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Illawarra Unity: Editorial & Contents 2010

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Illawarra Unity: Editorial & Contents 2010

Abstract

Since the last issue of Illawarra Unity, the labour movement has been shaken to its core. The leadership coup in the Labor Party and subsequent election highlighted problems so severe within the organization that it is still descending slowly into a hell of its own making. It is tempting to wax eloquent about a once great Party being dragged into the mud by self-serving factional hacks; tempting but insufficient. Singling out a few nasty creatures here or tendencies there does nothing to explain the thorough decay. Even those within Labor who acknowledge something is wrong are themselves part of the problem. They launch blistering critiques of a Party without soul or substance. They speak about parliamentarians silenced like zombies and unable to stand up for the things that matter. Yet when the crunch comes – whether it be electricity privatisation in New South Wales, railway privatisation in Queensland, the war in Afghanistan – guess where they line up? The Labor Government had not really lost its way at all – it was doing the sorts of things that right-wing social democratic Governments do. It had, however, lost its mind and its spirit and its ideals and its vision and anything else it might once have had. This, after all, was and is a Government that saw nothing amiss with keeping the Australian Building and Construction Commission in place with draconian powers to pursue and prosecute those, like Ark Tribe, struggling for the rights of workers. Line that up with the maintenance of the school funding rort manufactured by the previous Liberal Government, continued commitment to the Afghanistan disaster (and our endorsement, along the way, of torture, drone attacks and other crimes of war), the brazen support for whatever illegal and immoral actions Israel undertakes ... the list could go on but this is more than enough to signal a deep malaise.



ILLAWARRA
UNITY

VOLUME 10, NO. 1, 2010

APEC rally poster, Sydney, September 2007
Photograph by Nick Southall



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Editorial

Since the last issue of *Illawarra Unity*, the labour movement has been shaken to its core. The leadership coup in the Labor Party and subsequent election highlighted problems so severe within the organization that it is still descending slowly into a hell of its own making. It is tempting to wax eloquent about a once great Party being dragged into the mud by self-serving factional hacks; tempting but insufficient. Singling out a few nasty creatures here or tendencies there does nothing to explain the thorough decay. Even those within Labor who acknowledge something is wrong are themselves part of the problem. They launch blistering critiques of a Party without soul or substance. They speak about parliamentarians silenced like zombies and unable to stand up for the things that matter. Yet when the crunch comes – whether it be electricity privatisation in New South Wales, railway privatisation in Queensland, the war in Afghanistan – guess where they line up?

The Labor Government had not really lost its way at all – it was doing the sorts of things that right-wing social democratic Governments do. It had, however, lost its mind and its spirit and its ideals and its vision and anything else it might once have had. This, after all, was and is a Government that saw nothing amiss with keeping the Australian Building and Construction Commission in place with draconian powers to pursue and prosecute those, like Ark Tribe, struggling for the rights of workers. Line that up with the maintenance of the school funding rot manufactured by the previous Liberal Government, continued commitment to the Afghanistan disaster (and our endorsement, along the way, of torture, drone attacks and other crimes of war), the brazen support for whatever illegal and immoral actions Israel undertakes ... the list could go on but this is more than enough to signal a deep malaise.

This issue of *Unity* includes articles about the movement against corporate globalisation and the attempts to fence it in and close it off, the campaign for a boycott against Israel, the making of a book about radical Sydney, the nature of a real labour

historiography, the mythology surrounding our alternative national anthem and the need to bring public education back into the centre of our democratic life. Special mention must be made of the book *Radical Sydney* by Terry Irving and Rowan Cahill. Both authors have been frequent contributors to this journal and Rowan is on the editorial collective. Their book serves as a reminder of a past that needs to be remembered constantly. *Unity* is pleased to help launch this book yet again and notes with delight that it is in its second printing.

Finally, this year we celebrated the lives of three stalwart labour activists in the Illawarra: Doreen Borrow, Monica Chalmers and Mairi Petersen. A gathering to honour them, organized by the tireless May Day Committee, was held at the MUA office in Port Kembla on October 3. The vital contribution of these women to the working class, socialist, peace and feminist movements was acknowledged in stirring fashion. Long may they prosper.

Anthony Ashbolt
University of Wollongong
November, 2010

Index to Contributors

Anthony Ashbolt teaches Politics at the University of Wollongong.

George Bisharat teaches Law at the University of California, Hastings College of Law, San Francisco.

Doreen Borrow is a veteran Illawarra trade unionist, peace activist and socialist.

Rowan Cahill is completing a Ph.D. in History at the University of Wollongong.

Mike Donaldson retired this year from the Sociology Department at the University of Wollongong. He is enjoying life.

Terry Irving is a Professorial Fellow with the School of History & Politics at the University of Wollongong.

Glen Mitchell teaches History at the University of Wollongong.

Maurie Mulheron is an acclaimed folk singer-songwriter who lives and works in the Illawarra.

Nick Southall is completing a Ph.D. in Sociology at the University of Wollongong.



Poster of Mahmoud Darwish (1941–2008), Palestinian poet and author, on a section of the security barrier constructed by Israel in 2004 between Abu Dis and Jerusalem, original photograph by Jennifer Killen, Committee for Justice in Palestine, May 2008.