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Obituary: Rupert Lockwood

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Obituary: Rupert Lockwood

Abstract

Rupert Ernest Lockwood died in his hometown Natimuk, Western Victoria, 8 March 1997, at the age of 88. A career capitalist journalist before he devoted his life to the Left in 1939, Rupert became one of Australia's most prominent communists during the period 1939-1969, and a controversial and courageous figure during the Royal Commission into Espionage in Australia (1954- 1955). A man of many talents he earned the right during his lifetime to be termed journalist, orator, pamphleteer, editor, author, historian, intellectual, and socialist. His passing was the occasion for major obituaries in the Australian press.

RUPERT LOCKWOOD

Rupert Ernest Lockwood died in his hometown Natimuk, Western Victoria, 8 March 1997, at the age of 88. A career capitalist journalist before he devoted his life to the Left in 1939, Rupert became one of Australia's most prominent communists during the period 1939-1969, and a controversial and courageous figure during the Royal Commission into Espionage in Australia (1954-1955).

A man of many talents he earned the right during his lifetime to be termed journalist, orator, pamphleteer, editor, author, historian, intellectual, and socialist. His passing was the occasion for major obituaries in the Australian press.

In 1992 following the amputation of his left leg Rupert returned to his hometown, its nursing home, and the care of his Natimuk family.

Natimuk (450 people) had been formative in Rupert's life. At the age of 9 he commenced his journalistic training there, on his father's newspaper the *West Wimmera Mail* (525 subscribers); an intensely religious family upbringing in a house called 'Caxton' helped form his ethics; and in the town's Mechanics Institute he read and thought widely as a youth.

A friend of Rupert's since 1969, and working on his biography, I was privileged to be invited by his family to act as a pall bearer and to say a few words during his Lutheran funeral service.

After the pastor outlined Rupert's life to the eighty townsfolk and family members present, I contributed these words:

“As news of Rupert’s death spreads throughout Australia during the next few days via newspaper articles and comment, many Australians will pause and remember.

These Australians will range in age from somewhere in their 90s down to relative youngsters in their 40s. All will have been touched in some way by Rupert’s life.

Some will recall his various writings, their wit, passion and intellect — writings in pursuit of a better life for all Australians in an Australia to be proud of. Some will recall his oratory; it has been claimed that he was one of Australia’s best and most powerful public speakers in the twenty-five years between 1940 and 1965.

For others his courage and tenacity in the face of tremendous adversity will be the legacy that stays.

And for others there will be his sense of humour, the twinkle in his eyes, and the Falstaffian guttural rumble that became a chuckling laugh — his protection and defence against the ‘slings and arrows of outrageous fortune’.

Rupert Lockwood was a man who achieved much in life, who wrote his way into Australian history, became a legend in his lifetime, and was loved and respected across generations by thousands of Australian working people.

And such was the generosity of his being that in a sense he lives on.

Rupert was a Natimuk youth born and bred. Indeed the town was variously his home for 27 years, the longest constant address in a life of moves and travels.

It seems to me that Rupert took much with him from Natimuk when he left to create the adult he became — he took the grounding his father gave him in journalism; he took the pride he had in that profession; and he left armed with a moral view that the world should be a better place and there was no place in it for corruption, bigotry, and hypocrisy — a view Rupert variously interpreted, refined and developed.

And so it seems appropriate to me that what began in Natimuk in 1908, ends in Natimuk so

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many years later. There is something honest and fittingly Australian about this full circle.”

* * *

Rupert is buried in the Natimuk cemetery. His headstone reads:

Rupert Ernest Lockwood
1908 – 1997
Journalist, orator, intellectual.

Rowan Cahill