

Harry Holland - Son of Canberra honoured at last

Under a blazing Canberra sky on 2 February 2011, labour pioneer Harry Holland was finally honoured in the place where he was born and raised nearly 150 years ago.

ACT Chief Minister Jon Stanhope joined with acting New Zealand High Commissioner Vangelis Vitalis to unveil a heritage sign at Ginninderra Village in Canberra to honour the memory of a labour hero who made a significant contribution to both Australian and New Zealand politics.

Click on this link to read what His Excellency Mr Vitalis had to say

In a town often derided for its abundance of politicians, Harry Holland was in fact one of the very few who was actually born here. Yet, outside labour history circles he remains largely unknown. The Canberra Branch of the Labour History Society has long sought to have some kind of monument erected to his memory in Canberra. At last those efforts have come to fruition. But it would not have been possible without the generosity of our friends and neighbours from across the Tasman who contributed the cost of the sign.



Photos from the unveiling ceremony:

Top row: ACT Chief Minister Jon Stanhope MLA, Acting NZ High Commissioner Vangelis Vitalis, Messrs Stanhope and Vitalis unveil the sign. Bottom row: Unions ACT Secretary Kim Sattler, ASSLH Branch President Norman Abjorensen, ASSLH Public Officer Frank Mines. (Photos Peter Ellett)

A life well lived

Harry Holland was born in 1868, son of a rural farm worker, and had little formal education. At age 14, he was apprenticed as a compositor on the *Queanbeyan Times*. Having experienced poverty and unemployment during the harsh depression of the 1890's, Harry became active in radical politics, editing a number of socialist publications and supporting a number of major union struggles.

He helped form the Tailoresses Union in Sydney in 1901 and led them in a successful campaign for better pay and conditions. He twice ran for parliament as a socialist candidate. But it was his support for the striking miners of Broken Hill that led to his imprisonment on a charge of sedition in 1909.

In 1912, he migrated to New Zealand, arriving in the middle of the bitter Waihi miners' dispute in which a striking miner was killed. He was prominent in the formation of the New Zealand Labour Party and in 1918, was elected to Parliament. The following year, he became leader of the Parliamentary Labour Party, a position he held until his death in 1933, just two years before New Zealand's first Labour Government was elected.

Throughout his long political career, he never lost faith in the ultimate goal of a bringing about socialist society. He was kind and generous man who freely gave away his money, food and household furniture to needy constituents during the 1930's depression.

The unveiling of this memorial affords some long overdue recognition of Harry Holland in his home town and hopefully will contribute to a better understanding of what he stood for and the part he played in local and international politics.