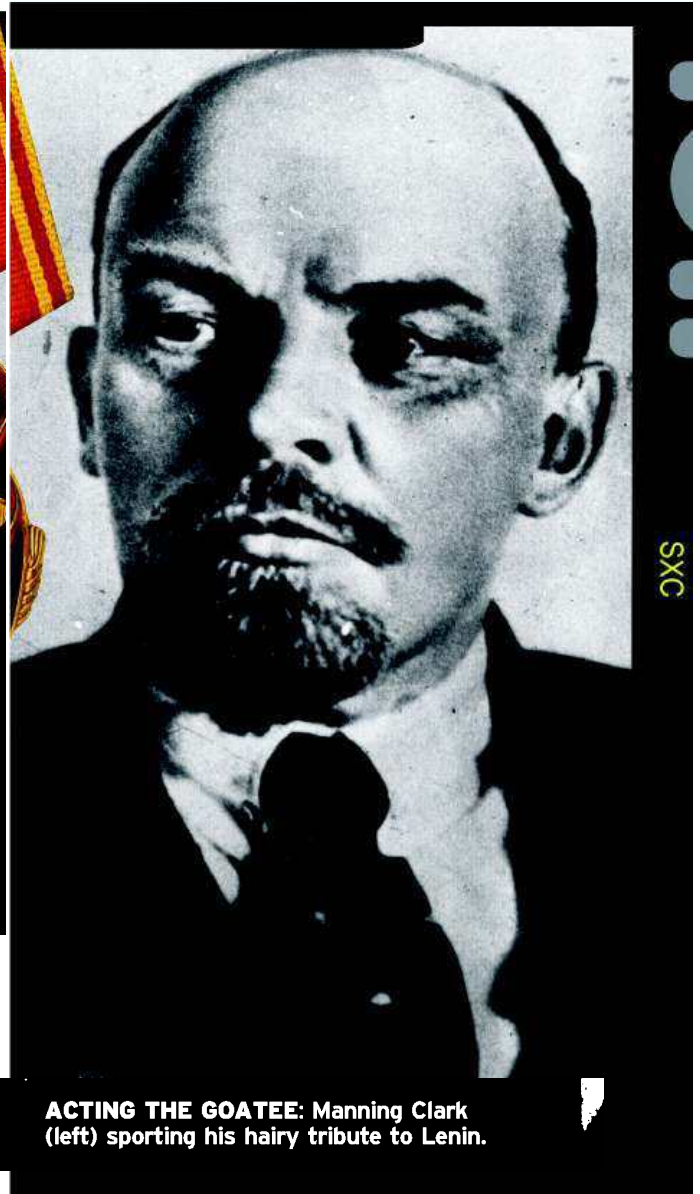
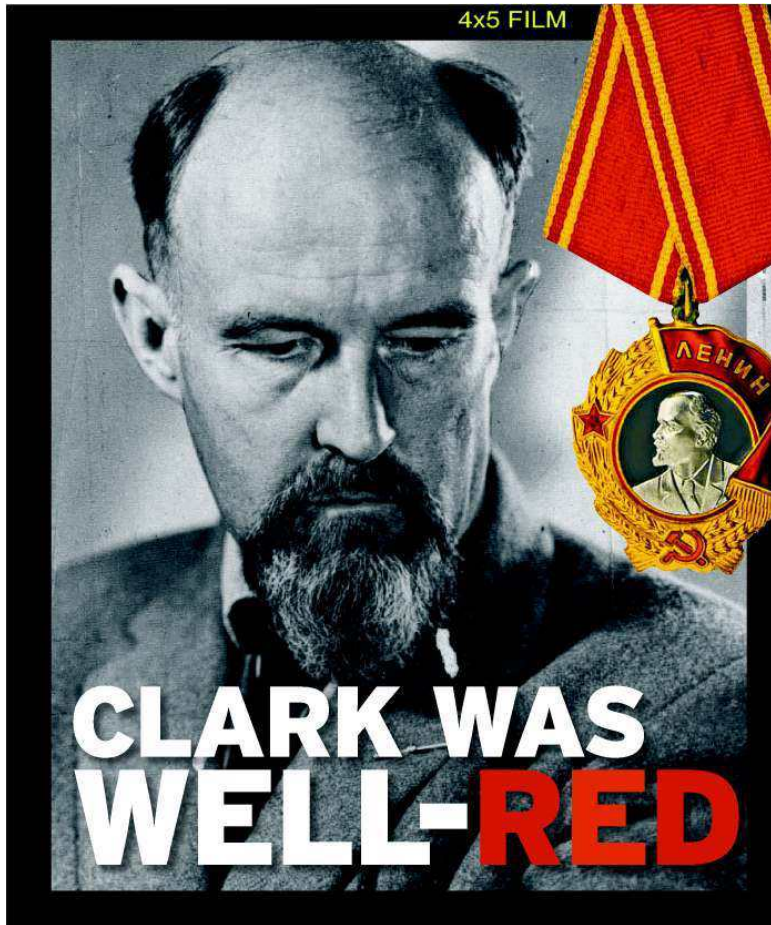




DesHoughton





In 1958 after a paid junket to Russia with communist hardliner Judah Waten and the Queensland poet James Devaney, historian Manning Clark did something quite spooky. He grew a goatee beard and took on the appearance and demeanour of Vladimir Lenin, the architect of the Russian Bolshevik revolution.

Clark described Lenin as "a man who seems to have been Christ-like, at least in compassion", in his 1960 book *Meeting Soviet Man*, a paean to the communist state. He is shown in a Lenin pose in publicity photos to accompany the release of *Volume 1, A History of Australia*, in 1962.

His love of the Soviet Union was no passing infatuation, as he revealed in his 1978 book *In Search of Henry Lawson*.

In it the greatest historian this country has yet produced said: "The victory of the peoples in the revolution in 1917 in Russia, in 1948 in the countries of Eastern Europe, in 1949 in China and in 1975 in Vietnam have meant teachings about the equality of all men and universal brotherhood have been read in the language of those countries where the people's cause has won a permanent victory."

I can't imagine the families of the millions slaughtered in these "victories" celebrating Clark's communistic ideal of a "universal brotherhood".

His extraordinary life is again in the spotlight. A new biography, *An Eye for Eternity: The Life of Manning Clark*, by Mark McKenna (MUP, \$54.95) contains the photos of Clark posing as Lenin. The book also tramples over controversial ground well-known to readers of *The Courier-Mail*.

Some background: In 1954 Clark was among a group of intellectuals attacked as communists for publicly criticising the Menzies government. Liberal MP William Wentworth told the House of Representatives Clark was part of a group of communists or "fellow travellers".

Wentworth was dismissed as a silly old right-winger, just as all those who subsequently questioned Clark's Soviet connections were.

Clark didn't know it in 1954 but he was considered a risk to national security and placed under surveillance by ASIO. Why? Two of his students complained to ASIO that he was "communistically inclined".

Communists came and went from his home regularly. He had deep contacts with the Soviet Embassy.

Much earlier Clark had sub-leased the Canberra home of External Affairs officer

Jim Hill, a suspected Soviet agent who was detected through messages intercepted and decoded by the US.

Clark was a tortured figure who battled the bottle as he wrestled with his Catholicism

Hill later was placed under surveillance by MI5 in London.

Clark visited Russia again in 1970 and 1973. Exactly where he went, and why, has not been adequately explained.

Nevertheless his grand volumes of Australian history had made him a towering figure in public life.

He remains a darling of the Labor Party, which won't hear a word against him.

A friend who remembered him at ANU said you wouldn't pass history under Clark unless your essays had a left-wing bent.

Queensland historian Ross Fitzgerald revealed recently that he was told in 1970 that Manning Clark was a "crypto" – "that is, someone who kept his membership of the Communist Party and-or his strong support for the party a secret because he could be more useful that way than as an openly CPA (Communist Party of Australia) member".

McKenna's 793-page blockbuster reveals Clark's strange world with awesome detail and richness.

"Painfully self-conscious and preposterously self-centred, he (Clark) was propelled by a need to give expression to the tempest within him," McKenna writes. "His most intriguing character was himself. He was no narcissist. Egotistical and vain, yes; but he lacked the one crucial ingredient of the narcissus: self-love. Instead, he seemed haunted by self-doubt and consumed by self-loathing, his ego and vanity driven by a cry for admiration, by a desire to prove he was indeed worthy of love."

Clark was a tortured figure who battled the bottle as he wrestled with his Catholicism. McKenna says many women found Clark sexist, especially if he had been drinking, and was he prone to kissing and touching them on impulse.

He adds: "In the manner of some of the good professors of the time he took liberties with women, sometimes meeting resistance, sometimes finding willing partners."

Clark would entertain students late at night with stories of the strange sexual exploits of the ancients.

Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky were Clark's "literary apostles", says McKenna.

In the late 1990s, stories emerged that Clark was much more than a fellow traveller. *The Courier-Mail* splashed with a story in August 1996 suggesting Clark was a "Soviet agent of influence" and had been awarded the Order of Lenin, Russia's highest honour.

At the time, the paper was edited by Chris Mitchell, now editor-in-chief of *The Australian*. Mitchell took charge of the story and was convinced of its veracity on the testimony of poet Les Murray, who saw Clark wear a medal to a boozy Canberra dinner party. Another of the guests backed Murray and told journalist Peter Kelly that he, too, had seen Clark wearing the Order of Lenin. Mitchell and Murray were convinced a clique of left-wing intellectuals and fellow travellers in the media – aided and abetted by the ABC and the Fairfax press – had for too long steered the national debate to the Left.

Mercifully, I was living in England when the story broke and I missed the slanging matches that followed. The Left in the media roundly criticised *The Courier-Mail*.

I was not especially friendly with Mitchell and don't think I have spoken to him since he left Brisbane, but he was subjected to personal vilification that in my view was unfair.

So I was disappointed McKenna dismisses the episode so briefly in his biography. It is a weakness in the work, and it is a big one.

Whether or not Clark got the Order of Lenin or another medal to celebrate Lenin's 100th birthday is a moot point.

From where I sat in London, I believed *The Courier-Mail* had every right – even a duty – to question whether one of our national heroes was a traitor. There is nothing wrong with journalism that seeks to find answers.

Mitchell was courageous, even though he did lead with the chin.

There were other forces at work against him. Editors south of the border I spoke to didn't really want to acknowledge that *The Courier-Mail* may have scooped them on what might still be one of the great stories of the era.

Others say Clark could not have been a spy because he could not possibly have had any secrets to sell.

In my mind, the Clark affair remains unresolved.

There are too many unanswered questions.