

## *Abstract*

Trade unionism was a dominant force in improving the lives of the Australian working class in the first half of the twentieth century. This thesis explores the history of trade unionism in the local context of Rockhampton which, despite being Queensland's second largest city until the 1950s, has been largely overlooked by historians. In this work, trade unionism is examined not simply as industrial organisation by workers but also as a social movement to redress the perceived injustices in workers' lives arising from their inferior economic and social position. Unlike traditional union histories which focus on institutions, leaders, politics and industrial conflict, this work emphasises the function and purpose of trade unionism and tries to capture the spirit which imbued local union activists.

This is a social history of Rockhampton trade unionism, set in the economic and social context of the period from 1907 to 1957. It employs a loose Thompsonian notion of class and sees the trade union movement as a manifestation of working-class consciousness. It is not a history of any one particular union body but rather of the broad trade union movement comprised of many people, many individual unions, several peak union bodies, other committees established from time to time and activities undertaken in the name of unionism. Areas examined include the issues which motivated Rockhampton workers to establish union organisations; the structural and organisational arrangements made; the ideological conflicts which developed; and the ways in which trade unions attempted to serve the perceived needs and interests of the working class both inside and outside the workplace. It seeks to explain the reasons for these aspirations and actions, their successes and failures.

Research of a wide range of primary sources informs this work, including hitherto unstudied local union records, oral testimony, contemporary newspapers, government and employer reports. Conclusions reached in this dissertation are that while the founders of the local trade union movement shared a vision of improving the lot of workers in their employment and in the wider social context, and they endeavoured to establish effective structures and organisation to this end, their efforts were of mixed success. They succeeded eminently in improving and protecting the employment conditions of workers to contemporary expectations through effective exploitation of political and institutional channels and through competent and conservative local leadership. However, the additional and loftier goal of creating a better life for workers outside the workplace through local combined union action were much less successful, foiled not only by overwhelming economic difficulties, but also by a local sense of working-class consciousness which was muted by the particular social and cultural context of Rockhampton.

**'FIGHTING IN THE GRAND CAUSE':  
A HISTORY OF THE TRADE UNION  
MOVEMENT IN ROCKHAMPTON  
1907 – 1957**

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Unity, the Hope of the Workers

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Finally, I wish to express my thanks to my family for their patience and understanding during the research and writing of this thesis, particularly to my husband, Tony Gubbins, for reading and commenting on this work and for his constant support and encouragement.

## *Declaration*

I declare that the material contained in this dissertation is my own work except where properly acknowledged, and that the substance of the thesis has not been submitted for assessment elsewhere.



Barbara Grace Webster

9 August 1999

## *Abbreviations*

ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union
AFBEU	Australasian Federated Butchers' Employees' Union
AFULE	Amalgamated Federated Union of Locomotive Enginemmen
ALF	Australian Labour Federation
ALP	Australian Labor Party
AMIEU	Australasian Meat Industry Employees' Union
AMT	American Meat Trust
APWU	Australian Postal Workers' Union
ARTWU	Amalgamated Road Transport Workers' Union
ARU	Australian Railways Union
ASCJ	Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners
ASE	Amalgamated Society of Engineers
ASFL	Australian-Soviet Friendship League
ASIA	Australian Stevedoring Industry Authority
ASIB	Australian Stevedoring Industry Board
AWA	Amalgamated Workers' Association (of North Queensland)
AWU	Australian Workers' Union
BWIU	Building Workers' Industrial Union
CDC	Central District Committee (of AEU) Central District Council (of AMIEU) Central Disputes Committee (of railway unions)
CLC	Central Labour College
CPA	Communist Party of Australia
CQME	Central Queensland Meat Export Company

CQMEU	Central Queensland Meat Employees' Union
CQREA	Central Queensland Railway Employees' Union
CRU	Combined Railway Unions
EACQ	Employers' Association of Central Queensland
EHDCC	Eight Hour Day Celebration Committee
ETU	Electrical Trades Union
FCDIU	Federated Carters and Drivers' Industrial Union
FCU	Federated Clerks' Union
FEDFA	Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen's Association
FIA	Federated Ironworkers' Association
IWW	Industrial Workers of the World
LDCC	Labour Day Celebration Committee
LWC	Left Wing Committee
MHR	Member of the House of Representatives
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
MLC	Member of the Legislative Council
MMM/MM	Militant Minority Movement/Minority Movement
OBU	One Big Union
PIEU	Printing Industry Employees' Union
PLP	Parliamentary Labor Party
QLP	Queensland Labor Party
QRTEA	Queensland Railway Traffic Employees' Association
QSSU	Queensland State Service Union
RTLCL	Rockhampton Trades and Labour Council
QCE	Queensland Central Executive (of the ALP)
<i>QGG</i>	<i>Queensland Government Gazette</i>
<i>QIG</i>	<i>Queensland Industrial Gazette</i>
<i>QPP</i>	<i>Queensland Parliamentary Papers</i>

QRU	Queensland Railways Union
QTA	Queensland Typographical Association
<i>QV&amp;P</i>	<i>Queensland Votes and Proceedings</i>
QTLC	Queensland Trades and Labour Council
SIC	Stevedoring Industry Commission
SPU	Storemen and Packers' Union
SSOF	Steamship Owners' Federation
THBM	Trades Hall Board of Management
TWPO	Transport Workers' Propaganda Organisation
TWU	Transport Workers' Union
VBF	Vehicle Builders' Federation
WEA	Workers' Educational Association
WIIU	Workers' International Industrial Union
WIUA	Workers' Industrial Union of Australia
WPO	Workers' Political Organisation
WWF	Waterside Workers' Federation



## *Note on Terms*

Throughout this thesis, I have followed the convention of other historians with regard to the terms 'Labor' and 'labour'. Although the Australian Labor Party formally adopted that spelling of its name in 1919, I have used that form for the entire period of this history for consistency. Any references to the political party or to its organisation, for example in Labor-in-Politics Conventions, use that form. The word 'labour' was retained in references to the broader labour or working-class movement, to labour politics, Labour Day, and Trades and Labour Councils. That useage is also employed in this work.

*The dry names and dates furnish but a small part of the history of the labour movement. To understand its real meaning one must comprehend the spirit animating it.*

Frank K. Foster\*

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\* Frank K. Foster (Boston labour leader and editor) quoted in H.G. Gutman, *Work, Culture and Society in Industrialising America: essays in American working-class and social history*, Oxford, 1976, p. 86

## *Introduction*

### Perspectives, Place and People

Early on May Day 1907, as the remnants of an autumn morning's fog lifted from the Fitzroy River, a crowd of several hundred men and children gathered on the flats next to Rockhampton's gasworks. At the command of the marshal, members of the Waterside Workers' Federation (WWF) and their children assembled behind two bearers of a large banner with the motto 'An injury to one is the concern of all'.<sup>1</sup> As the distant post office clock struck eight and the combined strains of the Oddfellows' Brass Band and the Pipers' Band fractured the still air, the parade moved briskly forward onto Quay Street with banner held proudly aloft. Passing the deepwater wharf where, for that day at least, vessels would lie idle, the marchers turned into Stanley Street and continued several blocks to the railway station.<sup>2</sup> There, the marchers, their waiting relatives and band members boarded the train for the seaside. Throughout the day, the crowd of some 700 picnickers enjoyed a festive luncheon, foot-races including the Eight-Hour Handicap, novelty events and an immensely popular greasy pig chase. That night, those who could still muster some energy after the return trip attended a gala concert and dance in the Hibernian Hall. All who attended the WWF celebrations that year voted them an outstanding success.<sup>3</sup>

This celebration was not the first time the wharfies had gathered for a union picnic: the inaugural occasion was in 1903.<sup>4</sup> Nor was it the first time they had processed with a

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1. *Worker*, 10 Oct. 1908, p. 9.

2. Map of Rockhampton (Map 3–Appendix) shows locations included in this thesis.

3. *Morning Bulletin (MB)*, 2 May 1907, p. 6.

4. *ibid.*

banner, as an early photograph illustrates, but former processions had been small affairs, without the crowd of participants or multiple bands. Moreover, whereas their

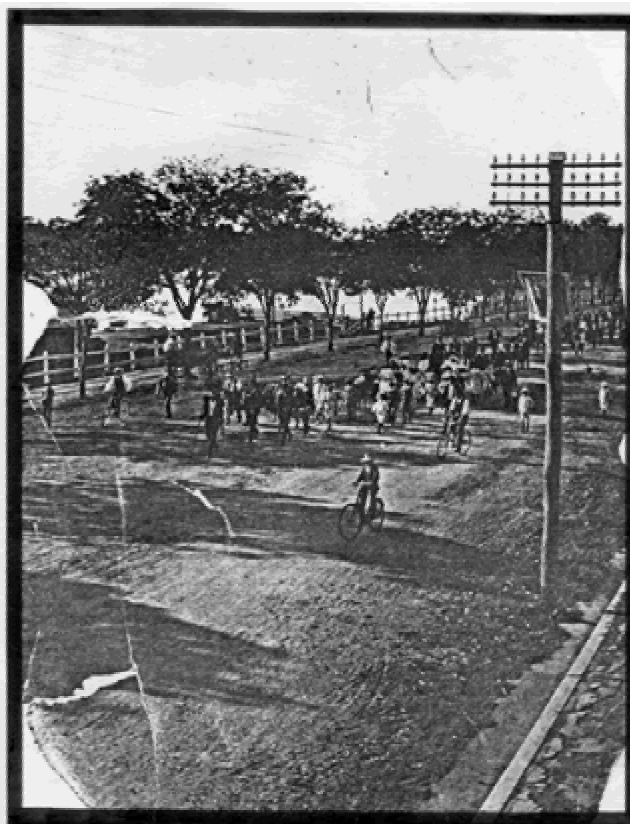


Fig. 1: Procession of Rockhampton Waterside Union along Quay Street, circa 1905  
Colin Maxwell

old standard, depicted overleaf, had merely identified the marchers as the Rockhampton Waterside Union, the new banner which they had purchased for the considerable sum of £45 now proudly proclaimed their federation with other waterside workers throughout Australia to advance the cause of trade unionism nationally. To give practical effect to their new motto of worker solidarity through unionism, the WWF had also contributed funds to two Brisbane unions currently embroiled in separate court battles over union principles.<sup>5</sup>

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5. *Worker*, 10 Oct. 1908, p. 9.



Rockhampton had not seen a similar display of worker unity in either celebration or defence of unionism since the shearers' strike protests of 1891. The failure of that strike, like the 1890 maritime strike and another pastoral strike in 1894, had crushed the short-lived new industrial unionism of the 1880s. During the severe economic depression and drought that followed, unionism remained moribund.<sup>6</sup> By 1909, however, the May Day procession and picnic had spread beyond the wharfies to embrace eleven different unions in a grand inter-union observance of Eight-Hour Day.<sup>7</sup> Some of those unions were revived after years of lethargy or dissolution, while others were entirely new unions

6. Stuart Svensen, *The Shearers' War: The Story of the 1891 Shearers' Strike*, St Lucia, 1989, pp. 84-85 and 149; see, for example, J. Brian Dalton, 'An Interpretative Survey: The Queensland Labour Movement', in Denis Murphy, Roger Joyce and Colin Hughes (eds), *Prelude to Power: The Rise of the Labor Party in Queensland, 1885-1915*, St Lucia, 1970.

7. Eight-Hour Day Celebration Committee Minutes, 1909, CCQC D9/260 1

formed in hitherto unorganised sections of the workforce in the fervour of renewed unionism that was sweeping not only Australia at the time but Britain, Western Europe and New Zealand as well.<sup>8</sup>

Over the next half century more than 40 different unions linked to national federations and amalgamations of kindred unions defended and promoted the industrial interests of Rockhampton workers. Notwithstanding their primary focus upon rates of pay and the hours and conditions of their members, several of the major unions recognised common interests and needs between the unions which gave rise to attempts at establishing peak bodies to further advance and strengthen the cause of unionism. Furthermore, some leaders perceived the common cause of workers as extending beyond the gates of the worksite to encompass the broader public and private aspects of working-class life. Unions, they believed, could play an active role in effecting much needed improvement in the lives of workers not just industrially but also politically, socially and culturally. In almost every endeavour to bring this vision of a better life for workers to reality, the WWF maintained the vanguard, just as it initiated the first demonstration of union solidarity and purpose in 1907. That particular event, therefore, symbolised the birth of the twentieth-century trade union movement and a nascent working-class consciousness in Rockhampton.

#### Labour Historiography, Union Studies and Rockhampton

Since the early 1980s, there has been a paucity of academic histories of unionism in Queensland. In part, this has been due to the untimely death in 1984 of Denis Murphy whose indelible mark remains on those works undertaken at the University of Queensland

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8. Eric Hobsbawm, *Worlds of Labour: Further Studies in the History of Labour*, London, 1983, p. 152 and 155; Eric Fry, 'Introduction' in Eric Fry (ed.), *Common Cause: Essays in Australian and New Zealand Labour History*, Sydney, 1986, p. xiii.

from the late 1960s.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, several union histories emanated from James Cook University of North Queensland in Townsville. Like most Australian, and even contemporary British labour historiography, these works shared several common characteristics and themes which prevailed at the time. First, they were written primarily by the politically committed<sup>10</sup> and, in the case of Australia, many were defences of the contemporary and 'much-maligned' union movement in an era of predominantly anti-Labor governments.<sup>11</sup> The search for institutional origins, analysis of structural development in the early decades of the union movement and the integral role of leadership were dominant and celebratory motifs.<sup>12</sup>

Second, as a result of this political commitment, many of these historians were ideologically informed by 'vulgar' Marxism.<sup>13</sup> They saw unionism as an element of working-class mobilisation against capitalism in an economically determined class-based social structure of the employers and wage-earners—the exploiters and the exploited. Inherent in this view was that conflict was the essential outcome of all class relations.<sup>14</sup> Thus, industrial militancy and strikes were standard subjects of research with, as in the case of North Queensland studies, an emphasis on environmental determinism.<sup>15</sup> Third, and also stemming from a sense of political intent, labour works concentrated upon the industrial-political nexus

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9. Douglas Blackmur, *Strikes: Causes, Conduct and Consequences*, Leichhardt, 1993, p. v.

10. Hobsbawm, *Worlds of Labour*, p. 6.

11. John Merritt, 'Labour History', in Graeme Osborne and William Mandle (eds), *New History: Studying Australia Today*, Sydney, 1982, pp. 120-121; G.W. Ford, foreword to J.T. Sutcliffe, *A History of Trade Unionism in Australia*, (1921), Melbourne, 1967, p. 7.

12. For example, Rodney Sullivan, *The ALF in Queensland, 1889–1915*, MA Thesis, UQ, 1973; John Armstrong, *Closer Unity in the Queensland Trades Union Movement, 1900–1922*, MA Thesis, UQ, 1975; M.B. Cribb, 'The ARU in Queensland: Some Oral History', *Labour History*, No. 22, May 1972, pp. 13-22; Kett Kennedy, 'Theodore, McCormack and the Amalgamated Workers' Association', *Labour History*, No. 33, 1977, pp. 14-28.

13. Stuart Macintyre, 'The Making of the Australian Working Class: An Historiographical Survey', *Historical Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 71, Oct. 1978, p. 233.

14. John Rickard, *Class and Politics: New South Wales, Victoria and the Early Commonwealth, 1890–1910*, Canberra, 1976, p. 310.

15. For example, Margaret B. Cribb, *Trade Union Militancy: Case Studies in Transport*, MA Thesis, UQ, 1972; Margaret B. Cribb, 'State in Emergency' in John Iremonger, John Merritt and Graeme Osborne (eds), *Strikes: Studies in Twentieth Century Australian Social History*, Sydney, 1973; Terrence Cutler, 'Sunday, Bloody Sunday' in Iremonger *et al.*, *Strikes*; Denis Murphy (ed.), *The Big Strikes: Queensland 1889–1965*, St Lucia, 1983; Douglas Blackmur, *Industrial Relations under an Australian State Labor Government: The Hanlon Government in Queensland, 1946–1952*, PhD Thesis, UQ, 1986.

with an 'undue emphasis' on the latter.<sup>16</sup> Yet as Denis Murphy himself concedes, even though most of these early union histories focused on origins, militancy and politics, the reality for unions themselves was that 'most time and energy was devoted to [their] day-to-day running'.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, while Murphy also believes historians ignored union leaders to a large extent, he acknowledges that 'below them the mass of labour sympathisers [including most rank-and-file unionists] remain faceless and forgotten'.<sup>18</sup> Despite Murphy's words and his profound influence on Queensland labour historians, the daily affairs and activities of unions and their role in the lives and experiences of ordinary workers in this state remains uncharted territory.

As well as these thematic omissions in traditional labour histories of that era, Rockhampton itself was and still is a 'gap in the map' of Queensland labour historiography. This is all the more perplexing given that it was second only to Brisbane in population during the first half of the twentieth century. Rockhampton's population grew from 18,326 in 1901—after which it was granted city status—to 34,988 in 1947.<sup>19</sup> As Map 1 overleaf clearly indicates, the city was the terminus of the Central Railway and river port for the vast pastoral and mineral production of the hinterland; the location of major railway workshops, the largest export meat-processing plant in the southern hemisphere, significant light manufacturing and wholesale distribution; as well as being the administrative, commercial and educational centre for the entire region as far west as Longreach and Winton.<sup>20</sup>

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16. Ford in Sutcliffe, *History of Trade Unionism*, p. 9; Denis Murphy, Unions and politics, an unpublished paper presented at the Australian Council of Salaried and Professional Associations' School of Industrial Relations at St Lucia, 23 May 1970, p. 1. See, for example Joy Guyatt, *Trade Unions and the Australian Labor Party, 1947–1957*, MA Thesis, UQ, 1971; Murphy *et al*, *Prelude to Power*; Douglas Hunt, *A History of the Labour Movement in North Queensland: Trade Unionism, Politics and Industrial Conflict, 1900–1920*, PhD Thesis, JCU, 1979.

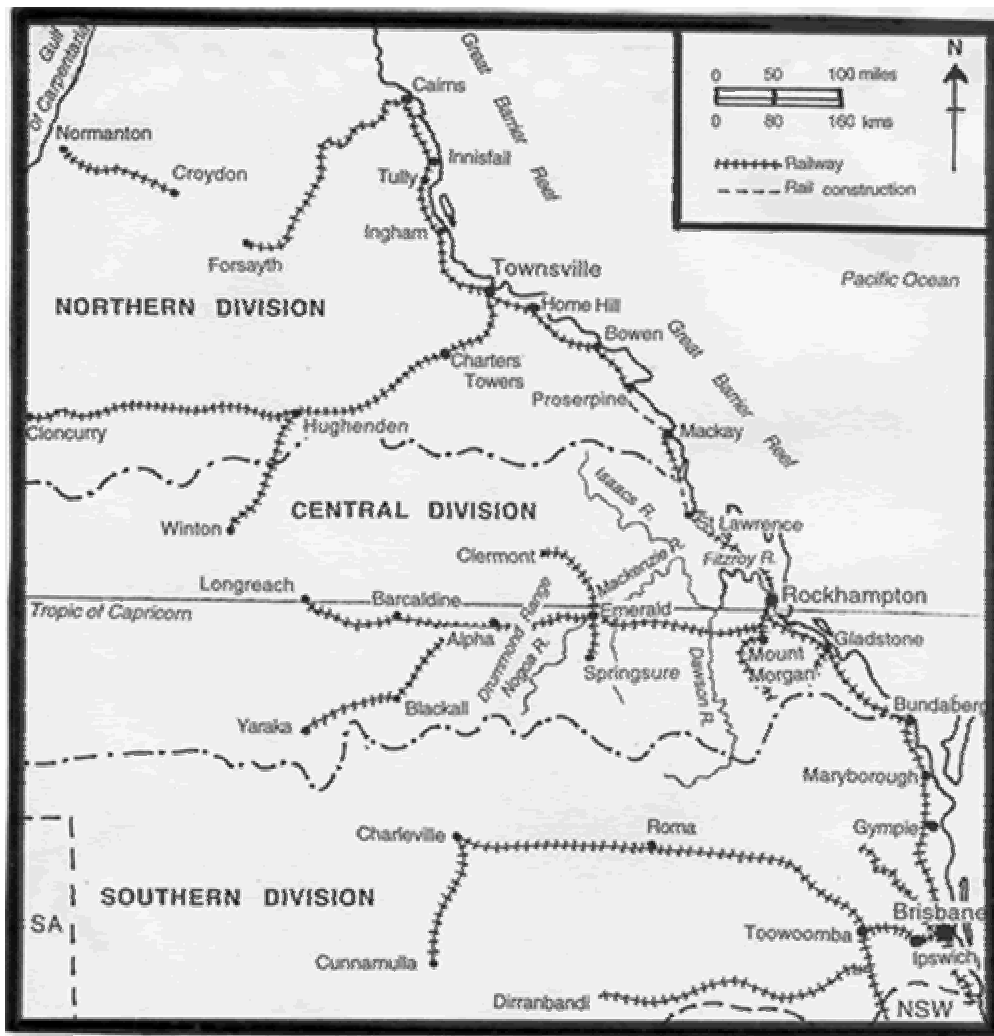
17. Denis Murphy, 'Introduction' in Archie Dawson and Denis Murphy, *A History of the Electrical Trades Union of Queensland*, Brisbane, 1977, p. 9;

18. Denis Murphy, 'Introduction' in Murphy *et al*, *Prelude to Power*, p. xviii.

19. *Census of Queensland, 1901*, Part I, Brisbane, 1902, p. 8; *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1947*, Canberra, 1947, Vol. I, pp. 212 and 218.

20. *Pugh's Almanac, 1911*, pp. 866-868; Mark Hinchliff, interviewed 23 Nov. 1995.





Map 1: Railway Divisions of Queensland, 1921

Report of the commissioner for Railways  
for the year Ended 30 June 1921. *QPP*, 1921  
Vol. 2, p 131.



Fig. 3: Rockhampton Railway Station, circa 1910  
CCQC



Fig. 4: Rockhampton Railway Workshops and  
Running Shed, circa 1938  
CCQC



Fig. 5: Ship Loading Blister Copper at Rockhampton's Deepwater Wharf, circa 1905

CCQC



Fig. 6: Central Queensland Meat Export Company's Lakes Creek Works

The outskirts of North Rockhampton are visible at the top right corner of the photograph

RML

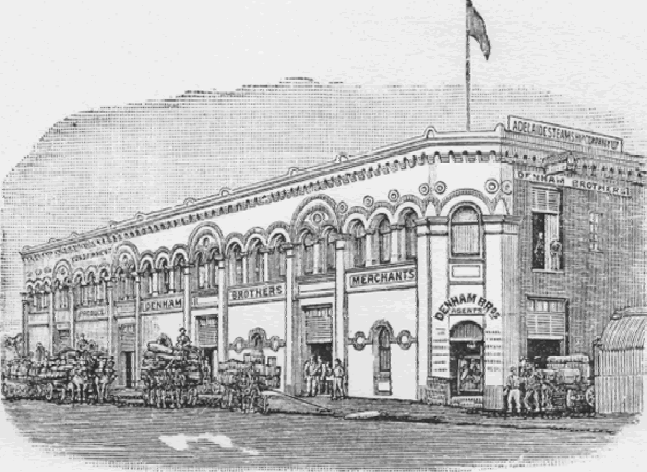
Queensland Country Life. ROCKHAMPTON.

# Denham Bros.,

## GENERAL MERCHANTS.

**AGENCIES.**

Adelaide Steamship Co., Ltd.  
 Australian White Lead Co., Ltd.  
 Alex. Gillespie's Flour—  
 "Gillespie's Special."  
 Melbourne Flour Milling Co.—  
 "Empress" Brand.  
 John Dunn & Co. (Adelaide)—  
 "Eclipse" Brand Flour.  
 Warwick Flour Milling Co.—  
 "Imperial" Brand.  
 Jingo Scott's "Superb" Flour  
 McRae & Yempere Sugar Co.  
 Sugars and Syrups.  
 Commonwealth Portland Cement  
 Co., Ltd.  
 Federal Broom Co., Ltd., N.S.W.  
 Standard Dairy Co., Ltd.—  
 "Standard Condensed Milk"  
 New Cannon "Jams & Fruits."  
 New Cannon "Matches."  
 Punch "Jams."  
 Punch "Marmalade."  
 Punch "Tomato Sauce."  
 Osborne "Pickles."  
 Breakfast "D" Light.  
 Queen "and "Dunlop"  
 Packet Tens.  
 Ellavilla "Ceylon Teas."  
 Pineville "Ceylon Teas."




Derby Street Warehouse.

**AGENCIES.**

"Orchard" Canned Fruits.  
 "King" Tea.  
 "Escalier" Oatmeal.  
 Gorge's Sauce.  
 "Ottoman's" Coffee.  
 "Livornis"  
 Irving's Eucalyptus.  
 Miller's Twines and Clothes Lines.  
 Australian Compressed Fodder  
 Co.  
 "Silverwood" Mountain  
 Creamery Butter.  
 "Yargan" Full Cream Cheddar  
 Cheese.  
 "Pineapple" Hams and Bacon.  
 B. Hornsby & Sons' Kerosene  
 Oil Engines.  
 Lawrence-Kennedy-Gillies  
 Milking Machines.  
 Rider & Keison Hot Air  
 Pumping Engines.  
 Alton Steam Windmills.  
 Sheep, Cattle, and Pig Troughing.  
 "King-Lee" Steel Droppers.  
 Cyclone Steel Droppers.  
 Cyclone Wire Fencing.  
 Hardware.  
 Wool Packs.  
 Fencing Wires.

Produce and Grain Merchants  
Hide, Skin, Tallow, and Leather Merchants.  
Stock and Station Agents.  
Horse and Cattle Salesmen.



East Street and Derby Street Offices and Warehouses.

Fig. 7: Denham Bros: Advertisement in *Queensland Country Life*, 1908  
*QCL*, May 1908, p 1

These economic activities created a large urban working-class by occupation<sup>21</sup> and a numerically strong and publicly visible trade union movement largely centred on Trades

21. *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1921*, Vol. I, pp. 892 and 869 shows 61% of male breadwinners were engaged in manufacturing, transport and communications industries while 60% of the female breadwinners were in domestic and manufacturing categories. Although the census data focus on industry rather than occupations, the 1922 electoral roll also indicates 64% of male workers were engaged in some form of manual work which, though not definitive of social class, may be usefully employed as an indicator in the absence of any other quantifiable evidence. *Commonwealth Electoral Roll: Capricornia Division—Rockhampton, North Rockhampton and Fitzroy Districts*, Brisbane, 1922.

Hall in the heart of the city. Reflecting the economic activities of Rockhampton, the main blue-collar state-based unions which maintained sub-branches locally were the Australasian Meat Industry Employees' Union (AMIEU), the Australian Railways Union (ARU), the Federated Carters and Drivers' Industrial Union (FCDIU) and its successors the Amalgamated Road Transport Workers' Union (ARTWU) and the Transport Workers' Union (TWU), as well as the Storemen and Packers' Union (SPU). The Waterside Workers' Federation (WWF), the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE) and its post-1920 counterpart, the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU), had autonomous branches of their national union—two in the case of the AEU from 1944 to cater separately for Railway Department employees and those metalworkers and mechanics in 'outside' industries. The Australian Workers' Union (AWU), although organised from Bundaberg and without a formal local structure, had a large membership in government departments and statutory authorities and among the hundreds of dispersed workers in small business and industry throughout the city and district. Of the plethora of smaller unions, the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners (ASCJ), the Boilermakers' Society of Australia, Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen's Association (FEDFA) and the Printing Industry Employees' Union (PIEU) maintained relatively high profiles.

Rockhampton's absence from the labour historical record can be partly explained by its failure to fit comfortably into the traditional conceptual framework. Urban unions like those in Rockhampton did not play any direct role in the Australian Labor Party's legendary foundations in the 1890s as did the western pastoral unions, nor were they prominent in Labor's 1915 parliamentary victory in Queensland as were the mining, sugar and pastoral unions.<sup>22</sup> Thus, Rockhampton unions were neither central to the search for origins nor instrumental in the structural development of state or national peak industrial or political bodies which traditional historiography favoured. Rockhampton was not the site of overt union militancy and no major strikes began there.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, any militant unionists with

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22. Ross Fitzgerald and Harold Thornton, *Labor in Queensland: From the 1880s to 1988*, St Lucia, 1989, p. 9.

23. Of the 16 major strikes discussed in Murphy (ed), *The Big Strikes*, none began in Rockhampton.

leadership aspirations generally left Rockhampton for more active union centres like Townsville and Brisbane.<sup>24</sup> Because of the dominant perspective of most academic labour historians, Rockhampton has offered them little of interest. In a practical sense, the absence of a substantial history department at Central Queensland University for many years has also contributed to Rockhampton's omission from the historical record.

However, even public historians have overlooked Rockhampton workers and their public and private lives.<sup>25</sup> The only major history of Rockhampton to date, Lorna McDonald's celebratory history commissioned by a former politically conservative municipal council, (understandably) portrays a city strangely devoid of workers, working-class institutions or interests. McDonald's work is a 'history from above' which concentrates on the pastoral, commercial and administrative leaders and middle-class socio-cultural interests.<sup>26</sup> The greater majority of the city's breadwinners who worked in the railway, meatworks, wharves, warehouses or were engaged in a wide range of other manual occupations seemingly played no role in the development or life of the city. One of the underlying objectives of this dissertation, and indeed part of its initial inspiration, is to remedy this situation. It seeks not to dispute McDonald's view of the city, which is a valid one from her perspective, but to bring necessary equilibrium to the historical record by writing what English historian E.P. Thompson pioneered as a 'history from below'.<sup>27</sup> Like Thompson's seminal work, *The Making of the English Working Class*, which 'rescued' the ordinary textile workers from historical oblivion, this work seeks—regrettably in a far less erudite and eloquent manner—to restore the lives and institutions of Rockhampton workers to their rightful place in history's pages.<sup>28</sup>

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24. Sir John (Jack) Egerton, interviewed 21 June 1996; Frank Campbell, interviewed 1 July 1995.

25. The exceptions being Gordon Stewart, *An Analysis of Industrial Relations at the Central Queensland Meat Export Company Works at Lakes Creek, Rockhampton, from 1945 to 1965*, BA Thesis, UQ, 1978 and Barbara Webster, *Stations in Life: A Study from Below of Social Class in Rockhampton, 1910–1921*, MLitt Thesis, UNE, 1993.

26. Lorna McDonald, *Rockhampton: A History of City and District*, St Lucia, 1981.

27. Merritt, in Osborne and Mandle (eds), *New History*, p. 132.

28. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, London, 1980, p. 12; Ray Markey, 'Labour History: Introduction', in Michael Costa and Mark Hearn (eds), *Reforming Australia's Unions: Insights from Southland Magazine*, Kensington, 1997, p.184.

If the traditional narrow labour history model cannot adequately fulfil this general purpose nor reveal anything about the role of unionism in Rockhampton workers' lives, an alternative and more flexible approach has been suggested by various historians since the 1980s. John Merritt has urged both the broadening of the field to accommodate social history and the widening in scope of traditional topics like unionism.<sup>29</sup> Unions, he claims, are social bodies as much as industrial institutions with political connections: they should not be seen as 'entit[ies] separate from [their] total social formation'.<sup>30</sup> In an international context, James Cronin believes that the basis of any working-class history should be the forms of organisation undertaken by workers in, for example, unions and politics, not as traditional histories of those institutions, but as vehicles for understanding how economic conditions and social structures affected workers' capacity to 'organise and act collectively'.<sup>31</sup> By studying unions in these broader contexts, it is possible to create what Ray Markey terms 'histories of institutions which [are] non institutional'.<sup>32</sup> Unfortunately, these new ideas appear to have born little fruit in Queensland even though they have informed some of the many institutional labour histories written in other states during the 1980s.<sup>33</sup>

A non-institutional union history such as both Markey and Cronin suggest could entail examining the economic and social forces and workers' responses which shaped union institutions and directed their activities. It would explore internal relationships between leaders and rank and file, and between various ideological factions. It would also include external relationships with other groups that opposed or formed alliances with unions as well as those between unions and unorganised workers. Most importantly, a

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29. John Merritt, 'Editorial', *Labour History*, No. 41, pp. v-vi; Greg Patmore, 'Australian Labour History: A Review of the Literature, 1981–1990', *Labour and Industry*, Vol. 5, Nos 1&2, Mar.–June 1993, p. 33.

30. Merritt, in Osborne and Mandle (eds), *New History*, p.121.

31. James Cronin, 'Neither Exceptional nor Peculiar: Towards the Comparative Study of Labor in Advanced Society', *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 38, Part 1, Apr. 1993, p. 73.

32. Ray Markey, 'The 1890s as the Turning Point in Australian Labor History', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 31, Spring 1987, p. 87.

33. Patmore, 'Australian Labour History', p. 34; Patmore cites, for example, Ray Markey's work, *The Making of the Labor Party in New South Wales, 1880–1900*, Kensington, 1988 and Mark Hearn's work, *Working Lives: A History of the Australian Railways Union (NSW Branch)*, Sydney, 1990.

union history of this nature would try to reveal the aspirations and ideals which motivated workers to undertake collective action as well as the significance of unions and their activities in the lives of workers. This approach entails more than looking at unions as mere industrial structures or even as active organisations in the workplace: it necessitates understanding unionism as a social movement with aspirations, goals and tangible outcomes for workers which extended beyond the bounds of work. This dissertation proposes such a union history.

### Unionism as Organisation and Movement

There is little or no agreement among sociologists as to exactly what constitutes a social movement either now or in the past.<sup>34</sup> There is consensus, however, that the union movement constituted part of the category of 'old' social movements as did the broader labour movement of which it was part.<sup>35</sup> The labour movement or working-class movement, as both names imply, derived from class divisions based on economic exploitation and deprivation. It was the dominant social movement or agent of social change in industrial society.<sup>36</sup> It is therefore considered distinctly different from the 'new' post-1960s mass social movements that are 'beyond the class paradigm' in arising from 'other forms of oppression' involving, for example, nuclear disarmament, the environment, gender, sexual preference and ethnicity.<sup>37</sup> As Verity Burgmann points out in her study of recent social movements in Australia, the labour/union/working-class movement also differed in that it focused on group rather than individual needs and rights; its mainstream

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34. Jan Pakulski, 'Social Movement and Class: The Decline of the Marxist Paradigm' in L. Maheu (ed.), *Social Movements and Social Classes: The Future of Collective Action*, London, 1995, p. 56; P. Byrne, *Social Movements in Britain: Theory and Practice in British Politics*, London, 1997, p. 10.

35. M. Roche, 'Rethinking Citizenship and Social Movements: Themes in Contemporary Sociology and New Conservative Ideology' in Maheu (ed.), *Social Movements and Social Classes*, p. 188; D. Plotke, 'What's So New about New Social Movements?' in S.M. Lyman (ed.), *Social Movements: Critiques, Concepts, Case-Studies*, New York, 1995, p.115; Verity Burgmann, *Power and Protest: Movements for Change in Australian Society*, St Leonards, 1993, p. 3.

36. Burgmann, *Power and Protest*, pp. 2, 10 and 12.

37. Pakulski, in Maheu (ed.), *Social Movements and Social Classes*, p. 68; Burgmann, *Power and Protest*, pp. 3 and 5.



ideology did not challenge the contemporary political organisation and structures; and it advocated attaining political power to further advance its cause.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, the trade union movement established its own formal structures and organisation to administer its operation as opposed to the flexible networks of recent movements. In Australia, the union movement was also comprised of virtually compulsory membership rather than voluntary adherents and sympathisers.<sup>39</sup> This history of the union movement in Rockhampton reflects these particular points.

In popular usage and even in many labour histories, the terms 'labour movement' and 'trade union movement' have been used, as Don Rawson observes, 'so freely...[and]...carelessly' as to lose their original and distinctive meanings.<sup>40</sup> Few labour historians bother to explain the precise meaning of 'movement' at a theoretical level and often regard the union movement as synonymous with unionists and with union organisation and structures. In this thesis, too, the interchangeable use of these generalised terms sometimes occurs. Specifically, though, both expressions are quite distinct in meaning and relate respectively to unionism's purpose and function.<sup>41</sup>

There is universal agreement among labour and industrial relations historians that the primary function of unions is to promote and protect members' employment interests by participating in wage determination and other aspects of industrial relations.<sup>42</sup> In the past, as they still do today, unions provided a counter-balance to the stronger economic power of employers and gave workers a degree of control over their employment conditions which they could never have achieved as individuals.<sup>43</sup> Trade unions were, therefore, agencies of

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38. *ibid.*, p. 3.

39. Byrne, *Social Movements in Britain*, p. 15.

40. D.W. Rawson, *Unions and Unionists in Australia*, (1st edn), Sydney, 1978, p. 14.

41. Rawson, *Unions and Unionists in Australia*, (2nd edn), Sydney, 1986, p. 14; Allan Flanders, *Management and Trade Unions: The Theory and Reform of Industrial Relations*, London, 1970, p. 16.

42. Flanders, *Management and Trade Unions*, p. 16; Ross M. Martin, *Trade Unions in Australia: Who Runs Them, Who Belongs—Their Politics, Their Power*, Ringwood, 1981, p. 96; Rawson, *Unions and Unionists*, 1986, p. 14.

43. Stephen Deery, 'Union Aims and Methods', in Bill Ford and David Plowman (eds), *Australian Union: An Industrial Relations Perspective*, Melbourne, 1989, pp. 74-75; Rawson, *Unions and Unionists*, 1986, p. 15.

worker power.<sup>44</sup> For unions to execute their function successfully, they required organisation in the form of a structured group<sup>45</sup> and sanctions which they could impose to ensure that members adhered to union policy and decisions. Such sanctions included rewards offered for compliance and penalties inflicted for breaches of discipline.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, for unions to function successfully they needed to be able to impose sanctions on employers by maintaining or withholding the labour supply or by the calling on an arbitral body to intervene when necessary. The function of union organisation, then, was to cater for sectional 'vested interests' of members.<sup>47</sup>

In contrast to unionism as organisation with a specific social function, unionism as movement had certain defining characteristics in common with other more modern social movements. First, it required a social purpose or cause which was premised on the belief that something was fundamentally wrong with society. In the case of the union movement to the 1950s at least, the inequities and deprivations in the lives of workers arising from their markedly inferior conditions of employment constituted this social injustice.<sup>48</sup> A union movement saw itself, in Allan Flanders's opinion, as a 'sword of justice': its crusade was to right the perceived wrongs and to create a better world for workers by changing society. It was this self-perception as an instrument of worker justice which 'generate[d] loyalties and induce[d] sacrifices'.<sup>49</sup> It elicited, as E.P. Thompson has observed, 'a sustained commitment...and a confidence [in workers] to stand up against the physical and moral resources of their opponents'.<sup>50</sup> Attributes such as these, together with vision and goals, gave the union movement its vitality and energy; they constituted what Thompson's American counterpart, Herbert Gutman, deems 'the spirit animating it.' It is this spirit we must locate to understand the meaning of unionism as a social movement.<sup>51</sup>

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44. Richard Hyman, quoted in Deery in Ford and Plowman (eds), *Australian Unions*, p. 75.

45. Paul Kelly, *Rethinking Industrial Relations: Mobilization, Collectivism and Long Waves*, London, 1998, p. 25.

46. Flanders, *Management and Trade Unions*, p. 43.

47. *ibid.*, p. 15.

48. *ibid.*, p. 16; Kelly, *Rethinking Industrial Relations*, p. 64.

49. Flanders, *Management and Unions*, p. 15.

50. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 938.

51. Flanders, *Management and Unions*, p. 15; Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture and Society in Industrialising America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History*, Oxford, 1976, p. 86.

Second, for a union movement to exist, the perception of injustice had to extend beyond the individual union though it was not synonymous with a mere collection of unions. As early English labour historian G.D.H. Cole has identified, it necessitated a collective point of view, a 'community of outlook...a common end or at least community of purpose which [was] real, and influence[d] men's thoughts and actions'.<sup>52</sup> A union movement, therefore, required a similarity of views on the part of several unions regarding major social questions to allow them to work in unison on broader goals.<sup>53</sup>

Third, to be effective in improving the lot of workers, the union movement had to provide them with what Rawson labels 'an instrument [or instruments] with which to change society, or attempt to do so, which [was] more effective than would otherwise be available to them'.<sup>54</sup> The most obvious and effective primary instrument was the union body itself but, in Australia, unions also possessed a strong instrument in the form of a political party. Thus, as part of the broader labour movement, unions promoted and defended the interests of workers through both industrial and political action.<sup>55</sup> The process of fulfilling these three criteria of movement—the perception of injustice, its transformation from an individual to a shared concern, and the establishment and maintenance of collective control of instruments and resources necessary for undertaking action to improve their lot—constitutes a mobilisation of workers.<sup>56</sup>

As the process of mobilisation indicates, unions were both movement and organisation.<sup>57</sup> According to Flanders, the initial response to injustice was the formation

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52. G.D.H. Cole, *A Short History of the British Working-Class Movement, 1789–1947*, London, 1948, pp. 3-4.

53. Rawson, *Unions and Unionists*, 1986, p. 14.

54. *ibid.*, 1986, p. 14.

55. Cole, *A Short History of the British Working-Class Movement*, p. 5; Ian Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics: The Dynamics of the Labour Movement in Eastern Australia, 1900–1921*, Canberra, 1965, p.xiii.

56. Kelly, *Rethinking Industrial Relations*, pp. 25 and 38.

57. Flanders, *Management and Unions*, p. 43; Markey, *The Making of the Labor Party in New South Wales*, p. 7.

of 'loose groups' of aggrieved workers which constituted a 'temporary [union] movement' as occurred, for example, in early strikes. To maintain power and effectiveness as employees' representatives and to withstand the usually superior strength of employers, this transient collectivism or sense of movement had to be converted into some form of permanent organisation.<sup>58</sup> But for their on-going effectiveness, Flanders argues, both organisation and movement were necessary. Trade unions 'need[ed] organisation for their power and movement for their vitality, but they need[ed] both power and vitality to advance their social purpose'.<sup>59</sup> Looking at the union movement therefore requires examination of the organisational structures and their workings together with a search for the spirit that animated it.

In Australia, unions maintained much of their organisational strength through the arbitration system and through reliance upon and power within the Australian Labor Party (ALP).<sup>60</sup> The relationship between unions and the ALP—wherein unions formed a large part of the power base and funded the political party, and Labor-in-office reciprocally introduced reforms in the interests of unions and the working class—has been termed labourism.<sup>61</sup> Labourism constituted the mainstream ideology of the Australian labour movement.<sup>62</sup> This was particularly so in Queensland where the ALP maintained office almost continuously from 1915 to 1957<sup>63</sup> and where a state arbitration system introduced by Labor controlled the terms of employment of most workers. In this dominant labourist view, improved conditions for workers were attainable by actions undertaken and reforms initiated within the existing political and social structures rather than through revolutionary change. For mainstream union leaders and unionists, trade unionism was a means of both

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58. Flanders, *Management and Unions*, p. 43.

59. *ibid.*

60. Markey, *The Making of the Labor Party in New South Wales*, p. 7; Rawson, *Unions and Unionists*, 1986, p.

21. In Queensland, both state and federal arbitration systems operated.

61. G. Foote, cited in Terry Irving, 'Labourism: A Political Genealogy', *Labour History*, No. 66, May 1994, p. 10.

62. Jim Hagan, *The History of the ACTU*, Melbourne, 1981, p. 14. The issue of whether labourism was grounded in ideology or pragmatism is discussed in Chapter 5.

63. With the exception of 1929 to 1932. For a detailed political history of Queensland in this era, see Ross Fitzgerald, *A History of Queensland: From 1915 to the 1980s*, St Lucia, 1984 and Fitzgerald and Thornton, *Labor in Queensland*.

industrial and social progress by raising the standard of living for workers through reform.<sup>64</sup> In their view, there was no need to overthrow the existing political and social system.

Some historians champion the aspirations and actions of a minority of left-wing union activists who saw reformism as futile. This vocal minority advocated a political and social revolution before workers could achieve justice both on-the-job and in society in general.<sup>65</sup> Ray Markey considers that while labourism promoted and strengthened union organisation, it simultaneously decreased the need for a spirit of movement to better the lot of the workers.<sup>66</sup> However, he does not consider that unionism's broader social purpose could still be served indirectly through political reforms and through political regulation of the conditions of employment. Flanders concedes that while promotion and protection of members' employment conditions is the function of unions, it can also be part of their social purpose if it is looked upon as a means to an end; namely, of 'enabling workers to gain more control over their working lives'.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, Rawson points out that while unions desire broader social change for workers, they may prefer to leave the implementation of this to the political wing of the labour movement, the ALP.<sup>68</sup>

Markey also claims there was always 'tension' between organisation and movement that was reflected in a power struggle between those who supported labourism and their 'opponents on the left'.<sup>69</sup> According to his view, it appears that only those left-wing minority elements embodied a sense of movement because only they subscribed to advancing workers' interests by a 'radical reconstruction of society' and a workers' revolution.<sup>70</sup> Mainstream unionists who subscribed to labourism were apparently devoid of

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64. Hagan, *The History of the ACTU*, p. xi.

65. Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, pp. xviii and 146; Kelly, *Rethinking Industrial Relations*, p. 40; Hagan, *The History of the ACTU*, p. xii.

66. Markey, *The Making of the Labor Party in New South Wales*, p. 8.

67. Flanders, *Management and Unions*, p. 42.

68. Rawson, *Unions and Unionists*, 1986, pp. 13-14.

69. Markey, *The Making of the Labor Party in New South Wales*, p. 7;

70. Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, p. xviii; Kelly, *Rethinking Industrial Relations*, p. 40.

the spirit and only pushed union organisation and bureaucracy; yet organisation and movement were not two separate entities belonging to two separate groups. This dissertation rejects Markey's view with the contention that, in Rockhampton at least, both orthodox and radical unionists possessed the spirit even though they advocated different means to the same end of bettering the lot of the working class.

The fourth aspect of a social movement relevant to this study is that, as both the term's literal meaning and Flanders's description of the process of mobilisation indicate, it is not a static entity. It is dynamic and fluctuates according to various influences, both positive and negative. He considers that

the social purpose of yesterday, once accomplished, becomes the social function of today. Social purpose has, therefore, ever to be created afresh. It is exhausted as much by success as by failure.<sup>71</sup>

Applying this to the past union movement, attaining improvements through workplace organisation and political reforms blunted the sense of injustice just as failure of these methods brought a decrease of spirit. Entrenched bureaucracy also brought complacency and lack of enthusiasm amongst some unionists. Unions therefore have to 'renew their vigour by keeping the spirit alive in their ranks' to avoid stagnation.<sup>72</sup> In the local context, as elsewhere, some unionists at times found that the union bureaucracy itself was a stimulant to renewed aspirations for change. In the post-World War II period, it was the challenge of other movements whose aims and methods were contrary to those of the mainstream union movement which rekindled the flagging spirit of unionism.

The evolution of the local union movement also reflected what early researchers have identified as stages of development. In 1930s studies, for example, Dawson and Gettys posed typical stages as: early social unrest marked by discontent with some crusading efforts from activists; popular excitement when the cause is being more widely

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71. Flanders, *Management and Unions*, p. 16.

72. *ibid.*, p. 43.

accepted and clearer objectives for social change are being formulated; formalisation with development of organisation, policy, tactics, rules and discipline to enforce the then-well-accepted cause; and, finally, institutionalisation when reforms are implemented, the cause has become normalised, and bureaucratic structures, entrenched leadership, rules and traditions predominate.<sup>73</sup> Of course, this is only a very generalised pattern and individual unions progressed at different rates through the stages, overlapping and influencing the progress of other local unions. Because of the consequent problem of periodisation, to use these stages as an analytical framework is impractical. Moreover, such a generalised schema imposes a determinism that denies much of the agency of unionists in shaping the course of the movement.

As a social movement which claimed to offer workers earthly salvation from their onerous predicament in life and by the faith it generated and sacrifices it demanded, early unionism was something of a secular religion.<sup>74</sup> Rather than replacing or conflicting with the strong Christian convictions and practice of quite a few unionists, unionism was a temporal extension of Christian principles in its focus on caring for the welfare of mankind. Indeed, many of the early union officials recognised the parallel themselves in their frequent use of the biblical analogy of 'spreading the Gospel of Unionism'.<sup>75</sup> It is an appropriate metaphor to employ in the early chapters of this dissertation.

### Worker Mobilisation and Class Consciousness

E.P. Thompson's re-conceptualisation and re-definition of class from its previous inflexible Marxist categories determined by the relations of production provides an appropriate analytical framework with which to undertake a history of unionism as both

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73. D.A. Dawson and W.E. Gettys (1935), cited in H. Blumer, 'Social Movements', (1939), in Lyman (ed.), *Social Movements*, p. 64.

74. J. Pakulski, 'Social Movements in Comparative Perspective' in *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, Vol. 10, Greenwich, CT, 1988, p. 249.

75. *Worker*, 6 June 1908, p. 2.

working-class organisation and movement in Rockhampton. For Thompson, class was not a static category or structure but a dynamic 'historical relationship...[between]...real people in a real context.'<sup>76</sup> In his view,

class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs. The class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born—or enter involuntarily. Class consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas and institutional forms.<sup>77</sup>

Thompson argued that the working class and a working-class consciousness arose from new occupational experiences and relationships produced by the free market (or political) economy which emerged with the Industrial Revolution in place of the traditional moral economy of the élites and masses.<sup>78</sup> He saw the working class not as hapless victims of industrialisation and capitalism but as an agent in its own making through the institutions created to address its needs and protect its interests and through distinctive attitudes and behaviour. Thompson's concept of working class and working-class consciousness closely parallels that of worker mobilisation. In both schemata, the collective recognition of social injustice, induced largely by the conditions of employment, stimulated communal efforts to establish institutions and to effect policies aimed at bringing about positive social change in the lives of workers.

Thompson's new social history, or 'history from below', particularly influenced Australian social historians like John Rickard, Bob Connell and Terry Irving during the 1970s,<sup>79</sup> even if it had little obvious impact on contemporary Queensland labour histories. They saw unions as an expression of the working-class consciousness or mobilisation which arose from a growing awareness of class difference.<sup>80</sup> In Rickard's opinion, working-class consciousness developed in Australia between the 1890s and 1910. These

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76. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 8.

77. *ibid.*, p. 9.

78. *ibid.*, pp. 9 and 913; E. P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present*, No. 50, Feb. 1971, pp. 79 and 89.

79. Patmore, 'Australian Labour History', pp. 34-36.

80. Rickard, *Class and Politics*; Bob Connell and Terry Irving, *Class Structure in Australian History: Documents, Narrative and Argument*, Melbourne, 1980.



decades saw the crushing of nascent unionism in the 1890s strikes, its spectacular revival after the turn of the century, the formal emergence of Labor politics and of a unified anti-Labor political bloc; and the appearance of 'a new class-oriented language'.<sup>81</sup>

Marxist theory, as already mentioned, equates class with relations of production: capital and labour or employers and wage-earners; however, these categories do not adequately reflect the historical reality of how people saw themselves and others. This point requires clarification to explain the specific meaning, as used in this dissertation, of both 'working class' and the ill-defined 'middle class'. In critiques of Connell and Irving's *Class Structure in Australian History*, both Robin Gollan and John Rickard target the 'thorny question' of the middle class and the 'major omission' in failing to account for a middle-class presence in Australian history or adequately identifying its constituents.<sup>82</sup> Thompson considers class was 'largely' occupationally determined, but obviously not necessarily so.

As Rickard points out, there was the dimension of social stratification which superimposed on the economic divisions between employers and workers. In the local context at least, proprietors of large businesses, managers and professionals regarded themselves as the social élite while public servants, teachers, clerks and other white-collar employees generally saw themselves as middle class even if they had associations and unions such as the Federated Clerks' Union and State [Public] Service Union to advance their workplace interests. Notions of respectability and status distinguished the middle-class from the working-class in their own eyes.<sup>83</sup> Men's workday clothing readily reflected social as well as occupational distinctions.<sup>84</sup> Middle-class employees went to work in suits

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81. Rickard, *Class and Politics*, pp. 287-288.

82. Robin Gollan, 'Class Structure in Australian History: The Bones Stripped Bare' and John Rickard, 'Class Structure in Australian History: The Middle Class: What Is to Be Done?' *Historical Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 76, Apr. 1981, pp. 441 and 447.

83. Rickard, 'The Middle Class', p. 453; Rickard, *Class and Politics*, p. 307; Charlie Fox, *Working Australia*, Sydney, 1991, pp. 73 and 80.

84. Joan Fox, 'Designing Differences', in Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee (eds), *A Peoples' History of Australia since 1788: Making a Life*, Ringwood, 1988, p. 20.

and ties like their employers and worked indoors using more brain than brawn. Working-class men, by contrast, wore dungarees and open-necked shirts, and later shorts and 'Jackie Howe' singlets;<sup>85</sup> they laboured physically with bare arms, often out-of-doors, and finished the day dirty, sweaty and smelly. Working-class homes invariably kept sand-soap like 'Solvol' at the wash tub downstairs so that men such as the railway workers illustrated below could remove at least the surface grime from arms and hands before they came upstairs into the house after work.<sup>86</sup> It is these manual or blue-collar workers and their unions which are the focus of this study because only they reflected the hopes and aspirations of Rockhampton's working class through organised labour.



Fig. 8: Tradesmen and Labourers of the Sheetmetal Shop, Rockhampton Railway Workshops, 1938

Bob Cole

Marxist theory also explicitly stresses conflict between classes, as traditional union histories also argued, but Thompson's redefinition is more implicit on this point. His notion

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85. Originally a sleeveless flannel shirt and later replaced by the navy 'Chesty Bonds' singlet. Frank G. Clarke, *The Big History Question: Snapshots of Australian History*, Sydney, 1998, p.14.

86. Clara Cole, interviewed 10 Feb. 1993. In this period, many houses were constructed on high wooden poles or stumps'.

of class is predicated on interests which are 'different from (and *usually* opposed to)' those of others or on a 'friction of interests'.<sup>87</sup> John Rickard points out, though, that these interests need not be '*diametrically* opposed' nor different at all times.<sup>88</sup> Connell and Irving also acknowledge that labour and capital can sometimes have a shared interest on some issues.<sup>89</sup> Without subscribing to what Raymond Evans denounces as 'the long vine of consensus historiography' in Australia,<sup>90</sup> one must concede that issues such as economic development often drew unanimous support from both employers and unions in bringing new profits and jobs respectively, thereby providing an identity of interests which transcended class boundaries. It was possible for employers and unions at times to reach something of a compromise in their fundamental relationship—a *modus vivendi*.<sup>91</sup>

Greg Patmore's explanation of the identification of other non-class-based interests both within and across classes fragmenting a uniform working-class consciousness sheds light on this point. He argues that a 'community consciousness', both geographical and associational as in, for example, local progress associations, can transect and mute class consciousness. Other cross-class collective identities such as friendly societies and sporting clubs can produce a similar effect.<sup>92</sup> English social historian Eric Hobsbawm concedes that working-class consciousness is 'probably politically secondary to other kinds of consciousness', especially to those of nation, race and religion, the last of these being particularly relevant to the Australian union movement and politics in the post-World War II era.<sup>93</sup> Hobsbawm also identifies a 'trade union consciousness'—a 'lower level...[of]... aspiration' or class consciousness—in which workers recognise the 'need to organize collectively against employers in order to defend and improve their conditions as hired

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87. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 939. Emphasis added.

88. Rickard, *Class and Politics*, pp. 310-311.

89. Bob Connell and Terry Irving, *Class Structure in Australian History: Poverty and Progress*, Melbourne, 1992, p. 15.

90. Raymond Evans, 'The Blood Dries Quickly: Conflict Study and Australian Historiography', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 41, Special Issue, 1995, p. 81.

91. Rickard, *Class and Politics*, pp. 302, 310 and 311.

92. Greg Patmore, 'Community and Australian Labour History', in Terry Irving (ed.), *Challenges to Labour History*, Kensington, 1994, pp. 174 and 184.

93. Hobsbawm, *Worlds of Labour*, p. 59.

hands'.<sup>94</sup> Although this 'trade union consciousness' was originally a Leninist label, it is nonetheless useful in explaining the lack of interest from some local unions and among individual unionists in participating in any wider union undertakings.

To better understand the class dynamic as expressed in unionism, it is necessary to study the peculiar local and regional setting because it was this which shaped the nature and degree of class consciousness. James Cronin warns against accepting the 'universalising assumption' that the making of the working class and its institutions like unions was uniform. He insists that class formation was not simply the product of a shared national experience of workers but evolved from diverse regional and local experiences.<sup>95</sup> Connell and Irving also argue that location was critical in producing 'endless local variations' in economic and social experience, creating 'a complex of local mobilisations which could take very different shapes'.<sup>96</sup> They claim that such differing experiences underlay the variations in patterns of militancy and moderation in industrial behaviour among unions throughout Australia.<sup>97</sup> Where Rockhampton unions were concerned, this latter point is not discussed at great length in this dissertation. It has been previously demonstrated that local unionism was, in the main, moderate-verging-on-conservative in an industrial sense, strongly wedded to the institutionalised processes of conflict resolution and supportive of Labor politics;<sup>98</sup> nevertheless, these characteristics are clearly evident throughout the present work and in part explain the industrial success of Rockhampton unionism. A union study of one particular location also allows the historian to observe, as Thompson says, 'real people in a real context'<sup>99</sup> as Ellen McEwen does in her study of

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94. *ibid.*, pp. 27 and 57.

95. Cronin, 'Neither Exceptional nor Peculiar', pp. 59 and 63.

96. Connell and Irving, *Class Structure in Australian History*, 1992, p. 10; Stephen Garton, 'What Have We Done? Labour History, Social History and Cultural History', in Irving (ed), *Challenges to Labour History*, p. 54.

97. Connell and Irving, *Class Structure in Australian History*, 1992, pp. 129-131.

98. Barbara Webster, "'A Bunch of Weakies?'" Region and the Making of the Trade Union Movement in Rockhampton to the 1950s', in Warwick Mules and Helen Miller (eds), *Mapping Regional Cultures*, Rockhampton, 1997.

99. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 8.

working-class struggle and union activity in the Hunter Valley and Erik Eklund also does in Port Kembla.<sup>100</sup> It also allows the historian to identify some of the 'faceless and forgotten' workers whom unionism served, and to understand how unionism touched their particular lives, both positively and negatively.

### Contemporary Challenges to a Social History of Unionism

In the last decade, a history of class and class institutions such as unions—even when broadly contextualised—has been called into question and, indeed, appears to be out of fashion in history writing recently. It is therefore necessary to defend the choice of the topic of unionism and the conceptual framework of class. The challenge is part of a broader attack upon labour history which, as Terry Irving observes, stems from the recent decline of ideology and the ascendancy of feminist theory, post-structuralism and the post-modern view.<sup>101</sup> To these challenges can be added one particularly critical viewpoint emerging recently in the field of industrial relations history.

First, despite the influence of E.P. Thompson's redefinition, studies of class and class-based institutions are still overwhelmingly associated with Marxist theory. As several historians have acknowledged, Marxism's reputation as the ideology of repressive socialist regimes contradicts the idea of working-class liberation. At the same time, the collapse of political socialism in Eastern Europe has clearly demonstrated that the anticipated proletarian revolution will not arrive.<sup>102</sup> Many critics of labour history now celebrate the 'death of Marxism' or the 'End of Ideology'.<sup>103</sup> They deny the concept of class as an historical experience and eschew studies of class and class-based movements and

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100. Ellen McEwen, *The Newcastle Coalmining District of NSW, 1860–1900*, PhD Thesis, University of Sydney, 1979; Erik Eklund, "'We Are of Age': Class, Locality and Region at Port Kembla, 1900–1940", *Labour History*, No. 66, May 1994, pp. 72-89.

101. Irving, *Challenges to Labour History*, pp. 4-7.

102. Andrew Wells, 'Marxism and Labour History', in Irving (ed.), *Challenges to Labour History*, p. 21.; Christopher Lloyd, *The Structures of History*, Oxford, 1993, p. 3.

103. Harvey Kaye, 'Hard Times?' in Alan Ryan (ed.), *After the End of History*; London, 1992, p. 65; Alan Ryan, 'Introduction' in *ibid.*, p. 3;

organisations like unionism.<sup>104</sup> To a lesser degree, the notion of class is also associated with liberalism. Ross McKibbin considers that the recent alignment of many western workers with political conservatism questions liberalism's assumption of a natural relationship between the working class and Labor politics.<sup>105</sup> This latter point is demonstrated by the attraction of many Australian workers recently to Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party and to other ultra-right-wing groups. The marked decline in union density in Australia<sup>106</sup> also questions the primacy of the relationship between workers and unions. As both McKibbin and Bryan Palmer point out, though, these contemporary attitudes about ideology are no reason to refute a class-based study of the past when an organised working class was central to both society and polity at the time.<sup>107</sup>

Feminist historians dispute that class was ever central to historical experience. They assert that gender was the main cleavage because all women, irrespective of class, suffered patriarchal oppression in every aspect of life even if class, gender and ethnic differences made the female experience a diverse one.<sup>108</sup> Such a value judgment places the reality of the material hardship of many working-class families (both male and female) as inferior to female social subjugation as perceived from a modern feminist viewpoint rather than the perspective of women at the time. Certainly in the era under study, gender transected the class experience but it did not negate class as the dominant social and political dynamic. Feminist historians also criticise the 'neuter-general assumptions' of class histories and the 'slotting in' of women as an afterthought: they believe that women should be central to all historical analysis.<sup>109</sup> As John Hirst points out, because women

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104. Bryan Palmer 'Is There Now, or Has There Ever Been, a Working Class?' in Ryan (ed.) *After the End of History*, pp. 98-98 and 101.

105. Ross McKibbin, 'Is It Still Possible to Write Labour History?' in Irving (ed.), *Challenges to Labour History*, p. 37.

106. Diana Bagnell, 'Trade Unions: Can Young Blood Save Them?', *Bulletin with Newsweek*, 27 Sept. 1994, p. 30.

107. McKibbin, in Irving (ed.), *Challenges to Labour History*, p. 40; Palmer in Ryan (ed.) *After the End of History*, p. 101.

108. McKibbin, in Irving (ed.), *Challenges to Labour History*, p. 38; Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans (eds), *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation*, Sydney, 1992, pp. xxii-xxiii and 3.

109. Marilyn Lake, 'The Constitution of Political Subjectivity and the Writing of Labour History', in Irving (ed.), *Challenges to Labour History*, pp. 77-79; Joy Damousi, 'Gendered Meanings and Actions in Left-Wing Movements', in *ibid.*, pp. 150-153.

were relegated—however unfairly, to private space for most of the past—it is difficult to place them central to the public sphere as in a trade union history.<sup>110</sup>

The marginalisation of women is particularly relevant to the union movement in Rockhampton where, more so than just by contemporary social expectation, regional and local economic activity dictated that the paid labour force in major industries, and therefore organised labour, was predominantly male. There was female membership in blue-collar unions such as the AMIEU, AWU and even ARU,<sup>111</sup> but in other major unions, women were absent. Even in those unions where they were present, women were peripheral as members and non-existent as leaders. Relegated to the occasional 'ladies' auxiliary' at Trades Hall and later in the WWF, women were little more than the stereotypical 'sandwich makers'. As Winifred Mitchell so aptly expresses of wharfies' wives in her study of Sydney waterfront life, local union women 'remain[ed] in the shadows, and [were] illuminated only by the reflected light of the men's lives'.<sup>112</sup> For women seeking to advance the cause of labour, political activism was the usual mode of operation and not union activism. Writing a history of a male-dominated union movement like Rockhampton's will no doubt be dismissed by feminists as 'androcentrism';<sup>113</sup> as perpetuating 'phallogocentric discourse';<sup>114</sup> and to be all the more condemned for being the product of a female historian. Yet to concentrate on women to the minimisation of men would be to grossly misrepresent the historical reality of Rockhampton unionism in the period to the 1950s.

Similarly, historians who assert the centrality of racial and ethnic difference to social experience would attack the absence of discussion of these issues in relation to

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110. John Hirst, 'Women and History: A Critique of *Creating a Nation*, *Quadrant*, Mar. 1995, p. 37.

111. For example, in the preserving/canning department of the meatworks; domestic and hotel workers; and railway refreshment rooms.

112. Winifred Mitchell, 'Home Life at the Hungry Mile: Sydney Wharf Labourers and Their Families, 1900–1914', *Labour History*, No. 33, Nov. 1977, p. 87.

113. Saunders and Evans (eds), *Gender Relations in Australia*, p. 3.

114. Gail Reekie, 'Women, Region and the "Queensland difference"', in Gail Reekie (ed.), *On the Edge: Women's Experiences of Queensland*, St Lucia, 1994, p. 9.

unionism in Rockhampton. They would condemn its obvious 'Anglo[-Celtic]-centrism'<sup>115</sup> even though it accurately reflects the homogeneous demography of Rockhampton to the 1950s and the absence of non-Anglo groups in the union movement. The 1901 census indicated 94% of the population were born in either Australia or Britain; by 1947, this component had risen to 98.6%.<sup>116</sup> There were a few outlying rural settlements of Germans, Scandinavians and some White Russians<sup>117</sup> while those continental Europeans who lived in the city quickly assimilated into the dominant Anglo-Celtic society and culture and, where unions were concerned, were indistinguishable from other members other than by their name. Of the visible but comparatively tiny Chinese population, almost all took up market-gardening or ran corner-stores. Two small 'colonies' of Australian South Sea Islanders, the descendants of indentured Pacific Islander labourers, also undertook market-gardening and fire-wood collection for many years on the outskirts of Rockhampton and at coastal Joskeleigh. Many of the young men also worked as stockmen on regional cattle properties.<sup>118</sup>

Where unionism was concerned, neither of these non-European populations raised the ire of the early unions by competing with white labour for jobs. Those workers of Chinese descent who did work in major industries, like the Keong family of butchers for example, took active roles in the AMIEU and FCDIU without any apparent impediment from their ancestry. Similarly, in the 1940s and after, some Islander men worked as labourers in the railway and at the meatworks with no differentiation being made by fellow unionists in the ARU, AWU or AMIEU.<sup>119</sup> Of course, Aboriginal Australians were almost totally absent from Rockhampton during this period of protectionism and reserves but even

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115. Saunders and Evans (eds), *Gender Relations in Australia*, p. 3.

116. *Census of the State of Queensland, 1901*, Brisbane, 1901, p. 127; *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1947*, Canberra, 1947, pp. 240-241.

117. For example in the Milman, Stanwell and Yarwun districts respectively.

118. Carol Gistitin, *Quite a Colony: South Sea Islanders in Central Queensland, 1867-1993*, Brisbane, 1995, pp. 49 and 52.

119. *ibid.*, pp. 54-55; Colin Maxwell, interviewed 20 June 1996; Campbell, interview.



the elitist AEU strongly protested against the refusal of the government to allow Aboriginal workers from Woorabinda settlement to take part in the annual Labor Day celebrations.<sup>120</sup>

A social history 'from below', as intended in this trade union history, has also been challenged by English industrial relations historian Jonathan Zeitlin who has stimulated a heated debate in recent years. He argues that many labour histories exaggerate the role and relevance of rank-and-file unionists when institutional forces really determined relations between employees and employers. In essence, Zeitlin's 'neo-institutionalism' denies the agency of ordinary workers who constituted the union rank and file.<sup>121</sup> He advocates abandoning people-centred histories of labour and concentrating on workplace relations. As Greg Patmore points out, such works risk the imposition of 'static contemporary industrial relations theories on dynamic historical relationships', ignoring as they do the crucial underlying social and economic reality of working-class life which impinged upon workplace relationships.<sup>122</sup> While many labour-turned-industrial relations historians fortunately still include the broader context, the main focus is on relationships in the workplace between workers, employers, unions, employer bodies and the state.<sup>123</sup> Notwithstanding this narrowness, industrial relations theory and writings have proved most useful in guiding this thesis's discussion of union activities in the workplace.

Finally, post-structuralism and post-modernism have also influenced the writing of labour history in recent years. Post-structuralism rejects the notion of human progress and refutes a systematic explanation of society such as Thompson gives for the making of the English working class.<sup>124</sup> It also questions the concept of human agency which is central

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120. AEU Minutes, 30 Apr. 1953. NBAC E162/33/3

121. Richard Price, 'What's in a Name? Workplace History and "Rank and Filism"', *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 34, 1989, p. 63. For this debate see, for example, Jonathan Zeitlin, "'Rank and Filism" in British Labour History: A Critique', *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 34, 1989; James Cronin, 'The "Rank and File" and the Social History of the Working Class', *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 34, 1989; Jonathan Zeitlin, "'Rank and Filism" and Labour History: A Rejoinder to Price and Cronin', *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 34, 1989.

122. Patmore, 'Australian Labour History', p. 35.

123. Greg Patmore, *Australian Labour History*, Melbourne, 1991, p. 16.

124. William Thorpe, *Colonial Queensland*, St Lucia, 1996, p. 4; Boris Frankel, *From the Prophets Deserts Come: The Struggle to Reshape Australian Political Culture*, Melbourne, 1992, p.176; Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History*, New York, 1994, p. 202.

to Thompsonian class consciousness and working-class mobilisation<sup>125</sup> and of a collective identity or actor such as a union or working class, a position which therefore questions the collective consciousness inherent in a social movement.<sup>126</sup> Some adherents to the broad-ranging post-modern view, on the other hand, dispute the possibility of reconstructing the lived experience of the past as Thompsonian social history aspires to do and is intended in this thesis on Rockhampton unions.<sup>127</sup> Neither the post-modern nor the post-structural approach serves the purpose of this dissertation which is to paint the initial canvas of historical knowledge about a little-known aspect of Australian labour history, based on thorough empirical research. It is for subsequent academics to provide an alternative interpretation of the development, purpose and nature of trade unionism in Rockhampton if they so desire.

### Methodology and Sources

To reconstruct the illusive past as accurately as possible—accepting the inevitable omissions and biases in the sources and on the part of the author—the methodological concept which E.P. Thompson calls 'historical logic' is most apt. As Thompson has explained, unlike scientific logic which depends on rigid laws and theories, historical logic can accommodate both the 'disorder' in history and the necessarily changing questions being asked of it. It is 'a dialogue between concept and evidence, a dialogue conducted by successive hypotheses, on the one hand, and empirical evidence on the other'.<sup>128</sup> It requires, as John Tosh echoes, a willingness to 'modify the original objective[s] in the light of the questions which arise directly from the sources'.<sup>129</sup> Of course, this thesis is the end-

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125. *ibid.*, pp. 211, 221 and 224; Windschuttle, *The Killing of History: How a Discipline Is Being Murdered by Literary Critics and Social Theorists*, Sydney, 1994. p. 22;

126. Connell and Irving, *Class Structure in Australian History*, 1992, p. 230; Irving (ed.), *Challenges to Labour History*, p. 6; Frankel, *From the Prophets Deserts Come*, p. 176.

127. J. Sperber, [histjs@showme.missouri.edu] 'Postmodern theory in German history', H-GERMAN, [d.rogers@jaguar1.usouthal.edu], 1 Aug. 1995.

128. E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays*, London, 1978, pp. 230-231.

129. John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History*, London, 1991, p.55.

product of that process rather than an exposition of it. The result is an historical argument interwoven with and generously illustrated by narrative.<sup>130</sup>

Such a history requires wide empirical research, from as many sources as possible, to compensate for the inevitable and acknowledged shortcomings and biases in all evidence.<sup>131</sup> It requires research beyond the traditional documentary sources of union and government records which, as John Shields observes, contain abundant detail on strategies and policies of organisations but reveal far less about how these affected individuals on a day-to-day basis.<sup>132</sup> Nor do they adequately capture the spirit of movement and sense of social purpose which lay behind those strategies and policies. Oral history, albeit distorted by subjectivity, hindsight and amnesia that the historian must acknowledge,<sup>133</sup> can reveal this personal dimension of trade unionism and give the viewpoints of 'insiders' to direct the perspective of the 'outsider' historian.<sup>134</sup> In reflection of class as a relationship, the opinions of employers and, to a lesser extent, those who considered themselves middle class have been sought. Rockhampton's ample supply of newspapers, both conservative and labour in outlook, have also provided a supplement to these sources.

David Plowman rightly makes the point that in studying a broad topic such as unionism, it is tempting to oversimplify its diverse structures, organisation and actions; however, as he emphasises, there is no 'typical' union.<sup>135</sup> Just as differing local conditions produced different experiences for workers and variously coloured their industrial outlook, so too did the wide range of working environments and conditions of employment affect the attitudes, structures and strategies of the various unions. To avoid reductionism, it has been necessary to try to capture the range of difference within generalised patterns and to consult as wide a selection of sources as possible. The records used depended not only on

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130. *ibid.*, p. 231.

131. *ibid.*, p. 66.

132. John Shields, 'Working Life and the Voice of Memory: An Introduction', in John Shields (ed.), *All Our Labours: Oral Histories of Working Life in Twentieth Century Sydney*, Sydney, 1992, p. 2.

133. *ibid.*, p. 3.

134. Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, p. 66.

135. David Plowman, 'Unions and the Industrial Relations Context: An Overview', in Ford and Plowman (eds), *Australian Unions*, p. 6.

the size of the union's membership and the role it played (or did not play) in the local union movement but also on which records are still in existence. Some have been preserved in archives in almost their entirety. Regrettably, many of the smaller unions' records have been lost from the historical record. Even in the WWF, which was a major actor in the local union movement, the pre-1938 minute books fuelled a large bonfire behind Trades Hall in the early 1950s to dispose of the 'old rubbish'—despite the protests of some unionists at the time.<sup>136</sup> Some records, like those of the Rockhampton Trades and Labour Council disappeared during the heated days of the 1950s when conservative forces feared 'the communists' were trying to 'rewrite history'.<sup>137</sup> Other records have been lovingly retained by past officials and, in the case of the Trades Hall Board of Management, have never been subject to outside scrutiny before. Such are the disappointments and delights of historical research.

A history of the establishment, organisation and actions of the union movement and the role of unionism in the lives of local workers can only be adequately observed by taking a long view over many decades. This also reveals the changing nature of the movement which occurred with time. It is also necessary to have a meaningful start and finish. The 1880s and early 1890s are the starting-point in many union histories, particularly those which focus on the political mobilisation of labour after the crushing of industrial unionism in the great strikes of 1891 to 1894.<sup>138</sup> But for urban unions like those in Rockhampton, a more appropriate date is 1907. Until then, only craft unions were in continued existence while the wharf labourers reformed at the turn of the century. From about 1906/7, an upturn in the economy following the end of a severe drought encouraged the reformation of other unions and the emergence of new unions while the number of individual unionists rapidly escalated in Queensland from that date.<sup>139</sup> Politically, a Labor split in state parliament in 1907 saw the working class abandoned by its representatives

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136. Harry Boyd, interviewed 6 Jan. 1999.

137. Evan Schwarten, interviewed 10 May 1996.

138. Markey, *The Making of the Labor Party in New South Wales*, p. 87.

and led to the Australian Labour Federation's inspirational cry of 'Back to the Unions!' from which point, as Doug Hunt argues, unionism 'gathered greater momentum'.<sup>140</sup>

Half a century later in the early to mid-1950s, ideological and sectarian divisions fractured the local union movement and working class. These differences affected individual unions and local peak union bodies as they did elsewhere. This upheaval culminated in a corresponding split in the political wing of the labour movement, the defection of Labor parliamentary representatives; and the defeat of the Queensland Labor government in 1957 after holding office almost continuously since 1915.<sup>141</sup> Thus, unions lost the link with government which was not only integral to the dominant labourist ideology but was by then regarded as the natural state of industrial affairs. From that point, employers succeeded in having workers moved to the less favourable conditions of federal awards. Moreover, this was the end of unionism's synonymity with working-class organisation and blue collar unions, with the ensuing decade bringing the rise of white-collar unionism.<sup>142</sup> In other ways, too, it was the end of an era. Many of the men who nurtured the early union movement and guided its organisational growth and development passed away. It was also a period of new challenges to unionism brought by technological advances. These changes, therefore, provide an appropriate point of closure for the dissertation.

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139. Report of the Registrar of Friendly Societies, Building Societies and Trade Unions, *QPP*, 1908, 2nd Session, Vol. II, p. 17 and 1909, 1st Session, Vol. II, p. 18; Hunt, *A History of the Labour Movement in North Queensland*, p. 21;

140. *Worker*, 22 June 1907; Armstrong, *Closer Unity in the Queensland Trades Union Movement*, pp. 43 and 52; Hunt, *A History of the Labour Movement in North Queensland*, p. 20; J. Brian Dalton, *The Queensland Labour Movement, 1889–1915*, BA Thesis, UQ, 1961, p. 4/1;

141. See, for example, Fitzgerald, *A History of Queensland: From 1915 to the 1980s* and Fitzgerald and Thornton, *Labor in Queensland*.

142. Hagan, in Ford and Plowman (eds), *Australian Unions*, p. 33.

## Aims, Argument and Hypotheses

This history of the union movement in Rockhampton, as a social history employing a loose Thompsonian view of class, attempts to situate itself in the broad social and economic context of the times. It is not an institutional history of any one union or of any peak union body: it is a history of the broad trade union movement in Rockhampton. It explores what motivated Rockhampton workers to establish union organisations to advance and protect their interests; the structural and organisational arrangements made; the ideological battles waged in this cause; and the ways in which unions served workers' interests. It seeks to explain the reasons for these aspirations, actions, successes and failures. The work is not a celebratory history in the old style but encompasses the aspirations and actions of local unionists—their successes and failures—in trying to achieve a better life for local workers.

The thesis is constructed in three parts to reflect the structural and organisational aspects of the movement, the ideological perspectives and the activities undertaken by local unions. Part 1 explores the process of mobilisation in Rockhampton from 1907 to the early 1950s. It discusses reasons for mobilisation, the successful and failed attempts to convert the initial union spirit into formal structures and organisation of local unions and peak union bodies. It also follows and explains the incorporation of individual unions into national amalgamations and federations. This section is more than a mere search for origins as in many traditional union histories. As G.D.H. Cole has observed, 'origins do not explain developments; but developed movements cannot be understood without a knowledge of their origins'.<sup>143</sup> Additionally, the initial section reveals the typical activities in the day-to-day running of the local union. Part 2 looks at the way the union movement was confronted by, and confronted, ideological challenges as to how workers' interests would be best served and how these contestations reflected upon the movement and its

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143. Cole, *Worlds of Labour*, p. 10.

structural forms and organisation to 1957. Part 3 then examines the union movement's endeavours to improve the lot of workers both inside and outside the workplace in its struggle for the 'Grand Cause' of trade unionism.

Finally, the dissertation proposes two related hypotheses. First, it asserts that early union activists in Rockhampton intended unionism to be more than a collection of industrial bodies concerned solely with workplace conditions. They shared a vision of redressing the perceived injustice in workers' lives by bringing positive change both inside and outside the workplace and they endeavoured to establish and maintain effective structures and organisation to do so. Second, over the fifty years of this study, the union movement succeeded in improving and protecting the employment conditions of workers through the exploitation of political and institutional channels and through competent and conservative local leadership. However the higher aspirations of its founders to also create a better life for workers outside the workplace by combined local action were largely defeated by, on a superficial level, economic problems and, at a deeper level, by a sense of class consciousness which was muted by the social and cultural milieu of Rockhampton.