

Chapter 4

119

Participation, Power, Routines and Relationships: Running the Local Union

Involvement in disputes and politics may have attracted more attention to the union movement from both the contemporary press and later historians, but it was the day-to-day running of the union which occupied most of the time and energy of officials.¹ An inside view of the routine workings of local bodies—who ran them and how they operated in relation to their own membership, the union hierarchy and other unions—reveals both the common characteristics and the variations in the union movement in Rockhampton and also identifies the dominant personalities. An understanding of the internal workings of local unions also provides insight into some of the challenges to union leadership and to the nature of local industrial relations which will be taken up later in this work. By the 1930s—within the living memories of many old unionists—the task of running the union on a daily basis was one of clear division between leaders and rank-and-file, of administrative routine, maintenance of fraternal relationships and requisite attention to the plethora of rules and to the rituals and traditions established over the years by each individual union.

1. Denis Murphy, 'Introduction' in Archie Dawson and Denis Murphy, *Points and Politics: A History of the Electrical Trades Union of Queensland*, Brisbane, 1977, p.9.

Rank-and-File Participation in Local Union Affairs.

120 Rockhampton unions may have been numerically strong and publicly visible, but this did not mean that all members participated in union affairs. Ideally, democracy should have prevailed with members attending meetings, taking part in discussions, freely electing executives and representatives and engaging in other forms of participation.² In reality, comparatively few rank-and-file unionists showed much interest in the running of the union, thus leaving the task to a few dedicated enthusiasts. Of course, there was nothing unique about Rockhampton in this respect: the pattern was quite characteristic of Australian unionism in general.³

In the early decades, attendance at AMIEU meetings fluctuated according to the time of year. At the opening of the killing season, the compulsory presence of new members swelled the ranks but during the slack, when meatworkers found alternative employment or went fishing or hunting koalas,⁴ meeting after meeting lapsed for the want of a quorum. The general recollection of members who worked at 'the Creek' in the 1920s and 1930s, however, was that there was a far better roll-up to meetings than in later years, even if the president still sometimes 'deplored the apathy' and urged more interest in union affairs.⁵

Interestingly, as the local AMIEU increased in size over the years, attendance at monthly meetings declined. From over 1,200 members in the late 1940s, 40 to 50 would constitute a typical gathering. By the 1950s, the union was lucky to get a dozen men turning up to general meetings. The secretary even tried to entice members with a keg of beer for afterwards, but to little avail.⁶ The only big attendances were at mass

2. Edward Davis, *Democracy in Australian Unions: A Comparative Study of Six Unions*, Sydney, 1987, p. 10.

3. Ross Martin, *Trade Unions in Australia: Who Runs Them, Who Belongs—Their Politics, Their Power*, Ringwood, 1981, pp. 87 and 88.

4. Les Hagstrom, interviewed 6 June 1996; Joe Underdown, interviewed 7 June 1996.

5. AMIEU Minutes, 25 Oct. 1921 and 20 June 1922. CCQC J19/940 5; Underdown interview; Hagstrom interview; Ewart Maxwell, interviewed 20 Nov. 1995.

6. Colin Maxwell, interviewed 20 June 1996.

meetings held during strikes and at 'All Up' meetings at the meatworks where the rank and file 'couldn't escape because the delegates went around to the dressing rooms and chased them out'.⁷ Despite a lack of interest in meetings, meatworkers keenly participated in annual elections. In 1949—admittedly a feverish time with ardent anti-communist activity and counter-activity as Chapter 6 will demonstrate—almost all members cast their votes for local and state positions.⁸

In the ARU, monthly meetings attracted few members even in the early days. In 1921, secretary George Kemp requested a district organiser to combat the 'great deal of apathy amongst members'.⁹ By the 1930s, participation had not improved and Kemp reported that meeting attendance was 'not what it should be' of the 700 or so members.¹⁰ As with the AMIEU, ARU meetings sometimes lapsed. The state president observed in 1950 that 'what was wrong in Rockhampton was a lack of interest in the sub-branch affairs' and that officials needed more effective action to get members to meetings.¹¹ Exactly what this action should be was not revealed. Unlike the AMIEU though, members were not very interested in union elections. In 1945, for instance, state officials condemned the poor turnout when only 26% of local members voted in the annual elections.¹² On the other hand, major railway strikes such as those in 1925 and 1948 drew hundreds of members to mass meetings.

After the early years of growing membership and active participation in the FCDIU, interest in the meetings of its successors, the ARTWU and the TWU, seemed to fluctuate. Sometimes there would be up to 90 for a regular meeting; however most usually there were about 30; and sometimes meetings lapsed altogether for want of a quorum. Annual general meetings and elections drew no more members than an ordinary meeting.

7. *ibid.*

8. AMIEU Minutes, 29 July, 1924. CCQC J19/940 5

9. Central District Report, ARU State Council Minutes, 26 Feb. 1921. PTU

10. *ibid.*, 1 Feb. 1935.

11. ARU State Council Minutes, 22 Apr., 1950. PTU Brisbane

12. Central District Report, ARU State Council Minutes, 21 Sept. 1945, p. 9. PTU

Like the TWU, rank-and-file participation in AEU meetings varied but with even poorer turnouts. Out of a membership of approximately 400 railway men in AEU Number 1 Branch, some nights drew 40 attendees while on other occasions there was barely a quorum. One former rank-and-file member and later the state secretary, Austin Vaughan, recalls of Rockhampton meetings from the 1940s that there was 'apathetic attendance'.¹³ At the September 'Star Night' when elections traditionally occurred, Number 1 branch could only muster 48 attendees in 1948—not much more than a good general meeting—with half that number in 1955,¹⁴ even with the attraction of a free keg of beer.¹⁵ Compared with the average participation in AEU elections across Australia, however, attendances were on par for the union and reflected the progressive falling off in support from the turn of the century.¹⁶ Nevertheless, during the big railway strikes, AEU men turned out in force to mass meetings just as did their ARU counterparts.

In contrast to the characteristic apathy of most rank and file, members of the WWF showed a good deal of interest in the union during times of industrial peace and turmoil alike. Out of approximately 200 members, a general meeting attracted about 70 wharfies and a roll-up of well over 100 on special occasions. Members also keenly took part in elections with almost a complete turn-out for the 1937 ballot.¹⁷

The general reluctance of members as a whole to participate in union affairs, with the exception of the wharfies, stemmed from many different factors. Some were common throughout Australia in general; some were specific to certain unions; others were shaped by the practicalities of Rockhampton life. A small minority of workers

13. Austin Vaughan, interviewed 22 Nov. 1995.

14. Tom Sheridan, 'Democracy among the Aristocrats: Participation of Members in the Affairs of the AEU (Australian section), *Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 21, No. 2, June, 1979, pp. 171-172. Contrary to Sheridan's claim that voting for other than secretary was by show of hands and results 'were never retained in the union's records', the results of Rockhampton No. 1 Branch ballot are included in the minutes; AEU Rockhampton No. 1 Branch Minutes, 9 Sept. 1948 and 15 Sept. 1955. NBAC E163/33/3 and 4

15. Bob Cole, interviewed 28 Apr. 1995.

16. Sheridan, 'Democracy among the Aristocrats', p. 172.

17. WWF Minutes, 28 July 1937. NBAC Z387/33/1

probably opposed unionism on principle and resented having to take out union membership.¹⁸ Some other members may have been indifferent but joined because it was virtually compulsory. Others may have believed their individual participation was of no consequence in the overall running of the union¹⁹ while some no doubt felt they secured the benefits of the union by membership alone and that active participation was not required to share in the 'free good' gained by others' efforts.²⁰

As well as these negative attitudes on the part of workers, organisational factors influenced participation patterns. Some theorists claim that increased size of the union and concentration of power in the hands of leaders reduced democratic participation of the rank and file in routine union affairs.²¹ Such a theory appears to explain in part the attendance pattern at regular AMIEU meetings. In the decades before World War II, the general meeting was the first point for handling union business and correspondence and was the centre of debate and decision. From here, recommendations passed to the Central District Council (CDC) for endorsement and action if necessary. Ordinary members therefore could have significant input into most union decisions. From the 1940s, business and correspondence became increasingly handled by the CDC and general meetings were relegated to the presentation of reports. There was little point in rank-and-file unionists attending because they no longer had any effective input. Of course, falling attendances could also have left the CDC with little choice but to make decisions at that level as one former secretary, Colin Maxwell, believes.²²

Shop-floor organisation in the Works' Board of Control at Lakes Creek also reduced members attendance at AMIEU meetings from 1942.²³ There was a prior system of departmental delegates but mainly for collecting dues, monitoring conditions and communicating with foremen. An elected executive and departmental delegates

18. Braham Dabscheck and John Niland, *Industrial Relations in Australia*, Sydney, 1984, p. 149.

19. Davis, *Democracy in Australian Unions*, p. 34.

20. Olsen, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 34.

21. Lipset cited in *ibid.*, p.12. See Davis for an outline of this debate, pp. 11-15.

22. C. Maxwell interview.

23. Davis, *Democracy in Australian Unions*, p. 35.

124

handled most domestic problems at 'the Creek' and by-passed the general meeting. Any matters which could not be resolved there passed directly to the CDC and the secretary for attention. Delegates also relayed the deliberations of the Board of Control directly to their respective departments. Even though members were expected to attend regular meetings to hear the official delegates' reports, most did not bother. Decisions had already been made for them in alternative arenas.²⁴

In contrast to the AMIEU, monthly meetings remained the main arena for discussion of industrial issues in the WWF and wharfies freely took part in the proceedings. The executive committee coordinated union affairs rather than controlled them and it functioned more as a delegation to shipping companies and merchants on its members' behalf than as a primary decision-maker. Being an autonomous branch with only one body of wharf-labourers to consider, there was no district committee to usurp power. At the same time, the WWF had no formal shop-floor organisation. Everyone was expected to be alert to union issues at work and to contact the secretary when necessary.

Shop floor organisation also reduced rank-and-file participation in ARU meetings after its introduction in 1934. George Kemp partly blamed poor meeting turn-outs on the fact that members no longer needed to attend monthly meetings to raise work-place issues or hear their outcomes. A shops committee, comprised of a dozen or so ARU stewards from the various workshops and departments, was very active and 'doing a great deal of good' for members by consulting directly with the engineer and reporting back to workers on the job.²⁵ Ironically, the introduction of shop committees followed a motion by a local delegate to a state ARU conference in Rockhampton, Frank Nolan. He believed such committees would create 'greater interest among the rank and file' in

24. Underdown interview.

25. Central District Report, ARU State Council Minutes, 1 Feb. 1935, 7 Feb. 1936 and 24 Apr. 1940. PTU

union affairs.²⁶ George Kemp also considered that having an office where members could transact union business further exacerbated poor turn-outs at ARU meetings.²⁷

125 However, size and organisational arrangements do not adequately explain cases of poor participation in other unions. Unlike the AMIEU and ARU, the AEU did not maintain an office as the part-time secretary was a working tradesman. A system of shop stewards existed in the AEU, in both the railway service and larger places like Burns and Twigg's engineering works, but all decisions which affected members were made at branch meetings, not on the job, and stewards merely monitored conditions and collected dues in their own workshop.²⁸ There was also a district committee although it was for coordinating the two local branches and not directing them. It conducted all negotiations with employers so that 'the general welfare of the union wouldn't be jeopardised by one [branch] going off the track'.²⁹ Other factors were clearly at work with the TWU and WWF. Both were the smallest of the major unions with no shop committee structure and both operated union offices with full-time secretaries, yet the wharfies attended far more enthusiastically than the carters.

It is necessary to look beyond organisational factors to practical and social aspects of workers' lives in Rockhampton to better understand members' attitudes to union involvement. Firstly, almost all unions held their meetings at night in Trades Hall. This arrangement posed transport problems for most local men who owned only bicycles. Many meatworkers lived at Lakes Creek and North Rockhampton where there was no tram service and only an infrequent bus service—especially at night. Secondly, in the opinion of one secretary, 'a lot of blokes' wives chatted them about going out at night', fearing they were indulging in other-than-union business.³⁰ Other workers were simply too tired after a strenuous day's labour to attend night meetings while a few

26. Minutes of ARU Conference held at Rockhampton, 31 Oct. - 6 Nov. 1934, Motion 142. JOL

27. Central District Report, ARU State Council Minutes, 1 Feb. 1935. PTU

28. Sheridan, 'Democracy among the Aristocrats', p. 164; Jack Treacy, interviewed 28 June 1995; Vaughan interview.

29. Treacy interview.

30. C. Maxwell interview.

habitually called into the pub on the way home from work and were drunk by meeting time.³¹



Fig. 34: Knock-off Time at the Railway Workshops
The *Morning Bulletin* reporter calculated that between 4.15 and 4.22 p.m. on that afternoon, cyclists crossed the intersection of Stanley and Bolsover Streets at the rate of 52 per minute.

MB, 19 Feb. 1955, p.7.

For the WWF, union meetings always occurred in the daytime and usually when shipping was quiet. Many members lived near the wharves and were only a short bicycle ride from Trades Hall or they could catch the Depot Hill bus back into town. Attendance at union meetings was also a good reason for men to escape from the house on slack days. Unlike at night, their presence was not expected or desired in the house when wives were busy looking after a family which, in some cases, contained upwards of seven children.³² It was also a convenient cover for going to the pub after the meeting, having a fortnightly hair-cut or laying a quiet bet on the horses with an 'S.P. bookie'—sometimes doing the latter two at the same time in the numerous barber shops which provided that ancillary, though illegal, service.³³ From the early 1950s, the union

31. *ibid.*

32. E. Maxwell interview; For example, the Maxwell, Wooler and Barnes families. Register of Deaths, Magistrates' Court, Rockhampton, 220/1950 and 26/1931.

33. Off-course, starting-price (S.P.) bookmakers were illegal.

held meetings at its amenities hall in Quay Street which, although not in the heart of town like Trades Hall, had several hotels nearby.

127 Third, the large number of men working in the one location, belonging to the same union and coming together for a regular labour pick engendered a strong sense of fraternity and solidarity amongst the WWF and AMIEU.³⁴ Everybody knew everybody else and were very often related to other members through extensive family networks that existed at the meatworks and on the wharves.³⁵ Annual union picnics, social functions and sporting teams further welded the men into a close-knit group. While other factors deterred meatworkers from attending general meetings, family and social bonds reinforced union loyalty and interest in elections at least. There was also no other union to join if they wanted employment and apathy about union matters was noted and remembered by the secretary.

In the FCDIU/ARTWU, ASCJ, Storemen and Packers and other unions with a dispersed membership, the same sense of union solidarity did not exist. Once new members had attended the admission meeting—if it was mandatory—their concept of 'union' was often the secretary who visited each site to police awards and to chase outstanding dues. They rarely met other union members socially and may not even have known some of the men nominated for office. Neither did railway workers develop the same sense of union camaraderie as the meatworkers or wharfies. They had a wide choice of unions to join and often worked alongside men who belonged to a different union. In these contexts, the union was neither omnipresent nor necessarily synonymous with the job.

34. G. Bain, cited in Davis, *Democracy in Australian Unions*, p. 36.

35. Mark Hinchliff, interviewed 23 Nov. 1995; Les Yewdale, interviewed 29 June 1995; Allan Reynolds, interviewed 6 June 1996.

Leadership

128

If regular rank-and-file participation in union affairs was more the exception than the rule apart from the wharfies, aspirations for attaining office were even scarcer. In the early decades, most presidencies rotated annually among senior unionists but later solidified into long-term incumbencies. Only rarely was there such avid competition as among the five contenders who vied for the ARTWU presidency in 1927.³⁶ Nominations for positions on committees and district councils fluctuated across unions and over the decades but, typically, the same figures comprised these bodies for long periods. From the 1940s, members of the executive and committee in the then TWU were returned unopposed year after year.

The position of union secretary had even fewer aspirants. Unless there was dissatisfaction with the incumbent's work, he was generally returned to office unopposed or with a comfortable majority. In the TWU, there was no annual election at all for the local secretaryship because the rules provided that where the post was a full-time salaried one, as it was in Rockhampton, a duly elected secretary held that office continuously 'during the pleasure of the members'.³⁷ In ARU, state council in Brisbane appointed the full-time secretary according to their view of what was best for Rockhampton.³⁸

This lack of competition for office meant that local union affairs remained in the hands of small groups of officials for long periods of time. But the presence of 'old-timers who served the union for years'³⁹ in what amounted to oligarchy⁴⁰ was as much through opportunities foregone by rank-and-file members as opportunities not presented by the union. If leadership was unsatisfactory—as happened from time to time—the

36. ARTWU Minutes, 12 Dec. 1927. CCQC P16/1952 7

37. TWU Minutes, 14 Nov. 1949. CCQC P16/1954 2

38. Although Bob Cole is adamant that Bob Nicholls (ARU District Secretary) was chosen by popular election in 1938.

39. E. Schwarten interviewed 10 May 1966.

40. Davis, *Democracy in Australian Unions*, pp. 11 and 12.

mechanisms existed to allow democratic protest by voting out, passing a motion of no confidence or requesting state council to remove the officer, and for others to stand for office in their place. Admittedly, a clean election was not always guaranteed. Unions appointed a returning officer and scrutineers for elections but this did not always ensure scrupulous procedures. Some AMIEU members believed that one long-standing returning officer 'helped' certain men retain power. Colin Maxwell remembers:

The ballots were run to suit people. They weren't always honest ballots. These things happen in unions. They appoint the returning officer—'Fiddle Frank' we called him. He was a good mate of Len Haigh's. There was all sorts of things going on in union ballots. Every union was the same. The AWU was the worst.⁴¹

Attitudinal, organisational, social and practical influences on participation notwithstanding, it is tempting to assume that the average rank-and-file member was simply apathetic when it came to union affairs. Certainly many past officials expressed that opinion in the minutes of the day or retrospectively in person.⁴² The case of the ASCJ well illustrates this view: all members had to attend quarterly 'summons meetings' to pay their dues but while several hundred would turn up to avoid the fine for non-attendance, most would leave as soon as they had paid up and took no further part in union business.⁴³ Members were not totally devoid of interest in union affairs, though, as roll-ups to mass meetings indicated. A less cynical interpretation would be that members were complacent about union affairs rather than apathetic.

As long as union leaders successfully 'delivered', particularly on bread-and-butter issues, their performance seemingly satisfied the rank and file. Members were therefore content to leave the routine running of the union and decision-making in leaders' hands.⁴⁴ Unionists were also unlikely to vote popular and productive incumbents out of office. This view is in keeping with the opinion of some writers who claim that, in the real

41. C. Maxwell interview.

42. *ibid.*; Frank Campbell, interviewed 1 July 1995; Treacy interview; Schwarten interview; Vaughan interview.

43. Schwarten interview.

44. Davis, *Democracy in Australian Unions*, p. 35; J. Hill, William Howard, R. Lansbury, *Industrial Relations: an Australian Introduction*, Melbourne, 1984, p. 83.

130 world of union politics, members' prime concern was that their needs were being met. If leaders delivered the goods, whether the union was run on democratic or oligarchic lines was not an issue of concern. Unions existed to provide a practical service in protecting and improving workers' conditions: they did not exist to 'provide workers with an exercise in self-government'.⁴⁵ Moreover, these realists argue, too much democracy impeded the efficiency with which the union operated and, therefore, the speed with which it achieved improvements for its members.⁴⁶ In a local inter-union context, one demonstration of that situation was the prolonged vacillation over the Trades Hall Theatre.

Decreasing rank-and-file interest was also a normal part of the evolution of unionism as a social movement. Employers' exploitation of workers through long hours, low pay and poor conditions inspired early unionists to organise workers and encouraged members to support the labour movement in the hope of securing a better deal. As unions achieved improvements over the years, members felt more confident in leaving the task to competent leaders. Ewart Maxwell, who worked at Lakes Creek from 1928, believes grass-roots interest in the union diminished as the AMIEU progressively obtained better wages and conditions for workers.⁴⁷ Similarly, the ARU secretary claimed that even by 1939, 'the men can see no immediate end to the conditions now enjoyed and are prepared to let officials and a handful of stalwarts carry on the fight'.⁴⁸

At the same time, the institutionalisation of labour's cause in industrial and social legislation by the state Labor government fostered the belief that improvements would automatically accrue by these processes and that rank-and-file activity was no longer necessary. Even officials came to accept that the award system, the Industrial Inspector, the court and occasional political intervention by local members were their guarantees for achieving better employment conditions. Thus, rank-and-file interest and

45. Dabscheck and Niland, *Industrial Relations in Australia*, Sydney, 1984, p. 148.

46. Hill *et al.*, *Industrial Relations*, p. 86.

47. *ibid.*

48. Central District Report, ARU State Council Minutes, Nov. 1939, p. 32. PTU

131 participation in unionism declined over the decades with organisational solidification and dependence on state systems. Nevertheless, when these usual processes were threatened by minority groups trying to impose other methods of action, as Part 2 of this thesis will discuss, or where they failed to live up to worker expectation as in the major strikes discussed in Part 3, the old spirit of the union movement was rekindled and rank-and-file involvement re-activated in defence of this most valuable of possessions—the union.

Union Leaders

The names which perennially appear in union minute books, particularly in the later decades, clearly illustrate the characteristic of entrenched leadership in Rockhampton. After the early years of alternating presidents in the AMIEU Central District,⁴⁹ E.W. (Jack or 'Dido') Ilott occupied the chair from 1925 until his retirement in 1947 whereupon vice-president from the 1930s, Danny Driscoll, succeeded him. On the AMIEU Central District Council, Frank West and Arthur Worthington held their positions for 15 years, Jack Stenhouse for 22 years and Jack Clark for 26. Several family names predominated in council membership, including Keong, Reynolds, Schutze, Curran and Bloomer. In the full-time secretary's position, John E. (Jack) Ryan replaced foundation officer, Henry (Harry) Longley in 1913 and served until his defeat by Len Haigh from Gladstone in 1924. Haigh then held office until his death in 1953, even though incapacitated by a stroke and hospitalised in 1952.

Like the AMIEU, the position of FCDIU/ARTWU president changed annually until the mid 1920s after which it rotated every few years among Charles Belz, Thomas Belz, Frank Flanagan, Frank Cole and Sid Plowes. By 1945, Frank Cole consolidated

49. From 1910, T.A. Cheshire, A. McDonald, M.J. Donnellan, E.J. Cheetham (2 years), W. J. Curran (4 years) and T. Haldane (7 years). F.J.P. Conlon to B.V. Hough, General Secretary, TWU, Brisbane, 10 Aug. 1953, inserted in minute book. CCQC P/16 1954 2

132

his leadership position of the then TWU as the others retired. He remained the unopposed president of the union until he retired at the advanced age of 72 in 1958.⁵⁰ Amongst long-term committee members of the TWU were Henry Cooper, Alfred Poole jnr, Edward Dolan, John Wilson and Austin Ferricks, along with several members of the Goss, Belz and Barnes families. Frank Conlon, who became secretary in late 1915 after Henry Harris took up an industrial inspector's position, continued in office until ill health forced his retirement in 1953.⁵¹ Conlon had been a founding member of the union in 1911 and was both vice-president and president before nominating for full-time secretary.

In the WWF, the presidency also alternated with Jack Burke and Tom Maxwell serving for long periods and Bert Buxton, Jack Melaney and Ted Mannion being other notable office-holders. The foundation secretary in 1899, Ernest Bracher (E.B. or 'Pa') Purnell, continued until his retirement in 1938, whereupon George ('Bendy') Thompson took over and held the position by 'vast majorities' until he resigned in 1945.⁵² John (Jack or 'Pussy') Curtin occupied the position for many years after Thompson. Other names that appear consistently in the minutes over many years are those of Lou Yahnke, Jack Hamilton, Frank Dunn, Joel Hart, Harry Boyd senior and junior, Jim McElrea and members of the Barnes, Belz, Sait and Wooler families.

Similarly, the ARU had minimal change over the period to the 1950s. Foundation secretary George Kemp remained in the position from 1914 until his retirement in 1938. After a short and colourful stint from Robert (Bob) Nicholls, Frank Campbell ran the union office from 1940 until the early 1960s when the state executive transferred him to Brisbane. Other officials who served for lengthy periods in the ARU included Tom Lee, Duncan McDonnell, Frank Nolan and Bernard (Barney) O'Brien in the 1920s and 1930s, with Cedric McBryde and John D. (Jack) Ryan in the 1940s and 1950s.⁵³

50. Cole interview.

51. FCDIU Minutes, 8 Nov. 1911. CCQC p16/1952 1

52. *Maritime Worker*, 14 Jan. 1950, p. 7.

53. Obituary, *MB*, 7 Mar. 1956, p. 3; Ted Cook, interviewed 10 May 1996; Campbell interview.

Although the AEU had only part-time officials, they also retained office for a long time. Christopher Stubbs held the early presidency until his death from tuberculosis in the Westwood Sanatorium in 1923.⁵⁴ Henry (Jack) Hassal had been in the position 'for donkey's years' by 1938—perhaps following Stubbs—and he continued until World War II years. From 1948 to the late 1950s, it was John (Jack) Moore. Here again it was the secretaryship which showed the least change: Sidney Face held office from sometime before 1923 until 1942, followed by Morgan Lander until 1956 when he stood down for a younger John (Jack) Treacy. In the AEU District Committee, Peter Whyte carried out the corresponding task for ten years until the early 1950s, with Richard (Dick) Thomasson as secretary of No. 2 Branch from after the war until 1957.⁵⁵ Even in some smaller unions, long-standing office-bearers were not uncommon. In the FEDFA, for example, Bert Hookham had already been secretary for 40 years when the union re-elected him in 1955;⁵⁶ Joe Cusack was secretary-organiser for the ASCJ during the 1930s and 1940s⁵⁷ and Jack Worthington was president of the SPU from 1924 to 1949.⁵⁸

Of those in executive positions, the full-time secretaries wielded the most power. They were the professionals with the oratorical skills, knowledge, experience and authority. Four secretaries particularly stand out in the record for these qualities and for the high esteem with which they were regarded by the rank and file, other union leaders, the ALP and by the Rockhampton establishment alike: E.B. Purnell, Frank Conlon, George Kemp and Len Haigh.⁵⁹ The former three were revered as founding fathers of their own unions and were instrumental in inter-union organisations such as the Eight-Hour Day/Labour Day Celebration Committee and Trades Hall Board of Management. Conlon's authority was boosted by being state president of the TWU for many years and, even though he always included 'your committee directs' in the minutes, both the

54. *AEU Monthly Journal*, Mar. 1923, pp. 18 and 29.

55. Treacy interview.

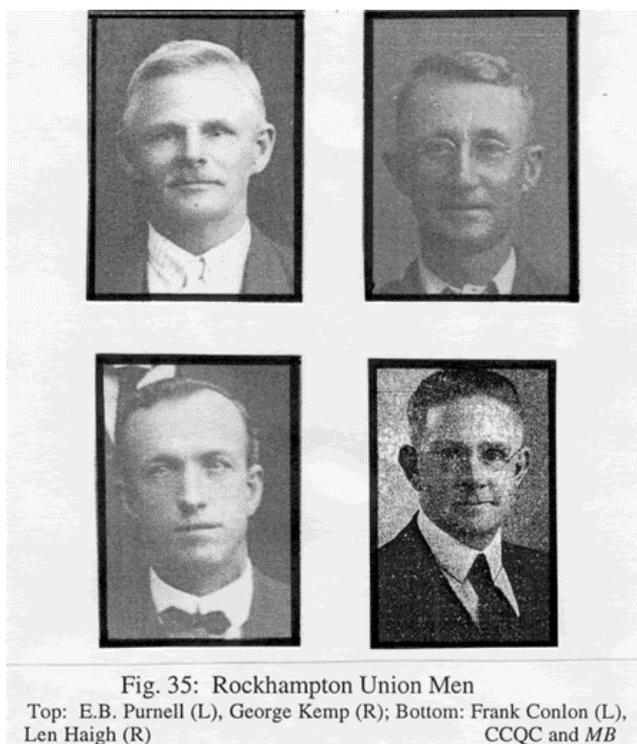
56. *MB*, 10 Sept. 1955.

57. *ASCJ Minutes*, 3 Nov. 1939. OMEQ 25/8/4

58. *MB*, 13 Apr. 1957.

59. *ibid.*, editorial, 5 Dec. 1956.

committee and general meeting invariably left matters for him to deal with at his discretion. Similarly, although the WWF had no formal state body, Purnell received wide recognition as the secretary of the quasi Queensland Branch, even by other unions.⁶⁰ And while Purnell claimed he was 'the obedient servant of his members and had given up attempting to lead them' by 1929,⁶¹ his role as an active life member, delegate to peak union bodies, auditor and returning officer at the age of 80 was testimony to the authority and respect the members vested in him. These men served on local authorities, on charity committees and sporting clubs and were all prominent members of the local ALP. Purnell had the added prestige of being a government appointee to the Legislative Council from 1917 to 1922.⁶²



Other full-time secretaries did not attain such prestigious public and union stature, but they still held significant authority and power within the union, and at times this verged on autocracy. As Colin Maxwell recalls of his period as AMIEU secretary after Len Haigh's death in the early 1950s:

60. Frank Nolan, *You Pass This Way Only Once: Reflections of a Trade Union Leader*, Brisbane, 1974, p. 62.

61. THBM Minutes, 19 Oct. 1929. CCQC U14/2063 2

62. Duncan Waterson, *Biographical Register of the Queensland Parliament, 1860-1929*, Canberra, 1972, p. 154.

When you're union secretary, you're chief executive officer, top dog, top brass. You're the boss. The president isn't the boss, you are....All sorts of things can be carried at a meeting but there are ways and means around them as long as they're in accordance with what the union wants generally.⁶³

135

The secretary's actions were not always in accordance with what the local union wanted as the ARU's Frank Campbell discovered. His independent action in distributing union leaflets in support of the 1949 coal strike, for example, sparked union censure. Fortunately his actions aligned within state policy and the ARU's state council later ordered the reprimand be struck from the minutes.⁶⁴ Neither did Campbell always maintain harmonious relations with his union colleagues. He complained about a lack of cooperation amongst district officers, that he had to 'be on the job day and night...[and]...could not live on the General Manager's doorstep' sorting out every problem which arose.⁶⁵ The officers retorted that Campbell was difficult to work with and 'liked to do his own thing.'⁶⁶ Despite these complaints, there was always acknowledgment that Campbell worked hard for his union and was scrupulously honest.⁶⁷

Notwithstanding the honesty of most union secretaries, over the years a few did betray the trust placed in them by the union. With access to financial resources and on little-or-no-better pay than members, there was always a temptation for dishonesty, particularly in times of personal crisis or need. Suspicions surrounded Jack Ryan of the AMIEU, including the whereabouts of money missing from the office. Ryan denied having taken the funds but reimbursed them out of his own pocket because he felt morally responsible. However, the damage to his reputation allowed Len Haigh to defeat him resoundingly in the 1924 election.⁶⁸ ARU secretary Bob Nicholls 'apparently embezzled' £190 18s 3d in ticket money in 1942 due to 'trouble over drinking and

63. C. Maxwell interview.

64. ARU State Council Minutes, 16 Nov. 1949. PTU

65. *ibid.*, 10-13 Apr. 1947.

66. Cook interview.

67. ARU State Council Minutes, 10-13 Apr. 1947. PTU

68. AMIEU CDC Minutes, 7 June 1923 and 19 Oct. 1923. CCQC J19/940 5; AMIEU Minutes, 25 July 1917 and 29 July, 1924. CCQC J19/940 4 and 5

gambling bouts.' The local Communist Party had expelled Nicholls a year earlier because of 'delinquency' but nobody in the ARU seemed to realise this behaviour could impinge upon his honesty with union finances. He had kept his problems well covered from ARU members and those officials who did know of his errant social behaviour did not suspect any dishonesty in the well-liked official.⁶⁹ The more-colourful version that circulated amongst railway workers, especially those outside the ARU, was that Nicholls 'scrammed off down south with the red-head barmaid from the Terminus Hotel and took a few quid travelling expenses with him'.⁷⁰

In these embarrassing cases, the union invariably closed ranks and gave the offender the chance to repay missing funds. Only when Nicholls failed to make restitution was the matter reported to the police. Secretary W.H. (Bill) Thursby of the Painters and Decorators' Union illicitly withdrew £600 19s 10d from the dormant Soldiers' Welfare Club funds while he was secretary of the Rockhampton Trades and Labour Council during World War II years. The deficit only became known in 1948 when the Queensland Trades and Labour Council asked for the refund of the balance of a war-time grant to its local counterpart.⁷¹ There may have been some connection, perhaps, with the death of Thursby's mother the preceding year and his frequent absences from Trades Hall Board meetings thereafter.⁷² When the business became known in union circles, the painters' union immediately removed him as secretary and council delegate. Frank Conlon, president of the Trades and Labour Council at the time, negotiated a deal whereby the council would drop the matter upon restitution of the embezzled money.⁷³ Apparently Thursby's father mortgaged his own home to repay the errant son's debt and prevent his prosecution.⁷⁴

69. ARU State Council Minutes, 3 July 1942, p. 3. PTU

70. Cole interview.

71. TWU Minutes, 14 Feb. 1949. CCQC P16/1954 2; Schwarten interview.

72. THBM Minutes, 19 Aug. 1947. CCQC U14/2063 4

73. QTLC Executive Minutes, 16 Feb. 1949, UQFL 118/A12 Box 6; TWU Minutes, 14 Mar. 1949. CCQC P16/1954 2

74. Schwarten, personal communication 12 Nov. 1997.

137

In one incident of a secretary's misconduct, union officials decided to drop the matter altogether for the sake of the movement's public reputation. In 1921, the Trades Hall Board suspended Albert Smith because of a £50 shortage in the cash on hand. Until then, Smith had given 'yeoman service' but had been 'neglectful of the wishes of the Board of late'.⁷⁵ Smith claimed 'certain untrusted persons' had removed the money from the office but would not present the cash books for audit.⁷⁶ Although Smith did not repay the missing money or return the books, the board believed nothing could be gained by prosecution: it would not recover the money and imprisonment would 'go hard on his wife and family'. Moreover, delegates feared a sympathetic jury would probably find against the board. Whether Smith was proven guilty or not was not the only issue of concern. Delegates believed that the reputation of the union movement would be damaged by the publicity so they pursued the matter no further.⁷⁷ Fortunately, most secretaries were honest and diligent in the execution of the daily duties to ensure the efficient running of the union. These duties were intellectually and physically demanding, occupied long hours and were often executed under uncomfortable physical conditions and sometimes amid strained inter-union relations.

Rules, Relationships, Routines and Rituals

In the administration of the larger unions, most of the routine activities devolved to the full-time secretary. Contrary to the popular conception of 'omnipotent' trade unions, running a union was a highly bureaucratic business and one which was stringently controlled by government regulations.⁷⁸ The secretary had to be fully conversant with all awards and agreements under which his members worked as well as comprehending the legal requirements of the arbitration system relating to dealings with

75. THBM Minutes, 28 Nov. 1921. CCQC U14/2063 1

76. *ibid.*, 16 Mar. 1922.

77. *ibid.*, 20 Apr. 1922.

78. Kathryn Cole, 'Introduction' in Kathryn Cole (ed.), *Power, Conflict and Control in Australian Trade Unions*, Ringwood, 1982, p. 6; Martin, *Trade Unions in Australia*, p. 31; D.W. Rawson, *Unions and Unionists in Australia*, Sydney, p. 1986, p. 75.

employers and the internal activities of the union under the Trade Union Act. The secretary also had to fully understand and administer the union's own extensive rules and procedures. In addition to federation rules, unions drew up by-laws for the government of purely local affairs provided, of course, they were in accordance with general rules.⁷⁹ In the case of the WWF, its domestic rules to be used with the federation rulebook extended to 35 pages.⁸⁰ A secretary who knew all the relevant legislation, awards, rules, by-laws and union procedures—even if not quite as soundly as Len Haigh who could 'go right through the award without even opening the book'⁸¹—greatly enhanced the efficient running of the union.

The full-time secretary's daily routine included regular visits to industrial sites around the town, policing awards and inspecting membership tickets. He also consulted with employers, the Industrial Inspector or the union solicitor, and attended a multitude of other related meetings. He might also have spent several weeks organising western areas for which the local union was often responsible. For the major part of the day, however, the secretary remained in the office attending to correspondence and finances, dealing with members who dropped in—both welcome and unwelcome—reporting to union headquarters and preparing for appearances before the local Industrial Magistrate or assembling local evidence for cases in the Industrial Court in Brisbane.

79. Insert in front cover of AMIEU Minutes 1928–1932. CCQC J19/941.1; FCDIU Minutes, 11 June 1917. CCQC P16/1952 3; WWF Minutes, 30 Mar. 1944. NBAC Z387/33/2

80. Waterside Workers' Federation of Australia, Rockhampton Branch, *Rules, 1935*, Rockhampton, 1935.

81. Reynolds interview.

Federated Waterside Workers' Union of Australia
Nº 1864 — ROCKHAMPTON BRANCH

	£	s.	d.
Subscription	6		
Medal			
Fines			
Political Levy			
Funeral Levy			
Trades Hall Levy	1	3	
TOTAL £	6	3	

Received from Member *July 1 1916*
H. Boyd
 the sum of *Six* Pounds
shillings and Pence,
 due to Union for Quarter
 ending *SEP 30 1916*
E. B. Curcell Secretary.

N.B. — All Dues to be Paid in Advance. See Rule 6.

Waterside Workers' Federation of Australia

Member's Ticket, 26/-
1940 Nº 10910

Rockhampton Branch
 Mr. *H. Boyd*
 of *Rockhampton*

is entitled to the privileges of membership and the protection of the Federation, while loyal to its rules and principles, for the year ending 31/12/40.
 Issued at *Rockhampton* on the *6th* day of *March* 1940.
 Issued by *G. E. Thompson* Branch Secretary

This Ticket is not negotiable or transferable to any other person.

Annual Subscription
 Maritime Worker
1/-
 Year 1940

Annual Levy
 Annual Conference
1/9
 Year 1940

Fig. 36: WWF Union Tickets of Harry Boyd snr
 Harry Boyd jnr



Fig. 37: Len Haigh's AMIEU Ticket
CCQC

Relations with the union hierarchy were of great importance and it was largely up to the secretary to maintain effective communication to that end. Sub-branches of state bodies like the TWU, AMIEU, ARU and most smaller unions, generated a constant stream of correspondence to and from the state secretary in Brisbane seeking advice and permission and receiving directions which they 'had to go along with' even if they did not necessarily agree.⁸² Because most industrial awards were negotiated and registered at state level, it was imperative that local unions maintained frequent communications with headquarters. Those unions with branch status, on the other hand, such as the WWF and the AEU, possessed considerable autonomy and remained more insulated from both the affairs of other branches and the intervention of federal councils. In the AEU, for example, the Central District Committee had authority to make all local industrial decisions provided they were within general rules and had only to send a copy of the

82. *ibid.*

minutes to the commonwealth body in Sydney.⁸³ Despite constant communications and the presence of delegates on state councils and at conferences, most local unions complained that Brisbane frequently overlooked them. From his perspective as secretary of the Boilermakers' Society and later president of the QTLC, Jack Egerton agrees that local unions were, in general, 'ignored by their headquarters' but at the same time they were mainly only interested in parochial industrial matters.⁸⁴

Trades Hall was the hub of union activity in Rockhampton. All the major unions with salaried officers occupied offices there: AMIEU and FCDIU/TWU for the entire period; WWF until the construction of its own premises near the wharves in about 1950; ARU until 1941; and AWU, although never affiliated with the Trades Hall Board, rented space until 1939. During the 1930s, the ASCJ occupied a small room in the hall but later vacated because of the financial burden.⁸⁵ The founding fathers of Trades Hall may have joyously celebrated 'a home of their own' in 1914, but after several decades of occupation, conditions in the hall were far from comfortable and, at times, secretaries conducted union affairs in unpleasant physical surroundings. Although the building was substantially of brick, a corrugated iron rear wall facing north made offices hot for most of the year, especially for the WWF whose office was at the back of the building. Security could not be guaranteed either because the partitions inserted in the former warehouse did not reach ceiling height. For many years, patrons of the adjoining theatre accessed the back-yard lavatories through Trades Hall and anybody who chose to do so could climb over the partitions and enter offices after hours.⁸⁶ There were periodic reports of petty theft and vandalism to offices.

Even when the hall was safely locked, tenants sometimes found the doorway littered with 'filth and such matter' in the morning because the front light was turned off

83. Vaughan interview.

84. Jack Egerton, interviewed 21 June 1996.

85. Schwarten interview.

86. THBM Minutes 21 Aug. 1941. CCQC U14/2063 4

142

after meetings to save electricity.⁸⁷ Unions constantly complained about the deplorable state of the vandalised lavatories with their broken louvres, leaking cisterns, dirty urinals, missing light bulbs and absence of paper. The bad state of Trades Hall's guttering and roof led to flooding of the AMIEU and TWU offices during heavy downpours and subsequent deterioration of the linoleum floor coverings.⁸⁸ To exacerbate conditions, the adjoining poultry sales room often emitted an offensive smell, particularly on wet summer days, while the proprietor's regular practice of loading fowls onto lorries in front of union premises led to 'feathers and other dirt' being tramped through the building.⁸⁹

Maintaining neighbourly relations with other unions in these surrounds was sometimes a difficult task. There were frequent disagreements and complaints to the Trades Hall Board over space allocation, rent differentials and lack of privacy. Incomplete walls allowed not only the passing public to overhear confidential union discussions but also revealed union business to other secretaries. Len Haigh installed a public telephone box in the AMIEU office to keep his conversations private and also, it has been alleged, to keep his own members ignorant of certain 'deals' with management.⁹⁰ The lack of privacy existed until the 1940s when the AMIEU secured its office to ceiling level with fibrolite sheeting but the WWF opted for wire-netting for better ventilation in their already hot and stuffy room.⁹¹

The main complaint by tenants was the AMIEU's practice of conducting the labour pick for casual meatworkers from the hall. Hundreds of hopeful men congregated on the footpath for the 2.30 p.m. line-up for work the next day.⁹² The milling crowd and bicycles brought frequent protests about congestion on the footpath and in the central passageway which interfered with other unions' activities. On one occasion, someone

87. *ibid.*, 16 May 1944. CCQC U14/2063 4

88. *ibid.*, 17 Nov. 1942 and 16 Oct. 1945.

89. *ibid.*, 19 Dec. 1944.

90. C. Maxwell interview

91. THBM Minutes, 18 Aug. 1942. CCQC U14/2063 4

92. Regular workers faced the pick at the opening of the season and proceeded to Lakes Creek each day until the particular task finished. They then lined up to secure another job and union work pass to be presented to the timekeeper at the gate.

called the police to deal with the problem of footpath obstruction.⁹³ The ARU secretary also complained that the meatworkers' coarse language was not 'not nice' for office girls to hear and had deterred his union from hiring a female assistant. Some of the AMIEU girls who lined up for the earlier female pick—probably some of those from the tallow shed whose reputation was less-than-desirable⁹⁴—also had a colourful vocabulary. Frank Conlon regularly ran the gauntlet of the girls with greetings such as 'Here's old frosty face!' being the most polite extended to him as he was forced to negotiate them lounging inelegantly in the corridor outside his office.⁹⁵ Unions also complained of the 'grave danger' that the whole front of the building could collapse if meatworkers continued to lean on the plate-glass windows. There seemed to be little concern for personal injury, however, only for the building and the glass which could not be easily replaced in wartime.⁹⁶

Most of the secretary's outdoor duties involved visits to the various workplaces and the usual means of travelling around town was the bicycle. With almost all his local members located in one site, this was not a great problem for the ARU secretary, particularly from the 1940s when the union moved from Trades Hall into an office in Denison Street opposite the railway station.⁹⁷ On the other hand, ASCJ secretary Joe Cusack had to visit numerous building sites around town. This task proved quite arduous by bicycle, particularly on hot Saturday afternoons when he was on the prowl for award breakers.⁹⁸ TWU secretary Frank Conlon also peddled around the town attending to union business and checking on those who were—or might be intending to—illicitly working after hours. The AMIEU secretary faced the task of not only touring retail butcher shops but also regularly travelling down to the Lakes Creek meatworks where the majority of members worked and where most industrial problems

93. AMIEU Minutes, 11 June 1928 and 21 Nov. 1939. CCQC J19/940 7 and J19/941 3; THBM Minutes, 20 Sept. 1938, 16 Dec. 1941 and 21 Apr. 1942. CCQC U14/2063 3 and 4

94. Bonnie Schwarten, interviewed 16 May 1996.

95. Glenda Matook, interviewed 13 Mar. 1998. Other expressions, apparently, were too rude to repeat.

96. THBM Minutes, 16 Jan. 1945. CCQC U14/2063 4

97. Campbell interview.

98. E. Schwarten interview.

144 occurred. Shortly after Len Haigh took up his position in 1924, the union acquired 'a single-seater Overland car with semi-balloon tyres' for the secretary after his defeated predecessor bought the union bicycle for private use.⁹⁹ After Gus Power's appointment as organiser in the 1940s, he supposedly did his regular visits to 'the Creek' on bicycle while the more sedentary Haigh drove in style in a large black Buick.¹⁰⁰

For the WWF secretary, it was not far to the city wharves but the 50 kilometre trip down to Port Alma at the river mouth, where overseas ships berthed in the deeper water, meant travelling by rail motor. In 1950, the union made the secretary a personal loan of £200 to buy a car and paid its running expenses.¹⁰¹ On the other hand, the state council of the TWU paid Frank Conlon to use his own open tourer for union business out of town. As well as travelling throughout Central Queensland organising rural areas for several weeks each year, Conlon regularly made the two-day journey to Brisbane for branch meetings as state president. On such trips, he also took local president Frank Cole as the Rockhampton delegate and both were often accompanied by their wives who enjoyed shopping and visiting relations in Brisbane.¹⁰² Most officials, though, attended union business throughout the district by train, especially ARU secretary Frank Campbell. Campbell regularly incurred the displeasure of the union hierarchy in Brisbane by travelling for free with the maintenance inspectors because there was no other way to visit fettling gangs on country lines. They may have been the boss's men officially but to Campbell they were just 'nice blokes' who helped him do his job.¹⁰³

99. AMIEU CDC Minutes, 15 Sept. 1924, 11 June 1925 and 25 Aug. 1925. CCQC J19/940 5 and 6

100. There is some disagreement about who actually had the car from the 1940s. Haigh's daughter maintains Gus Power (her uncle) drove the car and that her father suffered his stroke after riding the bicycle back from Lakes Creek in the summer heat. However, Colin Maxwell recalls having an argument with Mrs Haigh over possession of the car when he took over as secretary. Haigh's widow maintained the car was her husband's private property. Ursula Barry, interviewed 4 Nov. 1996; Colin Maxwell interview.

101. WWF Minutes, 16 Feb. 1950. NBAC Z387/33/2

102. Matook interview; Cole interview.

103. ARU State Council Minutes, 14 Oct. 1946. PTU; Campbell interview.



Fig. 38: 1936 ARTWU State Conference, Brisbane.
 Frank Conlon, President (front, fourth from left), Rockhampton Delegates
 Frank Cole (front, far right) and Frank Flanagan (middle, third from left)
 Bob Cole

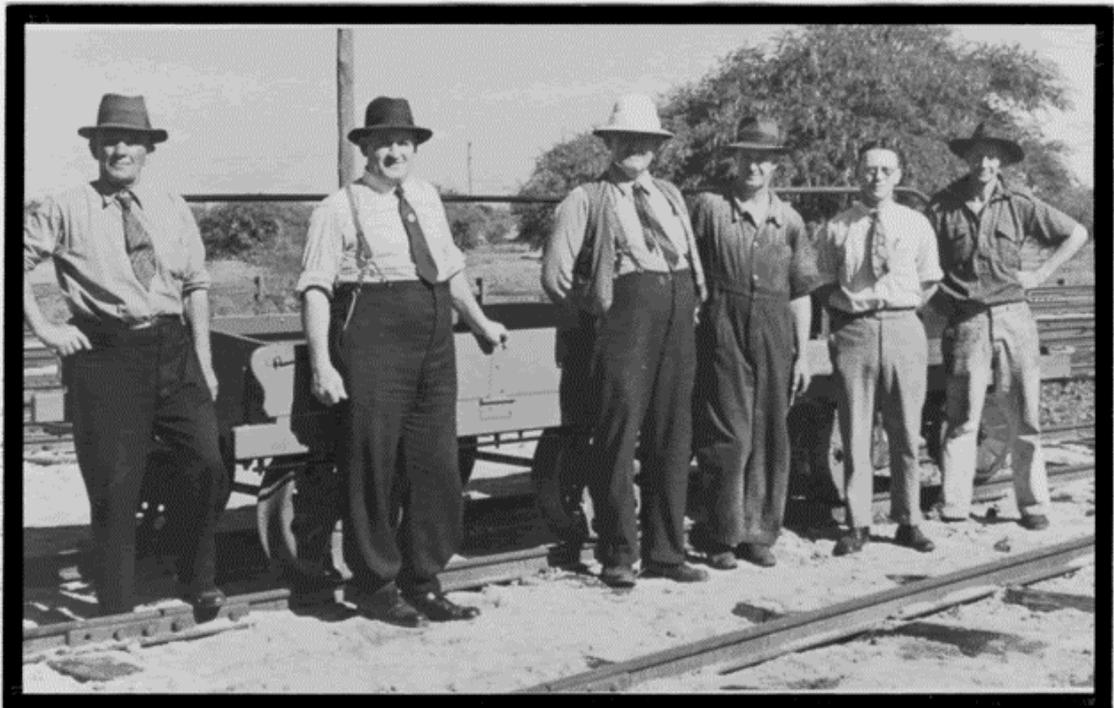


Fig. 39: ARU District Secretary on Tour
 Frank Campbell (second from right) with Railway Maintenance Inspectors
 Frank Campbell

146

Smaller unions which did not have offices sometimes conducted union affairs from home. There, business was transacted amid family life with a 'port' of union records stored under the bed or on top of the wardrobe.¹⁰⁴ During the 1930s, Builders' Labourers' Union members would go to secretary Dan O'Sullivan's house for meetings. His daughter, Bonnie, recalls that they would 'get around the kitchen table in a huddle and there'd be great discussions.' Because of noise and possible eaves-dropping, the children were sent out to play on the footpath beneath the street light, their usual haunts of under the house or the backyard being too dark at night.¹⁰⁵ At other times, labourers rode their bikes up to president Henry Schwarten's home in Bolsover Street to discuss union business and pay their dues, even long after Schwarten had retired from work.¹⁰⁶ For craft unions which also had part-time officers, shop stewards conducted union business at work to assist the secretary. The AEU steward in the railway sheetmetal shop, Jack Treacy, would sit at his bench at lunch time on pay-day, collecting the 'two bob' fortnightly union contributions, marking each man's 'pence card' as paid and updating the union's records.¹⁰⁷ He also handed out copies of the national *AEU Monthly Journal* to any member who might be interested in reading them.¹⁰⁸

A fundamental part of running the union was organising meetings, even if rank-and-file members showed little interest in attending. So nobody could fain ignorance, the secretary generally inserted a reminder notice in the daily paper stating the time, date and items for discussion. General meetings took place in the large upstairs front room of Trades Hall. Many smaller unions also used the hall: the Boilermakers, Blacksmiths, Plumbers and Gasfitters, Printers, Coachmakers, Coopers, Painters, Plasterers, Electrical Trades, Furnishing Trades, Builders' Labourers, Foodstuffs, Shop Assistants, Milk Vendors, Miscellaneous Workers, Miners and Prospectors, Theatrical Union and, during the Depression, the Unemployed Workers' Union. A diverse range of non-union groups

104. 'Port' was the peculiarly Queensland term for all luggage from a school bag to a suitcase.

105. B. Schwarten interview.

106. E. Schwarten interview.

107. A 'bob' was a shilling (1s)

108. Cole interview; Treacy interview.

including ALP bodies, Buffalo lodges, sporting and hobby groups rented the hall on a regular basis, too—even the Jehovah's Witnesses after a concerned Trades Hall Board officially checked they were not an illegal association.¹⁰⁹ The venue was in such demand during the 1940s and the board so keen to boost its income that the PIEU complained on one occasion of a double booking and that it had to hold a meeting in the neighbouring poultry sales room, thanks to the generosity of the proprietor.¹¹⁰

Despite the popularity of Trades Hall with both labour and outside groups, conditions in the upstairs rooms were spartan with bare floorboards and dark red brick walls. In the large front meeting room—the hall—there were a few tables and forms and a large number of stools which sometimes tore members' trousers with their protruding nails.¹¹¹ An upright piano allowed music for social gatherings. Unions frequently complained about the filthy condition of the floor from dirty boots and spilt beer and about poor lighting for night meetings. An outside staircase provided access to the upper storey until the erection of the theatre, whereupon it was moved from the side to the rear of the building. Five large arched sash windows across the Fitzroy Street wall provided the only natural light and ventilation in the main room. Youths passing through from the theatre gallery to the lavatories in the back yard sometimes removed the light-bulbs so that some night meetings entailed a search for spare bulbs before proceedings could begin. In early 1947, installation of modern fluorescent lights suspended by chains from the lofty ceiling finally remedied both the poor lighting and the vandalism.¹¹² The smaller meeting room at the rear, though, remained dark and claustrophobic.¹¹³

The surroundings created an appropriate atmosphere of masculinity and solidarity for union proceedings. From the picture rail around the walls of the main room hung photographic tributes to union pioneers and other luminaries of the labour movement:

109. THBM Minutes, 20 Feb. 1945. CCQC U14/2063 4

110. *ibid.*, 16 Apr. 1946.

111. *ibid.*, 13 Oct. 1945.

112. *ibid.*, 17 Dec. 1946.

113. *ibid.*, 20 Oct. 1942.

several portraits of early Eight-Hour Day Celebration Committees, Trades Hall Board of Management members and retired trustees. Their heavy wooden frames matched the solemn dignity of working-class men somewhat incongruously attired in their Sunday-best and with boots sometimes in need of a polish. An imposing portrait of former Labor premier T.J. Ryan, who had tragically died in his prime, took pride of place mounted above a marble memorial plaque between two of the windows. Beside him was a large print of early Labor leader, Dave Bowman.¹¹⁴ By the 1950s, there were also photographs of John D. Ryan of the ARU, Isaac Cant of the PIEU and another marble plaque in honour of George Kemp of the ARU.¹¹⁵

These masculine tributes reflected the fact that the union movement and Trades Hall was a man's world: it was no place for women unless for a social occasion. The old Labour Day Celebration Committee had planned to erect a memorial plaque to labour stalwart, Emma Willis, after her death in 1923. The committee opened a subscription list for which the AMIEU, at least, collected £5 12s 0d but with the hard economic times and collapse of that committee in 1930, nothing further came of the idea.¹¹⁶ In Trades Hall, a prominent tribute to a woman would have been decidedly out of place even if it had eventuated.

Amid these sombre monuments to unionism's past, the president conducted the regular meeting according to conventional meeting procedure, discussing such routine matters as union organisation, member discipline, awards, local conditions, inter-union affairs and sometimes topical political issues. The generally mundane nature of union meetings was occasionally enlivened by 'long and heated discussion', members becoming

114. *ibid.*, 15 Sept. 1921. CCQC U14/2063 1

115. These are now housed in the Queensland Council of Trade Unions (formerly ACTU) Centre in Campbell Street, Trades Hall having been sold in the 1980s.

116. AMIEU Minutes, 11 Mar. 1924 and 9 Feb. 1925. CCQC J19/940 5; THBM Minutes, 18 Nov. 1937. The bank advised the board in 1937 that unless the trust account was operated again, the money (amount unspecified) would revert to the government. The account was to be transferred to the board's trustees. CCQC U14/2063 3

149

'very unruly and jumping to their feet'¹¹⁷ and even 'some real dog-fights'¹¹⁸ over industrial tactics or organisational matters. Even at AEU meetings, 'things could get pretty hairy', particularly when discussing strike action.¹¹⁹ At times, personal animosities surfaced and factional differences emerged which required a competent chairman to contain. On other occasions, a drunken, abusive and sometimes aggressive member might disrupt the meeting and have to be ejected. AMIEU general meetings were the scene of many of these. Phil ('Broody') Orbell regularly disrupted the proceedings, one of which Colin Maxwell vividly recalls:

Broody was the knocker-down. He used to knock a thousand cattle a day with a hammer. He'd always be drunk when he came to meetings. There'd be him raving and old Dad Loughran going 'Ah shut up, you "so-and-so"!' One night they chucked him out and he was banging on the door and yelling 'I'll get you Haigh, you bludger!'...But he was a good union bloke when he was sober.¹²⁰

On that occasion, the union fined Orbell £2 for his 'bad conduct' and for refusing to leave the meeting when ordered. The chair ruled he be excluded from further attendance and promptly closed the meeting.¹²¹ At another meeting, George Stafford from the boning room physically assaulted President Ilott and found himself fined £5.¹²²

Each union added its own particular customs and practices to meetings. For the AEU, ASCJ and Boilermakers, the ritual form of address of 'Brother' not only perpetuated the centuries-old craft links with the English guilds from which each derived but also reinforced fraternity, solidarity and exclusivity through its 'club-like conception' of unionism.¹²³ It also mirrored the Masonic affiliations of many tradesmen.¹²⁴ Other unions used the term 'comrade', sometimes to reflect communist sympathies but more so to express their solidarity and Labor politics. Most bodies also created an aura of secrecy by appointing a tyler or door-keeper. This honoured position usually fell to a

117. FCDIU Minutes, 2 July 1917. CCQC P16/1952 3; TWU Minutes 14 July 1952. CCQC P16/1954 2

118. Les Yewdale, interviewed 29 June 1995.

119. Treacy interview.

120. C. Maxwell interview.

121. AMIEU Minutes, 3 July 1944. CCQC J19/941 4

122. AMIEU Branch Executive Minutes, 17 Dec. 1940. CCQC J19/942 3

123. Martin, *Trade Unions in Australia*, p, 96.

124. Cole interview; Treacy interview.

respected senior unionist like August Schwab in the AMIEU or Jimmy Damm in the AEU, but a sixteen-year-old railway apprentice, Jack Egerton, found himself in that esteemed role within a month of admission to the Boilermakers' Society in 1934. He recalls:

I was made the door-keeper, a *very* important job. Everyone had to show me their union ticket as they came in. It was a bit ridiculous really because everybody knew each other anyway. It was the tradition though, passed down from the old days in England.¹²⁵

Admission of new members also involved ritual practices to create a sense of awe and respect for the union. Each applicant generally had to present in person unless from country districts. After satisfying the requirements of good personal character, sound industrial reputation and a clearance if transferring from another union, prospective members waited outside the door for permission to enter from the tyler. One former meatworker recalls of his first night at the AMIEU in 1936 when the union admitted him and several other boys as 'youths':

They had a tyler on the door. We were outside and he opened a little hole and said 'Righto, you can come in now.' Then he shut the door behind us. You had to go right up to the table where the president and secretary were. Then you had to turn around and face the whole room so they could see you and get to know you while they read out the proposals. They were pretty strict. Then someone would say, 'Righto, admit them!'¹²⁶

The president then welcomed the new members with a short address and explained their obligations to the union as well as the regulations regarding levies, clearances and transfers.

There was no such performance for the female members of the AMIEU though. They did not have to present for induction nor were they made feel welcome at subsequent meetings. Bonnie O'Sullivan, who was one of hundreds of girls employed in the meatworks cannery under the World War II Manpower regulations, claims:

125. Egerton interview.

126. E. Maxwell interview.

Women were never encouraged at their meetings. A couple of us went one night and we were made to feel like lepers. 'What would you know?' sort-of-thing if you said anything. With that, we withdrew. It was 'we're the boss, do as you're told'... men's business. That was the attitude but they never said it.¹²⁷

151 Amongst the waterside workers, balloting with small balls became the established practice for admission to the local branch. After providing satisfactory responses to questions about his intentions in the calling and industrial history, each applicant was escorted from the room by the tyler. Every member then cast a white ball if he approved of the candidate and black if he disapproved: a majority of white balls meant the applicant became 'a duly elected member of the Rockhampton Branch of WWF of A'; if not, he was 'black-balled' and rejected.¹²⁸

Applicants for membership of the craft unions underwent a more formal initiation. As well as satisfying the essential criterion of good character, prospective members had to submit their trade qualifications or evidence of experience to a credentials committee to ensure only those of the requisite standard entered the ranks of the craftsmen. The initiatory address then read by the AEU president, for example, pointed out their moral and financial responsibilities as members and informed them of the 'fine traditions' set by their forebears in withstanding the 'persecution and victimisation' of the employing class to achieve the present-day conditions. At the conclusion of this stirring address, the union welcomed new members and 'extended to [them] the hand of Trade Union Brotherhood'.¹²⁹ There were, of course, no females in the AEU in Rockhampton, even during the war years.¹³⁰

While Trades Hall was invariably the venue for general meetings, unions held stop-work and mass meetings in other locations. Railway regulations prevented unionists who had downed tools from assembling in the grounds, so stop-work meetings

127. B. Schwarten interview.

128. WWF Minutes, 28 July 1937. NBAC Z387/33/1. Margo Beasley cites the same experience by Ron Maxwell (son of WWF president Tommy Maxwell and brother of Colin and Ewart) in the Rockhampton branch.

129. AEU Initiatory Address, copy of original held by Austin Vaughan.

130. Treacy interview; Egerton interview.

152

were convened in a large vacant allotment opposite the workshops gate in Bolsover Street. After the government resumed the land for bicycle racks for railway workers—allegedly to prevent stop-work meetings in public view—hundreds of striking unionists walked the two blocks or so down to gasworks' flats on the riverbank. This procession made the strikers even more conspicuous and the embarrassed railway department relented and allowed stop-work meetings inside the grounds, generally in the spacious wagon shop. The AEU preferred to hold 'stop-work' meetings at lunch time in the shade of the big water tank beside the running shed. These meetings did not infringe railway rules because of the timing. They also avoided the lengthy process of obtaining pass-outs from the time-keeper at the gate and, most importantly, prevented members losing pay.¹³¹ In the AMIEU, the slaughter yard was the usual site of 'All Up' meetings while the WWF used the pick-up shed in Quay Street and later its own hall erected nearby in the early 1950s.

For mass meetings during major strikes, the Tivoli Theatre was the most popular venue.¹³² The Tivoli was a large open-air cinema accommodating several thousand people and located diagonally opposite Trades Hall. For any combined railway meetings, which the ARU invariably dominated by weight of numbers, the AEU usually met beforehand in Trades Hall to plan its own strategy and then moved across to the Tivoli for the mass meeting.¹³³ At other times and especially in rainy weather, the enclosed Palais Royal and Wintergarden in Alma Street or the smaller Trades Hall (Liberty) Theatre were used. The Trades Hall Theatre's gallery proved very useful during one particularly contentious and rowdy meeting, according to the ARU's Frank Nolan. In the 1927 railway strike, when the committee took a vote on whether to join unions elsewhere in ceasing work, the men in the gallery could not see most of the hands below and those below were uncertain of the result upstairs. Only the officials on the stage had

131. Treacy interview; Cole interview.

132. Previously called the Strand.

133. Treacy interview; Cole interview.

full view of theatre and so the chairman, Tom Lee, could declare the motion carried as the strike committee wanted.¹³⁴

153



Fig. 40: Railway Workers after a Strike Meeting in the Tivoli Theatre, corner of Fitzroy and Bolsover Streets, 1925

MB, 30 Aug. 1925

Union Organisation in Rockhampton to 1957

Over the 50 years of union organisation in Rockhampton from 1907, rank-and-file members came to entrust the administration of local affairs to small cliques of long-serving and dedicated officials as the result of interacting attitudinal, organisational, social and practical factors. The full-time salaried secretaries proved to be the most influential and respected union leaders and largely thanks to their dedication and skill, union administrations ran efficiently even if at times in isolation from the southern hierarchy and other sub-branches throughout the state. Unions both large and small conducted their meetings in the traditional and masculine surrounds of Trades Hall where, for resident unions at least, sharing accommodation sometimes proved difficult

134. Nolan, *You Pass This Way Only Once*, p. 61.

and was made the more so by frequent inter-union competition for membership and demarcation disputes as Chapter 8 will discuss.

In the face of these inter-union squabbles about accommodation and competing interests in the workplace, one vital aspect of Australian trade unionism bound most Rockhampton unions and their members firmly together: their loyalty to and support for the Australian Labor Party, either as affiliated bodies or as Labor-voting individuals. Over the decades to the 1950s, however, not all unionists or even unions followed this orthodox line of thought. Notable among unions in Rockhampton for taking a contrary ideological and political view was the ARU. The remark about 'Red Ragers' made by its delegate to the failed 1927 industrial council and doubts that a prospective federal Labor government would introduce the 40-hour week in 1938—both raised in the previous chapter—indicated that its leaders, at least, placed little faith in the political wing of the labour movement to provide a better life for the working class. But the ARU militants and their friend in the ASCJ were not the first nor last dissident minorities to challenge the mainstream view during this period and to cause tension and division in the local union movement. The impact of radical ideological thought (and the counter-challenges mounted against it) upon the structures, organisation and membership of the Rockhampton union movement is the focus of the next part of this history.