Illawarra Unity: Editorial January 2000

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Abstract
This is the first issue of Unity for 2000, although it is the second in seven months, since we produced our special post conference issue (vol. 2, no. 1, 1999) just before Christmas 1999. It includes two important historical documents, a confirmation of the importance of labour history by the pioneering American oral historian and broadcaster, Studs Terkel (reprinted from New Internationalist), and an obituary for George Petersen. In one respect this issue continues the theme of the previous one, in that it includes a piece by Shirley Nixon on the early history of the South Coast Labour Council (SCLC), as it is now called. In fact, this article is the first two chapters of Shirley’s BA Hons. Thesis entitled The Illawarra Trades and Labour Council in Depression, Recovery and War, 1926–45, submitted to the Department of History at the University of Wollongong in 1984. Over the next couple of issues we plan to serialise the remainder of Shirley’s thesis, which is an important historical resource not previously published.
EDITORIAL

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No other history of the regional peak body exists at this point, although it has been one of the most important regional labour councils in Australia over a long period. For this reason, it is one of the priorities of the Illawarra Society to encourage the production of a substantial history of this organisation. I was appointed as official historian of the South Coast Labour Council by its previous leadership, but I have not had the opportunity to begin work on this project. It will require some funding for research, and in any case, I do not anticipate that I can complete it alone; in the best traditions of labour history I think that it should be a collective project. Furthermore, although the SCLC has extensive records deposited in the University of Wollongong Archives, there are large gaps in these records, some of which were sighted by Shirley and other years ago. Anyone who knows the whereabouts of old SCLC records, or who is interested in contributing to the history in some way should contact me at (02) 4221 3734.

The second substantial piece in this issue is a reproduction of unpublished material by the late Ted Roach, life member of our Branch of the Society, former assistant national secretary of
the Waterside Workers’ Federation (WWF), former secretary of
the Port Kembla Branch of the WWF and its leader during the
landmark Dalfram dispute over loading pig iron for Japan in
1937. As with other material of Ted’s previously published by
Unity, this collection indicates his great strength as a political
and industrial strategist.

On Wednesday, 19 April 2000, at the Fraternity Club, Tim
Anderson delivered the George Petersen Memorial lecture at the
Annual General Meeting of the Illawarra Branch of the Australian
Society for the Study Of Labour History. George Petersen, the
former State member of parliament for Illawarra, recently died
aged 78. He was a State MP for 20 years and widely respected as
a ‘working class hero’ for his activities in support of conservation,
abortion law reform, aboriginal rights, and prison reform, and
opposition to conscription and the Vietnam war. He was
instrumental in gaining the 1976 NSW Royal Commission into
Prisons, and the release of the three former Ananda Marga
members falsely gaoled for involvement in the Sydney Hilton Hotel
bombing in 1978. Tim Anderson was one of the former Ananda
Marga members who largely owes his release to the efforts of
George Petersen. He is now a barrister, lecturer in Political
Economy at the University of Sydney, and long-time prison reform
activist and friend of George. He spoke on “Prison Reform Since
the 1976 Royal Commission”.

George was described as a ‘stalwart’ of the Illawarra Labour
History Society by its president, when he was awarded a certificate
of recognition at last October’s National Labour History
Conference in Wollongong. His son, Eric, has contributed a fine
obituary to George for this issue.

Ray Markey