Illawarra Unity: Editorial 2001

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Abstract
This is only the first issue of Unity for 2001, due to a combination of factors. I apologise for that, but hope that the greater than usual quantity of material in this issue together with its quality, will partially make up for the absence of earlier issues this year. There will also be at least one other issue distributed in about 6–8 weeks’ time.

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Editorial

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This issue includes three substantial articles. The first, ‘Picket Lines’, by Rowan Cahill, a Bowral teacher, is concerned with an industrial dispute of very recent history, the Joy company lockout in Moss Vale. Many Illawarra workers, unionists, students and others were involved in the dispute in one way or another. Rowan’s article consists of ‘despatches from the front-line’, a diary of observations during the dispute.

The second article by Michael Organ, archivist at the University of Wollongong, on ‘The Battle of Bulli’, is concerned with a mining dispute of a much earlier era, 1887. Relying largely on newspaper reports of the time, which have never been reproduced so extensively before, the article focuses on a number of themes which have been taken up by historians of later periods of mining industrial relations. These themes include the depth of community support for the miners, and the active role assumed by miners’ wives in support of the miners and particularly against the use of strikebreakers.

Finally, the third contribution by Shirley Nixon concludes her serialised history of the Illawarra Trades and Labour Council, 1926–45, the forerunner to today’s South Coast Labour Council. As noted in an earlier issue, this work was originally submitted as a BA Hons. History thesis at the University of Wollongong in 1984. Shirley and I are also reworking this material for a contribution to an upcoming history of peak union councils in Australia, to be edited by Bradon Ellem, John Shields and myself.

Michael Organ’s article is based on part of a talk on ‘Sandon Point – Historical Perspectives’ which he gave to a meeting of the Branch on 22 July at the Piano Bar of the Master Builders’ Club in Wollongong. In this talk he linked the mining history of the
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locality with the contemporary local community struggle to preserve its rich industrial heritage.

On 7 June 2001 Professor Shelton Stromquist from the University of Illinois, Urbana USA, gave a reading from his historical playscript on Martin Irons to a Branch meeting at the Boardroom of the Master Builders’. Martin Irons was a Scottish immigrant machinist who led the Great Southwest Railroad Strike in the USA in 1886. The reading attracted a larger number to the meeting than usual, and participants greatly enjoyed the different format.

The Annual General Meeting of the Branch was held on 11 April in the Piano Bar of the Master Builders’. After the short formal meeting, participants enjoyed a talk from Professor Herman Knudsen of Aalborg University, Denmark, on ‘From Struggle to Cooperation – 102 Years of Danish Labour History’.

On 2nd December 2000 the Branch celebrated the 30th anniversary of the Rank and File Team gaining control of the Port Kembla Branch of the Federated Ironworkers’ Association at the Ironworkers’ building in Crown Street Wollongong. The speakers were:

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).
There was also a panel discussion group consisting of:
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 next issue of *Unity* will present a selection of these addresses.

Apart from these general meetings/forums of the Branch, activities continued in a number of other areas. Jennie George, former ACTU President and endorsed ALP candidate for the seat of Throsby, launched *Labour and Community, Historical Essays*, edited by Ray Markey. This book is a revised selection of papers form the 1999 National Labour History Conference organised by the Illawarra Branch in Wollongong, and includes a number of Wollongong contributions. It is on sale at the Unicentre bookshop at the University of Wollongong.

Despite some delays work continues on the marking of sites for the Labour History Tour for Wollongong, and more details
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will be forthcoming shortly. Planned activities are mentioned in the NOTICEBOARD section of this journal.

Finally, the branch officers and committee elected for 2001–2002 were:

President: Ray Markey
Vice President: Bronwyn James
Secretary: Frances Laneyrie
Assistant Secretary: Jo Kowalczyk
Treasurer: Neville Arrowsmith
Committee: Margaret Bronneberg, Val Dolan, Shirley Nixon, Marie Petersen.

Ray Markey