**Vintage Reds of the Canberra Region: Retired Progressive Trade Unionists**

Tradies Club, Badham Street, Dickson ACT 20 October 2020

Convenor’s Report to the Seventh Annual General Meeting

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It is again my pleasure to present this report to our Seventh Annual General Meeting.

**VR Committee of Management:**

Our committee is made up of some outstanding VR members including Adrian Cameron, Anne Gunn, Bob McFadden, Helen Sutherland, Janice Flaherty, Jenny Miragaya, Jude Dodd, Penny Lockwood, Pauline Westwood and Susan Wood and Pam Blakeley who resigned earlier in the year; they all have made invaluable contributions. Outside the committee we call on individual members to assist us, and special mention should go to Janette Morgan who in the last month has recruited 3 new members thanks to her diligence in placing free advertisements in local media.

I would like to extend my thanks to the Committee on behalf of the Vintage Reds for your work often under difficult conditions. I would like to place on the record a special thanks to Janice who is kind, professional and diligent in all the tasks we have asked her to perform. Janice is one of those outstanding people who manage to be the social and political conscience of what is good.

**VR Membership:**

Our membership numbers continue to improve and we have reported to the Office of the Registrar of Associations in the ACT that we have one hundred and twelve members.

This year we mourned the passing of a great friend and VR comrade, Don Dwyer. Don was an amazing character who took vicarious pleasure in the theatre of politics across Australia. Don passed away in the earlier weeks of the pandemic and the Vintage Reds have not yet had a chance to celebrate Don’s life. We remember Don’s great contributions by providing members at every meeting with a calendar of events usually of a political, intellectual or amusement nature that were available in Canberra and usually at little or no cost.

**VR Meetings:**

Back in September 2019, we invited one of our own members, Bill Thompson to speak to the meeting about his experiences of working as a union organiser in north-west Queensland. Bill gave us an empathetic insight to working in a remote location, indigenous communities and the tyranny of distance. Local author, journalist, editor, science commentator, Julian Cribb was our guest speaker in October on the topic of "Surviving the 21st Century"; and in November ANU academic Greg Fry spoke of the grim future for the Pacific as we know it.

2020 started with severe bushfires. Nonetheless, the Vintage Reds opened our year with Canberra identity Jack Waterford speaking on the local political matter of “Developing Away the Bush Capital”. Then the pandemic hit us and we suspended our meetings and activities for March, April, May and June.

We regrouped in July whilst fearing a second Covid 19 wave and invited Rachel Burgess from UnionsACT Young Workers Centre to talk about the industrial epidemic of underpayment in the gig economy. In August we invited the new Secretary of UnionsACT, Matthew Harrison to introduce himself.

Matthew was joined by Campaigns Organiser Kasey Tomkin and Josh Thornton, on loan from the AMWU to discuss the UnionsACT campaign for the territory elections. Last month (September) our guest speaker was Bernard Collaery who mspoke of the outrageous prosecution of himself and Witness K by the rancid conservative government who clearly are putting private profit when it comes to Woodside before public good in the case of the tiny nation of Timor L’este.

**VR Involvement in Union Campaigns:**

Post Bushfires, we asked the ACTU to establish a Bushfire Relief Fund for unionists who lost their homes. The fund raised more than quarter of a million dollars and the money was subsequently distributed to unionists.

The Vintage Reds also organised a Fundraiser Forum for the Bushfire Relief Fund at the Belconnen Labor Club with ACTU President, Michelle O’Neill, The Australia Institute’s Dr Richard Dennis & South Coast TLC Secretary Arthur Rorris to speak about the politics of climate change but we were forced to cancel due to the pandemic.

The calling of the Eden-Monaro by-election earlier this year also meant the union movement should involve the Vintage Reds when it comes to some electioneering in this part of the world. We were on the ground everywhere, and we did an extraordinary amount of pre-poll work in Canberra, Queanbeyan, Yass, Cooma and Jindabyne and on polling day we were also well spread across the electorate in some of the smaller villages. We were all delighted when Kristy McBain was elected.

Recently, we voted to send UnionsACT $400.00 for the Unions ACT elections campaign. Whilst many of us letterboxed and assisted with the UnionsACT Campaign, our contribution went to a generalist campaign flyer “Canberra doesn’t need two Liberal Governments” and focused our attention in Brindabella. We hope that we may have assisted in wrestling one of the three seats in Brindabella from the Liberals.

**VR and the Growth of Retired Unionism:**

The Vintage Reds have been involved with the establishment of the Retired Unionists Network (RUN) by the ACTU and represented by Jane Timbrell. Since the 2019 federal elections, the ACTU has reorganised much of its resources and staffing, and the issue of organising activists has been handed to Paul Doughty (amongst other things) to develop a comprehensive activist plan including a zoom conference in November. The RUN Group has established a committee (Peter Duffy, Rodger Smith, Janine Kitson & Jane Timbrell) to forward planning and map existing retired unionists’ groups which will be completed later in 2020.

The Living Income for Everyone (LIFE) Campaign has its geneses in a group of retired union officials and others all interested in a fair go for all: and then along comes the pandemic. The Vintage Reds were asked to represent the interests of the ACT and Jane Timbrell & Helen Sutherland filled this role. At a local level we campaigned to save “Job Seeker” in particular. We were joined locally by the Australia Unemployed Workers Union. They are truly inspirational! This campaign has had small beginnings and stands to grow, there are some interesting things coming out of the group in regards future actions in support of those on social security payments.

**VR General Matters:**

 We held one Special General meeting in October 2019 to pass changes to the Vintage Reds Rules to make them consistent with the requirements new ACT Legislative. This was a simple but painful change for a tiny organisation like the Vintage Reds attempting to be good citizens in a system not designed for us. I pay special thank Jenny Miragaya and Janice Flaherty who dealt with this most frustrating matter.

**Conclusion:**

In conclusion, I would like to say that this report is a useful reminder of just how much we have all done during this extraordinary year and that we managed to keep going whilst still maintaining all the Covid 19 safety rules. This was largely because of our wonderful committee. Finally, I take this opportunity to thank everyone here for making the Vintage Reds still the best retired unionist group in the country.

In unity,

**Jane Timbrell**

**Convenor**

**Vintage Reds of the Canberra Region**