

OPEN LETTER TO ALL MUA MEMBERS

Dear Comrades,

Since I have announced that I will be standing for the Queensland Branch Secretary of the MUA there has been some malicious rumour-mongering around the reason I resigned my positions as ITF Queensland Co-ordinator and MUA branch organiser. It appears to emanate from a section of the East Coast MUA hierarchy and a few of the usual hangers-on and underlings.

Let me set things straight right now.

As I stated in my first leaflet I resigned my position at the end of the waterfront dispute because I was politically torn between allegiance to a union executive I had known most of my adult life, and between the rank and file members I had considered it an honour to represent.



I considered the union to have suffered devastating losses in the 1998 waterfront dispute, and I didn't agree about painting these as "wins" as others in the executive wanted to portray it to the members. I have always said that for our union to have survived the attack was in itself an enormous victory. However, there is no way any honest trade unionist should paint the resultant mass casualisation of large sections of the stevedoring as a victory.

In the end, my hand was forced. This contradiction between the hierarchy and the rank-and-file, plus a crippling workload, led me to a severe breakdown which led to a long depressive illness. At that time my workload was approximately 16 hours per day 5 days a week, and 8- 12 hours a day on weekends. I was doing two jobs as ITF Co-ordinator and Branch Organiser, only paid for one, and incidentally, I was the only MUA official in Australia with such a job description.

I spent the best part of 5 years from August 1998 to March 2003 in ill health and out of work. I was hospitalised more than once.

It was only through the love of my now wife, a few good friends, my family, a switched-on psychiatrist and finally gaining work on a construction site as a labourer that I eventually got well.

None of that was easy, so I have no respect at all for spineless people going around making whispers about my "mental health". Some of the members in the MUA hierarchy should have a long look at themselves quite frankly. I suppose you play this sort of game if you've got no real answers to the trade union and political questions my campaign has posed to them.

All said and done though, while I don't mind being completely up-front about the lowest point in my life, any doctor will tell you that a person's medical history is confidential. I don't believe that my own medical history should be the plaything of gossip artists or sycophants. No member of the MUA – whether official or rank-and-filer – should have their acute or chronic diseases blabbed around the whole membership. I myself wouldn't stoop so low. Your medical history is a matter for you and your doctor, not for any amateur commentator parading around as a union official or one of their hangers on.

So, let's assess how "mad" I really have been. Since that time here a few of the things I have accomplished.

From 2004-2008 I was an elected organiser with one of the hardest unions in the country, the Builders' Labourers' Federation. I left the BLF with my head held high and if anyone has any doubts ask the rank-and-file BLF or speak to that union's leadership.

I had been the President of the Workers' Rights Coalition, 1995 – 1998 and had led several major campaigns to keep common law access for workers injured in the workplace.

The group was dormant, but in 2006 I helped to revive it and lead the first major stopwork of construction workers against the hated ABCC at a major public rally. I have been President of the Workers' and Civil Rights Coalition (the reformed Workers' Rights Coalition) from 2006 until present. The incomparable Julian Burnside QC was the guest speaker, which I arranged.

In 2007 I was awarded the annual Australian Lawyers' Alliance Queensland Civil Justice Award 2007 "in recognition of an outstanding achievement in promoting justice, freedom and the rights of the individual".

In 2006 I was elected lifetime Patron of the Queensland Asbestos-Related Disease Support Society (QARDSS), permanent appointment.

I was also awarded Certificate of Appreciation and Support by QARDSS at Parliament House in September 2007.

Also in 2007 I gained entry as a student in the QUT law school to study a Bachelor of Laws. This wasn't easy, as I only went to school to grade 10 and have limited computer skills, but I got accepted into this course and have slowly taken a few subjects on a part-time basis.

Comrades, I am very proud of my recovery from a debilitating illness that I suffered in the past. The fact is that I have come out the other side as more compassionate, more considered person. A better man I believe.

I will leave it up to the rank and file, the men and women who make up our union, to decide whether I am the up to the task ahead. Members will do this at an election shortly.

Those who sought and still seek to belittle me because of the difficult time I went through are trade unionists with false faces.

The unionism I have lived my life by is picking up your mate when he is down, not sinking in the boot. It is this trade union belief which is fundamental to me and it is a belief I know that the overwhelming majority of MUA members believe too.

In Solidarity

Bob Carnegie ,
9/3/2011