

## Editorial

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This edition of *Illawarra Unity* covers a very broad span of labour history, chronologically and geographically.

The first article by Henry Lee returns to the issue of miners who were the subject of the special edition of *Unity* in 2003 concerned with the Mt Kembla mine disaster. However, Henry brings a new perspective to occupational health and safety by comparing the rate of fatalities in mining with those suffered by women in childbirth. As Henry shows, childbirth was an even more dangerous pastime than mining in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, although labour historians have not given it anywhere near the same attention. By focusing on the reproduction of labour itself, Henry's article, therefore, is a very important correction to the historical record.

The second and third articles by Jorge Sibal and Ray Markey were originally contributions to the International Conference on A Century of the Labor Struggle in Asia and the Pacific, organised by the School of Labor and Industrial Relations at the University of the Philippines in November 2002, with the support of the International Labour Organisation and the European trade union movement. An earlier version of Ray Markey's article was also the subject of the Australian Centenary of Federation Lecture delivered at the Australia Centre of the Australian Embassy in Manila on 19 November 2001. The article by Jorge Sibal is important in giving us an overview of labour history in one of our near Asian neighbours, because in Australia we often have an insular understanding of labour history. Read together, the articles show how different the terrain of labour history has been in the two countries, although there also are some striking similarities, especially in the importance of compulsory state arbitration.

The following article by Dennis O'Keefe returns us to the more traditional Australian labour history territory of the shearers' struggles of the 1890s. Dennis is a well-known folklorist, poet and songwriter, and he brings all of these skills together here to create a unique approach to printed storytelling – one that is easily imagined being told around an Australian bush campfire,

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and draws on his performance work at the Illawarra Folk Festival and elsewhere.

The final two contributions represent participant history, that is, the authors contributed to the making of the history which they record here. The event with which they are concerned is the Kemira mine sit-in, or stay-in of 1982. This occurred as a result of BHP's intention to dismiss 400 miners from its regional collieries, following 8,000 redundancies at the Port Kembla steelworks. Members of the Kemira Lodge organized a stay-in strike during which 31 miners stayed underground for a week, supported by the Miners Women's Auxiliary. This action became a symbol of resistance to the mass dismissals of both the steel and coal industries, and soon after the miners went underground at Kemira, steelworkers and miners from the Illawarra traveled to Canberra to 'storm' Parliament House. The authors of the two articles produced here were major participants in these events, Steve Quinn as an organizer for the AMWU, and Barry Swan as General Secretary of the Miners' Federation. Their contributions here were originally presented to a meeting of the Illawarra Branch of the Labour History Society on 6 November 2003.

**Ray Markey**