

CONDOLENCE MOTION MOVED BY THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION, MS DELIA LAWRIE MLA ON MARCH 28TH, 2013, NT LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY, DARWIN.
Death of John Loizou

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, it is with deep regret that I advise of the death of 17 January 2013 of Mr Loizou, a great Territorian journalist

I advise honourable members of the presence in the gallery of Ms Christine Elizabeth Pass, Mr Loizou's widow; Ms Margaret Evans, his sister; Mr Brendan Loizou, his son; Ms Dawn Lawrie and also friends and family here, Mr Brian Manning, Ms Majorie Winpill, Ms Lorna Cubillo, Ms Alana Eldridge, Mr Chips Mackinolty, Ms Barbara Cummings, Ms Maureen Davey, Mr Nigel Adlam, Ms Andrea Alan, Mrs Barbara Slattery, Mr Jim Anderson and Mr Baz Ledwig. On behalf of honourable members I extend a warm welcome to you today to hear this condolence motion.

I remind honourable members that on the completion of the debate I will ask members to stand in silence for one minute as a mark of respect.

CONDOLENCE MOTION
Mr John Loizou

Ms LAWRIE (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, I move that the Assembly expresses its condolences at the passing of John Loizou, a journalist's journalist. I note that we do so on Larrakia land. I acknowledge the Larrakia elders, both past and present. I acknowledge the Larrakia farewell that occurred graveside at Thorak Cemetery for John Loizou, how appropriately so, he had that respectful acknowledgement from the Larrakia people.

John loved his sons Brendan and Damien. He taught them to treat people with respect and to always listen to what people were really saying. Both Brendan and Damien spoke openly and honestly about their father after he died, which says much about the courage he also helped instil in them.

I would personally like to pass on my deepest condolences to his partner, Cri; his sons, Brendan and Damien; and family members and friends who are here today. I welcome them to our parliament to join us in acknowledging the life of this great journalist, John Loizou.

Something can be said of the respect John had in Darwin by those who attended his first wake on 26 January at an old drinking hole favoured by him back in the days when it was known as the Hot and Cold, now renamed Hotel Darwin. They came from all walks of life and from all sides of politics. There were CLPers, Labor Party members, members of the old Communist Party and others with no political allegiances. While John never hid his political ideas over a couple of drinks at the bar, he always was scrupulously balanced and a fair reporter, and this was what was being honoured.

Chips Mackinolty recalled at the wake one of the many occasions when two of them reported side by side – Mackinolty for Fairfax, Loizou for the Murdoch Press. It was an episode at the old Darwin Airport which fellow members of the Assembly will recall was the site of many dramas over the years, from the ASIO seizure of Petrov's wife in April 1954 to events surrounding the Lindy Chamberlain affair. In this case, 28 May 1991, there were, in Mackinolty's words:

Emotional scenes at Darwin Airport yesterday afternoon as 11 East Timorese soccer players faced an agonising decision, should they return to their homeland or seek refuge status in Australia.

It followed the defection of three East Timorese soccer players to Australia the day before and involved scores of demonstrators begging the other 11 Timorese soccer players to defect. They

were openly weeping as they made the decision to return to their homeland. Both Loizou and Mackinolty were profoundly affected by the drama they had witnessed and had to report on for the next day's papers. Each of the reporters had long track records of support for the East Timorese struggle, perhaps not unsurprisingly, knowing both of them.

They headed upstairs to the old airport bar to compare notes, but also to share their feelings over the events of that day and the difficulties of reporting such emotionally charged events in a dispassionate and balanced way. After a few beers they went back to their respective offices, they reported the events in just that fashion, fairly and accurately, sourcing material from both sides of the events of the day, yet painting a vivid picture of the drama.

It has been inspiring to listen to people speak about John and offering their sincere condolences which I will share with you all. His reporting of the social, economic, cultural, environmental and political life of the Northern Territory is highly regarded not only by those who knew him, but those who read his work and had the pleasure of working with him.

John's work as a reporter at The Canberra Times, the Sydney Morning Herald, the Melbourne Age, the Financial Review, the Northern Territory News, the Star, the ABC, the Vietnam News and The Southeast Asian Times was an important contribution to the continuity and advancement of the intellectual development of the Northern Territory.

While working with the NT News it can be argued John's reports on Indigenous land claims during the early 1970s contributed to the establishment of land rights in the Northern Territory in 1976, reports such as the occupation of the RAAF Quail Island Weapons Range by Indigenous protesters in 1973 and protests on Bagot Reserve, with a headline such as 'Blacks told Bagot is Yours' helped to legitimise land rights and Indigenous identity in an Australia which back then resisted this legitimacy.

In 1992, he was awarded the NT Journalist of the Year for his report about two foreign women workers who fled a Chinese factory at Darwin's NT government Trade Development Zone because they were paid only \$1 a day.

NT News journalist, Nigel Adlam said:

There were never any complaints about his accuracy.

John's regular research at the NT News archives and the Northern Territory Library at Parliament House contributed to his accuracy. His accurate reporting of events in East Timor in the aftermath of the declaration of independence in 1975 was acknowledged by Fretilin General Secretary, Mari Alkatiri, in a condolence message.

The General Secretary said, in part:

We in Timor Leste who have struggled for justice and peace know very well and hold close to our hearts John's love and commitment to both principles. John's efforts in bringing the truth to bear, especially in the days of the political constitutional coup on the Fretilin government in 2006 and thereafter, will remain greatly appreciated and will not be forgotten by us.

As friend and colleague Jamie Gallacher recalls:

John was an incredibly physical person always close and intense. I vividly remember the time we drove down the track together with his son, Brendan, for one of the illegal Fretilin radio broadcasts.

We were in Cri's mini moke and had to take many turnoffs and back tracks as John shouted at me about the intricate details of how Fretilin policy was developing at the time.

He had an incredible depth of knowledge of the issues across so many of the stories that he covered. Later, Tony Haritos and I stayed in Cri's house in Montaro Court where John had kept some of his books. Looking through that bookshelf showed the real depth of John's reading. He was also a great user of the Library at Parliament House which underscored his real belief in the good of public institutions.

While no one would ever say John Loizou was a perfect person, few would argue that he always showed great respect and compassion to all.

John worked in Hanoi on and off over the last 15 years where his work at Vietnam's English language national daily newspaper, the Vietnam News, was also appreciated. Vietnam News editor and chief, Mrs Trinh Tan Tai, who John trained in the first years after the paper was established in 1991 said:

We considered John our mentor. He not only helped us edit and improve the newspaper, but also trained several generations of reporters. John was the one we went to when we had professional questions to ask or when we sought advice for our new plans as he always demonstrated deep sympathies and understanding of Vietnam. We were lucky to have shared the experiences he accumulated through his career. We are all grateful for all he did for Vietnam.

John and his partner, Cri, established the Southeast Asian Times as a regional newspaper in Darwin in 2000. The paper was designed to provide its readers with political, economic, social, cultural and environmental news from northern Australia and the 10 Association of Southeast Asian Nation member countries: Indonesia, Myanmar, Malaysia, Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia and Brunei.

John envisaged the development of the Southeast Asian Times, the first English language regional newspaper, would make Darwin a city of significance in Southeast Asia. Northern Australia is geographically located in Southeast Asia. This was a fact that was not lost on John Loizou or Cri.

John was also a very skilled and no-nonsense Aussie Rules football player. He learned his football playing for Dandenong in Victoria, and he was considered a VFL chance until he broke his leg at training playing a practice match for South Melbourne. He played in Darwin for St Mary's in a premiership side in the late 1950s and, when he returned later to Darwin, he played for Wanderers. His straight-ahead style was much admired.

Like many Territorians, he was sent back south after Cyclone Tracy. The presses had stopped running for a time at the NT News. When he finally made it back to Darwin, John started working at the Darwin City Council in the street labour team as there was no job for him at the NT News. But, being the top-notch journalist he was, the NT News did re-employ. From there, he became one of the Territory's best journalists - an old-school journalist who knew how to dig up a scoop.

He leaves behind a legacy of integrity and respect. I doubt there will ever be another journalist that quite matches up to his unique reporting style. The memories of his life, his works, and his deeds will continue in others. As I sat at the funeral listening to his sons, I felt pleased in a way that the legacy is truly living on within Brendan and Damien.

Madam Speaker, it is my honour to today acknowledge John Loizou. I feel very privileged to have known the man. I feel very privileged to have been inspired by his integrity. Everything

remembered is dear, enduring, touching and precious. My deepest condolences to Cri and the family and friends.

Mr TOLLNER (Treasurer): Madam Speaker, first, I say thank you very much to the Leader of the Opposition for bringing forward this condolence motion. Second, the Chief Minister passes on his apologies. He cannot be here for this condolence motion, but he wanted to extend his apologies to the people of this Chamber and to all the friends and family of John Loizou. He asked me to read a short statement on his behalf:

Across the political divide, I would like to extend the support of government to the family of John who, in the real sense of Territorians, was a true person of character. While his politics may have been at odds with this side of the House, his vigour and passion, as one fellow journalist recalls, ‘underlies the professionalism that he brought to his craft’.

With his passion for the media, including stints at the ABC, NT News and Darwin Star, in print and radio within the Northern Territory, he also worked at The Age, The Sydney Morning Herald and the Canberra Times, but followed on from the Territory with time in Townsville, culminating with a move to the electronic age and online Southeast Asian Times. He was and I quote, ‘a grumpy, cantankerous, old-school journalist who knew how to dig up a scoop’.

Of course, one major story that John had the scoop on involved John himself and that infamous head butt. It was well reported at the time that John, being the character he was, even though a bit of claret had been spilt, reminiscent of his footy playing days, kept the events of that night on the receiving end of Mick Palmer’s noggin to himself. It was only later the next day that the story came out through another source. I am reliably informed that there was not a backward step taken by Mick Palmer or John in regard to the incident, and it is amazing to read that he spent more than 50 years continuing on with the work he loved.

I suppose that it is fitting, then, that I leave a final comment to someone who knew him well. Often provocative, but always on the money when it came to well-sourced factual reporting; cheeky, irreverent humour as dry as the Todd; of political persuasion left of the left, right of the right, no one ever pinned him down. A giant of the Northern Territory. Rest in peace.

They are the words of the Chief Minister.

I knew John Loizou; I first met him when I came to the Territory. The first job I got at the Northern Territory was at the NT News, and he was a giant of that establishment, well respected by all. One of my colleagues asked me before lunch - he had never heard of John Loizou, which surprised me – ‘What sort of man was he?’ He was a bit of an old leftie; the NT News balanced him up quite well with Frank Alcorta, who was much more of our persuasion. Between John and Frank Alcorta they provided a good balance in the NT News. Both of them were fantastic writers and good reporters.

The Chief Minister mentioned the infamous head butt. Reluctantly I inform this House that I was in that restaurant that afternoon, and witnessed the event. Both of them were involved in quite a political stoush, similar to what we do here, fortunately we do not end up in fisticuffs. Both of them were extraordinarily embarrassed. Later that night I received a phone call from John saying, ‘Whatever you do, keep the story to yourself’. I am reliably informed that he had called as many people as he possibly could that evening to say, ‘keep it to yourself’. I believe the only person he did not ring was Mick Palmer, who, when contacted the next day, was quite up front and said, ‘Yes, there was an incident. Yes I did head butt him, but I copped one myself too.’ It was the measure of both men in a lot of ways, and I had no idea he was a former St Mary’s Footballer. Knowing that, he had to be one sort of a tough nut in that regard.

I found John Loizou one of life's great gentlemen. He was a fantastic human being, whilst his political persuasions might not have been those of mine, I enjoyed a wonderful relationship with John. He was always an easy bloke to talk to and was one of the true old style reporters - a bloke who really knew the game, knew his craft and did the best he possibly could every time he put pen to paper.

I will miss John Loizou. I enjoyed bumping into him quite often. He was a man I admired greatly because of his dedication to his work and the true belief in what he was doing. To his friends, family, it is so good to see so many people here celebrating the life of John Loizou. He really was a dead-set true Territorian and a bloke I think we will all miss.

Members: Hear, hear!

Mr VATSKALIS (Casuarina): Madam Speaker, I rise with pride to speak about John Loizou, not only because he was a top-notch journalist, but because we share common ancestry. We are both Greeks. I forgot about Frank Alcorta, but I will never forget about John Loizou.

My condolences to Cri, Brendan, and Damien. John passed away at Royal Perth Hospital, he was ill for several years, and he was 70 years old. He worked for the NT News and the Sunday Territorian before moving to Hanoi to work at Vietnam's English language national daily newspaper Vietnam News.

He was a man who trained several generations of reporters in the paper. He was described by his NT News colleague, Ashley Manicaros, as a grumpy, cantankerous, old-school journalist who knew how to dig up a scoop.

Ex-Darwin barrister, Brian Cassells, who was Petty Sessions - probably with you, Deputy Chief Minister - on that infamous day when John was hit by Mick Palmer, remembers John as, 'One of the last old style journalists who dug for his own information and did not rely on ministerial releases. John was a dedicated anarchist who never revealed his sources and whose accuracy was a cause of amazement to me. Last of his kind.'

Brian went on to say, 'I was present at the infamous incident at the local Petty Sessions bar.

Mick Palmer headbutted Loizou in a Darwin pub during a session at the local Petty Sessions. John made a name for himself in journalism in the Territory for being the man responsible for the headline: 'Toothless MP headbutts reporter'. Palmer had removed his watch and teeth before he headbutted John.

John won the NT News Journalist of the Year Award in the early 1990s for a story about two women who ran away from a Chinese sweat shop at Darwin's Northern Territory government owned Trade Development Zone. That was the first time I heard the name John Loizou on ABC television, when I was in Perth. It was a real story; it was a tragic story for the Chinese women. It was a brave John Loizou who found the information, tracked the women down, and brought it publicly for everyone in Australia to see what modern day slavery means. He won the award, but guess what? He did not turn up to collect it, he was at the local pub having a few drinks. He was a Marxist, but balanced his writing. He thought that Labor's first Chief Minister Claire Martin made the Territory a better kind of place. His son, Damien, recalls how his dad thought Alice Springs did not have enough Greeks, and I intend to agree with him. Damien said, 'He used to tell me that we make a better place when we are there'. He was a strong supporter of East Timorese independence and Mari Alkatiri, the Fretilin General Secretary said, and I quote:

John's passing has taken from our midst another honest, committed and inspiring journalist. [He strove] for truth and justice we will miss his tireless efforts.

John worked as a reporter for the Canberra Times, the Sydney Morning Herald, the Melbourne Age, the Financial Review, the Northern Territory News, The Star, the ABC, the Vietnam News and, last, the Southeast Asian Times. He always told both sides of the story, and got on well with all parties. I would like to quote from Peter Simon's book, *Little Darwin* who, in January 2007 had to say the following of John, and I quote:

There was a time in Darwin when the revolution reared its head at the Murdoch-owned Northern Territory News. The person who played the last part in this capitalist shock was Marxist journalist, the late John Loizou. It came in the form of workers' participation in the running of the paper, which evolved out of the strike over the replacement of James Frederick Bowditch as editor of the paper.

Loizou briefed the Australian Journalists' Association in Sydney in the negotiations. He pointed out that in a recent statement Rupert Murdoch had said the management of a newspaper was obligated to make sure it was run in a businesslike fashion. The AGA, Loizou said, should use this same argument and say journalists on a paper should have a say in the running of the editorial side, especially if they thought management action was, or could, damage the publication, financially and in the eyes of its readers.

It was John's proud boast that workers were given a say in the running of the paper for the first time in Australia and, what is more, the company negotiators in Sydney had not realised the importance of the agreement in the first instance. The whiff of Danny the Red did not last long as Cyclone Tracy blew the paper apart. Journalists, including John, were scattered down south, and the presses stopped running for a time at the Northern Territory News.

After Cyclone Tracy, John came back to Darwin and he worked for Darwin Council. It was not long before he went back to the Northern Territory News because the Northern Territory News would reemploy a journalist of his calibre. He was also appointed editor of the independent newspaper, Darwin Star. The proprietor said of all the editors John's time at the helm had been the smoothest and the most financially productive. The two Darwin papers naturally were locked in a deadly circulation and revenue battle.

Peter continues to say that when he was the Secretary at the Darwin sub-branch of the Queensland AGA, 'I do not think John was ever a financial member. This did not prevent him from attending meetings, being very vocal and becoming very grumpy when he was told he could vote on an issue because he was not a member' 'Over the years John and I', says Peter, 'had many discussions and he made startling statements like his claim that he could sail a boat to Mozambique and pick up a printing press and bring it back to Darwin. That brings to mind the time he was a skipper of the former drug boat Mariana which he was restoring on a yard at Doctor's Gully. Being a good Marxist captain he said the vessel should be run on democratic lines, all those who came onboard were able to cast a vote on how things were run. This was fine in theory, but one night he ordered everyone off the boat when somebody annoyed him.'

Well, that was John Loizou. He died in Perth and I regret I was not there to give him the coin to pay the ferryman. Vale John Loizou, the last of the real old school journalists.

Members: Hear, hear!

Madam SPEAKER: I would like to extend my apologies also and sympathies to the family of John Loizou, and his friends, on his departing, and extend my sincere sympathies to you on what is clearly a great loss. A terrific journalist, a great Territorian, and I know he will be sorely missed by his loved ones and his family.

Motion agreed to.

Members stood for a minute's silence as a mark of respect.

Madam SPEAKER: I thank honourable members for their contribution to the motion. I invite the family and friends of John Loizou, and interested members, to afternoon tea in the Main Hall. Thank you.

THE ABOVE TRANSCRIPT OF A CONDOLENCE MOTION MOVED BY THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION, MS DELIA LAWRIE MLA, ON MARCH 28TH, 2013, IS COPIED FROM HANSARD, A RECORD OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY, THE PARLIAMENT OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY, DARWIN.