

"DUTCHY" BOWS OUT AFTER 43 YEARS

Tribune, 14 January 1970

"I've always been very proud to be a wharfie", said Jim Young, as he looked back over the 43 years since he became a watersider and 22 years as Sydney branch president of the WWF.

He first became a watersider in 1926. Born in the Rocks area and son of a former windjammer man, Jim worked as a storeman and then became a watersider.

The 'bull' system was at its worst. Men were picked up individually at the wharf gates. It was wide open to abuse: favouritism, victimisation, corruption, selection of the strongest at the expense of all others. Jim Young, then single, found it tough: for married men with a family, it was desperately hard. Watersiders had to find their own way, at their own expense, to the pickup at the gate of whatever wharf at which a ship berthed. At the end of the week, it was up to wharfies to get to the offices of the various companies and collect their pay.

From the late '30s, with Jim Healy and others in the leadership, things started to improve: the pickup was moved to the 'bins' (pickup centres), then in the '40s they won the gang system and a roster, central pays, attendance money. Since then, paid public holidays, paid annual leave and long-service leave, and now permanency on a base rate of \$55 a week.

Jim made his first speech in 1939 in the Sydney Town Hall basement, against the 'dark 'uns', the 24-hour shifts which men could be required to work (they ended the next year).

He recalls that when the gang system was being introduced, he was one of those who fought against it. "I saw it in a narrow and selfish way, thinking only of what suited me", he said. On the very first day of work under the gang system, he said, "I knew that I'd been wrong".

His first position in the WWF Sydney branch was as relieving Vigilance Officer in 1943. The next year he became a VO and a Federal Councillor (a position he held until his retirement). He was for many years a member of the executive of the NSW Labor Council.

Jim was an active ALP man. He joined it in 1922 but in 1952, when the Right and its Industrial Groups were in arrogant power, he was expelled because he took part in 'unity tickets'. He held that it was his right to stand in union elections in association with whoever he considered to be the best men, including Communists such as Tom Nelson, the branch secretary.

What does he think of Communists?

Before I was first elected to a branch position, I was anti-Communist. But as an official I got to know men like Jim Healy, Tom Nelson, Stan Moran, Fred Malcolm, Harry Teasel and others.

I came to see their sincerity and their integrity, their devotion to improving the conditions of the membership.

They respected my views and I respected theirs. Never did they try to interfere with my political affiliations.

Had he ever found the Communist Party trying to interfere in the union and its internal affairs?

No, but if you sought advice or help or guidance on anything, it was always given, never withheld. In contrast, the Right-wing ALP Industrial Groups were very different.

At the 1946 ALP conference, Jim opposed the '50s: "they were an unwarranted and harmful interference in the trade union movement", he said.

How does their militancy now compare with then?

There's no difference. The watersider has never lost his militancy. They'll battle now, as they did always, for what they see as right.

(In 1954, Sydney wharfies refused to load the Radnor with arms for the war of the French colonialists against the people of Vietnam; in the week of this interview, wharfies were refusing to load the Jeparit for USA's war against the Vietnamese).

What does Jim Young see as the main difference between the position of watersiders now, as against that in 1926.

Again he spoke simply: "Now, they have their dignity."