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## **John Falzon**

Dr John Falzon is a poet and advocate who lives in Canberra. He is the author of *The language of the unheard* (2012) and has had long experience in political analysis and activism. He has worked in academia, in community development and in research. He has been the Chief Executive of the St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia since 2006 and a poet since 1973. He has written and spoken widely in the public arena on the structural causes of inequality in Australia. *Communists like us* is his first collection.

Poems from this collection were performed during 2016 at Canberra Slamboree at The Front and poems 5 and 6 were published in Arena Magazine in 2017.

John Falzon  
**Communists  
Like Us**

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*For Jacqueline,  
my intimate comrade,  
my love...*



*The poetry is the poet*

**Mahmoud Darwish**



# The revolution is alive

What follows is a simple love story, a little fiction told in a hundred poems, a hundred little places to live large in, since, as Blaise Cendrars rightly tells us, *humanity lives in its fiction*. They are fragments of a story of love in a time of struggle. But then, when isn't it a time of struggle? And when is a story not about love? And when isn't love a fragmented but tender dialectic of *the personal as political*?

All poets are scavengers and thieves. I was given much, found what I could and shamelessly stole snatches of stories from the lives of people who love today and fight for tomorrow. The result, I suspect, is a bit like a long, uneven wooden table that sits unsteadily in an overgrown garden surrounded by undisciplined dogs, all-too-wise cats and children who caucus in the corner and then leap to their feet marching and chanting with fists clenched, laughter dripping from the corners of their smiles; a noisy, chaotic meal but also a quiet dreaming; a very simple, very human, attempt at the confluence of dust and desire.

It is life that teaches us that an injury to one is an injury to all. Life teaches us as we struggle, especially when we fail, to be more intensely, more passionately, more personally, more collectively, political. Audre Lorde reminds us: *The true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations we need to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us.*

It is life that also teaches us, in the words of the Sandinistas, that *solidarity is the tenderness of the people*. Even if it is sometimes also the anger of the people and the courage of the people. In the end, as in the beginning, solidarity is simply love, because we will never achieve our own liberation while we ignore those who are in chains. Because we know vitally and viscerally that their struggle is our struggle.

This is the world in which Leila and Amilcar are intimate comrades, comrades filled with hope who are hopelessly in love; lovers for whom all reality is bursting forth with revolutionary desire. For, as Bobbi Sykes whispers knowingly to us:

*The revolution is alive  
while it lives within us;  
beating, making our hearts warm,  
our minds strong,  
for we know  
that justice is inevitable – like birth.*

01.

In my dream I was the last Palestinian  
And someone asked how many enemies I had  
And I said there was only one enemy

But many liberations

In my dream  
In my immediate dream  
I was one of the few left who had not been extinguished  
I who as Amilcar  
Had never left Leila's arms  
Not even when I was digging my heels in  
Against our only enemy  
Not even when I was dreaming the immediate dream  
Not even when in the dream I was the last Palestinian

On my way to school  
On my first day of school  
In the gorgeous remains of Gaza.

02.

I don't know where Amilcar came from  
But he wouldn't disappear

On the contrary  
He was always appearing  
Out of nowhere as it were  
Born of the dense night  
To follow me everywhere  
With his beautiful stories of Leila  
Making me smile at his fortune  
Which is mine

I don't know where Amilcar came from  
But my eyes were wide open  
Like beautiful broken structures  
Or archways or the remains of history  
Spying on the sea

Reminding me to learn from all who wear the chains  
As well as those who work in the factory where they're made

Reminding me that revolution  
Knows no envelope.

03.

In my dream I was a bad ghost  
Whom nobody could see  
Full of mischief and yearning  
Touched by impossible hope  
Even though I walked with death.

04.

I didn't really walk with death

How could I when

Because of you

My Leila

I spent nearly all my longing

In the sea

So utterly and wholly

Feeling lucky

With my lot.

But Leila warns me against poetry  
She's right  
We are all suspicious  
Because we are all so afraid  
And the truth is we are all very much in danger

But show me what isn't poetry  
What does not speak to the scar  
What fails to say more than what is uttered  
What is not sacramental  
What does not make you gasp  
What is not your story

Show me what is not your story  
Show me what is not poetry

Leila tells me there is nothing that can be stolen

I confide that I tried to avert my eyes  
And nearly lost my license

Leila you carry several hundred lonely seas of sudden love

I love it when I dive into them very far from  
Where I once believed I did belong  
Leila you who tell me nothing can be stolen  
You who stole me from the crude enclosure  
You who opened me  
You who made me unafraid of the ocean  
And even more prone to poetry.

06.

I was given strict training  
I was trained very strictly in how to understand

I was trained in the darkness to analyse the play of light

Leila of the Categories helped teach me  
Leila of the Categories and all the outcasts taught me  
Training me strictly

I was schooled in the secret courtyards  
I was taught to be silent so that one day I could speak

Leila took me and we went from street to street finding stones  
making bread

We guarded our outskirts like loving old dogs black with love  
Reeking of hard wisdom

We legislated language and rambling  
Tight in our drafting  
Never ever perfect or complete but with bucket-loads  
Of the presence of god and by *god* we mean the people.  
It's the people and only the people we mean when we say *god*

In the gorgeous guts of the day in the music of our asymmetry.

07.

Leila I have only these fragments for you

I thought I had finished my poem but  
How could I finish what could not end

I fell to earth with nothing  
Not even old wings to hock

Which is why I bring neither flowers nor wine  
When you ask me over

Which is why I am wearing clothes that are so retro  
They are not even yet considered retro

Which is why I bring nothing but longing and laughing eyes

Which is why I would like very much to make love to you

Not because I have nothing but because you are everything.