrial cities with their dystopian images and the engineers of the tourism industry seeking to describe picturesque surroundings. Those desiring to attract tourists to the Illawarra perpetuate the nineteenth-century view of progress as unfailingly beneficial, and in doing so they subsume aspects of industrialism in the rhetoric aimed at the tourist dollar. Tourism itself, in this scenario, becomes an

---

<sup>114</sup> Knox, “Once upon a place: writing the Illawarra,” 66.

<sup>115</sup> Knox, “Once upon a place: writing the Illawarra,” 68-69.

accomplice in the construction of dystopia. In Skewes' *Jamberoo Park* the theme park has become part of the Illawarra's identity.<sup>116</sup> She offers no analysis of the politics that allowed for the park to be built, describing the park gouging into the mountains and forests for the benefit of tourism. Tourism in part is a possible next step for the Illawarra to replace heavy industry. Yet it has not come without criticism for having the same negative impacts on the environment as heavy industry. The other reality is that 'transitioning' from heavy industry is much more difficult than moving on from farming as it takes time, money and effort to make industrial land reusable. And indeed, if the Illawarra is to become a tourist town it would continue being a one-industry city that fosters its economic and social growth at the mercy of a tourism decline.

Exploring the Illawarra demonstrates its natural beauty and potential as a tourist destination. The Port Kembla harbour and Marine centre is the perfect location for cruise ships to dock or for tourists to drive down the coast to try some fishing. The concern is that once you leave the harbour and marina you are in an urban industrial slum. As a city whose future appears to be in tourism, transport from the industrial areas to neighbouring Wollongong and Kiama will play a significant role. The Port Kembla station is empty, there is no parking, the walls and platform are covered in graffiti, and there is no security. It is not a place I can say I feel comfortable in waiting for a train (shown in figure 8). Hundreds of people from Port Kembla commute to Wollongong and Sydney every day and most choose to drive or to drive to another train station.

The surrounding houses, roads, and buildings echo the same concerns as the station and steelworks. Old houses stand unoccupied with broken windows; fences and walls collapse in on themselves; trees and grass grow wildly. 'For Sale' signs, empty lots of land and through it all the weave of graffiti. Wentworth Street, the main street of Port Kembla, is lined with empty retail buildings: prostitutes stand on street corners and teenagers walk the street drinking from bottles in brown paper

---

<sup>116</sup> Knox, "Once upon a place: writing the Illawarra," 69.



bags. These signs of the dystopian present are both real and imagined. The physical ruin is part of a larger social and economic malaise. The next section analyses the struggles of workers who must reconceptualise their lives without employment. While some may possess little hope, others express hope for their own and the community's collective futures beyond industrial steel labour.



Figure 8 - Port Kembla railway station terminal. The station is far from its best and needs to improve if tourism is to be a significant factor in Port Kembla's future.<sup>117</sup>

## Understanding Life Without Work

Research into industrial work has typically told a broad narrative about the industry, community or factory. The term post-industrial is criticised because it implies the epoch of industrialism is over even while manufacture continues to take place on a large scale across the world in many places.<sup>118</sup> Tracking regional industry's micro and macro level processes and relationships are important to understanding their future but are also crucial to mapping the future of labour. The book *Why the Future is Workless* proposes certain ideas about the future of work that

---

<sup>117</sup> Negro, *Lonely Tracks*.

<sup>118</sup> Rodrik, "Premature Deindustrialization," 1-2.

are relevant to the industrial sector.<sup>119</sup> The book is an attempt to understand the relationship between the technologies that are reshaping our connections with each other and our world. It addresses the topic of work and what it means to live in a world where technology is increasingly automating skilled labour jobs.<sup>120</sup> Work remains central to our conception of how we live and who we are, but paid employment is increasingly scarce, unstable and insecure. BlueScope is shedding more jobs at its Port Kembla steelworks as it moves to an automated system for moving slab metal. Recently the Australian Workers Union reported that in the slab-making section of the mill employees were advised during their shifts that up to 30 jobs would be made redundant.<sup>121</sup>

While the movement towards automation and cheaper production will keep the BlueScope gates open and hundreds of jobs in the region, it is of little comfort to the men and women who lose theirs, having spent their working lives as part of the steel industry. According to my interviews, the most prominent concern of workers have been economic losses and the associated social stresses such as losing their houses, being unable to afford food or other conveniences. As well as these concerns, many steelworkers have felt that their purpose has been lost and that they are unable to contribute to the community if they are unable to work.

Gary, a former steelworker and the OH&S manager, was forced into early retirement due to pressure from BlueScope to cut jobs in 2010. Gary owns his own house as well as an investment property and appears to live a comfortable life. As we sat on his back veranda, he told me about the worldwide trips he and his wife Tess had gone on since his retirement, to Europe, America, and New Zealand with another trip to America booked in November. As I looked around his back yard, I noted several garden beds all growing different assortments of fruits and vegetables.

---

<sup>119</sup> Dunlop, *Why the Future is Workless*.

<sup>120</sup> Dunlop, *Why the Future is Workless*, 3.

<sup>121</sup> Laurence, E, "Bluescope Steel plans to slash up to 30 jobs in slab-making at Port Kembla steelworks," *ABC News*, July 21, 2016, accessed November 20, 2016, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-07-21/bluescope-steel-cuts-30-jobs-slab-making-port-kembla/7650036>.

I asked if he had always had fruit and vegetable gardens: 'I only started once I retired,' he replied. 'I needed to keep busy, I usually grow quite a bit more than we could ever eat before it goes off, so I give a lot of it to my kids and their families.' I could see the pride he took in the fact that he was still a provider for his family, growing vegetables to plug the void that the steelworks had filled for over 40 years.

Potkonjak and Skokic make a number of claims about the value of labour. Their paper on unemployment and hope outlines three set of issues raised by Croatian ironworkers who lost their jobs due to industry collapse. The crisis was caused by bankruptcy, related to the political, ideological and economic collapse of the socialist period (and only secondarily due to the global economic crisis). The second issue was that workers were forced to conceptualise their lives without work, even as they often referred in interviews to a time when they were working. The final issue was hope, which was used to analyse the collective traumatic experience of losing jobs even as workers demonstrated a hope for the future. De-industrialisation was not the end of these Croatian communities' narrative.<sup>122</sup> While economic, social and physical survival despite unemployment was important for the Croatian ironworkers, it also threatened their perception of themselves as valuable workers or as contributors to their community.<sup>123</sup> In Gary's case while he was clearly troubled by his lack of purpose after he left BlueScope he was able to more than just hope for a positive future. He actively searched for a new purpose to contribute to his perception of himself as a valuable member of the community. Gary's response provides an exemplary example of the way the Illawarra must transform and reinvent itself if a dystopian future of urban ruins, social decline, and economic collapse are to be avoided. In the following section, this chapter will show how the Illawarra is planning to transition its economy and how these proposals have been received by the community from residents to council and government officials.

---

<sup>122</sup> Potkonjak, and Skokic, "In the World of Iron and Steel: On the Ethnography of Work, Unemployment and Hope," 74.

<sup>123</sup> Potkonjak, and Skokic, "In the World of Iron and Steel: On the Ethnography of Work, Unemployment and Hope," 92-94.

## Transitioning Economy

The various effects of industrial closure or shrinkage in communities have been well discussed in many research studies and my fieldwork. Strangleman and Rhodes trace the origins of deindustrialisation in the onset of industrial closure in Europe and North America. They argue that as time passes the effects of deindustrialisation have become more apparent.<sup>124</sup> The key for de-industrialised communities is to find a way to transition into a local economy that isn't reliant on one economic source. According to Cowell, in America's Midwest developers believe that they can transcend the economic forces that have decimated communities.<sup>125</sup> Cowell begins by analysing the term 'adaptive resistance' according to how developers understand the term. Urban planners use two forms of adaptive resilience that emphasise recovery of people and of places that have experienced extreme stress. Ecological resilience and economic resilience are not used to describe a return to normalcy but as signs of continual development.<sup>126</sup> Cowell identifies four phases of adaptive resilience: conservation, release, reorganisation, and exploitation. Jordan discusses how General Motors restructured its worldwide operations to exploit cheap labour markets around the world, which had devastating effects on local economies, including in Flint Michigan.<sup>127</sup> There long term stable employment was no longer secure, endangering workers' prosperity as well as diminishing the city's elite status. In response Flint has used small scale neoliberal practices to preserve their elite status through obtaining financing to run their own for-profit businesses.<sup>128</sup>

---

<sup>124</sup> Strangleman and Rhodes, "The 'New' Sociology of Deindustrialisation? Understanding Industrial Change," 412.

<sup>125</sup> Cowell, *Dealing with deindustrialization: adaptive resilience in American Midwestern Regions*.

<sup>126</sup> Cowell, *Dealing with deindustrialization: adaptive resilience in American Midwestern Regions*, 2.

<sup>127</sup> Jordan, "Neoliberalism Writ Large and Small," 28-29.

<sup>128</sup> Jordan, "Neoliberalism Writ Large and Small," 27.

There are many cases of industrial closure all around the world, but there are two cities in Australia outside of the Illawarra that have also suffered its consequences. Newcastle and Whyalla have also been caught up in the steel crisis. Whyalla steelworks remain fragilely open, but Newcastle's steel production was shut down at the turn of the millennium. Newcastle became the hero of the Australian Labor Party as they won the election in 1910 for the first time. The government used Newcastle to fulfil its nation-building role advancing the Australian economy. A great mistake was the belief Newcastle could fill this nation-building role with unlimited potential as an industrial centre.<sup>129</sup> According to Metcalfe, some of the region's natural limitations include poor drainage, an accumulation of mud in the harbor and a dangerous proximity to Sydney.<sup>130</sup> Despite this, Newcastle has had a number of 'reincarnations' over the years. Described by some as 'The Steel City' (locals, ex-BHP workers and fans of Bootmen), 'Dubbo by the Beach' (people from regional NSW), and 'Somewhere I've Never Been' (anyone from Sydney or Melbourne), the city seems to have transformed into a place one that locals are proud of. Residents have been quietly brushing off coal dust for over a decade to reveal a city that sits on a pleasant harbour. Given a leg up by the Renew Newcastle project, according to the marketeers the centre of town has evolved into a destination of choice for foodies, vintage shoppers, market hoppers and culture vultures alike. There are surfers, panel vans, groms and every other '90s surfer town cliché imaginable, but with one distinct difference: they are right in the city.<sup>131</sup>

Wollongong is not a victim of all the negative circumstances that caused the eventual closure of Newcastle. One concern the cities share is their proximity to Sydney. As the Port Kembla steelworks does not suffer from the same flaws that led to the demise of Newcastle's industry it is possible that the steel industry can remain in the Illawarra while it also grows in other economic areas. The transition in

---

<sup>129</sup> Metcalfe, "Mud and Steel: The Imagination of Newcastle," 7.

<sup>130</sup> Metcalfe, "Mud and Steel: The Imagination of Newcastle," 8.

<sup>131</sup> Allen, M. "Guys, You Should Totally Visit Newcastle Right Now." *AWOL*, August 20, 2015. <https://awol.junkee.com/guys-you-should-totally-visit-newcastle-right-now/12333>.

Wollongong's economy has been analysed with the release of Wollongong City Council's *Economic Development Strategy 2013 to 2023* document.<sup>132</sup> Launched by Lord Mayor Gordon Bradbery, the document examines how the city evolved from an industrial powerhouse in the early 1980s to its current state, when BHP and BlueScope began to downsize the steelworks labour force. The document found that the main economic challenges in Wollongong were high unemployment rates:

Wollongong's youth unemployment rate was 15.8 per cent in 2011 compared with the NSW average of 12.8 per cent. Some 27,660 workers living in the local government area commute out of the city each day for work. The majority of these, or around 16,553 people, commute to Sydney and surrounds. This makes the Wollongong to Sydney route one of Australia's busiest commuter corridors. This reflects a number of factors including a lack of opportunities in Wollongong along with opportunities for better pay in Sydney.<sup>133</sup>

Mayor Bradbery said the city was emerging as an important business and financial service centre and was home to the University of Wollongong, one of Australia's leading universities. He argued that a resolution to unemployment required a united approach between all levels of government, the business community and residents;

We are being proactive in promoting the region in terms of attracting investment and we are trying to position ourselves in a better way to deal with fluctuations in the economy and keep an even keel in our local economy and promote jobs.<sup>134</sup>

---

<sup>132</sup> *Economic Development Strategy 2013 to 2023*.

<sup>133</sup> Turk, L, "Ideas rise as Port Kembla stack falls," *Illawarra Mercury*, February 26, 2014, accessed November 20, 2016, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/2115576/ideas-rise-as-port-kembla-stack-falls/>.

<sup>134</sup> Turk, L, "Ideas rise as Port Kembla stack falls," *Illawarra Mercury*, February 26, 2014, accessed November 20, 2016, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/2115576/ideas-rise-as-port-kembla-stack-falls/>.

Continuing my conversation with John, it was clear that his narrative captured the struggle the Illawarra is experiencing trying to move from its industrial past. There is a deep local attachment to the steel industry, but it is obvious that the city must adapt to be successful in the future:

The steel works was the sole reason I came to the Illawarra, without the training program there is no way I would have ever come here. I loved working with motors and engines just like my old man; I would have stayed and worked with him. If and when the steelworks do close it will probably stop a lot of young people coming to the region to study and train with a good prospect of securing a job at the steelworks: without that draw card other universities become more appealing. The steelworks closure would definitively hurt but nowhere near as badly if we had closed during the financial crisis in the 80s when basically the whole Illawarra worked here. People commute to Sydney and the far south coast daily now, and lots of people are moving to the region from Sydney and just taking the train. The university just needs to make sure it stays competitive to students now that there isn't necessarily a clear progression path because I think that is the future of the Illawarra. That and tourism, for some reason the cruise ships like to come here. I guess we have the beaches and stuff. Thanks to the steelworks we have a world class harbour that could hold multiple cruise ships as well as trade for any other new industries in the region. I don't know if you have seen it but just over there (pointing towards the ship yard) thousands of cars come into the harbour daily. I like walking and driving around during lunch taking pictures around the steelworks and I really hope some parts always remain in the Illawarra. It has been such a big part of our history, the catalyst for the whole region. We have tried to sell off old blocks and sheds along Spring Hill road, but no one has been interested. Someone

will probably eventually find a use for them, but I hope they are never all completely destroyed. In a way, I also hope BlueScope doesn't entirely disappear either; hopefully they can adapt beyond specifically steel fabrication and maybe move into boutique building solutions. The urban landscape is going to keep changing and quite rapidly and if de-industrialisation and the building boom continues building is a niche they could potentially fill and keep jobs in the Illawarra. BlueScope has had to become very adaptive over the last 15 years since its split with BHP. Repetitive crashes in 2008 and 2015 have made it very difficult and we all feared for our jobs and luckily some of us are still here, at least for now.

While it is clear through John's interview that the city can't rely solely on the steel industry anymore, it is an important part of its past and could still have a role to play in the Illawarra's future if it becomes more adaptable. This indicates that the Port Kembla steelworks will not survive long into the future in its current state. If the steelworks can adapt, it can still remain as part of the Illawarra's economic makeup along with a variety of new industries. This is important as it both helps preserve the Illawarra's industrial heritage, and many current jobs in the steel industry while making Port Kembla's urban environment a more vibrant space.

Nathan Waters, the Science Party candidate for Cunningham, appears to support John's claim that the Steelworks need to innovate if it wants to survive and be a part of the Illawarra's future. Waters argues that ensuring 90% steel is used in federal infrastructure projects is great, but notes that this comprises a small percentage of the entire market, and is unlikely to make a significant long-term impact. There are plenty of more exciting, rapidly growing and lucrative endeavours within future manufacturing technology such as industrial robotics, 3D printing, nanomaterials and renewable energy. BlueScope hasn't established a fabrication lab or makerspace to facilitate the open exploration and development of such



technologies together with the public, business, academic communities and current employees.<sup>135</sup>

The State Government is backing a bipartisan plan by industry, unions and Wollongong University to gear the heavy-polluting manufacturers of the Illawarra towards renewable energy. The steel plant at Port Kembla can produce metal components for wind turbines, and be partially powered on site by recycling hot gases from its blast furnaces in a cogeneration energy plant. Under the Green Jobs Illawarra Action Plan, which has attracted some early funding from the Government, Wollongong could become a hub of wave power, using technology inspired by the Kiama Blowhole. Former Premier, Nathan Rees, said in a statement in 2016 that,

This strategy provides an excellent blueprint for regions that are traditionally supported by industries like coal and steel to build long-term plans for the future. What we've done is broken the back of the old jobs versus environment conundrum, if you can do that in Wollongong with our heavy industry steel and coal jobs, then you can do that anywhere. Our community has come to realise we will be living in a carbon-constrained world, and our industry needs will play a role in that future.<sup>136</sup>

The result would have been a net increase in jobs, without damaging the existing steel industry, according to the plan developed by university academics, the South Coast Labor Council, the Australian Industry Group, local governments and staff from the state environment and education departments. The steelworks

---

<sup>135</sup> Cubby, B, "Illawarra steelers get set to tackle renewable energy," *Sydney Morning Herald*, November 17, 2009, accessed November 20, 2016, <http://www.smh.com.au/environment/illawarra-steelers-get-set-to-tackle-renewable-energy-20091116-iic9.html>.

<sup>136</sup> Cubby, B, "Illawarra steelers get set to tackle renewable energy," *Sydney Morning Herald*, November 17, 2009, accessed November 20, 2016, <http://www.smh.com.au/environment/illawarra-steelers-get-set-to-tackle-renewable-energy-20091116-iic9.html>.

ultimately decided they wouldn't be supporting this plan from the government. Arthur Rorris on the SOS FaceBook page conveyed his concerns and disapproval of BlueScopes lack of planning for the future.

#### **Save Our Steel 21/02/17**

Arthur Rorris

Energy Security and Power Prices threaten Australian Industry?

You mean:

1. Privatising our power hasn't made it cheaper?
2. The country blessed with an abundance of resources has no reservation policy to keep some for itself?
3. BlueScope Steel walked away from plans to build a cogeneration power plant using waste gasses that would have provided all the power it needed to make steel and some left over for the grid.<sup>137</sup>

BlueScope Steel estimated that it would have to spend up to \$1 billion to fully develop a cogeneration plant at its Port Kembla steelworks, and shelved its plans during the economic downturn. According to the company, the proposed plan would not assist the steelworks long term economically in saving money and providing jobs, even if it would stop the release of about 1 million tonnes of greenhouse gases per year, a significant cut to a facility responsible for about 7 per cent of the state's total emissions. The positive environmental aspects of the government's plan could have assuaged part of the Illawarra's anti-industrial sentiment.

The Port Kembla Copper Stack while no longer operating is a symbolic reminder to anti-inudustrialists about the negative health impacts industry has had on

---

<sup>137</sup> "Save Our Steel - Port Kembla."

the Illawarra. Part of the Illawarra's transition will include demolishing industrial icons like 'the stack' (shown in figure 9).



*Figure 9 - Fall of an Icon: The demolition of Port Kembla Stack.<sup>138</sup>*

This process began when blast furnaces No.1 & 2 were demolished after being the pillars of the Illawarra's industrial growth. Similarly, the Port Kembla Copper Stack stood 198 meters tall for over 50 years. Marking the skyline 'the stack' was possibly the Illawarra's most iconic industrial relic. With a booming crack that echoed through the escarpment dust burst from the stack: moments ticked by in silence while the stack started to sway in the sea breeze. It slowly leant further and further before plummeting to the ground. Cheers erupted from the crowd that had turned out to watch the demolition of the Port Kembla Stack. According to local media coverage of the event,

once the stack went, that was the symbol for industry and pollution. With that gone, there's a whole new feeling in Port Kembla. Families found they could

---

<sup>138</sup> Gamberio, *The Stack Demolition*.

come here and it wasn't the industrial seaside working suburb it used to be; it's moving in a better direction for residents.<sup>139</sup>

Port Kembla's main street, too, has seen enormous changes, with new shops after closures, pubs, cabaret, art galleries and a wildly popular billy cart derby. Ms. Dal Molin has been a Port Kembla resident her entire life and has always been an outspoken advocate for the area. She acknowledges there are still a number of vacant shops on the main street, and that with the lingering sex trade, there is still a reality to the reputation the suburb has been working hard to shed: "We have the best beaches and pool, and we'll have a shopping centre to be proud of and an arts precinct that is moving forward", Ms. Dal Molin said. "Young people are moving in, and I know there are plans for Wentworth Street that will bring more accommodation of better quality. We're happy we think our image has changed and we're very proud of it".<sup>140</sup>

The stack was not the only part of the urban environment that sat dormant for years, but the former Port Kembla RSL building on the corner of Military Road and Allen Street will not be suffering the same fate. That space is being brought back to life as a one-stop shop medical centre. The space will house general practitioners, hydrotherapy, radiology, pathology, psychology, minor surgery, eye care, paediatrics, drug and alcohol addiction services, dentistry, acupuncture and other services. The re-purposing of the space allows Port Kembla residents access to medical care that wasn't previously available. Yet to submit a development application to Wollongong City Council, Jamoo wants to gauge commercial interest saying,

---

<sup>139</sup> Huntsdale, J, "Port Kembla's stack demolition changes future of suburb as industrial reputation begins to crumble," *ABC News*, April 12, 2016, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-04-12/port-kemblas-stack-demolition-changes-future-of-suburb/7319250>.

<sup>140</sup> Huntsdale, J, "Port Kembla's stack demolition changes future of suburb as industrial reputation begins to crumble," *ABC News*, April 12, 2016, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-04-12/port-kemblas-stack-demolition-changes-future-of-suburb/7319250>.

it's hard to put something to council right now because we want to get it right and in order to get it right we want to talk to doctors and who needs what. We believe probably the best outcome of this is because of the location, demographics of the people, unemployment something with healthcare, like a one-stop shop medical centre, would be ideal.<sup>141</sup>

The Illawarra community and council despite having many concerns about the Illawarra's potential post-industrial future is not short of proposals for new industries and business opportunities. As well as conservative practical options like Jamoo's proposed medical centre there is also a push to bring theme parks to the Illawarra. One proposed theme park idea was to make the Illawarra 'the Happiest Place on Earth' with the development of Disney Land Australia (shown in figure 10).



Figure 10 - Port Kembla the future "Happiest place on Earth".<sup>142</sup>

Wollongong identities joined a thread applauding the prospect of welcoming Mickey Mouse and co to their region. Businessman Geoff McQueen liked the idea,

---

<sup>141</sup> Savage, D, "Port Kembla RSL could turn into a medical centre," *Illawarra Mercury*, March 29, 2017, accessed March 30, 2017, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/4560270/developer-wants-port-kembla-rsl-to-become-a-medical-centre/>.

<sup>142</sup> McIlwain, *Disney dreaming for Port Kembla site*.

saying the proposal was good for a headline but questioned whether Australia had the domestic market or international connectivity to support Disneyland:

Effective planning and controls for those lands now is the only way we will protect them to create jobs moving forward. Tourism is absolutely an opportunity, but I am sure many other sectors could benefit from those land holdings to create jobs as well.<sup>143</sup>

Tourism is often spoken of as part of the solution to move the Illawarra into the future, given the loss of the steelworks will devastate the community and remove an important part of Wollongong's history. There are many hurdles to overcome in any successful economic transition: even clearing the existing site of the steelworks for repurposing would cost billions and there is doubt the steelworks would be willing to sell its prime portside land to other industries. The steel industry has played a significant role in the Illawarra's past and will continue to play a role in its future whether steel production continues or ceases. The mark of the steelworks will always remain in the Illawarra, as will the debate as to whether this is good or bad. It is unclear if the Illawarra will be able to avoid a dystopian future. However, with several regeneration projects in place and with the labour force still seeking to contribute to the community, there is a reason to be hopeful that the future Wollongong can replicate the success of cities like Newcastle and Flint, avoiding the creation of urban ruin, social decline, and economic disorder.

---

<sup>143</sup> McIlwain, K, "Disney dreaming for Port Kembla site," *Illawarra Mercury*, June 12, 2015, accessed September 15, 2016, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/3143621/disney-dreaming-for-port-kembla-site/>.

## Conclusion

### Dog Watch

The night is wound off like a film at speed  
and men still dance in the brittle light of furnaces.  
It is a kind of witchcraft, and they flicker like ghouls,  
vulpine, with the fat-yellow on them.

Conal Fitzpatrick<sup>144</sup>



*Figure 11 – A large moon over the Port Kembla BlueScope steelworks plant. This photograph provides visual stimulation for Fitzpatrick’s poem showcasing the furnaces brittle light.*<sup>145</sup>

The steel industry and its workers have faced much adversity over their inter-generational life, and its beating heart has threatened to flat line on many occasions. The lone furnace light may grow dim, but it continues to burn, producing steel. The aim of my research has been to investigate how policies directed towards the steel industry, and relationships between local, national and global processes, are shaping

---

<sup>144</sup> Knox, “Once upon a place: writing the Illawarra,” 65.

<sup>145</sup> Mclean, *A large moon over the Port Kembla BlueScope steelworks plant*.

the Illawarra's urban environment. To do so my research addressed several smaller questions: How does industry impact urban environments? How do policies and politics influence de-industrialisation? What are the social and economic impacts of heavy industry? What does the future hold for de-industrial urban environments? In answering these questions I have attempted to widen the scope of existing industrial discussions as suggested by Cowie and Heathcott.<sup>146</sup> Whilst this thesis has touched on parliamentary politics, exploitation and nostalgia it has also reached beyond these discussions to view the complex relationship the steelworks has with the broader community, not just the workforce. The thesis has also discussed a wide range of local, national and global politics and policies that are constantly changing the Illawarra's urban environment. Finally, using case studies that have illustrated prototypical plant shutdown and through multi-methodological ethnography in the field this research has looked to the future of the Illawarra, exploring the community's hopes for the Illawarra's urban environment.

Aided and abetted by the mining industry, steel transformed the Illawarra from a rural region of dairy farms into an industrial city. Roads, railways, houses, factories and harbours cut into the natural environment from the top of the green escarpment to the white sand beaches of the coast. The wealth from the extraction of resources and production of steel provided for generations of families since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. During its peak, the Port Kembla steelworks alone was responsible for the employment of 25,000 workers (disregarding miners or small contractors who also profited from the local steel industry). While Port Kembla itself never held a great reputation regarding elite housing, education or crime the Illawarra region prospered from the steel industry. While it is easy to think the steelworks operated for nearly 100 years without dramatic events this is not the case: the depression in the 1930s forced a change of ownership, and its expansion and contraction occurred in a series of smaller economic movements.

Perhaps Newcastle should have been a guide for the future of the steel industry? Port Kembla dominated the Australia steel landscape as business and

---

<sup>146</sup> Cowie and Heathcott, ed. *Beyond the Ruins*, p.1-2.



industry innovations were sent to the Illawarra instead of to Newcastle, leaving the city vulnerable. Newcastle was hit much harder by economic down turns and was eventually forced to close in the year 2000. BlueScope and BHP played-down similar fears in the Illawarra, claiming that there was nothing to worry about. When the companies split in 2002, and the steelworks became just BlueScope, concerns began to grow. Even after several lean years BlueScope decided to invest for the future in 2009, re-lining the No.5 blast furnace. While this decision saved the steelworks during the steel crisis of 2015, its new efficiency couldn't provide the profits that had been expected or save the No.6 blast furnace from closure. The closure of No.6 furnace and the steel crisis in 2015 lead to job cuts, freezing of wages and general uncertainty surrounding the future of the steelworkers who remained. These decisions lead in turn to the abandonment of a number of industrial areas in Port Kembla, which became run down and covered in graffiti. Many people in nearby houses couldn't afford their mortgages. The exodus from industrial Port Kembla meant businesses along its main street shutdown as well and with unemployment rates climbing so did crime in the area.

While the impact of the initial stages of de-industrialisation in Port Kembla has not been totally socially devastating the impacts have still been still dramatic. Numerous threats of immediate closure, including as recently as November 2016, has meant that the community is devoting considerable political energy both to saving the steelworks through the 'Save Our Steel' campaign and to the regeneration of Port Kembla. Renovation projects in the Port Kembla area have already begun with shops and buildings sold to developers with their promises to transform them from derelict remnants of the early industrial era into a medical centre and affordable housing. The 'SOS' campaign was vitally important to gathering the support of the government to change policy that had left the Australian steel industry vulnerable. The Steel Protection Bill states that in Australian infrastructure projects 90% of the steel used must have been made in Australia. Being a part of the vast crowd who marched through the streets was moving, and the sounds of worker's chants could be heard over the steelworks' furnaces and strip mills in full operation.

Yet despite the unified persona the community has forged to save the steel industry, my fieldwork unearthed several hesitations amongst locals concerning the future of steel. The Government itself is essentially non-supportive, as highlighted when it failed to vote on the Steel Industry Protection Bill allowing for the Bill to lapse. For locals themselves, the adverse health and environmental impacts that the steelworks has had on the region is still an issue. Environmental degradation is in part responsible for the Illawarra's inability to transition into new industries, as much of the steelworks' land is heavily contaminated, needing to be remediated before it can be repurposed. Without the roaring crowds and the judgmental keyboard warriors watching community members, in one on one interviews many people indicated that the steel industry is less important to them than it used to be. Some thought that with its proximity to Sydney, the Illawarra region will continue to grow even without the steelworks. If the steelworks do shut down, they would most likely be replaced with a variety of smaller industries such tech jobs, further University of Wollongong expansions, and expansion of the port and harbour for passengers and more cars.

Despite the belief the steel industry is no longer as important to the region, its history cannot be erased and the way the Illawarra will look in 20 years will still largely depend on the steel industry's future. Port Kembla has one operating blast furnace. Not only does this make for production limitations but it also limits how long the steelworks can make steel at all. This remaining blast furnace will eventually need to be relined. When it was previously relined, it took over six months to complete the process and turning the furnace back on is not without risk. Even with political and community support the final decision on steel making will depend on BlueScope. BlueScope will face a crucial decision in 10 years as to whether to spend between \$300 million and \$400 million re-lining the No.5 blast furnace again.<sup>147</sup> Like with everything in our neo-liberal age, there will need to be a 'business case' made for its delivery of acceptable returns before the investment will

---

<sup>147</sup> Evans, S. "BlueScope CEP says no guarantees Port Kembla will stay open." *Australian Financial Review*, August 22, 2016. <http://www.afr.com/business/manufacturing/bluescope-ceo-says-no-guarantees-port-kembla-will-stay-open-20160821-gqxnj7>.

be justified. Many of the Illawarra community believe this case will depend on the path the senior management take. If they continue down the current path, it will be successful while the economy remains stable yet will close down once there is another poor economic period. If they go down the path of innovation and upgrading their infrastructure, they can survive into the future. BlueScope's fortunes have continued to improve, largely on the back of foreign investment in the United States.<sup>148</sup> The boost in profits indicates that the steel crises of 2015 that included job cuts and wage freezes were worth it in terms of the steelworks survival and profitability, shoring up the decision to continue producing steel in Port Kembla. Unfortunately for the Illawarra's steelworkers the fight to save the steel industry is far from over, and there cannot be reliance on international investments to solve their problems in the future. Energy shortages and price hikes are currently a major concern for Australian industries particularly in Port Kembla, as BlueScope rejected a renewable energy project that could have saved millions of dollars and put them at the forefront of renewable technology.

In brief, there is a dual structure to the narrative of the steelworks in the Illawarra. One side concerns the steelworks that built a community and which local people are desperate to preserve. The other reveals an industry that has caused one hundred years of environmental and health degradation, while exploiting a workforce for its own gains. The Illawarra is unable to move to new industries while the old remain. Many are unwilling to give up on the steel industry, not just because it is important to the local community but because it is believed to be important to Australia. If BlueScope Port Kembla closes Australia will lose a large part of its production capacity and fears have been expressed that this will leave the country vulnerable particularly in the onset of any war or in the event of another global financial crisis.

---

<sup>148</sup> Humphries, G, "BlueScope's profits double," *Illawarra Mercury*, August 21, 2017, accessed, August 25, 2017, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/4867532/bluescopes-profits-double/?cs=300>.

Ethnographic research in the Illawarra is important now precisely because the steel industry continues. In other cities such as Newcastle there is no choice but to move forward as heavy industry has shut down. It begs the question: does the steel city need to choose one direction or another? Is it possible for the community to maintain its industrial past while moving into the new, more 'agile' industries that the current Government publicises? There is much that can be learnt about the social, cultural and political landscapes of industrial cities around the world based on current and future research in the Illawarra area. This research can help communities think about how they will reshape their cities even as they oppose certain external forces that are transforming their political and economic landscapes.

## Bibliography

Abu-Lughod, Lila. "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power Through Bedouin Women." *American Ethnologist* 17, no. 1 (1990): 41-55.

Allen, M. "Guys, You Should Totally Visit Newcastle Right Now." *AWOL*, August 20, 2015.  
<https://awol.junkee.com/guys-you-should-totally-visit-newcastle-right-now/12333>.

Altena, Bert, and Marcel Van der Linden. "Preface." *International Review of Social History* 47, no. 10 (2002): 1–2.

Arrium Annual Report 2015, *Arrium mining and minerals*, accessed December 12, 2016.

<http://www.arrium.com/~media/Arrium%20Mining%20and%20Materials/Files/ASX%20Announcements/FY2015/2015%20Annual%20Report.pdf>

Beder, Sharon. "Precaution needed beyond legal requirements." *Engineers Australia*, (1999): 60.

Bensman, David, and Roberta Lynch. *Rusted Dreams*. University of California Press, 1987.

Bluestone, Barry, and Bennett Harrison. *The Deindustrialisation of America*. New York: Basic Books, 1982.

Butler, J, "BlueScope denies Port Kembla closure, says large-scale cost-cutting necessary," *Illawarra Mercury*, June 10, 2015, accessed October 4, 2017,  
<http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/3136917/death-by-1000-cuts-bluescope-reviews-port-kembla-operations/>.

Cowell, Margaret. *Dealing with deindustrialization: adaptive resilience in American Midwestern Regions*. Routledge, 2014.

Cowie, Jefferson, and Joseph, Heathcott, ed. *Beyond the Ruins*. Cornell University Press, 2003.

Cubby, B, “Illawarra steelers get set to tackle renewable energy,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, November 17, 2009, accessed November 20, 2016, <http://www.smh.com.au/environment/Illawarra-steelers-get-set-to-tackle-renewable-energy-20091116-iiic9.html>.

Dudley, Kathryn. *The End of the Line: Lost Jobs, New Lives in Postindustrial America*. University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Dunlop, Tim. *Why the Future is Workless*. NewSouth, 2016.

*Economic Development Strategy 2013 to 2023*, Wollongong City Council, accessed February 20, 2017. <http://www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/city/economicdevelopment/Documents/Wollongong%20City%20Council%20Economic%20Development%20Strategy%202013-2023.pdf>

Eklund, Erik. *Mining Towns: Making a Living, Making a Life*. Sydney University of New South Wales Publishing, 2012.

Eklund, Erik. *Steel Town: The Making and Breaking of Port Kembla*. Melbourne University Press, 2002.

- Ellis, G, "Port Kembla's No 5 blasts into new era," *Illawarra Mercury*, August 19, 2009, accessed November 20, 2016, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/620829/port-kemblas-no-5-furnace-blasts-into-new-era/>.
- Evans, S. "BlueScope CEP says no guarantees Port Kembla will stay open." *Australian Financial Review*, August 22, 2016. <http://www.afr.com/business/manufacturing/bluescope-ceo-says-no-guarantees-port-kembla-will-stay-open-20160821-gqxnj7>.
- Firth, Beverley. "The industrialization of Wollongong, with special reference to Australian Iron and Steel Proprietary Limited." PhD Thesis, Macquarie University, 1986.
- Foucault, Michael. *The History of Sexuality*, Editions Gallimard. France, 1976.
- Gamerio, Justine. *The Stack Demolition*. Image, 2013. <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/news/the-stack/>.
- Geertz, Clifford. "Thick description: toward an interpretive theory of culture." In *the Interpretation of cultures* 3-30. Basic Books, 1973.
- Gibson, Katherine, and Janet Newbury. "Post-industrial pathways for a single industry resource town: a community economies approach." In *The Anthropology of Postindustrialism* 183-205. Routledge: New York, 2016.
- Gulick, John. "The Essence of Urban Anthropology: Integration of Micro and Macro Research Perspectives." *Urban Anthropology* 13, no. 2 (1984): 295-306.
- Hagan, Jim, and Henry Patrick Lee, ed. *A history of work and community in Wollongong*. Halstead Press, 2001.

Herben, C, “Steelworks forged by disaster,” *Illawarra Mercury*, July 30, 2014, accessed December 1, 2016, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/2452020/steelworks-forged-by-disaster/>.

Hoogendoorn, W, ed. *Port Kembla 1898 – 1998: World Class, Roadstead to Port – Celebrating the port’s centenary service to the Illawarra*. Port Centenary Committee, 1999.

Humphries, G, “Liberal MP says “so be it” if the Port Kembla steelworks was forced to close,” *Illawarra Mercury*, June 28, 2016, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/3995923/so-be-it-if-port-kembla-closes-says-liberal-mp/>.

Humphries, G, “New Illawarra trains to be built in Korea,” *Illawarra Mercury*, August 18, 2016, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/4105369/new-illawarra-trains-to-be-built-in-korea/>.

Humphries, G, “Time to look to the future,” *Illawarra Mercury*, August 24, 2016, accessed November 26, 2016, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/4117026/time-to-look-to-the-future/?cs=300>.

Humphries, G, “Steel campaigners will take on govt MPs,” *Illawarra Mercury*, August 26, 2016, accessed November 20, 2016, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/4122743/steel-campaigners-will-take-on-govt-mps/>.



Humphries, G, "Confidence in the steel campaign," *Illawarra Mercury*, October 11, 2016,

accessed March 3, 2017, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/4219702/>

confidence-in-the-steel-campaign/.

Humphries, G, "BlueScope's profits double," *Illawarra Mercury*, August 21, 2017, accessed,

August 25, 2017, [http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/4867532/bluescopes-](http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/4867532/bluescopes-profits-double/?cs=300)

profits-double/?cs=300.

Huntsdale, J, "Port Kembla's stack demolition changes future of suburb as industrial

reputation begins to crumble," *ABC News*, April 12, 2016, accessed November 26,

2016, [http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-04-12/port-kemblas-stack-demolition-](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-04-12/port-kemblas-stack-demolition-changes-future-of-suburb/7319250)

changes-future-of-suburb/7319250.

Jacobs, Jane. *Cities and the Wealth of Nations*. Random House, 1984.

Jennings, M, "BHP gave Steelers strength," *Illawarra Mercury*, August 28, 2015,

accessed January 4, 2017, [http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/3313429/bhp-](http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/3313429/bhp-gave-steelers-strength/)

gave-steelers-strength/.

Jordan, Laura. "Neoliberalism Writ Large and Small." *Anthropology Matters Journal* 15,

no. 1 (2014):18-62.

Kellehear, Allan. *The Unobtrusive Researcher: A Guide to Methods*. Allen & Unwin, 1993.

Knox, Peter. "Once upon a place: writing the Illawarra." Masters thesis, University of

Wollongong, 2001.

Lamphere, Louis. "Deindustrialization and Urban Anthropology: What The Future Holds."

*Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development* 14, no. 1 (1985):259-268.

Laurence, E, "Bluescope Steel plans to slash up to 30 jobs in slab-making at Port Kembla

steelworks," *ABC News*, July 21, 2016, accessed November 20, 2016,

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-07-21/bluescope-steel-cuts-30-jobs-slab-making-port-kembla/7650036>.

Lewer, John. *Not Chartered on Ordinary Maps The Newcastle Steelworks Closure*.

Australian Scholarly: North Melbourne, 2015.

Linkon, Sherry. "Narrating past and future: Deindustrialized Landscapes as Resources."

*International Labor and Working-Class History* 84, (2013): 38-54.

Low, Setha. "The Anthropology of Cities: Imagining and Theorizing the City." *Annual*

*Review of Urban Anthropology* 25, (1996): 383-409.

MacLennan, Carol. "Political Response to Economic Loss: The Automotive Crisis of 1979-

1982." *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development* 14, no. 1 (1985):5-19.

Marcus, George. "Ethnography in of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited

Ethnography." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24, (1995): 95-117.

- Marks, L, "Port Kembla: Renewed push for clean-up to protect community from contamination," *ABC News*, August 12, 2015, accessed February 25, 2017, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-08-12/renewed-push-for-contamination-clean-up-in-port-kembla/6682658>.
- May, Tim. *Social Research: issues, methods and processes*. Open University Press, 2001.
- McLean, Adam. *A large moon over the Port Kembla BlueScope steelworks plant*. Image, 2015. <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/3136917/death-by-1000-cuts-bluescope-reviews-port-kembla-operations/>.
- McLean, Jessica. "The Contingency of change in the Anthropocene: More-than-real renegotiation of power relations in climate change institutional transformation in Australia." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34, no. 3 (2015): 1-20.
- McIlwain, K, "Disney dreaming for Port Kembla site," *Illawarra Mercury*, June 12, 2015, accessed September 15, 2016, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/3143621/disney-dreaming-for-port-kembla-site/>.
- McIlwain, Kate. *Disney dreaming for Port Kembla site*. Image, 2015. <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/3143621/disney-dreaming-for-port-kembla-site/>.
- Metcalf, Andrew. *For Freedom and Dignity: historical agency and class structures in the coalfields of NSW*. Allen & Unwin, 1988.

Metcalf, Andrew. "Mud and Steel: The Imagination of Newcastle." *Labour History* 64, (1993):1-16.

Mollona, Massimiliano. "Steel Lives: An Ethnography of Labour in Contemporary Sheffield." PhD thesis, University of London, 2003.

Negro, Jesse. *Illawarra Escarpment*. Image, 2017.

Negro, Jesse. *Hidden Paradise*. Image, 2017.

Negro, Jesse. *Lonely Tracks*. Image, 2017.

Negro, Jesse. *Steelworks*. Image, 2017.

Negro, Jesse. *Urban Ruins*. Image, 2017.

"Our Bond". *BlueScope*. Accessed November 23, 2016. <https://www.bluescope.com/>.

Ortner, Sherry. "Dark Anthropology and its Others." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 6, no. 1 (2016): 47-73.

Ortner, Sherry. "Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no. 1 (1995): 173-193.

Palma, Jose. "De-industrialisation, 'Premature' De-industrialisation and the Dutch-disease." *Revista NECAT* 3, no. 5 (2014): 7-23.

Paver, C, "Bluescope blast furnace undergoes repairs," *Illawarra Mercury*, December 4, 2012, accessed November 25, 2016, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/1162076/bluescope-blast-furnace-undergoes-repairs/>.

Pearson, A, "Meet Fred, the Illawarra's man of steel," *Illawarra Mercury*, October 4, 2015,

accessed November 20, 2016, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story>

/3399558/meet-fred-the-illawarras-man-of-steel/.

Pearson, A, "Senator Kim Carr writes for the Mercury about Labor's stance on steel,"

*Illawarra Mercury*, May 6, 2016, accessed November 20, 2016, [http://www.](http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/3891287/we-cant-let-the-steel-industry-die/)

[illawarramercury.com.au/story/3891287/we-cant-let-the-steel-industry-die/](http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/3891287/we-cant-let-the-steel-industry-die/).

Pearson, A, "Ward talks health as steel bill introduced in NSW Parliament," *Illawarra*

*Mercury*, February 16, 2017, accessed February 18, 2017, [http://www.](http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/4472939/ward-talks-health-as-steel-bill-introduced-in-nsw-parliament/)

[illawarramercury.com.au/story/4472939/ward-talks-health-as-steel-bill-introduced-in-nsw-parliament/](http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/4472939/ward-talks-health-as-steel-bill-introduced-in-nsw-parliament/).

Pearson, A, "Disgust of steelworkers' aired in open letter to Liberal MP," *Illawarra Mercury*,

February 20, 2017, accessed February 20, 2017, [http://www.illawarramercury.com](http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/4477889/disgust-of-steelworkers-aiored-in-open-letter-to-liberal-mp/)

[.au/story/4477889/disgust-of-steelworkers-aiored-in-open-letter-to-liberal-mp/](http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/4477889/disgust-of-steelworkers-aiored-in-open-letter-to-liberal-mp/).

Potkonjak, Sanja, and Tea Skokic. "In the World of Iron and Steel: On the Ethnography of

Work, Unemployment and Hope." *Narodna Umjetnost* 1, no. 50 (2013):74-95.

Power, J, "Wollongong unites on campaign to buy local steel and Save Port Kembla's

steelworks," *Sydney Morning Herald*, September 18, 2015, accessed November 26,

2016, <http://www.smh.com.au/business/wollongong-unites-on-campaign-to-buy-local-steel-and-save-port-kemblas-steelworks-20150918-gjpolx.html>.

Public meeting calls for government to buy local steel to save Port Kembla steelworks,

*Illawarra Mercury*, August 10, 2015, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/3269580/community-unites-for-steelworks/>.

Robertson, Ken. *Port Kembla's No 5 blasts into new era*. Image, 2009.

<http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/620829/port-kemblas-no-5-furnace-blasts-into-new-era/>.

Rodrik, D. "Premature Deindustrialization." *Journal of Economic Growth* 21, no. 1 (2016):1-33.

Ryan, P, "China trade arrangements question over steel dumping," *ABC News*, September 28, 2016, accessed November 20, 2016, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-09-28/china-trade-arrangements-questioned-over-steel-dumping/7884026?pfmredir=sm>.

Savage, D, "Port Kembla RSL could turn into a medical centre," *Illawarra Mercury*, March 29, 2017, accessed March 30, 2017, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/4560270/developer-wants-port-kembla-rsl-to-become-a-medical-centre/>.

"Save Our Steel - Port Kembla". Facebook. Accessed January 2, 2017.

<https://www.facebook.com/saveoursteel/>.

Strangleman, Tim, and James Rhodes. "The 'New' Sociology of Deindustrialisation?

Understanding Industrial Change." *Sociology Compass* 8, no. 4 (2014):411-421.

Thompson, Angela. *Port Kembla stack to stay upright for now*. Image, 2017,

<http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/1724765/port-kembla-stack-to-stay-upright-for-now/>.

Tonkin, Liza. "Place-based Action in Wollongong: the role of union-community alliances in

constructing labour geographies of steel." *Australian Geographer* 35, no. 1 (2004): 59-75.

Turk, L, "Ideas rise as Port Kembla stack falls," *Illawarra Mercury*, February 26, 2014,

accessed November 20, 2016, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/2115576/ideas-rise-as-port-kembla-stack-falls/>.

Vaccaro, Ismael, Harper Krista, and Murray Seth. "The Anthropology of Postindustrialism:

Ethnographies of Disconnection." In *The Anthropology of Postindustrialism* 1-22. Routledge: New York, 2016.

Wachsmuth, L, "Grim tour exposes Wollongong's dark past," *Illawarra Mercury*, July 15,

2013, accessed December 1, 2016, <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/1637059/grim-tour-exposes-wollongongs-dark-past/>.

Walley, Christine. *Exit Zero: Family and Class in Postindustrial Chicago*. The University of

Chicago Press, 2013.

Westley-Wise, Victoria, Bernard W Stewart, Irene Kreis, Paolo F Ricci, Anthony Hogan,

Chris Darling, Steve Corbett, John Kaldor, Neill H Stacey and Pauline Warburton.

"Investigation of a cluster of leukaemia in the Illawarra region of New South Wales, 1989-1996." *Medical Journal of Australia* 171, no. 4 (1999): 178-183.