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LABOR PARTY, GAWLER SUB-BRANCH

Mr PICCOLO (Light) (15:29): The Friday 20 November 1908 edition of *The Bunyip* carried the following headline, 'Labor members at Gawler—a branch formed'. The report went on to state that:

A public meeting was held in the Institute Hall on Friday evening last, to form a branch of the Labor Party. Mr Samuel Finch presided and the speakers were Messrs H. Chesson and R.P. Blundell, MPs.

Messrs Chesson and Blundell were Labor MPs. So tomorrow, the Gawler sub-branch of the Australian Labor Party celebrates its centenary. The sub-branch will be holding a special centenary meeting in The Bunyip Reading Room of the Gawler Public Library, located in the Gawler Institute building. The meeting will commemorate the public meeting held on the same day in the same building 100 years ago.

According to *The Bunyip* the meeting was attended by over 20 members of the local community and a motion put by Mr W.H. Brown was overwhelmingly carried. Their object in coming to Gawler—that is, the Labor MPs—was to try to start a branch of the Labor Party. *The Bunyip* states that the MPs:

...were surprised that a town like Gawler, with so many workers in it, had not had a branch long ago. Their definition of a worker was one engaged in honest work that was useful for the sustenance and comfort of his fellows. The principal matters they had to combat were not the proposals of the Labor Party but the misrepresentations of their opponents.

Nothing has changed. Our opponents continue to misrepresent the government on a number of issues. *The Bunyip* notes that the:

...desire of the [Labor] Party was to bring about a state of affairs in which every man and woman would be able to live the life the Creator intended them to live. The conditions today were not that they should be. All they wanted was a square deal between man and man.

This was 100 years ago.

While the life of workers has improved, the struggle continues to maintain the living standards of working men and women that 'the Creator had intended'. The Labor MPs were reported in *The Bunyip* as saying:

No doubt there were difficulties in the way of bringing about improved conditions, but they could be overcome if there were larger interest taken in politics by people generally. As to the district of the Barossa—

Gawler was a town within the Barossa—

they thought there was room for a Labor man, much good would be done if a Labor man were returned to assist Mr Coombe.

Gawler had its first Labor parliamentarian in 1915, when Mr E.H. Coombe was elected as a Labor member to the multi-member electorate of the District of Barossa, a position he formerly held as a 'radical Liberal'.

From 1918 until 1924, the electorate was represented by Liberal members until A.L. Hopkins was elected on a Labor Party platform. G. Cooke was elected in 1927, and in 1930 all three members were Labor affiliated; namely, G. Cooke, T.T. Edwards and L.A. Hopkins.

In 1938, Gawler was included in the single member electorate of the District of Gawler and was represented by Labor MP Mr L.S. Duncan. He held this position until 1953, when Jack Clark, a primary school teacher, was elected. Mr Clark held the seat until 1970 when, as a result of redistribution, the boundaries changed dramatically and Gawler become part of the Light electorate. Mr Clark won the 1956 election uncontested. He is still fondly remembered by many of the seniors in our community.

The Liberals held Light from 1970 until 2006, with Dr Bruce Eastick holding the seat for some 23 years, while Mr Malcolm Buckby held it until the 2006 state election. After an absence of some 36 years, Gawler

is again represented by a member of the Labor Party, namely, yours truly.

It is fitting that in the centenary year of the sub-branch, Gawler is represented at both the state and federal levels by Labor members of parliament, with Mr Nick Champion being elected to the federal parliament in 2007.

I would like to thank *The Bunyip*, the Gawler Public Library, Jenni Newton Farrelly of the South Australian Parliament Research Library and Kristy Manning of the State Electoral Office for their research assistance.

The Bunyip reports that Mr Chesson ended his speech to the public meeting with the following:

The desire of Labor men was to leave the world a little better than they found it. Some might say that they had no chance of forming a branch of the party in Gawler, but they were not going to be disappointed. They intended to keep on until they were successful.

Successful they were. I extend my congratulations to the former and current members of the Gawler sub-branch of the Australian Labor Party and wish them a happy centenary.