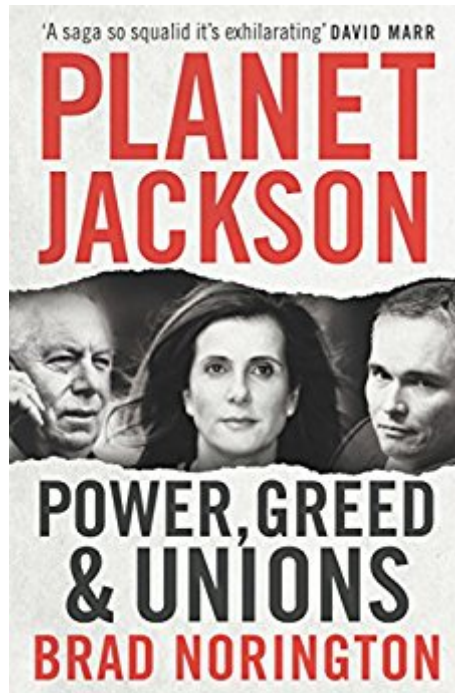


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Planet Jackson: Power, Greed And Unions



Synopsis

Kathy Jackson was hailed as a heroine for blowing the whistle on the million-dollar fraud of Michael Williamson, the corrupt boss of the Health Services Union. While remaining steadfast in this very public ordeal, she endured bitter personal attacks from enemies in the Labor Party and the union movement. But what if Jackson was just as corrupt as Williamson? Or worse? This is the real HSU story. The unbelievable misuse of the union dues of some of the lowest paid workers in Australia. While Jackson was portrayed as a Joan of Arc figure, she had been spending vast amounts of her own union members' money on jet-setting holidays, fashion, jewellery, a home mortgage and even part of a divorce settlement. Nothing, it seems, was off limits. The HSU scandal is more than a dark morality tale marked by high drama and farce. It exposes deep problems at the heart of the union movement and the Labor Party: tribalism, nepotism, a misplaced sense of entitlement and the abuse of other peoples' money. Together they are an intoxicating mixture and provide a ripe environment for corruption on a grand scale.

Book Information

File Size: 4711 KB

Print Length: 268 pages

Publisher: MUP Digital (August 1, 2016)

Publication Date: August 1, 2016

Sold by: Â Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B01ILTZ4N4

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #152,496 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #7 in Â Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Law > Business > Labor & Employment #44 in Â Books > Law > Business > Labor & Employment #45 in Â Books > Law > Specialties > Labor Law

Customer Reviews

Once upon a time, a very long time ago, I used to be a member of one of the unions that became the Hospital Services Union (HSU) in 1991. Because of this, I was particularly interested in what

became known as the "Health Services Union expenses affair" involving Michael Williamson and Craig Thomson. And, like many others, I considered Kathy Jackson a hero for having the courage to expose Michael Williamson's million-dollar fraud. Members of the HSU include some of the lowest paid workers in Australia, and these were the people whose membership dues were being used to fund Michael Williamson's lavish lifestyle and Craig Thomson's credit card misuse. Outrageous! There was widespread acclamation for Jackson's exposure of Williamson. She instantly became a national heroine. But it became clear that Michael Williamson and Craig Thomson were not the only officials misusing HSU funds. Kathy Jackson herself had a fairly lavish lifestyle, and union funds were used to fund holidays, jewellery, a house mortgage as well as part of her divorce settlement on her husband Jeff Jackson (himself a HSU official). Reading Brad Norington's detailed account made me angry. Did Kathy Jackson really think that she could get away with it? How much attention did the ACTU (and the Labor Party) pay to the good governance of unions? Or do the ACTU and the Labor Party no longer care about the workers whose interests they are supposed to represent? Are all union officials these days only motivated by the possibility of pre-selection for a safe seat in parliament? While this book is primarily about Kathy Jackson, it touches on other aspects of union mis-governance and trade-offs. Fewer and fewer Australians belong to trade unions now: is it any wonder?

4.5 "... On Planet Jackson, Kathy came first and members last. . . The total payout facing Jackson would reach \$2.5 million once legal costs and interest were added. Of course, she would pay none of this penalty unless her bankruptcy trustee could find money squirrelled away. . . She wanted the truth revealed about union officials "living an obscene millionaire's lifestyle" off the backs of their members. Kathy Jackson got her wish. •Whoa! While tracking corruption in the Australian Health Services Union (HSU), Brad Norington has not only left no stone unturned, he's left no little bit of dirt or slime uninvestigated, if you can follow all the double negatives. It's all here. We know politics makes strange bedfellows (actually, Shakespeare said it was misery, not politics, which I thought was "misery loves company", but I digress). Well, union politics makes for really dangerous alliances (and bedfellows, as it happens). There are no spoilers here, since this is all public knowledge, but boy does it read like a sleazy movie plot, so I can't help quoting. :) The Kathy Jackson show had become turbocharged and tasteless. It had everything: a charity shag, a personal vendetta, skin in the game, judicial gang rape, circling vultures, a barber's chair for Friday night sex, and imaginary long lunches followed by aquatics in the Red Turbo Spa Room. On Planet Jackson, facts were no longer distinguishable from fantasy.

In her haste to attack anyone who did not perceive reality from her perspective, Jackson was willing to make up nonsense if she thought people might believe it. Her wild, unsubstantiated claims undercut the believability of other utterances that had merit.

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