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Illawarra Unity: Editorial December 2000

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Abstract

This is the second issue of Illawarra Unity for 2000. It includes three articles. The first is a reminiscence by one of our members, Doreen Borrow. The second, is the essay with which another of our members, Jo Kowalczyk, won the Paddy Troy Memorial Prize in Labour History from the Perth Branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History. This was awarded at the 6th National Labour History Conference in Wollongong in October 1999. Jo's comparison of the 1890 and 1998 maritime disputes is very apt. Finally, we continue the serialisation begun in the last issue of Shirley Nixon's BA Hons. thesis which provides an historical account of the early years of the South Coast Labour Council. This is an important historical document in its own right, concerning a very important labour institution.

EDITORIAL

This is the second issue of *Illawarra Unity* for 2000. It includes three articles. The first is a reminiscence by one of our members, Doreen Borrow. The second, is the essay with which another of our members, Jo Kowalczyk, won the Paddy Troy Memorial Prize in Labour History from the Perth Branch of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History. This was awarded at the 6th National Labour History Conference in Wollongong in October 1999. Jo's comparison of the 1890 and 1998 maritime disputes is very apt. Finally, we continue the serialisation begun in the last issue of Shirley Nixon's BA Hons. thesis which provides an historical account of the early years of the South Coast Labour Council. This is an important historical document in its own right, concerning a very important labour institution.

The year has been an active and successful one for the Illawarra Branch of the Society. Three general forums were held. The first of these was reported in the previous *Unity*, vol. 2, no. 2, with Tim Anderson delivering the George Petersen Memorial Lecture on 19 April. The second forum was on the topic **'Is Labour History? (Again or Still). Trade Unions: Their Historical Significance and Their Future in Australia'**. It involved a panel discussion with contributions from:

- Naomi Arrowsmith (former organiser AWU, now CPSU),
- Di Kelly (Snr. Lecturer in Industrial Relations, University of Wollongong),
- Nando Lelli (former secretary Port Kembla Branch FIA, and former president SCLC), Arthur Rorris (secretary South Coast Labour Council).

This forum attracted about twenty participants at Corrimal Community Centre on Wednesday evening, 16 August 2000.

The third forum was held on the afternoon of Saturday, 2 December 2000 at the Ironworkers building in Crown St., to celebrate the **Significance of the 30th Anniversary of the Rank and File Team Gaining Control of the Port Kembla Branch of the Federated Ironworkers**. About thirty participants heard the

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following speakers:

- Graeme Roberts (secretary, Port Kembla Branch, and national president, AWU)
- Mary Dickenson (author of *Democracy in Trade Unions*)
- Jack McPhillips (former national secretary, FIA)
- Nando Lelli (former secretary, Port Kembla Branch, FIA)

with a Panel discussion including:

- Bob Heggen (former member of Rank and File team)
- Andy Gillespie (organiser, Port Kembla Branch, AWU)
- Steve Quinn (former organiser, AMWU)
- John Thirlwell (former industrial officer and HR Manager, BHP Port Kembla steelworks).

The Branch was also active at the **Illawarra Regional History Fair** held in Wollongong on Friday and Saturday the 17th and 18th of November, and organised by the History Council of NSW for the NSW Ministry for the Arts. Ray Markey was involved at the beginning because of his membership of the management committee of the History Council and of the Premier's Arts Advisory Council and its Literature and History Committee. He was joined by Neville Arrowsmith to represent the Branch on the steering committee which organised the Fair. On the Friday members of the Branch took a table to join Bob Carr at the luncheon for the Premier's History Awards for 2000, in the City Art Gallery. On the Friday evening the Branch organised a joint function with the Illawarra Folk Club at the Beaton Park Tennis Club, where Dave Benuick and his band performed. On the Saturday members of the Branch operated a stall amongst a number of others from historical organisations in the Civic Plaza, and in the afternoon Neville Arrowsmith and Bronwyn James led a Labour History Walking Tour of Wollongong, which attracted over thirty people.

The **Labour History Walking Tour of Wollongong** is being developed by Neville Arrowsmith, Bronwyn James and Ray Markey as a more regular fixture. Ray Markey gained \$5,000 from the NSW Committee for the Centenary of Federation for the installation of plaques to mark significant sites of labour history in the city and nearby districts, and Neville Arrowsmith has drafted a guide to the walk which will be printed for wider distribution. The plaques will be launched in the first half of 2001.

The Branch has also begun to develop a wider interest in

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heritage issues. In March, Ray Markey wrote to the Western Australian Heritage Council and WA Minister for Planning and Heritage (Hon. G. Kierath) urging the conservation of the Shell Annexe of the Midland Railway Workshops in Perth, in response to a call for assistance on this issue from the Perth Branch of the Society. Part of his letter stated that:

there can be no doubt of the heritage value of the Shell Annexe itself. It was constructed during the Second World War for the purpose of munitions production, at a time when our survival as a nation was threatened, and when the people of the nation stood together to withstand the Japanese threat. It is an important symbol generally of that heroism of ordinary Australian people, but also specifically of the contribution of women to the war effort, since it was female workers who were responsible for the production of its 25-pound shells. As a heritage site, therefore, it is of the greatest significance for military and women's history.

Representations from various groups have seen the setting aside of plans to demolish to Annexe.

Recently, Julia Murray and other members of the Branch have expressed an interest in the heritage value of the old Regent Theatre in Keira St. Wollongong. It is the only remaining cinema theatre from the immediate post World War 2 era still remaining in the city, with its original fixtures largely untouched, and it has played a major part in the leisure activities of the people of Wollongong for much of that history. The Branch will work up a submission to Council in the New Year, emphasising the social significance of the site. Anyone who is interested in contributing to the considerable amount of work involved, in any way, including with stories about past experiences at the Theatre, should contact Ray Markey at phone number 4267 4434 or email: ray_markey@uow.edu.au.

Finally, **membership subscriptions for 2000 are now due.** If you have not already paid in the last month – and that is most of you – please send a cheque with the enclosed membership form to:

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PLEASE NOTE THAT MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE NOW \$15.

Best wishes for the festive season, and we will see you in 2001.

Ray Markey