

**ANN SYMONDS EULOGY**  
**WEDNESDAY, 27 NOVEMBER, 2018**  
**SYDNEY**

**Anthony Albanese**

I am honoured and humbled that Ann Symonds asked that I speak at her farewell.

I searched for a quote that would characterise Ann's life and settled on Albert Einstein's: "Only a life lived for others is worthwhile".

I suspect that Ann would have told me she preferred: "Life is too short to drink bad wine".

For without exception, Ann was self-effacing in spite of a lifetime of extraordinary achievement.

She was a Member of the Order of Australia, an honour bestowed in recognition of her significant services to social justice, particularly through drug law reform, and to the New South Wales Parliament from 1982 to 1998.

Ann was a collectivist. She was also a leader.

Elected as Waverley's first female Deputy Mayor in 1977, she continued to be a trailblazer.

From her Bronte home, she embodied the spirit of *agitate, educate, organise* with the formidable Eastern Suburbs Left, including Jeannette McHugh, Ernie Page, Sue and Paul Tracey, Faye Gervasoni, Paul Pearce, Tessa Mallos and so many others.

Ann believed in social movements and in translating that into legislative change, working with NSW Left Leaders including Bruce Childs, Tom Uren, Jack Ferguson, Frank Walker, Meredith Burgmann and John Faulkner.

What distinguished Ann was her preparedness to pursue causes that were not high on the public agenda at the time of her initial engagement.

Women in prisons, the impact on children, safe injecting rooms as part of drug law reform, homelessness, same-sex law reform, juvenile justice – these issues were not fashionable.

To be taken forward, such issues required courageous and passionate advocacy.

Ann Symonds provided that advocacy, blazing the policy trail in the causes of progress and justice.

Those who didn't have a voice found their voice through Ann Symonds.

Because of Ann, thousands of lives of some of the most vulnerable in our community have been improved and, in many cases, literally saved.

One of Ann's first victories was getting a commitment to childcare adopted at the 1973 national conference in Surfers Paradise.

This was not Ann's first intervention at an ALP conference.

In 1971 Ann and Jeannette were backed by Syd Einfield to represent Waverley SEC at the NSW Annual Conference.

Seating at that time was alphabetical.

So they were next to the Vehicle Builders Union and surrounded by other Right wing delegates.

The two Left wing women stood out like a woman on the Liberal Party frontbench does in Canberra today.

They stood out even more when, to Syd Enfield's horror, their first action was to put their hands up and vote to add "without compensation" to the ALP's Socialist objective about nationalisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange.

Ann was principled, determined and at times provocative.

She had a capacity to work broadly and to win support from people from the Coalition as well as the Greens and minor parties.

Ann earned something that was universal.

Respect.

She inspired and mentored many, including myself and Carmel, who replaced her in the Legislative Council.

My first position in the NSW Steering committee was as a Member of the Policy Co-ordinating Committee, which Ann chaired.

She was patient, generous and supportive and had a command of policy across the spectrum, whether it was the arts, indigenous affairs, social justice issues, peace and disarmament or the economy.

Ann was a serious person, but ... and here is a declaration, Ann Symonds was fun.

Great fun. Tremendous fun.

I will smile every time I remember her. It was a pleasure to spend time with her.

She had a way of agreeing with pure, unadulterated, unexpurgated excitement.

“Yes,” she would declare. And repeat “yes” and “that’s right”.

She was great company.

And her capacity to build networks was second to none.

She was forgiving and absolutely loyal. If you were in a political battle, there is was no-one I would rather have by my side.

“There’s someone you’ve got to meet,” Ann would say.

Lunch introducing me to Helen Clark.

Lunch at the Spanish Club with Jeannette to propose the outrageous idea that the Member for Phillip, which had been abolished, should run for Grayndler.

“That can’t happen,” said Jeannette.

“Yes,” said Ann. “Yes.”

Ann never stopped. Her last days were spent still agitating for change.

Ann Symonds was much loved. And she had so much love to give.

To her family. To her friends. To her party.

And to generations of activists.

I loved her and will miss her.

The world is a better place as a direct result of her presence on this planet.