ANNUAL REPORT 2015

It's been a busy 12 months for the Blue Mountains Union Council and, as ever, our activities have focussed on our key objectives:

- to advance living standards, social justice and employment
- to stage Politics in the Pub sessions to address issues of concern to the Blue Mountains community
- to assist in the protection of rights for all wage and salary workers
- in solidarity with other community groups to formulate policies that protect the environment and community assets
- to support the election of people at local, state and federal level who will serve the best interests of wage and salary earners.

THE NSW ELECTION:

As 2015 was an election year we focussed on some of the biggest issues of the campaign - specifically proposals to privatise a large section of the electricity system - and secondly proposals to sell off other publicly owned assets, a campaign which eventually became known as **NSW NOT FOR SALE.**

To this end we held two open air community rallies in the mid mountains at Springwood Town Square - these were addressed by Candidates for the ALP and Greens, along with leading state politicians including Adam Searle (ALP) and John Kaye Greens and Mark Lennon, secretary of Unions NSW. The second rally was also addressed by a cross section of people working in various essential services in the Blue Mountains.

On each occasion the Liberal candidate and representatives of the Coalition government were invited to attend but declined the invitations.

EDUCATION

Support of education, particularly public education, has always played an important role in the activities of the BMUC and annually a Politics in the Pub is staged to debate important educational issues of the day - an event now held in memory of one of our founders - a Blue Mountains teacher and education activist Rod Brooks.

The 'EDUCATION IN CRISIS' Politics in the Pub focussed on the huge challenges facing TAFE and the universities. Speakers included Phil Chadwick, President of TAFE section of the Teachers Federation and two young student leaders - Chris Gall from UTS and Luke Heffernan from UWS.

UNEMPLOYMENT

BMUC recognises that unemployment is one of the biggest problems in the Blue Mountains, especially among the young where the stats for the out of work and underemployed are way above the official unemployment figures of 6%.

In July a Politics in the Pub entitled YOUR RIGHTS 2 WORK heard the case for full employment advocated by Professor Bill Mitchell and Dr Victor Quirk from Newcastle University's Centre of Full Employment. They were accompanied on the speakers' platform by local United Voice Delegate Jane Grundy who spoke about the importance of penalty rates to low paid workers.

PENALTY RATES

Calls to cut penalty rates frequently appeared on the news during the last 12 months and there are real fears in the Blue Mountains that people working in casual or part time jobs in areas such as hospitality - one of the biggest employers in the Blue Mountains - would face tremendous problems paying their basic bills if they have their week end penalty rates cuts, as has been most recently proposed by the Productivity Commission.

In recognition of these concerns BMUC's stall at this year's Winter Magic Festival had a petition calling on the Federal Government to preserve penalty rates - this received a terrific response from the public with over 1,000 people giving their signatures in support.

DISABILITY SUBCOMMITTEE

BMUC welcomes the rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme for young people in Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains but in response to concerns about its implementation a Disability Subcommittee has been formed. The focus of the Subcommittee is still under discussion but there are at least two clear issues emerging;

- Will services for people with disabilities improve?
- Is some of the community's responsibility for funding NDIS and related services being unfairly shifted to workers in the caring industry with cuts to conditions and job losses?

CAMPAIGN TO BUILD A BETTER FUTURE

In recognition that jobs for our kids and our community should be the number one priority for our politicians, the BMUC has joined the ACTU's campaign to BUILD A BETTER FUTURE. In the run up to the next federal election we will be engaging vigorously with the Blue Mountains community and asking candidates to commit to:

- Workers' Rights – protecting wages, conditions including penalty rates, and campaigning for secure jobs;
- Defending Medicare - protecting Medicare, properly funding hospitals and stopping new fees for visiting the doctor;
- Highest Quality Education – restoring funding to schools, TAFE and ensuring we never have $100,000 university fees;
- Public ownership of public services – proper funding to make them work, ending privatisation which has brought job cuts, higher prices and helped only the companies running them;
- A Secure Retirement – decent pensions and superannuation;
- A Fair Go For All – supporting our industries generating skilled jobs, making multinationals and the wealthy pay fair taxes.

FUTURE POLITICS IN THE PUB

Politics in the Pub remains one of our core activities. Events being organised in the coming months include a Politics in the Pub – "Domestic Violence: Why Not Leave?" on Saturday, 26th September and a Rod Brooks Memorial Politics in the Pub on education with a focus on the achievements of the Gonski programme and the benefits of implementing the full Gonski plan.

WEB

Our web presence continues to grow with 565 Twitter followers and 274 Facebook likes. The BMUC blog, managed by Mark Gregory, receives over 5,000 hits per month.

NEW MEMBERS: This year we welcomed 7 new members.

And finally, thanks to...

Once again I'd like to place on record my thanks to the many people who make the BMUC possible:

- The Mountains Community Resource Network for their continued support,
- Senator Doug Cameron's office for ongoing assistance,
- Carmel Blackburn and the Blackburn family for generously providing a home for Politics in the Pub,
- to Deb Smith who, as Secretary, devotes so much of her time to keeping us on the ball and
- to the Management Committee and other members who volunteer for a whole range of jobs which continue to keep us going like (as a visitor from Sydney described BMUC) "a well-oiled machine"

Kerry Cooke, President 16th August 2015