

## **Australian Society for the Study of Labour History (Canberra Region Branch)**

### **President's Report: 2015-16**

**15 November 2016**

This has been a year of transition for the branch, with a new secretary (Chris Monnox) and president (Frank Bongiorno) after many years of excellent work in these roles by Peter Ellett and Melanie Nolan. We were also delighted to be able to welcome on to the committee Anthony McLaughlin, the federal treasurer of the Society, following his move to Canberra.

Our events were:

**19 November 2015**, The Society supported US Wobbly and Folklorist George Mann's Joe Hill Tribute Concert at the Woden Tradies by purchasing a bloc of 10.

**10 December 2015**, *Emerging Scholars, New Research: Labour History in Canberra*, an event that brought together exciting new work by some emerging Canberra-based researchers in the field of labour history:

Rhianne Grieve (History, RSSS, ANU), *Conceptions of sociability in late 18th and early 19th Socialist Thought*

Chris Monnox (Modern History, Politics and International Relations, Macquarie), *Mayoral Partisanship at Federal Election Meetings 1910-1922*

Scott Stephenson (History, RSSS, ANU), *Equalled by few, excelled by none: Democracy within the Miners Federation*

Shaun Crowe (Politics and International Relations, ANU), *Whitlam's Children? Labor, the Greens and the Global Financial Crisis*

This was followed by our end-of-year/Christmas dinner at Spicy Ginger Café, 25 Childers Street, Canberra.

**24 May 2016**, Norman Abjorensen, *The Manner of Their Going: Prime Ministerial Exits from Lyne to Abbott*

Norman spoke on his book, telling the story of how Australia's Prime Ministers have fallen from power over more than a century.

**24 June 2016**, *Emerging Scholars, New Research: Labour History in Canberra II*

Rhianne Grieve (History, RSSS, ANU), *Conceptions of human sociability in the socialism of Robert Owen*

Ben Huf (History, RSSS, ANU), *'Productive and Free': the making of a state sociology in colonial New South Wales*

Chris Monnox (Modern History, Politics and International Relations, Macquarie) *'Like a Wolf on the Liberal Fold': Labor and Election Meeting Audiences in the Early Twentieth Century*

Shaun Crowe (Politics and International Relations, ANU) *Whitlam's Children? Labor, the Greens and Minority Government*

Emily Millane (Crawford School of Public Policy, ANU) *Retirement Incomes in Australia: the Historical Role of the Unions*

Discussant: Dr Nikki Balnave (Macquarie University and President, ASSHLH)

After the seminar, we went for dinner at Delhi 6 in Acton. This occasion, like its predecessor, was an excellent opportunity for students to widen their network and share their ideas with a different audience in a supportive environment. The College of Arts and Social Sciences, ANU, provided funding for Dr Balnave's participation and the branch is grateful for her contribution to the success of the event.

**12 October 2016**, Sue Williamson (UNSW Canberra School of Business) *Public Sector Industrial Relations in the Howard Era: Paradoxes and Pitfalls* (Thanks to Frank Cain for his role in organising this seminar).

**29 October 2016**, *The Defeat of Conscription: A Centennial Retrospective* (in partnership with the School of History, The Australian National University)

1.00-1.10: Frank Bongiorno Welcome: *Why does the centenary of the conscription crisis matter?*

1.10-3.00: Chair: Anthony McLaughlin

Humphrey McQueen *Conscription - Class and Nation*

Robin Archer *Why Was There a Conscription Referendum?*

Scott Stephenson *Opposition through Oligarchy: The AWU and the 1916 Conscription Plebiscite*

Maggie Shapley *Conscription: Where are the Archives?*

3.00-3.30: Afternoon tea and Professor Joan Beaumont to launch: *The Conscription Conflict and the Great War*, edited by Robin Archer, Joy Damousi, Murray Goot and Sean Scalmer

3.30-5.40: Chair: Chris Monnox

Frank Cain *Saucing-up the Anti-Conscription Protests by the Industrial Workers of the World and the Official Reactions*

Melanie Nolan *Fighting Militarism and Conscription in New Zealand 1908-1918: So Very Different From Australia?*

Michael Pearson *Depictions of Gender in the Conscription Campaigns*

Bill Thompson *The Sequel*

David Stephens *Honest History and Conscription: Lateral Thinking in a Linear Commemorative World*

The event, commemorating one of the major landmarks in the history of the labour movement in Australia, was barely noticed by our country's major national institutions. One exception was the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History. Our branch's contribution was largely the result of speaking contributions from members and friends of our Society here in Canberra. We are grateful to Humphrey McQueen for his bookselling efforts on the day, which have added to the funds for the Eric Fry Scholarship. We are also grateful to Dr Robin Archer, from the London School of Economics, for making a trip to Canberra during his visit to Australia to participate in the event. Finally, I was delighted that Professor

Joan Beaumont was willing to launch *The Conscription Conflict and the Great War* on the day.

The symposium was followed by a dinner at Spicy Ginger Café, 25 Childers Street, Canberra. Other matters for report:

Thanks for the efforts of Peter Ellett, and the generosity of Professor Paul Pickering as Dean, the College of Arts and Social Sciences, ANU has agreed to top up the Eric Fry Scholarship by a sum of \$1000 to allow a further two years of funding. Unfortunately, due to a shortage of applications for 2016, no scholarship was awarded. It must be a priority of the Society, in partnership with the Noel Butlin Archives Centre, to publicise this award as widely as possible for 2017.

We benefit from our relationship with the ANU in this and other ways. I would like to thank the university for its assistance with a venue for our various events.

I will be attending the ASSLH's federal executive and annual general meeting in Sydney on 18 November. At last year's AGM, the Canberra Region branch's recommendation of Professor Bruce McFarlane for Life Membership of the Society was accepted. The federal executive had a recent meeting at which it considered the review of the organisation conducted in 2014-15. One idea that will be put to the membership – probably at a meeting to be held during the next National Labour History Conference in Brisbane (23-25 September 2017) – is the idea of changing the Society's name to the 'Labour History Society of Australia'.

The branch has been very sorry to learn recently of the illness of Dr Sigrid McCausland, now living in Brisbane, but formerly a member of our branch, the ANU Archivist and a present member of the ASSLH federal executive. The Society sent Sigrid flowers and message in October and we wish her and Phil Griffiths, her partner, well.

We have also been sorry to hear of the recent illness of our fellow-committee member, John Myrtle and wish him a quick and full recovery.

### **Finally**

I am very grateful to all members of the committee for all their hard work and their comradeship during the course of the year. I especially thank our secretary, Chris Monnox, and our treasurer, Bill Thompson. Looking around the world as well as at our own country, it would be hard to imagine a less favourable climate than that of present for the labour movement. It is therefore all the more important that the Society vigorously promotes a politically engaged commitment to understanding the history of the working class and labour movement. I look forward to a productive year in 2017.

**Frank Bongiorno, President, 15 November 2016**