

Australian Society for the Study of Labour History: Review

Submission by the ASSLH (Adelaide Branch)

The following submission addresses questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7 & 8 of the terms of reference of the review.

Q1. Relevance of current aims

The Adelaide Branch supports the current aims of the Society and also the welcome addition proposed by the Sydney Branch: 'promotion of labour history as an ever present and active component of community'.

The place of trade unions and other elements of working class organisation in Australian history has been eroded in recent years, in parallel with reductions in union membership and influence. The proposed addition to the aims places the history of labour back as a vital component of Australian history and community. It is also a prompt for study and Society events to reflect on and publicise the contribution of labour organisation and activism to much touted 'Australian values' and hard won, but declining, social provisions.

Q2. Name of the organisation

The Adelaide Branch recommends a simplification of the name to the 'Labour History Society'.

We find that the current name is not user friendly, nor is it particularly encouraging to new members. The Branch is already simplifying the name to 'Labour History Society' in practice as we publicise and register events. For example, the full name was too long, and the abbreviated (ASSLH (Adelaide Branch)) unhelpful, for registration of an event for the state-wide About Time History Festival to be held in May 2015.

The Society operates both within and outside of the academy. It is made up of scholars and activists. The suggested simplified name encompasses study, exploration, promulgation and celebration of labour history.

Q3. Approach to social media

The Adelaide Branch currently has limited capacity to monitor, contribute meaningfully to and maintain a range of social media, except a website page and possibly Facebook. The branch is moving to the distribution of its newsletter, giving notice of meetings and publicising events primarily via email. However, a number of members do not have access to email and will continue to rely on paper mail.

We would welcome the opportunity to upgrade the Adelaide Branch page on the federal website so that it is more inviting and informative; can be continually updated; includes a blog for short articles and reports; and is consistent with the quality of the Melbourne page(s).

The Adelaide Branch supports Sydney's recommendation to establish a committee to assist all branches to establish and maintain a quality online presence.

Q4. Co-operation with like-minded organisations

The Adelaide Branch acknowledges the need to co-operate with like-minded organisations to further the Society's aims. We understand that improved connections are required to increase the interest in and understanding of labour history and to foster membership.

While we have a close relationship with the labour movement in South Australia, we are currently working on ways to extend and deepen our connections with the movement, other progressive organisations, the academy and other historical societies. Means identified to date to address these issues include:

- Improving the range, depth and quality of presentations given at Society general meetings/seminars in consultation with members.
- Conducting events that provide an historical perspective on current issues e.g. wage fixation; working hours; inequality of wealth & income; the gender pay gap; retirement and the aged pension. Such events also aim to contribute to current debate, and using an historical lens, generate ideas and hope.
- Inviting young researchers and PhD candidates to make a presentation on their work to a Society general meeting
- Organising events designed to generate interest in aspects of labour history amongst students of various disciplines e.g. a State Records 'show and tell' on labour history materials held in the state archives; a joint workshop with History SA curators on collection objects relating to labour history held in the state history collection; tours of significant places combined with presentations.
- Placing the Society on publicity/ mailing lists of other historical societies and inviting societies to be on our mailing list in order to encourage cross-attendance at events, cross-fertilisation of ideas and greater interest in all forms of history

The Adelaide Branch is not currently in a position to offer speakers to other organisations, but we agree that this would be a productive way to extend community outreach. We would wish to develop guidelines to ensure consistency amongst and quality of presentations.

Q6. National conference

The Adelaide Branch supports the running of the Labour History conference in conjunction with the conference of the Australian Historical Association. This arrangement could bring a range of benefits, including:

- Attracting people who would not attend a whole Labour History conference to labour history sessions
- Raising the profile of the conference amongst students and others not familiar with labour history or appreciative of its continuing relevance

Q7. Role of branches & relationship to federal organisation

The Adelaide Branch works to give effect to the aims of the Society within South Australia. Representation of the branch on the federal executive enables state input into federal policy and programs and the exchange of information in a forum where all are able to contribute and discuss issues at the same time.

The Adelaide Branch does not support the abolition of subscriptions. Subscriptions provide a relatively secure funding base upon which we can plan activities. Formal membership and subscriptions also generate connection and commitment within the Society. We do not wish to spend scarce time and resources on fund-raising.

Q8. Succession planning and attracting young scholars & activists

The Adelaide Branch is acutely aware of the very limited number of current and emerging labour historians in South Australia. The lack of local labour historians affects for example, the pool of

experts upon which we can call for seminars and events and the researching and writing of our state's labour history.

The Adelaide Branch is not university based. Our main connection currently is with trade unions and activists. However, we aim to arrange more activities that encourage participation and research by scholars. See responses to review questions 4 & 6.

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On behalf of the ASSLH (Adelaide Branch)