

PART 3

Unions at Work: Bettering the Workers' Lot in Life



Unions and Bosses: Asserting Members' Interests in the Workplace

The 'Grand Cause' of the union movement in creating a better life for workers drew its primary motivation from the struggle for improved pay and conditions of unionists as employees. It was this purpose which underlay the original formation of unions amongst craft workers; encouraged their extension to the semi-skilled and labourers in the late nineteenth century; and fuelled unionism's renaissance in the early twentieth century where this study begins. As representatives of employees, unions exerted their greatest energies against the employer or—to use the contemporary vernacular—'the boss'. They provided a counter-balance to the stronger economic power of employers and gave workers a degree of control over the terms and conditions of their employment which they could never have achieved as individuals.¹ Unions were, therefore, agencies of worker power in forcing employers to give some consideration to the interests of employees and in ensuring that workers obtained fair terms and treatment.²

An examination of the efforts made by Rockhampton unions to improve and defend employment conditions for their members illuminates the typical workplace standards which unions confronted in a variety of occupations and locations. However, the struggle for justice in the workplace extended beyond the practicalities of pay, hours and physical conditions. It often meant a sustained contest with employers over

1. Stephen Deery, 'Union Aims and Methods', in Bill Ford and David Plowman (eds), *Australian Unions: An Industrial Relations Perspective*, Melbourne, 1989, pp. 74 and 75.

2. Richard Hyman, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 75.

fundamental union principles which challenged managerial authority to control labour and production. This was particularly the case in the three leading industrial sites of the wharves, meatworks and railway. Although much industrial action was determined by the wider union organisation, as well as there being some unexpected local deviations, local unions implemented their own characteristic strategies to achieve goals. In the main, these strategies were firmly grounded in the institutionalised processes of the state, most of which were established for workers by the Labor governments which held office in Queensland almost continuously from 1915 to the 1950s. They gave industrial relations in Rockhampton a typical complexion of comparative quiescence.

Organisational and Legal Frameworks

The institutional structures in which unions operated closely circumscribed their relations with employers. Progressively to 1920, as explained earlier, all unions joined kindred bodies elsewhere to create large national federations. This closer unity greatly increased the number of industrial disputes into which local unionists were drawn, in the interests of the whole union rather than just those of Rockhampton members. It simultaneously curtailed the scope of issues which could be handled on a purely local basis. Most policies and actions affecting the union as a whole emanated from and were executed by the hierarchy in Brisbane, Sydney or Melbourne, and handling major issues of common concern became the province of state or federal officials. Local unions contributed to this wider organisation by submitting agenda items for state conferences and electing regional representatives to state councils and executives.

Similarly in the period to 1920, relations between unions and employers became subject to intervention by the state, primarily through the establishment of a conciliation and arbitration system under the new Ryan Labor government's *Industrial Arbitration Act*

of 1916.³ Not that this was undesirable to unions: a central tenet of the labourism to which so many unionists subscribed and a key point in Labor's fighting platforms for many years had been the introduction of a compulsory arbitration system.⁴ On the other hand, many employers objected to the new arrangement. The Employers' Association of Central Queensland maintained 'that awards, better, fairer and more just to both Employer and Employees' were obtainable under the former wages board system of conference. It consequently advocated a return to the old arrangement⁵ in which employers usually had the upper hand and unions were not recognised as employees' advocates.

The arbitral system set up under the 1916 legislation redressed this imbalance of power by giving registered unions formal recognition, legal protection, privileges in recruiting and representing members and, most importantly, by providing access to the new Court of Industrial Arbitration.⁶ In this neutral but hopefully sympathetic arena, a tribunal handed down legally binding judgments on industrial disputes and granted minimum wages and conditions. Even the smallest union could benefit from these terms as well as from the flow-on effect of gains made by larger unions.⁷ The conservative Moore government temporarily rescinded some of these benefits and other aspects of industrial reform under its *Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act of 1929* and its amendments; however, when Labor returned to office in 1932, it quickly restored them in

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3. Industrial Arbitration Act of 1916 (7 Geo. V, No. 16), *Queensland Statutes*, 1916, Vol. 9, pp. 7538-7597. The existing wages boards system in which unions could reach agreement with specific employer bodies also remained for a few years in the form of the newly-termed Industrial Boards.
 4. *Worker*, 25 Mar. 1905, p. 12; T.J. Ryan, *A Policy for Queensland: A Speech delivered at Barcaldine, 29 March 1915*, Brisbane, 1915, p. 10; Jim Hagan, 'The Australian Labour Movement: Context and Perspective, 1850-1987', in Ford and Plowman (eds), *Australian Unions*, p. 22; Ross Fitzgerald and Harold Thornton, *Labor in Queensland: From the 1880s to 1988*, St Lucia, 1989, pp. 25-26; Andrew Wells, 'A Failed "Passive Revolution": Australian Industrial Relations, 1914-1939' in Jim Hagan and Andrew Wells (eds), *Industrial Relations in Australia and Japan*, St Leonards, 1994, p. 54.
 5. Employers' Association of Central Queensland, *Tenth Annual Report*, 1926, p. 3.
 6. In 1925, the Court of Industrial Arbitration became the Board of Trade and Arbitration. In 1929 and thereafter it was called the Industrial Court of Queensland. When used in a general sense, the state court is referred to in this work by the abbreviated title of the Industrial Court.
 7. Ross M. Martin, *Trade Unions in Australia: Who Runs Them, Who Belongs—Their Politics, Their Power*, Ringwood, 1980, pp. 8, 32, 41 and 111; P. Miller and C. Mulvey, *What Do Australian Unions Do?* Discussion Paper 92.29, Oct. 1992, Perth, p. 8

the *Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act of 1932*.⁸ For most of the period from 1916, therefore, unions operated under Labor industrial legislation.

Reciprocally, under arbitration legislation, and also under Labor's *Trade Union Act of 1915*, unions had to subordinate themselves to government regulation of much of their internal functioning and, in theory at least, they ceded their 'right' to strike in pursuit of industrial goals.⁹ For the state's part, the Ryan government envisaged the arbitration system would create 'lasting industrial peace...[and would]...do away with strikes entirely...[by] get[ting] the parties together to settle their differences amicably'.¹⁰ The government obviously intended the conciliation function to take precedence over the arbitration power¹¹ but, either way, the state regulated almost every transaction between unions and employers in the interests of public welfare and concern. Under an arbitration system, therefore, unions—and to a lesser extent, employers also—entered into a 'symbiotic relationship' with the state.¹²

Before the advent of the Queensland arbitration system, a few unions had received awards from the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration that was established a decade before in early 1905.¹³ They believed its terms were far superior to the conditions obtained through the existing state wages boards¹⁴ and, in the case of the WWF, were better than the existing agreements struck with local shipping agents.¹⁵ The

8. Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act of 1929 (20 Geo. V, No. 28), *Queensland Statutes*, 1929–1930, Vol. 15, pp. 12565–12639; Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act of 1932 (23 Geo. V, No. 36), *Queensland Statutes*, 1932–1933, Vol. 17, pp. 14267–14329; Elizabeth Jensen, *The Effects of the Depression on the Trade Union Movement in Queensland, 1929–1932*, BA Thesis, UQ, 1971.

9. Trade Union Act of 1915 (6 Geo. V, No. 31), *Queensland Statutes*, 1914–1916, Vol. 8, pp. 6909–6925; Wells, in Hagan and Wells (eds), *Industrial Relations in Australia and Japan*, p. 55.

10. Edward Granville Theodore, *QPD*, 1915–1916, Vol. 120, 2 Sept. 1915, p. 577.

11. Denis Murphy, *T.J. Ryan: A Political Biography*, St Lucia, 1990, p. 117.

12. D.W. Rawson, *Unions and Unionists in Australia*, Sydney, 1986, p. 75.

13. Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Act (No. 13 of 1904), *Acts of the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia*, Vol. 3, pp. 15–41. The act was passed on 15 Dec. 1904 and first president appointed on 10 Feb. 1905. Referred to in this work as the Arbitration Court to differentiate it from Queensland's Industrial Court. Anthony Barker, *When Was That? Chronology of Australia from 1788*, Sydney, 1988, pp. 237 and 239.

14. Stuart Macintyre, *The Oxford History of Australia*, Vol. 4, 1901–1941, Melbourne, 1986, pp. 89–91.

15. Jim Healy, *Brief History of the Australian Waterfront and Waterside Workers' Unions*, unpublished manuscript, 1948, p. 16. UQFL

WWF received its first federal award in 1914 and the FCDIU gained one in 1919.¹⁶ However, both unions soon after approached Queensland's new Industrial Court whose terms they thought were by then superior to those of the federal system. For the WWF, the 1921 state award granted not only a higher rate of pay in the recognition of more arduous conditions in tropical ports but also conceded two principles the union had long espoused but had not gained under the federal award: preference to its members and equalisation of work.¹⁷ Both these conditions became key aspects of union actions in the local context. The AMIEU, in contrast, found itself reluctantly forced by the combined export companies into the realm of arbitration in 1918, having maintained a series of industrial agreements with individual employers since 1911.¹⁸ Unions covering state government employees, including those in the railway, had no choice in the matter of which arena to do combat. Their members had been excluded from federal arbitration as early as 1906 and were also barred from the state wages boards system.¹⁹ Only with the triumph of Queensland Labor in 1915 did railway unions gain access to the state arbitration system from which they gained their first award in 1917.²⁰

One of the attractions of the Queensland system was the considerably better rate of pay than under federal jurisdiction. For example, in 1927, the average wage for railway men was £31 per year more in Queensland than in New South Wales and £41 more than for Commonwealth employees, even though the retail price index in Queensland was less than in other states.²¹ The second advantage of the state system was the comparative ease of obtaining an award. To gain a federal determination, unions had to be engaged in an existing industrial dispute that involved members in more than one state. This process could be difficult to organise, proved costly to both unions and their members and was

16. Waterside Workers' Award, *CAR*, 1914, Vol. 8, p. 53; Carters' Award, *CAR*, 1919, Vol. 13, p. 879.

17. Waterside Workers' Award—State, Judgment, *QGG*, 1921, Vol. 116, No. 268, 9 June, p.1799 and Award, 14(1), p. 1803 and 21(1), p. 1805; Healy, Brief History of the Australian Waterfront, p.40.

18. Meat Export Award—State, *QGG*, 1918, Vol. 110, No. 104, 19 Mar., p.903.

19. Ray Markey, 'Australia, 1870-1914' in Hagan and Wells (eds), *Industrial Relations in Australia and Japan*, p. 35; Industrial Peace Act of 1912 (3 Geo. V, No. 19), *Queensland Statutes*, 1913, Vol. 7, pp. 5467-5517.

20. Industrial Arbitration Act of 1916 (7 Geo. V, No. 16), *Queensland Statutes*, 1917, Vol. 9, pp. 7538-7597.

21. Railway Award—State, Judgment, *QGG*, 1927, Vol. 129, No. 116, 9 Nov., p. 1589. Ironically, this information was presented to justify refusal of a further pay increase. The judge argued that as the net revenue had fallen considerably since 1925, the industry could not sustain the increase.

both industrially and socially disruptive.²² Under the Queensland arbitration system, unions or employers could approach the court at any time for a variation of an existing award or for a completely new award. Thus, most of the unions covering Queensland workers operated in the state arena after 1921. The main exceptions were the WWF and the AMIEU retail section which were very reluctantly forced back into federal jurisdiction in 1928 and 1932 respectively following interstate disputes.²³

Most unions accepted a compulsory award determined by a judge who heard cases presented by the union (or combined unions) and employers. The foremost issue was that relating to wage rates. These consisted of two components: a basic wage formulated on the current cost of living and adjusted at regular intervals, and an additional amount or margin for varying occupational skills. Both aspects of the wage structure proved the cause of major strikes over the decades to the 1950s. Other conditions prescribed in awards were hours, holidays, meal times, general conditions of employment and, in many cases, union preference. There was also a varying range of safety conditions pertaining to the particular occupation. For example, awards could specify maximum loads to be lifted or additional payment in the form of 'danger money', 'dirt money' or 'heat money' for handling chemicals, explosives and other hazardous substances or for working in difficult surroundings.

With the terms of awards largely dependent upon the court-room skills of state union officials, the task of their administration, and of overseeing the plethora of specific local conditions which general awards could not accommodate, devolved to Rockhampton union officials. In the day-to-day supervision of union affairs in the workplace to ensure their members received fair terms of employment and acceptable treatment, secretaries and organisers had three main areas of concern: checking time

22. Under section 51(35) of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1901. For a discussion of federal versus states' rights as relating to industrial matters see Martin, *Trade Unions in Australia*, pp. 31-36.

23. Report of Director of Labour and Chief Inspector of Factories and Shops for the Year 1938-1939, *QPP*, 1939, Vol. 2, p. 11; Meat Industry Award, *CAR*, 1932, Vol. 31, p. 541.

sheets and wage books; monitoring working conditions; and enforcing union principles for the protection of members and the union alike.

Checking Time Sheets and Wage Books

Foremost in awards were those clauses dealing with pay rates and hours of work. In the opinion of most rank-and-file unionists, these bread-and-butter concerns were 'the gut issue' of unionism.²⁴ Any union officer who failed to acknowledge their primacy in union affairs would not have lasted long in the position.²⁵ As seen in Chapter 4, Rockhampton leaders were particularly noted for their longevity in office. This was because—besides their administrative and oratory talents—they devoted much time and attention to monitoring basic award conditions and reacted swiftly to any reports of infringements. The Employers' Association of Central Queensland claimed that its members committed most breaches of awards 'unwittingly'²⁶ and genuine errors certainly did occur sometimes but, in the unions' opinion, there was always the possibility and often the reality of exploitation by unscrupulous employers whose main concern was higher profit margins. Reports of actual breaches of awards in relation to pay or hours—or even the suspicion of such an occurrence—brought an immediate investigation from union officials who took advantage of their right to inspect time sheets and wage books.²⁷

The FCDIU/TWU secretary, Frank Conlon, assiduously pursued employers who failed to do wage justice by his members. He conducted regular 'tours of inspection' to catch the many businesses which did not keep time books as legally required.²⁸ In the matter of keeping carters on after prescribed hours, the ice works and soft drink factories proved particularly troublesome and Conlon reported them to the Industrial Inspector on

24. Martin, *Trade Unions in Australia*, pp. 96 and 104.

25. *ibid.*, p. 104; Deery, in Ford and Plowman (eds), *Australian Unions*, p. 76.

26. Employers' Association of Central Queensland, *Seventh Annual Report*, 1923, p. 14. CCQC K18/966

27. See, for example, Carters' Award—Central and Southern Divisions, *QGG*, 1920, Vol. 114, No. 54, 12 Feb. p. 630, s. 24.

28. FCDIU Minutes, 10 Jan. 1921. CCQC P16/1952 4

numerous occasions. Complaints about award infringements typically escalated at Christmas and New Year when customers demanded prompt and frequent deliveries in the hot weather. Ice works also sometimes illegally employed boys as assistant drivers at a fraction of a man's wage. They rarely kept records of this practice, thereby giving the union several infringements to report. Paying a boy lower wages to do a man's work not only exploited the lad but also cheated an unemployed adult of the opportunity to work for a full wage.²⁹

Butcheries also often contravened wage and hours clauses of the award and the AMIEU secretary regularly patrolled retail shops. The State Butchery gave him 'no end of trouble' during the early 1920s. The manager worked members outside hours, failed to pay overtime and displayed 'tyranny and insulting language' whenever Len Haigh asked to see the books.³⁰ But the sight of the Industrial Inspector was usually enough to make the manager both honest and timid, even if only temporarily. T.K. Osborne and Sons' slaughter-yard frequently infringed award conditions also, with the union having to call upon the inspector to enforce compliance there on many occasions.³¹

In the opinion of the AEU organiser in the late 1920s, most firms employing his members recognised the award had to be observed but others 'evaded as much as possible' and had to be threatened with prosecution.³² Both large and small private businesses were guilty of contravening awards, particularly in the payment for overtime, for work done on public holidays and for annual leave,³³ but some were particularly renowned for their failure in this matter. Burns and Twigg, the leading private engineering works, often featured in wage complaints to the Industrial Inspector during the 1920s. The firm failed to pay employees for their six days annual holidays in 1923, following which the union contacted the Industrial Inspector who secured payment only on threat of prosecution.

29. *ibid.*, 13 Feb. 1922. CCQC P16/1952 5

30. AMIEU Minutes, 17 Jan. 1922 and 8 Sept. 1925. CCQC J19/940 5 and 6

31. *ibid.*, 29 Jan. 1924, 5 Jan. 1925, 13 Dec. 1926. CCQC J19/940 5 and 7

32. *AEU Monthly Journal*, May 1928, p. 19.

33. Report of Director of Labour and Chief Inspector of Factories and Shops for the Year 1938-1939, *QPP*, 1939, Vol. 2, p. 11.

The year after, the same situation arose and necessitated the same action by the AEU. According to the organiser, the firm was 'never...known to pay up until pressure has been applied'.³⁴

Reports of employers underpaying wages or exceeding hours occurred less in large worksites like the railway, meatworks or wharves and on major construction projects where an official time-keeper and vigilant union delegates existed. In those places, wage problems generally arose from disputed pay rates for special classes of work. For example, the AEU often had to take up with the railway pay master the matter of 'dirt money' for fitters when undertaking exceedingly messy tasks like disassembling uncleaned engines.³⁵ The WWF similarly referred to the local Board of Reference cases of shipping companies not paying 'obnoxious cargo' rates for handling chemicals, fuels, dusty materials like coal and cement or offensive goods such as fresh hides which, understandably, were none too fresh by the time they reached the wharves.³⁶

The Industrial Inspector was generally a sufficient weapon to make private businesses comply with regulations but the WWF matter above demonstrates that in the case of large corporations, securing the terms of the award often meant exhausting the full range of options available under the arbitration process. A similar situation existed with the municipal council and statutory authorities where aldermen and board members no doubt felt that recourse to the Industrial Court relieved them of decision making and personal accountability for public expenditure. During sewerage work undertaken in the 1940s by some 300 AWU members, for instance, the union protested Rockhampton City Council's failure to pay miners' rates to those men constructing timber supports in trenches deeper than five feet. When negotiations failed, the matter went to the Industrial Magistrate who ruled in the union's favour.³⁷ The AWU similarly defended members

34. *AEU Monthly Journal*, Feb. 1923, p. 13 and Mar. 1924, p. 18.

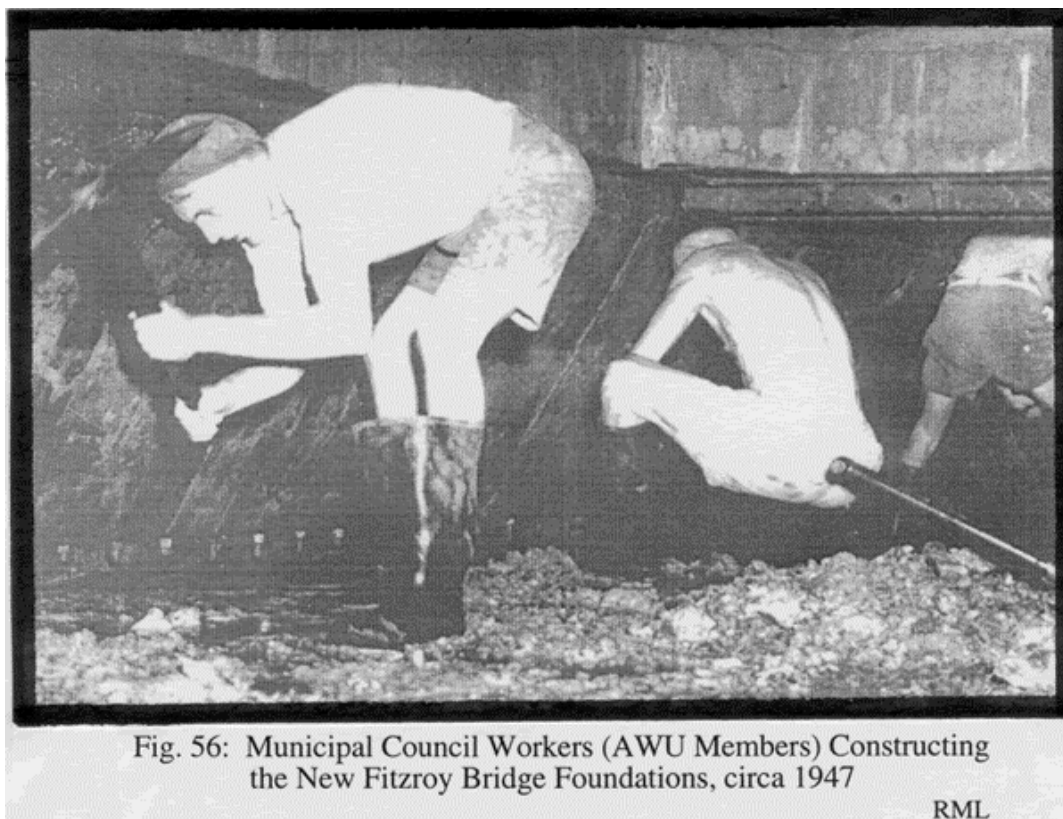
35. *ibid.*, Jan. 1923, p. 15.

36. E.B. Purnell to J. Morris, 14 Feb. 1920, WWF Federal Office correspondence. NBAC T/62/8/13/1. Boards of Reference consisted typically of the local magistrate and representatives of the union and employers, with the magistrate usually determining the outcome.

37. AWU Branch and District Secretaries' Reports, 1940, p. 31. AWU Brisbane

excavating the river bank to construct a caisson for the new traffic bridge across the Fitzroy River in 1947. On that occasion, the magistrate ordered an unsuccessful compulsory conference between the union and council to resolve the matter which, upon referral to the Industrial Court, resulted in another victory for the union.³⁸

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It was not unknown for employees to make false accusations about employers and thereby place the union in an embarrassing position. On one occasion, the AEU organiser and Industrial Inspector visited Byrne Motors where the union had been tipped off that 'conditions were not as they should be' with wages. But after checking the books, the union discovered it had no case against the firm.³⁹ Yet only a few months later, another complaint that the firm was not paying workers an award increase proved justified.⁴⁰ To the anger and dismay of union leaders, some members colluded with employers in evading the terms of awards. As the next chapter will explain in greater detail, whether

38. *ibid.*, 1947, p. 97.

39. *AEU Monthly Journal*, Apr. 1937, p. 18.

40. *ibid.*, Oct. 1937, p. 19 and Dec. 1937, p. 19.

this was done willingly to earn extra wages or unwillingly was irrelevant as far as the union was concerned. Compliance with the boss in breaking awards brought a stern rebuke from the union and sometimes a hefty fine as often happened with employees in butcher shops, including the troublesome State Butchery.⁴¹

Over the decades, constant union vigilance and action in reporting infringements to the Industrial Inspector proved highly effective in curtailing the practice of employers abusing the wages, hours and holiday entitlement clauses of awards. Even so, as late as 1950, the TWU reported the leading warehouse firm of Walter Reid and Company for not paying correct overtime and for failing to list wage details on the pay packet as required under the award.⁴² With other workplace matters that were not quantitatively specified or were not included in awards at all, the union's task was not so easily defined. Determining whether physical conditions warranted union action or not called for value judgments which were influenced by the prevailing idea of working-class masculinity and by comparative domestic standards at the time.

Monitoring Physical Workplace Conditions

It has been argued from a present-day industrial relations perspective that unions traditionally 'accorded a low priority' to physical conditions and industrial safety. Instead, they demanded and received compensation through 'danger money', 'dirt money' or their equivalent, and pushed for claims under workers' compensation legislation in cases of injury or death rather than take issue with the actual working conditions themselves.⁴³ Such opinions fail to acknowledge the historical reality of the time: there was little or no mechanisation then to relieve back-breaking toil nor bulk handling techniques to distance workers from cargo which might be injurious to health. Nevertheless, goods had to be

41. AMIEU CDC Minutes, 14 Apr. 1925, 14 July 1925 and 23 Feb. 1928. CCQC J19/940 5,6 and 7

42. TWU Minutes, 9 Oct. 1950. CCQC P16/1954 2

43. Deery, in Ford and Plowman (eds), *Australian Unions*, p. 81.

moved and tasks accomplished and doing heavy, dirty, sometimes dangerous and even 'brutal' physical work was, by definition, what working-class men did for a living. It was central to the construction of working-class masculinity⁴⁴ and the essence of blue-collar unionism.⁴⁵ Unions therefore had to reach a balance between the practical imperatives of the market place and their own ideological notions, on the one hand, and members' health and safety on the other. Through awards, they endeavoured to gain not only minimum physical standards where possible but also the recognition that dirty and dangerous work deserved additional remuneration.

Unions assiduously monitored those physical conditions specified in awards and, as the previous examples of the AWU and WWF demonstrate, they ensured their members received appropriate compensation when engaged in hazardous procedures or handled toxic or unpleasant goods. Unions also reacted swiftly to any unforeseen situation which impeded the working ability of their members or posed an imminent threat to their lives. When a shipping company failed to provide protective clothing for wharf labourers loading frozen meat or when equipment required repair, for instance, the WWF secretary had no hesitation in approaching the Board of Reference to rule on the matter. He usually also withdrew labour in the interests of the men until each matter was resolved.⁴⁶ In 1936, the secretary directed 80 wharfies to cease work after one collapsed from heatstroke in an outside temperature of 96°F. Despite the use of wind-sails, the temperature inside the hold was significantly higher.⁴⁷ Soon after this incident, wharfies had to work dusty coal which the shipping agents refused to water down. On union advice, members went out one-by-one by claiming breathing difficulties. However, the magistrate still deemed the ploy a strike and all wharfies concerned were summonsed and fined.⁴⁸ Similarly in 1957, incorrect rigging allowed an enormous beef hind to fall into a hold where men were loading frozen meat. When all 28 men refused to continue

44. Charlie Fox, *Working Australia*, Sydney, 1991, p. 37

45. David Atkin, *Aristocracy of Muscle: Meatworkers, Masculinity and Trade Unionism in the 1950s*, MA Thesis, LaTrobe University, 1991, p. i.

46. WWF Minutes, 5 Jan. 1939 and 17 Dec. 1952. NBAC Z387/33/1 and 2

47. *MB*, 21 Apr. 1936, p. 14.

48. Harry Boyd junior, interviewed 6 Jan. 1999.

working, the agent immediately stood them down in line with award provisions. The Australian Stevedoring Industry Authority (ASIA), which by then regulated the industry, reprimanded the men for unlawfully ceasing work but the union fully supported their action as being in their best interests and safety.⁴⁹

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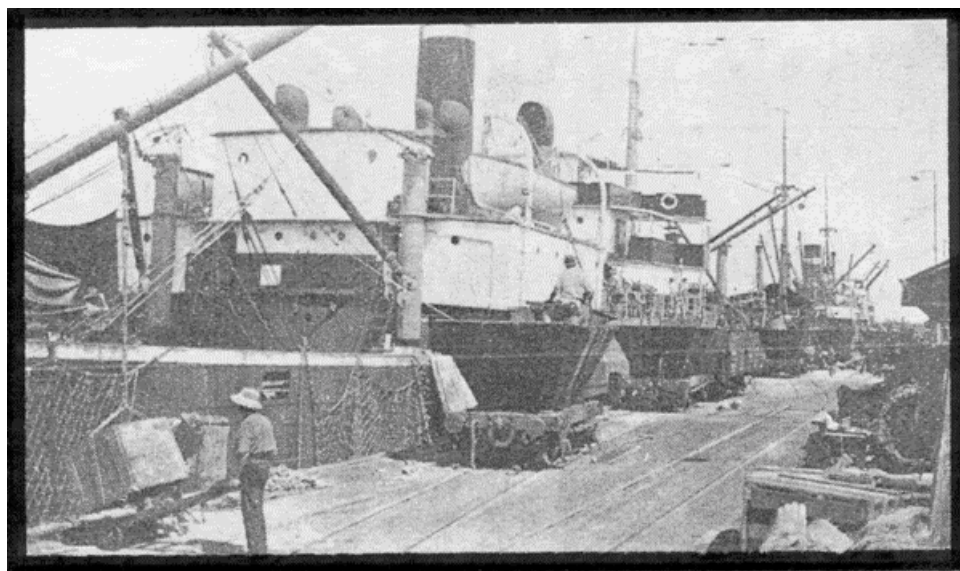


Fig. 57: WWF Members Working the Town Wharves, circa 1920
RPA

In contrast to this concern for life and limb, matters of personal comfort seemed to be of a far lower priority to the WWF. By the 1940s, facilities on the town wharves were limited to urinals that were 'in great need of disinfecting'. There were no 'proper' lavatories or even wash basins.⁵⁰ Living conditions down at Port Alma at the mouth of the Fitzroy River were a source of continual complaint by the union but, typically, there was little effective action to remedy the situation. The deep-water port was constructed 'virtually in mid-ocean' to avoid the continual silting problems that plagued the city wharves. Facilities at Port Alma consisted of a long wharf containing storage sheds, a post office and a dining room for wharfies. Away from the wharf there was a large open-style dormitory and three houses. There was nothing else except miles of mudflats and salt pans the low tide exposed.⁵¹ Until the construction of an elevated road in the 1960s,

49. *MB*, 9 Aug. 1957, p. 1.

50. WWF minutes, 23 Apr. 1942 and 2 Oct. 1944. NBAC Z387/33/1 and 2

51. The residences included two houses for port officials and an out-of-bounds 'nunnery' for the female domestics. Boyd interview.

Port Alma's only land connection with Rockhampton was a branch rail line joining the main North Coast Railway at Bajool.⁵² When ships were due in port, teams of wharfies travelled the 60 kilometre route by train or railmotor and lived in isolation for up to a week at a time, sometimes working around the clock to load perishable cargo.⁵³

The Rockhampton Harbour Board provided the dormitory but responsibility for its furnishing rested with the shipping companies through their local agents until the Stevedoring Industry Commission took over in 1942. An article in a 1941 *Maritime Worker* aptly described Port Alma accommodation:

Built over water, the barracks leave a lot to be desired. Sand flies in millions in summer, and the air pervaded by the stench always associated with salt-water flats, cause perpetual discomfort...The fresh-water service is at present limited to the amount caught in tanks. There are 12 small wash basins for some 150 men, and no showers or baths.⁵⁴

In line with the award, the agents provided stretchers but no bedding. They also provided the men with regulation sandfly nets but these were always dusty and full of holes. Wharfies had to use smoke-pots to rid the dormitory of the droves of biting insects before they could get some sleep. Unlined corrugated iron comprised the walls and roof so that the building was hot and stuffy in summer and icy cold on winter nights. As well, the roof leaked and saturated wharfies' beds and personal possessions in rainy weather. There were no mirrors for shaving, no lights in the lavatories or buckets in the dormitory for nocturnal calls of nature. Dirty cattle wagons left beside the unscreened dining hall complemented the pungent odour of the mudflats and the endemic rat population sometimes reached plague proportions.⁵⁵ Not surprisingly, there were often requests by wharfies for a supply of 'gastritis' and 'dysentery' medicine to be kept at the port.⁵⁶

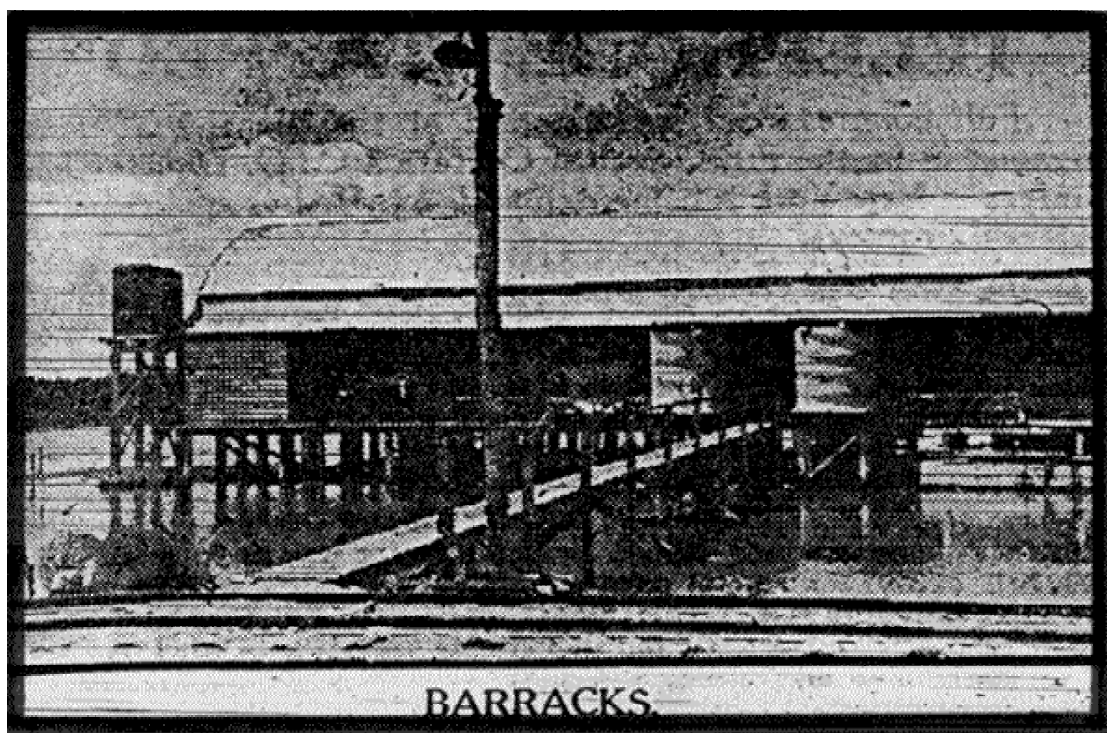
52. George Westacott, *Revised History of the Port of Rockhampton*, Rockhampton, 1970, p. 21.

53. Les Yewdale, interviewed 29 June 1995.

54. *MW*, 15 Nov. 1941.

55. WWF Minutes, 23 May 1938, 28 July 1941, 23 Apr. 1942, 23 May 1949, 26 Nov. 1952 and 29 June 1954. NBAC Z387/33/1 and 2

56. *ibid.*, 26 Aug. 1955. NBAC Z387/33/2



Figs. 58 and 59: Old Dormitory and Dining Room at Port Alma, 1941
MW, 15 Nov. 1941

Secretary Purnell also had cause on several occasions to chide the agents' caterer about dirty crockery, which was understandable with the limited water supply, while hungry wharfies grumbled about the 'continual bad tucker and slack service at the tables' where, for example, 'the cake was not put on the table but was served from the kitchen, one piece per man'.⁵⁷ They also protested loudly if the agents had not loaded the beer and tobacco onto the railmotor for Port Alma and soon learned to check this was done before boarding themselves.⁵⁸

The same issues being raised year after year indicates that little of substance was done in forcefully pushing for better facilities on the wharves, either by the shipping agents, by the statutory authorities which the federal Labor government established to control the national waterfront after 1942, or by the WWF itself. There are several explanations for this apparent complacency. First, up to World War II at least, local wharfies considered their general terms and conditions were 'a long way ahead' of those in Brisbane, Sydney or Melbourne. WWF president Tom Maxwell readily confirmed this on his return from an All Ports Convention in 1937.⁵⁹ Second, even after the war, the men viewed life at Port Alma as 'not too bad' as long as the food was plentiful and the beer and tobacco had arrived so they could share a bottle or two and have a smoke before falling into bed at the end of a long shift. The camaraderie was good—some men even relished the break away from the wife and family—and it paid reasonably well.⁶⁰ Third, as the living quarters were an extension of the masculine work environment, the men did not expect them to be as commodious as home with its comforts and feminine touches. And for some men at least, conditions at home were not much more salubrious. Fourth, political allegiances probably also deterred action on these 'minor' issues. Not until the 1950s, when Labor had lost office federally, did the union threaten to limit the number of gangs working at Port Alma if there was no improvement in the facilities and it actually

57. *ibid.*, 28 Apr. 1937 and 31 May 1937. NBAC Z387/33/1

58. Les Yewdale, interviewed 29 June 1995; Norm Draper, interviewed 17 Dec. 1998.

59. WWF Minutes, 22 Nov. 1937. NBAC Z387/33/1

60. Yewdale interview; Draper interview; Melvyn Guley, interviewed 13 Dec. 1998.

called a stop-work meeting on the port's poor standards. These measures seem to have been effective because, soon after, the stevedoring authority lined and sealed the dormitory, installed individual and group cubicles and screened the kitchen and dining room.⁶¹ In 1955, Rockhampton Harbour Board finally erected a new dormitory block on reclaimed land. The building also included a recreation hall and an ablution block, all of which, as the authority boasted in the daily paper, were 'electrically lit'.⁶²

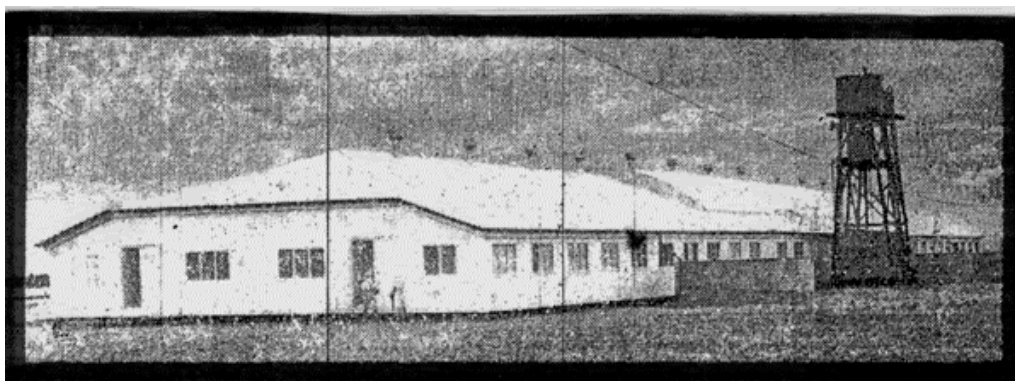


Fig. 60: New Dormitory and Amenities Block at Port Alma, 1955
MB, 18 Apr. 1955

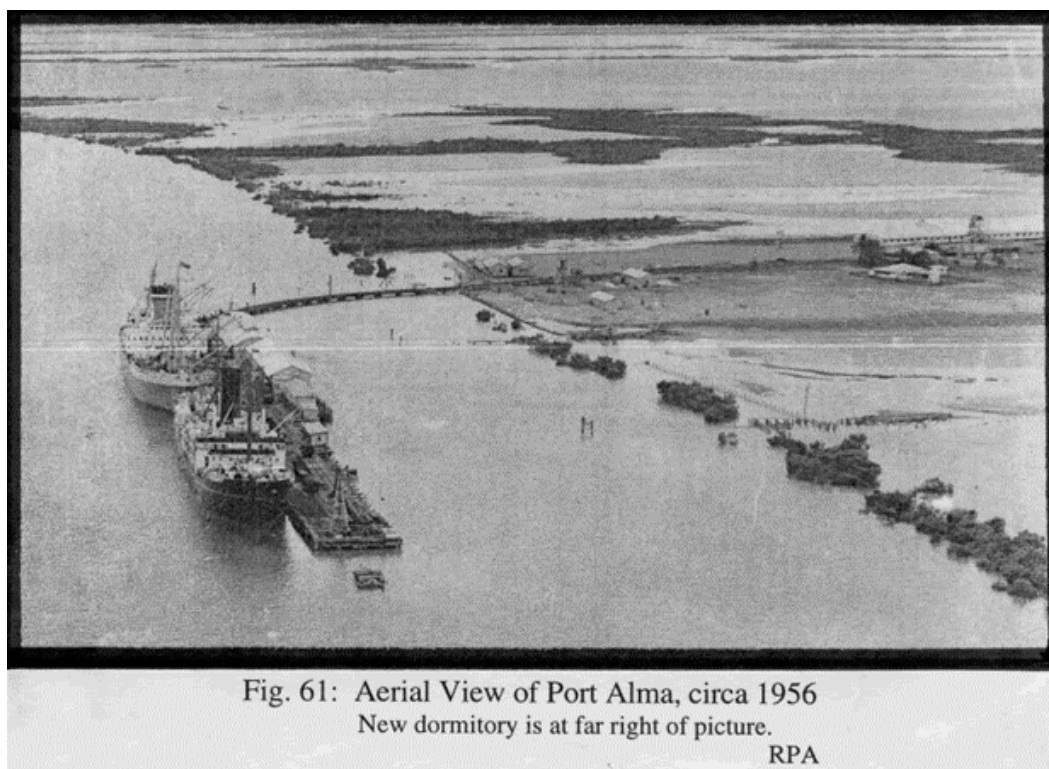


Fig. 61: Aerial View of Port Alma, circa 1956
New dormitory is at far right of picture.
RPA

61. WWF Minutes, Jan. 1951, 11 Feb. 1954, 29 June 1954 and 13 Jan. 1955. NBAC Z387/33/2

62. MB, 18 Apr. 1955, p. 3.

While the meatworkers' award was undoubtedly the best in theory where comforts were concerned, reality often proved less than satisfactory. But like the WWF, the AMIEU seemed not to pursue these matters with any great determination. The bathrooms provided under the award were mere corrugated iron sheds with communal showers, a concrete wash trough and urinal, and pedestals without seats. These amenities fed into an 'antiquated open-drain lavatory system'.⁶³ They did have hot running water and flush-systems, however, so the conveniences were probably more 'convenient' than most of the men had at home. Cramped 'hen coups' served as lunchrooms and dressing-rooms, with one being sandwiched between the gas furnace, a solder melter and the steam vats.⁶⁴

Yet in the matter of conditions directly related to working conditions, the union had no hesitation in raising the issue with management and on occasions declared an hour's—sometimes a day's—stoppage to 'assist' negotiations.⁶⁵ When it came to practices the union believed were dangerous, like working in the 'Sharp Freezers' for instance, the union approached the court for remedial action. These new cold rooms, which were installed in the late 1930s, froze meat in 24 hours—twice as fast as the old refrigeration. They reached temperatures as low as 30° F below zero and had an average daily temperature of 20° F below zero. In a 1939 affidavit by Len Haigh, himself an experienced freezer hand, he claimed:

That notwithstanding these employees wearing Balaclava [*sic*] Caps to cover ears, mittens to protect hands, extra trousers and flannels to protect the body, they have repeatedly informed me that it is definitely impossible to wear sufficient clothing (and leave freedom to work) to keep warm under the said temperatures.⁶⁶

Haigh claimed that the men complained about suffering continuously from 'coughs, colds and weak chests' and that they feared the longterm consequences on their health. The union contended that the men should not have to work more than two hours a day at these

63. *MLJ*, Mar. 1943, p. 7.

64. *ibid.*, Nov. 1942, p. 5.

65. Colin Maxwell, interviewed 20 June 1996.

66. Affidavit in the matter of the Meat Export Award—State and the matter of a dispute regarding working in certain temperatures of 'Sharp Freezers', 21 Sept. 1939. AMIEU Cutting Book CCQC J19/945 2

extreme temperatures and that in those two hours, there be 15 minute warm up breaks each half hour. They also sought extra payment for 'Sharp Freezer' work.⁶⁷ Despite the union's efforts in this matter, no changes were made to the award; the men were still only permitted the usual 15 minutes 'cooling down' before entering the chambers after outside work but the union secured breaks from freezer work, known as 'lapos', by mutual arrangement with management.⁶⁸

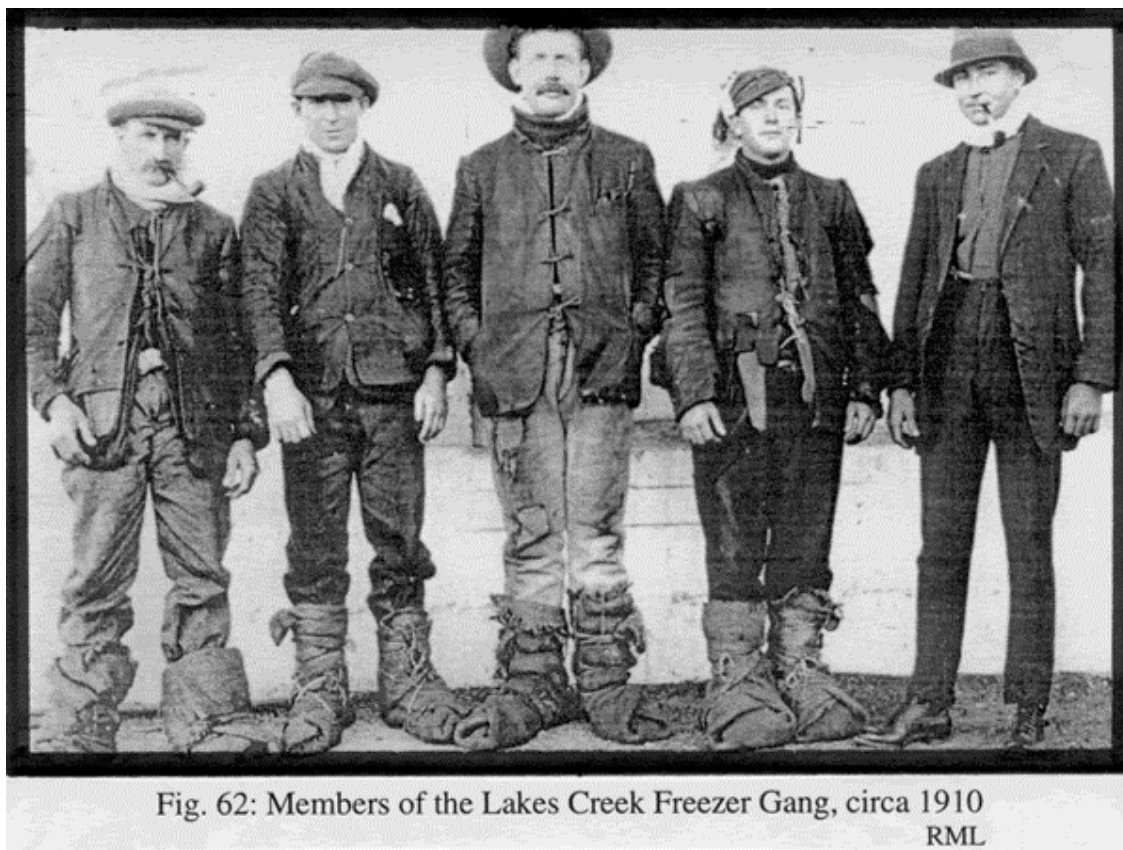


Fig. 62: Members of the Lakes Creek Freezer Gang, circa 1910
RML

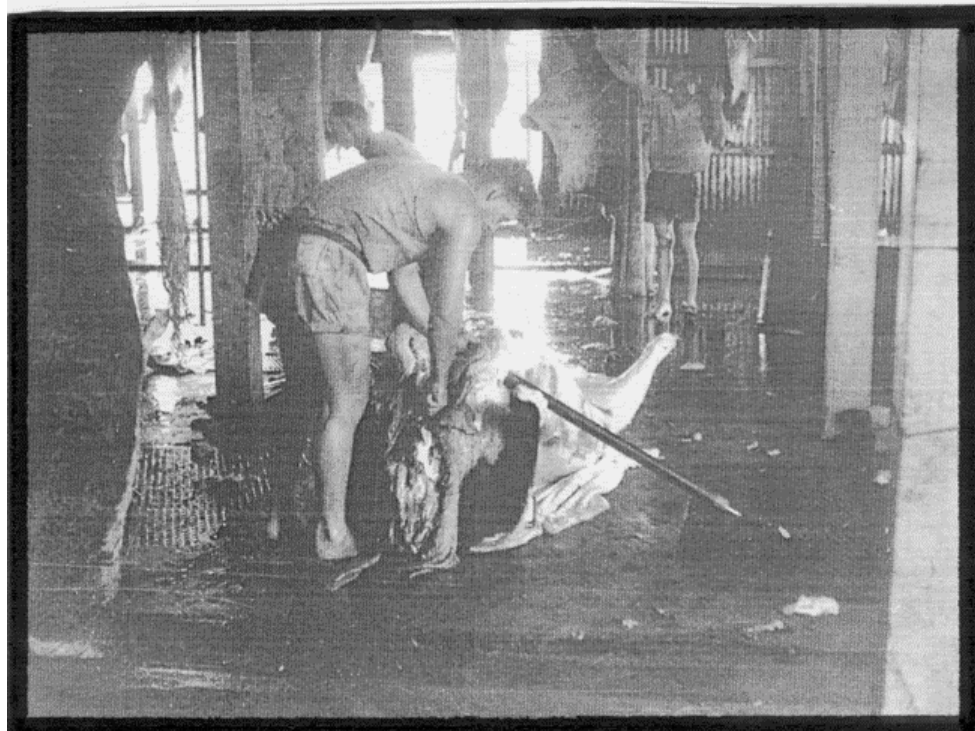
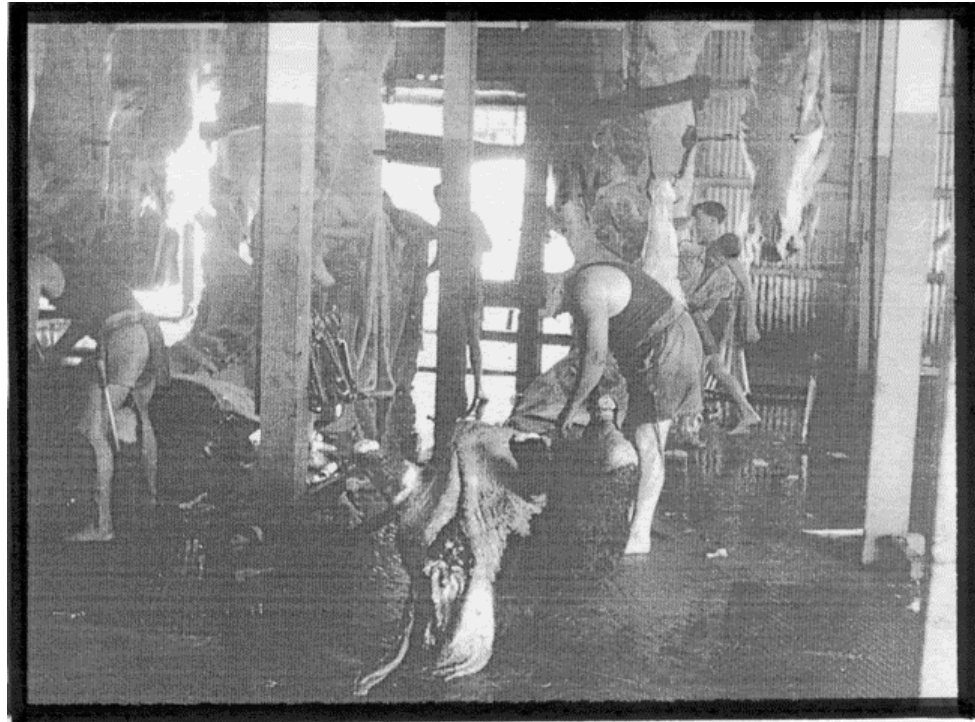
Surprising as it may seem to an outsider, the union did nothing about protective clothing or footwear for those on the slaughter floor: the men and boys there worked barefoot. That was what they preferred. Wearing boots could mean a slip on pieces of fat which endangered workers handling sharp knives and saws. Instead, boys constantly

67. *ibid.*

68. Meat Export Award–State, *Queensland Industrial Gazette (QIG)*, 1941, Vol. 26, no. 3, 30 Sept., p. 547; A 'lapo' was a 10 minute break every hour during which freezer workers warmed up outside between 'laps' inside the freezers. C. Maxwell interview.

sloshed buckets of hot and cold water across the floor to keep it clear of blood and debris.⁶⁹

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Figs. 63 and 64: Slaughter Floor, Lakes Creek Meatworks, circa 1950
RML

69. *ibid.*

World War II gave the AMIEU both the incentive and the opportunity to gain vast improvements in facilities as well as in other terms of employment. During the war years, the federal government took responsibility for labour supply, production levels and costs in supplying enormous quantities of canned meat to the Allied forces. In these unusual circumstances, high throughput and the need for industrial peace triumphed over peacetime economics: whatever the union asked for, it got. However, with the strict hygiene standards demanded by the American meat supervisors, the men were issued with boots and other forms of protective clothing which they had to wear even if not wanted.⁷⁰

In the railway workshops, conditions and facilities were generally considered as being far better than those in private engineering works, largely because the unions took active steps in approaching the Railway Department to have unsatisfactory situations remedied and they often did so in concert with other unions—in unity was strength!⁷¹ Early issues of union concern included poor lighting, the lack of protective lagging around forges and poor ventilation so that some workshops were 'like a furnace' in summer.⁷² By the late 1940s, after years of reduced funding because of the war effort, AEU and other unions in the Workshops Federation pushed for new equipment to replace run-down and out-dated machinery.⁷³ So inferior did they consider their working conditions that the AEU requested a visit from the government machinery and factories inspectors to prompt some remedial action by the railway administration.⁷⁴ Such action on the part of a union was hitherto unheard of in a government department.

Workplace conveniences and comforts in the railway proved relatively unimportant matters to both unions and administration, just as they did with the WWF and AMIEU. Austin Vaughan, a former state secretary of the AEU, recalls that when he started work in Rockhampton in 1945:

70. Mark Hinchliff, interviewed 23 Nov. 1995; C. Maxwell interview; Allan Reynolds, interviewed 6 June 1996.

71. Frank Campbell, interviewed 1 July 1995; Jack Treacy, interviewed 29 June 1995.

72. *AEU Monthly Journal*, Jan 1924, p. 10, Jan. 1925, p. 17, June 1926, p. 17.

73. AEU Minutes, 20 Oct. 1949. and 30 Oct. 1952. NBAC E162/33/3

74. *ibid.*, 19 Feb. 1953.

Conditions in the local workshops were absolutely appalling. No amenities for meals or for changing clothes. Nowhere for lunch. Washing facilities were like pig troughs. There were no door or seats on the toilets. They were never cleaned.⁷⁵

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There were numerous complaints of leaking guttering, stinking urinals and blocked sewers in the workshops and of the absence of showers, lockers and drinking fountains as late as the 1950s.⁷⁶ According to Vaughan, unions made numerous deputations to management and even to the Minister for Railways. They secured many promises but no action. These issues, it seems, were not important enough to take any direct action. Like the WWF, the railway unions only began to make a concerted effort through stop-work meetings to force the government to install decent amenities for railway workers throughout the state after Labor lost office in 1957.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, railway unions were not entirely complacent in pressuring the administration for improved facilities. After years of members having to eat a packed lunch squatting on the workshop floor or under the big water-tank, the unions established their own canteen in a building erected and equipped by the Railway Department. No doubt the working-class belief that labouring men needed three cooked meals a day partly motivated this action.⁷⁸

Asserting and Defending Union Principles

Ensuring that employees received award rates of pay and conditions and that standards in particular worksites met union approval assumed that all workers were, in fact, members of the union. This was not always the case and some employers were quite prepared to engage non-union labour where they could. Even by the late 1920s when preference to unionists was almost a decade old in many awards, the Employers' Association of Central Queensland was still 'totally opposed to the principle of preference

75. Austin Vaughan, interviewed 22 Nov. 1995.

76. AEU Minutes, 30 Oct. 1952. NBAC E162/33/3

77. Vaughan interview.

78. Richard Twopeny, *Town Life in Australia*, London, 1883, p. 63.

to unionists'. It criticised the 'indiscriminate' granting of preference by the then Board of Trade and Arbitration and claimed its action was totally without justification.⁷⁹ The association's members must have been disappointed indeed that the conservative Moore government did not remove preference in its new statute, the *Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act of 1929*, which became law six months after Labor lost office that year. Nevertheless, in an amendment the following year, the government removed the power of the then Industrial Court to award preference to any union. Fortunately for unions and their members, but to the detriment of employers, the following Forgan Smith Labor government promptly restored preference with its legislation, the *Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act of 1932*.⁸⁰

From the unions' point of view, non-union labour—'free' labour to employers but 'scabs' to the union—contradicted the fundamental union principle of employee unity against the employer and threatened unionism as an effective weapon in the workplace. Economically, non-union labour encouraged exploitation of workers and, in the case of an employer who did pay non-unionists award rates, unjustly allowed them to share the benefits of hard-won gains for which they had contributed nothing in dues and levies. And legally, where an award granted union preference, non-union labour infringed its terms while there were unemployed members available or where new employees subsequently failed to take out a union ticket. Any indication of the presence of non-union labour therefore galvanised officials into immediate action for the greater good of the union and its members.

The AEU organiser periodically reported instances where garage proprietors employed men who then failed join the union within the period specified in the award.

79. Employers' Association of Central Queensland, *Thirteenth Annual Report*, 1929, p. 8.

80. Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act of 1929 (20 Geo. V, No. 28), *Queensland Statutes*, 1929–1930, Vol. 15, pp. 12599–12600, s.57. The act provided that employers could engage any worker provided he/she joined a suitable union within 14 days; any worker could join a union upon written application and tendering of an appropriate fee, subject to being of 'good character and sober habits'; Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act Amendment Act of 1930 (21 Geo. V, No. 42), *Queensland Statutes*, 1929–1930, Vol. 15, pp. 13010–13011, s.10; Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act of 1932 (23 Geo. V, No. 36), *Queensland Statutes*, Vol. 17, p. 14283, s. 8(2);

Sometimes bosses deliberately paid them under the award rate in the knowledge that they would not complain to the union for fear of revealing their non-membership.⁸¹ Osborne's slaughter-yard regularly used free labour and, on one occasion, had the temerity to employ not only a non-unionist to cart meat but a female one at that!⁸² In such cases, the secretary threatened to call the Industrial Inspector if the employer failed to comply with the rules forthwith.⁸³

Burns and Twigg opposed union labour most vehemently. Founding partners William Burns and Foster Twigg, and Twigg's son Llewellyn, were all 'diehard as far as unions were concerned...strong against them...[and] would often stir them and the Inspector'.⁸⁴ On one occasion in 1929, AEU organiser John Willett confronted Burns about a scab worker, upon which Burns defiantly declared he 'was not going to allow [Willett] to force this man to join a Union composed of red raggers and agitators like [him]'. Burns jubilantly added that 'the Unions were now finished by a respectable [Moore] government being newly in power, that wages would be reduced and hours increased'.⁸⁵ Willett reported the confrontation to the Industrial Inspector who later informed him that the dues would be forthcoming. Whether the man paid up or whether Burns himself covered the cost was not revealed in Willett's report but either way it was a victory for the union over an old adversary.⁸⁶ It was an even sweeter victory for unionism when the government Burns had lauded lost the 1932 election. Burns and Twigg's habit of employing free labour also drew resentment from the FCDIU even though no carters were on the payroll. The union included the recalcitrant firm, along with numerous bakeries that did employ carters, in its policy of 'not assisting in any way' those businesses which persistently hired non-unionists.⁸⁷

81. C. Maxwell interview.

82. AMIEU Minutes, 29 Jan. 1924. CCQC J19/940 5

83. *ibid.*, 5 Jan. 1925.

84. Jack Neish, interviewed 23 May 1996.

85. *AEU Monthly Journal*, June 1929, p. 15.

86. *ibid.*, July 1929, p. 19.

87. FCDIU Minutes, 2 Feb. 1920. CCQC P16/1952 4

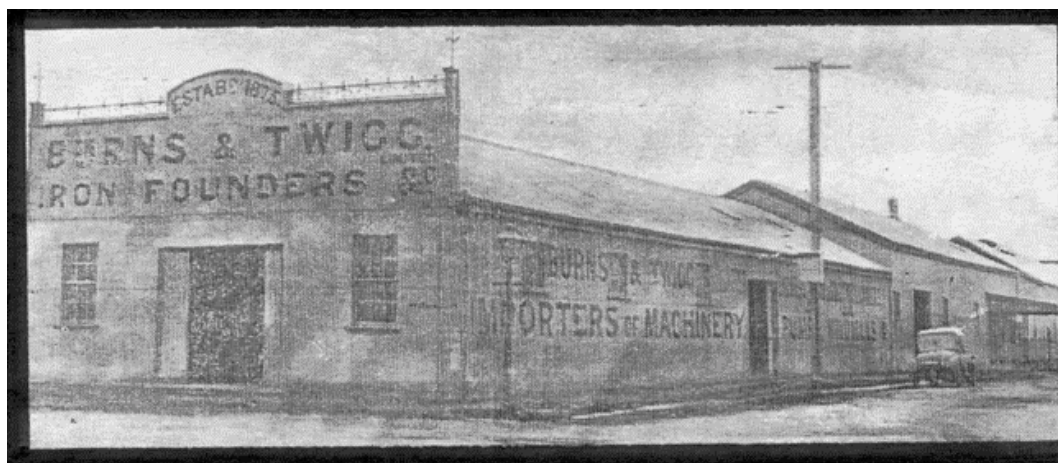


Fig. 65: Burns and Twigg Foundry and Engineering Works, 1908
QCL, May 1908

A second aspect of employee unity against the employer inherent in the principles of unionism was that no employer should be allowed union membership. While the idea of an employer seeking to join the union may appear improbable, the situation sometimes arose where a unionist went into small business for himself and put on a man to assist: he then became a boss. In the early decades, unions sometimes allowed workers in this category to retain their union membership, if they so desired, but only as long as they demonstrated their continued allegiance to union principles in the treatment of their employees. In the FCDIU, some members felt that the union should allow a good unionist like Stan Lucas, who went into business for himself in 1911, to be admitted as an honorary member. So, too, for any employers who were sympathetic to unionism, even though this was both against the rules and 'inadvisable' in the opinion of the president at the time, Richard Souter.⁸⁸ The union even elected one small employer who continued his membership, William R. Goss, to the presidency in 1914.⁸⁹ When some members questioned this anomaly in 1918, the union devised a local rule that any member who went into business could remain in the union as long as he did not join the employers' association.⁹⁰ Goss staunchly refused to ally himself with this latter group and maintained he was always a union man and Labor supporter.⁹¹

88. Carters and Storemen's Union Minutes, 11 Dec. 1911. CCQC P16/1952 1

89. *ibid.*, 22 Dec. 1914 and 4 Sept. 1916. CCQC P16/1952 2 and 3

90. *ibid.*, 2 Sept. 1918.

91. *ibid.*, 6 Apr. 1922. CCQC P16/1952 5

The AMIEU was not as tolerant of 'turncoats' as the FCDIU. In 1925, after a particularly trying time with retail butchers evading award provisions, the union refused to issue any more tickets to master butchers.⁹² This meant that Billy Keong, an AMIEU retail section stalwart, lost his membership when he took on running the State Butchery for two years after the former 'troublesome' manager left.⁹³ The same rule applied to foremen at the meatworks who, unlike their counterparts in the railway, were deemed to be 'the boss's men'.⁹⁴ The union instructed Thomas Neil to resign from the union on his appointment as yard foreman at 'the Creek', just as it did W.J. (Jack) Curran, a former AMIEU president, when he took over on the slaughter floor in 1920.⁹⁵ When foremen returned to their previous occupation—as they sometimes did—the union did not always welcome them back readily or warmly. The general meeting at first rejected John Garvey's application for readmission and later accepted it only after he apologised for his actions towards the union whilst a foreman.⁹⁶

In 1925, the local AMIEU submitted an item for the state conference that any member who became a master butcher or foreman be debarred from any official position for three years if he became an employee again.⁹⁷ Colin Maxwell had to abide by this rule and had to clearly demonstrate his renewed union allegiances after he returned on clearance in 1944.⁹⁸ For the previous few years, he had been a foreman in the cannery where he was obliged by his position as 'staff' to take an inflexible anti-union stance in doing the bidding of the boss. Understandably, Maxwell always played down his time on the other side of the industrial fence.⁹⁹

92. AMIEU Minutes, 16 Feb. 1925. CCQC J19/940 5

93. *ibid.*, 29 July 1927. CCQC J19/940 7

94. Joe Underdown, interviewed 7 June 1996.

95. AMIEU Minutes, 18 Apr. 1932. CCQC J19/941 2; AMIEU CDC Minutes, 20 June 1922. CCQC J19/940 5

96. AMIEU Minutes, 20 Apr. 1933. CCQC J19/941 2

97. *ibid.*, 4 June 1925. CCQC J19/940 5

98. AMIEU CDC Minutes, 19 Sept. 1944. CCQC J19/941 4

99. Bonnie Schwarten, interviewed 16 May 1996. In several hours of discussion with the author, Colin Maxwell did not reveal his early relationship to the company. His position as a foreman was probably influenced by his former father-in-law, Dick Scholes, who was the foreman in the freezer department.

Even small unions like the Federated Moulders (Metals) Union (FMMU) turned out of the fold members who had become employers. When Sid Robinson left Burns and Twigg and set up a small backyard foundry, he put on a mate as his 'off-sider'. Within a few weeks, Robinson had his union ticket rescinded. Feeling very bitter about being treated in this way after years of union loyalty, Robinson nevertheless resolved to maintain union standards towards his growing number of employees. But, being rejected by the union for being part of 'the boss class', he never voted Labor again.¹⁰⁰

Another membership problem relating to employers that sometimes confronted patrolling secretaries and organisers was the situation of a working family member. For example, Len Haigh reported that Albert Funch had recently gone into retail butchering and had his father assisting in the shop without a union ticket. Haigh warned Funch to have his father take out a ticket or dispense with his services if he did not want the union to take the matter further.¹⁰¹ Employers sometimes claimed a family employee was a partner in the firm and was therefore exempt from union membership. The FCDIU did not fall for this ploy and demanded to see legal documentation as proof.¹⁰²

Enforcing issues of union principle in the major industrial sites of the wharves, meatworks and railway was far more complex and protracted than the dealings unions had with small business proprietors. It was not simply a matter of the secretary-organiser confronting the boss or alerting the Industrial Inspector to breaches of the award. In these large industries, unions which could not achieve their aims by negotiation or arbitration found direct action in the form of disruptive go-slows, overtime bans, work-to-regulations, stoppages and strikes, sometimes proved a speedier and more effective strategy for obtaining their demands from management. To enhance their power, the WWF, AMIEU and major railway unions had extensive and comparatively militant union support networks on which to draw. At the same time, local industrial problems often

100. Sid Robinson, interviewed 2 Mar. 1993.

101. AMIEU Minutes, 5 Jan. 1925. CCQC J19/940 5

102. ARTWU Minutes, 9 July 1928. CCQC P16/1952 7

reflected those experienced in other union sub-branches across the state and Rockhampton bodies found themselves drawn into wider disputes and major strikes in the name of union solidarity.

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In flexing their muscle through direct action, unions found themselves confronting considerable opposition from the 'big bosses'. Shipping and meat companies, both individually and collectively, had enormous capital resources to back a sustained fight over industrial issues. In the case of the railway unions, direct confrontation with the employer meant doing battle with the Labor government. These unions also serviced key industries whose disruption meant not only loss of trade and decreased profit for employers but could also precipitate wider economic and social disruption as a powerful weapon. The conflict of principles, balance of strength and economic importance of these industries at times made an explosive combination which resulted in widespread and protracted strike action in which Rockhampton unions became involved.

Equity on the Wharves

The enduring concern of the WWF was the method of engaging labour for waterfront work. Employers hired wharf labour on a casual basis only, with selection undertaken as and when boats docked at the wharves. Until the early 1920s, the traditional 'bull system' of recruitment prevailed. Twice a day at labour pick-ups on the vacant land between the wharves and Quay Street, the stevedores¹⁰³ from the various shipping agents 'inspected [the men] like a lot of prize bullocks'. They usually chose the strongest men who could do the fastest and heaviest work.¹⁰⁴ Other wharfies who

103. Although this term has been variously applied to the shipping firms, the foreman/overseer and the wharf labourers, its specific use in union minutes and in government inquiries relates to the foremen who chose the labour and oversaw wharf operations.

104. Evidence Given to the Report of the Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Causes and Extent of Unemployment in the Calling of Waterside Workers in the Various Ports of Queensland, and into Other Matters Incidental Thereto, Conducted by T.A. Ferry (Chairman), W.E. Moxson (Employers' Representative) and E.B. Purnell (WWF Representative). Hereafter referred to as the Ferry Report. *QPP*, 1926, Vol. 2, p.5.

'crawled' to the stevedore with bribes of money, beer or free firewood also readily obtained work.¹⁰⁵ Active unionists—'troublemakers'—on the other hand, frequently found themselves overlooked in the line-up as early leaders like E.B. Purnell and Jack Burke found out soon after the union's re-formation.¹⁰⁶

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Fig. 66: Aerial View of Deepwater Wharf, circa 1938.

The pick-up took place on the vacant land behind the wharf. Town Wharves are at the top of the picture

RPA

Because of favouritism, corruption and victimisation, there was great inequity in the distribution of work and large variation in wharfies' incomes. Some gained frequent shifts and earned big money; others went weeks without any work and income at all. The injustice of this 'chopping-block' method of selection, where some were picked and others

105. Guley interview; Victor Williams, *The Years of Big Jim*, Victoria Park, 1975, p. 53.

106. *Worker*, 25 Mar. 1905, p. 7.

missed out, greatly upset the union. This was especially so after the 1921 state award granted preference to WWF members and directed the companies to make 'every effort' to secure an equal distribution of work among members.¹⁰⁷ However, Rockhampton men claimed that foremen still made very little effort to ensure equity. They sometimes deliberately delayed the second pick of the day until the 'star' or 'fancy' gangs of favourites had knocked off and could line up again. They also evaded the equity provisions by citing another clause which allowed the exclusion of anyone considered incompetent or who did not work to the satisfaction of the employer.¹⁰⁸ These terms could conveniently cover any out-of-favour wharfies. William Brown claimed he was 'left out of every job' for five months while George Thompson was black-listed for 16 months after disputes with foremen.¹⁰⁹

It was essential that the WWF enforced its own policy of preference to unionists to protect them from any free labourers who might turn up to pick-ups. It was also imperative that the union pushed for a system to regulate the picking order—'preference in employment' the union called it, as distinct from the former 'preference to unionists'. These measures would minimise victimisation by employers as well as provide greater equity within the membership. WWF branches throughout Queensland had first proposed an egalitarian rotary system of selection in 1921 but had done nothing to enforce it. So, faced with the inability of the award to ensure equality and the state WWF's failure to take effective steps, the local branch imposed its own method of recruitment on employers in 1924. The union refused all work outside the hours from 8.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m., including travelling to and from Port Alma or sleeping at the port. Employers therefore had only about five hours' work per day from the men and even less if the train was delayed. This action caused hold-ups in loading large quantities of export meat from

107. Waterside Workers' Award—State, *QGG*, 1921, Vol. 116, No. 268, 9 June, 14(1), p. 1803 and 21(1), p. 1805.

108. Ferry Report, p. 17.

109. *ibid.*

Lakes Creek so the agents reluctantly agreed to the system devised by the union to allow work to recommence.¹¹⁰

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While on that occasion the local union faced and solved its own labour control problem, its incorporation in a federated structure disposed the union to wider disputes in the name of solidarity. In 1925, all other Queensland ports except Brisbane and Townsville finally decided to enforce a strict rotary scheme of engagement by refusing to accept work on any other basis.¹¹³ With the shipping companies suspending all trade to offending ports and without the support of the two largest waterfronts in the state, the strike could not succeed. After five weeks, Rockhampton wharfies decided in a three-to-one majority to accept the Industrial Court's direction to return to the previous system

110. *MB*, 30 Oct. 1924, p. 9 and 4 Nov. 1924, p. 14.

111. Ferry Report, p. 18.

112. *ibid.*, pp. 17, 21 and 26.

113. *MB*, 8 Aug. 1925

pending a full inquiry into waterfront unemployment.¹¹⁴ The subsequent 1926 Ferry Report, for which E.B. Purnell acted as the WWF representative, found that the 1924 system of engagement was the fairest for waterside workers in Rockhampton and still left agents the some flexibility in choosing labour and placing it where they wanted.¹¹⁵ However, there must not have been a satisfactory return to the 1924 system after the report's release because the WWF secretary advised the Department for Labour and Industry in 1928 that there was 'some dissatisfaction among members over the unequal distribution of work' even though they were 'all getting a little work' as the Depression steadily encroached on port trade.¹¹⁶ The 1925 state rotary strike, therefore, gained the local WWF nothing. In the short-term, the men forfeited one month's sorely needed income and, in the long-term, they lost the improved system of labour selection they had secured through their independent union efforts in 1924. The experience made them more cautious about participation in wider disputes for many years.

The 1928 Waterside Workers' Award handed down by Mr Justice Beeby of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court brought Queensland waterside workers under federal jurisdiction again.¹¹⁷ This change, and the awards' terms, caused a wave of protest strikes throughout national ports but Rockhampton and Gladstone were the only Queensland ports not to 'come into line' by participating. The separate terms and conditions for Queensland in the new federal award were the same as the 1927 state award and, as Secretary Purnell advised the Brisbane branch to explain Rockhampton's lack of participation, 'local working conditions and rules remain undisturbed' under the new award.¹¹⁸ Thus, there was no rush of volunteer labour to man the wharves in Rockhampton nor any union protests and violence as in many other ports. As a result, the harsh annual licensing requirements of the subsequent *Transport Workers' Act 1928*—

114. *ibid.*, 7, 10, 11 Sept. 1925 and 12, 13 Oct., 1925.

115. Ferry Report, p. 18. The report made appropriate recommendations for other Queensland ports also.

116. Reports on Industry by Union Secretaries, *QIG*, 1928, Vol. 13, No. 9, 24 Sept., p. 583.

117. Waterside Workers' Award, *CAR*, 1928, Vol. 26, pp. 867-951.

118. Margo Beasley, *Wharfies: The History of the Waterside Workers' Federation*, Sydney, 1996, p. 80; Waterside Workers' Award, *CAR*, 1928, Vol. 26, p. 936; Purnell to Brisbane Branch Secretary, reported in *MB*, 15 Sept. 1928.

rushed through by the federal government in the wake of the strike—were seemingly not enforced in Rockhampton as they were in many other ports in Queensland and elsewhere.¹¹⁹ There was no licensing agent appointed for Rockhampton and the infamous 'dog collar' licence was the only document that one former wharfie, Harry Boyd senior, did not have among his meticulous collection of annual union tickets, port transfers, personal work logs and other memorabilia of his working life on the wharves from 1913 to the 1950s.¹²⁰

Following an application by the shipping companies, the Arbitration Court cancelled the highly prized union preference clause for Queensland and removed the rotary system (of sorts) from the ports in which it was operating.¹²¹ The 1932 federal award then incorporated Queensland ports in its uniform terms which also excluded a preference clause. Despite numerous requests to the court over the next decade, the national WWF could not succeed in having preference restored.¹²² Nevertheless, through those dark days for the union nationally, Rockhampton wharfies seemed to fare reasonably well. There were some complaints about the employers 'conspiring to defeat the spirit of the award' by giving certain members who had more than 30 hours work preference over members who had none, and of the 'pinpricking tactics of the stevedores'.¹²³ Yet complaints at meetings about favouritism, victimisation and selection of outside labour were more the exception than the rule according to minute books from 1937 at least. In a conference between the union and shipping agents in 1940, the agents gave their assurance that they would make every endeavour for equitable work

119. Transport Workers' Act, No. 37 of 1928, *Acts of the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia*, 1928, p. 112; Report of Committee of Inquiry into the Stevedoring Industry (Tait Report), *New South Wales Parliamentary Papers: Papers Presented to Parliament*, 1957-58, Vol. 5, p. 16. The licences, which could be easily revoked for disobeying 'lawful orders', refusal to work according to the award, intimidation, violence or other offences were required in Melbourne, Port Adelaide, Newcastle, Brisbane, Townsville and 'a number of other Queensland ports'. As Sydney was exempted because of a rapid return to work under the Beeby Award, it is logical to assume that Rockhampton, as the only port in Queensland not striking at all, would be also be exempted on similar grounds. In his biography of Jim Healy, the WWF general secretary from 1937 to 1961, Victor Williams, *The Years of Big Jim*, p. 13, claims that Mackay was the only port in Queensland to work under the Beeby award and in which the Transport Workers' Act was not enforced. However, this is contradicted by the evidence, none of which is cited by Williams.

120. *Commonwealth Labour and Industry Report No. 19*, Vol. 29, p. 105; Boyd interview.

121. Beasley, *Wharfies*, pp. 84-85.

122. Waterside Workers' Award, *CAR*, 1932, Vol. 31, p. 25 and *CAR*, 1936, Vol. 36, p. 103.

123. WWF Minutes, 25 Aug. 1938; 23 Mar. 1939, 31 July 1939 and 27 Aug. 1941. NBAC Z387/33/1

distribution. They agreed to choose labour from a list which applied the WWF's own equalisation system—the lowest-earning men during the previous month to be allocated jobs first—but flatly refused to allow the union to take over the actual selection of labour.¹²⁴

The turning point in the control of waterfront labour was the establishment of the Stevedoring Industry Commission (SIC) by the new war-time Curtin Labor government in 1942. Although determination of wage rates remained with the Arbitration Court, the SIC formally took control of the stevedoring industry from the shipping companies and regulated the engagement of labour and general wharf conditions. This intervention by the state into the area of labour supply greatly advantaged the WWF both nationally and locally. The SIC implemented the gang rotary system, gave the union the right to supply labour, took the power to allocate jobs from the stevedores and set labour quotas for each port.¹²⁵ The commission maintained a licensing requirement but, with union control of labour and a union ballot for 'suitable' new members to fill any quota shortfall, the licence was not seen as a punitive measure. However, the SIC could, and did, compulsorily transfer labour from port to port as required.¹²⁶

Within the SIC-administered system, there was still flexibility for local practice. Rather than adopt the gang rotary system which Rockhampton WWF believed only worked effectively in very large ports, the local union gained approval to continue an equalisation system. Similar to the earlier scheme, the lowest earners over a three month period had preference, with the highest earners being taken off the list when 'shortening' occurred.¹²⁷ Such a scheme was difficult to administer and discussion about the introduction of an equalisation system for Rockhampton at the SIC in 1948 suggests that the initial scheme lapsed at some point and an individual rotary scheme then operated.¹²⁸

124. *ibid.*, 19 June 1940; 19 Jan 1941, 5 Mar. 1941 and 28 May 1941.

125. Tait Report, p.18.

126. Boyd interview; Draper interview.

127. *MW*, 19 Sept. 1942.

128. Stevedoring Industry Commission (SIC) Reports, July 1948, p. 13. NBAC E217/79

Under a reconstituted SIC after the war, the union experienced a renewed attack by the combined shipping companies over labour recruitment. The companies pressured the new SIC to maintain the reserve pool of outside labour the WWF had permitted as an emergency concession under wartime conditions. They claimed there were insufficient gangs to handle the post-war shipping boom in meat exports and general trade.¹²⁹ In response, the union flatly refused a reserve labour pool and only reluctantly agreed to increase the port quota by 12 men—a compromise to protect the earnings of existing members and to ease employers' cries for standby labour.¹³⁰ Perhaps in response to this concession, the SIC agreed to the union's request to dispense with the afternoon pick for city work. The second pick had been a constant source of complaint for decades. Henceforth, labour engagement was between 9.00 a.m. and 11.00 a.m. and Saturday pick-ups for the city and Port Alma wharves were abolished.¹³¹ Other positive changes for the WWF nationally under the peace-time SIC were the introduction of attendance pay and annual leave which brought greater economic stability and certainty in a casual industry.¹³²

Just as a Labor government placed the control of labour supply in WWF hands in 1942, a change of government threatened to reverse the position in 1954. The Menzies government proposed to amend its 1949 legislation, which had replaced the SIC with the Australian Stevedoring Industry Board (ASIB),¹³³ to again give shipping companies the right to recruit labour. The companies claimed union control of labour caused slow turn-arounds, frequent stoppages and failure to fill quotas set by the ASIB—all of which the local union strenuously denied for its own performance. As Rockhampton secretary Jack Curtin claimed, the shipping companies wanted free labour which they 'could turn on and off like a water tap' but the WWF had a responsibility to look after the welfare of its

129. *ibid.*, Apr. 1946, pp. 7-8 and July 1946, p. 14. NBAC E217/77

130. *ibid.*, July 1948, p. 13. NBAC E217/79

131. *ibid.*, Nov. 1946, p. 12 and Jan. 1948, p. 11. NBAC E217/77 and 79

132. Beasley, *Wharfies*, p. 131.

133. The ASIB was replaced by the Australian Stevedoring Industry Authority (ASIA) in 1956.

members.¹³⁴ Like other WWF branches throughout Australia, the local union feared this would not just return wharfies to the old unjust conditions but would also eventually allow employers to control union affairs 'by the class of labour they would recruit'.¹³⁵

The response of Rockhampton wharfies to the proposed changes reflected their determination to maintain control of the labour supply which they had effectively possessed since 1942 and at various times in earlier years. Rockhampton branch joined a national strike over the proposed recruitment changes in November 1954. Members picketed the city wharves daily to ensure that the agents selected no free labour and their wives set up a committee to give mutual practical and moral support to the wharf community. AMIEU members held a day's sympathy stop-work and other unions offered moral support in a combined protest meeting at Trades Hall.¹³⁶ Almost a fortnight later, the national WWF reluctantly accepted an ACTU recommendation to return to work and resolved to make the amendments unworkable by black-banning for life any wharf worker recruited other than by the union.¹³⁷ The tactic succeeded. With both the government and shipping companies finally acknowledging that the industry could not operate effectively without the union maintaining the right to recruit and supply labour, both employers and union signed an agreement to that effect in the following February.¹³⁸

In 1956, the Menzies government introduced a bill to create another new statutory body, the Australian Stevedoring Industry Authority (ASIA), and to give the shipping companies power to engage and register extra labour in busy periods. While this latter provision was never used, the companies effected other changes that the union believed were in retaliation for a pay increase following a nationwide strike earlier in the year.¹³⁹ They successfully applied for a variation to remove all restrictions on sling loads and to

134. *MB*, 22 July 1954 p. 6.

135. *ibid.*, 4-5 Nov. 1954 and 9 Nov. 1954.

136. *ibid.*, 10 Nov. 1954.

137. *ibid.*, 4 Nov. 1954 and 16 Nov. 1954.

138. Beasley, *Wharfies*, p. 174.

139. Waterside Workers' Award, Judgment and Award, *CAR*, 1956, Vol. 85, pp. 295-299.

decrease gang sizes.¹⁴⁰ At Port Alma, reduction of freezer gangs from 16 men to 12 resulted in stop-works and the suspension of some 100 members. The union claimed it had been the local practice for the past 40 years to employ 16-man gangs on freezer work and that the move was simply 'provocative action' by shipping companies. Moreover, the union asserted, if the employers could decrease gang size and thereby increase the work per man, then the men could shorten their shifts.¹⁴¹ On this occasion however, the national WWF did not take strike action because the union executive considered that wharfies had secured better incomes and conditions than most other unions at the time and would therefore get little sympathy from the wider union movement.¹⁴² Unity on the part of the workers and their unions was critical under an unsympathetic federal Liberal-Country Party government. Accepting the decision, the local WWF handled the matter of smaller freezer gangs itself, just as it had done with its earlier labour concerns. Using the fewer men assigned to the task under the award, wharfies devised an easier and more efficient method of loading frozen beef than any other port in Australia to compensate for the reduced man power.¹⁴³

The fact that wharfies now had better incomes and conditions than many other workers was a reflection of the effectiveness of union action but, as already seen, the latter was a more recent matter for concern than the former. The local wharfies had first pushed for their own 'fair rate of increased pay' 50 years earlier under the guidance of E.B. Purnell.¹⁴⁴ In 1956 however, wage demands were the province of the federal union body and, that year, the local union had joined the national strike to secure increased rates of pay—the same strike that precipitated the retaliatory alterations to gang sizes and sling loads. The three-week dispute of January and February 1956 was in demand of increased margins which waterside workers—unlike workers in many other industries—had not received since 1948. Balanced against the increased cost of living, wharfies now earned

140. *ibid.*, p. 184.

141. *MB*, 30 Mar. 1957.

142. Beasley, *Wharfies*, p. 185.

143. *MB*, 6, 12 and 18 April 1957; Guley interview.

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

less than they did eight years earlier.¹⁴⁵ The national WWF had approached the Arbitration Court on several occasions to remedy this deficiency but after Mr Justice Ashburner had refused the most recent request in late 1955, the union lost hope in and patience with the judicial process and initiated a 24-hour stoppage.¹⁴⁶

In the direct negotiations with employers which the WWF then pursued, the union proposed a 1s per hour marginal increase. The employers responded with an offer of half that amount—6d per hour—and with conditions which, in the opinion of the local men, 'took [them] back 50 years'. These included compulsory transfers; placement of labour and judgement of misdemeanours by employers—all of which permitted victimisation; altered 'smokos' and lengthened shifts; the use of outside labour; press and radio call-ups; and the cessation of unauthorised stoppages.¹⁴⁷ The WWF was prepared to compromise at 9d per hour with continued negotiation on conditions but the employers claimed they could not afford that level of increase.¹⁴⁸ With both arbitration and negotiation having failed, the only instrument remaining at the WWF's disposal was the withdrawal of its membership's labour in a nationwide strike.

In response to the call to strike and its support by the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), Rockhampton WWF immediately formed sub-committees to coordinate local action and to organise publicity, employing the same methods they had used so effectively in the 1954 recruitment dispute. As part of the national strategy, the local men not only picketed the wharves but also embarked on a massive propaganda drive. They printed 40,000 pamphlets explaining their case and distributed these door-to-door throughout the city and immediate district of Rockhampton; they delivered them to Gladstone, Mount Morgan and down through the Dawson Valley; and they dispatched them north to St Lawrence and throughout the Far West to Winton. In this wider

145. Beasley, *Wharfies*, pp. 175 and 176.

146. *MB*, 14 Oct. 1955, p. 4 and 19 Oct. 1955, p. 11; Beasley, *Wharfies*, p. 175.

147. Margins Dispute Pamphlet distributed by WWF Rockhampton Branch, 25 Jan. 1956. CCQC M14/1565 5; *MB*, 24 Jan. 1956, p. 1 and 25 Jan. 1956, p. 1; Beasley, *Wharfies*, pp. 175 and 176.

148. *MB*, 24 Jan. 1956, p. 1.

distribution, the ARU proved an invaluable ally. The WWF even boasted in the national *Maritime Worker* that some of the leaflets actually reached the new Woomera Rocket Range in South Australia, although exactly how they got there was not revealed. While wharfies produced the pamphlets and made local deliveries, members of the Waterside Workers' Ladies Auxiliary 'rallied to the Federation' by providing refreshments and entertaining the men and their families with a concert to keep their spirits up.¹⁴⁹

As was only to be expected, Rockhampton Trades and Labour Council, which was still in the hands of the reactionary right-wingers and their Movement backers, considered that the WWF should accept the 6d per week offered by the shipping companies.¹⁵⁰ But what shocked, angered and disappointed the wharfies was that, by early February, the ACTU unilaterally and publicly recommended the men return to work on the basis of the 6d per hour increase and take up the case again in the Arbitration Court. The local Trades and Labour Council whole-heartedly supported this suggestion.¹⁵¹ The national WWF executive, although equally dismayed at this under-hand action by the ACTU, had little option but to adopt the recommendation for the sake of the all-important unity in the labour movement.¹⁵²

Fortunately for the WWF as a whole, the cloud of immediate industrial defeat contained a silver lining. Mr Justice Ashburner, who had refused to grant any increase only four months earlier, subsequently awarded a margin of 8d per hour extra, together with increased attendance money, sick leave and other improvements. He also granted the employers some concessions on the matters of transfers, deployment of labour, shift-lengths and call-ups. As far as the WWF was concerned, it was an ultimate even if subdued victory, attributable to their willingness to take direct action where other means

149. Margins Dispute Pamphlet distributed by WWF Rockhampton Branch, 25 Jan. 1956. CCQC M14/1565 5; WWF Minutes, 23 Jan, 1956. NBAC Z387/33/2; *MW*, 20 Mar. 1956, p. 2; *MB*, 24 Jan. 1956, p. 1 and 26 Jan. 1956, p. 1; Beasley, *Wharfies*, pp. 176 and 180.

150. *MB*, 28 Jan. 1956, p. 1.

151. *MB*, 9 Feb. 1956, p. 4.

152. *MB*, 15 Feb. 1956, p. 1.

had proved futile.¹⁵³ It was also testimony to their industrial power as a union determined to advance the cause of wharfies by improving their terms of employment.

Customs and Rights at the Meatworks

Like the WWF, control over the labour supply also became the AMIEU's major bone of contention with management at the Lakes Creek meatworks. However, unlike its federal counterpart for waterside workers, the Meat Export Award–State enshrined the principle of preference to unionists in its terms almost from the outset. Even when meatworkers in North Queensland and Gladstone lost preference for some time following a major strike in 1919, Rockhampton and southern meatworkers who had not joined the dispute retained their right to preference.¹⁵⁴ This did not mean that employers readily accepted preference and, at times when the union refused to supply labour in protest at some particular issue, management would apply to the court to have the clause struck out. One such attempt occurred in 1941 when local meatworkers struck in accordance with state AMIEU directions to force the restoration of a depression wage cut in the industry.¹⁵⁵ Not until the state-wide strike of 1946 was the preference clause deleted from the award, whereupon non-union or scab labour posed a major challenge to the union.

The AMIEU's central and longstanding dispute with management was preference in employment, or seniority, on a 'last on and first off' basis in recruitment, promotion and dismissal. In work which, like waterside labour, was casual and mostly semi-skilled or unskilled, anyone could turn up for selection and obtain work. To provide some job security and certainty of income for long-term workers in the industry, as well as to reduce the opportunity for victimisation by employers, the union argued for a system of seniority based on length of satisfactory service to both the company and the union. Only

153. *MB*, 31 Mar. 1956, p. 1; Beasley, *Wharfies*, p. 182.

154. Meat Export Award–State, Judgment, *QGG*, 1919, Vol. 4, No. 3, 10 Mar., pp. 188-189; Meat Export Award–State, *QGG*, 1920, Vol. 114, No. 224, 30 Apr., p. 1805.

155. News cutting from *MB*, 29 May–10 June 1941 in AMIEU Cutting Book. CCQC J19/945 2

one condition over-rode seniority based on length of service: union delegates had preference in employment over all rank-and-file members. As early as 1918, the local sub-branch declared that it would push for seniority in the various departments of the works, even for female labour in packing. The principle of seniority henceforth became 'a corner stone of Union policy' at Lakes Creek as it did in the wider AMIEU.¹⁵⁶



Fig. 67: Men and Women in Packing Room, Lakes Creek, circa 1910
RML

One way the AMIEU could ensure seniority—in engaging labour at least—was to secure the task for itself. In 1919, local union officials negotiated a mutual agreement for the supply of labour from Trades Hall, even though the company maintained its right under the award to refuse anyone it considered unsatisfactory.¹⁵⁷ The practice of the union supplying labour according to company needs became formalised in the 1922 state

156. AMIEU CDC Minutes, 28 Sept 1918 and 9 Dec. 1918. CCQC J19/940 4; W. Hodson, Northern District Secretary, quoted in *MLJ*, Jan. 1939, p. 6.

157. AMIEU Minutes, 7 Jan. 1919. CCQC J19/940 4

award.¹⁵⁸ In line with the union's seniority policy, the secretary selected workers according to length of service. A gang system existed for the slaughter floor and freezer departments but elsewhere it was an individual preference according to the year of commencement. These seniority lists were formalised in annual mutual agreements and, like many other aspects of labour control and work arrangements, became accepted as long-term customs and practices. The union resented bitterly any infringement of its sacrosanct seniority rule by management engaging workers at the gate, by its discontinuation through cancellation of an agreement; or by a new employer's refusal to acknowledge and maintain the custom when the works changed hands.¹⁵⁹

Union-controlled pick-ups avoided discrimination in hiring but the problem of management ignoring seniority still occurred throughout the season or as the slack approached, particularly where union representatives—'troublemakers'—were concerned. The dismissal of long-time Central District Councillor and freezer delegate Frank West before all other hands had finished the season brought a strong complaint about breaking the 'delegates last off' custom.¹⁶⁰ Ordinary members also reported unfair treatment by the company and stand-over tactics by certain foremen. Partly to minimise this victimisation and reduce the opportunity for favouritism and partly to maintain control over its members' work, the union insisted that all communication between foremen and workers had to go through the delegate. This, too, became an established custom and practice at Lakes Creek and elicited strong complaint by the union when not observed by the staff. On several occasions, the failure of a foreman to address workers through the delegate caused a protest walk-out by the men.¹⁶¹

The AMIEU also believed it had a right to influence the production process at Lakes Creek when it was in the best interests of its members to do so. On the principle of a fair day's pay for a fair day's work, the union strenuously opposed any increase in the

158. Meat Export Award-State, *QGG*, 1922, Vol. 118, No. 10, 10 Jan., p. 112.

159. AMIEU Minutes, 21 Aug. 1924 and 20 Oct. 1924. CCQC J19/940 5

160. *ibid.*, 29 Aug. 1922. CCQC J19/940 5

161. AMIEU CDC Minutes, 20 Oct. 1924 and 14 Feb. 1946. CCQC J19/940 5 and 942 4

workforce if it meant decreased earnings per hour for existing workers. At the peak of the season, management usually requested an increase in the size of slaughter gang but for many years the union successfully resisted pressure to expand the usual maximum 15-butcher gang to an 18-gang.¹⁶² When approached to increase the gang size in 1940, the union argued that, with only one race in operation, there was too much congestion to keep cattle up to the butchers who worked on a tally basis and usually finished by 1.30 p.m. The Lakes Creek slaughtermen, it claimed, 'ridicule the idea, and strenuously object to being expected to stay there all day to earn what they now do in normal hours'.¹⁶³ On that occasion, instructed by the court and influenced by wartime necessity, the union agreed to increase the labour supply.¹⁶⁴ At other times, the union objected to an increased slaughter gang or weekend killing, both of which shortened the season for everybody and meant lower overall income per worker.¹⁶⁵ When the company installed a new and extended slaughter floor for the 1955 season, the union used a request for an increase to a 21-butcher gang as 'a lever' to remove many 'anomalies' in its relationship with management.¹⁶⁶

While the union generally had no objection to members working overtime at award rates, it vehemently opposed any increased rate of production for company profit. In 1915, the subject of speeding-up in the preserving (canning) room was first raised at the general meeting which firmly declared it against union principles.¹⁶⁷ The union also considered that company proposals to introduce piecework to the boning room and incentive payments to workers were not in their best interests.¹⁶⁸ In 1953, management attempted to speed-up production in some departments by staggering smokos and meal

162. The slaughter gang size for minimum production was the 6-butcher gang, consisting of 6 tradesmen butchers (the 'cut') and a regular team of about 40 labourers (who were 'outside "the cut"'). Those in the 6-butcher gang had seniority in employment and worked from the opening of the season to the end. A 6-gang slaughtered 200 head per day. Gang size progressively increased to 9, 12, 15, 18 and later 21 butchers as slaughtering peaked, with the corresponding increase in the number of labourers. Underdown interview; Reynolds interview; Les Hagstrom, interviewed 6 June, 1996.

163. *MLJ*, June 1940, p.4.

164. *ibid.*, p. 9.

165. Underdown interview; Reynolds interview.

166. *MLJ*, Sept. 1954, pp. 6-8 and Oct. 1954, p. 9.

167. AMIEU Minutes, 16 June 1915. CCQC J19/940 3

168. *ibid.*, 4 Nov. 1924, 1 Aug. 1941 and 6 Oct. 1947. CCQC J19/940 5 and 941 3 and 5

breaks, by intimidation and by 'some reprisals to suit their desires for greater profits from production'. The union responded to the tactics with 'suitable actions'.¹⁶⁹ An integral part of these actions was the 'go slow'. The union viewed this strategy as a legitimate weapon to coerce management into conceding on a particular matter, as an overall 'irritation tactic' or as an effective way to extend the season as work tailed off. In a 'go slow', meatworkers dawdled over tasks; formed long queues to sharpen knives more often than necessary; took extended smokes and 'lapses'; and hid in the lavatories reading the paper or smoking—all to deliberately hold up the production process.¹⁷⁰ If the foreman 'chatted' the men about their pace, they went even slower.¹⁷¹

From the company's perspective, union policies on labour supply and production transgressed their managerial rights to employ whom they wanted and when they wanted, to move workers where needed and to determine output. A common ploy on the company's part was to stop production when desired—for example, before a public holiday or when the freezers were full. The usual strategy was to 'cause a blue' or provoke the union into strike action through an arbitrary dismissal. As with labour issues, this action resulted in retribution by the union at a time when damage to the company could be maximised. A lightning 24-hour stop-work just as the meat wagons were iced up for the rail trip to a waiting ship at Port Alma was the perfect union revenge.¹⁷² On occasions, management also retaliated to strikes by paying off employees in what constituted a lockout. Fortunately, such incidents were generally associated with state-wide industrial trouble like the 1941 restoration of a depression wage cut rather than being localised disputes.¹⁷³

As with the WWF's battle with shipping companies and their agents, contention between the AMIEU and meatworks management usually involved several inter-related

169. *MJJ*, Nov.-Dec. 1953, p. 3.

170. Hinchliff interview; C. Maxwell interview.

171. AMIEU Minutes, 16 Mar, 1925. CCQC J19/940 5

172. C. Maxwell interview.

173. News cutting from *MB*, 29 May–10 June 1941 in AMIEU Cutting Book. CCQC J19/945 2

issues concerning the control of labour and production. The case of Louis Zammitt provides an early illustration of this complex struggle and how individual members became the victims in the power-play between the company and the union. In 1928, management requested men for loading frozen meat on a Saturday morning. The union supplied the names of nine men who had seniority in that task and who were to be employed before any further names were tendered. Of these nine, the company refused to engage Louis Zammitt—claiming he had insulted the foreman—and maintained it had the right under the award to refuse work to any unsuitable employee. The union counter-claimed that Zammitt had had various jobs at Lakes Creek for 15 years; that previous foremen had never complained about him; and that he had worked all other boats that season without trouble. The union secretary refused to supply any further labour until the 'established custom' of employing men in order of previous seasons' work was respected. This demand was made even though the company had recently changed hands and the new management was not a party to any such agreement or understanding.¹⁷⁴

As passions rose in a compulsory conference on the dispute, the CQME Company representative declared that management had the right to employ whomsoever it wanted and that seniority was not a custom where it was concerned. Moreover, he alleged that the union was trying to stop production and that Len Haigh regularly told the men 'to work while the boss is watching them and to "loaf" when he took his eye off them'. The secretary vehemently denied both accusations.¹⁷⁵ The magistrate found for the union in the matter and ruled that the company should respect the custom which 'should be taken as attaching to the works regardless of the change of ownership'. Zammitt, it appears, was the innocent pawn in the company's test case over labour control and, while reinstated at the court's direction, he received no compensation for lost wages.¹⁷⁶

174. Purchased by Angliss, even though the trading name, Central Queensland Meat Export Company adopted in 1880, continued for the whole of the period of this study.

175. *MB*, 1 Aug. 1928.

176. Meat Export Award, Judgment re Louis Zammitt Case, *QIG*, 1928, Vol. 13, No. 10, 24 Oct., p. 613.

The owners from 1934, the British firm of Vestey Bros, continued the seniority custom by mutual agreement. But in 1940, they 'gingered up the members' by cancelling the agreement to give preference in engaging and retention of a gang system where applicable. Union threats of direct action made at a 'splendid' mass meeting of 650 workers secured a new agreement with management by the next day, with the document enshrining what the union considered its 'full rights' to continue seniority.¹⁷⁷ From that period until the end of the war, National Security regulations controlled the employment and dismissal of meatworkers with the local Manpower Committee working in close association with the union for labour selection. As with the WWF, this war-time intervention by the state greatly empowered the union in its control of the labour supply and allowed it to effectively assert its hallowed principle of 'first-on and last-off'.

After the war, and in line with the Queensland Meatworks' Companies Committee's policy, management endeavoured to reassert full managerial control into which it believed the union had made too many inroads through war-time regulations. This was particularly so for labour control and for the many customs and practices which had become regarded as union rights by then.¹⁷⁸ In late 1945, the Works Board of Control requested that, in line with accepted practice over many years, the company dismiss three boners who had failed to pay union fines. When management refused, the union imposed an overtime ban which, even when lifted, failed to secure the men's dismissal. The company maintained that the union was restricting production; the union accused management of refusing it any role whatsoever in the operation of the works, just as it had ignored union overtures to establish a works' production committee during the war.¹⁷⁹ After a further refusal of the union to increase the slaughter gang and a one-day stoppage, the Industrial Court ruled against the union:

177. *MLJ*, Mar. 1940, p. 15.

178. Hinchliff interview.

179. *MLJ*, Nov. 1942, p. 5, Dec. 1942, p. 5 and Jan. 1943, p. 8.

There is no authority under the award or anywhere else for the Union to usurp the functions of the management and to place a limit on or restrict the output of production in any way.¹⁸⁰

Thus the offenders remained in the boning room but as non-unionists.

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The challenge to the union's control of the labour force continued in January 1946 when the company put up notices that, henceforth, all workers having to leave early required the direct permission of the foreman on pain of dismissal. This tit-for-tat action followed a two-day unauthorised stop work in December by boners protesting against the presence of the three renegades in their department. The union boners had knocked-off without the foreman's approval as required by the company. Subsequent to the posting of the notice, the company refused work to nine members who had left early on the preceding Friday without the foreman's permission. Instead, they had observed the union practice of asking the delegate who then informed the foreman. As a result of the sackings, the 500 AMIEU members still at the works struck in protest and remained out for three weeks.

After several unsuccessful conferences, the matter went before the Industrial Magistrate. The company's legal representative contended the case was a 'barefaced attempt of a number of men to usurp the control and authority of the company over its operations'.¹⁸¹ Len Haigh for the AMIEU claimed that the company showed not the slightest intention of conciliation and that its action was a provocative one 'to test the strength of the union' on a practice he argued had been a custom for 25 years.¹⁸² Moreover, the timing of the incident during the beef slack raised union suspicions about another company motive. Haigh observed:

We cannot help thinking that the sudden action in putting into operation the new regulation was for the sole purpose of creating industrial unrest at the most convenient time, when no production was necessary apart from a few sheep, calves or pigs. By

180. Meat Export Award, Judgment re Lakes Creek Dispute, *QIG*, 1946, Vol. 13, pp. 116-116.

181. *MB*, 28 Jan. 1946.

182. *ibid.*, 21 Jan. 1946 and 25 Jan. 1946.

forcing the members to take action, it would allow staff members to do work that would be done by our members, at award rates, but would enable them to have cheap labour.¹⁸³

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In his judgment, the magistrate ignored the deeper allegations and, in the face of much contradictory evidence, he found that the practice of reporting through the delegate had indeed been a long-standing custom with company acquiescence but in the freezer and can-making departments only. His decision was that all nine workers be reinstated; that a compromise of approaching the foreman with the delegate would operate in the two relevant departments; and that no action be taken against other workers until 1 March.¹⁸⁴ In a subsequent appeal by the company to the Industrial Court, the full bench upheld the magistrate's decision on the validity of the custom in the freezers and can-making but ruled that, in other departments where it was not valid, there was no need for notice to be given to discontinue something which had never existed.¹⁸⁵

These two related incidents were precursors to the major, state-wide 1946 meat strike which lasted four months.¹⁸⁶ Managerial rights on the part of employers and issues of seniority and victimisation on the part of the union underlay the strike, but the catalyst was the sacking of four unionists at a Brisbane bacon factory. The local union, drawn into the strike in the cause of unity, found itself challenged by the company's immediate hiring of 'scab' labour. Following the combined meat companies' successful application to the Industrial Court to cancel the preference clause in the award because the union failed to supply labour, CQME Company advertised for non-union labour at award rates to assist staff members to maintain production. It set up its own labour bureau in William Street to handle the considerable number of applicants—some of them renegade AMIEU members.¹⁸⁷ The company subsequently formed and applied for registration of

183. *ibid.*, 21 Jan. 1946.

184. *ibid.*, 28 Jan. 1946.

185. Meat Export Award, Judgment re Lakes Creek Dispute, *QIG*, 1946, Vol. 31, No. 1, 31 Mar. 1946, p. 60. (The appeal appears in *QIG* before the judgement).

186. For a full account of this strike see, for example, Douglas Blackmur, *Strikes: Causes, Conduct and Consequences*, Leichhardt, 1993. For a detailed local account see Gordon Stewart, *An Analysis of Industrial Relations at the Central Queensland Meat Export Company Works at Lakes Creek, Rockhampton, from 1945 to 1965*, BA Thesis, UQ, 1978.

187. *MB*, 17 May 1946, p. 1 and 27 April 1946, p. 1.

its 'scab' company union, the Central Queensland Meat Employees' Union, in place of the deregistered AMIEU.¹⁸⁸ Although the Industrial Court refused the request and re-registered the AMIEU, the continued loss of preference meant that, when work resumed on government orders, there were more than 250 free-labourers still employed at Lakes Creek.¹⁸⁹

In all, the 1946 strike lost for the union its preference under the award; recognition of seniority and of delegates by management; and certain butchering tasks. It also gained new requirements like punching the Bundy clock before starting time.¹⁹⁰ The union believed that these onerous new conditions of employment, under 'the worst employer operating any Export Works' in the state, took the union back 30 years in standards.¹⁹¹ With the assistance of state organiser, Bill Hodson, the union reverted to 'irritation tactics' and 'go slows' and gradually regained all former conditions from management. It also forced the company to isolate the remaining but diminishing free labour in the Tallow Shed.¹⁹² To the AMIEU's frustration, the Industrial Court refused to reintroduce preference until the 1950 award and then only with the proviso that the union admit to membership the remaining free labourers.¹⁹³ In the comparatively few disputes referred to the court between then and 1957, however, the decision favoured the company in almost all cases.

The perceived failure of the arbitration system for the local AMIEU from the mid-1940s and the simultaneous discontinuation of the traditional negotiation between long-time union secretary Len Haigh and management at Lakes Creek reflect the changing leadership which had occurred over the years. According to former manager Mark Hinchliff, the company had little industrial trouble and no major stoppages until the

188. *ibid.*, 9 July 1946, p. 1.

189. *ibid.*, 27 July 1946, p. 1.

190. Central District Agenda for Committee of Management Conference, 1949, AMIEU Cutting Book. CCQC J19/945 1

191. *MLJ*, June 1947, p. 1.

192. Hinchliff interview; C. Maxwell interview.

193. Hinchliff interview; C. Maxwell interview.

advent of the Works Board of Control in 1942. Before then, under Haigh's authority and with his competent negotiating skills, many problems were ironed out and mutual agreements reached which accommodated most union principles and policies. It also helped, Hinchliff believes, that Haigh and the works manager from 1934, A.E. Moore,¹⁹⁴ were both Yorkshiremen who understood each other's blunt ways and could have 'an affable argument and settle matters one way or another'.¹⁹⁵ However, the introduction of the Board of Control and the post-war years brought into power younger men of the next generation who, like Peter Parsons and secretary after Haigh's death in 1953, Colin Maxwell, were impatient with the fossilising arbitration system and union bureaucracy. These new men wanted better conditions for workers as they had been led to believe would await them after the war. They were more prepared to actively fight for improvements.

Freedom and Wage Justice in the Railway

Members of railway unions had far greater security of employment than their counterparts in the WWF and AMIEU. An examination system or trade qualifications largely determined entrance to the railway service and an internal classification scheme and seniority based on length of service dictated promotions. Provided an employee maintained the 'pleasure' of the Commissioner, a position with the Department of Railways was a guaranteed job-for-life until retirement. During the depressed 1930s, unemployment and pooling or rationing of work did occur¹⁹⁶ but, with the emphasis on public service rather than private profit, railway labour requirements did not fluctuate with short-term market forces to the degree they did on the wharves or at the meatworks. The railway unions therefore had little need to secure control of the labour supply to ensure their members obtained work regularly or to disadvantage outsiders like those who

194. Not to be confused with Premier A.E. Moore (1929-1932).

195. Hinchliff interview.

196. Report of the State Secretary to Thirteenth Conference of the Australian Railways Union held in Rockhampton on October 31, 1934, p. 1. JOL

looked for casual work at Lakes Creek or on the wharves. Indeed, under the Railway Award–State, there was no preference clause at all but the administration 'professed' the principle of unionism¹⁹⁷ and, like the unions, assumed that any recruits to the service would join a suitable union as a matter of course when approached by an appropriate shop steward. At one time, at least, the administration requested that appointees sign a form to agree to joining a union.¹⁹⁸

As well as lifetime job security and the prestige that accompanied employment by the Crown, railway workers received various tangible 'privileges' such as generous rail travel concessions and accumulated leave. Moreover, award rates for most tradesmen in the railway, which served as the benchmark for lower classifications, were slightly higher than in private industry.¹⁹⁹ To counterbalance the economic and social benefits of 'a good job in the railways', however, there was a personal price to pay. Unlike other manual workers, railway workers found themselves subjected to the rigid provisions of the Railway Act and an extensive list of departmental by-laws and rules.

Over the decades, these two issues—punitive powers and wage levels—were major matters of contention the combined railway unions took up in the interests of their members. Taking on the railway administration was more complex than confronting a private firm or local authority. Not only was the employer in this case the state government but for the greater part of the period under study it was the Labor government which most workers supported politically and some by active ALP membership. Much of the battle was led by the ARU which, as Chapter 5 discussed at length, fell out with the parliamentary leaders of the ALP at the 1926 Labor-in-Politics Convention and subsequently disaffiliated from the party—or was thrown out, depending on the viewpoint—until 1957. Thus the ARU's criticism of departmental actions must be seen through this veil of animosity which, nevertheless, did not diminish the problem of the

197. *ibid.*, p. 9.

198. Central District Report, ARU State Council Minutes, 1 June 1934. PTU

199. Bob Cole interviewed 28 Apr. 1995; Blackmur, *Strikes: Causes, Conduct and Consequences*, pp. 118 and 121.

rigid control and often unjust actions of the Commissioner for Railways. At times of peak dissatisfaction, many unions joined a chorus of complaint led by the ARU against the disciplinary and wage policies of the railway department.

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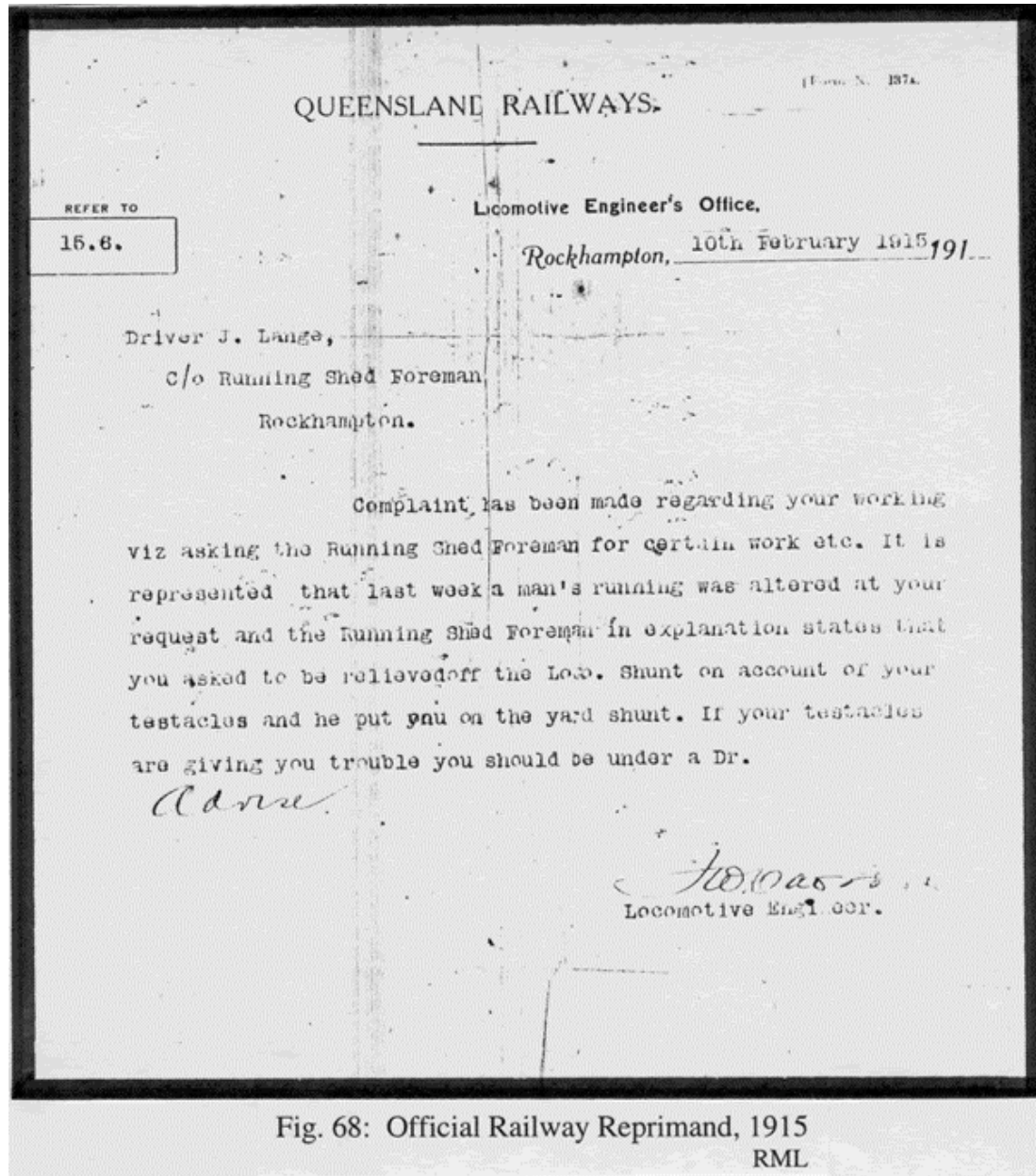
Under the *Railways Act of 1914* and its amendments, the Commissioner possessed the power to dismiss, suspend, fine, demote and reduce pay as punishment for neglect of duty, misconduct or breach of any rule or by-law. Any employee convicted in a court of law could also be dismissed, placed on probation, demoted or transferred as the Commissioner considered in the best interests of the service.²⁰⁰ While it was impossible for a union to challenge a verdict on a criminal offence, it strenuously defended any member whose conduct at work was the cause of an official investigation by a board of inquiry. The union would mount an appeal case where possible on behalf of those subsequently charged with departmental offences. Even railway workers who infringed in the most minor way incurred a stern rebuke from the administration, as the letter to Driver Lange from the Locomotive Engineer, overleaf, illustrates.²⁰¹

Certainly there was substance to most cases of official prosecution but it was the severity of the punishment to which the unions objected most. As late as 1957 for instance, ARU secretary Frank Campbell and a legal representative engaged by the FEDFA appealed against the sacking of four engine cleaners who were charged with 'idling and playing cards' on duty. The unions' case was that the men had not only completed all their work but had also assisted with other tasks. The advocate also pointed out that the foreman had not previously warned them about loafing, as the departmental representative alleged. Moreover, each man had already lost pay from the day he was suspended which, under the Railways Act, would not be made up. The appeal board—composed of the stipendiary magistrate, a departmental representative and a union representative—found in a two-to-one decision, that the punishment was indeed excessive

200. Railways Act of 1914 (5 Geo. V, No. 24), *Queensland Statutes*, 1914, Vol. 8, pp. 6290, amended as Railways Acts, 1914-1965, *Queensland Statutes*, 1965, Vol. 14, pp. 451-452, s. 17(4) and (4A); Queensland Railways By-Law 308: Book of Rules, *QGG*, 1934, Vol. 142, No. 120, 24 May, p. 1645 ff.

201. Locomotive Engineer to Driver J. Lange, 10 Feb. 1915. RHDS

under the circumstances and ordered their reinstatement.²⁰² However, with the magistrate usually siding with the administration, railway workers generally believed that appeal boards were most often 'stacked against them'.²⁰³



202. MB, 3 Apr. 1957, p. 11.

203. Cole interview.

The ARU firmly believed the department resorted too readily and unjustly to disciplinary measures. In 1926, a report to the ARU state body complained that the railway administration held inquiries into 'the most trivial matters' and punished employees for very small breaches of the rules.²⁰⁴ It considered there were also unfair limitations on the right of appeal. In 1933, members called for a mass meeting by combined railway unions to force the government to amend the Railway Act in the matter of appeals but one ARU official, Frank Nolan, claimed that such a plan was doomed to failure without proper preparation and would therefore do the union more harm than good. The ARU had to content itself with passing a 'motion of resentment' against the Labor government for refusing to amend the act and urging railwaymen to continue to agitate to that end.²⁰⁵

The ARU considered the government's actions were not only an expression of the contempt in which it held its employees but also a clear indication of its desire to continue the policy of unfair appointments and victimisation which the conservative Moore government had carried out under amendments made to the act when it entered office in 1929.²⁰⁶ During the Moore era, ARU activist Duncan McDonnell found himself 'exiled' to Longreach while Jim Griffin received a demotion transfer from the Rockhampton workshops to a fettling gang in the Central West. The union claimed neither transfer was for breaking any departmental regulations but for merely being 'nuisances' by advocating opposition to government plans to extend the working week to 48 hours again.²⁰⁷ It seemed to the union that the Labor government, which regained office in 1932, was bent on continuing these vindictive punishments—as it may well have been in the case of the ARU, considering the strained relationship between the union and the ALP. The ARU, by the same token, had no qualms about publicly criticising the Labor government, unlike its ALP-affiliated counterparts such as the AEU.

204. Central District Report, ARU State Council Minutes, 15-20 Sept. 1926. PTU

205. *ibid.*, 8 Dec. 1933.

206. *ibid.*, 8 Dec. 1933; Railways Acts Amendments Act of 1929 (20 Geo. V, No. 29), *Queensland Statutes*, 1929-1930, Vol. 15, ss. 9-12, pp. 12761-12769.

207. Report of the State Secretary to Thirteenth Conference of the Australian Railways Union held in Rockhampton, 31 Oct. 1934, pp. 6-7. JOL

In 1934, the ARU again urged the cooperation of other railway unions in supporting a campaign against the harsh powers of the administration regarding victimisation and punitive transfers.²⁰⁸ Exactly what action was taken was not revealed but a few months later the ARU expressed its thanks to the Minister for Transport and former union organiser, John (Jack) Dash, for personally reversing the transfers of McDonnell and Griffin.²⁰⁹ Yet in 1941, the ARU was still complaining of vindictive punishments by the Central Division administration and the plethora of union appeals arising therefrom.²¹⁰

The power of the Commissioner to summarily dismiss an employee proved the catalyst for a state-wide strike of railway workers in 1925. The underlying cause of this dispute, however, was the second major issue of contention for railway employees: wage and salary levels. While the sacking of a Brisbane ganger triggered the week-long strike, the fundamental issue was the longstanding discontent about the failure of the Industrial Court to restore a 1922 basic wage cut. The reduction been made under the influence of the government during financial difficulties in the early 1920s. The court's subsequent granting of salary increases to senior railway staff further magnified the discontent of ordinary railwaymen and their union representatives.²¹¹

Notwithstanding the injustice of this situation, the matter was more than an economic dispute over wages: it reflected the deeper issue of both the function and performance of the Labor Party's sacrosanct arbitration system. In a pre-strike mass meeting in Rockhampton, nearly 400 railway workers crowded into Trades Hall to express their 'great dissatisfaction' with the court's decision. ARU secretary George

208. Central District Report, ARU State Council Minutes, 1 June 1934. PTU

209. Report of the State Secretary to Thirteenth conference of the Australian Railways Union held in Rockhampton, 31 Oct. 1934, pp. 6-7. JOL; Duncan Waterson, *Biographical Register of the Queensland Parliament, 1860-1929*, Canberra, 1972, p.44.

210. Central District Report, ARU State Council Minutes, 3 Nov. 1941. PTU

211. For a full account of the strike and its causes see, for example, Anne Smith, 'Railway Strike, 1925', in Denis Murphy (ed.), *The Big Strikes: Queensland 1889-1965*, St Lucia, 1983.

Kemp, whose personal Labor loyalty was stronger than that of other ARU officials, expressed his profound disappointment that direct action was necessary but he conceded that conciliation and arbitration had failed on that occasion.²¹² Throughout the week from 28 August and in line with strike action taken by railway unions throughout Queensland, over 1,000 workers from almost all railway unions packed the Tivoli Theatre for daily strike meetings. As well as the basic demand of the wage increase, the unions' Disputes Committee made other claims: a restoration of the 36³/₄ hour week for railway clerks which the government had increased to 39³/₄ hours without additional payment in 1921; and the right of unions to hold stop-work meetings.²¹³ The meetings loudly booed local Labor politician and current Minister for Railways, Jimmy Larcombe, and member for Rockhampton, George Farrell, for their continued advocacy of arbitration. By contrast, they cheered the member for Fitzroy, Harold Hartley, who was the only local politician to support direct action under the circumstances.²¹⁴

In response to the disputes committee's declaring everything normally carried by rail transport as 'black', strikers formed pickets at post offices, transport depots and on all main roads leading out of Rockhampton. The FCDIU, WWF and AMIEU also cooperated in refusing to handle any black goods.²¹⁵ When the state-based strike committee urged the acceptance of the government's offer to restore the wage cut by legislation, but without effecting any change in the clerk's hours, a meeting of 1,500 Rockhampton men passed a motion in which they 'deplored the attitude of the bulk of railway strikers in other centres' in not standing to the latter demand. It was 'under strong protest' that the local railway men followed the advice of the Brisbane leaders to return to work for the sake of union solidarity and to be content with a compensatory pay rise for

212. *EN*, 24 Aug. 1925, p. 5.

213. *ibid.*, 25 Aug. 1925, 28 Aug. to 5 Sept. 1925. An original strike demand that Ganger O'Connor be reinstated was settled before Rockhampton workers went on strike.

214. *ibid.*, 27 Aug. 1925, p. 6 and 28 Aug. p. 5.

215. *MB*, 29 Aug., 31 Aug. p. 7 and 2 Sept. 1925, p. 7.

clerks as settlement of that point.²¹⁶ Nevertheless, Frank Nolan declared the strike a 'grand and glorious victory' for unionism in achieving wage justice for workers.²¹⁷

316 The militant stance taken by the local railway men in the 1925 strike must be brought into perspective by the overwhelming dominance of the ARU in the composition of the Disputes Committee and in the powerful oratory of speakers like sub-branch president Duncan McDonell and treasurer Frank Nolan. Also highly influential were left-wing intellectuals associated with the ARU, Gordon Crane and Fred Paterson, the latter of whom, at least, was presented by the committee with a commemorative gold medallion for his contribution to the cause of railway unionism.²¹⁸ Taking on the government was not just an industrial tactic of the ARU but more so an ideological and political battle. As well as the 1926 split between the ARU and ALP that soured the subsequent relationship, these ARU activists also subscribed to the radical ideology of OBU-ism. For several years previously, as Chapter 5 has discussed, they had derided Labor's slow reformist policies and measures taken to bring about improvements for workers. One of those measures was arbitration. In their view, the only way to effectively achieve socialism and working-class justice was by worker control of industry through industrial unionism and the use of direct action. While the majority of other railway unions, and many rank-and-file ARU members personally, did not share this radical outlook, they were nevertheless aggrieved at the inequitable action of the government and arbitration system. They therefore readily responded to the ARU leaders' impassioned and persuasive cries for strike action as the only way of obtaining their demands in 1925.

Two decades later in 1948, another major railway strike erupted on the issue of wages and the role of then Industrial Court in dispensing wage justice for Queensland railway workers. Unlike the 1925 dispute where the ARU played the dominant role, the

216. *EN*, 4 Sept. 1925, p. 5.

217. *ibid.*, 5 Sept. 1925, p. 5.

218. Ross Fitzgerald, *The People's Champion: Fred Paterson, Australia's Only Communist Party Member of Parliament*, St Lucia, 1997, p.35.

1948 strike initially concerned the skilled unions catering for workshops men and was led by the largest of those unions, the AEU. In this latter instance, the core issue of discontent was the failure of the railway unions to receive from the Industrial Court any marginal increases for skill since the war had ended. Metal trades workers in the private sector who also worked under state awards had received a flow-on from a new federal award in September 1947. Interstate railway workers had also received wage gains. The state AEU correspondingly sought a marginal increase of 12s 4d a week for a fitter but the Combined Railway Unions (CRU), of which the AEU was part, claimed retrospectivity to May for 16s a week for tradesmen, 13s for semi-skilled workers and 11s for lower classifications. The CRU also sought the payment of weekend penalty rates. Its claims became the basis of the struggle.²¹⁹

In Rockhampton, the AEU readily endorsed the policy of political and industrial action planned by the Ipswich District Committee which coordinated all industrial matters for other Queensland centres. At a mass meeting in early November, Rockhampton members resolved to petition local members of parliament to intercede for them with the Minister for Transport, Jack Duggan. They hoped Duggan would pressure both the Commissioner to agree to the increases and the Industrial Court to hear the claim before the Christmas shut-down of the workshops.²²⁰ The union also took direct action in implementing a total ban on overtime work for the much-needed repairs to engines and rolling stock which had received high usage but little maintenance during the war years.²²¹

The government finally offered a 6s 10d marginal increase to metal tradesmen to bring them into line with the federal award. That amount was predicated on the higher basic wage in Queensland and a calculation that railway workers already received the equivalent of 3s 8d per week in privileges. The offer applied to tradesmen only and was

219. Blackmur, *Strikes: Causes, Conduct and Consequences*, pp. 119 ff.

220. AEU Minutes, 11 Nov. 1947. NBAC E162/33/2

221. *ibid.*, 4 Dec. 1947.

retrospective to September.²²² Faced with the failure to secure wage justice through political lobbying and overtime bans, the local AEU voted overwhelmingly to support strike action in a secret ballot conducted state-wide in late January 1948.²²³ At a mass meeting of some 1,000 workers from the AEU and six other workshops and running shed unions, railway workers voted resoundingly to join their counterparts across the state to strike as from midnight on 3 February.²²⁴ They remained out for nine weeks.

The 1948 railway strike has been accurately described as 'one of the most viciously contested conflicts' in Queensland industrial relations history.²²⁵ It caused widespread unemployment through stand-down orders; brought severe economic hardship to strikers denied social security payments; and resulted in the declaration of a state of emergency by a retaliatory Hanlon Labor government which was determined to exert its authority over the industrial wing of the labour movement. Under the emergency laws, the government banned picketing and rationed electricity and gas supplies.²²⁶ Considering this complexity, a detailed discussion of the actions and reactions of both sides is beyond the scope of this thesis.²²⁷ Rockhampton unions' participation reflected that of other major railway centres by forming a local Disputes Committee to coordinate activities. They held regular mass meetings expressing resentment at the partiality of the Industrial Court in supporting the railway administration and hearing regular updates from the combined unions' Central Disputes Committee (CDC) in Brisbane; maintained peaceful picket lines at the railway and transport depots; and drew physical, financial and moral support from the AMIEU and WWF.²²⁸

222. Copy of letter from Minister for Transport Jack Duggan to AEU as published in abstract report of Commonwealth Council's Proceedings, *AEU Monthly Journal*, Feb. 1948, p. 4.

223. AEU Minutes, 29 Jan. 1948. NBAC E162/33/2

224. *MB*, 3 Feb. 1948, p. 1. Other initial participants were the ARU, Boilermakers' Society, Vehicle Builders' Federation, Blacksmiths' Society, ASCJ and Railway Traffic Employees' Union.

225. Douglas Blackmur, 'The Railway Strike, 1948' in Murphy (ed.), *The Big Strikes*, p. 235.

226. Abstract report of Commonwealth Council's Proceedings, *AEU Monthly Journal*, Mar. 1948, p. 4 and Apr. 1948, p. 3.

227. For full accounts see, for example, Margaret B. Cribb, 'State in Emergency' in John Iremonger, John Merritt and Graeme Osborne (eds), *Strikes: Studies in Twentieth Century Australian Social History*, Sydney, 1973; Blackmur, *Strikes: Causes, Conduct and Consequences*.

228. *MB*, 3 Feb.–6 Apr. 1948. Two members of each of the seven unions comprised the Disputes Committee, with Peter Whyte (AEU) elected chairman and Viv. Cooper (VBF and later local MLA) as secretary.

Regardless of these actions, several accounts of the 1948 strike cite Rockhampton as a weak link in the chain of union solidarity as early as the fifth week of the dispute.²²⁹ In particular, they point to the influence of the local AEU whose district secretary, Peter Whyte, secured the position of chairman of the Disputes Committee through support from other craft and sectional unions which did not want the ARU running affairs.²³⁰ Indeed, local news headlines reported on 6 March that the Rockhampton AEU had initiated negotiation of a settlement with the Premier. Whyte strenuously denied this claim both publicly and privately.²³¹ The story was, in the opinion of former AEU secretary Jack Treacy, a typical concoction of the *Morning Bulletin* —'the lie factory' —whose aim was to split the labour movement and bring down the Labor government.²³²

Rockhampton support for the strike certainly waned from 11 March as reflected in progressively decreasing attendance at mass meetings. This 'weakening' has been attributed to government and press propaganda about communist involvement and civic disruption, and to the strong influence of both freemasonry and the Movement amongst Rockhampton railway workers.²³³ While these factors played a role in influencing their views on participation in the strike, two very practical reasons existed for their apparent change of heart. First, on 11 March the government made an offer of 12s 4d for tradesmen which was in line with the AEU's original claim and which the members of the unions in the Rockhampton Workshops Federation had decided in December they would accept if offered.²³⁴ Even though AEU members still passed a resolution rejecting this offer on principle at a mass meeting at the Tivoli theatre the next day, many were beginning to see continuation of the strike as pointless: it would gain them nothing more

229. Cribb, in Iremonger, Merritt and Osborne (eds), *Strikes*, p.264; Blackmur, *Strikes: Causes, Conduct and Consequences*, p. 171; Campbell interview.

230. Cole interview.

231. *MB*, 9 Mar. 1948, p. 1; Personal discussion between Whyte and AEU member and fellow mason, Bob Cole. Cole interview.

232. Treacy interview. Jack Treacy also supports Whyte's denial.

233. Blackmur, 'The Railway Strike, 1948', p. 248.

234. Secretary of Workshops Federation to Jack Devereux, AEU Organiser, 12 Dec. 1947 as cited in Blackmur, *Strikes: Causes, Conduct and Consequences*, p. 168. The original correspondence viewed by Blackmur was apparently lost in the relocation of records from Ipswich Trades Hall to the new union offices.

financially and would only prolong the distress of the many men with families to support and mortgages to repay. As Jack Treacy recalls, 'a lot of blokes with kids were struggling all right. They were just about at the end of their tether'.²³⁵ Second, members of the AFULE, which had belatedly joined the strike on 18 February, returned to work across the state on 16 March. This included some 200 drivers and firemen in Rockhampton. The Railway Traffic Employees Union also directed its non-workshops members to resume work the following day.²³⁶ With trains able to move again, the chief weapon of the strikers had been removed. Rockhampton men increasingly saw prolonging the strike as satisfying the additional demands of the ARU-led CDC and as no longer being in their best interests.²³⁷

If the AEU members' resolve diminished after 11 March, many rank and file members of the ARU had clearly demonstrated in late 1947 that they did not share the enthusiasm of their leaders for strike action and even less so for a prolonged battle such as developed. Response to a 24 hour stoppage in November 1947 was 'bad' in the opinion of one union activist while secretary Frank Campbell reported poor attendance at another stop-work meeting in early December as 'not altogether encouraging'.²³⁸ So by 24 March, many Rockhampton ARU as well as AEU members had tired of the apparent industrial stalemate and a motion to remain out only narrowly succeeded by 175 to 160.²³⁹ Two days later, the local committee advised the CDC that 'Rockhampton lads could not hold out much longer'.²⁴⁰ When the former local ARU official and veteran of the 1925 campaign, Frank Nolan, rushed from Brisbane on 29 March to make a last minute plea for

235. *MB*, 13 Mar. 1948, p. 1; Treacy interview.

236. *MB*, 16 Mar. 1948, p. 1 and 17 Mar. 1948, p. 1.

237. Campbell interview; Treacy interview. The CDC's chairman was Mick O'Brien (ARU) with Alex MacDonald (FIA and member of CPA) as secretary. As Blackmur points out, the additional demands were the repeal of the Industrial Law Amendment Act of 1948 (repealed later that year), withdrawal of charges against strike leaders and an investigation into police brutality against leading unionists in the St Patrick's Day march in Brisbane.

238. S. Whitmee to F. Nolan, State Sec. ARU, 24 Nov. 1947. Syd Whitmee, a newly-arrived ARU activist wrote in a personal letter to Nolan explaining his view: 'the motion passed by Tuesday's meeting would have been defeated only it was moved by old Jimmy Griffin and supported by D. McDonel [*sic*]...I firmly believe that a repetition of Tuesday's stoppage would see at least 60% of ARU members in R'pton at work'; F. Campbell to F. Nolan, 9 Dec. 1948. PTU

239. Telegram from Campbell to ARU Brisbane, 24 Mar. 1948. PTU

240. *MB*, 27 Mar. 1948, p. 1.

the Rockhampton men not to vote for a return to work, his efforts were in vain. The CDC feared that such a vote coming from a major railway centre like Rockhampton would precipitate the collapse of the strike. It did.

On 31 March, 400 railway workers voted almost unanimously to negotiate the government's offer of margins based on 12s 4d for tradesmen and of weekend penalty rates.²⁴¹ With a similar attitude by then apparent in Toowoomba, Bundaberg, Mackay and Cairns, the CDC decided it was time to talk with Premier Hanlon who indicated the likelihood of a compromise. Together with railway workers across the state, the Rockhampton employees resumed work on 6 April, having accepted the marginal increases based on the 12s 4d offer, week-end penalties as demanded, and with no punishment or loss of entitlements for participating in the strike.²⁴² As far as many rank and file unionists were concerned, it was a settlement which could—and should—have been concluded over three weeks earlier but the imperative of union solidarity and characteristic obedience to leadership prevailed.²⁴³

Union Strategies and Industrial Relations in Rockhampton to 1957

In the struggle to improve and maintain the terms and conditions of employment of their members, Rockhampton unions extensively utilised the arbitration system established by the Queensland Labor government in 1916. Achieving industrial awards by the expert efforts of senior officials in their respective federations, unions exploited its mechanisms in rigorously monitoring award provisions in the local context and seeking redress for perceived employer infringements of their terms and conditions. In this task, the Industrial Inspector and Industrial Magistrate generally proved invaluable allies where negotiations between the union and management failed to resolve troublesome issues.

241. *ibid.*, 30 Mar. 1948, p. 1.

242. *ibid.*, 1 Apr. 1948 p. 1.

243. Cole interview; Treacy interview; Campbell interview.

In the struggle against the private employer, the state played an integral role in establishing and maintaining a system in which unions achieved formal recognition and protection as representatives of workers. Under a Labor government for all but three years of the period from its inception in 1916 until Labor's defeat in 1957, the arbitration system controlled almost every aspect of the employer-union relationship. It was also a federal Labor government-established Stevedoring Industry Commission, in the case of the WWF, and the wartime Labor government's regulation of the meat export industry for the AMIEU, which gained for those unions the control of labour supply which they demanded to ensure equity and justice for their members. Yet unions like the WWF and AMIEU also readily implemented direct action in the form of short stoppages and go-slows when it suited their purpose.

For railway unions as representatives of state employees, the arbitration system proved more difficult to utilise. Approaching the bench was, to use an old cliché, appealing to Caesar about Caesar. Although the Labor government had intended the arbitration system to be impartial in its decisions, on those occasions when it suited government purpose to interfere, it did so. Such interference—perceived by the unions as a failure of the system and betrayal by their elected government representatives—underlay both the 1925 and 1948 railway strikes.

Despite the frequent but usually short stop-works at the meatworks and wharves in reaction to immediate working problems, industrial relations between unions and employers in Rockhampton were reasonably good. Recollections of most former union officials—in the post-war period at least—indicate that unions maintained 'a pretty good relationship' with management.²⁴⁴ Even Frank Campbell of the ARU admits that his union, which was the most militant of all the railway unions, 'got on all right most of the

244. Treacy interview; Noel Furzeman, interviewed 15 Mar. 1993.

time' with the administration.²⁴⁵ Similarly, the WWF's Les Yewdale reflects about his years on the wharves:

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We had our 'blues' but we respected one another. They'd come down onto the wharves when the ship would come in and shake our hands and say 'G'day, when do you think we'll get this one out?'.²⁴⁶

Only Colin Maxwell of the AMIEU claims that 'the bosses deliberately antagonised the union'.²⁴⁷ On the other hand, Maxwell's fellow official and union organiser in the 1950s, Joe Underdown, nevertheless believes the bosses were 'reasonably fair blokes'. He states of that time: 'I often pass the remark about how well we did go, because we usen't to have much trouble, not much trouble at all'.²⁴⁸

Perhaps with the passing of the years memories have faded and feelings mellowed but Joe Underdown's view of union relations with management at Lakes Creek reflects the general picture for Rockhampton unions as a whole. In contrast to their counterparts in Townsville which earned 'a special place on the scale of labour militancy in Queensland',²⁴⁹ Rockhampton unions demonstrated a comparative industrial quiescence and made moderate demands of employers. Former state secretary of the Boilermakers' Society and of the QTLC, Jack Egerton, who began both work and his illustrious union career in Rockhampton, observes of the city's unions in comparison with those elsewhere in Queensland:

Rockhampton unions were staunch but conservative...not asking for excessive wages and conditions but demanding agreements, awards and various acts be observed in their entirety.²⁵⁰

Employer opinion also supports this view. In 1919, for instance, when strikes plagued the post-war nation, the Employers' Association of Central Queensland (EACQ)

245. Campbell interview.

246. Yewdale interview.

247. C. Maxwell interview.

248. Underdown interview.

249. Douglas Hunt, *A History of the Labour Movement in North Queensland: Trade Unionism, Politics and Industrial Conflict, 1900–1920*, PhD thesis, JCU, 1979, p.445.

250. Jack Egerton, interviewed 21 June 1996.

reported 'no untoward happening in that respect' locally and attributed the industrial peace to 'the good feeling existing between Unions and Employers generally'.²⁵¹ However, much of the freedom from industrial troubles, the body claimed in 1923, was the result of its own influence and efforts and it gave no credit to unions in this regard.²⁵² Admittedly, by 1926, after the upheaval of the preceding year's railway strike and the inflammatory oratory of local ARU leaders, the EACQ president regretted thus:

The amicable and friendly intercourse between Employers and Employees, is tending to disappear, owing to the Class Consciousness preached by the Labour Organisations.²⁵³

However this comment reflects more the events and attitudes at that particular historical point and not the long-term industrial relations of Rockhampton. Former Lakes Creek meatworks manager Mark Hinchliff recalls of his time there from 1938 that the Rockhampton export works experienced far fewer disputes than did either of the two meatworks in Townsville. The monthly reports of the AEU organiser who visited the various meatworks also bear out Hinchliff's contention of less industrial discord and disruption at Lakes Creek.²⁵⁴ In the railway, Jim Goldston—who rose from an apprentice fitter in the local AEU to tradesman, mechanical engineer, General Manager for the Central Division and finally Commissioner for Railways—considers that, from his perspective on both sides of the industrial fence, unions and administration maintained a good overall relationship.²⁵⁵ Even the Rockhampton Harbour Board believed:

The Waterside Workers' Federation...has played a significant part in the history of the Port of Rockhampton, not least from its comparative freedom from industrial strife, other than stoppages involved in national disputes.²⁵⁶

No major strikes began in Rockhampton nor were there any significant localised disputes other than the two AMIEU incidents leading up to the statewide 1946 strike. Indeed,

251. Employers' Association of Central Queensland (EACQ), *Third Annual Report*, 1919, p. 1. CCQC K18/966

252. EACQ, *Seventh Annual Report*, 1923, p. 10. CCQC K18/966

253. EACQ, *Tenth Annual Report*, 1926, p. 6. CCQC K18/966

254. Hinchliff interview.

255. Jim Goldston, personal communication with author, July 1995.

256. Westacott, *Revised History of the Port of Rockhampton*, 1970, p. 47.

despite being the largest provincial city in the state until the 1950s, Rockhampton's only occasional mention in the literature on Queensland industrial disputes and strikes is itself evidence of its lack of militancy. However, this outlook should not be equated with industrial weakness. It can also be interpreted as industrial strength whereby unions obtained most of their demands by pursuing other avenues of resolution and avoiding disruptive and costly direct action.²⁵⁷

Diverting conflict through institutionalised channels and thereby restricting the 'potential for militancy'²⁵⁸ and strikes partly explains the moderate industrial outlook of local unions, but it cannot account for the initial lower level of disputation nor explain why unions chose to adopt systematic means of prevention and resolution rather than pursuing direct action. No one factor alone can account for this moderate outlook. Margaret Cribb has observed that industrial militancy, as manifested in frequent recourse to striking and other forms of direct action, arose from an 'underlying complex of factors' which engendered 'latent discontent' among workers. Similarly, Rockhampton's industrial outlook stemmed from a combination of underlying factors, but ones which minimised, rather than stimulated, industrial discord between unions and bosses.²⁵⁹ These factors included contrasting regional and local economies and socio-cultural contexts which, in combination, produced a working-class experience and industrial outlook different from that in Townsville.²⁶⁰

Additionally, as Chapter 4 demonstrated, many Rockhampton unions remained under the control of the same secretary and committees for several decades, thus maintaining stability and continuity during periods of crisis and calm alike. These union

257. Greg Patmore, *Australian Labour History*, Melbourne, 1991, p. 68. For further discussion of lack of militancy and union weakness or strength, see Barbara Webster, "'A Bunch of Weakies?'" Region and the Making of the Trade Union Movement in Rockhampton to the 1950s', in Warwick Mules and Helen Miller (eds), *Mapping Regional Cultures*, Rockhampton, 1997, pp. 112-122.

258. John Wanna, 'A Paradigm of Consent: Explanations of Working Class Moderation in South Australia', *Labour History*, No. 53, Nov. 1987, p. 69.

259. Margaret B. Cribb, 'Causes and Catalysts of Strikes', in Murphy (ed.), *The Big Strikes*, p. 12 and Desmond Oxnam, quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 3 and 4.

260. Webster, in Mules and Miller (eds), *Mapping Regional Cultures*, p. 116.

leaders shared several characteristics which influenced their own industrial outlook and the policies adopted by their unions. First, many prominent union secretaries and officials were 'good Labor men', stalwart workers and local party officials who maintained close links with Labor politicians. Second, and largely due to these political affiliations, they espoused the principles of arbitration and not direct action, as Frank Conlon's frequent comment that 'my job is to keep members in work; strikes don't pay' echoes.²⁶¹ Len Haigh, the long-time AMIEU Central District secretary, always followed the precept neatly inscribed inside the cover of the union's 1946 scrap book: 'all reasonable means to achieve settlement short of striking must be tried first'.²⁶² Even the right-wing *Morning Bulletin* posthumously lauded these and other early union officials for being 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 legislation'.²⁶³

Third, many union officials were also members of socially conservative organisations like masonic lodges, friendly societies and church congregations. Purnell, Conlon and Haigh served on local statutory authorities during their terms of office while they and other leaders held executive positions in charities and sporting clubs. Fourth, and as the next chapter will reveal, these leaders kept a firm control over their rank and file, discouraging militancy and alienating any radical elements. And, especially in the railway, union leaders spent much time quarrelling amongst themselves over membership and demarcation issues, and thereby diverted some of their energies from the primary struggle against the boss to improve workplace conditions for their members.

261. *MB*, 9 Mar. 1954.

262. Len Haigh, note in front of AMIEU Cutting Book. CCQC J19/945 3; Ursula Barry interviewed 4 Nov. 1996.

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