

Chapter 3

The 'Coming Together of the Trades': Formation and Development of Local Peak Union Bodies to the late 1930s

The movement for closer unity between unions in the national context encouraged Rockhampton unions to undertake their own small-scale collective organisation. These inter-union bodies included committees to coordinate the celebration of Eight-Hour Day, to procure and manage a trades hall and to deal with contentious local industrial issues. In common with many similar organisations formed in provincial centres across Australia in the early decades of the twentieth century, not all of these bodies endured.

Like national schemes for closer unity, local inter-union organisations could only succeed where the power of individual unions remained in balance; where the interests of participating unions continued to find common ground; and where each affiliated union continued to feel it gained some benefit from the alliance.¹ Often these interests and benefits reflected founding objectives but while formally declared aims and objectives can give insight into why local combined organisations formed, they do not adequately explain, as Bradon Ellem and John Shields have argued, the characteristic 'false starts and temporary collapses' which frequently occurred.² At the same time, the agency of 'inspired leadership'³ in stimulating and sustaining members' interest in local peak bodies must be considered because it was largely the vision and dedication of early activists which established collective structures and often sustained

1. 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, p. 389.

2. *ibid.*, p. 384.

3. *ibid.*, p. 382.

them in times of crisis. The subsequent discussion examines the reasons for and the process of establishing inter-union bodies in Rockhampton. It also explores their respective successes and failures in the period to 1938 by which time three peak union committees were again functioning with a degree of confidence and success.

Commemorating the 'Great Boon': The Eight-Hour Day Celebration Committee

The first step towards closer unity among local unionists occurred in 1909 with the formation of a committee to celebrate the eight-hour day. Originally observed in Melbourne in 1855, Eight-Hour Day marked the attainment of an eight-hour working day by organised building trade employees and demonstrated workers' determination to extend the principle of eight hours toil, eight hours recreation and eight hours rest to all workers.⁴ In 1905, the local labour weekly, the *Critic*, had admonished Rockhampton for lagging behind Brisbane, Townsville, Cairns, Maryborough and Charters Towers in organising a celebratory 'annual uniting of the trades'. The paper claimed that even though the 'grafters of this Central District' returned Labor politicians to state parliament, they were either 'too frightened of the boss...[or]...too respectable, too level-headed, to procesh [*sic*] or carry banners'.⁵ Apart from the WWF and the craft unions, however, there were no other unions to permit the desired 'uniting of the trades'.

In 1909, buoyed jointly by the growing success of their own march and picnic and the 'great advance in Industrial Unionism in the district'⁶ even at that point, the WWF secretary, E.B. Purnell, circularised other unions about arranging a combined public demonstration to celebrate Eight-Hour Day. In Purnell's opinion, such a collaborative event would partially remedy 'the present disunited trades of the city'.⁷ In response to the invitation, representatives from the CQREA, AFBEU, ASCJ,

4. Robin Gollan, *Radical and Working Class Politics: A Study of Eastern Australia, 1850-1910*, Carlton, 1967, p. 72.

5. *Critic*, 21 Apr. 1905, p. 8.

6. *Critic*, 30 Apr. 1909.

7. *ibid.*, 5 Feb. 1909.

Locomotive Engine-Drivers, Firemen and Cleaners' Association, Operative Bakers, Typographical Association, and Shop Assistants and Factory Workers' Union met with those from the WWF in the Old Masonic Hall to launch a committee to organise joint festivities. There were also representatives from the Federated Seamen's Union whose members regularly called into Rockhampton on coastal steamers. Reflecting the pivotal role of their union in the formation of the new peak body, WWF president Jack Burke and secretary Purnell took on the corresponding positions in the new Eight-Hour Demonstration Committee, as it initially called itself.⁸

The new body opted to celebrate its cause on the first Monday in May of each year rather than the traditional first-of-the-month May Day.⁹ As well as being a public demonstration of unionism and the eight-hour principle which they espoused, the day as planned would entail an inter-union picnic with athletics, dancing and novelty competitions, prizes and small luxuries such as ice creams and fruit for the children. Ignoring the caution of Charles Manning, a Typographical Association representative, not to 'launch out too big for a first attempt', the committee also arranged a grand evening social to conclude the day. There was also a fund-raising art union with 3,000 tickets in prizes totalling £30.¹⁰ In retrospect, the committee, participants and press all voted the first Eight-Hour Day celebration an overwhelming success. Led by a mounted police escort and the Naval Brigade, nine unions—some with banners and working trade displays—a pipe band and two brass bands, an estimated 1,000 children wearing Eight-Hour Day badges, friendly societies in full regalia and floats promoting local firms processed through city streets to the showgrounds. There, 4,000 people attended a picnic and sports carnival. That night, 200 couples crowded into the School of Arts for the gala concert and dance. In the opinion of the labour press, the public demonstration

8. Eight-Hour Day Celebration Committee (EHDCC) Minutes, 30 Jan. 1909. CCQC D9/260 1

9. *ibid.*, 30 Jan. 1909. CCQC D9/260 1

10. *ibid.*; EHDCC, 1910 Art Union Ticket. CCQC D9/261 11

of unionism was 'an epoch-making event in Rockhampton' and bode well for a bright future for organised labour in the district.¹¹

Fortified by this success, the committee set about formally establishing itself by drafting a constitution. The new body, called the Rockhampton Eight Hours Day Celebration Union, adopted its constitution in August 1909. It had a special rubber stamp made to brand all property as the possession of the 'Rockhampton 8-Hour Celebration Union'.¹² Over its lifetime, the committee was very flexible with its name but most commonly used the name, Eight-Hour Day Celebration Committee.¹³



Fig. 14: 1909 Eight-Hour Day Celebration Committee

CCQC

Back: H. Longley, W. Keong, F. Lundin, A. Poole, W. Harvey, H. Pearson, A. Bartlem, H. Morris
Middle: A.O. Poole, L. Yahnke, S. Hadkins, A. Hodda, C. Manning, O. Heselwood, S. Till, W. Share
Front: J. Schwarten, J. Robinson, E.B. Purnell, J. Burke, C. Hough, J. O'Brien, C. Wisher

11. *Critic*, 21 May 1909.

12. EHDCC Minutes, 8 Aug. 1909. CCQC D9/260 2

13. Eight-Hour Day Celebration Committee and Labour Day Celebration Committee have been adopted in this work.

The objects set down in the constitution reflected the activities undertaken on the inaugural occasion. The function of the new organisation would be:

To organise and superintend the carrying out of an Annual Demonstration to fittingly celebrate the principles of 8 hours labour per day in all industries and to further inculcate this Great Boon in rising generations for its perpetual preservation and celebration.¹⁴

From the outset, the committee determined to maintain a balance of power between participating unions. Each affiliated body could nominate three financial members as delegates; any delegate absent for three consecutive meetings was to be replaced; no president could occupy the chair for two successive years; and a management committee of eleven would be elected annually. In the event of any financial loss, each union would contribute two guineas to liquidate the debt.¹⁵ Reality tested the mettle of this egalitarianism when the AWA, which converted many local workers in 1911, soon dominated the committee. The AWA presented credentials not only from neighbouring Mount Morgan and Mount Chalmers branches but also for each individual section of the Rockhampton Branch. The AWA's weight of numbers allowed its delegates, Joseph O'Brien and Harold Hartley,¹⁶ to secure the presidency and treasurer's position respectively for 1912. It also moved the meeting venue from the WWF's rooms to the AWA office.¹⁷ The other unions eventually protested against this apparent takeover by the AWA and forced it to comply with the rules about delegates. The committee also agreed to adopt the practice of an annually rotating presidency.¹⁸

Activities on Eight-Hour Day may have been organised by unions for unionists and their families to 'fittingly celebrate' the eight-hour principle and to demonstrate labour movement solidarity, but in the first decade of the committee's existence, it was the support of employers and the general community that jointly contributed to its

14. *ibid.*

15. *ibid.* The executive was comprised of president, two vice-presidents, secretary, assistant secretary, treasurer, three trustees and two auditors.

16. Harold Hartley was the Labor member for the state seat of Fitzroy from 1915 to 1929. *Queensland Parliamentary Handbook*, 1983, p.261.

17. *ibid.*, 2 Feb. 1912, 16 Mar. 1912, 3 Aug. 1912.

18. To 1917, the presidency was held by WWF, Typographical Assoc., QRU, AWA/AWU, FCDIU, AMIEU, Engine Drivers and Cleaners Association, Coopers, and Carpenters and Joiners. EHDCC minutes, 6 Oct. 1917. CCQC D9/260 2

success. The city's major retailer and manufacturer of clothing and furniture, James Stewart and Company, entered a display of mattress-making in the procession and donated three guineas for the mile foot race. Sidney Williams' Foundry, James Millroy and Sons' Emporium, Evans' Parcel Delivery and tradesmen of all callings entered promotional floats as well as donating and presenting prizes. Although the day was not yet a statutory holiday, the Retail Traders' Association and Lakes Creek meatworks granted an unpaid holiday for their workers. Not surprisingly, it was mostly those companies without personal links to the city, such as the southern shipping agents and wholesalers that refused to cooperate with the Eight-Hour Day committee in providing assistance or granting a holiday to their workers.¹⁹

The following year, employers discussed whether Eight-Hour Day or Victoria [Empire] Day on 24 May should be observed as a holiday. They complained that workers had far too many holidays, however they voted unanimously for the former date in the belief that 'a very important section of the community would be disappointed' if they did not.²⁰ Throughout the years to the end of World War I, local business provided sponsorship through donation and advertising, displayed art union prizes in their windows free of charge and even judged events on the day. Both unionists and the public—workers and middle class alike—could contest the varied sports programme. So, while the committee and the day itself were an essential part of working-class mobilisation, the celebrations were in some respects also a reflection of the wider community spirit of Rockhampton.

19. *ibid.*, 17 Apr. 1909 and 1 May 1909. CCQC D9/260 1

20. *MB*, 6 Apr. 1910. From 1910, the day became a statutory holiday following a Brisbane delegation to Premier Kidston. *QGG*, 1910, Vol. 94, No. 96, 30 Apr., p. 1127.

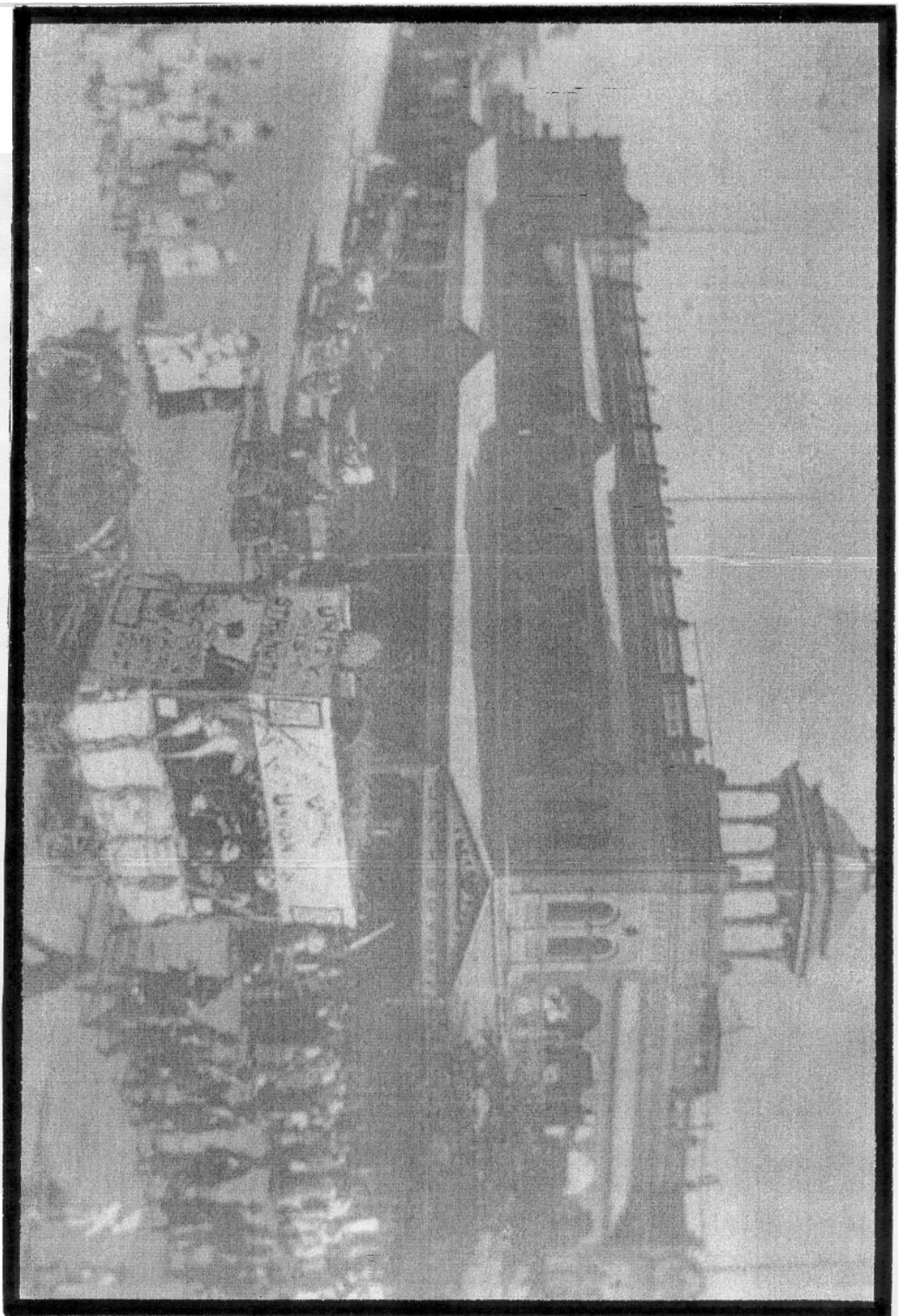


Fig. 15: Eight-Hour Day Procession, circa 1918, showing AMIEU float featuring a working butchers' shop followed by besuited members at the corner of Bolsover and William Streets outside the Normanby Hotel

RMT.

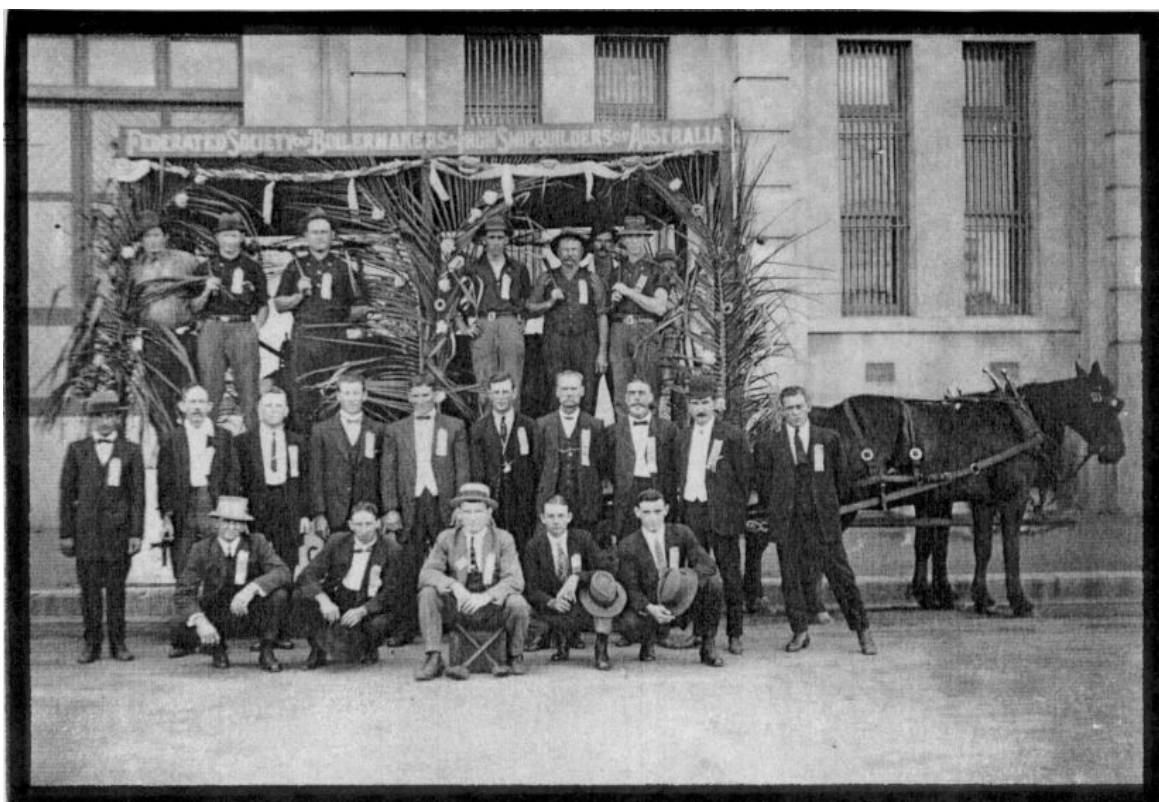


Fig. 16: Members of the Boilermakers' Society with welding and riveting display, outside Walter Reid and Coy's warehouse (top) and at the Agricultural Society's showgrounds after the procession
Hugh Armstrong

1912 25

PRICE, THREEPENCE.

Official Programme

OF

**FOURTH
ROCKHAMPTON
GRAND**

**8-HOUR SPORTS &
DEMONSTRATION.**

AGRICULTURAL
SOCIETY'S GROUNDS
Monday, May 6th
1912.

E. B. PURNELL, Hon. Sec.

PUBLISHED BY THE COMMITTEE.

City Printing Works, Rockhampton.

Fourth Rockhampton 8-Hour Day Demonstration and Sports.

Officials.

PRESIDENT—Mr. H. MORRIS.

JUDGES (Pedestrian and Cycling Events)—
Messrs. A. C. Anderson, Theo. Kingel, W. J. Curran.

JUDGES OF DISPLAYS—
Messrs. Peter Nelson, A. C. Anderson, Theo. Kingel.

SCOUTS—Mr. B. S. Hammond.

REFEREE—Mr. C. Wisher. **STARTER**—Mr. L. Mahon.

TRACKMASTER—Mr. G. Holst.

TIMEKEEPERS—Messrs. J. Applewaite, C. Manning.

STEWARDS:

Bookmakers and Band—Mr. L. Yahnke.

Press—Mr. J. Ryan. **Numbers**—Mr. G. Ganter.

Colours—Mr. G. Carrington.

Blackboard—Messrs. A. H. Schmidt, W. Goss, and C. W. C. Bluett.

Cycling—Messrs. L. Yahnke, J. Neil, G. Ganter, and F. Graddon.

Woodchopping—Messrs. C. Manning, C. Hough, and V. Briggs.

Horse Events—Messrs. L. Mahon, C. Holst, and G. Carrington.

Schools—Messrs. Joe O'Brien, H. Pearson, H. Gourley, and H. S. Schwab.

Sundry Events—Messrs. J. Robinson, J. Kerr, C. Bray, J. French, H. Clarke, A. Beaton.

Clerks of Course—Messrs. J. Lewis, H. Bracker, and J. Carey.

Sports Secretary—Mr. E. C. Wilkinson.

Treasurer—Mr. C. Hough.

General Secretary—Mr. E. B. Purnell.

Handicappers—Peds: Mr. J. D. Aitken; Cycling: Messrs. F. R. Clarkson, V. Mounsey; Trotting: Mr. John Ferguson.

Eight-Hour Concert & Dance

SCHOOL OF ARTS.

MONDAY, MAY 6th, 1912, at 8 p.m.

CONCERT AND DANCE

1. Overture.—Selection ("Balmoral"), ...
WATERSIDE UNION BAND.
2. Song.—"Farewell in the Desert" ... Mr W. DEAKIN.
(Stephen Adams)
3. Song and Dance.— ... Master W. HAY.
4. Cornet Solo.— ... Mr. C. WOOD.
5. Mirthful Mysteries.— ... Mr. CARL LEVING.

INTERVAL OF 10 MINUTES.

6. Overture.—Airs ("Old Favorite") ...
WATERSIDE UNION BAND.
7. Song.—"Hero of the Mine," ...
Miss GALSIE BANNON
8. Dance.— ... Miss M'KENNA
9. Song.— ... Miss M'CLELLAND.
10. Song.—"Thora" (Stephen Adams) ...
Mr. W. DEAKIN.
11. Dance.— ... Miss M'KENNA.
12. Song.—"The Singer was Irish," ...
Mr. G. IVETT.

DANCE TO FOLLOW.

Pianiste: Miss EILEEN TUCKER.

Ms. C.: Messrs E. BRAZIL & J. NEISH.

PRICES: Double Tickets (Admitting to Dance) 3s;
" Single (Admitting to Dance) 2s;
" Back Seats, (Concert Only), 1s.

E. B. PURNELL,
Sec. Eight-Hour Union Celebration.

Rockhampton Council Tramways.

Eight-Hour Day Celebration.

TIME TABLE.

Tram with Trailer leaves P. O. for S. Grounds.	Tram with Trailer leaves S. Grounds for P. O.
8.0 a.m.	7.45 a.m.
8.30 "	8.10 "
9.30 "	8.45 "
9.45 "	10.0 "
10.30 "	10.30 "
10.15 "	10.45 "
10.35 "	11.15 "
11.0 "	11.40 "
11.30 "	12.15 p.m.
12.5 p.m.	12.30 "
12.15 "	12.50 "
1.5 "	1.45 "
1.45 "	2.15 "
2.0 "	2.35 "
2.30 "	3.0 "
2.50 "	3.45 "
3.5 "	4.10 "
3.35 "	4.30 "
4.0 "	4.50 "
4.20 "	5.15 "
4.35 "	5.25 "
5.5 "	5.45 "
5.10 "	6.0 "
5.35 "	6.15 S.G. to T.
6.5 "	Shed.

ONLY ONE FARE.—TWO PENCE.

April, 1912. By Order.

Fig. 17: 1912 Eight-Hour Day Celebration Programme
CCQC



Fig. 18: 1910 Eight-Hour Day Art Union Ticket
CCQC

TIME SHEET.	
SPRINT HANDICAP	
First Heat	10.10 a.m.
Second Heat	10.15 "
Third Heat	10.20 "
ONE MILE BICYCLE HANDICAP	
First Heat	10.30 "
Second Heat	10.45 "
ALL SCHOOLS' COMPETITION	
RELAY RACE	11.0 "
EIGHT-HOUR HANDICAP	
First Heat	11.10 "
Second Heat	11.20 "
Third Heat	11.30 "
Fourth Heat	11.40 "
ONE MILE WALKING MATCH ...	11.50 "
COACHBUILDERS' WHEEL RACE	11.50 "
SEMI-FINAL SPRINT HANDICAP	12.5 p.m.
ONE MILE BICYCLE RELAY RACE	12.10 "
SEMI-FINAL EIGHT-HOUR HANDICAP	12.25 "
BILLY GOAT RACE	12.35 "
FINAL SPRINT HANDICAP	12.40 "
FINAL MILE BICYCLE RACE	12.50 "
FINAL EIGHT-HOUR HANDICAP	1.0 "
FIRST HORSE EVENT STARTS 2.15 p.m.	

First Prize—Sulky, Horse and Harness in Monster Art Union, on view here to-day. Purchase a Ticket at 1/- each. 35 other Prizes.	
PROGRAMME.	
INDUSTRIAL DISPLAYS.	
1. Best Industrial Trade Union Display, £15. First prize £7 10 0 Second prize £5 10 0	
2. Best Fancy Dress Costume £2 2 0	
3. Best Decorated Bicycle £2 2 0	
4. Best Worst Turnout, £3/3/- First prize £2 2 0 Second prize £1 1 0	
1. SPRINT HANDICAP, 75 yds., £3. First prize, £2; second, 15/-; third, 5/-.	
1. P. Walker ... 2 yds.	10. F. Chase ... 9 yds.
2. W. Marrison ... 6 1/2 "	11. A. Hughes ... 10 "
3. W. F. Black ... 7 "	12. R. Humphries ... 10 "
4. V. R. Browning ... 7 1/2 "	13. E. A. Boyes ... 12 "
5. R. V. Considine ... 8 "	14. W. Harris ... 12 "
6. J. Conaghan ... 8 "	15. R. D. Kennedy ... 13 "
7. F. H. Hughes ... 8 "	16. J. Austin ... 13 1/2 "
8. D. J. C. McGrath ... 8 1/2 "	17. J. Collins ... 13 1/2 "
9. A. Godbold ... 8 1/2 "	
First Heat, 10.10 a.m.	
<i>W. Marrison 6 1/2 F. Chase 9</i>	
<i>J. Conaghan 8 E. A. Boyes 12</i>	
<i>F. H. Hughes 8 J. Austin 13 1/2</i>	
1st. <i>Boyes</i> ... 2nd. <i>Austin</i> ... 3rd.	
Time ... 7 5	

Fig. 19: 1921 Labour Day Celebration Programme
CCQC

The constitution of the Eight-Hour Day Celebration Committee made no reference to political affiliations and the 1911 president, Charles Manning, maintained that the body 'recognised no politics'.²¹ Yet members' interest in supporting the Labor Party soon merged with Eight-Hour Day interests. Donations to local Workers' Political Organisations (WPOs), to the subsequent Labor Party branches and to state and federal election propaganda funds became common practice. Members believed that 'any battle fought in the interests of the workers of which this Union was composed...was within the constitution of the Union'.²² Moreover, whereas politicians were initially intended to be 'just plain ordinary citizens' at the celebrations,²³ they soon gained prominence in the procession and speech-making, particularly after Labor's state electoral victory in 1915.

In late 1918, the AWU submitted a request for a change of name to 'Labor Day'.²⁴ The reason given was to fall in with the planned state-wide alteration that was intended, perhaps, to reflect the ascendancy of the AWU-dominated political wing of the labour movement.²⁵ It also reflected the change of spelling adopted by the ALP at the time. Representatives from all unions unanimously supported the proposal but they adopted the traditional 'Labour Day', as moved by the AMIEU, in an attempt to keep the focus on the broader labour movement rather than on its political aspect.²⁶

Because organisation for the annual celebration entailed catering arrangements, the then Labour Day Celebration Committee encouraged the formation of a separate Ladies' Committee to oversee all domestic matters. Stalwart members of this auxiliary for many years were Emma Willis and Mary Jane Ashford. Most of their helpers were

21. *Critic*, 5 May 1911.

22. EHDCC Minutes, 4 Mar. 1911. CCQC D9/260 2

23. *Critic*, 5 May 1911.

24. EHDCC Minutes, 7 Sept. 1918. CCQC D9/260 2

25. Ross Fitzgerald, *A History of Queensland: From 1915 to the 1980s*, St Lucia, 1984, p. 3. In 1919, the Queensland Labour Party adopted the name Australian Labor Party—Queensland Branch.

26. EHDCC Minutes, 5 Oct. 1918. CCQC D9/260 2

the widows, wives or daughters of leading unionists²⁷ but both the Rockhampton and Fitzroy WPOs believed that to be eligible to join the auxiliary, each woman should be a unionist or WPO member herself.²⁸ There was even 'a little bitterness among the ladies' themselves over the matter. But when the main committee received a letter of complaint from Annie Smith, wife of WWF delegate and Rockhampton WPO secretary Albert Smith, it would not intervene in what was probably seen as petty female jealousy. Delegates believed Mrs Willis and her ladies were 'quite capable of managing their own affairs'.²⁹ In 1921, the Labour Day Celebration Committee acknowledged the role of the women with more than just the usual vote of thanks. Members rescinded an old minute debarring women from voting and the auxiliary gained equal representation with affiliated unions.³⁰ Nevertheless, female delegates rarely participated in any discussion other than progress reports on culinary arrangements. Men's business and women's business were clearly delineated and each side knew its domain.



Fig. 20: 1921 Labour Day Celebration Committee
CCQC

Mary Jane Ashford (back right), Emma Willis (front right) and May Purnell (daughter of EB, the young woman to the left of the picture)

27. Suzanne Gorman, personal communication 2 Apr. 1999.

28. Labour Day Celebration Committee (LDCC) Minutes, 5 June 1920. CCQC D9/260 3

29. *ibid.*, 16 Apr. 1921.

30. *ibid.*, 30 Apr. 1921.

In the second decade of its existence, the celebration produced progressively poorer processions, often with no union displays or banners and with far fewer rank-and-file marchers. The committee attempted to boost the quality of the procession in 1923 by promoting the new regional boom product, cotton. Even the Boilermakers' Society rather incongruously festooned what the press described as 'its aging and well perforated boiler-riveting display' with cotton bales that year. Regrettably, these efforts bought only a 'slight improvement'.³¹ By 1927, even the founding WWF voted against participation in the annual march. When only four unions agreed to march the following year, the committee abandoned the procession altogether.³²

The committee revived the march in 1929 to maintain face by marking its twenty-first year since inception. At the time, the local press rather erroneously observed that 'the movement—ever a sturdy infant—has attained its majority'.³³ The only union contingent of note was 50 AMIEU members following their banner. The rest of the parade consisted of an enormous photograph of Premier William McCormack followed by local politicians, members of various Labor Party branches, bands, motor cars entered by dealers, decorated billy-goat carts and a comic theatrical group. Dozens of children captivated by the antics of the entertainers trailed along behind the procession on their bicycles.³⁴ This rag-tag turnout presented a marked contrast to the proud ranks of unionists marching twenty-one years earlier.

As the press commented, participation almost certainly declined because of drought conditions and high unemployment caused by the deepening economic depression.³⁵ However, organisational factors also contributed to the fall-off in union support. First, while the body still drew participation from up to 15 unions at meetings, the spirit of unity which marked the previous decade had broken down. Perhaps this

31. *MB*, 8 May 1923, p. 7.

32. *ibid.*, 6 May 1927; LDCC Rough Minutes, Mar. 1928. CCQC D9/261 2

33. *MB*, 7 May 1929.

34. *ibid.*

35. *ibid.*, 3 May 1927.

was due to the retirement in 1921 of founder and secretary since 1913, E.B. Purnell. A very heavy work-load as the full-time secretary of the WWF and a Labor government appointee to the Legislative Council left Purnell little time to devote to the committee.³⁶ His replacement, Isaac (Ike) Shackleton of the then PIEU, although a dedicated and hard-working secretary until 1929, lacked Purnell's authority, dynamism and administrative skills. Furthermore, growing inter-union bickering was evident, stimulated by worsening unemployment, falling membership and tightening finances, set against the industrial turmoil of major railway strikes in 1925 and 1927. Ideological divisions in the union movement, which caused disagreements over whether to carry banners, wear individual union badges, mount trade displays, undertake a mass march of combined unions or whether to process at all, progressively strained relationships within the committee.

Second, the committee lost sight of its founding objectives. Despite attempts to retain its original character in the new name of 'Labour Day', the principles of unionism and the eight-hour working day gave way to political propaganda with Labor figures, slogans and 'how to vote' posters.³⁷ Local politicians like Jimmy Larcombe, Harold Hartley, George Farrell and Frank Forde led parades as 'the stalwarts of the Labour movement in Rockhampton' rather than union leaders or even the organising committee.³⁸ The procession became more a celebration of working-class party-politics than of industrial organisation. The committee also failed in its objective of inculcating the 'Great Boon' in the youth of the city. As Jimmy Larcombe observed in his 1927 luncheon speech, the poor turnout reflected that 'the rising generation was apathetic and did not fully appreciate the hard-won conditions for which the pioneers of the movement were responsible'.³⁹

36. LDCC Minutes, 18 Sept. 1921. CCQC D9/260 3

37. *MB*, 6 May 1927, p. 7.

38. *ibid.*

39. *ibid.*, 3 May 1927, p. 7.

Moreover, financial goals replaced the initial goal of celebration when the committee undertook 'the major objective' of establishing a trades hall and later building an adjoining theatre. The body's founding constitution provided for two-thirds of celebration profits to 'be appropriated and not spent on future celebrations', but did not specify to what project funds would be devoted.⁴⁰ As early as 1914, some members complained that 'commercialism was creeping into the great Eight-Hour movement'⁴¹ but the generous donations to the new Trades Hall of, for example, £250 in 1917,⁴² seemingly justified the gradual change of emphasis from worker participation to committee profit.

By the mid-1920s, the worsening economic conditions reduced celebration takings and an entertainment tax introduced by the Labor government—from which even the union movement was not exempt—further strained the financial situation.⁴³ In 1927, the sports carnival and fund-raising euchre parties ran at a loss and the annual art union, by then with a new motor car as the major prize, cleared only £24 so that no funds could be transferred to the 'major objective'.⁴⁴ In the escalating quest for profit, the dancing and novelty events for children, many juvenile races, the family atmosphere and friendly inter-union tug-o-wars gradually disappeared.⁴⁵

40. See for example, EHDCC Minutes of 5 Nov. 1911 and *DR*, 26 July 1913. A 1921 version of the rules, however, specifies this use of funds, but not as an objective. Rules of the Rockhampton Labour Day Celebration Committee, 1921. CCQC D9/261 33

41. EHDCC Minutes, 7 Feb. 1914. CCQC D9/260 2

42. EHDCC Cash Book, 1917, p. 74. CCQC D9/262

43. EHDCC Minutes, 21 Apr. 1917. CCQC D9/260 2; George Farrell was the member for Rockhampton from 1923 to 1929 while Frank Forde was the member for Rockhampton from 1917 to 1922, member for the federal seat of Capricornia from 1922 to 1946, Deputy Prime Minister from 1941 to 1945 and Prime Minister for one week after the Curtin's death in July 1945. *Queensland Parliamentary Handbook*, 1983, pp. 246 and 250; Duncan Waterson, *Biographical Register of the Queensland Parliament, 1860–1929*, Canberra, 1972, pp. 54 and 61; Rydon, Joan, *Biographical Register of the Commonwealth Parliament, 1901–1972*, Canberra, 1975, p. 77.

44. LDCC Rough Minutes, 1927. Unpaginated insert. CCQC D9/261 2; THBM Cash Book, 1927. CCQC P16/1955 4

45. *ibid.*, 5 Feb. 1921. CCQC D9/260 3

ROCKHAMPTON LABOUR DAY CELEBRATION UNION.
21st BIRTHDAY ANNUAL ART UNION.
 Sanctioned by the Attorney-General of Queensland.
 (In aid of the funds of the Rockhampton Labour Day Celebration Union).
 To be drawn on Monday 15th July, 1929, at Trades Hall, Rockhampton, at 8.15 p.m.

1st Prize—CHEVROLET NATIONAL TOURING CAR, complete £235 9 6
2nd PRIZE—A SILKY OAK DINING ROOM SUITE, comprising 1 Table and 6 Chairs (2 Carvers & 4 diners) 18 10 0
3rd PRIZE—A SILKY OAK SIDEBOARD 9 10 0
4th PRIZE—A 44 PIECE DINNER SET (including Cups and Saucers to match) 5 0 0
5th PRIZE—A PORTABLE "REXOPORT" GRAMOPHONE 4 0 0
6th PRIZE—A SEAGRASS CANE LOUNGE 3 0 0
7th PRIZE—1 YEAR'S SUBSCRIPTION "MORNING BULLETIN" (donated by The Morning Bulletin Ltd.) 2 12 6
8th PRIZE—1 YEAR'S SUBSCRIPTION "EVENING NEWS" (donated by Evening News Co.) 1 12 6
9th PRIZE—A COSY HAMMOCK (donated by D. Gillinder, Esq.) 1 0 0
10th PRIZE—TROPHY (donated by H. V. Hinton, Esq.) 1 0 0
11th PRIZE—TROPHY (donated by H. D. Peers, Esq.) 1 0 0
12th PRIZE—TROPHY (donated by W. M. Pattinson, Esq.) 1 0 0
13th PRIZE—TROPHY (donated by Charlie Murphy, Esq.) 1 0 0
14th PRIZE—A HAT (donated by J. W. Jones, Limited) 1 0 0
15th PRIZE—OPEN ORDER 1 0 0
16th PRIZE—OPEN ORDER 1 0 0
17th PRIZE—OPEN ORDER 1 0 0
18th PRIZE—OPEN ORDER 1 0 0
19th PRIZE—OPEN ORDER 1 0 0
20th PRIZE—OPEN ORDER 1 0 0
21st PRIZE—OPEN ORDER 1 0 0
22nd PRIZE—OPEN ORDER 1 0 0
23rd PRIZE—OPEN ORDER 1 0 0
24th PRIZE—OPEN ORDER 1 0 0
25th PRIZE—TROPHY (donated by W. Franks, Esq.) 0 10 6
26th PRIZE—TROPHY (donated by Baxter Bros.) 0 10 6
27th PRIZE—TROPHY (donated by Mrs. M. Lyons) 0 10 6
28th PRIZE—TROPHY (donated by Mrs. J. Kelly) 0 10 6
29th PRIZE—TROPHY (donated by a well-wisher) 0 5 0

Tickets: One Shilling Each.
 Prizes 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 will be frequently on view in Williams' Ltd. Furniture Department Windows, East Street, until date of drawing.
 [SEE OTHER SIDE. I. H. SHACKLETON, Secretary]

No. 13759

Rockhampton Labour Day Celebration Union.
21st Birthday Annual Art Union.
No. 13759

Name.....
 Address.....

PLEASE NOTE.—All Butts, Unused Tickets, and Cash must be returned to the Secy.
 I. H. Shackleton, c/o Trades Hall NOT LATER than SATURDAY, June 29th, 1929.

First Six Prize Winners of 1928 Art Union.
 1—1118—Stan. Francis, P.O. Emerald.
 2—1678—Heathcote, Coningsby.
 3—1678—Heathcote, Coningsby.
 4—1678—Heathcote, Coningsby.
 5—1678—Heathcote, Coningsby.
 6—1678—Heathcote, Coningsby.

Fig. 21: 1929 Labour Day Art Union Ticket, showing prizes and sources of donations including the anti-Labor *Morning Bulletin* CCQC

Horse racing, trotting, cycling and foot races had been a part of the celebrations since about 1912 and, by the end of that decade, the committee had registered the Labour Day Turf Club. These activities offered hefty cash prizes to attract outsider participation, bookmakers and public booths. As the emphasis on commercial activities grew and regimentation by a host of paid officials increased, the day progressively lost its appeal for many workers and their families. It was no longer an outing of minimal-cost celebration and probably emptied workers' pockets of scarce cash. FCDIU secretary and committee delegate Frank Conlon lamented that it had got to the stage where many unionists 'would sooner go fishing or shooting on Labour Day'.⁴⁶ The spirit of the union movement, it seems, had waned among workers.

The coming-of-age procession of the Labour Day Celebration Committee was simultaneously its funeral cortege. The committee collapsed in early 1930.

46. LDCC Rough Minutes, 23 Jan. 1925. CCQC D9/261 2

Instrumental in its demise was the ARU whose delegate, F. Gordon Crane, quite rightly claimed that Labour Day was no longer 'a real workers' holiday' nor provided adequate funds for Trades Hall.⁴⁷ The ARU pulled out of the joint union body, followed by the ASCJ and the majority of other unions, so that there was no longer a quorum of seven affiliated unions as stipulated in the revised constitution.⁴⁸ That year, a new committee of ARU officials and a stalwart Frank Conlon conducted a basket picnic and sports day for 2,000 children in Victoria Park. A family concert in the Trades Hall Theatre completed the day's celebrations.⁴⁹

Paradoxically, the ARU which dispensed with the traditional parade in 1930 resurrected it nine years later. Labour Day in 1938 saw a lengthy procession of unionists and floats move from Trades Hall to Victoria Park for a combined sports meeting while the picnic drew some 6,000 children as well as their parents, officials and others of the union community.⁵⁰ The impetus for again organising a combined march came from the 1937 national 40-Hour Week campaign orchestrated by the ACTU and in which the ARU took the lead in Rockhampton.⁵¹ But rather than being a day of celebration of unionism as in the early years of the movement, or even of Labor politics as it had become by the late 1920s, the 1938 procession was one of protest. The chief target was the Queensland Labor government because the Industrial Court had rejected a claim for reduced hours made by the combined railway unions the preceding September.⁵² Slogans such as 'Demand the 40-Hour Week', 'Award Rates', '£4 8s a week Basic Wage' and 'Sick Pay for All Workers', signalled the contemporary industrial demands of unionists. On the other hand, placards reading 'Collective Security will stop War and Fascist Aggression', 'Preserve your Democratic Ideals' and 'Out with

47. *MB*, 29 Apr. 1930. As Chapter 5 will reveal, Frederick Gordon Crane was not a railway worker but a tutor for the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and friend of ARU organiser, Fred Patterson. According to Trades Hall Board rules, an affiliated union could appoint whom it chose as a delegate, even if not a member of the union.

48. Rules of the Rockhampton Labour Day Celebration Union, 1921, p. 5. CCQC D9/261 33

49. *MB*, 6 May 1930, p. 5.

50. *ibid.*, 3 May 1938, p. 5.

51. *ibid.*, 6 June 1937, p. 6.

52. *ibid.*, 25 Sept. 1937, p. 5.

Malnutrition' indicated other issues of importance to some marchers, particularly those in the ARU and ASCJ.⁵³

87 The deteriorating international political situation in Europe stimulated some of these concerns but their promotion in the Rockhampton Labour Day procession also indicated the increasing prominence of ideological differences within the local union movement which, in the post-war period, would prove divisive. Despite this new aspect of the Labour Day march, the participants paid glowing tribute to the founder of the original procession in Rockhampton, E.B. Purnell, for his 'magnificent service to the workers' cause'.⁵⁴ This was indeed a fitting and timely recognition because Purnell had not only initiated the original Eight-Hour Day Celebration Committee and procession but had resigned the year before as secretary of the WWF—a position he had held since the turn of the century. Moreover, Purnell had played a key role in establishing the second peak union organisation in Rockhampton, the Trades Hall Board of Management.

Providing 'a Home for Labour': The Trades Hall Board of Management

The Trades Hall Board of Management proved initially less robust but ultimately longer-lived than its parent organisation, the Eight-Hour Day Celebration Committee. Just as the *Critic* prematurely urged the 'coming together of the trades' in Rockhampton, it also erroneously predicted in 1905 that the erection of a trades hall would be 'a probability in the near future'.⁵⁵ A hall remained a mere dream until enough unions existed in Rockhampton to fund its acquisition. Most importantly, these new unions needed to show they could work together in harmony before embarking on the mammoth task of financing a cooperative building venture.

53. *ibid.*, 3 May 1938, p. 5.

54. *ibid.*, 3 May 1938, p. 5.

55. *Critic*, 17 Mar. 1905, p. 6.

Having proved they had the necessary support and organisational skills by staging the successful 1909 celebrations, the Eight-Hour Day Celebration Committee instructed the secretary to approach the government for a grant of land suitable for building a trades hall. Their counterparts in Brisbane had been successful in a similar request two decades earlier.⁵⁶ Once again, the *Critic* urged their unified efforts:

This year there has been a grand exhibition of the true spirit of Unionism in working up the Eight Hour Celebration. Cannot this enthusiasm be kept warm and working until a Trades Hall is secured where organised Labour can feel itself permanently at home instead of lodging in a chamber up a back stair down a lane? Labour should not be satisfied with any old hole for its meetings...It is time it buckled up and demanded some of the good things for itself, and first and foremost should be a good hall in which to make a home and hold its meetings.⁵⁷

The Eight-Hour Day Celebration Committee's approach to the government proved fruitless so delegates struck a compulsory levy of five shillings per member on affiliated unions to raise the deposit for a hall.⁵⁸ Further guided by the Brisbane model, the 1911 Rockhampton committee requested each union to elect a delegate to form the Trades Hall Board under the chairmanship of Charles Hough of the AWA Grocers' Section.⁵⁹ The specific purpose of the board was to receive union levies and two-thirds of the Eight-Hour Day profits, as was the custom in Brisbane,⁶⁰ and to subsequently acquire and manage a building for use as a trades hall.

In common with many provincial peak bodies in their infancy, the board soon folded.⁶¹ The reason given for its 1912 collapse was that its members had 'too much other public work on hand' with the general strike and a state election that year.⁶² No doubt these events distracted the committee, particularly Charles Hough who was also the secretary of the local WPO. However, it is possible the collapse also stemmed from

56. EHDCC Minutes, 8 Aug. 1909. CCQC D9/260 1; Matthew McCabe to E.B. Purnell, 19 June 1911, insert in minute book; Brisbane Trades Hall was opened in 1891. Ronald Lawson, *Brisbane in the 1890s: A Study of an Australian Urban Society*, St Lucia, 1983, Plate 80 note.

57. *Critic*, 6 May 1910.

58. There is no record of a letter having been forwarded to the government nor any further mention of a government grant in the minutes. EHDCC Minutes, 5 Nov. 1910. CCQC D9/260 2

59. *Critic*, 24 June 1911.

60. McCabe to Purnell, 19 June 1911, insert in Minute Book. CCQC D9/260 2

61. Ellem and Shields, 'Why Do Unions Form Peak Bodies?', p. 384.

62. EHDCC Minutes, 1 Feb. 1913. CCQC D9/260 2

the AWA having dominated the board in the same way it did the Eight-Hour Day Celebration Committee with its over-representation during 1911 and 1912. The equally sudden local collapse of the AWA at the end of 1912 and the upheaval of a national merger with the pastoral AWU may then have created an executive vacuum in the new peak body and brought on its demise. Whatever the cause, the board disintegrated and the collection of levies for the hall also stopped.⁶³

Dedicated unionists like E.B. Purnell did not let this setback blight their vision of a home for labour in Rockhampton. Early in 1913, a committee under Purnell set up a new board under the constitution of the former body.⁶⁴ By that time, Rockhampton unionism had gained in numerical strength and stability so that delegates from 15 unions attended the inaugural meeting. Again, the WWF demonstrated its leading role with John Robinson and Albert Smith elected president and secretary respectively of the new Trades Hall Board of Management. At the same time, the new board maintained a balanced composition with John Taylor of the ASE as vice-president and Thomas Kean of the AWU as treasurer. Trustees John Adamson MLA,⁶⁵ John Ryan (AMIEU) and Frederick Goss (FCDIU) completed the committee so that all major unions in Rockhampton had representation.⁶⁶ The objectives of the new board were:

To transact all business in connection with the Hall; to receive rents; make additions or alterations to the property and do all and everything that may, from time to time, be considered necessary for the proper preservation of the building. The function of the Board shall not extend beyond the direct business of the Hall.⁶⁷

63. *ibid.*

64. *ibid.*

65. Member for Rockhampton from 1911 to 1917. He defected to the Nationalists in 1916 over the conscription issue. Waterson, *Biographical Register of the Queensland Parliament, 1860–1929*, p. 1.

66. *DS*, 22 July 1914.

67. *MB*, 29 Oct. 1929.



Fig. 22: 1914 Rockhampton Trades Hall Board of Management
CCQC

Back: E. Pordage (FEDFA), I. Cant (Typo), J. Laffan (FMMU), H. Harris (FCDIU)
Middle: J. Everett (FEDFA), S. Salton (ASE), T. Kean (AWU), C. Busby (AMIEU), L. Mahon and R. Goss (FCDIU)
Front: F. Goss and J. Ryan (Trustees), C. Wisher (AMIEU), J. Robinson and A. Smith (WWF), E. Hayes (AMIEU)
J. Larcombe MLA; Inset: J. Adamson MLA (Trustee)

Almost nine years after the *Critic* had predicted such an event, Rockhampton unions secured 'a home of their own'.⁶⁸ With the deposit advanced by the WWF, the board purchased a £2,500 half-acre property—a former hide and skin store located at the corner of Fitzroy and Bolsover Streets, only one block from the main street. The site contained a double-storeyed brick building to serve as a hall after renovations by union volunteers. There were the added advantages of a corner shop and house for rental and a generous yard for outdoor activities or extensions.⁶⁹ In the opinion of the correspondent to the *Daily Standard* in Brisbane, not only would the converted premises 'beautify the city but [also would] stand as a monument to their zeal, loyalty and devotion to the movement which they [were] so anxious to advance'.⁷⁰

68. *DS*, 22 July 1914.

69. *Queensland Towns Directory*, 1911-12, p. 276 and 1919-20, p. 375; EHDCC Minutes, 4 Apr. 1914.
CCQC D9/260 2

70. *DS*, 22 July 1914.

CONTRACT.

the undersigned _____ as
Agent for the Vendors THE QUEENSLAND NATIONAL BANK LIMITED do hereby
acknowledge to have this day sold to The Trades Hall Board
of Rockhampton the property in the County of Springston
Parish of Rockhampton containing 1 rood 3 paches. Being Lot
5 of alls 1. of Sect. 29.
for the sum of Two thousand four hundred & twenty
five pounds - and to have received the sum of £200 -

by way of deposit and in part payment of the said purchase money AND I/we the
above-named Purchaser hereby acknowledge to have this day purchased the said
property for the sum first above stated and agree to fulfil in all respects on my/our part
the Conditions of Sale endorsed.

DATED this Twentieth day of March 1914

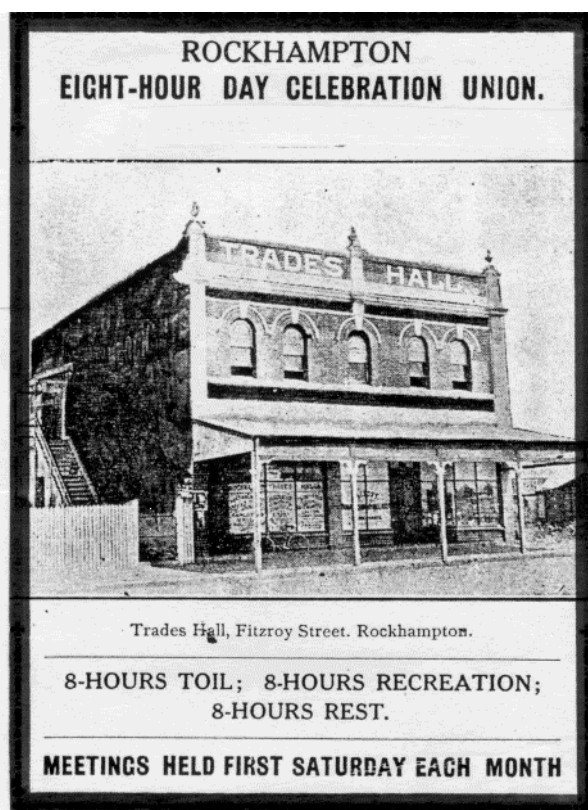
N. W. Roby Vendors' Agent.

Witness [Signature]
John Adamson Purchaser.
John Ryan
Hedrick. Robert. Gov. } Messrs
The Trades Hall Board
Rockhampton

Fig. 23: Contract of Sale of Property to Rockhampton Trades Hall Board
CCQC

Fig. 24: Rockhampton Trades Hall as illustrated on Eight-Hour Day Publications and Board Letterhead

CCQC



To mark the opening of Trades Hall on 22 August 1914, the board turned on a 'Grand Smoke Concert'.⁷¹ Then a concentrated effort of fund-raising commenced to repay the bank loan. Methods included a levy of £1 per member over four years on each affiliated union and low interest loans of £200 from both the WWF and AMIEU and £30 from the FCDIU. There was also the proceeds of social events and, as planned, two-thirds of the profits of the Eight-Hour Day Celebration Committee.⁷² As a result, within four years, the board had paid off the bank loan. Unfortunately, it had to spend the extra £400 it had raised on repairs to walls cracked during an earth tremor following a major flood in 1918.⁷³ Another inter-union smoke concert marked the official release of the title deeds in October of that year.⁷⁴

71. Rockhampton Trades Hall Board of Management Official Opening Programme, 22 Aug. 1914. OML

72. FCDIU Minutes, 30 Mar. 1914 and 27 Apr. 1914. The Carters' Union requested a refund of £5 the following December to purchase their new banner—a cost they had overlooked. CCQC P16/1952 2

73. F. Conlon to W.J. Riordan, State Secretary AWU, 26 May 1926; F. Conlon to W.J. Dunstan, State Secretary, AWU, 15 Mar. 1923 quotes £275. THBM Correspondence. CCQC U14/2064 7 and 6; The tremor occurred due to sea-floor changes after the record flood of the Fitzroy River in Jan-Feb. 1918.

74. THBM Cash Book. CCQC U14/2064 8

With recourse on all documents. Cheques, &c. not available until collected. A charge of Five Shillings (5/-) is made Half-yearly for keeping the Customer's Account. The Bank is hereby authorised to debit the Account with this charge in the months of June and December in each year and on closing the Account.

The Queensland National Bank Limited,

29th May 1914

Lodged as per Slip therewith
the sum of Seven shillings
and six pence

for Credit in Account Current of
R. P. H. Trades Hall Board
Teller.

With recourse on all documents. Cheques, &c. not available until collected. A charge of Five Shillings (5/-) is made Half-yearly for keeping the Customer's Account. The Bank is hereby authorised to debit the Account with this charge in the months of June and December in each year and on closing the Account.

The Queensland National Bank Limited,

29th May 1914

Lodged as per Slip therewith
the sum of Eleven pounds
Twelve shillings & four pence

for Credit in Account Current of
R. P. H. Trades Hall Board
Teller.

With recourse on all documents. Cheques, &c. not available until collected. A charge of Five Shillings (5/-) is made Half-yearly for keeping the Customer's Account. The Bank is hereby authorised to debit the Account with this charge in the months of June and December in each year and on closing the Account.

The Queensland National Bank Limited,

8 JUN 1914

Lodged as per Slip therewith
the sum of Two hundred
Pounds

for Credit in Account Current of
R. P. H. Trades Hall Board
Teller.

With recourse on all documents. Cheques, &c. not available until collected. A charge of Five Shillings (5/-) is made Half-yearly for keeping the Customer's Account. The Bank is hereby authorised to debit the Account with this charge in the months of June and December in each year and on closing the Account.

The Queensland National Bank Limited,

15th June 1914

Lodged as per Slip therewith
the sum of Four pounds

for Credit in Account Current of
R. P. H. Trades Hall Board
Teller.

With recourse on all documents. Cheques, &c. not available until collected. A charge of Five Shillings (5/-) is made Half-yearly for keeping the Customer's Account. The Bank is hereby authorised to debit the Account with this charge in the months of June and December in each year and on closing the Account.

The Queensland National Bank Limited,

16th June 1914

Lodged as per Slip therewith
the sum of Two pounds
18/-

for Credit in Account Current of
R. P. H. Trades Hall Board
Teller.

With recourse on all documents. Cheques, &c. not available until collected. A charge of Five Shillings (5/-) is made Half-yearly for keeping the Customer's Account. The Bank is hereby authorised to debit the Account with this charge in the months of June and December in each year and on closing the Account.

The Queensland National Bank Limited,

18th June 1914

Lodged as per Slip therewith
the sum of Six pounds
10/-

for Credit in Account Current of
R. P. H. Trades Hall Board
Teller.

Fig. 25: Repayments on Bank Loan for Trades Hall showing frequent payments in amounts both large and small

CCQC

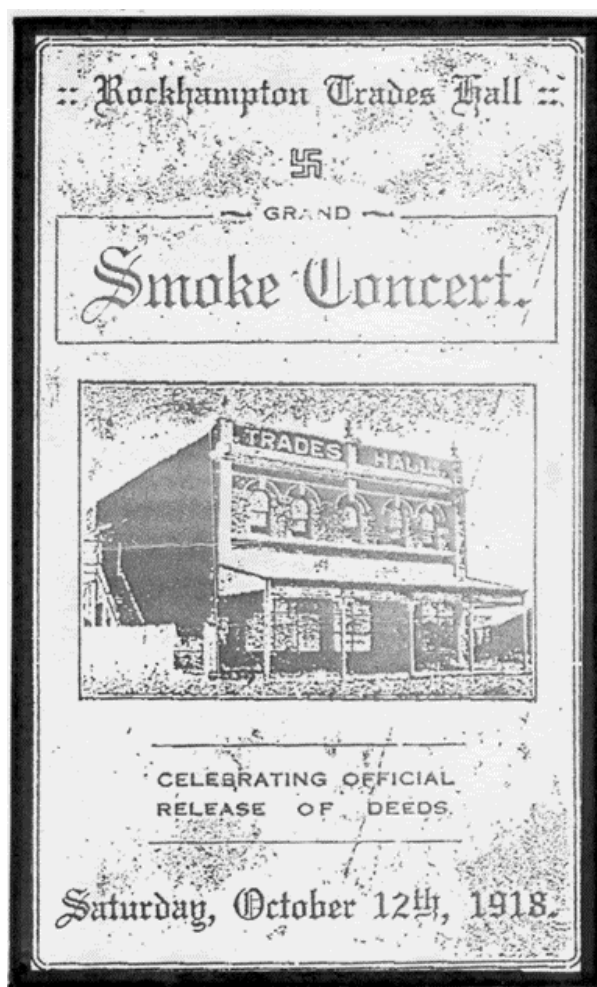


Fig. 26: Programme for 1918 Trades Hall Grand Smoke Concert to celebrate the release of title deeds

CCQC

Having a hall of their own solved the office accommodation problems of the major unions. Those unions with permanent secretaries—the WWF, AMIEU, FCDIU and QRU—as well as the AWU organiser, opened offices in Trades Hall. The new venue was far better than the 'hovel in Lower East Street' where, in the opinion of the Trades Hall Board secretary from 1922, Frank Conlon, 'a few so-called respectable tenants of the same building objected to the Unions having offices'.⁷⁵ The unions prided themselves on their independent surroundings while the *Daily Standard* congratulated them on being 'able to outwit commercialism' on the price.⁷⁶ Most importantly, the new premises put Rockhampton 'in the proud position of being one of the few Trades Halls where almost all the unions transact[ed] their business, centrally located in town'.⁷⁷

75. Conlon to Dunstan, 15 Mar. 1923. CCQC U14/2064 7; Trades Hall Rent Ledger, 1914-1925. CCQC U14/2064 4

76. *DS*, 22 July 1914.

77. Conlon to Dunstan, 15 Mar. 1923. CCQC U14/2064 7

Unlike the Eight-Hour Day Celebration Committee whose founding rules specified three delegates per affiliated union, the Trades Hall Board's constitution used union size as the basis for representation: unions with over 100 members could elect three delegates; over 50 members, two delegates; and for small unions with fewer than 50 members, one delegate.⁷⁸ While this did not allow equal representation, it still ensured that small unions could have a voice in the running of Trades Hall and that no one large union could dominate. The presidency also appeared to rotate annually although, in the absence of surviving minutes before 1921, this is difficult to substantiate. According to the minutes of affiliated unions, the period to 1920 was one of minimal complaint by unions and of financial success and positive achievement by the peak body.

The aspirations of the Trades Hall Board did not end with the acquisition of a hall for offices and meetings. From 1920, the board began to consider plans for a theatre on the land next to Trades Hall. In 1923, President Bert Buxton (WWF) outlined what the board envisaged and what the architect had designed to meet these requirements. The new concrete building would be bigger and grander than any other enclosed venue in the city and one in which 'the Labourites of Rockhampton' would hold dances, concerts, lectures and social gatherings. The Fitzroy Street frontage consisted of a foyer separating two shops for rental while an upstairs library and reading room opened onto a balcony over the footpath awning. Behind these rooms was an auditorium with gallery 'complete with all modern improvements in lighting and ventilation' and capable of seating 1,000 patrons. The adjoining kitchen boasted a gas range and oven while outside lavatories featured the 'latest septic system of waste disposal'.⁷⁹ The architect, Roy Chipps, estimated £7,497 for the project while the builder, Charles Gough, estimated £7,610.⁸⁰

78. AFBEU Minutes, 11 July 1911. CCQC J19/940 1

79. THBM Minutes, 27 Sept. 1922. CCQC U14/2063 1; *MB*, 29 Oct. 1925.

80. THBM Minutes, 18 Jan. 1923. CCQC U14/2063 1; Joint Report of Architect and Builder, New Concert Hall, 17 July 1926, CCQC U14/2064 6

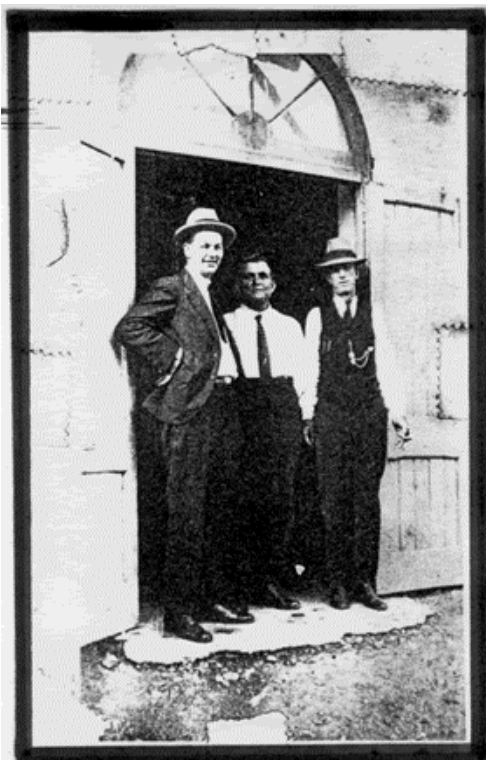


Fig. 27: Roy Chipps (architect), John Ryan (trustee) and Frank Conlon (secretary) discussing the new theatre at rear door of Trades Hall, 1924

CCQC



Fig. 28: Architect's Sketch of Proposed Theatre, 1925
CCQC

The Trades Hall Board intended to mortgage the existing building for the project. Unfortunately, it met rejection on all requests for finance. Despite the intercession of local politicians, the Labor government offered no assistance. It refused both a loan and permission for 'certain games' to be conducted as fund-raisers.⁸¹ Neither would the State Insurance Office, Public Curator or banks cooperate and the board resolved to again levy affiliated unions at £1 per member over four years.⁸² This request raised the question of which unions had actually contributed levies for the original Trades Hall purchase in 1914. The ARU had not paid up but had collected £200; the Boilermakers' Society had done nothing at all; and the AWU had agreed to pay but had not collected any levies. Other than Thomas Kean, the Trades Hall janitor who paid his own affiliation fee and attended as an honorary member, the AWU had no delegates on the board at all.

Because of this unequal financial support, the Trades Hall Board changed its rule on membership to disadvantage non-contributing unions. It subsequently allowed three delegates for unions giving over £20 per annum, two for over £10 contribution and only one for those paying less than £10.⁸³ The AWU used the hall without affiliating or contributing financially in any way other than rent so the board approached AWU state secretary William Dunstan for a loan of £500. That union forwarded £250 four months later.⁸⁴ With levies, loans, donations, rents, collections in hotel bars and the proceeds of the 'Liberty Fair' benefit carnivals, the board accumulated £5,068 by 1925.⁸⁵ With a bank overdraft of £3,000, construction began. The Minister for Railways and local member, Jimmy Larcombe, had the honour of laying the foundation stone of the new hall. This was a fitting gesture because Larcombe had been the founding secretary of

81. THBM Minutes, 11 May 1922 and 18 May 1922. CCQC U14/2063 1

82. FCDIU Minutes of special meeting of unions, 7 June 1920. CCQC P16/1952 4

83. THBM Minutes, 18 Aug. 1921 and 30 Jan. 1922. CCQC U14/2063 1

84. Conlon to Dunstan, 15 Mar. 1923; Dunstan to Conlon, 12 July 1923. CCQC U14/2064 7 and 6

85. The Liberty Fair carnivals were privately conducted on Trades Hall land on a 50/50 profit basis. Immediate Levies: WWF (230 members approx.) £232 18s 7d; AMIEU (400) £631; FCDIU (200) £227 15s 0d; PIEU (30) £21 10s 0d; Painters and Decorators (40) £23 10s 0d; ASCJ (100) £50. Subsequent levies: ARU (600) £812 15s 0d; Storemen and Packers (60) £41; Coachmakers (30) £15; Boilermakers (20) £11. Donations: AEU (200) £70; Engine Drivers and Firemen (160) £60. Conlon to Riordan, 26 May 1926. CCQC U14/2064 7

the old Carters and Storemen's Union in 1911 and still used a small room in Trades Hall to receive constituents.⁸⁶

The naming of the new hall caused considerable friction between unions. The builder's sign had heralded the 'Trades Hall Concert Hall erected by the combined unionist'[sic].⁸⁷ Trustee John Ryan (AMIEU) personally thought 'Willis Theatre' would be a fitting tribute to the 'grand old lady of the movement', Emma Willis, who had died in 1923.⁸⁸ Other AMIEU delegates insisted on 'Trades Hall Theatre' as did past-president Bert Buxton. Frank Conlon (FCDIU) preferred 'Union Theatre' because Rockhampton already had a separate Trades Hall. The issue stimulated such heated passion that the AMIEU delegates threatened to disaffiliate, the secretary temporarily quit and Ryan tendered his resignation as trustee.⁸⁹ 'Trades Hall Theatre' prevailed as the official title but the building also attracted the name of 'New Theatre' on occasions.

During construction, wage rises and delivery delays increased costs while rents and collections simultaneously decreased under tightening economic conditions. These unforeseen circumstances forced some modification of the original design even though the basic floor plan remained the same.⁹⁰ The total cost of erection amounted to a staggering £13,411 19s 8d and resulted in the Trades Hall Board taking legal action against the architect, Roy Chipps. The board believed his commission was to be calculated on the builder's estimate while Chipps insisted it was due on the actual construction cost. To avoid costly court action and adverse publicity for the union movement, the board paid Chipps £100 to settle out of court.⁹¹ Furnishing of the theatre, renovations to the adjoining hall, and crippling council rates all exacerbated the

86. THBM Minutes, 19 Nov. 1925. CCQC U14/2063 1

87. *ibid.*, 16 June 1925

88. *ibid.*, 17 June 1926. CCQC P16/1955 1. Emma Willis, who died in 1923, was the first female delegate to a Labour Convention, a key figure in Rockhampton Workers Political Organisation and head of the Trades Hall Ladies Auxiliary. She was the widow of John Willis, secretary of the Rockhampton Wharf Labourers' Union in the 1880s.

89. THBM Minutes, 16 Sept. 1926 and 21 Sept. 1926. CCQC P16/1955 1

90. Joint Report of Architect and Builder, New Concert Hall, 17 July 1926. CCQC U14/2064 6

91. THBM Minutes, 21 Apr. 1927 and 2 Feb. 1928. CCQC P16/1955 1

debt. In another effort to meet the mounting costs, unions again made donations or low-interest loans for up to five years.⁹² The only major union not to contribute in the time of financial crisis was the ARU. Even the AWU, which had still not affiliated with the Trades Hall Board, converted its original loan to a donation instead of making a further loan.⁹³ These additional funds at least kept the board safe from repossession.

After the theatre's opening in August 1926—without the traditional smoke concert on that occasion—unionists failed to support social activities and neither local organisations nor travelling companies made regular bookings for the auditorium. To promote business for the theatre, the board set up a company, Union Amusements Limited, in which it believed workers would eagerly purchase shares. The plan drew little response from workers already experiencing hard times. A consultant advised the board to 'eliminate sentiment' and run the theatre as a business proposition. He suggested floating the company on the stock exchange, dropping the word 'union' and gaining the backing of prominent business men for the prospectus.⁹⁴ This proposition contradicted the principles the unions espoused and was promptly rejected. The promotional company was wound up in May 1927 at a cost of £67.⁹⁵

As the economic plight of Trades Hall Board worsened, several unions vacated their offices. An irate AEU left because it believed the loan interest it had foregone should be off-set by free accommodation; the WWF fell well into arrears and had to leave; and the ARU closed the office and employed George Kemp on a part-time basis only.⁹⁶ The loss of rent, by then almost the sole income of the board, worsened the financial position and caused renewed friction over which unions were or were not

92. Donations: Storemen and Packers £10; AEU £10; Coachmakers £10 10s 0d; FEDFA £10. Loans: AMIEU £500; WWF £300; ASCJ £250; PIEU £100; FCDIU £100; AEU £100; Boilermakers £50; FEDFA £50; Painters and Decorators £50. Inserts in THBM Rent Ledger. CCQC U14/2064 4

93. THBM minutes, 20 May 1926. P16/1955 1

94. *ibid.*, 21 Jan. 1927.

95. *ibid.*, 19 May 1927.

96. ARU State Council Minutes, 5 Aug. 1928. PTU Brisbane; THBM Minutes, 18 Oct. 1928. CCQC P16/1955 1

contributing.⁹⁷ The decreasing profitability of the Eight-Hour Day celebrations did little to alleviate the situation either.



Fig. 29: The Trades Hall Theatre, early 1930s
AWU, Brisbane

By 1929, the bank threatened to foreclose unless the financial position improved. At the ARU's instigation, the Trades Hall Board called a meeting of all labour bodies to establish a special committee to 'Save the Hall for the Workers' by promoting local patronage of the theatre and hall. A social sub-committee held dances, social evenings and a 'Monster 1/- Drive'⁹⁸ The board also managed to fill the vacant shops and offices. As the result of these efforts and the continued union levies, secretary Gordon Crane reported in 1932 that the board had achieved 'the best result since the inception of the hall' in 1914.⁹⁹

97. *ibid.*, 28 Aug. 1928.

98. THBM Minutes, 17 Jan. 1929 and 15 Aug. 1929. 1/- = One shilling (1s). CCQC P16/1955 1

99. Secretary's Report, THBM Minutes, 21 July 1932. CCQC U14/2063 2

STOP--LOOK--READ
MONSTER 1/- DRIVE.

Unionists of Rockhampton.

You have Property in Fitzroy Street (old Trades Hall and New Theatre) worth approximately £15,500. As Rockhampton progresses its value will increase.

You owe £5,750 to the Bank, and they are pressing for payment.

If you do not pay this off you take the risk of eventually losing all you have already subscribed.

To avoid this, the Trades Hall Board has decided to run a Monster 1/- Drive with a view of reducing the debt.

What about a 1/- per month from you?

You Wont Miss It!

Hand over the property to your children (the future Unionists of R'ton) free of debt.

It's Up to You to Do Your Bit!

Hand your spare "bobs" to the authorised collectors once a month, or as often as you can, and receive your voluntary Subscription Ticket.

(Issued by the Trades Hall Board of Management.)

Record Printing Company, Ltd.

Fig. 30: Fundraising Flyer for Trades Hall, 1929
CCQC

Unfortunately, however, the financial woes of Trades Hall did not end there. Frank Conlon, who returned to the position of secretary after Gordon Crane left in 1932, reported the following year that although 'the Hoo Doo' on the theatre seemed to have lifted, the board still could not meet the full interest on the bank loan.¹⁰⁰ Trades Hall Board made renewed efforts to promote the theatre as a public venue but a proscription

100. *ibid*, 19 July 1933.

on wrestling, boxing or skating in the auditorium and the opinion that dances held by the City Band attracted an unsavoury 'rough element with obscene language' to union premises¹⁰¹ meant the theatre missed bookings for many popular events. In an attempt to make the theatre more attractive to 'a better class of patron', the wives of the secretary and one trustee, Sarah Conlon and Katie Damm, put up floral wall decorations as adorned other theatres.¹⁰² Despite the women's visually pleasing efforts, Frank Conlon's 1935 financial report noted that income on the theatre was 'drying up' again.¹⁰³

As in 1929, arguments broke out over which unions had paid levies and over rent differentials and arrears. Tenants complained about Conlon's officiousness in demanding prompt payment when times were also lean for them.¹⁰⁴ With the bank again pressing for repayments by 1936, Jimmy Larcombe acted as an impartial chairman at a combined unions' meeting where Conlon explained the 'obstacles, trials and tribulations' of the Trades Hall Board.¹⁰⁵ His plea for support to pay outstanding debts by the end of the month persuaded the AMIEU, WWF, TWU and BSA to impose yet another levy on their members but the ARU, ASCJ and AEU refused.¹⁰⁶ Most of the unions who had contributed funds in 1926 and 1927 also extended those loans. There were more dances and euchre parties arranged and, while the former did not succeed, the latter proved profitable for the next year or so. Once again, delegates on the Trades Hall Board put reputation before profits and refused requests to open a billiard saloon and bookmaker's office in the theatre.¹⁰⁷ Finally in 1938, the theatre became a paying proposition when a southern cinema chain, Liberty Theatres Limited, took out a five year lease and extended the contract thereafter.¹⁰⁸ With repayments on the loan's capital possible for the first time in over a decade, Frank Conlon deemed the 1938-1939

101. *ibid.*, 20 Dec. 1934 and 21 Feb. 1935. CCQC U14/2063 3

102. *ibid.*, 21 Feb. 1935. Katie Damm was the wife of AEU delegate and board trustee from 1932 to the 1950s, Jack Lauritson-Damm. She was the secretary of Allentown Branch of the ALP for many years.

103. THBM Minutes, 18 July 1935. CCQC U14/2063 3

104. *ibid.*, 20 Oct. 1936.

105. *ibid.*, 9 Dec. 1936.

106. *ibid.*, 17 May 1938.

107. *ibid.*, 20 July 1937.

108. *ibid.*, 27 July 1938. The company was taken over by Greater Union Theatres Pty Ltd in 1949.

financial year the best since the early 1920s and, with the success of the cinema and dances for American troops during the war, the theatre at last became profitable.¹⁰⁹

Throughout the long and stressful saga of Trades Hall finances from 1926, friction between participating unions over contributions, rents and even a name strained the unity and sense of purpose of the body. Nevertheless, when faced by the threat of bank foreclosure, the unions made a concerted effort to raise more funds. Always ready to assist were the AMIEU, WWF, FCDIU/TWU and Boilermakers, while smaller affiliated unions like the PIEU also helped by raising levies or making loans. Several of these unions did not recall the loans until the 1960s;¹¹⁰ some even remained on the books in the 1980s.¹¹¹ The AMIEU, on the other hand, levied its own members to repay the debt to state branch funds on behalf of the Trades Hall Board¹¹² as did the ARTWU.¹¹³

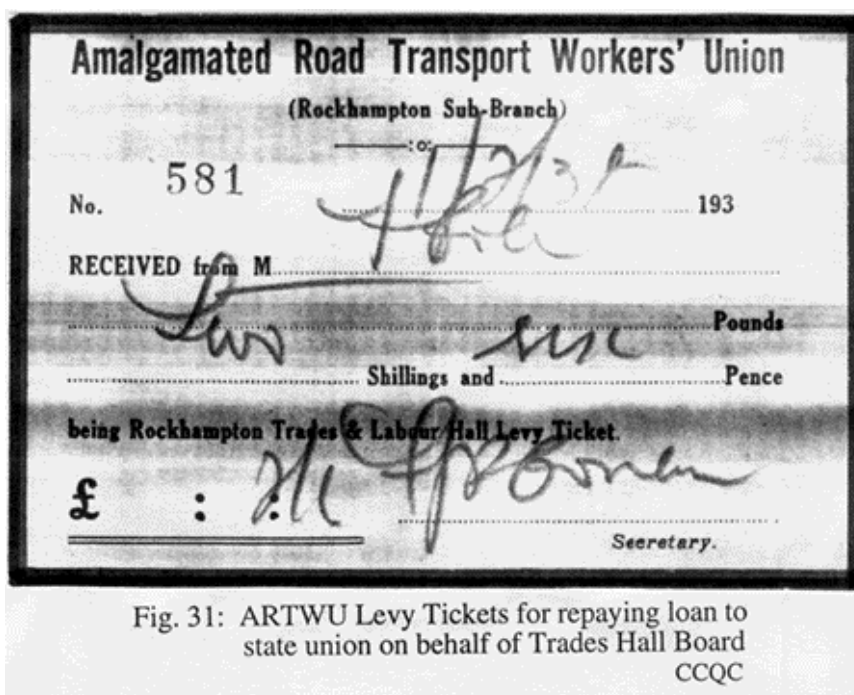


Fig. 31: ARTWU Levy Tickets for repaying loan to state union on behalf of Trades Hall Board
CCQC

109. *ibid.*, 18 Apr. 1939; Evan Schwarten, interviewed 10 May 1996.

110. J. Curtin, secretary WWF, to H.M. Lander, secretary THBM, 17 Nov. 1960; H. Hauenschild, secretary BSA to Lander 10 May 1965. CCQC U14/2064 6 and 7

111. THBM Balance Sheet, 30 June 1985. Document held by author with permission of E. Schwarten.

112. AMIEU Minutes, 21 Nov. 1939. J19/941 3; Newman to Conlon, 22 Nov. 1939; J. Russell, auditor for Qld TWU to Lander, 1 Sept. 1960. CCQC U14/2064 6 and 7

113. THBM Minutes, 12 Oct. 1943; TWU Minutes, 8 Nov. 1943. Qld TWU believed the debt was never cleared while the Trades Hall Board believed it was. There is no discussion of this extra levy in Rockhampton ARTWU minutes or of any amount being forwarded to Brisbane, however the existence of the illustrated levy ticket indicates that it was collected by the union. CCQC U14/2063 4.

Rockhampton Trades Hall Board.

2/6
Levy
Ticket



2/6
Levy
Ticket

The T.H.B. Levy as agreed to by all Unionists is £1, extending over 4 years, the object being to provide sufficient Funds to redeem all liabilities due by the Board.

The T.H.B. Levy as agreed to by all Unionists is £1, extending over 4 years, the object being to provide sufficient Funds to redeem all liabilities due by the Board.

Two Shillings & Sixpence

ISSUED ON BEHALF OF THE ROCKHAMPTON TRADES HALL BOARD

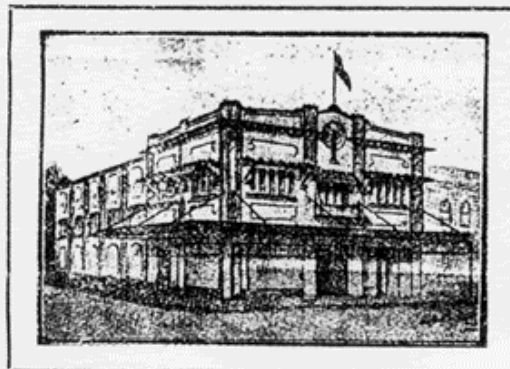
1149

By *L. C. Haigh*
to *K. Shuker*

Date *20/2/32*
A. M. I. E. Union.

Rockhampton Trades Hall Board.

5/-
Levy
Ticket



5/-
Levy
Ticket

The T. H. B. Levy as agreed to by all Unionists is £1, extending over 4 years, the object being to provide sufficient Funds to redeem all liabilities due by the Board.

The T. H. B. Levy as agreed to by all Unionists is £1, extending over 4 years, the object being to provide sufficient Funds to redeem all liabilities due by the Board.

Five Shillings

ISSUED ON BEHALF OF THE TRADES & LABOUR HALL BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

1225

By *E. W. Slott*
to *K. Shuker*

Date *24/1/35*
A. M. I. E. Union.

Fig. 32: AMIEU Levy Tickets for repaying Trades Hall loan.
Over the years, the illustration changed, as did the amount levied
CCQC

Together with the financial support from key unions, the efforts of several individual officers in supporting the Trades Hall Board through lean times were notable. During his term as secretary from 1929 to 1932, Gordon Crane gave almost full-time service on top of his job as the ARU organiser.¹¹⁴ In 1936, ASCJ secretary Joe Cusack ran weekly euchre nights almost single-handedly and even paid some of the expenses from his own pocket.¹¹⁵ Isaac (Ike) Cant (Typographical Society/PIEU), a foundation member of the board, also gave staunch support through all the crises as a trustee from 1917 until the 1950s.¹¹⁶ However, the greatest service came from Frank Conlon who 'weathered more bad times than good' in 26 years as secretary. Conlon served continuously on the Trades Hall Board from 1915 until his death in 1954.¹¹⁷

The economic climate certainly exacerbated the Trades Hall Board's financial plight during the 1920s and 1930s as it did of affiliated unions; however, the board's error was not simply attempting expansion during hard times. It was also that in trying to cater for the social and cultural interests of workers, the board deviated from its original objectives, just as the cause of the Eight-Hour Day Celebration Committee's downfall had been. The building of the theatre might have come within the definition of 'additions or alterations to the property' but providing a separate theatre was not 'the direct business of the Hall' as the constitution also specified. Their liberal interpretation of the objectives resulted in an over-ambitious programme of capitalistic expansion by well-meaning but managerially naive working men. They may have outwitted commercialism in the purchase of the original hall; they were certainly knowledgeable union officials and skilled industrial negotiators; but they were not astute businessmen. Their venture only succeeded financially when placed into the hands of private enterprise for public entertainment.

114. THBM Minutes, 17 July 1930. CCQC U14/2063 2

115. *ibid.*, 16 Mar. 1937. CCQC U14/1963 2; M.J. Cusack to THBM, 26 July 1938. CCQC U14/2064 6

116. *MB*, 16 Dec. 1957, p. 6.

117. Obituary, *MB*, 9 Mar. 1954, p. 3. Conlon's funeral notice shows his full name as Francis Joseph Patrick Conlon however the electoral roll contains the name Francis John Patrick Conlon. He preferred the name Frank Conlon for everyday use.

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This lack of business skills and financial knowledge again almost brought disaster in 1952 when the Trades Hall Board found to its utter dismay and disbelief that it had been liable for income tax from 1914. In a letter accompanying his 1952 annual report, Frank Conlon claimed that this unexpected debt might amount to 'some hundreds of pounds'. He claimed he had 'always understood that the Board was free from taxation because of Unions being free of taxation, and Unions comprise[d] the Board and therefore as such were exempt'.¹¹⁸ Fortunately, the taxation office set a retrospective claim for only ten years but the board still faced an enormous bill of £1,292 4s 0d for past and current tax, payable by November 1953.¹¹⁹ In August of that year, Conlon took leave from his position as TWU secretary because of a recent heart attack that the strain of work and financial worry perhaps induced.¹²⁰ While he did not resign, his statement that he was donating to the union all his personal furnishings and effects in the office indicated that he believed he would never return to the position.¹²¹ Conlon did not abandon the Trades Hall Board in its latest crisis, however, perhaps feeling that the predicament was his fault. By October, he had secured a bank overdraft of £500 and, with board reserves, cleared the debt.¹²² Frank Conlon died in six months later, aged only 66.¹²³

Without detracting from the dedication and efforts of these men, the logical question is why did not the Trades Hall Board sell the theatre which no longer served any good purpose as either a venue for workers or the general public? Only the ARU and ASCJ consistently favoured that option.¹²⁴ Perhaps other delegates still believed that Rockhampton workers needed and wanted a social and cultural centre; perhaps

118. Conlon to THBM, 23 July 1952. CCQC U14/2064 6

119. Conlon to M. Shanahan, public accountant, 28 Oct. 1953. At the time, Conlon's gross weekly salary was £13, thus the debt amounted to approximately two years' income. CCQC U14/2064 7

120. Noel Furzeman, interviewed 17 Mar. 1995.

121. TWU Minutes, 6 Aug. 1953. P16/1954 2

122. THBM Minutes, 20 Oct. 1953. CCQC U14/2063 4; Conlon to Manager, CSB Rockhampton, 22 Oct. 1953; Conlon to Shanahan, 28 Oct. 1953. CCQC U14/2064 7 and 6

123. Buried 7 Mar. 1954. Cemetery Records, Rockhampton City Council.

124. THBM Minutes, 12 Dec. 1928. CCQC P16/1955 1

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they felt that the economy and public support would improve in the future; or perhaps their pride was too great to admit defeat to both the union movement and the business community. Undoubtedly, the representative structure of the board and the necessity of referring all matters to individual union meetings prolonged the decision-making process, as did irregular attendance by some delegates and the numerous lapsed meetings. Decisions to sell the theatre were rejected, then made and rescinded on several occasions according to changing attendances. As trustee Duncan McDonell (ARU) criticised, the board did nothing one way or another and the theatre became regarded as 'a joke, a white elephant' by rank-and-file unionists.¹²⁵

When the situation worsened in 1929, the property market had slowed too much for any sale, let alone a profitable one. With the exception of the ARU, individual unions had substantial funds invested in the property which they would not recoup in a loss. The only way they had any chance of maintaining their investment was for the board to keep the property and the only way they could ensure that was to remain actively involved. Thus, it was this joint cause which kept unions together. This course was even more imperative because the original mortgage covered both the theatre and Trades Hall. If the bank had taken possession, the board would also have lost the hall as well¹²⁶ and, without a hall to manage or the spirit to undertake such a massive collaborative task again, the Trades Hall Board would have collapsed. Even the ARU had changed its attitude with a strong push for a sale by 1929. It now argued that a hostile and conservative state government newly in power necessitated 'the movement more than ever to preserve its own headquarters' in self-defence.¹²⁷ Because of this change of heart, Gordon Crane strove to improve board finances to 'save the hall for the people'. The tragedy was that, despite their financial battles, the vision of a venue for

123. *ibid.*, 12 Dec. 1928.

126. *ibid.*, 15 Aug. 1929.

127. *ibid.*

workers' enlightenment and recreation failed to materialise. The theatre always remained a 'white elephant' in that respect.¹²⁸

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There is one notable event in the history of the Trades Hall Board that remains without any logical explanation: a fire which broke out in the Trades Hall Theatre in June 1932. The blaze destroyed the stage where it began—melting a set of cymbals in the process—and burned the ceiling to the rear of the auditorium while water and smoke damaged gallery seating and woodwork. If the fire brigade had not promptly extinguished the flames on their arrival, the blaze would have engulfed the adjoining Trades Hall as well. Fortunately, there was only approximately £1,000's damage which the board recouped on its insurance policy.¹²⁹ Trades Hall trustee from the 1950s, Evan Schwarten, is in little doubt that the fire was a case of arson even though the original newspaper report did not hint at such, nor were any criminal charges subsequently laid.¹³⁰ The circumstances surrounding the fire and its outcome are quite puzzling.

The fire began in an unattended part of the premises during a weekday afternoon when no electrical or mechanical equipment was operational. None of the union men in the adjoining hall apparently noticed the dense smoke and flames which were 'coming from several points at the back of the building' and which would have been clearly visible in the yard behind the hall which abutted the theatre stage. It fell to a neighbouring businessman to alert the Fire Brigade.¹³¹ Despite the dramatic nature of the event, there was no discussion of the fire in subsequent Trades Hall Board minutes, with only Gordon Crane's annual financial report the following month commenting that the fire had decreased the expected income during Carnival Week celebrations.¹³²

128. Evan Schwarten, interview. When the Liberty Theatre closed in the 1960s with the advent of television, a second-hand dealer occupied the premises. After the sale of both hall and theatre in the mid-1980s, the property housed a nightclub, video store and—surely to the dismay of the board of the 1930s who were adamant about good public image— a pool hall.

129. *MB*, 22 June 1932, p. 8.

130. Schwarten interview.

131. *MB*, 22 June 1932, p. 8.

132. THBM Minutes, 21 July 1932, CCQC U14/2063 2

Neither was there any report—in union minutes or the newspaper—of an official investigation. If it was indeed arson, who lit the fire and why?

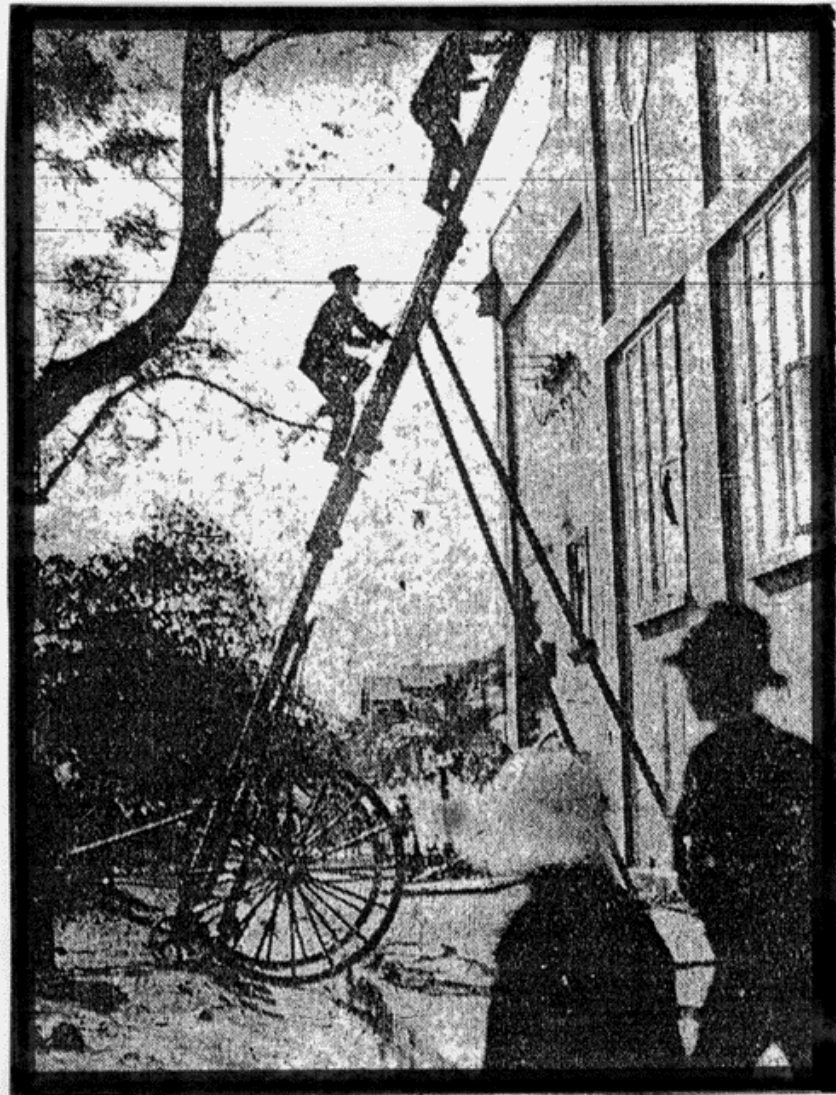


Fig. 33: The Fire at the Trades Hall Theatre, 1932
MB, 22 June 1932, p. 8

Considering that the board was still in a precarious financial position despite all the hard work of Gordon Crane between 1929 and 1932, drawing on an insurance policy of some £6,500 would have been a tempting solution to both the immediate critical predicament and the dismal long-term prospects for the theatre as envisaged at the time. The cloud of dense black smoke and temperature of the flames—perhaps from an oil-based accelerant—suggest arson, yet this would have been a more attractive proposition in 1929 when finances were at their lowest point and not when things were looking up

somewhat in 1932. If indeed the fire was deliberately lit and the Trades Hall Board somehow concealed the deed either before or after the fact, it was neither the first nor the last instance of a cover-up to preserve the good reputation of the local union movement, as Chapter 5 will reveal. Considering the dedication, honesty and respect for the law of most union representatives on the board, however, it is difficult to imagine they would condone that action as the solution to their financial dilemma. It seems more likely that the fire—again, if it was deliberately lit—arose from ideological differences within the board rather than its financial difficulties. As Chapter 5 will reveal in detail, underlying ideological and political differences between the ARU 'militants' and other moderate unions polarised attitudes and actions on Trades Hall Board from the mid-1920s and possibly fuelled the 1932 fire. These differences also affected the development of the third form of inter-union organisation in Rockhampton, an industrial council.

Inter-Union Industrial Organisation

The first gathering of an inter-union industrial organisation occurred in early 1916. Before that, there had been no specific body to deal with workplace matters since the collapse of the ALF's Rockhampton District Council in 1892. From soon after its inception, the Eight-Hour Day Celebration Committee handled any contentious industrial matters. Its constitution contained no provision for dealing with such issues, just as it made no reference to political affiliations or support but, as with political connections, the committee soon found itself addressing employer-union disagreements. Because delegates to the committee were often office bearers of affiliated unions, it was almost inevitable that they would seek moral, financial and practical support from other unions in times of industrial conflict.

The Eight-Hour Day Celebration Committee first used its influence to negotiate the settlement of a small lockout involving the local bakers' union in 1910. During a

1912 strike of municipal dredge workers, the committee also offered financial support to AWA members in financial difficulties.¹³³ Requests for assistance in industrial disputes elsewhere also came before the committee. In the 1911 sugar workers' strike, for instance, local unions contributed £20 in the belief that it was their duty to assist any movement whose object was to further 'the grand principle of the eight-hour day'.¹³⁴ A similar donation assisted the Lithgow coal miners in their 'prolonged struggle against capitalist tyranny' later the same year.¹³⁵

The model for local unionists to set up a separate industrial body in Rockhampton was the establishment in 1914 of the Brisbane Industrial Council. This new council replaced the defunct ALF District Council which had only re-formed in 1912 after its original demise in the 1890s.¹³⁶ The industry-based structure adopted by the new Brisbane body reflected the One-Big-Union philosophy adhered to not only by IWW radicals but increasingly by some leading mainstream unionists as well. They believed that the removal of craft and sectional divisions within individual industries was a necessary prerequisite for unity and solidarity of all workers.¹³⁷ Therefore they rejected the idea of re-establishing a trades and labour council like the one that had existed in Brisbane from 1904 to 1911 in place of the original ALF body.¹³⁸ Paradoxically, while the Brisbane Industrial Council adhered to the industrial unionism in its structure, its concerns were decidedly those of 'bread and butter issues' and not those of revolution as espoused by the IWW.¹³⁹

Soon after the affiliation of the Queensland Branch of the AMIEU with the new Brisbane peak organisation in 1915,¹⁴⁰ members sympathetic to industrial unionism in

133. EHDCC Minutes, 16 Apr. 1910 and 6 Jan. 1912. CCQC D9/260 2

134. *ibid.*, 1 July 1911.

135. *ibid.*, 2 Dec. 1911.

136. John Armstrong, *Closer Unity in the Queensland Trades Union Movement, 1900–1922*, MA Thesis, UQ, 1975, pp. 207 and 212; Ross Fitzgerald, *A History of Queensland: From 1915 to the 1980s*, St Lucia, 1984, p. 4;

137. Armstrong, *Closer Unity in the Queensland Trades Union Movement*, pp. 193–194.

138. *ibid.*, pp. 86 and 92.

139. *ibid.*, pp. 201–202.

140. *ibid.*, p. 198.

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the Rockhampton sub-branch considered that a similar inter-union council should be formed locally. At the urging of Sam McCreddie, who at the time was endeavouring to interest meatworkers in IWW ideas and had secured a place on the Central District Council of the AMIEU, Secretary Ryan contacted the BIC for information on how to establish an industrial council and asked for a copy of the new peak council's rules. The AMIEU then circularised all other local unions on the matter. With favourable replies from the WWF, QRU, FCDIU, ASE, ASCJ, Moulders and Engine Drivers, the AMIEU called a meeting of those unions to discuss its proposal to form an industrial council.¹⁴¹ Only the AWU seemed uninterested in joining with the other unions just as it did not affiliate with the Trades Hall Board. Most likely its failure to do so was in line with the state AWU's withdrawal from involvement in the Brisbane Industrial Council.¹⁴²

Ever one to take the helm on union committees, Frank Conlon became the inaugural honorary secretary of the Rockhampton Industrial Council. The new body organised a series of Sunday evening lectures in Trades Hall¹⁴³ and undertook some political activity. Prior to the 1917 municipal elections, for instance, the council appealed to affiliated unions to nominate suitable candidates. The last recorded mention of an active industrial body was in mid-1917 when it called for delegates for the forthcoming year.¹⁴⁴ Fourteen months later, local AWU organiser Thomas Dowdall contacted the AMIEU about 'again forming the Industrial Council' but nothing further transpired.¹⁴⁵

Why the Rockhampton Industrial Council formed and why it apparently failed to thrive are largely matters for speculation as little record remains of the council apart

141. AMIEU CDC Minutes, 30 Sept. 1915. CCQC J19/940 3

142. E. H. Lane, *Dawn to Dusk: Reminiscences of a Rebel*, Brisbane, 1993, p. 146; Armstrong, *Closer Unity in the Queensland Trades Union Movement*, p. 204.

143. FCDIU Minutes, 4 Sept. 1916. CCQC P16/1952 3

144. AMIEU Minutes, 26 June 1917. CCQC J19/940 4

145. *ibid.*, 20 Aug. 1918.

from indirect mention in individual union minutes. On hearing of the idea of forming an industrial council in 1916, FCDIU member William R. Goss commented that 'it was time Rockhampton done [*sic*] something in that direction' but did not indicate why.¹⁴⁶ Perhaps the separate industrial body formed because the Eight-Hour Day Celebration Committee found itself unable to deal with industrial matters which came its way as well as its own business. As with the collapse of the first Trades Hall Board—supposedly because industrial and political issues took up valuable time—unionists may have felt that there needed to be a separate committee to handle these matters.

Yet it seems more likely that, as with the other local peak bodies, the impetus for formation of an industrial council came from the example set by unions in Brisbane: it was more the emulation of a contemporary fashion than a response to a pressing local need. Certainly there was no organised employer body in existence to pose a collective threat to unionism at the time the council was created. As well, when the Employers' Association of Central Queensland (EACQ) formed in September 1916—perhaps as a reaction to the inter-union council—all unions were already firmly within state or national federations. Handling of most industrial problems, therefore, took place between the employers' body and individual unions, and not with the council.¹⁴⁷ Finally, at least in the opinion of employers, there was little industrial discord to settle because Rockhampton seemed to escape much of the industrial unrest which plagued other parts of Australia during and after World War I. As the 1919 annual report of EACQ stated:

It is a matter of congratulation...that in this district there has been no untoward happening in [that] respect, which it is felt, is largely due to the good feeling existing between Unions and Employers generally.¹⁴⁸

Most likely then, the first industrial council broke up because it had nothing to contribute to the local union movement. It was an organisation without any practical function and, therefore, had no reason to exist.

146. FCDIU Minutes, 3 Apr. 1916. CCQC P16/1952 3

147. Employers' Association of Central Queensland, *First Annual Report*, 1917.

148. *ibid.*, *Third Annual Report*, 1919, p. 1.

In July 1924, R.L. McMullen, the local AWU organiser, circularised unions for delegates to a 'proposed industrial council'. Following an initial meeting which at least AMIEU and FCDIU representatives attended, there was nothing more recorded in union minutes about the council so it seems likely that body failed also.¹⁴⁹ Eighteen months later, ARU secretary George Kemp contacted unions about the formation of another peak body—a 'Trades and Labour Council' according to the AMIEU minutes; an 'Industrial Trades and Labour Council' according to the FCDIU.¹⁵⁰ Seven unions attended a meeting to hear the visiting secretary of the Queensland Trades and Labour Council's promotional speech for the latest local attempt at closer unity.¹⁵¹ The following month, January 1926, McMullen approached both the AMIEU and FCDIU for delegates to the 'newly formed' Rockhampton Industrial Council of which he was secretary.¹⁵² One month later, Duncan McDonell of the ARU was recorded as secretary of this organisation, also referred to in some minutes as a trades and labour council and not an industrial council.¹⁵³

The confusion of names and committees between 1924 and 1926 raises several possibilities, all of which are mere speculation without any industrial council records. First, as the delegates the AMIEU and FCDIU appointed to the 1925 council were largely those attending meetings of the 1926 body and as the issues discussed were also the same, it is most likely that the 1925 and 1926 councils were the same organisation. Second, considering the interchangeable terminology used by Rockhampton union leaders, it seems that, to this period at least, they were either unaware of or uninterested

149. FCDIU Minutes, 14 July and 11 Aug. 1924. CCQC P16/1952 5; AMIEU Minutes, 15 and 29 July 1924. CCQC J19/940 5

150. FCDIU Minutes, 14 Dec. 1925. CCQC P16/1952 5; AMIEU Minutes, 2 Dec. 1925. CCQC J19/940 6

151. *ibid.*, 21 Dec. 1925. The Queensland Trades and Labour Council was formed by the amalgamation of Brisbane Trades Hall Council (formerly the Brisbane Industrial Council), Labour Day Celebrations Committee and the Trades Hall Board in 1922. Armstrong, *Closer Unity in the Queensland Trades Union Movement*, pp. 244-250.

152. AMIEU Minutes, 7 Feb. 1926. CCQC J19/940 6

151. *ibid.*, 23 Mar. 1926.

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in the ideological and organisational differences between a trades and labour council with its traditional sectional basis and an industrial council whose industry-based departments reflected the OBU philosophy. Third, while the relationship between the AWU and other unions in Rockhampton was marked by considerably less antipathy than in Brisbane, the sudden change of secretaries from an AWU to an ARU delegate in February 1926 may have been an extension of the bitter political wrangling between these two unions at state level. At the 1926 Labor-in-Politics Convention held the same month, the ARU and other so-called Brisbane 'Trades Hall militants' split from the AWU-backed Queensland Central Executive over the issue of signing the mandatory Labor pledge. Premier McCormack had deliberately engineered this measure to remove from the ALP the militants and suspected communist sympathisers in the ARU.¹⁵⁴ Perhaps the AWU instructed McMullen to withdraw from any Trades Hall associations in Rockhampton on principle, but it is also possible that the local ARU ousted him.

The Rockhampton Industrial Council as initiated by George Kemp in December 1925 had its origins in the railway strike of that year. The railway unions had demanded the restoration of the basic wage which the Labor government had cut in 1922.¹⁵⁵ In order to coordinate local strike action by railwaymen, the ARU and other unions established a combined disputes committee. As its secretary, Kemp contacted other unions about forming an industrial council even though the strike had ended three months earlier.¹⁵⁶ The spirit of the inter-union body during the strike must have convinced them that a united industrial front could be of on-going benefit in other fights against employers. The new council continued to pursue the issue of the basic wage, to fight the new federal Crimes Act which could be used as a weapon against militant unionists, and to support the growing cause of the unemployed.¹⁵⁷ Despite having these issues to confront, the infant industrial council was defunct by late 1927.

154. For further discussion of this see, for example, Ross Fitzgerald and Harold Thornton, *Labor in Queensland: From the 1880s to 1988*, St Lucia, pp. 39 and 40.

155. Anne Smith, 'Railway Strike, 1925' in Denis Murphy (ed.), *The Big Strikes: Queensland 1889–1965*, St Lucia, 1983, p. 162. Other demands were the restoration of the 36 hour week, the right of railwaymen to hold stop-work meetings, and the reinstatement of Ganger O'Connor whose dismissal was the catalyst for the strike.

156. *Evening News*, 7 Sept. 1925; AMIEU Minutes, 2 Dec. 1925. CCQC J19/940 6

157. AMIEU Minutes, 22 Mar. 1926 and 30 May 1927. CCQC J19/940 6 and 7; *MB*, 6 Oct. 1926.

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William Coull, an ARU delegate on the council and secretary of the Trades Hall Board in 1927, claimed that the industrial body was 'killed by the apathy of [other] unionists and their officials' but its dominance by the ARU probably played a major role in its downfall. Besides McDonnell as secretary, Frank Nolan secured a position on the executive, as did delegates Thomas Orchard and Harold Polley of the ARU's staunch supporter in those years, the ASCJ.¹⁵⁸ The militant approach of the ARU in advocating stop-work action to force the government to restore the basic wage did not gain approval from other unions.¹⁵⁹ The conservative and arbitration-supporting FCDIU under Frank Conlon pulled out and other unions soon followed.¹⁶⁰ These opposing industrial attitudes and Coull's comment that those who tried to revive the council were branded 'Red Raggers'¹⁶¹ provides some insight into the ideological conflict that was surfacing in the union movement and which Part 2 of this thesis will explore in detail.

Almost certainly the ARU was responsible for the collapse of the Rockhampton Industrial Council in 1927 but, just as that union was central to both the demise of the Labour Day Celebration Committee and its annual procession in 1930 and the revival of the march in 1938, so too did the ARU later re-establish a combined industrial body. And just as the failure of the nationwide ACTU campaign for the 40-Hour Week in 1937 encouraged the ARU to organise a protest-laden march on Labour Day, the same issue motivated the creation of a new trades and labour council in 1938. There was some mention by the then Amalgamated Road Transport Workers' Union (ARTWU) of 'moving in the direction' of another industrial council in early 1937,¹⁶² but definite plans only came later in the year from the official 40-Hour Week Campaign Committee. With any prospect of the state government introducing its own legislation on the issue quashed by Premier Forgan Smith,¹⁶³ nor any certainty that a federal Labor government

158. THBM Minutes, 26 Aug. 1926. CCQC P16/1955 1

159. ARTWU Minutes, 11 Oct. 1926. CCQC P16/1952 7

160. *ibid.*; AMIEU Minutes, 26 Sept. 1927. CCQC J19/940 7

161. THBM Rough Minutes, 17 Nov. 1927. CCQC P16/1955 2

162. ARTWU Minutes, 8 Jan. 1937. CCQC P16/1953

163. *MB*, 11 Sept. 1937, p. 9.

would reduce working hours if it won the October election, the committee's secretary, Bernard (Barney) O'Brien of the ARU, stressed the 'urgent need' for a permanent council so that they could continue organised industrial agitation. He claimed similar bodies existed in all other Queensland cities and that it was 'imperative Rockhampton should fall into line' by establishing a council 'to direct and facilitate industrial business'.¹⁶⁴

When the Industrial Court rejected the claim by railway unions for a 40-hour working week in late September, the disgruntled unionists pushed ahead with plans to establish a council.¹⁶⁵ By early 1938, the Rockhampton Trades and Labour Council circulated its rules to affiliated and prospective unions.¹⁶⁶ After more than 10 years, Rockhampton again had a peak body that could provide a combined voice on industrial matters which affected local workers as well as coordinate action on behalf of the wider union movement to assist other workers in their struggle for justice.

Peak Union Bodies in Rockhampton by 1938

After more than three decades of active unionism in Rockhampton, two permanent peak organisations existed locally. After numerous formations and dissolutions of inter-union industrial organisation, the Rockhampton Trades and Labour Council emerged in 1938 and managed to survive until the turbulent 1950s. The Trades Hall Board of Management had also finally secured its financial future by then. Even though the Labour Day Celebration Committee was not re-established as a permanent body, representatives from the Trades and Labour Council, Trades Hall Board and ALP branches met as a committee each year to plan a street march and celebration of Labour Day¹⁶⁷ although of course, with a political rather than an industrial focus. At the same time as individual unions fostered inter-union organisation through these peak bodies, they also refined and formalised their own

164. *ibid.*, 2 Sept. 1937, p. 1 and 6 Sept. 1937, p. 6.

165. *ibid.*, 25 Sept. 1937, p.9.

166. ARTWU Minutes, 14 Feb. 1938. CCQC P16/1953

167. With the exception of 1942-1944 during war in the Pacific.

internal systems of organisation to permit the effective and efficient operation of the union which was essential if they were to serve the interests of their members to maximum capacity.