

# RECORDER

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Eric and Shiela Fry

## DR ERIC FRY 21 August 1921 - 3 October 2007

By Peter Love

With the death of Eric Charles Fry on Wednesday 3 October 2007 the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History lost one of its founders and most staunch supporters. Remembered by all who knew him as an unfailingly courteous and encouraging comrade, Eric played a major part in sustaining the Society's organization since its foundation in 1961 from his base at the Australian National University. He had a significant influence on the early transformation of the Society's Bulletin into a serious scholarly journal. His PhD research at the ANU into the Australian urban wage earning class in the 1880s provided inspirational foundations for many later studies. He supported a legion of students and colleagues in their work and applied his acute insights and gentle diplomacy to resolve many a spat between people who had lost sight of the larger issues. He was one of the ASSLH's foundation stones, and we are the weaker for his slow, sad decline and recent death.

Eric Fry was born in Broken Hill on 21 August 1921, the son of an engineer. Although his family endured some tough times, young Eric barely noticed, enjoying a country childhood that 'was straight out of the pages of Henry Lawson'. Their circumstances improved when his father found a job in Sydney, a city that Eric came to love and always thought of as his real 'home'. He attended state schools in the 1930s and as he grew

through adolescence began to notice 'the contrasts of wealth and hardship'. He concluded his schooling at North Sydney Boys High where he was both a good scholar and very handy rugby player, going on to play for Gordon in his adult years. After leaving school he worked as a junior clerk in the Customs Service and, having won a free place scholarship to the Economics Faculty at Sydney University in 1938, attended evening classes. In 1941 he entered the Army and later joined the Air Force, serving as a flying officer in the Pacific region. After demobilisation in 1946, he returned to Customs and then to the Commonwealth Office of Education, which a year later awarded him an ex-service training scheme scholarship to study Arts at Sydney. By this stage his sharp sense of the inequality and injustice of the capitalist system impelled him to join the Communist Party. Disillusioned with Andersonian Philosophy, he turned to the study of History, which grew from an interest into an avowed vocation. He graduated with a first-class degree in 1950, and married a first-class wife, Sheila Williams on 19 May that year. They moved to Melbourne where he worked for a short while in the Department of Labour and National Service with another old comrade, Lloyd Edmonds. Eric and Sheila returned to Sydney where he completed a Diploma of Education at Sydney Teachers' College in

## Vale Eric Fry

1951, and began serving his term of bonded employment with the NSW Education Department.

In 1952 he won a PhD scholarship to the newly established Australian National University. Inspired in part by Engels' writing on the English working-class and T. A. Coghlan's books on Australian conditions, he researched and wrote a thesis on The Condition of the Urban Wage Earning Class in the 1880s. During the early stages of his candidature there were some changes of supervisor and department but, with the arrival of Bob Gollan, he found a sympathetic supervisor and congenial comrade who helped him shape and sharpen the thesis.

A pioneering work of meticulous scholarship, it was accepted for the PhD degree in 1956 and, although it was not published as a book, became a foundational work for many subsequent researchers in the field.

His first academic job was a temporary lectureship at the University of Western Australia during 1956. He took up a post at the University of New England in 1957 and in 1959 was appointed a Senior Lecturer in History at Canberra University College, which was incorporated into the Australian National University in 1960. Promoted to Reader in 1967, Eric remained in the Department until his retirement in 1986. During this long period at the ANU he left an enduring legacy with students and colleagues who benefited from his teaching, supervision and collegiality. He was a patient, methodical and encouraging teacher of undergraduates, a supportive and reassuring postgraduate supervisor with the capacity to challenge without deflating students' self-confidence, and a thoroughly congenial colleague. Eric's remarkable capacity for empathetic engagement with students was widely known and deeply appreciated. It

**Eric's remarkable capacity for empathetic engagement with students was widely known and deeply appreciated. It went so far as a brief period in the Canberra lock-up in July 1972 for backing them in their protests against national service for the Vietnam War.**

went so far as a brief period in the Canberra lock-up in July 1972 for backing them in their protests against national service for the Vietnam War. This brush with the law did him no academic harm, despite his pp. 350 ASIO file. He was Dean of the Arts Faculty from 1973 to 1975.

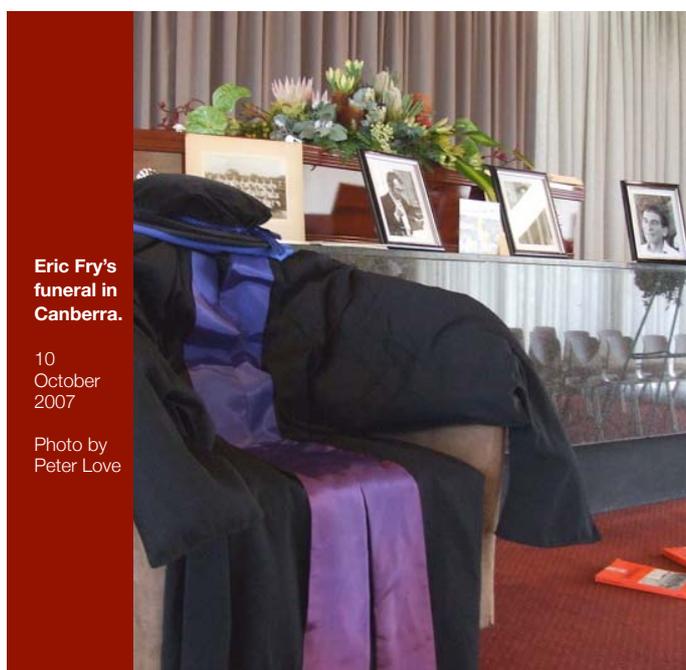
When Eric returned to Canberra in early 1960 he continued his life-long love of rugby. When his playing days were over, he was not content to be a mere spectator. He served for many years as a fair and well-respected referee. Even when that, too, was no longer possible he continued to attend games with his old rugby mates who grew increasingly sympathetic at the sight of a collapsing scrum.

In 1961 Bob Gollan and Eric were the prime movers in establishing the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History. Over the years he held every position in the Society, including being its first Secretary and President in 1984-86. He was a wise and measured advocate of the

more progressive tendencies in history writing, encouraging feminist colleagues in their campaign to broaden Labour History's horizons and supporting the Editorial Board's decision to embrace social history, while all the time retaining a commitment to politically engaged scholarly rigor in research and writing. Eric helped build the Society's fraternal links with like societies, particularly with the British, and especially at the University of Warwick. Up until his retirement, and for a while after, there was hardly a part of the ASSLH that had not benefited from Eric's constructive and unobtrusive work.

While he did not leave a large body of authored works, he maintained a steady stream of writing that ranged from an oral history monograph on Tom Barker and the IWW, numerous bibliographical studies, some of which were quite extensive in their coverage, and two edited collections of essays on *Rebels and Radicals* and *Common Cause: essays in Australian and New Zealand labour history*. In retirement he wrote *An Airman Far Away*, a biography of Sheila's brother, who was killed in the Dambusters' Raid in 1943. But Eric's work is, more than most, to be found in other people's writing ~ in his nurturing, support and encouragement of their projects, completed in the secure knowledge that he cared about what they were doing and what they had to say. Indeed, one of Eric's great skills as historian, teacher and organiser was his ability to listen and hear what was being said, and implied.

When he retired as Reader in History at the ANU in 1986, he and Sheila rejoiced in the wide circle of friends they had attracted over the years, continued their golfing interests ~ and rugby in Eric's case ~ travelled a



Eric Fry's funeral in Canberra.

10  
October  
2007

Photo by  
Peter Love

little, and enjoyed entertaining. Their most regular guests, however, were several generations of magpies and currawongs who maintained a continuing if uneasy relationship with a succession of the Fry's corpulent cats. In recent years their health declined to the point where they had to leave their Condamine Street home in Turner and move into Morshead veterans' nursing home where Sheila died on 4 May this year and Eric on 3 October.

He graced the University with his learning, teaching, and quietly gracious collegiality. In many ways, Eric Fry personified all that is admirable about the Labour History Society in his self-effacing commitment to its common cause, his steadfast support of its various activities and, above all, in his loyal and congenial comradeship. He might be dead, but it will be a long time before he's forgotten.

### Evatt and the Petrov Affair revisited By Phillip Deery

At the recent Labour History Conference (Melbourne, 4-6 July), I was fortunate to chair a fascinating session on 'Evatt and the Petrov Affair'. The papers, presented by Frank Cain and Laurence Maher, contrasted significantly in interpretation, especially regarding the extent of Evatt's prior knowledge of Venona and whether or not that shaped his behaviour during the 1954 Royal Commission into Espionage.[1] However, both drew on fresh archival research to throw important new light on the Affair. The result was a sustained, lively discussion between presenters and the audience.[2]

Maher's paper glanced fleetingly at the role of Sir Owen Dixon, the Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia. He was highly revered in legal circles and extremely friendly with Robert Menzies. According to Maher, Dixon revealed that Menzies requested him to act as the sole Royal Commissioner. Although he refused, Dixon flew to Canberra and personally assisted Menzies in choosing the three Royal Commissioners (Justices Owen, Phelp and Ligertwood). Primarily, he was motivated by an intense distrust of H.V. Evatt: 'All this was of greater importance than you might think, because the probability was not then low of Evatt being Prime Minister after 29th May [1954] and of the Commission having to proceed under a regime which might attempt to frustrate the enquiry'.

This comment can be found in a remarkable historical document: three private letters – the first fifteen pages long – written in October 1954 by Dixon to his friend, the Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain (1951-54), Viscount Simonds. They were located by historian David Lowe in the Swinton Collection in Cambridge University's Churchill College archives. While they provide stark evidence of Dixon's barely

concealed hostility towards Evatt, his remarks on the Petrov Affair are particularly revealing. They cast further doubt on the long-held conspiracy theory that Petrov's defection was deliberately timed by ASIO, with Menzies' active connivance, to assist the government's re-election.[3]

'When Petrov came over and sought asylum last April, Parliament was about to be dissolved and the election campaign which ended in the poll of 29th May was on the point of opening. As Menzies told me, he was rather puzzled about what to do when the Security people informed him of their prize. He felt that if he kept the documents Petrov brought with him secret together with all the facts of the case, he would find it difficult to explain why after the election, whatever the result. On the other hand if he published the facts as known at that date he knew that Evatt would denounce the whole thing as an electioneering invention.' [4]

In other words, Menzies was in a quandary. Once ASIO told him of its coup, he had to weigh up his options in the light of the imminent federal election. On the basis of this evidence, it seems unlikely that, as frequently alleged, Menzies helped orchestrate Petrov's defection. Remembering that Menzies and Dixon were close confidants,[5] it is highly improbable either that Menzies' private conversation with Dixon was intended to deceive or dissemble, or that Dixon's recollection of that recent conversation was faulty. Thus, Petrov was not a stunt: a rabbit pulled out of a hat by Menzies to save

his government. This is not to suggest, of course, that Menzies was blind to the electoral benefits flowing from the defection: he was too

**he knew that Evatt would denounce the whole thing as an electioneering invention.**

experienced and astute to allow myopia to deflect his ambition for political power. Certainly, he can be held responsible for timing the first sitting of the Royal Commission before not after the May 1954 election.

Dixon's wife was present during much of the Royal Commission hearings; indeed, she was a 'constant spectator' and reported developments back to her husband. She judged communist Rupert Lockwood, the alleged author of the infamous Document J, as 'a dreadful scoundrel' but reserved her sharpest venom for Fergan O'Sullivan, Dr Evatt's Press Secretary and formerly a *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist. According to Lady Dixon, O'Sullivan represented 'the most treacherous type of decadent renegade Celt'. Worse, he was 'an Irish Communist who had deserted his religion'. [6]

Dixon's letters, like his wife's astonishing prejudices, reveals much about the strength of the Anglo-conservative network. Dixon details, for example, how he was involved in the search for a new professor of Classical Studies at the University of Melbourne. This included personal enquiries to 'the head masters of the

most famous of the [English] public schools' as well as contacting the vice-chancellors of Oxford and Cambridge. Regrettably, for Dixon, a 'local man' was selected. 'I am greatly disappointed... I have a very strong opinion about the benefits which come from obtaining professors from Home.' [7] Nevertheless, the bulk of this fascinating correspondence concerns 'Evatt's doings' and the 'strange and sordid' course Evatt was pursuing. As Dixon candidly wrote: 'All that ultimately matters is the decreased probability of his ever becoming Prime Minister,' since 'the question of whether Evatt is to become Prime Minister of this country affects the Empire'. [8]

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> 'Venona' refers to a top-secret post World War II operation conducted by the British and American security services. It decrypted cables sent to and from Moscow to Soviet embassies and identified, with varying degrees of precision, Soviet spies in Australia, Great Britain and the United States.

<sup>2</sup> Both papers have been printed in Julie Kimber, Peter Love and Phillip Deery (eds), *Labour Traditions. Proceedings of the tenth national labour history conference* (Melbourne: Australian Society for the Study of Labour History–Melbourne, 2007), pp. 50-55 and 138-44.

<sup>3</sup> In different publications in 1993, David McKnight, Greg Pemberton and Peter Crockett resurrected elements of the conspiracy theory. For a cogent rebuttal, see Robert Manne, 'The Petrov Conspiracy Rises from the Dead', *Quadrant*, December 1993, pp. 2-3.

<sup>4</sup> Letter, Dixon to Simonds, 16 October 1954, pp. 1-2, Swinton Collection, SWIN 6/2, Churchill College Archives, Cambridge University.

<sup>5</sup> To give one instance: after Dixon was invited to give a paper at Harvard University, he 'would not have accepted' but for Menzies 'urging me to do so and I then saw him and deferred to his views'. Letter, Dixon to Simonds, 16 October 1954, p.14.

<sup>6</sup> Letter, Dixon to Simonds, 16 October 1954, pp. 7-8.

<sup>7</sup> Letter, Dixon to Simonds, 26 October 1954, pp. 4-5.

<sup>8</sup> Letter, Dixon to Simonds, 16 October 1954, p. 13; 26 October 1954, p. 1.

## The Italian Political Scene 2007

By Marcello D'Amico

*Labour Activist, Artist, Writer, Muscian, Actor*

To describe Italy's political situation at present is not an easy assignment and one has to have an insight into its intricacies and mechanisms. But one word describes it best: Instability and yearly change of government. It may sound like a page from a sci-fi book, but facts and statistics confirm this statement. And one can also safely say that the Italian political scene can be compared to a work of art, almost a living legend.

The first government of unified Italy was elected on 23 March 1861, and count Camillo Benso of Cavour was its first premier. At the time Italy was a monarchy ruled by the Savoy family, but on 2 June 1946, after the abdication of King Emmanuel II, the Italian people went to the poll to choose between the Monarchy and a Republic. The

result was unexpected as 56% decided to change the course of Italian history opting for a Republic. On the following June 28th, Enrico De Nicola was elected by parliament as first president of the Italian Republic. All this took place 2000 years, and only a few metres away, from where the senators of the last Roman Republic met. The Republic had finally returned to the Roman Hills. At the same time elections were held to elect a new government and for the first time Italian women were allowed to vote.

Italy was still recovering from 22 years of Benito Mussolini's fascist regime. As expected, the Christian Democrats held a majority over the left-wing alliance of communists, lead by Togliatti, the most influential left wing politician outside Russia, and socialists. Alcide De Gasperi was elected the first Head of Government of the new Italy.

One must consider that after Camillo Benso's first government, Italy had 58 different governments in the following 61 years, most of them formed by the same politicians. One would assume that after the Second World War things would change in Italy, at least in the political sense, but then it would have meant breaking away from tradition. So, in fifty years from 1946 to 1996, we saw another 50 different governments, incredible, but true. However, very little new blood was infused and party leaders survived by changing alliances and portfolios. In fact, this has been Italy's only political stability: same faces with new party names and change of ideology mid stream.

As an example, Giulio Andreotti was appointed by the Christian Democrats Minister for Defence in 1959. In 1972 he became Head of Government and held Italy's highest political post on and off seven times till 1992. One would assume that under normal circumstances this would be a long tenure, but we are talking about the Italian political scene. A few months ago the same politician, now a life senator, saved the present government with his vote at the tender age of 87, and next year he may even be presented with a gold watch celebrating 50 years of service to Italian politics. And this brings to the surface another anomaly.

The Italian parliament is constituted by 630 deputies (House of Deputies) and 315 senators (Senate), including 18 members elected by Italians living abroad

and 7 life senators nominated by the President of the Republic. In 2005, the Italian Parliament made another constitutional change to the voting system by adopting the Proportional Electoral Law, and the Majority Prize, government,

goes to the Coalition claiming a plurality. Confusing? As Tim Shaw would say on midnight TV, "there is more".

**In 2001 when Silvio Berlusconi rose from political oblivion after a brief stint as premier in 1994, his party Forza Italia (Italy Forward) was allocated more seats than candidates fielded.**

For the Deputies this law applies at a national level, and for the senators at a regional level. To add to this complex system in 2005 Italians living abroad were given the right to elect their own representatives, 12 deputies and 6 senators. In fact, these 6 senators finished by having the balance of power. And it gets better. In 2001 when Silvio Berlusconi rose from political oblivion after a brief stint as premier in 1994, his party Forza Italia (Italy Forward) was allocated more seats than candidates fielded.

The same politician, one of Italy's richest man and founder of the right wing Forza Italia party, has now the distinction of being the only Italian leader to govern for five consecutive years, from 2001 to 2006. De Gasperi had been head of government from 13th July 1946 to 2nd August 1953, but with five different ones, and only one in his own right with the Christian Democrats, the other four with coalition centre parties.

As an aside, while the USA can boast a real life actor as its past President, a wrestler and an Austrian born body builder/actor, as Governors; but who else can proudly claim that a porno star, Cicciolina, born in Hungary, was once elected to the Italian parliament. Her campaign slogan was to show in public her bare left breast to the delight of male voters!

What's today's political situation? On 29 April 2006 Italians went to the polls and the centre-left coalition lead by Dino Prodi, former President of the European Commission, was elected by the slenderest majority, and on 17 May the President of the Italian Republic gave Prodi the mandate to govern with his coalition. But it has not been plain sailing, and in 18 months the government has been on the brink of being toppled over a few times, as some deputies of the alliance have jumped ship. As mentioned above, Prodi has to thank the ageing Andreotti for his survival. But one thing is certain: the present government will not run its full five years mandate.

It would be easy to describe the Italian electorate as gullible, but in the past 60 years, in spite of what was described as a financial boom in 60s and 70s, in real terms very little has been done to create a balanced society. At times politicians and governments seem intent to fight for their political survival instead of serving the people, as indicated by their theatrics and antics during their pre-election eloquent speeches. Italian politicians are great master with their verbal delivery.

In many ways Italians are victims of a system that cannot offer stability. "Past governments are to be blamed" is the standard excuse, and this is a universal malady, but in fact we are talking about the same politicians!

In 2006 when Berlusconi was booted out the Italian people had hoped that the new left wing coalition, decimated in 2001 and rebuilt in a short time, would be

the answer to all their woes. But after the first Finanziaria (Budget) was presented in parliament, it was obvious that in reality nothing had changed. Again, politicians switched alliances and ideology and the government just managed to survive, at times by a single vote, and it still does with Damocles' sword hanging over its head. What a way to govern a nation when political survival is the priority.

Following the last elections, Romano Prodi, representing the Independent Olive (Indipendenza Ulivo), is leader of the Government with Massimo D'Alema and Francesco Rutelli as his two deputies. Nine parties are represented in the ministry. There are 26 ministers, 10 deputy ministers and 66 undersecretaries.

Parliament is divided into Coalitions, Major Parties, Minor Parties, Micro Parties and Regional Parties. Parties are then grouped in coalitions.

The two major coalitions are: House of Freedom-Casa della Liberta' and Unione- Union; 7 Major Parties, including Forza Italia-Italy Forward, with at least 30 members each and 4% of the votes; 11 Minor Parties with at least 5 members each and from 0-5% to 4% of the votes; 16 Micro Parties with less than 5 members each and less than 0.5% of the votes; Regional, 18 members. I have omitted, on purpose, to mention the extremely complex election of Parliamentarians representing Italians living abroad, as it deserves its own special chapter.

And now for the *pièce de résistance*. These are some of the names of the parties and alliances that govern Italy: Ulivo (Olive) lead by premier Dino Prodi, Forza Italia (Italy forward), Alleanza Nazionale (National Alliance), Rifondazione Comunista (Communist Foundation), UDC, Lega Nord (Northern League), Sinistra Democratica (Democratic Left), Italia dei Valori (Italy of Values), Rosa nel Pugno (Rose in the Fist), Comunisti Italiani (Italian Communists), Verdi Italiani (Italian Greens), Popolari UDEUR (Popular UDEUR), DCA Nuovo PSI (New DCA PSI), Gruppo Misto (Mixed Group), Verdi Comunisti Italiani (Italian Green Communists), Per le Autonomie (For Freedoms). We won't mention all other minor parties: at the last elections 74 parties fielded candidates for both houses!!

The new voting system adopted in 2005 is supposed to encourage coalitions as it would be impossible for a single party or even smaller alliances to form a government. But this system can also have some strange results. The present Minister of Justice Clemente Mastella was elected to the senate in two different seats, so he opted to represent the Calabria Region. Another candidate of his party was awarded the seat in the Campania Region.

Female representation in the Italian parliament is certainly not great, in fact with 11%, it is in 62nd place in the world. Australia is in 17th place with approx 20%. Scandinavian women are by far the best represented in

their parliaments. Swedish women hold 43% of the seats, followed by Finnish with 37%, Dutch and Norwegians with 36%, and Icelanders with 35%.

So what's the future of Italian politics? One can safely say that the tradition started in 1861 will continue for a long time, in fact it's almost assured an eternal life.

Governments will be formed with some strange coalitions and/or alliances and the Italian people will continue to live with an electoral system can only deliver political instability. Italians, politician included, have learned the art of living, of progressing and survival, but at the same time will not stop in their quest to preserve their dignity, fight for their human rights and live in peace. All considered, Italy is still one of the world's wonders and a paradise for tourists. Natural beauty and its people are Italy's treasures as they have been over the millennia. And we should remember that Italy was first unified by Garibaldi in 1861 and in its present state in 1946. In fact, notwithstanding its glorious past, Italy as a single state is only 60 years old.

### Left's Passionate Stalwart

#### Vale Tom Burns

Politician 27-10-1931 to 4-5-2007

By Tony Stephens

Tom Burns, who as Secretary of the Queensland branch of the Labor Party and later as National President, changed the course of Australian political history, died of an apparent heart attack on 4 May 2007.

Burns also led the Party in opposition at a state level against the Joh Bjelke-Petersen juggernaut helping to lay the foundation of the Goss Government.

His pivotal role in the election of the Whitlam Government began in 1966 when he took, and acted on, a telephone call from Canberra.

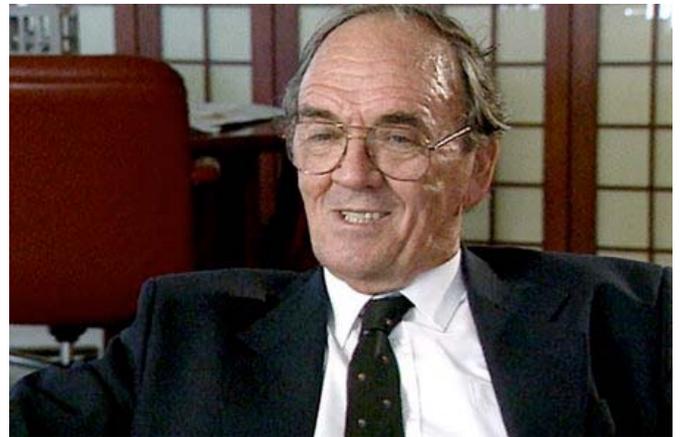
Rex Patterson had just won for the Labor Party, against the odds, a by-election for the Federal seat of Dawson, in Harold Holt's first election test since succeeding Robert Menzies as Liberal Prime Minister. Labor's successful campaign was led by its Deputy Leader, Gough Whitlam, yet he was in deep trouble in his party for having described the Federal Executive as "12 witless men" over their stance against Federal aid to private schools in need. A special Executive meeting had been called to discipline him.

Patterson was meeting Allan Fraser when Labor leader, Arthur Calwell, called to say that Whitlam would be expelled after lunch, and Fraser would be Deputy. A horrified Patterson telephoned Burns, then Queensland Branch Secretary, who persuaded two Queensland members of the Executive, who had intended to vote for expulsion, Jim Keefe and Fred Whitby, to vote against it. The

**Patterson was meeting Allan Fraser when Labor leader, Arthur Calwell, called to say that Whitlam would be expelled after lunch, and Fraser would be Deputy.**

intended vote of 7 – 5 against Whitlam became 7 – 5 for him. Whitlam said later that Burns had saved him.

There were two other occasions when Whitlam paid tribute to Burns, one being in 1975 when Burns as National ALP president accompanied Whitlam on the first Australian political delegation to China and the second, the 1972 successful Federal election campaign, with the election of a Labor Government for the first time in 23 years.



Burns grew up in Maryborough and moved to Brisbane during the Second World War and joined the Labor party at 15. He left school to set up his own business, declaring he would never work for a boss. His first election campaign was the 1949 Federal election. In 1951 Burns joined the RAAF during the Korean War and after the war he worked as a member of the Electrical Trades Union.

Following the Labor Split of 1956-57, Burns was the party's only organizer in 1959, when he toured Queensland trying to rebuild the party. In one countrytown, locals painted 'Commo' on the side of his vehicle. He became State Secretary of the ALP at 34 and the youngest Federal president at 38. He studied elections campaigns in the US and made a significant contribution to the 'It's Time' campaign in 1972.

Burns described himself as a militant and believed in the socialist concept and he also read books on Sociology and Economics.

Burns became Parliamentary Leader of the Labor party in 1974, following a dismal performance in the State elections in which the party was left with 11 MP's, sometimes known as 'Tom's Cricket Team'. He was an erratic leader and had a short fuse. He once settled a dispute with Clem Jones, the long-term Lord Mayor of Brisbane, with bare fists.

He didn't always get on with Whitlam and in 1975 he accused the Whitlam government of creating a 'coalition of voting enemies' by removing subsidies to sections of the community.

He left the State leadership in 1978 and on the election of the Goss Government in 1989 he became the

Deputy Leader and held that position for seven years. He considered one of his finest achievements the building of retirement homes in country towns for old people who would have otherwise had to move to the city.

He maintained certain rages and passions and he said he would not attend Bjelke-Peterson's funeral – and he did not. He remained Chairman of the Queensland China council until his death.

To his family and friends we extend deepest condolences.

This obituary has been taken from the *Age* of 7 June 2007, written by **Tony Stephens**.

Brian Smiddy

**Bennelongwhile: A timely reminder of the electoral fate of Stanley Melbourne Bruce  
By Peter Love**

As John Howard defends his vulnerable seat of Bennelong against Labor's Maxine McKew in the coming election, there's been speculation about what would happen if an incumbent Prime Minister were defeated in his own electorate. Inevitably, the only prior case ~ Stanley Melbourne Bruce in the Flinders electorate at the 1929 election – has been raised. We thought it might be helpful to *Recorder* readers if we put together a few details of the occasion so you can offer informed comment and invite your friends to savour the historical ironies.

The Nationalist-Country party coalition won the 1928 federal election but as the economy slid towards recession and industrial disputes, particularly in the timber and coal industries became more protracted under a difficult legislative regime, long-standing divisions within the coalition widened. The founder of the Nationalists, W M Hughes, a Labor rat with a vindictive long memory nursed resentments about being replaced by Bruce as party leader. During 1929 he was



forementing discontent and division in party ranks. Although relations between the coalition parties were overtly cordial, there were underlying tensions, some of which appeared on the surface in South Australia. In Victoria, the Country party was divided.

The Bruce - Page government had tried to take exclusive control of

industrial relations by various means including referendum or by agreement through a Premiers' Conference, but had failed. The government decided that the system of concurrent federal and state industrial relations jurisdictions was no longer tenable and proposed to vacate the field, except in the maritime industry, and hand the system over to the States. Bruce called an early election for the House of Representatives only on 12 October 1929 and declared in his policy speech that industrial relations was the single reason for the election. The Commonwealth did not have sufficient power to enforce federal awards, the people at referendum and the Premiers had denied them the power and, since economic and industrial conditions required greater unity between employer and employee, the issue had to be resolved. Scullin's speech for the ALP defended the existing system, which despite its failings, could be made to work well if sensibly amended. It was, in his view, the legal system that provided some defence of working people's living standards.

The electors went to the polls as the economy continued to slide and strikes intensified, especially the timber workers' dispute. In the seat of Finders Bruce was

opposed by two candidates, E. J. Holloway for the ALP and J. Burch and independent Liberal. Significantly, given the central issue, Holloway was Secretary of the Melbourne Trades Hall Council. In a close result, Bruce got 48.14 per cent of the primary vote, Holloway 48.23

per cent and Burch 3.63 percent. No candidate having an absolute majority, Burch's preferences were distributed and Holloway got 55.40 per cent of them. This gave Holloway victory with 50.24 per cent of the final vote.



Thus was a sitting Prime Minister unseated after an attack on the arbitration system. Moreover, he was defeated by an elected union official. It will be interesting to see how a sitting Prime Minister, who has effectively demolished arbitration in Australia, fares in the coming election. It will also be interesting

to see if his main opponent, widely identified with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, which he has simultaneously sought to control and diminish, will inflict symbolic revenge. We await the Bennelong electors' verdict.

## Remembering Harvester, 1907 - 2007: A Centenary Symposium

8th November, 2007 (Time: 9:00am - 5:30pm)  
Location: Gryphon Gallery, 1888 Building, Grattan Street, University of Melbourne.

On 8 November 1907, Justice Higgins, the President of the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Court handed down the decision that has come to be known as the Harvester Judgment, from the name of the agricultural machinery manufactured by HV McKay. It established a male living wage that had to be “fair and reasonable”, sufficient to support workers as “civilised beings” in a standard of living appropriate to a “civilised community”.

This centenary symposium reviews a range of questions raised by this pivotal event in Australian history.

- \* To what extent did the living wage provide a basis for social justice?
- \* How was it understood at the time and how has it been remembered since?
- \* How important was Higgins’ own agenda and values to its formulation?
- \* In what sense did it encode ‘national values’?
- \* How have feminist writers dealt with how it reinforced a breadwinner model of society?
- \* To what extent was the centralised arbitration of wages a boon, or a hindrance to economic growth?
- \* In times when the arbitration system has been undermined by enterprise bargaining, individual contracts and then by the removal of its power to determine minimum wages, what is worth remembering about the ideas behind the Harvester judgment?
- \* How does public memory in Australia enshrine some historical events while forgetting others?

### Speakers include:

- \* Judy Brett (LaTrobe University)
- \* Charles Fahey (LaTrobe University, Bendigo)
- \* Joe Isaac (University of Melbourne)
- \* Marilyn Lake (LaTrobe University)
- \* John Murphy (University of Melbourne)
- \* Paul Pickering (ANU)
- \* John Rickard (Monash University)
- \* Marian Sawyer (ANU)

With a keynote address by Sonya Michel (University of Maryland). The symposium will be followed from 5:30pm to 7:00pm by a reception to raise a toast to the living wage. This will also be held in the Gryphon Gallery, 1888 Building.

### General enquiries:

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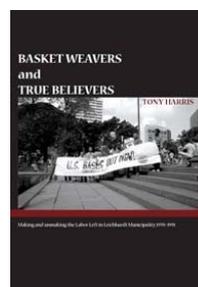
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## BOOK RELEASE: Tony Harris, *Basket Weavers and True Believers: making and unmaking the Labor Left in Leichhardt Municipality 1970-1991*, Leftbank Publishing 2007

In the 1970s and 1980s hundreds of people sought membership of the ALP branches of the inner-Sydney municipality of Leichhardt. These were people whose politics had been shaped by the social movements of the times and by the hopes and disappointments associated with the Whitlam Government. The political clashes between this Left-leaning new membership and the conservative working class, and working-class-made-good, patriarchs of the local Labor Right have become legendary. Yet as the fruits of victory were in reach, the Left began to fall apart in often bitter conflict.

By the beginning of the 1990s many of these participants, in what has sometimes been called the ‘middle-classing’ of Labor, had deserted the branches and switched their political allegiance to independents, Democrats and the Greens. This is the story of this turbulent transition told from the point of view of the members at the branch level, and the ALP political life they sought to construct.



As the Australian Labor Party struggles with its identity and purpose at the beginning of the twenty-first century, *Basket Weavers and True Believers* provides a timely case study of the recent making, and unmaking, of the Labor Left.

\$28 (including postage). Available from  
<http://www.leftbankpublishing.com.au>

## MELBOURNE BRANCH, ASSLH

Meetings of the society are held in Meeting Room 1 in the Trades Hall (enter the Trades Hall through the Victoria Street entrance)

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Please send all submissions and research questions/notes for inclusion in Recorder to the editor, Julie Kimber ([juliekimber@unswalumni.com](mailto:juliekimber@unswalumni.com)).

## NEW STANDARDS FOR NEW TIMES?

Papers from the conference *New Standards for New Times: The Eight Hour Day and Beyond* have been published in the latest edition of the journal *Labour & Industry*. For further information contact Susie Elliott: [susie.elliott@rmit.edu.au](mailto:susie.elliott@rmit.edu.au)