

## *Chapter 2*

41

### 'Closer Unity': National Federations, Amalgamations and

#### One-Big-Unionism, 1907 – 1927

Like most new converts to a faith, local workers newly inspired with the message of unionism were keen to share this experience with organised workers in other cities and regions of Australia. They also quickly recognised that efforts to raise workers' standard of living by improving and protecting their employment conditions would be far more productive if undertaken in concert with other unions. If the maxim 'in unity is strength' proved true for local organisation, then it meant even greater strength in a national context. This realisation was not unique to Rockhampton unionists: the quest for closer unity between individual organisations to form large national structures was the 'major aspiration' of the union movement in Australia as well as in other English-speaking countries during the early decades of the century.<sup>1</sup> This period saw a range of unification schemes spread throughout Australia and, as with unions elsewhere, Rockhampton unions considered and sometimes experimented with these ideas to find the most appropriate structural form to suit their members' industrial needs.

The first scheme for unification was that between kindred bodies so that local unions became incorporated into large national networks of workers in similar occupations or industries. The Australian Labour Federation (ALF) also tried to re-establish itself as the peak union body, or 'the union of unions', as it had been before the

---

1. Douglas Hunt, *A History of the Labour Movement in North Queensland: Trade Unionism, Politics and Industrial Conflict, 1900–1920*, PhD Thesis, JCU, 1979, p. 144; John Armstrong, *Closer Unity in the Queensland Trades Union Movement*, MA Thesis, UQ, 1975, pp. i-v

strikes of the 1890s. In the following years, there were proposals to form 'One Big Union'—a mass body covering all Australian workers organised into different industrial groups. Not all schemes held equal appeal for local unions. Ultimately, they adopted those which best served their purpose and rejected those which proved unsuitable.

As Bradon Ellem and John Shields observe, most historical accounts of closer unity attribute combination to 'inspired leadership', vague ideals and proposed objectives. These objectives often included practicalities such as facilitating access to arbitration systems, eliminating sectional interests, mediating inter-union disputes and achieving political goals. Other accounts identify plans to organise workers according to radical ideological principles.<sup>2</sup> However, these factors do not explain why and how such bodies actually did form and why some succeeded where others failed;<sup>3</sup> nor do they explain why some schemes for closer unity appealed to unions in regional areas and why others stimulated little or no interest and even outright rejection.

For closer unity efforts to succeed, there needed to be a clearly perceived external threat against which unification afforded protection or some common benefit to be gained from joining forces. At the same time, the new organisation had to maintain a balance of interests in which no single union dominated or lost its own identity in a 'take over'.<sup>4</sup> While Ellem and Shields' argument relates specifically to inter-union bodies such as trades and labour councils, the same principles applied to federations and amalgamations. These points provide a framework to analyse the reasons for and processes by which unions in Rockhampton accepted or rejected incorporation into national structures. Sometimes unions pursued different ideas simultaneously, to reap the best of both systems<sup>5</sup> or to compare their worth. We need to follow the spread of these national forms of closer unity to Rockhampton, and to

---

2. Bradon Ellem and John Shields, 'Why Do Unions Form Peak Bodies: The Case of the Barrier Industrial Council', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 38, No. 3, Sept. 1996, pp. 383-4.

3. *ibid.*, p. 384.

4. *ibid.*, p. 389.

5. Hunt, *A History of the Labour Movement in North Queensland*, p. 146.

appreciate the reasons for their success or failure, to understand the extent of local union operation over the decades to the 1950s.

### Linking of Kindred Groups: Federations and Amalgamations.

The earliest idea for closer unity to reach Rockhampton unions was affiliation or federation with unions covering workers in similar occupations in other parts of the state and nation. Through federation, a central organising structure emerged in either of two forms. A local union could become a sub-branch within a state branch of a national body. In such cases, administration and coordination of activities usually fell to the state executive and the federal body remained largely in the background. For organising purposes, sub-branches were often grouped into districts or divisions. The other form of federation placed the local union as a separate branch which accounted directly to a supreme national body. Whatever the organisational arrangement, participating unions shared a commonality of occupation and work interests. Thus, federations essentially aimed at bettering working conditions of a specific industry through their combined strength.

The establishment of the comparatively liberal and sympathetic Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration in 1904 also encouraged the proliferation of inter-state federations.<sup>6</sup> To gain registration under the federal system, a union required a membership from more than one state and the presentation of a case in which the matter extended across state borders. As already indicated in the previous chapter with the work of Joe Morris and Jack Gilday, federations also developed as part of the general move to spread and strengthen unionism at or about the same time as their

---

6. Robert McCaig, *Labour Organisation and Objectives in Queensland, 1890–1920*, BA Thesis, UQ, 1950, p. 95; J. Brian Dalton, *The Queensland Labour Movement, 1889–1915*, BA Thesis, UQ, 1961, p. 4/1; Armstrong, *Closer Unity in the Queensland Trades Union Movement*, p. 35; Hunt, *A History of the Labour Movement in North Queensland*, p. 144; Margo Beasley, *Wharfies: The History of the Waterside Workers' Federation*, Sydney, 1996, p. 21.

registration under the federal arbitration system.<sup>7</sup> The harsh conditions of Queensland's *Industrial Peace Act of 1912* provided an additional incentive for local unions to seek protection by federating and gaining registration under the federal system.<sup>8</sup> Under this legislation, the 'conservative Liberal' Denham government expressly prohibited the much-desired preference to unionists and introduced severe penalties for strikes, lockouts and breaking awards in the wake of the 1912 general strike and therefore restricted the expression of union grievances.<sup>9</sup> In some cases, though, federations embracing local workers existed before the advent of arbitration or even well before the revival of industrial unionism in the early years of the new century.

Federations of craft unions such as the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE) and the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners (ASCJ) existed before the establishment of local branches. When the Rockhampton Branch of the ASE formed in 1888,<sup>10</sup> it was under the auspices of a part-time inter-colonial Australasian Council of the ASE which itself had been established only the previous year by the British Executive Council in London. In 1917, with branches and membership rising steadily, a full-time Commonwealth Council replaced the former body as the central executive in the new nation.<sup>11</sup> The federation changed its name to the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU) in 1920, following the example of the British parent body.<sup>12</sup> The ASE/AEU assembled individual branches into geographical divisions for organising by full-time travelling delegates, with Rockhampton located in Division 1 under the control of Brother Robert Lyle. This area covered six separate branches in the Central and Northern Districts of Queensland with Brisbane and Southern District branches forming Division 2.<sup>13</sup> The centralised control of the Sydney-based

---

7. Both the WWF and AFBEU registered in 1906. Beasley, *Wharfies*, p. 23; Original certificate of registration of AFBEU, held by AMIEU Rockhampton Sub-branch office.

8. Armstrong, *Closer Unity in the Queensland Trades Union Movement*, p. 147.

9. Industrial Peace Act of 1912 (3 Geo. V, No. 24), *Queensland Statutes*, 1913, Vol. 7, pp. 5467-5517; Denis Murphy, *T.J. Ryan: A Political Biography*, St Lucia, 1990, p. 115.

10. AEU, *Souvenir 25th Anniversary of the AEU in Australia, 1920-1945*, Sydney, 1946, p. 63.

11. *ibid.*, p. 89; Tom Sheridan, *Mindful Militants: The Amalgamated Engineering Union in Australia, 1920-1972*, Melbourne, 1975, pp. ix and 23.

12. *ibid.*, p. ix.

13. *AEU Monthly Journal*, Jan. 1923, p.9 and Jan. 1924, p. 9.

Commonwealth Council meant that individual branches had little autonomy in the matter of funds and policy,<sup>14</sup> but, because of the great distance from union headquarters, the enormous area to be served by the travelling delegate and frequent troubles to be settled in the northern districts, the Rockhampton branch usually handled its own routine industrial matters rather than passing them on to the delegate to resolve.<sup>15</sup>

However, it was affiliation across entire industries which involved far more workers in Rockhampton than did the traditional craft linkages. The waterside workers had been the first industry-based union to federate in 1902, three years after their local re-formation by E.B. Purnell. As the preceding chapter discussed, this step followed within four months of the visit of the travelling ALF organiser, Albert Hinchcliffe. As well as encouraging the general principles of unionism during his 1902 Queensland tour, Hinchcliffe had convinced the wharf labourers of the benefits of joining with similar unions elsewhere to form a branch of the Waterside Workers' Federation (WWF). The federation itself had been established earlier in 1902 by future prime minister W.M. Hughes who, at the time, was secretary of the Sydney Wharf Labourers' Union and a member of the new federal parliament.<sup>16</sup>

For the wharfies, federation made it far easier to press claims against the large southern shipping companies whose agents controlled operations in each port. These employers had already formed their own central organising body in 1899, the Australian Steamship Owners' Federation (SSOF), to oppose workers' demands for improved rates of pay and conditions.<sup>17</sup> Thus, a unified body of workers provided the necessary counterbalance to collective employer interests across all ports. On affiliation with other wharf unions in April 1902, the Rockhampton Waterside Workers' Union became the Rockhampton Branch of the Federated Waterside Workers'

---

14. Sheridan, *Mindful Militants*, pp. 31 and 33.

15. Jack Treacy, interviewed 1995. See, for example, the Organising Delegates' Reports, *AEU Monthly Journal*. The delegate visited Rockhampton only periodically.

16. *Worker*, 10 Oct. 1908, p. 9; Beasley, *Wharfies*, p. 21.

17. *Worker*, 10 Oct. 1908, p. 9; Winifred Mitchell, *Wharf Labourers, Their Unionism and Leadership, 1872–1916*, PhD Thesis, UNSW, 1973, p. 291; Beasley, *Wharfies*, p. 21.

Union of Australia.<sup>18</sup> Like other branches, the local WWF came under the control of a federal council but, as with its counterparts in other Queensland ports, the WWF clearly demonstrated a sense of individuality bordering on 'parochial sectionalism' within the federation.<sup>19</sup> Their autonomous origins and the great distance from national headquarters in Melbourne encouraged this independent outlook.<sup>20</sup> So too did their negotiation of individual port agreements with local agents before receiving the first industrial award in 1914.<sup>21</sup> After an appeal to the WWF Federal Council through their representative, former MLA for Rockhampton North, Senator James Stewart, the local wharfies also won the right to confer directly with local agents to settle any disputes that arose in Rockhampton. Thus the WWF placed in federal hands only those matters which 'came to nothing' by its own efforts.<sup>22</sup> At times the union acted contrary to federal advice, as later discussion of affiliation with the ALF will reveal.<sup>23</sup>

For export meatworkers, incorporation into the four-year-old network of meat unions was simultaneous with their 1907 creation as a union by the secretary and organiser of the AFBEU, Jack Gilday.<sup>24</sup> The Rockhampton sub-branch hosted the first Queensland conference of the union in 1910 at which the state branch approved a request from local members to establish a district office in the city. It also agreed to appoint Henry Longley as a permanent full-time secretary to carry out the burgeoning business of the Rockhampton sub-branch and that of the entire central region including Gladstone, Mount Morgan and western townships.<sup>25</sup> In 1912, the AFBEU re-registered under the Commonwealth *Conciliation and Arbitration Act of 1904* as the Australasian

---

18. The name Waterside Workers' Federation (WWF) is used in this thesis for consistency.

19. Hunt, *A History of the Labour Movement in North Queensland*, p. 107.

20. *ibid.*, p. 108; Mitchell, *Wharf Labourers*, p. 319. Hughes established the WWF in Melbourne where federal parliament met as early representatives were usually the federal members for the various ports.

21. Jim Healy, *Brief History of the Australian Waterfront and Waterside Workers' Unions*, Victoria Park, 1948, p. 16.

22. *Worker*, 10 Oct. 1908, p. 9. Senator James Charles Stewart, a former export butcher, union secretary and MLA for Rockhampton, should not be confused with founder of the prominent retailing and manufacturing firm of James Stewart and Co.

23. Armstrong, *Closer Unity in the Queensland Trades Union Movement*, p. 148.

24. AMIEU (Qld Branch), *One Hundred Years of Struggle and Change*, Spring Hill, 1988, pp. 5 and 28.

25. AFBEU Minutes, 6 Dec. 1910, p. 12. CCQC J19/940 1

Meat Industry Employees' Union (AMIEU) to reflect more accurately its diverse membership across the entire industry rather than just the butchering trade.<sup>26</sup>

47

Federation placed the local AMIEU at the bottom of the organisational hierarchy. Above the sub-branch, a board of management (later the Central District Council) oversaw regional matters with a powerful state executive and largely supervisory federal executive at the higher levels. Although the Rockhampton union devised mutual agreements with the management of Lakes Creek meatworks from at least 1914, the general secretary negotiated most of them from Brisbane.<sup>27</sup> However, despite being only a sub-branch, the local union habitually referred to itself as 'the Rockhampton branch' until 1927.<sup>28</sup>

Closer industrial unity through federation also found willing converts in the Carters and Storemen's Union. As Bradley Bowden argues for provincial carting unions in general, dissatisfaction with the state wages board system and anticipation of a better deal under the federal arbitration system<sup>29</sup> obviously underlay the Rockhampton men's interest in pursuing federation. Their dissatisfaction was understandable. In early 1912, the Carting Trade Board for the Central Division had brought down its first determination. Although not as much as the union had wanted, members nevertheless considered it 'an excellent one' in which a one-horse lorry man would receive £2 17s 0d for a 48-hour week.<sup>30</sup> To the carters' dismay and anger, the award was never implemented. According to the editor of the *Daily Record*, the employers immediately rejected the award and 'even went so far as to persuade the

---

26. Copy of original certificate of registration of AFBEU, 1906, amended in 1912 to AMIEU, held by AMIEU Rockhampton Sub-branch office; AMIEU, *One Hundred Years of Struggle and Change*, p. 28.

27. AMIEU Minutes, 11 Feb. 1914. CCQC J19/940 3

28. *ibid.*, 11 July 1927. CCQC J19/940 7.

29. Bradley Bowden, *Driving Force: The History of the Transport Workers' Union of Australian, 1883-1992*, St Leonards, 1993, p. 48; Carters and Storemen's Union Minutes, 22 July 1912 and 16 Dec. 1912. CCQC P16/1952 1

30. Determination of the Carting Trade Board for the Central Division, *QGG*, 1912, Vol. 98, No. 30, 27 Jan., p. 285. The employees' representatives had submitted a claim for £3 for a 44 hour week; Carters and Storemen's Union Minutes, 2 Oct. and 12 Dec. 1911. CCQC P16/1952 1

Government to suspend the determination and dissolve the Board'.<sup>31</sup> The subsequent award handed down by a replacement board did not please the union at all. Despite its representatives 'putting up a good fight', members had to settle for a 56-hour minimum week at only £2 7s 6d.<sup>32</sup> Little wonder they were so keen for access to the federal court.

The harsh regulations of the Industrial Peace Act which followed the 1912 general strike also encouraged local carters to look to the federal court for a better deal.<sup>33</sup> In October that year, the secretary of the newly formed Brisbane Carters and Drivers' Union, George Lawson, invited local delegates to attend a meeting to discuss joining other provincial towns in a state federation of carters' unions that would ultimately link with kindred interstate groups. Seeing this as an opportunity to secure a better award, the local carters' decision to accept the invitation was immediate and unanimous.<sup>34</sup> Ironically, while the prospect of a satisfactory federal award attracted the local carters to federation, the federal court brought them no joy either. They claimed that they were 'not satisfied with the present federal award [by Mr Justice Powers] and never had been'. The carters therefore willingly endorsed the 1919 action of General Secretary Lawson to file under Queensland's new state arbitration system from where they received an award that was 'above all expectation'.<sup>35</sup>

Potential benefits other than access to the federal court also attracted the local carters towards federation. On his return from the conference which he attended as joint delegate with past-secretary and MLA for Rockhampton, James Larcombe, secretary Harry Harris informed a special meeting of carters:

---

31. *DR*, 12 Feb. 1912, p. 6.

32. [Re]Constitution of Carting Trade Board for the Central Division, *QGG*, 1912, Vol. 98, No. 53, 17 Feb., p. 405; Appointments to the Carting Trade Board for the Central Division, *QGG*, 1912, Vol. 98, No. 103, 13 Apr., p. 1039; Carters and Storemen's Union Minutes, 22 July 1912. CCQC P16/1952 1; Determination of the Carting Trade Board for the Central Division, *QGG*, 1912, Vol. 99, No. 62, 10 Sept., p.593.

33. Armstrong, *Closer Unity in the Queensland Trades Union Movement*, pp. 147-149.

34. Carters and Storemen's Union Minutes, 14 Oct. 1912. Others provincial centres to join the FCDIU (Q) were Bundaberg, Maryborough, Gympie, Ipswich and Toowoomba, with northern centres being under the control of the AWU. CCQC P16/1952 1

35. FCDIU Minutes, 19 Sept. 1919 and 6 Oct. 1919. CCQC P16/1952 4; George Lawson quoted in Bowden, *Driving Force*, p. 62.



He could safely say the conditions were the best ever laid before a body of men with regards [to] the accident fund. He was sure every member present would agree with him that every clause was for the betterment of the members of the Union.<sup>36</sup>

49

On 1 January 1913, the carters' union became the Rockhampton Sub-branch of the Queensland Branch of the Federated Carters and Drivers' Industrial Union (FCDIU). At the same time, the storemen pursued federation with the Storemen and Packers' Union in Brisbane. The FCDIU promptly ordered 150 badges and 180 rule books from Brisbane for their members, acquired an official rubber stamp, and proudly painted the abbreviated name 'Federated Carters' Union' on the pillars at the foot of the stairs outside the office in Trades Hall.<sup>37</sup>

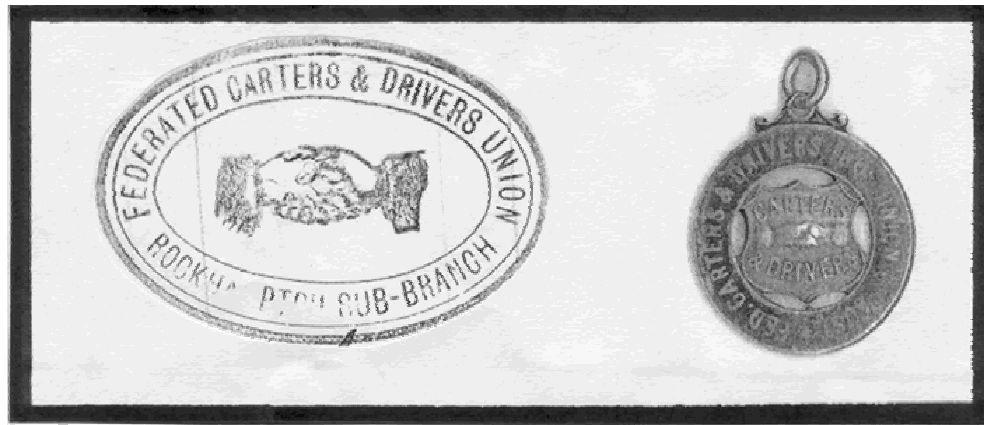


Fig. 12: Rubber Stamp of the Rockhampton Sub-Branch of the Federated Carters and Drivers' Industrial Union and Union Badge

Once part of the FCDIU, the local sub-branch ceded control of its finances and much of its industrial activity, resulting in a constant and voluminous interchange of correspondence between Rockhampton and Brisbane. The FCDIU later amalgamated with the kindred New South Wales Trolley, Draymen and Carters' Union in 1926 to form the Amalgamated Road Transport Workers' Union (ARTWU). On that occasion, there was no disruption to the organisation other than a name change and nor was there any discussion of the matter at meetings.<sup>38</sup> All the benefits of the federation continued

36. Carters and Storemen's Union Minutes, 9 Sept. 1912 and 14 Oct. 1912. CCQC P16/1952 1

37. *ibid.*, 8 Jan. 1913 and 6 Feb. 1913. CCQC P16/1952 1

38. Amalgamated Road Transport Workers' Union (ARTWU) Minutes, 9 Aug. 1926. CCQC P/16/1952 7.

and local unionists maintained their own identity as the Rockhampton sub-branch of the union but, like several other local unions, they continued to use their popular name of the Carters' Union for many years. In 1938, the union changed its name to the Transport Workers' Union (TWU) to reflect its broadened scope of passenger and air transport.<sup>39</sup>

For the last major union to organise in Rockhampton, the Queensland Railways Union (QRU), federation came several years after that of other unions. Plans for a federal union had begun in 1904 in response to the new federal arbitration legislation. The aim was to gain uniform conditions for railwaymen throughout Australia;<sup>40</sup> however it was not until the High Court finally ruled in 1920 that the federal arbitration court had jurisdiction over the disputes of state employees that the path was clear for federation of the Queensland body with its southern counterparts.<sup>41</sup> The Rockhampton Branch of the QRU, by then the largest local union with about 1,100 members,<sup>42</sup> became a minor part of a large national organisation. The local union, entitled the Rockhampton Sub-branch of the Australian Railways Union (Queensland Branch), together with Gladstone, Mount Morgan, Emerald and Alpha Sub-branches, elected representatives to the Rockhampton-based Central District Committee of which George Kemp was secretary. This regional committee then sent two elected delegates to the State Council of the ARU (Queensland Branch) in Brisbane.<sup>43</sup> There was also a federal council but most authority and administrative control rested with the state council, just as it did with the AMIEU and FCDIU.

Even among the smaller sectional and craft unions, the idea of federation found ardent support. The Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen's Association of Australia (FEDFA), Federated Coopers' Union of Australia and the Federated Moulders' (Metals) Association of Australia attended Eight-Hour Day Celebration Committee meetings by

---

39. Bowden, *Driving Force*, pp. 73-74.

40. Tim Moroney, 'All-Grade Railway Unionism: History of its Early Struggles', *Railway Advocate*, Oct. 1966, p. 1.

41. *ibid.*, Nov. 1966, p. 7.

42. *Militant*, Vol. 1, No. 9, 7 May 1920, p. 2

43. *ibid.*; ARU State Council Minutes, 2 May 1926, p. 10. PTU Office, Brisbane.

1914.<sup>44</sup> The following year, the Australasian Builders' Labourers' Federation and the Baking Trade Employees' Federation of Australia joined, while former members of the Typographical Association sent new delegates in the name of the Printing Industry Employees' Union of Australia (PIEU) following their federation in 1916.<sup>45</sup> All major Rockhampton unions and most minor unions had entered interstate federated structures by 1920. While this seemed to be the preferred form of closer unity to adopt, other schemes pervaded union circles during the early decades of the century. Unlike intra-industry federations, however, these aimed at linking unions across industry lines in either a peak union body or into one giant union of all workers.

'The Happy Mean': Affiliation with the Australian Labour Federation.

The Queensland-based ALF, which had achieved little organising success in the Rockhampton district during 1908, also endeavoured to re-establish itself as the peak union body or 'union of unions' after the revival of industrial organisation began. Whereas the Rockhampton District Council of the ALF had collapsed in 1892, the Queensland Provisional Council had survived in a weakened state.<sup>46</sup> Through its loose structure that promised simultaneous autonomy and central leadership, the ALF again sought to 'consolidate the unions, while at the same time leaving each one free to govern itself in its own way'. It claimed this feature of its constitution allowed it to 'provide the happy mean between the Unity which ma[de] for strength and the Liberty which ma[de] for progress'.<sup>47</sup>

Unions affiliated with the ALF in 1908 included the western pastoral Australian Workers' Union, various mining, sugar and rural unions and, providing a strong basis for renewed vigour, the new Amalgamated Workers' Association of North Queensland

44. EHDCC Minutes, 12 Sept. 1914. CCQC D9/260 1; DS, 22 July 1914.

45. EHDCC Minutes, 24 Apr. 1915 and 3 Feb. 1917. D9/260 2; J. Hagan, *Printers and Politics: A History of the Australian Printing Unions, 1850-1950*, Canberra, 1966, p. 190.

46. Rodney Sullivan, *The ALF in Queensland, 1889-1915*, MA Thesis, UQ, 1973, p. 212.

47. *Worker*, 23 May 1908, p. 9.

(AWA).<sup>48</sup> None of the unions in existence in Rockhampton had joined the ALF at this time. The wharf labourers had been affiliated with the ALF in the 1890s and had always extended a warm fraternal welcome to its travelling organisers but their subsequent incorporation in Waterside Workers' Federation precluded re-affiliation with the ALF.<sup>49</sup> To evade the control of individual Queensland branches by federal WWF officials, the ALF changed its rules in 1911 to permit affiliation by separate union branches and not just entire unions. The WWF took this opportunity to re-affiliate even though the federal executive had previously declared that branches 'owe[d] allegiance' to the federation and not to the ALF.<sup>50</sup>

Demonstrating their interest in both the principle of closer unity and the activities of the ALF, two representatives of the WWF, E.B. Purnell and J.G. (Lou) Yahnke, were the only Rockhampton unionists to attend the First State Congress of Trade and Labour Unions in 1910, held under the auspices of the Brisbane Trades and Labour Council and supported by the ALF.<sup>51</sup> The purpose of the 1910 gathering was to discuss 'better industrial organisation...[and] the necessity of taking a more active part in the political life of the state'.<sup>52</sup> To achieve the former objective, the congress sought to foster closer unity within the wider union movement but in a way that would maintain autonomy for each affiliated body<sup>53</sup>—a scheme for which the existing ALF structure was ideally suited.

AFBEU state leaders Gilday and Crampton also attended the 1910 union congress in Brisbane. Their keenness for the ALF system of closer unity, which would still allow them to maintain control of their own industrial union, influenced the first conference of the AFBEU's Queensland Branch held in December of that year in

---

48. *ibid.*

49. *ibid.*, 10 Oct. 1908; Armstrong, *Closer Unity in the Queensland Trades Union Movement*, p. 148.

50. *ibid.*, pp. 100 and 148. Committee of Management Minutes, WWF, 13 Sept. 1910, quoted in Mitchell, *Wharf Labourers*, p. 293.

51. *Worker*, 13 Aug. 1910, p. 14. The BTLC was a craft-based council which replaced the collapsed District Council of the ALF in Brisbane in 1904.

52. *ibid.*, 30 Oct. 1909.

53. *ibid.*, 13 Aug. 1910, p. 15.

Rockhampton. The first item on the agenda was affiliation with the ALF. Townsville meatworkers, with whom Crampton had very close links and perhaps influenced on this occasion, proposed the motion.<sup>54</sup> All delegates spoke in favour of affiliation and carried the motion unanimously.<sup>55</sup> However, there was no prior discussion of affiliation recorded by the Rockhampton union at the time of adopting the proposed conference agenda, nor was there any mention of the matter in Harry Longley's four-page report to members following the proceedings. It seems that the only item of importance was the purely parochial one of establishing a district office with a full-time secretary.<sup>56</sup>

At the time of the 1910 trade union congress, the carters of Rockhampton were not yet organised and therefore had no representation at the gathering, unlike their fellow workers in Brisbane, Warwick, Bundaberg and Maryborough.<sup>57</sup> In July 1912, an ALF organiser from Brisbane, J. Baulton, visited Rockhampton with Crampton and addressed a meeting of the year-old Rockhampton Carters and Storemen's Union. Baulton spoke on the position of unions throughout the state and urged them to affiliate with the peak body. Despite recording the usual 'hearty vote of thanks' to Baulton, the local men appear not to have been enthusiastic about joining the ALF which, by that time, was in a state of 'functional demise'.<sup>58</sup> The carters seemingly preferred to federate with other workers in their own industry. Within two months of hearing Baulton's plea to support the beleaguered ALF, the carters and drivers in Rockhampton had decided to join their own federated industrial union, the FCDIU, rather than be part of the dying peak body.

Affiliation with the ALF or rejection of that form of closer unity by Rockhampton unions had little if any bearing on the demise of the central body. The ALF's eclipse as the premier inter-union body by the powerful and centralised AWA,

---

54. Hunt, *A History of the Labour Movement in North Queensland*, p. 147.

55. *Worker*, 13 Aug. 1910, p. 14 and 17 Dec. 1910, p. 9.

56. AFBEU Minutes, 13 Feb. 1913, p. 147. CCQC J19/940 1

57. *Worker*, 13 Aug. 1910, p. 15.

58. Sullivan, *The ALF in Queensland*, p. 428;

after its successful campaign in the 1911 sugar strike and the ALF's disastrous handling of the failed 1912 general strike, sealed the fate of the older body.<sup>59</sup> The subsequent disaffiliation of many unions and the attraction of interstate federations combined to bring on the collapse of the ALF Queensland Provincial Council by 1914.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, both the ALF and its leaders were seen as obsolete. Not only were men like Hinchcliffe and his colleagues relics of the old defeated unionism of the 1890s, their ideas for closer unity proved impractical and outdated. The fundamental incompatibility within the 'happy mean' of structural independence and 'complete labour solidarity' caused the downfall of the peak body.<sup>61</sup> While the ALF offered continued autonomy of participants through its loose structure, and thereby attracted many unions throughout the state, it could not, especially during times of industrial crisis like 1912, achieve its other goal of effective central leadership. New men with new vision provided an alternative structure for unions throughout Queensland to consider, including some of those in Rockhampton who had both supported and rejected the ALF.

#### Joining the Ranks: Amalgamation with the AWA

The rise of the AWA as a dominant force in Queensland unionism counterbalanced the ALF's demise. Its pragmatic, energetic founders and future Labor premiers, Edward Granville Theodore and William McCormack, believed that to achieve industrial effectiveness, unions needed to be both unified and politically active. Their goal therefore was to amalgamate all Queensland unions into one mass body to provide the basis for industrial and political strength.<sup>62</sup> Reflecting this aim, the AWA's objectives included the protection and regulation of workers' conditions as well as practical and legal assistance in industrial conflict. Other objectives were for workers'

---

59. Ross Fitzgerald, *A History of Queensland: From the Dreaming to 1915*, St Lucia, 1982, p. 333.

60. Armstrong, *Closer Unity in the Queensland Trades Union Movement*, pp. 125 and 194. The ALF District Council in Brisbane collapsed in 1913 and was replaced by the Brisbane Industrial Council.

61. Sullivan, *The ALF in Queensland*, p. xviii.

62. Armstrong, *Closer Unity in the Queensland Trades Union Movement*, pp. 104-105.

representation in parliament and socialisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange.<sup>63</sup>

55

Catering initially for miners in North Queensland at its inception in 1907 and then unskilled and itinerant rural workers and railway navvies, the AWA embarked upon an ambitious state-wide amalgamation scheme in 1910 in pursuit of its goals. Its cannibalistic strategy was to absorb smaller unions and recruit any unorganised miners and railway construction workers.<sup>64</sup> In the central coastal area, 500 Mount Morgan miners and other interested locals quickly fell to the persuasive oratory of 'Red Ted' Theodore during a promotional tour in late October 1910 and formed a local branch of the AWA. At its first meeting the following month, there was a 'very large attendance'.<sup>65</sup> By the time AWA organiser Jack Moir addressed a highly successful public debate in opposition to the recent formation of a 'non-political Mine and Works Employees' Association', unionism of the AWA variety had grown beyond all expectation and, according to the *Critic*, was now 'a power to be reckoned with'.<sup>66</sup> Theodore's tour also included success in the mining township of Mount Chalmers, where unionism of the ALF variety had again lapsed, and among the railway workers at Many Peaks in the Boyne Valley. The AWA's intention was to 'properly organise' the entire coastal area of Central Queensland which, when achieved, would be a vital part of the movement towards industrial unionism.<sup>67</sup>

To this point, the AWA had restricted its amalgamation activities to non-urban workers just as the ALF had done earlier; but from 1911 it began to colonise Rockhampton from its new Central District administration base at Mount Morgan.<sup>68</sup> With the catchcry that 'everyone who is a unionist should join our ranks', the AWA

---

63. *Worker*, 10 Dec. 1910.

64. Armstrong, *Closer Unity in the Queensland Trades Union Movement*, pp. 116 and 117.

65. *Worker*, 5 Nov. 1910, p.15 and 10 Dec. 1910, p. 4; *Critic*, 5 Nov. 1910, p. 15. In his biography, "*Red Ted: The Life of E.G. Theodore*", Ross Fitzgerald states this tour and union formation occurred in November 1909; however, as his source is a November 1910 *Worker*, the error is most likely a typographical one.

66. *Critic*, 24 Mar. 1911.

67. *Worker*, 5 Nov. 1910, p. 15 and 10 Dec. 1910, p.4.

68. Armstrong, *Closer Unity in the Queensland Trades Union Movement*, p.117.

began drawing in 'the small useless sectional unions' covering tinsmiths, plumbers, gasfitters, painters, grocers and some bakers into a Rockhampton Branch.<sup>69</sup> The *Critic* joyfully reported:

The "Fighting A.W.A"...is fulfilling its mission in Central Queensland, in that it is completely knocking out Sectional or Craft Unionism, which, though paving the way, yet has proved totally ineffective for the purpose in view.<sup>70</sup>

Charles Hough, secretary of the absorbed Shop and Factory Workers' Union, took on the same position with the new union in Rockhampton and Charles Bluett, a former waterside worker, became president.<sup>71</sup>

Soon after the AWA's formation in the city, iron moulders amalgamated and, for the first time in Rockhampton, a separate women's union was formed as a section of the AWA.<sup>72</sup> Many previously unorganised labourers, particularly those working for the municipal council and the harbour board, took out AWA tickets. Such was the initial recruiting success of the newcomer to local unionism that the *Critic* declared that the AWA was fast 'becoming a force in the Industrial Movement' in the city.<sup>73</sup> Buoyant with its victory over employers in the 1911 sugar strike, the new union lived up to its epithet of the 'fighting union' by taking on the Rockhampton Harbour Board over the issue of union labour. After a ten week strike of dredge hands, the AWA brought the stoppage to a successful outcome with recognition of the union by the statutory authority.<sup>74</sup> In the 1912 strike some weeks later, the AWA again played a prominent role in the local context. It appeared that the new mass union, organised into industrial sections, had well and truly established itself as a major force in Rockhampton unionism.

---

69. *Worker*, 14 Jan. 1911 and 22 July 1911; EHDCC Minutes, 1 July 1911, p. 106. CCQC D9/260 2

70. *Critic*, 30 June 1911.

71. Carters and Storemen's Union Minutes, 6 July 1911. CCQC P16/1952 1; *DR*, 13 July 1911, p. 2.

72. *Critic*, 22 Sept. 1911; Carters and Storemen's Union Minutes, 18 Sept. 1911. CCQC P16/1952 1; *DR*, 12 Oct. 1911.

73. *Critic*, 22 Sept. 1911.

74. *DR*, 3 Feb. 1912, p. 5.



Yet by December of that year, the AWA was on the wane in Rockhampton. Delegates to the Eight-Hour Day Celebration Committee assured that body that the AWA was 'not defunct...It was still in existence but passive' and had sub-let its union room to the thriving FCDIU.<sup>75</sup> Many of the sectional unions subsumed in the initial burst of enthusiasm, particularly the ironworkers, painters and bakery trade employees, began to break away from the mass union, to subsequently reappear in their own right and pursue federation with kindred unions elsewhere. Builders' labourers also preferred to maintain their own identity as the local branch of the Australasian Builders' Labourers' Federation. As well, the opening of another branch of a craft union, the Federated Society of Boilermakers and Iron Shipbuilders of Australia, indicated that the old ways and old forms of organisation along occupational lines would not fall to the mass unionism of the AWA.<sup>76</sup>

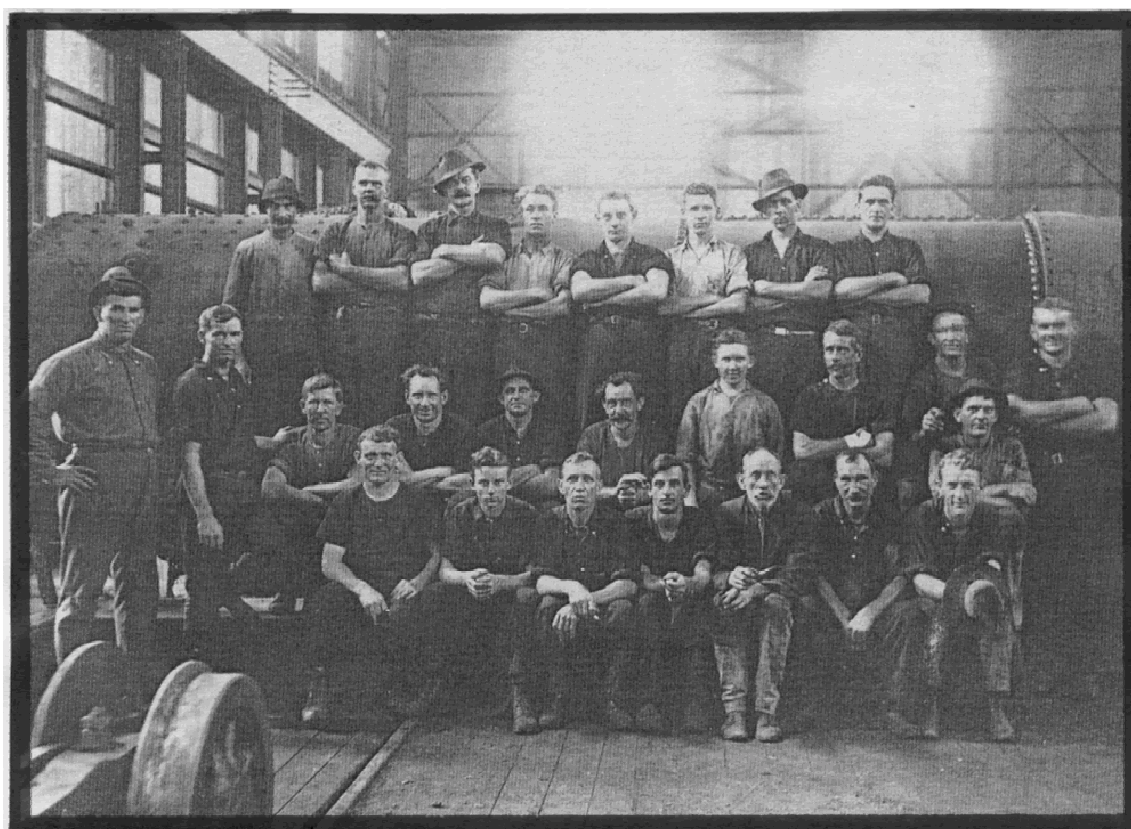


Fig. 13: Railway Members of the Federated Society of Boilermakers and Iron Shipbuilders of Australia

Hugh Armstrong

75. Carters and Storemen's Union Minutes, 12 Aug. 1912. CCQC P16/1952 1; EHDCC Minutes, 2 Nov. 1912, p. 162. CCQC D9/260 2

76. *ibid.*, 25 Apr. 1914; 24 Apr. 1915 and 13 Dec. 1913. CCQC D9/260 2

During 1913, the AWA amalgamated with the pastoral Australian Workers' Union and several other small rural unions to form a new and even bigger mass union also named the Australian Workers' Union (AWU). The Queensland Branch of the AWU maintained the highly centralised structure of the AWA while other state branches were to retain the autonomy of pastoral AWU. However, as the largest branch, Queensland's tight control ultimately came to dominate the whole organisation.<sup>77</sup> The resultant union contained over 62,000 members nationally with one third of them in Queensland. In the north of the state, the AWU inherited 'virtually an organising monopoly' on workers from the AWA.<sup>78</sup> In Rockhampton, however, the AWU proved to be a comparatively weak body industrially even if large in membership. The urban nature of local industry meant that the union lacked the strong support base of itinerant pastoral, agricultural and mining workers that it had elsewhere. Once the skilled sectional unions had withdrawn from the AWA, the remaining membership was mostly labourers scattered throughout the city, shop assistants, women in domestic work and other miscellaneous workers.<sup>79</sup>

'One Big Union of Australian Workers': Amalgamation with the AWU.

Fortified by its size and growth elsewhere, even if not in Rockhampton, the AWU's subsequent aspirations extended much farther than absorbing small sectional unions as it had done previously. It embarked upon a strategy of drawing in major industrial unions to form one big union run by and along the highly centralised lines of the AWU—a mass union of all workers organised by industry and committed to political action and the arbitration system.<sup>80</sup> The 1915 AWU convention formally enshrined the philosophy of 'One Big Union of the Australian workers' in its objectives.<sup>81</sup>

---

77. Mark Hearn and Harry Knowles, *One Big Union: A History of the Australian Workers' Union, 1886-1994*, Melbourne, 1996, p. 115.

78. *ibid.*, p. 114; Armstrong, *Closer Unity in the Queensland Trades Union Movement*, p.125.

79. Australian Workers' Union, Queensland Branch, *Membership Roll, 1916-17*. AWU, Brisbane.

80. Hearn and Knowles, *One Big Union*, pp. 115, 125 and 130; Armstrong, *Closer Unity in the Queensland Trades Union Movement*, p.134; Hunt, *A History of the Labour Movement in North Queensland*, p. 146.

81. Vere Gordon Childe, *How Labour Governs: A Study of Workers' Representation in Australia*, [1923], Melbourne, 1964, p. 129; Hearn and Knowles, *One Big Union*, p. 128.

The first local union to show interest in the AWU's grand plans was the AMIEU. In 1914, the AMIEU state conference resolved to take a membership ballot on amalgamation with the AWU following a proposal put forward by the Ross River (Townsville) branch.<sup>82</sup> Federal conference adopted the proposed scheme shortly after. General secretary Jack Crampton, on his way back to Brisbane from a northern tour, addressed a special meeting of Rockhampton meatworkers at Trades Hall in August 1914. The business of the night was to discuss "'Closer Unity" and particularly AWU amalgamation'. Representatives of other unions, the Labor Party and Trades Hall Board also attended Crampton's address. Whereas the AMIEU and Crampton had previously championed federation with the ALF, Crampton now spoke of the failure of such a peak body to protect workers in their hour of dire need. He cited the case of the American Federation of Labor's inability to defend strikers against the union-bashing tactics of the giant American Meat Trust (AMT) in Chicago.<sup>83</sup> This issue was of immediate relevance to Queensland meatworkers because Swifts, a subsidiary of the AMT, had acquired a site in Brisbane in 1912 and had also recently bought Alligator Creek meat cannery in Townsville.<sup>84</sup> In the northern city, there were additional fears that another American meat company, Armours, intended buying the Ross River works.<sup>85</sup> According to Crampton, the AMIEU needed protection against the American trusts with their 'ruthlessness against trade unions and appalling working conditions'.<sup>86</sup> He believed joining forces with the AWU would ultimately create a union of 100,000 members whose strength would be so great that 'inroads on their domain could be averted'.<sup>87</sup>

---

82. Hunt, *A History of the Labour Movement in North Queensland*, p.202, points out that the same item was raised by Alligator Creek (Townsville) branch at the 1913 conference.

83. *DR*, 10 Aug. 1914, p. 5.

84. AMIEU, *One Hundred Years of Struggle and Change*, p. 6; Denis Murphy, *T.J. Ryan: A Political Biography*, St Lucia, 1990, p.74; Hunt, *A History of the Labour Movement in North Queensland*, p. 202 points out that the need to amalgamate with the AWU for protection was raised by Alligator Creek (Townsville) branch at the 1913 conference.

85. *North Queensland Register*, 2 Feb. 1914, p.60, cited in Dawn May, *Arctic Regions in a Torrid Zone: The Ross River Meatworks, 1892-1992*, Townsville, 1992, p.48.

86. AMIEU, *One Hundred Years of Struggle and Change*, p.6.

87. *DR*, 10 Aug. 1914, p.5; Crampton was 'poached' from the AFBEU and worked for the AWA in Mackay during the 1911 sugar strike. Dalton, *The Queensland Labour Movement*, p. 4/23; AMIEU, *One Hundred Years of Struggle and Change*, p.5.

At Lakes Creek meatworks, the British-owned global interests of Nelson Bros owned Central Queensland Meat Export Company at the time with, as already mentioned, the shrewd Chicago-trained George Hopper in charge of operations.<sup>88</sup> Fortunately for local meatworkers and in contrast to the reputed American managerial style of union-bashing,<sup>89</sup> Hopper claimed he was not hostile to unionism as long as the members refrained from striking. From union minutes, it appears that management and union reached a reasonable working relationship in Rockhampton.<sup>90</sup> However, a managerial change at the nearby Mount Morgan gold and copper mine only two years earlier served as a clear example of what could easily befall local meatworkers under more typical American control.

The Mount Morgan general manager, 'Captain' George Richard, had been forced to resign in 1912 because, among other issues, the new proprietors deemed his attitude towards unions was too conciliatory. In his place they appointed an American metallurgist, Benjamin Magnus. The new manager quickly set about restructuring both operations and labour force, sacking 'trouble-makers' and changing the relatively amicable workplace atmosphere to one of repression and hostility.<sup>91</sup> Placing both the Townsville and Mount Morgan examples of American control before the Rockhampton men, Crampton easily persuaded them of the necessity to seek wider protection through unity with the AWU. In a ballot taken a fortnight later, the meatworkers voted overwhelmingly in favour of joining with the AWU to safeguard their industry. Of the 541 votes cast, 529 were for the amalgamation and only 12 opposed the merger.<sup>92</sup>

---

88. Lorna McDonald, *Rockhampton: A History of City and District*, St Lucia, 1991, p. 230; 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, p. viii.

89. Hugh Brogan, *The Penguin History of the United States of America*, London, 1985, p. 429 and 432.

90. Stewart, *An Analysis of Industrial Relations at CQME Coy, Lakes Creek*, p. 2 concurs with this opinion.

91. McDonald, *Rockhampton*, pp. 316-317.

92. AMIEU Minutes, 26 Aug. 1914. CCQC J19/940 3

Ultimately, amalgamation of the AMIEU and AWU did not come to fruition. Crampton had passionately argued in Rockhampton that the AMIEU 'was entering the amalgamation as a thoroughly organised body, dignified and financial, and with a fine sense of its duty to its own members'.<sup>93</sup> However, southern branches took the more realistic view that the meat union would be swallowed up by the AWU and they therefore rejected the scheme.<sup>94</sup> Following this setback for the AWU's plans, both unions adopted a system of membership ticket exchange. Over the next few years the local AMIEU sub-branch complained about the practice on numerous occasions, including the frequent refusal of AWU organisers to recognise the meat union ticket. By 1918, the Central District Council of the AMIEU decided to abandon the troublesome exchange system as their counterparts in the Northern and Southern districts had previously done.<sup>95</sup>

In its quest to establish itself as the premier union body, the AWU also made overtures to the FCDIU in 1914. At the time, the AWU controlled all lorry drivers north of Rockhampton and in western Queensland, leaving only the narrow coastal strip south from Rockhampton in the hands of the FCDIU.<sup>96</sup> Bradley Bowden argues that the AWU saw the absorption of the FCDIU in Queensland as the key to its planned eventual take-over of the national carters' body. Reciprocally, provincial sub-branches of the FCDIU desired a 'workable award' which their union had not yet been able to secure. They therefore pressured the state executive to conduct a ballot on amalgamation with the AWU in the hope of achieving success through that body.<sup>97</sup> Yet, in contradiction of Bowden's claim about provincial agitation for amalgamation, the minutes of Rockhampton Sub-branch indicate that it was not at all keen on merging with the AWU.<sup>98</sup>

---

93. *DR*, 10 August 1914.

94. Hearn and Knowles, *One Big Union*, p. 126

95. AMIEU Minutes, 9 Sept. 1914, 30 Sept. 1915, 25 July 1917 and 9 Dec. 1918. CCQC J19/940 3 and 4

96. Bowden, *Driving Force*, p. 31. The boundary was at St Lawrence, to the north of Rockhampton.

97. *ibid.*, p. 51.

98. It appears Bowden did not have access to the Rockhampton minute books.

From the outset, the FCDIU's lack of interest in amalgamation was marked. On receipt of the invitation to Crampton's address, the FCDIU replied that two representatives would attend 'if possible'; it chose no formal delegates, no prominent members appear to have attended and none reported on the discussions.<sup>99</sup> In the ballot that followed the promotional meeting, the Rockhampton sub-branch first sought advice from general secretary George Lawson, and then rejected amalgamation with only 11 supporting the move and 61 opposing it.<sup>100</sup> Fortunately for the local members, the state ballot produced a tied result and amalgamation did not succeed on that occasion.<sup>101</sup>

At a special meeting held before a second ballot in December 1915, FCDIU rank and file asked local secretary Frank Conlon for information about the AWU, indicating they were still not clear about the nature of the AWU organisation or what amalgamation entailed. Conlon 'strenuously opposed' the merger with the AWU and had ardent support from the acting president, William R. Goss. Conlon was a close associate and disciple of George Lawson who, it seems, opposed intervention by the AWU. Lawson had visited Rockhampton the previous month and brought the heartening news that the recent log of claims presented by the FCDIU to the federal court seemed hopeful.<sup>102</sup> Only one official, wages board representative Frederick Goss, spoke in favour of joining with the AWU. On that occasion, Fred Goss persuaded some other members to support the AWU proposal but the scheme was still well defeated with an 80 to 26 result. A second state-wide ballot rejected the amalgamation plan.<sup>103</sup>

Unfortunately for the AWU's aspirations of dominance of the union movement, it was not the only body seeking to become the basis of the 'One Big Union' at the time.

---

99. FCDIU Minutes, 4 Aug. 1914. CCQC P16/1952 2; *DR*, 10 Aug. 1914.

100. FCDIU Minutes, 2 Nov. and 7 Dec. 1914. CCQC P16/1952 2

101. *ibid.*, 1 Mar. 1915. CCQC P16/1952 2; Bowden, *Driving Force*, p. 51.

102. Bowden, *Driving Force*, p.198 observes that Lawson and several other secretaries were 'resistant to change from below...reluctant to accept interference from any other source'. Moreover, they ran their branches 'as semi-independent baronial fiefdoms'.

103. FCDIU minutes, 6 Dec. 1915 and 20 Dec. 1915. CCQC P16/1952 3

While the AWU envisaged a unified body committed to arbitration and political action through the Labor Party, other activists of a more radical ideological persuasion believed there was a need for industrial, political and social change of a revolutionary nature before workers' interests could be served to their greatest benefit.<sup>104</sup>

### AWU versus the OBU: Competing One Big Union Schemes

During World War I, a radical group which had been founded a decade earlier in Chicago, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), spread its influence to Australia. Disillusioned by what it considered the failure of craft and sectional unionism, the IWW espoused the replacement of trade unions with one giant body organised into industrial sections, just as did the AWU. However, unlike the AWU, the IWW envisaged 'revolutionary industrial unionism' which rejected arbitration and parliamentary processes in place of workers' control of industry and society.<sup>105</sup> After a very short life, the impact of which in Rockhampton is examined in Chapter 4, the IWW was declared illegal in late 1917.<sup>106</sup>

The most significant legacy of the IWW was the emergence of a general movement towards industry-based unionism throughout Australia. Whereas most union bodies rejected the revolutionary political propaganda of the IWW, they began to support the structural and organisational concept of one large workers' union, organised into industrial divisions, as an effective unified front against capital.<sup>107</sup> In 1918, meetings of combined unions in Sydney and Brisbane endorsed the idea of forming the Workers' Industrial Union of Australia (WIUA) which would put a One Big Union (OBU) scheme into practice. The preamble of the constitution of the planned WIUA

---

104. Hearn and Knowles, *One Big Union*, p. 128.

105. Verity Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism: The Industrial Workers of the World in Australia*, Melbourne, 1995, pp. 7 and 11.

106. Frank Cain, *The Wobblies at War: A History of the IWW and the Great War in Australia*, Melbourne, 1993, p. 25

107. Childe, *How Labour Governs*, p. 151; Cain, *Wobblies at War*, p. 291.

was the same as that of the IWW and the new body intended to be a giant federation of six industrial unions as the IWW had also envisaged.<sup>108</sup>

Some of the OBU literature circulating throughout Queensland in the wake of southern meetings reached the AMIEU in Rockhampton but the local members showed little interest in the material. There was no discussion arising from the inward correspondence at the following meeting, just a motion to forward the propaganda to the Trades Hall Board, perhaps to place it in their new library.<sup>109</sup> Similarly, on receipt of details of the proposed tour of an OBU organiser and a request for funds, the AMIEU sent the information to the state secretary in Brisbane for advice without discussing the matter locally.<sup>110</sup>

In 1919, QRU state organiser Hickey reported that Rockhampton railway workshops men showed keen interest in industrial unionism and had turned out in 'splendid attendance' to his two meetings to promote the OBU.<sup>111</sup> According to local QRU secretary George Kemp, there was great hope amongst the men that such amalgamation would rectify what the QRU saw as 'recent blunders of craft and sectional unions' in the Industrial Court.<sup>112</sup> However, in a ballot conducted later that year, Rockhampton QRU rejected the idea of a OBU, voting 314 to 227 against the proposal. Their counterparts in Brisbane, Ipswich, Townsville, Cairns, Mackay, Bundaberg, Maryborough, Mount Morgan and many other smaller centres, on the other hand, supported the ARU joining the OBU.<sup>113</sup> Perhaps general secretary Tim Moroney's claims that only through the OBU would workers be able to overthrow capitalism echoed too closely the ideas of the outlawed IWW for local railway employees.<sup>114</sup> Fortunately for the Rockhampton members of the QRU, while the state as a whole 'overwhelmingly endorsed' the OBU scheme, the lack of a federal body

---

108. Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism*, p. 253.

109. AMIEU Minutes, 26 Nov. 1918. CCQC J19/940 4

110. *ibid.*, 29 Oct. 1918. CCQC J19/940 4

111. *Militant*, Vol. I, No. 3, 7 Nov. 1919, p. 3.

112. *ibid.*, Vol. I, No. 4, 6 Dec. 1919, p. 17.

113. *ibid.*, Vol. I, No. 5, 7 Jan. 1920, Supplement p. 3. Other centres to oppose the OBU were Gladstone, Charters Towers and Toowoomba. The state majority in favour was 569 out of 5,810 votes cast.

114. *ibid.*, Vol. I, No. 3, 7 Nov. 1919, p. 3.



impeded further progress in that direction.<sup>115</sup> The following year, the QRU became a branch of the federal union, the ARU.

At that stage of OBU development, the AWU still believed itself to be the appropriate base for such a body because of its existing mass structure and organisation into industrial sections as OBU-ism dictated.<sup>116</sup> The struggle between the WIUA and the AWU to form the basis of the One Big Union is a complex and often confusing saga which is beyond the scope of this study of Rockhampton unionism. It is further complicated by the existence of another strand of militant OBU-ism at the time.<sup>117</sup> In essence, the relationship involved alternating hostility and compromise between the WIUA and AWU, as well as other unions, and considerable wrangling between the conservative leadership and a militant section of the AWU. Under the influence of the militants, the AWU joined the WIUA and other major industrial unions in conference in 1921. The outcome was a proposal for a new body, the Australasian Workers' Union. Eventually only the AWU, WWF and WIUA attended the first convention of the new body.<sup>118</sup> Radical OBU supporters backed this new 'fake OBU' and the body had a similar constitution and structure to its predecessor but it was dominated by the AWU with its tight centralised control and coloured-labour bar.<sup>119</sup> It was, after all the manoeuvring, One Big Union run by the AWU just as that union had originally desired.<sup>120</sup>

The debate about OBU-ism was also confusing for local unionists at the time. When instructed by the national executive of the WWF to conduct a ballot on the issue,

---

115. Moroney, 'All-Grade Railway Unionism', *Railway Advocate*, Oct. 1966, p. 3.

116. Hearn and Knowles, *One Big Union*, p. 129.

117. As Verity Burgmann points out, there was great confusion in the OBU movement by the existence of the WIUA or 'official OBU' which increasingly favoured 'top down amalgamation of unions' and a Workers' International Industrial Union (WIIU) or 'unofficial OBU' which insisted on 'bottom-up' shop-floor control. Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism*, pp. 256-9.

118. Hearn and Knowles, *One Big Union*, p. 131. Other unions interested were the ARU, AMIEU and Miners. E.H. Lane, *Dawn to Dusk: Reminiscences of a Rebel*, p. 264.

119. Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism*, pp. 259 and 260:

120. Hearn and Knowles, *One Big Union*, pp. 131-2.

local secretary Purnell wrote to his federal counterpart, Joe Morris, that Rockhampton members had asked exactly which OBU scheme they were to vote on: was it 'W.E. Trautman's or the AWU or was the question just a general one in the sense of complete [sic] affiliation of all Industrial Unions'.<sup>121</sup> Trautman was an American IWW theorist and his book, *Industrial Unionism Methods*, had reached Australian readers.<sup>122</sup> Seemingly, the local union was not conversant at that stage with the WIUA which embodied his ideas and which was the subject of the ballot.<sup>123</sup> In two consecutive ballots, the local WWF voted to join the WIUA.<sup>124</sup> Contrary to the recommendation of the national executive, however, the local men refused to support the idea of joining the Australasian Workers Union when it replaced the WIUA.<sup>125</sup> In particular, the question of financial control of the proposed body concerned the Rockhampton WWF. As an autonomous branch of the union, the local men feared a loss of their independence if their union entered an OBU dominated by the AWU.<sup>126</sup>

Like the WWF, the FCDIU was not interested in having its interests subsumed into an AWU-dominated OBU. In 1923, the local sub-branch committee defeated a motion to 'fall in with the movement' by adopting the preamble and constitution of the Australasian Workers' Union. Rockhampton FCDIU instead requested that the state secretary conduct a secret ballot of members on the issue.<sup>127</sup> According to the minutes, the only question asked of the George Lawson during his visit to oppose the amalgamation with the Australasian Workers' Union was the purely practical one—the fate of union property—to which he replied that it would certainly pass out of their control to the OBU.<sup>128</sup> Like the WWF, the FCDIU did not want its assets falling prey to the old AWU. As across the state as a whole, the Rockhampton sub-branch of the

---

121. Purnell to Morris, 14 Feb. 1920. NBAC T62/8/13/1

122. Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial unionism*, p. 73.

123. Morris to Purnell, 20 Feb. 1920. NBAC T62/8/13/1

124. First ballot: 75-47, Purnell to Morris 31 Mar. 1920. Second ballot: 61-37, Purnell to Morris, 31 May 1920. NBAC T62/8/13/1

125. Morris to Purnell, 2 Aug. 1921, and Purnell to Morris, 5 Sept. 1921 Butlin T62/8/13/1; Minutes of Committee of Management of the WWF, 21 Oct. 1921, p.518. NBAC T62/1/1

126. Purnell to Morris, 27 May 1922. NBAC T62/8/13/1

127. FCDIU Minutes, 23 Jan. 1923. CCQC P16/1952 5

128. *ibid.*, 12 Feb. 1923. CCQC P16/1952 5

FCDIU rejected the idea of joining the OBU, a decision then reaffirmed in August 1924.<sup>129</sup> Moreover, the FCDIU at the time was keener to amalgamate with other land transport unions than with an AWU-dominated OBU.<sup>130</sup> The Australasian Workers' Union formally ceased to exist in 1924 when the Commonwealth Industrial Registrar refused to register the union.<sup>131</sup>

Notwithstanding the official demise of the Australasian Workers' Union, the idea of OBU-ism lingered on, particularly with the ARU.<sup>132</sup> When ARU state president George Rymer addressed the 1925 WWF state conference in Rockhampton, local delegate Purnell did not seem too keen on his proposal for an OBU. Rymer's plan involved the formation of a Transport Workers' Union for Queensland 'as the first step towards the ultimate consummation of the OBU'. Purnell claimed his men did not want to rush into amalgamation and requested copies of the draft constitution of the 'Queensland OBU' be sent to all branches for careful consideration. He further commented that the financial arrangements of the WWF were 'very loose' and that his branch was not happy about the centralisation of funds that an OBU would require. The state conference elected Purnell as one of the three WWF delegates to a proposed OBU meeting to be organised by the ARU in Brisbane in August 1925.<sup>133</sup> It appears that the meeting did not take place, probably because the 1925 railway strike erupted at that point and diverted the attention of the ARU to more immediate domestic concerns. At the same time, the Queensland WWF became embroiled in strike action to force the stevedoring companies to adopt a rotary system of labour hire.<sup>134</sup> Finally, the 1927 formation of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), a peak body organised

---

129. *ibid.*, 11 June 1923 and 18 Aug. 1924. CCQC P16/1952 5

130. Mark Bray and Malcolm Rimmer, *Delivering the Goods: A History of the Transport Workers' Union in New South Wales 1888-1986*, Sydney, 1987, p. 98.

131. Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism*, p. 261.

132. Moroney, 'All-Grade Railway Unionism', *Railway Advocate*, December 1966, p. 3.

133. Minutes of Meeting of all Sub-Branches Conference (WWF), Trades Hall, Rockhampton, 15-24 July 1925. ML MSS 1049 1

134. Beasley, *Wharfies*, pp. 65-66. In 1921, Mr Justice McNaughton had handed down a new state award which directed employers to distribute work equally among wharfies but they refused to do so. Waterside Workers' Award—State, Judgment and Award, *QGG*, 1921, Vol. 116, No. 81, 8 Mar., p.1803, s. 14(1).

on sectional lines and not industrial lines, effectively ended any serious hopes of establishing any brand of One Big Union scheme in Australia.<sup>135</sup>

### Closer Unity by 1927

The position of closer unity in Rockhampton by the mid-1920s was that all the major unions and most of the smaller unions had considered, experimented with, adopted or rejected various schemes in an effort to better serve their members' industrial interests against those of employers. Of the several options for unification with workers outside Rockhampton, federation with kindred groups proved the most suitable and eagerly pursued. In this respect, local unions reflected the national pattern at the time in adopting the most successful and longest-lasting form of closer unity ever undertaken in Australian unionism.<sup>136</sup> Federation proved the most rewarding because it promoted the specific workplace interests of each industry; it facilitated a concerted and articulate approach to arbitration courts in opposition to employer groups; and it sometimes provided additional sickness and death benefits for its members. While federation limited local autonomy, unions still retained individual identities within the local community. They maintained considerable control over day-to-day affairs of the union and had channels of access to executive decisions and of complaint about local grievances. Moreover, the continuity and stability of federations allowed unions to devise and implement long-term policies to advance workplace conditions. Even when later opting for state awards which generally proved more satisfactory than those of the federal court which had initially attracted many unions to federate, they remained within the these national structures of kindred workers.

Closer unity across different industries, on the other hand, held little appeal for Rockhampton unions in the main. Affiliation with the dying ALF provided no tangible

---

135. Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism*, p. 261.

136. Armstrong, *Closer Unity in the Queensland Trades Union Movement*, p. 8.

benefits to workers and appeared not to be able to protect them in the struggle against exploitative employers. Amalgamation with the AWA, and the AWU which succeeded it, entailed losing individual identity within the mass union structure as well as submitting to the rigid, centralised control of those bodies. Neither did local unions want to become part of any One Big Union organised on the industrial lines of either the AWU or the revolutionary model. Here again, their individual identity, interests and funds would have been lost. And, as Chapter 5 will confirm, although most Rockhampton unions supported the arbitration and parliamentary processes which the AWU advocated, the IWW policy of direct action and industrial sabotage and its later championing by the ARU did not sit comfortably with the majority of Rockhampton workers. At the same time as Rockhampton unions accepted or rejected forms of closer unity in the national context, union activists applied the idea within their immediate context by attempting to establish in the city—with varying success—peak inter-union bodies to cater specifically for Rockhampton workers and to advance the 'Grand Cause' of the union movement locally.