

ROSEVEAR - "PEOPLE, NOT BOOKS"

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Know Your Parliamentarians

Thirteen years ago John. Solomon Rosevear, unemployed timber machinist, penniless, without food in the house for his wife and two children, applied for the card that would enable him to draw the dole. The following Saturday he was elected to the Federal Parliament, as Labor member for Dalley. Speaker Rosevear retains the dole card as a souvenir. Though generally good humored, he retains an undercurrent of bitterness, a ruthlessness that brushes aside opposition. A close associate of [Jack] Beasley, he follows the Beasley dictum, 'Never fight needlessly, but when you have to fight, go in boots and all'.

Rosevear was born to politics. His father, a laborer, was one of the ALP's founders in the 'nineties, a member of W.M. Hughes' committee in Pymont. One his earliest memories is of his father riding the traditional white horse that headed the torchlight political parades of the period. Sol was only 14 when he first decided that the world had done him an injustice. Sitting for a scholarship at a State school, he found that, while marks were counted in twenties, he, for some reason, had obtained only 15. Partly in disgust, partly to supplement the meagre family income, he quit school, started in a timber yard at 8/- a week, increased to 10/- .

By 1916 he was married, with a boy and a girl as a family, and was one of the highest paid machinists in the timber trade. Only about 10 men of the 150 in the timber yard were union members when Rosevear was selected as shop steward. The yard became 100 per cent, union labor. Three years earlier, Sol Rosevear had gone as NSW delegate to the Timber Workers' Conference in Hobart, which drew up the Federal Constitution for the union. Another young man present, as secretary of the Victorian Timber Workers' Union, was John Curtin.

For a while life was rosier. Came the black year of 1929. For 11 months the timber workers struck in protest against the Lukin award [which cut wages and increased working hours]. Savings dwindled. When the strike ended, the family was penniless and Rosevear a marked man. Nothing will persuade him that there was not a black list. He obtained a job running a one-man mill for a builder but when the depression came he was discharged and went on relief work:

It was then I met the finest men I have known. We went on the sandhills like into the Sahara, lunched in a galvanised iron hut. If anyone was without a feed, someone took up a collection of sandwiches. It's hard to give up sandwiches when your own belly's empty. But those blokes did. I don't think there was a mean-spirited man amongst the crowd.

When the Scullin Government toppled in the Labor split, Rosevear got the selection for Dalley against E.G. Theodore. It was then that he went for his ration card to draw the dole. "It was tough" he says. "I had to borrow my £25 deposit. I didn't have a cracker." Yet Rosevear defeated Theodore and arrived at Canberra to find himself the whole of State Labor's rank and file. Beasley was leader, Rowley James deputy, Ward secretary, Gander whip.

His good points: A graceful, logical debater, a good knowledge of the rules and traditions of the House, a loyalty to rank-and-file outlook, a refusal to be over-awed by more prominent men in the party.

His weaknesses: Occasional inability to control a caustic tongue, lack of finesse when fighting a personal issue, too much independence to make a good team member, a truculence that becomes evident when crossed.

His hobby: Meeting people, listening to them. Rosevear reads few books, but his home is like a doctor's consulting-room. He claims that, by listening to all classes of callers, hearing their side of life and their opinions, he learns more than he could from books.