

Resolution of Council

18 May 2020

Item 3.1

Vale Jack Munday AO

Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

I inform Council of the death of Jack Munday, trade union leader, environmental activist, protector of our natural and built heritage and former Sydney City Council Alderman on 10 May 2020.

John Bernard Munday was born on 17 October 1929 in Malanda, a small town on the Atherton Tableland 100km west of Cairns in far north Queensland, at the beginning of the Great Depression. His mother died when he was six and his four siblings were scattered among relatives. Jack remained with his father, a dairy farmer who moved around looking for work. Jack attended several schools, running away from his last school, St Augustine's, Cairns at the age of 14 because of its "authoritarian methods" of discipline.

He had excelled at sport and in 1951 moved to Sydney to play rugby league for Parramatta, which he continued for three years, mostly in the reserve grade. He also worked initially as a plumber's apprentice, then in a range of jobs, eventually becoming a builder's labourer.

As Jack changed jobs, he became increasingly involved in the union movement. This culminated with his active membership of the Builders Labourers Federation leading to him being elected as a full-time organiser in 1962. In 1968 Jack, Bob Pringle and Joe Owens supported by a rank and file committee took over the union leadership with Jack becoming secretary.

Jack's election coincided with the beginning of a building boom in Sydney. Workplace safety and improving wages and conditions in this environment were the initial priorities. Jack however believed that the union movement had wider social responsibilities and should act on them. This was put to the test when the union was approached by a group of women who had exhausted all obvious avenues in their campaign to save a small patch of bushland in Hunters Hill from residential development. When a public meeting attended by several hundred people supported their campaign, the union agreed to not allow work on the site and stop work on the developer's new office building. This was the world's first green ban, although the name came later. Kelly's Bush is still there, part of a larger park on the Parramatta River.

Around 40 green bans followed, all imposed with widespread community support. They preserved significant sites and social housing in The Rocks, Woolloomooloo, Centennial Park and Victoria Street in Potts Point. Other green bans stopped a car park for the Opera House being built underneath the Royal Botanic Gardens and ensured a new theatre would be included in the MLC Centre development to replace the theatre which had occupied the same site since 1875. Another green ban supported the rights of a gay university student threatened with expulsion from his residential college. A "Blak" Ban was placed on supposedly 'empty' houses in Redfern were actually occupied by Indigenous Australians. That ban gave the newly elected Whitlam Government time to buy the houses and hand them over to a new housing company under Aboriginal control.

In a letter to the Sydney Morning Herald Jack explained that the preferred to build urgently required hospitals, schools, other public utilities, high-quality flats, units and houses, provided they are designed with adequate concern for the environment, than to build ugly unimaginative architecturally-bankrupt blocks of concrete and glass offices ... "

"The environmental interests of three million people are at stake and cannot be left to developers and building employers whose main concern is making profit. Progressive unions, like ours, therefore have a very useful social role to play in the citizens' interest, and we intend to play it."

Jack retired as Builders Labourers Federation Secretary on 1 November 1973, consistent with his belief that union officials should have limited tenure and return to the rank and file and Joe Owens succeeded him. The following year the Federal office of the Builders Labourers Federation took over the NSW Branch and in 1975 Jack, Joe Owens, Bob Pringle and several of their supporters were expelled. Their membership was reinstated in November 1981, just as Jack was launching his book, Green Bans and Beyond.

Jack continued his activism both in Australia and internationally, undertaking a lecture tour, which included London's Centre of Environmental Studies and the first United Nations Conference on the Built Environment in 1976. He was a Communist Party candidate for the Senate in 1974 and just missed out being elected to the Legislative Council in 1978.

Jack was elected to Sydney City Council in April 1984 as an Alderman for Gipps Ward, which covered the northern CBD, The Rocks and Millers and Dawes Points, one of nine independents elected that year. A former Liberal Alderman described us as "communists and trendy bleeding heart lefties". We were all committed to ensuring people had a voice in the decisions that impact on their lives.

Jack chaired Council's Planning Committee until September 1985, which historian Hilary Golder has suggested that probably sent shivers down many a developer's spine! He promoted low-cost housing and attempted to broaden the social and environmental criteria used to assess development applications. He was active in our campaign against the monorail, a developer led proposal to link the CBD to the Darling Harbour development. The alternative, which Council supported, was light rail connected with other public transport.

In March 1987 the State Labor Government sacked the Council. Jack continued his activism supporting community groups, Indigenous Australians, educational institutions, and antinuclear campaigns. He served as a Councillor of the Australian Conservation Foundation from 1974 to 1993 and as Chair of the Historic Houses Trust from 1995 to 2001. During the 1990s he was involved in campaigns to protect Circular Quay and the Opera House precinct.

His activism continued into this century. In 2003, he became a member of the Australian Greens, in support of their opposition to the Iraq War and their environmental stance. In 2012 he joined the action to preserve what is thought to be the oldest public square in Australia, Thompson Square and protect Windsor Bridge from further development. In 2014 he became Patron of the Friends of Millers Point after joining the campaign to save the Sirius Building.

It is one of the many accolades Jack received during his life. In 1998 the University of Western Sydney made Jack an honorary Doctor of Letters and an honorary Doctor of Science in recognition of his service to the environment. Three years later, in 2001, the University of Sydney presented Jack with an honorary degree of Master of Environment - a degree especially created for him. In 2000 he was made an Officer of the Order of Australia for service to "the identification and preservation of significant sections of Australia's natural and urban heritage through initiating 'Green Bans' and through the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales". In 2007, a portion of Argyle Place in The Rocks was renamed Jack Munday Place.

Jack is survived by his wife Judy, a lawyer and activist in her own right, who supported him in many of his campaigns. In the late 1950s Jack married Stephanie Lennon, who died aged only 22, in 1963 15 months after their son Michael's birth. Michael died in car accident also at the age of 22.

Jack's legacy is not just the natural and built environment that was saved through his leadership and activism. It is the values which inspired his activism and which should continue to inspire us.

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE

Lord Mayor

Moved by the Chair (the Lord Mayor) –

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council observe a minute's silence to mark the passing of Jack Munday AO, noting his significant contribution to conserving and protecting the natural and urban environment and heritage, to trade unionism and for activism in support of Aboriginal, women's and gay rights, social justice and peace; and
- (B) the Lord Mayor be requested to write to Mr Munday's widow, Judy expressing Council's condolences.

Carried unanimously.

Note – All those present at the meeting, held remotely, observed a minute's silence in memory of Jack Munday.

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