

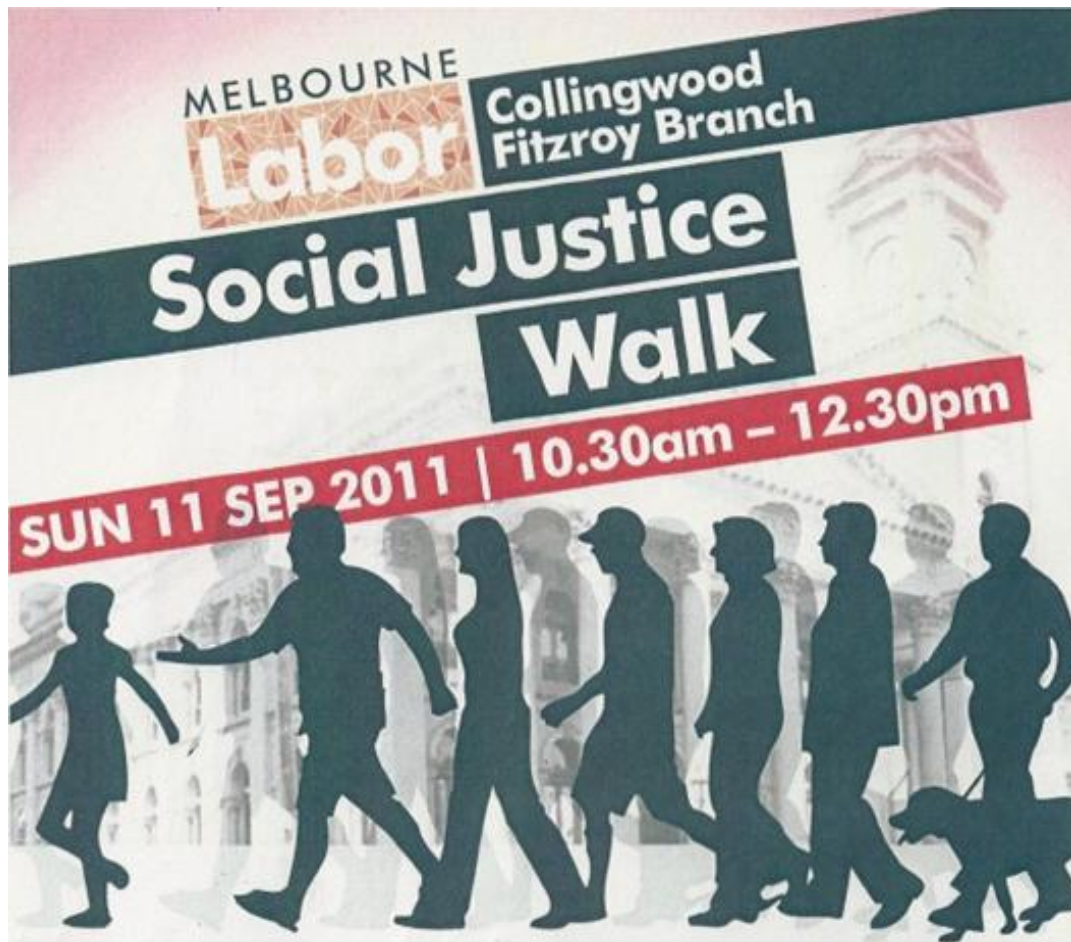
# FITZROY

## The Australian Labor Party, Community and Change: A Street Walk



*Brunswick Street looking north to Gertrude Street intersection around mid- 1970s. The Belvidere Hotel (later the Eastern Hill Hotel) is in the foreground. The Atherton Gardens Estate towers dominate over the Fitzroy Town Hall. Photo courtesy Fitzroy Local History photograph collection.*

Edited by Brian Stagoll 2014

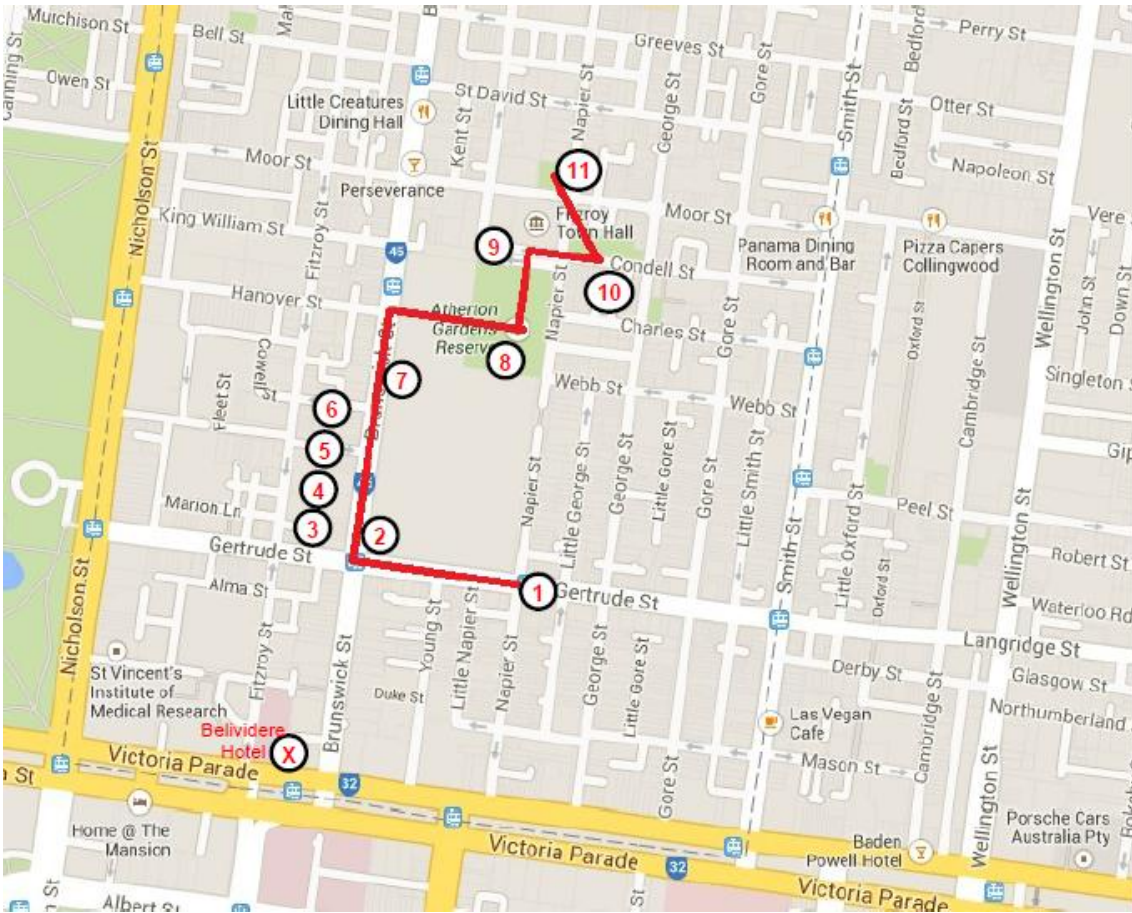


This pamphlet originated from an informal walking tour for the then newly amalgamated Collingwood, Fitzroy and North Fitzroy branches of the Australian Labor Party in 2011. Our hope was to revive and reconnect with old struggles, campaigns, victories, and social reforms over the past 100 years. We hoped to show the connections between the ALP and community activism in Fitzroy, always a hot bed of social change, and perhaps get some ideas from our past to guide us into the future.

This pamphlet continues and overlaps with the two previous pamphlets: B. Stagoll, P. Spencer, B. Pullen, Social Justice Walk around Fitzroy and North Fitzroy 1999 and 2002, available on the Fitzroy History Society website at: <http://www.fitzroyhistorysociety.org.au/selfdirectedwalking.php>

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Map of Fitzroy

### Stops on the walk

- 1 Charcoal Lane
- 2 Brunswick Street, looking down to Belvidere Hotel
- 3 Brotherhood of St. Laurence
- 4 Fitzroy Community Health Centre
- 5 Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre
- 6 Barry Pullen's office  
ROAR studios
- 7 Atherton Gardens Estate towers
- 8 Atherton Gardens
- 9 Fitzroy Court House  
Alfred Deakin steps
- 10 Fitzroy Town Hall  
1933 Fitzroy Strike Committee  
Fitzroy Learning Network
- 11 Whitlam Place

## Stop 1 - Charcoal Lane

*136 Gertrude Street*

*Introduction - Brian Stagoll*

Welcome to this walk, organised by the Collingwood/Fitzroy Branch of the Australian Labor Party.

Our foremost task is to acknowledge the Wurundjeri people and their ancestors as traditional custodians of the land we are walking on today. We also acknowledge the sorrow of the Stolen Generations and the impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We are standing in the heart of Aboriginal Fitzroy, a place that has played a vital role in the recent history of Aboriginal Australia, and a place that exemplifies the resilience, strength and pride of the Aboriginal community. In the past this block along Gertrude Street was sometimes referred to as the 'Black Mile' because many important movements for Aboriginal rights and self-determination in Victoria and Australia began along here. Yarra Council has marked out this area with historical plaques and developed a Fitzroy Aboriginal Walking Trail that I would recommend to you.

Our walk today covers different themes to Aboriginal history but while we are here I would highlight a couple of important sites. Down at 211 Gertrude Street, on the corner of Gore Street, is the Builders Arms Hotel, an important social and political gathering place from the 1940s until the 1980s (including an Aboriginal branch of the Communist Party). Known as the 'Black Pub of Melbourne', it was the place to go and meet up with your mob wherever you came from.

Then at 258 Gore Street (near St. David Street) was the Church of Christ where Pastor Doug Nichols (later Sir Douglas Nichols) established an Aboriginal congregation in 1943 and formed the Australian Aboriginal League, later the Aboriginal Advancement League, which played a central role in self determination.

*References:*

Radio National, *The Black Mile* (audio), 17 October 2010,  
<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/hindsight/the-black-mile/2984328>

City of Yarra, *Aboriginal History Walk* (pamphlet),  
<http://www.yarracity.vic.gov.au/services/Community-Planning/aboriginalservices/Aboriginal-History-Walk/>





*Charcoal Lane*

We are standing in the front of Charcoal Lane, a lovely restaurant offering Australian cuisine infused with native ingredients. This was once the home of the Victorian Aboriginal Health Services (VAHS). VAHS was the first community controlled Aboriginal Health Service in Australia, an organisation of enormous importance. It was started in 1973, just down the street at 229 Gertrude Street, moving here in 1979 until 1992 when it relocated to the old site of Exhibition High School on Nicholson Street. It remains a large and influential service, a model for many others around Australia.

*References:*

Pam Nathan, *A Home Away from Home: a study of the Aboriginal Health Service in Fitzroy*. Pit Press, 1980.

Victorian Aboriginal Health Services, [www.vahs.org.au/history.html](http://www.vahs.org.au/history.html)

## ***Charcoal Lane***

**Archie Roach (1990)**

Side by side we'd walk along to the end of Gertrude Street  
And we'd tarpaulin muster\* for the quart of wine  
Thick or thin, right or wrong, in the cold and in the heat  
We'd cross over Smith Street to the end of the line

Then we'd laugh and sing, do anything  
To keep away the pain  
Trying to keep it down as it first went round  
In Charcoal Lane

Spinning yarns and telling jokes, now the wine is tasting good  
Cos it's getting closer and closer to its end  
Have a sip, and roll some smokes, we'd smoke tailor-mades if we could  
But we just make do with some shitty leaf-blend

Then we'd all chuck in and we'd start to grin  
When we had enough to do it again  
But if things got tight then we'd have to part  
From Charcoal Lane

Up Gertrude Street we'd walk once more with just a few cents short  
And we'd stop at the Builder's to see who we could see  
And we'd bite around until we'd score a flagon of McWilliams Port  
Enough to take away our misery

And we'd all get drunk, oh so drunk  
And maybe a little insane  
And we'd stagger home all alone  
And the next day we'd do it again  
Have a revival in Charcoal Lane  
I'm a survivor of Charcoal Lane

*\*tarpaulin muster is an older Australia expression from the Depression meaning 'putting the canvas on the ground to beg'*

This handsome bluestone building was erected in 1854 as the English Scottish and Australian (ESA) Bank. When I was a medical student I remember it as the Victorian Venereal Diseases Clinic. The location reflects the rough reputation that Gertrude and Gore Street had at the time as a red light district with brothels and casinos. But I also remember the VD clinic as a place of humanity and tolerance for those on the margins, part of the important tradition of public health. After the VAHS left it was derelict until 2007 when Mission Australia with the support of the ALP government, developed Charcoal Lane, as a restaurant, and hospitality training site for young Aborigines. It was named Charcoal Lane after Archie Roach's first album. He wrote his song about a lane out the back, at one time a briquette factory where many Aborigines worked and met in relative privacy after work.

So this building has gone from being a public health clinic, then becoming the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service, to its latest incarnation in Fitzroy, a fancy

restaurant and tertiary institution and facility for tourists. I suppose that's some kind of upward curve symbolising our suburb.

Does anybody have any other stories about this particular area of Fitzroy, particularly around Aboriginal culture, history or memories?

**Tom Marino** - I went to George Street School in the early 1950s. We were just migrants from Italy. We didn't speak much English. A lot of Aborigine students went to the school also. They weren't liked, so I became very good friends with them because we all had the same sort of feeling of being discriminated against. I kept in touch with them for a long, long time.

They all moved away and we also moved on, but it was interesting being at that George Street School at the time with the many Aboriginal children that were there.

## **Stop 2 – 'Social Reform Street'**

*Corner of Brunswick and Gertrude Street*

**Brian Stagoll** - We are now in Brunswick Street. We've just walked up the Black Mile. It's not unreasonable to talk about this street as a 'Social Reform Street'. Many important social policy initiatives in Australian history started in this block.

This area has been called a 'much charited acre' and was a magnet for over 90 different social agencies in the mid 20th century, centering around the Brotherhood of St Laurence founded in the Depression by Father Gerard Tucker.

But before we ask Alison McClelland to talk about the Brotherhood can we look south along Brunswick Street to Victoria Parade?

## **Belvidere Hotel**

### **Eight Hour Movement**

On the west corner we can see a yellow building, now part of St Vincent's Hospital, used for storage and private medical suites. It was previously the Eastern Hill Hotel. Before that the Belvidere Hotel, a pre-Gold Rush hotel built in 1853.

This is a site of world historical significance, or should be! In Victoria's history it ranks with the Eureka Stockade in December 1854 as a key event. It was here that the Eight Hour Day Movement began. This was the meeting place from which the Operative Mason's Society were joined by other trade unions, bricklayers, carpenters, and so on, to campaign for the Eight Hour day: 'Eight Hours Work, Eight Hours Rest, Eight Hours Recreation'. The group called themselves the Belviderites. They gained this great advance, a world first, on 12 March 1856, now celebrated as Labor Day.

Until the 1950's there was a march from the Belvidere over to Yarra Bank on the Eight Hour Day. There was once a sign recording the historical significance of this site but that has gone.

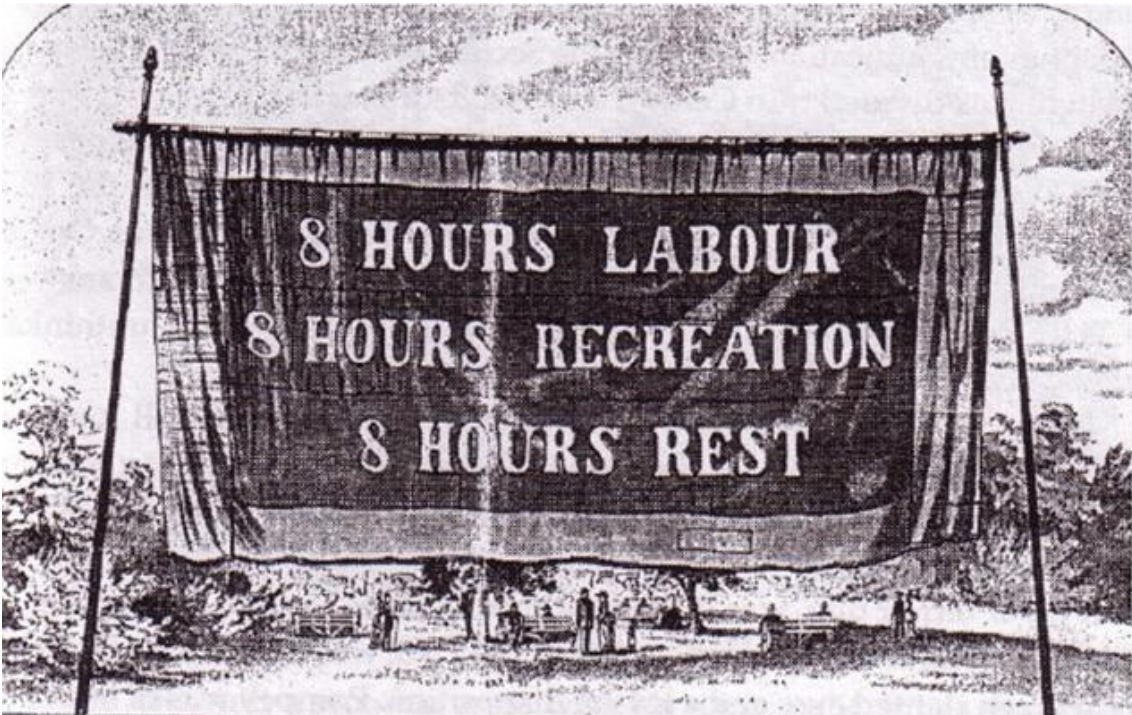
### *References:*

John Lahey, How Victoria's Unions Won Their Holy Grail, *The Age*, 2 February 1988, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1300&dat=19880202&id=46wcAAAIAJ&sjid=ApcDAAAIAJ&pg=5797,558880>

Maryanne McCubbin, 'Eight Hours' Day Movement', *eMelbourne - the Encyclopedia of Melbourne Online*, <http://www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM00513b.htm>



*The Eastern Hill Hotel, formerly 'The Belvidere', base of the Eight Hour Day movement.*



*Eight Hour Day banner, 1856*





*Eight Hour Day march outside Victorian Parliament, 1900*

### **Community Organisations Originating In Brunswick Street**

Below is a list of organisations that had their original headquarters in Brunswick Street. We will pick up some of the locations as we walk down Brunswick Street.

- The Coolibah Club (1946) - a forerunner of the Suburban Senior Citizens Clubs
- The first Opportunity Shop in Australia
- Fitzroy Community Legal Service (1975)
- Brotherhood Family Planning Clinic (1967)
- Community Aid Abroad (1962)
- Australian East Timor Association (1975)
- Family Day Care Centre (1971) – for mothers in flats without access to childcare
- Community Child Care (1972)
- Victorian Play Group Association (1975)
- Hanover Welfare Service (1964)
- Tenants Union of Victoria (1974)
- Refugee Immigrant Legal Centre (1998)

#### *Reference:*

Laurie O'Brien, 'A Much-Charited Acre', *Fitzroy: Melbourne's First Suburb*, Fitzroy History Society, MUP 1989, page 67,  
<http://www.fitzroyhistorysociety.org.au/publications/index.php?pub=first&page=cover>

### Stop 3 - Brotherhood of St. Laurence

64 Brunswick Street



*Alison McClelland and Brian Stagoll opposite the Brotherhood of St. Laurence*

**Brian Stagoll** - Alison McClelland will tell us about the Brotherhood of St. Laurence which came to Fitzroy in 1933 and became Australia's most prominent non-government community-based social justice organization. Alison was a member of the Policy and Research unit here for 13 years. We have invited Alison to tell us about links between the Brotherhood, community activism, policy development and the ALP.

**Alison McClelland** - I first encountered Brunswick Street in 1969 as a final year social work student. It was physically very different then, it was very down and out. I had just completed a major in Economics. In my final year I had a three month placement at the Brotherhood in the Research and Policy Division. It was quite a small unit, run by a wonderful woman, Janet Paterson, who started at the Brotherhood as a social worker and moved into Research and Policy. There was also a terrific woman, Rosemary Nairn, a social worker, and Judith O'Neill. I think Judith went on to work with the union movement after she left the Brotherhood. Peter Hollingworth was also there. I had known Peter as a student in the same year of social work as myself. Bishop Sambell was the executive director. He was very important in the Brotherhood and had professionalised the service delivery. He had taken over from the founder Father Tucker who started the Brotherhood in Fitzroy Street in 1933 in what was then St Mary's Church in Fitzroy Street. Father Tucker came with a group of Anglican priests originally from Newcastle, N.S.W to form the Brotherhood, living and working with people in poverty. Right from the beginning there was a sense that you had to change society if you wanted to change people's lives.

When I started I was working on a very interesting research project called the 'Have Not's'. It was a study of about 80 to 100 people who were on low incomes and it showed their lived experiences including their community contacts, their involvement in society's structures and how that wasn't working for them. I was a young middle class girl from Ivanhoe, and interviewing these people was a major learning exercise

for me. I vividly remember one man. This was pre-Medicare. He'd been a low wage worker and had a very bad accident. He'd gone to hospital. At that time you paid for hospital care unless you were below the means test or you were in Queensland. When he had his accident he was working, so he was above the means test.

He ended up being not able to work but was still confronted with huge hospital bills. We forget things like that and often take for granted the important changes that Medicare introduced. 'The 'Have Not's'" pointed to such issues and was published in the early 1970s. It was very important and the culmination of a decade of research that the Brotherhood had undertaken through the 1960s as the Research Department was developed.

That project, amongst other things of course, led to what was one of the Brotherhood's most iconic projects, the Family Centre. The Family Centre was run by Connie Benn and was based on a very different way of working with low income people and dealing with poverty. It was based on a structural view of poverty, that to change people's lives you had to change the structures in society. It was the Brotherhood moving from a focus on rehabilitating the poor so that they would better fit into society, to saying no, the way that society is structured isn't right and we need to change that. It drew on the Brotherhood's research and on a number of decades of service delivery such as the 'Family Service Bureau' where social workers would interview people, talk about their problems and give them money. Connie's Family Centre was a way of moving beyond that and it was quite contested at the time.

As Brian has said there were also a number of other iconic projects.

Earlier, Brian talked about the Brotherhood setting up the Coolibah Centre. The Brotherhood also started Free Milk in Schools, Family Planning and Family Day Care. Later on in the 1980s the Brotherhood continued those programs, and also set up SPAN (Self Development Project for the Aged in Northcote), the first project that illustrated the potential of older people to continue to contribute to society. The Brotherhood also helped establish Community Aid Abroad in 1962, later to become Oxfam Australia. David Scott who became an important Executive Director of the Brotherhood was the first director of Community Aid Abroad.

Central to Connie Benn's work on the Family Centre project, as with the 'Have Not's' research, was the sense that you did not do research for its own sake, you did it to advocate for change. Such activity had a broader purpose - to advocate for change because of the sense that poverty and disadvantage were caused by the way society was structured wrongly and to change them required an advocacy focus.

The basis of our advocacy was for larger social change. The Brotherhood did that in a number of ways over its history. In the 1940s it made some films that many may know of including 'Beautiful Melbourne', which showed the effects on the lives of people living in a slum and 'A Jail Does Not Cure', to show that you need to do something different about alcoholism. In the 1930's there were sit-ins to highlight unfair tenancy laws. Father Tucker, the founder, and Frank Coaldrake, who worked with Father Tucker, both engaged in the sit-ins. There were also many pamphlets and articles written by David Scott.

Another important feature of the Brotherhood, especially from the late 1960s onwards, was working with other community groups. There was a realisation that you had to move beyond the charity model, and one organisation couldn't do it all on its own. So a number of the changes and programs were undertaken with other organisations, including setting up new organisations such as the Fitzroy Credit Co-op and Fitzroy Legal Aid. I think one of the important things for me as part of the Brotherhood's history was the sense that it had to support the development of other organisations that empowered people and to try out different ways of working. We provided a place for groups such as Community Child Care and the Tenants Union, and we supported self help groups. Moving beyond the charitable model was a very important part of the

Brotherhood's history.

When I started here, I was quite religious, a Methodist, but that didn't matter with the Brotherhood. One of the important things about this history is that you could almost be a communist, you could be an atheist, you could be a different believer and still find a place at the Brotherhood.

When I started at the Brotherhood I think I was very narrow in my understanding of the world and while I believed fervently in social justice I still think I had the view deep down, and I wouldn't have admitted it, that you could really get yourself out of poverty if you worked hard enough.

But I had this experience that was quite important. As part of my placement at the Brotherhood I had to conduct interviews in some detail. I visited one family a number of times, to really understand in some detail about the way they lived their lives and the choices they were able to make. They lived in Preston, I think Stoke Street, and they were working class. He was unskilled and they had a number of children. The thing that stood out for me was that they were always on the edge. No matter how hard they worked, because of their background and because of the advantages that they lacked, they were always limited in what they could do unless we changed things.

The Brotherhood provided that realisation for a lot of people. Janet Paterson talks about it happening for her when she described her experiences at the Brotherhood in a wonderful little book, called 'Looking back, looking forward'.

In 1993 as Director of the Policy and Research Department, with Michael Challen, then Executive Director, I was invited to a Youth Summit organised by Keating after he became Prime Minister and was keen to respond to unemployment. During the reception for the Summit the Head of Prime Minister and Cabinet came up to me commenting, 'I want to tell you that I used to work for the Brotherhood, I was a volunteer in its youth centre'. Other influential people have made similar comments over the years illustrating that open, welcoming organisations like the Brotherhood can touch the lives of people, who later go on to understand society differently as they advance and make important decisions. I think the experience of the Brotherhood and of Fitzroy has had an impact on a number of people.

Another thing to say is that the Brotherhood also helped establish Community Aid Abroad in 1962, later merge with Oxfam Australia. David Scott who became an important Executive Director of the Brotherhood was the first director of Community Aid Abroad.

To sum up, I think the history of the Brotherhood has a number of features that are relevant to the Labor Party and how you can advocate for authentic change. There was a strong focus on poverty throughout the Brotherhood's history, particularly in relation to unemployment but also housing. This was a critical focus that the Brotherhood didn't really deviate from. The development of its research and policy capacity enabled it to be authoritative. There was also a link with services so that that authority was also based on people's authentic experiences, it wasn't just academic. There was a social justice vision about the kind of society that we were trying to create. Finally, there was a very important link with community, the sense that you work with others and you don't try to do it by yourself. These are some lessons for the Labor Party from my thinking about the Brotherhood.

**Brian Stagoll** - Thank you Alison. Can I do a spot check? Who here has had some involvement with the Brotherhood as a volunteer or a worker? (There is a strong show of hands). I think the ripple effects of the Brotherhood were profound. It came into all of our lives as an intersection with community activism and the ALP. Connie Benn of course went on to become the Director of Social Policy in the first Cain government.



*References:*

C. Holden and R. Trembath, *Divine Discontent: The Brotherhood of St. Laurence - A History*, Australian Scholarly Publishing 2008

J. O'Neill and R. Nairn, *The Have Not's: a study of 150 low income families*, Brotherhood of St. Laurence, Melbourne 1972

Brotherhood of St. Laurence Collection, Beautiful Melbourne (film), 1947; clip available online at *Australianscreen* operated by the National Film and Sound Archive, <http://aso.gov.au/titles/sponsored-films/beautiful-melbourne/clip1/>

#### **Stop 4 - North Yarra Community Health, Fitzroy Centre**

*75 Brunswick Street*

Brian Stagoll - Moving on to Fitzroy Community Health Centre we stop in front of the mural 'The Colours of Fitzroy', completed in 2006 by the BEEM Artists, an indigenous artists collective which has done a number of murals around here.



*BEEM mural*

This is a place close to my heart. Alison mentioned how the Brotherhood of St. Laurence linked up with other groups and if it weren't for the Brotherhood, Fitzroy Community Health Centre would not be here at all! The Health Centre's existence at all was a close run thing. In 1974 St Vincent's Hospital was able to get the money allocated under Whitlam's Community Health Program to set up their centre, the DePaul Centre in Nicholson Street. Although there were a number of excellent people there, many of us in Fitzroy had a problem with the fact that it was run by St Vincent's Hospital. It was not a community health centre. It did provide various services but not others such as family planning.

The Fitzroy Community Health Association was constituted in 1985 and met for 7 years with the aim of trying to get community control of Community Health in Fitzroy. That was a long and hard struggle. It was only after 1982 and the election of John Cain with Tom Roper as the Minister of Health and Barry Pullen as our local Upper House member, that we were able to transfer the funds and staff to form the Fitzroy Community Health Centre. It then took us 2 years to find a building. We had many disappointments and temporary premises, until the Brotherhood stepped forward and said we could share the old Community Aid Abroad cottage, which they were redeveloping. As Alison noted, Community Aid Abroad had its first office in this spot in 1955 under David Scott's management. We then worked out a deal with the Brotherhood.

I was the first President of the Fitzroy Community Health Centre when John Cain opened this building in December 1987. The Community Health Centre took over the lower floor while the Brotherhood was upstairs. Our joint ownership arrangement was that if one of us fell over the other would take over the rest of the property. This was actually very reassuring to us during the Kennett years because Community Health almost collapsed from savage budget cuts. But we survived that era and in 1993 we amalgamated with Carlton and Collingwood Community Health Centres to form the mighty North Yarra Community Health, with over 100 staff in four centres providing a complete range of health and community services.

The history of North Yarra Community Health which goes back to 1869, was published in 2012. It is called *Missionaries, Radicals, Feminists*. I hope you will all read it!

As I said, it was a very close thing, Fitzroy getting a community health centre. We very well might not have got it if it hadn't been for the Cain government and Barry Pullen and Tom Roper. The second president of Fitzroy Community Health Centre, Anne Horrigan-Dixon is here.

**Anne Horrigan-Dixon** - The great thing about the ALP and social justice is that it supported a community development approach where people like Barry and Brian supported a person like me who was a young mum and new to the area. They mentored me to be able to become a participant in the community. The Community Health Centre was open to everybody and worked on a very different model to the standard medical model when it started off. It was about having a small centre run by a fantastic CEO Terri Jackson, where we had outreach workers that went and delivered in the community and around the community to find out what the needs of the community were. This information was fed back to the committee. Support was given to people who were least able to participate. The Community Health Centre did amazing things to get those people into meetings. They supported them with childcare and with interpreters so that people from non-English speaking backgrounds could participate. We would give a lot of input before meetings so that people actually could meaningfully participate. I find it really frustrating now the position that I'm in when I look at what's done to various people so that they are really excluded by bureaucratic processes. The great thing about the Community Health Centre is that when you work in this community, if there is a problem the Community Health Centre is still the first point of call and it will respond. It really, really deals with emerging needs and I think that is a great thing. But the other thing to say about the DePaul Centre, is that it was not only owned by St Vincent's, it was exclusionary in certain ways.

The Community Health Centre from the initial first committee had people from the flats, non-English speaking people, and young mums like me. Everybody was really supportive and supported by a grass roots bottom-up approach rather than a top down.



Anne Horigan-Dixon

**Brian Stagoll** - It's a tradition that Anne continued later on and I'm sure we'll get a chance to talk about Fitzroy Learning Network. Fitzroy Community Health Centre also developed a number of very important innovations in refugee health.

*Reference:*

H. Townsend, *Missionaries, Radicals, Feminists; a History of North Yarra Community Health*, 2012, North Yarra Community Health, [www.nych.org.au](http://www.nych.org.au)

## **Stop 5 - Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre**

*95 Brunswick Street*

The Refugee Immigration Legal Centre, or RILC, was opened here in 1998. It is now down at 121 Brunswick Street. A small organisation with only 7 full time staff and many volunteers, it played a major role providing legal services, advocacy and community education, going all over Australia and to Christmas Island and Nauru, providing advocacy, and bringing legal challenges. David Manne CEO of RILC spoke to the branch in September 2011, just before the High Court decision, which ruled against the Malaysia solution. This had proposed direct transfer of asylum seekers to Malaysia from Christmas Island. It was major decision and advance for the human rights of refugees. RILC had led the appeal.

*Reference:*

*Plaintiff M70/2011 v Minister for Immigration and Citizenship [2011] HCA 32*, 31 August 2011, <http://www.hcourt.gov.au/assets/publications/judgment-summaries/2011/hca32-2011-08-31.pdf>

## Stop 6 - Barry Pullen's Electoral Office (1982-1999) and Roar Studios

115 Brunswick Street

**Brian Stagoll** - Many of you will remember this building, now a fancy wine shop. But it had another history from 1982 to 1999 and I believe that Richard Wynne worked there for a period as an electoral officer. What happened in this building Dick?

**Richard Wynne** - This is a pretty important building for two reasons, one because it was Barry Pullen's office for most of his time in Parliament, but also up above was the famous Roar Studios. Roar Studios was for many young emerging artists, their very first opportunity to start their artistic career. Some of Australia's best artists careers were born here, upstairs at 115A Brunswick Street.

*Reference:*

Traudi Allen, 'Roar studios', *eMelbourne - the Encyclopedia of Melbourne Online*, <http://www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM01256b.htm>

But the reason why this office was also important is where it's located, opposite the high-rise estate. Our office was located here was because we wanted to continue a really strong engagement with the people living on the public housing estate who the previous Liberal government did nothing to support.

**Bystander** - They took the revenue from the humble people and the poor. They robbed the poor.

**Richard Wynne** - So, for example, when we were working here at that time there were still copper boilers, that's right, copper boilers in the laundries! People really lived in quite difficult conditions. Here's the president of the Atherton Gardens Resident's Association, Roy Collins. Come over Roy. Roy has lived on this estate for how long?

**Roy Collins** - 35 years.

**Richard Wynne** - So Roy you would remember when we worked in this office here there were no laundries, and the then government did nothing to support public housing.

**Roy Collins** - Even now, in the 9 months since the Baillieu Liberals took over, we are worse than ever. They cut everything, rubbish everywhere, everything in pieces. So we had to take some action immediately.

**Richard Wynne** - It's happening again.

**Roy Collins** - We have to stand our ground and say, 'Excuse me, you don't provide the service, we don't provide the rent.' Under human rights and a better service, we should have public housing and that's it.

**Richard Wynne** - As you can see there's still great militancy in our area. Anne Horgan-Dixon also worked with me and Barry Pullen in this office and I think we did some fantastic things in terms of really helping to mobilise the residents and to fight, as this gentleman rightly said, pathetic conditions for public housing.

**Roy Collins** - We sent a clear message to Parliament to give us free public housing and abolish debt under human rights and self-respect and dignity. The Prime Minister lives in the Lodge while we suffer, it's not good enough. If she felt she wasn't doing the job right or her life was at risk she should simply resign and that's it. People have to make choices but people like me, I fight for my rights and if I die so be it, I fight for the people of Australia and those that are disadvantaged. I will continue on and hope I've got a long life ahead of me.



**Brian Stagoll** - Let's hear from Barry Pullen. Barry was a Member of the Legislative Council from 1982 to 1998, and Minister in the Cain and Kirner Labor State governments.

**Barry Pullen** - I won't talk about the whole period of the office. I'll just give one little account. One night I was working here, it was late, the staff had gone (they had this idea that they could only work an 8 hour day!). They'd all pissed off so I was there by myself. I'd left the door open, hadn't locked it and a man came in, an oldish sort of man, and he came down and he just lay on the carpet. I went over to him, but he didn't come and ask anything, he just lay there. He didn't look too good. I went over to him and I had to bend down. Finally he said, 'I'm feeling really crook.' There was nothing in the MPs handbook on how to handle this situation! 'I haven't had a thing to drink or eat all day.' I was a bit worried so I went up to the shop and I got some sandwiches, I didn't know what to do, and I came back and I offered him the sandwiches and he said, 'I thought you'd bring beer.' Then he got up and walked out.

## **Stop 7 - Atherton Gardens Estate and the Fitzroy Narrows**

*151 Brunswick Street*

**Brian Stagoll** - The Atherton Gardens Estate was built on the notorious Fitzroy Narrows as part of the slum reclamation projects of the mid 20th century. The Narrows were infamously a hive of crime, gambling and vice, 'the drunken underbelly of Melbourne'. It was the haunt of Squizzy Taylor and the Fitzroy Vendetta of 1919. It was demolished in the early 1970's against strong community protest. Barry Pullen tells of that struggle in our previous pamphlet about social justice in Fitzroy. Tony Birch has written a moving and sympathetic account of living there as a child in his important book 'Shadow Boxing'. Let us go into the foyer of the 151 building with the kind permission of the concierge and hear from Richard Wynne, Housing Minister in the last Victorian Labor government.



*Richard Wynne and Renate Howe*

### *References:*

Tony Birch, *Shadow Boxing*, Scribe 2006

B. Stagoll, P. Spencer, B. Pullen, *Social Justice Walk around Fitzroy and North Fitzroy* 1999 and 2002, <http://www.fitzroyhistorysociety.org.au/selfdirectedwalking.php>

### **Inside the foyer of 151 Brunswick Street**

**Richard Wynne** - This really gives you some idea of the quality of work that the Labor Government put in to renovate this whole estate over the last half a dozen years now. As you look up into the towers you'll see that the windows have changed. You'll see some have got old style windows in them still and some have got new ones. New windows means the whole floor has been completely renovated. When I say renovated I mean from the front door to the back, so new kitchens, new bathrooms, new carpeting, completely renovated. At the same time, what we strove to do was to actually ensure that the foyers of the buildings were secure as much as possible. Now I'm not saying that it is absolutely 100% but it is a very significant improvement on what we had before which was essentially pretty much just open access. So you've got the gentlemen here where there's 24-hour security on the building, there's a key swipe at the door and you have to work your way through into the building itself. You can see the quality of the finishing here which in my view is as good as any private sector building. That's how it ought to be, so these are really the legacies of our time in government...

**Brian Stagoll** - When you were Minister of Housing.

Richard Wynne - Yes indeed. When I was Minister of Housing. You'll see of course also with all of these buildings the grounds are serviced by storm water recycling and also grey water recycling. This is the only estate in Victoria, which fully services its gardens naturally by rainwater and by grey water. It is quite a significant achievement to have these grounds in such a beautiful condition as they are now, particularly through the drought. People said, 'What's going on here, are you people watering?' When in fact it was just the grey water and the rainwater.

### **Stop 8 - In the Grounds of the Atherton Gardens Estate**



The old Wesleyan church hall. Brian Howe, the minister, used the compensation money to fund CURA.  
Courtesy: Fitzroy Local History photo collection

**Brian Stagoll** - Renate is Associate Professor of History at Deakin University and author of many books on local and women's history. She is the author of the history of the Victorian Housing Commission, 'New Houses for Old: 50 Years of Public Housing in Victoria 1938-1988'. She came to Fitzroy in 1968 with her husband Brian, then Minister of the Wesleyan Church on Brunswick Street.

**Renate Howe** - In 1970, the telephone rang in North Fitzroy. On the phone was Father Fitzpatrick from the Catholic Church that you can see over there in Condell Street. He rang to tell us that the Housing Commission bulldozers were bulldozing our church, which had been on the corner there. It was an 1840's church, one of the oldest buildings in Melbourne and we attempted to save it as the Housing Commission area had been redeveloped. I want to say we all have a defining moment and I suppose that was a defining moment for us. Brian went on to become very active in the area. I've got this terribly bad photocopy of The Age that came out to interview Brian as the Church was being demolished or about to be demolished. That was the first time that the public press had started to take an interest in what was happening. Up until then they really had just gone along with the Housing Commission. So that was I think the start of us all feeling here was something we had to really fight against.

The Housing Commission had huge powers at that time. The government had just passed a 1970 Act, which turned them into an Urban Renewal Authority. So they could demolish anything, they had very few restraints.

It is unfortunate what they did demolish, and some younger person here has just asked me, what was here on this site? Part of what was here on this site had been identified in the 1930s Slum Report as an area that needed rehabilitation. However the Housing Commission took the Slum Report and went far beyond what had ever been intended and demolished the area. Louise Elliot of the Fitzroy Resident's Association used to call it 'the scorched earth policy'. But it was not just here. We've got to think of the huge impact it had on Melbourne.

Just think of Melbourne: Carlton, South Melbourne, all the inner suburbs, North Melbourne, Flemington. All Labor electorates of course, so you had this well entrenched Liberal government moving in with these huge powers to demolish these areas. What had been here were old communities. They were very important for the Aboriginal community, as Tony Birch has written. There were social networks that were very strong, along with Squizzy Taylor, the prostitutes and the homeless men, all living around this area. All that was wiped out.

As we started to do some research to react to this situation, we found that very few residents really got compensated if they were home owners or got adequately rehoused if they weren't. To Brian's and my horror we had come back from Chicago only to find that the Housing Commission's model for this redevelopment had been as a result of some of the Commissioners visiting overseas. They had visited Chicago and seen the Robert Taylor Homes and this was to be the model. We had lived in Chicago and the Robert Taylor Homes were regarded as an absolute disaster.

**Brian Stagoll** - They also visited Moscow?

**Renate Howe** - They visited Moscow, yes, and Europe and Britain. Of course this was happening around the world at this time: this Le Corbusier modernist type response was the go.

So it comes here to Fitzroy, at that time a poor community. The concrete towers went up very quickly using the Housing Commission's pre-cast concrete building. Four towers, 3,000 people and very few community facilities or any thought of the social consequences. That was to be a very significant thing in our opposition.

We're standing here near a soccer ground and I can remember how we really fought

for this. We said, "You've got to provide something here for the families that are moving in' and 'how about a kick-to-kick area here?' But the Housing Commission wouldn't cover that, and it's only recently since our Labor Government's been in that we've even got a kick-to-kick area and improvement in the surrounding areas. There was very little consideration for social issues.

This may seem a story of failure on our part. We didn't stop it; it happened. But I think if we go on (and you've heard Alison speak) a lot of good things came out of our response to these demolitions. I think that's important for those of you who are new branch members to think about. You don't have to accept what's handed down. Interest in community and responding can still be an important challenge to our ALP branches. I like to think that Obama came from community working in Chicago and he got a tremendous response in that last election to 'Yes We Can'. People did respond to it and I think that perhaps the difference between our generation and the latter ones, is that in the 1970's we really did believe we could make a difference. I think we did achieve many things which have been forgotten in a period of managerialism and neo-liberal ideals. We've got to get back to that.

Policy is important as Richard will tell you. That's why Labor governments and local governments with commitment are important. This was a failed policy in many ways and as you know the Robert Taylor Homes in Chicago have now been demolished and many of those Le Corbusier type developments have gone. The Labor government has managed to make this estate work a lot better since they've been in. I hate to think what would have been the situation now if we hadn't had them.

Policy is important, thinking about housing policy and so on does need to go on and local branch members can be very important in that. If you think about it, Tony Abbot, Ted Baillieu and dare I say, our current Housing Minister, Alison Clarke, won't achieve what Labor has achieved in the past and must achieve in the future. That requires thinking of social policy and action in the community. They won't do it in these inner city areas. They haven't got the breadth or the policy development expertise to undertake it. Richard Wynne has been very important and the Federal Labor government has been important in providing the first new developments on these housing estates in 40 years. Finally on our old church site. Over those 40 years, it has just been a concrete car park for Brotherhood of St Laurence staff. What a waste!

But things are changing. As you can see there is new development here, the Atherton Gardens Hub. It is heading away from the Le Corbusier style. It's been designed by eminent architects. I am part of the Housing Advisory Committee. So we've come a long way. It's got a community hub at the bottom, with 152 social housing units, and an integrated child and family services centre. It is going to be managed by housing associations. So we've got a new model here which I think we couldn't have got without Federal Labor government providing the money and State Labor government being in power; so let's not forget power is important.

To end on another personal note. I said I was involved in the Committee that is evaluating this new project. Once Father Fitzpatrick and the Catholic Church ran a school on that site. The new building also has a school on the site that has come from the Federal Labor government and it's making a tremendous difference. Who goes to the school? Of course a lot of the kids from the Housing Commission, with many Sudanese immigrants. But their only playground is the old Hanover Street. Even though that is owned by the Housing Commission, it could have been extended into the estate to give a bit more space for those kids that really have got nothing to play on. That didn't happen. So there are still things, those little things that matter as much as the big things. We've still got a lot to fight for in this area. Tom Marino mentioned that a lot of kids also went to the Collingwood School that he went to. Many of you may not know that at the time the Save the Children Fund actually put that school on its list of its worst schools in the world. And actually gave it some money to improve its services.



**Brian Stagoll** - Thank you Renate. That is a beautiful new facility, particularly for residents who will be able to have their children cared for whilst undertaking their training. It's really going to be a comprehensive opportunity for residents who want to work. The unemployment rate here is horrendous because people have never been given the opportunity to step up. So what you'll have here in the future is this community fully active in civic life and that means being in employment, being in training and having the opportunities and the dignities that comes from that. So this will really be –as beautifully put by Renate– a lovely bookend to what was an extraordinary history of struggle in this area around housing and social justice.

*Reference:*

R. Howe, ed. *New Houses for Old: 50 Years of Public Housing in Victoria 1938-1988*, Ministry of Housing and Construction, 1988.

### **Stop 9 - South Side of Fitzroy Town Hall**

*Condell Street*

**Brian Stagoll** - This building at the back of the Town Hall and next to the police station was the base of the Special Branch. Victoria had the most notorious Special Branch in Australia. Do I have to explain what the Special Branch was? The Special Branch was the Victorian surveillance and spy operation that kept tabs on well-known radicals, communists, fellow travellers and sectarians. Who here has a Special Branch dossier? (Hands rise up) Roger Wilson, veteran trade unionist... and probably a few others!

**Max Ogden** - Roger's got one as big as a telephone book.

**Brian Stagoll** - The Special Branch moved out of Fitzroy in the 1970s and then in 1972, in an ironic twist, its space was taken up by an organisation that represented completely opposite views, the Fitzroy Legal Service, which started here in 1972. It was the first non-Aboriginal community legal centre in Australia. In those days it was very radical with a strong a view that it wasn't just about interpreting but about changing the law. Did anybody here work there or volunteer there or have any contact with them?

**Tom Marino** - I did. I was never in trouble with the law, I was a volunteer! If anyone listens to 3LO, Jon Faine was one of the initiators of it, he was a young lawyer at the time and he started off here with lots of other volunteers.

**Brian Stagoll** - One famous Fitzroy identity of those days is Paul Coghlan who was the leader of the Labor caucus and the Mayor of Fitzroy. He is now in the Supreme Court. In the previous social justice walk of Fitzroy you can read Paul's account of the early days at Fitzroy Legal Service and I recommend that to you

*Reference:*

B. Stagoll, P. Spencer, B. Pullen, *Social Justice Walk around Fitzroy and North Fitzroy* 1999 and 2002, available at:

<http://www.fitzroyhistorysociety.org.au/selfdirectedwalking.php>

Fitzroy Legal Service has gone on to bigger and better things and is now of course round in Johnston Street.

**Glynn Elias** - Can I just relate one little story about the Special Branch; I remember

one time we were having a meeting in the Council Chambers here at Fitzroy Town Hall. We heard all of this noise, sort of screams and the noise of equipment. Because we were all a bit paranoid about the Special Branch we leapt up, 'Hey they must be torturing someone.' We all rushed down and had a look inside and the Special Branch had got some exercise equipment in and they were just exercising on it.

### **Alfred Deakin Foundation Stone, South Side of Fitzroy Town Hall**

**Brian Stagoll** – this is the Foundation stone for the Fitzroy Court House, launched by Alfred Deakin in 1888. He was then Chief Secretary of Victoria. He was born in Fitzroy at 90 George Street, on 3 August 1856. He was Australia's second Prime Minister, architect of Federation and a genuine Liberal, so rare these days.



Historian Carole Woods reports that at the laying of the Foundation Stone the mayor presented Alfred Deakin with a silver trowel on behalf of the city council and thanked him for the substantial aid that he and his government had “ever extended to the Fitzroy Council.” Mr Deakin commented that the courthouse part of the building “would not cost the ratepayers a farthing,” and he performed the ceremony “amid great cheering.” Afterwards, at a dinner in the town hall, the mayor proposed a toast to the “Ministry coupled with the name of Mr Deakin.” When responding by proposing a toast to the “prosperity to the City of Fitzroy,” Alfred Deakin mentioned that he had a special interest in Fitzroy “for it was his native place”.

*'This stone was laid by the Hon Alfred Deakin MP, Chief Secretary, 18 December 1888' - Foundation stone for the Fitzroy Court House, South Side of Fitzroy Town Hall*

#### *References:*

Carole Woods, 'Alfred Deakin's 150th Anniversary in Fitzroy', The Fitzroy History Society, <http://www.fitzroyhistorysociety.org.au/images/file/Oct06.pdf>

Carole Woods, 'Alfred Deakin and the Foundation Stone of the Fitzroy Courthouse', The Fitzroy History Society, <http://www.fitzroyhistorysociety.org.au/images/jan2009.pdf>

## Stop 10 - Napier Street, Opposite Fitzroy Town Hall

*184 Napier Street*



*182 Napier Street, Fitzroy Learning Network and 184 Napier Street, Fitzroy Strike Committee 1933.  
Courtesy: Fitzroy Local History Photo Collection*

**Brian Stagoll** - This vacant block at 184 Napier Street was the site of the Fitzroy Strike Committee in the 1930's. The building has since been demolished. The Fitzroy Strike Committee was part of the Unemployed Worker's Movement in the Depression. The Unemployed Worker's Movement was a significant social movement. At its peak in the 1930s it had over 60,000 members. In the Depression there was government paid relief, which was a small wage for people who were unemployed. In 1933 they stopped paying relief and instead moved to a program called Work for the Dole or sustenance. The pay for Work for Dole was not money but a voucher. Then this was revoked and there was an 8-week strike following the government's plans to have a Work-for-Dole call up.

They were literally drafting people to work for the dole for which you didn't get paid, but for which you might get a voucher. The Unemployed Workers Movement called in a strike in mid 1933.

There is a letter about these events in Fitzroy, written by the Fitzroy Strike Committee of the Unemployed Worker's Movement. It's a very interesting letter, written to the Plumbers and Gasfitters union, signed by the secretary of the Fitzroy Strike Committee, D. Lovegrove. Dinny Lovegrove was a North Fitzroy branch member. He got kicked out of the Communist Party, then rose to be state secretary of the ALP and then Deputy Leader of the ALP from 1947 to 1955. Barry, I remember you saying at the start of your political career you had the occasion to call on Dinny. Is that right?

FITZROY STRIKE COMMITTEE.

184 Napier Street. Aug. 3rd 1933.

Secretary,  
 Fitzroy General Unemployed,  
 TRADES HALL, MELBOURNE.

U/  
265.

7 AUG 1933

Dear Comrade,

We desire to obtain your co-operation in a Protest against the glaring example of Class Justice meted out to five men recently convicted in the Fitzroy Court of "unlawful possession of Firewood" and sentenced to £5 or 1 month imprisonment, which four of them are now serving. The Bench would not raise the fine to permit of an appeal. These men are members of the Fitzroy Single Men's Camp, who have struck against Work-for-Sustenance. One of them is an active member of the Strike Committee.

The Firewood in question was donated by the members of the Fitzroy General Unemployed who are still receiving Sustenance Wood, to the Strikers deprived of wood. This Donation was the unanimous resolution of a meeting of the Fitzroy General Unemployed, and it was for the collection of this Wood that the five men were framed by the Fitzroy Police on a charge of "Unlawful Possession". The Police evidence to the effect that the men stole the Wood from little boys who were carting it in trucks was totally unsubstantiated by witnesses. Their assertion was "that a complaint had been made".

The evidence for the defence included unemployed men who had donated part of the wood, and the Minutes registering the Resolution of the Unemployed to Donate it. This evidence was ignored by the Bench on the grounds that "insufficient wood had been accounted for", and that "the Government would not permit of such collection".

The entire case throughout has been characterised by perjury and intimidation by the Fitzroy Police. When the men were locked up, all enquiries were refused until Mr Turner J.P. and Mr Cain M.L.A. had phoned the Fitzroy Police Station and demanded to know what charge was being preferred. Mr Tunnecliffe has presented full facts with additional evidence secured since the conviction to the Chief Secretary, but to date no satisfaction has been obtained.

We believe that the Industrial Movement should lodge a vigorous Protest against the Fascist savagery which has characterised the attempt of the Argyle Government to force men to work for the Dole, and we appeal to your organisation to carry and forward to the Chief Secretary and the Attorney General a Resolution condemning the action of the Fitzroy Police, and demanding the immediate release of our Comrades in Fitzroy.

Resolutions along the following lines have been carried by some of the organisations concerned in the Dole Dispute:

--- "The \_\_\_\_\_ strongly condemns the action of the Fitzroy Police in framing on a charge of "unlawful possession" five Dole Strikers collecting Firewood, and we demand their immediate release. We regard this case as an evidence of Fascist Intimidatory methods, constituting a damning indictment of the Government on whom responsibility must rest, and we pledge our solidarity and support to the Dole Strikers in resisting these attacks."

Trusting your organisation will add its weight to our fight,

I am yours fraternally,  
*D. Lovegrove*  
 SECRETARY  
 FITZROY STRIKE COMMITTEE.

*diffn table  
for members  
7/8/33  
[initials]*

*Letter from the Fitzroy Strike Committee, 1933*

**Barry Pullen** - Yes I didn't realise how important he was so I gave him the pamphlets to hand out, and he took them and handed them out for my local government campaign.

**Brian Stagoll** - In 1933, if you were receiving sustenance there was a supply of free firewood, but you were supposed to be working for the dole to be eligible. The Fitzroy General Unemployed Committee gave some firewood to five ineligible workers, who were immediately arrested by the police, fined £5 and put in jail for theft. That's what this letter is about. You can read it in detail, but just read out some of the phrases, which remind us what politics was like at that time:

*'The entire case has been characterised by perjury and intimidation by the Fitzroy police.'*



When the men were locked up all enquiries were refused until Mr Turner JP and Mr Cain MLA (John Cain Senior) phoned the Fitzroy police station, which is just down the road, and demanded to know what the charges were.

The letter goes on:

*'We believe that the industrial movement should lodge a vigorous protest against fascist savagery which is characterised by the attempt of this Argyle government (Sir Stanley Argyle was the Premier at the time) to force men to work for the Dole and we appeal to your organisation and so on demanding the immediate release of our comrades in Fitzroy and resolutions have been carried along the following lines, the North Fitzroy ALP strongly condemns the action of the Fitzroy police in framing on a charge of unlawful possession for 5 Dole strikers for collecting firewood. We regard this case as evidence of fascist intimidatory methods constituting a damning indictment of the government on whom responsibility must rest and we pledge our solidarity and support to the Dole strikers in resisting these attacks.'*

We don't write letters like that anymore.

**Roger Wilson** - Just as a matter of interest regarding Work for the Dole, some of you may be aware that the Boulevard around Yarra Bend Park was actually built by people on sustenance/the voucher payment, just as the Shrine of Remembrance and much of the Great Ocean Road were. They went down there, pick and shovel, horse and dray, built the Great Ocean Road for a ticket, for a meal.

**Brian Stagoll** - The strike went on for 8 weeks and was successful. The workers were then granted the grand sum of 12 shillings a week. A year later it was upgraded to 20 shillings a week. I want it on the record that one of the magnificent organisations supporting the strikers was Collingwood Football Club!

*Reference:*

John Button, 'Denis Lovegrove', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, volume 15, MUP, 2000, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/lovegrove-denis-10864>

## **Stop 11 - Fitzroy Learning Network (FLN)**

*182 Napier Street*

**Anne Horrigan-Dixon (former Director of FLN)** - This building next door also has a deep history. My involvement began when the Brotherhood of St Laurence decided that an adult learning facility was needed for people in the high rise flats. The Fitzroy Learning Network actually didn't grow out of the grass roots, it was set up by the Brotherhood and various agencies in Fitzroy. When I started working it was up at the old Church Hall and we had no facilities and the organisation was faltering. There was a big demand from the flats for people to learn English as a second language. I was employed to wind up the organisation because we had no students, no money, no committee. I got the job and the committee walked out the door. That's a challenge that you've just got to take head on. We moved with the help of Frankie Thompson, who was a Commissioner, into this building here. This building had been built in 1912 as a convent. It had been used by the Brotherhood of St Laurence during the Depression where they had a kindergarten out the back and a program for kids. We came here in 1996 and there was community ground swell from people, many from the North Fitzroy ALP branch who became involved and did voluntary work. We turned it around and set it up into a really community based organization embedded in the community facility.

**Anon** - Is it still operating?

**Anne Horrigan-Dixon** - It most certainly is still operating, there's more coming up. One of the things we did was to re-invigorate fundraising with the Fitzroy Ball which was supported by people in the community.

The big challenge came in August 2000 when people were released from immigration detention. They were housed in the empty flats over the road here, six men in a flat. They were moved out of detention and put in there and then told they were entitled to nothing, especially not English classes.

So in the middle of August 2000 a group of men came and knocked on the door. One guy could speak English and said that they had been told they weren't entitled to learn English and he said, 'You won't teach us English will you?'. My staff and I had heard that morning that 400 people had been taken out of Woomera and bussed here overnight, given a Medicare card, \$200 and dumped on the streets.

That began a new phase for the Learning Network. For the next 5 years we had more than 2,000 people from immigration detention coming through the door. In 2002 we wrote and performed the first play that told the story of people who were on temporary protection visas that came by boats. It was a real turning point for people to understand what their story was, people that were boat people were performers in the play. That was a catalyst for us to take a deputation to Canberra in 2003.

Between 2002 and 2003 nobody was released from immigration detention at all. Philip Ruddock had locked it down. We went to Canberra with support from money raised from this community. We took 80 people up, many of them boat people on temporary protection visas who were all about to be sent back, to Afghanistan and Iraq. The amazing thing that came out of that was we turned the press gallery around. Once we had the press gallery turned around the silence was finished and the doors were opened. The next year we were the people that settled all the refugees that came off Nauru into Victoria. We received no government funding for it at all. I raised the money for all of that from this community.

So Fitzroy Learning Network has been a really dynamic place, it has had to change over and over again as each new group came in. At the end of 2005, when the Sudanese came that was when we worked with the community, called a meeting, and we were instigators in getting this new hub built. The Fitzroy Learning Network has had hundreds of volunteers from this community. It got money and volunteer hours but the most important thing is it is the bridge between the new arrivals and the community. It's the bridge that allows people to walk into Australia with a volunteer that holds their hand and that's the great thing about the Fitzroy Learning Network.

**Brian Stagoll** - Well thank you Anne. I find it very interesting, the 21st century equivalent of unemployed workers were boat people in detention centres and both of them received the rough end of justice but eventually justice came. Or is coming.

### **Recollections of the Labor Council, Fitzroy Town Hall, in the 1970s to 1980s**

**Brian Stagoll** - We're opposite Fitzroy Town Hall and have a number of past Fitzroy councillors here: Ted Rush, Glynn Elias, David Halsted, Tom Marino, Barry Pullen, and other people who've had involvement with Fitzroy Town Hall; Roger Mitchell was on the Melbourne Times. I wonder if we could have a couple of stories about goings on at Fitzroy Town Hall in the 1970's and 80's. Tommy do you want to talk about your time as Mayor in 1982-3.

**Tom Marino** - I got elected to the Council and at the time a fellow wharfie Frank Thompson was on the Collingwood Council and he said, 'Look you want to do this.'

The ALP branch said, 'Look it's your turn we can't get anyone...' So reluctantly I nominated and got elected. In the 6 years I was on council, I was working on the waterfront where everyone supported me. I never missed a meeting whether I was working day shift, twilight, midnight, anything. The year I was Mayor I wondered how was I going to thank all these people that gave me support over those years so I spoke to the town clerk 'Can we do something?'. As Mayor at that time I had a discretionary budget, a bit of money, so he said, 'Why don't we put on a nice supper for them?' I said, 'Terrific, the people that cater for the Town Hall, just a big table, at supper time.' I decided to invite all those people that I was associated with on the wharves. Upstairs, apart from the food we had a wet cupboard and, as Roger will confirm, the blokes liked to drink. I said, 'We better get plenty of drinks on hand because I don't want to run short.' About 30 guys turned up that night. It wasn't a council night, it was just a normal night. So we all had a drink and they all know the cupboard is in the corner and they had a look in here and the boys said, 'What are these drinks here.' I said, 'Look they've been there for ages.' There was cherry brandy, there was Aquavit, all these half bottles of drinks. I said 'Well different people just like a different drink so we get it for them.' Stuff had been there for years. It didn't last that night because everything absolutely got drunk. Absolutely every drink. We finished up putting them in taxis at the end of the night. They just couldn't scratch themselves most of them. That's my story about the drinks cupboard. But it cleared a lot of drinks that had been there for years!



*Fitzroy Town Hall*

**Anon** - I remember another story about being young, coming from Waverley in the back blocks of suburbia and coming here to Fitzroy and being invited as a resident to participate in functions with the council and the Mayor in the Mayor's room where everybody was so friendly, welcoming, it was a fantastic place to come in those days for the Labor Party, but it was about forming community. I remember Tommy and the other councillors being so great and there were jazz nights up there. It was a real community building exercise. The council wasn't distant.

**Kris Spark** - I was going to say something similar. I was a member of the Balwyn branch of the ALP. We met in someone's living room and talked about world issues.

Then when I moved to Fitzroy in the early 70s I transferred to the Fitzroy branch and it was just the absolute opposite to what I'd experienced. It was a large meeting and people very enthusiastic about issues in the local community and that incredible sense that 'yes, we can', as Renate put it. One of the tasks was to put 'how to vote' cards under doors before council elections. There are some very funny stories about what happened, I'll just tell one of them.

One of the branch members, Keith Lumley, got a bit sick of going in and out the gates of the single fronted houses to put the 'how to vote' under the door. So he decided to jump the gate on one of the houses. He caught his foot on the gate and fell flat on the path at the front door and he thought, 'Well while I'm down here I might as well put the 'how to vote' under the door.' And so he was putting the 'how to vote' under the door and the door opened and the resident found Keith lying on the front path, so very enthusiastic.

We picked up people who needed ferrying to the booth if they couldn't make it themselves, we ran a tick board to then go out and knock on people's doors if they hadn't voted. You were just, as I said, swept up, and became part of it and then very involved in the community and what you could actually do. I've got terrific memories.

**Tommy Marino** - Chris you didn't mention the part where we used to take the opposition electoral pamphlets out of the letterboxes!

**Glynn Elias** - I was a member of the Fitzroy branch and there was a little bit of rivalry between the Fitzroy branch and the North Fitzroy branch of the Labor Party. There were some stories around and the North Fitzroy folk used to always suggest that that telephone box over there was where the Fitzroy branch had their meetings.

We're talking and about how some things started. Barry reminded me that I had the nickname of a 'Rocket Man.' We had lots of external opponents but also we did have internal opposition in the ways of some of the Council staff. One particular staff member was the city engineer by the name of Jack Faulkner. He might have been a very efficient guy but he had totally different values. His idea was to pull down all the old and erect something new. He liked to amalgamate blocks of land so he could put up Greek veneer houses, concrete channels around and close all the little lanes. One of the things he was very big on was traffic. In Fitzroy, because we were such a small municipality, indeed the smallest in Australia, we had small wards. I had a western ward, you could get out and meet everybody. We used to go round and look at building permits, talk to everybody basically in the community. One of the big problems was traffic. Even back in the 1970s traffic was really big. It hasn't gone away, it was always there. But Jack Faulkner knew that, whenever a bit of opposition came he would always like to try and have fun with what he regarded as the young Turks. He would get some authority to issue some sort of notice. We had one notice from the Road Authority suggesting that Moor Street along here needed to become a through-way to get the traffic through from Collingwood into Carlton, straight through Fitzroy. It would be what they call a 'rocket route' through the two suburbs. We were thinking about traffic but we didn't quite know what to do, we didn't have any way of trying to stop the traffic. When this was announced at the council chambers by Jack Faulkner he said, 'Well here's this letter from the Road Authority, it's going to be a rocket route.' I got very incensed and I leapt up and I said, 'No it's not going to be a rocket route, we'll close the bloody street.' So we moved to close Moor Street, which duly happened. There was a lot of kerfuffle, the ambulances and the police, everybody else complained that you couldn't possibly do it. A compromise was eventually reached of a half-traffic closure and that was the start of traffic calming in Victoria. It started with Moor Street.

**Ted Rush** - I can follow up on that because I've got at home a copy of that week's cartoon in the Herald which has something about Fitzroy Council closing down a city. I was the first of what were called 'the new breed', there by myself. At the very first



caucus meeting they went around the table giving people various responsibilities. I thought, 'My God what will happen to me.' So I got property and works or something and they said, 'You've got to have this ready for Friday.' This was like Tuesday and it came over a note saying they're going to open the Fitzroy Public Library here, the renovation. Eileen Wheeler had been the previous Mayor and she was a bit miffed not to have this responsibility for opening the Library. The day came and we duly opened the Library and they put up a plaque about us. I went to have a look but the plaque has gone.

**Christine** - I remember that when Kennett came in to government it was considered that the seven Yarra- Melbourne libraries were too many for the area. They decided that we would only have 3: Richmond, Fitzroy and North Melbourne and that the other 4 would be closed. What I thought was worth sharing was that 7 people from the 7 libraries formed themselves as a committee and without knowing each other at all we all worked really hard together to make sure that every community retained their library which we did. Then we also fought the Kennett push for tendering out the library service. One tender potential company was a book buying company from the United States that had a super efficient style that did not relate to how our libraries were run. That committee of seven made sure that the in-house bid of people who were already running the libraries got the bid. That's worth noting.

**Anne Horrigan-Dixon** - We have been fighting for North Fitzroy Library which is going to be closed. The council have allocated 14 million dollars to build a community hub in North Fitzroy on the triangle site up there which will roll into the library and International House. We need community input. The problem is what the bureaucrats have offered the community is totally inadequate. There's not enough space. The worse thing is that it's supposed to be for the library and the library that we're being offered is so small, it's tragic. We need support. I want people to actually email Craig Kenny, I want you to look at the plan. There's a lot of money, 14 million dollars is an enormous amount of money for a building for the next 30 years that won't meet our needs and a library which is really too small to be effective and to offer the services to the most disadvantaged people in North Fitzroy. Libraries are not for the middle class, they're for everybody. They have made a really big difference in these communities in improving outcomes. I actually need all of you, I'm going to give you a card, to send an email, look at the plan, send an email, pass it on because if you don't we're going to get a 14 million dollar building that is just going to be a waste of money. I have to say I feel extremely isolated in my position in this committee. I've had very little support from anybody. I've found some support from just walking the streets and talking to people so I need support. I've got a card, I've got these documents and I want people to send an email.

**Brian Stagoll** - Nobody leaves without getting a pamphlet from Anne and a commitment! This is an example of how past history merges into the future.

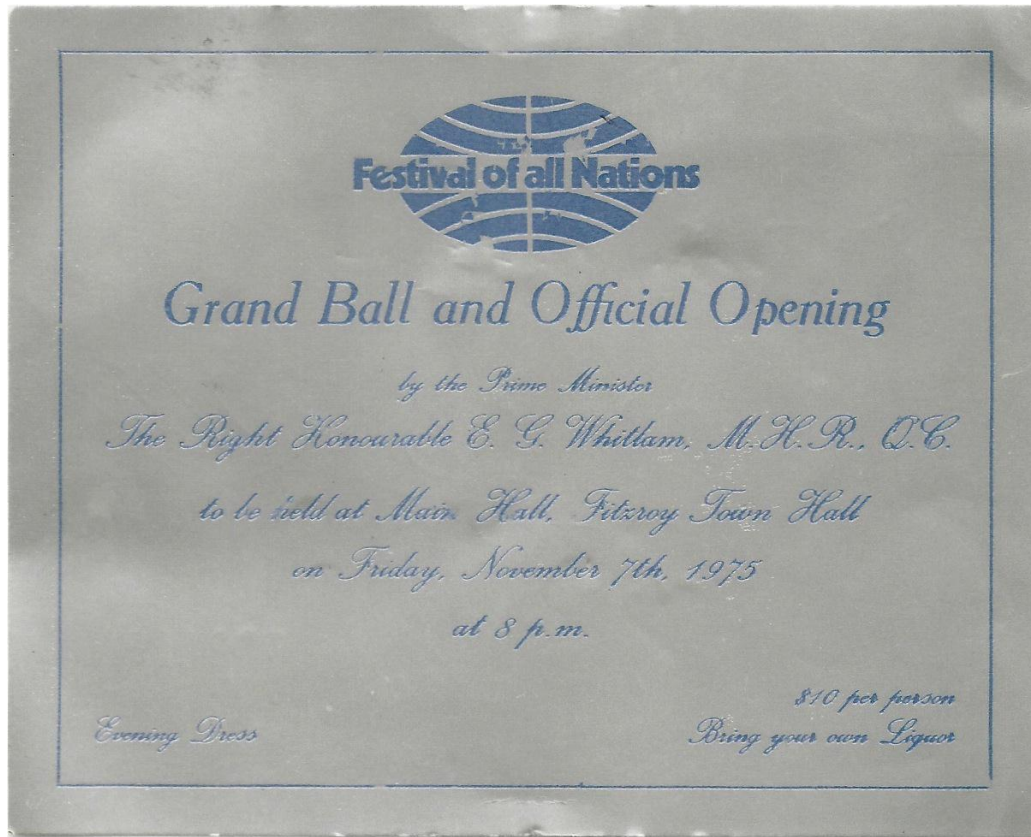
## **Stop 11 - Whitlam Place**

*Corner Moor and Napier St*

**Brian Stagoll** - I'm not sure what year this was declared Whitlam Place. Previously it had been La Trobe Square. We went to the Library and people there don't know about that either. But this nice little square was named after Whitlam, we think about 1978. That wall is the largest art space in Fitzroy and it's run by the Napier Street artists. That particular art on display was done a couple of years ago by the Downs Syndrome Society of Victoria.

On the 7th of November 1975 Margaret and Gough Whitlam came to the Fitzroy Town Hall for the Festival of All Nations Ball. The Festival of All Nations was another initiative that was started in Fitzroy in 1972 and really led the movement for

multicultural arts in Victoria. In 1975 there was a Ball to start the annual festival. This is a copy of the Ball ticket courtesy of Paul Coghlan. It's signed by Gough and Margaret Whitlam.



Signatures on reverse of invitation. Courtesy: Paul Coghlan collection

It was evening dress and cost \$10 a person but bring your own liquor. Was anybody here at that occasion? The late Lance Patford was the Mayor at the time.

It is a historic event. The Prime Minister comes to Fitzroy to promote multiculturalism in the midst of a grave constitutional crisis. Remember this is just four days before the Dismissal. What happened I'm told is that a very large crowd assembled outside the Town Hall with hundreds and hundreds of people from the Greek and Italian communities. At a certain point Whitlam walked out onto the steps to mass cheering, flags were waving and there was a degree of tumult.

Whitlam stands on the steps for a while and the crowd just keeps cheering. One of his advisors tries to calm them down. Then Whitlam makes a speech and I'm told by George Papaellinas who was there, says:

*'You are the voice of the people, you are the people, you're the people who've come to Australia and what I must tell you is the Conservatives hate you and we will not let you down. We will not forget you. We are here to give the voice of the people meaning.'*

Apparently he got very stirred up and then against the advice of his security guards lurched into the crowd and shook hands all around.

This is a significant occasion; it's the last public event that Whitlam attended as Prime

Minister. And it happened here on November 7th 1975. I bring the evidence, Gough and Margaret's autograph and a photograph from The Age. Whether that was the start or the end of something I'm not sure, but I don't think it has been noted before.



*The Age, Saturday 9 November 1975*



## Concluding Remarks

**Barry Pullen** - I want to add something which follows on from what Renate said, which I think it is really important for the Branch to understand. It's one of those things that's not so clear to people that weren't part of it. Renate knows it very well but I think she was unduly modest on Brian Howe's part, to not feature it in her address. It's what some people might call an unintended consequence of the action of the Housing Commission that you've heard about. What you did hear about was that the Church was demolished along with the Sunday school. It was quite ridiculous to demolish it because it simply became a car park. Brian was the Church Minister. He had come from Chicago and his recent experiences there had acquainted him with the action there where Saul Alinsky and others were doing things in a very uncommon way for the time. When the Wesleyan Church received compensation for the loss of their building this usually would have been turned into another bricks and mortar building. The genius of Brian, which was really was important at the time, was to take that money and create CURA, the Centre for Urban Research and Action at the Presbyterian Church at 124 Napier Street.



*Left to right: Tom Marino, Barry Pullen MLC for Melbourne 1982-1999 and Brian Stagoll*

It was a base for intense community action and it had a profound effect. Partly I think it was because the choice of people who worked in it were so remarkable. We had someone like Andrew Burbidge, a Fitzroy advocate who worked for the residents in the case of Brooks Crescent. We had Kay Hargreaves who produced a seminal report entitled 'I Wouldn't Like My Wife to Work Here' which launched a whole lot of ideas about the clothing industry. We had Paul Madden who carried forward ideas about the importance of structure in urban areas. For me what made a huge difference as a junior local person getting involved was to find that there was a way to actually work with the community that had a discipline and a theoretical structure about it. CURA isn't there anymore but I think all the people that were acquainted with



that and in the Labor Party saw a different vision which flowed onto the work in the policy committees, affected the council, affected the State government when we got elected in the Cain government and could be traced through to some of the federal policy. I think looking back that process is actually quite pertinent for the branch at this time.

*Reference:*

**Renate Howe**, 'Centre for Urban Research and Action (CURA)', *eMelbourne - the Encyclopedia of Melbourne Online*, [www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM00320b.htm](http://www.emelbourne.net.au/biogs/EM00320b.htm)

**Brian Stagoll** - I think that our agenda today is to go back to our history and see what we can learn from our history for the future. I think we've had some fantastic stories of great value and I'd like to thank Barry and Renate and Anne and Dick, who continues to provide such good leadership in this community.

**Richard Wynne** - Thanks Brian and Steve and other members of the branch who have put this together for us today because as much as anything else it is an opportunity for us to reflect on what's been an extraordinary rich history of Branch involvement in the trade union movement, in local politics, in community affairs more generally. In relation to the comments that Barry made in relation to CURA, it's now a time for us as a Party in opposition at the State level to actually regenerate our policy ideas, to revive some of that rich history that we have, because these things don't get achieved unless you have Labor governments. It's as simple as that. We will see over the next three and a bit years what havoc will be wreaked by the Conservative government. They are no friends of poor people, they're no friends of people who are struggling and no friends of the trade union movement. We will see this emerge over the next three and a bit years. That's why it's incumbent upon us as party members and indeed people who are activists and involved in policy committees and people with a rich tradition to actually be a part of the conversation. We are very committed to developing a new policy framework leading to the 2014 election where people are going to see a very clear difference between what they've got with this Conservative government and what we're going to offer as a state Labor Party. We can win in 2014 but we can only win if we do have attractive and new policy offerings. Drawing on the incredible rich history and experience that really is around this park here today is a fantastic starting point.

So congratulations to those who've put this together. It's both a snapshot of the past but it's also some of the pathway towards getting us re-elected in the future.

Thank you.