

**VAN BADHAM**  
**ADDRESS TO 2016 NATIONAL CONFERENCE**

Thank you very much Comrade Dettmer. First of course I'd like to acknowledge that I appear today on aboriginal land, I believe I'm on the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation and somebody from the Kulin nation down south I pay my respects to elders past and present for the privilege of being on this land today.

I'd also like to acknowledge how exciting it was that as I walked in today and seen my godfather Pat Johnston, who I believe is driving your international delegates to and from the airport because unionism never sleeps. I'm certainly grateful to have Pat around if not present here today because the speech that I wanted to give was about the union family and about why certainly over the past couple of weeks of my now very colorful existence, I have never had it so explicitly reminded to me how proud I am and how strong I am to my core because of the union movement and the unionism that we share and that's really what I wanted to talk about today.

It's a very scary time in the world. I don't know if any of you caught Michelle Obama's address to the democratic national convention currently taking place in the United States, where amidst praising the virtues of Hilary Clinton, Michelle Obama also dropped in the rather classic reminder that the election of Donald Trump will result in a person who can't get his hair straight having the codes to a new clear arsenal.

As a person who spent 10 years of my life living in Britain, obviously it's been very disturbing for me to live in the reality that the country that I lived in for so long as a citizen also of Europe mainland Europe that that experience has now vanished for the coming generations of British people since the Brexit that vote led an agitated four by the far right was successful in triggering Britain's removal from the European union.

We are of course living in an Australia where Malcolm Turnbull has just been re-elected with a Cabinet full of diversity hating, climate deniers and I don't think we can really put it in any gentler terms than that. And certainly in the reality where in Melbourne in winter it's been 33 degrees in Brighton at the same time that the weather has been the same in London in summer, we're living on a planet where a fundamental reluctance to acknowledge the fragility of the eco system in which we live is certainly presenting challenges for our political future – about industry, about production, about sustainability and their challenges that were ignored by far too many legislators for too long.

So it's a tricky planet we're living on. We are living on a planet of course where continuing the instability in regions like the middle east has provoked one of the hugest refugee populations seen since the second world war. There are currently 60 million displaced people who have removed from their homes by forces of war, hardship, terror, conflict, division and persecution and certainly it's not very hard to get scared and if we look at the rise of somebody like Trump it is very easy to look at a newspaper, to look at terrorism, jihadism, radicalism and get very concerned about the safety of the world that you live in, the security for yourself and your family, your expectations of leaving the house and coming home.

I'm here to tell you that there's actually more hope, more optimism and more positive opportunities for inclusive, productive, sustainable change than there ever has been and I'm here to remind you how important every single person in this room is to the challenges for change that lie ahead and how crucial you are in being the difference between a world of fear, division and pain and a world which is productive, inclusive and prosperous.

I speak specifically looking at something like jihadism and radical Islam it might seem like a pretty crazy thing to bring to an AMWU Conference but I did a speech recently about my experiences dealing with the extremist right down in Melbourne you would have seen United Patriots front reclaim Australia and flag waving boomer boys, all seven of them, getting up to as much trouble as they can possibly muster with a brain that they share between them and an increasingly diminishing number of teeth. Their reappropriation of the Eureka flag is something that has to end.

I've been going to those demonstrations to put myself on the line to say we will not tolerate fascism in the state of Victoria or anywhere else because historically that has been the lesson that it's a really interesting historical phenomenon in Britain and I don't know how many of you know this fascism never caught on as much as people thought it would just by having the backing of the Daily Mail the great right wing union bashing newspaper who praised Oswald Mosley in the British black shirts and the fascists in Britain because the coalition of urban Jews, trade unionists, communists, socialists, people like myself gathered together made a very dedicated commitment that the kind of the political extremism that spread in Europe in the 1930's would not spread to Britain and there was a very famous demonstration called the Cable Street demonstration where the fascists decided they would march through a particularly Jewish area of London to you know stand up for their fascist values and unionists and Jews took them down. They protested, they blockaded, they threw things at them and so utterly smashed was the image of invulnerable fascist masculinity by you know this crazy assortment of red ragging odd balls that fascism never got the hold on the popular imagination in Britain like it did in Germany and other places obviously to catastrophic results.

So down in Melbourne of course when the fascists decide they'll get together and wave our flag in our faces we gather and it does get ugly and I'm not going to lie. I believe in non violent protests which means I will take a punch as opposed to give one but I have been asked given the fact that those guys proceeded though identified me from some photographs, they harassed me on the internet called for my death, this is now what I know is my day at work and in the midst of all of this I've sort of got to know them and what they stand for.

So I was asked in Melbourne to give a speech for the Fabian society progressive left wing society to talk about the far right in Australia and did I think it was gaining hold and why and before I spoke there was a Melbourne academic called Dr Joshua Ruse who's an expert on extremism and jihadism and he specifically writes and researches about young men from western countries like Australia, America and England who grow up here but become radicalised and go off to join Isis in Syria and engage in things like the horrible 7 bombings in London all of this kind of out of nowhere extreme violence and it was absolutely extraordinary to hear Dr Ruse speak about what he had come to realise what the causes were of that kind of radicalisation.

Overwhelmingly the boys who get involved in that kind of stuff are unemployed. Overwhelmingly they have only ever been in service industry jobs. They don't see themselves as having a long term economic future. They don't have access to the kind of trades education that could get them a foothold in the labor market. They're isolated, they lack a peer group, they lack effectively the influence of their fellows. What they lack is brotherhood, fraternity, a sense of community. And it was extraordinary hearing Dr Ruse say this about the the jihadists because I was giving the exact same speech about what I've learnt about the Australian far right. About those guys and why they get attracted to these strange ultra nationalist movements and the flag waving and the white pride nonsense. Because overwhelmingly those guys are unemployed, they're not in secure work, they don't see themselves as having a foothold in the labor market, they don't have the sense of security in the economy and it was absolutely amazing to hear just how identical those experiences were.

What was even more amazing was that Dr Ruse projected on the screen the kind of recruiting material that the young jihadist had been receptive to and reading the language of the things of these sort of crazy Isis recruiters had sent them was, for me, like looking at the banners that you see hanging in the CFMEU bar at Trades Hall in Victoria. The language of brotherhood, a family, of being together, of standing up for one another, for feeling like you were part of a cause that was bigger than your individual life and of course all I could see looking out at these radicalised isolated frustrated guys was a desperate need for those young men to be in trade unions. Because if we look at the sources of division in our community, if we look at the places where extremism flourishes, it does actually flourish in the isolation of the individual and the creation of false communities like those crazy facebook groups like Reclaim Australia, like the kind of false community created by recruiting people who overwhelmingly are not particularly religious into some kind of extremist religious band guard trying to bring about some kind of you know nutty future society and somewhere dreadful in the middle east. And what I realized, was just how important the work we do individually as trade unionist is in spreading a message of a reality of a family of a movement, of inclusion, of collectivism that actually rescues people from despair. That's what we do. And our contribution as people who work together in the workplace and across industries to support one another, to fight the battles of the whole, to stand up for principles that it is about the many and not the few, that is the most powerful force for change within our society and always has been.

The reason why I currently have the strength to get up in the morning, get my hundred death threats a day, get my lovely letters where I am told people are praying for my death, be told that I am too ugly to rape that is always a favourite, my only gratitude being that if those people consider me ugly it is a great blessing from god.

The strength that I have to participate in the kind of social discussions where I'm forced to explain the nature of reality to the likes of Steve Price, who has not been in contact with it for sometime, is because I am of course part of a movement that is bigger than my individual life and is led not for my individual ambition or my personal goals but for the greater good of the community in which I live. And the experience of being a unionist at work is the experience of engaging a world of ideas and values that are played out minute by minute in the workplace which is of course the most powerful structural tool for social education that we have.

We learn who we are at work because it organises our lives, it feeds us, it shapes the hours of our day, it determines the way in which we socialise with one another, where we live and how we can live and to be a unionist in that situation is taking on a set of values about where we dedicate our time, who we are and how we interact with one another that educates everybody around us and the society beyond us in what is important and how to live.

Struggles such as what is currently taking place in Abbotsford with CUB is an unbelievable educational tool for the rest of society. Just by taking action collectively, standing up sharing stories defending a principal of a right to work and a right to work fairly is a means of communicating to every other person in our society that the strength of community is strong, it does determine a better opportunity for the individual worker and for society at large and it instructs people that there exists a brotherhood in our community, a fraternity, a sisterhood, a community in which individual lives mean something because they are part of something much bigger..

I've learnt since I started writing for the Guardian just how desperately needed the voices of our values are in the broader social conversation because in a Australia where 40% of workers are now in casualised work, the idea that there are options beyond just individual labor are more important than ever to share and to demonstrate because if we're trying to understand why British working class people voted themselves out of Europe and into economic uncertainty and catastrophe, if we are trying to understand how any working class person could possibly think that electing a property billionaire was somehow going to lead to a better economic outcome for their family, it's because individualised workers, service industry workers, deunionised communities are losing their education in a world that could be better, that can be different. And what I've learnt since I've started writing for the Guardian is that I'm not some extremist random, feminist, red ragging, fringe element that I'm actually part of an enormous community of people who if they aren't members of unions now understand and value why unions are important to our workplaces, to our communities and to our national and international futures. Because the articles I write about ordinary working people their days at work their struggles at work and the ongoing fight for fairness and equality in power in the workplace and beyond it have been enormously popular.

The stories that I tell of the places I go in my work whether it's the warehouse workers who unionised and stood up against terrifying and dangerous industrial conditions in the northern suburbs of Melbourne, whether it was the poultry workers who were sacked from their turkey factory six days before Christmas and took it over started a c-operative and decided they would determine the shape and structure of their own working lives, whether its talking about organised retail industry workers standing up for their rights, whether its talking about the amazing Australian unemployment workers union who are organising and unionising kids who are forced into the now fatal industrial conditions of work for the dole. A kid that was forced into work for the dole 18 year old kid in Toowoomba child of a single mother with three other children had his head crushed in a hay bailer and is no longer with us because basic safety procedures were not followed because they're just work for the dole kids and because he died on work for the dole his human life was worth exactly half as much as any other worker who would have been killed in an industrial accident.

These stories mean something to the audience beyond this room or other rooms like it because they connect to the Australian yearning for community, for fairness and frugalitarianism. We are very lucky in this country that we have the values that we are all born equal and we all have our right to a fair go, to an equal share of the social pie that we all deserve opportunity to direct our own lives and this is why the transformation that's taking place in the media is so important because now more than ever your voices, your stories, your values, your insights, your experiences can be shared and they can influence other people to think differently to organise better and to live a more fulfilling life.

Overwhelmingly Australians receive their news not from individual newspapers anymore and not from television, but from Facebook. Young people overwhelmingly receive their social communication from Instagram. The size of the Australian twitter community is thirteen million people - that's more than half the population are engaging in social media and its in this space that we are finally beginning to crack open the façade that use to masquerade as majority opinion.

I've been thinking a lot about just why Steve Price cracked it so badly when I had the temerity to insist on speaking without being interrupted by him on Q&A, I came to realise that Steve Price, Ray Hadley, Andrew Bolt, all of those guys who happen to share the same wealth, the same privilege, the same opinions, bloody feminists, bloody unionist, bloody muslims, bloody everybody else that those guys just aren't used to two way communication. Steve Price doesn't speak to a live audience, he certainly doesn't usually speak to an audience that's particularly diverse, so when he gets on the radio like he did the other night and talked about this bloody woman who just would not shut up and her dreadful unionist boyfriend, he's used to nothing but approval from his co-commentators and he is certainly not used to anybody speaking back. Well that opportunity to actually represent majority opinion is now in our hands and the most extraordinary thing about my appearance on Q&A wasn't the death threats because frankly I get them for speaking aloud, the most extraordinary thing was the number of people who wrote to me saying I support you, I'm with you, I'm just so glad someone stood up to that prick because overwhelming I can tell you that correspondence was in the thousands and far dwarfed any kind of negative reaction from the likes of Steve Price who are holding on for dear life to values that keep people isolated and keep as many groups down as they can. I think it was particularly revealing that he had a go at my unionist boyfriend cause I thought my god if I'm terrifying then the two of us together must be your worst god damn nightmare.

I mentioned this power that we have as a community to articulate ourselves as being absolutely crucial to the next few years. It was extraordinary and everybody in this room is to be congratulated to see shining golden wonder boy of the Australian right Malcolm Turnbull reduced to not quite a majority in the Australian parliament after unprecedented popularity level and I think you all deserve a huge round of applause for being part of that because its been mention in dispatches more than once that the electoral muscle of the Australian trade union movement was worth overwhelmingly a 2.5% swing and contribution to the electorate and has brought that government to its knees. So give yourselves a huge round of applause.

It demonstrates what we can do and who we are within the broader political conversation because certainly as an organised movement of committed people who share the values of community, who share the values of inclusion, of diversity, of secure work, of good conditions, of stable pay and fairness for Australian workers. Our conversations are actually more powerful than anything our enemy can try and have with the rest of the electorate because if you look at what kept Turnbull and those guys alive they ran on nothing but fear, they ran on smear and fear, fear of the other, fear of the unknown, fear of refugees, fear of other workers, fear of other cultures, fear of feminists, fear of gay children in schools can you even imagine it? That we are supposed to be terrified of isolated queer children who are going to school. These are the kind of people who are enemy will demonise the most vulnerable the mostly marginalised people within our community.

Their conversations do not actually stack up to the kind of conviction that we bring to going about our lives and living our values as unionists, as workers, as leaders in our community and that's why we were able to have such an impact and when we bring our voices into the public's view like with this brilliant ad which is of course you know going to find an enormous audience of people who connect immediately to its values we flex an enormous muscle and an enormous influence that we desperately need to have in order to stop the kind of madness we've seen afflict the UK and are watching now afflict The United States of America. Because we do actually spread a message that not only is hope possible, but participation in the means of change is accessible and the right of all Australians.

I mentioned this in particular looking at the challenge of climate change and how important it is for us as unionists to lead the policy discussion about how our society is going to change and adapt because where people get terrified to the point of not wanting to watch the news or read the articles, or look at the dead bats falling out of the sky, or the floods, or the damage, or the destroyed agriculture, it is really depressing to consider the impact of human activity on earth.

At the Paris climate conference the most inspiring speeches I heard were from unionists who were there with the International Trade Union Confederation led by the great Australian Sharan Burrow, people saying this is our opportunity to get industry right. Climate change demanding the real organisation of our economy is our opportunity as unionists to lead a better, fairer conversation about how we organise production, how we organise sustainability, how we keep jobs in communities, how we have good jobs, good conditions, the rights of all workers to an equal standard of living and this is our opportunity to lead that discussion around change and use it as a mechanism for fairness and for equality.

So while I do watch Donald Trump videos late at night in the way that other people probably watch horror movies, I actually feel incredibly positive about the capacity of the Australian Trade Union Movement to make the change that lives a better alternative to the one that is on offer. I am so grateful to be here, thank you very much for having me today.