Blue Mountains Unions Council Inc: President's Report 2011/12

Introduction: In the past year Politics in the Pub has continued to thrive in the Blue Mountains - we have staged a number of well attended events covering some of the big issues of our times - from protection of the environment to the privatisation of power generation; from the influence of the media mogul Rupert Murdoch to the challenges to the public education system; along with a stimulating talk by one of Australia's leading historians on the lessons of labour history. It's fair to say that none of these events would have been possible without the continuing support of MCRN for covering our insurance and the Blackburn Family for once again providing us with a suitable venue free of charge.
The main debates we staged during 2011/12:

The Lessons of Labor History: The distinguished author and historian **Humphrey McQueen** drew on half a century of research and writing to present an invigorating and at times challenging analysis of Labor history**. Kim Sattler**, secretary of Unions ACT, gave a progress report on plans for a National Museum of Labour, which is to be established in Canberra.

Gotcha: Murdoch Exposed! This debate was led by the authors of two recent books investigating Murdoch's media empire - its sometimes illegal reporting methods and its political influence. Speakers were **Alex Mitchell**, the former political editor of the Sun Herald, who started his journalistic career on Murdoch papers, had recently published **Come the Revolution: A Memoir** and **David McKnight**, Assistant Professor at UNSW had just published **Rupert Murdoch: An Investigation of Political Power**.
Their speeches were followed by a vigorous Q&A session heightened by the background of mounting public disgust in Australia and Britain where Rupert Murdoch had closed Britain's top selling newspaper, **The News of the World** in the wake of the burgeoning phone hacking scandal.

Power, Guns 'n Money - Privatising power to shoot in the parks: This event brought together two separate but closely linked issues. **Mark Lennon**, Secretary of Unions NSW talked about the consequences of the NSW Government's decision to further privatise electricity, warning that similar experiences interstate had led to steeply rising electricity bills. **Lachlan Garland**, President of the Blue Mountains Conservation Society talked about the impact of the Government's deal with the Shooters and Fishers Party, allowing shooting in range of national parks in exchange for getting their vote to privatise power. The bringing together of different issues on the same platform attracted a more diverse audience.

Education The Equaliser: The Rod Brooks Memorial focussed on the great challenges faced by the TAFE and schools system after the state government's announcements of big spending cuts.
Phillip Chadwick, President of the NSW Teachers Federation**, Michael de Wall**, NSW Teac hers Federation organiser as speakers were joined by **Keely Tregillgas** a student teacher from Springwood.
The education forum is staged annually in memory of **Rod Brooks**, a well known Blue Mountains teacher and community activist, who taught many students the art of public speaking and was passionately committed to the importance of free speech. On behalf of the Brooks family, the BMUC presents the $2,000 Rod Brooks scholarship annually to two students of Katoomba High School - divided equally between a girl and a boy - to help them further their education. Money raised at Politics in the Pub raffles is also used to buy books to donate to school libraries in the Blue Mountains.

The future: While the concept of Politics in the Pub is very much old style debating, we believe the attendances over the past year show there is still a demand for these kind of events. Simultaneously

we recognise the importance of engaging with new media - in this regard the energy of our Secretary Debra Smith in using social networking to publicise these functions through Facebook and Twitter, and giving the debates a new life through videoing speakers and placing them on You Tube is of growing importance for our future. As is the work of Mark Gregory in running the Blue Mountains Union Council website and blog.

Kerry Cooke, President, Blue Mountains Union Council