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Recollections of the 'Black Armada' in Brisbane

Since Boxing Day 2004, the attention of all Australians has been focussed on countries in Asia, particularly Indonesia, Sri Lanka and India. These countries were the worst affected by the devastating tsunami which struck their coastlines and other areas in the region such as Thailand, the Maldives and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Australians have been generous in their aid to assist those who survived, to help rebuild their devastated countries and their lives.

This is the second time Australians have come to the forefront in assisting the Indonesian people. Back in the 1940s Australian trade unionists were the first to respond to an appeal from Indonesian Trade Unions. This appeal was directed to the 'democratic and peaceful peoples everywhere, and especially to the working class in all countries of the world, to boycott all that is Dutch in all harbours, stores, roadways and other places throughout the world in the event of the outbreak of warfare in Indonesia'.[1]

The boycott of Dutch shipping in Australia, colourfully described by journalist Rupert Lockwood as the 'Black Armada', was instrumental in preventing the return of Dutch shipping for the re-occupation of the Indies and the re-establishment of Dutch rule. It thus made way for the foundation of the Indonesian Republic. The embargo began in Brisbane and held up 559 vessels.[2]

The War Years: Our Indonesian Friends Prowito, Asir and Slamet

In the large, rambling house on the top of the hill in a Brisbane suburb, we welcomed many visitors during the war years. Our family consisted of my mother, two sisters and their two small children and myself. Our husbands were in the army in New Guinea, in navy small craft around the islands to the north and in the airforce in Britain. Our many visitors included Australian and American soldiers, sailors and airmen, Chinese and Indonesians.

For the two Indonesians, Prowito and Asir, with whom we became firm friends, our household, they told us, resembled their own extended households in Indonesia. To some extent, they felt welcomed and at home. Prowito often brought his wife and several children with him on his many visits and we had many talks about life as it was in Indonesia when he left there. When we met the family they

were living in a type of boarding house in New Farm. A whole lot of Indonesians were housed there in a building near what was the old Brewery in Brunswick Street. One of Prowito's children came top of New Farm school that they attended. On one occasion, Prowito came to the door when my sisters and I were at work. He asked my mother if he could use our sewing machine. He explained that he wanted to make some pyjamas for his children. 'Of course', she said, very surprised. It wasn't very common for Australian men to do the household sewing! At this time Prowito was employed by the Dutch. Asir was employed on a farm outside Brisbane but came to visit by train in the weekends. Prowito was a teacher, who had been involved in the Teachers' strike in 1926, part of an abortive uprising against Dutch colonial rule.

But what were the events which led to the arrival of these Indonesians on Australian shores? In history classes at school we were told about the 'Spice Islands' to our north where the happy Indonesian people lived under benevolent Dutch rule. But in fact I discovered later that for 350 years Indonesians had lived as a colonial country under the rule of the Dutch. The Dutch used the country's rich resources not for the benefit of the country or its people but largely for European investors. 'A rich country but her people were kept poor'.[3]

In 1919 a central trade union organisation was established in Indonesia and a wave of strikes followed. The PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia) was formed in 1920, and its influence spread rapidly up to 1926-1927.[4]

Following these strikes, some 13,000 arrests were made, and of those arrested an unspecified number was shot and thousands were sent to prison. Dutch autocratic law specified that 'those who can be considered by the government to disturb or have disturbed the public peace and order will be without any legal proceedings exiled for an indefinite time at a specially appointed place.'[5] 1,300 were sent into exile to Tanah Merah (usually the 'specially appointed place') a notorious concentration camp at Boven Digul, West Irian, then part of Dutch New Guinea.[6]

In February 1942. Japan invaded the Netherlands East Indies. On 8 March all organized Dutch resistance ceased and on the 10 March a nucleus of the NEI administration was evacuated to Australia. As a result, the Australian government reluctantly became host to the Netherlands East Indies Government-in-Exile (formerly the Dutch colonial government in Indonesia). In Brisbane, their headquarters were at Wacol Army Camp and their Air Force at Amberley Air Force base.
Life in Tanah Merah

Prowito was part of the group that had been exiled after the 1926 Teachers' Strike. He was 'betrothed' (as he put it) at the time of his arrest and was given the option of taking his wife-to-be with him. She agreed, and their seven children were born in imprisonment.

During the long years of imprisonment in this strange land across the seas, far from their homeland, the prisoners managed to carry out the tasks of daily life. The place was unhealthy, surrounded by mosquito-infested swamps. Many prisoners contracted malaria and other illnesses; the jungle country was reputed to be inhabited by head hunting natives, and the perils of the crocodile infested Digul River were a deterrent to any would-be escapees.

But a few prisoners did escape in 1929. Prowito told us that he knew of the escape and had heard of their remarkable journey to Thursday Island where the escapees were handed back to the Dutch for re-imprisonment.[7] Whilst in Tanah Merah, Prowito continued his teaching, and when we decided to learn Malay, he again became a teacher for a small group in our home. I don't think we were particularly good students!

Arrival in Australia

Prowito and his family remained in Tanah Merah until June 1943 when the Dutch Government-in-Exile transferred the surviving 500 political prisoners and their families to Australia on the steamship Both. The Indonesians were completely isolated during their imprisonment in Tanah Merah. They obtained some information about the world from any new prisoners who might be brought there. Prowito told us that until he reached Australia, he had no knowledge of the war and he was shocked to learn of the development of Nazism in Germany and Japan.

The Indonesian political prisoners arrived in Bowen, then continued to Sydney where they were eventually transported by train to military prison camps. They were held and guarded by Australian military personnel. With great daring and initiative, the prisoners made their plight known to Australian rail and waterside workers. They threw notes to workers on the Bowen wharf and from the train to rail

workers on the lines explaining their presence and their predicament.

Prowito told me the harrowing story of the train journey in Australia with his very sick child. He attempted, with limited English, to get medical attention from a train guard. I asked him how he did this – and he said – "I spoke to the guard and I told him that my little boy had a 'pine in his billy'." (He had obviously heard some Australians speaking.) Understanding was eventually reached with a sympathetic guard who gave him assistance.

In December 1943. pressure was exerted on the government, principally by Australian trade unions and civil liberty organisations, to secure the release of Indonesian prisoners and their families. Eventually, after his release, Prowito accepted service with the Dutch government in Australia, not only to help the anti-Japanese war effort in Australia, but he told us, to sabotage Dutch re-occupation of his country. Ban on Dutch ships –the Indonesian Independence Committee

After the proclamation of the Indonesian Republic on 1 September 1945, the Central Committee for Indonesian Independence (CENKIM) in Brisbane called on all Indonesians in Australia to mutiny and asked for Australian support for the nationalist cause.

On the weekend 22-23 September 1945 in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, Indonesian merchant seamen walked off Dutch ships that were being loaded with supplies for Dutch re-occupation of the East Indies. The walk-off marked the beginning of the renowned Dutch shipping ban, which held Dutch ships in Australia for four long years.

Prowito and Slamet were to play a significant role in Australia in the Independence struggle. They were the two members of the Indonesian Independence Committee who accompanied Ted Englart and Alby Graham (officials of the Waterside Workers' Union), an organiser of the Building Workers Union (Archie Nichol) and Mick Healy (Secretary, Trades & Labor Council when they met with representatives of seamen on Dutch ships in Brisbane. At this meeting tactics were finalised for the seamen's walk- off in support of wage demands linked with demands for non-interference by the Dutch government with the newly proclaimed republic.

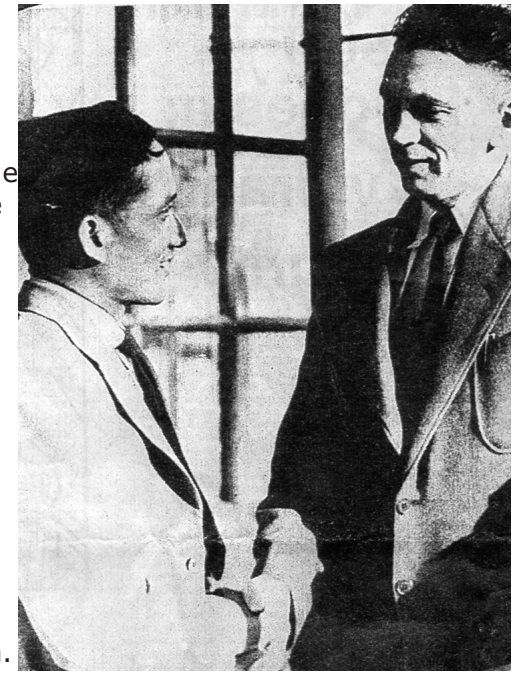
The five hundred Indonesian seamen who walked off the ships were housed in the top floor of the Trades Hall (the dance floor) for three weeks. Blankets were provided from American stores by Chinese working for the Americans at Bulimba, and meals were brought from Chinese restaurants. Many of the Chinese met at the long table in the dining room at our house on the hill and their leader Albert was the only one, to my knowledge, who spoke English. They were delighted when my mother and we three girls waited on them with tea and cakes. On one occasion Albert took us down to their Bulimba

camp where we were surprised to see that the Chinese seemed to run the camp!

Eventually complaints from Trades Hall office staff and the Health Department led to the removal of the Indonesians by trade union officials, who transported them to different stations along the Ipswich line and put them on the Ipswich bound train. They then walked in to the Dutch Wacol camp in small groups, and the Dutch authorities, taken by surprise, were forced to accommodate and feed them. Later the Dutch government asked the Australian government to accept responsibility for them and they were then housed at a CCC (Civil Construction Corp) camp at Chermside. Mick and I were invited to a wonderful dinner and concert organised by the Indonesians at the Wacol Army camp some time in 1945. After the dinner, there was singing and dancing and an Indonesian play. We went back stage after the play to be introduced to the players – to my surprise the very beautiful young women in the play were our Indonesian friends! And of course I learned that as part of their traditions women were not permitted to take part in public displays of this nature and were represented by men dressed in women's costumes.

Prowito and fellow Indonesians return home

Australian trade unions and the Council for Civil Liberties had continually exerted pressure on the Federal government to repatriate the striking seamen and other striking Indonesians from the Dutch army (including Tanah Merah deportees) and successfully force the Dutch government to grant them political amnesty on their arrival in Indonesia.



Prowito left Brisbane, along with hundreds of other Indonesian men, women and children and Australian born wives (about 800 in all) on the steamship Manoora[8] in February 1946. The HMAS Manoora was an Adelaide Steamship Company coastal passenger ship converted to a landing-craft carrier. Mick Healy (who had come to know many of the Indonesians well) and a few more trade union officials went down to where the ship was berthed at a little used wharf across the river from Hamilton to see them off.

After leaving Brisbane, the ship called at Mackay to take other Indonesians aboard, most of them Tanah Merah survivors for whom Mackay had been a main centre. Mick also went to Mackay to say farewell to the 80 Indonesians who joined the ship there. On arrival at Tanjong Priok in Java, defying Dutch demands that Indonesian repatriates be handed over, the repatriated Indonesians were escorted by Gurkhas, at Australian Captain Cousin's request to Republican territory, about 60 miles from Batavia. Women and children were escorted ashore later.[9]

For Prowito and his family it was a sad homecoming. He had complained of stomach problems for some time whilst in Australia. Sadly he died shortly after his arrival in Indonesia. He had spoken proudly of his eldest son who had studied in Melbourne to become an Aircraftsman. The young man also died fighting in the Indonesian Air Force against the Dutch. We heard of their deaths in a letter from a fellow Indonesian who had been in Australia. At least they reached the shores of the land that they loved so well. I do not know the fate of Asir, a simple countryman, whose dream was an Indonesia, free from Dutch rule.

Mick Healy and Ted Roach attend SOBSI

In May 1946 the Central organisation of the All-Indonesian Trade Unions (SOBSI) invited Mick Healy (Secretary Trades & Labor Council) and Ted Roach (Assistant Secretary of the Waterside Workers' Federation) to attend its first conference since the Republic was proclaimed. The conference was held in Malang, Java, and, according to Mick, they received a tremendous reception similar to those accorded to other Australian visitors at the time. For example, Sir Richard Kirby, who played a leading role in mediation efforts, recalled that when visiting Yogyakarta in July 1946 with Republican Prime Minister Sutan Sjahrir, 'they were greeted by cheering crowds who were shouting “Australia, Australia” and showering them with flower petals.'[10] The Australian delegates Ted Roach and Mick Healy went from Jakarta by train to Malang with Indonesian trade unionists and interpreters. About 600 to 800 delegates, including two Dutch trade union representatives from Holland, attended the conference. Most delegates came from Java but oil workers from Borneo, sugar and tobacco workers from Sumatra, were also present. A humorous incident occurred on the train. One of the Indonesians asked Mick if

he could come back to Australia as his house-servant. Mick had great difficulty in convincing him that he didn't have a house – just a flat – and couldn't afford a servant even if he wanted one! Women workers, including school teachers and cane basket makers, also attended the conference.

They later took the Australian delegates to a small factory presenting them with little baskets which Mick brought back for our baby son. President of SOBSI (Haryono) chaired the Conference. He had been in Tanah Merah and was an expatriate from Australia.[11] He had been in Mackay working in sugar mills for a couple of years after his release, then came to Brisbane to work on communications for the Dutch government-in- exile at Wacol thus becoming aware of developments and future plans of the Dutch government. He was prominent in the leadership of the Indonesian Independence Committee and a leading member of the illegal, highly secret Indonesian Communist Party, of which little was known by anyone in Australia. He returned to Indonesia with the Dutch to Hollandia in West Irian and then Java.[12]

After the Congress, Ted and Mick were invited to have tea with Prime Minister Hatta who had been in Tanah Merah in earlier times. Speaking in perfect English, he discussed with them the Australian political situation. They were also entertained by Sarafudden, Minister for Defence, and Sediadit, Minister for Railways. The latter was a Communist who during the early part of the war, as a student at a Dutch University, had participated in the resistance movement against Hitler. Both Sarafudden and Sediadit had attended the SOBSI Congress and were interested in developing relations with Australia. They recognised the important role that Australian trade unionists could play in assisting their country's development. They hoped that under the influence of the trade unions the Australian government would be persuaded to recognise Indonesian independence.[13] With this in mind, Haryono asked the Australian delegates to advise Australian trade unionists to continue the ban on Dutch shipping. In a letter to Australian trade unions he described the Australian unions' boycott of the Dutch as 'a deed of historic importance and an example to the world'.[14] Haryono was later killed by the Soekarno Government troops at Madiun in 1948 when the left forces were crushed.[15]

Slamet, the Indonesian Independence Committee and the visit of Dr Oesman Sastroamidjojo[16]

Slamet, a member of the Indonesian Independence Committee in Brisbane, has already been mentioned. That committee worked closely with the trade union movement here and I had the opportunity to meet him as I worked for some years in the Waterside Workers Union in Brisbane. Slamet, like Prowito, was a teacher who had been in Tanah Merah. After my air force husband was killed in a wartime bombing raid over Belgium, I married Mick Healy and we set up house in Moorooka. Slamet often visited us there for friendly discussions.

On one occasion he accompanied Dr Oesman Sastroamidjojo, of the Republic's Foreign Ministry, the first Indonesian Ambassador to Australia, when he visited us in our home to discuss the Indonesian trust account funds in which a considerable sum of money had accrued. The Indonesian seamen who were in Brisbane were unable to take with them the money they had earned in Australia because of currency export regulations. They left this money in a Trust Fund in a Commonwealth Bank account under the aegis of the Trades & Labour Council with Harry Harvey, President, Frank O'Brien, Treasurer and the Secretary Mick Healy as the official trustees. A sum of about £32,000 was accumulated in this fund and the interest was paid to the account of the Indonesian Independence Committee (by agreement with all depositors) to enable the work of this committee to continue.

Dr Oesman was anxious to have control of the funds transferred to the Soekarno government and was urging immediate action on these lines. But Slamet and the Indonesian Independence Committee secretly advised against this procedure at the time. The money was finally paid over, the last payment being made in the 1950s, but not until strict arrangements had been made with the Commonwealth Bank and the Indonesian government for its final distribution. They took full responsibility for the payment of the remittances to their rightful owners, or if deceased, to their relatives.

A last farewell

After the other Indonesians had left Brisbane, Slamet and another Indonesian named Bondan and Molly, his Australian wife, stayed behind to finalise matters after the other Indonesians had left. Bondan was also a member of the Indonesian Independence Committee in Australia.

A farewell function was held in the Trades Hall on 24 October 1947 and Mick, as Queensland Trades and Labor Council Secretary, said goodbye to Slamet and Bondan. They left Brisbane shortly after by 'plane. Two photos commemorate the farewell occasion.[17]

Slamet later became Chairman of a District Committee of the Communist Party in Indonesia and then a member of Parliament. He wrote to us once from Indonesia saying he had married and had a small child. It was Slamet who told us of Prowito's death. He appealed to us for help with warm clothing for his family and we sent a parcel to him. He died later in the massacres which followed the September 30 Movement of 1965 in which it has been estimated that from half to one million people were murdered.[18]

On my bookcase stands a stylised wood carving of an Indonesian man given to us by Slamet. It is a constant reminder to me of our very fine Indonesian friends. But sadly it also recalls the terrible fate that many great fighters for the freedom of their country from Dutch colonial rule later sustained at the hands of their own people and the Suharto regime which had ousted the Soekarno Republican government.

Indonesian Republic recognised

Although Australia, the UK and the US had given de facto recognition to the Republic, the ban imposed on Dutch Shipping on 24 September 1945 was not lifted until 26 May 1948. The decision to lift the ban was made at an ACTU Conference of Federal 8 Transport and Waterside Unions in Melbourne, which Mick Healy attended. It was temporarily reimposed but finally lifted by a decision of the Waterside Workers' Federal Council in November 1949.[19]

The sovereignty of the Indonesian Republican government was only finally recognized by the Dutch government in the Hague on the 27 December 1949, after protracted negotiations instigated by the Australian government on the 30 July 1947 in the Security Council of the United Nations.[20]

Whilst the bans were initiated by Communist led unions there was widespread sympathy and support for the Indonesians throughout Australia. Opposition leader Menzies and the press denounced the boycott and claimed that the union movement was attempting to dictate foreign policy. The Worker newspaper claimed that Communists were distorting the situation to 'suit their revolutionary programme'. This attitude was supported by an element in the union movement itself, such as the Bundaberg Trades and Labor Council. And under the right-wing leadership of Secretary C.G. Fallon, the AWU called for an enquiry into funds raised for Indonesians in Australia.[21]

But these were minority views. Many Australians remembered that, as Japanese prisoners of war, they had worked alongside Indonesian forced labor, suffering the same hardships.22 In Australia, friendships sprang up between Australians and Indonesians in many small towns. The story of Indonesian friendship with Casino townspeople has been told on ABC radio. And in Mackay for example, Les Crofton, a retired official of the Rail, Tram and Bus Union, whose father was a railway worker, remembers as a child attending many social gatherings where Indonesians were present. A function hosted by the Indonesians who had provided what he described as 'sumptuous food' led to the comment by his mother Ivy that 'they must have deprived themselves to have put on such a wonderful spread'.[23] It has been said that 'the bans gained more public support than any other communist political initiative ever had'.[24]

The political influence of the Dutch shipping bans, which had commenced in Brisbane, was far reaching. It resulted in actions of international solidarity by trade unionists worldwide. The American Longshoremen's Union (West Coast), the New Zealand Federation of Labor, the Canadian Longshoremen's Union and workers in more than fourteen countries refused to load Dutch ships or give them berthing facilities. The old colonial order that had operated in Indonesia was successfully challenged. Combined with the diplomacy of the major powers, an Indonesian Republic was finally established.

Notes

1 Margo Beasley, Wharfies. The History of the Waterside Workers' Federation, Halstead Press in association with Australian National Maritime Museum, Sydney, N.S.W, 1996, p.128. A quotation from the Minutes of the Federal Council Waterside Workers' Federation Minutes, 24th July 1947.

2 The 559 vessels included 36 Dutch merchant ships, passenger liners and troopships, two tankers and other oil industry craft, and 450 power and dumb barges, lighters and surf landing craft. Nine corvettes, two submarines and seven submarine chasers. Three Royal Australian Navy vessels and two British troopships, as well as aircraft and a vast land transport fleet were also caught up in the ban. See Margo Beasley, Wharfies...,pp.129-130.

3 Gerald Peel, Hands Off Indonesia, Current Book Distributors, Sydney, Noel Butlin Archive Centre (ANU), p.6. Indonesia was traditionally a country very rich in natural resources. According to the author, at this time it provided 92% of the world's pepper, 91% of the world's cinchona, used for making quinine, 80% of the world's bauxite, 77% of the world's kapok, 40% of the world's rubber. And very large quantities of total world requirements of tea, cocos products, tin, tow fibres, sugar and oil.

4 Bernard Dahm (trans by P.S. Falla), History of Indonesia in the Twentieth Century, Pall Mall Press, London, 1971, p.59 and Rex Mortimer in 'Studies in Indonesian History', Gen. Ed. Elaine McKay, Pitman, Australia, 1976, p.18.

5 Gerald Peel Hands Off Indonesia, Noel Butlin Archive Centre (ANU), p.8.

6 Malcolm Caldwell and Ernst Utrecht, Indonesia: an Alternative History, Alternative Publishing Co- operative Limited, Sydney, 1979, p.56.

7 The story of this escape has been told in a number of books. See Rupert Lockwood, Black Armada, Australasian Book Society, Sydney, 1975, pp. 18-19.

8 Rupert Lockwood, Black Armada, Australasian Book Society, 1975, Sydney, pp.144, 146.

9 Information from a talk given by Mick Healy at a function organized by Brisbane International Socialists to commemorate the boycott of Dutch Shipping on 7/8/1983. In author's possession.

10 Tom Critchley, in Martin O'Hare & Anthony Reid, Australia & Indonesia's Struggle for Independence, p.xiii.

11 Rupert Lockwood, Black Armada, p.141.

12 Information supplied by Mick Healy in a letter dated 9 July 1975 to Rupert Lockwood (in author's possession).

13 Information in a letter dated 9 July 1975 from Mick Healy to Rupert Lockwood (in author's possession)

14 Rupert Lockwood, Black Armada, pp. 141,285.

15 Rupert Lockwood, Black Armada, p.141.

16 Dr Oesman Sastromidjojo was sent to Australia in June 1947.

17 A photo published in June/July 1969 in the Maritime Worker, the national newspaper of the Waterside Workers' Union, depicted presentations by two leaders of the Indonesian community in Australia (Slamet and Bondan) to Mick Healy as a token of gratitude for the help rendered by the trade unions in Queensland to the cause of Indonesian independence. The second photo shows Mick saying farewell to Slamet.

18 Malcolm Caldwell and Ernst Utrecht, Indonesia: an Alternative History..., p.133. In an endnote the authors state that the number of victims killed without trial 'will presumably always remain unknown'. It has been estimated that up to 1 million people were massacred. See also The Indonesian Killings 1965-1966. Studies from Java and Bali, Ed. By Robert Cribb, p.5, quoting a CIA report.

19 R.A. Gollan, Revolutionaries and Reformists. Communism and the Australian Labour Movement 1920-1955, Allen & Unwin, Syd. 1985, p.238.

20 Information from discussion by the author with Mick Healy.

21 Worker, 29 October 1945, p.1, 5 November 1945, pp. 1 & 4, 3 December 1945, p.1, 3 December 1945, p.4 (Editorial), 27 January 1946, p.1.

22 Martin O'Hare & Anthony Reid, Australia & Indonesia's Struggle for Independence, Jakarta:PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 1995, p.6 . 6,000 Australian prisoners-of-war in Indonesia and 15,000 in Singapore were forced by the Japanese to work in building airfields and installations alongside Indonesians. About 5,000 Australian prisoners labored on the notorious Burma-Thailand railway with more than 30,000 Indonesians who were sent there as -volunteer laborers'.

23 Author's conversation with Les Crofton.

24 Margo Beasley, Wharfies..., p.130.

Brian Manning
The 'Stayput' Malayans

In Darwin during the middle of August 1961, a group of young CPA recruits were critically reviewing their first Party meeting while having a supper on return to the old house in McMinn Street. An original tropical design with split bamboo walls and large push out shutters, the house had been the old Burton family home. On piers, with 6 bedrooms, a large kitchen and a modest 'flat' underneath also with split bamboo walls and partitions it was ideal for tropical, co-operative living.

The place became known as 'The Kremlin' as so many of the young couples - Hazel & Tom, Ian & Pat, Pam & John, Gwen & myself - had joined the Party.

The party branch was being resurrected after a long period of stagnation. The meeting had been monopolised by the old comrades from the Wharf discussing tactics and strategies in a current Wharfies' battle with the Stevedoring Authority. The young members were clearly browned off after their first meeting having been merely silent witnesses to an endless post-mortem on the issue of the day on the waterfront.

There was a clear consensus that the Wharf Comrades should form a 'Wharf Fraction' within which to analyse strategies and give a report to Branch Meetings, thus enabling meetings to get on with other agenda items concerning National and International affairs.

So it was in this setting the discussion got round to how the Party Branch could have been organised and activated.

How does a Party Branch identify issues of injustice that we could become active on?

The Front Page Story on the 'Northern Territory News' sitting on the kitchen table leapt out at us: 'Smiles from the G.G.' 'MALAYANS CASE IS BACK WITH DOWNER'

Smiles from the G.G.

The Governor General (Lord de L'Isle) brought the smiles to the faces of Daru bin Saris (left), Jaffa Madunne (right) and their friends Ali bin Salleh and his son Jimmy. They had

MALAYANS CASE IS BACK WITH DOWNER

The Governor General Lord de L'Isle has re-

The Editor of the N.T. News, Jim Bowditch, had served in Malaya, Borneo and East Timor with Australia's Special 'Z' Forces operating in small groups behind enemy lines. He claimed to owe Malayans a debt and was now doing his utmost to help these men.

With Bowditch's help the men had petitioned Governor- General Lord de L'Isle, who had requested the Minister for Immigration, Alexander Downer (father of current Foreign Affairs Minister), to reconsider their position. The front-page picture showed a crippled diver in a wheel chair, a victim of the dreaded Bends, to emphasise the hazardous nature of the Industry [which industry] that employed indentured foreign labour.

The following story told of moves to deport three Malayans who were no longer required by Jimmy Gonzales, Master Pearler and dealer in pearl shell and Crocodile Skins. There was a down turn in the pearl shell industry and they were out of a job.

Darus bin Sarus had been here 14 years
Jaffa Madunne had been here 9 years and
Zainal bin Hashim 5 years.

They had all made friends amongst the cosmopolitan Darwin community and wanted to stay here. What could we do that might influence the Federal Government to let them stay?

We decided to launch a petition, circulate it as widely as possible to see what level of support there was in the Darwin Community.

A petition was drafted simply putting a request that they be allowed to remain here and with our collective efforts in typing a stencil and resurrecting an old single sheet feed Roneo Machine, we printed pages of petition forms ready for distribution by the next afternoon.

We circulated the forms into shops where shopkeepers didn't hesitate to pledge support by drawing customers' attention to the issue, and took to the streets with clipboards and set up a table in Rain Tree Park, a central city spot. People volunteered to circulate the petitions. One of the most notable was Dawn, a young lass who worked in Government and who circulated the petition through the Public Service. She handed in 35 completed petitions in the first few days. It's no wonder that within a few years as Dawn Lawrie, she was elected to the Legislative Assembly as the Independent Member for Nightcliffe, and later in her career served as an Anti Discrimination Commissioner.

Support for the petition was overwhelming; Jim Bowditch gave it a plug in the paper saying a group of 'young people' had decided to launch a petition. The Darwin Community reaction was firmly in favour of them staying.

The Party Branch got behind the initiative and recommended that a Broad based Committee be set up under the auspices of the North Australian Workers Union to decide on conduct of a campaign.
The 'Anti-Deportation Committee' was open to anybody who had the time and/or desire to be involved and sixteen people nominated from a public meeting included

Bert Graham; President, N.A.W.U
Dick Ward; Solicitor and Member Legislative Council.
Pat Wood; Secretary, Amalgamated Engineers Union.
Grace Wood; Housewife, spouse of Pat Wood.
Des Robson; Accounts Clerk, Darwin Hospital.
Norma Robson: Housewife, spouse of Des Robson
Paddy Carroll; Secretary, N.A.W.U
Brian Manning; Airport Fireman, Dept Civil Aviation
Bill Donnelly; Vigilance Officer Darwin Waterfront
Dorothy Aston; Bookkeeper
Ken Stagg; Amalgamated Engineering Union
Pauline Shah; Housewife
John Banks; Meteorological Bureau.
Frank Martin; Boxer
George Gibbs; Waterside Worker
Jim Bowditch; Editor, N.T. News

The Committee was chaired by the Union President, Bert Graham and met in the NAWU Offices. It moved quickly to organise a Public Meeting on the Darwin Oval opposite the Hotel Darwin and invited

N.T. MHR Jock Nelson to address the meeting.

A couple of thousand people attended the meeting and heard Dick Ward, Moira Gibbs, Jim Bowditch, Jock Nelson and Brian Manning speak on the injustices and blatant racism of the White Australia policy. The meeting decided to march on the Administrators residence and elected a deputation to put the demands of the meeting to the Government through the Administrators office.


No. 97.

ome search for lays

Malays protest

lice search for eportees Daru and Zainal bin noved into top terday.

Rumors

Offers

Warrants

These men, who walked through the city yesterday carrying an anti-deportation poster, reflect the solid Darwin front against attempts to deport Zainal bin Hashim and Daru bin Saris.

The march to Government House took up the full width of the street and speakers continued to address the crowd outside the gates through a loud hailer whilst the deputation, led by Jock Nelson and Dick Ward, approached the Administrator unannounced. But they were expected as Police had already posted a cordon outside the gates.

Roger Nott, the Administrator gave a sympathetic hearing to the deputation and undertook to pass on the demands of the Public protest to Immigration Minister, Alexander Downer and Prime Minister, R G. Menzies in Canberra.

The noisy but orderly crowd remained outside Government House waiting for a report from the deputation before breaking up with an air of subdued optimism that perhaps the plea on behalf of the Malays would be fruitful.

Jim Bowditch was sceptical. He had connections that led him to believe that the men were to be taken into custody and deported without delay.

The paper next day carried a story with a photograph of Darus and Zainal indicating they had gone into hiding…

After a couple of weeks, Immigration realised there was a great deal of resolve amongst the Darwin Community. They despatched an Assistant Secretary to Darwin to take charge of the search, generally

read the riot act and Indicate there would be serious actions taken against persons harbouring the men. He pressed the Police to upgrade their searches so we found our homes being searched without notice twice and sometimes three times daily, generally around meal times.

HIDING

Daru Bin Saris and another former oyee due for repatriation today have

not turn up at Dar- this afternoon and or Singapore left

believed to be hid- e hope that the dra- c battle on their succeed in winning sion to stay.

Registered in Australia for transmission by Post as a newspaper

DARWIN, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 1961.

Vol. 10, No. 93. Price : 8d.

Protest march

Tuesday night's protest marchers swing down Bennett Street, past the Police Station, on their way to Government House.

Police did not interfere with the men, who marched down the middle of the road, stopping traffic in Smith Street and calling on bystanders to join the ranks.

Several hundred men and a number of women and children marched.

The demonstrators sang songs outside Government House while their delegates

Deputation

There was all sorts of speculation as to where the Malayans were. Because Douglas Lockwood, well known author and Journalist was believed to have taken a photograph of them in hiding and was asking questions about the issue, it was assumed by authorities that he was involved with a Bowditch Ward group and that they had them hidden on an island in the harbour.!!!

Plans were about to be put in place to use the navy to search an island in the harbour until they then believed that the 'communists' had taken custody of the fugitives and the island search plan shelved. The Authorities had concluded that the Anti-Deportation Committee was fragmented into 'groups' and the 'Communists' had 'taken over'.

Nothing could have been further from the reality, which was simply that 'Silent Majority Darwin' was in favour of the Malayans being given the right to remain here. The Committee was working as a united group.

So what had started as a Newspaper Editor supporting a cause and a group of young idealists who happened to have joined the Communist Party taking up the cause and taking it further was proving to be a successful working model.

Meanwhile, the Darwin Community was reacting in opposition to the application of the White Australia Policy. Not surprising because the Darwin population included a significant percentage of coloured people of mixed race who had, as recently as 1956, fought with a mass demonstration against blatant racist policies which required part-aboriginals to be registered and carry permits authorising them to be in town after dark.

Also bear in mind that in addition to the large population of mixed race people, Darwin had a legacy of Chinese presence dating back to the Gold Rush days and the Palmerston to Pine Creek Railway constructed between 1886- 89.

The Anti-Deportation Committee had the task thrust upon it to take responsibility for the welfare of the two Malayans in hiding. Jaffa Madunne, the third diver did not face immediate deportation as his passport had been lost so he kept a low profile being prepared to join the other two if the need arose. A Chinese man, Chan See Sam was also facing deportation but his case was being processed

separately.

A small sub-committee took on the task of co-ordinating the Malayans movements, selecting hiding places and moving them from house to house. Needless to say, as a security measure, the sub-committee was anonymous and no reports were detailed.

MISSING MALAYANS

NOTHING TO LOSE SAY HIDEAWAYS

By a "News" reporter

"We've nothing to lose now. We'll just depend on our friends and do what they tell us."

Still hoping

We were to learn much later that this security precaution was frustrating Immigration and Police intelligence and led to the belief that 'The Communists' had 'taken over' the Committee. In fact this belief was contained in a report by an Immigration official, H.G. Brooks, who came to Darwin to co-ordinate the search. He reported that this 'takeover' had caused some concern and 'some responsible people' seeking immediate action in the matter made an approach to the Administrator.

Mr Brooks attended a meeting of the Anti-Deportation Committee in early October with Les Liveris the local Immigration Chief. He indicated he was not in a position to reach any decision but listened to our pleas and suggestion that the Malayans case be reviewed and they be allowed to remain in the community pending further consideration of their request to remain in Darwin.

It is now apparent through reading his report, available under Freedom Of Information, that Mr Brooks was convinced the Committee was being manipulated by 'The Communists'. He reported that non-committee members spoke first but didn't contribute anything new; non-communist members spoke next but introduced no new material that had not been previously submitted. The Communist members concluded the orations with 'a series of political slogans'.

One could be forgiven for assuming that Mr Brooks was influenced by the White Australia Policy when he found it necessary to mention in his report that: "Jim Bowditch's views were undoubtedly influenced by the fact that he was married to a mixed blood girl." Frank Martin he described as "Half Caste Boxer". Pauline Shah as "married to an Indian"

Brooks' report claimed that a plot had been reported to police by a "well known and respected member of the Darwin Community" to 'kidnap' him after luring him to a secluded spot for a meeting with the Malayans.

He claimed that he took some precautions but didn't take the threat seriously. In the event it did not happen so he dismissed it as a publicity stunt.

It wasn't a proposal of the Anti-Deportation Committee but I have not discounted it was a stunt set up by Immigration to claim some sympathy from the public.

Consistent with this view, Immigration generated erroneous public statements that Darus Bin Saris had four children in Malaya and the Minister had also been guilty of deliberate misrepresentation by asking

the Administrator to release a cabled plea from Zainal's father asking him to come home.


Deport talk

With head in hand senior Immigration official Mr. H. G. Brooks of Canberra listens intently as members of the Darwin Anti-Deportation Committee explain their opposition to Immigration Minister Downer's efforts to deport Malays Daru bin Saris and Zainal bin Hashim.

In the picture above ... committee, ... Donnelly

5th OCTOBER.

Zainal responded in a note saying he had heard the news on the radio but could not believe his father was interested in him as he had not heard from him for years, besides he was now of age and wanted to stay in Australia amongst friends

There was a need to raise funds and appeals were made for financial support. As usual the wharfies dug deep with pay line donations to meet the men's living expenses. One wharfie who had a small property down the track, donated a pig to B.B.Q so the young people living at 'the Kremlin' organised a pig on a spit whilst Jaffa Madunne, the third Malayan who was not in hiding, displayed his cooking skills by making and cooking Sartee chicken Malayan style; marinaded chicken pieces basted with marinade using a brush made from lemon grass. We even had a hula dancer, Mary-Anne, an Australian born lass of Malaysian parents, as the main attraction. It was a good social and fundraiser.


GRIP TIGHTENS

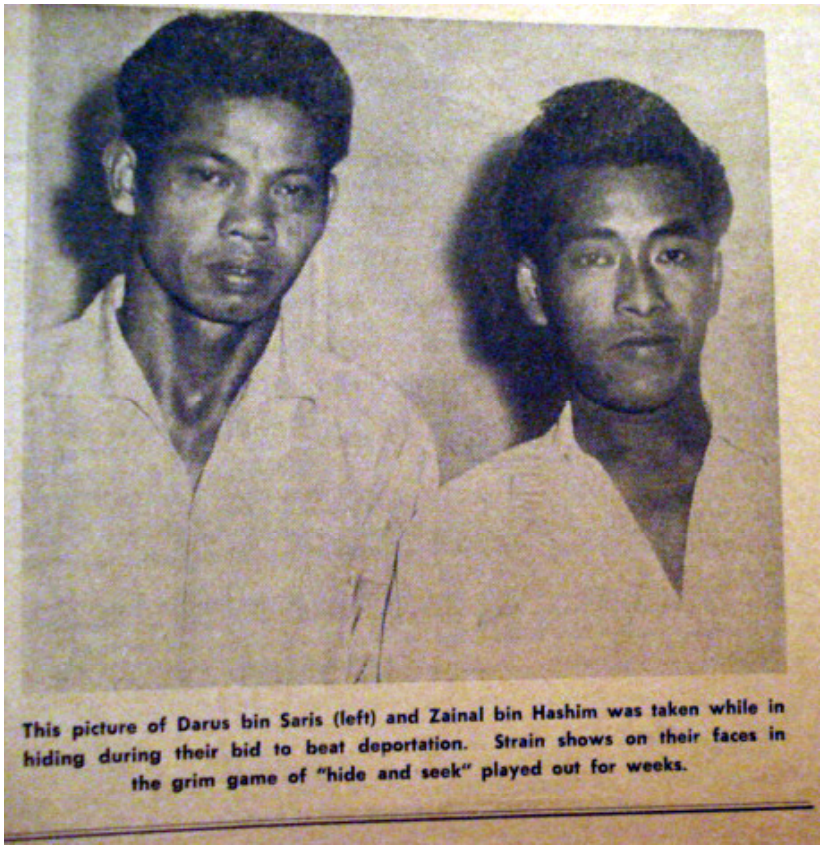
Darwin nurse Mary Ann Sallik made a pretty hula girl at the Malayan Anti-Deportation Committee's "Hawaiian night" on Saturday.

The remarkable thing that remains in my recollections is the courage of ordinary people; folks who had never contemplated breaking the law; people who were aware they could be in serious trouble if caught harbouring immigration fugitives. People I only vaguely knew sidled up to me saying, 'you can hide them at my place' whilst slipping me their address.

The 'sub-committee' discussed movements and selected the placements, deliberately avoiding the homes of Party people whose homes were being searched regularly by police who had obtained 'general warrants'.
One morning, I awoke to the presence of police who decided to start early. I occupied the downstairs space of the Kremlin. My partner and I with our two girls were asleep in one room and Jaffa Madunne was asleep in the lounge area. Jaffa pulled the sheet over his head and the police officer asked me "Who's that?"
I off handedly said, "Oh just one of the Malayans". He looked at me and said sarcastically, "Oh yeah!" and walked out.

We believed the police officers were not diligent in carrying out these searches because they privately held reservations about the issue of 'White Australia'.

Nevertheless, the Federal Government was eager to take the heat out of the issue, which was developing increasing support nationally. Negotiations commenced around the proposition that the men would surrender themselves and the Government would undertake to review the matter.



This picture of Darus bin Saris (left) and Zainal bin Hashim was taken while in hiding during their bid to beat deportation. Strain shows on their faces in the grim game of "hide and seek" played out for weeks.

On 26th September, Darus and Zainal presented themselves to Sgt Barry Tiernan of the Federal Police on the understanding that the matter of their remaining in Australia would be reviewed. They gave themselves up to the Administrator in the company of:

Harold Cooper, The Mayor of Darwin.
Rev N.C. Pearce, Uniting Church.
Brother Aidan, Church of England.
Paddy Carroll, N.A.W.U.
Pat Wood,A.E.U
Lou de Courcy, private citizen, Rotary.

It was agreed that they would not be taken into custody provided they report daily to Immigration.

Jim Bowditch lost no time in getting them on a plane down to Melbourne where the support movement was very strong. Jim had contacted prominent Barrister, Frank Galbally, with a view to challenging the deportation orders in the High Court, thus at least giving us some breathing space to pursue the issue politically.

Alexander Downer was heckled wherever he went with students painting their faces black and disrupting his efforts at electioneering for the forthcoming election.

After a few weeks in Melbourne, being feted by supporters they returned to Darwin now buoyed by what they felt were strong chances they would be allowed to stay. They reported back to Immigration and were advised that they should report daily in future.

They would have but for information that the following day when they reported they would be arrested and immediately deported. Sure enough, a drive past the Immigration offices confirmed a Federal Police vehicle at the rear of the building. We felt this was a breach of trust on their part and did not hesitate to once again put them in hiding.

Daily searches recommenced with determined efforts. The heat was turned up to the point where we feared the searches might be successful as we understood road blocks were to be set up and vehicles searched.

It was clear we had to move them out of Darwin. But what about the roadblocks and where would we take them?

Jack & Esther Meaney, semi retired from wage slavery, had taken up some property near Adelaide River. But we daren't ring them as our phones were being tapped.

"Fella name Downer — wanted to know if we'd seen any colored people come this way!" . . . This was famous cartoonist Rigby's comment on the search for Darwin's two missing Malayan deportees Daru Bin Saris and Zainal Bin Hashim.

It was decided we would travel in convoy with three cars using stop pedal signals in the event that we came across a roadblock. The men would be in the last car; three pumps on the brake pedal would relay a signal, enabling the men to skirt around and join the convoy out of sight of the road block.

We did not encounter a roadblock at three in the morning and travelled on to Adelaide River. The first two cars pulled up in front of the pub to wait for the last car, which we seemed to have lost! It arrived after an anxious wait. Jim Bowditch had a tyre blow out and nearly rolled the car when he swerved off the road knocking down some small scrub and into a wire fence. We needed Jim, to navigate to "Milton Springs" the Meaney farm. We had come too far. Jack & Esther's place was down the Stapleton Creek turn off a couple of miles before Adelaide River.

We reached the Meaney's property just on sunrise and with no fore warning prevailed on them to hide the Malayans. They didn't hesitate - Jack was a Union stalwart. He had held just about all positions in the Union, who had stayed in the top end during the war and helped re-establish the NAWU after the war despite official obstruction. Esther, a devoutly religious person who practiced her humanity, had been a Northern Territory delegate to a southern peace conference before the war. A remarkable woman who prior to her marriage to Jack, had worked alongside her father and brothers, working cattle in the harsh Territory outback.

The property was on a permanent spring so Jack set up a camp in the bush near the spring where the men languished for the duration of the campaign.

With the care of the Malayans resolved we put extra effort into publicising the issues around the 'White Australia Policy.' Police resumed their daily raids morning and evening and included Jim Bowditch's house whereupon he initiated proceedings for trespass and damages. The claim was disallowed but police toned down their raids to those premises where there were grounds to believe the deportees might be hiding.
Channel Island was thoroughly searched and the police enlisted the aid of Aborigines but their efforts were fruitless.

Police continued to receive telephone tips of sightings but they concluded that they were diversionary measures to throw them off the scent.

Mr Brooks was having no luck so he prepared to leave Darwin concluding in his report that the people of Darwin were apathetic and the issue was not fully understood.

He claimed that the Anti-Deportation Committee only represented a couple of hundred people and that Community Leaders such as the Mayor and clergymen were only acting on their personal behalf and did not represent the Council or their Congregations.

He claimed that 'responsible people' in Darwin have privately expressed support for the Government and that some deplored the 'direct action' outside the law.

I believe citizens have a duty to oppose bad laws such as the current Immigration laws of this country, which fly in the face of international conventions. Mr Brooks and his contemporaries in Immigration might study this quote:

"Individuals have international duties which transcend the national obligations of obedience. therefore [individual citizens] have the duty to violate domestic laws to prevent crimes against peace and humanity from occurring." - Nuremberg War Crime Tribunal, 1950

May Day was planned nationally to highlight the blatant racism of the policy in parades around Australia when the Federal Government did an about-turn and decided to allow the men to stay. In Jim Bowditch's words, the issue of "The Stayput Malayans" drove a big nail in the coffin of the White Australia Policy.
Ten years later, an effort was made to prevent a Filipino family being forced to leave despite the Darwin Community supporting their desire to stay. The family had decided to leave voluntarily rather than be deported.

At the time, the Labor Party was holding its Conference in Hobart and a phone call to Bob Hawke and Gough Whitlam secured a pledge that when in Government, they would facilitate the family's return to Australia. It was a colourful Al Grassby as Minister for Immigration who in the Philippines, where he had gone to honour the pledge, when asked "What about the White Australia Policy Mr Grassby" replied, 'The White Australian Policy is dead … Give me a shovel and I'll bury it!"

It's a wonder Al Grassby's ghost doesn't haunt the hardliners in the Howard Government given their performance with the people smuggling issue, the Siev 6, the Children overboard debacle and their present compulsory detention policy.

Jim Baird
After the Coup: The Trade Union Delegation to Chile

November 2004


TWELVE DAYS IN CHILE

How and why the Delegation went to Chile

Press statement released by the delegation in Chile

This was a press statement released in Chile by the delegation. It was not published and was returned to the Department of Foreign Affairs in Canberra with a letter saying it was an act of interference in the internal affairs of Chile.

In February 1974 a LAN Chile Boeing 707 made the first non stop flight over the pole from Punta Arenas in Chile to Sydney. LAN Chile was the national airline and the Airline President, Air force General Stuardos was aboard. He had come to approach the Labor government to grant landing rights for a LAN Chile service to Australia. The plane landed in Sydney after the record breaking flight but there it stayed –indefinitely. Workers at Sydney airport refused to service it. Black banned, it was grounded.

Five months after the violent coup in Chile that had overthrown the socialist government, there were still many unanswered questions about the fate of Chilean trade unionists, activists and their families.

Discussions were held between the Unions and the LAN Chile management in Sydney. Agreement was finally reached that a delegation of trade unionists would be allowed to visit Chile and report back to the Australian unions on their return. General Stuardos was able to say, "We will be lucky if union officials from your country come to Chile and see what has happened and how much happier the people now are."

It was on again then off again and the plane continued to sit on the tarmac. After much discussion, the General gave an undertaking that there would be no discrimination against those interviewed by the delegation including jailed trade unionists and former members of Allende's government. They would have free movement and protection.

The composition of the delegation was raised with a number of unions. This led to a debate about whether the delegation should go at all! In my union, the AMWSU there was opposition from some of the National Committee; whilst they supported the protests against LAN Chile they were unconvinced about the value of the delegation. Finally the decision taken was that the delegation should only proceed if it received the support of the international trade union organizations. Henry McCarthy, a journalist with the Metal Workers got to work and through his international contacts was able to secure the support of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, the World Federation of Trade Unions and the Catholic International Trade Union organization. Within an hour of sending the requests, telexes of support from these organizations arrived at the Union office.

The delegation eventually comprised: Henry McCarthy, journalist with the metalworkers; Brian McMahon, an Organiser with the TWU in Victoria; Ron Masterson from the Newcastle Branch of the Plumbers Union; Steve Cooper a rank and file worker who had been in Chile the previous year and was endorsed by the Miscellaneous Workers Union; Carmen Bull who had extensive background knowledge of South America and who would act as our interpreter and myself. I was a National Organizer with the metal workers and was selected to lead the delegation.

LAN Chile finally agreed that if the bans on their aircraft at Sydney Airport were lifted, they would fly us to Chile. So in March 1974 we were off. The 707 had now been sitting at Mascot for close to a month. We were given a send off by a large group of Chileans including trade unionists and others wanting to expose what was happening in Chile.

We found we were the only passengers on the aircraft and we were well looked after by the crew. It was at Easter Island that we first encountered the military and police presence we were to see everywhere in Chile. Landing in Santiago we were met by a strong military presence and a representative from the Australian embassy who had arranged accommodation and who was to accompany us on our travels. Our link with the Junta government was through an officer of the Minister for the Interior, an Army General called Commandant Figueroa.

We were advised when we first arrived not to stand in front of the windows. Gunfire could be heard in the adjacent streets around the 9 o'clock curfew time. This is when dogs were let loose in the streets and American trucks with guns poking out the back cruised around.

Over the next few days we made some contacts. The Archbishop of Santiago, Raul Silva Henrique, arranged many of these. They included trade unionists who had been held in the infamous Stadium where many were killed, including the musician Victor Jara. The delegation split up into smaller groups to meet these contacts, some of whom were still underground, trade union officials in hiding. Some were met at night in secret after the curfew with the assistance of church members opposed to the takeover. (Carmen had unbeknown to me, gone out after curfew to find and interview people and to arrange meetings). Others we met in the prisons through the assistance of the General. We interviewed former members of the Allende government including the Minister for Education. He was 80 and guarded by two teenagers holding American sub machine guns.

Mr. MacDonald, our man from the Australian embassy was able to advise us on the location of embassies where various leaders of the deposed government had been given protection from the military after the coup. We visited the Minister for Labor in the Allende government and a leader of the Chilean trade union movement in the Swedish Embassy where he had taken refuge.

The Embassy was still being fired at and people going to and from the embassy were harassed by the military. Luis Figueroa was very familiar with the trade union situation and what had happened to the various organizations. He said, " When that plane was grounded in Sydney, the news swept through Chile and from that moment, lives began to be saved in Chile." He was able to direct us to the many buildings which had been taken over by the military when they closed the unions down. I had a small pocket camera, which I used to surreptitiously photograph the notices on the doors. These photographs proved to be invaluable evidence to the ILO inquiry in Geneva later that year.

The delegation interviewed prisoners in the Santiago Women's prison about their experiences since the previous September. We also met the daughters of a General who had been killed prior to the military takeover and heard of the harrowing way they had been treated by the military. From central Santiago we traveled through the police and military controls to a shanty town. Our arrival was at first greeted with alarm. the Australian Embassy representative was able to reassure them we were not government officers and we were not bringing the military with us. The conditions in which people lived were pitifully poor and they complained of higher prices, shortage of food and no assistance for their plight. They talked of how immediately after the army takeover, bodies had been thrown into the canal which was the boundary of the shanty town.

Some of the delegation went to Valparaiso where they contacted members of the leading stevedoring union and others who gave information on the suppression of unions in that city. It was a similar

pattern to Santiago and elsewhere with union offices and the property of community organizations, even mothers clubs being taken over.

In the first week spent interviewing people, we received great support wherever we went despite the evident and often threatening police presence. The cleaner on our floor of the hotel quietly drew our attention to the occupants of the room across the corridor. Three men with loaded shoulder holsters playing cards. She said they had been there since we arrived. We were under surveillance.

For our remaining time in Santiago we decided to split into groups. We had an "interpreter" provided by the government who wanted to be at every meeting and complained about our plan to separate. He ended up accompanying me wherever I went which enabled others in the delegation to meet with those who might be under threat if it was known they had talked to us. We were successful in keeping the interpreter away from all sensitive contacts.

We were able to interview General Bonilla who was the Minister for the Interior and one step below the Junta. He had strong connections with the church and the right wing of the Christian Democratic Party. We were told that he had expected, as in previous coups that the armed forces would go back to barracks after installing a puppet civilian regime. This had not happened it was said, because the CIA, who directed the coup operation, had advised against it.

I raised a number of questions with him including the allegations about the mistreatment of political prisoners, including those in the Stadium and the crackdown on free democratic processes including the taking over of community and union property by the armed forces. He tried to justify the military takeover on the grounds that they had restored democracy against a communist government.

I told him that was not the view we had formed and asked for the release of union officials, together with the women prisoners we had met and the Minister for Education who was in ill health and being treated inhumanely. He denied the mistreatment but we were able to point out we had already met and spoken to these people. (Hector Olivares, ex president of the Copper Workers Union and Professor Enriquez were subsequently released.)

I then raised the issue of people wishing to migrate to Australia should not be denied their right to do so or be harassed or mistreated. He gave this assurance so we then requested that the children of a Chilean family living in Wollongong should be allowed to join their parents. He agreed to make the arrangements and shortly after we arrived back in Australia we were pleased to learn that this had been done.

Our contacts in Santiago had given us a list of people who were being held in Chacabuko prison, near a large copper mine which had been confiscated from Kennecot by the Allende government. We were flown to Antifagasta and from there went by road in a small convoy to Tocipilla. The government interpreter was still with us. He proved useful in smoothing our passage through military road blocks, flashing his identification card got immediate respect from the army and police. Tocipilla was on the west coast of Chile and had a power station which supplied the copper mine. We lunched with a number of people associated with the power station, invitees of the Superintendent of the Power Station. We all exchanged social pleasantries for a couple of hours. I was quietly taken aside during the course of the afternoon and told in English to beware because two of the people we were sitting with had been involved in the murder of the President and Secretary of the Miners Union.

We then continued across the Atacama Desert towards the spectacular Andes Mountains. We stopped in small towns along the way. There were television aerials everywhere. On inquiring we were told they had been provided by the former Allende government as part of their education programs. We noted the small community buildings were locked and were told this had done by the military. In one town, the townspeople took us to a cave which showed signs of habitation, empty cans and an old cooking fire. The villagers talked reverently of a group of young priests who were attempting to escape over the Andes who had camped there. They were found by the local army group and were all killed, the bullet holes were in the walls of the cave.

We continued on to Chacabuko prison. It was called a mine but it had been a guano processing plant producing fertilizer for export. An air force officer was in charge of the prison. Obviously well educated and a pilot, he and his fellow officers had been to the United States for training. We were expected and he welcomed us, offering assistance with our investigations.

He arranged for us to meet the 20 prisoners for whom we had names. They were brought to a rotunda by young looking soldiers armed with automatic weapons who then surrounded the bandstand. Henry

McCarthy and Carmen Bull were with me and whilst I talked with some of the prisoners, others were able to get messages to Carmen for their families and information about their imprisonment. We assured them we would take back all this information with the hope of assisting in their release.

The prisoners seemed very pleased to see us and our visit at the very least had helped to build their morale. In common with many we met, they felt the world authorities had failed them. They were particularly critical of the role of the United States who they blamed for the coup. I met some of those we had spoken to in Sydney later and received their personal thanks to the delegation members and the Unions for our endeavours and their final release.

At the conclusion of the interviews we were ushered back to the officer in charge who then invited us to lunch. I declined his invitation. For us to be seen to be collaborating with the armed forces or officers of the Junta would undermine the international standing of the Delegation. He was greatly offended by this but managed to wish us well in our investigations as we left to visit the copper

All protests should go to:
Chilean Government Headquarters EDIFICO DIEGO PORTALES, SANTIAGO, protests can also be sent to the Chilean Ambassador, Chilean Embassy, Canberra.

The Australian delegation arrives at Tocopilla in the North of Chile en route to the Chacavuco detention camp and to the copper miners in Chuquicamata.

mine. At the mine site, they had made available to us a large building with a central courtyard, four bedrooms and meeting rooms. Elaborate in the Chilean style. We were at altitude and some of the Delegation were having trouble moving around. We toured the mine the next day by bus but were unable to speak to any of the people working around the job. The mine was run by the military but their presence was not immediately apparent. I decided we would go into town and try to talk with people in the streets. We received a warm welcome from those we talked to. They were not willing to say too much about the military and insisted they were all right. The shopkeepers had not been greatly affected by the military coup and whilst the mine was not operating at full capacity, things were fairly normal. We were later told that the copper miners union had not opposed the coup and they continued to benefit from the better living conditions they had enjoyed under the Allende regime.

We went down to the mine office later that evening. There were two military officers, engineers who were in charge of plant operations. Although surprised to see us they happily talked about the problems of getting the mine functioning again and complained about the lack of work being done by the mine staff.

We went to the foothills of the Andes to talk to some people on the mountainside. They made us welcome in their small rock homes and showed us the items they made from lama fleece to be sold in the towns and cities. They complained of how the soldiers took their goods.

When we returned to Santiago we had been moved to another hotel. We returned to our old one to pick up some clothes and laundry. The cleaning lady on our floor said we had been lucky. A young American attending an international banking conference had taken our old room. He was a large man,

like Henry McCarthy and had been exercising in front of the window. He was shot through the head from the street. Was the shot meant for one of us?

The delegation had been in Chile 10 days when we met with officers of the Chilean metalworkers Union who were still allowed to operate. They said that knowledge of the delegation was now wide spread throughout Chile. The sporadic gunfire we heard when we first arrived had stopped and people appeared to be moving around more freely. We were told later that following our arrival, the authorities had given instructions for indiscriminate shooting to stop.

We had to use subterfuge on occasions. While Henry and Carmen were waiting to meet with representatives of the underground coal miners, a police wagon started circulating the park. Henry grabbed Carmen and they pretended to be lovers.

We had now completed all that could be done and set about preparing a statement for Commandant Figueroa as he had requested. It was brief, a number of headings critical of what we had seen. We handed this to him just prior to our departure form the airport and reserved a fuller telling for our return to Australia.

On our last day a young man handed me a tape which he asked me to give to someone who would approach me when we got back to Sydney. I was apprehensive, was this a set up to discredit the delegation? I didn't tell the other members, hid the tape in my baggage and hoped for the best. It turned out to be a speech by a representative of the left forces which provided a morale boost to many of those who had settled in Australia and wanted news from home.

We were very tired when we arrived back in Sydney and unable to give a good account to the assembled journalists other than we were convinced of the ill treatment meted out to the Chilean people and that the suppression of rights was rampant.

Some Mission Achievements

During its stay in Chile, the Australian delegation made a special appeal for the release of prominent trade unionists Olivares and Morris, prisoners on Dawson Island. Another prisoner for whom a special appeal was made was the former policitcal leader Enriquez, an elderly and sick man, held in the Air Force Hospital-prison in Santiago.

The release of Olivares and Enriquez was announced in the weeks that followed. The case of Morris is still under revue.

The delegation was also able to meet some children of refugees and ensure the priority re-scheduling their departure for Australia.

The delegation also spoke to people in asylum in several foreign Embassies and were able to bring back messages for friends and relatives.

The interview with prisoners in Chacabuco con-centration camp and many person to person discussions with workers at a shop-floor level, poor suburbs and open meetings were also solid achievements, going beyond what was possible for representatives of previous delegations.

This great freedom was undoubtedly due to the firm backing, through job action, of Australian workers fully conscious of the plight of their fellow trade unionists in Chile.

Over the next months, the delegates participated in organized meetings across Australia which reached thousands of people. This generated some media publicity. We produced a newspaper in seven languages; this was distributed internationally. We passed on our information to the Australian Labour government and they subsequently refused LAN Chile landing rights in Australia. The New Zealand government followed suit.

I produced a report with photographic evidence of the suppression of the trade union movement and community groups which I used when I went to Geneva to attend the International Labour Office investigation in to the suppression of workers rights in Chile.

The ILO inquiry led to the expulsion of Chile from the organization in 1974 . Much later I found out that the delegation was greatly complimented by the ILO for our action in pursuing the issue even against opposition from some of our own officials.

I recently attended a commemoration of the 11th of September 1973 coup organized by the Australian Chilean community in Sydney and had the honour of addressing them on our experience. Many in the audience had suffered at the hands of the Pinochet regime; there were others who remembered the delegation including some who had been in Chacabuko prison at the time.

While the delegation did not solve the problem of the Chilean people, it was the first international action which received publicity and exposed the Pinochet government. This resulted in worldwide condemnation of the regime and Chile's expulsion from the International Labour Organisation.

vintage reds Australian stories of rank and file organising

Mark Gregory
Union Songs in Australia: history in song and song in history

This overview of union songs in Australia is confined to labour movement songs and poems created since World War 2. Many of these were first published in union journals or folk song magazines or on folk song recordings. They number in the hundreds so this overview will only examine a small selection.

In 1946 Dorothy Hewett, a young journalist in Western Australia, wrote a poem called Clancy and Dooley and Don McLeod. The poem resulted from her investigation of a strike that took the form of a coordinated walk off by some 600 Aboriginal workers from stations in the Pilbara in WA on May Day 1946. It was the first strike by Aboriginal people in the nation's history. The strike was well supported by unions, particularly the Seamen's Union of Australia. It surprised and shocked the pastoralists and it took ten years to be resolved. Today it has become known as "the Blackfellas Eureka" and is considered a precursor of the modern Land Rights movement. Dorothy Hewett's poem soon became well known around Australia and many workers learnt it by heart for recitation. After more than fifty years the poem finally found itself a tune courtesy of veteran folk singer Chris Kempster.[1]

Bob Fagan singing ... Sonia Bennett and Denis Kevans seated

Song: CLANCY AND DOOLEY AND DON MCLEOD (Dorothy Hewett, tune Chris Kempster, 2000)

Clancy and Dooley and Don McLeod
Walked by the wurlies when the wind was loud,
And their voice was new as the fresh sap running,
And we keep on fighting and we keep on coming.

Don McLeod beat at a mulga bush

And a lot of queer things came out in a rush.
Like mongrel dogs with their flattened tail
They sneaked him off to the Hedland jail.

In the big black jail where the moonlight fell
Clancy and Dooley sat in the cell.
In the big white court crammed full with hate
They said, "We wouldn't scab on a mate."

The poem recounts the story of a struggle as it happened: a poem created to be recited and memorised, as an oral description of events and key participants. However any labour movement songs and poems have history as their subject, providing a warning or an example to follow. Consider the two ballads written by Helen Palmer, The Ballad of Eureka and The Ballad of 1891, and set to music by her friend Doreen Jacobs. Both were written in 1951.

Song: BALLAD OF EUREKA (Helen Palmer, tune Doreen Jacobs)

"The law is out to get us
And make us bow in fear.
They call us foreign rebels
Who'd plant the Charter here!"
"They may be right," says Lalor,
"But if they show their braid,
We'll stand our ground and hold it
Behind a bush stockade!"

There's not a flag in Europe
More lovely to behold,
Than floats above Eureka
Where diggers work the gold.
"There's not a flag in Europe
More lovely to the eye,
Than is the blue and silver
Against a southern sky.[2]

Here in the name of freedom,
Whatever be our loss,
We swear to stand together
Beneath the Southern Cross."
It is a Sunday morning.
The miner's camp is still;
Two hundred flashing redcoats
Come marching to the hill

Come marching up the gully
With muskets firing low;
And diggers wake from dreaming
To hear the bugle blow.
The wounded and the dying
Lie silent in the sun,
But change will not be halted
By any redcoats gun.

Helen Palmer wrote these ballads for the Sydney choir Unity Singers whose leader and founder was Doreen Jacobs.[3] Unity Singers was a workers' choir or trade union choir and amongst its members were people destined to become notable singers, folklorists, collectors and songwriters. They included John Meredith, Chris Kempster, Alex Hood and Bill Berry

These two songs were written at time strangely similar to our own, A time when a backward looking federal government was engineering a taxpayer funded attack on the labour movement, an attack that centred around the attempt to outlaw the Communist Party and militant unionists and nobble any institutions that got in the way. Menzies' "Red Bill" was rejected first by the High Court and then by the voters at referendum.[4]

The purpose of Helen Palmer's ballads was quite clear at the time: to alert the listener to some lessons from the history of Australian class struggle. If the final lines of Ballad of 1891, "where they jail a man for striking/it's a rich man's country yet", point backwards to the shearers' strike, they also point to the contemporaneous 1949 miners' strike (where the leaders were jailed) and to the new penal clauses of Menzies' anti-union legislation.

Song: BALLAD OF 1891 (Helen Palmer, tune Doreen Jacobs)

The price of wool was falling in 1891
The men who owned the acres saw something must be done
"We will break the Shearers' Union, and show we're masters still
And they'll take the terms we give them, or we'll find the ones who will"

"Be damned to your six-shooters, your troopers and police
The sheep are growing heavy, the burr is in the fleece"
"Then if Nordenfeldt and Gatling won't bring you to your knees
We'll find a law," the squatters said, "that's made for times like these"

To trial at Rockhampton the fourteen men were brought
The judge had got his orders, the squatters owned the court
But for every one that's sentenced, ten thousand won't forget
Where they jail someone for striking, it's a rich man's country yet

Two years after they were written, The Ballad of Eureka, and The Ballad of 1891 were selected along with a number of bush ballads and Lawson and Paterson poems to be woven into the musical play Reedy River. This play was launched by New Theatre[5] in Melbourne in mid 1953 and in Sydney before Christmas 1953. The title song was Lawson poem put to music by Chris Kempster (in 1949) and was popular in the Eureka Youth League[6] around Australia.

Reedy River, a play set in the 1891 shearers' strike, written and performed at the height of the cold war, seems to epitomise a relationship between unions, the left wing movement, the folk song movement, theatre, the arts, and the new interest in labour movement history. Many individuals were active in a number of those spheres and quite often in all of them.

The popularity and long runs of the play Reedy River gave the folk movement in Australia an enormous boost. The play's success seems to have led directly to the formation of the Bush Music Club in Sydney (1954) and the Victorian Folk Music Society in Melbourne. (Labour historians Ian Turner and Wendy Lowenstein were among the founders of the latter). These two organizations were established to collect bush songs, publish them and promote them, and over a period of some decades their work helped to reveal that the number of Australian folk songs in existence was not just a dozen or so, but something closer to 500. Folk song clubs and folk festivals[7] and folk recordings[8] and the academic study of folksong and folklore all followed from that work.

The relationship between the labour movement and the nascent folk song movement had a profound effect on the kinds of new songs that songwriters were composing and that folk singers were singing and recording, and scattered among them there was the ongoing creation of new union songs. Indeed, during the 1960s a number of unions[9] were encouraging the composition of songs and poems with campaign records (Oh Pay Me (1963), Basic Wage Dream (1964) and Ballad of Women (1964)). There were song and poetry competitions and even a touring "Four Capitals Folk Festival" (1964), devised to encourage this kind of creative activity, particularly in the younger generation.

Song: WEEVILS IN THE FLOUR (Dorothy Hewett, tune Mike Leyden, 1964)

And just across the river
Stood the mighty B.H.P.,
Poured pollution on the waters,
Poured the lead of misery
And its smoke was black as Hades
Rolling hungry to the sea.

In those humpies by the river
Where we lived on dole and stew,
While just across the river
Those greedy smokestacks grew,

And the hunger of the many
Filled the bellies of the few.

Chorus
For dole bread is bitter bread
Bitter bread and sour
There's grief in the taste of it
There's weevils in the flour
There's weevils in the flour

Song: ROAR OF THE CROWD (Denis Kevans, 1962)

I Heard the roar of the wind, boys, in the mighty, green-shirt pines.
As if the trees were blazing, like a gas-fire in the mines,
The wind's voice kept on mounting against the midnight's face,
I felt that roar well up in me, that roar has left its trace.

I heard the roar at the school-gates, when the holidays began,
When the kids raced out like brumbies, grown men turned and ran,
They raced down through the playground, and they roared out -
"We are free!" Ah, the hungry roar of those school kids, still lives inside of me.

And I heard the roar at the Town Hall, when the delegate rose to speak,
A roar to shake the merciless, a roar to raise the weak,
To raise the weak and wandering, to give eyes to the blind,
That was the roar off a tidal wave that was making up its mind.

Song: BASIC WAGE DREAM (Don Henderson 1963)

I dreamed a doctor told a judge from the Arbitration Court
That he would only live to preside on one more case being fought.
The judge whose conscience was ill at ease thought if this case will be my last,
To hand down a fair decision might make up for his unjust past.

The next case that was to come before this very worried sage,
Was a request to raise by fifty-two bob the weekly basic wage.
The old chap granted the raise in full and to assure his place in heaven,
Made the payments retrospective to nineteen hundred and seven.

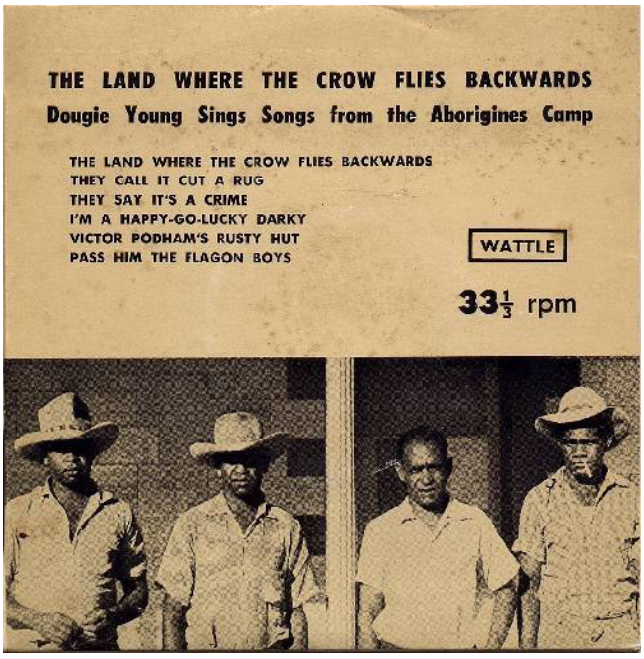
During the 1964/65 Mount Isa struggle[10], the Brisbane Trades Hall sent songwriter Don Henderson and militant seamen's union delegate Geoff Wills to the town to perform for the striking miners. Prior to

the dispute there had already been poems written about the conditions at Isa. For instance Merv Lilley published two of his in What About The People (1962)

Poem: UNTIL ANOTHER MAN'S KILLED (Merv Lilley 1950s)
Poem: LEAD BONUS (Merv Lilley 1950s)

Henderson and Wills combines song making and performance when they arrived in Isa in March 1965 found themselves, and their up-to-the-minute songs written about the struggle, in great demand.

Song: ISA (Don Henderson 1965)
Song: TALKING MOUNT ISA (Don Henderson 1965)
Song: IT'S A FREE WORLD (Don Henderson 1965)



The 1960s saw many issues such as Aboriginal rights, feminism and the Vietnam War were being taken up by broad sections of the community.

Anthropologist Jeremy Beckett's field recordings of Aboriginal stockman/songwriter Dougie Young became very influential in the mid 1960s when released on pioneer folk label Wattle Records. Dougie Young songs like The Land Where The Crow Flies Backwards and Cutting a Rug became popular among folk singers, specifically because they were contemporary Aboriginal songs. As University Students, under the leadership of Charlie Perkins, organised their "Freedom Ride" buses, Gary Shearston's released his influential LP of Australian contemporary songs Australian Broadside (1965). The record included Aboriginal poet Kath Walker's (Oodgeroo Noonuccal) poem Son of Mine along with Dougie Young's The Land Where The Crow Flies Backwards. These were among the first recordings of contemporary Aboriginal songs in Australia.

Song: LAND WHERE THE CROW FLIES BACKWARDS (Dougie Young)
Song: NOW IS THE TIME TO BE SINGING (Mike Leyden 1965)

Well I walked into town
And I looked all around
What could I see in the land of the free?
Man against man,
Hate through the land
And people all shouting and jeering at me

Chorus
We don't want nobody making a fuss
And we don't want you if you can't be like us
So just move along and don't you come back
Yes it sure is a time to be singing

Well I walked down the street,
Placard in my hand,
Policeman came up and he pushed me around,
Said, "Come on with me,
I'm moving you on,
I'm taking you down to the outskirts of town

In 1967, on the 20th anniversary of The WA walk off strike the Northern Territory Wattie Creek sit down strike had begun with support from the Waterside Workers' Federation in Darwin and unions across Australia.

Song: GURINJI BLUES (Ted Egan)
Song: FROM LITTLE THINGS BIG THING GROW (Paul Kelly and Kev Carmody 1992)[11]

Vestey man said "I'll double your wages
Eighteen quid a week you'll have in your hand"
Vincent said "uhuh we're not talking about wages
We're sitting right here till we get our land"

Vestey man roared and Vestey man thundered
"You don't stand the chance of a cinder in snow"
Vince said "If we fall others are rising"

From little things big things grow
From little things big things grow

Then Vincent Lingiari boarded an aeroplane
Landed in Sydney, big city of lights
And daily he went round softly speaking his story
To all kinds of men from all walks of life

And Vincent sat down with big politicians
"This affair" they told him "Is a matter of state
Let us sort it out, your people are hungry"
Vincent said "No thanks, we know how to wait"

The 1960s was also a time for the peace movement was very active. The movement was rallying in opposition to Australia's involvement with what the Vietnamese call "The American War". Many unions were involved in the large demonstrations and opposed the war with industrial action too as in the case of the Jeparit and Boonaroo, freight ships that members of the Seamen's Union of Australia refused to sail because they were carrying munitions for use in Vietnam.

Song: BOONAROO (Don Henderson 1968)

Chorus
Oh, who will man the Boonaroo?
Who will sail her, be the crew,
sailing on the Boonaroo?

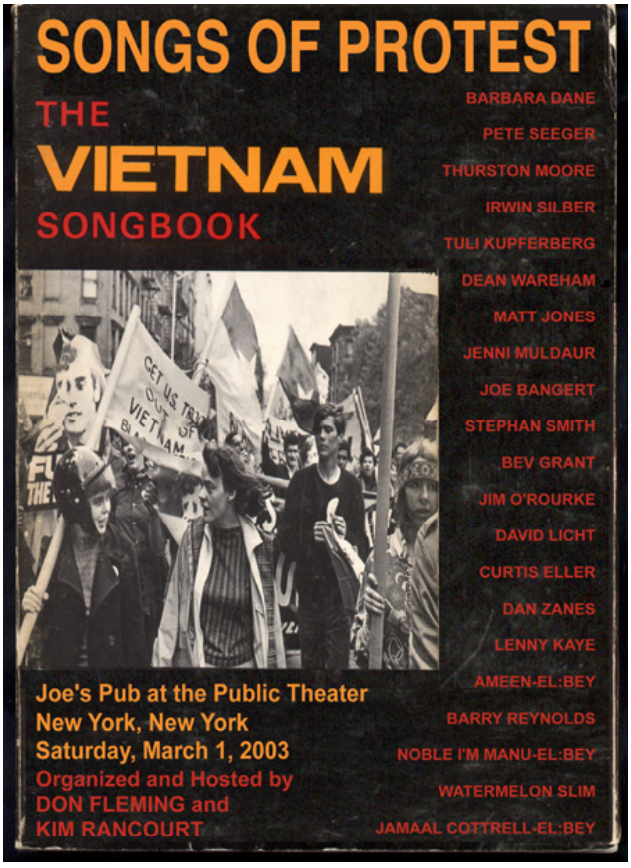
Is there food and is there store
to feed the hungry, clothe the poor?
In this world their number isn't few.
In her cargo would you find
any way for one mankind,

sailing on the Boonaroo.

Is there bandage by the reel?
Is there medicine to heal?
Christ knows, there's healing work to do.
In her cargo would you find
any way for one mankind,
sailing on the Boonaroo?

Would the hull be filled with material to build,
perhaps a bridge for a world that's split in two?
In her cargo would you find
any way for one mankind,
sailing on the Boonaroo?

Or jam packed in the hold,
is there grief and death untold
and asked "Why?" have to answer true.
In her cargo would you find
any way for one mankind,
sailing on the Boonaroo?



Songs were also written about the issue of conscription the most popular being Glen Tomassetti's Ballad of Bill White about a young NSW school teacher who was jailed for refusing to be drafted to fight in Vietnam.

Song: BALLAD OF BILL WHITE (Glen Tomassetti 1968)

The Ballad of Bill White and Boonaroo gained an international as well as national audience by being among eight Australian songs published in the US in the 1969 collection of songs from around the world under the title Vietnam Songbook. Today this songbook now has it's own website![12]

The issue of equal pay for women had been promoted in song on the 1963 union campaign recording Oh Pay Me with of Denis Kevans' song Equal Pay. However the most successful equal pay song was undoubtedly Don't Be Too Polite Girls written by Glen Tomassetti in 1969 and sung by her on Channel 7 TV News. Glen's song is sung to this day each year on International Women's Day and is regularly

heard on demonstrations.

Poem: ME AND LIL (VBU leaflet 1963)
Song: EQUAL PAY (Denis Kevans tune Chris Kempster (1963)
Song: DON'T BE TOO POLITE GIRLS (Glen Tomassetti 1969)

Chorus
Don't be too polite girls, don't be too polite,
Show a little fight girls, show a little fight,
Don't be fearful of offending, in case you get the sack
Just recognise your value and we won't look back.

Don't be too afraid girls, don't be too afraid,
We're clearly underpaid girls, clearly underpaid,
Tho' equal pay in principle is every woman's right
To turn that into practice, we must show a little fight.

We can't afford to pay you, say the masters in their wrath
But woman says "Just cut your coat according to the cloth"
If the economy won't stand then here's the answer boys,
"Cut out the wild extravagance on the new war toys".

If Aboriginal rights, equal pay and peace were union issues that found their way into song so too was the environment. In the 1970s the members of the Builders Labourers' Federation of NSW (BLF) became famously involved in struggles to protect the environment with their innovative Green Bans. Green Bans prevented the development and destruction of areas and buildings considered of conservation value. The first Green Ban took place in Sydney at the request of and with the support of a group of Hunters Hill residents who wanted to save Kelly's Bush from the developers.

Song: ACROSS THE WESTERN SUBURBS (Seamus Gill and Denis Kevans 1974)

Chorus
Under concrete and glass, Sydney's disappearing fast
It's all gone for profit and for plunder
Though we really want to stay they keep driving us away
Now across the Western Suburbs we must wander

What's happened to the pub, our little local pub
Where we used to have a drink when we were dry, boys
Now we can't get in the door for there's carpet on the floor
And you won't be served a beer without a tie, boys

Now I'm living in a box in the west suburban blocks
And the place is nearly driving me to tears, boys
Poorly planned and badly built and it's mortgaged to the hilt
But they say it will be mine in forty years, boys

Now before the city's wrecked these developers must be checked
For it's plain to see they do not give a bugger
And we soon will see the day if these bandits have their way
We will all be driven out past Wagga Wagga[13]

Song: ROLL ON FRANKLIN (Dave De Hugard)

denis kevans

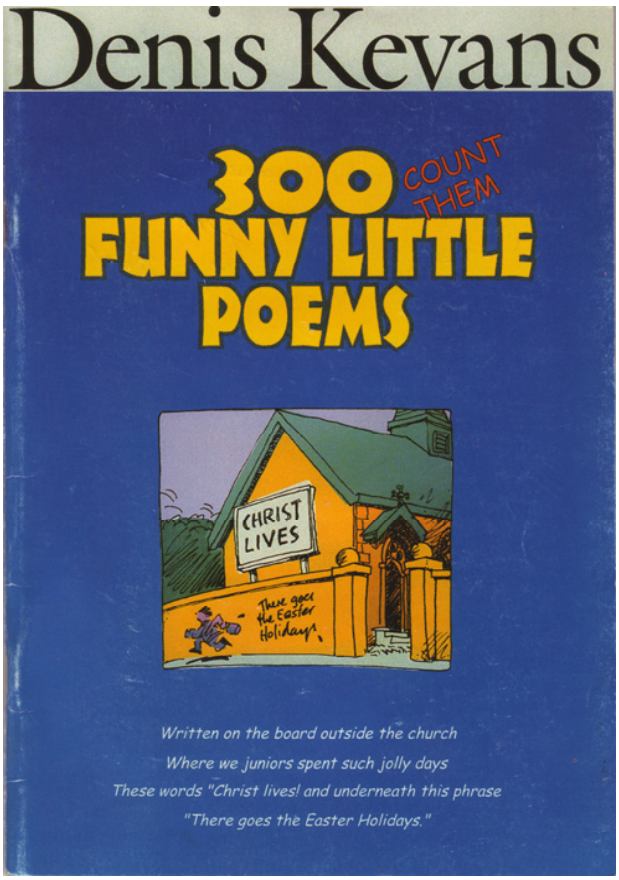
Song: GREEN BAN FUSILIERS (Denis Kevans)

Chorus
Up Broadway to the MBA[14] come the Green Ban Fusiliers.
They stole the street with their marching feet, placards high above their ears.
In Sydney town they would not lie down, they gave Martin 's scabs some cheer,
And it's up Broadway to the MBA come the Green Ban Fusiliers.

Bulldozer blades made a lightning raid, coming in with a great big rush,
Moving in for the kill up at Hunter's hill, at beautiful Kelly's Bush[15],
But the local women lay in the bulldozer's way, to the bucking and the shuddering of the gears,
When their hands were raised the ones they praised were the Green Ban Fusiliers.

They made a stand for our sunny land at the Rocks and Woolloomooloo.
On the chimney tops they waltzed with the cops to save a bit of Sydney for you,
And the finance fleas who made refugees of families who had been pioneers
Finished on their arse, and they did their brass with the Green Ban Fusiliers.

Through the years and through my tears I can see 'em marching again,
From the dizzy heights and the concrete sites in sunshine and in rain,
That patch of green's gettin' a lovely old sheen, no matter how many flow the years,
And it's up Broadway to the MBA come the Green Ban Fusiliers.



In response to a protracted struggle with the giant mining company Utah in Queensland the Seamen's Union of Australia (urged on by Geoff Wills) issued an LP of new songs in 1979 under the title Flames of Discontent. The twelve songs include four written by Don Henderson and the rest by "young boilermakers, shipwrights, carpenters and electricians".

Song: TOO LITTLE TOO LATE (Griff Bignell 1979)
Song: GO TO THE WALL (Peter Cross 1979)

Railway unions have a long history of promoting song and poetry in union journals. In the 1980s Denis Kevans and railway worker Brian Dunnett and had brought to light a large number of poems from old railway union journals and campaign pamphlets. A result of this collection was a joint shop stewards committee project called Trains of Treasure.[16] This 1985 exhibition of 26 large panels depicting railway history and railway culture from the workers viewpoint travelled in its own carriage around Australia along with recordings of railway songs, poems and stories.

The Trains of Treasure and Railway Voices cassettes, have been updated and re-issued on CD and are available from the Rail Bus and Tram Union (RBTU). They and an updated exhibition are being used during 2005's 150th anniversary of NSW Railways. The original project has evolved into The Australian Railway Project with its own website[17] to encourage the online collection of new songs and poems.[18] The project also plans to publish a book of railway songs and poems by September 2005 with the assistance of The University of New England Heritage Group

Song: TRAINS OF TREASURE (Denis Kevans 1981)

Tracks of steel I thought weren't used now, tunnels...mushrooms there I thought,
From the lights of Darling harbour, and Glebe Island, to the port,
Just a smiling driver, standing with his cap at jockey tilt,
I knew they carried treasure by the little bit they spilt.

And the shunter's yard exploding in the deepest, darkest night,
And the trucks, they are unloading, in a light that's brightest white,
And the coupled trains uncouple, and the shunter's glove is shown,
And another train of treasure trundles down the iron road.

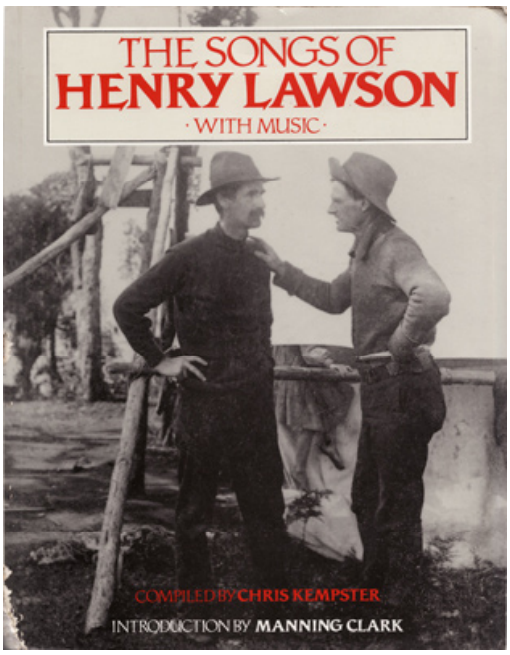
They are leaving, trains of treasure, without measure, everyday,
Trains of corn and coal and ore for the countries far away,
Treasure trains and treasure troves, leaving for the ports and coves,
Taking loads of gleaming treasure to the countries far away.

Song: JANET OAKDEN (Pip James 1984)
Song: 3801 (Ray King and Ron Russell 1984)

In the golden age of steam
There lived a beauty queen
Roamin' around the countryside
She was a driver's dream.
Workin' days and workin' nights
Up before the sun
They all tried hard to get aboard
Thirty-eight o one.

The queen of all the fleet
The railway's pride and joy
To ride upon the footplate
Was the dream of every boy.
As she went roarin' by
on another express run
Everyone would turn their heads for
Thirty-eight o one.

Ah thirty-eight o one
You stood the test you're still the best
You just keep rollin' on.



Historically, Henry Lawson has been accorded a special place in the culture of unions in Australia . He wrote a number of poems specifically for the early labour movement. In 1989, after years of research, Chris Kempster published The Songs of Henry Lawson, a collection of Lawson poems that had been set to music by dozens of composers including himself.[19]

Song: OLD REBEL FLAG IN THE REAR (tune Chris Kempster, 1984)
Song: WAIT HERE SECOND CLASS (tune Tony Miles, 1981)

Union involvement in the funding of The Songs of Henry Lawson was crucial and Chris makes special mention of "Harry Anderson, Judy Driscoll, Yve Bennett, Chris Raper and the Federated Miscellaneous Workers Union" in his acknowledgements. The launch of the book took place at the NSW Teachers Federation, Chris' union headquarters in Sydney.

The long connection between the folk song movement and unions continues today. Each year at the National Folk Festival

in Canberra there is a Union Concert sponsored by the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU). In 1996 the Mining Section of the CFMEU commissioned a CD Union is Strength as part of its Weipa campaign.[20]

The support of unions has encouraged poets and songwriters to continue to write. Many of them have been doing so for decades. Denis Kevans[21] is a good example, and a number of his songs have been cited here. He has written peace songs, equal pay songs, songs about Aboriginal rights, songs about the "Green Bans" and the environment over a period of more than 40 years.

Song: THE WOLLEMI PINE (Denis Kevans/Sonia Bennett 1998, tune Sonia Bennett)

The only clue to your tale,
Were some leaf prints in the shale,
And we thought you'd come and gone
Long years ago, but suddenly what do I see,
A living Wollemi tree,
Where the mountain waters pure and sweet do flow

There's a tree that's so rare,
Grows deep in the gorges out there,
Deep in my heart I will sing of the Wollemi Pine,
No preaching words, no angry tones,
The Wollemi stands all alone,
One hundred million years of passing time.

Chorus:
Wollemi, Wollemi, Wollemi, look around you.
There's a tree that's so rare,
Grows deep in the gorges out there,
Deep in my heart I will sing of the Wollemi Pine

The widespread take up of new technologies such as email and web sites impacted on the collection and distribution of union songs. In 1998 during the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) "Patrick's Dispute" over 30 songs and poems were collected from songwriters around Australia and added to the Union Songs[22] collection on the web.

In 2000 for May Day the NSW Labour Council organised a competition for a new May Day song through its Wobbly Radio website, a campaign deliberately targeted at young bands and songwriters. Over 100 entries were received and some 20 of which were published as a CD MayDay MayDay,

In 2002, as part of its centenary celebrations, the MUA commissioned a CD With These Arms; songs and poems of the MUA.
Song: WITH THESE ARMS (Tim O'Brien 1998)

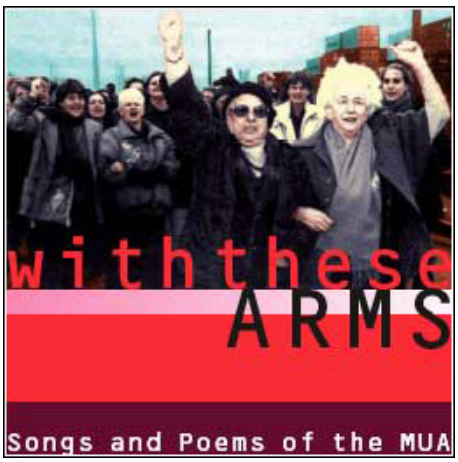
The deal was done behind a coward's door
they came in darkness, shadows on the shore
the snarl of dogs sent shivers through the night
as union men were thrown outside the wire

They locked the gates hanging them in chains
they gloated seeing working men in pain
We watched and saw a veil of darkness fall
with working men and women we heard the call

And with these arms we held the line
with these arms our strength combined
and with these arms made our demand
and with these arms we made a stand
And with these arms
- arms that held a baby held the line

Hundreds grew to thousands through those nights
faces glowed defiant for workers' rights
Police moved in, building workers moved behind

and mothers, sisters, brothers held the line



Song: BLACK ARMBAND (John Hospodaryk 2002)

Balaclava guards Rottweilers and Alsatians
Such is the face of your industrial relations
Anti-union tyranny right across the nation
On the waterfront and down the mines you're proud of your creation
You've got the gaul to call it reforms in the workplace
When waging war on workers is a retrograde disgrace
You want us cap in hand to crawl you're smug and mean and base
You want our rights and hard earned gains to sink without a trace

And hey there Johnny this song it is for you
I see rack and ruin in all the things you do
You can tell 'cause I'm wearing a black arm band
For all those stolen generations you can't understand
Well here's your report card you don't get many marks
On greenhouse emissions and logging national parks
At reconciliation you've chained up all our hearts
You score a zero just a naught you get a buggery of arts
Of liberty equality fraternity I didn't know
Ownership of shares is democracy the way to go
But on a privatised planet I guess it must be so
Where any soul is bought and sold your marks are very low

Well I know what you stand for will shrivel up and die
We'll throw it overboard and that wont be a lie
But until that day I wear a black armband
In mourning for what you are doing right across the land
But until that day I wear a black armband
In mourning for what you are doing right across this
right across this right across this right across this land

Song: MAYDAY MAYDAY (Swarmy G 2002)

Chorus
MAYDAY MAYDAY - solidarity's the only way
MAYDAY MAYDAY - It's about time we had our say
MAYDAY MAYDAY - we won't be held back no way
MAYDAY MAYDAY - our voices won't fade away
MAYDAY MAYDAY - solidarity's the only way
MAYDAY MAYDAY - It's about time we had our say
MAYDAY MAYDAY - we won't be held back no way
MAYDAY MAYDAY - our voices won't fade away.

Mayday Mayday - make a stand without malaise
we come in peace - why can't police come the same way?
a sad state of affairs our cries met with blank stares

caught by the curly hairs to obey what the bank says
the fact is if you think it's fine? - you gotta be blind
Austudy is well below the poverty line
now the cost of education is a life of debt
and you wonder why some have turned to crime instead
just to pay for books let alone pay the rent
while most these hypocrites have never paid a red cent
not investing in our future rather spend on defence
hospitals shut for velodromes just don't make sense
employees are expensed - intense pressure on those left
to reach the benchmark set - stressed to an early death
downsizing a rising trend - redundancies abundant
casuals see no currency - after all you're just a number
directors plunder funds until the company goes under
they're paid more than 10 workers - so really it's no wonder
let's turn the power of one into one unified power
to fight in unison and shout in spite of John Howard

The largely informal relationship between unions and songs in Australia begins, with hindsight, to look more like a tradition, a tradition that is alive and well in the 21st century. It may not be the material sought out by broadcasting and recording industry conglomerates but it has its own production and distribution network operating largely through the folk song movement, individual CD production and the unions themselves.

Like other minority music it has taken to the web. The web is used for publicity, for publishing lyrics, selling recordings and for collecting new material. The much faster download times possible with the widespread adoption of broadband and wireless technology has meant web is also used for Internet Radio[23]. Union songs and union news are now streamed around the globe every day to those with access to computers, or for rebroadcast by radio stations. This form of distribution provides songwriters and singers with a unique and inexpensive way to be heard around the world.

References

1 Chris Kempster (1933-2004) was a pioneer of the Australian folk revival and wrote tunes to some 24 poems. Chris was an active unionist and enthusiastic promoter of new songs of the labour movement.

2 Raffello Carboni, who published his eyewitness account "The Eureka Stockade" in 1855, wrote: "There is no flag in old Europe half so beautiful as the 'Southern Cross' of the Ballaarat miners, first hoisted on the old spot, Bakery-hill."

3 Doreen Jacobs had worked with similar choirs in Britain as a member of the Workers Music Association, and had brought her choral enthusiasm back with her.

4 Justice Michael Kirby has recently asked the question as to whether today's High Court would support Mabo in the way it did before it got stacked with Howard appointees. We might similarly ask would the present High Court throw out legislation designed to ban or bankrupt a working class political party or a militant trade union?

5 New Theatre was founded in 1932 and pioneered the staging of modern Australian plays. It has a long association with the labour movement and the Communist Party and is the oldest continuously running theatre in Australia.

6 The Eureka Youth League (EYL) was a very influential and active youth organization essentially the youth arm of the Communist Party of Australia.

7 Today there are enough folk festivals to attend a different one each week, some like the Woodford festival are huge (130,000 attended in 2005) and others like the one in Gulgong are quite modest. With hardly any fanfare many hundreds of thousands of all ages go to them each year.

8 An online database of such recordings shows the number to be in excess of 1000: (http://folkstream.com/)

9 The Waterside Workers' Federation (now MUA) had an annual poetry and song competition that ran for many years and is cited in John Manifold's book Who Wrote The Ballads (1964)

10 Mount Isa is an important mining town in central Queensland. The dispute ran over several months with the miners gaining support from unions across Australia in the face of massive attacks from employers in collusion with the Queensland and Federal Governments.

11 From Little Things Big Things Grow was written to commemorate the struggle some 35 years after it began, another example of song writing to reflect on and learn from history.

12 On the eve of the Iraq War on Saturday, March 1st, 2003 Joe's Pub at the Public Theatre in New York celebrated the protest-song tradition. Much of the repertoire was drawn from The Vietnam Songbook including Boonaroo.

13 When they composed this song Denis Kevans and Seamus Gill were members of the BLF in Sydney.

14 MBA: Master Builders Association

15 Kelly's Bush in Sydney was the site of the first Green Ban.

16 Taking its title form Denis Kevans' song "Trains of Treasure"

17 http://railwaystory.com/

18 This collection now number over 500 items

19 In his introduction to the collection Manning Clark wrote, "This book of songs to the words of Henry Lawson is evidence that he is still with us. He wrought a great marvel. The boy from Grenfell became part of the conscience of Australia".

20 An ACTU report in 1995 stated "We note that for almost two years the award workers at Weipa have sacrificed considerable income and suffered threats of personal legal action in defence of key union principles: the right to collectively bargain; the right to belong to a union without discrimination; equal pay for work of equal value."

21 Denis Kevans: poet, songwriter, historian, journalist, translator. His latest book is "Ted Roach, From Pig Iron Hero to Long Bay Gaol, A Wharfie's Life". Between 1958 and 1962 Denis was Secretary of the Sydney Realist Writers.

22 http://unionsong.com/

23 http://radio.labourstart.org/
Radio LabourStart, which began in February 2004, now has 1000 songs from many nations and in many languages available to a growing audience and with the beginnings of international union support. Half the songs on Radio LabourStart are Australian (including most of those referred to in this paper).

Harry Black
50th Anniversary of the Waterside Workers Film Group

Contribution by Harry Black at the launching of the book written about the W.W.F. Film Group held at the National Maritime Museum.

The decade of the 50's was one of the most dangerous and challenging periods in the history of the labour movement.

The Labor Government of Ben Chifley had been swept from power late in 1949. This marked the beginning of the long reign of the Liberal Government led by Pig Iron Bob Menzies. Asked how he got the name, 'Pig Iron Bob' he replied, "It was that bastard Moran."

Menzies first act was to bring down a Bill to Ban the Communist Party. A number of Communist Party trade union officials were named, including Jim Healy and Eliott V. Elliott. The Waterside Workers Federation engaged Dr. Evatt and the Bill known as The Red Bill was thrown out by the High Court. This did not deter Menzies, who by way of a Referendum placed it before the people of Australia. Again it was defeated.

Menzies and his wealthy friends were determined to destroy the militant trade unions. Coming back from one of his many trips to England and America in 1951, Menzies gravely announced we must prepare for war in three years.

However the "cold war" and the class war were well advanced in the maritime industry. ASIO Agents launched raids on the Federal Offices of the W.W.F. and Seamen and the Sydney and Melbourne offices of the Waterside Workers.

As a consequence, 60 Sussex Street, the office of the Sydney Wharfies developed into a centre of action, agitation and organization.

The meetings and decisions made there attracted the attention of State and Federal Governments and their secret police. Many of you will recall working on the job with Federal Agent Clive Young and Rex Cann a state policeman who became a Sergeant of Police while spying for the State Government.

Meetings displaying the "House Full" sign went up when the Red Dean of Canterbury Hewlett Johnson spoke and Paul Robson gave his finest Sydney performance and the famous war correspondent Wilfred Burchett attracted an overflow attendance.

The stage was set for a show down between the government, shipping representatives and the Waterside Workers Federation.

A letter from the Royal Dutch Shipping Cartel to the Federal Government which fell off the "back of a truck" into the hands of Jim Healy, called for the destruction of the Waterside Workers Union and led up to the National Strike of November 1954.

All the signs of a show down with the employers and government had been signaled and the Sydney Branch was well prepared for that conflict. A well organized United Front Executive, a powerful rank and file Delegates Organisation, supplemented and led by many active Communist Party members and 60 Sussex Street became a centre of intense activity.

Tom Nelson, Sydney Branch Secretary---on the black list of Menzies Red Bill, a dedicated Communist matured by years in defence of working conditions and wise to the skullduggery of ruthless employers and politicians carefully prepared members for action.

Part of that action was the creation of the Sydney Branch Film Group.

Today we recall and honour the achievements of this group. The work of Jock Levy, Norma Disher and the late Keith Gow, moulded it into a highly valued and successful part of the industrial and political

struggles of the 50's.

The screening of the first film "Pensions for Veterans" in Leichhardt Stadium left a lasting impression and impact upon the 6000 wharfies at that stop work meeting.

The November Victory was recorded-----Waterfront history was made. The skill of the film producers' art was demonstrated and highlighted the significance of the United Front, the commitment of delegates, gang leaders and rank and file members.

These were the "golden years" of the maritime industry. 60 Sussex Street was, however, much more than a place where films were produced. Movies were screened to members at mid-day showing the art and culture of people from many countries.

There were also book and Art exhibitions, piano recitals', ballet performances and opera. There were also art and dance classes for children.

And the magnificent mural was created by the artistic skills of wharfies Ralph Sawyer, Sonny Glynn and Clem Millwood. Their skill was directed and developed by the vision of an outstanding artist Rod Shaw.

And another fine artist to have a significant influence on the artistic and cultural life of wharfies was Nan Horton.

Oscar Hammerstein said "All the sounds of the earth are like music."

And the sounds of the waterfront are like music to maritime workers.

And the music of the Sydney Civic Orchestra was enjoyed and appreciated at the wharfies union hall early in the 50's.

And the songs, music and drama of New Theatre delighted wharfies and the general public for many years.

All of these rich and exciting events formed a vital part of a development of a high social, industrial and political consciousness in maritime workers and the high point of this awareness was the great value of their union and the need to build international good will and unity in action.

The Film Group gave us this visual picture of wharfies at work and at the same time the formulation of union policies. These films captured the humour of wharfies which was always a feature of their work and their industrial and political activities off the job. The films were not just about propaganda but in essence about political education. The skill and the heart and soul are contained in these films. They demonstrate the hard obnoxious nature of some cargoes, but they highlight the nature of mateship, of collective organization. In these films is shown the work and integrity of a great union.

All the principles and values of the Waterside Workers Federation enabled it to win significant conditions of work and industrial battles in 1954-56.

Our history goes back to 1872. It has enriched the trade union movement and the political history of our country.

We have learnt some sharp lessons from our history. But we must at the same time look to the future and the future belongs to the M.U.A. The leadership of the MUA, the young members who are delegates and members of union committees have been tested in action and have good runs on the board.

They will again be challenged in the future, but I am confident that they will produce great films and works of art and at the same time ensure a rich and productive history as members of the MUA.

Connie Healy
Women In Radical Theatre In Brisbane

Firstly, I must introduce myself. I was interviewed five years ago by a reporter from the Courier-Mail (our local Brisbane newspaper) after my book Defiance, dealing with the history of radical/political theatre from 1930 to 1962 in Brisbane, was published. She described me in lurid terms. 'An atheist at 15, a socialist by 16, a communist by 17, widowed at 19. Adolescent angst, Connie Healy had it by the truckload.' Aimed at a reading public eagerly pursuing the private lives and antics of film stars and so-called celebrities, these bare facts fail to explain how I, and many of my generation, became interested in radical theatre and socialist ideas. The effect of war on my father and his generation and the death of my first husband in the Second World War left indelible marks. A fear of unemployment and poverty and the need for a peaceful and just society has never left me.

We were the children of the depression of the 1930s that had its impact on every aspect of Australian life. It was a period of intense cultural activity and amateur theatre groups flourished in all major towns many producing serious dramas focussing on contemporary social problems. The New Theatre movement was very much a product of these times. My two sisters joined Unity Theatre and after I left school I worked in the Commonwealth bank and acted in Unity Theatre in my spare time.

Women led the way, writing books, poetry and plays of some distinction. Half the novels in Australia between 1928 and 1939 were written by women and were recognised as the best in this field. Literary historians confirm that at least four women - Mona Brand, Dymphna Cusack, Catherine Duncan and Betty Roland – were also writing plays of impressive quality. All wrote for the left theatres.

Queensland has long had a thriving tradition of radical theatre. Unemployed workers from the bagman's camp at Victoria Park formed a dramatic group the Roving Reds Revue Company in the early 30s. It later became the Proletarian Players and their best known work The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropist was staged in the Albert Hall in 1936. It proposed socialism as the remedy for unemployment and poverty – important issues in this Depression era.

The Student Theatre formed in 1936 was an offshoot of the University of Queensland Radical Club, forerunner of Unity theatre, emerging as New Theatre after the war's end. This was a new type of theatre full of young people who loved theatre, believed in popular culture, and was serious about changing the world. Left theatres were about and for the working class, supporting workers' struggles, welcoming strikers into their theatres and taking sketches to jobs and picket lines. In 1938 Unity theatre presented Clifford Odets' famous strike play Waiting for Lefty at a protest meeting organised by the Trades and Labour Council at the Ritz Theatre (formerly Bohemia Stadium) in South Brisbane. Two women, Marjorie Bulcock (later Puregger) and Mabel Pound, later a Secretary in the national office of the Waterside Workers' union, were in the cast.

Occasionally, the working class audience targeted by Unity theatre reacted in an unexpected fashion to the serious message that the players were presenting. During the Spanish Civil War, the one-act play Remember Pedrocito was taken around Brisbane suburbs. Once it was done in a very run-down working class area over at South Brisbane. They had a rather tough sort of audience there at the time. In the play the Spanish loyalists captured a girl from the fascist side – they were dealing with other captives – and they pulled her over and one of them said: 'What are we going to do with her?' Well, they were told in no uncertain terms by the audience just what they should do with her. It just about closed the play.

Another example of the how the group took theatre to the people. In 1954 the local newspaper the Courier-Mail used its columns to launch vicious attacks on Brisbane wharfies, depicting them in cartoon and prose as overweight, overpaid, underworked and far too militant. A skit, 'The Courier-Mail Wharfie' written by Jim Crawford, lampooning the Courier-Mail's depiction was always a popular drawcard for workers at any open-air worker's gathering.

The flourishing Unity/New theatres introduced workers to left-wing issues, Irish plays, American protest plays and plays discussing Aboriginal and women's rights and racial tolerance. They urged worker solidarity and a fighting spirit. The slogan 'Art is a Weapon' defined their aims.
Women participated in every aspect of radical theatre contributing as playwrights, actors, musicians,

dancers, singers, artists and administrators. Janet Gentle (later Henderson), a ballet student at the time, obtained her first experience of teaching dancing and choreography with the cast of Cannibal Carnival. This irreverent and hilarious musical satire, presented by Unity in 1940, was very left wing, anti-capitalist, and anti-religious. A policeman, a parson and a capitalist got stranded on a Pacific island and they decided to turn it into a capitalist enterprise and make all the natives work for them after fencing off the breadfruit trees. Of course, the natives won in the end and we boiled them in a pot. Played with enthusiasm and enjoyment by the cast, it was dismissed by critics as 'a vulgar spectacle', but Brisbane audiences flocked to see it on all six nights. The bank manager called me in, he had the script and photographs of people in the play and he'd obviously got them from security. He was incensed that a 17-year-old should have been in such a disgusting play (offending both politically and morally) and said 'you'll be sacked if you don't pull out.' The play's leading man, Neville Thiele (a fellow employee) (brother of the well-known Leonard Thiele) was also threatened with the sack by the bank. . In a time of unemployment, Neville had to withdraw and I accepted an option of a trade union position shortly after.

The many women actors in New Theatre cannot be enumerated and one play produced in 1940 Angels of War had an all women cast. The theatre was able to call on many competently trained professional artists. Helen Collings, a professional music teacher, trained the singers for Dick Diamonds' Reedy River, produced in Brisbane in 1954 to capacity audiences. It was a new type of musical comedy, which aimed to highlight Australian democratic traditions.

Marlene Stewart (later Davis) wrote the overture for Dick Diamond's 'Under the Coolibah Tree, a rollicking musical set in the 1880s and composed a tune for 'Donohoe's song', (the words reputedly written by Donohoe) that featured in another great Australian musical, John Meredith and Joan Clarke's 'The Wild Colonial Boy'. This play was based on the life of John Donohoe, a convict-runaway turned bushranger.

Miya Studio artists used New Theatre rooms in Fortitude Valley in exchange for making props and painting backdrops. Miya Studio eventually became New Theatre Club Artists Group. Pamela Crawford (née Seeman)'s work was featured in the groups many successful art exhibitions at the Albert Galleries, Ann Street. One exhibition advertised 'original paintings for sale at a people's price.' Pamela also devised and drew costumes for Bushland Picnic, a 1952 children's play.

Gwen McKay joined New Theatre in 1955. As a trained commercial artist she assisted Ossie Nash (a professional signwriter and creative artist) paint backdrops and later painted sets for All My Sons, Tinker's Wedding and the Painter. She was a fine actress, acting in about thirteen plays, often in leading roles and directed several plays.

Playwrights Mona Brand, Oriel Gray, Dymphna Cusack and Nance Macmillan wrote plays specifically for Unity and New Theatre. Following the growing tide of migrants who fled Europe after the war, New Theatre presented plays that drew attention to often conflictual ethnic relationships, as well as turning to the long-neglected plight of Aborigines and their treatment by the white community.

Mona Brand worked in Sydney as a copywriter and research officer. An early play, Here Under Heaven (Unity 1948) dealt with colour prejudice. The play won first and second prizes in Ballarat's South Street competitions. Its Melbourne New Theatre production in May 1948 was praised by local papers, including the Melbourne Herald, as worthy of production by some commercial theatre. But it was ultimately rejected as unworthy of large commercial production on the grounds that 'there is no colour problem in Australia' and it would be irrelevant to Australian's experience. It was only after she won first prize in the New South Wales Arts Council drama festival for her play Our 'Dear' Relations in 1963 that she found a wide audience,

Sydney playwright Oriel Gray joined New Theatre in 1937 aged 17 years. She wrote at least fourteen plays for stage, radio and television. Her political interests are reflected in her stage plays, nearly all of which deal with oppression, exploitation and discrimination. She began writing about feminism 'long before feminism became a big subject.' Her play Had We But World Enough, is a tragic tale in which racial hatred is directed against a twelve-year-old Aboriginal girl. Of topical interest at the time, it had a ten-weeks' season in Brisbane in 1950. New Theatre's program notes reminded the audience that 'at this very moment, in Brisbane, coloured people living at Moorooka have had their huts burnt down with all their possessions and left to find shelter wherever they may'.

Latent anti-semitism flared up briefly in Australia in the 1930s with the limited entry to Australia of European Jews fleeing Hitler's terror and it again emerged in the late 1940s as thousands of displaced persons sought refuge overseas. Oriel Gray's 1952 Brisbane production Sky Without Birds, dealt with this question. Her 1955 play The Torrents won major critical acclaim. It was awarded equal first prize

with Summer of the Seventeenth Doll, but unlike Lawler's much acclaimed play, it was left to gather dust. It was not until 1996 that she earned a place in the sun when it was produced in the commercial theatre. Gray would have been an unpalatable political choice in the conservative 1950s due to her strong connection with New Theatre.

Brisbane playwright Nance Macmillan (later Nancy Wills) acted with a little theatre in 1939. In Melbourne she joined a Realist Writers' Group and in 1944 joined the Communist Party of Australia. She attended the World Peace Conference in Paris in 1949 and met Paul Robeson, the famous black singer, who was an ardent campaigner for workers' rights, peace and equality. This meeting provided the inspiration for her play Land of Morning Calm written in the following year and presented in 1952 by Brisbane New Theatre. It was a plea for peace in the midst of the Korean war. It had a successful six and a half-weeks' season in 1952 with London Unity Theatre, and was played in Melbourne, Sydney, and Adelaide and at the Youth Carnival for Peace and Friendship in Sydney.

Nance Macmillan's 1961 play The Painter, based on the life of Aboriginal artist Albert Namatjira, raised the issue of civil rights for Aborigines. It. played to packed houses for four nights in Brisbane's All Saints Hall. It exposed the federal authorities' lack of encouragement of this fine artist who refused to abandon his people's customs and culture, resulting in his jailing and early death. Nance said that her interest in writing the play was prompted after reading Namatjira's passionate plea, his cry from the heart, during his imprisonment:'Better they shoot us all, get rid of us and save all this trouble if we are not allowed to live like men'. Two Aborigines, Bob Anderson, now a well-known elder of his people and his cousin then known as Pene Thrower, now Dr Penny Tripcony, former Deputy Director of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit, were in the cast. Penny was recently honoured with a medal in the General division (OAM) by the Australian government.

In 1962 Nance collaborated with well-known poet and academic Dorothy Hewitt to write the Ballad for Women. A one-act play, it celebrated the role of women in Australia. She also wrote a very successful musical play Deep Bells Ring dealing with the life and work of Paul Robeson, Directed by well-known playwright Errol O'Neill, it premiered in Brisbane in 1987 at the Princess Theatre and toured Australia in commercial theatres.

1956 will be particularly remembered in Australia as the year of major atom tests. Britain exploded an atomic device on the Monte Bellow Islands off the northwest coast and the United States dropped the infamous H-bomb over Bikini atoll. After a second atomic explosion at Monte Bello, radioactive clouds were detected in Cloncurry in Queensland. Australians were very disturbed and Queenslanders feared that the milk supply from Malanda could have been contaminated. Dymphna Cusack's timely play Pacific Paradise about the dangers of atomic testing was staged by Brisbane New Theatre in 1956 for a three months' season and also at Ipswich Town Hall, Booval, at the Silkstone Methodist Hall and Enoggera Memorial Hall, Brisbane.

Runner-up to Summer of the Seventeenth Doll in a national competition in 1955 it was broadcast by the ABC and commercial radio and produced by many amateur theatres in Australia and in New Zealand with Pacific Islanders in the cast. Dymphna Cusack was born in 1902 and died in 1981. She was an Australian writer of international reputation. She never belonged to a political party but was preoccupied with social injustice in all her writing.

The radical theatre gave real opportunities to women in all aspects of theatre life. Their many fine women playwrights wrote plays of real significance. But in a climate hostile to minority views, newspapers, other than the trade union and socialist press, were guilty of censorship by omission. Brisbane local papers failed to review Reedy River, one of the most successful musical productions of New Theatre to reach the stage in Australia. It promoted Australia's national cultural traditions with bush bands and folk music and attracted more than 5,700 people to its Brisbane performances. Unofficial but very effective censorship had devastating effects on the careers of talented playwrights like Mona Brand, Oriel Gray and Nancy Macmillan, who never obtained, or obtained only partially and belatedly, the recognition they deserved.

Boycotted by the daily press that frequently denied them publicity and reviews, further marginalised by its dependence on the trade union and socialist press, Brisbane New Theatre folded in 1962/3. In a hostile political climate, without government subsidies, New Theatre depended entirely for financial support on its members and supporters. No permanent radical working class theatre exists in Brisbane today. Over the period of their existence from 1930, radical theatres answered a need when nothing in the commercial theatre reflected Australian life or opened its audience's mind to changing thought abroad.

vintage reds Australian stories of rank and file organising

Warren D. Keats

Bluey Evans and the 'Bucco Panno' a 1951 Waterfront Incident

The use by Patrick Stevedoring of 'goons' wearing balaclavas, with their Rottweilers, to evict the working waterside workers from the Swanson St. Docks, Melbourne in 1998, at the outset of the MUA dispute, was only a continuation of a policy that the precursor of this employer, operating then as James Patrick, used in by-gone years. This is a dramatic story, which tells how a waterside worker in Sydney put a halt to this practice of intimidation that is still remembered and talked of by old wharfies to this day.

As a former merchant seaman I am fully conversant with the activities of the so-called 'bucco mates'. Old sailors have recounted tales to me about the time they were carried on many British and foreign ships. These were individuals, without proper certification, who were employed by some unscrupulous shipping companies to intimidate and physically discipline seamen if they stepped out of line. The practice was commonplace in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Singling out, then assaulting those militants, or any who questioned the scandalously poor, prevailing living and working conditions. The ships of the Unilever Company early last century, running from the UK to the Niger and Belgian Congo for cargoes of palm oil, were notorious for the employ of these brutal enforcers. There is even a reference about one during the building of Isambard Brunel's 'Great Eastern'in 1861, ('The Great Iron Ship' - James Dugan P.55 Pub. - Hamish Hamilton 1953). It relates the downfall of such an individual at the hands of an irate Irish fireman.

> *'The Great Eastern's crew were suppressed by a tough boatswain's mate. The firemen complained loudly of the beatings and the first officer had to pay him off. The boatswain's mate sneaked back on board to get some last licks at the firemen the day before sailing. He grappled with a big Irishman. Kicking and gouging each other across the deck, the two men fell over the rail and landed 30 feet below on a scow; they continued the battle across the scow and into the Solent River. The [boatswain's] mate swam towards the ruined abbey on the bank, followed by the fireman. They were pulled out half drowned but still full of fight.'*

This preamble sets the scene for an Australian Shipping and Stevedoring Company, James Patrick, who during the Depression and post WW2 years were fully engaged in the covert practice of physical intimidation of their workforce by the employment of 'bucco foremen' at their wharf sites. (The waterfront jargon for foremen in general, was 'Pannikin Boss' or 'Panno', for short.)

During the war the new left wing leadership, under the direction of their famed communist general secretary, Jim Healy, transformed the Waterside Workers Federation into a militant force prosecuting worker's rights that had become very diminished during the 1930s Depression. Sustaining the nation's war effort saw the depleted work force, mainly older men, doing twenty-four hour shifts to keep the cargoes and the ships moving during those perilous years. At war's end the Federation demanded an end to the degrading conditions under which work, on the Sydney waterfront, was conducted. The hiring of labour at the wharf gate was terminated, as was the 'bull system', with all its concomitant abuses and corruption, where compliant and subservient employees were given work preference. Substituted in its stead was a roster system, conducted at a 'Pick-Up' centre each morning and the work apportioned fairly. Gone were the days of the wharf workers walking the 'Hungry Mile' (lower Sussex St.) each day and every day and hanging around outside the gates all day, in the hope that they would be chosen for a few hours work. The roster system saw workers organised into gangs, which comprised a set number of workers, some of whom worked aboard ship down the hatch stowing or unloading cargo, winch drivers and a signaller on the ship's deck, and others working on the wharf and in the adjoining shed. Usually the wharf work was confined to the older men who were known as. 'veterans'. In the forties and fifties, all work was executed by ship's gear. There were no wharf cranes. The gangs were numbered and the members of each gang worked together, going to the various jobs as a group. When a ship berthed, a set number of gangs were engaged for the discharge, corresponding to the number of cargo hatches on each ship. Some wharfie's worked independently and were known as 'floaters'. They fitted into the gangs where illness or injury created a vacancy.

When the war ended thousands of servicemen were demobilised and soon found their way back into industry. The world experienced a boom time as the ravages and shortages of war were repaired and replaced. Shipping, being at the forefront of transportation burgeoned, as did the waterfront labour force. In 1951 some 7000 waterside workers were employed on the Sydney waterfront. This was prior

to the era of containerisation that witnessed the decimation of waterfront jobs. In the 1950s as many as 80% of the Sydney work force were ex servicemen. They were a much more militant group than pre-war, as the great struggle against world fascism had released more assertiveness and expectation, and being recipients of war time propaganda, which foretold of a better and fairer world, they, in the main, demanded that this should happen. All were loath to return to the pre war world of deprivation and poverty. They elected communist and militants to the leadership of the trade unions to achieve this.

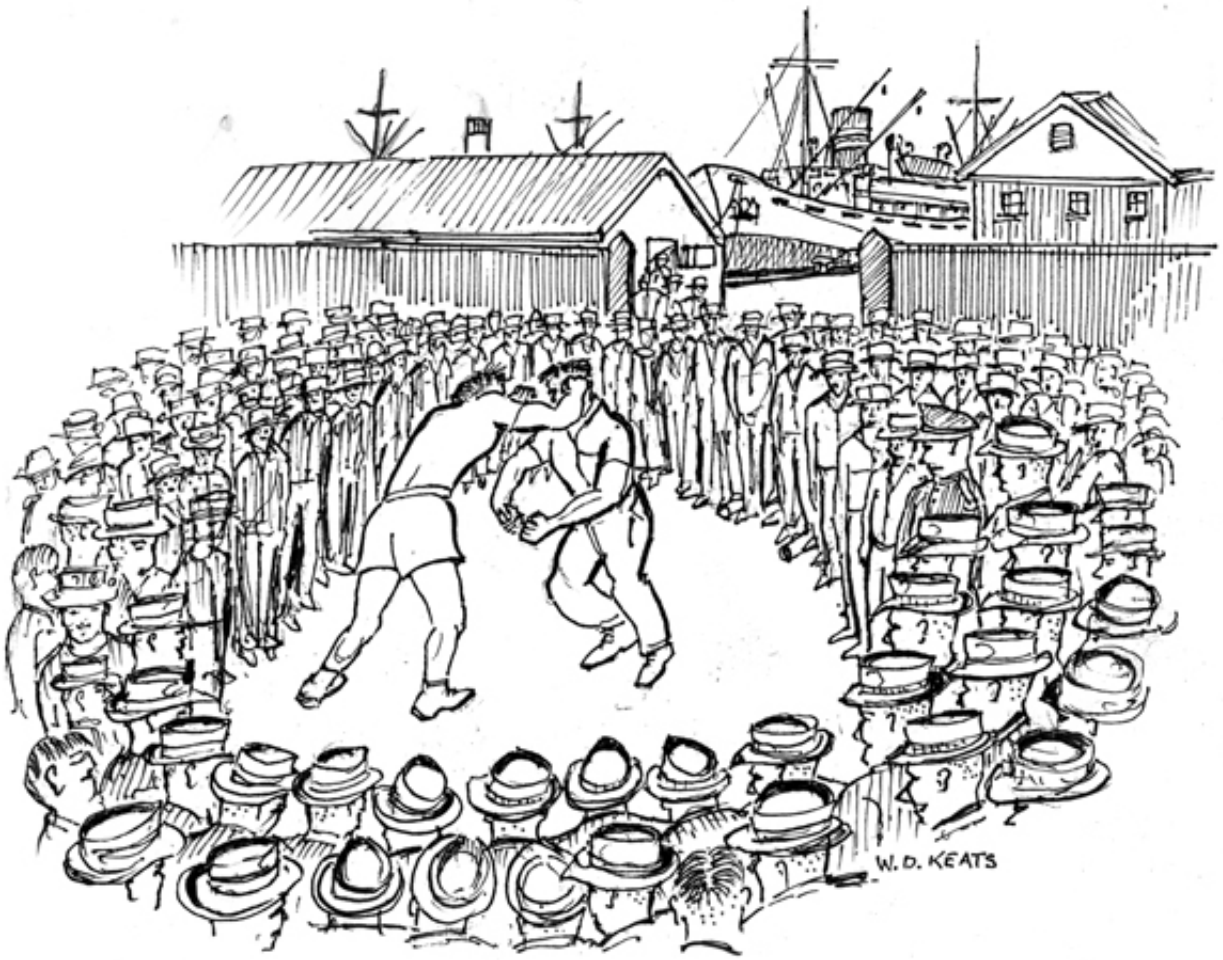
Bluey Evans

Ron (Bluey) Evans was one of these returned men. He had joined the Federation and had been working on the Sydney waterfront for two years. In his mid twenties he was a veteran of the battle for Milne Bay where the Japanese suffered their first land defeat at the hands of the Australians. He had been injured and repatriated to Australia where he had spent time in the Concord hospital. Three other brothers, saw war service overseas. One as a Japanese POW on the Burma railway. He came from a working class family. Reared in the N.S.W. rail junction town of Werris Creek, his father was an engine driver in steam. By nature Bluey was a typical Australian of those times with a larrikin spirit, quick-witted and humorous, he was well liked by his work mates. His work gang was comprised of young men in his own mould; most were ex-soldiers such as he, whose politics were decidedly left wing. Bluey had gravitated towards the Federation leadership and the Communist Party.

On the eventful day in 1951 when Bluey's path crossed that of 'Panno' Jack Sykes, his gang was engaged to work at Walsh Bay aboard a Blue Funnel ship and to discharge the cargo it brought. James Patrick was the stevedoring company who employed the labour and controlled the cargo's discharge. Bluey's ebullient manner soon fell foul of the foreman. Sykes and his siblings had been reared at the Rocks, the old historic urban area which encompassed the hill above Walsh Bay. They were a tough family, reared in one of the toughest precincts of Sydney, The Rocks and its environs had been the home of the ill famous 'Pushes', the street gangs that had infested its streets in the early century. Born in this milieu, Jackie Sykes was known as a hard character and as one of Sydney's toughest street fighters. This ability, and his aggressive 'stand-over' attitude, soon brought him to the notice and into the employ of the stevedoring company, James Patrick, who had a policy of employing these bullies. They were used to enforce unpalatable conditions, or to weed out any recalcitrant or militant employee. The victims would be singled out, harangued and goaded and finally provoked and bashed. The consent of his employers to act in this way was unspoken and covert but understood and was affected by Sykes with alacrity. Selecting, then baiting his victims with abuse and inveigling them into combat. A situation through skill and experience he was very well equipped to handle. He was not averse to administering a kicking to an opponent who had succumbed and fallen too quickly to his initial onslaught. So as Bluey's gang commenced their work, Sykes the foreman, was paying them attention as he knew of this gang's militant reputation. It was only a question of time before Bluey himself was receiving very close scrutiny. His witticisms, banter and obvious popularity among his mates made him an obvious target. More so, when Sykes observed him selling the communist weekly newspaper, Tribune, to other wharfies. After which he set out with purposeful intent to denigrate and provoke Bluey. Each day he would make it his business to have a verbal joust with him, which was quite unproductive because of Bluey's quick wit and mastery of repartee. As the week wore on the exchanges had degenerated to abuse, his voice grew louder. The abuse became taunts, which was his well-tested method to provoke a scapegoat into retaliation enabling him to use his superior pugilistic skill. This was done in front of the victim's mates and always had a salutary effect. He would later claim that he had been attacked first which would bring further punishment from the Stevedoring Commission, often by the banishment of the victim from the industry.

His abuse towards Bluey had reached depths of derision as the working week ended but Bluey had resisted the provocation. Sykes then interpreted Bluey's conduct as being submissive. The practice was at the end of shift for the workers to line up and hand in their medallions at the gate. Each medallion contained a number that was given to each at the commencement of the job. The wharfie removed it from the board at the commencement of the workday and replaced it when the shift was completed. In this way the wages clerk knew how many men and who were employed, on the one job. On the

Friday of the incident, a long line of wharfies queued to replace their medals and as Bluey waited his turn in the line, Sykes stood near him mouthing insults. Calling him a 'dog' which in the vernacular of criminals means a coward, and savouring the response his verbal comments were having on the assembled workers at Bluey's expense.



During the week Bluey was wide awake to what was involved as he had met these bullies before, but he was also cognizant of the fact that if he became involved in a tussle with Sykes during working hours he could face the disciplinary action of the Stevedoring Commission, which oversaw the operation of labour on the waterfront and even be excluded from the industry. So he ignored the foremen's mouthing. However when Bluey reached the door of the company's office he made a loud formal verbal complaint of Sykes's conduct to the wharf Superintendent. He then picked up his gladstone bag, which every wharfie carried and walked through the wharf gates and outside onto the public road where he turned around and faced Sykes dropping the bag and beckoning for Sykes to come out onto the public place. On witnessing this, mighty roar went up from the two hundred workers who had lined up to clock off work. The seasoned street fighter, Sykes, completely underestimating his adversary because of his earlier passive response to his jibes, rushed out to do combat with this upstart. Bluey, sensing that this would occur nimbly stepped aside and hit him with heavy punches with both his left and right fists. The momentum of Sykes's charge gave added effect to the blows. It was then thaffae suddenly realised that he had a major battle on his hands and brought into effect every pugilistic stratagem he had ever leamt and used. However, as the minutes passed it became evident that the speed of his younger opponent's reflexes was superior and unable to use his dirty tricks in front of so many witnesses, he started to make mistakes and received some heavy punishment in return. By this time hundreds of wharfies had gathered around the combatants as the workers from the other ships at Walsh Bay knocked off and rushed to witness this epic fistfight. Some six hundred crowded around the fighters, most hopefully to witness the downfall of a feared 'stand-over man'. Sykes rallied with flurries of wild punches some of which struck home, but as the fight progressed it was becoming apparent to those looking on that he was starting to face defeat.

The Patrick's wharf superintendent, seeing the way the contest was developing into the defeat of his henchman, rang for the police and three carloads of police arrived. As they moved to break up the fight a cry went up from the hundreds of on lookers, 'This is fair go/leave them alone!!' So insistent and threatening did this appear to the police that they hesitated and stood back. The tremendous physical effort that each combatant had expended was now beginning to show, but as Sykes was the older man

and was not used to his clashes lasting anywhere near the duration of this encounter, it was evident from the gasps that came from his bloodied mouth that his reserves of strength were fast being depleted. It was then that he fell to his knees. Bluey waited for him to regain his feet then knocked him down again. An old watchman called out to Bluey to 'Give him another one for he had been knocking down old men for years!!' Bluey obliged and Sykes went down again. By this time Bluey had worked himself up into such an aggressive state that he knelt down beside his opponent in readiness to continue the bout. A policeman walked over and put his hand on Bluey's shoulder. 'Let him up mate he's had enough!!'

It had been a brutal encounter but its aftermath had repercussions right around the waterfront. Word of Sykes's defeat at the hands of an unknown, spread like wild fire. There was little sympathy for Sykes and his defeat had a profound and lasting effect in halting the behaviour of his ilk on the Sydney waterfront. Bluey quickly became known as the man who had beaten Sykes and his appearance anywhere caused curiosity and compliment. Both combatants were summoned to report before the officials of the Commission. The Union fully backed Bluey after gathering evidence from those who were witness to events leading up to the fight and knowing of the foreman's bad reputation. Sykes was suspended from the Industry for six months and Bluey resumed his place in his gang and went to work as usual.

At this time, (2005), when a reactionary, conservative Federal Government attempts to turn the industrial relations clock back a century, it is well to remember those workers who fought literally to erase contemptible work practices. Without vigilance, unscrupulous employers who still abound in conditions of rampant capitalism could easily revisit these unsavoury practices.

Harry Black
No Religion, Politics or Sex

How often have you heard the advice that you must not talk about religion, politics or sex?

This advice may have some value if you are taking afternoon tea with the local Methodist Minister and his wife. However, it had no value if you were having smoko with a gang of wharfies. No subject was banned or frowned upon on deck, down below, making up cargo for discharge or out in the wharf shed.

Politics was always the flavour of the month and left wing politics occupied a dominant part in most discussions. However, vulgar and negative features did arise from time to time when a broke and disgruntled wharfie related how his visit to Randwick on Saturday proved to be a financial disaster and his opinion of jockeys, bookmakers and horses could not be published or repeated. During the football season strong feelings were often aimed at referees and opposing teams. Many arguments were marked by fierce debate, anger and frustration.

The Menzies Government came in for some special mention, followed by Arbitration Court Judges, Shipping and Stevedoring Companies, an assortment of bosses, the police and the unanimous condemnation of the mass media.

This ensured a robust and interesting environment. Lunchtime and smoko job meetings added another dimension to the job and allowed rank and file members to hear and speak on reports embracing important national and international issues. You must understand that this did not sit well with the powers that rule. Wharfies and their union were often sent to the sin bin to be fined or suspended.

Strong united action was often the order of the day. Job and strike action were features of the Sydney waterfront in the decade of the '50's. The attempt to ban Communist Union Officials, Menzies Referendum, soundly defeated by the people, war in three years, and the' rabbit out of the hat' in the form of the Petrov conspiracy saw militant trade unions under heavy pressure.

In 1954 an attempt had been made to smash the Waterside Workers Federation with the full support of the Menzies Government. Every port in Australia was closed down. The Union, under the leadership of Jim Healy set up Strike Committees in all ports. Sydney was a hive of activity with eight special committees on action. At the centre was the Publicity Committee, contacting factories for meetings and support. The members went to the highways and byways conducting meetings and receiving wide support. Outstanding work was performed by the Women's Committee; their meetings in factories, workplaces and on deputations obtained some of the best results in the campaign.

As a job delegate I was engaged in addressing meetings wherever workers assembled. One meeting I shall always remember. I was sent out to a Botany wool wash to contact the delegate and arrange for a meeting on the following day. I located the factory and the delegate who proved to be a friendly bloke and I was settling all the details for the meeting when we were interrupted by a gentleman in a suit and carrying a brief case who turned out to be the General Manager.

He informed me in loud firm tones that he did not want me upsetting his workers with political statements and industrial issues which were no concern of theirs.

In my defence I stated the first thing that came into my mind. I assured the Manager I would not be talking about politics, but on the establishment of a National Shipping Line, adding with emphasis that this should be near and dear to his heart and would be good for his company and Australia generally. Much to my surprise he accepted this and stated as long as you are not going to speak about politics. (I didn't know what he thought a National Shipping Line was about.)

Next morning I arrived just before smoko. My mate Mick handed out our leaflet stating the facts of the strike. It was a leaflet prepared by the Strike Committee with a strong political content. The setting for the meeting was perfect. Workers perched on bales of wool, some four and five high, and other sitting on the bales at various heights and angles.

The delegate from the Wool and Basil Workers Federation introduced me and the meeting was underway. I immediately hoed into Prime Minister Menzies telling the workers of his hatred of militant unions and how he became known as Pig Iron Bob. My next target was the Arbitration Court and its judges, and my audience appeared to respond well to what I was saying. I spent some time on our wage demands and a few other issues. I concluded by placing before them a resolution of support for the Waterside Workers Federation. The resolution was carried unanimously.

I felt great satisfaction with the meeting and its outcome. The Delegate walked with us towards the gate. Like many speakers before me I sought the opinion of the Delegate who appeared most enthusiastic about the meeting. He stated with some emphasis that it was a good meeting. No one could object. It had no politics. I was stunned and my mate Mick did not improve matters by laughing all the way back to the Union Rooms.

In 1967 following the "Woodward Conference" permanent employment was introduced on the Australian waterfront. This provided for a minimum weekly wage for regular waterside workers in major ports and reduced the retirement age from 70 to 65. A majority of employees would now be directly employed by the shipping companies with the remainder by the "Stevedoring Employers of Australia Ltd." (SEAL) The employers were now responsible for rostering and allocating work.

Vic Williams
Tiger And The Convicts

Tiger treated documents like snakes, with caution but no reverence.
"There's a trap in it somewheres," he said, lifting the form up by one corner as if to look at it through the light.
"Straight forward," said Burglar, at the next chair. "Just down the line. Put Adelaide Stevedoring at the bottom of the list, and you'll dodge them- and their bloody Borneo logs."
"Bit like voting, "said Wandi, from the other side of the table. "Except you don't get fined $2 if you don't put it in."
"But the officials said we had to fill it all in, put our preferences for the companies - as if we wanted any of them," said Burglar. "Wish we could vote to stay as we were in one pool."
"That's the agreement, all or nothing," chipped in the Quiz Kid from the end of the table.
"We get the guaranteed wage - over $50 even if we don't lift a finger, and they get the labour spread around the companies. Can't have one without the other. That's the agreement, that's the little green book."
"There must be a trap," said Tiger, turning the form over to look at the back.
"Well, it won't catch me," said Burglar. "I've put Adelaide Stevedoring last."
"Need a dingo trap to catch you," said Tiger, settling down to the heavy job of writing his preferences. "Adelaide last."
"Adelaide last," echoed the table.

Two days later Tiger and Wandi stood in front of the lists. "Can't believe it. Must be a misprint -my number's up for Adelaide Stevedoring."
"So's mine," said Wandi. "And I put it last to make sure I missed it - freezers, Borneo logs, wool, not for mine. Burglar's here too, and the Quiz Kid. They must have been reading the forms upside down - Chinese style."
"That's cross-wise," said Wandi.
"Reading I mean. Here's Burglar. Hey, seen this?"
Tiger pointed. Burglar nodded.
"I sure have. Been down to the Union office. They said Adelaide wanted a hundred and fifty downholders. They only got five for a start, so they took the preferences, right down to the bottom of the pack, and they got all of us."
"What about those who didn't fill in a form?" asked Wandi.
"Free as air." said Burglar. "We've been conned into it! Come on, up to the Union office and we'll fix this!" And Tiger led the way. But at the office the lists, the forms were put before them.
"Couldn't be any other way, Tiger," they assured him. "They had to get the last eighty from the last preferences. You were the last card in the pack. There it is in black and white; you can't get away from it."
"Words! I can bring down words and birds when they are on the wing - but once they're written I'm beaten. A bloody fence would never keep me in a paddock, but now I'm trapped with two words on a piece of paper. Come on Burglar, let's have a drink. We won't have time after the Company, gets us."

That was nearly true. Adelaide Stevedoring averaged its two or three ships in port, and with enough of their own men to cover the gangs needed for the day, evening and midnight shifts, they worked continuously. They had to be employed first by the Company. The old Sunday roster, that had previously spread the Sunday work at double time and a half evenly among the men, no longer applied. For three months they worked six and seven days a week. The other companies were slack part of the time; the SEALS, the pool of spares not in any company, to be used anywhere when companies had used up all of their own men, were often idle up to two and three days a week. Weekend work very seldom came their way; they were paid the flat rate for the five weekdays.

"Oh Seals are Seals and we are the bulls, and never the twain shall meet," said the Quiz Kid to Tiger and Burglar as they went into the usual waterhole on a Wednesday after work. But he was wrong; there were quite a few Seals in the bar when they walked in.
"Here are the arse-licking brown tongues," the Duchess sneered. "Give us a pound Tiger. You've got all the money and no time to spend it!" For him a dollar was still five bob; he wasn't one to acknowledge or welcome change - unless it was someone else's on the bar.
"Work for it Duchess," said Tiger and then ignored him. But the Duchess wasn't going to be ignored. He was a big man, a deckhand, with the habit of stripping down to his shorts on hot days. Someone had seen Dobell's painting and had named him "The Duchess Disrobes"; because of the similarity of build and the stripping habit the name stuck, although, or perhaps because, the Duchess didn't like it.
"How can we when you brown tongues pinch all the cream? We don't get an hour of premium shifts. You forget all about the roster when it suits you, you mangy cat!"
"Roster? You were one of the bulls what bucked against the roster when it first came in.
You're nothing but a howling dingo, Duchess!"
Duchess moved in and swung at Tiger. Tiger blocked the punch and hit the Duchess on the chest. But before it went any further the men close by grabbed the both and pulled them apart without much trouble for neither wanted a fight to a finish.
"It's not the first of fights about this set-up," said Burglar.
"I don't like it at all," said Tiger. "One part of the union fighting another. Not what unions are for. They want their fair share of wages but we want a fair share of idle time."
Splinter, another of the Adelaide men, came in then waving an official looking document. "Does this ring a bell, Tiger?" he asked, and handed it to him.
"Convicts in transportation to Australia on board SS Brimstone." read Tiger wonderingly. "What to do with us?"
"Aren't we as good as convicts on all Adelaide ships and no chance of getting off?" asked Splinter.
"Sure we are," agreed Tiger. "Bakke boat convicts. Here's some of their names - Kingston alias Gordon. Day alias Knight. What's alias mean Quiz Kid? And their mark too?'
"The mark because they couldn't write. Alias means like a nickname." he explained.
"Oh, like Splinter alias Tack, or Quiz Kid alias Enos," asked Tiger.
"Or like Tiger alias -" started Burglar. "Leave it at that," warned Tiger. "Now, Quiz Kid, what about doing something about us as the Bakke boat convicts, and we'll get a list of the nicknames and marks of the Adelaide mob."

Tiger hounded Quiz Kid for two days about the writing, while the collecting of nicknames and the working out of the marks went on, with Burglar, Tiger and Orang Outang doing the editing.
"What mark for Quiz Kid?" asked Burglar.
"Big book open and a big ear sticking out each side." said Tiger.
"What's the mark for Tiger?" asked Burglar.
"Five scratches across your arse," said Tiger.
"Settled," said Orang Outang, looking shrewdly over his glasses.

The verses were finished, list of aliases and marks done. "That'll do," said Tiger. "That'll tell them how we feel about it. If they laugh at us they might cry too."
"Only if they get crying drunk," said Burglar, "Like the Duchess did after you left him."
Quiz Kid was serious. "I can get a stencil cut and run off -five hundred would be a ream - cost about $2." "Right," said Tiger. "Now, Burglar, you go up the bar that way -get. two bob or a dollar from our blokes. Orang, you do the other side."

The next day Quiz Kid brought the ream to Tiger on the job. "Good enough," said Tiger. "Good enough. Now to get it around the port, the main water holes and the union and
the company office. I'll do the Railway at dinnertime." And the leaflet was launched.

THE BAKKEBOAT CONVICTS.

We are the Bakkeboat convicts,
Chain gangs from ship to ship.
We might have still been sealing
But we missed the lucky dip.

Now we are freezer snowmen
So cold we croak like frogs.
We slide like half-drunk monkeys
Along the Borneo logs.

And when the port is empty
And every pub is full,
There's one ship in the harbour;
We're winging up the wool.

We thought we'd earned a breather;
We asked for idle time
But we were told "You're convicts'
You're sweating out your time!"

So day by day they work us,
The old, the lame, the lags.
We tried to beat the whistle
But there's one more sling of bags.

But our jailers aren't so wicked
When we groan and limp and couch,
They take the legirons off us _
"You can have the Sunday off!"

We are the Bakke boat convicts;
We're Kevins's merry men.
And boy, they'll never catch us
If we get free again!

The leaflet went like wildfire. "Want another five hundred at least," Tiger told the Quiz Kid. "It's going well. Mopoke was cutting up about it with his mark being on it - said he was barely game to take it home to his wife. Half a dozen signed their names to it, and took it up to the company office as a reason to get out. It's done some good. It's one way of telling them the set-up is crook. It's softening up the enemy, but what do we do next? Have you got an answer in your books?"
"New one on me," said Quiz Kid," but I'll work on it."

The work eased for a while; the Bakke boat convicts had some time free; the Seals got work with other companies with quite a lot of overtime shifts that gave them more than the guaranteed weekly wage. But then it came again; full weeks of work, evening and midnight shifts for the Adelaide men. A gang of four men were asked to push a big lift into place; they wanted two more men.
"Can't get any more men," said the foreman. "You can do that - or else - or you can go home." and he left to see if he could get more men.
Skippy said "Hear that? You can go home. Come on, what are you waiting for, he mightn't tell us again." He led them bounding across the deck and along the wharf and away.
"Christ," snorted the supervisor, "I'd do better with sheepdogs."

After a full three weeks of it Tiger called a conference of war in the Railway bar. A committeeman was there so they moved around him
"What's the committee doing about our idle time? The Seals are getting plenty of it." asked Tiger.
"There's nothing in the little green book that says you've got to equalise idle time - only wages."
"Which you're not doing. Seals are a long way behind us on points - and that comes from wages. They're getting hungry, even the blowies are in danger," said Quiz Kid.
"Well give us time and we'll even that out!" said the committeeman.
"How can you put them on our evening and midnight when we've got all the men to cover them, unless you give us some of their idle time and them some of our midnight?"asked Orang Outang.
"Federal Office says if you do anything about equalizing idle time you draw the crabs; you could bring redundancy." The committeeman was getting uncomfortable and hurried his drink.
"Bullshit," snorted Tiger. "Sharing the idle time can't add to it - unless the Seals turn the ships around faster than we do- and that won't happen!"
"You're going against Federation leadership in this," said the committeeman stiffly. We've got to use the little green book."
"As arse paper," Tiger' came back. "All right we'll use it. We've got the right to resign, so we'll all do it together and force something."
"That would be the last card in the pack," said the committeeman.
"Just what they called us at the union office," chipped in Burglar. The committeeman put down his glass.
"Don't do anything I wouldn't do." he advised as he left. "We'll do what we want," said Tiger. "Your shout, Quiz."

"If we all resign we've got to each sign a paper," said Orang
"Or put your mark on it. What mark do you use in the jungle?" asked Burglar.
"Chewed nuts - could be yours," Orang's eyes gleamed over his glasses.

They worked out the wording of the resignation and Quiz Kid had the job of getting it typed and roneod. Next day they signed on bales of wool, on hatch covers and rails, in smoke rooms. "Pardon for Convicts" was the password as they signed and some added their mark or made one up. By the second day, Tiger's cubs had rounded up a hundred and forty completed forms. He and his small team took them round to the union office.
"Don't want to go right over your heads," he told them. You won't get anywhere with these," said the committeeman who was at the counter.
"We'll see," said Tiger, "But it's worth a try.
Only cost us half a ream and a hour's drinking time."

The pile of resignations caused a bit of a flurry at the company office. "We'll have to oppose all these. We're not against what you want, we think you deserve it but we don't want to lose our labour, so we must oppose them. It will be a week before your resignations will be heard."
They went back to their jobs the next day; Tiger to his wool, Wandi to groping in his freezer and the Orang Outang perched on Borneo logs and springing from sawdust bag island to sawdust bag.
Then, after two days, the incredible rumour, from too authentic a source to be disbelieved, that the management in the main office in Adelaide had told the local office to oppose the resignations with the ultimatum "We want another forty general hands. Give them to us or we'll let that mob of convicts loose on the world." The leaflet had got as·far as Adelaide. Then, two days later, a hurried top level meeting in Melbourne of the top brass.
"At our level it would be called panic stations," said Tiger.
"No, it's executive expertise in processing a problem," said Quiz Kid. "The advantage of collective bargaining without coercion."
"What race is that starting in?" asked Wandi. "Is it worth a bet?"
"Don't know," said Tiger,"but it's worth a bet that we'll get something out of this."

There was a special stopwork meeting called before work, the day set for the hearing of the mass resignations. The Branch secretary held up a sheaf of papers to get attention. "We have the documents from the Woodward Conference in Melbourne for your information. Forty more general hands are to be allocated to Adelaide Stevedoring. They will be drawn out in a ballot today. There is a scheme for sharing of idle time, between operational companies and SEAL labour by means of substitute labour. Now, this is not equalisation of idle time as some have been campaigning for. This is sharing, mind you, sharing, though the result maybe the same. Now, the other thing that needs to be done is that the Adelaide Stevedoring men who resigned, be asked to withdraw their resignations now, before the hearing begins, because they are not being opposed and cannot be stopped. Now, can I get something definite on that?"

Tiger looked round at his group, and all the Adelaide men behind them. They laughed and nodded.
"I'll stay with the logs," said Orang Outang.
"I'll stay in the dark in the daytime," said Mopoke.
"O.K.O.K." said Tiger to the meeting. "The convicts have T.V. in their cells, so we'll stay where we are."

Two days later the first substitute labour from Seal took over Tiger's job. The Seal labour was on evening shift and Tiger came down to the job to make sure, or just to gloat. The Duchess was at the winch by the gangway. "Satisfied, Tiger?" he asked.
"Sure am. Had a good day off. Just looking over the temporary convicts. And you?" "Sure am said the Duchess. "At least I'll be floating a bit off the bottom pay day next week." "Well, come and have a drink with me this smoko," said Tiger, "And I'll have one on you next pay day on the strength of this shift."

Signed by his Mark

Tiger
Orang Outang
Quiz Kid alias Enos
Burglar Bill
Captain Kon Tiki alias Wandi (deserted ship)
Wandi (four eyes) alias Broken Spear
Weebo
Eaglebeak alias Anteater
White Leghorn

Mopoke
Karate Kid
Rigor Mortis
Cuddling Skunk
Pedro

Signed by his mark

Goat Rider alias Barb Wire
Logger alias Bones
Morris 1100 (floats on fluid) alias Lion
Rubber Legs
Barney Rubble alias Gravel
Splinter alias Tack
Pumpkins
Skippy
Chicken Bones alias Lindy
DDT alias Dumb Dopy and Tired alias Drive Determination Tenacity

Bakke is a shipping company operating in the port of Freemantle in Western Australia.

Betty Fisher
Mrs Lawrence & Mrs Thomson

January 2005

There are some stories of the great Depression that could be told about Port Adelaide.

One concerns two women, the only names I have so far found, Mrs Lawrence and her sister Mrs Thomson who are still remembered by working class people in the Port. They were nursing sisters. During the worst of the Depression they did the following:

They placed themselves on call at any time 24 hours a day for women needing help with childbirth, or with problems attendant on botched, back-yard abortions or with any problems arising from complicated child birth. Their services were free, night and day, any weather, any time of the year.

They organised the unemployed to raise money to help women in total penury and delivered to them sheets, blankets and total baby provisions to women left alone, sometimes without even a flock mattress on which to have their child. Someone would get word to Mrs Lawrence and she and her sister would ride their bicycles to that place, wash and clean the woman, prepare her for the birth, deliver the child, clean and tend the baby, ensure that the woman had enough to eat to help her milk begin for the baby. If the women were too starved for that they would ensure that a feeding bottle and milk was available for the baby. They would attend her several times a week after the woman had got help from the unemployed and neighbourhood women. They would then call on ad hoc occasions to ensure the baby and mother had attention.

During the Depression, many women with too many children to feed would resort to the despair of going to abortionists and often they were in great danger of septicemia. Mrs Lawrence and Mrs Thomson would be called or notes would be left for them to attend such cases. Often they would organize a doctor to attend and although so far we have no evidence of this, we know there were doctors who would set aside time to attend these women at the behest of Mrs Lawrence especially. She was highly regarded and valued by all the unemployed and destitute in the Port Adelaide area.

Mrs Lawrence was well known as a great speaker at Port Adelaide during the Great Depression. It was her speaking to the unemployed who urged them, particularly the women at the Port, to organize and cooperate together to help one another. Slowly this cooperative effort gathered momentum and the men of the various groups overcame their despair and began to form the groups and gradually the organizations of the unemployed.

It was Mrs Lawrence and Mrs Thomson who informed the unemployed men’s groups of the low food value of the rations they were getting and urged them to insist on having beef placed on the rations. Scraggy mutton, often green with rot was the only meat for the unemployed on rations. Mrs Lawrence told the unemployed they and their children needed good beef and fresh fruit to eat. She urged them to plant fruit and vegetables if they could get the seeds and trees. She told them about planting fruit trees and nut trees and gave them practical outlines of what they could do to ensure that their children got enough to eat.

Mrs Lawrence and Mrs Thomson also talked to the women, urged them to learn by example from their mothers or neighbours how to pull apart and reknit woollen clothing and how to use rags to make peg rugs; how to use scraps to make colourful covers on hessian backed bed covers; she taught the men and women to find materials to make soap; then told them about the use of wood ash from domestic fires to sprinkle on the outdoor lavatory pans supplied by the council to reduce smells blow flies and infections from unclean lavatories. She lectured the women on insisting that everyone wash their hands before eating, she urged the unemployed to make and manage, to make items for sale and she fearlessly advocated helping one another when they were in danger of being evicted from their homes.

In Port Adelaide the women’s groups from all walks of life organized regular weekly bazaars, trestle tables in the local hall stacked with items and produce to be sold for the benefit of the unemployed community. They were able to pay the wages of the Librarian at the Port Adelaide Institute. The

women's groups also organized and funded Christmas parties for the children at the Port Adelaide Institute. Every child got Christmas lunch and took away a pair of sandshoes (so they could go to school) and a bag of lollies.

Ask any of the old people at the Port, the old residents, who was the person they remembered who did the most for the unemployed and the names of these two women come to mind. "Oh yes, those women Mrs Lawrence and Mrs Thomson". They attended the poor on any and every occasion; they were there to attend the bashed and broken after strikes and bashings on the wharves. But they remained in the background, were part of the fabric of life, so often there, so much part of the life of those at the Port that they were never featured as heroic persons. They did what they did without any notoriety. In fact they avoided publicity and the working class protected them, never mentioned their names to the police who may be called in to ask questions about such matters as back yard abortionists. The law was extreme in those days on any matters surrounding abortion. These two women were never betrayed as the ones who would help patch up and mend the broken bodies and broken lives.

For this reason it has been impossible, despite talking to people from around the wharves and the district who knew them or knew of them, to find out even their first names let alone their background. About where they came from, where they learned their nursing, what first motivated them, who their own families were and what happened to them. Like most working class women, their self image was based on the requirement todo what was needed, quickly and with out remark.

It was known that they never discriminated. All persons were the same to them be they Aboriginal, women or men on the run for some misdeeds, especially seamen who did not want their origins known. If an interpreter was needed they would find one. If an Aboriginal family was in need of some one who would not discriminate, they were there. They worked with the Aboriginal women in midwifery and healing and would have learnt from them. They wanted to remain anonymous because they saw no purpose in any kind of notoriety in those times.

Times change. It is good to remember that Mrs Lawrence and Mrs Thomson existed but frustrating that there seem to be no details of their lives to give some background to the women themselves. Obviously they were educated; also they made no display of religion or religious dictates. But none can tell us more than that

"They were always there, they were called on all the time. Mrs Lawrence was a wonderful speaker."

That's all we find. They were great working class heroes.

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Ray Harrison
Metalworker in the Redbelt

April 2005

Introduction

The Communist Party emerged from the war and the immediate post war years as a very powerful force in Australia and influenced politics across the whole spectrum of social life. Often in hidden as well as overt ways.

The vital expression of this was in Party organisation in industry where on the job activity resulted in many gains for the workers and a challenge to the ideology of the ruling class and the hegemony of ALP reformism such as to constitute a real threat to the capitalist system.

This led to a situation where the most decisive major unions were led by Communists and like minded 'fellow travellers' including ALP forces.

This led to many forms of repression including attempts to ban it and its activities. ASIO was formed and developed with the primary aim of destroying its influence particularly in the working class and trade union movement.

In response to this challenge, the extreme right wing and the Catholic Church were organised to destroy the communist militant influence. The National Civic Council led by Santamaria, using among other things the parish priests and other forces, were mobilised to interfere in the democratic processes that existed within the trade union movement.

Hence the setting up of the Industrial Groups (the Groupers) which in turn led to debilitating internal struggle within the trade union movement and the labour movement generally.

While it may be argued that sectarian mistakes and attitude helped the forces of reaction, the main vehicles were the capitalist press, ASIO and the Industrial Groups that brought about defeats for the workers and the destruction of the virile militancy that had been developed by the Party.

Metalworker in the Redbelt

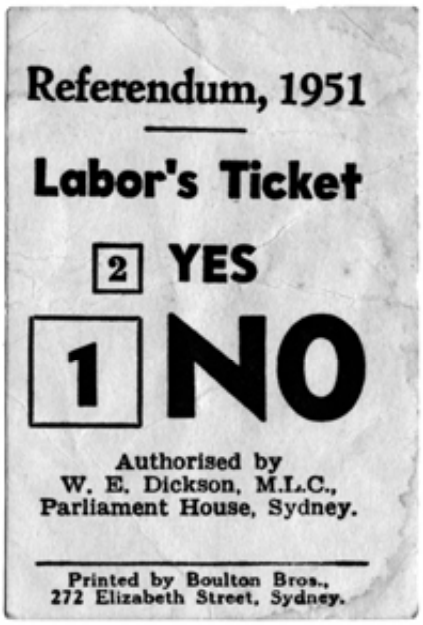
My first political action was at Uranquinty out of Wagga in the Vale of Winds. I was an electrical fitter at the RAAF flying school there. It was the end of 1945 and the Indonesians were resisting the attempts by the Dutch to recolonise. The Dutch Air Force was touting for recruits from the RAAF. We had a meeting at the base, there were also meetings at the air force stations at Amberly and down at Tocumwall. We decided that none of us would join the Dutch Air Force. The Labour government eventually followed our lead and no one was allowed to go by Air Force orders.

I was demobbed in 1946 in my Deadman suit in Bradfield Park and Joan and I got married the following year. I finally got a Tradesmans Rights Certificate as a fitter and went to work at Poole & Steele's shipyard in Balmain.

When the Menzies government introduced the legislation for court controlled ballots in 1950 it was condemned by the Communist Party, the ACTU and the ALP. The legislation gave great impetus to the Groupers.

I was working at the CSR Canite factory in Pyrmont at the time. I had been there during the Miners strike of the previous year. We were all stood down by CSR during that period and I had ended up cutting bakers wood at Wilberforce for the seven weeks of the lockout.

From CSR I went across the water to Balmain Power House and the fight around the Communist Party Dissolution Bill in 1951. I was in the AEU, on the union badge they had the slogan – organize, educate and control. There was a meeting called out the gate about the referendum on the dissolution and the



Communist Party had organized speakers. I wasn't in the Party at that stage but I was sympathetic. I didn't join until 1956. The meeting was chaired by Tiny Richards, the FEDFA Organiser, and speakers were Jesse Street, a feminist and activist and Harold Rich, a communist lawyer. Only six of us, the delegates, attended, the site had a strong influence from the Groupers. Activity was started, postering, organization, talking in pubs. The referendum was won by a narrow majority. The Communist Party stayed legal.

I left Balmain and went to the gas company where I worked with Ernie Thornton. We got the sack together. Everywhere he went he got the sack. They called him "week in lieu". Some thought he was Chinese. He had been in China as the Secretary of the World Trade Union Federation. Ernie had been the Federal Secretary of the Ironworkers Union but had lost a battle with Laurie Short for control of the Union. The Groupers used Judge Dumphy of the Arbitration Court to get him expelled from the union. Dumphy ruled he was not fit to be a member! He tried to rejoin the Ironworkers many times but when the delegate on the job took the money into the office in town the girls wouldn't accept it. The boss at the shop told Ernie that he was getting pressure from the employers and had got to sack him for not being in the union. They told me the job had finished and I was sacked along with him; as a fellow traveler I suppose.

I've always been a peace activist. In the fifties the Party Branch at Hurstville solicited signatures for a petition to ban the bomb. Then there was large peace marches in Sydney. Modeled on the Aldermaston marches in Britain they went for two days. These radial marches started from Cronulla, Manly and Parramatta on the Saturday and converged on the Domain for a big rally on the Sunday afternoon. The party branch pasted up from Tom Ugly's bridge to Hurstville before the march. We did many telegraph poles.

I worked all around western Sydney, mainly as an installation and maintenance fitter. I worked in the shipyard at Mortlake and for a printer. Many other places too. I was the delegate at MacDonald Construction when they built the polythene plant for ICI. In 1954 I left the Kurnell oil refinery and went to the Shell oil company then to CIG. In 1955 I was at National Motor Springs as a maintenance fitter. 1956 was the Olympic games; Jane was born.

When at Coalcliff colliery working for AE Goodwin, their Chief came down and sacked the delegate to bust up the shop committee down there. I had been sick and arrived back at work on the day of the strike. They said I was exempt from the strike but I told them I had started back so I was in it. The strike went for seven weeks. Shona had just been born and I had no money to get Joan and Shona out of hospital. Joe Slingsby, a comrade did it for me. We were doing meetings at Bunnerong and other places to raise money for the strike fund. In the wash up we had more strike funds than our rate of pay would have been. We got great support from the Miners Federation and the Waterside Workers. The Watersiders never refuse to do a tarpaulin muster for other workers.

Punchbowl Brickworks was a non union shop but I managed to sell some Tribunes. I have always sold Tribunes. I was called Red Ray, as there was another fitter there they called Black Ray. Joe Dodds the Organiser would come down to see me. I tried to get him a job after he lost his position in a court controlled ballot but the employer did a security check and Joe didn't get in. He joined me up to the Hurstville Branch of the party.

Between 1961 and 1963 I worked at Procon, it was in the Monsanto Group Refinery at Silverwater. We had a Party Branch on the site and at one stage Joe Slingsby ran the red flag up the flagpole outside the boilermakers shop. We had a Party publication called the "The Good Oil" I was chair of the shop committee there. The site committee had representatives from all the unions and sections; Boilermakers, AEU, Ironworkers Electricians & Painters. We had lunch time meetings with good progressive speakers to address the workers – Rev. Allan Walker on peace. We used to sell 50 to 60 Tribune's there. Joe Slingsby had them on the bench and his mate was the bookmaker. They would come down to put money on with the SP bookmaker and buy a Tribune at the same time. Don't know whether they read them. I had joined Rex Oliver to the Communist Party. There was far from universal support for the Party Branch. Whenever Joe Slingsby the boiler maker took Rex and I to work in his Austin a right wing fitter called Loose Head would sing out "Here comes the Moscow Express". Going home in the Moscow Express one afternoon, Bluey Ryan jumped out and grabbed an escaped pig. We took him up to Jacques Hotel in Bankstown and raffled it out of the boot. The proceeds went to the

Party Branch.

Harry Jensen, who was the Lord mayor of Sydney at the time, had the electrical contract at Silverwater. "Headline Harry" we used to call him. The employers were out to get the shop committee and the foreman sacked the electrician's delegate who came back to work late on a Saturday. The job stopped and we were all outside the gate. At the meeting on the Monday with 800 troops outside the gate, the Site Committee met with Jensen down the shed. Jensen said he would suspend the delegate for four days. Victor Desailley the boilermakers delegate spoke up, "Who do you think you are Harry, Judge Dumphy? Suspending workers, we won't cop it." The shop committee want Delegate Fisher reinstated immediately and we will all wait outside the gate for your response." Jensen went down to see the powers that be and after a shot or two of whiskey came back with the news the delegate was reinstated.

In 1963 Barwick pushed up legislation under the Crimes Act. The five delegates from the Procon site committee went to Canberra to protest the Act. It was a big gathering, thousands had come. We had to report back to our Branches and out of that the AEU formed area committees. – I was chairman of the Crimes Act Committee for the St George area. At the inaugural meeting in Kogorah, Senator Doug McClelland addressed us on the implications of the Act. We decided that if the Crimes Act was invoked on any AEU member in the Area, there would be an immediate stoppage of all AEU workers in the area. The Crimes Act was never used but it is still on the statute books.

The Communist party metal fraction used to meet at the BWIU office. Jack McPhilips, member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and former assistant national secretary of the Ironworkers, said if we are going to win the court controlled ballots we need to organize hard.

I moved from Peakhurst to Liverpool in 1963 at the height of the fight against the court controlled ballots. We were doing the footwork. Lots of door knocking. We had to get the members names from the secretary, then we had to find out where they lived and try and deliver to them. Jack McPhilips through the Party Branch had me responsible for mailing out to 700 in the Liverpool area one weekend. We went out at lunch time to deliver and all day Saturday to try and contact the Branch members living in the area personally. All the leaflets had to be handwritten under the union rules so everyone had an equal opportunity. The wise fathers of the AEU had done this to stop rich factory owners getting material printed that favoured a particular group of candidates. We had everyone writing. We had to do 10 before we started work.

Support your loyal union candidate
No court controlled ballots
Clean Union ballots
More democracy in the Union
Campaign for three weeks annual leave
35 hour week

The Groupers had a population advantage when it came to writing things out, they had all the kids. Shearer also managed to get away with breaking the union rules by distributing printed material.

In 1964 The AEU had over 50 branches around Sydney and there was 1,200 members in the Hurstville No 1 branch and 1,000 in Hurstville No 2 Branch.

There were area shop committees comprised of representatives of all the union delegates on the site. They would elect a convenor. Laurie Carmichael was the Victorian State Secretary of the AEU at this stage and he would come up to the Sydney shop stewards quarterly meetings to liaise around the work on the court controlled ballots. In Victoria, the Groupers had 30 full time organizers.

At this time there was a hot debate in the trade union movement as to the correct role of shop committees. This was triggered by stoppages in some Commonwealth establishments over a long standing log of claims. The debate was used by the employers and the Groupers as a general attack on shop committees. The "unauthorized" actions taken by the shop committees was usurping the authority of the official leadership and could rashly expose the union to the use of penal powers by the employers. It was even suggested they were an embarrassment to the unions.

The court controlled ballots were starting to bite. The Branch Secretary had to submit the membership books to the Industrial Registrar for the court controlled ballots. The Groupers were using them to increase their influence in the Union movement. Bob Santamaria was saying in his regular radio broadcast, with court-controlled ballots you can vote from the comfort of your homes, you don't have to go to branch meetings. There was a big struggle for control of the AEU.

In 1964 I was working at the Punchbowl Brick & Tile Works and I became President of the Hurstville No.1 Branch. Wally Buckley's election as a Divisional Organiser came up at that time. It was under a court controlled ballot. Two of the Groupers who were already national organisers, (Colin Shearer and J McDowell) had a meeting on their own and petitioned the Registrar for a court controlled ballot.

We needed money for stamps to send out campaign material and the Treasurer, Eddie Tourle moved an amount of five pounds from the Branch incidental fund to the AEU Rights Committee which we used to pay for the mailout. (The Groupers had a similar counter organization to the Rights Committee called the Engineers Committee) The Groupers found out about the use of the Branch funds for election purposes and decided if they could get hold of the books with evidence of this payment, they could get the Registrar to cancel out Wally Buckley in the election.

The delegates got the drum by telegram about two o clock from the AEU state office "Important, be at the Branch meeting tonight". The meeting was, as usual, at the Railway Institute in Hurstville. When we got there, Joe Dodd the organizer told us Shearer and McDowell were coming to take the books. When the meeting started the Chairman ruled that Shearer and McDowell could look at the books but could not take them away. "Shearer, you can sit there and slobber (which he did) but you're not getting the books". Shearer had the books at this stage and went over and threw up the window. Eddie

the Treasurer had arrived late as usual to see Shearer with his books. He grabbed them off him as we closed the window and locked the doors. McDowell was a wrestler, big bastard with a cauliflower ear and I had been detailed to contain him. I had been wondering how to do it. I didn't need too. Once we locked the doors and windows all McDowell could do was sit there. Any chance of bolting out and picking up the books was gone. Eventually we threw them out of the meeting.

Wally Buckley won his election in the court controlled ballot however Joe Dodd and Arthur Searle the State Secretary lost their positions. From then on the AEU started to win court controlled ballots through organization. We worked closely with the more progressive forces in the Labour Party. Roy Bruggy was on the shop committee at Austral Bronze and was the Secretary of the AEU Rights Committee. He stood in a court controlled ballot for national organizer. The Groupers found another Bruggy out at Broken Hill and stood him as a candidate to confuse the ballot. The spoiling tactic didn't work and Bruggy got up.

In 1964 I worked at Pettifords a subsidiary of ACI. It was a wire factory in Padstow. It was a non union shop which over time we turned into an all union shop. We set up the Communist Party Wire Branch and recruited to the Party. Rex Oliver was there too but he left to became an organizer for the Union.

We had a plant in the office, a draftsman, Fox by name fox by nature. He was an AEU member and kept the delegates informed of what was being cooked up. During this time they tried to do a time and motion study, the Employers Federation were pushing it through all the factories in Sydney. Clarence the clocker was supposed to carry it out but maintenance refused to do it. We wouldn't clock our cards after every job.

There were growing demonstrations against the Vietnam War. Peace was union business. The shop committee won the right for people to knock off early around 3pm to go to the city to participate in the demonstrations. They lost money but they didn't lose their jobs. Stop Work to Stop the War! Similar to Procon we had meetings outside the gate about the Vietnam war and international peace. This was also when the French nuclear Tests were on in the Pacific. We would address the workers in the canteen at smoko about the radiation drifting over the Pacific and the potential effect on the North Coast of NSW.

Ken Thomas who founded TNT was showing films against the Vietnam war. We showed Felix Green's film, Inside Vietnam around the district on an old Russian projector we had borrowed from the Party school at Minto. It was broken down and I had to make a new wooden cog for it. At the showing in Lurnea they pulled a bomb scare which slowed us down but we carried on.

Laurie Aarons, Lloyd Caldwell and I went out to the airport to support Wilfred Burchett, a journalist who was the first Westerner to give an eyewitness account of the dropping of the atom bomb on Hiroshima in Japan. He had covered the Korean War "from the other side". He was accused of being a traitor for his stories. The Australian government denied him a passport for many years. He traveled on North Vietnamese documents. Burchett came back on a light plane from Fiji and we met him in the press room. This is the first time these two metalworkers had been called journalists. It was hot and Burchett, a big man was white and sweating with anxiety. No other media showed any interest.

At Holsworthy Army barracks the local party branch and student supporters from Victoria sat down in the road. They were protesting the war and the detention of conscientious objectors like O'Donnell in the Holsworthy compound. The coppers moved in and arrested about fifty who they tried to hold at Liverpool police station. Don Syme, a local Branch member opened his house to use as a base to bail them out and feed them before the students went back to Victoria on the Monday.

In 1965 I went to CC Diecasting at Punchbowl. They cast Holden parts and did lawn mower bases. The whole place was working overtime Saturday and 2 nights a week. They had a Shop committee: AEU (1), sheet metal (1), ironworkers (1), section delegates e.g. 2 ironworkers, women production workers, the toolroom and the die repair shop. I was a maintenance fitter which gave me a roving commission around the factory. Very useful to sell Tribunes and have a chat. The shop committee had the whole place tied up.

I ended up as the chair of the shop committee after only a month when they got rid of Des Crisp the Convenor of the committee. We had advance warning of this because the electricians delegate was trying to have a nap in the air conditioning ducts next to the board room when they were discussing the plan to put him on the afternoon shift and down size him out of a job. They were stunned when the shop committee confronted them with their plans and had all the offices professionally swept by a security firm for non existent listening devices. We couldn't save Des Crisp on this occasion.

There had been a shop committee at CC Diecasting for many years built by communists such as Bill Britten, Peter Hawkins and Des Crisp. Shop committees were supported by the AEU as being close to the rank and file and often able to represent their local interests most effectively. Generally the local employer saw the sense in working with the shop committee as the unified voice of labour on the worksite and in the factory.

By this stage the shop committee was in the habit of meeting with management on Friday afternoons in work time over tea and bikkies and talking about the thickness of the shithouse paper. After rank & file criticism of this bludge, the shop committee reformed its practice and said they would only meet with the management if they had something important to tell them. No more Friday afternoon meetings.

On payday the shop committee would regularly collect for other workers who were on strike. With management consent we had the apprentices wash up early and man the collection boxes at the door. The collection boxes were kept in the paymasters office.

Once a year the delegates went to Canberra on the budget train. The costs of this trip were financed by the whole of the factory including the office staff. We would report back to everyone at a lunchtime meeting in the factory grounds the following day. Vic the Painter, a cockney socialist, used to paint all the banners for the trip. They tried to sack him but under the policy of the shop committee we immediately went into talks about the merits of the case. The management said he was no longer needed to paint the production lines as the Ironworkers could do it. The Ironworkers said they wouldn't do it. Vic was reinstated.

The big struggle in this period for the AEU was over the margins. As Paul Mortier put it in a pamphlet of the period,

"The purchasing power of the secondary wage called "margin" which is paid as reward for skill, hardship and other factors should be maintained by adjustments similar to those made to the basic wage. Women should receive equal wages to men."

We had many meetings over the margins at Diecasting. When the meetings went overtime, everyone would sit on their benches until the next quarter hour ticked over on the factory clocks. It drove the Manager mad.

The local Communist party bulletin was called the Punchbowl Beacon, we slipped articles about goings on in the factory and the margins campaign into the bulletin and it was distributed at the factory gates. Not by me but I contributed some good stories; about them giving themselves cars whilst holding out against an increase in the margin. Workers were very interested and the boss would tear his hair out about where the information was coming from.

The Grouper influence in the Ironworkers was always a bit of a problem on shop committees but not at CC Diecasting. The Ironworkers could have a meeting by themselves on the internal affairs of the union but on shop matters they were bound by the Constitution of the shop committee and had to work with the other union delegates. When the Ironworkers organizer "Bow Tie Gibb" (on account of his red neck attire) came down to address the members, the local delegate told him to go away, he wasn't wanted.

When the shop committee and local union organisation became too strong for the local bosses, the Metal Trades Employers wheeled in an industrial solicitor, Doug Wright to do the negotiations with the shop committee.

The Party had a house in Punchbowl. George and Zara Splayford were living there. He was a Party functionary. I went to a function there. There were four trade union officials from Indonesia there who were in the communist party. They talked of what was happening. This was before the coup in1965. They all subsequently disappeared. Pat Clancy tried to take it up in the ACTU but sympathy for communists was in short supply. The trade union reaction to the coup was minimal.

Joan, my wife joined the Party in 1966. She had been active in the UAW and the Women's Movement for many years. It was the Liverpool Branch that met at Don Syme's place. We got active on local issues such as the Council Peace Committee and Liverpool, in common with a number of progressive councils, became a nuclear free zone. We also got part of the Old Powerhouse site made over as a peace park.

After the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Russians in 1968, the Communist Party in Australia split

again. I went to a meeting at the Sydney Town Hall over the Prague Spring and the Czech invasion. Laurie Aarons, the National Secretary who he had been in Russia the previous year spoke out against it. The Australian party took an independent line and condemned the invasion. Those communists who disagreed with this independent line went with the Socialist Party of Australia. There was some sectarian bitterness on both sides after the split but in the metal industry we generally managed to work together on industrial campaigns.

In 1969 Clarrie O'Shea wouldn't give up the books of the Bus & Tramways Union to the Industrial Registrar and they sent him to jail. For months job militants had been hassling me about taking direct action against the penal clauses. The Union and the Party had been cautious up until now, but this was it, massive protests. 1 million workers stopped around Australia. Non union shops stopped. I went to the meeting at Bankstown. There were about 3,000 there.

UGLY: A protester is removed from the SCG

July 1971 was my Mothers 80th birthday party. It was also the big demonstration against the Springboks at the Sydney Cricket Ground. I went into work to get some bolt cutters. I was due to be working that Saturday so I had to make excuses to the foreman before sidling out. I hid the bolt cutters down the leg of my trousers and into my socks to get into the game. There was all these rugger buggers chanting through the fence "Paint them black, send them back", ugly. After cutting the fence which was supposed to keep us from the ground I was thrown over the top barbed wire strands and kicked by the muster of coppers stationed around the ground inside the fence. A number of people had got on to the ground. As they threw me in the paddy wagon, Peter Elston the wharfie jumped out and took off across the ground with the keystone cops in pursuit. He led them a merry dance in and out of the orange smoke from the flares. Meredith Bergman was dragged across the ground by a copper on each leg. Her sister Verity was also collared.

They took us up to the cells in Darlinghurst. Fred Hollows, I didn't know him then, was in there writing on the walls 'Land rights for Aboriginals'. He had a look at my eye socket which was bleeding. Also in the cells with us was Mick McNamara, secretary of the Builders Labourers, Ron Page Methodist Minister from Bankstown and Charlie Dumbrel secretary from the Water Board in Newcastle.

I never did get to Mothers birthday party.

In 1972 we went down to Canberra again, this time to support the Aboriginal tent Embassy. We went down on a Friday night. Five of us in the party car, a little Mazda station wagon. The petrol strike was on and we had gerry cans of petrol in the back. I was going crook because they were smoking, tobacco and other things. Always been safety conscious. I was off on compo at the time with a welding burn on my leg. It was cold, there was snow on the hills around Canberra. Thousands came to Canberra to support the demonstration. Chicka Dixon the wharfie led the march. Bobby Sykes said the week after we left and went back to Sydney, the police moved in "in their hundreds", and demolished it. They waited until there was only a few there to defend the Embassy.

I had finished at Diecasting when we went to the Workers Control conference in Newcastle. Same Party car and some of the same comrades. There were over 400 delegates there at the new trade union club. There was a big fight with the Trotskyists who wanted to take over the meeting. Typical they wouldn't get off the floor. Workers control wasn't really supported by the traditional trade unions. Some of the other comrades like Wally Buckley didn't show much interest. They thought it was adventurist, like the builders laborers were called later. I went to Conference knowing I had been sacked on the Friday. On the Monday I came back fired up and staged a one out work-in but I had no support. Sludgeguts Dugan called the police and said there was a demented fitter on the job. A sergeant and two constables escorted me off the premises.

By 1973 when I got a job on the waterfront I was now in the AMWSU. The AEU had amalgamated with blacksmiths, boilermakers, and sheetmetal workers into a single metals union in 1968-69 later to be

joined by the moulders and shipwrights. I was a maintenance fitter at Seatainers in Balmain and then moved to Botany Bay.

When Kerr sacked the Labour government in 1975 there were calls for a general strike. Whilst Whitlam was saying maintain the rage Hawke who was the ACTU President at the time was saying no industrial action, stay at work. The Party produced a daily Tribune during this period which I sold at a huge meeting in the Domain and at other meetings around the coup.

After I retired in 1986, I became a retired maritime union member as part of the big industry union amalgamations in 1993. When Corrigan and the Federal Government locked the waterfront out in 1998, I went down to join the picket at Botany Bay and down "the hungry mileC in The Rocks as a member of the MUA Retired Members Association. The support at the picket was all sorts of people outraged at what was going on. - MUA here to stay. Recently the Retired Maritime Members supported the picket line at the Hardies factory at Rosehill in the blue about asbestos compensation. I used to work with the stuff, packing valves at Balmain Power House and I am slightly dusted.

It is the May Day March today, I will catch up with many of the comrades who are still alive. This will be the start of the campaign against the Howard Government's proposed changes to the industrial legislation. It's on again.

vintage reds Australian stories of rank and file organising

Drew Cottle and Angela Keys
The Harco 'Stay-Put': Workers' Control In One Factory?

Factory occupations are rare in Australian labour history. While 'work-ins' and other forms of workers' control have occurred in coalmines, power stations, on building sites and on the waterfront, they are almost unknown in factories. Their importance has always been a crucial part of the Left's political programme and strategy to establish socialism. This paper will examine the Harco 'stay-put' as an example of workers' control in one factory. It is a study of democracy from below where rank-and-file workers attempted to run things at a small metal-shop on Sydney's urban fringe.

The Harco 'work-in' occurred amidst a time of growing confidence and militancy by the organised workers' movement. Internationally, the working class in the advanced capitalist countries were on the move. The struggle against the American war in Vietnam radicalised many students. The Cultural Revolution in China, and the occupations by French students and workers of universities and factories were inspiring episodes within the gathering storm of global struggle. In Australia, the massive mobilisation of workers to smash the Penal Powers in May 1969 was the catalyst of a generalised offensive by the working class, in which the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) played a leading role.[1] Days 'lost' to the bosses in strikes doubled from 705,000 in1967 to 2,393,000 by 1970.[2] Nevertheless, even in this time of heightened struggle, the 'work-in' at Harco Steel had its own unique features.

The 'work-in' was the culmination of a protracted struggle between Harco management and its workforce over the right to work. Originally, Harco had been a small Australian steel manufacturing company situated in the industrial belt stretching from Lidcombe to Granville. It was taken over by the Gollin group, an English-Japanese consortium, and relocated to semi-rural Campbelltown in 1970, where land was cheap and State and local government rates were lower.[3] The Gollin group was a power within the Metal Trades Industry Association (MTIA), and the new Harco general manager, J.P. Foster, was an executive member of the MTIA policy-making body.[4] In the move to Campbelltown, the Harco workforce was reduced to 15 boilermakers and 20 ironworkers.

The company's existence and profitability was dependent upon securing and fulfilling state and federal government contracts. As these orders were completed, workers were sacked, only to be rehired when new contracts were signed. Although strikes at Harco were frequent and sometimes successful at maintaining higher than award wages, they could never prevent dismissals. With fewer workers, the rate of exploitation intensified. Work was often stockpiled before these sackings took place allowing the company to ride out the duration of the dispute without a loss of profits. At Harco, the small but militant workforce achieved a high degree of job organisation. Bans were placed on new work and overtime, but the sackings continued in order of seniority, as determined by the bosses.

The Harco Steel factory was isolated on Sydney's urban fringe in a Liberal electorate. On 16 November 1971, the company announced the dismissal of five boilermakers and one ironworker because of a downturn in orders. Amongst those to be sacked was the boilermaker and Communist job delegate, Lloyd Caldwell.[5] Because of his ability to organise successful strikes in other major metal workshops, Caldwell had been blacklisted.[6] An immediate stop-work meeting of workers refused to accept this 'management' decision, and walked off the job. An informal gathering of the Harco workers was held in a nearby pub, to which Jack Sponberg, the Boilermakers and Blacksmiths' Society organiser, was invited. A lengthy discussion about their situation ensued. Sponberg, 'a Balmain Trotskyist' a veteran of workers' industrial struggles, and 'Lloydie' Caldwell, a rebel worker, argued that a strike at Harco would only perpetuate the management routine of sackings and rehirings. New ways of struggle had to be considered. Sponberg and Caldwell looked to Glasgow and Paris for new methods of proletarian organisation. The Upper Clydeside Work-In during 1970, and the collective action of French car-workers during the May Days of 1968[7] provided impetus for such a possibility at Harco.

A work-in was considered at Harco within the framework of 'capitalist legalities, the struggle for a 35-hour week, payment of wages for sacked workers, workers' compensation, the opening of the company's books, and the inevitability of police intervention.'[8] Their demand was the right to work for all. Accepting the sack, the workers argued, did not challenge the bosses' prerogative to hire and fire at will. The workers concluded that halting production through strike action would be ineffective at the Harco site. Control of their workplace became imperative, as it aimed at the core of the wage

relationship under capital. They decided that if the boss took their jobs, they would take the factory.

The Harco workers returned the following morning to run the factory with discipline and creativity. At a lengthy job meeting they adopted the following resolution: 'We, the Harco workers, having taken control of co-operation among ourselves are able to produce more and have no desire to return to the outmoded system of non-constructive employer supervision.'[9] The boss was made 'surplus to their requirements'. The arrival of the workers prompted the Harco management to contact the police in Campbelltown to remove the 'trespassers' from its property. To maintain the offensive at Harco, the workers needed to publicise their stand. By phone and by mail, the workers informed the press and other unions. Within days, the Harco work-in had provoked unprecedented discussion and debate in the pubs of Campbelltown and Liverpool. Letters of support, money and food parcels were delivered to the Harco site. With community support for the work-in growing, the local police took no action.[10]

Recourse to the Arbitration Act to remove the 'trespassers' was not a possibility for management, as the Harco workers could not be penalised for working. The legal rights of the employer were being successfully repudiated by the moral economy of the Harco workers. The Harco management, foreman and supervisors remained on the site, perplexed and bewildered by the workers' actions. The workers who had 'stayed-put' at Harco collectively designed their work schedules and throughout their four-week occupation, they achieved a 35-hour week of production. A 35 hour working week was an established demand of the Boilermakers' Union, but nowhere else had it been implemented. Maintaining wages above the award rate was problematic, as the Harco workers did not receive payment from the company during the work-in. Donations from various unions, work-sites, and workers paid their wages. As the work-in progressed, these payments could not be sustained.[11]

The removal of tools, ladders, and the shutting down of the power supply were forms of industrial sabotage deployed by management to destroy the unity and work discipline of the factory's occupiers. The Harco bosses called upon the Federated Ironworkers' Association (FIA) to intervene and end the dispute. From the 1950s until this period, the leadership of the FIA was noted for its anti-Communist outlook and its compliance with the interests not of its members, but their employers.[12] At the behest of Harco's management, the FIA called for an all-out strike by its members at the plant, a ploy that would have effectively destroyed the work-in. The Harco ironworkers, puzzled and amused by their union's newfound 'militancy', ignored the call and 'stayed-put'.[13]

The prospects for continuing the work-in at Harco faded, as the remaining job contracts were completed. The initiative, discipline and creativity, which were unbounded in the early days of the work-in, became increasingly hard to maintain. After the failure of the FIA's 'militant intervention' at Harco, the employers resorted to legal tactics. Trespass notices were issued to the workers under the NSW Summary Offences Act. The occupiers' response was imaginative. Jack Sponberg approached the Labor barrister, Lionel Murphy, who agreed to act as their legal counsel pro bono. Murphy was able to delay the court proceedings against the workers who 'stayed-put' at Harco.[14]

Frustrated in the civil court system, Harco Steel, in conjunction with the MTIA, attempted to move against the workers through the provisions of the Commonwealth Industrial Act. Such a strategy would bring the occupiers into collision with the boilermakers' union, the employers, and the state. Under the Act, those unions that supported the work-in would be penalised. Consequently, the Sydney leadership of the boilermakers' union voted to withhold legal aid from the Harco workers if the work-in continued.[15] Nevertheless, it was clear that implementation of this Act would be slow and cumbersome, while decisive action to end the work-in was essential. In response, the Harco workers attempted to broadcast their plight more widely. Although, 'at every single factory, job, or rank-and-file meeting addressed by the Harco workers voted support for them without exception', no union would officially support the work-in financially or industrially. The work-in was to be short-lived, as the workers became increasingly isolated from the labour movement.[16]

As the Christmas 'lay-off' period approached, Harco Steel, advised by the MTIA industrial officer, C. Buckland, and its team of solicitors, presented applications to the New South Wales Supreme Court for restraining orders on each of the Harco occupiers. These legal restraints meant that the workers were required to vacate the premises, and would be prevented from ever entering the site again. Failure to comply with the Supreme Court's decision would incur heavy penalties. Individual workers who remained on-site would be fined $1,000 per day. These costs could not be defrayed by serving time in gaol. The Court could seize and sell the 'properties or goods and chattels' of the workers to meet the cost of the separate fines.[17] It appeared that the example of the Harco struggle had to be destroyed. Buckland stated, 'If they were allowed to get away with it at Harco it would spread like wildfire.'[18]

Despite the possibility of bankruptcy or gaol, the Harco workers were prepared to continue the work-

in. As their financial support dwindled, the forces of their employer, the MTIA, their unions, and the State were arraigned against them. The beginning of the end of the work-in occurred when the federal executive of the boilermakers' union demanded 'that our members refrain from attending work at Harco. In the meantime, we call upon our members to continue all forms of struggle initiated in that shop.'[19] This contradictory decision represented the union's abandonment of the Harco workers. The Sydney branch of the boilermakers' union initially had given its unanimous support to the work-in, and made a donation to its fighting-fund. At first confused and disbelieving, the workers were finally resigned to this union decision. When maximum union support for the Harco struggle was required, its opposite was the response. The work-in was destroyed, but not by the spirit of its participants.

To celebrate the end of the work-in, the occupiers organised a Christmas party in defiance of their employer, their unions, and the Supreme Court orders. They left the job-site defeated but not broken. In the course of their stay-put, they had gained a deep and contradictory knowledge of who their friends and enemies were. The limitations of orthodox trade unionism were revealed and seen to be as much a weapon against their action as the legal repression of the State. Throughout the work-in, the power of capital was manifest in the strategies of their employer, the trade unions, and the State.

The Harco work-in need not be mythologised. The action taken by a small band of proletarians in an isolated factory should be critically understood. Faced with sackings, they chose to work-in. This decision, for a time, gave them the freedom of the factory. Despite the combined power of the State, their employer and unions, the workers stayed-put and determined their working day. Such liberties came about through collective decision-making, even if they did not seize control of the company, or inspire other factory work-ins. Surpassing wage-slavery at least momentarily, they gave their working lives a meaning and purpose.

The Harco work-in could only have been a temporary measure. The contractual nature of the work, the size of the workforce, and its geographic location ensured the brevity of the occupation. Work during the stay-put was organised so as to only partially fulfil the existing job contracts. Deliberately incomplete work was worthless to the Harco management and black-banned by the workers. The Harco workers broke with long-standing hierarchical trade union practices where decisions were made with little democratic discussion. At Harco during the work-in, forms of self-management and participatory democracy flourished. Actions in the factory were taken only after the workers held full and open discussions.

The significance of Harco is not that the work-in failed, but that it was attempted within the prevailing political and economic conditions. While the smashing of the Penal Powers in 1969[20] gave impetus to more militant actions by the organised working class through a crescendo of strikes in all sectors, sackings and factory closures continued.[21] The student struggles for self-management in Paris '68 had inspired workers throughout France to occupy their factories.[22] Glaswegian workers staged brief but successful work-ins. The Harco work-in, isolated and determined, did not spark a mass occupation of factories. Workers' control under capitalism remains an elusive contradiction, if not an impossibility. In spite of the inevitability of failure under the existing material conditions, the Harco workers stayed-put. They reached out for workers' control by refusing the rule of capital, and faced the consequences with resolution, not resignation. The Harco proletarians dared to make their dreams a reality.

The Harco proletarians knew the limits of their actions. They could neither smash the State nor carry out some more general kind of subversion.[23] If Harco became part of the ultra-Left 'CP rhetoric of the time', the Harco workers never raised it to the level of a charismatic global strategy.[24] After the Harco work-in other similar actions were taken by the South Clifton coalminers, metal workers at Pillar Narco and Evan Deaken in Brisbane and by building workers at the site of the Sydney Opera House. Each of these struggles was more successful in achieving their objectives than the Harco action. At Harco, the workers lost but they demonstrated that workers' control is something that must be fought for not in the future, but now if capitalism is to be overthrown. Momentarily, the Harco workers 'showed their unequalled potential power to bring about change because of their role in producing our society's wealth.'[25] The work-in was both a defence and an extension of their immediate class interests. Their collective action was a brief glimpse of how socialism might be brought into existence.

Editors note. I have made a number of stylistic and grammatical changes, without, I hope, taking away from the style of the piece. I think that it is important for the authors to state the starting and finishing dates of the work-in so that the reader has an accurate understanding of the time-frame. At the moment the time aspect is quite vague.
Deidre

Notes

1 See J. Arrowsmith, Abolish the Penal Powers: Freedom's Fight of '69, Automatic Printing Company, Collingwood, August, 1969.

2 See Tom O'Lincoln, Into the Mainstream: The decline of Australian Communism, Stained Wattle Press, Sydney, 1985, pp. 139-140.

3 Lloyd Caldwell and Mick Tubbs, The Harco Work-in: An Experience of Workers' Control, National Workers' Control Conference Publication, Sydney South, 1973, p. 1.

4 Foster was described 'as a 'new breed' executive who understood the psychology of the worker.' See Australian Financial Review, 7 December 1971, p. 9.

5 See ASIO security file L.A. Caldwell CRS 286/1, 481/3/6.

6 Hall Greenland, Red Hot: The Life and Times of Nick Origlass, 1908-1996, Wellington Lane Press, Neutral Bay, 1998, pp. 137-164; 306. See also the ASIO security file J.T. Sponberg, CRS 286/1, 212/5/9.

7 For a description of the Upper Clydeside struggle, see Willie Thompson and Finlay Hart, The UCS Work-In, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1972. The occupation of the Renault car-plant is noted in Kristin Ross, May '68 and its Afterlives, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2002, pp. 70-73.

8 Lloyd Caldwell and Mick Tubbs, The Harco Work-in: An Experience of Workers' Control, National Workers' Control Conference Publication, Sydney South, 1973, p. 2.

9 Lloyd Caldwell and Mick Tubbs, The Harco Work-in: An Experience of Workers' Control, National Workers' Control Conference Publication, Sydney South, 1973, p. 8.

10 Lloyd Caldwell and Mick Tubbs, The Harco Work-in: An Experience of Workers' Control, National Workers' Control Conference Publication, Sydney South, 1973, pp. 3-4.

11 Lloyd Caldwell and Mick Tubbs, The Harco Work-in: An Experience of Workers' Control, National Workers' Control Conference Publication, Sydney South, 1973, p. 5.

12 Robert Murray and Kate White, The Ironworkers, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1982, passim.

13 Lloyd Caldwell and Mick Tubbs, The Harco Work-in: An Experience of Workers' Control, National Workers' Control Conference Publication, Sydney South, 1973, p. 10.

14 Telephone conversation between author and Jack Sponberg, 1 March 2003.

15 Lloyd Caldwell and Mick Tubbs, The Harco Work-in: An Experience of Workers' Control, National Workers' Control Conference Publication, Sydney South, 1973, p. 12.

16 Lloyd Caldwell and Mick Tubbs, The Harco Work-in: An Experience of Workers' Control, National Workers' Control Conference Publication, Sydney South, 1973, p. 13.

17 Lloyd Caldwell and Mick Tubbs, The Harco Work-in: An Experience of Workers' Control, National Workers' Control Conference Publication, Sydney South, 1973, p. 14.

18 Lloyd Caldwell and Mick Tubbs, The Harco Work-in: An Experience of Workers' Control, National Workers' Control Conference Publication, Sydney South, 1973, p. 9.

19 Lloyd Caldwell and Mick Tubbs, The Harco Work-in: An Experience of Workers' Control, National Workers' Control Conference Publication, Sydney South, 1973, p. 15.

20 Ian Turner, In Union is Strength: A History of Trade Unions in Australia, Thomas Nelson, West Melbourne, 1976, p. 122.

21 Malcolm Waters, Strikes in Australia: A sociological analysis of industrial conflict, George Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1982, pp. 171-172.

22 Michel Bosquet, Capitalism in Crisis and Everyday Life, The Harvester Press, Sussex, 1977, pp. 88-90.

23 Tom O'Lincoln correctly indicates these limitations of the work-in. See Tom O'Lincoln, Into the Mainstream: The decline of Australian Communism, Stained Wattle Press, Sydney, 1985, p. 147. None of the Harco workers were unaware of them. Nevertheless, they maintained their occupation of the factory.

24 Bob Gould, The Communist Party in Australian Life, mimeo, Newtown, c. 1996, unpaginated.

25 Diane Fieldes, 'From exploitation to resistance and revolt: the working class', in Rick Kuhn (ed), Class and Struggle in Australia, Pearson Education Australia, French's Forest, Sydney, 2005, p. 66.

Russ Hermann
Taking Over The Cranes

It all started in October, 1974 when Norm Gallagher, the federal secretary of the Builders' Labourers Federation arrived in Sydney with a number of Victorian officials and other assorted people, necessary to provide the muscle to take over the NSW Branch, then led by Joe Owens, Secretary, and Bob Pringle, President. Jack Mundey, the previous secretary, had recently retired under the Branch's 2 terms in office agreement.

Norm Gallagher had claimed that the reason for his intervention was the maladministration the NSW branch. Much later, Gallagher was jailed for corruption, but that's another story.

Gallagher's main tactic was to set up a Federal Branch and with the help of the Master Builders Association started issuing Federal tickets. The first job to sack workers who refused to join the Federal Union, was the E.A.Watts job at the NSW Institute of Technology (now UTS) building site on Broadway. The State Industrial Commission had ruled that they be reinstated, but when the men again refused, they were dismissed. This happened on October 18.

Naturally the officials and the rank & file wee a little upset. A meeting was called, in fact there were meetings every afternoon in the office and it was decided that we would occupy the crane the next evening.

We arrived at the next afternoon's meeting, expecting that volunteers would be chosen and that it would all happen. Instead, the officials and a couple of party members all argued against it.
There was a lot of discussion in the pub that night and four people, including one party member said

that they were still going to occupy the cranes. I was asked to go as well, but said that I was reluctant because I was in a new relationship and didn't feel like sitting up in a cane for a few days, but if they were desperate, I would. At 2.00 am there was a knock on my door. One of the four had disappeared. So off we went.

We had no trouble finding a staircase, but it only went up 2 flights. We then searched for a while and after crawling through scaffolding found it. Then up about 20 flights of stairs. We arrived on the roof and assessed the situation. One crane, the one nearest Broadway was of the concrete slab and only needed a short ladder to climb aboard. The other one, was on a steel tower. Brian and I climbed the tower. A small problem. There was a padlock on the trapdoor on the floor of the crane. Brian suggested we climb out under the bottom of the crane, up the sides and then onto the crane platform. I looked down, it was about a 200 foot drop, and said no way.

I went on to the roof and found a hammer and chisel and proceeded to attack the padlock. By this time it was daylight and we cold hear the scabs arriving on the job. I was frantically hitting the lock, sometimes my hand and finally broke the lock as they were arriving on the concrete slab. Then we were the lucky ones. A 30 gallon drum on top of the trapdoor and there was no way they could get in.

Men in the cabin of a crane boil the kettle on a portable gas heater. From left are Mr Peter Stevens, dogman, Mr Terry Edmondson, dogman, Mr "Scotty" Morrison, builders' labourer, and Mr Pat McMahon, crane driver.

Protest at the top

Builders' labourers occupied two cranes at the NSW Institute of Technology building site in Broadway yesterday with supplies of food, drink and blankets to last them a week.

The site has become a focal point in a dispute between the militant NSW branch of the Builders Labourers' Federation and interstate officials who have set up a Federal office of the union in Sydney.

The Federal secretary of the union, Mr Norm Gallagher, said yesterday that the action taken by the NSW branch members was endangering the lives of other workers on the site as well as their own.

The secretary of the State branch, Mr Joe Owens, said the five labourers still in the two cranes would stay up until the company abided by last week's court order.

Mr Bruce Skeoky, voted in the State Industrial Commission last week that 16 members of the NSW branch be reinstated on the site. The men, refused to join the Federal union and were dismissed on October 18, Mr Owens said.

He said under the rules of the State branch, three months' notice was necessary before a member could resign and join the Federal body.

The men on the cranes would be replaced on a roster basis next Monday, he added.

At the foot of the cranes other members of the Builders Labourers' Federation and the crane drivers' union held a peaceful demonstration of solidarity with the men on top.

They voted unanimously to stay on the site and support the cranes' men.

The NSW president of the Builders Labourers' Federation, Mr. R. Pringle, keeps in touch by radio.

lots will get

Landslide for Democrats

But for the other two, they were only about 10 feet above the concrete, but they were courageous. They stood with crowbars over their shoulders and didn't say a word, they just looked. After a while, the workers gave up went back down the stairs. We had done it. But it wasn't a great victory. We didn't have any crane drivers to get supplies or change shifts. But we did have a flagon.

Joe Owens was furious. He came up onto the concrete slab and talked to us. We didn't think we'd quite made our point. We told him that we'd come down when we'd finished the flagon. So about lunchtime we came down and Joe led us away without any recriminations from the workers on the job or the police.

Brian and I went back to our job on the Monday. The foreman was furious because we hadn't told him. But he and the owners respected Brian and didn't want any action from the union.

So we settled back into replacing the mastic in the roofs of the three Housing Commission buildings in Surry Hills, known as Poets Corner. They'd leaked for years, and now had finally got to the top of the Commission's maintenance list.

A couple of weeks later at the daily afternoon meeting, Bob Pringle, the President said that they wanted me to go up the crane again. I said I'd already been up once. Bob answered that they needed someone who knew the way up. Reluctantly I said OK. So on the very early morning of the 6th November, we went up again. This time we had crane drivers, dogmen, labourers and a pair of boltcutters. There were four on the Broadway crane and three on the tower crane.

We were much better prepared. We had sleeping bags, a gas stove and a means of getting supplies. The press loved it. TV interviews, the front page of the Herald, and heaps of union members showing support. And the view was fantastic.

We had a lot of fun playing games with the cops. To get supplies, the dogman would go down in the box and hover just above their outstretched hands. I would be standing on the platform next to where the crane driver was sitting, giving him directions. He would slowly swing the box around with the cops chasing it. Then at a signal from below, he would swiftly swing the box to where the people with our supplies were. They would quickly load the box and it was up and away before the cops could get to it. This was always the highlight of the day, as we would then check to see what goodies they had given us.

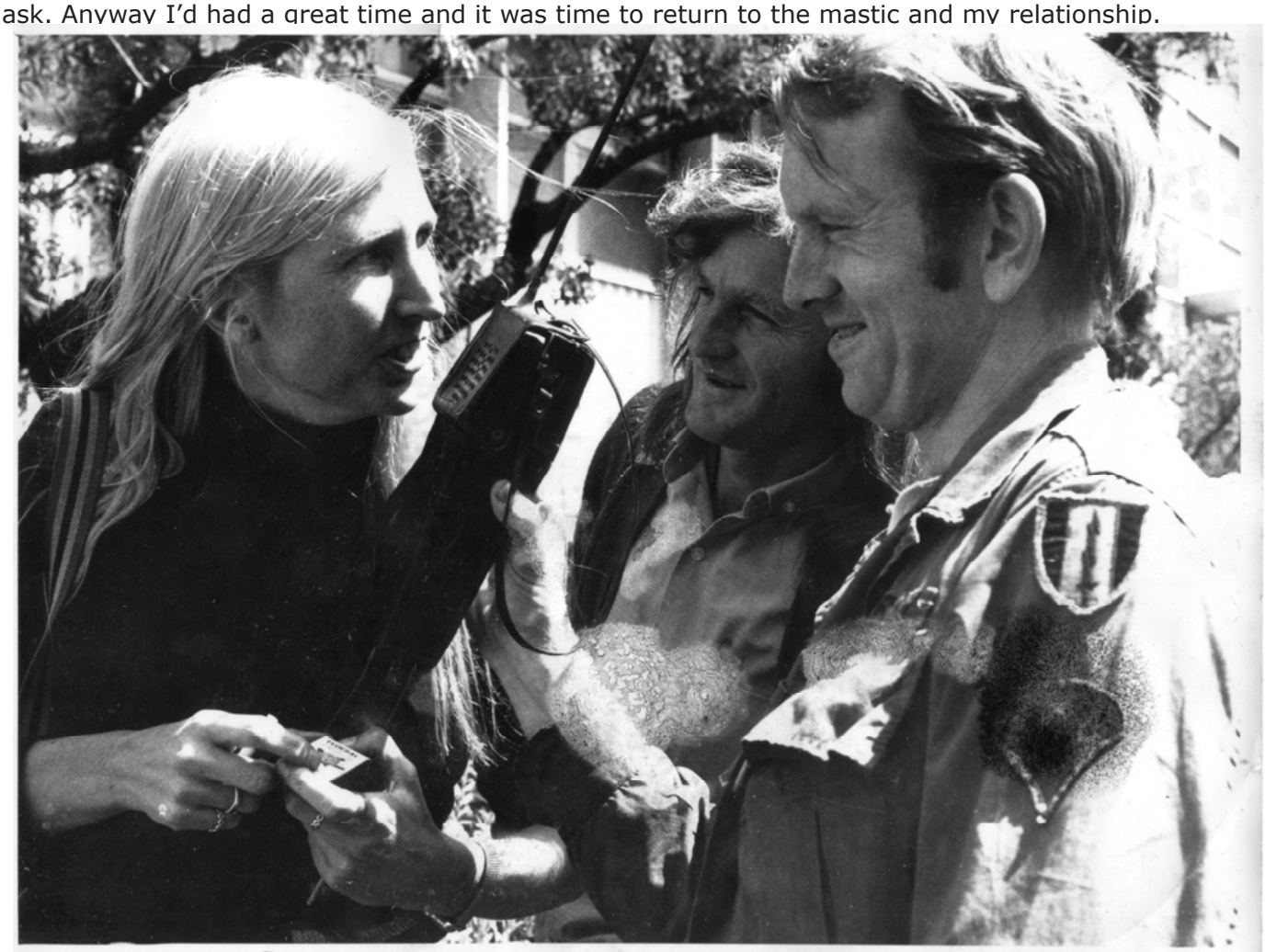
We now had a sheet of masonite to sleep on, and we were getting very comfy, even to the point of getting upset if our supporters woke us up too early. On the second day, we were surprised to see Deano, one of our city organisers suddenly arrive in the Broadway crane box. Although the union

executive were a little annoyed, as was the other city organiser, we were very pleased to have him up there. He would come over to visit us and we'd have lots of argument, discussions etc. He certainly brightened things up.

So things went on in a fairly regular way. By now we also had walky talkies. This was useful in giving directions to our suppliers. They also caused me to make a fool of myself, for which I'm still reminded. We'd just had the usual fun with the cops and my unit was still stitched on, when I heard someone say that the helicopters were coming. I nearly shat myself. Was this training for the SAS. I sang out to the other crane. We decided that we would make it difficult. The crane drivers raised the jibs and we started to go round and round. This would make it hard to land. Then we saw them. We waited.

They flew straight overhead and on to Garden Island. What a relief. What an idiot.

After 4 days, it was my turn to come down. Maybe it was because of the helicopters. I wasn't game to ask. Anyway I'd had a great time and it was time to return to the mastic and my relationship.



The sit in lasted 19 days. As well there were sit ins at the Prouds job next to the Hilton Hotel and a Kell & Rigby job at Rose Bay.

Except for a couple of days off the crane having a much needed shower, the Organiser stayed up there 'til the end. One of the cranes broke down and Hal Alexander went up to have a look.

Then on the 17th day, while the occupiers were asleep, one of the cranes caught fire. No one knows how it happened. Some of the people on that crane then moved to the other one. Two days later the cops came up onto the concrete slab. You'd better come down the cops said. There's a milk crate full of Molotov cocktails on the deck and we can't guarantee your safety.

So they came down. It had been a marvellous effort. We held out for another four months but with the weight of the Master Builders behind Gallagher, we were in a no win situation. Every new job started up with his Federal Tickets and that was it.

The final crane occupiers including the crane driver Bobby Chandler were all charged with trespass. The magistrate dropped charges on the Organiser, because he could have fought it on the right of entry.

Hal Alexander
The Bastards Never Told Me
I Had No Feathers To Fly With

I make it to university. Sort of.

The Poet Lorikeet calls them the Green Ban Fusiliers. The Builders Labourers Federation. A healthy rambunctious turmoil pervaded the industry.

Like the Miners, Ironworkers, Maritime and other unions in earlier periods, the BLF had become the fighting vanguard of the working class. It had won improved conditions and pay rates through militant actions. The Master Builders were savage. Like that 'it makes me feel a proud old builder' Jennings creep in the TV advert.

Other bosses and many union officials were snarly because their own troops were talking darkly that the BL's way was the way to go. Like they used to about the Wharfies and other aforementioned.

In the meeting halls of power where these things were discussed, some even spoke with certitude that we could blaze the way, show the world that here in Oz the unions were potential organs of revolutionary power and the vehicles of future proletarian emancipation. Such proclamations led to the usual fulminary esoterics and many trees were sacrificed.

However, justice where its due. The NSW Builders Labourers Federation won many a victory, many hearts and minds, had songs and poems written in its honor and put new political concepts on the agenda. Above all, it fought for its members and their rights.

Stormin Normie Gallagher had his own pan of fish to fry and moved in from the Federal Melbourne office to take over the NSW branch.

The fur flew and splits appeared. In the Party and the Union leadership arguments were heated and unresolved. The rank and file (or some of them) opted for job site occupation.

The University of Technology was a skeletal frame of steel and concrete of thirty stories. The big crane on the Broadway southern side was occupied by a group of union members. The site was enclosed by a five metre high wooden fence. The back Haymarket stretch had a three metre cyclone wire counterpart.

Hindsight does not allow a telling of the names of the aerial campers or who supplied them, relieved them or otherwise helped. Likewise of the two union officials who came to Glassop Street to proposition me but this is the story.

Somehow (someone?) the starter wiring on the back crane was tied in with the building and as it rose it had suffered a circulation seizure. Would I go up next day and try and fix it? They made it sound like the world revolution could depend on it. This bunny said yes but with the odd presentiment that it might be like poking one's prick into a cage of hungry ferrets.

Five a.m. on Broadway, at about opposite to where the main entrance is now, about a dozen BLs and some others like Pat/F taking piccies had gathered. A whistle up and they've barricaded the road a hundred yards either side. Cars queued as a rope snakes down over the hoarding and the blokes heave on it to swing the box over the high wooden fence onto the road. When it thumps down I climb aboard with the doggie. We lift, another heave, the box clears the woodwork and shoots straight up to the top of the structure where I'm deposited.

Great view. Stretching to all horizons.

Sydney. Home of all my homes.

I look down. I shouldn't have.

[Vertiginous (ver. tij' a. nas) - adj - giddy, dizzy, causing giddiness, whirling, revolving.] -Websters.

Yes. All of that. When the fundamental orifice and other organs had resumed their more or less normal functions, I looked over to my comrades in their crane cabin a long way away. They toasted me with a couple of tinnies. Very helpful.

Hoisting the toolbox ahead I wound the cable over my shoulder and edged across the narrow girder to the crane motor. Sussed out, there was no way to reach the burnout without crawling under the motor sump. Nice. There was a tray of sticky oil, black and congealed, under it. I dice the tee shirt and thongs.

They reckon that Cleopatra bathed in oil. She didn't have to rewire a huge metal diesel object at the same time. I did and did it.

Back under and out, looking like ready to sing 'Mammie', I hoy the lads across the way. They wave back, someone presses a starter control and the beast roars into life. Cheers all round. They shut it down and give me the old clenched fist. Then I yell.

"How do I get down?"

The big bearded one leant out of his cabin and replied.

"Walk." The erstwhile dogman joined him at the window. "Yer an angel, brother, maybe you can fly." So can pigs.

The bastards never told me about this.

So down the raw concrete narrow stairway or by ladder where it
stopped. The bastards never told me about this. Thirty floors.

Down on the paddock. Sudden realisation that there is no way out to Broadway. The solid timber wall stared back.

And I looked and felt like a furry Exxon oil spill victim.

Or a cormorant in the Gulf War. Bloody undignified.

The bastards.

So I head for the cyclone fence backing on to Thomas Street. and stop.

Outside the only gate are a bunch of blokes. Two seemed to have some sort of security insignia on their shirts. No seeming about the holsters at their hip or the contents. Two others were, to my scrambled senses, Big Norm's boys from Melbourne. They were likely enough looking customers that way. And where were my back up buddies? Where indeed.

What was that about getting a steady job and sticking to it?

I head for the part of the cyclone fence furthest from the hoons, running. As I hoist the toolbox over the top, there's a yell. Something like, "who are you and where the fuck did you come from."

Stealing a fraction of time I yell back. "Been fixing that sump," then hit the top strand on the fly, land in a sprawl on the other side. This was no time for pleasant exchanges of political opinion or any other kind for that matter and head for the markets and Chinatown.

From where would you go in Chinatown in just a pair of footie shorts, carrying a tin toolbox, with no money, having the hard boys on your hammer and everyone staring, partly because you have a wild staring look yourself and partly because you're covered in black shit and the wildness is because the bastards never told you about this?

Dead set right. The Trades Hall to find my procurers of the night before.

Into the Labourers' office first looking for sympathy and that ratbag place can't stop laughing. I enquire as to where my two benefactors might be found. Just a little job they said.

I'm ushered around the corner and along the corridor.

(A giveaway if you know anything of the wierd geography of the warren that was this history soaked, grey edifice. And of a sheltered-world-within-itself to an often grog soaked troupe of numbers men of

left and right who haunt its corridors and crannies. Even the best meaning had to learn to count and, for a few, drink. You could write a hundred books about a thousand characters of a colour and life who schemed, wheedled, raged, fought and laughed within its walls).

And of the staff, mostly women, who ran the union offices and without whose efforts and devotion most organisations could not have survived.

Anyway. Escorted by one of these unsung still smiling ladies, we arrive to confront the perpetrators of stares and laughter. After they had stopped staring and laughing they said they'd run me home. So down and out into Sussex Street.

From there into the Union Secretary's new Kingswood. "Fuck him," they said, not so carefully lining the seat with the Sydney Morning Herald. Back to Balmain, a full body detergent and hose down. Oh, Cleopatra!

You'd think enough was enough! St. Jude you have deserted me.

Working next day at R.P.A. there's a phone call.

"Jim Staples here. Can you come down to my office right away?"

Jim Staples? Hadn't seen Jim Staples since we expelled him, late fifties or so for being rude and out of order. What could he want?

What's that? Some problem about yesterday? Serious?

So I told the boss I was clocking off sick - again. Like yesterday he said. Yair, only worse I told him.

Cut short, the thing was (as related by my 'two best mates' and Jim) the contractors' inspectors had examined the crane and there was either sugar or water or piss or something in the hydraulics that ensured its continued immobility, that that little number would cost a horrible big bundle of big ones to repair and that noises about industrial sabotage were made and possible proceedings under the Crimes Act mooted.

Not all that much really except that we could all be in deep shit. Especially me.

They were all sweetness and light. Jim didn't appear to be wearing any grudges and said they would fix it up somehow.

The important thing was to keep me out of it. They just thought I ought to know.

Ought to know?

That was the trouble.

THE BASTARDS NEVER TOLD ME!

Peter Murphy
Building up to Sydney's first gay and lesbian Mardi Gras

1978 turned out to be a very exciting year. At the end of January I became unemployed when my job as a NSW organiser for the Australian Union of Students was abolished. While looking for work I became a volunteer researcher at the newly formed Transnational cooperative, focusing on the maritime industry. By the end of the year I was wondering when I would recover from the physical and psychological traumas from my participation in the gay and lesbian movement and the anti-apartheid campaigns.

I turned 25 in April, and looked back on four and a half years since I had decided not to renew my vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in the Divine Word Missionaries, a Catholic religious order where I had been training to be a priest. I had completed an undergraduate degree with honours from Macquarie University in anthropology and sociology in 1976, and then worked for most of 1977 for AUS.

In February 1975 I had joined the Communist Party of Australia, mainly motivated by the shocking realities about Australian society I had witnessed in Alice Springs in December 1974, while taking part in a summer school to learn elementary Pitjantjatjara language with some friends. If this wasn't enough motivation, then the Liberal Party mobilisation against the Whitlam Labor government in early 1975 pushed me over the line from thoughtful criticism to activism.

I attended the AUS National Conference at Monash University in January, with the help of a live-wire law student, Helen Golding, who had been in Alice Springs in December. There at Monash I had met some of her friends who were Sydney University communists. Helen Golding was a straight-up anarchist and feminist, who really respected everyone who worked for justice, whatever their particular political brand, and so she herself was an inspiration to me.

Back in Sydney, I moved from my house in West Lindfield, shared with two close friends who left the Divine Word Missionaries when I did, and moved into a small terrace house in Redfern, with Helen and her young daughter, Joanna, to help pay the rent.

Once in the Tertiary Education Branch of the CPA, I tried to be active in every way I could. This meant working in the Macquarie University Communist Club, helping to produce and distribute its newsletter, Red Menace, selling Tribune at Redfern Station, attending fortnightly branch meetings and taking part in the broader CPA campaigns. This meant a lot of paste-ups, both for student campaigns and broader political struggles. At the end of 1975 this became a daily routine, when we sold the Daily Tribune during the federal election campaign after Kerr sacked the Whitlam government.

Part of this process was engaging with the homosexual politics of some of my new student comrades. Both the CPA and the Australian Union of Students supported homosexuality as a 'right' – a positive, health alternative lifestyle choice! In reality, this meant lots of drinking and talking, as well as taking part in the campaigning.

At least by then I knew something about sex, but my new milieu was friendly, non-pressured, and open about so many issues, and for me, sex and sexuality was so important – so this was a time of high-speed learning.

My first homosexual encounter had been in 1974, with an older man who was a devout Catholic. He was very kind, but had no attitude about an ongoing loving relationship, something I just couldn't grasp at the time.

I did respond to an older woman that year, and we had a warm and intense love for a year and a half. But it foundered on my quite naïve experimentation with other people in the relatively free sexual atmosphere of student and left politics in 1975. That included homosexuality. My friend broke off with me and commenced her own lesbian lifestyle! In my turn, I was approached by an older married man, and we became lovers for several years.

In 1975, a homosexual students caucus, in which CPA members played a part, organised the first National Homosexual Conference in Melbourne through the Australian Union of Students, and I attended. The conference was intense and exuberant, as people felt their strength as a movement. The misogyny of most gay men was a real problem and conflict between political lesbians and gays was a big issue. We communists opposed lesbian separatism, and instead agitated for gay men to oppose sexism as a basis for unity between lesbians and gay men. We linked sexism to capitalism. The next National Homosexual Conference was in Sydney in 1976, and again I could take part. The third was in Adelaide in 1977 and the fourth was to be in Sydney later in that fateful year of 1978.

Meanwhile, in 1976, my comrade Craig Johnston in the CPA Tertiary Education Branch had persuaded the Sydney District Committee, of which I was a member, to have a 'homosexual education' program for all the party branches. He and I then went and spoke to many comrades, in industrial and local branches, in a matter-of-fact way, about what the basic issues were for gay people and how it fitted into the CPA's democratic program and vision for a socialist Australia. This was a very positive process.

During 1976 and 1977, we participated in several gay rights demonstrations in Sydney, which took the form of a rally at Town Hall Square and a march down George Street, then up Market Street to Hyde Park. Participation in these marches was in the hundreds. There was always an electric atmosphere, because the media would cover these events, and for many participants, this was how they 'came out' as gay or lesbian. We communists were always in the front of these rallies, which were in fact organised under 'Sydney Gay Liberation'. We had our own ethos, that we should be out in front for what we believed in, but SGL was diverse in its politics and only a minority were socialists. Again, inspired mainly by Craig Johnston, the gay communists and some others created the Sydney Lesbians and Homosexuals in 1976 and issued a manifesto linking gay oppression with women's oppression and capitalist power. This was aimed at offsetting the weight of conservative politics in CAMP (Campaign Against Moral Persecution), the biggest political grouping in the Sydney gay scene, and attracting more radical young lesbians and gays into activism.

Back at Sydney University where I worked in 1977, gay bashing and abuse of lesbians by right wing student groups, often led by Tony Abbott, was just part of the broader combat between left and right. Gay student groups were formed on some campuses, echoing the women's groups that had been active for most of the 1970s. These groups mainly created a space for young people to talk about their sexual desires without getting abused, they were a buffer against the gay-bashers, and they tried to initiate political action to remove legal oppression of gays.

It was out of a number of trends that the Mardi Gras emerged. One was a move by Ken Davis and Ann Talve to organise support for the California Gay Pride day that year, against a powerful anti-gay rightwing movement there. We all went to Word is Out a US documentary at the Paris cinema and the US parade images there also inspired ideas of a street party event. People in CAMP supported it, as did the Sydney University gay student group and the CPA Homosexual Collective. In particular, Gary Bennett at Sydney University was a driving force, and I recall quite a few discussions with Ken Davis and Lance Gowland.

Even in 1976, we had been concerned that only hundreds would take part in a protest march against the laws that made gay male sex a criminal offence. We knew from the Kinsey Report that perhaps 10% of the population was homosexual, and that meant about 300,000 in Sydney alone!

These laws were a license to police and all sorts of other thugs to bash and abuse gays and lesbians, often to the point of murder. At a lower level of oppression, gays and lesbians suffered humiliation at work, discrimination in housing, in churches, and often suffered psychological suffering in their families. Even in the 1970s, gay men were being prescribed electrical shock therapy to 'cure' them of their 'disease'.

We had a very real experience of oppression at Macquarie University in 1975 when Jeremy Fisher, a student living at the Anglican Dunmore Lang College, tried to commit suicide due to the stresses arising from his homosexuality. The college responded in a very christian manner - they expelled him. Fortunately, the college was having extensions built at the time. Many of the workers were members of the Builders Laborers Federation, led by CPA and left ALP activists, and they went on strike until Jeremy was reinstated in the college. Such were the times!

Also in 1975, Michael Clohesy was sacked from his teaching job by the Catholic Education Office because he appeared on television to support the CAMP submission to the Royal Commission on Human Relationships. Michael had studied at Macquarie Uni.

In early 1978, I was unemployed, still a member of the Tertiary Education Branch of the CPA, and in the Homosexual Collective, but not on campus any more, and volunteering at a union-oriented research centre, the Transnational Cooperative.

I followed the discussion about the Mardi Gras idea through the early months of 1978. There was some disagreement about whether this idea was really 'political' enough, but the majority view was consistent - the Mardi Gras idea would create a space that was 'non-political' in a formal sense, but would still allow people to 'come out'. Unless gay people really came out in numbers, the politicians would never change the laws, we thought. The compromise was that when Stonewall Day came around, we would still have the political rally, still have the political forum about the issues, but we would also have the Mardi Gras in the evening. I supported this idea whenever I had the opportunity, but I was not an organiser of the event.

Stonewall Day was June 24, the anniversary of the first 'gay riot' in Greenwich Village, New York, in 1969, when the gays fought a pitched battle with police who were doing a 'routine' raid on the gay Stonewall Bar.

As I said, I wasn't an organiser that day. I didn't go to the march at lunchtime; I didn't go to the forum in the afternoon but I did finally opt for the Mardi Gras, only to find it had already arrived at Hyde Park. I was late! I walked into quite a night as a couple of thousand excited men and women came quickly around the corner into College Street, I saw police dragging Lance Gowland out of the driving seat of the sound truck while the music was still playing.

There were hasty consultations. Word spread fast that Hyde Park South was packed with police and we would be beaten up if we went in there, which was the designated end point of the parade. Many people were complaining that the police had completely ruined the parade by rushing it straight down Oxford Street, and that we should protest. But where to go? Kings Cross was a popular suggestion and the whole crowd started moving toward William Street. Lo and behold, when we got there, a large uniformed police officer was standing in the intersection and directing the crowd up William Street. The parade was now a protest march, the most popular chants were: "Stop police attacks - on gays, women and blacks!", "Get your laws off our bodies" and "Not the church, not the State, women will decide their fate!".

I found most of the Tertiary Education Branch and the Tin Sheds art crowd there and started talking about what would happen. As we hit the rise up to Kings Cross we could see a huge convoy of police paddy wagons with blue lights flashing proceed across Darlinghurst Road and into Kings Cross. I found the first public phone I could and called a household of lawyers to warn them of the volatile situation and that we would definitely need help. Then I rejoined the rear of the march, which was having a great reception from the late night crowd in the Cross. It was about 11 pm.

We reached the El Alamein Fountain without incident, but there we stopped to figure out what to do. There were police in all the side streets, it was ominous. We concluded that the safest way out was back down Darlinghurst Road and dispersal among the crowd there in the Cross near William Street. I can distinctly remember linking arms, on the one side with Michelle Martin, the other with Chips Mackinolty, the three of us very solid friends. We were in the middle of the quiet march back down the street, seeing the police vehicles in every street to right and left.

Then all of a sudden a searchlight hit our eyes, all the people in front were silhouettes. A paddy wagon was blocking the way, police were hurling people into vans, onto the ground. The three of us ran forward and I grabbed the arm of the first person I saw on the ground, and dragged the person to the left, away from the police. Unfortunately I ran straight into a police officer who grabbed me by an arm and swung me though the air straight into a paddy wagon. My glasses flew off on the way.

Inside there were already four people, a man and woman couple who were already complaining that they weren't even gay, two lesbians and me. In a few seconds, another comrade came flying in, Graham Chuck. A few things happened in that wagon and the couple managed to escape, but not the

rest of us. It was a police riot, and the poofters and dykes were fighting back, and the Kings Cross crowd was on our side. Garbage and garbage bins were flying. I had never seen anything like it, and neither had the police. Our wagon didn't move for over 40 minutes while the fighting swirled around us. I distinctly remember feeling very proud that we were fighting.

Unfortunately, when we got into the yard of the nearby Darlinghurst Police Station the other three were ordered out and I was ordered to stay, by a police officer contorted with rage. In a minute or two he and another came back to get me and walked me fast down a corridor past cells, around to the right and then right again into a room with some equipment stored in it. The angry cop, who turned out to be a former Australian javelin throwing champion, flogged me until I was convulsing and the other police officer called him off. Dragged back to a cell on my own I tried to clean myself up and grasp what had happened, and I could hear a large crowd outside chanting against the police bashing, calling for our release, calling out my name. I felt elated that people cared about me and fearful that the cops would come in and bash me some more.

It took hours to get into the dock, crammed in with over 20 others including Christine who had been in the paddy wagon with me. Then I was taken back into the police station to be examined by a doctor and a lawyer, in the presence of the most senior uniformed police officer I had ever seen. I was so glad to see Jim Walker, another real friend. He examined me and said I should be taken straight to hospital, but the police commander refused and I was taken back to the dock. I could barely walk. The people outside were still chanting for our release and about 4.30 am I was one for the first group to be bailed out. Meredith Burgmann put me straight in her car and took me to St Vincents casualty. After an hour when no one examined me, we decided to go. She took me to see Pat O'Shane, then a barrister, to get advice, and then I went home to sleep.

Many people thought I was hurt much more than I was, but I was in very bad shape. On the Monday morning I went to the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and there I was x-rayed and checked over better. No broken bones. Very bad headaches. Very swollen leg. I had to be at the Magistrate's Court in Liverpool street at 10 am, and just made it. There was a protest and support crowd gathering and the police again went wild. They locked the court and started hurling people to the ground. I was punched in the head again. There had been 54 arrested on the Saturday night, but about seven more were arrested on Monday morning.

My lawyer was from Redfern Legal Centre and is now a judge. She advised me not to enter a plea until the arresting officers showed up. They didn't. It took two more appearances before they did, and as soon as we had their names I took out assault charges against them.

Meanwhile I had to give up my volunteer work for a while, give up selling Tribunes and try to recover. I felt that the bashing was a very severe attempt to make me stop being politically active, and so I was determined not to stop. I also felt it psychologically as a message that I was to blame for it, I had brought it all on myself, I was somehow bad and deserved it. I had to work my way through that too. I had the symptom of trauma where I dreamed day and night about the bashing repeatedly, and in my dreams and day dreams I always managed to beat up the police man. My head ached where it had been struck for many months. It took me about three years to feel I had recovered.

But in that time I went to the big meeting at the Stanley Palmer that developed the 'drop the charges' campaign, and I took part in the marches, difficult as it was.

One of Bob Hawke's daughters, Susan, was in Sydney then and arranged for a delegation to see the Premier, Neville Wran, to call for action against the police and for repeal of the laws against homosexuality. I was there as living evidence of the police brutality, but couldn't say much. The Premier walked out in a rage as soon as Susan produced a notebook! He did come back, but pleaded that he had done a lot to civilise things for gay people.

In the end, all the charges from that first Mardi Gras were dropped, except for me. I was prosecuted because I had the temerity to lay charges against the police. One woman later faced charges from the Mardi Gras because she was arrested along with 120 others at the 4th National Homosexual Conference in August and the police discovered she had used a false name in June. So two of us were prosecuted. I was found guilty in 1980 on three charges – taking part in an illegal procession, hindering police and resisting police. I appealed and in 1981 the illegal procession charge was overturned, but the other two convictions were upheld. By the time my charges against the police were listed, I was working on a ship and I was refused an adjournment until I could attend. So the charges were dismissed.

I had moved to Adelaide in April 1981, and took no further part in the organised gay movement in Sydney. I missed the great moment in 1984 when the campaign to repeal the anti-gay laws was victorious, apart from the discriminatory age of consent clause only recently withdrawn. Craig Johnston was a prominent leader in that phase of the campaign. He and Brian McGahen and Jack Mundey were elected to the Sydney City Council that year.

I was there later in 1984 for the first public meeting, which was held in the Teachers Federation auditorium, to discuss the Aids epidemic and to create an organised response in the gay community. The Mardi Gras had moved to summer and the commercial gays had taken it over from the politicos. I attended many Lesbian and gay Mardi Gras from the second half of the 1980s, and was really proud to join with the 78ers for the great celebration in 1998

The gay liberation movement started by CAMP and then Gay Lib has been a bigger success than we every imagined. Communists made a significant contribution to it and still do. One of those contributions was the Lesbian and Gay Mardi Gras, which, despite its many problems, remains true to its origins as a civil rights and social justice movement, full of irreverence, humour and fighting spirit, and still providing a vital social space for people to 'come out'.

vintage reds Australian stories of rank and file organising

John Tomlinson
Black and White Poverty in Brisbane in the 1970s

Abstract

This chapter will describe community work efforts undertaken with Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders living in South Brisbane and white single parents in Inala (a Western suburb of Brisbane) during the 1970s. The aim at that time was to assist both communities to confront repressive aspects of their poverty. The chapter reflects upon what was accomplished and attempts to show continuities with several difficulties facing both Indigenous people and lone parents in the 21st century.
Introduction

In 1970 residents of Brisbane, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, were about to enter tumultuous times. Twenty-three years of unbroken Liberal rule at the Federal level was drawing to an end whilst, at a State level, the Country-Liberal Party was consolidating its suppression of dissent (Masters 2002, Dickey 1988). The Vietnam War dragged on. The Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) and the Queensland Police Special Branch were ever vigilant in their efforts to ensure authority was not challenged: in schools, on the streets, at work and in universities.

Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders

During the 1950s, the official Federal Government policy was one of assimilation. The 1961 meeting of Federal and State Ministers in charge of Aboriginal affairs decided that assimilation:
means that all Aborigines and part-Aborigines are expected eventually to attain the same manner of living as other Australians and to live as members of a single Australian community, enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities, observing the same customs and influenced by the same beliefs, hope and loyalties as other Australians (cited in Pittock 1969, pp.12-13).

In 1965 the definition was changed:
...so that now the policy officially seeks (rather than means) that all persons of Aboriginal descent will choose to attain (rather than are expected eventually to attain) a similar (rather than the same) manner and standard of living. The words 'observing the same customs', are omitted, and so too is reference to their 'being influenced by the same beliefs' " (Pittock 1969, p. 13 italics in original).

Between 1965 and 1972 the Federal Government's policy changed to integration and then in 1974, under the Whitlam Government, it became self-determination. The Howard Government considers the term self-determination inappropriate because it conjures the spectre of independent sovereignty. Instead, the Government prefers a limited form of self-management and practical reconciliation (a euphemism for their determination to continue with welfare handouts) rather than adopt a rights-based approach predicated upon a treaty (Koch and Karvelas 2005, Tomlinson 2003, Ch. 6, 2004).

Rosalind Kidd (1997), Charles Rowley (1972 [a], [b], [c] and Henry Reynolds (1998) provide useful academic accounts of the reality faced by Indigenous people in Queensland in the1970s. More political accounts were written by the Black Resource Centre Collective (1976) and Daisy Marchisotti (1978), which built on the earlier work of Campbell, Cameron, Keats, Poulter and Poulter (1958) and Bennett (1957). The poems of Oodgeroo Noonuccal, particularly in We are Going, provide a sense of the depth of racism at the time. The 1967 Referendum had come and gone and little had changed in the day-to-day lives of Aborigines. The infamous 1897 'protection' act, though modified, was still in place, controlling every aspect of Indigenous people's lives. People, not exempted from the act, had their wages, place of residence, employment and even choice of spouse controlled by 'protectors' (O'Shane 1979). Paddy Killoran, the long-serving Director of the Department of Native Affairs, kept tight control of his staff and system of 'protectors'.

There was a major division within organisations representing the interests of Indigenous people between those like the One People of Australia League (OPAL) with a 'welfare approach' and the rights-oriented approach of the Queensland Aboriginal Advancement League - which was associated nationally with the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI) [Taffe 2005]. The Aboriginal and Islander Tribal Council (Brisbane) was formed on the 7th December 1969

with the intention of bringing together representatives of all the disparate progressive Indigenous groups operating in Brisbane (Tomlinson 1974 Appendix H). There was also to emerge a Brisbane Chapter of the Black Panther Party of Australia in late 1971. With the exception of OPAL's welfare / housing activities these broader Indigenous organisations played little part in the issues which daily confronted Indigenous residents of South Brisbane.

South Brisbane: a brief history

The Brisbane River meanders through the city and forms the demarcation line between North and South Brisbane. South Brisbane at no time succeeded in rivalling North Brisbane as a commercial or social centre (Petrie 1904, Greenwood and Laverty 1959). Knight (1895) stated: "So marked indeed has become the contrast between the two divisions of Brisbane, that the south side has ceased to aspire to the position of first importance it for some years hankered after (p.58)." South Brisbane remained a separate municipality until 1925 when it was incorporated into the city of Brisbane. Changes to the transport system significantly affected the commercial decline of South Brisbane by the 1960's (Tomlinson 1974 Appendix F). The area also had a large and diverse migrant population (Tomlinson 1974 Ch.6).

At the beginning of the twentieth century Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders were generally excluded from inner Brisbane (both North and South). Certainly after sunset they were required to remain beyond the respective Boundary Streets in both parts of the city. Then, during the Second World War Black American soldiers were not allowed into the centre of Brisbane and South Brisbane became synonymous with Blackness - American and Indigenous. Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders continued to live in the general area after the war and - despite ongoing attempts to get rid of them - they maintain a tenacious foothold to this day.

Why I was there

During the early 1960s, I had been active in anti-racist struggles, and with Oodgeroo Noonuccal (1964), Joe McGuiness (1991), Steve Mann and others had been involved in land and citizenship rights campaigns (Taffe 2005). I then spent three years working as a social worker for the Welfare Branch in Darwin, observing the remnants of a colonial frontier struggling to drag itself into the second half of the twentieth century.

Externally imposed colonial structures promote the interests of the 'metropolitan' country and ensure that the interests of the expatriate entrepreneurs and workers prevail over the interests of local entrepreneurs and those of the 'natives' (Fanon 1970, 1967, Cabral 1973). Australians who have not had the experience of living in the more northern or remote parts of this continent during the 1950s, 60s and 70s may not conceive of white / Black relations as resembling a colonial interface. But the language which governments of the day employed to describe their administration of Indigenous matters was not dissimilar from that of the British Raj, for instance, until 1966 the Queensland Government had a Department of Native Affairs.

In Darwin I had become disenchanted with the welfare approach to Indigenous issues and looked to community work and decolonisation as alternative approaches. Management of the Northern Territory Welfare Branch told me that community work would not be effective with Aboriginal people. So, in 1970, I began a research masters degree designed to look at community work with Indigenous people in South Brisbane. I chose this locality because many people (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous who did not live in the area) had described the Indigenous people there as "just a mob of metho-drinking no-hopers" (Tomlinson 1975 [a]). I thought that if I could show that this Indigenous community found community work a useful way to engage and improve things in their community then governments and welfare organisations would be hard pressed to continue to rely solely on welfare 'solutions' in their work with Indigenous people. In addition any successes they achieved in confronting the source of their oppression would make it harder for whites to continue to denigrate Indigenous people.

Indigenous people confronting their issues

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have been fighting to retain sovereignty, maintain control of land, culture, families, and promote their political rights since at least 1606 (Sharp 1952, Rowley 1972 [a], [b], [c], Reynolds 1972, 1981, 1989, 1996, 1999, Turnbull 1974, Evans, Saunders and Cronin 1975, Robinson and York 1977, Roberts 1978, Lippman 1981, Goodall 1996 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission [ATSIC] 2001 [a] pp.27-34, Tomlinson 2003 Ch.6).

The Indigenous Community in South Brisbane

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw large numbers of Indigenous people leaving rural areas of Queensland, particularly missions and settlements. This was due to the fact that the segregation era of the 'protection' system was beginning to unravel and more attractive options were becoming available to Indigenous people in cities. As well, following the Arbitration Commission Aboriginal equal pay case in 1967, many farmers forced Aborigines to leave pastoral properties. Both non-Indigenous and Indigenous farm labourers found there was less demand for rural labour as a result of increased farm mechanisation. Many Indigenous people moved to the cities in the hope of finding a better life.

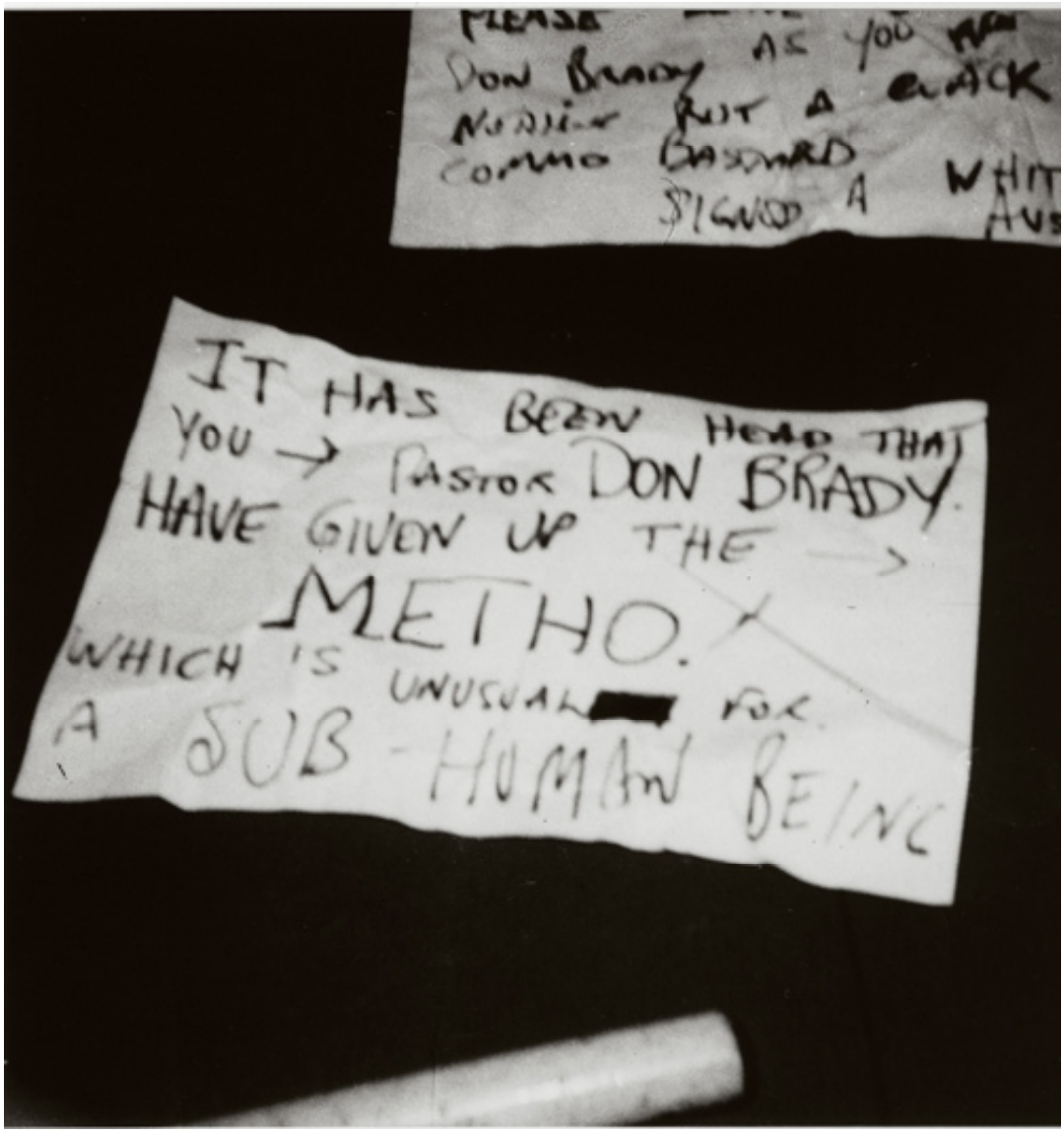
On arrival in Brisbane, Indigenous families frequently encountered racist attitudes when seeking accommodation and dealing with people in authority. Many had relatives or friends living in South Brisbane and such extended kin relationships sustained them till they could get on their feet. Others weren't so lucky and were forced to camp out under bridges or along the riverbank in places such as 'the Tank' (a disused water reservoir). Drinking has been associated with homelessness and the Indigenous community was no exception (Beckett 1964, Tomlinson, 1974, Ch. 3). Drinking in 'public places' brings increased police surveillance. Substantial parts of the infrastructure of South Brisbane were dilapidated or in the process of being demolished. Businesses in the area were in decline; entrepreneurial business spirit was in decline. So Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders arriving in Brisbane found it hard to find accommodation and work. They were frequently confronted by racism, police brutality and White indifference at best.

In the face of resistance from the white population, the Indigenous community in South Brisbane demonstrated that they were interested in struggling to confront the reality they faced. In South Brisbane arrest for drunkenness was virtually arbitrary. The police were often more drunk than the Aboriginal people they were arresting. I often saw police, after downing free drinks provided by the

publican, walk out to Aboriginal men sitting quietly in the bar, tap them on the shoulder and say:
"You're coming with us."
"Why?"
"It's your turn."
They were then taken out to the paddy wagon.

The most vicious arrest I witnessed was that of a frail old Aboriginal woman who had been drinking and was unconscious on the footpath outside the Palace Hotel. She was picked up by two policemen who dragged her to within a metre of the back of the paddy van (the door of the van was open) then they flung her into the van where she landed with a sickening crunch against the front wall of the van. I lodged an official complaint but was told that the arrest had been carried out in line with official police procedures.

In January 1972, a few days before an anti-racism conference was to begin in Brisbane, the two plate glass windows of the Born Free Club, on which posters advertising the conference had been placed, were smashed by rocks around which Nazi Party leaflets had been wrapped. Notes written on the back of the leaflets threatened the lives of two Indigenous leaders of the Brisbane Tribal Council: Pastor Don Brady and Dennis Walker (Tomlinson 1974 Appendix G). Members of the Nazi Party were subsequently suspected of attempting to set fire to the Club in which 20 people were sleeping at the time.



A detailed account of the self-help efforts of the South Brisbane Indigenous community in the early 1970s can be found in Community Work with the Aboriginal Citizens of South Brisbane (Tomlinson 1974, 1975 [a]). It was a community, which managed to set up its own organisation to confront discrimination. Indigenous people in South Brisbane financed a social club (the Born Free Club), which also provided housing assistance. The Club's main income sources were: takings from pool tables, a jukebox and barbeques. The Born Free Club organised a major public march to protest against the ejection of Indigenous patrons from its lounge bar; this occurred despite the presence of hundreds of police in the area at the time of the march. The Club met with other business owners and managers

and worked with them to end practices, which discriminated against Indigenous people. In 1975 I predicted that my research would lead to further experimentation by Indigenous community workers who, working with their own community, would be likely to have even greater success (Tomlinson 1975 [a] p. 137).

The Born Free Club now runs two Hostels in the South Brisbane area, assists people get access to income support and health services, it has a funeral program designed to help families get bodies back to traditional country for burial and other funeral-related matters. Its staff are active in rights campaigns such as the current stolen wages campaign being spearheaded by Indigenous leaders, supported by Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (Queensland) [ANTaR (Queensland)] and the Queensland Trades and Labour Council.

Single parents

In the early1970s, apart from the Widows Pension, there were no Commonwealth payments for single parents. Those who were not married had to rely on the State Department of Children's Services (now Department of Families, Youth and Community Care) for financial support. There was no fixed schedule of payments. Discretion and arbitrary moral judgments were the order of the day. This was also true of Federal Social Security at the time: people could be refused pensions and benefits, for which they otherwise qualified, if they were "deemed to be not of good moral character" (Kewley 1973, Jordan 1984). The provisions dealing with "character" and "non-deserving" were not removed from the Social Services Act until 1974 (Whiteford, Stanton and Grey 2001, p. 26)

In 1970 I went to the head office of the Department of Children's Services and asked what benefits they paid. I was asked on what basis I wanted such information. I pointed out I was a citizen – only to be told that such information was "classified". It was only when I said I would not leave until the senior officer on duty was prepared to identify himself and declare, in writing that he could not tell me what benefits were paid by the Department that any information was provided. Clearly, these were times when the financial viability of single parents and their children depended on the whim of Departmental staff. There was no concept of rights, eligibility, appeal or guarantee of procedural fairness (Grassroots November 1971, April 1972, Client Power 1975).

Client Power

At this time the State Department of Children's Services provided assistance to single parents who did not qualify for Commonwealth Social Security payments, such as widows pensions, and controlled the placement of children taken into care. The clients of the Department were not told how their benefit payments were calculated. People in equivalent financial situations were paid substantially different amounts. Tutors in the Social Work Department of the University of Queensland (Cathy Bywater, Lyn Trad and Marg O'Donnell) and social work students worked with me to help organise clients of the Department in order to generate enough power to be in a position to insist the Department at least treated clients in an equivalent situation in a similar manner (Client Power 1975, Tomlinson 1975[b]).

There were many actors in the tableau, which unfolded. There were the officers of the Department of Children's Services, many of whom saw their role as being to carry out the orders of senior officers. The clients of the Department who felt there were many constraints on them brought pressure to bear upon these public servants. The majority of the staff of Children's Services was either hostile or indifferent to clients' needs, but the Department also employed some young social workers that were horrified by the injustices they saw daily. Most social workers working in other agencies averted their eyes from the excesses occurring at Children's Services. The Australian Association of Social Workers Queensland Branch (AASW [Qld]) had suppressed evidence of widespread Departmental maladministration, which was having major adverse impacts on clients (Client Power 1975 [editors footnote 2]). The staff of the School of Social Work at the University of Qeensland was divided. Some lecturing staff attempted to undermine junior staff and students' attempts to organise clients of the Department of Children's Services. Other lecturers such as Harry Throssell were consistently supportive.

The group who contributed most to the change were poor women and their children who, though initially fearful, came to confront not only their uncertainties but also the Department's Director and Queensland politicians in order to gain some concessions. This group, through their contact with Bill Hayden (subsequently the Federal Labor Party's Minister for Social Security), played some part in the introduction of the Federal Government's Single Mothers Benefit in 1973 (Whiteford, Stanton and Grey 2001, p. 26).

Setting up Client Power

I obtained the addresses of clients of the Department of Children's Services from a source inside the Department. The Department made inquires about this leak for months and subjected some younger social workers to frequent questioning. The Department approached some AASW [Qld] executive members who attempted to haul me before the ethics committee of the Association. Supporters of Client Power managed to get the matter brought before a special general meeting of the Association where the attempt to discipline me failed.

Many students and colleagues said they would help if "they could be sure that clients of Children's Services will not get hurt by joining Client Power". This sort of guarantee is not mandatory in casework services. Social Workers do not say: "I will only work as a caseworker in the Department of Children's Services if you (DCS) can guarantee no one will be hurt"! Client Power at present is operating on the basis of taking the regulations and asking the department to live up to its own regulations. The fact that social workers could not be certain that individual clients acting in their own interests and demanding nothing but justice would not be hurt should have been sufficient to provoke some effort on the part of these social workers (Tomlinson 1975[b] p.119)

Too many social workers, now as then, spend their day helping clients adjust to an unequal and unjust society. Writers such as Karl Marx and Frederick Engels (1971), Saul Alinsky (1969), Francis Fox Piven and Richard Cloward (1971), William Ryan (1971) and Bill Jordan (1973) inspired those associated with Client Power to try to change the way social workers interacted with their clients. This was to be a model where clients would be helped to see that the forces which impinged on them adversely could be confronted.

We visited clients of the Department in their homes and invited them to become involved. Inala, and later Redcliffe (a North Brisbane beachside suburb), were the main organising centres. Meetings were rotated around members' houses. Office bearers were elected and members were encouraged to recruit other members. Initially, clients had little success at recruiting mainly because they did not want to publicise their low status, namely, deserted wife. Those they called on saw them as relatively powerless and were not attracted to the idea of 'uniting in weakness'. Clients who were uninformed as to their entitlements tended to see the Department as all-powerful because of the arbitrary manner in

which the department dealt with them.

After people had acclimatised to meeting procedures and discussing what was affecting them, they started to identify the things they had in common and the things they wanted to change. Some were prepared to intercede with Departmental staff on behalf of other clients when accompanied by student advocates. Later, the Client Power members advocated for themselves. A six page manifesto (a list of demands and compilation of grievances) was worked through with the membership and then, in 1971, it was widely circulated to politicians, Departmental staff and through progressive social work networks (Client Power 1975). There were demonstrations in the Department's Head Office and outside Parliament. A three-hour sit-in by mothers, their children and students in the Head Office of the Department only ended when the Director agreed to negotiate with the members of Client Power.

The surveillance of single mothers

One of the most objectionable practices engaged in by officers of the Department of Children's Services, was the surveillance of clients' homes in the hope of catching them with a man. If they could find a 'man in the house' the officer would cancel the woman's and her children's payments.

One male officer according to our informant parked outside one woman's home every workday for two weeks for at least an hour a day. He even questioned a Housing Commission employee who had been in the woman's home to fix her stove for a quarter of an hour. He asked him what he had been doing in there. The employee returned and informed the woman. The same Welfare Officer on another day entered the woman's home and stripped her beds and searched her bathroom for evidence of a man's presence. He questioned her in detail about a razor, which she used for shaving beneath her arms (Client Power 1975 p. 128).

What was achieved

Many members came to see themselves as people asserting their rights rather than as petitioners waiting for a handout. One member said:
Until Client Power got going, if they did something nice to me I thought they were being kind, if they took money from me I thought they had it in for me… the Department granted one woman a concession she had been trying to get for five years – she rang up the senior clerk, not to thank him, but to abuse him for not paying it five years earlier. Many of the members have come to see that they have the right to try to control their own lives (Tomlinson 1975[b] p.119).
The success which these low income-earning women and their children was most obvious in relation to their sense of taking control of their own destiny but it extended to expressing their common humanity with other single parents who were not entitled to Commonwealth income support payments.

A brief description of underlying issues in progressive community work

When working with any community it is important to identify the negative stereotypes that powerful people hold about that group and then investigate why powerful people hold such negative views about your community. It is important to look at the economic and social drivers that reinforce powerful people's perceptions. For example, "Aborigines were 'nomads' they didn't have any significant connection with the land, therefore it was a vacant land. We did not steal or invade the land it was never really theirs so we acquired it by discovery, settlement and development –terra nullius". This, still repeated 'observation', manages in the one breath to rationalise the seizure of the land whilst simultaneously denying the theft of Indigenous people's property rights.

It is then necessary to look at these negative stereotypes from the community's perspective and to seek out the contradictions between the opposing views. Operating in line with the community's view of the world, you act to negate the ideas of the powerful. Part of this process is identifying how your community sees itself and trying to understand how powerful people might respond to the community's perspective of itself.

There are two underlying themes in progressive community work. They are:
* Work with and not for your community, you are there to take direction from the community, and
* Operate in solidarity not empathy.
Solidarity is much more than understanding how people feel – it is about the interconnectedness between their wellbeing and yours (the issues raised here are further elaborated upon in Freire 1972, Galper 1975, Bailey & Brake 1975, Corrigan & Leonard 1978, Tomlinson 1982).

The twenty-first century

The struggles waged by Indigenous Australians in South Brisbane and those waged by the women of Client Power during the 1970s have continuing relevance.

The dispute over wages of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders stolen by the 'protectors' who were appointed by the Queensland Government or withheld by the Government itself cannot be justly resolved when the Government is offering only one-tenth of the missing wages by way of reparation (Kidd 1997). There is a also a continuing inadequate and insufficient supply of housing to Indigenous Australians. In 1970, the cost of the Australia-wide backlog in Indigenous housing was estimated to be $3 billion (Lovejoy 1971). In the 2001-2 Budget the Howard Government promised an extra $75 million over 4 years to assist with the housing shortfall. Geoff Clark pointed out that this "will make little dent in the $3 billion deficit in this area (ATSIC 2001 [b] p.2)". At this rate of improvement in the availability of Indigenous housing, the Born Free Club hostels and other crisis accommodation centres will be needed forever. In the 2005/6 Budget spending on Indigenous affairs hardly kept up with inflation and the abolition of ATSIC means that non-Indigenous agencies now have total control of funding for Indigenous services.

There are now more Indigenous people in jail than in 1970 (Cunneen 2001) and more dying in custody (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission [HREOC] 2002 Ch.1). The latest Indigenous health statistics would shame any civilised nation. The Census figures show that the average age of death of Indigenous men in the early 1980s was 56. The latest available figures show that the average age of death for Indigenous Australian men is 56 years and 62 years for women. This compares with 76 years for non-Indigenous men and 83 years for non-Indigenous women. In Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory three-quarters of Indigenous male and two-thirds of Indigenous female deaths occurred before the age of 65 years compared with one-quarter of male and one-sixth of female total deaths in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [ABS and AIHW] 2003, p.183).

The Whitlam Government was the first Federal Government to take the issue of Indigenous education seriously. The Indigenous educational allowance, the Aboriginal Benefit Study Scheme, was starting to address educational inequality until the Howard Government amalgamated the Aboriginal Benefit Study Scheme and the mainstream student study assistance program. The few economic and cultural advantages received by Indigenous students have dissipated – making it harder for them to proceed to tertiary studies. This has led to a drop in the number of Indigenous students attending university since 2000 (Wright 2005).

The need for Indigenous-owned and controlled legal, health, housing educational and community services is ongoing. It is also necessary to come to a just treaty, to negotiate land and other Indigenous rights issues while, at the same time, significantly reducing the socio-economic disparity between white and Black Australia (Tomlinson 2003 Chs. 5 and 6).

Clients of the Department of Children's Services in the 1970s fought for their rights to be recognised, particularly their right to procedural fairness. Their struggle began just before the welfare state in Australia became more comprehensive, generous and procedurally fair. This period continued until Brian Howe became Minister for Social Security in the Hawke Labor Government. Howe started to tighten eligibility criteria for benefits and required welfare recipients to 'reciprocate' in some way (Tomlinson 2003).

The 1996 election of the Howard Government installed a socially conservative and economic fundamentalist regime. Australia today is a more unequal society than ever before (Argy 2005, see also the Australian Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union's [LHMU] submission to the Senate Inquiry into Poverty 2003). In the financial year 2001-2, Centrelink issued 386,946 breaches against social security recipients - which meant they were forced to live on income substantially below the poverty line (Schooneveldt 2004). The Howard Government has imposed dole diaries, compulsory literacy classes, 'work for the dole' and other 'mutual obligations' on poor people. The Brotherhood of St Laurence and St Vincent de Paul 2003 report entitled Much Obliged asserts that people who become long term unemployed have so much of their time taken up just meeting the obligations imposed on them that they don't have time to find work: the report concludes the mutual obligation regime "is failing the most disadvantaged job seekers. Overall the system operates…not as 'welfare to work' but 'welfare as work' (Ziguras, Dufty and Considine 2003, p.43)". It is clear that (within the Australian social welfare system) there has been a major ideological shift from a social democratic noblesse oblige to a compelled conservative compact (Tomlinson 2002).

Since 1975 Australia has, as a result of the adoption of economic fundamentalist policies, become a

dramatically less egalitarian society (Gregory 2000, Briggs and Buchanan 2000). Once again, we need to develop the sort of partnership between welfare recipients and progressive forces, which made the Client Power, story a success. The 1998 amendments to the Native Title Act in the wake of the Wik judgement, and the deceit and vicious treatment meted out to Asylum Seekers demonstrate the depth of racism, which inspires the Howard Government (Lock, Quenault and Tomlinson 2002). There is an urgent need to build a progressive union of men and women, rich and poor and Indigenous and non-Indigenous to confront this Government's attack upon our national integrity and to promote the social and economic rights of all Australian citizens.

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Edited Interview with Stan Jones in 1985
Working On The Railways

I'm Stan Jones. I was born at Redfern in 1908, and at the age of fifteen, went to work in the Eveleigh workshops. I became a railway worker because I had a family background associated with the railways. I knew that my grandfather had worked in the railways, that my father had worked there, and uncles and cousins and so on had worked on the railways. So after I'd tried half a dozen different jobs and didn't like any of them, I decided the railways must be a better place to work in. And I found that they were a place that needed a lot of improvement and I'm happy to say that there has been a considerable improvement today which is a reflection of the good work put in by the rank and file over the years in shop committees, unions and so on.

I was brought into contact with the various conditions, which existed at the time. They were disgraceful. There were no sanitary washing facilities in workshops. There were crude lavatory arrangements and the question of safety was at all times subordinate to the question of output. There was a bonus system in operation after the 1917 strike in various sections of the workshops and particularly in the foundry, where men made themselves ill endeavoring to accumulate bonus money. This was partly stopped by the Lang Government in the early '30s, but nevertheless some of it persisted up till much later periods.

The workshops at that time were still divided following the strike in 1917. Men were bitter towards each other because some had worked on, during the strike and others had remained out and paid the consequences. Some lost positions of authority where they'd been supervising sections; because they were strikers they were reduced back to the bench. For a long time there was agitation to have them restored to their positions. Finally this was achieved. The 1917 strike was lost because of lack of proper organisation amongst the union leadership despite the enthusiasm shown by the rank and file. The rank and file was very concerned about the introduction of the card system, which they considered was going to result in loss of jobs and speed up in the workshops. I had forty-nine years nearly, service in the railways, in workshops mainly at Eveleigh and for short periods at other depots.

The workshops in the period from 1917 up till the beginning of the 2nd World War had these different groups of people. They were divided on the basis of their attitude to the strike, their religious groupings and various organisational tie-ups that people had from that period. So bitter was the position with regard to strikers and non-strikers that it was quite common over the years to find people being warned not to talk to other persons because they'd worked during the strike and on many occasions when a striker died, there would be a white lily placed on the coffin by some mate of his who'd remembered that they'd been through the strike together. This was where the term "lily-white" was applied to people who had gone through the strike.

My family had a workshop back then. My father and uncles worked in the Eveleigh workshops and my father was very active during the period of the strike and I went with him at times to the picket line - I was only nine years of age but from this point of view I considered that winning the strike was going to provide a great benefit to us.

As a result of his activities, my father, along with many others was victimised and they were not employed back in the railway service for a long period after the strike. My father went to work at the steelworks in Newcastle as a boiler-maker and he continued to travel from Redfern to Newcastle each week, bring home his wages at the weekends in order to keep the family going.

One of the problems of course from the strike was that of the bad attitude taken by people, understandably towards those who had worked during the strike. I was a believer in the maxim, which was popular among the more militant section of the Labor movement of that time, "Knock his head off while the strike's on, and convince him afterwards that he should join in union action in the future. In that way you could overcome the personal bitterness that existed and result in strengthening the unions.

After the strike organizing unionism became difficult. Representatives on the job found that they were being harassed by the new supervisors. The NUR, which is in existence today, was of little assistance.

It was regarded at the time as a Commissioner's or employer's union, this made it difficult for ordinary union activity on the job to be carried on. There developed on the part of union leaders, a reluctance to involve themselves in any activity, which would lead to industry stoppages.

The first stoppage of which I was aware was in 1926 at the Enfield Loco Sheds where fitters walked off the job in complaint about their conditions of work. Apart from that most of the activity around the workshops was carried on around safety questions and that wasn't a great deal of activity.

The Railways Department had set up a safety first organisation which had no real power. It could not stop a dangerous practice from being carried on and could not call workers out of the shop where it was being carried on and so was simply an organisation that was an employer's organisation. Representatives were elected from the various sections, and this gave the appearance of democracy. It also had an annual meeting at which representatives from all over the area would meet under the Department's control in the Railways Institute. There they would discuss matters of safety without getting very far with them. The organisation was finally regarded by the worker on the job as a joke. So many of the matters, which should have been dealt with by the committee, were left unremedied.

By 1925 there was, however, a developing or a renewal of a militant attitude towards many matters associated with the work. Because of the inability of the trade unions to carry out real campaigns during this period, there developed a desire for job organisation. At that time a political identity, named Jock Garden, had returned from a trip to Scotland where he had made contact with the workers in the ship building industries on the Clyde. Here the shop stewards movement had formed committees on the job that was comprised of representatives of the workers elected by the various sections. He addressed the NSW Labor Council and gave a very enthusiastic address on the question of these shop committees, as he termed them, and as a result of that the Council decided that it would endeavour to foster such a system of job organisation in New South Wales.

The first organisations that we established, (and there's considerable rivalry as to which was the very first), were at Enfield Loco and Eveleigh Loco workshops. The trade unions gave support to the new shop committee movement and the Commissioner at the time viewed the shop committees, in some way as an alternative to the unions and an improvement on the NUR. He gave recognition to the shop committees that had been formed. The way was then open for these shop committees to have regular monthly conferences with management to discuss grievances in the workshop areas. Where the same issues affected different workshops they could arrange for a deputation to the Commissioner himself. The work of organising committees in different places went ahead however an attempt to establish a central body, a Council of Shop Committees, broke down in the early period, before 1930. A change took place in the Commissioner's attitude and it became more difficult to get recognition for shop committees. Some of these work areas found different ways of making representations such as bringing in unions to take up matters for them or sending representatives along as ordinary trade union committees.

The committees were formed in different ways. At Eveleigh Loco Workshops for instance, each separate shop elected its own representative and in some cases elected a committee. This created a miniature organisation similar to what was desired for the shop committee movement as a whole. At Eveleigh, a central committee was established at which representatives from all the various sections of the workshop sat and dealt with matters concerning that workshop.

At the water supply workshop for example, every person that worked there was regarded as a member of the shop committee. This meeting would elect a managing committee, which was responsible to the full body of the workers. In Chullora, at the Electric Car shops, there was again a different form of organisation; trade union delegates together with people elected from the various sections of the Chullora car shops constituted the shop committee there. The boiler shop, Perway and Signal shops had committees similar to the one at Eveleigh.

Eveleigh carriage shop started with a committee at a slightly later period. They had a combined trade union and shop committee meeting which was held separately to the shop committee itself but which brought the two forces together. It was in this combined forum that one of the leading individuals in the building of shop committees, Alan Wilson, showed what a good organiser he was. A revival took place in the early `30s. Delegates from the existing shop committees were all invited to send their delegates to a meeting, which elected the executive of that Council. At that workshop he was able to build up towards the establishment of the Central Shop Committee on a sounder basis than on which it was brought into existence previously.

This gave the shop committee movement a leap forward. Every month the minutes of that meeting

were taken back to the workshops and were then read discussed, debated and either adopted or rejected by the particular workshop. These meetings were held with the Commissioners approval but there arose a problem. Being an overall organisation, with contact with the Labor Council and trade unions generally, the matters discussed by it at times were regarded by the Commissioner as being political. And to illustrate the absurdity of some of the attitudes that were taken, these were struck from minutes and in one case, the committee discussed the increase in the price of bread and the instruction came out from the Commissioner that this was a political matter and was not to be discussed at the monthly meetings. Needless to say, there were means by which the committees finally got away from these kinds of bans, some of them meeting outside the workplace to discuss the minutes in full.

At Boundary St. for instance where the Everleigh Loco workshops were situated, and at Coddrington St. for the carriage side, the meetings used to be taken outside the gates, and the discussions would take place unhindered by any kinds of bans whatsoever. But this was not satisfactory to the people involved and it became an objective to remove these bans and claim the right of free speech in the workshops themselves. This was finally attained, in practice if not in open acknowledgement, by the authorities.

There were of course, a number of political issues, which were developed in the period concerned. There was the development of the fight inside the Labor party between the Lang leadership and the other forces opposed to Lang. This was brought into the workshops at meetings and discussions that took place throughout.

Some of these meetings became quite hectic, decisions were made at a period when the Commissioner was frowning on political discussions, decisions would be made outside the workshops, attempts on a ban, not only by the Railway Commissioner, but also by political forces outside and there were quite a number of battles which took place in regard to this.

It’s interesting to note that in respect to the Boundary St. area this was the area chosen by Lang, at the height of his connection with the Labor movement, to deliver what was regarded as his industrial policy speech. This became unsatisfactory too, and we campaigned to have election meetings held inside the workshops instead of outside. One of the factors leading to this was that the person supplying electricity for Lang to speak to present this policy cut him off the air at a certain stage so it was decided that this couldn’t be repeated and from then onwards these meetings were held inside.

We’re going through the period now when the workshops were feeling the impact of the development of the electrical train system throughout the service. The steam engines were taken off the road, a lot were sold or stored and they were replaced by electric trains. This to a large extent shifted the centre of influence in the railways over the years from the Eveleigh Loco workshops to the electric car shops at Chullora, which became stronger in its protest about different matters and developed an organisation there which was of a very good character. There was one point of course which had to be considered - the tendency for areas to concentrate mainly on the things that were related to their particular area rather than the general matter, which required general support. This was usually a problem, which had to be overcome, and many good people took part in the various areas in seeing that the program of the shop committee received that support.

People like Acer North at Chullora car shops, Joe Pool at the Perway workshops and Cec Matthews at the signal workshops were very active shop committee people and active trade union people. They helped to build the general approach towards the program of the council shop committees. At this time, the shop committee movement commenced putting forward a general program in respect to matters which had not been taken up by the trade unions over the years. These were matters such as a program of 3 months long-service leave for 20 years service in place of one month, and 3 weeks annual leave in place of the one week at that time and a number of other related conditions. Meetings were held with the members of the Labor Party who were in office, Claude Matthews, Joe Carlton who had worked in the Eveleigh workshops were appointed as liaison officers between the ALP or the Parliamentary section, and the shop committee movement. They met with the shop committee council on Saturday mornings in the old Trades Hall and planned what they were going to do in connection with this matter.

Claude Matthews undertook the carrying through in the Parliament of the Bill for the Annual and Long service leave. It meant however that a good deal of rank and file support had to be obtained and this was done. People were quite enthusiastic about it and at the period before the war at a session of parliament, a Private Members Bill was moved by Matthews and an amendment was moved by Mark Davidson who came from the Broken Hill area. Whereas Matthews as he had an agreement with the

shop committees for a fortnight's annual leave, Davidson proposed 3 weeks and he also proposed an improvement upon the long service leave provisions. This was put before the House and Bruxner who was then the Minister for Transport. There was a delegation of shop committee people who waited at Parliament House lobbying the members beforehand and endeavoring to secure what support we could. It was significant that one member of the government, a chap called Reed, known because of all his initials, as alphabetical Reed, met with the delegates outside and told us he wouldn't have a bar of it. When he went into the House during the course of the debate he told the House that he'd interviewed the men's delegates and as far as he was concerned, he saw no objection to what was asked for and he also added, we in this House get six months leave a year.

Despite the opposition of Bruxner, Minister for Transport, who told the House that no matter what you carry today, railway men will not get extra leave, the motion was carried on a vote of 47 to 27. And Bruxner was taken to task in the Truth newspaper, which editorially enquired who gave Mr. Bruxner authority to reject a motion of the House. However, he continued to reject it and in the following election, the shop committee movement issued 185,000 leaflets calling Bruxner a dictator for the attitude he had taken. We considered that this had contributed largely to the defeat of the Bruxner government at the elections and the election of the Labor government in place of it. The Labor government promised it would carry through the decisions that were made previously and finally it did so. Just at the period at the outbreak of war.

It then became important that leave should be granted as annual leave, the long service leave as such, to be regarded as recreation leave and not as a leave to be taken as a retirement leave. This became an issue and at Eveleigh, there was a motion carried which accepted that the outbreak of war had created a new situation that manpower was difficult and that we would have to make certain adjustments. This was done by a motion that provided that for the period of the war, the long-service leave should be provided only when it was allowable due to exigencies in the service and that the annual leave would be taken as annual leave wherever possible. Now this was something accepted by the Labor Party. I might mention that the motion that was moved and carried by the Eveleigh meeting was incorporated word for word in the Railway Act of that time. It had been taken by the Secretary of the Australian Railways Union (I might mention his name was Dr. Lloyd Ross), down to the Executive of the ALP of which he was a member, and was successful in gaining their support for it. So that the matter of leave, long service, annual leave rested there until the termination of hostilities.

However, the shop committee movement had taken up the amount of leave that was called for by Mark Davidson and it had devised this programme to include the extra amounts of leave that would be provided by the amendments that he had moved. And finally this was accomplished and even improved upon. The Bus and Tram Organisations had joined in with the campaign for leave and they had found it was a going campaign and they were responsible with the stoppage of buses for obtaining finally, four weeks annual leave and all this is part of a process of improvement of leave.

And it's interesting to observe that whilst talking about the question of annual leave that prior to the 1917 strike, there was no annual leave as such. There was good conduct leave and the good conduct leave could be used as a penalty against a man for infringement of rules and regulations or any offence committed on the job. If a man came late, for instance, on too many occasions, well, perhaps he might lose a day of his good conduct leave which meant to say that his amount of long-service leave was reduced for that year by whatever penalty was imposed. After the strike the authorities made provision to change this good conduct leave provision to a proper annual leave and they made provision of one week. The good conduct leave was then abolished for workshop sections but was kept in existence for other sections of the service which meant that the traffic people and the engine drivers would still be in a position where they could lose their good conduct leave for offences which the Department regarded as serious enough, but would still retain the one week's leave complete.

At the period before the war, we had what was called 'The Bloody Mile', extending through Sydney yard up beyond Redfern. It was called that because from time to time, fettlers, extra gang men were killed when carrying out their duties. And when one looks today at the kind of vests that are being provided by the department for people working in that area so's that they'll be immediately observable by train drivers and the systematic placing of detonators in areas where fettlers are working, or gangs are carrying out any sort of re-railing, the comparison is obvious. This has been responsible, under union pressure, for cutting down on the casualty rate in that area.

Then too, the Railway Department generally, adopted a much better attitude with regard to safety matters and it did become possible to have discussions between the shop committees, trade unions over the question of safety in workshops. Previously, safety questions had been shelved with the reply - this is a matter for the safety first movement. And as I indicated earlier, this was such an

unsatisfactory organisation that it wasn't possible to exert any kind of pressure and the danger still remained. But the shop committees becoming more active on matters of safety, with the trade unions also coming in on matters of safety, it became a different proposition.

The Departmental heads themselves were undergoing a different approach to the question, until we find today that safety under the present administration of the Railways is a fairly important question, as it should be. However, there'll be many problems ahead and it might be necessary to get back to some of the methods employed by the shop committees in the past. Today you find the need to exert political pressure to a far greater extent, even than previously because of the financial needs of the State in the present period.

The prewar depression affected the railways as it affected most industries and rationing of work took place. It ranged from one week off in every twelve through one week off in every six, to down as low as one week on and one week off, so that those who were down on the lowest amount of work were really only working for a dole existence. These were the people in the Construction branch of the Railways. Workshops were able to bring pressure to bear through the shop committee movement and through the unions, finally to relax the amount of time off to places so that one in five went to one in twelve. That was one week off in twelve instead of one week on in twelve. There were various changes which took place in regard to rationing of work. And they were mainly due to the organisation that existed on the job. This too was a period in which the impact of electric trains as opposed to steam, was having its effect on the Everleigh workshops. But nevertheless, even in Everleigh, the rationing was never more severe than one in six.

During the period of the thirties, the shop committee movement produced its own paper, which used to come out once a month; it was financed by the donations of workers on the job. The name of it was Magnet. It was taken over from a militant group that used to operate throughout the Chullora area and they allowed the shop committee movement to take the paper over. But it, changed over from a roneoed paper to a printed paper and Arthur Searle, who later became the State Secretary of the Amalgamated Engineering Union was editor of the Magnet for a number of years. He did a very good job and was followed as editor by a chap at the Carriage works named Alex Woklack who was also a member of the Australian Writers League.

Also on the job were publications produced by shop committees, in Eveleigh Workshops - Eveleigh News was produced, and at one stage, the sub-branch of the Australian Railways Union also produced a roneoed publication the Eveleigh Call. These were but a few of the publications that developed throughout the railways through the period of years, showing that the workers were concerned with the expression of their views with regard to one matter after another In addition to the Magnet, use was also made of the journal of the Australian Railways Union, Railroad, and The political and industrial campaigns waged in its columns as well.

During the war period, these papers and publications helped to explain situations to people in the workshops and were used to secure a good deal of co-operation for the war effort. This was particularly important in those areas of the railways, which had been given over to wartime production, such as Chullora, and the shell production at Eveleigh workshops. For the first time we had the employment of women in the production of shells and they had men as well working side by side. This introduced a new element into the workshops generally. The women got on quite famously and took part in several stoppages, which were quite a novelty as far as the workshops were concerned at that time. The women brought some new life into the workshops.

In the post war period, the workshops became an avenue of employment for migrant labour and for the first time we were confronted with different languages being spoken in the workshops and with people who had different views brought from overseas. There was no real trouble about this. Generally speaking there was a great degree of unity established with the migrant worker. There were people brought forward who were interpreters, belonging to the particular ethnic group and they were able to give good explanations of what was done and the necessity for it and so on.

One aspect of railway employment was, of course, the annual picnic and this was one thing that the children of railway workers looked forward to. Different sections had different picnics on different days. The Eveleigh picnic was one, which I remember from my earliest period, when I went with my parents, to Clontarf. Of course, everyone in the workshops was paid for the day off. It was a holiday, and they really enjoyed it in a good way. There were thousands who would attend the different picnics and families would start their preparations at five and six o'clock and in the mornings to pack the lunch baskets. By the time that they got on the ferry many of the parents were pretty well worn, but not the kids. The kids used to be eager to receive their packets of lollipops, ice-cream, chocolates whatever

was available handed to them by the willing workers as they left the ferries. In later years, these picnics became much more ambitious in their scope. They were held at Luna Park, at Manly, Cronulla, Gunnematta Bay and generally still retained their attraction and were still popular with the children. The migrant workers seem to have big families of children, whether they were theirs or the neighbours you wouldn’t know, they would go along to the picnics and they helped to give a good feel, a good atmosphere.

Edited from Interviews with Frank Bollins
Organising the Railway Workshops

I joined the union quite readily and it was through the union's assistance that I obtained my first job as a First Class Sheet metal worker in the private enterprise.

I was one of the very fortunate people. I never ever was unemployed. I went directly from school to a job as a junior labourer in a Radio Company down in Woolloomooloo and from there I went into the Railways into apprenticeship metalworker I was terminated at the end of my apprenticeship but I had a weeks holiday due to me and before the end of that weeks holiday I then became employed at a place called United Brass in Botany Road, Waterloo. I worked there from the end of October to early December 1939, and much to my own and to my father's surprise I received a letter from the Railway Dept., indicating there was a temporary vacancy for a first class sheet metalworker at the Eveleigh Carriage Works.

Well now this was quite unique in the sense that up till two or three years after this period, all sheet metalworkers very wrongly were employed as second class sheet metalworkers, despite the fact that one had passed through an apprenticeship and had done a technical college course, it was the state of the industry that you had to be first employed as a second class sheet metalworker.

Well I had to be the first and youngest former railway apprentice to be employed as a first class sheet metalworker; it was only a temporary classification. The reason for that was the person who's place I was filling had been taken down to Melbourne and trained to work in the aircraft factory at Chullora which at that stage it was not open and unfortunately for me it wasn't ready to be opened, and so the person who's place I was filling came back to the Eveleigh Carriage Works. I was then advised that I could either accept dismissal or be transferred to the electric car shops at Chullora as a temporary second-class sheet metalworker.

In that period I was quite substantially influenced by my father's thinking, who always had a very strong anti-war attitude and he encouraged me to take this job, and also because of the fact there was still a degree of unemployment in general industry, to take this job as a second class sheet metalworker at Chullora. Well now it was a blow to my pride and prestige because a second-class sheet metalworker had very limited scope, he was not supposed to use a rule or to exercise any initiative whatsoever. He was only supposed to do repetitious work where patterns had already been created by a first class sheet metalworker.

I turned 21 in 1939 and by that period in the war, compulsory military service had been introduced. I knew I would be called up for the military service So I started at Elcar in late December 1939 and in April of that year I went into the camp at Liverpool for 3 months military service. Having returned to the Railway at the end of that three months I then had to go on parade once a fortnight at Victoria Barracks. I succeeded in getting myself in quite a serious trouble because on one occasion I had been encouraged by one of the foremen of Elcar to work overtime rather than go on parade and he assured me that it would be alright. The next time I went on parade I was wound up before the Colonel and really given a taste of military discipline.

Being dissatisfied with the nature of this employment, (in effect as a non tradesman) I then applied to join the Air force and it was only then that I started to see a way out of the position that I was in. The railway refused me leave of absence to join the air force as a tradesman coppersmith on the grounds that I was a tradesman and under the terms of the national security and regulations as they then applied, all tradesmen had to remain within the railway service. I well recall writing a letter to them and explaining the fact that either they had employed me in a wrong category over a non-tradesman when I had tradesmen qualifications which was in breach of the national security regulations, or they had failed to train me adequately as a tradesman because I was not employed with the full qualification of a tradesman.

I recall putting that letter one afternoon in the then works manager who's name was Basher Bill White, came down to me the next morning and said "Now look son, we have just discovered there is a vacancy at the Eveleigh Carriage Works for a first class sheet metalworker, are you interested in it?"

and I said "My oath I am" and within a day I was bundled out of the Carriage works, he said, "you don't want this letter do you" I said "I'd very much like it back" and I carried that letter for many years but unfortunately I lost it. It was a first major victory I had over the railway. And incidentally after that when I became active, that was the first thing that I became active in railway affairs, and that was to ultimately to bring about the abolition, almost the abolition of second class sheet metalworkers and all of those that I had worked with as an apprentice at the signal branch, in particular were elevated to first class sheet metalworkers and it was quite a feather in mind in quite a few other peoples caps that we were able to negotiate with the railway department to get rid of that terrible state where a fully qualified tradesman was employed because of a lousy pinch penny policy as a second class tradesman.

Before I left the electric car shops, and I think largely because of the policy at the signal branch in my last year of apprenticeship, I became an observer of what was going on in the workshop, I attended a number of mass meetings.

One of the earlier campaigns was a ban on beer because beer went up by a very small amount, a penny a middy (or a hard schooner as they were then called). I remember attending mass meetings and voting for a ban on the afternoon newspapers because of the price increases.

It wasn't too long before I was asked by a couple of the adult or older workers in the sheet metal section to become the elected sheet metal shop steward and I subsequently learned that the main interest was that they wanted somebody other than themselves to push the burrow to have their own leading hand sheet metal worker rather than become under the direct supervision of a foreman fitter. This was the first major issue that I got involved in at the electric car shops, to pressure and negotiate with the then works manager Bill White to have a leading-hand Sheet metalworker. Ultimately we were successful in that.

Activist at Eveleigh I transferred to the Eveleigh Carriage Works in the beginning of 1941 and then that's when my very intense political and trade union activity commenced. I was not there very long when I started to express some opinion. I was introduced to the then President of the shop committee Ted Walsham, and over the road from where I was working in the sheet metal workshop was Alec Bookluck who ultimately became the editor of the shop committee newspaper "The Magnet" and a little vehicle builder or carriage builder as they were then called, Franky Holman who was a member of the Communist Party. And between three of them it was not long before I was proposed for full membership in the Communist Party. I joined quite readily, I don't think I understood a great deal of what was going on but I understood enough to clarify my own mind that changes had to take place in society if workers were to get any reasonable improvement in their working and industrial and general living conditions.

Earlier on I became a self appointed representative of the sheet metal section of the shop committee. It was not long after that that I was elected to the position of assistant secretary of the shop committee. This was much to my surprise because up until then I had always been a very shy sort of a person, and speaking in public or expressing any opinion in public at that time was quite an ordeal for me.

I started to enjoy my involvement as the assistant secretary of the shop committee and soon became extremely active there in workshop affairs and apparently created quite an impression with some of the older workers for the enthusiasm that I was imparting into this job. In that period the Communist Party was still an illegal body. Some of the early party meetings that I went to in the inner city and up in the Darlinghurst area where with the candle light and everybody being very furtive about going up back stairs and going down alley ways to and from the meetings. Mass meetings were held in Wilson Street over the internment of Max Thomas and Horry Ratcliffe who had been caught distributing the Tribune. I always remember Lloyd Ross speaking out there. He was quite an orator in that period. He went very red in the face being done on a motion that the carriage works should stop in protest of the internment of these two well known Communists. There was lack in understanding and backwardness in the minds of the workers as to the effect of the role and nature of the Communist Party as it was then functioning.

During the rest of my period of Eveleigh Carriage Works, I was very much involved in shop committee affairs and I believe particularly under the guidance of Ted Walsham who was a particular forceful person, we made a substantial contribution to the standard and conditions that applied to the carriage works in that period. There were a number of forces mitigating against advancement and conditions. One was the backwardness of the workers; they didn't want to change away from the conditions they had worked under for many years. They were quite happy with the primitive amenities that either existed or amenities that didn't exist at all. The management was extremely conservative, old

fashioned and reactionary and resented the shop committee and did everything possibly they could to forestall its activities and there were some strong differences with some of the service unions, particularly the then leadership of the ARU. Lloyd Ross had changed his position politically and had become extremely anti-communist. We had difficulties with the Vehicle Builders Union which was the largest single union force in the carriage works, it was an extremely conservative right wing sort of do nothing union and as a consequence we were able to win a great deal of support from many of the carriage and wagon builders because of the shocking conditions under which they worked.

It became the policy of the Communist Party in that period towards the ending of the war to develop programs of action, they were called "Programs for Victory, Peace and Security" and each of the Communist Party branches or cells as they were sometimes called was given the responsibility of creating, or initiating these programs for victory, peace and security. Well on reflection I think we were extremely bureaucratic about it, but nevertheless we did a tremendous job in establishing a program of improvement to the working conditions that prevailed in the Eveleigh Carriage Works, so much so that we put forward plans for the complete restructuring of the whole of the workshop anticipating a very (?) Railway transport that would take place at the end of the war.

In addition to that we paid a great deal of attention to the question of amenities and we developed the argument that there should be substantial improvement, or the creation of reasonable workshop amenities. There were no meal rooms, there were no washing facilities and the majority of workers had to use a bucket, it was one of these foreign order jobs for sheet metalworkers to make these wash buckets for all of the other trades and you had this bucket of water which was changed sometimes on a daily basis by one of the labourers who would go to the hot water rooms and fill the buckets up with hot and cold water to the liking of the person involved. We also raised the question of showers because at that stage there were none there and if you were required to do a very dirty job as often you were required to do you had to go home covered in muck. We also raised the issue of meal rooms because of the congested nature of the Eveleigh Carriage Works as was the case of most of the railway workshops that existed in that period, there was little or no space available for amenity blocks and the carriage works, we were successful in having a number of mezzanine floors established in various places to accommodate workers for meal room and locker facilities.

First Aid at Eveleigh

We also raised the whole concept of improved and more adequate first aid facilities within the railway service. In this program for Peace and Security we had that printed as a demand. We had it printed at the newsletter printery and it was quite a substantial four leafed document where we had set out in detail all of these proposals for this new deal that should prevail at the end of the 2nd World War.

We had paid a great deal of attention to the problem of first aid treatment for workers who received work injuries. In all of the major workshops there was a first aid room and the main first aid worker was a worker who had gone through the St. John's Ambulance Course that was regularly conducted within the railways. Whilst they were very genuine and quite capable to a limited degree, the amount of service and the facilities available was very limited by comparison to modern standards.

Through the Communist Party program for Victory, Peace and Security we raised the need to have fully qualified medical assistance available at the first aid centres with a doctor in both the Chullora and Eveleigh areas and also an ambulance always ready and available to take any injured worker to hospital.

This was one of the most successful parts of our campaign. It fell in line with what the railways may have had in mind for the future of the medical service within the railway system. Shortly after the end of the war, there were full time nurses appointed as sisters in the major first aid centres, at the Eveleigh, Chullora and Clyde areas.

We circulated the program for Victory, Peace and Security amongst the workers and then through the shop committee which was originally asked to endorse it, we then presented it to a series of mass meetings to ultimately become the policy for the workshop. As this was done in all of the major workshops in the Chullora and Eveleigh area, we had all of the workshops fully in agreement with some of the basic questions. We had related the program to each particular set of circumstances as applied to the different workshops, but overall the basic issues of first aid, washing facilities and amenities and so on was endorsed as an overall policy.

The appointment of these nursing sisters created a major problem for the Shop Committee. When the sisters came in, there was an immediate reaction to them. There were two reasons for this. Firstly was

the absolute conservatism, particularly the old style railway worker who would have been able to go to the first aid room whenever he felt so disposed have a bit of a yarn with the first aid officer and if he had any personal problems (and some of them did such as piles and a few other male problems), they were very embarrassed about the possibility of having to talk to a female nursing sister about some of these problems and consequently we started to run into very heavy weather.

In addition, the first two sisters that were appointed to the Eveleigh Carriage Works and the Eveleigh Loco were former army sisters and they in turn brought into the railway first aid situation forms of military attitudes that were very obnoxious and objectionable to the average railway worker, and so as a consequence, we were on the shop committee caught between two forces. One the workers who didn't want them because of male chauvinism and secondly the nursing sisters who wanted to maintain or establish and maintain their superior position over the worker by imposing a somewhat military attitude towards the workers.

I recall one incidence that indicated the hostility that existed between the nursing sisters and the general staff. On one occasion this affected me personally, I had to go over to the Eveleigh Loco, I got a foreign body in my eye and it was the doctor's responsibility to remove it and so I was sent over to the loco and the sister that was there unfortunately, and I certainly have some reservations in saying this because it was very cruel at the time, but she was a former army nursing sister and she was certainly not the most attractive looking women and as a consequence she had been given the name of "The Beast of Belsen". Railway workers have never been short of a bit of initiative on giving somebody or some issue a bit of a title.

Anyhow I was sitting in a chair and she had administered the local anesthetic to my eye and she was asking me a series of questions about it, and all I was saying was yes and no. I wasn't being smart or trying to take a rise out of her but she turned on me and said "You use my correct title" she said "My title is sister", "When you answer me you say yes sister, no sister" and with that I said "Yes sister". I hadn't done it deliberately, I was quite sympathetic to her position, and as I have said I played a role in her establishment of the medical service or improved medical service within the system, but this was just an indication of the hostility that existed between the nursing sisters and the substantial proportion of the workforce and unfortunately I was the sought of innocent victim of that.

The sister at the carriage works was an attractive person and I had many interesting and deep reaching discussions with her particularly about political issues. I remember I had to get a lot of ray treatment, I had whacked the back of my hand with a mallet, and so I was able to sit there for about half an hour a day and in between visits we used to sit and talk and discuss our attitude towards a lot of the socialistic issues that prevailed at times.

However on one occasion Sister Nardy went on annual leave and when the acting first aid worker, who was one of the older type of first aid workers, went into the ambulance room to operate it, he found that all of the up to date equipment which had been issued to the nursing sisters had been locked away and in its place she had substituted all the old paraphernalia that was used by the first aid workers. A couple of pairs of tweezers, a couple of bodgers for getting the splinters out and that was that.

We protested to the management about this, (as we regarded it as a slight on the male first aid worker that had been placed in there as a substitute for Sister Nardy while she was on holidays. When she came back she argued that "Well look I am trained to use all of this modern equipment but the first aid worker is not" I could see that there was a very established warrant of demarcation there and as a consequence I acted on the logic of that, I didn't accept the fact that when she went on holidays that workers had to have a secondary or a reduced standard of service, but I could understand why she as a trained medical person had refused to allow the more sophisticated instruments used by her in her classification to be used by somebody with lesser training than herself.

That was just one small facet of the hostilities that developed during the early period of the nurses.

I can remember being of a platform at a mass meeting in for the carriage works, defending the right' the nursing sisters to be there and arguing with some of the male workers as to why they should be retained. The fight against the nursing sisters at the carriage works was led by one of the people that would have been adversely affected because in a big shop like the carriage works in the loco, full time full time first aid officer carried with it a staff position and with the introduction of the nurses it meant that possibility of advancement in that particular area have been cut off short. So this created a subjective approach by a number of the workers who could see a little sinecure that they had an eye on her for a number of years going down a spout, and as a consequence adopted a hostile attitude.

Ultimately we were able to break down a lot of the hostility and I think that in general the railway worker became much more appreciative of the improved and much more substantial service the nursing sisters gave to the worker over the very conscientious but poorly trained first aid workers that we had for many years before the advent of the new nursing system.

In my experience one of the things that kept railway workers in a reasonable state of sanity was the ability to both laugh at themselves and unfortunately sometimes laugh at others. There was always an ability to give somebody a nickname.

I remember in my early remarks about that fellow being called "a blue nosed bastard". In the shop that I served my apprenticeship which was the most difficult and complex Shop in the sense that there were many divisions that existed, petty childishness where one group of workers or one worker would not speak to the other and I mention the reference to the "Blue Nosed Bastard" more than once.

It always made me wonder how I myself as an individual came out of that shop with an appreciation and a need for united action. Maybe that was one of the reasons.
But in that shop there was a number of nick names that were handed out to people associated to workers attitudes.

For instance the nickname of the shop steward was uncle, he was everybody's uncle, he adopted that paternal attitude towards workers. The active communists were always referred to as the Reds but that was pretty genetic as far as the Communist Party was concerned.

When I first went down to Eveleigh, every task we had to perform, every job had a specific time to it. One of the first things that happened to any new worker that went into the sections, somebody would come up and say "there is so many hours associated with that job, you haven't under any circumstance got to put it under those hours, you have got to see that you don't too many hours over, otherwise you'll end up getting the bung and you will be in trouble"

One of the first jobs I was given was soil pipes. (This was the pipe that would take the waste from the toilet down onto the railway track.) This was a substantial area of work for the sheet metal section and there were a whole variety of soil pipes, different bends, different sizes and different shapes and so on. I was advised, if you want the time on those, go and see Dainty, so I went over and I said to this bloke "Dainty would you mind telling me the time on these soil pipes" Well he really blew up and abused me no end, he said "My name is not Dainty my name is Les Peters" And I had to explain to him "Look I am very sorry, I didn't know anything about that, somebody referred to you as Dainty "

The reason why he was Dainty he was a bit of a punter and at some stage of his career he bet on a horse called Dainty Bell and Dainty Bell was everybody's favourite and as a consequence he did his dough and so he was referred to as Dainty from then on, but it was a nick name he didn't like, apparently he never got over the losses that he sustained in backing Dainty Bell.

There was another character in the Boilershop, I must say this practical jokes were always part of railway workers lives and I learnt at a very early stage they can be extremely dangerous and personal problem, and I was always lessons during the course of my apprenticeship and in my early days as a tradesman always studiously avoided getting involved in any practical joke that could bread down on any individual who was a person who was either a little backward or had some peculiarity or physical being that brought about a lot of persecution.

There was a guy in the boilershop who was an absolute blowhard, I won't mention his full name, but his name was Alf, and no matter what subject he would always a worldwide winner at it. He could beat anybody at anything. And on this occasion there were some workers there who deliberately set out to provoke Alf to get to the point of making him look a bit of an idiot. And on this occasion Alf had been boasting about the size chook that existed during the period of the war, and one of his mates or the person he worked for, actually the father of Sir John Kerr the notorious governor general, Harry Kerr who was a very competent smith. The other mate of Harry Kerr was Bill Alley who was a first class cricketer who ended up becoming an English cricketer for many years and one of the umpires in test matches.

However the story was that Alf was boasting the size of his chook, so one of the blokes said "Listen Alf how about bringing in a couple of them in and show us" So Alf brings these two chook eggs in and it was during the war and we were working overtime, they used to use the fire in the boilershop to do a little cooking on it around tea time.

So Alf puts these two eggs in the billy can and puts them on the fire, and then somebody very adroitly labeled to divert Alf's attention away from his chook eggs for a period of a time and in the process they substituted two pigeon eggs instead of the two chook eggs. By this time the whole of the boilershop had been made aware of this situation and there was a big circle of interested and enthusiastic workers around the fire. Of course Alf comes back and KH starts to bait him about the size of these chook eggs that he was so boastful about and in the end they said "Alf give us a look at them"

Alf goes over to his billy can and picks these two eggs out with a spoon and instead of being two large chook eggs they were two pigeon eggs. Well than brought the house down. In the instance of those two eggs I have always regarded that as being one of the prime prized practical jokes that I have ever seen or heard of, it was subsequently talked about for years in the boilershop, the time that Alf was brought down to general size by substituting two pigeon eggs for a couple of hen eggs.

Railway workers had always a propensity for being able to make a joke out of some of the serious aspects of railway life; it was always somebody that was able to do a part turn. It was one of the standard practices in my early life that when a railway worker was retiring they would decorate his workplace, his lathe or his bench or where ever he worked with banners and ribbons and somebody would be able to draw a few cartoons that represented some of the incidents in his lifetime at work within the railway and it always brought about a great deal of humour.

I remember when I first went to the Carriage Works, went back to the Carriage Works in the 1940's there were a lot of social clubs that used the function there. These were the days before paid sick pay and as a consequence there were sick and accident funds where you only paid 6d a fortnight and if you were off sick you received a few bob a week to help you over the bad times. With the advent of sick pay, sick and accident funds gradually went out of existence. But these lead to each of the sections having their own social committee and so you could put in 6d a fortnight towards a show or a social function at the end of the year around Xmas time. Well these were highly entertaining; some of the workers would spend weeks in preparing little skits that represented some activity either on an individual basis.

Building the Shop Committees

So that and a lot of other issues I think emanated from the intense interest that the Communists in the railway workshop developed in improving the standards and conditions of railway workers.
There is no doubt about it that in that period while we didn't develop a tremendous amount of mass of support for the things we were doing, we also developed a high degree of animosity and hostility, particularly from not only the main authority of the railway department but a lot of the trade union leaderships including the N.S.W. Labor Council.

We built the prestige of the various shop committees operating in the major workshops and also the Council of Railway Shop Committees. This met monthly and was representative of the shop committees, as they existed throughout the state.

We built this prestige on the basis of giving service to the members, not apparently to each particular workshop but overall through the council of railway shop committees. I must say the service that we gave the workers in that period was vastly superior to the service that was given by the full time union officials that had responsibility in the railway industry, (or lack or responsibility for the railway industry it truthfully could be said.)

We concentrated on such issues as annual leave, long service leave, improved past conditions, the extension of the sick pay facility, improvements in the then very primitive employed paid superannuation system that existed within the railway service as well as placing a great deal of emphasis on local issues.

During the war workers were not able to clear annual leave and there was very substantial restrictions on train travel. The first two or three years after the war it was like lifting the lid on a boiling pot. Everybody wanted to go away on holidays.

At the Eveleigh Carriage works the main responsibility there was to get everything that had wheels under it out onto the track during the Christmas holiday period and as a consequence prior to the advent of Christmas, the carriage works was a massive hive of a very intense industry, but come a week or two or three days prior to Xmas with everything that I say had wheels under it was out on the road, the carriage works became something like a ghost town. There was a lot of pressure on the railway department for railway transport for railway workers to take them particularly up the North

Coast, and as a consequence of that we established by negotiations through the Council Shop Committees the right for the various shop committees to carry out all of the booking for railway workers when they were clearing their annual leave.

At the carriage works about 90% of the shop had to take their holidays at Xmas time because there was no other work available for them. It was a massive job and the responsibility and processing of this booking of holiday travel arrangements for railway workers fell on my very broad shoulders. And it was a fascinating experience, and I did it I don't know how many times. I was always one of those shop committee activists who refused to make it a full time occupation and everything I did had to fit in with my work pattern activity or my work pattern activity had to fit in with my shop committee activity, but I always had a job to do. As a consequence I did most of this booking of railway seats in my own personal time at home. But as I say it was a fascinating thing and I used to book seats for people who stay away the north of Queensland and Perth in Western Australia, and on one occasion I think it was the first or second year we entered into this arrangement with the traffic section of the then railway service, they just gave us a complete train for the North Coast and said "Here is eight carriages here are all of the diagram forms, you go ahead and do the whole of the booking." It was all done at my expense or the expense of other shop committee officers who assisted and we collected the money, we booked them in all of the stations, particularly up the North Coast, Sawtell Bowambi? All of those places where railway workers in their thousands used to go. On the two main evenings the railway personnel were going on the holidays, I used to go down to Central Railway Station at about six o'clock and stop till nine or ten at night to see each train off and see that there were no problems associated with the workers and there families.

Because of this type of activity the shop committee prestige was raised to an extremely high level. Workers could see in a vivid way that the role of the shop committee was there to help to solve their problems with the guidance and assistance and so on. But at the same time, as I have said earlier, we did get into areas of hostile relationship between the shop committee and the department and the shop committee and some of the more conservative right wing dominated unions, particularly the ARU and the Vehicle Builders Union at the Eveleigh Carriage Works. I think this was largely due to the fact not only had we consolidated ourselves in the minds and the thinking of the average railway worker but we set out to attack what we considered to be the do nothing policies and attitudes of the unions at that time and unfortunately we rarely differentiated, the union was either left or right. The ARU, the Sheet metalworkers, the Boilermakers were the three goodies and all the others were the right wing do nothing unions. It was particularly in the period of the cold war, the period of industrial groups became an intensely political struggle within the railways and in whole number of instances what was termed then the Industrial Group were able to win some of the major positions on the shop committee with some of the assistance of the Labor Council and other right wing union, particularly with the assistance of the then State Labor Government because we poked some substantial holes in our members with them by adopting an all too aggressive attitude on some of the pertinent political attitudes, such as education, health care and so on, in that period and as a consequence there was a mounting pressure on getting rid of the Communists from within the shop committee movement in the railway system.

At the Carriage Works I think we had done a tremendous job in building up the prestige of the shop committee that we were in an unassailable position, it's true that we did lose some positions in some of the sections, but the peculiarity of the shop committee organisation at that time, it was to my more developed ideas now, it was a very primitive form of organisation. One did not have to be a shop steward to be an activist on the shop committee and in fact in most of the railway workshops there were two committees. There was the shop stewards committee which was representative of elected shop stewards, union delegates and the shop committee which was largely based on a sectional basis and so you could have peace of conflict, you could have a section where you could have a union steward who was hostile to the shop committee but at the same time you could have a shop committee representative who was actively engaged in shop committee activity, and so you had this degree of competition and hostility between the two forces and this applied particularly in the ranks of the ARU and the Vehicle Builders Union who I think unfortunately a number of the shop stewards were conservative in the sense that they followed completely and without any questioning the overall policies of the leadership of those union.

Because of pressures that were applied to the functioning of the shop committee at the behest of the then Labor Government and on refection I think with some justification there were moves to curtail the activity of the shop committee to issues outside of award matters. Well subsequently when I became a union official I saw more clearly the lines of demarcation between a shop committee that was not necessarily a representative of either one or more particular unions but more representative on a sectional basis and a conflict that emerged from that and an established trade union movements, so that I'm certainly not putting all of the blame and all of the responsibility on the Government, on the

Commissioners or the industrial policy that was pursued by the railway service at that time and by those who became active in the industrial groups. I think that we did open the door on many occasions by being over political in a lot of our activity but I repeat because of the tremendous prestige that we have been able to build up for ourselves at the carriage works and looking after the grass route problems of the railway worker, we were in a fairly unassailable position. But I can say this; there were many very hectic moments particularly at mass meetings when attempts were made to get rid of the Communist element within the shop committee movement on occasion when the annual elections were there. From memory I think we must have had over a 1,000 workers at the mass meeting at lunchtime when the voting for the President and the Secretary and the treasurer was undertaken. And I must say we wiped the floor with the industrial group but it wasn't easy and I felt it very much at the time, a number of the people became involved with the industrial groups were quite personally friendly, they were good conscientious workers. And again I say this in a non-sectarian way the Catholic Action at the time had a substantial finger in the industrial group movement and it did create some quite unfortunate sets of relationships between the communist leader of the shop committee and the extremely conservative leadership of the industrial groups.

However with the passage of time particularly after the end of the coal strike when again we had some massive meetings at the Eveleigh Carriage Works and in all of the other work shops, the shop committees were fully supporting the miners during that struggle when the industrial groups were supporting and upholding both the Federal Government and the State Government in their attempts to beat the miners during that strike. And as I say there were some extremely tense and hostile politicised struggle.

The Combined Rail Union Committee

I believe that the rank and file members of the Communist Party in that period did a tremendous job on behalf of the railway workers and laid the basis for the extremely competent trade union organisation that exists at the rank and file level throughout the railway system.

We found ultimately that the railway shop committees had served its purpose because of the restrictions and limitations that were imposed on us. At Government Level we found that a lot of the issues that the Council had previously built its reputation up on such as long service leave, annual leave, superannuation etc., were then taken up by the unions and I say we, when I say we, the leadership of Council Railway Shop Committees, raised a demand for greater attention by the unions to these problems. We raised the need to establish a combined rail union committee under the leadership and authority of the Labor Council of N.S.W., we were successful in that. In the early stages the Council of Railway Shop Committee had representation on combined rail unions committee but no vote because it was argued (and I think on reflection correctly so, that that would have given one at least of the constituent unions two votes on that committee, it was both a policy that one union to one vote.

Over a period of time the influence and authority of the Council of Railway Shop Committee was gradually broken down to the stage that ultimately it went out of existence in the late 1950's early 1960's. I know there was a lot of heart burning in that period, particularly with Stan Jones and Ted Walsham, but I myself could see the inevitability and could see the contradiction between the unions and the shop committee movement. The shop committee was quite primitive in its organisation such that one didn't have to be a bonafide shop steward to be a participant or an activist on the shop committees.

We didn't leave a vacuum, we didn't leave a gap, and we established the authority of the combined rail unions Committee and it ultimately took over many of the issues that the Council of Railway Shop Committees actively looked after over a whole period of years. In the process we did establish a much better understanding and appreciation of the role of the trade union, and as I say the end result was a very fine rank and file organisation functioning within the system today that guaranteed that railway workers conditions are always raised at the appropriate time and many further advances have been made in respect to the basic issues of long service leave and annual leave.

During the early 1960s we were able to develop what was then the first major campaign on wages ever conducted in the railway system, and we brought about in 1960 the first stoppage of railway workers since the period of 1917 when the major strike took place. It was the railway shop committee who was fundamentally responsible for this tremendous development that expressed itself at the beginning of the 1960s when we were able to change the direction away from the questions of superannuation, long service leave, annual leave etc into the next question of wages, and ultimately over a period of years were able to bring the standard of wage conditions particularly amongst the tradesmen up to a reasonable level to the worker working in private enterprise.

Over a whole period of years we were able to change the character of the trade union movement within the railway system to get away from the everyday issue onto some of the more fundamental issues that confronted railway workers, particularly in respect to wages and other conditions.

The strike was an extremely difficult thing to achieve because there was substantial differences, still very deep suspicions as to the role of the shop committee movement or the then developing shop stewards movement. We took very important steps to consolidate a better relationship with the main service union the ARU in particular. The stoppage took place mainly in the workshops. One of the tragic situations was the continued aloofness of the traffic and operation side of the system when it came to industrial action they concentrated on pushing their own barrow. We were never been able to achieve any major break through in co-ordinated united action with the ARU and the AFULE.

There had been some minor sectional stoppages in the late 1950's I was been involved in at least one of them, or more than one in the sheet metal section, particularly over dismissals in early 1952 period. It was not until 1960 that we were able to get the first major stoppage of the railway workshops in particular. I just don't recall off hand how extensive the involvement of the traffic operations side of the industry were involved those actions, but as far as the workshops they were almost completely one hundred percent. This required a tremendous amount of activity and negotiation on part of the leadership of the shop stewards committees.

At that stage we had developed a much better relationship with Lloyd Ross the then Secretary of the Australian Railways Union and we had applied ourselves much more effectively in a united way with the leadership of the N.S.W. Labour Council. As a consequence were able to develop sufficient support amongst the leadership of the various unions, the ARU, the Vehicle Builders, the Timberworkers, the Ironworkers and of course the Boilermakers, AEU, and the sheetmetal workers to guarantee a massive involvement in that form of activity. And from then on after a tremendous amount of campaigning negotiation between the rank and file leadership and the leadership of the unions, in particular the Labour Council of N.S.W. were able to develop other forms of activity, not long duration strikes but mainly stop work demonstration type meetings where the voice of railway workers was very effectively heard by the general public, either by marches or deputations with a mass backing to various Government departments and heads of the Government.

The main leadership of the Council of Railway Shop Committees in the period that I first became involved with it was Allan Wilson from the Eveleigh Carriage Works, He was the father of the Council of Railway Shop Committees It was largely through his initiative and determination that the Central Council of Railways Shop Committees first came into existence and then prospered. When I first became involved with the Council, Allan was still the General Secretary. He was subsequently elected to the position of organiser of the AEU and his position of Secretary of the Council of the Railways Shop Committee was then taken by Stan Jones. Stan was an industrial truck driver, an ARU rank and file from the Eveleigh Loco. He was, the same as Ted Walsham was at the Eveleigh Carriage Works. Both he and Ted were highly intelligent people and it was a great tragedy at the time, that so deep and bitter were the personal political differences that existed within the ARU that both of them were denied the opportunity of becoming a full time official for the ARU. I am quite convinced that given the opportunity, they would have made outstanding full time ARU officials because they were so effective and competent in the work they did. Because of the strong political differences that prevailed in the industry at the time their progress in the movement was always restricted to being activists within the shop committee. (I think in the case of Stan Jones for a period he became a leader of the ARU Sub-Branch at Eveleigh Loco).

I had more to do with Ted Walsham; he was the one that initiated me into full political activity. I had a great personal affinity & respect for him right until the time that I severed my connection with the railway, I think that then we gradually we grew apart because my work took me in different directions and I had had some differences about the contradictory situation that existed between the shop committee that was then constructed and the trade union system as it was then constructed in the railway.

Both Stan and Ted because of their background and their abilities was closely tied to the Council of Railway Shop Committees and I think as I became more and more involved in full time union activity I could see the contradictory gap between the two and I think it was because of that we did have some differences of opinion. I have always had an extremely high regard for both Ted and Stan, more so to Ted because I had a much more closely association with him. He was one of those people I understand in his earlier life he desired to be a school teacher, he is a highly intelligent person, because of the nature society, then coming out of the depression he was denied that opportunity. He always encouraged me as a young blossoming Communist to become involved in the theoretical aspects of the

Communist movement which I thoroughly enjoyed and appreciated and I believe that behind a lot of the development that I was concerned with, Ted Walsham has played a very significant part.

Stan by the same token was highly effective leadership in the Eveleigh Loco. I think there were subjective differences between himself, (normal state of affairs), and other members of the Communist Party branch that operated at the Loco. The same as it was between Ted Walsham and myself and others at the Eveleigh Carriage Works, its all part of our political life and activity. Stan was a tremendous leader, a tremendously conscientious and a capable organiser, in that he never left a stone unturned in detail at the conclusion of each of the Council of Railway Shop Committee meetings which used to meet monthly, the executive met every second week, so that every second week there was a meeting, either an executive meeting with the Council or a full meeting of the Council and the minutes of those meetings were out and produced and circulated to the shop committee movement. Generally at that stage at the height of the council Railways shop committee I think there was about 35 affiliated committees. We had committees functioning at Goulburn, we had committees functioning at Bathurst, we had them in the Newcastle area, Broadmeadow Loco, Port Waratah, Civic Workshops, Cardiff Workshops and a number of the smaller sections there, and also we had connection with the Power Producing Industry because originally they had been part of the railway set-up we had, representatives from the White Bay, Pyrmont and Ultimo Power Stations, we had representatives from the Zara Street Power Station in the Newcastle area and it was quite a comprehensive rank and file organisation.

In addition to the day to day activity the Council had its own newspaper called "The Magnet" and one of the editors of the Magnet was Arthur Serle who ultimately became the district secretary of the Amalgamated Engineering Union until he was defeated in the ballot and then went back into general industry as a machinist. Alex Bookluck, who was a little Russian worker, tremendous guy, took his position as editor of the Bulletin. Alex would have been one of the first interpreters utilized by the railway in the early intake of migrants in the industry. Something for which he never received as far as I am aware, any special payment or any recognition but Alex played a tremendous part in assisting many of the migrants who came into the workshops in a sought of a hostile environment because at that period the first intake of migrants were from the Soviet Union and they brought in a very strong anti-Communist attitude and as a consequence there were some substantial differences between ourselves on various occasions.

Irrespective of that he became the father of all of the migrants that came to be employed at the Eveleigh Carriage Works. Alex was deeply interested in journalism and in writing, he was something of a short story writer himself, was active in the Fellowship of Australian Writers and thoroughly loved and applied all of his abilities to Editorship of the journal Magnet, it was tagged by the industrial groupers as "the Little Tribune" and I guess it was heavily larded left wing politics, but nevertheless it did the job of spreading the activity and the campaigns of the railway workers to a very wide number of railway workers .

I think the "Magnet" used to come out every quarter, either monthly or quarterly and there was always the job to get the big bundles of the Magnets in from the printery at the Carriage Works and Alec and I and a couple of the others would be busy rolling them up into various bundles for transshipment to the various workshops, some we had delivered by truck others by rail but in a very short time we would have the "Magnet" distributed to almost all of the major sections of the railway industry in relation to the workshops throughout the state, so that the "Magnet" along with the Council of Railway Shop Committees played a very important role in the high standard of conditions that exist within the system today.

Another member of the Council of Railway Shop Committees that I well recall was Azor North from the electric car ships at Chullora. Azor was one of the old time militants, I think from my knowledge he was a member of the Communist Party but nowhere as deeply involved as Ted, Stan Jones or myself but nevertheless was a grand old man who was not short of a few thousand words, was thoroughly an enjoyable person till he finished up the Council of Shop Committees on a Saturday afternoon and then do a pub crawl for the rest of the afternoon. I got into serious troubles in my early married life by getting home around 6 o'clock in a fairly pickled state by spending the afternoon at a thoroughly enjoyable company with Stan, Azor, Ted Walsham, (he was a non drinker so he used to disappear) but the three of us and a couple of others, in the period particularly after, during and the end of the war when grog was very difficult to come by. We did a pub-crawl into the city and had a thoroughly enjoyable afternoon of it.

The Council of Railway Shop Committees had it's own meeting room in Wembly Chambers. Azor North was a very capable carriage builder and he spent a lot of time building cupboards for storing our material. We had a Gestetner there. I used to take a lot of time after work running off stuff for the

shop committee and also a few foreign orders for the Communist Party such as the notices of meetings that we were holding outside the gate.

It was a very effective rank and file conducted organisation; it never had any full time officials. One of the highlights was the production of a hand book setting out all of the conditions of railway employment, long service leave, sick pay, passes, you name it we raised it in the hand book. Largely Ted Walsham, Stan Jones and myself did that on a purely voluntary basis. It was sold in the workshops and created a tremendous impression because a lot of workers didn't understand what their rights were. There was a lot of confusion.

The United Front

There was over 20 unions in the railway system some of them had very few members. The ARU was of course the major work shop union which had a big membership and the Vehicle Builders had a substantial membership. There was the ASE which was more conservative than the AEU, there was the Boilermakers which were generally militant and left winged although there were some officials such as Ralph Marshall who ultimately became the secretary of the Labour Council of N.S.W. was elected to the position of Secretary of the Redfern Branch which was largely related to the railway workers. There was the Sheet metalworkers Union which I ultimately became an organiser of in 1959. There was the Hotel Club, there was the BWIU, the Operative Painters, practically the Timber Workers, practically nearly all of the major unions had a foot hold in the railway industry and it was only through the combined railway unions committee and the Trades and Labour Council of N.S.W. that we were able to get a sort of a consolidated union policy but then it was a question of getting that policy applied in the workshops, and some of the unions while they were to agree to a policy at top level, they did precisely nothing about having it applied to their membership at rank and file level and that is where a lot of areas of conflict emerged.

We were very busy people. As soon as we were able to push through a policy decision at top level through the Labour Council Combined Rail Union's Committee, we then got very busy seeing that there was some form of a job action undertaken to give expression to those policy decisions. So that it was a continuous process of finding ways forward, the policy issues that we could get agreement with the Labour Council and then where necessary action. It wasn't easy and in the process of it I think we all learnt a great amount of on the question of the united front. I think one of the substantial contributions for this was - our approach was to Lloyd Ross who had become again for the second time the General State Secretary of the Australian Railways Union, there had been a wide gap between Lloyd and the Communist Party at one period and I undertook the initial approach as to Lloyd Ross, I don't think I am speaking out of school when I say that my original association with him was fairly hostile as it was most with other unions apart from the Boilermakers, the Sheet metalworkers and the AEU, and I approached him on one occasion when the ARU was starting to be adversely affected by technological change, they had just suffered the effects of the rail standardisation between Sydney and Melbourne and Albury with a substantial number of railway porters losing their jobs.

The railway system was developing the concept of automatic carriage cleaning in conjunction with the concept of an automated shunting facility at Enfield Loco Depot, and it was quite obvious that the ARU was going to suffer, possibly more than any of the other service or other unions operating within the railway system.

I made the initial approach to Lloyd on the basis, that well here we had a situation where the left had been standing up for the bucket of rubbish throwing it at the ARU leadership and the ARU leadership had responded, the consequence of it was we were both where we were a few years ago. This mismatch that took place on a sort of unreal basis was not serving the purpose of railway workers. At this time we started to get together to develop some united action. Well I must say to Lloyd Ross's ever lasting credit, he saw the logic of that approach and so we were able to develop a much closer understanding between the workshop and Lloyd Ross. He played a very important role in developing this movement around wages as far as the workshops were concerned. I developed a very high regard for him both as a person and as a leader of a very important trade union.

Academically trained and there was a gap between the Academic and the Rank and File. He expressed his own views very forcefully, one had to be extremely patient to get your own ideas across to him. However, I repeat I think it was a tremendous significance that people like myself and Harry Hatfield and others were then were able to vote for him. in effect speaking for the Communist Party but nevertheless seeing that there was a meaningful united action between all of the causes of railway workers if we were to make any substantial gains and offset the effective technological change which started to emerge in the railway industry during the late 1950's early 1962.

Well as far as myself was concerned in the late 1950's I became more and more involved in the functioning of the Sheet metalworkers Union. I was elected to the executive during the middle 50's and was elected the position of State President and from time to time when need arose I was booked off from my railway job and became fully employed for a period of a week, two, three or four weeks by the union. When any of the officials went overseas I was usually booked up to fill the gap that they left. In the process I became thoroughly immersed in trade union activity. I was still very active in the ranks of the Communist Party, I was on the Central District Committee at the party and devoted a tremendous amount of my time in the activity in that aspect of my political life, and ultimately when a vacancy occurred in the Sheet metalworkers Union in 1959 I was elected as an organiser.

Becoming an Organiser

I well recall this incident that when I had been a job activist in the railway that had been elected to a railway union position as organiser was able to maintain the connection with the railway as an industry. I kept the employment at Redfern each 12 months; I had to apply for 12 months leave of absence to continue the union activity.

Well, I made up my mind that that wasn't going to be the case as far as I was concerned, I saw from a personal point of view as a matter of principle. I felt that if I was capable, being elected to a full time position, I should be in a no better position than any other union official and not to have two jobs, one to fall back on. This was my personal attitude and so at the end of the first period of office when I was re-elected I went down to the Railway Department and indicated to them that I was to resign my position. And I well remember the staff superintendent said to me "Why do you want to do that son?" And I told him, I explained to him that I have got an obligation to my own conscience to have but one job, I didn't want to be under any obligation to the railway I anticipated that I would be closely associated with the railway from then on as my position as a union organiser, I didn't want to be compromised.

When I put my letter of resignation down and gave it to Mert Commis, he said "Son you are a bloody fool" and then he listed all of the union officials that were still on leave from the railway department. A number of them were people I knew well. People of the Communist Party who had sought leave of absence to become full time union officials but I stuck to my guns, I said I see it as a question of principle and that's that. So in 1960 I finally severed my formal connections with the railway department by having them accept my resignation, and I recall writing a letter where I thanked the local management for the assistance and co-operation that they - well that was the then current management - and extended to me as a shop committee and a union activist within the system. I certainly didn't sever my connections with the railway I was still regarded generally speaking as being one of the leaders of the railway, I assumed the responsibility within the Sheetmetal Union for a number of years to specifically look after the railway industry, it was one of my organising responsibilities.

Ultimately when Harry Hatfield was elected as a union official of the Sheet metalworkers Union he took over that role and carried on the work of organising the rank and file within the bounds of the Combined Rail Union's Committee as effectively or in some instance was more effective than I myself had done.

But over the period I have always had the association with the railway industry when we amalgamated in the early 1970's. While I didn't have any specific responsibility because of my job of President of the Union I still maintain this close interest and association with the industry, particularly during the period of major development of technological change. I also had a connection with the railways through the former Sheet metalworkers Union, I had been given the responsibility of the rolling stock industry at Clyde, Commonwealth Engineering and A.E. Goodwin who had a close association with the railway, and so I sort of acted as a go between for the

Workshop forces of the railway and the workshop forces at the private enterprise and I could speak for many hours on some of the very intense battles I had in trying to reconcile some of the differences that existed between the workers in the two separate industries because of conflict of interest, and I believe that ultimately we did get a much better relationship and understanding between the railway worker and the worker who was employed in private enterprise in the manufacturing and construction of railway stock in locomotives.

During the period of technological development within the railways, I became deeply involved in this. I was one of those union officials that spent a tremendous amount of time in trying to lift the railway system up by its bootlaces. For many countless years there was the common cry was that we have got

no money and as a consequence the railways deteriorated almost to the point of complete and utter collapse. It wasn't until the advent of the early era in 1960-70 period I think it was in the late 1960's that (Shirley?) came on deck. Whilst I had some very strong reservations about him as an administrator, I have always been prepared to give him and others within the system a chance to break through the railway bureaucracy and lift the lid off the railways. Largely his intentions were to completely destroy the manufacturing servicing section of the railway and hand it over to private enterprise and as a consequence I found myself in distinct opposition to him, but I think because of my earlier associations with my father, my apprenticeship in the industry I developed a great love and respect for the railways and I have done everything 'possibly could to encourage railway workers to see the need for change in not only the workshop situation, better machinery, better equipment and the expansion of the railway industry, but also changes within the attitude of railway workers towards their own responsibilities. I sometimes feel that never made a great deal of progress in that regard because of the strong feelings that was emanated by some of the shocking policy attitudes that were developed by the administration of the railway industry, particularly during and in the immediate post war period when they deliberately set out to destroy and suppress the developing rank and file movement within the railway industry and at the same time got so deeply immersed in their own internal fighting and bickering that they almost brought the railway system to its knees, and in so doing created a tremendous fall off in the degree of morale that existed within the railway industry, and I and others spent a lot of time trying to re-create the very fine spirit that had always existed within the railway industry and I feel particularly because of the changes that have taken place within the system today that there is a re-creation of that very fine understanding and appreciation of the railway industry as a service to the general public. It is true there is a long way to go, but I feel the developments that have taken place particularly over the past ten years indicate quite clearly that not only is there a new approach and attitude adopted from above that there is also a new developing attitude within the rank and file. And I think in a small degree I can assume some of the responsibility for the creation of that what I consider a new attitude.

So that I have had a thoroughly enjoyable life, the whole of my existence, my married life emanated from the fact that I became an apprentice sheet metal worker at the Chullora Signal Branch in 1934 and from then on I thoroughly appreciated my association with both the shop committee, the union movement and in a limited extent my association with some of the administration. I have met very fine people were who 'as much subject to the whims and fancies and dogmatic assertions of the railway bureaucracy as the rank and file worker in the workshop, and as a consequence I think I always had a very good relationship with the majority of the administrators that I came up against over the period of time. I sometimes felt in the latter period before I retired in 1983 that I was being effectively used as a trouble shooter but many of the issues that the rank and file were getting involved in at rank and file level could be resolved by careful negotiation between themselves and the degree of management that they first came in contact with, and as a consequence I felt that we were able to resolve many of the day to day problems by careful, patient negotiation that ultimately made some improvement in the average railway worker standard of life.

The first major form of industrial activity took place in 1960 and that was an extremely difficult achievement in that there were still substantial divisions and reservations by some of the union leaderships and by a lot of the rank and file themselves. There were still differences between the various railway workshops and as a consequence to get any united action was an extremely difficult and complex task, as I have said the first was in 1960. Well, between then and now there had been any number of instances where forms of industrial activity had been engaged in. One of the tragedies as I see it has been the period of isolation between the workshops which have been for many years have been very effectively organised and the workers in the operation and traffic side, particularly the members of the ARU and the AFULE. Both those sections have tended to isolate themselves from the workshop and it was always one of my strong talking points that until such times as we got complete united action between the operation and traffic side of the industry in the workshops, there would always be some restriction both on the extent of the action taken and on the end result achieved by that action. This was born out very effectively, or this argument was substantiated very effectively during the Hours Campaign where we spent many hours of meetings in consultation with the ARU and the AFULE. I think the ARU both state wise did apply themselves more effectively in relation to the campaign to reduce working hours within the industry. We never had the same success with the AFULE; neither did we have any major success in involving the AFULE in wage claims that related to the industry as a whole. This is not so much a criticism, it merely indicates the role and function that the AFULE have carried on over the years. They have always been independent mainly of the other unions, always applied themselves on an individual union basis and despite the many efforts that we made to get them involved in united action we never succeeded very effectively in getting them closely associated or allied with the workers in the workshop on any of the major claims.

In getting railway workers to engage in industrial action as a united character, either within the workshops themselves, there has always been substantial differences of levels workshops in the of understanding between some of the Chullora area to the Eveleigh Workshops and the Clyde shop, in particular the Centre at Clyde.

It was always a complicated task where you had to apply yourself very carefully to understand and estimate correctly the various levels of development and appreciation of the problem; otherwise you would put yourself in a corner and so destroy the effectiveness of any move.

I found from the point of view being a full time union official that working within the railway industry on an industrial basis was an extremely complicated and extremely
time consuming aspect of being a trade union official. But it had to be done to achieve any united activity, one had to go through all of these time consuming processes of talking, talking and talking to the various levels trying to bring them all up to a common level of understanding, in some instances asking the more militant section to hold themselves back a little bit while the rest of the industry caught up many efforts that we made to get them involved in united action we never succeeded very effectively in getting them closely associated or allied with the workers in the workshop on any of the major claims.

So that between the period of 1960 and the current period there were many examples of united activity largely within the workshops, although it must be said that both the ARU and the AFULE have engaged in independent isolated action on their own part which is as far as I am concerned a much more simple and less complex problem in getting all of the workshop unions to engage in united struggle.

Overall in that period the whole of the railway system from the staff right through to the operative unions have engaged in some form of industrial activity. Having worked in the railway from 1934 when the aftermath of the 1917 strike was still a predominant thought in the many minds of the workers and this was so right until the beginning of the 1960's remember the lessons of 1917 were always told "don't let's go out on the end of the limb, don't do this, don't do that" we had to overcome all of the legacy from the past and I believe that overall the trade union movement within the railway, the operative service unions and the craft unions in the workshops in particular have done a very fine job in their own independent way advancing the standards and conditions of railway workers, unheard of in the periods prior to the 1960's.

Edited from Interviews with Frank Bollins
Growing up in the shadow of the Railway Sheds

The whole of my life I guess has been closely related to the Railway. My first recollection arises from the fact that my father was one of the initial rail motor fitters appointed in the period when rail motors first came into the system in the early 1920's. Around about 1924, he was transferred to the country railway depot at Binnaway which is between Mudgee and Coonabarabran. This had been developed as the centre the railway motor services from Werris Creek, to Dubbo and up to Gwabegar.

My father spent about six months living in Binnaway in what was called the White Way. This was a line of camp tents that had been established within the railway yard primarily for the construction work for the rail line from Mudgee to Coonabarabran. After having been up there six months and consolidating his position, my family which was my mother and two brothers, moved up there in 1925.

My first real recollection was standing on the Werris Creek station with my brother about 9.00am in the morning waiting for the rail motor service to take us from Werris Creek across to Binnaway and in the station there was a steam train, an old Bauldwin type of locomotive either an 0 or a J. The driver noting that we were gorking at the loco pulled a whistle, it was one of these big siren types and in consequence both my brother and I nearly jumped out of our strides, because of the extreme noise. Traveling from Werris Creek across to Binnaway in the rail motor is about 90 odd miles. I don't recall how long it took, but being amazed at the size of the wheat paddocks all along the railway line and I think there was only my mother and the three of us and a couple of other people on board.

At Binnaway we were met by my father. Our furniture hadn't arrived at that period so we got to live with a family by the name of Potts. He was a railway worker who lived just at the back of the loco depot. The first house that we lived in at Binnaway was the remains of the original railway barracks. The construction was of weatherboard up to about three or four feet and the rest of it was canvas on the outside and the interior was lined with hessian over which was pasted newspapers.

One of the railway workers who lived in the White Way was a South African, Bob Weatherburn. He used to have South African newspapers sent to him and I can recall some of the photographs from the newspapers pasted to the walls and ceilings of this old house that we lived in. I don't know exactly how long we stayed in this old building, but however long, it must have been it must have been a tremendous ordeal for my mother. Both my parents and my older brothers were born in England and she had been only in Australia for three or four years before she went from living in the conditions in Bankstown into the extremely primitive conditions that prevailed in the country areas at that time. The house only was part canvas and lined with hessian and newspapers inside, there was no electricity, there was no water laid on. We were one of the very fortunate families that had a tap in the yard which was part of the railway system. The water came from the Castlereagh River. It was inadequate for drinking purposes and could only be used for washing clothes and a little bit of cooking.

The toilet or the country dugout was nothing more than a hole in the ground, there was no postal service, there was no garbage service and all of the washing that my mother did at that period was done in the kerosine tins in the open air.

The first real home that we lived in was part of a lot of houses that was built by a local builder specifically for railway workers, they were pretty much of a standard pattern, 2 bedrooms, a kitchen and a small verandah front and back.

One of the characteristics of these cottages were that they were built completely from Cyprus pine from the Piliga forest which was up in the Gwabegar, Baradine area. The interior was clear varnished rather than painted, we used to do was to lay in bed of a morning and try to count the number of knots in the Cyprus pine ceilings.

Whilst living in those cottages was much more attractive than living in the old barracks, however there was still a lot of hardship there. We had no water supply, we had to rely on a 1,000 gallon tank, the country dunny was down the back of the yard. by this time there had been a sanitary service introduced into the town, so that we were not obliged to have the old earth closet type of toilet.

Although there was one place next door to us that still had it. If there was any argument as to who owned what marbles Mrs. Flemming would grab the lot of them and would throw them down into the dunny to resolve the argument, so that somewhere in Binnaway there must be a cache of well preserved glass marbles.

Living in a small country railway centre, the whole of your live seemed to evolve in around the railway and during the early period of the 1920 depression there was always a lot of fear amongst some of the younger railway workers, that their services were going to be terminated because of the downturn in the overall industry. I can remember discussions between my mother and the father where there was great concern as to his future because of the possibilities of the sackings. He was one of the very fortunate ones and was never ever dismissed from the service, but there were a number of younger workers particularly fuel-men and cleaners who had their services terminated.

My father had to give one of the rail motors a comprehensive service. I don't understand the details of it but it was decided unofficially that he would take it for a trial run on a Sunday from Binnaway to Coonabarabran and back. Well despite the fact that Coonabarabran was only 22 mile distance, it became quite an event and there would be a special excursion. It wasn't only the railway workers families that availed themselves on the trip, a number of local residents also traveled. One of the families there had a child who was in the Coonabarabran hospital with diphtheria and so it was arranged that they would travel on the special and would bring the kid back to Binnaway.

I was extremely proud of the fact that my father drove this rail motor, whether he was in breach of the regulations, I don't know. I don't think so, I think he had a ticket for driving outside of the loco and I recall standing alongside him and he allowed me to blow the filter of the rail motor whenever we were going around the bend, and I can recall the wind from the air heater blowing up the sleeve of my shirt.

We lived not far from the loco, say 200 yards, and as a consequence we spent a great deal of my boyhood days meandering around the railway. On a number of occasions I managed to get myself into little bits of strife with some of the more officious railway personnel. My dad had shown us how he as a kid in England he had made little hand warmers out of tobacco tins. You had a tobacco tin and punched a hole, with a little bit of cotton waste with a little bit of kerosine on it and lit it and it used to smoulder and you used to carry it in your hands and warm your hands. Well we had these one day and I remember the station master bailing us up and then ultimately dobbing us in to my father for being in the railway yard with these little tins with smouldering cotton waste in them on the argument that we could have set fire to some of the carriages.

My father was always a very humane sort of a person and I recall that on one of my excursions down by the river, I discovered a nest of kittens that somebody had dumped there, so I took them home, and my mother was very distressed at the fact that I had done so and didn't know what to do with them. She didn't have the heart to burn them, and I actually saw this happen and didn't understand the significance of it at the time, but my father had arranged with one of the engine crew to take these kittens in a sugar bag further out the line and dump them. Well railway workers being what they were, I'm quite certain that they decided that they were going to have a bit of a joke at the expense of Frank Bollins, that was my father, so as the loco was passing the loco shed itself, through one way or another, they got my dad out onto the embankment near the loco to watch this train go through. So they had my father lined up there and I could remember seeing all of those railway workers standing for this loco. I didn't understand the significance of it, but as the train passed where my dad was standing the driver with a great flourish picked up this sugar bag which my father thought had these kittens in it and then waved it around his head and opened the fire box and threw the bag into the firebox of the locomotive. My father was a very humanitarian sought of a bloke and he was terribly upset at this very cruel action the driver had taken to dispose of these kittens. However when he got home he found the kittens still at home, because what they had done they had taken the kittens out of the sugar bag put a few chunks of coal in there and threw the coal into the fire box rather than the kittens. What ultimately happened to the kittens I do not know, I suspect they may have been drowned.

When I was 9 or 10 I got into very serious trouble with my father, it was the only time that I could recall that he really belted me, that is with his belt. One of the other kids Bob Nickles, became a junior porter (his father was a storeman at the loco at the time), and one of Bob's duties was to go out once a week on his tricycle and refill the fuel cisterns on the seven day signal lamps. On one occasion he asked if I would like to go with him on the old push trike where you sat astride with a flipper type action. I think he did it because I would have been a help to him get up some of the hills. However having replenished some of the kerosine supply in the siqnals we then proceeded to return to Binnaway. It was a single line working and anyone out on the trikes always had to observe the timetable to see there were no trains when they were traveling on it. Bob had apparently had made a

mistake in figuring the timetable, because as we were coming down the hill to Binnaway we were being followed by a goods train. The driver and fireman observing us on the trike ahead of them apparently decided they would have a bit of fun with us, so they started to blast the siren of the loco.

Well it caused a bit of interest in the crew in the loco shed itself when they heard this repeated whistle blowing, they all climbed outside to see what was causing it, and here is Bob Nickles and myself going flat out there down the hill towards the loco with this goods train following us and blasting us with the whistle. Cause I suppose this could have been quite serious but nobody other than my father saw the serious side of it and the railway workers got a lot of enjoyment,
When my father got home from work the first thing he did was to take his belt out of his trousers and he really gave me a leathering and I was banned from going anywhere near the railway sheds for a long time after that.
As I say our whole life centred around the loco, there was a tennis court at the back which we all helped to build and I recall the opening was quite a gala occasion event for a small country town.

We lived there until I think 1931 and out of nowhere so to speak my father came home one evening to say we were moving out, going to leave Binnaway and move down to Auburn. He had applied for a transfer as a rail motor because my brother Jack had just passed the intermediate certificate but being a small country town there was nothing there as far as a job was concerned. We were in the throws of the great economic depression of the late 1920's early 1930's.

I remember being very upset about the hurried leaving, I didn't understand the significance of the transfer and I had a thoroughly enjoyable boyhood and my life was very much akin to Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. I remember I was rarely ever at home particularly during the school holidays.

There was a large number of unemployed workers that would come around the town, mainly to get themselves the dole but coming and knocking on the door of our home and other peoples homes and asking for either a bit of bread or any old cast off clothing. Being a kid I didn't understand or appreciate the problem but there were many young fellows who were 16 to 18 who have been compelled by economic necessity to leave home to get the dole.

We had just formed a scout troop in Binnaway in that period and we would invite scout people to the meetings. They would give us the benefit of their experience of the scout movement in the city which we greatly appreciated. The country copper used to give a heave ho to see that they got out of town as soon as he paid the dole to them. Well, it was a very tragic period in the history of the State to see so many young people and others wandering from point to point, they weren't allowed to stop in the country town.

As this was in the 1920's so there was still a lot of ex servicemen from the first world war around. One returned serviceman down on the river bank became ill. This poor bloke had been carrying a lot of his relics from his time as a soldier in the trenches in his swag. He became so ill that he was no longer able to do so and he left a lot of his mementos in a bit of a cave that he dug. We came across them and some of the things that I got from it were buttons off German soldiers uniforms and a couple of maps of some of the front line situations in Belgium and France. I hung onto those for many years. I never forgave my mother because she threw them away just after I got married.

I was 14 at the time we moved from Binnaway, and after the first year I went to Granville Tech as a secondary student. In that period there was still a massive amount of unemployment. When we came down to the city my father got an appointment of railmotor fitter at the Clyde loco and as a consequence we got a cottage in Auburn and I lived in that and another cottage in Auburn until about the early 1940's when I got married and left home.

My brother was unemployed for quite a considerable period before he became apprenticed as a fitter and turner in the railway and when I approached the age of 16 my father encouraged me to apply for a position of an apprentice within the railway system.

I was interested in the woodworking trades and I developed a bit of appreciation of woodwork and sign writing. I applied as an apprentice carpenter, apprentice pattern maker, apprentice carriage builder or an apprentice sign writer, and I was apprentice to none of those trades.

I always recall the trauma of preparing for the examination. I must say this, but from memory I was pretty dumb at mathematics, which I attributed this largely to the poor facility of schooling in country areas because never in any of the classes that I've been through that I had a teacher for a single class. At Binnaway you would be either in 2nd to 4th class, or 5th to 9th class with the one teacher.

My father pounding me years before I went for the examination because strangely enough my elder brother, who was always very bright at school, failed in his mathematics when he first went to the apprentice examination causing great discomfort to himself and my father. So that it was almost a foregone conclusion with me being what I was, I was going to fail the examination first up. However, it was not so because when the results were announced I had got top marks both in the mathematic section of the examination and on the spelling.

We were sent straight from our examination room around to the medical branch so I didn't get home until late in the afternoon around about 5.30pm and both my mother and father were extremely worried as to what had happened to me, because I think it was the first time in my life that I'd ever been down to the city on my own at the age just on 16.

I received the proposition to become an apprentice toolsmith. In that period we were classified as at the Chullora Signal Branch, and again whilst I desired an apprenticeship in the wood trade, because of the scarcity of job opportunity in that period, I readily grabbed the opportunity. That decision has determined the whole future and character of my life since that date.

In that period, getting from Auburn to the workshop one had to get several trains. It was a rather complicated procedure first up. Having got on the train as we were going up the hill to the signal branch, I spoke to a worker and asked directions to the tinshop
He said "Oh! You must be the new apprentice".
Well I said "Yes" and he said "You come with me, I work in the tinsmith shop and I will take you there" So that as we alighted from the train the first thing he said to me "You see that big blue nosed bastard over there " and described the bloke to me as I was walking ahead and I said "Yes" and he said "Never you will have anything to do with him because he is no good". I subsequently learned the big blue nosed bastard was the leading hand in the shop and apparently there had been some feeling between the two because, I won't use his name, other than Sam (the big blue nosed bastard) had knocked Jimmy off his position as leading hand. But it also went much deeper than this.

Jimmy had been classified for a period of time as a second class tinsmith and through the services of the then very primitive union in the industry, he had been elevated to that of first class tinsmith and as a consequence received a certain amount of money in back pay. Well Jimmy was a bit of a punter as well as being a bit of a boozer, so Jimmy didn't tell his wife about this backpay that he received. Sam's wife was notorious for being a bit of a chatter box. Sam went home and related to his wife that Jimmy had got this backpay, and the first thing that happened was that Sam's wife had met Jimmy's wife one morning and said "Oh! Mrs. So and So wasn't that wonderful of Jimmy getting that back money". Of course Jimmy's missus didn't know anything of it. When Jimmy arrived home his wife held out her hand for her share, but unfortunately for both of them Jimmy had punted it all away.

Jimmy claimed he had been dobbed in by Sam and as a consequence there was a great deal of enmity between them. Incidentally I took no notice of Jimmy's directive that I shouldn't have nothing to do with the blue nosed bastard and ultimately became quite friendly. I used to walk both home and down to the station with Sam practically during the whole of my apprenticeship. Within the first 18 months to 2 years of my apprenticeship the term was changed from tinsmith to sheet metalworker and I completed my apprenticeship in 1939 as an apprentice sheet metalworker

My apprenticeship of five years was very quiet. I must have been a reasonable sort of apprentice it wasn't very long before I was doing the work of a fairly detailed nature. I remember I thoroughly enjoyed the work, the first job I ever did was to help a guy by the name of Frank Christie make flare lamps of a particular style. Within six months of starting, I had been given a job by the foreman to make the patterns for a new style, a new shape of a flare lamp and I did many of those flare lamps before I finished my apprenticeship. I must have been a reasonable model apprentice, in that over the period of a five year apprenticeship I only lost just a little over one week. I had only one week to make up for my service before my services were terminated in 1939.

In that period it was a standard practice for all apprentices other than those who got an honest pass in the higher trade certificate to have their services terminated. From memory it didn't constitute a problem. I don't remember giving it a great deal of thought, but in that period there was still quite a considerable amount of unemployment in existence and I think it might have been more of a problem for my parents than it was for me, the knowledge that come the time when my apprenticeship would finish that I would be dismissed from the service.

I always recall the last day or couple of days before I concluded my apprenticeship. I was sitting at my bench working away there and I could sort of sense someone standing behind me and I looked over

my shoulder and it was then the Assistant Works Manager, his name was Jack Allan, he was very tall with a cadaverous face individual and a very austere type of person. The average person there lived in some degree of fear of Jack Allan because of the fact that he was always on the go watching what you did or didn't do. And here he was standing right behind me, I was extremely nervous. He said "Look son I have come to apologise to you" he said "we thought so much of you as an apprentice that we have done everything we possibly could to have you retained in the service but unfortunately it is the policy of the Department to dismiss all apprentices at the conclusion of their apprenticeship and I am very sorry to see you go"

During the period 1938,1939 in the build up period to the commencement of the second world war, there was a great deal of interest by numbers of workers as to the future of mankind. The Workers Education Association, W.E.A. used to conduct lunch hour discussion courses and I can remember being invited along with workers in the sheet metal section. Les Ruly who was to become a life long friend of myself and my wife encouraged me to get involved in these lectures on International Affairs and so we used to go along during our lunch hour and one of the tutors from the WEA would come out and talk to us about the issues, I remember Poland, Czechoslovakia and all of the circumstances leading up to the onset of the 2nd World War being discussed. In this period I also became a member of the Left Book Club because the WEA was sponsoring the circulation of Left Book Club publications. That was my early beginning of my political activity. I didn't get involved in any union activity in that period we were not encouraged to joint the union until our final year of apprenticeship.

Brian Manning
A Blast From the Past:
An activist's account of the Wave Hill walk-off

The 6th Vincent Lingiari Memorial Lecture
Delivered by Brian Manning
Northern Territory University
23rd August 2002

Photo - Manning Collection [from Freedom Day website - http://freedomday.info/]

There was an expectation amongst Aboriginal Workers that the 1965 application to vary the Cattle Industry Award by the North Australian Workers Union would at last grant them wage justice and remove laws which arbitrarily denied them equal value for equal work.

For a seven day week, working from sun-up to sun-down Aboriginal pastoral workers in the Northern Territory were paid around 3 pounds 6 shillings ($7.00) when white workers were paid around 23 pounds ($46). In addition Aboriginal workers were to be fed in accordance with a schedule in the Wards Employment Ordinance, which provided for an adequate and varied nutritious diet.

Daily fare in the Wave Hill stock camps consisted of dry-salted beef, dry bread, tea and sugar.

Employer advocates asserted that most Aboriginal workers were merely hose-holders; an inference that they were only capable of watering the vegetable garden on the station and therefore were not deserving of the same wage and conditions as non-Aboriginal workers.

Contrary to the argument expounded by many of the employers that Aborigines either couldn't handle money or alternatively had nothing to spend it on there was eager anticipation amongst Aboriginal Communities who would be able buy up on consumer goods: radios, record players, records, stockmen's outfits clothes and toys for their wives and kids and maybe even a second hand motorcar when the travelling hawkers came round.

In fact many station stores stocked consumer goods and operated credit accounts, which dissipated what wage accumulation Aborigines might accrue. One instance which came to the attention of the Northern Territory Council for Aboriginal Rights (Rights Council) when twelve aboriginal families consisting of 35 men, women and children were brought in to the 13mile at Berrimah to sit out the wet season revealed that most workers owed money to the employer after 6 months work when they purchased on credit, working clothes, blankets, swags, canned food and tobacco; items which should have been supplied.

They had no money to see them through the wet season.

When presented with the situation, Welfares response was to tell them to go to Bagot Aboriginal Reserve where they would be fed and housed. However, they objected to living in Bagot for cultural reasons and wanted to stay at a camp they had set up at the 13 mile.

After considerable argument and threats to mount a publicity campaign, authority was given to obtain food supplies from the Bagot Reserve Stores.

Aborigines were arbitrarily bound to employers by a system of institutionalised poverty.

Needless to say, in March 1966 when Arbitration Commission President John Moore handed down the decision that Aborigines should be paid equal wages but not for almost 3 years(to allow pastoralists breathing space to prepare for the change) they were variously dismayed disappointed and downright angry.

Paddy Carroll, North Australian Workers Union (NAWU) Secretary had not anticipated the result. Although the union case was ill prepared, he expected the claim would be granted given the strong moral argument.

He gave a report on the surprise decision to a hastily convened meeting of the Northern Territory Council for Aboriginal Rights people held on the foreshores at Rapid Creek

The Northern Territory Council for Aboriginal Rights had been formed in December 1961 as an Aboriginal pressure group with a majority membership of traditional Aboriginal People who at that time were wards of the State & Territory in addition to sympathetic non-Aboriginal supporters. The organisation became active supporting Aboriginal struggles for equality and actions against discrimination wherever it appeared.

The Council for Aboriginal Rights had pressed the North Australian Workers Union (NAWU)to act in the matter of equal wages for all Aboriginal workers. The Cattle Industry Award in which the N.A.W.U was a respondent covered the largest number of Aborigines experiencing gross exploitation.

Dexter Daniels, a Roper River man was the Rights Council nominee to the position of Aboriginal Organiser in the the N.A.W.U. He was bitterly disappointed about the outcome and took the decision as a personal failure to deliver the goods. He had been building up the expectations of Aboriginal stockmen during his organising trips.

His brother, Davis Daniels, Secretary of the N.T.C.A.R was an orderly in the Aboriginal ward at the old Darwin Hospital on Myilly Point. He advised Dexter that Vincent Lingiari the Gurindji traditional owner and leader was in Darwin for medical treatment.

This turned out to be most opportune. Dexter seized the opportunity to inform Vincent of the Arbitration Courts decision and discussed their options with him.

Dexter was in favour of widespread strike action in protest. However, Paddy Carroll the NAWU Secretary who had presented the Union case was not confident the Union could sustain a general strike of pastoral properties and instructed Dexter that he was not to initiate any strike action without his authority.

Paddy agreed to protest the decision by calling a strike at Newcastle Waters ; a smaller property near Elliott south of Katherine on the Stuart highway. He was hopeful that the action could be confined to the one station, which would be convenient and relatively easy to service with provisions and maintain contact.

On 1st May 1966 Newcastle Waters Stockmen went on strike. Quite ironic really as Roy Edwards'

Newcastle Waters property was one of the better stations.

Dexter's wings had been clipped and he spent his time servicing the strikers at Newcastle Waters supplying them with stores from Elliott and travelling back and forth to Darwin to keep Paddy informed and relay progress back to the strikers.

When news of the Newcastle Waters strike hit the southern press, Southern Trade Unions responded instinctively with financial support. Wages struggle was an issue with which Unionists easily identified. As finances rolled in pressure was brought to bear on Paddy Carroll by the Rights Council to extend the strike to the larger stations in order to achieve a more meaningful protest. The main exploiters of skilled Aboriginal labour were the large absentee landlord holdings; Vestey's Wave Hill and Australian Estate's Victoria River Downs. At the time the two largest properties in the Northern Territory.

Paddy was unmoved. He was wrestling with a pastoralists' proposal for a slow worker clause; a proposition where pastoralists would only pay full wages to Aboriginal workers deemed competent by the management and reduced amounts to others commensurate with their level of skills to be determined by management.

The Rights Council did not agree with Paddy's assessment that the strike should be confined to a small "token" protest and determined to canvass the feelings of workers on the larger properties by sending a deputation on a fact finding tour to get first hand information. Nick,a Greek Wharfie took some leave from his job and with Dexter Daniels and Clancy Roberts, also a Roper River Man and Rights Council committee member, set out to tour the major stations ;Victoria River Downs, Wave Hill and Helen Springs, another Vestey's property south of Katherine where steers from Wave Hill were fattened before movement to Morestone in Queensland for slaughter and export through Townsville.

At Wave Hill they found Vincent Lingiari waiting for news of a breakthrough, which had not occurred as a result of the Newcastle Waters strike. Vincent was eager to take action, however all the stockmen were away at the Annual Vestey's Negri picnic races near the West Australian border and no action could take place until their return. Nick wrote out a couple of telegrams for Vincent to send if and when the Gurindji decided to strike.

One telegram was addressed to Paddy Carroll, Secretary of the N.A.W.U advising him that they had gone on strike; the other was addressed to George Gibbs, the Public Officer of the N.T.C.A.R advising him also of the strike. Telegrams were sent to both parties because there was a concern that the Union might not acknowledge the strike.

The Council had learned that a strike by the Gurindji some years earlier around 1953, had gone unheeded and the strikers had been starved back to work when no support was forthcoming. The union said they had not been advised of the strike. Not surprising since the Union did not have an organiser in the field at that time.

At VRD Dexter spoke with traditional owner and leader, "King Brumby" he too was prepared to join the strike. He was given telegrams to both Paddy Carroll and George Gibbs advising them of the strike action.

However it was learned some weeks later that when he presented the telegrams to the postmaster at VRD, the messages were torn up and not sent.

When George Gibbs the Public Officer received his message he knew that the Union would also have received a telegram. He went to Paddy Carroll with Phillip Roberts, another Roper River Man and President of the Aboriginal Rights Council insisting that immediate support be given to the strikers despite Carroll's reluctance to widen the action.

Paddy Carroll was not happy with the prospect of widening the strike. He felt control was slipping out of his hands. However he agreed that someone should take a trip to Wave Hill with supplies and report back to the union on the situation there.

George Gibbs and Paddy Carroll were not on good terms and Paddy would not agree that George should go, nor would he endorse Nick who was one of his outspoken critics.

However, at that time I was between jobs, waiting to pick up a casual job on the Darwin Waterfront and I had a small truck. Paddy and I had a reasonable working relationship so he agreed that I should go with Dexter, the official Union Organiser.

A Tiwi Man, Robert Tudawali, a former football great and out of work Aboriginal film star from Chauvel's film "Jedda" and a television series "Whiplash" was a member of the Council for Aboriginal Rights. He had been elected Vice President at a recent meeting and wanted to become involved in the struggle. He joined the trip with Kerry Gibbs the 14 year old student son of George and Moira Gibbs who had instilled in Kerry a respect for Aboriginal Culture and an interest in the movement for Aboriginal Rights which the Gibbs' had inherited. Moira was now assistant Secretary and George was Public Officer of the NTCAR.

As soon as Paddy gave the go ahead we moved to purchase stores and fuel enough for the return trip.

Three 44gallon drums of fuel took up half the load capacity of my 30cwt Bedford truck. We set out early the following morning and managed to get south of the Willeroo turnoff where we camped for the night.

The road from willaroo to Wave Hill was in the process of being rebuilt with a major upgrade under the Federal Governments National Beef Road development scheme. It was a horror stretch consisting of a series of temporary,heavily corrugated diversions which could not be driven at great speed with my overloaded small truck. We crawled along most of the way between 15 and 20 m.p.h. Fortunately I had fitted new ten ply tyres before setting out. Travel on the surface being constructed was not permitted so we did not reach the strikers camp in the dry bed of the Victoria River until 9.30 that night.

I will never forget the reaction to our arrival.

There were nervous cries of ' cudeba' 'cudeba' the Gurindji term for white fellas.White ringers from the station had been cruising the area hoping to entice some of the women from the camp. In the tense atmosphere of the strike camp this was in fact harassment. As I turned onto the riverbed and drove slowly towards the camp the people realised it was not a ringers vehicle. An excited young Aboriginal lad climbed up onto the running board and called out that it was Dexter Daniels.

The nervous cries changed to loud and excited cheers from a swelling crowd around the truck. I could actually sense their relief in the realisation that they were no longer on their own as they had been on a prior occasion and the promise of support was now a reality.

That was when I first met Vincent Lingiari.

Vincent was a quietly spoken, dignified man who spoke with the confidence of a leader.

"Its good to see you. We been waiting for you fellas"

We shook hands and I asked him how they were and whether they had food. He said 'we alright. Might get some tea and sugar tonight and unload in the morning.'

I too was relieved to finally arrive. I had been driving on my nerves and I was exhausted having wrestled with the appalling conditions for the last 16 hours.

After unloading a few supplies to meet their immediate needs. I unrolled my swag alongside the truck at a respectable distance from the nearest Strikers campsite and listened to Vincent's account of their walk off as we drank a welcome mug of tea. He had confronted the Wave Hill manager, Tom Fisher and asked for full wages for the stockmen. When Tom Fisher refused, Vincent told him they were walking off. Vincent went down to the Aboriginals camp and called the people together.

He told them that proper wages had been refused so he had said they were walking off. There was no dissention. The stockmen agreed they should walk off.

The people collected their belongings and quietly walked away from Wave Hill Station to the dry bed of the Victoria River near the Police Station and Welfare settlement about ten miles away.

This event has become part of Gurindji folklore and is annually celebrated and re-enacted as 'Freedom Day'.

Vincent went to see the resident Welfare Officer, Bill Jeffrey and told him of their decision. He handed Bill Jeffrey the telegrams and asked him to send them.

As we talked a utility with a couple of ringers aboard drove slowly down the low level crossing and stopped for a couple of minutes. Vincent said 'them ringers looking for Aboriginal women.' They didn't approach but drove off.

Everyone I spoke to had stories to tell of hardship, abuse, lack of respect and loss of dignity. Obviously the issue of wages was just the last straw. If they had been treated with more respect and consideration they might not have gone on strike.

Some of their complaints should have been rectified by Welfare Patrol Officers' diligence in policing the Welfare and Wards Employment Ordinances. I asked them if they had complained to Welfare Patrol Officers about abuse and food supply. I was told that Welfare Patrol Officers spent most of their visits with the manager of Wave Hill Station and didn't come to the Aboriginal camp to ask about their living and working conditions without the Manager. Consequently they could not talk freely to these Officers in the presence of the Manager. In other words, they were gagged.

I turned in well after midnight.

You can't sleep in after daybreak. The flies get you up early. After a quick breakfast we got the strikers together and Dexter Daniels gave them a talk promising that we were going to continue supporting them, and that we were going to call on people around Australia to help.

He told them how the Unions down south were already sending messages of support and donations to the Union in Darwin after the Newcastle Waters strike and they were sure to continue their support for the Gurindji. I took the opportunity to take a few pictures, which I passed on to the press after I got back to Darwin to ensure good media coverage.

We then asked Vincent where he wanted to put the stores. He said we will take some off now and share around and the rest we take up to Bill Jeffrey at the Welfare Office.

I was surprised that he elected to store the stuff at the Welfare Office. My experiences with Welfare due to my activities in the Northern Territory Council for Aboriginal Rights were negative. Welfare control over Aborigines was absolute, enshrined in draconian legislation which became a model for South African Apartheid.

However, Vincent had confidence in Bill Jeffrey, the Resident Welfare Officer who apparently helped to sustain the people until we arrived.

I drove up to the Welfare Office with Dexter and Vincent. Bill Jeffrey came out to meet us. He was eager to meet 'that terrible Dexter Daniels'. He was privately elated at the turn of events and expressed great admiration for Dexter and the leadership role he was playing. He directed us to an engine room where we unloaded the provisions.

Bill Jeffrey asked me where I had camped last night. I told him I had camped in the bed of the river with the Gurindji. He said ' You had better bring your swag up here and camp in the works accommodation.' I was aware that there was an Ordinance in force which prohibited camping within a half a mile of an Aboriginal camping area and assumed that he had advised me to move camp with this in mind.

I discussed with Bill Jeffrey the need to organise regular meat supplies.He thought this might be arranged from Hooker Creek Aboriginal Reserve south of Wave Hill. He said he was driving down there the next day. I asked if I could go with him to organise on-going meat supply. He agreed saying that he would be leaving early.

Vincent and Dexter had discussions about other Gurindji who were working on nearby VRD outstations; Mt Samford and Pigeon Hole. They had been thwarted in their intentions to walk off through their telegrams not being sent but more likely through intimidation by the Manager.

Since I planned going to Hooker Creek with Bill Jeffrey it was decided Dexter, Vincent and Robert Tudawali would take the Bedford truck next morning. They took off before daylight and I waited for Bill Jeffrey. He came over to the works accommodation to tell me I could NOT go with him to Hooker Creek as I did not have a permit to enter an Aboriginal Reserve I was not impressed, as I could have gone with Dexter and Vincent if I had known this was to happen.

I occupied myself writing a couple of articles for Tribune the CPA weekly newspaper retelling some

of the stories I had been told of abuse and hardship experienced by Aborigines working on Wave Hill Station: the jewel of Lord Vestey's empire.

Before lunch a vehicle pulled up driven by Wave Hill station manager,Tom Fisher with Ted Evans a Darwin based Welfare Department Executive Officer and his charter pilot,Ossie Osgood. I walked out from the accommodation to greet them.Ted Evans, surprised to see me, asking abruptly, 'What are you doing here ?' I told him I had brought a load of supplies from Darwin on behalf of the North Australian Workers Union for the Gurindji Strikers and the welfare officer had invited me to camp in the works accommodation.

He was visibly displeased but made no comment.

He then spoke to Jeffrey's teenage daughter, Sue who had come down from the residence then drove off. Shortly after the light aircraft took off, circled, then headed in the direction of Hooker Creek.

At lunchtime I was pleasantly surprised and gratefully accepted a sandwich and cup of tea from Sue ,a polite and pleasant girl.

Around 4 o'clock in the afternoon Bluey Harvey, the local police officer drove up and asked me if I was Brian Manning. I said yes, that's me. He then ordered me off the property saying he had received a radio message from the welfare officer to tell me to leave.

I was flabbergasted. I told him I had been invited by the Welfare Officer to camp there and until such time as Bill Jeffrey told me to go, I was staying put unless he wanted to forcibly remove me. He drove off without a word.

It was dark when Bill Jeffrey arrived back. I came to help him unload some beef into his coolroom. He exploded ! Are you still here ? I told the copper to tell you to go… Hell you should have been more astute than to tell Evans I gave you permission to camp here. You will have to go.

That sounded more like the Welfare Department I was accustomed to and had grown to mistrust!!

I assumed he had the authority to permit me to camp there in the circumstances and I knew of other people who had stayed there. I thought the episode quite strange.

I just rolled my swag and went back down to the river bed to catch up with Dexter, Vincent and Robert Tudawali who had returned with a truck load of Gurindji people from Pigeon Hole and Mt Samford. The truck was loaded to capacity with Gurindji Workers and their families.

I asked Vincent if all the workers had walked off Wave Hill. He said yes, every one walked off…except the Pumpers (these were maintenance workers who camped out at water bore sites where windmills and diesel motors continuously pumped water into troughs for the cattle.) I suggested that they should walk off too.

Vincent hastened to assure me that they wouldn't call out the pumpers because they had to look after the cattle.

Here was another insight into this quiet unassuming and responsible leader who understood his priorities.

Lupnagiari, known as "Captain Major" was a Gurindji employed on Newcastle Waters. He was a skilled stockman who had worked around a number of stations and participated on many cattle drives. He had injured one eye as a young man chasing a breakaway steer on horseback through scrub country: an injury for which he was never compensated.

Indeed I later became aware that Aboriginal Workers had been specifically excluded from the provisions of the Workers Compensation Act of the Day. Incidence of serious and disabling injury were and still are quite high amongst Aborigines in the Pastoral Industry.

Another such case was Mick Rangiari also known as 'Hoppy Mick'. As a lad he was working for the local policeman. While riding over to Wave Hill to pick up mail,he was thrown from his horse startled by a snake as he was leaning down to open a gate. He lay injured with a broken pelvis for a couple of days until he was found by an Aboriginal man who happened to be walking that way. He was taken to Wave Hill Station where he lay on the verandah for a couple of weeks until examined by the visiting Flying

Doctor Fenton and flown to Katherine. By then it was too late to do anything as his pelvis had already set crooked. He is now permanently disabled but continues a vocal stalwart of the struggle.

The next morning we got the strikers together again to discuss where we were to go from here. I raised a couple of issues which I felt were important.

There were health and education issues to be addressed.

There was a need to arrange a local supply of beef. I had not been able to arrange this from Hooker Creek but Bill Jeffrey had told me they needed stockmen there.

I suggested that some of the men could work there as stockmen and perhaps eventually run their own Station on the Hooker Creek Reserve.

This suggestion was not well received. They explained that Hooker Creek (now Lajamanu) was not Gurindji Country.It was Walpiri Country.

We then headed back to Darwin, the truck, with no load shuddering over the corrugations handling the rough road no better. With another dozen or so trips before some of the new road was opened up, the timber tray on the truck literally shook to pieces.

Back in Darwin, Dexter and I reported the situation to Paddy Carroll, the Secretary of the NAWU, confirming that the people were resolute and intending to stay on strike until a satisfactory result was reached. They would need ongoing supplies, which we could continue to ferry down. There were a number of Darwin Wharfies who rotated to run supplies to the Gurindji over the next few months. Paul Patten, Barry Reed, Nick Pagonis, Jack Phillips and George Gibbs who made more trips than anyone else.

We reported to the Rights Council also and it was obvious that action was required to raise the profile of the strike which was now receiving expanding coverage in the national press thanks to noted Australian Author Frank Hardy's contacts in the media and letters the Council for Aboriginal Rights had sent to Unions seeking financial support.

Looking ahead, the Rights Council was planning to send a couple of spokesmen south to campaign amongst Trade Unions and community support groups for broader support and more financial aid.

Robert Tudawali was well known around Australia through his film and television acting and he seemed a good choice as envoy. Besides, as a well known actor, Actor's Equity was prepared to finance his trip to Sydney and Melbourne. With Dexter Daniels they would prove to be an excellent team.

A day or so after our return a concerted effort was launched by Welfare Officers and top Management from Vesteys Organisation to get the people back to work. Paddy Carroll was present and Frank Hardy had managed to go along with him as a press observer. Welfare Department had enlisted the aid of Jacob Roberts a Roper River Man to talk to the people. Jacob had been a founding President of the Rights Council but resigned during the first Executive Meeting. His brother Phillip Roberts was elected in his place.

Frank described to me how the parties tried to convince the strikers to return to the station. They presented a confusing exercise trying to explain how they would be earning more money in the change over to decimal currency. Can you believe that?

Jacob earned himself a reputation from the Gurindji as a 'snake' trying to portray Tom Fisher as a 'good man' and how things were going to change for the better now at Wave Hill. The Aborigines were amused that Tom Fisher kept rubbing his head. It seems he had a habit when he was annoyed – taking his hat off and rubbing his bald head.

Vincent made it clear. They were not going back to the station. They experienced a feeling of pride and regained dignity. There was more to this than just increased wages. Over the ensuing months as I talked to various strikers and understood their indignation and anger I was told quite emphatically. 'We never go back to Vestey'.

In early October 1966 I commenced work on the Darwin Wharf and a few months later was elected to the Union executive. I now had less spare time on my hands but the truck continued to supply the Gurindji with volunteers from the wharfies, co-ordinated by George Gibbs, the Public Officer of the

Rights Council who was also a seasoned wharfie.

The onset of the wet season was imminent. This meant the Gurindji had to move from the bed of the Victoria River. They shifted camp to an area near the Welfare Office and Police Station where they erected some temporary shelters and sat out the wet season. This was a difficult period for them.

Boredom for the young men who would rather be working and uncertainty as to what the future held for the Gurindji. Welfare maintained an ongoing contact for health and education purposes But their continued attempts to convince the Gurindji to go back to work for Vesteys was not welcome. The Gurindji were adamant. They were not going back to work under the appalling conditions at Wave Hill.

Some Gurindji families travelled to Katherine and Darwin during this time taking the opportunity to do some socialising whilst at the same time taking pressure off the strikers camp.

Meanwhile the Gurindji decision not to return to work at Wave Hill Station meant it was necessary to broaden support. To achieve this the Rights Council decided to implement plans to send a couple of people to Sydney and Melbourne.

We had anticipated that this might be necessary and set about making arrangements. Frank Hardy was active in Sydney gaining publicity and organising press conferences.

We had initially intended to send Robert Tudawali and Dexter but a positive Tuberculosis test ruled out Tudawali who was Quarantined in the Darwin Hospital T.B. Ward.

Lupgnagiari (Captain Major) who had initially walked off Newcastle Waters was asked if he would go with Dexter and how he felt about speaking to meetings telling people about the life of Aboriginal stockmen in the Northern Territory.

Captain Major was articulate around his friends and he knew what working as an Aboriginal stockman was all about. He had never spoken to meetings of non-Aboriginal strangers though so we had a few dummy runs to give him an idea of what he would be in for.

There was no doubting his resolve and determination. He was the leader of the Newcastle Waters Stockmen and had gone down to Helen Springs with George Gibbs and Clancy Roberts to pick up some more Vestey stockmen who wanted to join the strike.

There were about eight Aborigines there who said they were ‘waiting for Dexter’ to come and pick them up. They went back to the homestead to collect their families and belongings then on to join the people at Newcastle Waters.

On arrival at Newcastle Waters they found that a child’s mother had been left behind so they did another trip back to pick her up. She was in the camp and said she wanted to go to Newcastle Waters and put her things on the truck.

As they were leaving the manager arrived brandishing a rifle and ordered them off the property. The woman was very frightened but without argument they left and returned to Newcastle Waters. There had been numerous reports of Pastoralists threatening to shoot any “trouble makers” stirring up the stockmen to strike. The facts were that Aboriginal stockmen already knew about the Newcastle Waters Strike and were ‘waiting for Dexter’ to join in the struggle despite intimidation from their employers.

At Newcastle Waters Lupgnagiari told the strikers he was going to Darwin and then on to Sydney and Melbourne with Dexter to tell people about the strike and ask for their help.

Actors Equity were disappointed that Tudawali could not go, however Hal Alexander, their Secretary put to his executive that they still finance the trip with Lupgnagiari taking Robert Tudawali’s place despite his not being a member of Actors Equity.

In Darwin I took Dexter and Lupgnagiari to a mens outfitters and rigged them out with some clothes for the trip: Lupgnagiari with stockmen’s gear and Dexter with town clothes. Frank was to meet them in Sydney and expose them to the media, Trade Union and community meetings.

Frank Hardy was at the airport to meet them. Hal Alexander had organised a press conference. Journalists were eager to get first hand news of the strike from Aboriginal participants instead of recycled press reports.

That night I rang Frank to ask how they went. He said Lupgnagiari was a bit nervous but soon responded when asked questions. His simplicity, sincerity and sense of humour impressed the journalists who did not give him a hard time.

Although one journalist was sceptical about the much publicised report that food rations in stock camps consisted of only dry-salt meat, dry bread, tea and sugar.

He said 'Captain Major, surely you got more tucker than just salt meat, dry bread, tea & sugar'.

With a slight thoughtful pause. Lupgnagiari replied:

'Well yes, I reckon maybe sometimes they might put some more salt on the salt beef'. Frank said there was a few seconds of complete silence whilst they all digested what he had said and realised he had cracked a joke! There was applause and much laughter as they realised here was a man with a sense of humour. This reaction served to put Lupgnagiari more at ease.

Dexter spoke slowly but confidently and made it clear that Aboriginal stockmen in the Northern Territory were prepared to extend the strike and he wanted to ask people to continue giving them support.

Frank considered they had made a very good impression and would be introduced to the Union rank and file meetings over the next few days. It was proposed they stop over in Canberra on the way to Melbourne and speak with Aboriginal Affairs Minister, Barnes and meet Labor Party leader, Arthur Caldwell and Gordon Bryant the ALP shadow Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

They both were kept busy speaking wherever the opportunity arose. Gurindji support groups around the country were being formed with people who had a commitment to the issue of Aboriginal rights.

The involvement of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI) broadened the support to include the wider community. Stan Davey, then executive Officer of FCAATSI arrived in Sydney to help co-ordinate the tour.

The Waterside Workers Federation (Sydney Branch) hosted Lupgnagiari on a trip to Brisbane and Townsville while Dexter continued to address job meetings in Sydney before their return to Darwin after about 4 or five weeks of what proved to be a very successful speaking tour. This was mainly because people in the Southern States were hearing about the strike first hand.

On his return Lupgnagiari went back to Newcastle Waters.

The Union had arranged for the people to receive their supplies from the Elliott store. This was a cost saving move, which in fact meant less contact with the strikers. The men from Helen Springs had moved on to Banka Banka Station where they had family. Other clan groups decided to move to their own traditional areas during the wet season when they usually stopped work until next mustering season. A couple of men had been enticed back to work with the promise of more money. The Newcastle Waters Strike had run it's course.

Lupgnagiari and wife Amy moved to Darwin for the remainder of the wet season.

Early one morning in March 1967 the Gurindji decided to move from the camp near the Welfare Officer's residence and go to Wattie Creek to set up a permanent settlement of their own, where they would not be under the scrutiny of Welfare and Police.

A petition was composed and sent to the Governor General, Lord Casey, requesting the grant of 500 square miles for their own use.This site is now known as Daguragu.

The Gurindji were going to run their own Station on their own land. If Vesteys did not agree they would fence the land anyway.

They immediately set about establishing a permanent campsite with the building of bush shelters. Subsequent trips by the Rights Council provided a brick-making machine of their own and supplied more substantial building and roofing materials. Their efforts to plant trees and grow vegetables was encouraged and supported

with a small pump set up to pump water from nearby Wattie Creek although the introduction of a few goats to provide milk and meat did not help with the development of the garden.

Everyone in the camp was busy establishing their permanent presence making shelters, building a toilet, hunting for food, fetching timber for posts and fuel for fires …squatters on their own land...

Peter Gilgi was the camp baker. He made bread for the whole community using Bidouri Ovens in a trench where he had made a fire then shovelled out the coals, placed the Ovens in the trench then covered them with the coals.

After the bread was turned out onto a makeshift table Peter summoned the people for their share by loud clanging on a wheel rim with a tyre lever.

In 1967,a year after the strike commenced, NAWU Secretary, Paddy Carroll asked if I would do a trip with Dexter around some of the stations to check if pastoralists were paying full wages to experienced stockmen.

We travelled west from Katherine through Timber Creek to Auvergne and Bullo River Stations down the Duncan Highway to Rosewood, Mistake Creek, Nicholson and Ord River Stations then back through Inverway, Wave Hill and VRD Station.

None of the properties we visited were paying Aboriginal stockmen full wages. Faced with the prospects some said they would use white stockmen or engage contractors who would choose and employ their own labour.

The manager at VRD was quite unco-operative and openly hostile towards us because Dexter and Vincent had collected Gurindji from his out stations, Pigeon Hole and Mount Samford.

Brumby,the traditional owner of VRD wearing an engraved silver plate on a chain around his neck proclaiming him "King Brumby" of V.R.D was standing nearby. He said to me 'This all my country' with a sweeping gesture of his hand. The manager scoffed derisively and said 'The silly old bugger reckons he owns all this country.'

I asked the manager where we could camp for the night. He wouldn't hear of us camping nearby and directed us to the bed of the Humbert River about 20 miles away from the station. He did not want us to talk to his stockmen. He didn't realise that in the short time he and I were talking, Dexter had found out all we wanted to know from King Brumby and the few Aborigines still at the homestead.

There was considerable uncertainty as to what the reaction of Vesteys would be to the Gurindji decision. A Vestey's manager had told Vincent that he did not approve of them erecting fencing on Wave Hill land.

Vincent maintained this was his Ancestors land and did not belong to Vestey. They just owned the cattle.

The Governor General, Lord Casey replied to the Gurindji petition declining the request for a land grant. Their minds were made up though; they continued with their plans to live at Dagaragu. They were not moving from Gurindji land.

Pincher, A Gurindji Man, was an avid rock collector and had samples he had collected over some time but not identified.Bill Jeffrey organised miners rights and Frank Hardy painted a sign at his request naming the Wattie Creek camp as Gurindji Mining lease and Cattle Station.

With the aid of a young geologist volunteering his expertise the Gurindji covered an area defined on an exploration map, picking up rock samples and bringing them back for his inspection and identification.

Each man had a specific area and on return pointed on the map to the place where he had picked up each rock.

We were optimistic that there might be a worthwhile discovery, which could provide justification for a mining lease. Unfortunately surface indications were not encouraging with the exception of some semi precious stones such as agate.

The squalid state of Aboriginal living conditions on pastoral properties was highlighted by the Walk off.

Vesteys had bulldozed the aboriginal camp within days of the Gurindji walking off to avoid national press focus on housing, which could only be described as dog kennels or humpies.

The Government was embarrassed by the disclosure and six members of the Northern Territory Legislative Council visited in 1967 to see the situation for themselves. The issue of decent accommodation for Aborigines in the area could not be ignored any longer.

W.C.Wentworth, Federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs visited Daguragu in April 1968, and gave the impression that he was in favour of granting the Gurindji land. However,Vesteys were opposed to it. Vestey's had a more effective lobby in Cabinet with Peter Nixon.The Government rejected Wentworths proposal a few months later.

Instead, plans were revealed to construct houses for Aboriginal families. Of course there was no consultation with the Gurindji as to the siting of these dwellings which were built on the area known as the 'drovers common' a treeless, barren,dusty tract of land which was not part of the Wave Hill Pastoral Lease and which was subject to flooding. The area is now known as Kalkaringi.

Some Gurindji worked on the building sites making bricks with a small brick making machine however they refused to live in the houses which were eventually occupied by Wailpri people and other outsiders.

The Gurindji wanted houses built on an area of their choice which had cultural significance a few miles away on Wattie Creek. However the Housing Commission refused on the grounds that they could not get title to the area, which was part of the Pastoral Lease.

Lupgnagiari was a Gurindji. He and Amy, an aboriginal woman from Boorooloola whom Lupgnagiari wanted to marry decided to go to Wattie Creek and join Vincent.

A marriage between the couple was a 'wrong skin' union in Aboriginal Lore and not permitted by custom. However, the couple were beyond child bearing age and Vincent eventually agreed that they could marry and live at Wattie Creek. Vincent wanted Lupgnagiari to be his head stockman when they started their own station.

Southern Union support extended to donating a Toyota Dyna truck and building materials while many supporters visited Wattie Creek to assess for themselves the needs of the people and discover areas where they could offer further support.

With the Gurindji decision that they were not going to return to Wave Hill the Rights Council moved to assist them apply for unemployment benefits and other family welfare entitlements. Our biggest obstacle was the difficulty in establishing applicants ages. Departmental assessments invariably rejected claims for age pension to many who were in our opinion well qualified.

There was concern in areas of government at the prospect of losing the skilled workforce, which had walked off Wave Hill.

The Gurindji were asked to attend a meeting of some four or five members of a Sessional Committee of the Legislative Council.They asked me to go along with them.

With Pincher, Mick Rangiari, Long Johnny,and Donald I attended the meeting in the Legislative Council building.

The proposition raised by the members was for the Gurindji to take over the stock work at Beswick Station.

I thought it was a reasonable proposal, which appeared to be a genuine attempt by Legislative Council Members to resolve the impasse. However, I waited to see what the Aborigines had to say about it.

Pincher spoke out without hesitation. "No that not our country Wave Hill our country. We can't take that nother fellows country. We stay our country."

There was no more to be said. It was a good try but the Gurindji had already told me they were not interested in going to Hooker Creek. Now they were not interested in going to Beswick or anywhere other than their own land.

The Gurindji dilemma was that there was no Aboriginal Reserve land on Gurindji country. It had all been leased to pastoralists. They had no choice other than to take some land back from Vesteys: their original proposal.

Cecil Holmes a well -known film maker came with me to Wattie Creek and shot some 16mm film for southern T.V showing the Gurindji erecting fencing in the act of claiming their land back.

The resulting publicity raised the level of activity with demonstrations around Australia and also in London demanding Vesteys relinquish land to the Gurindji people.

I was elected by the Darwin wharfies to attend the Waterside Workers Federation's All Ports Conference in Sydney as a fraternal delegate.

My contribution to the conference was to report on the Wave Hill walk off with reference to the active support by Darwin Waterside Workers in maintaining supplies and to highlight the problem of the Gurindji claim for some of their land and their decision to take some back by fencing it.

The Conference decided to recommend to the Rank and File Members, a $1.00 per member national levy to support the Gurindji claim for their land. This raised $17,000 dollars, which became the Gurindji "war chest" in their fight for land. The money was expended on wire and pickets through the Rights Council making purchases as required on behalf of the W.W.F.

Vincent had been approached by managers from Montejinni and Camfield stations, both privately owned, to supply stockmen at full wages. He decided to let some of the young stockmen go. They were skilled stockmen and enjoyed the life.

He was going to continue with plans to build at Wattie Creek and take back some of their own land.

The Gurindji who were working away on other properties would come back to Wattie Creek on the off-season for holidays and to visit family. He said a contractor had also come to employ some stockmen for contract mustering.

With the employment of some young stockmen on neighbouring properties, the strike was beginning to run its course, others wanted to return to employment. Unbeknown to Vincent, some men went back to work on Wave Hill Station. They were mostly Walpiri men with their women who were apparently employed by a contract musterer.

Vincent was adamant that the Gurindji would never go back to work for Vesteys and continued to maintain his determination that they would continue to live on Wattie Creek at Dagaragu.

In October 1968, the Northern Territory Administration increased the wages of all their Aboriginal employees to coincide with the introduction of full wages in the pastoral industry. This represented a victory for the Union and effectively ended the wage campaign.

By 1970 the Gurindji struggle had advanced beyond a claim for equal wages it had now developed to a claim for their ancestral land. All government efforts to dissuade them from this course of action were fruitless.

Over the next couple of years they continued to consolidate their occupational presence with the building of a store where provisions supplied by the Rights Council and from other donations were kept; The building of more substantial housing with the assistance of visitors from Southern Unions and an ongoing refusal to move into Housing Commission dwellings constructed on the 'Drovers Common'.

Long term plans included:

· The establishment of a herd of cattle and horses under their own brand.

· The establishment of their own school; Billy Bunter was to be their own school teacher.

· A water bore with water supply in every house;

· An ablutions block including proper washing facilities;

· An electricity supply;

· Some more vehicles and a workshop in which to service them plus training in vehicle maintenance.

Bandy had his own 3 ton Bedford which he was quite capable of maintaining although the Rights Council had arranged for a Darwin mechanic, Norm Philpot, to do a major engine overhaul and recondition

In March 1971,the Gurindji formed the 'Murramulla Gurindji Company' as a further action to press their claim.

In January 1972 The McMahon Government was considering the purchase of an area of land as a reserve and Vesteys was offering to surrender some of the pastoral lease but there was strong resistance from members of McMahon's Cabinet representing Pastoral and Mining interests. As a result of government intransigence the Aboriginal Embassy was established on the lawns in front of the National Parliament in support of Land Rights.

The December 1972 election saw the Whitlam Government elected on a policy supporting Aboriginal Land Rights. Gordon Bryant was appointed Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and was a strong supporter of Aboriginal Land Rights in perpetuity including mineral rights.

Early in 1973 the Whitlam Government established the Aboriginal Land Rights Commission and appointed Justice Woodward as Chairman. He had represented the Yirrkala Aborigines in 1970.

The Terms of reference required him to enquire into 'arrangements for vesting title to land in the Northern Territory'….including rights to minerals and timber.'

The July 1973 ALP Conference amended ALP policy in this regard and watered down the policy statement replacing 'mineral rights' with receiving royalties from mining on Aboriginal land.

In a cabinet reshuffle in October 1973 Gordon Bryant was replaced as Minister for Aboriginal Affairs by Senator Jim Cavanagh.

Justice Woodward visited north America late in 1973 seeking information as to how the Canadians had addressed American Indian Land Rights.

His 1974 report excluded mineral rights from Aboriginal lands on the basis `that the land should be subject to all laws normally applying to freehold land.'

And recommended that:

"minerals and petroleum on Aboriginal lands should remain the property of the Crown." This would have effectively removed Aboriginal Land Rights from the Federal election of the 18th May 1974.

With the election out of the way Prime Minister Gough Whitlam presented the Gurindji with leasehold title at Dagaragu in August 1975 nine years after the walk off. The occasion was almost an anti-climax but nevertheless a time for celebration and a media fest. The heroes of the strike such as Lupnagiari took it all in their stride.

The issue of leasehold title enabled the improvement of Gurindji housing and facilities and saw the beginnings of Vincent's vision of the Gurindji running their own station. In 1977 Vincent came to Darwin on one of his rare trips to receive recognition for his special contribution to the Australian Aboriginal People's struggle for justice and Rights in the award of the Australia Medal.

My visits to Dagaragu became less frequent although I maintained an ongoing interest with occasional trips when I could manage a seat on a visiting politicians flight or share a road trip over a now tarred beef road.

Clyde Holding, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs in the Hawke Government presented Freehold title in 1985 (?) on the occasion of another re-enactment of the walk-off.

In August 1986,Kerry Gibbs and I decided to resurrect the Bedford truck, which had been off the road for 6 or 7 years and take it down for old times sake.

I was disappointed to see helicopters mustering cattle and to learn the Gurindji were paid $50 a head compensation for stock destroyed in the T.B. & Brucellosis eradication campaign when there were serious doubts they were infected.

The enterprise was being run by accountants from Katherine and an appointed white manager who did not appear to consult with the Aborigines and was not implementing a training programme to teach the young men stock working skills.

I talked with Vincent about the possibility of creating employment for women and non-stock workers with a value-adding proposal to use their turn off to make a sun-dried meat product and export it to Asia instead of live cattle export.

We had come prepared with enough seasoning spices and vinegar to make a marinade and conduct a trial. Vincent was interested in the proposal so he sent off a couple of men to get a killer and we prepared about 100 kilos which we strung up on a makeshift "clothesline" of barbed wire.

After 3 days the product was suitably dried. I took a control sample back to Darwin, which I found quite edible 6 months later. I asked the Gurindji to harvest the remainder after 2 more days. I learned later from Victor that the product was considered very good. They ate it all.

I ran the proposal past someone in the Aboriginal Benefits Trust Fund but they were not enthusiastic. It would have to operate as a joint venture.

Vincent looked quite frail during that visit and sadly about 18months later in January 1988 ALP Senator Bob Collins offered me a seat in his charter flight to be present at Vincent's Funeral. During the flight I reflected on the stages of the struggle. From what had started as a fight for equal wages had grown into a National Movement for return of stolen Lands and a reassertion of Aboriginal Nationhood. This old Man in his quiet, gentle but firm stand could teach us all a lesson in solidarity.

He had become a National Aboriginal Leader.

I made a brief impromptu speech, which did not do him justice: some words of admiration for his strength of commitment and passed on a message of condolence from Frank Hardy. It was an honour to have known him and be considered a friend.

My old friend Vincent Lingiari, Gurindji Leader had become a legend:

"Freedom Day" as the walk-off anniversary has become known are occasions when I revisit where possible.

The last one in August 2000 saw the occasion celebrated with the unveiling of ten fabric banner size panels sewn by the Gurindji women with the guidance of Joanna Barkmann depicting the historic event.

There were two unveilings, one on the banks of the victoria river above the campsite and another at the NT University. I was invited to speak at the first one where I noted that Dexter Daniels had passed away in Katherine on Xmas Day 1999 without recognition of his special contribution to the Gurindji struggle.

I also expressed my disappointment that the Gurindji cattle venture was not thriving except for a small killer herd. The Gurindji lands are now being leased.

Vincent's vision of the Gurindji running their own station served to satisfy the aspirations of his contemporaries many of whom have now passed away.

But his legacy is still there in the freehold Gurindji country. It is in the hands of the Gurindji People to decide what they will do in their own time.

When the time comes it is incumbent on the nation to assist their economic advancement and social development as a significant gesture in the spirit of reconciliation. That will be a most appropriate way of saying 'Sorry'.