

# The Queensland Journal Of Labour History

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# Editorial

**Howard Guille, Ross Gwyther and Bob Russell**

To say the least, there were many disappointments under the ALP in Queensland. The privatisations and the failure to make a decent settlement with Indigenous people about stolen wages head our list. Even so, after the wipe-out of the ALP in the March state election, the LNP seems to us to be systematically working through all state agencies and all state funding looking to remove what it thinks is the taint of progress. While no one in Queensland has yet been treated with the severity of the members of Pussy Riot in Russia, community organisations with public funding have been told they cannot lobby or advocate for legislative change. Funding has been cut and changes imposed on health, housing, environmental and advocacy programmes. Wholesale changes have been made to the membership of boards and statutory authorities. Much of this seems petty and little more than bullying to show who is in charge. One small example is the removal of the Secretary of the Queensland Council of Unions from the Board of WorkCover.

At the time of writing (August 2012), public servants are taking the brunt of the attack with, it seems, 20,000 people to lose their jobs. The State Government

has usurped award and enterprise agreements by deeming that clauses on job security are without effect. There is little justification for this even in the self-evidently politically partisan review of state finances led by Peter Costello.

Workers and their industrial and political organisations have had to deal with conservative regimes before. The BLHA seminar in October is a chance to look at some of the history and perhaps draw some lessons about strategy and tactics. However, it is also salutary to realise that people who were voters under Bjelke-Petersen regime must now be over 43 years old. This is much less than half the current Queensland population since the median age is 36 years. Hence, we need to have a history that can tell the stories of what happened before. Moreover, we need to make such stories attractive to school and tertiary students, workers and activists. This is a matter for social media as well as mainstream media, magazines and journals.

In a modest way, we hope that some of the articles in this issue of the journal will help start such discussion. Di Zetlin traces the struggle for equal pay from

the Harvester decision of 1907 to the Equal Remuneration Order made in the SACS Award in 2011. She shows that equal pay remains unfinished business with even some members of the Fair Work Commission unconvinced of the principles. Muriel Heagney's caution is extremely important, 'equal pay must be fought for as a wage justice issue on the basis of working-class unity, rather than as a means of protecting men's jobs at the expense of women workers'.

This is an appropriate lead to a short piece reporting on a seminar to mark the 40th anniversary of Women's and Gender Studies at UQ. The struggle to establish Women's Studies represented a significant step towards recognising the role of women in Queensland labour history. The same applies to Aboriginal history and the article Mil Binnung reports on an exhibition built about the life of Bob Anderson. The exhibition, first presented on Minjerriba / North Stradbroke Island combines material on his Ngugi identity and history with his labour and union activism.

In June, the Queensland Government pushed its 'Fair Work Harmonisation' Bill through Parliament. The changes directly affect those public service and public sector workers who remain under Queensland awards. John McCollow provides a careful and clear analysis of the changes and concludes 'It appears that "the war against public sector collective bargaining" in Queensland may just

be getting started'. This provides a fitting introduction to the next major piece in the Journal an interview with Alex Scott, General Secretary of Together. This is the union created by the recent merger of the Queensland Public Sector Union (QPSU) with the Australian Services Union — Central and Southern Queensland Clerical and Administrative Branch.

This interview and the piece by John McCollow show how we hope the Journal can cover recent events as well as more conventionally historical ones. We canvassed this direction for the Journal in the previous issue, the first under our joint editorships. In undertaking, what we hope will be an on-going series of interviews, it is our aim, in the words of the late Paul Sweezy, to try and deal with 'the present as history'. We view this as very much a dialectical exercise. That is, while the study of labour history is an invaluable intellectual tool for informing our analysis of current forces, trends and strategies in the labour movement, serious consideration of current events can also aid us in our analysis and interpretation of the past. The editors welcome any submissions that attempt to build bridges between our understandings of labour's past and the current challenges that confront it.

Ted Riethmuller's account of starting work on a large site in London in 1964 is history writing 'from below'. It is a rich piece using the everyday

