

SA LABOUR HISTORY NEWS

Australian Society for the Study of Labour History
(Adelaide Branch)

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Munitions workers, 1944, State Library SA, B64211

Included in this Issue

Book review of One and All, The Enigma Plumbed, Sally McManus, Inaugural Labour History Scholarship, Donald Trump, May Day dinner and march, 1945 energy market, Race management, Make education free again.

Leadership: past, new and emerging

The Branch is delighted to announce the winner of the Inaugural South Australian Labour History Scholarship and to congratulate PhD candidate Rachel Harris in this edition of the newsletter. The outline of her research topic on page 3 indicates a welcome emerging South Australian labour historian.

Leaders of the labour movement, past and present, are examined in several articles. Allison Murchie documents the impressive background and experience of new ACTU Secretary Sally McManus, the first woman to occupy this position. A sense of Sally's politics and commitment to working people can be found in the report of her address at this year's May Day dinner. Also speaking at the dinner was rank-and-file leader Paul Jeffares, Electrical Trades Union Shop Steward involved in the drawn-out but ultimately successful CUB55 dispute with Carlton and United Breweries. Paul's determination and principle are evident in Allison's report on his address.

Past leadership is critically analysed in David Faber's piece on Dr Herbert Vere Evatt and the recent biography of Evatt written by John Murphy. Members and friends impressed by the entertaining presentation by Professor Philip Payton to the April Branch meeting can find out more about the origins and nature of South Australian Labor leadership in the review of his book *One and All: Labor and the Radical Tradition in South Australia*.

The antithesis of progressive leadership is examined in David's article on the election of Donald Trump. He considers Trump's election in the context of the effects of neo-liberal policies and his Democrat Party opponents.

Major current issues are tackled in articles by Steve Acton, Fletcher O'Leary and student activist Phoebe Kelloway. Steve reminds us of the history of electricity supply in South Australia and the nationalisation of the Adelaide Electric Supply Company by Premier Thomas Playford in 1945. Fletcher casts a critical eye over assertions of working class racism in expressed concerns about 457 visas. He analyses the strategic historical use by employers of racial stereotypes and 'race'-based wages and conditions to divide workers and pit people against each other. Phoebe gives an informed analysis of changes to tertiary education policy and funding and their effects on equity in education and beyond.

You may also find photos of friends and comrades in images from the May Day march included with this issue. There is much to celebrate and rally around.

Look out for the membership renewal notice coming out soon. A Membership Form can also be found on p.23 We would love to have you with us as new and long-standing members through the coming year.♦

Jude Elton
President

Inaugural SA Labour History Society Scholarship

One of the aims of the SA Labour History Society is to encourage and support original research on South Australian labour history, especially amongst young researchers. To this end, honours and post-graduate students across SA universities were invited early this year to apply for an inaugural Labour History Scholarship.

The scholarship provides the successful applicant with \$500 to assist with research and living expenses and a year's membership of the Society. The recipient is required to write a short article for the newsletter and may be invited to give a presentation on the topic to a general meeting. The Society will also be acknowledged in the thesis and provided with a copy.

The executive set the following criteria for applications:

To be eligible a student must:

1. Be enrolled in an honours or postgraduate degree at a SA-based university, in which one requirement is the production of a research thesis of at least 10,000 words (or equivalent).
2. Intend to write a thesis that will contribute to the fields of labour and social history of South Australia.
3. Supply a written application with references from their intended academic supervisor, and one other academic with personal knowledge of the student. These references must, inter alia, attest to the nature of the proposed research program and the ability of the student to complete the proposed thesis to a high standard and on time.

The criteria for the grant are:

1. The project is relevant to the fields of South Australian labour and social history.
 2. The project engages with critical thinking and discussion on aspects of labour and social history in South Australia.
 3. The student is capable of undertaking the project (as reflected in academic references and other evidence supplied).
 4. The degree to which the grant may assist the student to conduct their research.
- Preference is given to proposals with strong potential for conversion to publication / exhibition.*



We congratulate **Rachel Harris, PhD student, Department of History, University of Adelaide**, as the successful applicant. Rachel's thesis topic is: ***In a state of war: Women's experiences of the South Australian Home Front 1939-1945***

The topic investigates the extent to which gender shaped the social and economic experiences of civilian women in South Australia during and immediately after the Second World War. The affects of factors such as age, occupation, location and race are incorporated into this analysis. Women's employment in wartime industries and those usually filled by men e.g. munitions and rural occupations, are included in the study, as is voluntary work. Wartime challenges to traditional gender relations will be analysed in relation to wages, working conditions, trade unionism, industrial action and employer relations. Social issues confronting women in paid and unpaid labour such as child care and domestic responsibilities will be considered, together with their impact on matters such as absenteeism. Rachel will trace women's failure to maintain employment gains made during the war into the post war period with reference to issues such as sexuality and morality and the persistence of a traditional gender system of relations.

The Society looks forward to working with Rachel and hearing about her exciting research.

Sally McManus

Unionist first, second and third

Sally McManus was appointed as the first woman Secretary of the ACTU on 14th March 2017 and she hit the ground running, starting as she intends to continue. She has vowed to take on corporate greed and fight for workers' rights. With Ged Kearney as President it is the first time the ACTU has had an all-female leadership team.



Her election has been lauded by trade unions and activists and she has already rattled Malcolm Turnbull who said he could not work with her. Bill Shorten has been disappointingly quiet. The day after she was elected Sally issued a media release and left no-one in doubt as to what her agenda is: *"Australia has been built by working people who have had the courage to stand up to unfair and unjust rules and demand something better ... There is rampant lawlessness in the workplace of*

Australia and this is occurring in the form of chronic underpayments of workers, exploitation of visa workers and workplace practices that put the safety and lives of people at risk." See note 1.

Sally grew up in northwest Sydney and went to Macquarie University where she studied philosophy. She was a left-wing leader of the student union. Her first involvement with unions was as a trainee in the Organising Works program (at the same time as Bill Shorten). Later she became the youth representative on the ACTU Executive. In 1998 Sally was part of a youth organising group who helped in the Port Botany picket in the waterfront dispute. She later founded the Destroy the Joint movement.

Most of Sally's working life was spent in the Australian Services Union (ASU) where she worked for 22 years: eight years as an organiser and from 2005 to 2015 as Secretary of the NSW Branch. Her biggest success was the ASU equal pay campaign, which ran over five years with the aim to put equal pay provisions in the Fair Work Act. The test case resulted in 150,000 low paid workers, mainly women, in the social and community services area winning pay increases between 20-50%. Sally then moved to the ACTU as their campaign director where her team recently coordinated the campaign for the Carlton United Breweries boycott. Last year she was in charge of the Medicare campaign during the federal election.

Sally is from the left and a very strong campaigner, with her work being driven by the union membership. She argues that the decline in union membership is largely due to the casualization of the workforce and the destruction of secure, full-time jobs and work being outsourced. She will fight for this to be stopped before we are faced with the level of insecurity experienced by American workers. Her aims are to grow union membership and improve the rights of workers through effective and well organised campaigns. Sally wants to bring the community with her in grassroots campaigning. As head of campaigning at the ACTU she has learnt how to mobilise people and involve armies of volunteers, as was seen by her work in the last federal election.

Within days of being appointed, Sally hit the headlines after an interview on the 7.30 Report where she said she did not have a problem in breaking an unjust law. She explained that union officials were being stopped from entering sites where workers had been killed – these unionists were fined more than the employers whose poor safety standards led to the deaths of workers. Twenty eight workers died on building sites last year. Australia has a proud tradition of breaking unjust and bad laws – consider Clarrie O'Shea, the Eureka Stockade, Sydney Green Bans or the Vietnam Moratoriums.

In her address to the Press Club on 29th March Sally elaborated on her views, stating that most industrial action is illegal and this is where many gains for workers have been achieved. The first living wage in the world was won by Australian workers. Working people have always stood up to unjust laws. (Note 2)

One way to describe Sally is to look to the people who know her best and have campaigned and worked with her:

“Relentless and ruthless - the ACTU will pack a punch under her leadership” Tim Ayres, Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union.

“She builds ‘strong community connections’ through campaigns, ‘that don’t just rely on political wheeling and dealing, they come from the grassroots up.” Michael Flinn, Australian Services Union.

[McManus] is a really inclusive person ... She is one of the few I’ve ever met that treats union members the same as delegates, the same as organisers, the same as a national secretary, she doesn’t think she’s too good for others or have her head in the clouds.” “Sally is a feminist, an activist, an organiser, a campaigner and a rock star.” Ros McLennan, Secretary, Queensland Council of Unions.

Ms McManus is “not just a brilliant campaigner, she is a highly strategic leader driven by the interests of working people.” Nadine Flood, National Secretary, Community and Public Sector Union. (Note 3)

Sally McManus is the new face of unionism in the Australian union movement. ♦

Allison Murchie

Notes: 1. Media Release from ACTU 16.3.2017

2. National Press Club transcript ABC 29.3.2017

3. The Guardian 15.3.2017

Photos: 1. Sydney Morning Herald 14.2.17 (Public Domain). 2. ACTU 3. Illawarra Mercury – taken in Sussex Street Sydney Banner Room, 17.3.2017 (Public Domain)



STAND UP FIGHT BACK

One and All: Labor and the Radical Tradition in South Australia

Philip Payton

It's a great time to read this accessible exploration of South Australia's radical, social democratic tradition and its manifestation in trade unions and especially the Labor Party. In *One and All*, Philip Payton encourages the reader to consider what our 'radical tradition' is about, and to ponder what it is within the labour movement that facilitates progressive social change and what works against it. Payton traces the changing influence of factors such as religion, grassroots demands, union militancy and visionary leadership on labour movement radicalism, from the early nineteenth century to the present. Woven into his story are entertaining details of strikes, political intrigues and labour characters. You may recognise some of these characters; but some will likely be unfamiliar. Payton adds significant detail and analysis to previous histories of the labour movement in South Australia, especially in relation to the influence of Cornish immigrants.

Cornish miners, Methodism & Chartism

Payton commences his study in the Cornish dominated mining communities in South Australia's mid-north and Yorke Peninsula. Cornish miners and their families arrived in large numbers from the 1840s, driven by the potato blight and decline of mining in Britain and opening of mines in the colony. They brought with them a distinct Cornish patriotism and militancy, 'One and All' being their motto. As Methodists they had experience of discrimination in Britain and argued for the separation of Church and State. Many supported Chartist demands: universal male suffrage; secret ballots, abolition of property qualifications for Members of Parliament (MPs); payment of MPs; equal electoral districts; and annual elections. Their discourse was of social justice and societal improvement.



Miners at Moonta, 1894, State Library of SA, B12593

Cornish miners soon demonstrated a capacity for industrial action. Payton describes how in June and September 1848 they stopped work and blockaded the Burra mine, rallying with teamsters under a Red Flag. In 1864 miners struck at the Moonta and Wallaroo mines in the first of many strikes. Union leaders tended to be Methodist lay preachers, bringing organisation and discipline to industrial action. Unionism and Chartist ideals were preached from the pulpit. Social justice was integral to their religious perspectives. Payton notes that women also preached and actively supported strikes. In 1874 over 100 women at Moonta and Wallaroo took up mallee brooms and swept scabs from the mines.

Formation of the United Labor Party & decline of radicalism

Payton traces the influence of the evolutionary Christian Socialism of Cornish mining communities and other Nonconformists on the United Labor Party (ULP), which was formalised after the 1890 Maritime Strike. Early Labor MPs included a representative from the seat of Wallaroo and Methodism featured amongst ULP leaders, including the first Labor Premier Tom Price. The ULP supported women's suffrage; abolition of the unrepresentative

Legislative Council; regulation of wages and working conditions; free secondary school education; and infrastructure projects. In 1910 South Australia elected the first Labor Government in Australia and the world. Its leader was Wallaroo miner, Methodist lay preacher and Christian Socialist John Verran.

Paton goes on to analyse the limits of this form of leadership and politics and the practical difficulties that Labor confronted in government and in opposition. He documents the damaging Party divisions that occurred over the conscription referenda during World War One (WWI). It was at this point that Labor and Methodism diverged, as the Methodist Church came out in favour of conscription, while the labour movement was strongly opposed.

Between the wars

Immediately after WWI Payton notes that Labor seemingly shifted to the left. The South Australian ULP became a branch of the Australian Labor Party, involving the adoption of the socialist objective (collective ownership and democratic control of the means of production, distribution and exchange) and commitment to religious, political and social freedom. A practical, progressive program was taken up by the Branch, including equal pay for women and ongoing support for returned servicemen. In 1924 Labor Premier and previous Drivers Union Secretary, John Gunn led major government interventions in housing, public transport and education. His bold program was carried out in spite of Liberal opposition and the hostile, rural dominated Legislative Council.

Following Gunn's resignation in 1926 Labor lost much of its vision and reforming zeal. Payton attributes this to weak leadership as well as the context of the Great Depression and mass unemployment. Bitter divisions over the Premiers' Plan reflected widely disparate political and economic views within the South Australian Labor Party. Payton quotes Don Hopgood as concluding that while subsequent tightening of party organisation worked to prevent future division, it did not enhance innovation and new ideas.

The Playford years

Labor was further hamstrung when in 1936 electoral changes entrenched conservative parties in power. The Liberal and Country League consequently remained in government for 33 years. From 1938 this was under the leadership of Thomas Playford. Payton describes how during much of this period Labor virtually gave up active opposition considering Playford's support for industrial development and public infrastructure. Social and political reforms stagnated.

Revitalisation & the Dunstan Decade

Impetus for the revitalisation of radical Labor politics came with the election in 1953 of the energetic, articulate and visionary Don Dunstan and his elevation to Cabinet in 1965 under Premier Frank Walsh. Payton notes major initiatives carried out by Dunstan as Attorney General and Minister for Social Welfare and Aboriginal Affairs. These included Australia's first anti-discrimination and land rights legislation.

From 1970, Labor under Premier Dunstan embarked on almost a decade of radical change, and succeeded, with defectors from the Liberal Country League, to reform the Legislative Council. Payton documents the progressive program implemented under Dunstan's leadership. Staid and conservative South Australia was shaken up by major initiatives in consumer protection; censorship liberalisation; gay law reform; the arts; protection of civil liberties; rights for Aboriginal Peoples and women; and industrial democracy. Payton identifies Dunstan's capacity to innovate and preparedness to take risks. He explores Dunstan's place in the radical Chartist tradition and notes that in the 1976 Chifley Memorial Lecture he rejected revolutionary change in favour of the 'practical, technocratic' approach of social democracy.

Dunstan resigned due to ill health in 1979, but in the 1990s was prompted to write a series of articles in the *Adelaide Review* criticising 'economic rationalism' and its hold over state and federal politics. He decried neo-liberal policies of privatisation and deregulation, and reasserted the need for public ownership and commitment to social justice. Payton argues that Dunstan was concerned that 'social democracy was ceding its right to criticise capitalism'. Payton's brief analysis of Labor following the Dunstan years notes both the external constraints on government and a less progressive approach, especially in relation to the economy and public service.

Throughout this history of Labor and the radical tradition in South Australia Payton reveals internal and external factors that enabled or constrained government intervention. Periods of vision, energy and progressive change are closely associated with radical leaders – people willing to challenge the status quo. There is much to ponder and perhaps to learn from this welcome book.♦

Jude Elton

Philip Payton, *One and All: Labor and the Radical Tradition in South Australia*, Wakefield Press, 2016.



Evatt: The enigma plumbed?

John Murphy, *Evatt-A Life*. UNSW Press, Sydney, 2016

This work is the most recent of several attempts to understand Dr Herbert Vere



Evatt, Australia's greatest Foreign Minister, and arguably the nation's foremost 20th century public intellectual, who is widely considered to have contributed to his own and the labour movement's undoing at the hands of the conservative party leader Robert Gordon Menzies during the Cold War. He was a man who thought big and strove for a post-war international order of justice and full employment. Evatt's fate only underlines the poignancy of his legacy and the complexity of the labour tradition. He contributed to the splicing of progressive liberalism onto the stock of democratic Australian socialism, maintaining a friendly tolerance towards the Marxism of his friends and peers Vere Gordon Childe and Guido Baracchi, whilst turning his back on the Stalinist

face of contemporary communism. Evatt was of larger sympathies than his nemesis, and his personal tragedy of ultimate defeat and dotage was a national one in that Australia was condemned to a narrow and provincial political conservatism from which it still struggles to its cost to extricate itself.

On one level Murphy's work is a traditional psycho-biography, seeking to divine the twin secrets of Evatt's grandeur and his fatal eccentricity. This is a necessarily speculative device of literary and theatrical origin, intended to capture the drama of life and politics. Whilst delving into his subject's childhood, Murphy largely avoids Freudian excess, generally limiting himself to opining that, as a natural born overachiever, Evatt suffered from an anxiety neurosis contingent on his lower middle class family's austere work ethic, which drove his prodigious intellect. However Murphy does entertain a certain amount of interested speculation by quasi-fascist religious conservatives and spooks on the crucial question of Evatt's sanity in middle age and before, which should have been more severely scrutinised. While Murphy adequately demonstrates that Evatt suffered dementia in later years, his canvassing of the concerns of Evatt's friends before that is deficient. In particular he fails to identify Evatt as a high functioning bipolar affective disordered man with manic tendencies. This would explain his acumen, energy and psychotic lapses in judgement, not to mention his personal insensitivity to colleagues.

A straight 'A' student who paid his way through secondary school and university by dint of winning scholarships, Evatt found time to captain the Fort Street High cricket and rugby teams. He nurtured early leadership aspirations in both law and politics. Evatt was much more a self-made man than your typical capitalist claimant to the title. He was a successful student leader and journalist. He was appointed to the High Court and he carved out a reputation as a civil libertarian sympathetic to the labour movement. He crossed swords with Lyons' Attorney General Menzies in favour of the visiting Czech antifascist Egon Kisch. A young man in a hurry, Evatt embodied the ambition of his aspiring class for the career open to talent. His petty bourgeois class repaid him with recognition and Labor votes when he stepped down

from the High Court Bench to serve the war effort in parliament in the fight against Tory misrule and fascism, the need for which he had been one of the first to appreciate. Evatt was already an identity in the community. He had not spent his time on the Bench resting on his judicial laurels. He wrote a series of influential legal and historical studies in his spare time and jousted with Menzies over the merits of modern art, a proxy political culture war, which both prosecuted with gusto. His resignation was condemned by the Right as politicising the High Court. And clearly an aficionado of jazz was a dangerous radical.

Murphy's fundamental thesis is that Evatt had the rationalism of the law too much in his system since youth to be any good as a politician. This is an overstatement. Evatt proved himself capable in the Fantin affair, where the Curtin government was embarrassed by the death in custody of an Italian antifascist at the hands of Fascists. Labor had inherited mass internment from Menzies, who had promised not to repeat the mistakes made with the German community in WWI. Evatt deftly released Fantin's associates before going on to clear the camps on a case by case basis. The notion of Evatt as an impolitic intellectual is too stereotypical.

Another flaw in the book is the treatment of Menzies qua nemesis. We are asked to believe on Murphy's say so that Menzies was an unlikely police state tyrant. Murphy appears to be unaware that the post-war Menzies had contingency plans drawn up for the mass internment of suspected communists. Here we are face to face with Evatt's greatest service to democracy, labour and the nation; the unexpected defeat of the liberty killing Communist Party Dissolution Act. This would have delivered progressive Australians into the hands of spies and informers soothed on by Menzies, a career anti-communist bigot. Let it be admitted that Evatt's tactical judgement over the Petrov Commission, which uncovered no nest of traitors, and the Split also, was flawed in a manner which raises queries over his sanity. Nevertheless, it is all too easy to personalise matters, as if Evatt's fallibility was the sole pertinent factor. Evatt was under enormous pressure from unscrupulous foes, and as Lenny Bruce pertinently said 'if you're not paranoid, you're not paying attention'. All in all, Evatt was a better man than his detractors, and we have not heard the last of him. ♦

David Faber

Photo: State Library of NSW, 1945. Reference 239951. From article, 'Zionism and Australia'.

Race Management

The debate over temporary foreign workers in Australia - especially the much-discussed 457 visas - has been driven, so it is said, by the racial anxieties of the 'white working class'. Turnbull and Shorten are both appealing to these individuals when they claim that they want to put 'Australia First'. The *Australian Financial Review*, the paper of record for capital, fulminated that this was a wasted opportunity and the beginning of a brain drain that will cost Australia its competitive edge against other nations such as Canada and New Zealand. It has given prominence to the voice of a business 'backlash', which presents these industries as staunch defenders of internationalism against a rising tide of nationalist populism.

Quite rapidly, the 'white working class' has become portrayed as the central impediment to progress and internationalism. There has been a surge in news reports, think pieces, and analysis of the 'white working class' in the past twelve months. They are to blame, we are told, for a regressive turn towards economic nationalism, the supercharging of anti-immigrant rhetoric and the crisis of legitimacy that has upset the status quo in the Anglophone world – from Brexit in the UK, to Trump in America (according to Google Trends, searches for the term 'White Working Class' reached an all-time high during the week that Trump was elected). Here in Australia, the return of Pauline Hanson's far-right outfit has been framed almost entirely in their appeal to a deeply embedded racism in the working class.

But perhaps we should understand the historical phenomenon of racism in the working class in different terms.

Traditionally, Marx and those who followed have given credit - too much credit, perhaps - to capital for its universalising impulses: the 'particularities' inherent in the 'bodiliness of the worker' are something that capital must standardise to maximise the extraction of value, while capitalism receives praise – in contrast to other regimes of production – for the introduction of a 'cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country'. From the barrack-like discipline of the factory the working class is formed, united and ready for the struggle.

How then does this square with the historical progress of the working class, especially the continued division of workers along ethnic, racial, gender, and geographic lines?

For the Deutscher Prize-winning economist Michael Lebowitz, there is an 'x-factor' that affects the relationship between capital and labour - and the relative strength of combatants in the class struggle. Following Marx's observation that 'the workers' power of resistance declines with their dispersal', Lebowitz asserts that capitalists are willing to forego some productivity to achieve the separation of workers from each other and thus weaken the overall strength of the working class.

The way that this has been given historical expression, according to US historians David Roediger and Louise Esch, is in the 'race management' of labour. By building racial stereotypes and other divisions into the very structures of work, workers can be pitted against each other. One example, drawn from the Westralian goldfields, is particularly illustrative of this. Herbert Hoover, later President of the United States but at the time an efficiency expert, was the 'Yankee engineer' who elaborated an entire theory for managing workforces by playing them off against one another. The 'saucy independence' and 'loafing proclivities' of the local white miners, he believed, required a counter-weight. Italians should be imported, if only to be kept in reserve in case of strikes. Apparently, Italians were more 'servile', 'peaceable', and productive than their 'white' counterparts. Later, Chinese labourers became the focus of Hoover's recognised expertise: their 'capacity for thieving' was counterbalanced by their 'mulishness', while he declared that Chinese workers were on the

whole cheaper mineworkers because - in an absurd lack of self-reflection - money could be saved on timber supports necessary for safety in the mines. In a Catch-22, Hoover declared that the Chinese 'disregard for human life' meant that compensation for death and injury was significantly lower.

When you look beyond the business lobby groups to what business owners who employ workers on 457 visas say, it is not hard to find reasons for their use expressed in ways that fall very much into the strategies employed to divide the working class for generations. According to one business owner, Australian workers are useless. 'Not turning up for interviews, not showing up for trial run, want the money with very little effort, late for their shifts, do not turn up for work because of a late night and the list goes on and on,' they said, 'Overseas workers are reliable honest and trustworthy'.

'I employ a 457 visa holder and he is a valuable part of our team,' another said, 'He isn't like the 'Aussie' employee who quit three weeks ago via text message saying "thanks but he might give the job a miss" the job I had spent the last six months training him in.' A third employer the Murdoch press quoted obliviously declared 'I'm all for giving Aussies jobs, don't worry about that, but there are just none.' (see references below)

Just for the record, there are roughly 19 jobseekers for every job vacancy in Australia.

Too often racism is treated as an individual moral failing, rather than a winning strategy employed by the bosses and impressed upon the working class for the benefit of capitalism. This is not to say it doesn't need to be overcome - just be aware of where it comes from.♦

Fletcher O'Leary

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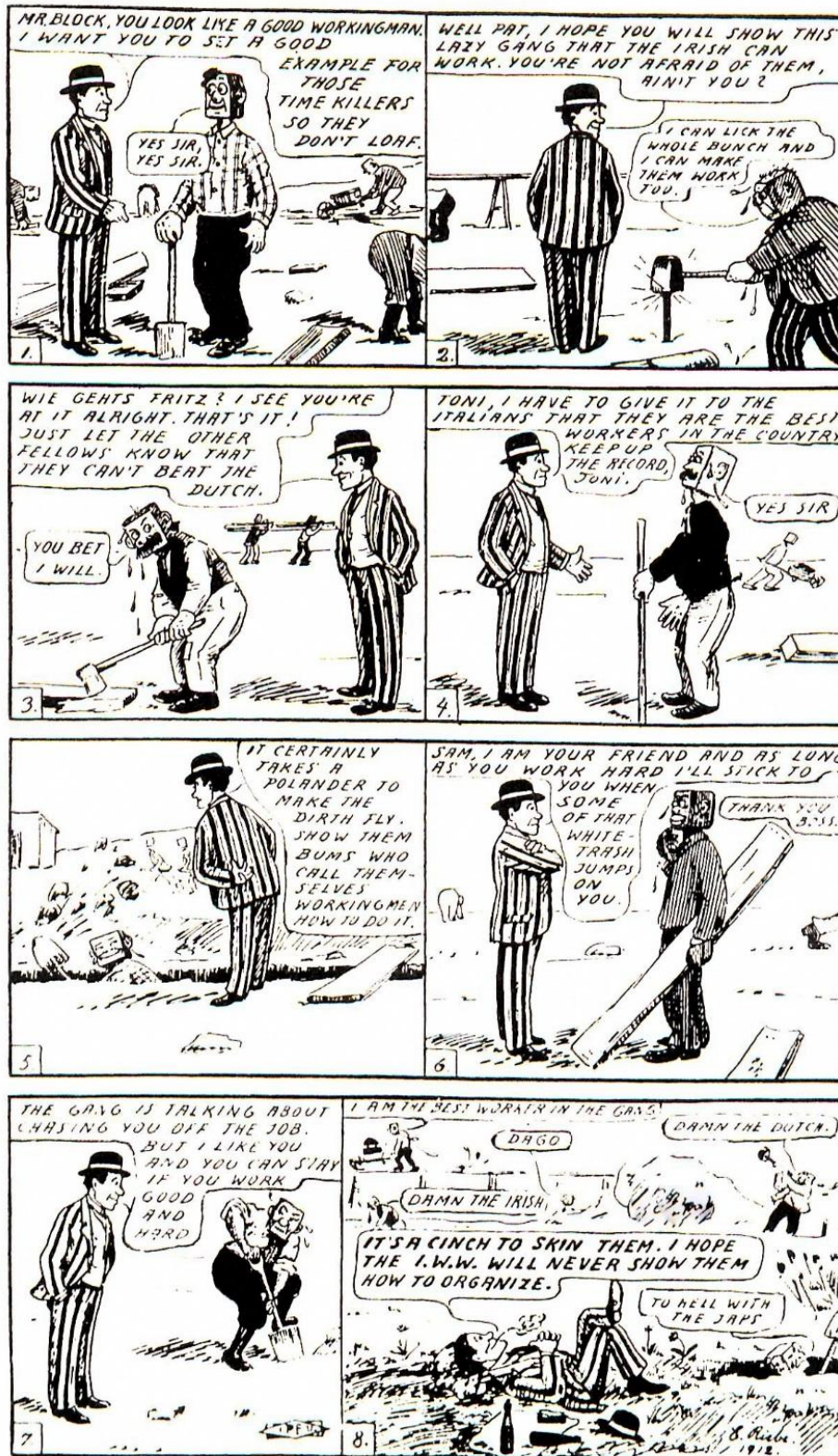
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Ernest Riebe, MR. BLOCK: HE MEETS OTHERS. Originally published in Ernest Riebe, *Twenty-Four Cartoons of Mr. Block* (Minneapolis, MN: Block Supply Company, 1913), n.p.

How the S.A. Government intervened in the energy market in 1945

The recent announcement by the Weatherill Government into the State's energy system has an historic parallel into an earlier privatisation by a State government. Although the circumstances were different and a national grid was decades away, the actions of a conservative government led to the establishment of the Electricity Trust of South Australia (ETSA) in 1946. A cheap reliable power supply was essential to Premier Playford's plans to ensure SA moved from an agricultural economy to one where manufacturing played a key role economically. This article explores some of the aspects as to how a Tory government nationalised the energy system of a State in the 1940s.

Prior to the formation of ETSA, the responsibility for the provision of power lay in the hands of the Adelaide Electric Supply Company (AESCO). The Company, headquartered in London and established in 1897, was slow to extend electrical energy beyond Adelaide, a fact that did not go unnoticed by Playford. AESCO further angered the Premier by buying boilers that only used black coal, thus preventing the use of Leigh Creek brown coal.

In March 1945 a Royal Commission was appointed by Parliament in an attempt to solve the conflict between AESCO and the Government over the provision of power to the State. Leigh Creek as the major provider of energy was integral to the government's response. Its importance was legislated for by the Parliament given that it had been effectively ignored by AESCO.

In August 1945 the Commission recommended that AESCO be nationalised. At that time and into the late 1940s a series of major strikes in the eastern states crippled power production and adversely affected the State's economy. Industrial strife in New South Wales enhanced Playford's argument for energy independence in South Australia.

Playford acted. He called upon the Chifley Government for money to enable the nationalisation of AESCO to proceed. Chifley responded positively. On the 11th October 1945 Playford presented a Bill to Parliament to nationalise AESCO and to create the Electricity Trust of South Australia (ETSA).

Playford then had a battle within his own party to ensure the Bill became law as his actions ran directly contrary to the economic conservatives in the LCL (Liberal and Country League). Although he mustered support in the lower house within the ALP (the only dissenters being dissatisfied LCL members) the Upper House proved to be more problematic. But eventually the Bill passed and the Trust came into existence soon thereafter.

The Trust's success in part rested upon the advantage of vertical integration; that it was able to mine, produce and distribute power by controlling in one organization all the processes necessary to provide a reliable source of cheap energy. By 1965 the proportion of South Australians connected to electricity had reached 96%.

Playford's actions cannot be divorced from his broader plans. As South Australia was distant from the large markets on the eastern seaboard, the development of manufacturing was built upon cheap power, cheap land and importantly, cheap housing through the Housing Trust. Wages in South Australia were kept relatively low (at least until the mid 80s) and production costs were low. The State also had the benefit of a high tariff wall. All of these factors augured well for South Australia under the Playford regime. The creation of ETSA was of lasting importance to South Australia, and underpinned an important aspect of our economic history.♦

Steve Acton

Students demand: Make Education Free Again

Amidst heavy rain, a determined crowd of about 200 students rallied outside South Australia's Parliament House on Wednesday 17 May. We were there not only to protest against the latest attacks on tertiary education, but to raise the demand: 'Make Education Free Again!' NTEU (National Tertiary Education Union) representatives joined us, one sporting an umbrella in the union's purple. Hundreds more rallied on the same day to oppose Turnbull's \$2.8 billion education cuts, in other capital cities, plus Wollongong and Newcastle.

Access to education is a class issue, and Simon Birmingham and Malcolm Turnbull's projected cuts to education are an attack on the working class. They want to impose a fee increase of 7.5% for students in Commonwealth Supported Places (CSPs) – that's up to \$3,600 more for a degree. Fees will be higher than ever before if their cuts are implemented. This is in a context where a university qualification is a prerequisite for an increasing number of jobs. Another element of the Liberal Government's plan is a 2.5% 'efficiency dividend', which is sure to result in staff cuts, fewer subjects, and larger classes – in other words, they want us to pay more for a lower-quality education. And they want us to pay the debt back quicker – once your yearly income is \$42,000 (instead of \$55,000) or more. This is basically a regressive tax.

The rule of the owning class has been intertwined with racism in this country ever since invasion, and that racism is evident in these proposed education cuts. The cuts involve an attack on migrant students in particular: permanent residents will no longer be eligible for CSPs. Instead, from 1 January 2018 they will be treated as international students and made to pay full fees – that is, three to four times more on average than the current fees. At the same time, the Liberal Government is making it more difficult for permanent residents to become Australian citizens, with longer waiting times and ridiculous citizenship tests. Racism is already hard-wired into Australia's tertiary education system, with international students treated as cash-cows, but this measure would take that a step further.

Turnbull went to university for free, and so did most of the Liberal MPs who want to push through these cuts. It's worth noting their part in denying today's students a right they enjoyed themselves. But sometimes there is an attempt to justify cuts through use of a narrative of the older generation robbing the young, which just lets the ruling class off the hook. It is not as though most of the people who benefitted from free education are in cahoots with the Liberals to try to increase fees. Opinion polls in early May showed strong majorities against both the proposed fee increases and funding cuts. In fact, despite nearly 30 years of university fees, almost half the population – 45% – agrees with student activists that tertiary education should be free, while only 29% disagree. Perhaps this is not surprising in view of the labour movement's long history of demanding free education. For example, as early as 1902, the New South Wales Trades and Labor Council lobbied that state's government for a free education bill (Markey 1994: 147).

University fees are often justified with reference to the benefits of tertiary education for individual students. It remains true that graduates in general earn more than their

counterparts who don't have a degree. However, the 2011 Higher Education Base Funding Review (the Lomax-Smith Review) found the public benefits of higher education to be much greater than the private benefits to students. The public returns it pointed to were research innovation and skills for employers, higher tax contributions and lower costs for provision of health care. In other words, the bosses and the state enjoy substantial benefits from mass participation in higher education. They should make it free again, as it was in this country for a few years from 1974, after the Whitlam government abolished fees, until 1987, when the Hawke government introduced an administrative fee for all students and tuition fees for international students before unleashing HECS in 1989.

Where would the money come from? It's estimated that free education for all students would cost about \$8 billion per year. That's a substantial sum, but consider a couple of other figures. The government plans to spend \$65.4 billion on corporate tax cuts over the next 10 years. So if that was scrapped, more than three-quarters of the cost of providing education free to students would be covered for the next decade. Australia's military expenditure was nearly \$US27 billion last year, making it the 11th-biggest military spender in the world in 2016. Perhaps the armed forces could spare some of that. These examples indicate that making higher education free again is not an impossibility – it's a question of priorities. Free tertiary education for all, including international students, is the rule in Germany today. In Chile, education reforms introduced in response to the mass student protest movement of 2011 mean that students from the poorest 50% of the population are now eligible for free university education. About 165,000 students attended university free of charge last year, with the prospect of free education being extended to a greater percentage of students in the near future. Meanwhile, Turnbull and Birmingham prefer to push a hard-line neoliberal user-pays agenda, taking us further down the path of a US-style higher education system.

But students intend to fight these attacks. With socialists leading the campaign, students have not only rallied for protest marches, but have started hassling Birmingham and other Liberal MPs wherever they show their faces. Here in Adelaide, students protested against Julie Bishop being conferred with an honorary doctorate. Government ministers have faced demonstrations at their offices. Birmingham was unable to avoid students heckling him on ABC TV program "Q&A", despite the producers' extreme vetting. Student protests beat back the Liberals' plans for full fee deregulation in 2014, which shows that when we fight, we can win. We'll keep shouting out – "No cuts, no fees, no corporate universities!" – not just against this round of attacks, but until higher education is free again.

To stay up to date with the campaign, like the [Make Education Free Again](#) Facebook page.♦

Phoebe Kelloway

Book reference:

Raymond Markey, *In Case of Oppression: The Life and Times of the Labor Council of New South Wales* (Leichhardt, NSW: Pluto Press, 1994).

Trumped by Shock & Awe

So many of us who should have known better, including yours truly, were caught napping, How could such a brazenly uncouth unstable incompetent be elected CEO of the Empire of the Free World? As if capitalism, imperialism and the sleep of reason does not breed monsters. In this country since 1975 neoliberalism has weighed like a nightmare on our lives. Thatcherism and Reaganism fuelled austerity, class warfare and militarism. Under Hawke and Keating 'reform' ceased to mean socioeconomic enhancement and became the dismantlement of the public sector and adaption to vested interests. Blair and Clinton and Rudd and Gillard brought us neoliberalism-lite, with little enough to show for it. Identity politics came to replace the time honoured left-wing vocation to advocate for the welfare of the 99% regarding the basic concerns of life, liberty and happiness, namely health, welfare, wages, conditions, housing, education and so on. Shame on us. We need to toughen up. The election of one more lunatic, who is not to be underestimated so far as rat cunning is concerned, is not the end of the world, but just another phase of the struggle. History goes on, and we are still in play if we learn its lessons in time.

Remember the 'unelectable' Bernie Sanders? With his limitations, he appealed to the same need for change that the demagogue Trump suborned. Politics 101 should have taught that it was the Democratic National Committee's preferred establishment



candidate Hilary Clinton who was in truth unelectable; a policy free zone clothed only in her blatant glass ceiling ploy to commandeer the woman's vote after a life-time of gutting labour representation for women on the shop floor. So less educated blue collar women voted for Trump or failed to turn out for Clinton in key rust belt States in the Mid-West. Trump was actually less successful at winning votes than John McCain and Mitt

Romney. Effectively Clinton snatched defeat from the jaws of what might have been a significant if marginal and ambiguous Democrat victory. Politics is still feasible, it just lacks practitioners. History teaches, but it has too few students as yet. Thomas Frank was one who predicted the outcome, on the basis of the hollowing out of the politics of the cloth eared faux-centre-left, in his *Listen, Liberal!* It is a classic analysis of November 2016, along with Sanders' *Our Revolution*.

This is the context of Trump's headlong retreat from ecological sanity, for job generating clean coal and other delusions about the supposed unreality of anthropogenic global warming. The environmental movement has established in spades that the planet is in a parlous state. We should be exercising precautionary commitment in favour of the scientific consensus, not defying it in the name of 'alternative facts' in a post-truth world. What has yet to be achieved is a common sense view made mass awareness that capitalism is inherently predatory and corrosive of the very globe our socioeconomic well-being depends upon. Until we direct our message to the concerns of the 99%, they will continue to lend an ear to the siren call of the Trumps. ♦

David Faber

May Day Dinner

The annual May Day dinner is fast becoming the social event of the year for the trade union movement in Adelaide. This year was no exception. We wined and dined superbly at the Cypriot Club. Sandra Dann from the Working Women's Centre hosted the evening in style.



Our first speaker was Paul Jeffares who is a Shop Steward with the ETU (Electrical Trades Union) and involved in the CUB55 dispute in which Carlton and United Breweries fired 55 workers, the entire maintenance workforce at Melbourne's biggest brewery. They offered them their jobs back at a 65% reduction in monetary entitlements and cuts to conditions. The strike lasted for 6 months. Their story was told across Australia and CUB products were boycotted.

CUB had provided the workforce with a very dodgy Site Agreement that is now the subject of Senate Enquiry into the Corporate Evasion of the Fair Work Act. A 'community protest line' was established and gave a daily welcome to the scab workers. This included a 3 story inflatable rat. The strikers made trips to Parliament, railway stations, football games and to liquor outlets selling CUB products. The MUA and CFMEU provided shipping containers decked out as a kitchen, a garden bar and a gymnasium – it was clear they were there for the long haul. They held rallies and barbecues. They marched 10,000 strong and brought Melbourne to a standstill. They put billboards all around Australia calling on a boycott of CUB products and people stopped drinking their products.

The ACTU and the public backed the workers. After 5 months the CEO of Carlton and United Breweries was sacked. It cost the company \$55 million, loss of market share, loss of reputation and loss of production. On 10th December Anheuser Busch took over the running of CUB. The new CEO contacted the Commission and said 'Give them what they want, just give them what they want'. And they did. The workers returned to work, the scabs were evicted and workers' pay and conditions were reinstated. This strike was important for the whole union movement in defence of our core values.

Paul closed with these inspirational words, 'I will not live long enough for there to be a better time to be great – to be brave and to stand so resolute. For all the agony and disenchantment of this dispute, it brought out the best in me and united us in a way unimaginable'.

Sally McManus, recently elected as the first woman Secretary of the ACTU told how the rules that made Australia a fair country are now broken. The level of inequality is at a 70 year high and has got worse since the Global Financial Crises. One of the

worst aspects of inequality she referred to is the rise in casualization of jobs, which is now 40% of the workforce. These jobs are not true casuals and there are no rules to stop this behaviour by bosses. Sally noted that last year there were 679 Australian companies who made large profits but did not pay one cent of taxation – they were prepared to pay lawyers and accountants up to a million dollars just to find ways of avoiding taxation. This is the new business model for Australian companies. Workers are being levied with huge fines for exercising their democratic right to withdraw their labour but companies are not fined on a similar scale for their actions.

Today the minimum wage is 42% of the average wage. Sally pointed out that it used to be 53%. This is about \$35,000 annually and an average family cannot survive on that. In the past unions could go out on strike and campaign for wages and conditions but that is severely hampered under current laws. Sally stressed the urgency in getting these unfair laws changed. The recent penalty rates decision lowered the wages of the lowest paid. This unfair decision was made by the independent arbiter, again illustrating that the laws need to be changed to prevent this happening. Sally talked about the proud history of the union movement, the hard battles fought by our parents and grandparents to achieve a fair Australia and of the need to take up the fight again. Her closing comments brought the audience to their feet with promises to continue the fight. 'We are the holders of Australian values, us, the Australian trade union movement. We are the history makers. We are the brave people. We are the courageous people. We are the principles people. We are proud of who we are, the mighty trade union movement of Australia'.



Following these two inspiring talks Sandra Dann proudly awarded the Spanner Award, given annually to a person who had gone above and beyond in their contribution to the working class. It was awarded to Jude Elton. Jude is a labour historian and has been a research officer; trade union official and Assistant Secretary; an educator; and a lecturer with a special interest in race and gender relations. She was a Director of the Working Women's Centre. She is currently

the President of the Adelaide Branch of the Labour History Society and we are proud of her lifelong achievements being recognised by the May Day Collective. The audience response showed the great esteem in which Jude is held by the S.A. trade union movement.

Additional thanks go to Sally Mitchell and Cath Story for their outstanding singing and to the May Day Collective for organising the event.♦

Allison Murchie

Photos by Allison Murchie. Photo 1 – Sandra Dann, Sally McManus and Paul Jeffares. Photo 2 – Jude Elton with Sally McManus.

MAY DAY MARCH 2017

THE WORKERS UNITED WILL NEVER BE DEFEATED

A selection of photos of the many hundreds who marched through the city streets



One struggle one fight, workers of the world unite



What's outrageous ... unfair wages



What's disgusting ... union busting



When Workers Rights are under attack we STAND UP FIGHT BACK



Photos by Allison Murchie

Adelaide Workmen's Homes

On his death in 1897, wealthy South Australian businessman Sir Thomas Elder bequeathed £25 000 to establish a trust to be called 'Adelaide Workmen's Homes'. The purpose of the organisation was to construct and manage cottages for working men in or near Adelaide. Elder wanted the scheme to be modelled on the Peabody Donation Fund in the United Kingdom. Merchant banker George Peabody had given a large amount in 1862 to provide housing for the poor in London.

According to the *South Australian Register* of 17 June 1898, the executors of Elder's will, Robert Barr Smith and Alexander Martin, held a meeting 'of all persons desirous of expressing their views on the best means of employing the bequest' at the offices of Elder, Smith & Co. on the previous day. The gathering included ministers of religion, parliamentarians, businessmen and a representative of the United Trades and Labor Council. Proposals were sent by the mayors of Port Pirie and Moonta but Barr Smith considered these towns to be too far from Adelaide. Suggestions were made for homes for young blind men and women, and workmen with physical disability 'who consequently were severely handicapped in the struggle for existence'. There were no government pensions or benefits to support people with disability, sickness or injury then.

Barr Smith's views were taken up. He noted that the aims of the Adelaide and London trusts were the same, namely 'the comfort and health of working men, giving them convenient nearness to their work'. But he pointed out that the high cost of land in London had led to the construction of high-rise housing with a density of 725 persons per acre (0.4ha), about 13 times the density of London as a whole. He did not think that such housing was appropriate or necessary in Adelaide. He advocated 'cottage homes'. Barr Smith also noted that even with a high population density in the London estates, infant mortality was lower than the average as a result of 'well-ordered sanitary houses under strict supervision and in perfect repair'. The *Advertiser* of 17 June 1898 reported him wanting the 'best sanitary arrangements [and] homes made of such as kind as would build a national character'.

The resulting housing scheme was targeted at 'industrious and deserving' workmen, not the 'dependent poor'. Occupancy was to be a mark of character, independence and financial stability. The Adelaide Workmen's Homes Inc. Trust Deed stipulated that the homes were to benefit working men and, unusually, working women by providing them 'suitable dwellings at a reasonable rental' and within 10 miles (16km) of Adelaide's GPO.



The trustees of Adelaide Workmen's Homes, formed on 30 September 1898, were Alexander Martin (chairman), Robert Barr Smith, Allan Campbell MLC, Sir Edwin Thomas Smith MLC, Egerton Lee Batchelor (Minister of Education), David Morley Charleston MLC and David Murray (a merchant). The secretary was F Stevens of 44 Grenfell Street, Adelaide.

The Trust Deed was amended by legislation in 1933 to enable the trustees to be remunerated. An amendment in 1966 broadened the residential eligibility criteria to include pensioners and aged persons who had been workmen or were descendants of workmen, which reflected the long occupancy of residents.

The organisation's first homes were completed in 1899. Designed by architect Charles Rutt, they were located on a site bordered by Wakefield and Angas Streets and a newly created Elder Street in Adelaide. In 1968 the Adelaide City Council purchased the homes with a view to demolishing them to make way for an extension of Frome Street. By 1972 only 13 of the original cottages remained along Frome and Angas Streets. These were saved, renovated and reoccupied, but were no longer the property of the organisation.

In 2013 Adelaide Workmen's Homes owned more than 200 homes and real estate in Richmond, Mile End, Norwood and Woodville Gardens, which it continues to rent out. A 1966 legislative amendment which increased its domain for the purchase of real estate to 100 miles (160km) 'not further in a straight line from the GPO' has never been implemented because the original intention was to house the workers in Adelaide. An Act in July 2013 amended the constitution again and the name of the organisation changed to Adelaide Workers' Homes Inc. ♦



Jude Elton, History SA, 'Adelaide Workers' Homes Inc.', SA History Hub, History Trust of South Australia, <http://sahistoryhub.com.au/organisations/adelaide-workers-homes-inc>, accessed 5 April 2017. Photos courtesy Jude Elton



**Australian Society for the Study of Labour History
(Adelaide Branch) Inc**

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Date

Name.....

Organisation/Union (if applicable)

Street

Suburb.....Postcode:

Phone Mobile:.....

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Comments:.....

Type of Membership: (please tick where relevant)

Waged - \$30 ☐

Unwaged – \$15 ☐

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Aims and Objectives

The Australian Society for the Study of Labour History was founded in 1961 to study “the working class situation ... and social history in the fullest sense.” The Society aims not only to encourage teaching and research in labour history but also the preservation of the records of working people and the labour movement. It desires to make history a vital part of popular consciousness, a matter for reflection and debate, at a time when it is under attack from prominent conservative intellectuals.

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Except where explicitly stated, news, commentary and discussion are provided for educational and information purposes and do not represent the official position of the Society

Meetings are usually held at the Box Factory in Regent Street South, Adelaide and are advertised in the newsletter, by email and by post to members and friends. Admission is free and all are welcome.

This newsletter is a publication of the Adelaide Branch of the ASSLH. It is not affiliated to the Australian Labor Party or any other political party. Members are encouraged to make contributions to this newsletter.

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