

# John Thomas Lang

*Shirley Seale*

*Many newer residents in the district may not be aware that Jack Lang, former State Premier of New South Wales, lived for many years in Schofields. The following article provides a wonderful insight into his life.*

*To the older generation his name recalls vivid memories of other days when he was enthusiastically supported or severely criticised, but never effectively ignored. History will say that he did sincerely try to help his fellow man and I think he would have been content. These were the words of Cardinal Freeman, speaking of the late State Labor Leader, Jack Lang, during his funeral at St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney, on 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1975.*

Thousands of people stood beneath the trees in Hyde Park in the shadow of the cathedral to say farewell to a man who had been one of the most controversial political figures the state of New South Wales had ever known.

## Early Life.

John Thomas Lang, (Jack), had been born 98 years before, on 21<sup>st</sup> December, 1876 at George Street, Sydney, between Bathurst and Liverpool Streets. He was the sixth child of James Henry Lang, an Edinburgh born watchmaker, and Mary Whelan of Galway, Ireland. James had converted from Presbyterian to marry the Catholic Mary and the children were brought up in this religion. His early education was probably at St Francis Marist Brothers School in Castlereagh Street.

Jack's father was bedridden with rheumatic fever for seven years, from 1882 until 1889, and Jack first sold papers after school to help with family finances but later his health too began to break down and at the age of seven he was sent to stay with aunts at Bairnsdale in Victoria for four years, until he was twelve. There he developed a sympathy for the farmers' hard life. As a teenager he returned to Sydney to look for work.

His first job was on a poultry farm at Smithfield, and later he became the driver of a horse drawn bus in Guildford. He worked in the bookshop of H.J. Douglas for some time, and in 1893 he was employed as an office boy to an accountant and learned some basic bookkeeping skills. Housing and employment were a constant problem for him at that time and he knew well the problems of low income families. He was a tall young man with a dark complexion, but had not yet reached the stature of 193 cms and weight of 101 kgs which in later years were to earn him the soubriquet, 'The Big Fella'.

He went to work at W.H. McNamara's bookshop. McNamara's wife, Bertha, was called "mother of the Labor movement", and was involved in the push for women's suffrage and other causes. Many debates took place in the large reading room over the bookshop and Lang's interest in politics was fuelled. On 11<sup>th</sup> March, 1896 he married McNamara's stepdaughter, Hilda Amelia Bredt at St Francis Catholic Church. He was 19, she was 17. The following month her sister Bertha married Henry Lawson in the Episcopal Church. Hilda and Jack spent their early married life in her parents' home, where their first child was born, a daughter, in June of that year.

#### A Taste for Politics.

Lang changed careers as he grew older and around 1899 - 1900 he worked as manager at R.W.J. Harley's Real Estate agency at Auburn. In 1901 he set up his own company with H.H. Dawes as partner. (When a bank opened on the site of the Lang and Dawes office in 1967, a plaque paid tribute to a "distinguished man of the people".)

By 1902 he was able to move his ever increasing family to Carnarvon Street, Auburn, and by 1904 he and Hilda had three daughters and one son living.

His political career had already begun when he joined The Auburn Labor League in 1901. By 1906 he was secretary of Auburn Starr Bowkett, a co-operative building society which helped workers to buy their own homes. Jack Lang became well known in the area and was elected a member of Auburn Council from 1907 till 1914, including a term as Mayor from 1909 to 1911.

His personal life was in chaos at this time as he was estranged from his wife for a period until 1908, but they reunited and their last child was born in 1913.

#### Parliamentary Career.

In December, 1913 Jack Lang was elected the first Labor Member of Parliament for the state seat of Granville, which was not a safe Labor seat at the time as it included parts of Strathfield, and his notable political career, which was to make him renowned, loved and despised with equal enthusiasm, had begun.

Lang wore the uniform of the typical Edwardian man, a three piece suit, watch and chain across the waistcoat, stiff collar, sober tie, brushed boots and a felt hat. He was insecure with people, being more at home with working folk, and seldom laughed, but men and women were attracted to him by his appearance of strength.

He was full of ideas on how to give people confidence in tough times, and in the book, *Weevils in the Flour*, he is quoted: *There was immense unemployment in Australia after the First World war and there was a drought too. Well, there was a State election in 1920 and in order to get the country vote, Mr Storey, the Party leader had promised that if the farmers took the risk and planted a crop he would guarantee to buy all the wheat at 7/6 (75 cents) a bushell, a wonderful price. The Labor party was returned to office and the farmers took us at our word. All right, we*

*were in power and money had to be found for the wheat and work had to be found for the unemployed. I was the Treasurer. They asked me, could I find the funds? I thought I could.*

Lang approached the Under Secretary, Mr Bellemore who was Superintendent of the NSW Labour Exchange and suggested they do the work on 'Gallipoli' - that's what they called Parramatta Road in those days because it was impassable between Homebush and Lidcombe. You couldn't get through from Sydney to Parramatta, you had to go through the Cemetery. Mr Bellemore said there were no plans and no machinery. Lang said there were lots of municipalities with steam rollers and machinery but no work because there was no money. So they found a road working plant. Then they wanted shovels and picks and found plenty of these at Victoria Barracks, but Bellemore said they were no good because they were smaller than ordinary ones, and would only hold a "spoonful of dirt". Lang said they were ideal because most of the men had only pushed pens before. *I suppose one quarter of the number of professional men would have done the job quicker, but it didn't matter*, he said. They built a beautiful concrete road from Homebush towards Lidcombe and the men got full wages.

Lang said, *I needed a few millions to pay for the wheat as there had been rain*. He tried the banks for a loan but they would not give him money as all loans of that size were raised in London then. Lang decided to raise his own money. He put ads in papers for stocks and debentures and told people it was to pay the farmers. The money started to pour in almost immediately, mostly from country people so he was able to pay for Parramatta Road. Then the crop grew and the farmers got more than 7/6 for it on the open market, so he didn't need to find money for the wheat.

There was no Main Roads Department so he started a board. They went on to build the Princes Highway, named for the Prince of Wales, whom Lang had taken on a boat trip up the Hawkesbury River during his visit to Australia in 1920, regaling him about the Labor Party and the working folk. And they built the main road north to Newcastle. Parramatta Road, which would have been under the jurisdiction of many councils, came under one authority by the formation of the Main Roads Board.

By March of 1923, the AWU controlled Labor State executive expelled Dooley from the Party. The Caucus would not recognise J.J.G. McGirr or W.F. Dunn as the next leaders so the June conference reinstated Dooley who then stepped down to allow Caucus to elect Lang as leader of the Labor Party for the state. On 30<sup>th</sup> May, 1925 the Lang Government won the right to govern with 46 seats.

This is one of the stirring jingles sung lustily to the tune of *Happy Days are Here Again*, which helped to win that election:

*Happy days are here again With J.T. Lang to steer again,  
No more need to fear and moon again, Happy days are here again..  
Bavin will be biffed by us And Stevens will be stiffed by us  
On the joyous 25<sup>th</sup> by us. Happy days are here again.*

Also this one sung to the tune of *Advance Australia Fair*:  
*Now Premier Lang for us will fight We've got to see him through*  
*Our slogan clear is "Lang is right" And don't we know it too?*  
*He's staving off our enemies, He fights and never fails*  
*He'll crush the rats and goats in spats, Who'd ruin New South Wales*  
*So sing and let your voices ring For Lang and New South Wales.*

However things were not running smoothly under Lang and there was some dissension within the Party so that in November of 1926, Deputy Premier P.F. Loughlin resigned, alleging that persons outside Parliament had "instituted a dictatorship through the Premier". Lang narrowly retained control of the Assembly.

### Lang's Programs of Social Reforms.

Jack Lang is best known for his wide ranging social reforms which he put in place to help the lower paid workers. He knew from personal experience how difficult life could become when you were scraping by from week to week with no way of saving for the proverbial 'rainy day'. He set about ensuring that workers earned a living wage enough to keep their families, and on 4<sup>th</sup> February, 1926 when working hours were reduced from 48 to 44 hours a week, there was no reduction in wages. The basic wage was set at four guineas (eight dollars and eighty cents) a week. In December of that same year a 'motherhood endowment' to boost wages was recommended by the NSW Industrial Commission which found that a living wage for a family should be five pounds six shillings (ten dollars and sixty cents) a week. The NSW Arbitration Act had already been amended to allow equal pay for equal work.

When Lang came to power a widow was dependent on charity. She had to be destitute to obtain assistance from the State Welfare Department. She had to hand over her children to the state and accept custody of them as state wards to get assistance. In 1925 Lang made Child Endowment and the Widows' Pension his platform. He introduced the Widows' Pension Bill which paid one pound a week for the widow (\$2) and ten shillings (\$1) for each child under 14. His was the first Government in the world to introduce a Widows' Pension on a non-contributory basis. My husband's mother, who was widowed in 1931 said this was the one thing that saved her and her family of four small boys and she remained a staunch Lang supporter all her life. Family endowment, despite opposition, was to be paid directly to the mother. This was paid even during the Depression.

Lang also started the Government Insurance Office of NSW in 1926, when the insurance companies who covered the workers of the state for Workers' Compensation put up their rates as a group. Lang began his own insurance company, which he said was "a state enterprise established to fight a monopoly".

On May 26<sup>th</sup>, 1927 Lang resigned in order to secure an early dissolution of Parliament and was re-commissioned, however on 8<sup>th</sup> October, Labor lost the election and Thomas Bavin became Premier.

In 1929, under the new government a three person family became the basis for the calculation of the basic wage which was reduced to four pounds two shillings and sixpence (eight dollars and twenty five cents). One child per family was excluded from the Family Endowment.

In October of 1930 economic and industrial unrest defeated the Coalition and Lang became Premier again. In 1930 he introduced the Lotteries Bill which started the State Lotteries to assist in the upkeep of hospitals. The churches were strongly opposed to it, but Lang was short of funds so he gave them a month to raise the money by other means or else to come back and tell him to go ahead with the lottery. The churches failed in their attempt, so withdrew their opposition to the bill and for many years the lotteries were the main source of revenue for Public Hospitals in NSW. He also levied a ten per cent tax on winning bets. Amongst other lesser known initiatives of this time was the dedication of the Cenotaph in Martin Place on 8<sup>th</sup> August, 1927 on the spot where the first recruits of the first A.I.F. were enrolled publicly, and the money that he guaranteed to Charles Kingsford Smith and Ulm when they needed funding to make the first Pacific flight. To Lang the decision to back this enterprise was one of his Government's best decisions. (When Lang lost the election, the next Premier, Bavin, decided not to pay the last two thousand pounds!)

The depression was hitting hard and the Prime Minister, Mr Bruce didn't know what to do. When the Labor Party got in it was Scullin's turn and he didn't know what to do. He decided on his advisers' recommendations to ask advice from the Bank of England. At the Melbourne Conference the experts said, "Economise - balance your budget - then you'll be able to borrow again". Lang ran his election campaign on a rigorous opposition to the Melbourne plan. When other politicians were warning people to tighten their belts to get through time, Lang at least gave them some hope.

*Until I was elected I was a terrible man. I was a frightful man to the press. The pictures they had of me with jaws bigger than the Harbour Bridge and buck teeth reaching from here to Jericho ..... It troubled me none because I said that when the Sydney Morning Herald and the capitalist press began to favour me it would be time for people to look around for someone else. I never tried to please the press, just kept going my own way.*

Lang was determined to pass the Moratorium Act as he had promised so that people's homes and possessions could not be seized for non-payment. He had the authority to do it, but didn't know how as there were no precedents. Ordinarily a Bill would be sent to the Crown Law Department to be drawn up, but then everyone would know that it would be coming up and he was sure it would fail, so he sent for Joe Lamaro, the Minister for Justice, and asked if it was possible for him to draw up the Bill by himself. Every other law in the state that compelled people to pay interest had to be suspended. Lamaro and a typist were put into an office to work it out and had done so by lunchtime. Under the Bill no-one could be evicted and have their property sold for non-payment of interest. At 4pm Lang announced to the House that after the tea adjournment, they would reconvene at 7pm and would sit continuously until the measure before it passed.

No-one except the three concerned knew what was going on. At 9pm the Legislative Assembly had passed it, and by 11pm it had passed through the Legislative Council. By midnight the Governor had signed it and when everyone woke up the next morning it was law. (Jack Lang, writing in *Weevils in the Flour*.)

In February of 1931, he proposed the 'Lang Plan' - that interest payments to British bondholders should be suspended, that interest on Australian borrowings should be reduced to 3% and that a new form of currency should be based on the goods standard. The scheme was opposed by Prime Minister Scullin and soon divided the Australian Labor Party.

In March 1931, Lang announced that interest due in London on 1<sup>st</sup> April, would not be paid, and that dole payments to the unemployed should take priority. Scullin paid the debt. The State Labor Party Conference endorsed Lang's plan, but in the same month, as a continuation of the power dispute within the party, a special conference expelled the NSW branch executive.

For five years two Labor parties existed in the state, but Lang's state party retained the majority of union and public support. Lang was quoted as saying, *Faction fights are never dull. You either kill or you are killed politically.*

In May, the Government Savings Bank of NSW was forced to close. Next month the Premier's Conference agreed to a cut in wages and pensions. Lang's budget deficit had reached 11.5 million pounds (23 million dollars). There was still unrest in his ranks though and on 16<sup>th</sup> June, Attorney General Andrew Lysaght resigned, critical of Lang's methods and under pressure for not initiating the abolition of the Legislative Council.

In 1931 radical changes were sought by the NSW Labor government, including \*overtime to be forbidden unless absolutely necessary, \*tribunals to determine equal pay and annual and sick leave, \*payment by results prohibited unless the union consented and \*jurisdiction of tribunals to be practically unlimited. By now the Great Depression had hit Australia and government money for further social reforms was not available. By 1932 unemployment had reached 31% in NSW.

#### The Opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

*Most people remember the official opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. To me that was only an insignificant incident. (Jack Lang in his book I Remember.)*

One of the proudest days in Jack Lang's two terms of Premiership should have been 19<sup>th</sup> March, 1932, when the great engineering feat of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, bringing both sides of the harbour closer together for access, was opened.

It was a day of bright sunshine and 750,000 people were gathered around the foreshores of the harbour to listen to the ceremony, which was being broadcast over loudspeakers, and to see the final chapter of the construction which had been the focus of Sydney and even the world for many years. The official party included the Gov. General, Sir Isaac Isaacs and his wife, the new Prime

Minister Mr Joseph Lyons and Mrs Lyons, Dr Bradfield, the designer of the bridge and many other notables. Mrs Lang, dressed in navy georgette and a navy hat was presented with a bouquet of flowers by little Freda Martin. Mr Lang wore a business suit and hat. The NSW Governor, Sir Philip Game read a message from the King, George V and pressed a button which unveiled a plaque 100 yards away, naming the bridge and the Bradfield Highway. The premier spoke about the unity of commonwealth and state, which he felt Australia had not yet attained. He unveiled a plaque and declared the bridge open.

The next speech, by Mr Davidson, Minister for Public Works was interrupted as a horseman in uniform, who had attached himself to the Gov. General's escort rode up to the ribbon across the bridge. He saluted when he passed the Governor's stand and the salute was returned. He sped up to the ribbon and with two slashes of his sword, severed it. He declared, "On behalf of the decent and loyal citizens of NSW I declare this bridge open". The ribbon was tied up again as the man, who identified himself as Captain de Groot of the New Guard was dragged away by Police Superintendent Mackay.

Jack Lang then stepped forward to cut the ribbon officially, (now held by two police officers), with ceremonial scissors, plated with Australian gold and decorated with opals. The handles were hand wrought with flannel flowers, waratahs and gum leaves and a depiction of the Harbour Bridge. (These scissors were used to cut the ribbon at a Federation pathway at Schofields Public School in August, 2001, and were loaned for the occasion by Miss Violet Alderton who had worked with Jack Lang in his later years and had been bequeathed them by the former Premier. She later donated them to the Parliament where they can be viewed in the reception area under a portrait of Mr Lang.) The bridge opening ceremony then continued as if nothing untoward had happened.

The unscheduled cutting of the ribbon by de Groot was approved by many of the middle class population who were anti Lang as they felt he had Communist tendencies. The cheeky nature of the act appealed to the larrikin streak of the people who were suffering from the effects of the Depression and did not mind a good laugh at the undermining of authority. De Groot was held overnight and faced a charge of being a person "deemed to be insane and not under proper care or control". He was found to be sane however, and was then charged with damaging public property, found guilty and fined five pounds (ten dollars). De Groot's home in Castle Hill Road at West Pennant Hills was pointed out as a tourist attraction for many years.

#### Lang's Dismissal.

Lang had run headlong into battle with the Federal Government, headed by Lyon, for his refusal to pay loan interest due to England. His view was that with the Depression hitting the people of NSW so desperately, the money was needed much more by the state than by the English, but the establishment viewed it as an act of shame. The Federal Government exercised all the pressure it could to make him change his mind, including setting up a new Labor Party in NSW and stating that any member not joining it by 30<sup>th</sup> April would be expelled, but he was steadfast. The Federal

Government then passed legislation enabling it to get the money from Lang's Government. Lang foresaw this, and withdrew a million pounds from the banks and stored it in the Treasury building. Railway stations became tax collection agencies and all monies were to be paid in cash and taken to the Treasury. Lang saw to it that the Treasury building was locked up, and he pocketed the keys, having sent the entire staff on holidays.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* of the 14<sup>th</sup> May, 1932, reported what happened next:

*The Premier was dramatically dismissed by the State Governor, Sir Philip Game, shortly before six o'clock yesterday afternoon, 13<sup>th</sup> May. His dismissal was brought about by his refusal to withdraw a confidential circular issued on Thursday to heads of Government Departments, instructing them not to pay money into the Commonwealth. The leader of the State Opposition, Mr Stevens was sent for by His Excellency and accepted a commission to form a Ministry. An executive minute may be issued proroguing Parliament with a view to dissolution. It is considered in parliamentary circles that the general elections will take place in June or early in July.*

*It is understood that Mr Stevens gave the Federal Government an undertaking that the state will meet its interest obligations.*

*Considerable activity in the Premier's department followed the dismissal. Messengers hurried to and fro carrying boxes, presumably containing the Premier's personal papers to a car in Macquarie Street.*

*A Herald representative was granted an interview and entering the Premier's room was greeted with the remark, "Well, I am sacked. I am dismissed from office". Beyond that dramatic admission Mr Lang would make no other comment for publication. "Well, I must be going. I am no longer Premier, but a free man. I have attempted to do my duty." Mr Lang then donned his greatcoat and hat, picked up his attache case and went out by the main door. Several officials who were standing on the stairs were greeted by the dismissed Premier who shook them by the hands fervently. Messengers and even office boys were given an equally fervent farewell.*

The constitutionality of the Government's action was widely acclaimed in the British Press and in Great Britain, his dismissal enhanced Australia's credit. The British press felt that his dismissal was essential to the financial recovery of Australia.

The State Labor Party was divided, and although 750,000 people crowded into Moore Park on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> June, or watched the procession, Lang was defeated at the elections only six days later with only 40% of the votes, although Lang's faction won all 24 of the Labor seats. Lang felt he had lost the election partly because some employers had put slips in the pay envelopes on Friday saying, "If Lang wins the election, don't come to work on Monday!" Stevens became Premier. Lang never regained his electoral appeal. From 1931-1938 he lost three State, three Federal and three Sydney Municipal elections In 1939 the Federal executive organised a unity conference, which decided to revise the party's rules and directed that caucus should elect its leader and other officers. McKell defeated Lang by 20 votes to 12.



### The Later Years and the Riverstone Connection.

Lang retained many followers and in April, 1940 he formed the Australian Labor (Non-Communist) Party, with supporters in both State and Federal spheres. The new party demanded home defence as the World War 11 developed. Curtin, who was now the Australian Prime Minister demanded unity in the party yet again, and his first wartime ministry favoured modified conscription. Lang, through his newspaper *The Century* which he had begun in 1938, attacked the policy, and finally in March, 1943, John Thomas Lang was expelled from the Labor Party.

In the 1946 general election, Lang won the seat of Reid as an independent, but lost it in the subsequent elections in 1949. He failed to win a Senate seat in 1951.

In the 1960s he had an office in Nithsdale Street, Surry Hills where ironically he was often visited by Malcolm Philip Game, the son of the Governor who had dismissed him in 1932. Game Jnr. had graduated in Science from Sydney University and become a geologist, and married an Australian. Lang's residence in Auburn was sold in 1963 and they moved to his farm at Ebenezer. His wife died in Wentworthville Hospital on 25<sup>th</sup> May, 1964. He was one of the great characters of Australian politics and was often asked to speak at schools and universities, to which engagements a young Paul Keating would often drive him, and one of those in the audience told me that he never lost his charismatic presence, even in extreme old age, when he could hold spellbound, children and young people of a generation who were not aware of his past deeds.

In 1969 a report indicated that some Labor members wanted him reinstated, and at the 1970 State conference delegates pressed for it. It was brought up again in 1971, and Paul Keating, the mover of the resolution said, *If this party does not accept him back, it brands itself as a party of great and unyielding spite.*

Paul Keating, who was to rise to become Prime Minister of Australia, had sought Jack Lang out when the twenty one year old Keating was working for the Municipal Employees' Union, in 1965. "He was a big man with big views and a big heart", says Mr Keating, and remembers him as always formally dressed with his shirt sleeves secured by barbell cufflinks. He and Jack Lang would often have lunch together, Tuesdays and Fridays, from 12 – 1pm in Lang's office in Nithsdale Street. Lang would never go out for lunch but always brought a packed sandwich lunch from home. He always expected that Paul Keating would leave when the hour was up.

Lang wrote his editorials for *The Century* in an exercise book. He wrote without corrections or cross outs. Paul would proofread the 'pulls' from the press while Lang checked the exercise book or vice versa. *He was a complex and complicated person who was nice to be with, courteous, not naively nice, but never a knock-about chap.* He always called him Mr Keating although there was such a big age gap between them. He used to rap the tables with his knuckles to emphasise a point.

Jack Lang was required to join his local branch, which, as he was living at 45 St Albans Road at Schofields, was the Riverstone Branch and in July, 1971, his application for membership there was

approved. The meeting, which is of great historical importance, was held at the old Pensioners Hall which was on Railway property where the railway car park is now. Mr Keating, and his father, Matthew John Keating, a strong Labor unionist, accompanied him to the meeting. There were about 50 or 60 people there and it was held on a Sunday morning as all the Branch meetings were. Laurie Doolan was secretary of the Branch but the President, Bill Knowland asked him to conduct that meeting, as Laurie remembers.

The re-admittance had been sanctioned by the State conference so it went through without dissension. Paul Keating said he always liked going to Riverstone where the people were friendly and he remembers the meeting ended with tea and scones. Unfortunately the minutes of the meeting, which were bound in leather by State M.P. Richard Amery cannot be located at the time of writing.

Paul Keating's final words about Jack Lang were that "he produced positive leadership, indignation and support for the disadvantaged. He was headstrong, and at a time when the Establishment still looked to Britain and called it home, he was an Australian".

In his 90s he rose at 6am caught the 7.15am train from Schofields to the *Century* office at Auburn and worked until 3pm. The train that left the city to bring him home was known as 'The Jack Lang Special' by my uncle who was State Minister for Transport at the time. It was first a diesel motor, then an old 'red rattler' of course in those days, and he was picked up at the station at 5.40pm by Bernie Sullivan each day to be driven home. When Riverstone High School's Auditorium was completed in the 1970s it was named *The Jack Lang Auditorium* in honour of the famous politician who ended his days in our area.

Bernie Sullivan was a Hire Car Proprietor at Schofields, and although as an ex-Premier, Jack Lang was entitled to have a Government car pick him up, he chose to travel with Bernie each day to and from Schofields station.

Bernie remembers him as a "wonderful, wonderful man", who was a "gentle, kind, big fellow". He always called Bernie Mr Sullivan and when told it wasn't necessary, he said Bernie was entitled to be addressed as formally as he was. He had a very quiet and confidential manner and would often ask Bernie to do some little favour for him such as cutting down a leather spectacle case so it would fit his hearing aid, Bernie did and he was delighted and asked how much he owed. He was very pleased when Bernie said it was a pleasure to do it for him.

On another occasion, Miss Alderton, at whose home he had a flat, had shut the door of the house leaving the keys inside. Bernie managed to open the door with an old knife. Jack Lang was amazed and said, *How did you manage to do that?* Bernie told him in his early days he was a housebreaker.

Bernie Sullivan drove him to the meeting at which he was readmitted to the Labour Party and he asked him to go in with him so he could leave early if he was tired.

Bernie remembers he and his wife staying at the house with him for a few nights at the end of his life when he had been treated with a cobalt injection for cancer and was very restless. Bernie considers Jack Lang to have been a special friend and likes to think the feeling was reciprocated.

For the last years of his life Jack Lang occupied the flat which formed part of Miss Violet Alderton's St Albans Road home in Schofields. Miss Alderton's niece, Coral MacDonald said that her aunt worked for Mr Lang from the time she was in her teens, often and mostly in the early days as a chauffeur. She had her own Jaguar car and used to drive him about, but gradually as he became older, she became more of a personal assistant, doing errands for him etc. She was never his secretary, but as he aged she became his carer in his latter years. His wife had been an invalid and Coral thinks she was in a wheelchair when Violet went to work for him. His farm at Ebenezer was a weekend retreat and Coral feels he never lived there full time.

Coral remembers that he had a mind like a steel trap right to the end of his life and a great memory so that he could usually tell you not only the year something happened but the month and the day as well. He was a very modest man and never 'blew his own trumpet'. When Coral and her husband wanted to buy a house he took them to the Rural Bank in Blacktown where the staff were most impressed as he had started the bank in the first place. She thinks that the main thing he did for Riverstone was to have a better rail service made available.

#### His Death and State Funeral.

Jack Lang was admitted to St Joseph's Hospital at Auburn, which he had helped to have built, by his staff at the newspaper office who felt he needed a rest. He died there on the 27<sup>th</sup> September, 1975, less than three months before his 99<sup>th</sup> birthday. His last words to an aide who came to visit him were, *Don't give up the fight. It must go on.*

The *Sun-Herald* newspaper, announcing his death the next day in its column, *Candid Comment*, stated: *Like a great tree that survives all the storms of the forest and falls suddenly when no wind is blowing, J.T.Lang has died in extreme old age. His critics, in his prime of life when the fiercest controversies raged, called him "a mad dog that has to be disposed of". The mad dog lived to become an elder statesman and to see his reforms become the common place of social security.*

Many prominent figures in politics gave statements to the press:

Paul Keating: *In the fight against privilege and the battle for social welfare he was one of Australia's greatest figures.*

Gough Whitlam: *His Government achieved electrification of railways, the underground, the Harbour Bridge and the new Parramatta Road.*

Neville Wran: *Mr Lang's great slogan was 'Lang is Right' and indeed he was more often right than wrong.*

Malcolm Fraser: *He was a turbulent man - a proper representative of the Australian worker.*

His funeral was reported in great detail by the *Sydney Morning Herald*, on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1975:

*With prayers and solemn music and the sudden cry of a child in the stillness, Sydney said farewell yesterday to the 'Big Fella', John Thomas Lang.*

*The people gathered around him for the last time, as long ago in days that seemed without hope, they had rallied in their thousands to his call. Men and women stood beneath the trees in Hyde Park in the shadow of St Mary's Cathedral to say farewell.*

*It was in the Domain that Jack Lang, twice premier of N.S.W stood up with his fierce face and pounding fist and cried out to the people.*

*He became the most hated and the most loved politician in Australia.*

Two thousand people packed the cathedral, including the political leaders of the day. His coffin was covered with the Australian flag and a wreath of red roses.

He was survived by one son and three married daughters, Eirene (Mrs Herwie), Laura (Mrs Hill), Nellie (Mrs Budge), and James Christian Lang. Hilda (Mrs Arnold), John Donald and John Keith had pre-deceased him. He was buried at Rookwood Cemetery and his wife's ashes were later interred with him.

Henry Lawson, his brother-in-law, wrote a poem that could have been his epitaph.

*I loved Australia first  
I strove for her  
And when at last I die  
Then who to wear the wattle  
Has a better right than I?*

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