

PART 2

Conformity and Dissent: Ideological Differences In the Local Union Movement



Chapter 5

157

Labourists and 'Ratbags': the Impact of Ideological Differences on the Local Union Movement to 1945

In the first half of the twentieth century, other ideas for industrial and political organisation and action in pursuit of a better life for the working class gained varying degrees of popularity in the Australian labour movement. The spread of these new ideologies and the movements which espoused them was facilitated by periods of economic, industrial and political crisis, particularly during World War I, the Depression years and the decade following World War II. Across the nation, there was intense and passionate debate in response to the propaganda and activities of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the radical One-Big-Union movement (OBU-ism) and the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) during these respective periods.¹ The ideology that underpinned these new movements challenged mainstream labour thought and the accepted forms of working-class organisation in Australia. In Rockhampton, the IWW had minimal effect on unions but, from the mid-1920s, supporters of the IWW's successor, radical OBU-ism, attempted a new system of union organisation and, while their efforts ultimately failed, the legacy of bitter inter-union discord persisted in the local trade union movement for many years.

1. Ross Fitzgerald and Harold Thornton, *Labor in Queensland: From the 1880s to 1988*, St Lucia, 1988, p. 168. As Jim Beatson points out in the preface to his BA Thesis, *Communism and Public Opinion in Queensland 1939-1951: An Explanation of Queensland's Vote in the 1951 Anti-Communist Referendum*, University of Queensland, 1974, the Communist Party of Australia renamed itself the Australian Communist Party between 1944 and 1951. The more familiar name and its abbreviation, CPA, is used here.

There is a long-established belief that the Australian labour movement generally eschewed political ideology for pragmatism.² Frenchman Albert Métin proffered such an opinion during his 1901 visit. He considered that the antipodean labour movement had, by an apparent concentration upon practical issues and not on socialist theory, created 'the working-man's paradise' where democratic institutions and an emerging welfare state ensured the world's highest living and working standards for ordinary people. Indeed, during his brief stop in Rockhampton, Métin found wharf labourers debating issues of hours and pay and not political theory.³

As Terry Irving points out, a lack of debate about political principles should not be interpreted as an absence of ideology. He claims that recent scholarship on the 'power of ideas' has broadened the meaning of ideology from the province of 'the lunatic fringe' where Marxian socialism predominated.⁴ The 'ideas, policies and practices' which characterised the Australian labour movement, and which produced such comparatively advanced working-class conditions without revolution, should also be seen as a valid ideology and not be dismissed as mere pragmatism. It was these principles which inspired unionism as a social movement rather than as simply an industrial organisation.

Many historians have labelled the dominant ideas and methods of Australian working-class organisation as 'labourism'. In the labourist political model, strong unionism was fundamental to the power structure of the labour movement's political wing, the Australian Labor Party (ALP).⁵ Through affiliation with the party, participation in Labor-in-Politics conventions and plebiscites, and donations to electoral campaign funds, for example, unions played a crucial role in maintaining the ALP and

2. Terry Irving, 'Editorial', *Labour History*, No. 66, May 1994, p. iii. See, for example, Denis Murphy, 'Queensland', in Denis Murphy (ed.), *Labor in Politics: The State Labor Parties in Australia, 1880-1920*, St Lucia, 1975, p. 129.

3. Albert Métin, *Socialism without Doctrine*, (1901) translated by Russel Ward, Chippendale, 1977, pp. vi, 66 and 180.

4. Terry Irving, 'Labourism: A Political Genealogy', *Labour History*, No. 66, May 1994, p. 1.

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

shaping its policies. Reciprocally, unions expected that when Labor held office, as it did in Queensland almost continuously from 1915 to 1957, an interventionist state would protect working-class interests.⁶ In practice, labourism meant Labor legislation for compulsory arbitration and other industrial and social reforms, and legislation against the importation of coloured labour and cheap goods.⁷ Locally, labourism included lobbying Labor politicians as well as developing and exploiting a close alliance with the Industrial Inspector. In the labourist model, therefore, there was a symbiotic relationship between unions and political institutions and representatives.

While labourism characterised mainstream political and industrial thought, a small minority championed an opposing 'revolutionary tradition' which advocated class struggle and the overthrow of capitalism by a workers' revolution.⁸ The 1905 Labor-in-Politics convention had adopted the socialist objective of 'collective ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange' as part of its political platform but it intended socialism to be 'attained through the extension of the industrial and economic functions of the State' and certainly not by revolution.⁹ Even so, the socialist objective remained largely political rhetoric as Labor adopted methods to protect workers within the existing capitalist state through industrial and welfare reforms. Labor sought to control capitalism by reform, not overthrow it by revolution.¹⁰

'Good Labor Men': Labourists in Rockhampton

The men at the forefront of the local union movement maintained strong links with the ALP. E.B. Purnell (WWF), Frank Conlon (TWU) and George Kemp (ARU) were all early members of Rockhampton and Fitzroy Workers' Political Organisations

6. R. Neil Massey, 'A Century of Laborism, 1891-1993: An Historical Interpretation', *Labour History*, No. 66, May 1994, p. 51.

7. Jim Hagan, *The History of the ACTU*, Melbourne, 1981, p. 14.

8. *ibid.*, p. 43.

9. *Worker*, 3 June 1905.

10. Fitzgerald and Thornton, *Labor in Queensland*, p. 168.

(WPOs) and carried their membership into the later ALP branch structure. These three union leaders, together with Len Haigh (AMIEU); Tom Maxwell, Frank Dunn and Jack Burke (WWF); Tom Lee, Jim Griffin, Dick Mannion and George McBryde (ARU); Sid Face and Tom Cook (AEU); James A. (also Jim) Griffin (Boilermakers' Society); Harold 'Mick' Gardner (Coachmakers/ Vehicle Builders' Federation); John Dowling (AWU/TWU); and Fred Kluver (ASCJ)—to name but a few of the most prominent politically active unionists—regularly contested municipal elections on a Labor ticket in the decades before the 1950s.¹¹ In the first municipal election with universal franchise, for example, Labor stood almost a full complement of candidates, most of whom were leading union figures. Unfortunately, the voters of the time still believed that businessmen were the best city administrators. By 1930 though, the Labor team triumphed for several terms with Tom Lee twice winning the mayoral position and Len Haigh holding aldermanic office for almost 20 years until 1949.¹²



Fig. 41: Tom Lee (ARU)
Served two terms as Mayor of
Rockhampton(1927-1933)
DR, 10 Apr.1933

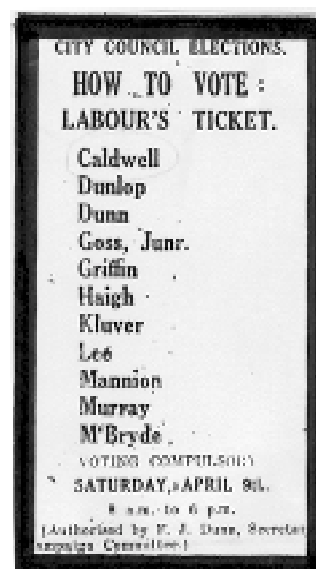
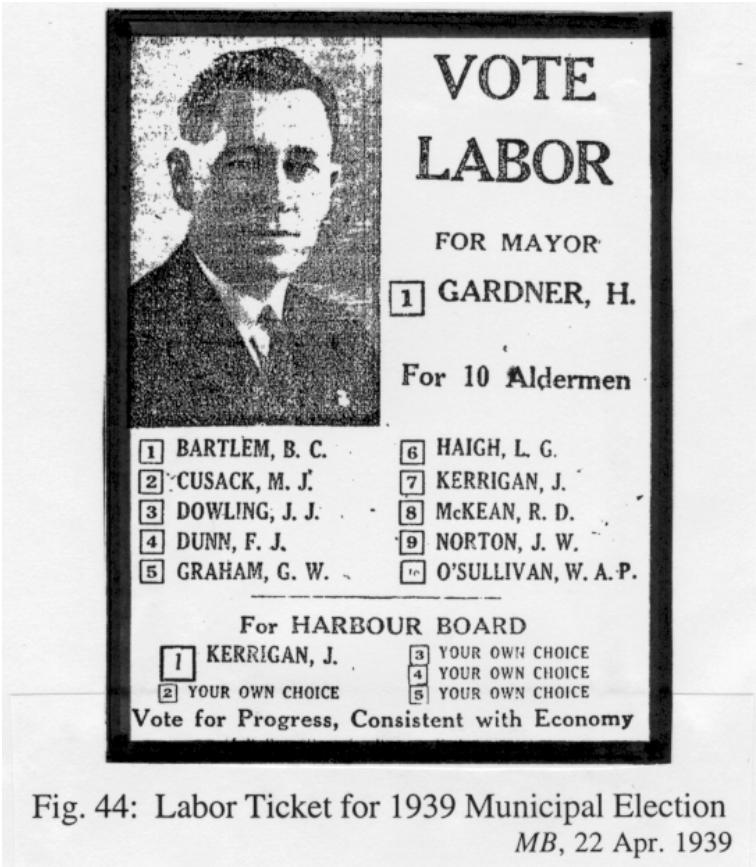
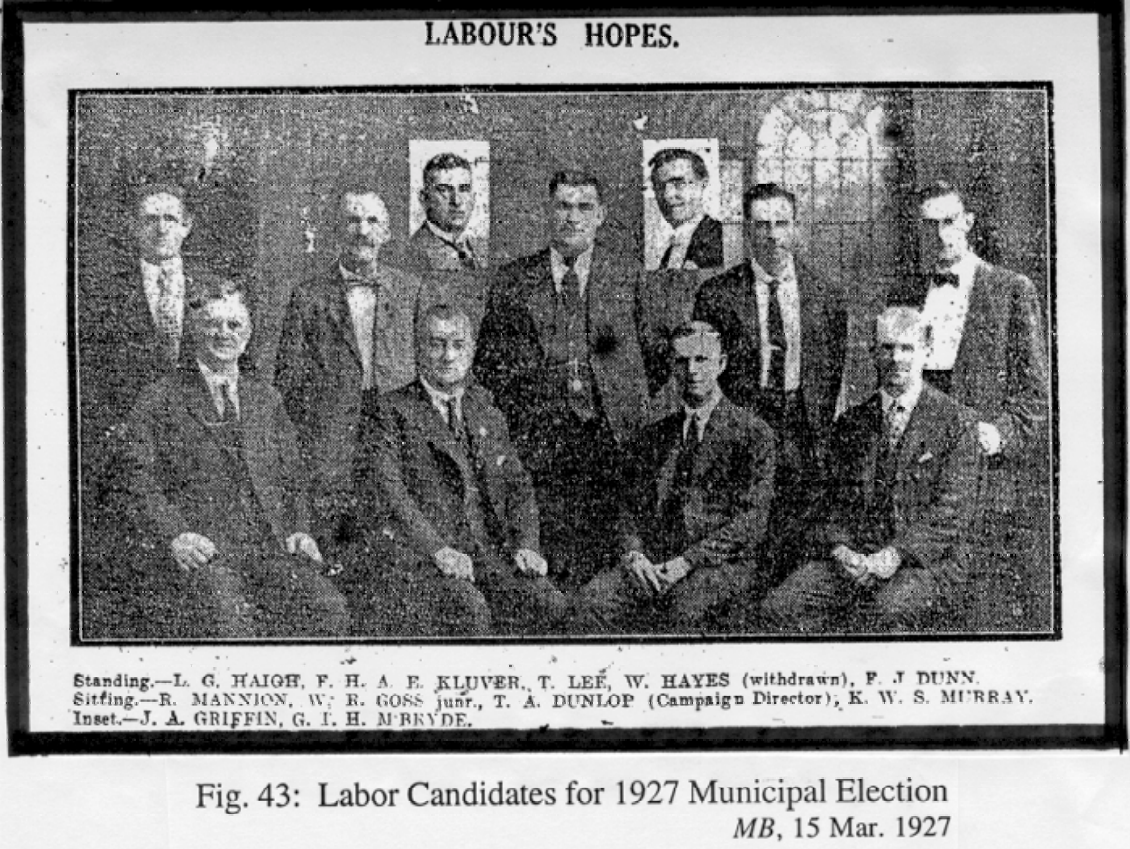


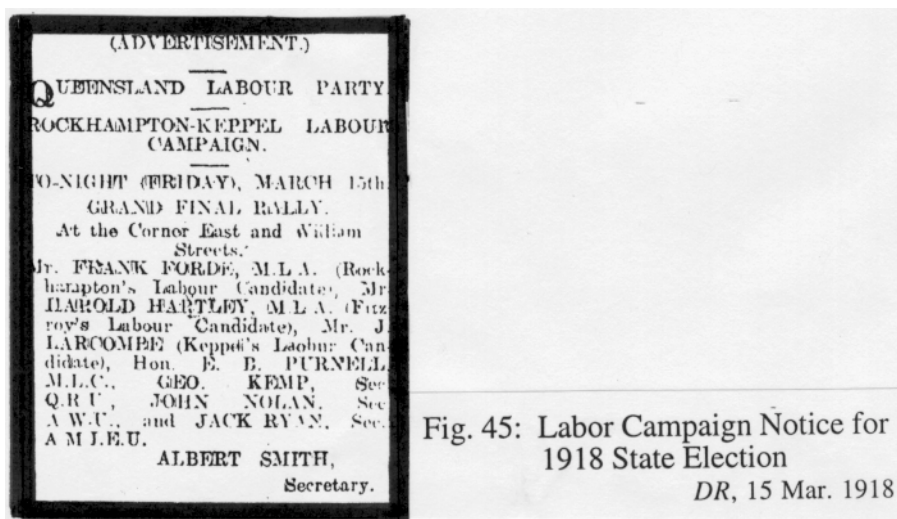
Fig 42: Labour Ticket for 1927 Municipal Election
MB, 8 Apr. 1927

11. As regularly listed in the *Morning Bulletin* during Mar./Apr., 1927, 1930, 1933, 1936 and 1939.

12. *MB*, 7 Apr. 1930, p. 7 and 10 Apr. 1933; Ursula Barry, interviewed 4 Nov. 1996.



In the state parliamentary sphere, Labor members Jimmy Larcombe and Harold Hartley were former secretaries of the old Carters and Storemen's Union and AWU respectively, while the Ryan Labor government appointed E.B. Purnell to the Legislative Council in 1917.¹³ Hailed in his obituary as 'a stalwart worker' for Labor,¹⁴ Purnell, together with Conlon, Kemp, Maxwell, Dunn, Jack Ryan (AMIEU) and others served on numerous electoral campaign committees.



In the 1940s, federal member for Capricornia Frank Forde (AWU and WWF) sought out Frank Campbell to manage his electoral campaign.¹⁵ Colin Maxwell, who succeeded Len Haigh as AMIEU secretary, not only ran for Capricornia a decade later but subsequently coordinated the campaign of Mervyn Thackeray (AFULE) in Rockhampton North.¹⁶ The leader most politically active behind the scenes over more

13. Australian Labor Party, *The Labour Government of Queensland: A History of the Labour Movement*, Brisbane, 1915, p. 56; Duncan Waterson, *Biographical Register of the Queensland Parliament, 1860-1929*, Canberra, 1972, pp. 82, 105 and 154; Duncan Waterson and John Arnold, *Biographical Register of the Queensland Parliament, 1930-1980*, Canberra, 1982, p. 18; Ken Buckley in *Mindful Militants: The Amalgamated Engineers in Australia, 1852-1920*, Canberra, 1970, p. 224 claims that Harold Hartley was a member of the ASE at the time of his election to state parliament in 1915. As Hartley had served his apprenticeship as a fitter at Burns and Twigg and subsequently worked in the railway, in engineering works and foundries, it is possible he also kept that membership current as well as his AWA/AWU ticket—perhaps for political reasons.

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

15. Campbell declined the request because he felt there were others more worthy of this great task than himself. F. Forde to F. Campbell, 16 May 1943 and reply 7 June 1943. Copies of personal correspondence held by the author with Mr Campbell's permission. Forde was also a life member of Rockhampton WWF. WWF Minutes, 22 Apr. 1949. NBAC Z387/33/2

16. Colin Maxwell, interviewed 20 June 1996. Maxwell and Thackeray were also brothers-in-law.

than three decades was Frank Conlon. He served on the Capricornia Executive of the ALP almost continuously from the 1920s and, with Jimmy Damm of the AEU as his close associate, presided with an iron hand over Allenstown branch of Fitzroy ALP for 38 years.¹⁷ In a 1934 Labor publication, Jimmy Larcombe acknowledged with gratitude those union leaders who had 'rendered valuable service' to the political wing of the Queensland labour movement. Understandably from his perspective, many of them were Rockhampton men.¹⁸

The close links between union leaders and the ALP demonstrated not only their personal political interests and aspirations but also their deep conviction about the relationship between the political and industrial wings of the labour movement implicit in labourism. Rockhampton TWU consistently maintained its affiliation with the ALP, while records of both the AEU and WWF indicate that there was affiliation with the party for much of the time. In the period while the Queensland Branch of the AMIEU broke off with the ALP in the mid-1920s, the Rockhampton union pushed for re-affiliation.¹⁹ Even when unions themselves did not have a formal link with the ALP, there was the assumption that most members, as working-class born and bred, would vote Labor at election time. To do otherwise was to be 'a traitor to your class'.²⁰

As well as maintaining close links with Labor, local unions also relied heavily on the arbitration mechanism established soon after the 1915 Queensland electoral victory. When workplace problems arose, as Chapter 7 will reveal in detail, the first lines of defence were the Industrial Inspector and the Industrial Court rather than resorting to direct action. In the main, the union leaders of this era were, as the *Morning Bulletin* lauded in retrospect, of 'a school of union leadership which held the best deal for the workers was 'to be gained...through the Arbitration Court and by industrial and social

17. *MB*, 9 Mar. 1954, p. 3.

18. James Larcombe, *Notes on the Political History of the Labour Movement in Queensland*, Brisbane, 1934, p. 120.

19. AMIEU Central District Council Minutes, 21 Aug. 1928. CCQC J19/940 7

20. Bob Cole, interviewed 28 Apr. 1995; Claude Barnes, interviewed 26 Mar. 1993.

legislation.²¹ To give extra strength to their efforts through these processes, local unions rarely failed to lobby politicians to intercede for them with government or employers.

Of course, adherence to labourism did not mean that these unionists unquestioningly accepted every policy or action the Labor government or its institutions dispensed. During the railway strike of 1925, for example, the failure of the arbitration system to restore a previous 5% basic wage cut—interpreted as the government's abandoning accepted labour principles—left local railway workers with little option but to join the state-wide strike.²² Similarly in 1948, the perceived partiality of the Industrial Court in refusing a margins flow-on brought Rockhampton railwaymen out on strike with their counterparts throughout the state.²³ Occasional failures of labourism notwithstanding, what staunch orthodox labour men vehemently opposed was any ideology which ran counter to its fundamental principles or which threatened the existence of unionism, the Labor government or its institutions. Any unionist who did not conform to the labourist tradition was a potentially destabilising element in the movement. Ideological dissent and dissenters had to be contained or, preferably, their power and influence eliminated.

Early Dissenters: Industrial Workers of the World

The first ideological challenge to the local union movement arose during World War I when the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), a radical American syndicalist group that had formed in 1905, became active in Australia. While the IWW's espousal of one large union of workers—already discussed in Chapter 2—was not necessarily incompatible with mainstream labour thinking, its policy of direct action in place of

21. Editorial, 'Unions Past and Present', *MB*, 5 Dec. 1956.

22. Anne Smith, 'Railway Strike, 1925', in Denis Murphy (ed.), *The Big Strikes: Queensland 1889-1965*, St Lucia, 1983, pp. 162 and 164.

23. Douglas Blackmur, 'Railway Strike, 1948', in Murphy (ed.), *The Big Strikes*, p. 238.

arbitration, its rejection of parliamentary processes for workers' control, and its aspiration to transform society by the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism most certainly were.²⁴ Moreover, the IWW's anti-imperialist and anti-militarist stance encouraged workers not only to oppose the war in principle but also to express this opposition by striking and industrial sabotage.²⁵ Such actions were tantamount to treason. Like unions elsewhere, those in Rockhampton openly opposed conscription and led the 'No' campaigns for the 1916 and 1917 referenda; however they certainly did not oppose the war effort itself.²⁶ IWW policies, therefore, conflicted with both the ideology and patriotism of Rockhampton unionists as they did for most Australian unionists who variously branded the militants as 'I-Won't-Workers' and 'Wobblies'.²⁷

IWW radicalism gained support in Rockhampton from a very small group of meatworkers. Some of these men spent part of the year in North Queensland cutting sugar cane or working the shorter meat season there. In Townsville, the IWW had an active base in the AMIEU where it promoted direct action²⁸ and allegedly fomented a strike at Alligator Creek meatworks in 1916.²⁹ Tom Healy, who carried out extensive propaganda work among the many itinerant workers as well as with Russian and Danish

24. Verity Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism: The Industrial Workers of the World in Australia*, Melbourne, 1995, pp. 7 and 11. Burgmann (p. 44) classifies the IWW as 'revolutionary industrial unionists' rather than the usual syndicalist, anarchist, anarcho-syndicalist or even Marxist tag applied by other historians and contemporaries. Frank Cain, *The Wobblies at War: A History of the IWW and the Great War in Australia*, Melbourne, 1993, pp. 81, 90, 96, 100 and 107. As both Burgmann and Cain point out, there were two IWW groups based on a split in the movement in the United States - the Detroit 'Clubs' which advocated continued political action and the Chicago 'Locals' which advocated non-political or direct action. The latter form was more successful and influential in Australia.

25. Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism*, pp. 139 and 183; Cain, *The Wobblies at War*, p. 115.

26. *Capricornian*, 14 Oct. 1916, pp. 41 and 43; FCDIU Minutes, 5 June 1916 and 2 Oct. 1916. CCQC P16/1952 3; AMIEU Minutes, 6 Sept. 1916, 1 Nov. 1916 and 21 Mar. 1917. At the November meeting, it was decided that 'any comment by the few conscriptionists in the union should be treated with contempt'. CCQC J19/940 4; Denis Murphy, *T.J. Ryan: A Political Biography*, St Lucia, 1990, p. 197.

27. Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism*, p. 61.

28. Terrence Cutler, 'Sunday, Bloody Sunday: The Townsville Meatworkers' Strike of 1918-1919' in John Iremonger, John Merritt and Graeme Osborne (eds), *Strikes: Studies in Twentieth Century Australian Social History*, Sydney, 1973, p.85

29. Douglas Hunt, *A History of the Labour Movement in North Queensland: Trade Unionism, Politics and Industrial Conflict, 1900-1920*, PhD Thesis, JCU, 1979, p. 263.

immigrants,³⁰ was one of those who came to Rockhampton after the annual close of the northern works to take advantage of the longer season at Lakes Creek.

166 Healy and fellow itinerant worker Sam McCreadie disseminated propaganda among local meatworkers. They encouraged members to subscribe to the IWW paper, *Direct Action*; they lauded the virtues of revolutionary industrial unionism at meetings; and they urged working-class solidarity in 'exposing the tactics of Capitalism and the way it played the different nationalities off one against the other' when an industrial dispute occurred.³¹ On McCreadie's request, the union bought several copies of *Eureka* by the radical writer, R.S. (Bob) Ross, and arranged for political talks to be held during general meetings.³² After McCreadie's first 'spirited address on Direct Action', poor attendance forced the union to cancel the next talk on Oscar Wilde's work, *The Soul of Man under Socialism*.³³ No further talks of that sort occurred at AMIEU meetings—the ever-popular billiard tables at the Lakes Creek School of Arts no doubt proving a greater attraction for meatworkers after work hours.³⁴

Despite this apparent lack of interest in IWW ideology, McCreadie and Healy did not give up their revolutionary task easily. In 1917, McCreadie chaired a combined AMIEU, ASE and FEDFA rank-and-file meeting which opted for striking while the union took the usual route of resolution through the Industrial Court. AMIEU secretary Jack Ryan warned the men that striking would be 'to the detriment of the Union and to the delegates fighting with success' at the compulsory conference. Only after lengthy

30. Raymond Evans, *Loyalty and Disloyalty: Social Conflict on the Queensland Homefront, 1914-1918*, Sydney, 1987, p. 75; Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism*, 127.

31. AMIEU Minutes, 24 Feb. 1915, 5 May 1915, 19 May 1915 and 8 Sept. 1915. CCQC J19/940 3; Evans, *Loyalty and Disloyalty*, p. 67.

32. AMIEU Minutes, 25 Aug. 1915. CCQC J19/940 3. Robert (Bob) Samuel Ross was the editor of *Socialist*. P. Young, *Proud to be a Rebel: The Life and Times of Emma Miller*, St Lucia, 1991, p. 209.

33. AMIEU Minutes, 22 Sept. 1915. CCQC J19/940 3

34. In a report in the *Daily Record* of 28 Jan. 1911, the trustees of the Lakes Creek School of Arts expressed regret that while the billiard tables proved popular with local meatworkers, few men availed themselves of the 1,500 books in the lending library, including many classics and technical manuals.

discussion, an urgent telegram from the delegates for a return to work and, finally, legal advice did the militants relent.³⁵

167 In line with the IWW's anti-militarist philosophy, McCreadie and Healy objected to the local AMIEU supporting a popular fund-raising carnival for Belgium or participating in Eight-Hour Day celebrations. Claiming to defend civil liberties, they urged unionists to protest against the incarceration of a Brisbane IWW member in the Goodna Lunatic Asylum. They also criticised northern meatworkers for refusing to work with Germans and Austrians. During the 1916 tour of Bill Jackson, an IWW propagandist, AMIEU members listened 'with interest' to his protest in support of the Sydney 'Twelve'—the dozen IWW members convicted of incendiarism and 'seditious conspiracy to foment class struggle'. Members unanimously passed a motion requesting the state executive to try to have the sentences quashed.³⁶ Likewise the following year, the union welcomed Tom Barker, another campaigner twice convicted under the *War Precautions Act*, who again spoke on the IWW prisoners.³⁷ Considering the meatworkers' previous lack of interest in revolutionary ideology, it was probably more the notoriety of the visitors and their subjects that attracted a good audience rather than their message. On several occasions, Healy and McCreadie appealed for IWW donations from the union; however while the meeting agreed to give in support of IWW prisoners' wives and children, it turned down most other requests because of the slack season. The few that the union did approve never appear to have actually been made.³⁸

Outside the meatworks, there was scant interest in the IWW. No group or 'Local' formed, unlike Mount Morgan where 'a foreign and socialistic section among the men' established one in late 1915. Strike action supposedly fomented by the IWW closed the

35. AMIEU Minutes: Special Combined Meeting, 11 Feb. 1917 and Special Meeting, 13 Feb. 1917. CCQC J19/940 4

36. AMIEU Minutes, 13 Dec., 1916. CCQC J19/940 4; Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism*, p. 212.

37. AMIEU Minutes, 12 Mar. 1917. CCQC J19/940 4; Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism*, p. 212.

38. AMIEU Minutes, 6 June 1918. CCQC J19/940 4

mine there for a considerable time in 1917.³⁹ Later that year, the federal government declared the IWW an unlawful association, subsequently imprisoning or deporting members.⁴⁰ For the local union movement, the IWW ideology proved unattractive and irrelevant. Labor's political triumph in 1915 and its programme of industrial and social reforms, together with steady economic growth to 1927⁴¹ in Labor's supposed 'Golden Age',⁴² meant that most unionists had no need to look to radical ideologies for a better life.

One possible structural legacy of the IWW supporters for the local union movement, albeit briefly, was the Rockhampton Industrial Council which formed in 1916. The impetus for its establishment came from the AMIEU on the urging of Sam McCreadie.⁴³ One of the council's few activities during its short life was a series of Sunday evening public lectures in Trades Hall. Some of these talks were presented by self-proclaimed 'socialist...writer and student of Sociological subjects', John H. Wood. Wood also approached the AMIEU to buy a copy of his 'treatises...upon various socio-economic subjects' published as *The Coming Slavery*, but the matter was not discussed further.⁴⁴

Probably because of the nature of these talks in Trades Hall, the union activities of the few IWW supporters and the leading role played by prominent unionists in opposing conscription, local returned servicemen targeted the union movement in the wave of anti-Russian hysteria which swept the western world in the wake of World War I. Just before Armistice Day in 1918, several young men rushed into Trades Hall and

39. Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism*, p. 124; Evans, *Loyalty and Disloyalty*, pp. 75 and 137; Robert Archer (managing director) to R.G. Casey Snr (director), 11 Aug. 1915, quoted in Lorna McDonald, *Rockhampton: A History of City and District*, St Lucia, 1981, p. 317.

40. Cain, *The Wobblies at War*, pp. 256 and 260.

41. Glen Lewis, 'Nationalism and Capitalism in Australia: The Queensland Economy 1890-1930, *Arena*, No. 38, 1975, p. 89.

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

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

44. Wood published under the pen-name of John O'Rockie, *The Coming Slavery*, Brisbane, 1918; J. O'Rockie, *The Ideology of a Protestant*, Rockhampton, 1947, pp. 64 and 115; AMIEU Minutes, 1 Oct. 1918. CCQC J19/940 4

hung a Union Jack out of the upstairs windows over Fitzroy Street. E.B. Purnell, who witnessed the incident, had no objection to the presence of the flag, but he was greatly offended by the accusation of one intruder: 'This is the first time that the Union Jack has floated over the Trades Hall...Pull down the flag now and put up the red flag, I defy you!' As Purnell explained to a *Morning Bulletin* reporter, Trades Hall had no flagpole nor flags of any description to hoist, let alone a red one.⁴⁵

Even when the 'Red Flag' riots erupted in other Queensland cities in March 1919, there were none in Rockhampton. Sergeant Short of the federal police had claimed in late 1918 that there was an 'IWW-Bolshevik' branch in Rockhampton, even if it was 'less developed' than elsewhere.⁴⁶ However, while the Returned Soldiers' and Sailors' Imperial League mounted a concerted attack on suspected Bolshevism in other places, the local branch did not. League president, Colonel Thompson, freely admitted that 'he did not know that it was active in Rockhampton...it had not come to the town very much at all.'⁴⁷ Lieutenant-Colonel Dawson supported Thompson. In rejecting claims by two rank-and-file members that the WWF and the railway running shed men contained Bolshevik elements, he retorted:

Had a Bolshevik popped his head outside the window during the last ten days we returned 'diggers' would have gathered together in less than an hour: if a man showed any sign of it he would not have had to wait long for trouble.⁴⁸

In all, the issue of Bolshevism presented little threat to Rockhampton, just as the radical ideology of IWW-ism failed to present any significant threat to the local union movement. However, the legacy of the IWW proved to be a greater challenge.

45. *MB*, 11 Nov. 1918, p. 8.

46. Raymond Evans, *The Red Flag Riots: A Study of Intolerance*, St Lucia, 1988, p. 30. According to Evans, Sergeant Short and his superiors considered IWW-ism and Bolshevism were 'one and the same thing'.

47. *MB*, 5 Apr. 1919, p. 6.

48. *ibid.*

ARU Militants and the Workers' Educational Association

170 In the mid-1920s, a second wave of radicalism confronted orthodox labour thought. Its roots extended back to the principle of One-Big-Unionism advocated by the IWW. At the forefront of the new dissent was the Australian Railways Union (ARU) which rose to prominence by leading the highly successful 1925 railway strike. Early in 1926, two after-effects of the strike began the alienation of the ARU militants from the Labor-supporting moderates in the union movement. First, because of its defiance of the government and the arbitration process during the railway strike, the ARU antagonised the political wing of the movement. The climax of the feud was the refusal of the ARU delegates to the Labor-in-Politics convention, state secretary Tim Moroney and president George Rymer, to sign unconditionally the anti-communist pledge imposed by Premier William McCormack. Because of this bitter quarrel, the ARU disaffiliated from the ALP and did not rejoin until the 1950s.⁴⁹

Tim Moroney served as a role model for those railway men in Rockhampton inclined to radical ideas, as he did throughout Queensland. Moroney passionately advocated class struggle and believed that a Labor government should legislate in the interests of the working class alone and not for the benefit of the whole population. He rejected the principle of arbitration, which he saw as the tool of capitalism, and advocated direct action instead.⁵⁰ For the most effective strike action, Moroney argued, it was necessary to adopt industrial unionism and to create one combined union of workers to oppose the capitalists. Only through such unity and solidarity could the working class gain control of industry as well as government. Moroney's revolutionary ideology inspired the ARU's attempt to form a Transport Workers' Union for

49. Margaret B. Cribb, *Some Manifestations of Ideological Conflict within the Labour Movement in Queensland, 1925-1929*, BA Thesis, UQ, 1964, p. 5; Fitzgerald and Thornton, *Labor in Queensland*, p. 39

50. Cribb, *Some Manifestations of Ideological Conflict*, pp. 14, 31-34.

Queensland with the WWF in 1925. As the ARU claimed, this was to be 'the first step towards the ultimate consummation of the OBU'.⁵¹

171 Chairman of Rockhampton ARU, Duncan McDonell, gave zealous voice to Moroney's ideology and his antipathy to Labor during the 1925 strike. In a passionate speech to local railway men at the initial stop-work meeting, McDonell branded all Labor politicians:

Those parasites in the labour movement who think nothing of riding into power on the backs of the workers—and, after they have been in for a short time, hobnobbing and drinking champagne with the enemy, the capitalist class.⁵²

He urged unionists to strike immediately rather than waste valuable time with arbitration. McDonell exclaimed:

To hell with arbitration, what have we ever got from the Arbitration [Industrial] Court. The Arbitration Court is a capitalist institution [and] is useful only as a means of keeping you working peacefully and so not interrupting capitalistic industry and profits. If you want to improve your conditions you must do it by your own industrial strength and solidarity.⁵³

At a later public meeting, McDonell openly agreed with one angry unionist that what was needed was an OBU.⁵⁴

Compounding this general ARU disaffection for Labor's party machine and its politicians and processes, was that several unionists were upset by the punitive transfer of their local ideological guide and mentor, F. Gordon Crane, BA. In 1924, the government had transferred Crane from his teaching post at Mount Morgan High School to the position of tutor-organiser for the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) classes in Rockhampton. While the University of Queensland designed and supervised the external courses, the government provided the funding and staffing.⁵⁵

51. Tim Moroney, 'All-Grade Railway Unionism: History of its Early Struggles', *Railway Advocate*, Dec. 1966, p. 3.

52. *Evening News (EN)*, 24 Aug. 1925, p. 5.

53. *ibid.*, 24 Aug. 1925, p. 6.

54. *ibid.*, 31 Aug. 1925.

55. *MB*, 21 Mar. 1924, p. 10.

Crane's task was to direct studies in industrial history, psychology, economics, literature and education. Throughout Central Queensland, Crane became an immensely popular figure with ARU members, conducting or supervising the majority of some 50 different classes offered by the WEA throughout the state.⁵⁶

Crane's left-wing views appealed to ARU militants like McDonell, Frank Nolan and William Coull. He also attracted some railway carpenters from the ASCJ including Ernest Ellis, Thomas Orchard and Arthur (Harold) Polley. Nolan became secretary of the local WEA group, Ellis was class 'leader', and McDonell organised debating. E.B. Purnell, an avid reader of both radical and conservative intellectual works, accepted the position of president.⁵⁷ Crane also contributed an educational column to the ARU weekly paper, the *Advocate*.⁵⁸

Gordon Crane's close association with the unionists and his talent for public speaking drew him into the 1925 railway strike together with communist and fellow intellectual, Fred Paterson BA. Paterson was a temporary WEA organiser whom the ARU regarded as its 'honorary organiser and official lecturer'.⁵⁹ Shortly after Crane's vocal participation in the strike, the Department of Public Instruction withdrew him from the WEA programme and transferred him to a one-teacher school west of Toowoomba. The local WEA group condemned the government for allegedly victimising Crane, not only for his 'private activities' in agitating against the government during the strike but also for his 'fearless expression of working class philosophy' in WEA tutorials.⁶⁰

The Rockhampton class disaffiliated from the WEA in protest against the transfer and formed a branch of the Plebs League. This new organisation encouraged

56. *ibid*, 3 Nov. 1926.

57. *ibid.*, 3 Nov. 1926; Les Yewdale, interviewed 29 June 1995; Evan Schwarten, interviewed 10 May 1996.

58. Mary Murnane, *The Workers' Educational Association of Queensland, 1913-1939*, BA Thesis, UQ, 1969, pp. 96 and 103.

59. *ibid.*, p. 98; *EN*, 27 Aug. 1925, p.5.

60. *MB*, 3 Nov. 1926; Murnane, *Workers' Educational Association*, pp. 102 and 105;

the spread of class-conscious ideas as espoused by the Central Labour College (CLC), a radical organisation which had formed in England in 1909 and had branches in Sydney and Melbourne by 1920. The CLC's ideology of workers' control and 'nothing short of social revolution' attracted Rockhampton unionists disaffected with both the WEA and the ALP. Under the guidance of Ernest Ellis who had been a member in England before emigrating to Australia, McDonell, Nolan, Orchard, Polley and Coull and some others formed their own Plebs League to promote its line of thought in Rockhampton. The new body also attracted Gordon Crane who had resigned his teaching post and joined the ARU as an organiser in Central Queensland.⁶¹ Later in 1926 after his transfer to Brisbane, Ernest Ellis established a Queensland CLC in which he was the president and George Rymer of the ARU was secretary.

The opinions of McDonell and Nolan, stimulated first by WEA classes and then by the Plebs League, placed them and kindred thinkers at odds with mainstream labour views. Even though other railway unions had joined the ARU in striking in 1925, it was more because they believed the arbitration system had failed them on that occasion and not because they opposed the concept of arbitration⁶² or a reformist Labor government. Paradoxically, most of the militants were active members of the local ALP at the time. Polley presided over North Rockhampton ALP and Ellis worked on Harold Hartley's campaign in Fitzroy. McDonell and Nolan also figured prominently in Labor circles.⁶³

In the weeks leading up to the 1926 state election, the contradiction between the militants' political affiliations and their ideological leanings became apparent. As members of the WEA at the time, they took part in a 'practice debate' on the topic: 'Would an Industrial Party in opposition to the Australian Labor Party hasten the emancipation of the Working Class?' The formation of such a party had been canvassed in labour circles after the 1925 strike. Under the adjudication of Ellis, the affirmative

61. *ibid.*, p. 105; *MB*, 25 Feb. 1927, p. 10.

62. *EN*, 24 Aug. 1925, p. 6

63. *MB*, 7 Dec. 1925, p. 4, 12 Apr. 1926, p. 4, 14 Apr. 1926, p. 7.

team of Nolan, Orchard and John Conway (ARU) argued that a new party should be formed to fight on class lines and to expose the existing corruption of Labor. The Labor Party, they claimed, had no belief in industrial organisation, so a new revolutionary industrial party was needed to lead workers 'out of the wilderness to emancipation from capitalism'.

For the negative side, McDonell, Polley and Coull claimed that a new party would merely be another Labor Party and, just as one union was essential in industry, one party was essential in politics. Creating a new party, they argued, would only fracture the workers' united front and hamper 'the march of progress towards the socialist revolution'. A revolutionary party would eventuate only when workers accepted that Labor could neither 'stand against the capitalistic dictatorship' nor emancipate them by parliamentary reform. Moreover, they concluded, why was a new party needed when there already was a Communist Party to pursue these goals effectively?

This debate might have been merely an intellectual exercise to test members' debating skills and knowledge of political theory, but the radical rhetoric McDonell had publicly espoused just six months earlier indicated that he, at least, spoke with conviction. As members of the ALP and with a state election imminent, it could be expected that the negative team would defend the cause of Labor. Yet what both sides argued, in essence, was that Labor was a spent force and only a revolutionary industrial party could deliver workers from the evils of capitalism. Coming soon after Crane's transfer and the ARU's convention clash with Premier McCormack, the debate was almost certainly vengeful anti-Labor propaganda, all the more so because it was a public gathering and the press reported it the following day. Fortunately for Labor, most Rockhampton workers did not hold with these radical views. They had rejected Nolan's challenge to George Farrell in the pre-election plebiscite for Rockhampton and resoundingly returned the sitting member and the other two Labor men, Harold Hartley

and Jimmy Larcombe, in the 1926 election.⁶⁴ The ARU and ASCJ's militant political stance and continued advocacy of OBU-ism alienated them from other unions but even more so did their attempt to impose their ideological and organisational views at Trades Hall.

One Big Union in Trades Hall

One of the frequent and popular topics of debate in WEA classes had been One Big Unionism⁶⁵ and Rockhampton offered the perfect model to test its principles in microcosm. A logical preliminary step to replacing craft and sectionalism in the wider union movement, as OBU-ism advocated, was to amalgamate the three existing but separate peak bodies into one central organisation and to do so along industrial lines—creating One-Big-Peak-Union at Trades Hall.

Participation in the amalgamation scheme by the Rockhampton Industrial Council (RIC) which had reformed in 1925 was reasonably assured because the militants already controlled that body: the ARU's McDonell was secretary and Nolan and Coull were delegates; the ASCJ's Ellis was president and Orchard and Polley were delegates; and the TWU was on the verge of pulling out because it disapproved of strike action advocated by the council. There was little anticipated opposition from other affiliated unions.⁶⁶ The ARU needed to manoeuvre itself into similar positions of power on the Trades Hall Board of Management as the first step of the amalgamation strategy. It did so by a combination of clever organisation and sheer good fortune. Through its large membership, the ARU succeeded in having Duncan McDonell elected to a trustee vacancy and John Conway filled his delegate place.⁶⁷ At the same time,

64. *ibid.*, 7 Dec. 1925 and 10 May 1926, p. 8.

65. Murnane, Workers' Educational Association, p. 75.

66. THBM Minutes, 26 Aug. 1926. CCQC P16/1955 1; ARTWU Minutes, 11 Oct. 1926. CCQC P16/1952 7

67. THBM Minutes, 16 Dec. 1926. CCQC P16/1955 1. Trustees were elected by membership ballot of affiliated unions. As one of the largest and the best organised union, the ARU dominated the voting.

Frank Conlon unexpectedly resigned his position as secretary on medical advice and ASCJ delegate, Harold Polley, eagerly stepped into this fortuitous vacancy.⁶⁸

At a special Trades Hall Board meeting in December 1926, the ARU gained enough votes to initiate amalgamation by moving successfully that

...it be a recommendation to the Labour Day Committee, the Rockhampton Industrial Council and all unions that the three bodies...be re-organised into one body with representation on an industrial group basis.⁶⁹

One of the inherent weaknesses of these peak bodies—although in this instance, a strength—was that they could not make any major decisions without delegates consulting their own union first. When they took the amalgamation proposal back to their respective unions, the AMIEU, WWF and TWU vehemently opposed the plan and directed their Trades Hall Board and Labour Day Celebration Committee representatives to oppose the ARU's plans.⁷⁰

In an attempt to win over these uncooperative unions, the ARU delegates presented a practical reason for amalgamation. They claimed it would greatly ease the board's financial plight by allowing the employment of one full-time secretary who could secure clients and oversee the renting and maintenance of both the theatre and hall.⁷¹ The other unions saw through this ploy to use the board's financial crisis to force OBU-ism on Trades Hall. The AEU refused to attend any further fund-raising meetings, as Trustee McDonell constantly begged, because it believed such gatherings were a front for another amalgamation push.⁷²

After months of wrangling during which, as Chapter 3 explained, the Rockhampton Industrial Council effectively collapsed, a combined meeting to discuss

68. *ibid.*, 18 Nov. 1926. CCQC P16/1955 1; THBM Attendance Book, 1927–1954, in possession of the author with permission of E. Schwarten.

69. THBM Minutes, 16 Dec. 1926. CCQC P16/1955 1

70. *ibid.*, 17 Feb. 1927.

71. *ibid.*, 21 July 1927.

72. *ibid.*

the financial distress of the Trades Hall Board finally took place in late 1927. The AEU's suspicion of ARU ulterior motives proved correct. With the preface that amalgamation and the appointment of one full-time secretary was the only way to make the hall and theatre economically viable, the ARU moved that the three separate bodies be abolished. In their place a new Rockhampton Trades and Labour Council would be formed which contained a Trades Hall Sub-committee, a Labour Day Sub-committee and an Industrial Disputes Sub-committee.⁷³

In reality, the ARU still envisaged a body organised on the industrial group lines it had advocated the year before and not on sectional lines as this new title implied. The militants probably chose the name very carefully, however. Those unions which had withdrawn from the defunct Rockhampton Industrial Council would not have been keen to participate in a new body of the same name. Moreover, since 1922, Brisbane had successfully operated a trades and labour council that embraced all three functions as the militants planned for Rockhampton.⁷⁴ Put to the vote, however, their proposed amalgamation, even if it would have solved the financial crisis, did not gain support from delegates other than those of the ARU and ASCJ. Neither was the Labour Day Celebration Committee in favour of the proposal and so, for the time being at least, the scheme for implementing a peak OBU subsided.⁷⁵

In the minutes of the numerous meetings held on the subject of reorganisation along industrial lines, there is little detail recorded to explain the other unions' vehement opposition. Certainly the ARU's arrogance towards craft and sectional unions and the AEU's well-known disdain for a 'labourers' union', together with their intense workplace competition for members, bred mutual animosity between these two large unions at the best of times.⁷⁶ From a practical point of view, industry-based

73. Minutes of Conference of Unions, 23 Oct. 1927, THBM Rough Minutes. CCQC P16/1955 2

74. John Armstrong, *Closer Unity in the Queensland Trades Union Movement, 1900-1922*, MA Thesis, UQ, 1975, p. 252.

75. Minutes of Conference of Unions, 23 Oct. 1927, THBM Rough Minutes. CCQC P16/1955 2

76. Fitzgerald and Thornton, *Labor in Queensland*, p. 43; Jack Treacy, interviewed 28 June 1995; Frank Campbell, interviewed 1 July 1996.

organisation in a joint body meant that each union would lose control over its financial investment in Trades Hall. In a combined transport workers' department, for example, the ARU, as the largest component, would control the investments of both the WWF and TWU while it had contributed nothing by way of levies, loans or donations.

A cryptic comment by E.B. Purnell, contained in the rough minutes but deleted from the formal record, hints at a deeper reason. He claimed that the WWF had not revealed the whole reason why it opposed amalgamation because 'one particular reason would cause [a] split' in the local movement.⁷⁷ In light of developments at Trades Hall over the following three years, it is most likely that Purnell alluded to communism. But to preserve unity, at least outwardly and especially in the face of economic difficulties which required a joint effort to combat, the moderate unions probably did not wish to precipitate a split. To this end perhaps, no delegate at the following meeting questioned the formal minutes as being a true and accurate record of the proceedings of the October gathering.⁷⁸

In 1929, the militants again attempted to introduce One-Big-Unionism by re-organising the two surviving bodies—an industrial council not having been re-established after that body's demise in 1927. As with previous efforts to create an OBU, the ARU and ASCJ led the attack. Rather than amalgamation on this occasion, they planned to create a multi-purpose organisation from within the existing Trades Hall Board. In a carefully orchestrated move at the board's annual general meeting in July 1929, the ARU again manoeuvred Frank Conlon into the presidency which he had held since 1926. It then secured the more powerful position of secretary for Gordon Crane. The ARU had recently dispensed with Crane's services as an organiser and was then looking for a job which suited his talents and ambitions. His appointment to the position also facilitated the ideological plans of the ARU for Trades Hall.⁷⁹

77. Minutes of Conference of Unions, 23 Oct. 1927, THBM Rough Minutes. CCQC P16/1955 2

78. *ibid.*; THBM Minutes, 17 Nov. 1927. CCQC P16/1955 1

79. *ibid.*, 18 July 1929. CCQC P16/1955 1. Crane's dismissal was supposedly for financial reasons and not because of his performance or actions.

At the next month's meeting, the militants again set the stage to advantage their own plans. During presentation of the incoming correspondence, Conlon ruled two particular items out of order because they dealt with industrial matters. He claimed the Trades Hall Board had no constitutional authority to handle such issues. One letter was from fellow-militant and old comrade in Brisbane, Ernest Ellis, relating to a trade union conference; the second was from another left-wing group, the International Class-Warfare Prisoners' Association. Both were almost certainly pre-arranged. Following this incident, Trustee McDonell proposed that the name of the board be changed to the Trades Hall Board and Labour Council and that the new body's role be extended beyond the running of the buildings to be 'a central authority in industrial matters to settle all industrial or inter-union disputes'. McDonell again stressed the financial wisdom of incorporating all functions in the one organisation and, in referring to the previous ruling on the correspondence, pointed out the inconvenience and embarrassment of not having an industrial council to handle relevant matters in Rockhampton. He cited the case of Brisbane where one body controlled the various functions and which had been found 'most expedient'.⁸⁰

In the heated argument which erupted, those delegates opposed to the ARU's plans refused to listen to McDonell's reasoning. They denounced OBU-ism and claimed their members did not want the likes of Crane and Nolan running the affairs of Trades Hall. They might have been 'brainy' men, the moderates conceded, but they were 'dis-organisers, not organisers' and were not good for the local movement. Delegates also accused the militants of having denigrated Labor in the 1929 election campaign and blamed them for the loss of government and the defeat of all local Labor members. On being put to the vote, the motion for One-Big-Peak-Union again failed.⁸¹

80. THBM Minutes, 15 Aug. 1929. CCQC P16/1955 1

81. *ibid.*, 19 Oct. 1929.

At the time of this final assault on Trades Hall, the link between the ARU militants and communism was somewhat clearer. The ARU as an organisation did not affiliate with the Communist Party of Australia after leaving the ALP in 1926, nor were its leaders at the time members of the party, but their anti-Labor views and left-wing ideology placed them in a 'very similar position' to the communists.⁸² The militants' involvement in so-called 'communist' political and industrial activities proved even more divisive in the local union movement than did the issue of revolutionary One Big Unionism.

'Communist' Organisations: Left Wing Committees and the MMM

The Communist Party of Australia (CPA), which had formed nationally in 1920, had encouraged workers to return a 'reformist' Labor government in the 1926 state election.⁸³ After the Communist International (Comintern) in Moscow dictated a change of policy in 1928 to one of hostility to reformism, the CPA effected a corresponding change in its policy for Queensland. It subsequently rejected the 'social fascist' ALP and denounced Labor's tool of compulsory arbitration. To foment opposition to the ALP, but at a discrete distance from the party, the CPA established a front organisation in the form of local Left Wing Committees (LWCs). These groups were to have a nucleus of communist and other left-wing activists who would generate a mass following of unions, ordinary unionists and other interested individuals.⁸⁴

Shared antipathy towards the ALP attracted militant ARU members to the new LWCs, with Tim Moroney and Gordon Crane joining the first committee established in

82. Cribb, *Some Manifestations of Ideological Conflict*, pp. 39-40. Before his defeat in 1929, Member for Fitzroy Harold Hartley maintained in a parliamentary debate that Gordon Crane was definitely not a communist. Address in Reply, 29 Sept. 1927, *Queensland Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 149, p. 313.

83. In 1928, they denied this had been 'unqualified support', claiming instead it was 'as the rope supports the hanged man'. *Workers Weekly*, 14 Sept. 1928; Alastair Davidson, *The Communist Party of Australia: A Short History*, Stanford, 1969, p.48.

84. Cribb, *Some Manifestations of Ideological Conflict*, pp. 129-133; Beris Penrose, *The Communist Party and Trade Union Work in Queensland in the Third Period: 1928-1935*, PhD Thesis, UQ, 1993, pp. 89, 123 and 126.

Brisbane, although as individual members because their union as a whole did not affiliate.⁸⁵ Ernest Ellis, by then the state secretary of ASCJ, also supported the LWCs.⁸⁶ Probably because of the personal connections of Crane and Ellis with Rockhampton, an LWC formed locally in December 1928 with Tom Orchard as secretary. A second influence may have been the staging the same month of a Transport Workers' Propaganda Organisation (TWPO) conference in Rockhampton. This latter organisation functioned as an industrial section of the Militant Minority Movement, another CPA front.⁸⁷ The TWPO gathering attracted WWF delegates from seven Queensland ports in the wake of a major waterfront strike in 1928, but the local branch did not attend. Unlike most other WWF branches, Rockhampton had agreed to work under the controversial federal Beeby award recently handed down. For breaking union ranks, Rockhampton incurred the displeasure of, and temporary alienation by, other branches.⁸⁸ Local ARU activists denounced the WWF for its apparent abandoning of working-class principles by working boats manned and loaded by scabs during the national strike. They were also keenly aware that militancy in Rockhampton unions left much to be desired from their point of view.⁸⁹ Whether the ARU sent delegates to the conference was not indicated but, considering their similar ideological inclinations and opposition to the ALP, they would have followed its proceedings and concurred with its recommendations. One of these was for militants to establish 'committees of action' to advance the revolutionary struggle throughout the state.⁹⁰

The communist publication, *Workers' Weekly*, joyously heralded the 1929 advent of a Rockhampton LWC and claimed there was 'a good team of militants in that town'.⁹¹

85. Elizabeth Jensen, *The Effects of the Depression on the Trade Union Movement in Queensland, 1929-1931*, BA Thesis, UQ, 1971, p. 134; Cribb, *Some Manifestations of Ideological Conflict*, pp. 140-141. Cribb argues that Moroney feared that open association with the CPA would endanger the ARU and would also isolate even more the ARU from other unions at a time when trade union solidarity was essential. There was also the risk of internal revolt by moderate ARU members.

86. *Workers' Weekly*, 7 June 1929, p. 3.

87. Davidson, *Communist Party of Australia*, p. 56.

88. *WW*, 11 Jan. 1929, pp. 1 and 5; *MB*, 11 Sept. 1928, p. 7. It appears that Rockhampton was chosen as the venue for its central location and not for its strong local WWF support. The 1928 strike is discussed in detail in chapter 7.

89. *MB*, 11 Sept. 1928.

90. *WW*, 11 Jan. 1929, p.5.

91. *ibid*, 18 Jan. 1929; ARTWU Minutes, 11 Feb. 1929. CCQC P16/1952 7

Despite this optimism, the new left-wing organisation failed to flourish. An invitation to the TWU to send delegates to meetings, together with an enclosed circular explaining the CPA platform for the forthcoming state election, probably elicited a similar response from all unions other than the ARU and ASCJ. The TWU, firmly under Frank Conlon's control, soundly rebuffed the approach with the assertion that it was affiliated with the ALP and therefore opposed any other political party.⁹² In the June 1929 edition of *Workers' Weekly*, the CPA admitted the widespread failure of LWCs to attract workers and confirmed that the Rockhampton LWC had fallen through without ever really being established. Its anti-Labor rhetoric had offended many mainstream unionists, particularly after the disastrous 1929 election. Another stumbling block had been that the local committee could not find a suitable and willing candidate to contest the poll even if there had been electoral support.⁹³

After disbanding the LWCs later that year, the CPA rejuvenated the Militant Minority Movement (MMM) which it had established in 1928 but had subsequently let stagnate nationally while it pursued its political activities through the LWCs. The MMM was an industrial organisation intended to build a strong and militant left-wing rank and file in trade unions. This faction, in turn, would maintain the class struggle industrially: it would challenge 'the corrupt non-fighting leadership' of the trade union movement and its reliance upon arbitration; it would adopt of the principles of revolutionary One Big Unionism; and, ultimately, it would overthrow the capitalist economic and social system.⁹⁴ Just as the common goal of opposing Labor had attracted militants from the local ARU and ASCJ to the LWC, a common belief in OBU-ism drew the same men to MMM activities.

92. *ibid.*

93. *WW*, 7 June 1929, p. 3.

94. *ibid.*, 30 Mar. 1928, 22 Mar. and 10 May 1929. Davidson, *Communist Party of Australia*, p. 56. As Beris Penrose argues in her study of communist influence in Queensland trade unions during this period, the early CPA which was comprised of many former IWW supporters drew more from the syndicalism of the defunct IWW than from Marxism. Thus the CPA envisaged the OBU as the means of both effecting the workers' revolution to gain economic, social and political control and maintaining post-revolutionary power rather than vesting it in the hands of state-controlled soviets as in Russia. Penrose, *Communist Party and Trade Union Work*, pp. 25 and 26.

The actual formation of an official MMM group in Rockhampton cannot be pinpointed but one definitely operated by late 1930. In November of that year, the MMM offered the Trades Hall Board a nominal fee to share the office of its secretary, Gordon Crane, who had taken on the part-time job at Trades Hall in June after his return from Brisbane in 1929.⁹⁵ However, the militant ARU and ASCJ members had previously responded to MMM directives for 'the new method of struggle', at least six months earlier. In May 1930, MMM members attempted to take the lead in the causes of both disgruntled railway workers and the unemployed against changes proposed by the conservative Moore government which ousted Labor in 1929.⁹⁶

When the new government revealed plans to reintroduce a 48-hour working week, the combined railway unions immediately reacted. ARU leaders, Frank Nolan, Duncan McDonnell, William Coull, Jim Griffin and George Kemp, together with Tom Orchard of the ASCJ and Gordon Crane, formed a Council of Action to steer the campaign and to 'attempt to induce workers' to resist government proposals.⁹⁷ Nolan had already heeded the MMM call for workplace organisation by leading a 'Left Wing Rank and File Committee' in the railway. Later that year, he travelled to Moscow to attend a congress of the Red International of Labour Unions with which the MMM was affiliated.⁹⁸

The Council of Action also took on the cause of opposing government plans to exempt unemployment schemes from industrial award conditions. It wanted to set up locally yet another communist front, the Unemployed Workers' Movement (UWM, formerly the One Big Union of the Unemployed).⁹⁹ However, all efforts in this direction came to nothing. Instead of criticising the new conservative government, the militants again repudiated Labor's sacrosanct principle of arbitration and ridiculed

95. THBM Minutes, 20 Nov. 1930. CCQC U14/2063 2

96. *WW*, 10 May 1929

97. *MB*, 5 May 1930, p. 7.

98. *WW*, 1 Aug. 1930; Frank Nolan, *You Pass this Way Only Once: Reflections of a Trade Union Leader*, Brisbane, 1974, pp. 60 and 70; Ralph Gibson, *The People Stand Up*, Melbourne, 1983, p. 67.

99. *MB*, 5 May 1930, p. 7;

placing any hope in a return to Labor government as urged by the defeated Jimmy Larcombe.¹⁰⁰ Far from swallowing the council's propaganda, the existing Unemployed Workers' Committee repudiated the CPA and refused to accept any leadership or even assistance from any known communists or communist sympathisers.¹⁰¹ So, while Brisbane, Ipswich, Toowoomba, Maryborough, Mackay, Home Hill, Townsville, Charters Towers, Innisfail, Tully and Cairns all formed UWMs after successful organising by MMM members, it seems that no corresponding body eventuated in Rockhampton.¹⁰²

The ARU militants' association with MMM and the anti-Labor propaganda they espoused branded them as 'communists' in the opinion of most local workers, whether they were actually members of the CPA or not. Trades Hall Board president Frank Conlon had no doubts that communists were using the venue for meetings through the secretary, Gordon Crane. Conlon called a special meeting at which delegates passed a motion outlawing the use of board property by 'any known members of the communist party'.¹⁰³ It was a hollow victory because nobody could prove whether Crane, Nolan and their colleagues were actually CPA members—at the time there was no CPA branch in Rockhampton—nor could they establish if the MMM was an official CPA organ. Yet it was a loop-hole in the board's own rules that gave Nolan the ammunition he needed to gain the upper hand in the matter. He contended that, although a majority of delegates represented unions which were affiliated with the ALP, the Trades Hall Board itself was non-political—and always claimed to be so—thus the board had no grounds for excluding the MMM until it was clearly proven to be a political body or one officially connected with the CPA. On the basis of his persuasive logic, the 1931 motion to ban the Minority Movement (MM), as it was by then called, was narrowly defeated. Crane therefore continued to conduct MM meetings in Trades Hall.¹⁰⁴

100. *ibid.*, 14 May, 1930, p. 10;

101. ARTWU Minutes, 8 Dec. 1930. The transport workers endorsed this action to ban communists from the Unemployed Union. CCQC P16/1952 7

102. Penrose, *Communist Party and Trade Union Work in Queensland*, p. 213.

103. THBM Minutes, 20 Nov. 1930 and 11 Dec. 1930. CCQC U14/2063 2

104. *ibid.*, 20 Aug. 1931. See, for example, usage in *WW*, 17 July 1931.

In June 1932, as previously mentioned, Gordon Crane resigned from what he by then considered the 'thankless task' of secretary to accept the position of ARU Education and Organisational Officer in Townsville.¹⁰⁵ It was at that juncture that the mysterious fire erupted in Trades Hall Theatre. Considering Crane's personal feelings and the animosity engendered by all the ideological disputes, the question arises of whether the blaze can be attributed to Crane or to one of his ardent supporters in the ARU or ASCJ who may have been keen to exact revenge on the Trades Hall Board. Or could some other delegates—or anybody else—have wanted to discredit the ARU for their militant views and actions? Perhaps someone remembered the spate of fires in Sydney in 1916 for which the 'Twelve' IWW militants, some of whose ideas the ARU militants espoused, were made scapegoats and suffered imprisonment for incendiarism as a consequence.¹⁰⁶ Unfortunately, the puzzle remains unsolved.

Whatever the cause of the blaze or whoever the perpetrators, the fire symbolically purged Trades Hall of its radical elements from 1932. Besides Crane's resignation, the Railway Department transferred Duncan McDonell to Longreach and another ARU delegate, Jim Griffin, to the Central West. The ARU—probably rightly—claimed these were cases of punitive railway transfers of 'troublesome' unionists.¹⁰⁷ At the Trades Hall Board elections in 1932, non-militants secured all executive positions with Frank Conlon returning to the secretaryship which he had held from 1921 to 1926 and subsequently maintained until 1953.¹⁰⁸ Frank Nolan kept his position until 1935 but the other ARU delegates were more moderate, the union perhaps having exhausted its supply of militants. Moreover their attendance at board meetings became increasingly irregular even though the union occupied an office in the hall until 1941.¹⁰⁹

105. THBM Minutes, 14 July 1932 and 21 July 1932. CCQC U14/2063 2

106. Cain, *The Wobblies at War*, pp.212-218.

107. Report of State Secretary to 13th Conference of ARU held at Rockhampton, 31 Oct. 1934. JOL

108. *ibid.*, 21 July 1932. President - F. Dunn (WWF), Vice President - D. O'Driscoll (AMIEU), Secretary - F.J.P. Conlon (TWU), Treasurer - E.B. Purnell (WWF), Minute Secretary - R. Lyle (AEU).

109. *ibid.*, 16 Dec. 1941. CCQC U14/2063 4; THBM Attendance Book.

The ARU may have lost interest in imposing its ideology on Trades Hall but the animosity engendered by its anti-Labor attitudes and actions, exacerbated by its failure to contribute to funds when the bank threatened foreclosure, left a bitter legacy.¹¹⁰ Clearly avenging themselves, board members either delayed or obstructed action on all future requests from the ARU, particularly its application to return to a hall office in 1946.¹¹¹ When the union decided to appoint delegates in 1949 after many years of disaffiliation, the other unions closed ranks against the ARU regaining membership of the Trades Hall Board. They remembered only too well the ARU's quest to dominate and then to destroy the board between 1927 and 1932 and its failure to share the financial burden. At the instigation of the ASCJ, which by 1949 had severed its close association with the ARU and had expunged any militant element in its own ranks, the Trades Hall Board altered its constitution so that only those unions currently affiliated could comprise the management committee.¹¹² In support of the change, TWU delegate Frank Cole bluntly stated:

As the A.R.U. did not contribute towards the Board in its depression days when finance was needed to prevent the bank from taking over nor did they hold their meetings there, he did not feel inclined to let that Union now come in when they were well ahead of finances and the future assured.¹¹³

Even after the period of this history when the ARU had rejoined the political fold, its traditional enemy in Rockhampton, the AEU, adamantly opposed all ARU's attempts to re-affiliate with the Trades Hall Board.¹¹⁴

By 1935, the influence of communism in trade unions elsewhere may have been increasing¹¹⁵ but, in individual unions in Rockhampton, it does not appear to have been very widespread or of any great depth. As indicated by their activities at Trades Hall to that time, the ASCJ contained a small left-wing core led by Cedric McBryde and to a

110. *ibid.*, 17 May 1949.

111. *ibid.*, 16 Apr. 1946, 21 May 1946 and 15 Oct. 1946.

112. *ibid.*, 17 May 1949. Rules of the Board of Management, Trades and Labour Hall, Rockhampton, 1949, pp. 3 and 4.

113. *ibid.*

114. AEU Minutes, 24 Apr. 1958. NBAC E162/33/4

115. Penrose, Communist Party and Trade Union Work in Queensland, p. 307.

letter extent, Joe Cusack. Yet only in 1929, the local branch had submitted a motion to state conference to ban communists from the union.¹¹⁶ Perhaps it was this underlying lack of militant support, as well as his own rejection of craft unionism, which persuaded McBryde to switch to the more militant industrial unionism of the ARU. In his new union, McBryde also helped strengthen the existing MM support initiated by Gordon Crane and Frank Nolan.¹¹⁷ On one occasion at least, AFULE district secretary Tom McBryde urged fellow unionists through *Workers' Weekly* to adopt the MM programme but the extent of his influence in that union is unknown.¹¹⁸ Unlike their counterparts in Mackay and in other WWF branches,¹¹⁹ neither did the Rockhampton WWF show any apparent interest in the MM as their absence from the 1928 TWPO conference foreshadowed.¹²⁰ The only indication of possible MM sympathy amongst wharfie officials in the 1930s was from Bert Buxton who regularly sided with the militants against his fellow union delegates on the Trades Hall Board over the question of communists.¹²¹

Economic conditions during the Depression may well have fostered support for the MM among the out-of-work but the prospect of losing one's job in a time of high unemployment probably suppressed potential militancy in those lucky enough to have work to go to.¹²² Moreover, the MM, like the CPA which backed it, repelled many would-be union supporters by its insistence on class warfare and world revolution, and by its condemnation of the ALP as the chief enemy of the worker.¹²³ However from 1936, a change of policy brought a corresponding change of fortune for communist activists both locally and across the nation as a whole. As a result, their influence grew to such an extent that they seriously challenged the traditional Labor-supporting

116. *WW*, 8 Feb. 1929.

117. *Red Leader*, 6 July 1932 and *WW*, 14 Feb. 1934, cited in Penrose, *Communist Party and Trade Union base in the AEU*. McBryde was a railway carpenter and member of the ASCJ before moving to the ARU. His trade precluded membership of the AEU. Cole, interview.

118. *WW*, 17 July 1931, p. 4.

119. Penrose, *Communist Party and Trade Union Work in Queensland*, p. 252; Davidson, *Communist Party of Australia*, p. 60.

120. *WW*, 11 Jan. 1929, pp. 1 and 5. The TWPO was an industrial section of the proposed OBU.

121. See for example, THBM Minutes, 11 Dec. 1930 and 20 Aug. 1931. CCQC U14/2063 2

122. Gibson, *The People Stand Up*, p. 42.

123. Davidson, *Communist Party of Australia*, p. 62.

leadership, much of which had by then settled into an entrenched position of comfort, confidence with the return of Labor in 1932 and, perhaps, complacency about the role and power of trade unions in modern industrial society in Australia.

Communist Infiltration of Unions from 1936 to 1945

At its eleventh congress held in December 1935, the CPA adopted the new line dictated by Comintern several months earlier in Moscow. The change of direction was the formation of a 'popular front' against war and fascism in which a conciliatory 'class alliance' replaced the previous antagonistic 'class-against-class' line.¹²⁴ Comintern also amended its theory of imminent world revolution to one of serial national revolutions, the individual timing of which depended on the particular circumstances in each country. Within this more relaxed policy, communist parties were to devise their own methods of achieving the necessary inter-class unity to bring on the revolution in their country.¹²⁵

For the CPA, the new approach was an attempt at reconciliation with the ALP to facilitate the deeper goals of infiltrating the party machine and establishing a united front in trade unions. In contrast to MM methods, the CPA now advocated leadership of workers through the existing trade union structure, with communist unionists seeking positions of power and influence.¹²⁶ While the ALP rejected any reconciliation until 1943, because it believed the communists still intended to destroy Labor, the CPA's more flexible attitude and its more moderate industrial approach softened the attitude of many rank-and-file unionists towards communists.¹²⁷ New policies, like pushing for better pay and conditions, accepting arbitration and supporting sectional strikes only when necessary rather than advocating disruptive general strikes, indicated an

124. Penrose, *Communist Party and Trade Union Work in Queensland*, p. 307.

125. Davidson, *Communist Party of Australia*, pp. 72, 73 and 87.

126. *ibid.*, p. 75; Penrose, *Communist Party and Trade Union Work in Queensland*, pp. 338-339.

127. Davidson, *Communist Party of Australia*, pp. 76 and 87.

acceptance of the reality of Australian conditions on the part of the communists. This more traditional programme of industrial goals struck a chord with many unionists and, together with their immense effectiveness in organising, communists began to capture office in many unions.¹²⁸

With the Soviet Union joining the Allies from 1941 and the communists' diligent war efforts against Nazism and fascism thereafter, their popularity and that of their front organisations increased even more. Two of these fronts were the Australian-Soviet Friendship League and the Movement against War and Fascism.¹²⁹ Just as the CPA encouraged members to join the ALP and keep their communist membership a secret until the early war years,¹³⁰ so too did some unionists keep their official CPA membership quiet. Of course, it was not necessary to join the CPA to espouse communist ideas.

Like its counterparts elsewhere in Australia,¹³¹ the local ARU sub-branch demonstrated communist sympathies, building upon the militant base established by the MM and pledging to support communists at its annual conference in 1937.¹³² A newsletter specifically targeting railway workers on the issue of the 40-hour week, 'The Driver', was put out by the very small local CPA branch then in Rockhampton. The ARU had taken the lead among railway unions on this matter. This newsletter became the substance of right-wing Social Credit campaigners' allegations of communist activity in the ARU. Union official Bernard (Barney) O'Brien refuted all other claims made against his union in a letter to the *Morning Bulletin* but, according to the editor, his 'normally effective mind scouted the suggestion of communistic [*sic*] activities'.¹³³ At the least, disgraced and short-lived ARU secretary Bob Nicholls was a local CPA member by 1941, although the party expelled him that year for his 'delinquent' drinking

128. *ibid.*, pp. 89, 90 and 95.

129. *ibid.*, pp. 84-85.

130. *ibid.*, p. 128.

131. *ibid.*, p. 90.

132. *MB*, 10 Sept. 1937, p. 8.

133. *ibid.*, 20 Sept. 1937, p.5. Social Credit supporters derided the pamphlet as 'The Drive!'

and gambling.¹³⁴ Also in keeping with past militant associations, the ASCJ retained a communist-sympathetic core, with secretary Joe Cusack holding the same position in the Rockhampton branch of the Australian-Soviet Friendship League (ASFL).¹³⁵

In contrast to their poor response to communism during its oppositional phase, the WWF also proved more receptive to the new-look communists during the 1940s. In 1941, only one member objected to the branch affiliating with and electing delegates to the ASFL. Soon after, wharfies turned out in force to hear an address by a Mrs Hennessey who was soliciting donations for the Medical Aid for Russia Fund.¹³⁶ At the war's end, the union granted permission to members of the CPA to attend the pick-up to address unionists on the party's 'People's Plan for Rockhampton' for the next municipal election.¹³⁷ The local CPA also circulated a periodic news-sheet, 'The Wharfie', among waterside workers,¹³⁸ but the union curiously refused to subscribe to the national paper of the same name because it was supposedly under communist control.¹³⁹

War-time sympathies elicited a more favourable response from rank-and-file AMIEU members as well. The general meeting recommended to the Central District Council (CDC) that a donation of £5 be made to the local ASFL, with Frank Barton elected as its delegate. The meeting further approved £25 'to assist the Soviet people in their present struggle' and requested the union approach the federal body with the idea of financing a 'fighter plane' for Russia.¹⁴⁰ However, their concern with matters Russian did not find acceptance in the upper echelons of the union. At the following CDC meeting, councillors agreed to donate only five guineas¹⁴¹ to the Medical Aid to Russia Fund. There was no mention of a donation to the local ASFL nor of the ambitious aircraft purchase.¹⁴²

134. ARU State Council Minutes, 3 July 1942. PTU

135. TWU Minutes, 8 Sept. 1941. CCQC P16/1954 1

136. WWF Minutes, 27 Aug. 1941 and 29 Dec. 1941. NBAC Z387/33/1

137. *ibid.*, 16 Oct. 1945. NBAC Z387/33/2

138. Pat Pastourel, interviewed 21 May 1996.

139. WWF Minutes, 31 July 1939. NBAC Z387/33/1

140. AMIEU Minutes, 6 Oct. 1941 and 13 Nov. 1941. CCQC J19/941 3

141. Five guineas equals £5 5s 0d.

142. AMIEU CDC Minutes, 18 Dec. 1941. CCQC J19/942 1

Most of the meatworkers who advocated support for these wartime communist fronts came from the boning room. This section of the plant had a reputation for militancy and disruption: it defied almost as many official union instructions as it did those of management.¹⁴³ Boners were also probably responsible for the production of a pamphlet entitled 'The Meat Worker', issued under the auspices of the Rockhampton Communist Party. A 'Special Issue' in late 1942 called on unionists to hold a lunch-time mass meeting to protest the alleged victimisation of a fellow boner, Jack Daley. The article described Daley as one of the 'militants who exposed the [CQME] policy of using the war to racketeer at the expense of the Government and the public'. It alleged that Len Haigh, 'hand in glove with the company', had arranged Daley's military call-up while in an exempted occupation because both Haigh and management considered him a trouble-maker. Most rank-and-file unionists evidently disagreed with Daley's opinion of Haigh because they resoundingly defeated the communists' motion for his resignation as AMIEU secretary. At grass-roots level, as well as on the CDC, communist influence obviously had not become dominant.¹⁴⁴

In line with the most recent CPA policy, war-time AMIEU communists supported Labor in their propaganda. Daley's 1941 protest had claimed he worked 'for unity around the Curtin Government' and, in 1943, Peter Parsons and William ('Tinker') Emslie moved in a sub-branch meeting that the AMIEU pledge its support to returning a federal Labor government.¹⁴⁵ The support was not reciprocated: Charlie Collins and Daley's motion that the union request the federal government to back CPA affiliation with the ALP 'for unity's sake' proved unsuccessful.¹⁴⁶

143. Mark Hinchliff, interviewed 23 Nov. 1995; Joe Underdown, interviewed 7 June 1996; Colin Maxwell interview.

144. AMIEU CDC Minutes, 14 Dec. 1942 (Pamphlet inserted) CCQC J19/942 3. At the time, the employer had the say as to who should be retained in a protected industry.

145. AMIEU Minutes, 3 July 1943. CCQC J19/941 4; C. Maxwell interview.

146. AMIEU Minutes, 4 Sept. 1944. CCQC J19/941 4

In contrast to the ARU, WWF and AMIEU, both the AEU and TWU were solidly anti-communist. The AEU overwhelmingly passed a motion in 1940 thus:

The Commonwealth Council be requested to use every effort in order to have the Communistic [*sic*] Party declared illegal:— to expel from the Union any member who is a declared or avowed Communist or any member who attempts to introduce into the Union any Communistic teachings, practices, doctrines or propaganda as directed by the Alien Communistic Dictators or their propagandists.¹⁴⁷

After the Soviet Union joined the allies in 1941, the AEU moderated slightly in its attitude to communists. It accepted Joe Cusack's invitation to join the ASFL by donating £1 and selecting two delegates, Alaric 'Sully' Sullivan and another fitter called Hennessey.¹⁴⁸ The latter was perhaps the husband of the Mrs Hennessey who addressed the WWF on Russian medical aid.¹⁴⁹ The TWU, on the other hand, sought advice on the matter from general secretary Alf Milton in Brisbane. This step was probably because the Menzies Government had declared the CPA an illegal organisation in June 1940¹⁵⁰ and therefore could have had serious implications for anyone joining a communist front. Milton advised that the TWU had endorsed the recent banning of the ASFL by the ALP's Inner Executive. Typically adhering to union policy, toeing the Labor line and ever-conscious of the law, the local TWU rejected Cusack's request for a delegate to the ASFL.¹⁵¹

147. AEU Minutes, 6 Mar. 1940. NBAC E162/33/1

148. *ibid.*, 4 Sept. 1941 and 16 Oct. 1941.

149. Extensive searches of the electoral rolls fail to identify the Hennesseys further.

150. J. Jupp, *Australian Party Politics*, Melbourne, 1964, p. 91. Jupp points out the ban was widely ignored until it was lifted by the Curtin Labor Government in December 1942.

151. TWU Minutes, 10 Nov. 1941. CCQC P16/1954 1

Lakes Creek Works Board of Control

At the same time as some of the boners at Lakes Creek were attempting to stimulate AMIEU rank-and-file interest in communism, they began to push for the formation of their own 'soviet' or local council to control internal industrial affairs at the meatworks. As early as 1913, state organiser Jack Crampton had explained the need for an in-house union body to handle purely domestic issues without having to call in the secretary all the time.¹⁵² Rank-and-file meatworkers at other export abattoirs throughout the state had formed 'boards of control' from 1914 onwards but the Lakes Creek men did nothing in that direction for another 20 years or so.¹⁵³ However, rather than being a vehicle to deal with minor domestic issues, the board of control formed in 1942 was a deliberate challenge to the traditional leadership and industrial methods of the AMIEU and particularly of its secretary, Len Haigh.

In 1936, the Central District Council of the AMIEU briefly discussed the formation of a board consisting of existing shop delegates and instructed the president to call a meeting of all export delegates, but nothing transpired.¹⁵⁴ It was not until 1939 that the boning room men—principally Frank Barton, George Stafford, Edgar Jessop and Tinker Emslie—began to push for the formation of a board. Barton and Emslie again raised the matter at a general meeting and successfully moved that the union adopt the plan. Once again, nothing was done. The following year, after nothing had yet been organised by the CDC, the boners pushed for a mass meeting to discuss the issue.¹⁵⁵ Nor did anything come of a similar resolution from the general meeting in 1941 and when rank-and-file unionists presented a special petition to the CDC, councillors merely ruled it out of order.¹⁵⁶ It was another five months before the

152. AFBEU Minutes, 22 Jan. 1913. CCQC J19/940 1

153. Gladstone Meatworks Board of Control is mentioned in Rockhampton AMIEU minutes, 6 Mar. 1914, CCQC J19/940.3; A.D. Dodds, *How One Big Union Works*, 1918 quoted in A.E. Davies, *The Meat Workers Unite*, Annandale, 1974, p. 60; Doug Hunt also mentions boards at both Townsville abattoirs in 1918. Hunt, *A History of the Labour Movement in North Queensland*, p. 360; Minutes of Special All Up Meeting of Export Section, AMIEU Minutes, 31 Jan. 1942. CCQC J19/941 3; C. Maxwell interview.

154. AMIEU CDC Minutes, 23 Mar. 1936 and 8 June 1936. CCQC J19/941 2

155. AMIEU Minutes, 5 June 1939 and 3 June 1940.

156. AMIEU CDC Minutes, 24 Apr. 1941. CCQC J19/941 3

general meeting once again called for an election for board representatives but, with the season almost at an end, council deferred the matter at the opening of the following season.¹⁵⁷

In late January 1942, AMIEU members gathered at the Palais Royal in Alma Street for a special compulsory 'All Up' meeting on a hot Saturday morning. On the agenda were several other items including maintenance of the picnic levy during wartime and election of Rockhampton Trades and Labour Council delegates. At the end of the list was the question of establishing a board of control for the forthcoming meat season. When this item finally came up for discussion, it was about 11.30 a.m. No doubt the chairman knew that, by that hour, rank-and-file members would be keen to go to the pub for a cold beer or be off to the races at Callaghan Park; they would probably not want any lengthy debate on the issue. Regardless of this ploy, the meeting carried the motion to form a separate board of control for Lakes Creek.¹⁵⁸ In keeping with the CDC's reticence about this change, there had still been no action taken to constitute a board by the March general meeting. Emslie and Stafford put it to the meeting that the union call another 'All Up' meeting at the works for the sole purpose of forming a board.¹⁵⁹ Once again the council procrastinated, but on that occasion it did promise to appoint board officials in conjunction with the annual union elections in July.¹⁶⁰ In mid-1942, the local AMIEU finally established the Lakes Creek Works' Board of Control.

The opinion of several former unionists and of a former works' manager is that both Len Haigh and the CDC vehemently opposed the formation of the Works Board of Control because they saw it as a rank-and-file threat to their long-held power.¹⁶¹ Certainly the council's procrastination between 1936 and 1942 supports this contention.

157. *ibid.*, 5 Sept. 1941; AMIEU Minutes, 1 Sept. 1941. CCQC J19/941 3

158. *ibid.*, 31 Jan. 1942.

159. *ibid.*, 2 Mar. 1942.

160. AMIEU CDC Minutes, 2 Apr. 1942. CCQC J19/942 3

161. Hinchliff interview; Underdown interview; C. Maxwell interview.

C. D. Branch Executive Rep. (1 Wanted)		<input type="checkbox"/> ORBELL, P. <input type="checkbox"/> PETERSON, C. <input type="checkbox"/> REYNOLDS, W. <input type="checkbox"/> SCHUTZE, W. J. <input type="checkbox"/> STENHOUSE, J. F. <input type="checkbox"/> WHITCOMBE, T. <input type="checkbox"/> WORTHINGTON, C. A.
<input type="checkbox"/> ILOTT, E. W. <input type="checkbox"/> JAMES, R. <input type="checkbox"/> JESSOP, E. J.	C. O. M. E. WORKS	
Branch President (1 Wanted)	<input type="checkbox"/> BLOOMER, P. H. <input type="checkbox"/> PARSONS, P.	President (1 Wanted)
<input type="checkbox"/> FIELD, B. <input type="checkbox"/> THORNTON, J.	Vice-President (1 Wanted)	<input type="checkbox"/> CAMERON, A. <input type="checkbox"/> DRISCOLL, D. J.
Branch Vice-President (1 Wanted)	Secretary (1 Wanted)	<input type="checkbox"/> BOURKE, W. D. <input type="checkbox"/> BURNHAM, W. J. <input type="checkbox"/> CHADBONE, J. <input type="checkbox"/> LIDDELL, D.
<input type="checkbox"/> EGAN, S. <input type="checkbox"/> MANSFIELD, E. E.	A Cross X to be placed in the square in front of the name of the candidate you wish to vote for. Ballot slip "A" January-June, 1942, ticket to be attached to Ballot Paper. Ballot closes 30th June, 1942, at 5.0 p.m., at the district office, Rockhampton.	
Branch Treasurer (1 Wanted)	FRANK ROBERTSON, Returning Officer.	
<input type="checkbox"/> CHARLTON, J. <input type="checkbox"/> MARTIN, C. <input type="checkbox"/> McLEOD, S. <input type="checkbox"/> PICKET, J.		
BRANCH SECRETARY NEUMANN, A. J. (Unopposed)		
DISTRICT SECRETARY HAIGH, L. G. (Unopposed)		
FEDERAL COUNCILLOR HAIGH, L. G. (Unopposed)		

Fig. 46: Election for Inaugural Lakes Creek Works Board of Control, 1942
CCQC

At the same time, the militants seemingly did not have enough backing to force the issue until 1942. However, their success that year must be seen in the light of substantial expansion of the meatworks during the Pacific War and consequent growth of both membership and issues of minor dispute. Haigh and his councillors may have

been more amenable to ceding to an internal board many of the petty domestic matters that regularly arose in the works and which took up too much of their time.¹⁶²

196 Communist participation in general meetings and on the Lakes Creek Works Board of Control increased significantly between 1942 and 1945 when production escalated and the works operated on three shifts a day to supply beef for American troops in the Pacific. At this time, left-wing union elements pushed many 'progressive' demands and management, keen to keep up the high kill-rate to meet lucrative army orders, readily conceded. These successes further strengthened communist popularity.¹⁶³ Peter Parsons, an avowed communist, rose to secretary of the Board of Control and presented a formidable challenge to the authority of Len Haigh.¹⁶⁴ Even so, the rebellious Jack Daley took the board to task in yet another CPA publication over its harsh disciplinary action against boners, just as he criticised management for its poor amenities for workers. Neither the Board of Control nor the CDC took further action against the renegade unionist, perhaps fearing a backlash from the militant boners.¹⁶⁵

Communists and the Rockhampton Trades and Labour Council

The Rockhampton Trades and Labour Council which had formed in late 1937 was 'fast coming under Communist influence' by 1939, in the opinion of the AEU and TWU.¹⁶⁶ As with left-wing activities earlier in the decade, the ARU and ASCJ took leading roles in the new council with Cedric McBryde as secretary and Joe Cusack as president.¹⁶⁷ Under their influence, the council issued a peace resolution that favoured a 'combined Democracies and Soviet Union' approach in deterring further German aggression in Europe. The RTLCL's 'sympathies with the Soviet Union', especially during

162. Hinchliff interview.

163. *ibid.* Production included 120,000 cans of corned beef per day.

164. C. Maxwell interview.

165. AMIEU CDC Minutes, 30 Nov. 1945. CCQC J19/942 4

166. TWU Minutes, 11 Dec. 1939. CCQC P16/1954 1

167. WWF Minutes, 28 Aug. 1940 and 23 Oct. 1940. NBAC Z387/33/1

the currency of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, so raised the ire of the AEU and TWU that both immediately disaffiliated from the new industrial body and the latter only re-affiliated in 1941 due to pressure from its federal council.¹⁶⁸

Until 1945, the local Trades and Labour Council exhibited marked sympathies towards communism, largely because of the presence of AMIEU delegates such as Barton, Jessop, Stafford, Emslie and even Daley. They probably saw this body as a useful vehicle for spreading their influence to other unions. By 1943 at least, Peter Parsons had succeeded Cedric McBryde as secretary.¹⁶⁹ The council certainly carried out the industrial role expected of it by, for example, coordinating meetings between union representatives in the metal trades dispute and undertaking a renewed drive for a 40-hour week in 1945.¹⁷⁰ It also organised the Labour Day celebrations and procession after its revival in 1938—until suspended during the Pacific War years—and a 'Monster' Labour Day turn-out in 1945.¹⁷¹

Some Trades and Labour Council activities demonstrated a distinctly communist bent, however. AMIEU delegates in particular pushed for the setting up of an Industrial Youths' Organisation—possibly a junior communist front—as well as the establishment of a cooperative bakery in Rockhampton.¹⁷² Neither appear to have come to fruition. Nor did the motion by Collins and Daley for the ALP to accept CPA affiliation succeed.¹⁷³ Other activities also extended beyond immediate union concerns and showed some of the typical Communist Party interest in fostering good community relations and social work to win the support and confidence of the general public during the 'popular front' years.¹⁷⁴ These measures included creating an anti-profiteering

168. AEU Minutes, 15 Nov. 1939. NBAC E162/33/1; TWU Minutes, 11 Dec. 1939 and 21 Apr. 1941. CCQC P16/1954 1; John Bollen and John Cosgrove, *Two Centuries: A Profile of Modern History*, Melbourne, 1985, p. 670.

169. THBM Minutes, 15 Feb. 1944. CCQC U14/2063 4

170. MB, 12 Feb. 1945 and 12 Nov. 1945; TWU Minutes, 9 Apr. 1945. CCQC P16/1954 1

171. *ibid.*, 4 Apr. 1945. CCQC P16/1954 1

172. AMIEU Minutes, 4 Sept. 1944 and 4 Dec. 1944. CCQC J19/941 4; TWU Minutes, 9 Apr. 1945. CCQC P16/1954 1

173. AMIEU Minutes, 4 Sept. 1944. CCQC J19/941 4

174. Dianne Menghetti, *The Red North: The Popular Front in North Queensland*, Townsville, 1981, p. 109.

committee; undertaking an anti-venereal disease drive; carrying out soldiers' relief work; urging the government to abandon the proposed war-time meat rationing; and arranging the resumption of home bread deliveries.¹⁷⁵

198

Ideological divisions by 1945

In the years before World War II, overwhelming support for traditional labourist principles and forms of organisation saw overtures by proponents of revolutionary ideologies rejected by the mainstream labour movement in Rockhampton. The propaganda disseminated by the IWW during World War I found little support and while the advocates of its successor, One-Big-Unionism, attempted to implement their ideas on local peak union structures, their efforts also proved futile. The early communist front organisations found few willing recruits other than among a small group of railway workers in the ARU and ASCJ in the years between 1928 and 1935 when the Communist Party advocated an oppositional line to traditional unionism and Labor politics.

However, between 1936 and 1945, the conciliatory line adopted by the CPA, the war-time alliance and marked success in achieving workplace improvements for unionists promoted a greater tolerance of communists by rank-and-file unionists. These changed attitudes on both sides gained the communists more influence in local union matters. At the same time, the influence of communism also peaked nationally at the end of the war.¹⁷⁶ Although estimates vary, somewhere between 25% and 40% of Australian unionists were believed to have been either under communist leadership, influenced by or sympathetic to communist ideas by 1945.¹⁷⁷ Yet it cannot be said that communists or any other group advocating a revolutionary ideology had significant

175. TWU Minutes, 22 Mar. 1943, 16 Apr. 1943, 13 Mar. 1944, 8 Nov. 1943 and 10 Mar. 1945. CCQC P16/1954 1

176. David Stephens, 'Unity Tickets and the Victorian Branch of the ALP', *Labour History*, No. 44, May 1983, p.55.

177. Davidson, *Communist Party of Australia*, pp. 92-93.

power in individual Rockhampton unions. Even in the ARU, AMIEU and WWF where support was the greatest, communist members and sympathisers were still well in the minority and regarded as marginal to mainstream Labor support.¹⁷⁸ Most ordinary unionists dismissed communists simply as 'ratbags'.¹⁷⁹ Their concentration on the Rockhampton Trades and Labour Council may have lent the peak body a distinctive tinge of pink by 1945 but, for all its posturing, the council really had little impact on local industrial matters because each union still deferred to its own hierarchy in times of work-place discord.

Irrespective of this present-day assessment, many unionists at the time believed the influence of communist ideology had reached such epidemic proportions as to destroy unionism and even the Labor Party. Other interests outside the union movement also saw the atheistic ideology as a threat to their religion and way of life. Such a perilous situation, both groups believed, necessitated a concerted effort to eradicate communism. As the following chapter which continues this theme of ideological divergence will argue for the post-World War II period, opposing viewpoints even among the usually quiet rank and file created widening divisions within individual unions and on the Trades and Labour Council. The ensuing struggle for power was between those who considered themselves 'good Labor men' by remaining true to the labourist cause, and those whose convictions took them on divergent paths of either the militant left of the communists or the reactionary right of their bitter opponents.

178. Campbell interview; C. Maxwell interview; Norm Draper, interviewed 17 Dec. 1998; Harry Boyd jnr, interviewed 6 Jan. 1999.

179. Cole interview.