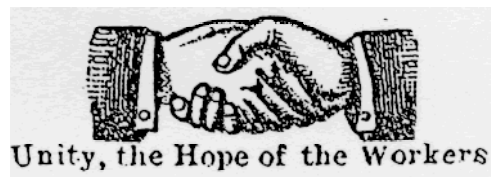


PART 1

Constructing the Framework: Emergence and Development of Local Union Structures and Organisation



Chapter 1

Rekindling the Spirit: Early Development of Unionism in Rockhampton, 1907–1920

The triumphant parade of the Waterside Workers' Federation through Rockhampton streets in 1907 represented but a small part of the renaissance of trade unionism which occurred in Queensland in the first two decades of the twentieth century.¹ During this period, there was a great increase in the number of workers joining unions and in the number of trade unions in existence. Some of these unions were revivals of those which had flourished briefly in the original wave of industrial unionism of the 1880s but had collapsed in the wake of strikes in the early 1890s. However, many more were completely new unions established in sections of the workforce which had never before been organised. After years of suffering from employers dictating exploitative terms of employment, workers at last began to take a stand against what they considered a social injustice. As they had done in the 1880s, a few activists dedicated to the cause of unionism began to campaign among the unskilled and semi-skilled workers who were most vulnerable to exploitation. Their goal was to demand and defend workers' right to a fair day's pay for a fair day's work and for an

1. Denis Murphy, *The Development of the Queensland Labor Movement: A paper delivered at the ACTU Seminar at Emmanuel College, University of Queensland, St Lucia, 17 Aug. 1970*, p. 7; Robert McCaig, *Labour Organisation and Objectives in Queensland, 1890–1920*, BA Thesis, UQ, 1950, p. 91; J.B. Dalton, 'An Interpretative Survey: The Queensland Labour Movement' in Denis Murphy, Roger Joyce and Colin Hughes (eds.), *Prelude to Power: The Rise of the Labour Party in Queensland, 1885–1915*, Brisbane, 1970, p. 21; Denis Murphy, 'The Changing Structure of the Party', in Murphy *et al.*, *Prelude to Power*, p. 101; Rodney Sullivan, *The ALF in Queensland, 1889–1915*, MA Thesis, UQ, 1973, p. 424; John Armstrong, *Closer Unity in the Queensland Trades Union Movement, 1900–1920*, MA Thesis, UQ, 1975, p. 43; Douglas Hunt, *A History of the Labour Movement in North Queensland: Trade Unionism, Politics and Industrial Conflict, 1900–1920*, PhD Thesis, JCU, 1979, p. 22; Peter Sheldon, 'The Missing Nexus? Union Recovery, Growth and Behaviour during the First Decades of Arbitration: Towards a Re-evaluation' *Australian Historical Studies*, No. 104, Apr. 1995, pp. 419 and 433.

improvement in the conditions under which they laboured. The only way to do that effectively was through collective action in the form of organised unionism.

The task of rekindling the spirit of trade unionism in the early twentieth century was not an easy one. For several years, depressed economic conditions, high unemployment and drought militated against any revival of the enthusiasm for unionism. The few workers who continued to advocate union principles suffered personal sacrifice which, rather than blunt their convictions, strengthened their resolve to see justice prevail. It was a quest which they pursued with almost religious zeal but, until the economy improved, their calls for organisation generally fell on fallow ground. Only with an economic upturn, and later with political and legislative changes, could their vision of collective action to address the industrial plight of workers be realised. The process of union mobilisation in Rockhampton was one of struggle and initial setbacks but ultimately one of success. While the 1907 WWF march was the first notable public event in this mobilisation, the roots of the union movement lay in the grievances and injustice of the preceding two decades.

'Freedom of Contract': The Nadir of Unionism

The defeat of unionism in the great maritime strike of 1890 and the pastoral strikes of 1891 and 1894 established for employers the principle of freedom of contract and the practice of hiring non-union labour.² Gone were the agreements on wages and conditions where they had existed; gone were the conditions which had fleetingly made life more tolerable for those fortunate workers; and gone were the unions to protect them against unfair treatment or dismissal. Those unions most adversely affected by the deterioration of employment standards during the 1890s were the newly formed

2. Rodney Sullivan, 'The Maritime Strike, 1890' in Denis Murphy (ed.), *The Big Strikes: Queensland 1889-1965*, St Lucia, 1983, pp. 76 and 77; Rodney and Robyn Sullivan, 'The Pastoral Strikes, 1891 and 1894' in *The Big Strikes*, pp. 80 and 97; Stuart Svensen, *The Shearers' War: The Story of the 1891 Shearers' Strike*, St Lucia, 1989, p. 255; Rick Palmer (ed.), *The Shearers' Strike, 1891-1991: A Celebration*, Rockhampton, 1992, p. 9.

industrial unions which had organised the many unskilled and semi-skilled workers within some sectors during the economic boom of the 1880s.³ Unlike tradesmen in the craft unions, these workers had no specialised skills or qualifications with which to control the labour market and, therefore, to regulate the price of their hiring by employers.

At one of Rockhampton's largest industrial sites, Central Queensland Meat Export Company's Lakes Creek meatworks, hundreds of export meat workers suffered poor pay and conditions after the collapse of unionism there. In 1894, the Amalgamated Slaughtermen and Journeymen Butchers' Union of Rockhampton and the four-year-old Lakes Creek Branch of the Queensland General Labourers' Union had both folded.⁴ The many carters and drivers who worked for the numerous wholesale and retail businesses also did not have any organised voice or protection against possible exploitation following the demise of the Rockhampton Lorry, Dray and Vanmen's Union after the maritime strike of 1890.⁵

Other local unions to collapse in these difficult times were the Woodworkers' Union, the Operative Stonemasons' Union, the Bootmakers' Union, the Queensland Typographical Association, the Draymen's Union and the Saddlers, Collar and Harness Makers' Union. Many of these bodies had formed and flourished in the short summer of union organisation in 1890 when Gilbert Casey of the Australian Labour Federation (ALF), a peak union body established in Brisbane in 1889, had toured provincial regions of the state. Besides establishing unions where none had previously existed, Casey succeeded in effecting the affiliation of about ten local unions with his federation. He also set up a separate Rockhampton District Council of the ALF with a

3. William A. Howard, 'Australian Trade Unions in the Context of Union Theory', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 19, No. 3, Sept. 1977, p. 261.

4. Report of the Registrar of Friendly Societies, Building Societies and Trade Unions for the Year Ended 30 Aug. 1901, *QV&P*, 1901, Vol. 2, p. 56; AMIEU (Qld) Branch, *One Hundred Years of Struggle and Change*, Spring Hill, 1988, p. 4.

5. Bradley Bowden, *Driving Force: The History of the Transport Workers' Union of Australia, 1883-1992*, St Leonards, 1993, pp. 22 and 24. Bowden refers to this body as the Lorry, Van and Draymen's Union.

combined membership of about 500 men.⁶ When these infant unions and other longer-established bodies began to wither from the competition of non-union labour during and after the strikes of the early 1890s, the council also collapsed.⁷

On the waterfront, unionism had also floundered when the ten-year-old Rockhampton Wharf Labourers' Union dissolved in 1892.⁸ Some of the dedicated members formed themselves into an Associated Workers' Union whose focus was political activism rather than industrial organisation. This body also apparently folded in 1894 and individual members continued their involvement through the newly established Rockhampton Workers' Political Organisation (WPO), part of the early Labor Party support structure.⁹ For the next four or five years, unionism was 'practically dead' but a spark of enthusiasm for specific industrial organisation remained alive among a small core of committed wharfies. On several occasions over the next few years, they attempted to re-form a union to combat the 'fleecing' by shipping companies who, according to the men, were determined to recoup losses suffered in the maritime strike. Their efforts failed but continued reductions in their wages of up to a half and 'persistent persecution' by employers at last drew more than just the usual 'subdued grumbling' from the bulk of the wharfies. They finally supported collective action in 1899. The wharf labourers' delegates gained some concessions from employers with the assistance of one of the Labor members for Rockhampton, William Kidston.¹⁰ From this initial action, the union movement in Rockhampton slowly smouldered into life.

Their success encouraged the wharfies to formally establish the Rockhampton Waterside Union later that year. The new body boasted a membership of 87 out of a

6. *Brisbane Courier*, 10 July 1890, p. 5; 16 July 1890, p. 5; 17 July 1890, p. 5 and 17 Oct. 1890, p. 5.

7. Sullivan, *The ALF in Queensland*, pp. 211. 212 and 213.

8. Report of the Registrar of Friendly Societies, Building Societies and Trade Unions for the Year Ended 31 Aug. 1900, *QV&P*, 1900, Vol. 5, p. 53.

9. Sullivan, *The ALF in Queensland*, pp. 212-213; *Worker*, 3 and 10 Sept. 1892 and 11 Mar. 1893.

10. *Waterside Workers' Gazette*, 31 Aug. 1906, p. 5; *Worker*, 10 Oct. 1908, p. 9. The nature of the concessions was not specified. At the time, Rockhampton was a dual constituency.

labour force of about 110 men and registered under the *Trade Unions Act, 1886* in 1900.¹¹ Despite rising unemployment during the severe drought and victimisation of its leaders by employers, the union pressed for and won overtime rates for Sunday work and basic amenities such as a shelter shed on the wharf.¹² By 1902, the union gained recognition from shipping companies and it adopted the policy of refusing to work with non-unionists.¹³ Even so, in the tight labour market which prevailed, both steamship companies and their local agents often chose not to employ 'troublemakers' like union secretary, Ernest Purnell, and president, Jack Burke.¹⁴ In the same year, local wharfies joined kindred waterside unions throughout the nation in the Waterside Workers' Federation of Australia (WWF).¹⁵

While the new industrial unionism of unskilled and semi-skilled workers had collapsed in the 1890s, the older-established craft unions of tradesmen continued. Their aloofness to unskilled workers, rigorous control of membership and apprenticeships, and maintenance of trade standards set craft unions well apart from industrial unionism and the militancy with which the newer unions had unsuccessfully confronted employers. Their usual choice of the term 'society' rather than 'union' reflected this distinction. Of the numerous craft bodies in the city, two predominated: the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners (ASCJ) and the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE).

The ASCJ, which had 'its home wherever British subjects were found', maintained a strong membership among the many carpenters employed in the railway workshops and in the private construction industry. The society met quarterly in the Old Masonic Hall and had been under the watchful eye of its president, Alfred Godfrey,

11. *Worker*, 10 Oct. 1908, p. 9; Report of the Registrar of Friendly Societies, Building Societies and Trade Unions for the Year Ended 30 Sept. 1905, *QPP*, 1905, Vol. 1, p. 34; Trade Unions Act, 1886 (50 Vic., No. 29), *Queensland Statutes*, 1889, Vol. 2, pp. 2477-2484. This act legalised the formation of Trade Unions.

12. *Worker*, 11 Mar. 1905, p. 7 and 25 Mar. 1905, p. 7.

13. *ibid.*, 10 Oct. 1908, p. 9.

14. *ibid.*, 25 Mar. 1905, p. 7.

15. *ibid.*, 10 Oct. 1908, p. 9.

for many years.¹⁶ The largest craft union, the ASE, encompassed most of the skilled metal tradesmen in the railway workshops and in the various engineering workshops as well as mechanics in motor garages and cycle shops. The ASE had established a Rockhampton branch as early as 1888 and, like the ASCJ, was proud of its traditions and continued links with Britain.¹⁷ Because of their trade qualifications, members of the ASCJ and ASE were more protected from employer exploitation than were labourers but even these workers felt they were being sold short on their skills. The Brisbane ASE secretary, speaking for Queensland members, complained that 'never having had a fight' in the past because employers had granted all reforms asked for 'with very little demur', they now deserved more recompense for the demands of the new technologies in the workplace. They felt it was time to confront employers on the matter of employment terms and conditions¹⁸ just as did some of the unskilled workers. The hard economic times also adversely affected tradesmen. The Government Labour Bureau report for 1903 listed engineers and metal workers as prominent amongst the workers affected by the severe unemployment.¹⁹

Other unions still existed in the railway besides the ASE and ASCJ. Most were small sectional bodies which catered for semi-skilled workers in particular occupations such as the Locomotive Engine-Drivers, Guards or Goods Office clerks. The largest union was the Central Queensland Railway Employees' Association (CQREA) which began in the late 1880s as an 'all-grade' industrial union to cater for railway workers who did not qualify for membership of craft or sectional unions; however, the union had gradually atrophied due to the punitive powers and actions of the Railway Department against 'troublesome' union activists.²⁰ Because of the sub-division of the state into three railway administrations, the CQREA was a separate entity from its counterparts in the northern and southern divisions. While these latter unions stirred

16. *Critic*, 30 June 1911.

17. Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU), *Souvenir 25th Anniversary of the AEU in Australia, 1920--1945*, Sydney, 1945, p.63. AMWU Brisbane

18. *Worker*, 7 Nov. 1908, p. 9.

19. Report for 1901 of the Officer in Charge, Government Labour Bureau and Relief, *QPP*, 1902, Vol. 1, p. 16.

20. *Critic*, 12 May 1905.

themselves into action again in 1905 over grievances about appeals, pays and the eight-hour working day,²¹ the CQREA could not gather the strength to join the protest. The local pro-labour weekly, the *Critic*, denounced the CQREA and smaller railway unions for their lack of activity and failure to be of 'real, tangible benefit to members from the point of view of industrial unionism'. It branded them 'unions in name only'.²²

Such was the almost moribund state of unionism in Rockhampton to 1906. Apart from the WWF, there was really no active industrial organisation in the city. Craft unionism protected the exclusive workplace interests of tradesmen and railway unions catered for their members where they could against the punitive power and control of the administration. The *Critic* decried the profound apathy of the bulk of the workers and called for a revival of union activity, both locally and across the state. In an impassioned leading article, the editor declared 'we want the old-time enthusiasm back again...without Unionism and Organisation, the Movement will be inert, limp and useless'.²³

At the time, two well-publicised court actions against unions for allegedly conspiring against non-unionists would have dampened the desire of many workers for forming or even joining a union. Both the relevant unions lost their cases and suffered heavy damages, with one folding as a result.²⁴ Only the WWF had the organisation, confidence and funds to donate £5 to each of these beleaguered unions.²⁵ The old-time enthusiasm of the 1880s—the spirit of unionism—for which the *Critic* called had to await a more conducive economic climate to spring to life in other industries and to be transformed into effective union organisation there. High ideals for organising workers were commendable but they were also quite impractical when there were comparatively

21. Tim Moroney, 'All-Grade Railway Unionism: History of Its Early Struggles', *Railway Advocate*, Feb. 1966, p. 1. This serialised article was originally published in the *Daily Standard* circa 1922.

22. *Critic*, 12 May 1905.

23. *ibid.*, 4 May 1906 and 7 July 1906.

24. Heggie v. Brisbane Shipwrights' Provident Union and Standley v. Queensland Typographical Association. *Worker*, 17 Mar. 1906 and 31 Mar. 1906; S.K. Proctor, 'Brisbane Unionism and the Plumbers' Union, 1904–1915', in Murphy *et al.*, *Prelude to Power*, p. 143.

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

few people in employment to organise and those who did join a union could easily be sacked for their actions.

Economic Recovery and Union Growth

The severe drought which had crippled Queensland for the preceding eight years broke in the summers of 1902 and 1903.²⁶ The repeated failure of wet seasons had not only severely curtailed pastoral and agricultural production but had also restricted local and southern manufacturing through shortages of raw materials.²⁷ As a major river port for Queensland coastal shipping, Rockhampton depended upon the export of

Table 1: Rockhampton Port Trade - 1898-1908

Year	Imports (£)	Exports (£)	Total Trade (£)
1899	702,336	2,390,380	3,092,716
1900	663,252	2,105,793	2,769,045
1901	419,736	1,445,663	1,865,399
1902	504,088	1,337,874	1,841,962
1903	411,794	1,315,057	1,726,851
1904	346,989	Not available	Not available
1905	437,068	1,708,489	2,145,557
1906	472,397	1,834,155	2,306,552
1907	596,488	2,140,300	2,736,788
1908	738,372	2,289,835	3,028,207

Source: Statistics for the State of Queensland, *QPP*, 1902, Vol. 2, p. 51; 1906, Vol. 1, p. 51 and 1911-12, Vol. 1, p. 27b.

26. Commonwealth Bureau of Meteorology, *Results of Rainfall Observations Made in Queensland from 1840 to 1913*, Melbourne, 1914, pp. 28-29.

27. John Lavery, 'The Queensland Economy, 1860-1915', in Murphy *et al.*, *Prelude to Power*, p. 40.

hinterland produce and the importation of manufactured goods. The drought certainly took its toll on Rockhampton trade, as the port statistics for the period indicate. Only gold and copper mining at nearby Mount Morgan continued much as usual.²⁸ A government report for 1901 considered the port was at 'complete standstill' and, over the next two years, economic conditions sank further to 'one of the worst experienced' in Queensland's history.²⁹ Despite below-average rainfalls again in 1904 and 1905,³⁰ primary production improved by 1907 and enough prosperity existed to ensure there was plentiful labouring work available. The Labour Bureau reported that year that 'the City of Rockhampton is more prosperous than it has been for some time past' and the excess of 752 job-seekers in 1903 had been almost totally removed by 1907.³¹ Similarly, the annual amount of government relief for the unemployed and destitute had fallen from a peak of £401 8s 4d in 1903 to only £51 2s 1d.³² Once the 'spectre of unemployment' cast by the economic downturn had passed and employers were keen to hire every available worker to tap the renewed prosperity,³³ employees had less to fear by forming unions and asserting their demands. Under these more favourable labour market conditions, unionism began to spread unhindered across Queensland. In some New South Wales unions as well, there was significant growth from this time.³⁴

28. Glen Lewis, *A History of the Ports of Queensland: A Study in Economic Nationalism*, St Lucia, 1973, p. 134.

29. Report for 1901 of the Officer in Charge, Labour Bureau and Relief for 1901, *QV&P*, 1902, Vol. 2, p. 9; Report of the Chief Inspector of Factory and Shops for the Year 1903, *QPP*, 1904, Vol.2, p. 15.

30. CBM, *Results of Rainfall Observations*, pp. 30-31.

31. Report of the Director of Labour and Chief Inspector of Factories and Shops for the Year ended June 1907, *QPP*, 1907, Vol. 2, pp. 2 and 26; Report of the Officer in Charge, Government Labour Bureau, 1903, and Relief for 1903-4, *QPP*, 1904-5, Vol. 2, p. 8.

32. Report of the Officer in Charge, Government Labour Bureau, 1903, and Relief for 1903-4, *QPP*, 1904-5, Vol. 2, p. 10; Report of the Officer in Charge, Government Relief, for 1907, *QPP*, 1908, 2nd Session, Vol. 2, p. 1.

33. J.Brian Dalton, *Queensland Labour Movement, 1889-1915*, BA Thesis, UQ, 1961, p. 4/1; Hunt, *A History of the Labour Movement in North Queensland*, p. 23.

34. Sheldon, 'The Missing Nexus?' p. 431.

Table 2: Queensland Trade Union Growth - 1900-1923

Year	No. of Unions registered under <i>The Trade Unions Act of 1886</i>	Registered Membership	Year	No. of Unions as listed in <i>C'wealth Lab. & Ind. Reports</i>	Male Membership (aged 20 years and over)
1900			1912	67	44,768
1901	17	4,590	1913	94	51,683
1902	16	4,582	1914	86	55,580
1903	17	4,901	1915	89	58,310
1904	18	5,278	1916	93	66,807
1905	19	6,297	1917	96	75,393
1906	20	8,332	1918	102	87,737
1907	25	11,236	1919	106	97,378
1908	32	14,980	1920	115	103,784
1909	33	16,423	1921	118	103,786
1910	37	18,522	1922	118	100,939
1911	29	20,000 approx	1923	119	109,153

Sources: Report of the Director of Friendly Societies, Building Societies and Trade Unions, *QV&P*, 1900, Vol. 5, p. 17-18; 1901, Vol. 2, p. 18; *QPP*, 1902, Vol. 1, p. 19; 1903, Vol. 2, p. 15; 1904/5, Vol. 2, p. 17; 1905, Vol. 1, p. 17; 1906, Vol. 1, p. 17; 1908, 1st Session, Vol. 1, p.19; 1908, 2nd Session, Vol. 2, p. 17; 1909, 1st Session, Vol. 2, p. 19; 1910, Vol. 2, p.19; 1911-12, Vol. 2, 1911, p. 19; *Commonwealth Labour and Industry Report No.11*, 1921, p.10 and *Report No. 14*, 1924, p. 123.

The Registrar of Friendly Societies, Building Societies and Trade Unions commented in his 1907 annual report that 'undoubtedly there has been a very considerable increase of late' in unionism and that membership and finances had more than doubled during the previous three years. In 1908, he observed that the returns again reflected 'considerable expansion and extended organisation'.³⁵ As the registrar himself admitted, the official figures did not give the full picture of union growth because many unions did not bother with the voluntary registration while some of the larger unions discontinued their initial registration. However, the more reliable

35. Report of the Registrar of Friendly Societies, Building Societies and Trade Unions for the Year ended 30 Sept. 1907, *QPP*, 1st Session, 1908, Vol. 1, p. 17 and 1st Session, 1909, Vol. 2, p. 18.

commonwealth records, issued after 1912, demonstrate strong growth in unionism in Queensland to the early 1920s.

The improved economic climate stimulated membership growth in the local WWF after fluctuations in the early years. From a peak of 191 during the euphoria of re-formation in 1900, membership plummeted to only 130 the following year and remained low as the drought set in and port activities declined.³⁶ Many men drifted onto and off the wharves in search of work and membership waxed and waned until 1905 when trade

Table 3: Rockhampton WWF Membership - 1899-1907

Year	Admitted	Left	Balance
1899			86 [#]
1900	219	114	191
1901	48	109	130
1902	76	65	141
1903	39	57	123
1904	48	38	133
1905	64	50	147
1906	Not available	Not available	176
1907	Not available	Not available	293 [*]

[#] Secretary indicated 87 in the *Worker*.

^{*} Cancelled registration 10 Dec. 1907.

Sources: Report of the Registrar of Friendly Societies, Building Societies and Trade Unions, *QV&P*, 1901, Vol. 2, p. 58; *QPP*, 1902, Vol. 1, p. 38; 1903, Vol. 2, p. 34; 1904/5, Vol. 2, p. 36; 1905, Vol. 1, p. 36; 1906, Vol. 1, p. 37; 1908, 1st Session, Vol. 1, p. 37; and 1908, 2nd Session, Vol. 2, p. 35.

picked up.³⁷ As waterfront employment opportunities increased and labour supply became shorter, the diminished likelihood of discrimination by the foreman at the daily

36. Report of the Registrar of Friendly Societies, Building Societies and Trade Unions for the Year ended 31 Aug. 1900, *QV&P*, 1901, Vol. 2, p. 58 and for the Year ended 31 Aug. 1902, 1902, Vol. 1, p. 38.

37. Armstrong, *Closer Unity in the Queensland Trades Union Movement*, pp. 25, 28 and 41 argues that the 'breaking-of-the-drought thesis is too simplistic and cannot explain what he sees as the 'steady, uninterrupted growth' of Queensland unionism from 1902. While he considers these increases were largely in western pastoral areas, he also believes they occurred among the waterside workers and Amalgamated Society of Engineers. Yet

labour pickup facilitated union growth. The union's policy of only working with union labour also assisted the growth of membership. Even in these early years of union expansion, the punishment for not embracing the cause was made as patently clear to workers as were the benefits to be gained by joining.

The better economic times and growth in membership emboldened the WWF to push for a formal industrial agreement with the shipping companies on more just rates of pay. In 1905, the secretary proudly claimed to other Queensland unionists in the ALF's weekly paper, the *Worker*:

the trade of the port was now recovering after three years' of drought and work became more plentiful. Our members consequently began to think they had a right to share in the prosperity. So they drafted a fair rate of increased pay...[and]...after a tough fight of three meetings our present agreement was fixed for two years from May 1, 1907.³⁸

The early rewards reaped by the WWF owe much to the union spirit and organisational zeal of one man in particular, Ernest Bracher Purnell, secretary of the Rockhampton branch from 1900 to 1938 and Queensland secretary from 1920 to 1938.³⁹ Commonly referred to as 'E.B.' and, particularly in his later years, as 'Pa' by all in the local union movement, Purnell's vision of unionism's role in improving the employment conditions of workers and his activism in inter-union affairs deservedly attracted to him the epithet of 'father of the Rockhampton union movement'.⁴⁰ His dedication to working-class interests and mobilisation through both unionism and Labor politics also secured him a position in the Queensland Legislative Council from 1917 until its abolition by the Labor government in 1922.⁴¹ Largely because of his efforts and the support of keen followers, the WWF served as the nucleus for a wider resurgence of unionism in

the pattern of recovery demonstrated by the Rockhampton wharf union and the high unemployment among metal tradesmen refutes his argument for Rockhampton at least. However, he correctly points out that economic recovery cannot *fully* explain the dramatic increases in unionism after 1906 and that other factors must be considered as well.

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

39. Frank Nolan, *You Pass This Way Only Once: Reflections of a Trade Union Leader*, Brisbane, 1974, p. 62. As Chapter 7 will explain, the various WWF branches in Queensland ports formed a quasi Queensland Branch in 1920 for the purpose of gaining a state industrial award.

40. *MB*, 27 July 1954, p. 3.

41. Duncan B. Waterson, *Biographical Register of the Queensland Parliament, 1860–1929*, Canberra, 1972, p. 154.

Rockhampton when more favourable economic times returned and when other union leaders keen to spread the word toured the state on the union crusade. However, proselytising in the name of unionism was not always an easy task.

'Spreading the Gospel': Travelling Union Officials.

In the latter half of 1906, the Melbourne-based general secretary of the WWF, Joe Morris, set about reorganising and reinvigorating the Queensland wharf unions, including the branch in Rockhampton.⁴² Morris was not the first southern official to visit the provincial districts on a union crusade, however. From 1902, other promoters had toured Queensland eager to spread the 'Gospel of Unionism'.⁴³ These missionary-unionists sought to rebuild the dormant union movement into the industrial force it had been two decades earlier by reviving unionism where it had lapsed and by bringing the good news to all the workers who had never before been organised.

In January 1902, Albert Hinchcliffe had campaigned on behalf of the ALF.⁴⁴ Although the Rockhampton District Council of the ALF was defunct by 1892, the parent body continued with support from waterside workers, seamen and pastoral workers in the original Australian Workers' Union.⁴⁵ By 1902, the ALF was endeavouring to re-establish its power and influence by encouraging individual Queensland wharf unions to federate with kindred southern unions.⁴⁶ Hinchcliffe did not specifically target waterfront employment problems or present them with any concrete solutions to their present predicament but his visit probably inspired them to

42. *Worker*, 22 Sept. 1906, p. 7; Hunt, *A History of the Labour Movement in North Queensland*, p. 103.

43. *Worker*, 6 June 1908, p. 2; Armstrong, *Closer Unity in the Queensland Trades Union Movement*, abstract.

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

45. Vere Gordon Childe, *How Labour Governs: A Study of Workers' Representation in Australia*, (1923), Melbourne, 1964, p. 99; *Worker*, 10 Oct. 1908, p. 9; Winifred Mitchell, *Wharf Labourers, Their Unionism and Leadership, 1872–1916*, PhD Thesis, UNSW, 1973, p. 288.

46. Childe, *How Labour Governs*, p. 99; *Worker*, 10 Oct. 1908, p. 9.

continue to organise locally. Despite the worsening drought and decreased port trade that year, the Rockhampton union membership increased.⁴⁷

Irrespective of any possible positive influence Hinchcliffe might have had on WWF numbers during his 1902 visit, by 1905, they were still only 'partially organised...[with]...room for much improvement in their own interests', as was also the case with wharfies in other Queensland ports. This was the opinion of renowned English union organiser and socialist crusader, Tom Mann, who visited Rockhampton on a national promotional tour that year.⁴⁸ Hinchcliffe's influence could not have extended beyond the wharves either because Mann considered that 'industrial organisation was [still] at a very low ebb' here, as it was in other centres he visited.⁴⁹

By the time Joe Morris arrived in Rockhampton in 1907, improved trade and employment prospects created a more favourable climate than that experienced by Hinchcliffe in 1902. Morris received a tumultuous welcome from Rockhampton wharfies, being greeted as both a friend and long-awaited saviour. He wrote in the *Waterside Workers' Gazette* of his visit to Rockhampton after a four-hour trip up-river from the coastal steamer:

I had corresponded with E.B. Purnell for years and knew him through his letters. I now saw him face to face...At last we arrive at the wharf, jump ashore and get some dinner, then down to the meeting-rooms where I got a grand reception. Every man seemed as though he had known me for years. We spent the afternoon talking about the Federation. Every time I wanted to cry 'Enough', they did cry more, for they said it might be a long time before they saw me again. So I had to go on and on, and we finished at 6 o'clock just in time for tea...I left some real good friends there, whom I hope to meet again some day if the Fates are kind to me.⁵⁰

The main reason why Morris's trip was so successful was that, unlike Hinchcliffe and Mann, Morris specifically addressed the nature and conditions of wharf work. He gave the men practical guidance in confronting their particular problems and in organising

47. *ibid.*, 10 Oct. 1908, p. 9.

48. *ibid.*, 27 May 1905, p. 6.

49. *ibid.*

50. *Waterside Workers' Gazette*, 29 Sept. 1906, p. 5.

their union affairs rather than simply espousing general union principles. Morris's visit produced a dramatic increase in membership of the local branch by 1907, assisted of course by the brisker port trade. So busy did the affairs of the branch become that the union appointed 'Pa' Purnell its first permanent full-time secretary later that year, an initiative probably suggested by Morris.⁵¹ Perhaps the new banner and May Day march that year also owed something to Morris's inspirational visit.



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

Shortly after Joe Morris's tour, the export meatworkers at Lakes Creek welcomed another southern organiser keen to spread the good news exclusively among members of one industry. The return to prosperity and expanded regional trade in the export beef and mutton industries greatly facilitated his task as it did for Morris.⁵² John T. (Jack) Gilday, appointed secretary of the newly reformed Brisbane Butchers' Employees' Union in 1906, toured the state in 1907 to build a union that would incorporate all sections of the industry, with a particular emphasis on organising large export sheds like that operated at Lakes Creek.⁵³ Interest in unionism was already awakening there—perhaps as a result of the WWF's example—with workers contacting the new Brisbane union for guidance on organising.⁵⁴ So with little difficulty, Gilday succeeded 'in bringing the men into line' by establishing a local sub-branch of the Australasian Federated Butchers' Employees' Union (AFBEU). The men elected young Henry (Harry) Longley as honorary secretary and delegate to the state body.⁵⁵

The works manager, George B. Hopper, boasted that he opposed neither Gilday's entry to the works nor the formation of a branch there. He also verbally agreed to recognise the union.⁵⁶ This situation contrasted markedly with the hostile reception Gilday's assistant, W.R. (Jack) Crampton, received from management when he attempted to organise the two Townsville export sheds the following year.⁵⁷ Gilday also succeeded in drawing up an industrial agreement between the union and management. In place of the existing contract system, both parties signed an agreement that included an eight-hour day, pay rates based on a fixed kill rate and certain specified holidays.⁵⁸

52. Hunt, *A History of the Labour Movement in North Queensland*, p. 109; *MB*, 7 Aug. 1907, p. 4.

53. AMIEU, *One Hundred Years of Struggle and Change*, p. 5. Gilday had been identified by Tom Mann during his 1905 Queensland visit as the best man 'to build the union' in Brisbane at the request of the Victorian meat union which had survived from the 1890s.

54. *Worker*, 20 Sept. 1906, p.7; *MB*, 5 Sept. 1907, p. 6.

55. *Worker*, 24 Oct. 1908, p. 9.

56. *MB*, 3 Sept. 1907, p. 6;

57. *ibid.*; Childe, *How Labour Governs*, p. 117; Hunt, *A History of the Labour Movement in North Queensland*, p. 110.

58. *MB*, 3 Sept. 1907, p. 6. At that time, a gang consisted of four butchers and eight skilled labourers. With additional semi-skilled labour, it took 30 men to slaughter (but not process) 100 cattle per day. The maximum capacity of the works was 300 cattle and 3000 sheep per day in 1907. Central Queensland Meat Export Company, *Chronological History of the Lakes Creek Meatworks*, Rockhampton, 1971, p. 4.

According to Gilday, the new terms were a vast improvement on the previous employment conditions although they still 'did not place them in an exemplary position as workers'.⁵⁹

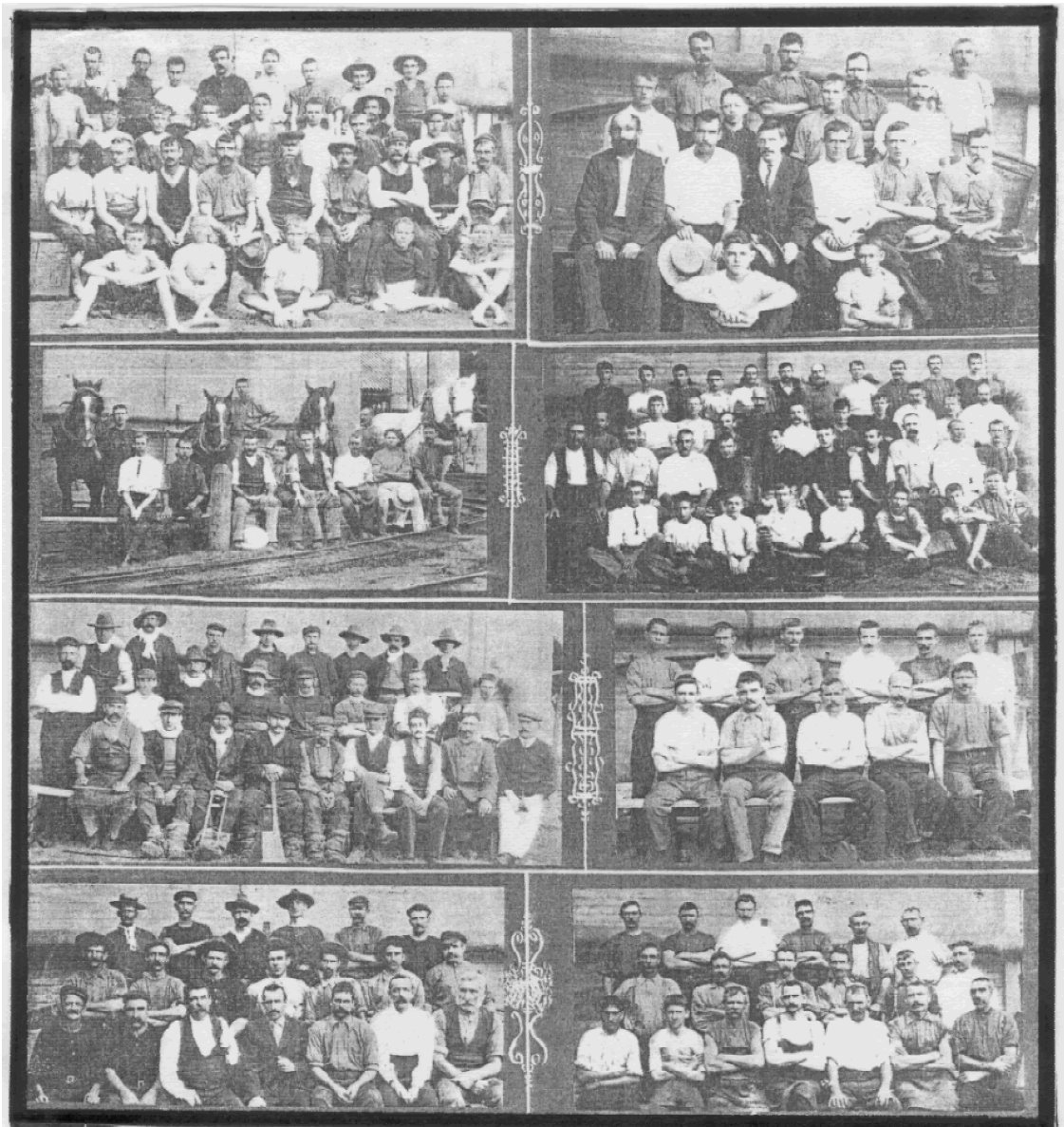


Fig. 10: Employees of CQME Coy's Lakes Creek Meatworks, 1908, including all those unionised by Jack Gilday the previous year
Queensland Country Life, May, 1908, p. 57

59. *Worker*, 24 Oct. 1908, p. 9.

Within one month of the agreement's operation, a dispute arose which tested the union's resolve to adhere to its principles when management decided to reduce the size of beef butchering gangs to prolong the killing season. The ensuing strike provoked the comment from Hopper that he believed in unions but 'not those that went too far' by striking. He insisted he had the right to employ only what labour he considered necessary for operations, just as he had done in previous years. Moreover, he claimed there was still enough non-union labour to keep the plant operational on his terms.⁶⁰ In a letter to the *Morning Bulletin*, Harry Longley claimed that management was 'openly and wilfully violating' the agreement by refusing to divide available work equally amongst the men as they believed was both just and implicit in the agreement.⁶¹ He vehemently denounced the hiring of 'scabs', even if they were paid at union rates.⁶² After ten days, the union backed down in defeat. Management reinstated the striking unionists as promised but only as and when it required labour. Hopper explained to the press that the men had put a wrong interpretation on a clause and that when Gilday had explained this to them, the dispute had been resolved in a 'strictly honourable and courteous manner'.⁶³

The continued existence of free labour meant that Gilday had not been entirely successful in organising the Rockhampton export shed. Nor could his organising efforts overcome the management's ability to withstand strike action. In contrast to the Rockhampton position, the risk of loss of a highly perishable commodity through strikes in North Queensland export sheds encouraged management there to oppose unionism. When the union had control of the sheds, it could and did adopt an aggressive policy towards employers because it possessed a 'powerful weapon' in striking.⁶⁴ Of the two Townsville meatworks to 1912 at least, Ross River had only 'somewhat hand-to-mouth storage' requiring frequent shipping while Alligator Creek

60. *MB*, 3 Sept. 1907, p. 6;

61. *Worker*, 7 Sept. 1907, p. 7.

62. *MB*, 5 Sept. 1907, p. 6.

63. *ibid.*, 10 Sept. 1907, p. 6.

64. Hunt, *A History of the Labour Movement in North Queensland*, pp. 109-110; Dawn May, *Arctic Regions in a Torrid Zone: The Ross River Meatworks, 1892-1992*, Townsville, 1992, pp. 51 and 53.

In this era of renewed union fervour, the ALF again undertook intensive efforts to campaign throughout Queensland in 1908. The ALF's strength had been boosted by the affiliation of the recently formed Amalgamated Workers' Association (AWA) in the mining camps of North Queensland⁶⁷ and, as subsequent discussion will reveal, its renewed campaign gained increased impetus from a political crisis in the Labor Party that year. In the Central Queensland region, Albert Hinchcliffe and accompanying Labor parliamentarians preached the message of unionism to railway construction workers in the Boyne Valley to the south of Gladstone. All along the Boyne Valley line, the crusaders had 'a successful mission'.⁶⁸

Most of the pioneering in coastal Queensland, however, fell to the ALF's travelling organiser, Charles Collins. His early endeavours seem to have had success in urging existing unions into renewed activity and in organising small groups of unattached rural workers into various General Workers' Unions.⁶⁹ He established a union after 'storming' Mount Morgan where he argued that the newly formed Fitzroy Miners' Union was not serving the interests of other workers.⁷⁰ Following this success, Collins held an 'enthusiastic' gathering of gold miners at Mount Chalmers, to the north-east of Rockhampton. There he formed another General Workers' Union with about 50 members and a committee of nine which he left to draft its own set of rules.⁷¹ Unfortunately, both the enthusiasm and the union were short-lived and, by 1909, there were reports of trying to revive 'defunct' unionism in the camp.⁷²

Collins's other proselytising efforts in the immediate district appear to have had little success, even though he preached to those men whose wages he considered were

67. Childe, *How Labour Governs*, p. 99.

68. *Worker*, 17 Oct. 1908, p. 13.

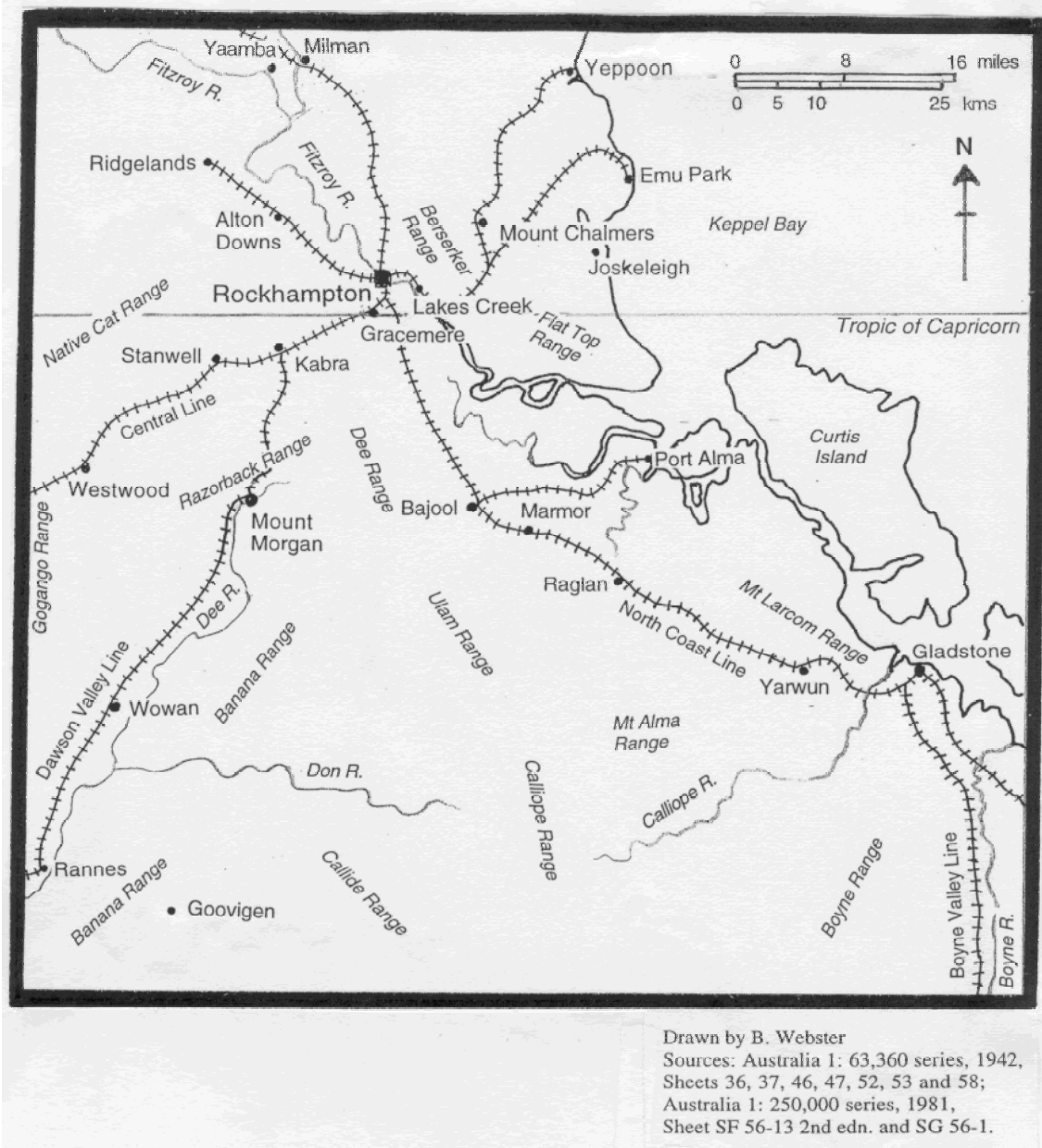
69. *ibid.*, 20 June 1908, p. 14 and 24 Oct. 1908, p. 9; Armstrong, *Closer Unity in the Queensland Trades Union Movement*, pp. 53-54.

70. *Worker*, 28 Mar. 1908, p. 8.

71. *ibid.*, 23 May 1908, p. 5 and 30 May 1908, p. 9.

72. *ibid.*, 20 Feb. 1909, p. 16.

Map 2: Rockhampton and District



unacceptably low and were, in his opinion, in great need of rescuing through organising. Unlike ALF efforts among Boyne Valley railway construction workers, Collins could not rouse any interest among the railway navvies at New Zealand Gully who were extending the track from the Rockhampton-Emu Park line to Mount Chalmers mine.⁷³ He also failed to enthuse the 120 workers at the Rockhampton Harbour Board quarry the following month despite a well-attended on-site meeting. Later that week he had a 'good roll up to hear the Gospel of Unionism' at Marmor limestone quarry to the south of Rockhampton. There was plenty of applause for the entertainment but, once again,

73. *ibid.*, 30 May 1908, p. 9.

the men were not interested in forming a union.⁷⁴ His Lakes Creek meeting, advertised with the permission of the Company, did not even attract a crowd out of mere curiosity.⁷⁵

This last failure astounded Collins because, in his opinion, the labourers at the meatworks needed a union separate from that of the butchers. He claimed they had received only 6d increase to bring their wage to 5s 6d per day. This was still less than half the top rate for butchers.⁷⁶ Collins made no reference to the AFBEU, despite its nine months' existence at the works, but he obviously felt the meatworkers' union was not serving the interests of general labourers in the industry. In contrast to the apathetic turnout for Collins, AFBEU assistant secretary and newly appointed organiser, Jack Crampton, received a rousing welcome the following month on his way to North Queensland to campaign for the establishment of the AFBEU in the various meatworks there.⁷⁷

The ALF crusade of Collins, like that of Hinchcliffe before him, was largely a failure in Rockhampton and district for three reasons. First, the ALF's campaign did not embrace the large number of skilled and semi-skilled urban workers in craft and sectional unions or associations, however ineffective those bodies might have been. It also overlooked the many unskilled urban workers whom unionism had not yet reached and targeted instead the comparatively few rural and mining workers throughout the district. When organisers did visit the city itself, they either preached to the converted like the WWF or attempted to encroach on previously organised territory such as the meatworks, rather than break entirely new ground among, for example, warehouse and factory employees. To ALF missionaries, Rockhampton was largely an overnight train stop en route to the greener crusading fields in the pastoral West and in the agricultural and mining areas of North.

74. *ibid.*, 6 June 1908, p. 2.

75. *ibid.*

76. *ibid.*

77. *ibid.*, 29 Aug. 1908, p. 7.

Second, amongst workers in outlying areas, the 'convert-and-pass-on' method left too much responsibility and too little guidance for actual organisation unless there was an experienced and motivated unionist permanently present. This was clearly demonstrated at Mount Chalmers where Collins had set up a General Workers' Union. The body had disintegrated by the time gold miner Daniel Dowling arrived with prior experience as a union official in Gympie. When asked by miners why the previous body 'had been allowed to become defunct', Dowling pointed out that a union was what the members themselves made of it; it could not function by itself. After a stirring address by Dowling exceeding an hour's duration, the miners agreed to form an All Workers' Union under his direction. When Dowling left Mount Chalmers to become a wharf worker in Rockhampton sometime later, however, the union again collapsed.⁷⁸ In reflection of these failures in the district, Collins pessimistically expressed the opinion that to make unionism a success in the Rockhampton region, it would require an organiser to be constantly at work.⁷⁹

Third, the ALF's generalised push for unionism meant it did not address specific workplace concerns as did Gilday and Crampton of the AFBEU and Morris of the WWF. In contrast to the failure of the ALF to generate much sustained union growth in Rockhampton, the efforts of AFBEU and WWF travelling officials had a marked effect in either establishing or strengthening two key local unions. At the same time, though, even their crusading would have been thwarted had not the drought and consequent high unemployment in these industries ended beforehand. Ultimately, the reasons for the failure of the ALF's efforts in the Rockhampton region were, like their goals, political as well as organisational.

78. *ibid.*, 20 Feb. 1909, p. 16; *Critic*, 23 Sept. 1910; *DR*, 12 Aug. 1911, p. 7.

79. *Worker*, 20 Mar. 1909, p. 5.

'Back to the Unions': The 1907 Labor Split

In 1907, a political crisis occurred in Queensland that brought forth an appeal for workers to return to unionism as their champion of reform and to abandon the hope they had placed in politics after the failure of union action in the 1890s. It was ALF secretary Albert Hinchcliffe's rallying cry of 'Back to the Unions' that inspired apostles like Charles Collins to revive the ALF and to spread its gospel of 'political unionism' throughout the state.⁸⁰ The biblical rhetoric of the *Worker* inspired them thus:

It is in Unionism we sow the seed for Labour-in-politics. From Unionism, sown in the hearts and intellects of the people, will come a harvest of good things for the legislative sickle. By the unity of the working classes we hope for all that we have dreamt [*sic*] in our fairest dreams of justice and fraternalism. Sow the seed of Unionism assiduously! Never mind how unpromising the soil may seem...Sow the seed though the ground appear barren, for by such sowing the most visionary expectations shall be realised in returns of abundant fertility.⁸¹

Only a brief discussion of the background of this situation is necessary to explain its effect on unionism in Rockhampton but it is nonetheless a crucial point because the instigator of the crisis was one of the two Labor members for Rockhampton and later Queensland premier, William Kidston. In 1905, Kidston had defied the Labor Party by refusing to sign its socialist objective and to reaffirm its electoral platform. In the ensuing two years, Kidston's defiance led to a widening gulf between the party organisation which formulated policy and many parliamentarians who sided with him.⁸² In 1907, Kidston—by then elevated to Premier in a Liberal-Labor coalition—launched his own 'labour' platform of industrial and welfare reforms and soon after left the Labor Party. He took with him 19 other Labor parliamentarians including his three Labor colleagues from Rockhampton and the adjoining electorate of Fitzroy.⁸³ At the next election, Labor suffered widespread defeat throughout

80. *ibid.*, 22 June 1907, p. 2; Armstrong, *Closer Unity in the Queensland Trades Union Movement*, p. 52; Ross Fitzgerald, *A History of Queensland: From the Dreaming to 1915*, St Lucia, 1986, p. 328.

81. *Worker*, 15 Feb. 1908, p. 4.

82. Childe, *How Labour Governs*, p. 31; *Worker*, 3 June 1905. Although a senior parliamentary member, Kidston was not a member of the Central Political Executive or a delegate to the Labor Party Convention.

83. K.J. Wanka, 'William Kidston: the Dilemma of the Powerful Leader' in Murphy *et al*, *Prelude to Power*, p.205. The other local members who defected from Labor were Kenneth Grant (Rockhampton), Henry Turner (North Rockhampton) and Henri Cowap (Fitzroy).

Queensland while Kidston received a landslide personal victory in Rockhampton. He then maintained government through a series of alliances with non-Labor factions for most of the following three years until his retirement from politics in 1911.⁸⁴

The political crisis and apparent betrayal of workers by their parliamentary representatives encouraged Queensland workers to again place their faith in unions as the champion of their interests. The ALF, therefore, aimed at political organisation amongst workers rather than with directly improving workplace conditions. But while unions elsewhere responded to Hinchcliffe's clarion call with great enthusiasm,⁸⁵ the ALF's political message did not visibly move local unionists just as its generalised union message seemingly fell on deaf ears. Secretary Purnell of the WWF, despite his intense personal interest in political activity through the Workers' Political Organisation (WPO), rebuffed a request for union assistance from that body. He claimed his union was only interested in industrial concerns and 'had decided not to touch political matters'. Politics, he claimed, was for members to pursue for themselves if interested.⁸⁶

The failure of the ALF's efforts to generate significant union interest or growth in the Rockhampton area from 1908 caused Charles Collins to again comment dejectedly on the marked contrast between Rockhampton and other regions he had visited. At the completion of his 1908 campaign, he lamented in the *Worker*:

I have noticed such a feeling of timidity existing in this district as I did not think existed anywhere in the State of Queensland. It would take some time to work up the place properly, and I hope the Parliamentary party, when on tour, will devote some time to it, as it is badly needed.⁸⁷

As the wharfies' decision on political involvement indicated, many workers in these early years probably still believed in keeping industrial and political concerns

84. *Worker*, 25 May 1907, p.14; Wanka, in Murphy *et al*, *Prelude to Power*, p. 206; Waterson, *Biographical Register of the Queensland Parliament*, p. 100.

85. Armstrong, *Closer Unity in the Queensland Trades Union Movement*, pp. 43 and 74; Dalton, *The Queensland Labour Movement*, p. 4/1; Hunt, *A History of the Labour Movement in North Queensland*, p. 20.

86. Rockhampton Workers' Political Organisation (WPO) Minutes, 10 Mar. 1907, p. 28. CCQC L6/1056 3

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

separate. They may also not have been keen to form new unions, as the ALF urged, with the ulterior motive of defeating the premier and other government members who, as local representatives, undoubtedly benefited the region financially. Moreover, at least in the early days of office, Kidston still offered a 'labour' programme of social and industrial reform for workers.⁸⁸ Irrespective of his defection from Labor, Kidston's enormous personal following amongst local workers ever since his initial victory in 1896 proved a major obstacle to any ALF-inspired plans to oust him through union-based political power.⁸⁹ Over the next few years, however, increasing disillusionment with Kidston and his colleagues turned support back to Labor so that, by 1912, two of the three local members were again Laborites, including the secretary of the new Carters and Storemen's Union, James (Jimmy) Larcombe as the member for Keppel.⁹⁰

Legislative Inducements: Arbitration and Wages Boards

In 1904, the federal parliament established the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration which handed down compulsory judicial awards for employees' pay, hours and basic conditions. The court's 'liberal' awards and sympathetic decisions like Mr Justice Higgins's 1907 Harvester judgment, which created a minimum 'living' wage for workers, were indeed attractive to unions.⁹¹ The new federal institution under which both the WWF and the AFBEU registered in 1906⁹²

88. Wanka, in Murphy *et al.*, *Prelude to Power*, p. 206.

89. *Queensland Parliamentary Handbook*, Brisbane, 1983, p. 272; Lindsay Mather, 'The Struggle: A Brief History of the Early Days of the Labour Movement in Central Queensland, an unpublished and undated paper, p. 8. RDHS; Frank Forde, introduction to Murphy *et al.*, *Prelude to Power*, p. xiv.

90. Initially the member for Keppel (1912-1929) then Rockhampton (1932-1957), James Larcombe was the Secretary/Minister for Public Works, Railways, Mines, Transport, Public Instruction, Treasurer and Attorney-General. He retired from politics in 1956, the year before Labor's defeat. *Queensland Parliamentary Handbook*, Brisbane, 1977. p. 151 and 1983, pp. 353 and 363.

91. Jim Hagan and Andrew Wells, *Industrial Relations in Australia and Japan*, St Leonards, 1994, p. 34; Dalton, *The Queensland Labour Movement*, p. 4/1; Armstrong, *Closer Unity in the Queensland Trades Union Movement*, p.35; Denis Murphy, 'Trade Unions' in Murphy *et al.*, *The Big Strikes*, p. 36.

92. Margo Beasley, *Wharfies: The History of the Waterside Workers' Federation*, Sydney, 1996, p.23; Copy of original certificate of registration of AFBEU, 1906, held by AMIEU Rockhampton Sub-branch office.

also probably encouraged the promotional tours by Joe Morris and Jack Gilday.⁹³ Indeed, Gilday said he would have preferred to see the men at Lakes Creek under either a federal or state arbitration system rather than the workplace agreement he negotiated with management.⁹⁴ But while some historians now consider that the establishment of the federal arbitration system had little impact on union revival and growth in Australia as has been the 'conventional wisdom',⁹⁵ it can be argued that it did partly affect union rejuvenation, in Rockhampton at least, through the crusading efforts of Morris and Gilday.

In 1908, the Queensland government of William Kidston introduced an alternative system of wage control through regional wages boards.⁹⁶ These statutory authorities did have a major though indirect impact on union growth, particularly in urban centres like Rockhampton. Wages boards consisted of several representatives from both employers and employees whose task it was to negotiate terms and conditions of employment even though they had no power to handle industrial disputes. Under the board system system, workers had an opportunity to bargain for what they considered a fair deal and one that was legally binding on employers. The boards neither recognised nor made provision for employee or employer bodies, but representatives from both sides had to be elected and rolls had to be compiled to carry out this task.⁹⁷ Union organisation was the logical and most effective way of gathering enough signatures to petition for a particular board and for ensuring employees'

93. Hunt, *A History of the Labour Movement in North Queensland*, p. 98; Armstrong, *Closer Unity in the Queensland Labour Movement*, pp. 35 and 36.

94. *Worker*, 24 Oct. 1908, p. 9.

95. Greg Patmore, *Australian Labour History*, Melbourne, 1991, p. 121; Peter Sheldon, 'Compulsory Arbitration and Union Recovery: Maritime-related Unions 1900–1912' *Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 40, No. 3, Sept. 1998, p. 422. Sheldon argues that union recovery came before the introduction of arbitration and that economic and organisational factors stimulated the rejuvenation. For fuller discussion of this debate on the impact of arbitration on union growth, see also P. Sheldon, 'The Missing Nexus? Union Recovery, Growth and Behaviour during the First Decades of Arbitration: Towards a Re-evaluation?' *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 104, Apr. 1995, pp. 415–437. On the other hand, Bill Howard, 'Australian Trade Unions in the Context of Union Theory', p. 255, argues that arbitration 'called [unions] into existence' to facilitate its own functioning.

96. Wages Boards Act of 1908 (8 Edw. VII, No. 8), *Queensland Statutes*, 1908, 1st Session, Vol. 4, p. 8943–8954; Greg Patmore considers wages boards also contributed little to union regrowth also; but the evidence disputes his view for Rockhampton at least. Greg Patmore, *Australian Labour History*, Melbourne, 1991, p. 121.

97. J. Matthews, quoted in Hunt, *A History of the Labour Movement in North Queensland*, p. 87; McCaig, *Labour Organisation and Objectives*, p.95.

representatives did not become the stooges of employers. In most cases, existing union officials stood for and won seats on the various boards, so active organising was to their advantage.⁹⁸ Regional wages boards were progressively established throughout the state, with Brisbane being provided for from 1908, probably because union organisation was far more advanced among the larger metropolitan workforce. It was 1910 before the first wages board for Rockhampton workers was operational.

The Rockhampton Branch of the AFBEU found its membership increased significantly as a result of the formation of the Meat Industry Board for the Central Division in late 1909. All the workers' members on the board were union men: Jack Gilday; local branch secretary, Harry Longley; and retail section members, William Keong and James Robinson.⁹⁹ As a result of the organising for signatures, the union, which had largely been confined to the Lakes Creek meatworks since the AFBEU's inception in 1907, then spread to retail shopmen and slaughtermen. By early 1911, over 200 members had taken out union tickets.¹⁰⁰

The prospect of a forthcoming wages board also motivated Rockhampton printing workers to reform a sub-branch of the Queensland Typographical Association (QTA), the predecessor of which had lapsed in 1895.¹⁰¹ Here again, encouragement came in the first instance from southern officials. In this case though, Brisbane officials were more interested in protecting their own members' wages and conditions by making sure that employees' representatives in provincial areas were well under metropolitan control.¹⁰² In October 1908, QTA secretary William Colborne and Peter McLachlan MLA conducted a meeting of keen printing trade employees and successfully formed a union with Alfred Hodda as chairman and James Applewaite as secretary.¹⁰³ Saddlery employees also approached the southern visitors for information on wages boards and

98. Armstrong, *Closer Unity in the Queensland Trades Union Movement*, p. 37.

99. Constitution of the Meat Industry Board for the Central Division, *QGG*, 1909, Vol. 93, No. 115, 20 Nov., p. 1261.

100. AFBEU Minutes, 7 Mar. 1911 and 5 Apr. 1911. CCQC J19/940 1

101. *Worker*, 26 Dec. 1908, pp. 5-6.

102. Jim Hagan, *Printers and Politics: A History of the Australian Printing Unions, 1850—1950*, Canberra, 1966, p. 181.

103. *Critic*, 23 Oct. 1908.

unions so that they, too, could share in the benefits other workers seemed to be gaining.¹⁰⁴

Within seven months of the QTA's local formation, only a few compositors remained outside the new union.¹⁰⁵ Unfortunately, it was quite some time before the union could enjoy the benefits of a board-determined award: the Printing Trade Board for the Central Division was not constituted until February 1910.¹⁰⁶ Membership nevertheless grew steadily amongst the employees of the city's four newspapers and several printeries over the next three years to include all compositors, many other print trade workers¹⁰⁷ and even reporters. Members requested that the half-yearly meetings be conducted on a monthly basis, such was their interest in union affairs.¹⁰⁸

Local bakery employees also formed 'a sturdy little union' in August 1908 in response to the introduction of boards. Again this was with the encouragement and guidance of southern officials.¹⁰⁹ The Brisbane branch of the Operative Bakers' Union of Queensland wanted three separate boards established for the state in place of the one already arranged, but the government refused the request.¹¹⁰ It was necessary for a majority of local bakers' employees to request a separate board for the Central District and the formation of a branch of the bakers' union in Rockhampton was the result of the organisation required for that petition. Within six months, the local branch, led by the aged union stalwart Johan (Jack) Schwarten, had gained a monthly bakers' holiday, the inauguration of which members celebrated with a picnic and banner display like that

104. *ibid.*

105. *ibid.*, 21 May 1909.

106. Nomination of Representatives for the Printing Trade Board for the Central Division, *QGG*, 1910, Vol. 94, No. 33, 12 Feb., p. 483.

107. Jim Hagan, 'The Queensland Typographical Association' in Murphy *et al*, *Prelude to Power*, p.161. Hagan considers this broadening of membership was to allow compositors to control determinations for other workers in the print industry who might otherwise encroach upon the craft.

108. *Pugh's Almanac*, 1910, p. 878; *Critic*, 17 Nov. 1911.

109. *Worker*, 15 Aug. 1908, p. 7,

110. *ibid.*, 19 Sept. 1908, p. 7.

originated by the WWF.¹¹¹ As with other wages boards in provincial Queensland, the Bread and Pastry Cooking Trade Board for the Central Division, which had provided the impetus for the union's formation, took many months to eventuate and representatives were not appointed until October 1910.¹¹²

The steam engine-drivers formed a local branch of the Amalgamated Certificated Engine-Drivers Association of Queensland in early 1910. Its stated aim was to secure 'sufficient strength to make themselves heard' for a wages board just as was being achieved by other unions.¹¹³ Initially, the union had just seven members with James Ratcliffe as president and Harry Allen as secretary. Within a short time, Allen had organised 40 of the 70 men who operated stationary steam engines at the meatworks, the harbour board, the city council and in numerous joineries, iceworks and dairies in the city. In the first six months of its existence, the Rockhampton branch campaigned as far west as Longreach and collected the 400 signatures to obtain a regional wages board.¹¹⁴ Membership of the local body had reached 103 by 1911.¹¹⁵ Shortly after the formation of the Engine-Drivers' Association, local workers in the infant electrical industry organised themselves into a 'strong' Electrical Workers' Association and participated in the constitution of a state-wide board for their benefit.¹¹⁶

One of the most influential Rockhampton men in promoting unionism in the wake of wages board legislation was Charles Hough. After the formation of a Shop Assistants' Board in Brisbane in 1908, Hough set about preparing for a similar body for shop and factory workers to obtain fairer employment conditions in Rockhampton.¹¹⁷

111. *ibid.*, 20 Feb. 1909, p. 10; Eight-Hour Day Celebration Committee (EHDCC) Minutes, 3 May 1913, p. 200. CCQC D9/260 2.

112. Constitution of the Bread and Pastry Cooking Trade Board for the Central Division, *QGG*, 1910, Vol. 95, No. 85, 1 Oct., p. 933.

113. *Critic*, 18 Mar. 1910.

114. Constitution of the Engine Drivers, Firemen, Greasers, and Assistant Firemen's Industry Board for the Central Division, *QGG*, 1910, Vol. 95, No. 115, 5 Nov., p. 1284.

115. *Critic*, 21 Nov. 1911.

116. *ibid.*, 10 Sept. 1910; Electrical Engineering Industry Board gazetted 16 Oct. 1910, and Report of the Director of Labour and Chief Inspector of Factories and Shops for the Year ended 30 June 1912, *QPP*, 1912, Vol. 2, p. 993.

117. *Worker*, 28 Nov. 1908.

He also offered his services to the ASCJ and addressed them on the many benefits to be had from a wages board for carpenters in the district. The ASCJ soon after reported keen interest in meetings and the initiation of many new members.¹¹⁸

Woodworkers and sawmill hands in local timber yards and joineries also joined the throngs being organised in 1910. Their efforts succeeded through the help of E.B. Purnell who 'render[ed] valuable assistance in successfully organising the latest addition to the strength of Labour' in Rockhampton.¹¹⁹ Purnell's enthusiasm for federating with southern unions to gain even greater industrial strength persuaded the woodworkers to form a branch of the Federated Sawmill, Timber Yard and General Woodworkers' Employees' Association of Australia with George Gosling as president.¹²⁰ The new union immediately appointed a sub-committee to draw up a scale of wages and hours and, within two months, secretary Lyn Nicholls had received favourable replies on an agreement from three of the six timber merchants. The unionised woodworkers spread their influence to the timber industry in outlying districts around Bajool and to Mount Morgan, assisted by the a promotional tour of the general secretary.¹²¹ Through their organisation, a successful petition for a Sawmilling Industry Board eventuated within a year of their formation.¹²² Unfortunately for local woodworkers, the new union lost strength soon after and by 1913 their body was defunct,¹²³ perhaps its practical purpose of achieving a board having been served.

In March 1911, some 120 carters, lorry drivers, draymen and storemen met in the Old Masonic Hall to form a union catering for the specific interests of the carting trade and to petition for their own wages board. After hearing another inspiring address by Purnell on 'the principles of Unionism and the benefits to be gained by adhering thereto', the men agreed to form a union. The decision was taken in the midst of much

118. *Critic*, 30 June 1911 and 29 Sept. 1911.

119. *Worker*, 30 Apr. 1910, p. 7.

120. *ibid.*, 16 Apr. 1910, p. 7 and 30 Apr. 1910, p. 7.

121. *Critic*, 19 Aug. 1910 and *Worker*, 21 Oct. 1911, p. 17.

122. Report of the Director of Labour and Chief Inspector of Factories and Shops for the Year ended 30 June 1912, *QPP*, 1912, Vol. 2, p. 995;

123. EHDCC Minutes, 24 June 1911 and 9 Sept. 1913. CCQC D9/260 2

cheering by all in attendance.¹²⁴ The Carters and Storemen's Union, as they called themselves, then set about organising the hundreds of men in these occupations in the many warehouses, factories and retail shops in Rockhampton and beyond. Petitioning from Mackay to Gladstone and west to Longreach, union secretary James Larcombe and president Henry Harris readily gained the required signatures. A Carting Trade Board for the Central Division was gazetted in October and a corresponding board for storemen was set up five months later.¹²⁵ Shortly after the formation of the boards, the union split into two separate bodies with the formation of a Carters and Drivers' Union, with some 140 members, and a Storemen and Packers' Union.¹²⁶ As with many other new unions in Rockhampton, the advent of the wages board system certainly proved a boost to the cause of unionism even if the boards neither formally or informally recognised unions as representing workers.

The 1912 Strike and the Rise of the Labor Party

The numerical strength to which unionism had grown in the early twentieth century became evident in the first major strike to occur in Rockhampton. The 1912 general strike—which began in Brisbane over the right to wear union badges and spread in a wave of worker solidarity throughout the state—drew almost 5,000 local workers from 23 unions in a public defence of unionism. Despite its eventual failure, the strike revealed the extent of union organisation in the city by 1912. Those bodies represented locally included the WWF; Amalgamated Workers' Association (AWA) which, as the following chapter will discuss, had only recently arrived in the city; the AFBEU; Carters and Drivers' Union; Storemen and Packers' Union; Typographical Association; Certificated Engine-Drivers; Operative Bakers' Union; and other unions such as the

124. *Critic*, 18 Mar. 1911.

125. Constitution of the Carting Trade Board for the Central Division, *QGG*, 1911, Vol. 97, No. 88, 7 Oct., p. 967. The employees' representatives were Harry Harris, James Larcombe and Laurence Mahon—all of the union; Constitution of the Board for Storemen for the Central Division, *QGG*, 1912, Vol. 98, No. 40, 3 Feb., p. 323.

126. Carters and Storemen's Union Minutes, 16 Sept. 1912. CCQC P16/1952 1

Grocers, Seamen, Saddlers, Timber Workers, Ironworkers, Galvanised Iron Workers, Painters, Tinsmiths, Plumbers, Gas Fitters, Harbour Board Workers, Council Employees, North Coast Railway Construction Workers, Tramway Employees and Domestic Workers.¹²⁷ The 1912 strike itself had little effect on the continuing steady union growth throughout the state, either positively or negatively;¹²⁸ however, there was one small addition to unionism locally. The previously unorganised tailors and tailoresses from various clothing factories and shops sought guidance from Charles Hough, who was by then with the new AWA, and hastily formed a Clothing Trade Employees' section to officially participate in the strike.¹²⁹

While the 1912 strike demonstrated a sense of solidarity amongst industrial and sectional unions in Rockhampton, it highlighted the division between participating unions and the elite craft unions like the ASE and ASCJ which were conspicuously absent from the contingent of strikers. Even if they had sympathised with other workers against employers' determination to crush unionism, a declaration by Harry Brownbill of the AWA, amid much applause, that 'the day of craft unionism was past, and industrial unionism had taken its place'¹³⁰ would not have sat well with many tradesmen and would have further encouraged them to maintain their aloofness to industrial unionism. The strike also demonstrated the division between participating 'outside' unions and the railway unions which feared the strict regulations of the department. The CQREA did not participate in the strike, unlike its counterparts in Brisbane, Ipswich and Townsville, and the railway authorities promptly dismissed the four individuals who downed tools independently.¹³¹ Along with sectional railway unions, the majority of CQREA members thought the better of antagonising the Commissioner for Railways by striking: instead they resolved to donate a day's pay per man per week to assist

127. *DR*, 6-8 Feb. 1912.

128. Murphy, *Trade Unions*, in Murphy *et al*, *The Big Strikes*, p. 36.

129. *DR*, 7 Feb. 1912, p. 6.

130. *ibid.*, 6 Feb. 1912, p. 7.

131. *ibid.*, 5-8 Feb. 1912. A.A. Morrison, 'The Brisbane General Strike of 1912', in Murphy *et al*, *Prelude to Power*, pp. 133 and 135; *MB*, 7 Mar. 1956, p. 3.

workers who were on strike.¹³² Disheartened and weakened further by its ineffectiveness in the strike, the CQREA languished on in 'an unsettled state' until 1914,¹³³ even though the Brisbane all-grade railway union considered the local body defunct from 1912.¹³⁴

The railway administration's punitive measures against the four strikers and the conservative Denham government's subsequent *Industrial Peace Act of 1912*, which introduced penal provisions for strikes and otherwise restricted union activities,¹³⁵ did not destroy the faith of one of the sacked men—George Kemp. Kemp resolutely believed that union organisation was essential to defend the workplace interests of railway employees. The increasing prospect of a Labor electoral victory in Queensland in 1915 and its pledge of major industrial reforms for workers further strengthened his convictions. Of particular relevance to railway men were election policies for the removal of restrictions on government employees accessing arbitration and for granting preference to unionists in employment.¹³⁶

After his readmission to the railway service as a shunter in mid-1914, Kemp canvassed fellow workers between his night shifts. He organised 92 men into a branch of the new Queensland Railways Union (QRU). That new body had emerged from the amalgamation of the surviving counterparts of the CQREA in the southern and northern divisions. His first ticket sale—according to union legend—was to Tom Lee who just over a decade later became Mayor of Rockhampton.¹³⁷ In the month before Labor's 1915 state victory at the polls, Kemp signed up some 750 new members. Among those later converts was a young clerk, Frank Nolan, who became a prominent local union figure from the mid-1920s and rose to state secretary of the union.¹³⁸ So heavy was the task of organising while working as a night shunter and so large the membership that

132. *DR*, 5 Feb. 1912, p. 7.

133. EHDCC Minutes, 1 Aug. 1914. A representative from the CQREA and several from its successor, the Queensland Railways Union (QRU), presented credentials.

134. Moroney, 'All-Grade Railway Unionism', p. 2.

135. Industrial Peace Act of 1912 (Geo. V, No. 24), *Queensland Statutes*, 1913, Vol. 7, pp. 5467-5517.

136. Murphy, 'Trade Unions' in Murphy (ed.) *The Big Strikes*, p. 39.

137. *MB*, 7 Mar. 1956, p. 3.

138. Nolan, *You Pass This Way Only Once*, p.62.

the union appointed Kemp as the first full-time paid secretary of the QRU in Queensland. The cause of unionism did not elicit sacrifice only from Kemp: the members themselves considered his work so important that they accepted a massive increase in annual dues of 60% to fund Kemp's appointment.¹³⁹ Despite continuing to have the highest membership dues of any railway union, the QRU and its successor from 1920, the Australian Railways Union (ARU), was the largest and most active railway union. It was also the most vocal and controversial union in the Rockhampton movement during the decades to the 1950s.

The impetus towards union organisation touched even those metal craftsmen and mechanics who had remained outside the ASE. In 1910, the general organiser of the union, S.J. Elston, travelled throughout the coastal regions of Queensland, including Rockhampton, and reported success in recruiting those who were not in the union.¹⁴⁰ However, there must have still been many metal tradesmen who resisted his appeal. In 1913, the union's federal body appointed six full-time organisers to launch a recruitment drive nationally and one of those officials, Robert J. Carroll, secured many more members throughout the state between 1913 and 1915. In one month alone in Rockhampton, Carroll secured over 100 recruits to the ASE.¹⁴¹ Most likely these new members were from private industry and not from the railway where the ASE was already firmly entrenched.¹⁴²

139. *MB*, 7 Mar. 1956, p. 3; Trevor Campbell (ed), *The ARU in Queensland*, Brisbane, p. 8; Moroney, 'All-Grade Railway Unionism', p. 2. Dues increased from 12s to 20s (£1) p.a.

140. *Worker*, 10 Mar. 1910, p. 6.

141. ASE, *Australia Council Monthly Report*, April 1913 and July 1915, cited in Ken Buckley, *The Amalgamated Engineers in Australia, 1852–1920*, Canberra, 1970, pp. 204 and 231.

142. *ibid.*, p. 203.

Reporting the 'Good News': The Labour Press

Notwithstanding Rockhampton's physical isolation,¹⁴³ an awareness of industrial issues and problems elsewhere kept the topic of unionism prominently in the minds of local workers. They had the press to thank for bringing many of these events and matters to their attention. From 1909, news of a series of mining disputes at Broken Hill and Stannary Hills led to a public meeting in Rockhampton to highlight the workers' plight and both strike committees gained financial support from the local WWF.¹⁴⁴ In the 1911 sugar strike organised by the AWA, awareness of union action on behalf of aggrieved workers resulted not only in more generous donations from local WWF but also from the AFBEU which circulated subscription lists among members. The new Carters and Storemen's Union reported both increased interest in meetings and an expansion of membership as a result of the 1911 sugar strike.¹⁴⁵ The strike by Lithgow unionists also drew financial and moral support from local unions.¹⁴⁶

The *Worker*, distributed by the ALF in Brisbane until its takeover by the Australian Workers' Union (AWU),¹⁴⁷ constantly promoted industrial unionism and brought to local attention the latest news of union growth and affairs in the state and national context. Initially, its Rockhampton readership must have been small because only one local firm, James Stewart and Company, advertised in the paper. Even then it was more likely intended for the western mail order trade than for the urban worker clientele. In 1909, however, Rockhampton advertisers mushroomed from just two in January to 41 in September. This rapid increase in custom was almost certainly in response to a greatly expanded urban worker readership. Those businesses listed in the

143. The North Coast Line from Brisbane was connected only in 1903 and that to the north not until 1926.

Entry to Rockhampton before this was by coastal steamer.

144. *Critic*, 15 Jan. 1909 and 19 Feb. 1909.

145. *ibid.*, 14 July 1911; AFBEU Minutes, 28 July 1911, p. 42. CCQC J19/940 1; Carters and Storemen's Union Minutes, 6 July 1911 to 2 Oct. 1911. CCQC P16/1952 1

146. AFBEU Minutes, 22 Nov. 1911, p. 67. CCQC J19/940 1; Carters and Storemen's Union Minutes, 20 Nov.

1911. CCQC P16/1952 1

147. Fitzgerald, *History of Queensland: From 1915 to the 1980s*, p. 15.

paper included numerous public houses, oyster saloons, tobacconists and tailors, all of which would have drawn substantial local working-class patronage.¹⁴⁸

More influential than the *Worker* in raising an awareness of unionism was the popular local weekly newspaper, the *Critic*. Its proprietor and editor, Andrew 'Lofty' Anderson, openly supported and encouraged the growth of the local union movement in his publication. Its masthead proclaimed: 'Central Queensland's Democratic Weekly: Fearless but not Offensive; Independent but not Neutral'. Rather than being dedicated to 'social gossip and sport' as claimed by one historian,¹⁴⁹ Anderson's paper consistently preached the gospel of industrial unionism and of the wider Labor cause from 1905.¹⁵⁰ Without his 'candid and critical' editorials, the good news about unionism would have taken even longer to spread amongst the workers of Rockhampton. The often saucy snippets about local life and sports results provided an effective lure for this purpose.

Another local paper, the *Daily Record*, although taking an anti-union stance initially and branding certain WWF moves as 'arrant folly' in 1905,¹⁵¹ supported unionism and workers' interests both in its editorials and news coverage by 1909. In 1910, future Labor premier T.J. Ryan took over the paper and it remained under his political influence even after its sale in 1917 through his friendship with the new proprietors.¹⁵² Like the *Critic* but not in the same rabid manner, the *Daily Record* countered the openly anti-union stance of 'the inspired organ of the government' and 'Kidston's mouthpiece', the *Morning Bulletin*, and in doing so helped encourage union growth in Rockhampton.¹⁵³

148. *Worker*, 9 Jan. 1909, 20 Mar. 1909 and 25 Sept. 1909.

149. Joy Guyatt, 'The Publicists: The Labour Press, 1880 to 1915', in Murphy *et al*, *Prelude to Power*, p. 247.

150. James Larcombe, *Notes on the Political History of the Labour Movement in Queensland*, Brisbane, 1934, p. 8.

151. *Worker*, 12 Aug. 1905, p. 9.

152. George Westacott, *A History of Rockhampton Newspapers*, a Paper presented to RDHS, 1956, p. 44; Denis Murphy, *T.J. Ryan: A Political Biography*, St Lucia, 1990, p. 43.

153. *Worker*, 9 Mar. 1907, p. 2.

Into 'the Golden Age': The Rockhampton Union Movement by 1920

By the time of the 1915 Labor electoral victory in Queensland, which the union boom itself had facilitated through its support, membership of registered unions had reached almost 60,000—a tripling in the preceding five years.¹⁵⁴ While we cannot determine definite numbers for Rockhampton, by that year unions covered workers in all major industries. In 1912, only 33.38% of the state's male workforce over the age of 20 was unionised and by 1918 this had risen to some 60%. In the female workforce over that period, the rate rose from a mere 2.63% to 22.7%. Thus, Queensland had changed from the second lowest unionised state to one of the highest, particularly in the years from 1916 to 1918 when increases exceeded those in all other states excluding the Northern Territory.¹⁵⁵

Two pieces of legislation introduced by the Ryan Labor government soon after gaining power helped facilitate this enormous increase in unionisation in Queensland. The first, the *Trade Union Act of 1915*, indemnified unions from charges of criminal conspiracy and allowed them to give financial and moral support to political parties. With additional amendments to the *Criminal Code Act, 1899*, unions could also conduct peaceful pickets.¹⁵⁶ The second statute, the *Industrial Arbitration Act of 1916*, introduced a conciliation and arbitration system with the judicial determination of wages through court awards and the impartial decision on disputes. The act created a policing mechanism for awards by giving union officials the right to enter workplaces to interview employees and inspect employers' time and wages books. It also protected workers from being dismissed for union activity.¹⁵⁷ Most important in encouraging

154. *Commonwealth Labour and Industry Report No. 9*, 1919, p. 11.

155. *ibid.*, No. 2, Apr. 1913, p. 12; No. 9, 1919, p. 14 and No. 11, 1921, p. 10.

156. Trade Union Act of 1915 (6 Geo. V, No. 31), *Queensland Statutes*, 1914–1916, Vol. 8, pp. 6909–6925; Criminal Code Act, 1899 (63 Vic., No. 9), *Queensland Statutes*, 1897–1899, Vol. 8, pp. 6825–7095; Murphy, 'Trade Unions' in Murphy (ed.), *The Big Strikes*, p. 38.

157. Industrial Arbitration Act of 1916 (7 Geo. V, No. 16), *Queensland Statutes*, 1917, Vol. 9, pp. 7538–7597; Murphy, 'Trade Unions' in Murphy (ed.), *The Big Strikes*, p. 39.

union growth, however, was the promised lifting of the proscription on government employees like railway workers from seeking awards, thereby boosting recruitment.¹⁵⁸ Additionally, the progressive inclusion of preference to unionists as determined by the new state Court of Industrial Arbitration also encouraged workers to join unions. These industrial changes continued the union growth until the early 1920s by which time most urban employees in Queensland, including those in Rockhampton were—at least in theory—organised.¹⁵⁹ Reflecting their approval of these measures and the many other legislative changes introduced by Labor after 1915 in the pursuit of 'reform, justice and progress',¹⁶⁰ Queensland workers resoundingly returned Labor to power in 1918 and continued to do so for the next decade in what the Labor Party deemed 'the Golden Age of Queensland Workers'.¹⁶¹

Belief in unionism as the salvation of workers had taken firm root in Rockhampton by 1920. During the dark years at the turn of the century, with low wages, long hours and poor conditions under exploitative employers, depressed economic conditions and drought, the embers of faith in worker organisation which had first flared in the 1880s remained aglow in a few dedicated individuals who struggled to share their belief with fellow workers. When conditions improved by the middle of the first decade, local activists and travelling organisers from the South could rekindle the flame of unionism, a trend further encouraged by subsequent legislative and political changes as well as the labour press.

But for some of the early activists, unionism was more than workers collectively promoting and protecting their own industrial interests. They recognised a commonality of interests and needs between all workers that transcended the divisions

158. *Commonwealth Labour and Industry Report No. 8*, 1918, p. 100 and *No. 9*, 1919, p. 12.

159. Under the 1916 act, arbitration was granted to all workers except wards of the state, domestic servants or those occupied in many farming activities.

160. James Larcombe, *The Life and Work of T.J. Ryan: A Lecture Delivered by J. Larcombe MLA to the Members of Lower East Street (Rockhampton) Branch of the Australian Labor Party*, Brisbane, 1937, pp. 11-12.

161. James Larcombe, *Notes on the Political History of the Labour Movement in Queensland*, Brisbane, 1934, p. 49.

of trade and industry and spanned the wide gulf of geographical distance. These common interests involved more than their inferior conditions of employment even though, of course, such issues were paramount. Workers' shared concerns extended beyond the workplace into most aspects of public and private life. This broader social purpose or common cause envisaged unionism as bringing not only much-needed industrial and economic improvements in the lives of the Australian working class but also as having the potential to effect necessary social change.¹⁶² Charles Belz, president of the FCDIU, its state conference representative and delegate to the several local peak union bodies by then in existence, encapsulated this vision of unionism and the spirit which empowered it. On the occasion of his gold medal presentation for dedicated services to unionism in 1924, Belz proudly declared that he would continue 'fighting in the Grand Cause' for Rockhampton workers for many years to come.¹⁶³

The 'Grand Cause' involved more than individual unions carrying out their own industrial function: it required structural and organisational bonds between unions to devise collective policies and to undertake collective action to better the lot of the working class. As part of the national union movement, Rockhampton unions forged links with other workers outside the region as well as setting up their own peak organisations. In such unity, as a second motto which frequently emblazoned early publications declared, lay 'the Hope of the Workers'.¹⁶⁴ Sowing the initial seed of unionism had required sustained hard work, dedication and an unwavering belief in the 'religion' of unionism, but local unions, once established, had to decide which of the many forms of unity abroad at the time best fulfilled the secular needs of their members.

162. George D.H. Cole, *A Short History of the British Working-Class Movement, 1789–1947*, London, 1948, pp. 3–4; Robin Gollan, *The Coalminers of New South Wales*, Melbourne, 1963, p. 65; Ross Martin, *Trade Unions in Australia: Who Runs Them, Who Belongs – Their Politics, Their Power*, Ringwood, 1981, p. 96.

163. Federated Carters and Drivers' Industrial Union (FCDIU) Minutes, 11 Feb. 1924. CCQC P16/1952 5

164. For example, the cover of *Official Programme of 4th 8- Hour Sports and Demonstration*, 1912. CCQC D9/261 21