

# COMRADE HAND GRENADE

By Bill Hunt



By now many if not most of our members will be aware that Bob Carnegie is no longer an organiser with the BLF.

Bob has a job with Grocon as a peggy and is looking forward to reacquainting himself with the rank and file.

Bob Carnegie was born to unionism. His father was a seaman who brooked no bullshit from anyone and was affectionately known by one and all as "Fuck-'em," as this was his response to any demand or requirement that he thought was unfair or unreasonable.

With that sort of heritage Bobby was always going to go somewhere but he had the intelligence, the nous and the drive to go much further.

He threw his heart and soul into the support and defence of the working class. He was a firebrand within the Seaman's Union and in society generally.

Bob was an inspiration throughout many disputes and social upheavals. He was the first person jailed during the infamous SEQEB dispute when Joh Bjelke Petersen declared war on workers and was instrumental and inspirational in many other disputes.

Bob played a major role in the MUA dispute when the fledgling Howard government unleashed the dogs of war against workers under the Bastard Peter Reith.

He gained a lot of notoriety in normal society and a lot of support for the dispute when he chained himself to the rail tracks and then had the chains welded to the rails.

Bob has been a rallying point around which supporters gather, in most of the pivotal fights for justice and freedom in Queensland in the past 30 years.

I was a Painter and Docker when I first came into contact with Bob but I only really got to know him when we were locked up together at some time, I think it was during the Right to March dispute.

Many years of friendship and many shared watch house cells were to follow.

The Painters and Dockers were decimated by Australian ships being docked overseas and I returned to the building and construction industry as a member of the BLF in the late Seventies.

Bob suffered a long and debilitating time with depression after the MUA dispute but in 2003 he returned to the workforce as a construction worker and proud member of the BLF. BLFQ Secretary Greg Simcoe offered him a job as an organiser and Bob grabbed it with both hands. He has acquitted himself well in the role and left a legacy especially for the new young organisers coming through. Bob has always supported the advancement of youth and the renewal of the union through new blood.

He asked me particularly to remind each and every member to support their delegates, but most importantly to encourage and aid the new organisers.

There are thousands of working class men who looked up to him as an organiser and will support his decision to go back to his roots among the rank and file.

It would be easy to over simplify Bob. You know what they say: "Look up unionist in the dictionary and there's a picture of him."

But Bob is a bit like those Russian dolls. You think you know him but there is more inside.

Everyone knows Bob supports the working class and their struggle but Bob is much deeper than that. Take off one layer of the unionist and you will find a humanist who works for the homeless for no kudos or reward.

Take off another and you find a person whose commitment is much greater than just to the working class. Bob has a deep and abiding belief in the Brotherhood of Man.

Look even deeper and you find a lover of philosophy who actually has a Camus quote tattooed on his forearm.

At another level is the perennial student. Bob is studying for a law degree and the Grocon job is near the campus.

And even deeper in is the Bob who earned the nickname Comrade Hand Grenade. A bloke that still dares to dream of a "Glorious Socialist Future" where one May Day the parade in Brisbane will be led by a Soviet tank being driven by Leon Trotsky.

One of my favourite quotes of all time comes from Elie Wiesel an American Writer born in Romania in 1928, winner of the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1986:

*"I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented."*

Many of us have read this quote, some of us even believe it. Bob Carnegie lives it.