Thank you Mike.
I also would like to thank Kevin Tory for his welcome to country and I to would like to acknowledge the traditional owners on who’s land we meet tonight the Gadigal peoples of the Eora nation and pay my respects to the elders both past and present.

I wish to welcome everybody here tonight, including our distinguished guests and our speakers. Tonight we celebrate the men and women who this day one hundred years ago, began a great struggle against injustice at work and in society generally.

The story of the Great Strike is central to the story of Australian trade unionism.

You cannot fully understand the nature of the labour movement – how it is structured, how it operates, it’s guiding principles – unless you understand the story of 1917.

It’s a story of the courage and determination of working people who finally took a stand against unjust and arbitrary treatment, against falling wages and deteriorating conditions.

It’s a story about the triumph of solidarity, the tragedy of broken dreams, and the power of a vengeful state.

Just as we continue be inspired by the strikers’ legacy, we must never forget the lessons learned from their bitter experience.

Tonight’s dinner – along with the other events being held to mark the 100th anniversary - is an opportunity for us to learn more about the conditions that led to the strike; and the grass roots activism that brought so many workers together in solidarity.

It’s an opportunity to pay homage to our heroes of that great industrial battle – the brave workers who stood up against the might and power of the state.
And it’s also a moment to reflect on how the strikers were eventually defeated, and the long-lasting impact the defeat had on the union movement.

I believe the lessons of the Great Strike are just as relevant today as they were in 1917.

Our speakers tonight are all leaders in the industrial and political labor movement:—
I would like to welcome Sally McManus, Secretary of the ACTU, John Graham, MLC, and Mark Morey, Secretary of Unions NSW.

Sally will consider the events of the great strike in relation to our contemporary situation and what we can learn from the past, John will consider the effects of the strike on the subsequent development of the NSW ALP, and Mark will consider the effects of the strike on the union movement in NSW.

My task here tonight is to extend a warm and comradely welcome to all the unions gathered here, and pay special tribute to those unions and their members who paid a terrible price for their staunchness in the face of overwhelming odds.

While the strike commenced in the Eveleigh and Randwick workshops, it was the solidarity of all the workers and their unions who refused to handle goods and materials produced by what was called ‘black’ or ‘scab’ labour, that drew thousands of workers into the conflict.

The scale of the strike was unprecedented in Australia.

Over one third of union members in NSW - 14% of the total workforce in NSW - took part, as well as thousands of workers in Victoria and Queensland.

The retribution of governments and employers against those unions and their members was calculated and severe.
The list of unions that were deregistered, and had their Awards cancelled, is extraordinary.

It shows not only the breadth of the strike, but the impact that it had on the ability of the labour movement to advocate for workers after the strike ended.

The deregistered unions included:

- Amalgamated Society of Engineers, NSW District
- Australasian Society of Engineers
- Amalgamated Coach Makers, Railway Car and Wagon Makers, and Wheelwright’s Society of NSW
- Newcastle Branch, No 4 of the Boilermakers Workers of Australia
- NSW Amalgamated Railway and Tramway Service Association
- NSW Railway Traffic Employees’ Association
- NSW Government Tramways Employee’s Union
- NSW Locomotive Engine Drivers, Firemen and Cleaners Association
- Carrington Coal and Coke Shipping Union
- Newcastle and District Trolley Draymen and Carters Union
- Trolley Draymen and Carters Union of Sydney and Suburbs
- Amalgamated Timber Workers Union of Australia, NSW Branch
- Pyrmont Sugar Workers Union
- Federated Storemen and Packers Union of Australia, NSW Branch
- Wool and Coal Labourers Union of NSW
- Sydney Coal Lumpers Union
- Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen’s Association of Australasia, (Coast District)
- United Labourers Protective Society of NSW
- Coke Workers Association of NSW
• Federated Ironworkers Association of Australia, NSW Branch
• Federated Liquor Trades Employees Union
• The Cold Storage and Ice Employees Union
• Gas Employees Union
• Wool and Basil Workers Association of NSW
• And the Seaman’s Union.

Tonight I extend a warm welcome to the proud descendants of these valiant union members and acknowledge, in alphabetical order, the members and officials of the union descendants of the unions that were deregistered:

• Australian Manufacturing Workers Union
• Australian Meat Workers Union (Broken Hill Branch)
• Australian Workers Union
• CFMEU General, Construction, Mining and Forestry Divisions
• Maritime Union of Australia
• National Union of Workers, NSW Branch
• Rail Tram and Bus Industry Union
• Transport Workers Union
• And United Voice

Today, our unions carry the torch for the brave men and women who struck in 1917.

Tonight we are also paying tribute to the TWU, whose young member, Merv Flanagan, a member of the Trolley Draymen and Carter’s Union, was shot and killed by a scab on Pyrmont Bridge Road on the 30th August. The justice system failed to deliver justice for Merv.

The Coroner’s Court dismissed the charge against the scab who shot and killed Merv, instead, jailing his brother and a mate for two months!
Merv’s death left a young widow and a large family without the support of their breadwinner.

Although Merv was not the first worker to be killed in the course of a strike, nor the last, he remains especially remembered as a victim of the 1917 Great Strike.

We are especially honoured tonight to welcome two special guests, his granddaughter Sandra Williams, and his great granddaughter Natalie.

We welcome you here and on behalf of every-one here, rest assured, we have not forgotten and will not forget, what happened to your grandfather.

The history of the events as they unfolded and the impact on working people of the time has been put together by Professor Lucy Taksa for us in a booklet that is available to everyone here tonight.

I would like to thank Lucy for her fine work and I’m sure the booklet will be an important resource for unions activists and labour historians in the future.

Finally, the 1917 Strike Committee is also trying to raise money for the completion of the documentary that will tell the story using film footage from the time.

You have all seen the trailer of this documentary, and we really hope to be able to complete it!

So once again, thank you for coming along, and I look forward to an informative, entertaining, and inspiring night.