

**ITEM-9 LMM 26/05/2020 - Condolence motion – Denis Nichols**

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**MOTION**

**That City of Newcastle:**

1. Notes with sadness the passing of former City of Newcastle Alderman and Councillor, Deputy Lord Mayor and union leader, Denis Nichols;
2. Recognises his enormous contribution to the betterment of the lives of working people, and all Novocastrians, through his roles as an Official for the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (1981-2001); President, Newcastle Trades Hall Council (1983-1997), City of Newcastle Councillor (1986-1995) and Deputy Lord Mayor of the City of Newcastle (1987-1989). Mr Nichols was also a Director of the Labour Co-operative Group from 2002 and a Director of the Hunter TAFE Foundation from 2000 until his passing and a member of the BHP Steelworks Transition Steering Team;
3. Notes that Mr Nichols was also a Newcastle Rugby League legend, playing 110 first grade matches for North Newcastle and Central Charlestown, winning a First Grade Premiership with the Bluebags in 1967, and making his Newcastle Representative debut in 1968;
4. Sends our condolences to Mr Nichols' family, his loving wife Iris, his friends, comrades and former teammates.

**BACKGROUND:**

Former City of Newcastle Alderman and Councillor (1986-1995) and Deputy Lord Mayor of the City of Newcastle 1987-1989 has sadly passed away.

Mr Nichols was a very well-respected union leader, first elected as an Official for the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union in 1981, serving as the President of Newcastle Trades Hall Council from 1983 to 1997 and as a workers representative on the BHP Steelworks Transition Steering Team.

Even in retirement, Mr Nichols continued to make a contribution to Newcastle, serving as a Director of the Labour Co-operative Group from 2002 and a Director of the Hunter TAFE Foundation from 2000 until his passing.

Mr Nichols was very well respected by all sides of politics, as a great bloke, a true gentleman, and a fighter for the working class.

**From the North Newcastle Rugby League Football Club:**

With sadness we would like to advise all of the passing this morning of former Northern Suburbs, Newcastle Representative front rower and club Life Member Denis Nichols this morning after a long illness.

A few notes on Denis's fantastic career at North's 1965-1973

- Northern Suburbs Junior
- 1965 3rd Grade debut
- 1965 Reserve Grade debut (after only one 3rd grade game)

- 1965 First Grade debut against Central Newcastle at Newcastle No1 Sportsground on Saturday 3rd July 1965.
- 1967 Northern Suburbs Premiership win.
- 1968 Newcastle Representative debut.
- Denis went on to play over 110 first grade games;
- 1971 elected Life Member of the Northern Suburbs Football Club.
- 1974-75 played out his career with Central Charlestown.

Our condolences go out to Denis' family, friends and former teammates.

Rest In Peace Denis.



***Newcastle Trades Hall Council President Denis Nichols with Secretary Peter Barrack with the Newcastle Trades Hall Council centenary banner.***





1967 - "Croakers Corkers"

**LEFT TO RIGHT - Back Row:** L.Perry, W.Owens, R.Cooper, K.Hutchinson, W.Mattingley, B.Askie, N.Hancock (Selector)  
**Third Row:** S.Farquharson (Treasurer), D.Williams (Vice-Pres.), J.Webber (Trainer), F.Wilkinson (Assist. Sec.),  
L.Bunt (President), W.Morton (Team Manager)  
**Second Row:** J.Lane (Secretary), D.Maddison, D.Ellis, J.Gill (Capt.-Coach), D.McManus, D.Newton  
**Front Row:** D.Davey, D.Nichols, C.Lawson (Ball-Boy), C.Ball, E.Russell  
**Absent:** A.Jones, R.Butler, R.Hunter, P.Watsford

# Labour of

NH 28/4/2001

Union stalwart Denis Nichols is enjoying a well-earned retirement and a better diet,  
**IAN KIRKWOOD reports.**

NEWCASTLE metalworkers union stalwart Denis Nichols slipped quietly out of public life before Easter, retiring a few months short of his 55th birthday.

Having felt a few twinges in his chest during the long and bitter Steel Tank and Pipe dispute — the diagnosis was more 'years of bad diet' than anything else — he decided to put away the hard hat and mobile phone and look for 'a better quality of life'.

He and wife Iris may take a bit of a holiday away from their Stockton home but for the meantime Mr Nichols intends to walk to the beach and toss in a line.

Having kept a lower profile in recent years — he doesn't even hold an office position in the ALP's Stockton branch — his last big hurrah is the World Skills (formerly Work Skills) competitions, which encourage the skills of young tradespeople and trainees.

He will stay on as chairman of the organisation's Hunter committee and hopes to see the region host a national or international competition in the next few years.

In one sense, Mr Nichols's retirement as a union organiser marks another step along the road from a more combative era of industrial relations.

'I look around and I think Bobby Cochrane is the only one who was around when I started who is still going,' Mr Nichols said, referring to his well-known compatriot in the building workers union.

Mr Nichols left the ranks of union organisers after more than 20 continuous years on the job.

In that time, he became one of the city's most high-profile Labor figures.

He was president of Newcastle Trades Hall Council from 1983 until 1997.

He served on Newcastle City Council from 1986 until 1995, and was Deputy Mayor from 1987 to 1989.

As one of the council's representatives at Shortland Electricity (a forerunner to EnergyAustralia), he spent nine years on the board, the final five until 1995 as chairman.

It is these high points the Labor movement most cares to remember, along with the indisputable energy and determination Mr Nichols showed in fighting countless industrial disputes and company closures along the way.

From this point of view, it is inappropriate to remember Mr Nichols as the candidate who lost Newcastle for Labor in the 1988 'Greinerslide' election, yet it is precisely this tag that most dogs the man.

In an interview this week Mr Nichols said there were a number of reasons why real estate agent George Keegan, a conservative Independent, did the unthinkable and wrested Newcastle from Labor's grasp.

A redistribution had given the seat unfavourable new boundaries, and, probably more importantly, the high-profile Margaret Henry had resigned from the ALP and was running against then Alderman Nichols as an Independent.

Newcastle was one of three safe Hunter seats lost by Labor in 1988. Stan Neilly in Cessnock and Don Bowman in Swansea were able to regain their places at the following election but it was Bryce Gaudry, not Mr Nichols, the ALP turned to in Newcastle in 1991.

Mr Nichols was elected as an organiser with the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (the metalworkers) on February 2, 1981.

By 1983 he was Trades Hall president, alongside secretary and Communist Party member Peter Barrack.

Their 'reasonable working relationship' all but dissolved in 1986 when Mr Barrack stood against Mr Nichols in Newcastle City Council elections on an Independent ticket with current Lord Mayor John Tate.

The move surprised many

# love

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## Fact file DENIS NICHOLS

- Elected as an organiser with the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union in 1981.
- President of Newcastle Trades Hall Council from 1983 until 1997.
- Served on Newcastle City Council from 1986 until 1995.
- Deputy Mayor of Newcastle from 1987 to 1989.
- Lost Newcastle for Labor in the 1988 election

in the union movement.

Similar questions were asked in sections of the ALP a few years later when avowed left-winger Mr Nichols worked closely and well with then Lord Mayor John McNaughton, a prominent member of the ALP Right.

'When you are in an election the representatives of that team have a duty to support the team and one another, including the Lord Mayor,' Mr Nichols said.

'It's fair to say that I had a good personal relationship with John in that period.'

Mr Nichols says he is disappointed that present ALP councillors are even thinking about dumping the ad valorem rating system and claims the council made a mistake in swapping citywide franchise for council wards.

'People are pressured in their wards to take certain decisions that are not in the best interests of the whole of the city,' he said.

Politics is a hard game and when Mr Nichols speaks about the past there are plenty of references to 'my enemies' or 'my opponents'.

But enemies can still command respect.

Mr Keegan said he had 'a good relationship' with Mr Nichols, who 'had a job to do for the trade union movement'.

Australian Workers Union secretary Kevin Maher said he had 'buted heads' with Mr Nichols over the years but knew that he never gave less than 100% for his union.

'He is a committed community member as well as a trade unionist and I think it's a shame that the stupidity of Unsworth's policies robbed him of the chance to be the State Member for Newcastle, because I think he would have been a good member,' Mr Maher said.

A number of people including Mr McNaughton and Newcastle MLA Bryce Gaudry said Mr Nichols had never received the kudos he should have for steering Newcastle Foreshore Park through to completion.

'The railway shed down there would never have been kept if Denis had not fought and fought hard for it,' Mr Gaudry said.

Mr Nichols accepted a major role in preserving the railway shed but said the honours for the park should go to former councillors including Allan Morris, the retiring Newcastle federal Labor MP.

Industrial relations has changed a lot in the past 20 years but Mr Nichols is confident about the future of the union movement.

'There's a downturn in Newcastle at the moment but some unions, such as the metalworkers, are putting in new initiatives on recruiting and reassessing their positions on a lot of things that were unfortunately let go by the wayside,' he said.

One of the 'great problems' for unionism has been the decline of big industrial employers such as BHP and the State Dockyard.

'On the job in my day young workers got a good education about what the trade union movement is all about,' Mr Nichols said.

He said the policies of the Howard Government had shown people the need for a strong union movement, dismissing what he called 'the myth of the middle class'.



**WORKING CLASS MAN:** New retiree Denis Nichols relaxing on Stockton Beach this week.

— Picture by Anita Jones