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

**Held by Zoom at 11.00am on Tuesday 5 October 2021**

**Convenor’s Report to the Eighth Annual General Meeting**

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

**VR Committee of Management:**

Again, we been most fortunate that the Vintage Reds has a Committee of Management made up of some very competent and committed retired trade unionists. This year, our committee members have been Anne Gunn who looks after our website and meets the challenge of Minutes Secretary. Adrian Cameron has looked after and finances and banking. Bob McFadden keeps our membership list up to date. Garrett Purtill has been one of our incredible research officers. The other outstanding researcher has been Helen Sutherland; she has led a very large project this year. Jenny Miragaya is our diligent and forensic Public Officer and has assisted with much of the job of Minutes Secretary. Jude Dodd has been the Deputy Convenor and Twitterer, and is always willing to step up to render assistance. Pauline Westwood has stepped back a bit this year but is one who makes invaluable contributions to the Committee, whist Penny Lockwood has volunteered for some additional work on the committee and activating all of us around other progressive causes.

Whilst Janette Morgan is not a member of the Committee, she has taken on the role of Recruitment Officer. It is Janette we should thank for putting those Community advertisements in our local print publications which have yielded such fine new members.

I would like to place on the record a special thanks to our outgoing committee members, namely, Adrian, Jude and Pauline and to extend my great thanks to them on behalf of all the Vintage Reds for your work under even more difficult circumstances in the current pandemic.

**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 three properly signed up members whilst we have one hundred and thirty people on our email list. Some of these members are pleased to just stay with us even if we don’t see them.

On a sad note, I must report that Doc Wright passed away this year. Doc was a committed and active trade unionist whenever possible, Doc died quietly in hospital supported by his loving wife Jane Bennett. For personal reasons, Jane & Doc did not wish to have any ceremonies or condolences to mark his death. As everyone knows, Doc struggled with his physical condition brought upon him by a progressive disease. Doc was always with us in spirit. Vale Doc Wright.

We lost another of our inspiring activists in April this year, with the unexpected death of David Morgan. David did so much for the Vintage Reds, he was a very hard worker, a committed unionist, and he loved the Vintage Reds. David was a quiet achiever with a great and often laconic sense of humour. David was a wonderful campaigner in the street and in shopping centres. He willingly did street stalls, letterboxing, sausage sizzles, doorknocking and spent many hours working on pre-poll and on election day. David is an even greater loss to his life partner Janette and their extended family and friendship networks; we like all of them will miss him greatly. Vale David Morgan.

**VR Meetings:**

Over the past year we have continued to be engaged by a fabulous line-up of guest speakers at our monthly meetings. In October 2020 the delightful Bill Bush representing “Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform” came to speak about the need for drug law reform. Bill’s presentation included data and modelling all in an effort to prevent deaths to a very vulnerable cohort of our community. In November, the formidable Marie Coleman spoke about “the Gender Lens on the Budget” which is an annual review of the Australian budget conducted by the National Foundation of Australian Women, they are mindful of the subtleties of gender bias.

We started the New Year in February 2021 an address by Dr John Merrett, Retired ANU Academic. John spoke about the “History of Labour History” and the rise and fall of the popularity of labour history across the world. In March, Elizabeth Reid was unwell and one of our emeritus members, Dr Anita Chan gallantly agreed at short notice to speak to us about “Hong Kong’s new trade union movement” which has risen from the ashes of the changes to Hong Kong’s under China. The indefatigable Dr Elizabeth Reid spoke to us on the most difficult subject entitled “A Feminist Perspective on Trans Issues”. This continues to be a tough and evolving subject for all of us as it challenges our binary constructs around gender.

The VR audience were enthralled May to hear the erudite Professor Amin Saikal speak on “Iran, the US and the Gulf”. Amin unpacked for us what is a complicated set of alliances that will remain complex. In June, the VR were addressed by Matthew Harrison, Secretary of UnionsACT who spoke about injured workers, their industries, statistics, and the changes in the nature of industries and injuries, not only in the ACT but across the country.

In keeping with our practice of having an indigenous speaker each July, I think we were all suitably impressed with the delightful Dhani Gilbert who did a wonderful job of unpacking a range of issues and why they are critically important to the first nation’s people. It was easy to see why Dhani was honoured with being the Young Canberran of the year in 2018.

Then it all stopped! Lockdown commenced and we have not met in August or September, and if we are lucky, we may be able to meet again at the end of this month.

**VR Activities throughout the Year:**

Political Front:

I am unsure if the Vintage Reds are growing into a band of very grumpy old people, or if it is testament to our fiery political attitudes that on most days of the week there will be at least one letter published in the Canberra Times from a Vintage Red expressing their exasperation at the state of the world and more specifically at the state of the nation lead by this rancid Morrison Government.

Things are certainly changing quickly, for we are seeing the implosion of the NSW Government; we are relieved that John Barilaro MP is not going to run for Eden-Monaro, but clearly we will again need to work in the seat of Gilmore. Only yesterday, I sent an email to Fiona Phillips advising that many VR were concerned with the announcement by Andrew Constance MP that intends to run against her. We await word from her campaign manager.

In previous years, we have certainly been busy with election campaigning particularly in Federal Elections; and to a lesser extent, we have electioneered in local elections via UnionsACT, and we have made various submissions, mostly to Senate inquiries. This year our projects have been different, and I will focus on the major items.

Submission to the ACT Government Budget:

Adrian, Helen, Garrett and I presented the newly elected ACT Government with a log of claims to better improve the life of the aged community. We made a detailed submission of approximately a dozen items; the major items being a linen service for people to continue to live in place; An amendment to the Official Visitor Program so that it be extended to people in receipt of services which were not up to scratch; a phone card monthly recharge for aged pensioners who have little disposable income; and we asked for a place on the MACA (Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing. So far, we have achieved just one of our claim and I am delighted to have been appointed to the MACA on 1 July 2021.

Aged Care:

When the Royal Commission into Aged Care brought down their Final Report on 1 March 2021, we decided to use our not inconsiderable skills to look at the Report and to focus on the Findings and Recommendation.

Helen Sutherland led the charge and she was ably assisted by Garrett Purtill. I stayed in the background making cups of tea. So we were ready for when the Government brought down their response at five minutes to midnight on Budget night, 11 May 2021 which gave $17b to the sector. However, the devil is certainly in the detail. Whilst the Government overwhelmingly accepted most of the recommendations, they did not accept the vital recommendation about funding to impose a levy, similar to the Medicare Levy of between 1% and 1.4%. Otherwise, there has only been deafening silence from the entire Government. We held a special Vintage Reds zoom meeting on 16 September to hear the reports from Helen and Garrett. This same report will be presented to the RUN meeting on 28 October. In the circumstances, the Vintage Reds Committee has largely dealt with the procedural recommendations to adopt the report. At the end of this AGM, there will be a general discussion about where to from here.

Submission to IPAN (Independent and Peaceful Australia Network):

In late 2020, Penny Lockwood raised the matter of the Vintage Reds making a submission to the IPAN Inquiry concerning the escalating militarisation of Australian Government interests and similar international interests by the US and their allies. A subcommittee was formed and David Perkins led the discussions with Penny Lockwood, Irene Davies, Pauline Westwood and Janette & David Morgan. A submission was drafted, and adopted by the Vintage Reds at our meeting in July and subsequently forwarded to IPAN in August.

The recent developments where Australia is purchasing nuclear powered submarines, and all the consequences of that decision means that IPAN have re-opened Submissions and David is co-ordinating a supplementary submission with the sub-committee due today (5 October) The submission has been amended and endorsed by the Committee and will go under the name of the Vintage Reds.

LIFE (Living Income for Everyone) Campaign:

The LIFE Campaign is born out of frustration that poor people are there to be punished and is managed by a number of retired unionists, principally, Don Sutherland and Janet Burstall. The campaign has primarily focused on the “Debit Card” rolled out by the Commonwealth to restrict the spending patterns of welfare recipients. It is an evil and perverse tool. The two main groups involved in the campaign in the ACT are the Unemployed Workers Union and the Vintage Reds. Anita Chan has been our main representative in the campaign as Helen Sutherland and I stepped back.

Ephemera:

The Vintage Reds resolved to change/expand our ephemera and have placed an order for 100 tea towels bearing the Vintage Reds logo. Like so many others business the T-towel Keepsakes firm based in Victoria has closed for the duration of the lockdown. We have not paid nor lost any money.

Finances:

We continue to “punch well above our weight” and produce some great achievements “on the smell of an oily rag”. The Committee have been very pleased that our monthly contributions from our members have remained reasonably constant and we can afford the small things we need to purchase from time to time.

One of the consequences of the pandemic has been the significant reduction in the amount of cash in circulation as more and more of us move to putting just about everything onto our plastic credit or debit cards. The committee does have a proposal to request the VR members to make a small donation by way of a direct deposit into our bank account so that we didn’t have to rely on collecting cash. This would be a voluntary contribution and not a fee or subscription and avoid the need to make a change to our constitution.

**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.

**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!! I am stepping down as Convenor, and I am keen to remain on the Committee. It has been an honour to have been the first Convenor and to have held the post for eight years.

In unity,

**Jane Timbrell**

**Convenor,**

**Vintage Reds of the Canberra Region**