

Walking through Canberra or The Ballad of Muscles MacFarlane

The musical score is written in treble clef with a 3/4 time signature. It consists of six staves of music. The lyrics are written below the notes, and chord symbols (C, F, G7, D7, Em) are placed above the staff lines. The lyrics are: "I was walking through Canberra where the bullshit grows thick, With me handcuffs and notebook, me gun and me stick, When who should I see but that terrible man: It was Muscles Mac Farlane, the pride of his clan. All in blue, all in blue, Each word I swear is true: I'm a New South Wales copper, I can't tell a lie."

C F G7 C
 I was walking through Canberra where the bullshit grows thick, With me
 C D7 G7
 handcuffs and notebook, me gun and me stick, When
 C Em F C
 who should I see but that terrible man: It was
 C F G7 C
 Muscles Mac Farlane, the pride of his clan.
 C Em F C
 All in blue, all in blue, Each word I swear is true: I'm a
 C F G7 C
 New South Wales copper, I can't tell a lie.

Music: Traditional ('Villikins and his Dinah' and 'Riding through Texas')

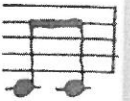
Farlane



th me



n



It was



I'm a



I was walking through Canberra where the bullshit grows thick,
With me handcuffs and notebook, me gun and me stick,
When who should I see but that terrible man:
It was Muscles MacFarlane, the pride of his clan.

*All in blue, all in blue,
Each word I swear is true:
I'm a New South Wales copper, I can't tell a lie.*

MacFarlane, he stood at the rear of the crowd;
He was pushing and shoving, which is not allowed.
Men, women and children he'd felled to the ground,
And hundreds of bodies lay scattered around.

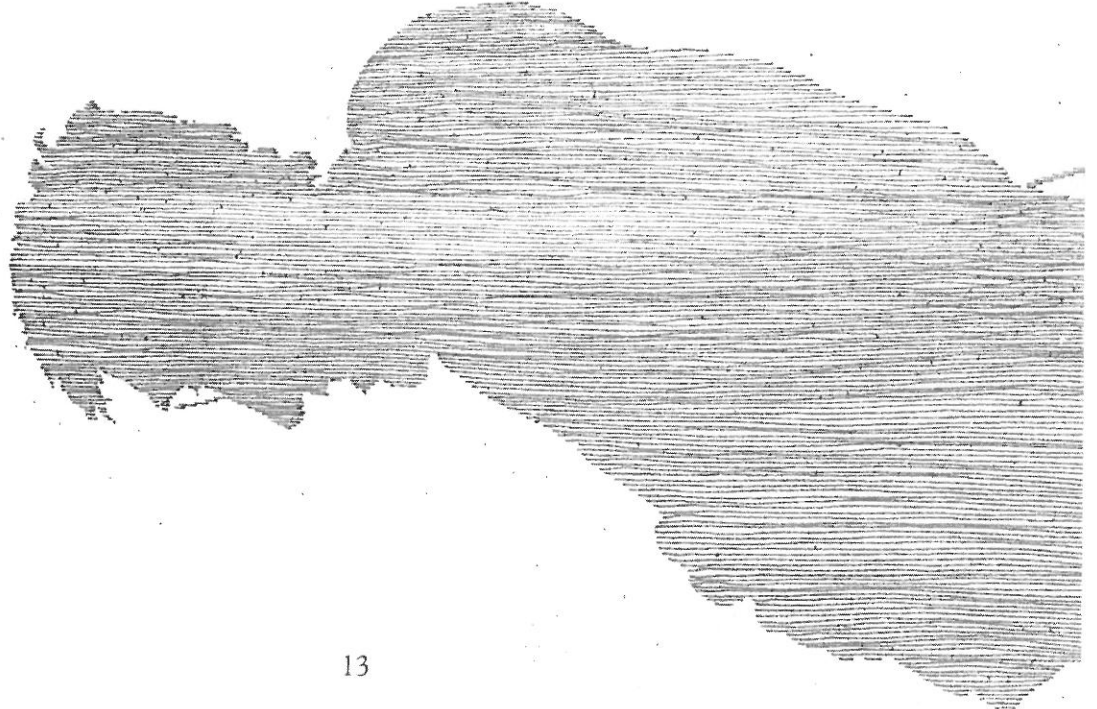
*All in blue, all in blue,
Each word I swear is true:
I'm a New South Wales copper, I can't tell a lie.*

I'm a tough Sydney sergeant, that none can dispute,
With an ivory skull and a size fifteen boot;
I eat students for breakfast and hoodlums for tea,
But Muscles MacFarlane scared the Christ out of me.

*All in blue, all in blue,
Each word I swear is true:
I'm a New South Wales copper, I can't tell a lie.*

He stood eight feet tall and weighed twenty-five stone;
Like two bloody red stop-lights his spectacles shone.
So me and me coppers, we turned tail and ran
At the sight of MacFarlane, that terrible man.

*All in blue, all in blue,
Each word I swear is true:
I'm a New South Wales copper, I can't tell a lie.*



As Muscles MacFarlane advanced to attack
Even Iron-Fist Fogarty showed him his back;
And that's how MacFarlane, with one mighty bound,
Bore Fogarty struggling, brave lad, to the ground.

*All in blue, all in blue,
Each word I swear is true:
I'm a New South Wales copper, I can't tell a lie.*

Once MacFarlane was down we all jumped him, of course,
For that's what we're taught in the New South Wales force:
If a bloke's on the ground we can all put the boot in,
If he gets up and runs, then we're licensed to shoot him.

*All in blue, all in blue,
Each word I swear is true:
I'm a New South Wales copper, I can't tell a lie.*

That's me story, Your Worship - it's here in me book;
And if you don't believe me you're welcome to look.
And should Muscles MacFarlane attempt to deny
What I've said - just remember that policemen can't lie.

*All in blue, all in blue,
Each word I swear is true:
I'm a New South Wales copper, I can't tell a lie.*

because of their supposedly unreliable political colouring. Canberra, oddly enough, seemed at the time to be relatively isolated from this – and it was from the security of the ANU's ivory tower that we were able to laugh at the situation in songs like 'Wouldn't it!' and 'The Back-Blocks Academic'.

Vietnam changed this as it was to change so many things. On January 18, 1967 when Air Vice-Marshal Ky from South Vietnam made a State visit to Canberra a contingent of New South Wales police was brought in to help deal with the expected demonstration. Relations between ACT police and demonstrators up till this time had been relatively cordial. With the addition of the boys in blue from over the border, however, a new note of violence entered the scene. Eighty policemen were assigned to control a crowd of two hundred demonstrators outside the Hotel Canberra. Although the demonstration by all (other than police) accounts was orderly, four people, including Bruce McFarlane, a Research Fellow of the ANU, were arrested and charged with offensive behaviour and resisting arrest. McFarlane, a mild-mannered, bespectacled rather stout and unathletic person, was in particular accused of pushing people about and endangering the safety of women and children and of attacking Constable J. A. Fogarty by leaping on his back. After lengthy and expensive legal proceedings all the accused were acquitted.

The situation seemed to cry out for a song, especially as the friends of the accused had to organise a number of parties to raise funds for their defence. 'The Ballad of Muscles McFarlane' was duly written, and passed in time into the local repertoire. In 1970 Ken Buckley published it in his book, *Offensive and Obscene: A Civil Liberties Casebook*, where it forms part of the chapter, 'Canberra Rugger – Sydney Police Style', that deals with the incident.

The only other pieces in this collection that are of an overtly political character are 'Gough and Johnny were Lovers', 'The Ballad of the Drover's Dog' and 'Waltzing O'Reilly'. The events they refer to are so recent that they require no annotation or explanation. It is perhaps worth recalling, however, that the first public rendition of 'Gough and Johnny' was given if not under Vice-Regal patronage at least in the Vice-Regal presence. An account of the occasion is given in a Court Circular prepared by Humphrey McQueen and published in *Meanjin*.⁵

The rest of the poems in the book are also of relatively recent vintage. They are all convivial in tone, they are designed to be read aloud or recited rather than sung, and they celebrate the joys of friendship and the delight that can be found in drinking good

wine in congenial company. If they strike a mellower note than the earlier pieces this is a reflection, among other things, of the way in which Canberra has changed. It is now a city of over two hundred thousand people and is generally a much more civilised place than it was when I and my friends first came to live here.

Two of the most obvious signs of the way things have improved is the increase in the number of pubs and clubs in the city and the increase in the number of poets who now live in Canberra or the surrounding countryside. Among the clubs one of the most pleasant and distinguished is the ANU Staff Centre. It flourishes under the management of the genial and hard-working Jim Murphy: and under his patronage the commendable practice has grown up of inviting some of the local poets – and occasionally some from elsewhere – to contribute verses to the Staff Centre's annual Christmas Wine List. The publication of the List is celebrated with a Poets' Lunch – and most of the pieces in this section were written for this occasion.

Two were not: the lines to Brian Sweeney, as the title indicates, were inspired by the publication of a poem; and 'With a Glass of Spaetlese' was written to celebrate the official opening of the A. D. Hope Building in the Australian National University. But as a Poets' Lunch without Hope is almost inconceivable and as Sweeney has been a Poets' Luncheon guest these pieces are obviously appearing in the right company.

'Company' is in every way the appropriate word with which to bring this introductory note to a conclusion, for although I alone must take authorial responsibility for the verses in this collection, they must also to some extent be seen as part of a communal effort by a group of old friends and acquaintances in Canberra. Over the years these songs and poems have given us all a deal of innocent amusement and entertainment. I hope the fun can now be shared by a wider circle of singers and readers.

R. F. Brissenden

Notes

- ¹ *Old Bush Songs and Rhymes of Colonial Times*, enlarged and revised from the collection of A. B. Paterson, by Douglas Stewart and Nancy Keesing (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1957), vii
- ² 'The Acton School', in *Australia Writes*, an anthology edited for the Canberra Fellowship of Australian Writers by T. Inglis Moore (F. W. Cheshire, Melbourne, 1953), 252
- ³ *The Age*, 20/3/64
- ⁴ See, among others, *The Bulletin*, 28/3/64
- ⁵ 'Down Under Buñuel', *Meanjin* (XXXV, 1, 1976, 219-221)