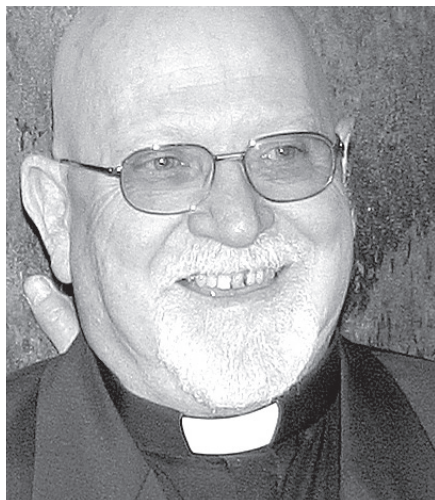


Priest's political calling



WHEN Father Roy O'Neill was ordained, he got a congratulatory telegram from someone special, Gough Whitlam.

O'Neill grew up on a cane farm, in Towoomba, Queensland, where his father stood as the Labor candidate. His campaign manager was Rex Patterson, who went on to become a minister in Whitlam's Cabinet.

"I always had a strong consciousness of workers' rights. My father had a sense of justice and was very community minded."

It is not surprising then that O'Neill's journey has seen him become an outspoken critic of Howard's WorkChoices legislation and involved with the workers' movement.

Before becoming a man of the cloth, O'Neill found himself studying in Sydney and Canberra. "I was in Canberra in 1967, '68. It was a radical time. A time of tremendous change."

After joining the Catholic order, Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, O'Neill spent 20 years teaching around Australia.

For the past eight years he has been the chaplain at the Randwick Children's and Prince of Wales hospitals and has recently become chaplaincy services co-ordinator. He also works on the Children's Cancer Ward. "It can be very exhausting, but it is also incredibly rewarding."

O'Neill looks like he would fit in on any building site, and has an easy-going and slightly knockabout temperament. But when it comes to politics, he is a priest who is not afraid to speak his mind and is a vocal opponent of the Howard Government.

"I wrote a letter to the paper just after the Cronulla riots. I said that what happened there was where John Howard had led us. He had been stirring up this kind of resentment and division for a long while."

He criticises the Howard Government's focus on economics: "It has given far too much power to business. Its workplace laws are designed to cause dread and fear."

O'Neill believes in the rights of workers to organise and is impressed by the community he has seen within the union. He has been appalled to learn about the coercive powers of the Australian Building and Construction Commissioner, such as the right to compel workers to answer questions or face jail.

"In previous decades these people had a name. It was called the Gestapo. The Government's policy seems to all about the politics of division. People do have the right to gather for their protection, the right to join a trade union."

Don't miss the crucial March 29 meeting!

Other 2007 meetings: June 28 AND Sept 27

The Howard Government's Building and Construction Industry Improvement Bill, and the Commission used to enforce it, is adversely affecting your livelihood. The Australian Building and Construction Commission's purpose is to monitor "behaviour" in the industry – your behaviour. It is time for YOU to play a part in fighting against these unjust laws,

PUT THE MEETING DATES IN YOUR DIARY SO YOU DON'T MISS IT

GOSFORD

Central Coast Leagues Club, Dane Drive, Gosford. Meeting starts 5pm.

LIVERPOOL

John Edmonson BC Memorial Club, 185 George St, Liverpool. Meeting starts 5pm

NEWCASTLE

Newcastle Trades Hall, Devonshire Lane, Newcastle. Meeting starts 4pm

SUTHERLAND

Sutherland District Trade Union Club, 57 Manchester Road, Gympie. Meeting starts 5pm.

SYDNEY

South Sydney Leagues Club, 265 Chalmers Street, Redfern. Meeting starts 4pm

WOLLONGONG

Wollongong Trade Union Centre, 1 Lowden Square, Wollongong. Meeting starts 4.30pm.

MOUNT DRUITT

Mount Druitt Workers Club, Woodstock Avenue, Dharruk. Meetings start 6.30pm. Mount Druitt Meetings are held on the last Thursday EVERY month. March 29, May 31, June 28, August 30, September 27, November 29

Visit the Rights at Work Community Forum now!

www.rightsatwork.com.au/community/index.php

MEET THE RANK & FILE

Name: Jose Pinheiro



Job: Concreter at De Martin & Gasparani, Homebush.

Family background: Married with two children and now living in Lakemba. Grew up in Angola, Africa. Lived in Australia for 19 years and is a citizen.

Passions: Martial arts in particular Kung Fu.

Heroes: I really like Julia Gillard. I think she has a good way and is a person who inspires trust.

If you were PM for a day: I'd bring the troops in Iraq back to Australia