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Illawarra Unity: Editorial January 2000

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Illawarra Unity: Editorial January 2000

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 It includes two important historical documents, a confirmation of the importance of labour history by the pioneering American oral historian and broadcaster, Studs Terkel (reprinted from *New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The second substantial piece in this issue is a reproduction of unpublished material by the late Ted Roach, life member of our Branch of the Society, former assistant national secretary of

Illawarra Unity

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