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Illawarra Unity: Editorial July 2006

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Abstract

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Editorial

As the new Industrial Relations legislation prepares the labour movement for wider and more militant struggles, it is good to be reminded of industrial action that resulted in trade union victory. The 1976 Warilla High School teachers' strike remains the longest teachers' strike in Australian history. Its success still reverberates in educational policy today. At the time of its thirtieth anniversary, *Unity* is pleased to highlight its historic role, particularly through an interview with the local New South Wales Teachers Federation representative at the time, Jim Bradley. His reminiscences are colourful and inspiring. They remind us of times gone by but also of future possibilities.

Repressive government legislation is hardly novel and Rowan Cahill explores briefly some of the precedents for the Howard Government's obsession with homeland security. Rowan places all this in the context of a shift in Australian political culture towards greater jingoism and a worship of militarism. This shift is highlighted by the Bowral call-out and occupation following the 1978 bombing of the Hilton hotel in Sydney. Damien and Rowan Cahill provide a detailed assessment of this little known chapter in Australian political history that provides, in part, a sharp focus for contemporary legislation and practice.

While the Government splutters about the mutual obligation of the unemployed (to Government), the unemployed themselves have shown sometimes tenacious examples of mutual obligation (to each other). The Wollongong Out of Workers' Union (WOW) during the 1980s provides one example of ways that the unemployed can combine to further their chances in life. The interviews conducted by Nick Southall with two representatives of the organization illuminate the potential of the unorganised to organise in effective ways, particularly when they are given the active support of the established trade union movement.

When 353 asylum seekers lost their lives due to the sinking of a boat known now only as SIEV X, a former diplomat began to sense that there was something seriously rotten in the state of Australia. Tony Kevin's research and organising on behalf of refugees is exemplary and culminated in the publication of his controversial book *A Certain Maritime Incident: The Sinking*

of the *Siev X*, which won the prestigious Community Relations Commission Award at the 2005 NSW Premier's Literary Awards. Kevin highlighted ministerial and bureaucratic incompetence but there is also a stench of corruption and immorality surrounding the incident. When Hannah Arendt wrote about the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Israel many years ago, she coined the phrase "the banality of evil" to try to capture a sense of the way ordinary people could become involved in extraordinarily evil deeds. Tony Kevin sees *SEIV X* as a contemporary example of "the banality of evil" and *Unity* is proud to conclude this issue with an interview in which he covers much critical ground regarding Australian politics today.

Anthony Ashbolt

Postscript: As this edition was about to go to press, we learnt with great sadness that Irene Arrowsmith, a stalwart of the Illawarra labour and women's movements, had passed away. The next issue of *Unity* will feature tributes to her life and work.