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Editorial

Howard Guille, Ross Gwyther and Bob Russell

Politics and the Australian Labor Party (ALP) are prominent in this edition of the Journal. Some background might help to put the contributions in context although we proceed with caution since many readers have had intimate experience in and of the party.

The ALP dominated electoral politics in Queensland from 1915 to 1957 and from 1989 to 2012. In both periods, it was in government for all but one parliamentary term. In the first period, it dominated from a rural base with Labor members from almost all electorates west of the Great Divide. In the second period, it had a suburban base — at one stage holding all but one of the electorates in Brisbane.

Affiliated unions are a structural part of the ALP. The party rules say that the origin of the party is ‘the recognition by the Trade Union movement of the necessity for a political voice’. Affiliated unions have 50 per cent of the delegates at State Conference which is the ‘supreme rule, policy and decision making body’. This proportion works through to all other decision-making including candidate selection.

Union affiliation is the special characteristic of the labour parties of Australian, Ireland, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. They differ from the social democratic and socialist parties of western continental Europe by structure not ideology. Indeed, the constitution of the ALP says it is a *democratic socialist party* — a point espoused by the current President Dick Williams on the ALP web-site.

There have been spectacular fissures — over conscription in 1916; over austerity in 1932; consistently over communist membership and influence; and the 1950s split over the Industrial groups and Catholic Church influence. Underlying these major eruptions has been two almost permanent tensions— one between the parliamentary party and the wider party and the other between industrial aims of affiliated unions and the political and electoral judgement of the party.

The ostensible reason for the expulsion of Premier Vince Gair in 1957 was the refusal of the Cabinet to accept a direction from the Party Central Executive to legislate to increase annual leave. This was a struggle between affiliated unions and the parliamentary

party. A critical factor was that the Australian Workers Union (AWU) and the Trades and Labour Council unions (TLC) were temporarily united.

The last issue of the Journal had an obituary for Harry Hauenschild, former President of the Queensland Trades and Labour Council and one of the leaders of the Old Guard, who resisted federal intervention into the Queensland ALP in the 1980s. There were unions and unionists for and against intervention and it provided a base for a more inclusive party that would return to government in 1989 with heightened consciousness about social as well as industrial issues.

Intervention did though alter the composition and the organisation of the party and probably made it more in the ‘Whitlam mode’ that Andrew West criticised in “*Fading Loyalties*”. Writing in 1991, he said ‘One of the reasons given by current Cabinet Ministers for ignoring or undermining ALP policies is that the Party’s members are unrepresentative of the concerns of Labor voters’ (p46). The privatisations undertaken by the Bligh government are a good example of a Labor government undermining ALP policies. As we wrote in the previous editorial ‘there is much room to ruminate about a counter-factual of whether the Bligh government privatisations would have occurred if there was still an “old-guard” style

Queensland Central Executive of the ALP’.

Sue Yarrow takes up questions about the “old guard” in this issue. This is the first of four papers to be published from the 2012 BLHA seminar on labour under conservative regimes. It covers the rise and fall of the Trades Hall Group from the late 1950s to Federal intervention in 1980. Sue makes the important observation that the old guard was industrially ‘left’ but socially conservative. They eventually fell to those they variously denigrated as ‘academics, women, environmentalists or silvertails’.

Factions were a product of federal intervention. This is one of many matters covered in the interview with Dick Williams in the second major article on the ALP in this issue. Dick became State President of the ALP after the disastrous 2012 election. He was previously Secretary of the Electrical Trades Union when that union moved from the right (old guard) faction to the left faction. He says this was fundamentally part of making the ETU into a campaigning union. The interview is enlightening about the issues facing the party including convincing affiliated unions both that the party has changed and that it will have to be serious about increasing revenues to fund necessary services.

The interview with Dick Williams is our second illustration of how we

hope the journal can cover current as well as historical events. It follows on the interview in the previous edition with Alex Scott of the Together Union. Such interviews and accounts will be a continuing feature and we acknowledge that we need to ensure some balance by getting a woman's voice and perspective.

Dick Williams argues strongly that 'we need to have governments that support the working class'. This is pertinent to Iain Campbell's article on insecure work in Australia given as the Alex McDonald lecture in 2012. This is a very informed and impressive article. He repeatedly argues that work security, in its many forms, was principally gained and enforced through institutions and regulation. That is, through political and collective action. The erosion of work security over the last two or three decades needs to be seen as a big political loss for organised labour — whether the stripping of award protections under Work Choices or the substitution of employer-based qualifications for national and occupational ones.

We are honoured to publish Kevin Brown's oration in memory of his mother, Clarice. She gave a lifetime of 90 years to the movement in Queensland and Darwin. It is a beautifully written record of an overwhelming contribution. As Kevin says, 'Clarice, with her typical humility and generosity, would prefer

to be remembered by you not as one-of-a-kind but as one Comrade amongst many. It seems to me that there is much more hope for the world if we think of her that way.'

Glenda Ross was another strong union woman. She was the Queensland Nurse Union organiser in Central Queensland. As she said, 'If there's a picket line you go and show your support to the workers'. It is a good practice.

We continue the theme of politics and regulation in the book reviews. One is on the 'precariat', Guy Standing's word for the global work force without security. There is a review of *Left Turn* — a recent collection of progressive essays and one of Mark Baker's history of town planning in Queensland. The latter is a very nice introduction to some original photos of the building of the Storey Bridge that will feature in our next issue.