Ian Turner

INDUSTRIAL
LABOUR
AND
POLITICS

*The Labour Movement in
Eastern Australia*

1900-1921

Australian National University

Cambridge University Press

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1900-1921

IAN TURNER

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Industrial Labour and Politics is a new examination of some of the crucial questions of Australian labour politics—the relation of the industrial and political wings of the labour movement, the conflicts between Labor politicians and the extra-parliamentary organizations, and the part played by left-wing minorities in the movement.

This study is centred on the movement's formative years, the first two decades of this century, when the first Labor governments were formed and such 'settled policies' as the reliance on arbitration, the 'socialist objective', and control of the parliamentary parties by the party conferences, were first established.

As well as providing an extensive analysis of the Australian labour movement in these years, this book tells in detail, for the first time, some of the most remarkable episodes in the history of the movement—the general strike of 1917, the imprisonment of twelve Industrial Workers of the World for arson and conspiracy, the origins of the Communist party, the Labor split over conscription. The book is thus concerned more with the internal politics of the movement than with its place in Australian life and society as a whole.

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Industrial Labour and Politics

The Dynamics of the Labour Movement in
Eastern Australia, 1900-1921

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FOR DEBORAH, JUDITH, AND JOHN HENRY

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Monash University
January 1965

Abbreviations

A.C.P.	Australian Communist Party
A.C.S.E.F.	Australian Coal and Shale Employees' Federation
A.L.F.	Australian Labour Federation
A.L.P.	Australian Labor Party
A.M.A.	Amalgamated Miners' Association
A.M.I.E.U.	Australian Meat Industry Employees' Union
A.R.T.S.A.	Amalgamated Railway and Tramway Servants' Association
A.S.L.	Australian Socialist League
A.S.P.	Australasian Socialist Party
<i>Aust. Comm.</i>	<i>Australian Communist</i>
A.W.A.	Amalgamated Workers' Association
A.W.U.	Australian Workers' Union
B.I.C.	Brisbane Industrial Council
C.P.	Communist Party
F.E.D.F.A.	Federated Engine Drivers' and Firemen's Association
F.S.U.	Federated Seamen's Union
<i>Hist. Studies</i>	<i>Historical Studies Australia and New Zealand</i>
I.I.W.	International Industrial Workers
I.L.P.	Industrial Labor Party
<i>Inter. Comm.</i>	<i>International Communist</i>
<i>Inter. Soc.</i>	<i>International Socialist</i>
I.S.L.P.	Industrial Socialist Labor Party
I.W.W.	Industrial Workers of the World
N.S.W.L.C.	New South Wales Labor Council
<i>Parl. Deb.</i>	<i>Parliamentary Debates</i>
<i>Parl. Pap.</i>	<i>Parliamentary Papers</i>
P.L.C.	Political Labor Council (Vic.)
P.L.L.	Political Labor League (N.S.W.)
P.L.P.	Parliamentary Labor Party
<i>Rev. Soc.</i>	<i>Revolutionary Socialist</i>
S.D.L.	Social Democratic League
S.D.V.	Social Democratic Vanguard
S.F.A.	Socialist Federation of Australasia

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S.L.C.	Sydney Labor Council
S.L.P.	Socialist Labor Party
S.M.H.	<i>Sydney Morning Herald</i>
T.H.C.	Trades Hall Council
T.L.C.	Trades and Labor Council
T.U.C.	Trade Union Congress (or Conference)
V.R.U.	Victorian Railways Union
V.S.P.	Victorian Socialist Party
W.I.I.U.	Workers' International Industrial Union
W.I.U. of A.	Workers' Industrial Union of Australia
W.L.U.	Wharf Laborers' Union
W.W.F.	Waterside Workers' Federation
W.P.O.	Workers' Political Organization

A Note on Terms

THE LABOUR MOVEMENT has its own technical language, which must be used in any study of the movement because it describes phenomena and concepts which came into being only with the movement. However, this language is often used imprecisely; furthermore, the same word may mean different things to different people because of different political assumptions. So it may be useful to define at the outset the sense in which the most common of these terms are used here.

By the 'labour movement' is meant the whole complex of organizations which claim to represent the interests or the aspirations of the working class, as well as the individuals who belong to them or who speak in their name. Broadly, these are of two kinds, industrial and political. Industrial organizations combine workers in their character as producers; they are the economic organizations, the trade unions, whose primary concern is the wages and conditions of labour. The political organizations combine workers in their character as citizens and as voters, whether they stand for parliamentary action, insurrection, or the denial of all political action (which is itself a political act). Hence the 'industrial' and 'political' wings of the movement, 'industrial' action (strikes, boycotts, the withdrawal of industrial efficiency) and 'political' action (electoral campaigning, pressure group activity, parliamentary activity, propaganda directed towards other than industrial ends). The word 'labour' signifies the whole movement; 'Labor' signifies only the Australian Labor Party (as it was officially known from the 1908 Commonwealth Conference) or its various state forerunners—the Political Labor League (N.S.W.), the Political Labor Council (Victoria), the Workers' Political Organizations (Queensland), the United Labor Party (South Australia).

The term 'industrial unionism' has a special meaning: it is used to distinguish a trade union so organized as to include all the workers, regardless of their specific skills, who are employed in one industry and contribute with their labour to one product or a group of similar products. Thus, a building workers' industrial union would include all workers involved in the erection of buildings—carpenters, joiners,

plumbers, painters, electricians, tilers, plasterers, builders' labourers, etc.; a railway workers' industrial union would include all workers whose labour contributed to the provision of railway transport—train crews, signalmen, shunters, station crews, goods yard and workshops employees, permanent way maintenance staff, administrative staff. A union of this sort is contrasted with a 'craft union', whose members use the same tools with roughly the same degree of skill (for example carpenters, engineers, compositors, engine drivers) regardless of the industry in which they are employed, and with a 'mass union'—an organization of unskilled workers, either in one industry (for example builders' labourers) or in several (construction labourers employed in road-making, railway line laying, quarrying). A 'skilled worker' or 'craftsman' is one whose trade is sufficiently complex to require a considerable period of training to master it. In the period with which this book is concerned the term 'trade union' was commonly used to mean what is defined above as a 'craft union'; I have preferred to use 'trade union' in its present sense—that is as a general term for all working-class economic organizations, whether industrial, mass, or craft.

The validity of the concept 'working class' is often questioned. It is used here to describe an objective social category: the class of men and women who work for wages, as distinct from the employers of labour and the self-employed. The use of the term implies that this class has certain interests in common, 'class interests', which often conflict with those of the employers of labour, but it does not imply that all or even most of its members are always conscious of these interests. The class is not homogeneous: its members are divided economically by the industries in which they are employed and by the kind and degree of skill they possess, and each of these divisions has its own special interests. Class interests do not always prevail over such sectional interests; the interplay and conflict of these interests is central to this book. Wage-earners are also divided by their cultural affiliations; a consideration of these is, however, beyond the present scope.

Nevertheless, defined in this objective way, the term 'working class' seems sufficiently precise to permit its use; and there seems to be a sufficient community of character and interest among those so defined, and a sufficient recognition of this, to justify it. It is, however, true that the category is blurred at the edges—should white collar workers be included? professionals who are employed on salaries? foremen, managers, and other supervisors of labour? The only possible answer to this is, like the platypus, for some purposes yes, for others no. But the difficulty of drawing precise boundaries does not make it impossible to define the class.

The words 'revolution' and 'revolutionary' create some special

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problems. 'Revolution' is commonly used to mean a fundamental change in economic and political structure as well as to define the means by which such a change is to be brought about. For most of the period covered by this study (until the Bolshevik revolution) the word was generally used in the first of these senses, and I have so used it: that is, the 'revolutionaries' were all those who advocated a fundamental social reconstruction, whether by winning a parliamentary majority, by a general strike, or by an insurrection and the forcible seizure of political power. The contrast here is with 'reform' and 'reformist'—the policy of ameliorating working-class conditions by a continuing process of limited change which regulates the worker-employer relationship without transforming or abolishing it. Linked with this are the contrasts of conservative with radical and moderate with militant. 'Radical' is used to describe those who advocate policies involving substantial and rapid change, in contrast with those who sought slighter and more leisurely adjustments. This is a matter of degree and not of kind: what is a radical position at one time may be conservative at another. 'Militant' and 'moderate' describe the methods by which particular aims are to be accomplished: the former signifies industrial action rather than reliance on arbitration or legislation, an uncompromising attempt to win all that is demanded rather than to settle for a part, an attitude which asserts the clash of class interests rather than a community of interests. Like radical and conservative, these terms are relative rather than absolute; nevertheless, in a particular context they do serve to delineate trends within the movement as a whole.

Introduction

LABOUR HISTORY is history of a new kind: it introduces the concept of masses rather than *élites* as the moving forces in the historical process. This concept may be, and often is, denied by the proposition that the leaders of the labour movement are nothing but a new *élite*, taking their place in a Pareto-style 'circulation' and providing no reason to modify the general picture of a social *continuum* in which *élites* attain power, rule, and give way to other *élites*, using the masses in their drive for power and manipulating them when in power but allowing them little or no scope as historical agents.

One of the arguments of this work is that the limits of the actions of labour leaders are set by the masses of the labour movement—primarily the working class—in a way which distinguishes them from other *élites*. It is of course true that the actions of all *élites* are limited by the readiness of the masses to conform, however reluctantly, to their decisions, and are shaped to some extent by the prevailing climate of opinion. But the labour movement is considerably different: its primary concerns affect the masses of the movement very directly and immediately; these are matters on which the masses feel themselves competent to pronounce and act, if necessary without or even against their leaders. This is not to say that manipulation by the leaders of the machinery of the labour movement or of the opinions of its rank and file is not important in deciding how the movement will act; it is. But investigation of the labour movement suggests that the decision-making of its leaders is under a more direct and informed scrutiny, and is more subject to intervention from below and even to a direct action which cuts across or negates the intention of the leaders, than that of other social institutions. The labour movement is the institutional method by which the masses transform themselves from passive to active elements in society, from weights to be pushed around to social levers in their own right.

Labour history has a special attraction because of the high aspirations of the movement, which traditionally seeks not just to change governments but to change society. These aspirations can be qualified by the time-serving and place-seeking, the graft and chicanery, which

are endemic in labour movements; but because these aberrations involve a conflict of interests between the leaders and the rank and file, and because the structure of the movement is generally such that the latter can operate sanctions against the former, there is a continual tendency towards purification, towards the restoration, perhaps in new forms, of the original values. It is this concern with values, and the conflicts this engenders, which insists that labour history is almost necessarily partisan: not only are the historian's sympathies engaged, but his work affects present circumstances and is often written with answers to present problems in mind.

Labour history is concerned with modern industrial society—with the creation of a class of wage-labourers who, because of the private ownership of the means of production, have no rights over the opportunity to labour or the products of their labour; with the formation by this class of organizations to protect their immediate economic interests, to participate in government, to change the structure of society; with the formulation of a general theory of society and an ideology which at the same time explains their condition and guides and justifies their action.

This complex of organizations, the men and women who inhabit them, and the ideas which inform them constitute the labour movement. The character of the movement depends on the circumstances of its formation. If, as was the case in most of Europe, the working class is formed and begins to organize in conditions of political autocracy, the tendency is for the formation of political parties, illegally if necessary, to defeat the autocracy and to create the conditions for the formation of economic organizations, trade unions, which, because of their mass character and the necessarily public nature of their activities, could not long exist in defiance of the prohibitions of the state. In these circumstances the formation of trade unions is stimulated by the political parties as legal concessions are won. From this two things follow. First, the political party, formed for struggle against autocracy, tends to have a revolutionary ideology, although this may become a mere ritual as the party operates within a bourgeois democracy which it may have itself played a major part in creating. Second, the initiative within the labour movement rests with the political wing, while the trade unions, in so far as they take on a life of their own, tend to become a conservative force within the movement, at least so long as the political party remains in opposition and its revolutionary zeal is uncompromised by political alliances or the responsibilities of government.

On the other hand, the natural first move of the working class is towards economic organization, so that if the working class first begins to organize within conditions of an already existing bourgeois

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democracy, trade unions are formed before political organizations and stimulate the movement of labour into politics, at first as a pressure group and later as an independent working-class party—but one which is reformist and empirical in character, concerned with immediate legislative reform rather than revolutionary social reconstruction.

This has been the pattern in the English-speaking countries, but with important variations arising from the different circumstances of origin. In Great Britain, where the mass unions of unskilled workers were not fully developed and carried little weight in the movement while the old unions of skilled craftsmen had a traditional allegiance to Liberalism, and where there existed a relatively well organized and widely dispersed socialist* party (the Independent Labour Party), it was this party which inaugurated the shift from pressure group to mass labour party, enlisting the often reluctant support of the trade unions and cutting the programme of the new party to fit the traditional economic organizations. In Australia it was the new mass unions of the unskilled, influenced by socialists within their ranks, which moved for the formation of a mass working-class party; confronted with the need to win a more general support, this party too tailored its programme to craft union measurements and style. In the United States, craft unionists and socialists had independently attempted to inaugurate parties of labour, but cultural divisions inhibited the organization of the mass of unskilled workers, the working-class party was stillborn, and the development of the labour movement remained frozen for many years at the point reached by Australian and British labour sixty or seventy years ago, the trade unions operating as pressure groups within the existing party structure. A corollary of this is that the greater the trade union influence in the formation of the party, the more limited is its programme, theory, and objective: thus in Australia the party's programme and activities have been concerned almost exclusively with immediate reforms, particularly those of direct interest to the trade unions, whereas in Britain there has always been a stronger element of theory, a clearer socialist aspiration. It does not follow, however, that a union-oriented party is less militant than one with a stronger ideological orientation; on the contrary, given favourable economic circumstances, the former may well fight more vigorously for its objectives than the latter.

This book tells the story of the Australian labour movement over a limited but important period (roughly the first twenty years of this century) which saw the flowering of Labor Parties and the formation of the first Labor governments, a major change in the composition and character of the working class, the reconstruction of the trade

* This use of the word 'socialist' begs the revolutionary question posed by the Leninists. However, the word is used in this broader sense throughout this book.

unions, the development of industrial arbitration and other devices for regulating the conditions of labour, and the rapid spread of ideas of fundamental social change. It seeks to explain why the Australian labour movement developed as it did, and how and why it differed from labour movements elsewhere; it seeks to analyze the interplay of forces within the movement, largely in terms of the conflicts and contradictions between revolutionaries and reformers, 'ideologues' and machine men, politicians and trade unionists, and leaders and rank and file; it argues in general terms that the trade unions provided most of the impetus for change in the movement's policy and structure, that this impetus for change (in so far as it went beyond immediate trade union demands) originated with left-wing minorities, and that it succeeded to the extent that these minorities won support within the trade unions, which in turn depended on the response of workers generally to their social and economic situation.

The emphasis is on the movement in New South Wales. This State had the largest population and the strongest and most diversified economy, and it provided both the core of the movement and its most acute internal contradictions. The weight is also with the years of World War I and its aftermath, during which these contradictions came to a head. The result was a prolonged and hard-fought struggle which produced substantial changes in the movement and set new patterns of ideas, organization, and internal conflict which determined the character of the movement until the new upheaval in the years following World War II.

The central question is this: assuming that in Australia the labour movement has been the principal initiator of social change,* what causes the movement itself to change? Consequently, this investigation is concerned with the internal politics of the movement rather than with the place of labour in Australian politics generally. This has meant that many important questions have gone unanswered, but for those concerned with the politics of labour this is nevertheless a rewarding study.

* Professor H. Mayer has suggested that the commonly accepted image of the Labor Party as the party of 'initiative' and the non-Labor parties as parties of 'resistance' does not stand up to detailed investigation. (See 'Some Conceptions of the Australian Party System 1910-1950', *Historical Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 27.) I have not been concerned to consider this problem directly, but it seems to me that it arises out of a confusion about terms. Supporters of the theory think of 'initiative' in terms of mass democracy and social welfare; their opponents think rather of industrial innovation and the growth of a cultural *élite*. I hope it will be clear from what follows that I do not accept Mayer's interesting argument, and (even if obliquely) why.

Labour in 1900

THOSE WHO, in the late nineteenth century, observed Australian society through European eyes found the antipodes bewildering, often unpleasing; the native-born democracy found it an exciting challenge. Both were observing the same reality: the relative prosperity and enhanced status of workingmen, and the growing political influence of labour. For the Australian, the 'workingman's paradise' was a promise of the future, while for the visitor it was an apt description of the present; for both, what was happening in Australia was something new. 'It is to Australasia', remarked the Earl of Onslow in 1893, '... that we must look for an example of the manner in which political power is wielded by the best educated English worker under political and climatic conditions similar to, though more favourable than, those of the Mother Country'.¹ Whether one regarded this with hope or apprehension depended on one's temperament, or political belief, or social class.

Australian society was at that time unique in the situation and prospects of the working class. Three factors made it so. First, there was the peculiar development of the Australian economy, which created a working class whose composition and weight varied substantially from the patterns which had been established in the older countries of capitalism. Second, there was the strong bargaining position which the working class enjoyed because of the continuing high demand for its labour. And third there were separation and distance: the separation of the Australian colonies, each with its own economic structure in which grew labour movements whose institutions and policies differed in important respects; and the distance, the isolation of workers in primary industries and sometimes transport and construction from their city brothers.

The Formation of the Working Class

The privileged position of Australian workingmen derived from one economic fact, the chronic scarcity of labour in a rapidly expanding

economy in the decades which followed the discovery of gold. Between 1861 and 1900 the national product of the six Australian colonies grew approximately four-fold; the rate of growth was among the most rapid of its time.² New capital invested in Australia compared at its peak with that in the United States; a half or more of this capital was imported from Great Britain, while from a third to a half was used by governments for public enterprises and public works. Most new investment was concentrated in building, in railways and other government undertakings, and in pastoral improvements, all of which provided major employment opportunities for unskilled labour. All sectors of the economy shared in this growth, but primary industry expanded less rapidly than did other sectors—a consequence of the steady decline in gold production until the Western Australian discoveries in 1887—while manufacturing, especially in the years to 1891, was ‘by far the fastest growing segment of the Australian economy’.*

Manufacturing was, so the statistician Coghlan said, still in its infancy, most of those in this sector being employed ‘in works depending on the natural production of the country, or in what might be termed domestic industries—that is, furnishing the supply of goods which must of necessity be produced on the spot’.³ Nevertheless, secondary production was already highly mechanized and it employed a growing body of workers in factories and workshops of increasing size. Primary industry, on the other hand, was more highly developed than anywhere else in the world,† and served a rapidly growing export market. Because Australian grazing and agriculture developed within a market rather than a natural economy, and because alluvial gold was worked out fairly quickly on all the Australian gold-fields, while shaft or tunnel mining was from the beginning the rule on the coal-fields of New South Wales and in the silver-lead-zinc complex at Broken Hill, Australian primary industry moved early along capitalist lines and provided a major field of employment for wage labourers. Total trade turnover (imports and exports) trebled between 1861 and 1900, and this rapid expansion was the basis for a similarly rapid growth in the numbers and importance of transport and construction workers. Most of this great volume of trade flowed through the six capital cities of the colonies, which grew explosively as administrative

* The share of manufacturing in the net national product increased from 5 per cent in 1861 to 12½-15 per cent in 1881 (N. G. Butlin, *The Shape of the Australian Economy, 1861-1900*, pp. 9-11).

† *Per capita* production of primary industry, 1891-2: Australia (including New Zealand), £27. 3s. 4d. Compare U.K., £8. 2s. 10d.; U.S.A., £14. 2s. 7d. (T. A. Coghlan, *Statistical Account of the Seven Colonies of Australasia* (1893), pp. 312-13).

and commercial and later as manufacturing centres; accordingly, the building workers formed a major part of the working class.

The headlong pace of the first three post-gold decades was brought up short by the financial crisis of 1891-4 and the several years of drought which followed the crisis and delayed recovery. Unemployment rose sharply during the crisis years (but had fallen off by the end of the decade); the intense competition for jobs drove down wages in most industries, but this was not reflected in an equivalent fall in the standards of living of those in employment, since prices fell at about the same rate as money wages (see Appendix V). Manufacturing, which depended almost entirely on the domestic market, suffered especially. The rate of formation of new capital fell off by three-quarters, and the inability of governments to raise funds on the London money market severely restricted public works.

By 1900 production was back to the 1889-91 high point. However, this did not imply a full restoration of living standards, since population had risen by over half a million during the decade, so that *per capita* production was still well down. It was none the less a remarkable achievement: in forty years, the Australian colonies had built a highly efficient rural industry whose exports contributed largely (though in decreasing proportion) to the national income; they had created an extensive transport system to service primary production and trade; they had opened up important mineral deposits; they had absorbed a large inflow of immigrants without serious economic dislocation, thanks largely to the simultaneous inflow of capital; and they were well advanced in the transformation from a primary to a manufacturing economy, from a rural to a predominantly urban society.

Despite their inadequacy, the results of the censuses of 1891 and 1901 make it possible to build up a fairly accurate picture of the Australian working class as it was in that decade. The two largest and roughly equal occupational groups were those labelled 'Industrial' (embracing manufacturing, processing, building and construction workers) and 'Primary Producers' (agricultural and pastoral pursuits and mining): in the decade, these accounted between them for roughly six out of ten Australian breadwinners (840,000 to one million people out of a population which grew during the decade from 3.2 to 3.8 million) and it was in these groups, together with the smaller but rapidly growing transport and communications section, that the working class, apart from domestic servants and shop assistants,* was found.

* These two groups, while of considerable sociological interest, are not relevant to a study of the labour movement since they gave rise to no significant trade unions, although the special interests of shop assistants were widely canvassed during the successful labour agitation for early closing legislation.

The effect of the financial crisis was shown clearly in the very slight inter-censal increase in the numbers of those getting their livelihood from industry, compared with the substantial increase in the primary producers' group (see Appendix I). This did not reflect any permanent trend in the working class, however, for the proportion of employers and self-employed was much higher among primary producers than in industry; already by 1891 most workers were involved in secondary industry of one kind or another. What happened during the crisis years was that a large number of workers normally employed in industry 'went bush', either on their own account or under government pressure; many of these headed for the newly-opened fields on Western Australia's 'golden mile', but a large part went fossicking for gold in Victoria and for other minerals in New South Wales.* There were, nevertheless, large and increasing groups of workers involved in agriculture and the pastoral industry, the pastoral workers being heavily concentrated in New South Wales and Queensland, while the agricultural workers were more evenly distributed with the largest groups in New South Wales and Victoria. These constituted the Australian version of a 'rural proletariat'—that is, they were engaged in primary industry, remote from the cities and commercial and manufacturing centres. But the pastoral workers among them were quite unlike the British or European rural proletariat: they were not farm labourers scattered in ones or twos on small individual farms, accepting the rural values and difficult to organize; rather, they were itinerants, working in fairly large groups, with no permanent connections with their employers.† The agricultural workers, except for the fruit-pickers, were more like their European counterparts, while the miners, except on newly-opened fields or in times of depression, were overwhelmingly wage-labourers in large-scale enterprises. And these men were not in the main aspiring landowners or mine-owners, not since the working out of alluvial gold and the failure of the Free Selection Acts. The pastoral workers were scattered throughout the colonies; the miners were drawn into compact communities by the location of the natural resources—coal-miners almost entirely in New South Wales, gold-miners in Western Australia and Victoria, and other miners in New South Wales, Queensland, and Tasmania. However, pastoral workers, coal-miners and metalliferous miners were all homogeneous groups—that is, they were not divided along craft lines. Together with similarly homo-

* 'Self-employment' in gold and other metalliferous mining (i.e. fossicking) was a characteristic feature of economic depression.

† The Australian pastoral workers were at the time a unique group; the obvious parallels are American lumberjacks and harvest workers, but these did not emerge as cohesive groups until ten or twenty years later.

geneous groups in the transport industry they were the largest sections of the working class: industrially, but not at the turn of the century politically, they were the most important forces in the labour movement.

In secondary industry, in 1891, Victoria, with just over one-third of her breadwinners engaged in industry and employing two-fifths of all Australians so engaged, was the most highly industrialized of the colonies; ten years later, New South Wales claimed a greater number of workers in industry than Victoria, but not yet a higher proportion. Victoria owed her early lead to the rapid development of light industry, especially the clothing and boot trades, behind the tariff barriers first raised in 1866; in other light industries, in the metal trades, and in power Victoria was only slightly ahead of New South Wales, which led in building and construction. By 1901 the senior state had caught up with or passed Victoria in all the major manufacturing industries except clothing; this industry employed large numbers of female workers so that there was in Victoria a higher proportion of women in the work force than elsewhere.* Industry otherwise was not highly developed, except for large groups of metal-workers employed at the Port Pirie smelters in South Australia, which serviced the growing production of Broken Hill, and of meatworkers employed in Queensland in the newly opened export trade in frozen meat. Employment in the building trades and in rail and road construction was fairly regularly distributed throughout the colonies. Construction, however, showed the more sensitive response to the financial crisis; thus the proportionately higher number of such workers in New South Wales in 1901 was due to Labor pressure on the state government to absorb some of the unemployed in public works. Employment in transport was also distributed fairly regularly and was growing rapidly, in rail transport faster than in maritime or road.

Those employed in industry and transport (except for watersiders, seamen, carters, construction workers, Port Pirie smelter workers, and Queensland meatworkers) were more fragmented by craft divisions than were the pastoral workers and the miners; they were, however, concentrated in the cities, and (especially the more highly skilled workers in the metal, building, and printing trades) were often well organized. Because of this they exercised an influence in the labour movement, and particularly on the political wing, beyond their numerical strength.

The working class made up about two-thirds of Australian bread-

* Women as proportion of breadwinners, 1901: Australia, 21.7 per cent; Victoria, 23.3 per cent. The Tailoresses' Union, formed in Melbourne in 1882, was the first Australian organization of working women and probably one of the first in the world.

winners, while about one-sixth were self-employed. These were largely farmers, but there was a considerable group of skilled craftsmen scattered through a wide range of trades who were working on their own account, and a widely variable group of independent miners. About 10 per cent of breadwinners were employers of labour; the available figures on the size of factories suggest that most of these were small employers.

This description of the Australian economy and the working class suggests several general conclusions:

Firstly, the early development of the pastoral industry and mining on comparatively large-scale capitalist lines, primarily to serve the export market, and the consequent rapid development of transport created large and generally homogeneous groups of country-based unskilled workers who formed the new mass unions and came to play a major part in the organized labour movement.

Secondly, heavy industry had as yet barely begun to develop in the major industrial centres: consequently, the dominant force in the urban labour movement was the complex of smaller, craft-divided unions of skilled workers in the light industries and the building trades; this was qualified, however, by the presence of large groups of maritime and other transport workers.

Thirdly, once they are organized, unskilled workers tend to be more militant and to rely more on their industrial strength than skilled workers; consequently, social factors combined with geographical factors to turn the mass unions towards industrial methods of realizing their ends and the craft unions towards more moderate and parliamentary means.

Fourthly, the major exception to this division between mass and craft unions was the rapidly growing number of workers employed in rail transport. The fact that a large number of workers of a wide variety of skills were all employed by one employer in providing one service early suggested the formation of a new kind of organization—the 'all-grades' or industrial union. The social composition of the railway unions led them towards industrial action; while the fact that these unions were city-based, and that the employers were the six colonial governments, suggested the need for political action.

Finally, there was a wide variation, arising from natural as well as historical factors, in the size and composition of the working classes of the several colonies. This led to differing forms of organization and lines of action, to a tendency towards isolationism, and—in so far as the movement operated effectively at a national level—to the domination of the movement by the eastern states and particularly by New South Wales.

The Trade Unions

Although the Australian labour movement was regarded internationally as one of the most advanced in the world,* in fact there were in Australia in 1901 only about 100,000 trade unionists, organized in some two hundred separate associations, in a work force of over a million and a half (see Appendix II). The reputation of Australian labour rested more on its fortuitous success in raising living standards and reducing hours of work, and on its dramatic advance in politics, than on the extent of its industrial organization.

As everywhere where working-class organization was not suppressed, the earliest trade unions were those of skilled craftsmen, the first wage-workers to be differentiated by division of labour in the developing market economy. Their unions were designed to protect the interests of the craft by restricting entry through the apprenticeship system, by establishing wages and conditions of work appropriate to the craftsman's dignity, and by providing financial help in case of unemployment, sickness or death. These were such organizations as the engineers', stonemasons', carpenters', typographers', formed in the Australian cities from the 1850s and closely paralleling the British craft unions from which most of their members had come—sometimes, as with the engineers and the carpenters, even formally affiliated to the British unions. The craft unionists were exponents of the dignity of labour, setting standards of 'competency and good conduct' as well as high entrance fees for their unions; in return, they required of their employers recognition that the labourer was worthy of his hire, and wrote into their rules the minimum rates of wages for which their members would work. They were the progenitors of the 8-hour day, inspired more by their fervent belief in self-improvement than by the expectation of immediate economic advancement;† often they aspired to the economic independence involved in the transition from journeyman to master craftsman or small employer. Their method of enforcing their claims was first to enrol the members of the craft—and especially the best tradesmen—into their union, then to declare a minimum wage, and finally to withdraw labour from such of their employers as could not be persuaded to comply; the support of those who left their employment was the responsibility of those remaining in. Usually, success required that the unions were able to split the employers' front; once a number of employers agreed to conform to union rates and restarted production, all but the very biggest had to follow suit or lose their share of the

* This was not universal; a Marxist criticism was made, for example, by Georges Sorel, in 'A Socialist State' (1898), trans. P. Coleman, *A.P.S.A. News* (Australian Political Science Association, University of Sydney), Vol. 6, No. 3, pp. 1-4.

† It was common for unionists to offer to accept a lower wage in return for a reduction of hours.

market. Like their English counterparts, the skilled craftsmen were radical or liberal in their politics, often, in the Australian environment, with a strong leaning to protection. They favoured legislation for the universal 8-hour day, for employers' liability, the prohibition of 'coloured' immigration, and the establishment of institutions for the conciliation and arbitration of industrial disputes.

To secure such measures they formed parliamentary committees of their unions to lobby existing parties and to endorse candidates who were pledged to support the reforms urged by labour, but were left a free vote on all other matters before parliament. There was at first little in this of a specific class consciousness, in the sense of an awareness of group interests which necessarily conflicted with those of their employers. Rather they saw themselves as sharing with their employers an interest in the prosperity of their trade and a subjection to the blind movement of the market which was beyond the control of masters and men alike; what they demanded were only their just rights and a fair day's pay for a fair day's work, conditions which would be conceded by all but the most grasping and selfish, the 'bad' employers. They felt, however, a need for mutual support in times of trouble and mutual action to secure the desired reforms. Thus, Trades and Labor Councils (in Melbourne the Trades Hall Council) were formed in the major cities from the 1860s. These were concerned primarily to co-ordinate the action of their affiliates for the unions' economic demands so that resources were not strained by a simultaneous withdrawal of labour in several trades; to channel financial assistance to any union whose members had struck work; to present through the parliamentary committees a united voice to the colonial legislatures.*

Straddling the borders, an emergent consciousness of nation accompanied the growing intercolonial movement of goods and labour. This, along with the community of problems confronting workingmen, led the Labor Councils and their constituent unions to a series of irregular but frequent intercolonial trade union congresses, the 'parliaments of labour', which began in Sydney in 1879 and which, ten years later in Hobart, resolved unanimously that 'in order that the rights and the opinions of the working classes may be faithfully represented . . . every effort should be made to obtain direct representation of Labor in Parliament . . .'⁴—but by then a new unionism was making its presence felt.

Outside the craft unions (which accounted for perhaps a half of the recorded 97,000 unionists in 1901) there had developed, with the

* Not all craft unions accepted even this degree of common interest, however; unions in the metal and building trades, for instance, commonly preferred their own combinations to the more diffuse Labor Councils.

growth in the 1870s and 1880s of wage labour in the pastoral and mining industries and in transport, 'new unions' of the unskilled and the semi-skilled—unions of seamen and watersiders, of coal-miners and gold- and other metalliferous miners, of shearers and shed-hands, of construction workers and general labourers. These unions were comparable with the miners' unions in Great Britain, and indeed the early Australian miners' organizations leant heavily on the British example; but they were broader in conception, more far-reaching in their objectives, and more profound in their effect. In almost all ways they were the opposite of the craft unions. Based on unskilled and often itinerant workers, they were not exclusive in their membership (except in regard to Asiatics), admitting all who sought work in their industry and seeking, as far as their strength permitted, to enforce the union shop. As they grew, they concerned themselves less and less with benefits, preferring that 'a Union should be merely a protective trade organisation, and have nothing to do with the assistance of workers, except in the case of dispute'.⁵ Confronted by a single large employer (such as the Broken Hill Proprietary) or a powerful combination of employers (such as the Pastoralists' Union, the Shipowners' Federation, or the Coal Vend) the new unions were not able to use the divisive tactics of craft unionism. They relied rather on collective bargaining backed by the threat of mass strike than on the boycott of individual employers.* Their members had few connections with the traditional political groups and few inhibitions about forming a party of their own: 'the time has now come when Trades-unionists must use the Parliamentary machinery that has in the past used them'.⁶ And having no aspirations towards economic independence and feeling no community of interest with their employers, their horizons ranged beyond the protection of the social status and immediate economic interests of their members to the inauguration of the co-operative commonwealth.

These new unions were mass rather than industrial organizations—that is, they brought together the unskilled workers in one or a number of industries, rather than seeking to combine within one organization all workers, whatever their craft or degree of skill, whose work contributed to the one finished product. Except for seamen and watersiders and those construction workers engaged in metropolitan railway and tramway works, the new unions were country-based and generally held aloof from the city-oriented councils of craft unions. But, in the cities, there were as well organizations of the unskilled

* This is over-simplified: both the Amalgamated Miners' Association and the Amalgamated Shearers' Union in their early years used individual boycott tactics, but these were outmoded by the formation of tightly-knit employers' organizations, a process which was developed much more effectively by these employers than, at this time, in manufacturing industries.

workers connected with the various skilled trades—ironworkers' assistants, builders' labourers, ship painters and dockers; these, however, tended to model themselves in constitution and methods of action on the craft unions with which they were directly associated and with which they were joined in the Labor Councils or the trades combinations. Similarly, as increasing mechanization replaced skilled craftsmen with unskilled process workers in light manufacturing industries such as the clothing and boot trades, their unions tended to continue the traditions of their craft predecessors.

Among the new unions, the Australian Workers' Union was pre-eminent both in political influence and in industrial strength. Formed in 1894 by a merger of the Amalgamated Shearers' Union and the General Labourers' Union (the organization of shed-hands), it set its sights high: 'Realising that all workers, no matter what their occupation or sex may be, have a common interest, the A.W.U. aims at embracing all within its ranks.'⁷ This grand gesture recalled Robert Owen's Grand National Consolidated Trades Union and anticipated the One Big Union; but at the time and for years later the A.W.U.'s membership was confined to workers in the pastoral industry in the three south-eastern colonies. (Parallel organizations of shearers and shed-hands operated in Queensland.) Even so, the A.W.U. was already Australia's largest union: the Shearers' Union alone had claimed a membership of 20,000 in 1890, on the eve of the great strike which temporarily crippled Australian unionism. By 1900, the A.W.U.'s membership had fallen to 8,000, partly as the result of the strikes of 1891 and 1894, but more, perhaps, because of the drastic decline in the Australian sheep population during the years of drought. From the turn of the century membership rose rapidly.

The A.W.U. took its politics seriously. Aiming 'to endeavour by political action to secure social justice' and 'to gradually replace the present competitive system of industry by a co-operative system',⁸ the union taught its members—in the words of W. G. Spence, its President for thirty years—that 'to vote straight for Labor candidates is as necessary as to act straight in regard to Union rules and conditions industrially. The working man who supports any candidate for Parliament opposed to a Labor candidate is considered as politically black-legging on his class.'⁹

In these respects—non-exclusive membership, political aims, and the use of collective bargaining and the mass strike—the A.W.U. was close to industrial unionism, but its structure inhibited development in this direction. Inevitably, since almost all its members were itinerants, the basic unit was the geographical rather than the work-place branch. Shed meetings had the right to submit resolutions to the union's annual conference, a right which was fully exercised as the shearers devoted

many of their leisure hours to discussing the affairs of the union; but the delegates to the conference were elected from the regional branches, and the union was administered by the branch secretaries and organizers who, because they were almost the only channels of communication between the union and its members and between the members themselves, generally managed to dominate the conference. This bureaucratic structure, superimposed on a scattered, roving membership, was at the same time a broad highway of political preferment for the officials and a constant cause of irritation and frustration to the radical minority among the rank and file.

In contrast to the A.W.U., the miners' organizations, both coal and metalliferous, were closer to industrial unionism. The coal-miners' unions were centred on the pits, each mine having its own lodge which operated as a direct democracy, common problems and action being the concern of loose federations of lodges which were very responsive to rank-and-file opinion. Throughout these years (and indeed until 1909) the characteristic miners' action was the pit stoppage, although strikes which affected whole districts were not unknown.

The organizations of gold- and other metalliferous miners were initially more highly centralized than those of their coal-fields comrades: by 1893, 23,500 Australian and New Zealand miners were united in the Amalgamated Miners' Association for purposes of mutual aid, the union being organized into colonial districts and local branches to determine local policy and rates of pay; shortly after this, however, the 'conservatives' in the Association broke the union up into its component parts.¹⁰ Unlike the coal-miners' organizations, the A.M.A. at first sought to recruit all who worked in or around the mines, including such skilled men as the stationary engine-drivers; these, however, formed their own association and left the A.M.A., not without some bitterness on both sides. The miners' unions, then, were mass unions, embracing nearly all the men employed in mining, both underground and on the surface, but there remained small groups of skilled workers (shot-firers, engine-drivers, carpenters, and others) who owed allegiance to the craft unions and remained an obstacle to industrial unionism.

The new unions did not share the preoccupation of the craft unions with status and privilege; they could see little value in the Labor Councils, whose constitutions provided for a maximum representation from unions of two or three delegates which could be reached with a membership of a few hundred. But there was among new unionists a consciousness of their identity as a class. 'We are all mutually dependent upon one another', said the preface to the A.W.U. rules. 'Alone, we can agitate; organized, we can compel.'¹¹ The pattern for new-unionist confederation was set by the Queensland Shearers' Union; in 1889, the Q.S.U. formed the Australian Labour Federation, the first plank in

whose platform was 'The Nationalisation of all sources of wealth and all means of producing and distributing wealth'.¹² Smarting from their defeat in the Maritime Strike, the new unions attended the 1891 Inter-colonial Trades Union Congress in force, determined to perfect their organization and to challenge the hold of the employers on the machinery of government. The 1891 Congress affirmed that 'class questions require class knowledge to state them, and class sympathies to fight for them', and urged the extension of the A.L.F. throughout the Australian colonies and New Zealand to secure 'unity of purpose and action', an essential element of which was the direct representation of labour in parliament.¹³ The Sydney Labor Council responded by re-forming itself in 1894 as a District Council of the A.L.F. and incorporating the unions of coal-miners; but elsewhere the call went unheeded.

Alone among the unions at the end of the century, the organizations of employees of the government railways were, in conscious aim, industrial unions. Known as all-grades unions because they purported to cover every railwayman, no matter what his position or degree of skill, they were the first example of the sort of union that, two decades later, was widely canvassed as the final solution of all labour's troubles. Because the railways unions demonstrate so clearly the problems inherent in industrial unionism, their character deserves more detailed consideration.

Between 1891 and 1901 the number of employees in the six colonial railway systems increased from 21,000 to 33,000, most being in Victoria and New South Wales. This was the largest concentration of workers in any Australian industry. All-grades unions were formed in Melbourne in 1884 (the Victorian Railway Service Mutual Association, later the Victorian Railways Union) and in Sydney in 1886 (the Amalgamated Railway and Tramway Servants' Association); they aimed to enrol all railwaymen from senior executives, through engine-drivers, clerks, fitters, porters, signalmen, to labourers in the goods yards and on the permanent way. This range of occupation and status created a diversity of attitudes which from their earliest days beset the all-grades unions with difficulties.

The railways staff men saw themselves first as career public servants; their immediate concern was the management of the largest enterprises in the colonies, and their interests seemed remote from those of the thousands of unskilled labourers and even the highly trained craftsmen of the running grades and workshops. They tended to be conservative in politics and to abjure industrial action, and their officers' associations reflected these attitudes. The running grades employees—engine-drivers and firemen, conductors and guards, shunters and signalmen—were also career railwaymen; most of them had joined the service as boys, had

been trained to skilled and reputable jobs, and expected to see out their working lives in the railways. Like the officers, they often thought of themselves first as public servants with an interest and a pride in keeping the trains running; many of them would have nothing to do with the all-grades unions, preferring to belong to their own sectional associations which were generally moderate both in their demands and in their methods of action. The workshops, in which rolling stock was constructed and serviced, and the maintenance depots, which looked after railways property, employed all kinds of skilled workers—among them electricians and engineers, carpenters and coachbuilders, bricklayers and boilermakers—for all of whose callings there were craft unions. Unlike the running grades employees, these men were not 'married to the service': alternative employment was available in private industry, and here opposing pulls operated. Many of the skilled craftsmen accepted the railways as a career, and with it the all-grades union; but others were dissatisfied with the lower wages which prevailed in the service (governments and commissioners habitually claimed that these were offset by greater security of employment), and felt that the craft unions were in a better position to enforce uniform pay for comparable work. For their part, the craft unions resented the intrusion of all-grades unions into their field of recruitment. The wide scatter of railwaymen through the countryside—particularly station crews, gate-keepers, and permanent way fettlers—created a special problem, that of the moderating influence within the union of men who were often drawn from, and continued to live in, a farming environment. Sometimes these men were centres of radicalism in the countryside; but often they carried a rural caution and conservatism into the councils of the union. In the cities, on the other hand, the thousands of labourers in the workshops and goods yards and on the permanent way were the breeding ground for railways militancy; as with all unskilled workers, labour mobility was high whenever jobs were plentiful, and these men showed scant respect for the railways as a career and less for the government as a boss. Often they grew impatient with the moderation of the career railwaymen and acted on their own initiative, threatening to break away altogether when the union did not respond to their demands. With the permanent way employees a different question arose: should a line be drawn between those employed permanently on repairs and those taken on temporarily for particular construction works, thus demarcating the railways unions from those which claimed to cover construction workers generally?

The typical problems of industrial unionism were the seeming clash of interests between staff men, skilled craftsmen, and unskilled workers; the wide range of attitudes to political and industrial affairs, which tended to hold the whole union back to the pace of its most moderate

section; the claims of the craft unions to the allegiance of the skilled men; the uncertainty about the boundaries. Nowhere else perhaps did these problems appear so acutely, but they were the counterweights which checked and finally reversed the swing towards industrial unionism between 1910 and 1920.

The financial crisis, the years of drought, and the defeats suffered by miners, shearers, watersiders, and seamen in the great strikes had a devastating effect upon the trade unions. There had been setbacks before but they had been short-lived. Now, for the best part of a decade, the labour market was over-supplied; working-class living standards and organizations suffered accordingly. The available official statistics show only that, while wages and employment fell and then recovered during the decade 1891-1901, prices slumped even more, so that real wages—even allowing for unemployment—actually rose; and that, while trade union growth had almost stopped in the early years, by the end of the decade it had picked up again, so that there was a substantial expansion (about 75 per cent) of trade union membership, bringing the total in 1901 to nearly 100,000.*

The motif of the great strikes of 1890-4 was 'freedom of contract'—that is, the refusal of the employers to recognize the authority of the unions to bargain collectively for the wages and conditions of work of employees. In conceding defeat, the unions also conceded their inability, at least for the time, to have any effective voice in the determination of wages. Throughout Australia the trade unions were confronted with the employers' demand that wages must come down, and willy-nilly they had to accept it; as existing wage agreements expired, the unions of shearers, miners, watersiders, seamen, building workers found that they could no longer enforce their rates, and their organizations declined, sometimes collapsed. Attempts to restore the workers' bargaining position proved futile. Land was made available for selection and for the establishment of labour colonies, but few selections were taken up and the labour colonies were a dismal failure. The London money market had dried up and there were no funds for public works. Governments helped the unemployed to leave the cities and go fossicking; but, as fast as they left, out-of-work bushmen flocked in to take their places. Demands for legislation to compel employers to negotiate on wages and to abide by agreements once they had been made were resisted by governments or rejected by property-franchised upper

* These figures do not, however, reveal the full picture. The deep troughs of the depression were 1893-4 and 1897-8, for which years there are no index numbers; the unemployment figures are far from comprehensive. The early figures for trade union membership are almost certainly considerably understated, which suggests a much greater fluctuation than the figures show.

houses. Only the Western Australian gold discoveries, which attracted over 120,000 people between 1890 and 1899, largely from the eastern states, saved the country from complete disaster; for, by the time the miners began to drift back east, trade was beginning to pick up and the worst of the depression was over.

The corner was turned after the drought of 1896-7, and recovery, once it got under way, was 'speedy and remarkably complete',¹⁴ so that, by 1900, the *Worker* could say:

The maritime Unions are regaining their old position, and nothing can stop them doing so but their own mistakes. Shipowners cannot do without Union men so long as Union terms are reasonable. The Newcastle coal-trimmers won recognition last week with hardly a struggle. The Sydney carpenters are winning without much trouble their reasonable request. In Gippsland, the coalminers are moving. In the back country, the A.W.U. asks the old shearing rates, and will fight shed by shed in the old guerilla fashion if the P.U. [Pastoralists' Union] should refuse to confer. The tide at last is turning to the working man. It is not at present possible to rake up hordes of unemployed to break down the Union organizations.¹⁵

Throughout Australia workers began to regroup their forces and to demand the restoration of their former condition. The A.W.U. gained 5,000 members in the 1900-1 season; despite the cautious view of General Secretary Donald Macdonell that the union had 'not the means nor the membership to enter upon a general strike', the pastoralists' organization, although it still refused to negotiate with the union, could no longer restrain its members from unilaterally granting the union rate.¹⁶ Sydney carpenters were able to get their wages back to 9s. a day in 1899, and, after a lengthy strike against recalcitrant employers, to 10s. a day in 1900. The coal-miners, by threatening a general strike, succeeded in persuading the owners that the world market would stand a rise in price, and that they could then afford to restore to the miners the old rate of 3s. 6d. a ton. Seamen met shipowners in a conference which agreed to important improvements in conditions of work and an eventual restoration of the last 10s. of the £2 (per month) which they had lost in 1893. Plasterers, bricklayers, and other building workers, railway navvies and other construction workers, began to reform their unions and to force their wages up—generally to 7s. a day for labourers, 9s. to 11s. a day for skilled workers.¹⁷ In Sydney the craft unions, which had in 1894 dissolved the Labor Council to form the Australian Labour Federation, finally decided that the demands for help from the miners' organizations were too heavy to be borne; they 'regretfully withdrew' from the A.L.F. and re-formed the Labor Council, immediately embarking on a vigorous programme of organizing among

workers in the electrical trades, the boot trades, the tramways, and other industries.¹⁸ The Melbourne Trades Hall Council appointed an organizing committee to assist in the formation of unions in those trades which could claim wages boards, newly provided for in the legislation of 1896—among them the boot trades, coachbuilders, painters, and gas stokers.¹⁹ Wharflabourers helped to organize coal lumpers and carters; typographers began to organize the letterpress machinists; the metal trades societies assisted the unskilled ironworkers to form a union. In Queensland the Australian Labour Federation was working vigorously to renew its strength; in South Australia fifteen unions had voted in favour of an interstate labour federation; in New South Wales the A.L.F. had become the central organization of the miners; in the A.W.U., the first moves were being made to merge the union with its Queensland counterpart. Unemployment was falling, wages were rising, the unions were re-forming; with the new century, a spirit of aggressive confidence was in the air.

The Labor Parties

For those in Europe who had been led by the poverty and insecurity of wage-labour and the gulf between masters and men to a socialist critique of the existing order, the realization of their proposed alternative was necessarily a political act—but what kind of politics? At first it had seemed self-evident that co-operation in production and an equitable distribution were so much more rational and just than the barbarities of capitalism, that all they needed to do was to sow their ideas widespread and their harvest would be assured. But the ground was infertile and the going was hard. Then, as the skirmishes of isolated groups of workingmen spread out into conflict with employers as a class and with the machinery of state, and as the Marxian concepts of the class struggle and the destiny of the proletariat as the grave-digger of capitalism came to take a central place in radical thought, the socialists reached a new understanding: the starting-point for their politics must be the establishment of close bonds between their ideas and aspirations and the organizations created by workingmen to protect and advance their economic interests. Out of this understanding grew the political parties of the working class.

In Australia it was the trade unions which made the leap from support for working-class candidates, who were expected to press trade union demands but who otherwise had a free hand in parliamentary affairs, to an independent working-class party; the socialist organizations trailed along behind. This suggests the most difficult of all questions concerning

Australian labour: why, in this country alone, did the political labour movement develop in this way?*

The answer lies in the confluence of new organizations and ideas with economic crisis and the bitter class war of the great strikes, set in a social environment which had created high expectations among Australian workingmen and a political environment which had given them the right to organize and the right to vote. Together, these elements created a situation in Australia in 1890-1 which was without parallel.

The necessary condition for a mass working-class party (as distinct from a socialist sect or a trade union pressure group) is a consciousness of community of interest within the working class, and of conflict of interest with the employing class. Such a consciousness is more likely to develop among unskilled than among skilled workers: in Australia from the 1880s the unskilled, organized in the new mass unions, formed the largest units of the labour movement, and it was they who bore the brunt of the 1890s strikes. The breadth of the struggle (it was thought of as a 'universal' strike) and the intervention of governments demonstrated that this was more than an argument between particular employers and employees—that it was a war between Capital and Labour;† and this was in harmony with the preconceptions which many of the leaders of new unionism brought to the strike from their acquaintance with the teachings of socialism. Already—a fortnight before the outbreak of the maritime strike on 16 August 1890—the Australian Labour Federation, as yet operating only in Queensland, had, under the influence of William Lane and other disciples of the American socialist Bellamy, adopted a programme of state ownership and operation of industry, 'the Reorganisation of Society upon the above lines to be commenced at once and pursued uninterruptedly until social justice is fully secured to each and every citizen',²⁰ and similar ideas were held by many of the leaders of new unionism in New South Wales. When the Defence Committee, which was dominated by the unions of seamen and shearers, came to write its post-mortem on the strike defeat, it was natural for them to conclude that

once the worker determines—as he has determined—that the very basis of modern industry is antagonistic to his welfare—once he questions the right of any man to interpose a partition between

* In these years developments in New Zealand were very similar to those in Australia, and the following generalizations can be taken as applying to 'Australasia' as a whole.

† Compare the earlier comment of the Seamen's Union when refusing to man ships during a waterfront strike in 1886: 'We are compelled to take this course . . . owing to the struggle having assumed a new phase, viz. Capital v. Labor'. (Quoted by B. Fitzpatrick, *A Short History of the Australian Labor Movement*, pp. 57-8.)

himself and the fruits of his labour—he must set about the work of reform where it seems that reform can alone be obtained—and that is in Parliament

and to aspire to the overthrow of the competitive system.²¹ But when it came to translating this aspiration into practice, it worked out rather differently.

The Paris Commune, which was already providing the basis for the revolutionary strategy of European Marxists, had no significance for Australian labour; there seemed to be no barrier to the workers assuming control through the ballot box of the organs of government and no discontinuity between social reform and social reconstruction. Thus, when the A.L.F. demand that the workers should receive '*the full benefit* of their share of the common toil'²² was carried into the electorates with the formation of Workers' Political Organizations, it was transmuted into 'any measure that will secure a *fair and equitable return* to labor';²³ and likewise the inadequacy noted by the Defence Committee in the traditional trade union objective 'to get as much wealth for the workers as present conditions will admit of'²⁴ was carried through into the 1891 platform of the N.S.W. Labor Electoral League.²⁵ The early labour platforms were, as has often been said, a rag-bag of immediate demands, uninformed by any coherent theory and reflecting the preoccupations of the various strands of the new political movement. These ranged from radical democratic policies in the direct line of descent from Chartism to land reform as suggested by Henry George and various measures for the regulation of the conditions of labour.

It was not, however, merely a matter of the inadequacy of the socialist theories of the day: behind the translation of revolutionary ambition into the piecemeal reforms of the labour platforms there were real conflicts of interest and purpose.

For the mass unions the first purpose of parliamentary representation was to prevent the employers using the machinery of state against the unions; beyond this, it was to be the means of social reconstruction. But, as the unions suffered defeat after defeat, they turned in desperation to political action to do what they could no longer do industrially—to force the employers to the conference table and thus safeguard the conditions achieved over the last three decades.

This shift in concept was further complicated by the circumstances under which parliamentary representation was first achieved. Although the independent working-class party was inspired by the mass unions, with their socialist inclination, these were largely country-based and lacked the effective day-to-day contact with the centres of government which was possible for the city-based craft unions. It was therefore the craft unions which did most of the practical work in launching the new

parties, and their outlook was different. They were concerned to use parliament as a defensive weapon against the employers; but equally they were eager to insulate themselves against the disastrous consequences of mass strikes. Consequently, while the mass unions saw parliamentary action as complementary to industrial action, and were insistent upon strengthening the trade unions to prepare them for even more general strikes,* the craft unions saw political action as a substitute for the strike† and sought the establishment of machinery for conciliation and, later, compulsory arbitration. There was, further, a clear division of interest over the fiscal question: the shearers and the miners were engaged in producing for the export market, and so tended to be free-traders or at least indifferent; while the manufacturing workers were often producing in competition with imported goods, and were solidly protectionist.‡ And on top of this there was the special interest of those unions whose members were employed by government in using the parliamentary process to force the governments to accept trade union conditions.

It was a foregone conclusion—as the radical wing of the Australian Socialist League was quick to point out—that any party which put its hopes in electoral victory rather than a revolutionary crisis would soon lose any socialist flavour it might have had. Any organization which seeks a mass membership and a regular popular following tends to whittle its programme down to those elements common to its potential supporters and the minimum needed to maintain its separate identity. This was a universal problem. In England the Independent Labour Party tried to solve it by proposing a platform for the new Labour Party which did not go beyond such policies as were acceptable to the trade unions while continuing its independent socialist propaganda; finally, the I.L.P. was swallowed by the monster it had created. In Russia the Bolshevik faction of the Social Democratic Labour Party did solve the problem by insisting, against the Menshevik desire for a mass labour party, on the revolutionary purity of a hierarchical vanguard, which established its mass influence by winning the leadership of such

* Cf. the Defence Committee Report: 'It is impossible for independent local organizations to conduct a general strike with success. Some form of federation is imperative' (Ebbels, op. cit., p. 151).

† Cf. J. D. Fitzgerald at the declaration of polls at West Sydney in 1891: 'I ask you, which do you prefer; the strike or the ballot box?' The contemporary report says: 'Thousands of voices shouted "The ballot box!"' Fitzgerald replied: 'The choice is a right one.' (T. R. Roydhouse and H. J. Taperell, *The Labour Party in New South Wales*, p. 19).

‡ Thus the A.W.U. was prominent in the demand that the parliamentary party 'sink the fiscal question'; while Victoria, the largest manufacturing centre, was also the centre of labour protectionism. The N.S.W. city unions—those engaged in manufacturing—also tended to be protectionist.

organizations as the trade unions; but this solution necessarily anticipated the future development of a revolutionary situation. In Germany the Social Democratic Party sought an answer in a programme binding on all its members which expressed also the philosophy of the party, and the affiliation to the party of a variety of mass organizations; but the programme was subject to re-definition, and the mass affiliates (notably the trade unions) emerged as rival leadership centres within the party.

Even if these European experiences had pre-dated the formation of the Australian Labor Parties and so been available as models, they would scarcely have been relevant, for the Australian organization was extemporized to meet a rapidly changing situation; its progenitors were the trade unions, whose purposes were various; it had no philosophy from which its programme was derived, but rather proceeded from the particular to the general—to a collection of ethical catch-cries, subject to an infinity of interpretations.

Associated with this was an imprecision about the nature of the organization: was it a 'class party' or was it not? The early documents were clear enough: what was required was the representation of labour as such, by men who would scorn to play politics and who would regard parliamentary life as 'a real and perhaps bitter warfare, at all events a life into which no man must enter who does not love the Cause before himself . . .'.²⁶ But this straightforward class approach was soon blurred by ideas of community and nation. There was a lot in this of the desire to find an effective counter to the anti-labour complaint that the Labor Parties were concerned only to promote 'class legislation', and of the hope of convincing the electors that the platform had something for everyone; but there was more to it than that. Writing late in life of his early and continuing attachment to the Labor Party, the one-time parliamentarian Randolph Bedford said: 'I belong to the Labor Party because it is the only Australian party there is. All others are Imperialist and Imperialism is the real enemy of Australia.'^{*} This was a common attitude in the party from its foundation; it led to such 'national' policies as the New Protection and White Australia (although these were also justified in terms of the immediate economic interests of the working class). At the same time, there was the claim that Labor stood for the community as a whole, against the anti-Labor parties whose concern was to protect only the interests of employers and landowners: it was not just, as Labor men argued, that it was doubtful whether the term 'class' could be applied to the 80 or 90 per cent of the community whose interests Labor claimed to represent,²⁷ but that some went so far as to reassure those to whom it had been assumed Labor was hostile

^{*} *Naught to Thirty-three*, p. 248. 'Imperialism' here meant the British interest in Australia, and not the newly-acquired Australian interest in New Guinea.

—thus W. G. Spence, paying a doubtful compliment to Thomas Price, the first Labor Premier of South Australia: 'the rich anti-Socialists soon discovered that the Socialist Premier . . . could be trusted with big business affairs'.²⁸

The party suffered not only from lack of definition, but from the efforts of sectional enthusiasts to give it definitions which it could not carry. A new radical party acts as a magnet for all the community's lost causes, especially if it has no clearly defined philosophy; and almost everyone with an axe to grind found room at the Labor whetstone. The single tax on unimproved land values, racial purity, the reform of the liquor traffic, the nationalization of credit, the initiative, referendum and recall—all had their devout adherents and all found a haven in the Labor platform, with little regard for significance or coherency.

However the party was to be defined, its electoral ambitions automatically involved it in a new series of contradictions. In the initial stages it was sufficient that the trade unions, whether mass or craft, should themselves state a political programme, select candidates who would espouse it, and campaign in their support. But the early and striking successes at the polls created four problems: the need for a permanent electoral organization based on geographical rather than occupational divisions; the place in the party of individual supporters who were not trade unionists, whether these were self-employed artisans, small employers, or professional men (lawyers and journalists particularly), some of whom were attracted by the ideals of the movement and some by the prospects of a political career; the relation between the trade unions which created the political organization and the party machine which developed out of it; and the relation between members of parliament and the movement in whose interests they stood.

Finally, the party's position in parliament as a minority group dedicated to winning immediate reforms, rather than to the use of parliament as a forum for revolutionary propaganda,* quickly led it into compromise. Thus, George Black, one of the thirty-six Labor members elected to the N.S.W. Parliament in 1891, early announced that it was his party's intention to sell itself to the highest bidder, that it offered support in return for concessions, while the party leader, J. S. T. McGowen, four years later drew the obvious conclusion: 'In party warfare we may have to vote against some of our principles to obtain one of them in the course of legislation'.²⁹

It was this combination of factors—the lack of a philosophy of labour, the idea of a mass party, the conflicting interests of the various strata of the movement, the belief in parliament as an appropriate

* This tactic, particularly associated with the Bolsheviks, was common currency for revolutionaries in the late nineteenth century. In Australia, it was urged by radicals in the A.S.L.

instrument for reform and an effective substitute for industrial strength, and the necessities of electoral and parliamentary compromise—which determined the character of the Labor Party at the moment of its birth. Most of what follows is concerned with the development of these themes.

By 1900 there was substantial Labor representation in the parliaments of New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, and South Australia, but in different situations and with different results.*

The N.S.W. party, holding the balance of power between Protectionists and Free Traders, was playing the 'support for concessions' game for all its worth; there was, however, growing trade union dissatisfaction with the compromise involved in this tactic. In South Australia there was no question of bargaining: the party was closely aligned with the radical liberals, to whom almost all the policies adopted by the Trades and Labor Council in 1890 were acceptable. In both colonies the party claimed substantial results for its parliamentary tactics. In Victoria the party was not sufficiently represented in parliament to affect the course of legislation. Its main strength was in the city; what advances it could claim (such as the establishment of the Wages Board system) were more the result of extra-parliamentary pressure than of anything the party was able to do in parliament. In Queensland the striking Labor success of 1893 forced a coalition of the two older parties, and inaugurated the 'continuous' government which, under a variety of premiers, lasted until 1903, relegating the Labor Party to semi-permanent opposition. Because the Party was in opposition, it achieved little—only a long overdue electoral reform and an extensive Factory Act stood to its credit; however, it maintained a militant front, and there was little disagreement between it and the unions.

In these four states the structure of the Labor Parties was becoming clear. It had been firmly established that the Labor parliamentarian was not a free agent: he was bound first by his pledge to a programme drawn up not by the parliamentary party but by the movement outside, in which trade union influence predominated, and then to vote on all questions before parliament as the majority of his caucus determined.† His parliamentary strategy was likewise dictated by the movement, which was generally suspicious of any sort of official or unofficial

* Parliamentary parties had not yet been formed in the other two colonies.

† The original pledge (the 'compromise pledge' of 1895) specified adherence to caucus decisions on matters affecting the party's platform or the fate of the government; however, this was quickly extended in practice to all questions before parliament.

coalition, reluctant to allow Labor members to take office in non-Labor governments, and flatly against electoral pacts. To the anti-Labor parties, these external limitations appeared a denial of the central principle of parliamentary democracy—the responsibility of the member of parliament to his electors alone; while, to the labour movement, it was just this which was basic to Labor's conception of democracy: 'In the case of Labor, the electors frame the policy, and select the man they want to carry their banner to the polls. . . . It is a people's movement, controlled by the people; and so long as it remains true to that principle, so long will [it] continue to grow.'³⁰ But many Labor politicians were restless under the tight rein of party conference and executive, and were demanding a greater flexibility of parliamentary manoeuvre.

The parliamentarians were selected for candidature by, and directly responsible to, the local electorate organizations, which nominally consisted of all members of trade unions which contributed to party funds together with such other people as accepted the party platform and constitution. It had been established early in New South Wales that local organizations could not draft their own platforms, but were bound to the general party platform; and, while the selection of candidates was the prerogative of the local branches, it was generally agreed that the central executive had the right to refuse the party's endorsement. Inevitably, since most trade unionists belonged to the party by virtue of their union's affiliation rather than by their own act, control of the branches passed quickly into the hands of local politicians whose prime concern was to win elections and whose interest was therefore to moderate the party's policy.

The relative weight of the unions and the local organizations in the party machine was still unresolved by 1900, while the parliamentary parties had already established a strong position. Generally, the local organizations were content to go along with their parliamentary representatives, supporting them in their resistance to union claims; at times of party crisis, however, the unions could usually mobilize enough of their members to swing the branches over to their side. The parliamentarians had begun to separate out as a group with their own special interests, but many of them were still close to the unions from which they had come. In New South Wales and Queensland the unions of miners and bushworkers watched closely over the activities of the representatives of the mining and pastoral electorates; in Victoria the Trades Hall itself nominated the parliamentary candidates; in Sydney and Melbourne parliamentarians were well to the fore in the revival of unions from 1898. Policy initiative tended to come from the unions, parliamentarians were responsive to trade union pressures, and the unions generally conducted their negotiations with governments through the parliamentary parties. Consequently, the policies pressed most

actively by Labor Parties were those of direct and immediate concern to the trade unions. Regulation of conditions of labour in factories and of the closing hours of shops had been achieved in most of the colonies by 1900; there was pressure now for similar legislation to cover shipping, mining, and shearers' accommodation. Immigration restriction was often presented as a cultural question—the protection of a white civilization against corruption by inferior races; but there was a sound economic base for it in the strong Chinese representation in certain sections of Victorian manufacturing* and the continued importation of Pacific Islands labour into Queensland. Restriction of Chinese immigration had been generally accepted, but the Queensland government was standing firm on Kanaka labour; there was, too, labour agitation against the continuation of assisted migration from Great Britain at a time of considerable unemployment. Labour colonies had been advocated to offset unemployment, had been tried, and had failed; trade union pressure was now directed towards the responsibility of governments to find work for the unemployed. Government labour exchanges were demanded and—long before it became economic orthodoxy—the expansion of public works to counterbalance shrinking private employment. It was generally accepted by the labour movement that hours of labour should be fixed by legislation, but so far this had been done only for juveniles and women workers. It was moreover expected that governments should set an example to private employers by establishing union conditions in their own departments and on public works. Workers' compensation and old age pensions were urged as a means of relieving unions of benefit payments and providing a necessary measure of security for workers not covered by such benefits.

After the crisis years, restoration of wage levels was the major pre-occupation of the unions; by 1900, unionists had generally agreed that it was desirable 'to substitute the methods of reason, arbitration, common sense and judgement for the methods of brute force',³¹ but this consensus had not been reached without conflict and indeed was still not universal.

From the eighties, attempts had been made to introduce a system of conciliation, based on English models, and various Victorian unions were quoted as examples of the successful use of this method of settling industrial disputes. What was envisaged originally was a series of committees (at first *ad hoc*, later permanent) which would detach disputes from the employers and workers immediately concerned and settle them amicably around the conference table. In these terms, con-

* Chinese, although only 2 per cent of the population, in 1891 made up 20 per cent or more of the workforce in sixteen trades in Victoria, and averaged less than 40 per cent of the wages of Australian workers in those trades (T. A. Coghlan, *Labour and Industry in Australia*, Vol. IV, pp. 2318-19).

ciliation meant little more than the substitution of negotiation for direct action—which seemed important enough to the unions, because of the financial cost of strikes. But even this involved the formal recognition of unions by employers, many of whom still thought of themselves as ‘masters’ and their employees as ‘servants’ and resented any interference in the master-servant relationship; the initiative for voluntary conciliation generally came from the unions, the employers preferring to dictate, if they could, rather than discuss.

The early experiments with conciliation were not therefore very successful, and some union men began to ask the further questions: should not voluntary conciliation be extended to compulsory arbitration by an independent authority, and should not the arbitrator’s decision be enforceable? Neither unions nor employers, however, were prepared at first to accept this extension; both sides argued that arbitration would be self-defeating, as the losing side would inevitably feel aggrieved and would seek its revenge, while the employers added that the attempt to make arbitration enforceable would be unworkable—if ten or twenty thousand workers refused to accept the decision, were they all to be gaoled?—and some at least of the unions feared that arbitration would reduce their organizations to ‘mere shadows’.³² But when voluntary conciliation proved ineffective to avert the defeats of the 1890s, labour opinion consolidated behind compulsion, while the employers, entrenched in the upper houses of the colonial parliaments, consistently rejected or emasculated all legislation aimed in this direction. Only in Victoria was an Act put on the statute book—that of 1896, which established the Wages Board system.* It resulted from a combination of the unions and those employers who objected to ‘unfair competition’ against the ‘sweating’ employers whose activities had been condemned by a parliamentary committee of inquiry in 1893. The Wages Boards were gradually extended to new occupations, and Victorian unionists were generally satisfied with their operations, even urging their benefits on their comrades in the other colonies. Labour elsewhere, however, was at the turn of the century pressing hard for compulsory arbitration. The campaign was especially vigorous in New South Wales, where the Labor Party had turned one government out of office in 1899 because of its failure to prosecute arbitration legislation with sufficient vigour, and the Labor Council had begun a public campaign with strong backing from wharflabourers, coal lumpers, and miners, as well as typographers, engineers, and other craft unionists, to force the hand of the succeeding government on arbitration. The A.W.U. was likewise urging the early passage of the Arbitration Bill, and even expressing

* Boards consisted of elected representatives of employers and employees with an independent chairman, and were empowered to make a binding determination.

its 'surprise and disgust' that the parliamentary party had not been more forthright in its demands.*

Despite this preoccupation, arbitration was not discussed at the foundation conference of the Federal Labor Party, held in Sydney on 24 January 1900 in the *Worker* office, 'a longish, barn-like hall, low ceiled and not too well lighted; with bare floor and wooden benches and nothing of ornamentation. The gilded saloons are for the lords of the land and the machines . . .'.³³ The N.S.W. party had called the conference and provided the agenda and well over half the delegates; apart from the Victorians (two prominent Trades Hall men), the delegations consisted almost entirely of members of the colonial parliaments, among them J. C. Watson, W. M. Hughes, and W. G. Spence from New South Wales, all soon to be members of the House of Representatives and the first two future Labor Prime Ministers. There was unanimity among the delegates on the need for democratic reform of the Commonwealth constitution; the Queenslanders won support for their motion for the 'total exclusion of colored and other undesirable races'; and, after some discussion of whether it was really an issue of principle, a motion was carried in favour of old age pensions. This was the whole of the first Federal platform, a move by a group of N.S.W. protectionists for the inclusion of a tariff plank and another in favour of a citizen defence army being defeated.³⁴ It was found, as Spence later explained to the N.S.W. conference, that the only way to get a Federal platform at all was to leave out all those questions on which there was no agreement among the states. There was some comfort to be derived from this, however; as another of the delegates commented, 'the shorter the programme the more likely were they to secure united action'.³⁵

The new Federal party, with its preponderance of parliamentarians and its cautious programme, was a forecast of the respectability which increasingly characterized the parliamentary Labor Parties as they soared above their origins on the way to power.

The Socialist Critics

Outside the Labor Parties, more and more critical and increasingly dissociating themselves from the official machine, were the various factions of socialists. In the early days of labour in politics the socialists had taken an active part in the new political machine; but the first

* General Secretary D. Macdonell in the *Worker*, 1 December 1900. Sydney Labor Council Minutes for 1900, *passim*, record this general union support for arbitration. Almost the only opposition came from a small group of A.S.L. members on the Council—e.g. J. O. Moroney's comment that arbitration 'was only a palliative dealing with the effects of strikes and in no way aiming at the causes' (Minutes, 9 August 1900).

decade of parliamentary activity sorted out the ideologues from the medley of sincere reformers, careerists, and axe-grinders who came to dominate the Labor Parties, and the familiar paradoxes of the international labour movement were present in strength. Was it possible to achieve a revolutionary social reconstruction through an accumulation of limited reforms? Did the parliamentary process necessarily corrupt the purity of the socialist aim? Was the maintenance of a socialist objective consistent with the creation of a mass political party? Were 'reforms' or 'palliatives' (the choice of words was determined by political alignment) of any lasting value, or did they merely provide a temporary amelioration of conditions and serve only to sap the workers' revolutionary vigour? Australian socialists were, with the rapid rise of the parliamentary Labor Parties, the first to confront these puzzles in practice, and the solutions they came up with were as little satisfactory intellectually as they were in everyday politics; but this was not so much the consequence of a lack of powerful intellects as of the social environment.

Writing many years after the event, with the advantage of a recently acquired Leninist hindsight, E. H. Lane suggested that in Australia in 1890-1 there had existed a 'revolutionary situation'.³⁶ But in fact the conditions Lenin, the greatest practitioner of revolution, listed as being necessary for a revolutionary situation were not present; the government had not lost the support of all sizeable social classes—it was still able to govern; and, even if it had not been, there was no revolutionary *élite* capable of leading the mass of the people to revolt. What did exist was a revolutionary mood among the handful of convinced socialists which expressed itself not in practical measures for the seizure of power, but in writing revolutionary proclamations addressed to the striking workers, which were posted on the walls of Sydney at dead of night.

The history of the international labour movement suggests that the sort of desperation which produces popular revolt is more likely to arise in the early stages of industrialization than in a developed capitalism—and particularly so if the authoritarian government which is normal for this situation is disrupted by defeat in war. The Marxist prediction—of an ordered progress from feudalism to capitalism which would remain viable until social polarization and the impoverishment of the proletariat created a revolutionary crisis—did not work out. Once through the danger period, capitalism was able to meet working-class demands with concessions sufficient to inhibit the general development of a revolutionary consciousness; even in the depths of crisis, when capitalism bore down hardest on working-class living standards, it was possible to regard this as a temporary aberration rather than as a permanent condition. So in Australia in 1890-1: while the socialists

inveighed against the strikes and the crisis as final proof of the decay of capitalist society, the majority of unionists looked rather for the way back to the modest well-being which had gone before.

It was not for want of hope or hate or even hard work on the part of those who felt with William Lane that 'the whole wages system is rotten to the core and will produce social misery and want and degradation until we sweep it away';³⁷ nor even for the want of the right idea, the identification of socialism with the mass of the working class. When Lane, with his minute Bellamy Society and his editorial chair on the *Worker*, convinced the Australian Labour Federation that state ownership of the means of production was the answer to the workers' wrongs, he thought he had won: 'all active unionists are already conscious Socialists and . . . ninety-nine unionists out of a hundred are consciously or unconsciously so'.³⁸ But for the majority life was neither so bad nor so hopeless that they were prepared to make a revolution; what Lane's powerful personality and transparent sincerity of purpose had done was to convince a large part of the Queensland trade union leaders and a considerable minority of unionists of his cause, and many of these, once the strikes were beaten, followed him to Paraguay to 'write the history of humanity on the rocks of the Andes'.³⁹

It was not just that Lane, the revolutionary, overestimated his prospects and his achievements. There was an ambivalence in his own position which was common to all the socialist groups—how to reconcile revolution and reform? His departure for New Australia sidestepped the resolution of this conflict in Queensland: it worked itself out more fully in New South Wales, in the Australian Socialist League.

Founded in 1887 to carry out socialist propaganda and advocating a moderate immediate programme, the A.S.L. was, according to an early member, 'quarter philosophical anarchist, quarter physical-force anarchist, quarter state socialist, and quarter laborite'.⁴⁰ The anarchists largely left the League before 1890, and the collapse of the revolutionary optimism occasioned by the Maritime Strike and the success of the newly-formed Labor Electoral Leagues precipitated that conflict between 'possibilists' and revolutionaries which was already well known to continental socialists.

In 1897 a number of A.S.L. members who had remained in the Labor Party became convinced that the party was suffering 'inevitable decay', that 'the self-seeking adventurer [was reaping] the plums . . . while the earnest enthusiast fell in for all the hard and thankless work',⁴¹ and resigned; while, in the Socialist League, a number of prominent Labor politicians (among them W. M. Hughes and W. A. Holman) had become increasingly preoccupied with parliamentary affairs and had left the way clear for the revolutionaries to win the League's conference for a new constitution, manifesto, and programme,

and for a decision to run its own candidates at future elections. This was followed in 1898 by the formal adoption of a socialist objective ('The establishment of a Co-operative Commonwealth founded on the collective ownership of the land and the tools of production') and a ban on members of the A.S.L. belonging to any other political organization.⁴²

The League's influence was more extensive than its membership of a hundred or so would suggest; it was in open competition with the Labor Party for industrial support, its members were active in the formation and the affairs of quite a few unions,* and there was a small group of A.S.L. supporters in the Sydney Labor Council. From these vantage points the League condemned the majority support for arbitration and encouraged the workers to use militant methods to improve their wages and conditions of labour, while advising them that any advances they might make would be of strictly limited value and warning them that the professional politicians were interested in the trade unions largely as vote-catchers.

Meanwhile, on the political front, the League had drafted a platform for the coming Federal election which on the face of it contained little that was not common ground with the Labor Party.† Their point of departure from the official party was the belief that the Labor politicians, by betraying the independence of the working-class organizations, were compromising the socialist cause: 'Labor must be absolutely free to fight for its own emancipation. . . . [The worker's] great concern is not how he might temporise with the robber, not how he might persuade the robber to take a little less of what he produces; his great concern is rather how to get rid of the robber.'⁴³ This would be accomplished, the League believed, when Australian workers realized that it was 'their mission to effect [the] social revolution by means of an intelligent use of the ballot' and organized

a political party on the principles of the international working class movement as enunciated in the platform of the Australian Socialist League, to bring into existence at the opening of the Twentieth Century the only party that can truly and intelligently advocate the interests of the Australian workers—the Australian Socialist Labor Party.⁴⁴

* Among them the A.W.U. (in which Arthur Rae was in the early stages of a long and impressive militant career), the re-formed Sydney Wharf Laborers' Union (of which W. M. Hughes was secretary), the Sydney Coal Lumpers, the Newcastle waterside unions, the northern miners (where Peter Bowling was active), the typographers and the tailoresses.

† The programme called for a White Australia, old age pensions, a citizen defence force, a Commonwealth note issue, constitutional reform, and union conditions on government jobs.

The A.S.L. reached this point earlier in New South Wales than did the socialists in the other colonies because of the unique parliamentary position of the Labor Party.

In Queensland those socialists who had survived the New Australia exodus kept the flag flying first in the Queensland Socialist League and then in the Social Democratic Vanguard. Although the Labor Party had formally abandoned the socialist objective, it was in opposition and was not faced with the tactical dilemmas of New South Wales; it was still 'largely imbued with the Socialist viewpoint', although 'the emasculating influence of political life and ambitions' was already making itself felt.⁴⁵ The Vanguard, well dug in at the higher levels of the extra-parliamentary movement, was able to carry on a vigorous propaganda (deriving largely from the ideas of Bellamy, Robert Blatchford, and William Morris) under the official aegis. The differentiation which had occurred in New South Wales was delayed until 1903, when a majority voted to support a coalition government in which Labor shared, and the Vanguard collapsed.

In Victoria a Social Democratic Federation had been founded in 1889. Its aim was 'the nationalisation of all the means of production and the exertion of every capable individual in the commonwealth for the benefit of the common weal'; its proposed method was 'the general education of the public mind . . . the natural outcome of which will be the return of Social Democrats to Parliament', although it recognized that there were circumstances under which 'revolutionary methods will be perfectly justifiable'.⁴⁶ The Victorian S.D.F. was present at the initial conference summoned by the Melbourne Trades Hall Council for the formation of a Labor Party, and its members largely disappeared into that party, constituting the nucleus of a left wing which was to emerge strongly in the new century. In 1898 the poet Bernard O'Dowd and others formed a Victorian Socialist League which attracted some intellectual support; its appeal was largely ethical,* and it had little effect on the movement generally. More important was the Victorian Labor Federation, also formed in 1898, which declared itself in favour of 'an Industrial Co-operative System', to be achieved by the 'unification of the workers in one all comprehensive and extensive union' and the realization, through parliament, of 'the organised power of the working class'; its immediate aim was the formation of union-based consumer co-operatives,⁴⁷ which by 1900 had grown to considerable proportions in Melbourne. But this—one of the very few attempts to

* 'There is no security against poverty save in collectivism. . . . We say that we want to alter the conditions, we want to build beautiful characters, we want to rear fine men and women'. (B. Tillett, *Environment and Character*. Tillett, a British trade unionist and socialist, was influential in Victorian and N.S.W. socialist circles during a visit to Australia in the late 1890s.)

develop the Rochdale-type co-operation in Australia—did not last long; its rules had barred members of parliament as officers of the Federation on the grounds that 'official positions have been too often utilised as mere stepping stones to political situations, after which Labour interests have been forgotten—partly forsaken—principles sacrificed—connection with Unionism sustained as a mere political catch vote';⁴⁸ despite this solemn warning, its foundation president and secretary themselves joined the ranks of Labor parliamentarians in the Victorian election of 1902.

In their various ways Australian socialists had, by 1900 or soon after, confronted the major questions of socialist strategy: their relations with the working class and with the mass Labor Parties. They had answered the first by directing their propaganda towards trade unionists; the second remained a divisive issue for socialists throughout the period covered by this book.

The Century Begins

In the Australia of 1900 a new working class had taken shape whose centre of gravity, despite the rapidly growing numbers of workers in the manufacturing industries, was among the unskilled workers of the mines, the railways, the wharves, the ships, and the shearing sheds. These men had, over a decade earlier, created their own 'new unions', which in almost all respects were quite unlike the old-established and exclusive societies of the skilled craftsmen of the cities. They had fought and lost bitter wars against employers and governments, and had suffered through prolonged depression. From this they had concluded that they must perfect their industrial organization by the federation of labour, and enter political life as an independent force in order to wrest the weapon of government from the hands of the employers and to reconstruct society in the image of the mateship which was at the heart of their unions. But as the new Labor Parties were formed, the purity of this conception was soon blurred by the part taken by the craft unions, whose vision was narrower and whose concerns were more immediate than those of the mass unions, and by the growing desire of the parliamentarians themselves to temper the aspirations of the new unions to the necessities of parliamentary compromise and electoral success. The socialists, who had provided the framework of ideas within which the new unions had operated in their move into politics, had already condemned the opportunism of the mass Labor Parties and asserted their independence; while, within the mass parties, the signs of conflict between industrial and political interests were already evident. But the successes of the Labor Parties had been spectacular: from a minority position they had already achieved much, and now they looked forward to becoming the majority; and moreover the crisis was past,

unemployment was falling, wages were rising, new unions were forming and old unions uniting, the federation of the Australian colonies was close at hand. It was the dawn of a century and hope was abroad:

We are now founding an Australian nation—one that in many respects is unique in the world's history. It has now [no?] small tale to tell of rapine and slaughter, or of the blood of the weak ruthlessly shed for its baptism. It comes together only through the strong instincts of unity in the race. It has no hereditary aristocracy and no man need bow the knee to the title and not to the individual. It knows no racial feuds to embitter its existence and has no differing languages to keep its people apart. Instead of a division by a Rhine or a Danube it is kept together by the oceans which also separate it from any foreign foe. . . . It has scope within its vast confines for scores of millions of people who need not covet the vineyards of others, and in its wonderful variety of soil and climate has all that is needed to lift men to the highest standard of comfort, even though all the other nations should be blotted off the map. With no occasion to prosecute the arts of war, and with every facility for promoting the arts of peace, nothing but time and good government are needed to make our country a queen among the nations of the earth.

That Government is best which sets its face against monopoly and privilege, towards national and industrial peace, and seeks to grant equal opportunities for all. The several Labor Movements in the different colonies have been the chief factors in moulding whatever legislation has yet been achieved in this direction. Encouraged by their past successes, strengthened with the power which comes from unity, and inspired by the greater glory of the national task, it will not be Labor's fault if our country does not make the most of her golden opportunities, and if it cannot be truly said of her in the time to come that her ways are ways of pleasantness and that all her paths are paths of peace.⁴⁹

Industrial and Political Labour, 1900-1914

THE NEW CENTURY opened on the upswing of the economic cycle, and Australian labour set about making the most of its 'golden opportunities' with hope and vigour and determination. The years between the inauguration of the Commonwealth and the outbreak of World War I were not unfavourable to labour's ambitions. Primary industry had passed through a decade of drought and was now beginning to flourish; gold-mining was declining, but coal-mining and metal-mining were advancing fast; railway construction and other public works pressed ahead; manufacturing was undergoing its most rapid growth. The demand for labour remained strong—sufficiently so to keep pace with the impressive population growth, although throughout these years 5 or 6 per cent of trade unionists were out of work; these were generally unskilled workers, but there were pockets of unemployment among craftsmen as technological change made their skills redundant. The cost of living was rising steadily, but so were money wages; these roughly balanced one another, so that real wages, although they oscillated through a spread of about 5 per cent, were almost the same in 1913 as they had been in 1901. If standards of living had not advanced greatly, neither had they slipped back, and at least the pre-crisis level had been restored.

Trade Unions and the State

The major preoccupations of the unions were the 'living wage', the universal 8-hour day (later, the 'Saturday half-holiday'—that is the 44-hour week),* and the 'right to work', as well as recognition both of trade unions and of the principle of preference in employment for union members. The key to this was stronger trade union organization and the more effective participation of labour in politics; the preferred solution was the regulation of working conditions and standards of living by arbitration.

* The A.W.U. did not support this, considering that the 8-hour day was impracticable for many bushworkers; see D. Macdonell to Commonwealth T.U.C., 1902 (*Report*, p. 14).

The union story in these years is one of steady growth and of contradictory relations with the state. From slightly under 100,000 in 1901, trade union membership grew to well over half a million in 1914; while, despite the violent controversies over arbitration, over one thousand Court awards, Wages Board determinations, and legally registered industrial agreements were in operation by 1914, and these covered roughly four-fifths of all trade unionists.¹ The two themes were not unconnected: the possibility of registration under the various Acts, which secured such legal benefits as the recognition of the union's corporate identity and immunity from prosecution for conspiracy as well as the possibility of an award, greatly encouraged the formation of unions; the struggle for preference aided their growth; and the establishment of the Commonwealth Court in 1904 gave state organizations a powerful incentive to federate, so that, by 1914, two-thirds of all unionists belonged to the seventy-nine 'interstate unions' (see Appendix IV (b)). But arbitration was not the sufficient cause: it facilitated the growth of unionism and made it more complete, bringing in groups of workers with special difficulties who might otherwise have remained unorganized, but the most important unions pre-dated arbitration and would have continued to exist and grow without it.

Nevertheless, in their weakened condition, it was to arbitration that the unions turned—as a compensation for their weakness and a substitute for strikes. At first they had to fight hard to overcome employer opposition; but, this achieved, they were frustrated by the inadequacy and inefficiency of arbitration. There developed a division in the labour ranks between those who believed that the principle was sound and that the practice could be improved, and those who (sometimes for ideological reasons) wanted to scrap the system altogether and to rely solely on industrial strength; while the employers, for their part, came to realize that recognition of unionism was no great price to pay for the security of long-term wage fixation and the penalties which were increasingly prescribed for strikes. But initially the desire for arbitration led the trade unions straight into politics. 'All industrial matters are now coming within the political sphere,' wrote the secretary of the Australian Typographical Union to a local society in 1902, 'and if any union's rules [do] not now provide for political action being taken it would be wise to take the opinion of the majority as to the best means of securing political representation for unionists.*' Generally, this meant the Labor Parties.

* Outward Correspondence Book, A.T.U. Letter to Broken Hill Typographical Society, 27 December 1902. Other legislation was important too—especially that providing for the safety and comfort of men at work, such as the Factory Acts and the Commonwealth Navigation Act. (Thus, the prospect of a satisfactory Navigation Act was held out as a special inducement to the Seamen's Union to contribute to Labor

Arbitration was argued most fiercely in New South Wales and the Commonwealth in those years when the Labor Parties, with substantial parliamentary representation, held the balance of power. In Victoria, Labor was in a hopeless minority, and the unions were at first satisfied with the Wages Boards, although later they came to favour a Federal Arbitration Act; the Queensland unions wanted arbitration, but, despite the Lib.-Lab. coalition of 1903, they had little chance of getting it.

The first legislation to incorporate substantially the trade union requirements was the N.S.W. Industrial Arbitration Act of 1901,* which established a tribunal, to be presided over by a Judge of the Supreme Court, with power to hear industrial disputes referred to it by either party or by the Registrar of the Court, to make binding awards, and to extend these to a common rule for the whole of the industry concerned. The newly formed Sydney Labor Council had led the labour demand for this legislation. Already it had excluded from its rules any provision for strike levies or a permanent 'Defence Fund';² now it wanted to make the new system work. This pacific sentiment was tested almost immediately by a strike of tailoresses, recently organized into a union by H. E. Holland of the Socialist League, to enforce the union shop. At first the majority of the Labor Council favoured a general stoppage in the tailoring trade, but after three weeks the Council executive had its way and the women were sent back to work. Holland denounced this as 'cowardly treachery'; some delegates withdrew from the Council; but generally the conciliatory stand was endorsed—most unions wanted arbitration, and militant industrial action was out.³

In practice, however, the Arbitration Act was a great disappointment. The Legislative Council had removed the preference clause from the original Bill, and the High Court disallowed the common rule provision. The legal procedures—especially the use of lawyers—proved costly and slow. The Court, new to its work and overwhelmed by the trade union demands for its attention, was unable to cope; by 1905 the original President had resigned, and for some months no judge could be found to take his place. The unions were anxious and annoyed. 'We are on the verge of having one of the most sensational strikes in New South Wales', a delegate of the Coal Lumpers warned the government. 'It's taking us all our time to keep the men down.' And another union leader commented that another 1890 was needed 'to bring the Government to their senses'.⁴ But there was no return to 1890; the craft unions had

election funds in 1903.) Despite union pressure for legislation for standard working hours and, on occasions, a minimum wage, Labor politicians generally preferred to hand these questions over to judicial tribunal rather than leave themselves open to such pressure.

* This Act was based on, but went beyond, the New Zealand Act of 1894.

come to depend on the parliamentary process, and the majority of the Labor Council rejected a boycott of the Court in favour of continued pressure for amending legislation.⁵

What they got from a Liberal government, when the original Act expired in mid-1908, was an Industrial Disputes Act which established a Wages Board system with an appeal to the Industrial Court and provided heavy penalties for strikes, the government's aim being, the Labor Council secretary claimed, 'the destruction of Labor's power, the dissipation of its influence, and the surrender of its principles'.* From this developed a prolonged internal dispute, during which the industrial movement began to redefine its attitude to arbitration and to parliamentary action.

Once the Act became law, the parliamentary Labor Party, which had opposed its passage, urged the trade unions to accept it; the Labor Council, however, called for a boycott.⁶ At the 1908 N.S.W. Trade Union Congress the parliamentarians, strongly supported by the smaller craft unions, were able narrowly to defeat the move of the mass unions and the Labor Council to maintain the boycott.[†] The unions were strong enough at the N.S.W. Labor Conference, early in 1909, to reject the equivocal comment of the party executive on the Act;⁷ but at the same year's Trade Union Congress the Labor Council reported that it had been unable to enforce its ban;⁸ and at the 1910 Congress—held six months before the state's first Labor government took office—a motion for repeal of the Industrial Disputes Act was withdrawn in favour of one for its amendment.⁹ But by this time the Act had been challenged on the industrial field, and the challenge had failed.

The N.S.W. coal-miners had supported the arbitration legislation, but they had soon become dissatisfied, and, with the election of the International Socialist, Peter Bowling,[‡] as president of the northern miners' union,[§] they swung over to militant opposition to the Industrial Disputes Act. In 1909 Bowling piloted through an amalgamation of the three

* The unions opposed the Wages Board system because it meant sectional hearings and a multiplicity of awards; these, it was thought, would weaken the unions and put the employers in a favourable tactical position.

† *Report*, T.U.C., pp. 12ff. McGowen, shortly to become Premier, commented: 'He, as secretary of the Boilermakers' Union, could talk easily enough of a strike, but as leader of a party in Parliament he could not' (p. 15).

‡ Bowling is usually referred to as a member of the I.W.W. In fact, he belonged to Holland's Socialist Federation, which was at this time committed to industrial unionism but not to the I.W.W. A 1908 (n.d.) letter from W. North, a Cessnock miner and I.W.W. member, refers to the miners 'being led and bled by Peter Bowling and his gang of boodle-hunters' (Correspondence, Sydney I.W.W. Club).

§ There are three major coal-fields in New South Wales—the northern (Newcastle-Maitland), western (Lithgow), and southern (Illawarra); each at this time had its own union.

miners' unions and prepared for action. Preliminary inquiries indicated that stockpiles of coal were low and that the miners could expect the necessary support from the maritime unions. On 5 November 1909 the northern union secretly recommended a strike; next day, all but one of the miners' lodges declared it.¹⁰ The union's demand was for a conference with the mine-owners, open to the press, at which the 'eight hours bank to bank', the minimum wage* and other matters of mutual interest would be discussed, and it was looking forward to a 'short, sharp and shiny' struggle. On 9 November the Strike Congress (the miners, the maritime unions, and the Labor Council) assembled and endorsed the miners' demand, threatening that, unless it were granted, transport workers would stop in one week's time. For the Congress, W. M. Hughes asked all branches of the Waterside Workers' Federation whether they were prepared to strike; the watersiders replied that they would leave it to their union to call them out.¹¹ The government offered to arrange a conference (but not an open one) at the same time as work was resumed, but this the miners refused. The strike dragged into its third week, and still the transport workers were not called out—there would be no extension unless unionists were arrested, Hughes declared. The following week, five of the miners' leaders were arrested, and Hughes conducted a 'herculean struggle' to keep the maritime workers at work; he failed with the coal lumpers, but prevailed—with difficulty—in his own union.† This provoked Bowling to denounce Hughes's tactics as 'useless and ineffective', and to threaten a direct appeal to the watersiders. It was, Hughes said, 'the parting of the ways'; he was not in the strike 'to make war against society . . . to create chaos' or to enable the I.W.W. and the revolutionary socialists 'to hamstring the Labor Party, to destroy unionism, to plunge the country and the people into irreparable confusion'. The Strike Congress supported Hughes, by nineteen votes to four.

Immediately, the Wade government gagged through Parliament an amendment to the Industrial Disputes Act that provided further severe penalties for the incitement or encouragement of strikes. The Strike Congress dissolved, advising every union to look out for itself, and the Labor parliamentarians washed their hands of the 'extremists' and left them to their fate.‡ Hughes and Bowling were now in open competition

* I.e. that the 8-hour working day be measured from the time the first man left the pithead until the last man returned; and that the owners guarantee a minimum wage to miners working on contract rates.

† Hughes claimed that the opposition was I.W.W.-inspired; in fact, it was led by the International Socialists, but the I.W.W. was the currently fashionable stalking-horse.

‡ Bowling was sentenced to two and a half years, and four others to eighteen months. They were released after nine months.

for the allegiance of the unions, and, except for Bowling's own union and the coal lumpers, Hughes won. But first the western, and then the southern, and finally—after Bowling had been gaoled—the northern miners abandoned the struggle and submitted to the Wages Board.

The conclusions drawn from the defeat were mixed: Bowling was beaten as president of the northern miners by a Labor Party man, but shortly afterwards defeated the moderate secretary of the southern miners for his position, while the pro-Hughes president of the Sydney watersiders was replaced by an International Socialist at the next ballot. Most unionists reasoned that only a Labor government could deal with the Industrial Disputes Act; but when J. S. T. McGowen came to amend it, although he accepted most of the changes proposed by the Labor Council, he left the penalty clauses intact—for by now most Labor politicians had come to agree that arbitration was unworkable unless strikes were punished, and the 1912 N.S.W. Trade Union Congress, by thirty-five votes to twenty-eight, agreed with them.*

The Commonwealth Arbitration Act did not produce so much contention, partly because the penalties which it provided were seldom if ever invoked, and partly because of the sympathetic administration of the Act by the Court's second president, Mr Justice Higgins. The unions had strongly urged the legislation,¹² which was denounced by the employers as 'socialistic', and it was first introduced by the Barton government, with Labor support, in 1903. One parliament, three governments (including the short-lived first Labor government led by J. C. Watson), and eighteen months later, it became law. Generally the Act met labour specifications, although, in line with employers' objections, an unwelcome limitation had been imposed on the Court's power to award preference. The Court began to operate in 1905, and in November 1907 Mr Justice Higgins, in the Harvester case, established as a 'fair and reasonable remuneration' that wage which would provide for 'the normal needs of the average employee, regarded as a human being living in a civilised community' and in 'a condition of frugal comfort'.¹³

There were few complaints about the Commonwealth Court, but the effect it had on unions is interesting. The A.W.U. and the Waterside Workers' Federation are two representative examples.

The A.W.U. registered with the N.S.W. Court in 1902, but it got caught up in the queue, and it was further bedevilled by the operations

* Compare J. C. Watson to 1910 N.S.W. P.L.L. Conference (*Worker*, 17 February 1910); E. J. Kavanagh to Interstate Congress of T.L.Cs., November 1913 (*Report*, p. 16); Report of 1912 N.S.W. T.U.C. (*Worker*, 13 June 1912). The miners and watersiders demanded repeal; the Labor Council and craft unions opposed them.

of the Machine Shearers' Union, a pastoralist-sponsored company union which lived a few inglorious years until the A.W.U. ruined its officials with a well-timed libel action.¹⁴ Thrust back on its own resources, the A.W.U. took the best it could wring out of the squatters. After the amalgamation with its Queensland counterpart in 1905, the A.W.U. applied for a federal award; the pastoralists conceded most of the union's claims, an industrial agreement was registered, and the Court awarded preference in employment. From this time, the A.W.U. leaders were deeply committed: arbitration would, Spence thought, 'provide a peaceful means of avoiding strife, leaving the Labor unions free to devote their time, their money, and their energies to securing permanent and lasting reform by means of political action'*—action which would be carried out in no small measure by A.W.U. officials who had won political preferment.

So the A.W.U. was able, in its second giant amalgamation in 1913-14, to digest unions like the United Laborers (an organization of South Australian fruit-pickers and farm labourers) and the Amalgamated Workers' Association (metal-miners and sugar workers in North Queensland), which had until then got along without arbitration.† Optimistically, the militants of the A.W.A. had thought that they would 'outweigh and submerge in a short time the moderate, even reactionary . . . policy of the A.W.U.', but it was the A.W.U.'s devotion to arbitration which submerged them.¹⁵

Within the Waterside Workers' Federation, the conflict was more severe. In 1902, W. M. Hughes had told the Sydney watersiders:

If we are going to sit down and rely wholly on the [N.S.W.] Arbitration Court to adjust our grievances and look after our interests then what is the good of our union to us. . . . This [is] all tommy-rot, and every concession wrung from the employers [is] not through dread of the law but through the stability of our own Union.¹⁶

By a well-executed strategy of divide and conquer, culminating in a strike in 1908 of watersiders employed on coastal shipping, Hughes led the Sydney union into agreements with the three sections—coastal, interstate, and overseas—of shipowners;¹⁷ however, the coastal men had been left with a lower rate of pay, and late in 1911 they went on strike.

* *Australia's Awakening*, p. 489. Contrast Senator G. F. Pearce (also Labor, but with weaker trade union connections), who said that one of the purposes of the division of the political wing from the industrial was 'to enable the Trades Hall . . . to concentrate its energies largely on the still necessary work of industrial action' (*Review of Reviews*, 19 November 1904, p. 458).

† As well as these unions, the Rural Workers', Rabbit Trappers', and Carriers' Unions were amalgamated; after this, the A.W.U. had over 60,000 members, nearly one in eight of all Australian unionists (*Worker*, 9, 22 January 1913, 5 February 1914).

Hughes, by now Attorney-General in the Fisher government as well as the strong man of the W.W.F., lined up the Federation, the Melbourne and Sydney branches, and the Seamen's Union (of which a Labor Senator, R. S. Guthrie, was president) against the Sydney branch of the watersiders; the N.S.W. Labor government threatened to reopen the port with 'free' labour* and ordered the formation of a Wages Board. Threatened with isolation, the Sydney union capitulated.¹⁸

In 1914 Mr Justice Higgins gave the W.W.F. its first federal award; it provided for substantial wage increases and the 8-hour day, but was made conditional on the union amending its constitution to give the Federal Council power to discipline its branches and so become responsible to the Court for the members' adherence to the award. On Hughes's motion, the Council instructed the branches that 'in the event of any dispute as to the meaning of any term of the Award . . . no cessation of work must in any event take place'.¹⁹ From North Queensland, the Mackay branch asked plaintively: 'Are the Council selling us?'²⁰ It was thirty months later, after the first conscription referendum, that the members answered yes.

What these cases revealed was the domestication of the trade unions to the arbitration process. The miners were broken by the forces of the state, while the watersiders and the A.W.U. were bridled by the politicians who led them; this, however, worked only one way, as was shown during the four-months lock-out of the Broken Hill miners early in 1909.

The Barrier Amalgamated Miners' Association had gone down with the other mass unions in the nineties and the miners had laboriously rebuilt their organization, destroying a company union on the way, until they had secured, in December 1906, a two-year agreement with the mining companies which had worked 'fairly satisfactorily' from the union's point of view.²¹ But the biggest of the companies, the Broken Hill Proprietary, was not satisfied, and four months before the agreement was due to expire it warned the unions that wages would have to come down. Anticipating trouble, the unions sought the help of Tom Mann, the well-known British socialist who had been in Australia since 1902. Two months' vigorous organizing by Mann enrolled 1,600 new members in the Barrier unions and built out of nothing a powerful branch of the A.M.A. among the smelter workers at Port Pirie:²² the mines and the smelting works were ready for common action.

The unions presented their claims for a 44-hour week, a minimum rate of 9s. a day for surface men, and a guaranteed minimum for

* The strike was the work of the International Socialists, and a blow at the Labor Party and arbitration, Premier McGowen said.

contract miners. The smaller companies were prepared to renew the existing agreement, but the Broken Hill Proprietary demanded a 12½ per cent wage cut. The men were prepared to settle for a renewal but would not accept the cut, and from 1 January 1909 they were locked out, both at the Barrier and at Pirie.

The unions appealed to the Arbitration Court, seeking an award and an injunction restraining the Broken Hill Proprietary from closing its mines. Mr Justice Higgins granted the injunction but warned the unions that it probably could not be enforced. The companies refused to give the Court an undertaking that they would abide by its decision; nevertheless, the Court made an award which was favourable to the men—renewal of the 1907-8 wage, a guaranteed minimum for contract miners, and the six-day week at Port Pirie.* The companies took the case to the High Court, which disallowed the last two vital sections.

By the time these proceedings had run their course the lock-out had been on for sixteen weeks, and the men were beginning to feel their isolation. The N.S.W. Labor parliamentarians had, from the start, been disapproving, W. A. Holman arguing (quite without foundation) that

the whole trouble is due to two or three men belonging to the Industrial Workers of the World. . . . What they want to see is, not a victorious body of strikers, but a defeated body of strikers. The I.W.W. is based upon the extraordinary idea that only by things getting a great deal worse can they get better.†

The Lib.-Lab. coalition in South Australia had sent police into Port Pirie to protect the 'free' labour with which the smelters were being reopened. And, at the N.S.W. Trade Union Congress, an impassioned appeal by Peter Bowling for a general strike in support of unionists imprisoned in the course of the dispute for 'rioting' was defeated by forty-six votes to seventeen, the craft unionist majority urging that only the return of a Labor government could secure the release of the prisoners.²³

The companies would accept nothing less than unconditional surrender, and, first at Port Pirie (on the advice of Tom Mann, who feared that the union would be completely destroyed) and then at the Barrier (against the advice of the A.M.A. leaders, who wanted a guarantee of no victimization), the men voted to go back to work. But by now the companies were not disposed to reopen the mines, and thousands were left without work. Day after day the militants urged the unemployed

* The Pirie smelter workers had been working a seven-day week with no holidays.

† Quoted by R. G. S. Williams, *Australian White Slaves*, pp. 43-4. The nearest I.W.W. group to Broken Hill had been at Cobar, some 300 miles away, but this had collapsed some time before the strike broke out, while the socialists had only a minority influence in the A.M.A. See Sydney I.W.W. Club Minutes, 27 January 1909, for a denial of I.W.W. influence or responsibility.

to take the law into their own hands, to seize the mines, to march on Sydney, pillaging as they went. But the men were demoralized, and the agitation faded out in a whimper. The N.S.W. government provided funds for some public works; the Broken Hill Proprietary gradually resumed operations; the unemployed drifted away; 'in time the position became sufficiently relieved to keep the slaves a bit quiet'.²⁴ For the unions, it was a major battle and a total defeat.

The mine-owners had clearly been the aggressors, but the forces of the state were aligned with them and against the miners, while arbitration, the instrument which labour had created to ameliorate its condition and to secure its strength, was found to operate as a bludgeon against the unions when they aggressed but to be ineffective against the employers when they were the offenders.

In other respects, too, the unions found the forces of state aligned against them—and none more than those unions which were concerned with public transport and the service industries. Generally, public transport was operated by government instrumentalities, and this created some special problems. There was the reluctance of governments to recognize the unions of state employees or their right to have their claims go to arbitration—these were regarded as infringements of sovereignty. There was the unwillingness to allow state servants to associate with private employees,* for this might lead to their involvement in outside industrial disputes. There was the proposition that state servants, whose job it was to administer the law, should remain aloof from political controversy; this was held to prohibit affiliation (even indirectly through the Labor Councils) with the Labor Party. And there was the proposition that the added security of employment enjoyed by state servants justified the lower wages they commonly received. This was an explosive mixture.

The question of recognition precipitated the most extensive strike that Australia had until that time known—the Brisbane general strike of 1912. During twenty years, the employees of the Brisbane Tramways Company (a private firm) had several times attempted to form a union, but each time their plans had been discovered and the promoters sacked. In 1910 a federal tramways union was registered and began to form a Brisbane branch, whose members decided to force the issue by publicly wearing their union badges. The company dismissed the badge-wearers and replaced them with non-union men.

The Queensland A.L.F. called the railwaymen, watersiders, seamen, and other unions into conference, and on 28 January 1912 declared

* Whether by affiliation of state service unions with the Labor Councils or by membership of state servants in comprehensive unions.

that, unless the tramways union was recognized, there would be 'a general cessation of work'. Three days later, the first issue of the Official Strike Bulletin sounded a triumphant note:

The Workers Raise the Flag of Solidarity . . . First Simultaneous Strike in the World . . . At 6 o'clock last night the signal was given to down tools. Brisbane unionists nobly responded . . . Superb Demonstration This Morning . . . City Business Ceases . . . Unparalleled Proof of the Solidarity and Power of Labour . . . Brisbane Toilers Class-conscious at Last.²⁵

Curiously, this was near to the truth. Over twenty thousand Brisbane unionists came out on strike and business in the city was almost at a standstill. Railwaymen and miners at Ipswich, and fourteen thousand unionists in the far north,* stopped work in support. Maritime workers in the south declared a highly effective blockade of the port of Brisbane. And every day thousands of unionists took possession of the streets, often led by members of the state and federal parliamentary Labor Parties.

'There is no doubt that this is an organised attempt on the part of Socialism to capture Brisbane, and, of course, the Government,' wrote one government supporter. 'But I have no doubt that in the long run they will be completely smashed down. This strike must end in the downfall of Socialism.'²⁶ Both diagnosis and prognosis were somewhat exaggerated, but this was how the government saw the struggle. They suspended Wages Board determinations, recruited three thousand special constables, banned the union demonstrations, and provided protection for blacklegs. After a major clash between police and unionists in which swords were drawn and bayonets fixed, they appealed to the Commonwealth Labor government to send troops to maintain law and order; the strikers had also appealed for protection against the police; Prime Minister Fisher refused both requests.

The Strike Committee hoped for a settlement through the Commonwealth Arbitration Court. A compulsory conference was called but no compromise could be reached. Mr Justice Higgins then found that the unionists were entitled to wear their badges, and enjoined the company not to dismiss its employees for this reason. But his decision was irrelevant—the company had recruited sufficient 'free' labour to operate a full service without the unionists, and the Court did not have the power to order the re-employment of those already sacked.

The strike had now been on for four weeks, the government and the employers showed no signs of weakening, and the unions had had

* The A.W.A. conference was meeting at Townsville at the time, and called together all the northern unions. There were some objections from the smaller unions, but E. H. Lane records that he and other A.W.A. militants 'managed to skulldrag them to vote for the strike resolution' (*Dawn to Dusk*, p. 102).

enough. After an unsuccessful attempt to get guarantees against victimization, the committee, on 6 March, declared an unconditional return to work, and the strikers returned to such jobs as were still available. Wise after the event, and in contrast to the fervour of its Brisbane contemporary, the *Sydney Worker* wrote: 'The Brisbane strike lasted five weeks too long; it should never have occurred. Now that the trouble is officially over, the truth may be told.'²⁷

In terms of the then current theories of militant trade unionists and socialists (briefly, 'if a strike is big enough, it's bound to win') it was hard to see why the Brisbane general strike should have failed so badly. The solidarity was splendid, the organization was good, the finances were far from bad. But the solidarity and determination of unionists are not enough: once a common front of government and employers has decided that here is the point of no return, then, unless there is sufficient popular discontent beyond the ranks of organized labour to ensure the effective isolation of the anti-labour forces, or unless the unions are prepared to take their chance on an insurrection, the general strike must lose. And conversely the only general strike that can succeed is one which wells up spontaneously out of profound mass discontent, carrying with it not only organized but unorganized labour and beyond that the urban middle class, the farmers, even the forces of law and order themselves. For a general strike, unless it is a limited demonstration of protest, is a revolutionary challenge to the existing order, and inevitably it is treated as such. What was surprising, however, was that the recognition of a union by a private company was an issue on which any government thought it worth while to stand and fight.*

The strike over, the Liberal government quickly dissolved Parliament; in the subsequent elections the Labor Party lost eight country seats, but won four in the city where feelings were still bitter. One of the new government's first measures was an Industrial Peace Act, which followed closely the 1912 Act of the N.S.W. Labor government but prescribed special penalties for strikes in public utilities.

The strike committee and the Labor Party had claimed (although they opposed this measure because of the penal clauses) that, had Queensland had an arbitration system before the strike, there would have been no serious trouble.²⁸ But the experience of trade unions else-

* The government had, in 1910, opposed the registration of the federal tramways union at the company's request, but once this was granted it was inevitable that the Queensland union would sooner or later have to be recognized. Possibly the government was worried by the growing power of trade unionism, as evidenced by the successful strike organized in the sugar industry by the A.W.A. the previous year, and by the growing support for the Labor Party, and saw this as a good opportunity for stemming both tides.

where did not support their confidence. Labor administrations, too, were prone, when confronted with major industrial upheavals, to pronounce solemnly that 'the government must govern'.*

Much of the experience of trade unions in the years before World War I concerned the relation of the unions to the law and the state. Arbitration had secured the recognition and stimulated the growth of industrial organizations; it had provided a partial application of preference to unionists and the general application of a minimum living wage and standard hours of work, and this was a considerable advance. But the price was the renunciation of the strike, and gradually employers came to see the legal entanglements into which the unions had entered as something which could be turned to advantage. Consequently, once the system was established, the unions divided—between those which, from weakness or involvement in Labor Party affairs, clung to the peace and security of arbitration, and the mass unions which increasingly found arbitration a fetter on their industrial strength.

At the same time, the Labor Parties, especially in government, saw in arbitration a convenient way of escaping from their obligations to the industrial movement. They were less ready than their employer-oriented opponents to use the full force of the state against striking unionists; but when in power they avoided any commitment to the unions in industrial disputes, demanding—and if necessary backing their demand with force—that the unions accept the jurisdiction and decision of the 'independent' industrial tribunals.

Trade Unions and the Labor Parties

The fight between the industrial and political wings of the labour movement had threatened on several occasions between 1900 and 1914 to split the Labor Party. When the split came in 1916 and again in 1919, it was the direct consequence of the new character the Labor parliamentarians sought to give the party as it moved from cross-benches or opposition to government.

The Labor Party had decided that it was not purely a working-class party; on the contrary, as one of the members of the Fisher Ministry said of the coming second Commonwealth Labor government: 'Their policy was a national one, which they felt sure would result in the development of the Commonwealth along right lines, and the general well-being of the people.'²⁹ As well as every kind of worker, the party laid its claim to 'the small farmers "by oppression's ruffian gluttony driven" from the arable lands; the business men struggling in the grip of the usurer . . . every interest in Australia . . . except the interest of the parasitic classes'.³⁰ The party had come a long way from its trade

* The N.S.W. Labor government had, for example, taken strong action against striking ironworkers and gasworkers in 1911-13.

union origins, and for this, W. A. Holman felt, the movement could thank 'the wider outlook, the very much fuller opportunities [Labor parliamentarians] get for attaining knowledge and the sense of responsibility.'³¹ But the problem, as unionists saw it, was not so much how parliamentarians should develop their sense of responsibility as whose interests it should serve.

Labor's vulnerability was the distribution of the working-class vote. Wage and salary earners and their families made up about two-thirds of the electorate. But even if the Labor Party could have counted on the whole of this vote (which of course it could not), it would not have been assured a parliamentary majority. For the working-class vote tended to be concentrated in 'industrial' suburbs or in particular isolated (for example, mining) communities. This meant a relatively high number of 'blue ribbon' Labor seats, and a correspondingly greater pressure to find policies acceptable to non-working-class electors in other seats. The obvious targets were the rural electorates.

The urban orientation of the early Labor Parties had meant that there was, from the beginning, a special problem with rural workers, which the parties turned over to the A.W.U.; the union's political organizing was often effective, but as a result it acquired a greater weight in the political machine and committed itself more and more to parliamentary means. However, the votes of bush-workers were clearly not enough to ensure Labor a parliamentary majority; so the party directed its appeal towards the farming vote, and herein lay a source of conflict. There were rich farmers and small farmers, but all were private entrepreneurs, employing wage-labour and producing for a capitalist market. With the rich farmers—especially the pastoralists—the Labor Party was not concerned; they were the traditional enemies of the A.W.U. and not a potential source of votes. The problem was to devise a policy which, without prejudicing the basic working-class support, would appeal to the petty capitalists of the countryside.

Ideologically, Labor was committed to 'the recognition . . . of the natural and inalienable rights of the whole community to the land—upon which all must live and from which by labor all wealth is produced',³² which was interpreted to mean the universal establishment of individual small holdings, on leasehold rather than freehold tenure. Accordingly, apart from a detailed programme of improvements in agricultural techniques and marketing arrangements,³³ the major Labor preoccupations were the suspension of the sale of Crown lands and the nationalization of land already alienated, and the introduction of a progressive tax on unimproved land values, the aim of which was to break up the big estates for closer settlement. Farmers regarded the first of these policies with great suspicion; unionist influence was strong enough to prevent the politicians divesting the party of this embarrassment, but radical efforts to have land nationalization promoted to

Labor's 'fighting platform' were consistently defeated,³⁴ and the policy was never seriously pressed. However, the progressive land tax was vigorously pursued: it could be expected to appeal to small landowners who wanted more land for themselves or land for their sons;* it was supported by the unions, who saw closer settlement as a means of relieving unemployment;³⁵ and it was enacted by the Fisher government in 1910. The argument here was not over the tax itself, but over the extent of the exemption. Originally, no exemption had been proposed; but, under pressure from the country branches, the party decided that holdings worth less than £5,000 should be free of tax—it was, said Holman, who represented a small-farming electorate in the N.S.W. parliament, the 'unanimous opinion of country people' that this was 'a fair, practical, working exemption', and trade union attempts to reduce or abolish it were unsuccessful.³⁶ This policy won support in the countryside, and local organizations were formed in which the farming interest formed a centre of conservatism within the party.† But land nationalization and the land tax affected only the ideological preconceptions of the industrial wing; more immediate interests were at stake when industrial issues were involved. The A.W.U., for example, took it badly when the N.S.W. Labor government accepted a country backbencher's amendment excluding farmers from the operation of an Act providing for minimum accommodation standards for rural workers; the Minister for Labor (G. S. Beeby) was hounded out of the movement,‡ parliamentarians were carpeted before the A.W.U. conference, and a motion to cut off financial support was withdrawn only when the party conference changed its rules to increase the power of the unions in the party machine.³⁷

The Labor Parties were thus caught between two often contradictory pre-requisites for electoral success: to win a substantial farming vote and to hold their working-class support. Usually, the parties sought a compromise, but, if one interest had to be jettisoned, more often than not (because their votes were more dependable, and left-wing resentment could generally be contained within the movement) it was the working class which suffered.§

* Relations between the Labor Party and the Farmers' and Settlers' Association were good early in the century, but by 1909 the Association had fallen into the hands of the wealthier farmers and had swung against the land tax.

† E.g. the reluctance of country Labor organizations to co-operate in the political organizing work of the A.W.U. in 1908-9; the S.A. secretary of the A.W.U. said that this was because the A.W.U.'s work would mean 'a militant spirit in the House' (*Worker*, 26 January 1910).

‡ Beeby was later to found the N.S.W. Country Party.

§ There was as well a dark suspicion among trade union militants that the anxiety shown by Labor governments to prevent or wind up strikes of coal-miners and maritime workers was due in no small measure to this sensitivity to the farming interest. See *Inter. Soc.*, 10 September, 22 October 1910.

This attempted reconciliation of conflicting interests, rationalized as the desire to become a 'national' party, was the prime source of the factional conflicts within the Labor Parties in the years before the war. The theme of these was the fight of the trade unions to establish their hegemony over the parliamentary party, for which control of the party machine at three points was necessary—first the conference, which decided the platform; second, the pre-selection ballots, which chose the men to carry it out; and third, the executive, which could exercise some disciplinary powers over the parliamentarians.

Unionist control of the state Labor conferences was established by providing in the rules for representation of affiliated organizations—whether local electorate committees or trade unions—on a sliding scale based on membership. There were continual squabbles over the precise levels of the scale, but generally, in New South Wales from 1901, in Queensland from 1905, and in Victoria from 1909, the unions were in a position to dominate the party conferences—provided that they were affiliated and were not divided among themselves. Once it had been established (on the insistence of the unions) that members of parliament should not sit *ex officio* on the party executives,* and that the executives were to be elected by and responsible to the conferences, the unions were in a position to control these too. But pre-selections were not so easy: these were conducted by ballot of the local party organizations, in which individual branch members as well as members of affiliated unions had a vote; in theory, this ensured trade union predominance, but in practice most unionists did not bother to vote, and those who did were just as likely to be swayed by local considerations as by the power struggle at the top. While the executives could disallow a local selection, they rarely did so even when the chosen candidate was not to their liking, because this usually meant local disintegration. In the electorates, a superior supply of words and money often enabled middle-class members of the party to exercise an undue influence in pre-selections, so that the social composition of the parliamentary parties, as well as their electoral ambitions, usually placed them to the right of the union-dominated conferences and executives, no matter what constitutional provisions were set up to prevent this.

The case of the Federal party was somewhat different. Federal parliamentarians were responsible to the state parties, although the Commonwealth conferences determined federal policy which, from 1905, was binding on all party organizations if carried by a two-thirds majority.⁸⁸ Six delegates from each state party constituted the Commonwealth conference, and among these federal parliamentarians were invariably well represented. However, most matters of immediate con-

* On the other hand, moves to prohibit members of parliament from being elected to the executives or as conference delegates were not successful nor were similar moves to limit the rights of members of parliament in the A.W.U.

cern to trade unionists were still within the province of the state parliaments; because of its strong national organization the A.W.U. was well represented in the federal parliamentary party, others of whose members were closely identified with other federal unions; and there was little trade union criticism of the federal party, the unions rather supporting an extension of Commonwealth legislative powers as one part of their fight with the state politicians.*

Given this special place in the party machine, the trade unions generally affiliated to the party and contributed generously in money, propaganda, and organization to its electoral campaigns. Their immediate aims were twofold: to get the Labor Party into power, and to ensure that, once in, it carried out their demands.

Entering parliaments in which a two-party system was already established, the Labor Parties soon found themselves involved in parliamentary trading, and Labor members were tempted by the fruits of office in coalition governments which carried with them the *quid pro quo* of electoral immunity for their non-Labor partners. The movement outside was quick to reject this conception of the party's role in Parliament—both because it involved unacceptable compromises and because the local organizations, which carried much more weight in the Labor Parties than in any other party, were unwilling to forgo their right to nominate candidates.† But the parliamentary parties were not easy to convince.

In the tangle of negotiations which surrounded the four short-lived governments of the Second Commonwealth Parliament (1903-6),‡ the movement refused to make any concessions to the Federal party's evident desire for a formal coalition with the radical wing of the protectionists, who supported most if not all of the moderate programme advanced by the Labor Party.§ At the 1905 Commonwealth conference, and again

* This became a major source of conflict in the N.S.W. party with the 1909 debate on federal-state financial relations and the constitutional referenda in 1911 and 1913. On each of these occasions the state parliamentary party, influenced by W. A. Holman, took a 'state-rights' position; each time, the party conference, on A.W.U. initiative, condemned the parliamentarians. Disciplinary action was threatened but it was never taken. The unions supported increased Commonwealth powers because the Commonwealth Parliament was not burdened by an undemocratic upper house and because effective intervention in the economy could only be undertaken on a federal basis.

† E.g. the decisions of the 1900 N.S.W. P.L.L. conference and the 1904 conference of the Victorian P.L.C. against Labor participation in non-Labor governments (*Worker*, 3 February 1900, 2 April 1904).

‡ First Deakin (Radical Protectionist with Labor support), Watson (Labor), Reid-McLean (Free Trade-Protectionist coalition) and second Deakin.

§ The platform adopted by the 1902 Commonwealth conference consisted of White Australia, old age pensions, nationalization of monopolies, citizen defence, restriction of public borrowing, and a navigation law. Of these, only the nationalization plank was possibly not acceptable to the radicals, and that in any case was beyond the powers of the Commonwealth.

at the 1906 N.S.W. conference, the federal parliamentarians pleaded to be allowed to decide their own tactics, but both conferences turned them down, resolving that there must be no alliances beyond the life of Parliament and no immunity for non-Labor members.³⁹ The radicals were not 'pledged men' and the movement would not be beholden to them, and Watson and his associates reluctantly accepted the party's ruling. In Queensland, on the other hand, the party organizations approved both a coalition government and an electoral alliance—but only for the purpose of having adult suffrage legislation passed; once this was achieved, the 1905 Labor-in-Politics Convention directed the parliamentary party to break the alliance. William Kidston, the parliamentary leader, refused, and led twelve of the thirty-four Labor members out of the party, relegating Labor to the opposition benches for another decade.⁴⁰ By 1909, with the break-up of the Lib.-Lab. coalition in South Australia, it was firmly established that the Labor Parties would settle for nothing less than undivided power.

It is beyond the range of this study to attempt an evaluation of the legislative record of the Labor Parties. Current commentaries tend to emphasize the continuity of Labor with radical-liberal legislative programmes and to suggest that much of the legislation for which Labor has claimed the credit was in reality the work of radicals. There is a lot of truth in the first of these propositions and a little in the second, but it seems probable that, whether or not Labor members moved the actual Bills, it was the presence of Labor in politics, and the growing strength of the industrial organizations, which precipitated the wave of social legislation that for a time made Australia a model for the world. Acts of Parliament and administrative decisions establishing the rights of workers to organize and to enjoy reasonable standards of living and conditions of work, the formation of institutions for the legal regulation of wages, and the acceptance of the responsibility of governments to set an example to private employers; the development of social welfare legislation, the growth of government enterprise and the creation of institutions, such as the Commonwealth Bank, to give effect to government economic policy; such nationalist policies as immigration restriction and defence—all these, the better and the worse, owed their existence substantially to the Labor Parties. However, it is not relevant to present purposes to argue this point; this study is concerned rather with the ways in which trade union pressure conditioned the platforms of the Labor Parties, and with how particular political actions were received by the industrial movement.

The Commonwealth picture is fairly simple. The original federal platform, drafted largely by state politicians, was referred to the unions for their endorsement.⁴¹ The 1902 platform followed closely the

decisions of the Interstate Trade Union Congress. The decision of the Watson government (1904) to resign rather than to accept any qualification of the Arbitration Court's power to award preference to unionists, and the record of the Fisher government (1910-13) in carrying through legislation of special interest to trade unionists were alike commended.* Once the High Court's decision in the Harvester case had called into question the scope of the Commonwealth's industrial powers,† there was overwhelming trade union support for the attempt of the Federal Labor Party, by referenda in 1911 and 1913, to enlarge the powers of the Commonwealth to legislate on industrial and economic matters.

Only with the Federal Party's defence policy was there any sustained opposition, and that was very much a minority affair. Pleading the Asian threat, J. C. Watson won the overwhelming support of the 1908 Commonwealth conference for a citizen defence force based on compulsory training, and for an independent navy;‡ in the minds of the parliamentary leaders Australia was to become 'the guardian of civilization in the southern seas'.⁴² There were trade union objections to two sections of the defence proposals—the compulsory training clauses and the provision for the use of troops in case of 'domestic violence' (which the unions took to imply strikes). But this was a request for amendment rather than repeal.§

The argument between unions and parliamentary party was most intense in New South Wales. So long as the party was on the cross-benches or in opposition, the unions were largely content; there was some criticism of the part played by the parliamentarians during the 1909 disputes on the coal-fields and at the Barrier, but Peter Bowling,

* S.L.C. Minutes, 18 August 1904; 16 January 1913. Especially praised were the amendments to the Navigation, Workers' Compensation, Invalid Pensions and Immigration Acts, the establishment of the sugar bounty (which was conditional on the employment of white labour on trade union conditions), and the decision of the government to give preference to unionists on government works.

† In *R. v. Barger* (the Harvester case), the High Court, by a three to two majority, held invalid those sections of the Excise Tariff Act (1906) which in effect provided that tariff protection should be conditional on the Arbitration Court finding that the industry concerned was paying a fair wage to its employees.

‡ *Report*, Fourth Commonwealth Conference, 1908, pp. 16-20. The unexpected success of the Japanese against the Russians was very much in the minds of delegates; the motion was carried by twenty-four to seven. A further motion that the defence programme be financed by direct taxation was carried by twenty-nine to three.

§ The coal-miners' organization and the A.M.A. were the only unions to oppose the Defence Act on internationalist grounds. The 1909 N.S.W. T.U.C. endorsed Fisher's Policy (*Worker*, 29 April 1909), and the 1912 N.S.W. T.U.C. and the Interstate Congress of the T.L.C.s called only for the amendment of the Act to prohibit the use of troops in strikes (*Worker*, 13 June 1912; *Report*, Interstate Congress, 1913, pp. 19-20).

at the 1909 N.S.W. Trade Union Congress, could not even find a seconder for his motion that, as there was 'never a weaker and more spineless party' than the Labor Party, the congress should not recommend to unions that they affiliate.⁴³ Then, with the return of the McGowen government in 1910 (although with a minute majority of two), it seemed to the Labor Council that 'the "New Unionism" has come to stay';⁴⁴ but, within the life of this one parliament, the miners' unions had disaffiliated and there was talk of an independent trade union party. The government's role in industrial disputes, the failure to deal with the Legislative Council, the argument over the constitutional referenda, the encouragement of the Broken Hill Proprietary steelworks at Newcastle despite the party's policy of a state-owned iron industry, had convinced a large section of industrial opinion that the McGowen-Holman government* was betraying the trade unions and that, as an A.W.U. spokesman said, 'the curse of this movement was the Holman policy of winning seats at all costs and not caring a dump who won them'.⁴⁵

Not even the significant victory in the 1913 election† (which followed closely the narrow defeat of the Fisher government earlier in the year) put a stop to the criticism. The Labor Council's impatient comment that, relieved of the anxiety of a closely divided House, the parliamentary party should delay no longer in pushing ahead the Labor platform,⁴⁶ drew from Holman the short-tempered retort that, although he would not hold up any legislation that might be popular, he would not undertake to follow the priorities demanded by the unions.⁴⁷ But before it could achieve much in the way of legislation, the government was engrossed with the war effort and the chain of events which carried the industrial-political dispute to the climactic upheaval of 1916.

'We are all socialists now', said the Federal leader, Andrew Fisher, to the 1908 Commonwealth conference,⁴⁸ but this bland acceptance concealed the wide rift in ideology which was both cause and effect of the intra-party argument from 1905. The power struggle in the party machine was largely a practical question, one of what immediate policies the party was to follow and of who was to administer them; but weaving the disputes together so that they became one continuous campaign instead of a series of isolated skirmishes was the argument over the character of the party—was Labor socialist, or was it not?

The fervour with which the Queensland bush unions embarked upon the formation of the Australian Labour Federation in 1890 was nourished on William Lane's vision of the workingman's paradise as

* Holman became Premier when McGowen resigned in June 1913.

† The party increased its representation from forty-six to fifty in a House of ninety.

well as on the realities of the class war; but the entry of labour into politics, the men it promoted, and the place it occupied converted the heady excitement of social revolution into the drab compromise of piecemeal reform. Unionism and 'Laborism' were flourishing, wrote H. E. Boote in 1903, but socialism was 'a ring-barked tree. . . . It is mentioned, if ever, with bated breath, lest the reporters might hear. Often it is repudiated; oftener still, and worse still, it is ignored'.⁴⁹

But the socialists were not prepared to abandon their hopes lightly. In 1905, with the party already involved in Lib.-Lab. coalitions in Queensland and South Australia and clearly destined within the next few years to take power in New South Wales and the Commonwealth, they sought to impose their conception of what a working-class party ought to be on what was becoming a machine to serve sectional interests.

At the 1905 Queensland conference, where the local organizations, under militant trade union influence,* were already hotly critical of parliamentary compromise, the objective became one way of attacking the politicians; two delegates who were also members of the Social Democratic Vanguard won a two-to-one majority for the 'collective ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange'.⁵⁰ In Victoria, in the same year, the influence of socialists who had infiltrated the parliamentary party was able to secure the adoption of a similar objective. In South Australia, with its radical rather than socialist tradition, the party conference decided that there was no need for an objective—that the platform was enough. Again, it was in New South Wales that the division was clearest. The 1905 debate opened on a motion from the Barrier A.M.A. that the objective should be 'a Co-operative Commonwealth founded upon the socialization of the production and distribution of wealth'. The radicals from the unions and the local leagues supported the Barrier motion; the politicians 'approached the matter with evident caution'; Donald Macdonell, the secretary of the A.W.U., declared flatly that the Labor Party 'was not a Socialistic but a trade union movement'. The objective was referred to a sub-committee headed by J. C. Watson, which came back with a two-clause compromise for 'racial purity' and 'the collective ownership of monopolies'. The left wing grumbled about the chauvinism of the first clause and the timidity of the second, but the conference accepted this declaration.⁵¹ At the Commonwealth conference which followed this round of state gatherings Watson moved for the N.S.W. statement, while the Victorian and Queensland delegates lined up behind the latter's 'all-out' objective. For New South Wales it was argued that to

* The unions as such were not represented at this conference; the conference changed the rules to provide for this in the future.

go any further would frighten the electors, that what the party wanted was a practical programme and not 'the ideas of Continental Socialists', that what was already on the platform was quite enough to keep the party busy for 'two or three lifetimes'. For the Queensland-Victorian objective it was suggested, on top of the ideological argument, that the party needed to distinguish itself more clearly from the Liberals, and that it should announce its long-term aim as well as its immediate programme. The moderate objective won the conference, by twenty-three votes to eleven.* Subsequent attempts to 'socialize' the Labor objective failed just as badly and there, until 1919, the matter rested.

But socialism could not be ignored—partly because of the growing criticism from the left and the gradual development of links between militant trade unionism and revolutionary theories, and partly because of the 'socialist tiger' attack from the right.† So the theorists of the Labor Party—such as they were—were forced to try to define the party's position. Challenged by the Free Trade leader, George Reid, to debate the party's objective, W. A. Holman took his stand on the 1905 objective; if state ownership of monopolies meant socialism then they were socialists, but beyond that they did not go. Monopoly was the necessary outcome of modern industry and this was incompatible with the general welfare; the state must buy out the trusts, but 'one monopoly at a time is enough for us'.⁵²

For W. G. Spence revolutionary socialism was 'not a healthy form of doing things'; however, 'the successful enterprises, such as Newport [Railway] Workshops [in Melbourne], are really socialism in our time'.⁵³ While W. M. Hughes, with that regard for felicity of phrase rather than consistency of ideas which is characteristic of the brilliant parliamentary debater, declared: 'Socialism will come if it is to come—as I believe it will—in due time; just as manhood comes to a boy. . . . Socialism is here; less robust, less complex, less comprehensive, than it will be in years to come; but it is here'.⁵⁴

The politicians, driven by electoral and parliamentary ambition, were trying to reconcile two incompatibles: on the one hand, to reassure the middle-class electorate of their moderation and respectability; on the other, to persuade their working-class critics that the Labor recipes would satisfy their appetites and cure their ills. In the event compromise prevailed over conviction, and the stage was set for the challenge from the left.

* *Report*, Third Commonwealth Labor Conference, 1905, pp. 10 ff. All the N.S.W., W.A., and S.A. delegates, and five of the Tasmanians, supported the N.S.W. motion; the Queensland and five of the Victorian delegates opposed it. One Tasmanian abstained, favouring the Queensland motion but being mandated against it. The Victorian chairman did not vote.

† After the fall of the Reid-McLean government in 1905, George Reid began a major public campaign against Labor Party socialism.

Socialism, Syndicalism, Closer Unionism

So long as the left-wing challenge was confined to the propagation of revolutionary utopias, it did not greatly trouble the Labor Party, but when, from the industrial troubles of 1909, revolutionary doctrines again began to penetrate the trade unions, the problem became real. The socialists of 1909 were rediscovering the principle on which the Labor Parties had been based—the linking of socialism with the mass movement—but this time with the experience of nearly twenty years of labour in politics behind them, and with a greater commitment to the class war.

There were two sources of this new awareness: the revolutionary theorizing imported from Europe and America,* and the practical experience of Australian socialists in the mass labour movement. From the first came the discussion of what was meant by socialism and how the revolution was to be brought about; from the second came an awareness of the dangers facing revolutionaries who ventured out of their sects and into the mass movement. Sometimes the ideologues tried to force organization and action into their theoretical moulds; at other times those who began as ideologues, and tried to adapt their theories to their daily experience, ended by abandoning ideology for Labor and trade union pragmatism. The Australian socialists in these years were seeking a new synthesis of ideology and practice in the context of two immediate questions: the relation of socialists to the Labor Party and to parliamentary democracy generally, and the place of the economic organizations of the working class in the revolutionary process.

By the end of the century the small band of revolutionaries in the Australian Socialist League in Sydney had concluded that the Labor Party had degenerated into a 'sad group of professional politicians—a non-existent body as far as the rank and file is concerned'—whose programme showed a lamentable ignorance and offered no salvation from the indignity and injustice of wage slavery.⁵⁵ The answer was the creation of a *Socialist* Labor Party, modelled on Daniel De Leon's party in the United States, which would fight for a programme of immediate demands without forgetting its working-class origins or its socialist aims. One important way of winning working-class support was the activity of A.S.L. members in the industrial movement, through which they hoped to instruct the workers in the limitations of 'pure and simple' trade unionism and the revolutionary possibilities of a socialist unionism working closely with their new party. Starting from these premises, the A.S.L. was not without influence in the Sydney unions, and for the first Senate election in May 1901 it stood six

* British socialist theory was of little importance to the Australian labour movement from the turn of the century, except for the guild socialist strand of thinking of the leaders of the Miners' Federation during and after World War I.

candidates in New South Wales who polled an average of over 4,500 votes. (The lowest successful candidate polled 70,468.)

But, from the formation of the International Socialist Club in 1898 by a group of immigrant German Social Democrats, and H. E. Holland's association with the Club, divergent tendencies began to appear in the Socialist League. Holland was editor of the League's paper, *People*, but devoted a great deal of his time to trade union organization—too much, the A.S.L. executive felt. He resigned as editor in 1902. Meanwhile, the majority of the League, disappointed by its poor showing in the Senate election, resolved to abandon 'palliatives' and to campaign as a Socialist Labor Party on a one-point programme: the establishment of the co-operative commonwealth. The International Socialists, however, continued to urge an immediate programme, and the two groupings gradually moved further apart.⁵⁶

As well as this argument, there were other substantial points at issue. With the formation of the Industrial Workers of the World in America in 1905, Daniel De Leon had completely reformulated his tactics. The political party of the workers was now to be the 'shield' of the revolution—that is, its function was, through the ballot box, to capture and neutralize the capitalist state; while the 'sword' of the revolution, the socialist labour union, was to 'take and hold' the means of production and to administer the economy once this seizure had been accomplished. But for this the industrial movement would have to be reorganized; the old 'pure and simple' unions must be discarded and in their place must be built a new union, one union embracing the whole of the working class and organized on industrial rather than craft lines, the Industrial Workers of the World.⁵⁷ Against this, Holland's group of International Socialists argued the established Marxian position: the seizure of state power by the working class and the establishment, by the nationalization of the means of production, of state socialism.*

In Victoria socialism had taken a different course. The English socialist Tom Mann had, since 1902, been engaged in organizing work for the Trades Hall and the Labor Party; he and other socialists had formed a Social Questions Committee in 1905, with the aim of investigating unemployment in Melbourne, and later had arranged a merger of this and other socialist groups to form the Socialist Party of Victoria.† In 1904 Mann had described Australian Labor politicians as 'Independent Labour . . . but not necessarily Socialists';⁵⁸ now he declared of himself

* The 'Internationals', however, also supported the reconstruction of trade unionism on industrial lines; the difference was over the role of industrial unionism in the revolution.

† *Tom Mann's Memoirs*, pp. 204 ff.; *Socialist*, 2 April, 8 August 1906. In 1906 the V.S.P. claimed over 800 members, in 1907, 1,500; by 1909, membership had fallen to 430.

and his associates: 'Being Socialists, we are therefore Labor men, but our Labourism always includes Socialism'.⁵⁹ A former secretary of the British Independent Labour Party, Mann was an advocate of state and municipal ownership of industry and at this time believed that, with the adoption of the 'all-out' objective by the Queensland and Victorian Labor Parties, 'Australia is perfectly safe for Socialism'.⁶⁰ The duty of socialists was to work through the mass party, to improve its programme, to ensure the selection of class-conscious candidates; to do otherwise meant running the danger of becoming 'doctrinaire, exclusive, pedantic, and narrow . . . comparatively useless and perhaps even mischievous'.⁶¹ The measure of the success of this policy was the adoption by the Victorian Labor Party of the socialist objective, the growing influence of socialists in the Victorian unions, the adoption of socialists as Labor candidates for parliament.

In June 1907 these disparate groups came together to discuss the formation of a 'United Class-conscious Socialist Party'.* The conference was unanimous in condemning the arbitration system as having 'weakened trades unionism in spirit and achievement' and in urging the re-organization of the working class on the lines of the Industrial Workers of the World, but there was disagreement over the kind of political action socialists should undertake. The Victorian faction urged that, as the Labor Party must soon choose between the working class and the middle class, socialists should not cut themselves off from this struggle, while the 'Internationals' called for a ban on socialists participating in the Labor Party; the latter won. However, when it came to the formation of a Socialist Federation of Australasia, the V.S.P. agreed, but the Socialist Labor Party, claiming priority in time and in purity of doctrine, demanded that the other groups merge with it; the Socialist Federation won.†

The S.L.P. refused to join the Federation, and, still asserting its priority, formed in Sydney in October 1907 an I.W.W. Club as 'a propaganda and educative force' to disseminate the principles of industrial unionism and eventually to launch the I.W.W. union in Australia.⁶² Other clubs were soon established in Melbourne and on the northern coal-fields, and members of the V.S.P. and the International Socialists

* As well as the S.L.P., the V.S.P., and the International Socialist Club, the Barrier Socialist Group, the Brisbane Social Democratic Vanguard, and the Kalgoorlie (W.A.) Social Democratic Association were represented. Total membership of the groups was over 2,000.

† Report of Socialist Unity Conference (*The Flame*, July 1907). The inaugural members of the S.F.A. were the V.S.P., the International Socialist Club, and the Barrier Socialist Group. The Brisbane and Kalgoorlie groups refused to break their links with the Labor parties. The S.A. Socialist Party joined in 1908.

freely joined. Membership of the six clubs which had been formed by early 1908 was perhaps two or three hundred. But, although the constitution of the I.W.W. Club proclaimed that it did not endorse any political party, it maintained a close connection with the S.L.P., and this proved irksome. The Internationals broke with the Club in 1908, and that year's conference of the S.F.A. withdrew its endorsement of the I.W.W., taking its stand only for the principle of industrial unionism. Significantly, the conference proclaimed that industrial unionism was not the enemy of craft unionism but its logical extension; this meant that, contrary to the De Leonite policy of discouraging members from taking an active part in the trade unions, the International Socialists urged that they be captured for industrial unionism and socialism.

The Victorian socialists were far from unanimous about the original S.F.A. pronouncement on political action, and an intense debate raged in the party until finally a ballot of members supported the decision of the 1908 S.F.A. conference for the endorsement of independent candidates on a pure socialist platform with the intention of 'harassing the Parliamentary machine . . . in the spirit of Revolutionary Socialism'.⁶³ The V.S.P. resolved to stand two candidates in the Victorian elections of December 1908; between them they polled 167 votes.* This defeat caused chaos; several members resigned because of the party's opposition to Labor, and one moved (unsuccessfully) that the party be wound up altogether.⁶⁴

The dispute over tactics came to a head with the Federal election of 1910. At West Sydney, Holland, who had recently been released from gaol by the Wade government (to embarrass Labor in the election, the *Worker* said), campaigned vigorously against W. M. Hughes, citing the Labor man's misdemeanours in the recent coal strike. Holland got only 600-odd votes in a total poll of nearly 19,000; the workers were, he later explained 'as yet economically uneducated', but it was good that Labor had been returned, because they would certainly soon fail 'on their demerits'.† For its part, the V.S.P. flatly refused to stand any more candidates and withdrew the ban on its members supporting the candidates of the Labor Party. The issue was debated at the 1910 conference of the S.F.A. and the views of the Sydney socialists prevailed; no member of the Federation was to stand as, nor support, other than a socialist candidate.⁶⁵ The two points of view were clear. To most of the Victorians it seemed that this ban 'imposes upon the membership a

* The Labor Party alleged Liberal financial support for the two socialists; this rang rather hollowly when the V.S.P. had to find £100 to repay the money it had borrowed for its candidates' deposits.

† *Inter. Soc.*, 30 April 1910. This anticipated a later Leninist theory that only by the mass Labor parties forming governments could the workers learn their true anti-working-class character.

do-nothing, non-voting, our-kingdom-is-not-of-this-world, anarchistic policy in respect of all public elections'. Not at all, replied Sydney; 'it simply means that Socialists shall not vote against Socialism'.⁶⁶

Hard on the heels of this fight came the argument about Labor's new defence policy. The Internationals adopted an uncompromising anti-militarist stand, urging defiance of the call-up; the V.S.P. was divided between anti-militarists and advocates of a citizen army and took no official stand.* A pro-Sydney faction began to organize to take over the V.S.P.; the moderates appointed a special board to take control of the party's affairs, and the leader of the faction was expelled. The break was completed in 1912; a branch of the S.F.A. was formed in Melbourne; the Federation finally converted itself into the unified Australasian Socialist Party, and the V.S.P. formally withdrew.⁶⁷

Apart from the protracted argument over attitudes to the mass labour party, the socialist groups were from 1907 deeply concerned with the trade union movement.

The unions themselves were quite aware of the inadequacies of their own organization. The 1902 Commonwealth Trade Union Congress had urged a national federation of labour, incorporating both the Labor Councils and the 'big unions',† but this had foundered on craft union fear of domination by the A.W.U. and the miners. The Sydney Labor Council was growing rapidly in size‡ and was enforcing its principle of one trade, one union, although its craft union affiliates were irreconcilably opposed to industrial unionism as represented by the railways union.§ Both the Sydney Labor Council and the Melbourne Trades Hall

* Minutes, V.S.P., 10, 24 October 1911. Compare H. E. Holland and W. R. W. [inspear], 'An Open Letter to the Conscript Boys of Australia' (*Inter. Soc.*, 11 February 1911); Holland, *The Crime of Conscription*. The socialists freely suggested that working-class conscripts should turn their guns against the capitalists. They were joined in their defiance of the call-up by Quaker and other Christian pacifists who organized in April 1912 the Australian Freedom League. Between January 1912 and the outbreak of war there were nearly 28,000 prosecutions of defaulting youths (mainly instituted by the Labor government), which involved 5,700 gaolings (L. C. Jauncey, *The Story of Conscription in Australia*, pp. 50, 65-7). The principal concern of the socialists—drawing the lesson from the recent French railway strike—was that the troops might be used against the workers in industrial disputes (*Inter. Soc.*, 22 October, 26 November 1910).

† *Report*, 1902 Commonwealth T.U.C. The Congress claimed to represent 150,000 unionists; however, the Commonwealth Statistician reported only about 100,000 trade union members for that year.

‡ The Labor Council, which had represented at most 5,000 unionists in 1900, claimed to represent 70,000 in 1905, 130,000 in 1911.

§ Minutes, S.L.C., 22 June 1905. A delegate of the Amalgamated Carpenters said that he had 'never yet heard of a Society that assumed the same pretensions' as the A.R.T.S.A. When the Council refused to endorse its protest against craft union objections to its registration with the Industrial Court, the A.R.T.S.A. disaffiliated.

Council were trying to establish closer executive control over industrial disputes—in the end successfully. Federations of kindred and allied unions were proceeding apace. Into this ferment of reorganization was thrown the entirely new principle of the I.W.W.

The idea of one great union embracing the whole of the working class and divided tidily into six departments and thirty sub-departments, each representing one major branch of production,⁶⁸ came to many unionists as a revelation. The Melbourne Trades Hall Council went close to being captured for the I.W.W. in 1908, but finally resolved, the following year, to consolidate the industrial movement by grouping together the kindred unions.⁶⁹ At the 1908 N.S.W. Trade Union Congress the Newcastle Labor Council moved for reorganization on I.W.W. lines; the Congress preferred the Barrier A.M.A.'s proposal for the federation of existing unions, but subsequent Congresses could report no progress.⁷⁰ Despite the preoccupation with closer unionism, three things held back the adoption of one or other of these proposals: the fear of the craft unions that they would lose their identity; the unwillingness of the mass unions to embark on a federation unless representation was according to membership;* the suspicion among moderate unionists and Labor politicians that the I.W.W. organization and theory would lead to a 'general lock-out of the owners', something which they regarded as 'impossible, foolish and needless' while a powerful Labor Party operated within the Australian democracy.⁷¹

In its own way, each of the three socialist tendencies rejected this reliance on political labour. The S.L.P.-I.W.W. relied on its propaganda, directed particularly towards the miners, to convince the workers that they should abandon their old unions and form the I.W.W.; but the tiny I.W.W. Clubs had little influence on the movement generally. The Victorian socialists were well entrenched in the building and metal trades and among railway-workers and wharflabourers; from these positions they urged a militant industrial policy on the unions and a radical political policy on the Labor Party.

The International Socialists believed more specifically in the use of industrial struggle to give the workers a revolutionary education: 'That is the vital use of a strike; it is an object lesson to those who are still too undeveloped to respond to theory. These backward and muddle-headed thinkers require a special course in economics and industrialism; and they get it whilst a strike is on, and the rumble of battle is in the air.'⁷² With strong support among N.S.W. coal- and metal-miners and on the waterfront, the Internationals were in a good position to point

* Cf. the A.M.A. delegate's comment at the 1909 N.S.W. T.U.C. that 'skilled trades rule the Labor movement instead of Miners and Laborers' (*Worker*, 22 April 1909).

the lesson—but often they pointed it too sharply. Both because of the broader educative possibilities and because it seemed the way to win strikes, the socialists favoured their extension.* This was Peter Bowling's tactic in the coal dispute but it led to isolation and defeat, and the miners for a time turned not towards a revolutionary solution but back to arbitration and the Labor Party.

The revolutionaries had discovered the question, but not the answer; they had not yet found the ways of identifying themselves with the immediate struggles of the workers. The point was made adequately by a member of the Broken Hill I.W.W. Club, writing at the time of the big strike.

Throughout the industrial turmoil [the group which professed to believe in I.W.W. principles] rather stood aloof from the unionists, and on every possible occasion attacked the Labor Party. The effect was that workers who regard the Labor Party as bona fide were antagonised. . . . Had they endeavoured to explain the principles of the I.W.W. and show what advantages were to be gained by organising on those lines we might have almost swung the A.M.A. round to that form of organisation.⁷³

But while rank-and-file unionists, discouraged by defeat and antagonized by sectarian smugness, were turning again to political action, many socialists were drawing the quite contrary conclusion. To Tom Mann the lesson of Broken Hill was that sectional unionism was powerless against the machinery of state and that the Labor Parties showed precious little desire to assist. Had not the organized railwaymen transported police and strike-breakers and supplies for use against the Barrier miners? And this without effective opposition from—in the case of the South Australian party, even with the co-operation of—the Labor Parties? His remedy was the formation of industrial unions, with power to determine strategy for all the workers involved in any way in an industrial dispute, and the bold use of direct industrial action—'economic organisation . . . for the achievement of economic freedom'.⁷⁴ This was not the one great union as proposed by the I.W.W. but rather giant amalgamations of the existing unions according to the industries they served,† and it embodied a significant move away from the I.W.W.'s existing position on political action towards a quasi-

* Thus, the I.W.W. Club condemned the 'insanity of the absolute general strike' as propagated by the S.F.A., urging that this would be fatal until the workers were organized into the I.W.W.—when it would be unnecessary (I.W.W. Club Minutes, 1, 29 December 1909).

† Cf. 'An Open letter from the Industrial Workers of the World Club to the Australian Working Class', which warned of the dangers of another federation of craft unions and urged the workers to join the I.W.W. Club and help to educate the working class in the benefits of true industrial unionism.

anarchist denial of politics; but, as Mann said, the doctrine he was advocating had become the common currency of labour movements in many lands.⁷⁵

Anarchism has many points of origin, but a single source: impatience with the slowness of political action and moral revulsion against the corruption and compromise of political life. Its social ideal rejects centralized in favour of atomized society, and condemns any system of representative government as necessarily involving the exercise of minority power. Its ethic is absolute: the greatest evil is the rule of some men over others, and that which inhibits or destroys this is good. Its method of action distrusts the calculated and the organized and exalts the spontaneous acts of individuals and small groups. Men must live their own lives, and not those decreed for them by a ruling *élite*, an owning class, or an impersonal market: this they can only do when they join together as producers and themselves freely determine the organization of their labour and the disposal of its product, meanwhile, as citizens, living freely without the restraints imposed by a conventional morality or a property-based law.

In Bakunin's time, and in his Russia, anarchism did not seem altogether impossible, and it was widely accepted in the economically more backward parts of Europe—in Russia, Spain, Italy, and parts of France. But mechanization and the development of the large-scale enterprise made obsolescent the simple anarchism of the First International, the instinctive revolt of peasants and petty craftsmen against the cancer of industrialization. Syndicalism was the reaction of anarchism to large-scale industry, to the formation of an industrial proletariat and the growth of economic organizations of the working class, and it clung to many of the features of anarchism—to a contempt for parliamentarism, a reliance on spontaneous action, an image of an atomized society based on the free association of producers, a moral conviction that property was theft.

The common elements of syndicalism, as it developed before 1914 and fought for its positions in the national and international labour movements, were its rejection of political action as an effective or adequate means of securing the social objective of the labour movement in favour of industrial ('direct') action; its assertion that, since capitalist class rule and the exploitation of wage-labour were the ultimate evils, the working class need have no moral qualms about the means used to encompass their downfall; and its image of a future society in which the production process would be controlled directly by the workers involved therein. Since direct action was the necessary road to emancipation, it followed that the final act must be the general strike; but this presupposed a high level of class consciousness among

the workers—some, like Georges Sorel, even regarded it as having the quality of myth—and immediate ways of prosecuting the class struggle had to be found. Generally, the syndicalists did not favour sectional industrial disputes; these, they felt, were doomed to almost inevitable defeat. Instead, they urged the short-lived irritation strike, 'Ca' canny', go-slow, what is now known as the regulations strike; the physical sabotage of the production process: the worker must carry on the struggle at the point of exploitation, and if the boss would pay him while he was on strike so much the better. And there must be no moral inhibitions, for political action and ameliorative policies were a fraud, emasculating the workers by entangling them in the law while serving the interest of parliamentarians in power and wealth; furthermore the wages contract was concluded under duress. Revolutionary syndicalism was a complete and well-knit philosophy and ethic and programme for action.

Within this general framework, the specific forms of syndicalism were determined by the particular structures of the working classes and labour movements from which they grew. In France and Italy, where the small-scale enterprise prevailed, the characteristic form was the local syndicate of the workers employed in a small enterprise; these were loosely linked in federations of kindred syndicates and in an all-embracing national federation, while maintaining a high degree of autonomy of local action and administration. In Great Britain, where there was already a well-developed trade union movement covering most of the workers employed in Britain's giant industries, the characteristic forms were the movement towards industrial unionism by the amalgamation or institutionalized common action of existing unions, and the revolt of the shop stewards' movement against the well-entrenched and conservative trade union bureaucracy with its close links with the parliamentary labour party. In the United States in a period of rapid industrial growth, when the traditional craft unions were indifferent or hostile to the mass of unskilled workers (usually recent immigrants) employed in mining, construction, timber, meat-packing, textiles, the characteristic form was the creation of a new union of the unskilled (the I.W.W.) which challenged the dominance of the traditional unions. In Australia the spread of syndicalism took two forms: the move among militant trade union leaders for closer unionism and a return to industrial action; and the growing support among unskilled workers—watersiders, bush workers, miners, construction labourers—for the ideas of the Industrial Workers of the World. Both were a powerful threat to the interests of the traditional Labor and trade union leaders, and both met with a vigorous response.

Syndicalism had first reached Australia, in dilute form, with the formation of the I.W.W. Clubs in 1907 and the adoption of the I.W.W.

by the Socialist Federation of Australasia. But the American movement had split in 1908 between the followers of De Leon, with their insistence on the 'sword' and 'shield' concept of working-class emancipation, and the neo-anarchist opponents of the Socialist Labor Party (or any other party) and supporters of direct action. A new I.W.W. was set up, with its headquarters in Chicago, its bases among the unskilled workers on the eastern seaboard and in the far west, and a Preamble which declared peremptorily:

Between [the working class and the capitalist class] a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organise as a class, take possession of the earth and the machinery of production, and abolish the wage system. . . . The army of production must be organised, not only for the everyday struggle with capitalism, but also to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown. By organising industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.⁷⁶

From late in 1908 there was unrest in the Australian I.W.W. Clubs as more and more of the members advocated the adoption of the new Preamble and the industrial tactics which went with it.⁷⁷ The De Leonites denounced this 'anarchistic' tendency in the movement, but it could not be quelled: as the socialists of the S.F.A. grew increasingly disgusted with the role of Labor Parties and governments in industrial disputes, and increasingly disheartened with their own failure to make electoral headway, so they turned towards the shining promise of Chicago. Finally, on 6 May 1911, a meeting convened in Adelaide by a De Leonite but attended largely by members of the S.F.A. resolved to form a 'mixed local' of the Chicago I.W.W. and to begin recruiting members to the union of the Industrial Workers of the World.⁷⁸ The Sydney I.W.W. Club found this 'insane', but from the fourteen 'muddle-headed prejudiced and ignorant pseudo-socialists'⁷⁹ who constituted the Adelaide local grew the most significant revolutionary movement the Australian working class had yet known.

Six months later a group of dissidents in the Sydney I.W.W. Club, together with some S.F.A. members, formed themselves into a Sydney local and applied for a charter from Adelaide, which the Chicago headquarters had nominated as the Australian administration of the I.W.W.⁸⁰ In both Sydney and Adelaide the inspiration was not so much anarchism as dissatisfaction with the identification of the I.W.W. Club with the S.L.P.; the Socialist Federation welcomed the formation of the new I.W.W., which, the secretary of the Australian Administration declared, was 'neither pro-political nor anti-political but purely economic'.⁸¹ The I.W.W. Club approached the new Sydney local, seeking unity, but was told that this was possible only on the basis of the Chicago Preamble which omitted any mention of political action;⁸²

and renewed unity discussions between the S.L.P. and the newly-constituted Australasian Socialist Party broke down on the S.L.P. insistence that the united party endorse its version of the I.W.W.⁸³ As had so often happened, the ambition of socialists to unite the entire working class in one great revolutionary movement was dissipated in the doctrinal disputation of the sects.*

But the first Australian followers of the Chicago school had misunderstood both the nature and the essential appeal of the syndicalist doctrine. It was not enough that the new I.W.W. should be non-political—it must be anti-political, as well as anti-capitalist, anti-respectable, and anti-patriotic. This was what Chicago offered, and this was what a significant part of the Australian working class was ready to receive. So, in Sydney, the same ‘cantankerous and disruptive elements’ as had taken over the American I.W.W. invaded the No. 2 Australian local and succeeded in capturing it.† The founders of the local departed indignantly; the A.S.P. returned to the fold of the De Leonite I.W.W.;‡ the ‘physical force element’ was left to propagate direct action, sabotage, and a plague on King, Country, Capitalism and the Law.⁸⁴

The vigour of this lower-depths agitation for industrial unionism gave a new impetus to the top-level movement for closer unionism: the great A.W.U. amalgamation was carried through; the craft unions, through their Labor Councils,§ joined in a pretentious Federal Grand Council of Labor which had a strictly limited power ‘to advise in respect to, and if deemed necessary, by State Council, [to] control or endeavour to prevent any dispute with employers extending, or likely to extend beyond the limits of any one State’;⁸⁵ the N.S.W. mass unions, not to be outdone, formed a Federation of Labor which was denounced by the craft unions as a ‘No. 2 Labor Council’,¶ and later an Australian Union Federation which was denounced by the I.W.W.

* The total income of the Australian Administration of the I.W.W. in its first fourteen months was £10. 0s. 6d. (letter of E. A. Moyle to G. G. Reeve, 10 August 1912). The combined membership was perhaps thirty.

† *Inter. Soc.*, 19 July 1913. (The captors included T. Glynn, J. Fagin and J. B. King of the I.W.W. Twelve; see Chapter 5.)

‡ *Inter. Soc.*, 27 September 1913. However, the unity negotiations with the S.L.P. again broke down—this time on the S.L.P.’s insistence that it be allowed to absorb the A.S.P.

§ In Brisbane, the Industrial Council, which was formed after the A.L.F. had voted itself out of existence on the advice of the A.W.U. and following the A.W.U.-A.W.A. amalgamation early in 1913. There were, in 1914, twenty-six central organizations of this kind throughout Australia, to which were affiliated 668 trade unions and union branches (*Labour Report*, No. 8, p. 16).

¶ *Worker*, 23 October 1913; N.S.W.L.C., *Report*, 31 December 1913, p. 6. The A.R.T.S.A., the R.W.G.L.U., and the coal-miners’ unions took part; the organization folded up with the formation of the miners’ federation in 1915 (A.R.T.S.A. Minutes, 13 April 1915).

as an attempt to shackle the legs of trade unionists whose hands were already tied by arbitration.* On the revolutionary political front, the I.W.W. Club had fallen away by mid-1913 to under a hundred members; the S.L.P. was complaining of 'apathy and indifference', and its membership was less than 300; the membership of the V.S.P. was down to 200-odd and the circulation of its paper to 1,500; and the desperate efforts of the political socialists to meet the I.W.W. challenge by uniting their declining strengths all foundered on sectarian bitterness.†

Meanwhile, the I.W.W. (Chicago-style) flourished. Its propaganda was simple and effective and had a ready appeal especially to the itinerant and unskilled workers who were its source of strength:

The hours are long
The pay is small,
So take your time
And buck them all.

Its message was not over complex, and it could readily be expressed in such slogans as:

FAST WORKERS DIE YOUNG . . . ARBITRATE ON THE JOB . . .
AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL.

It was a singing movement, with a vigour and a humour which readily captured street-corner audiences from socialists and salvationists alike:

I've read my Bible ten times through,
And Jesus justifies me,
The man who does not vote for me,
By Christ, he crucifies me.

So bump me into parliament,
Bounce me any way,
Bang me into parliament
The next election day.‡

* *Direct Action*, 1 June 1914. As well as the above unions, the A.U.F. proposed to include the A.W.U. and the Seamen's Union; it failed when the A.W.U. refused its endorsement (J. T. Sutcliffe, *A History of Trade Unionism in Australia*, pp. 171-3).

† See *Inter. Soc.*, 7 June, 30 August, 29 November 1913; *People*, 29 January 1914. In Victoria the A.S.P. and the V.S.P. differed substantially in their attitudes to political action and to defence; in New South Wales, the A.S.P. and the S.L.P. differed only on whether the united party should be called the U.S.P. of A. or the U.S.L.P. of A.

‡ 'Bump Me Into Parliament', the most notable Australian contribution to the I.W.W.'s 'little red song-book' (known officially as *Songs to Fan the Flames of Discontent*), was written by W. Casey, a ship's fireman who was known as the 'philosopher of the proletariat' (G. Baracchi, *Communist Review*, December 1937). After I.W.W. stump men had been convicted for blasphemy over this song, the words were modified, at least in the official publications.

And its members were young and enthusiastic, with a burning conviction in the faith they professed and a total contempt for the boss and the law. They roamed Australia, at first a handful, then five hundred, then a thousand or more of them, with copies of *Direct Action* in their swags and red cards and song-books in their pockets, working wherever there was a boss to trouble, agitating wherever there was a street corner or a stump, forming locals and filling gaols, and when war came and they were called to battle, they fought—not against their foreign brothers, but against their enemies at home.

The Labour Movement and the War

EVEN BY THE TIME OF THE BOER WAR, the Labor Parties had moved far enough away from their original radical nationalism, bordering on republicanism, to give their blessing to Australian support for the British; but this was, contemporary observers suggested, not so much a matter of conviction as of their desire not to antagonize the electorate, and a small group of parliamentarians and a fairly large group of unionists (most importantly the leaders of the A.W.U.) were outspoken against Australian involvement.

The Outbreak of War

By August 1914 there had been a further slide: Labor had transformed itself into a national party, in office in three of the six states (New South Wales, Western Australia, Tasmania) and fighting an election to regain control of the Federal Parliament which it had lost the previous year. The formation of Labor governments had put the finishing touch to the tendency for Labor not only to present itself but to think of itself as a community rather than a class party, concerned to prosecute a conception of the national interest that was increasingly acceptable to its traditional opponents. This tendency had been underlined, in the early years of the defence debate, by Labor's advocacy of what has since remained a dogma of foreign policy—that Australia, an outpost of European civilization in an alien and hostile environment, can be secured against the coloured hordes only by alliance with and reliance upon a major power. The earlier picture of Australia as an island whose surrounding oceans were an adequate guarantee against invasion had, with the penetration of the Pacific by Germany and France and the Japanese defeat of Russia, given way to a fear of imminent invasion; and, for all the nationalist gloss which Labor gave its defence policy, it maintained from the outset close links with the Imperial strategists.¹ Besides, Great Britain still controlled Australia's external relations, and the British declaration automatically involved Australia.

The nature and extent of Australian participation were, however,

within the competence of the local government. Already, in the last stages of the crisis which followed Sarajevo, Joseph Cook, the retiring Liberal Prime Minister, had offered the Imperial Government the Australian Naval Squadron and an expeditionary force of 20,000 men, to be financed and supported by Australia. There can be no doubt of the popular sympathy for Great Britain—even fervent Irish patriots declared for burying the Home Rule hatchet—and, caught in the middle of an election campaign, the Labor Party capped the government's patriotic professions with Andrew Fisher's pledge that Australia would stand by the 'old country' to the last man and the last shilling.* The Labor leaders even offered the government an electoral truce, but this was refused; the electorate reacted adversely—and perhaps remembered kindly Labor's early efforts for defence—and the party was returned with the biggest popular vote it had yet won, capturing five seats from the Liberals in the House and winning thirty-one of the thirty-six places in the Senate. It was a famous victory; Fisher formed his second government, and Labor set itself to uniting the nation for the speedy military triumph which was generally expected.

There was little qualification to the patriotic enthusiasm of the Labor leaders. A few Labor candidates sounded a warning, and there was no great round of cheering from the unions—indeed the war was little mentioned, in union gatherings, except in terms of its possible economic effects. Trade union members were quick to flock to the colours, however; of the 54,000 recruits who enlisted in the first five months of the war, 43 per cent were unionists—well above the proportion of unionists among adult males;² and later there were some chauvinistic outbursts in which watersiders in several ports, a few N.S.W. miners' lodges, and—most importantly, since it led to a substantial strike in 1916—Western Australian gold-miners refused to work alongside men they deemed to be enemy aliens.† But the prevailing note in the labour movement was perhaps one of sadness:

This is not a war for which a single extenuating reason can be given on either side. There is no great principle at the back of it, no vital issue on which two high-spirited and intelligent people might earnestly differ, and deem it not unworthy to shed their blood. . . . Australia will suffer much in the struggle that seems ahead. . . . Thousands of unemployed will be created; unscrupulous greed

* This is not to suggest that the Labor leaders were other than convinced supporters of the British cause; the tone of their pronouncements suggests, however, that they were not unmindful of the electoral implications.

† This could, however, be interpreted as unionists using the anti-German hysteria to settle old scores; e.g. most of the gold-miners to whom objection was taken were Serbs, and unwilling citizens of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Despite socialist and militant unionist pressure, the central trade union bodies refrained from condemning the offenders.

will seize the opportunity to raise the necessities of life to famine prices. . . .

We must protect our country. We must keep sacred from the mailed fist this splendid heritage. For that our Army of Defence was formed, and our Navy built.

But we hope no wave of jingo madness will sweep over the land, unbalancing the judgment of its leaders, and inciting its population to wild measures, spurred on by the vile press, to which war is only an increase of circulation, and every corpse a copper.

God help Australia! God help England! God help Germany! God help us!³

Among the socialists there was some confusion. The three main groups had identified themselves with the Hardie-Vaillant 'war against war' resolution, carried at the Amsterdam Congress of the Second International; the Victorian Socialist Party had won the endorsement of the Melbourne Trades Hall Council for this policy, but in Sydney, where the A.S.P. and the S.L.P. were pretty much insulated by their dogmas from the mass labour organizations, little had been done to gain trade union support. However, it was just this connection with the mass labour movement that lay behind the V.S.P.'s early ambivalence. It was not only that the party 'found itself confused and amazed by developments amongst the Socialists of other countries'⁴—as well it might, when every mail brought news of great European parties and revered leaders like Guesde, Blatchford, Kropotkin, Plekhanov declaring for the war, while it seemed that only a handful (Jaurès, already dead, and Liebknecht and Luxemburg, wrongly believed to have been executed) stood out. But the V.S.P. had deliberately chosen to 'bore from within' the Labor Party; and for most Victorian socialists, whose sympathies were with the anti-war minority of the International, there was the considerable moral problem of whether their party could continue to follow this tactic. A minority wanted a public condemnation of the 'apostasy' of the Victorian Labor leaders and a repudiation of the 'fakers, twicers, and blood-suckers' who comprised the Federal party; but the majority, led by party secretary R. S. Ross, stood firm behind the original position that, 'owing to the "say" of the unions and leagues and conferences at the back of the [Labor] party', socialism, free speech, and the workers stood a better chance with Fisher than with the Fusionists.⁵ Untroubled by any other feeling for the Labor Party than a profound contempt, the Sydney sects were immediate and direct in their denunciation of the war. 'For the time being the war-mongering savage in our midst holds sway,' wrote the *International Socialist* in August 1914, 'and we are about to reap in blood and tears what he has

for some time been sowing.' But there were not many who listened; in the working-class electorate of Cook, the lone Socialist candidate in the 1914 Federal elections won a miserable 509 votes in a total poll of 27,272. The socialist position was firmly taken, but there was little suggestion yet of any practical opposition to the war; and in this sense the Australian socialists were just as overwhelmed as were their European comrades who declared for their countries, right or wrong. Certainly those unions which had endorsed the Hardie-Vaillant resolution showed little intention of putting it into effect; and the socialists showed just as little understanding of how to persuade the unions to act.

Only the I.W.W. were quite clear about what they wanted:

LET THOSE WHO OWN AUSTRALIA DO THE FIGHTING

Put the wealthiest in the front ranks; the middle class next; follow these with politicians, lawyers, sky pilots and judges. Answer the declaration of war with the call for a GENERAL STRIKE. . . . Don't go to Hell in order to give piratical, plutocratic parasites a bigger slice of Heaven.

WORKERS OF THE WORLD, UNITE! DON'T BECOME HIRED MURDERERS!
DON'T JOIN THE ARMY OR NAVY!*

As yet, not many more workers were listening to the I.W.W. than to the Socialists, but the Wobblies were shouting louder, and later, when disillusion succeeded the early optimism, it was their voice which was heard.

The War on the Wages Front

Unless they accepted the revolutionary opposition offered by the I.W.W., or something like it, there was little that the labour organizations could do about the war. True, Australia was involved, but it was in a voluntary capacity; the popular response to the appeal for men was so great that the government did not even begin a recruiting campaign until the war was nearly twelve months old. There were only two possible points of challenge—action designed to secure Australian withdrawal or a direct appeal to men not to enlist; but these courses seemed, to most labour organizations, neither realistic nor desirable. The *Worker's* forecast of unemployment and economic hardship did not wait long for its fulfilment, and the concern of the trade unions was more with the effects of the war on the working class than with the war itself.

It was clear from the beginning that the war would have serious consequences for the Australian economy; on the day after the declara-

* Tom Barker, *Direct Action*, 22 August 1914. (Barker was later gaoled for publishing a 'recruiting poster' which repeated these sentiments.)

tion, the *Sydney Morning Herald* warned its working-class readers that the boom was over, and that they should accustom themselves to the possibility of a wage cut.* This was just what the unions feared—that the burdens of the war, economic as well as military, would be loaded on to the workers; and, as unemployment spread, prices soared, and wages were frozen, their fears seemed justified.

Despite the 140,000 workers who had been added to the labour force in secondary industry, the essential features of the Australian economy remained the export of primary production and the import of manufactured goods, the metal industry in particular still not having reached the point where Australian industrial development could proceed independently of an inflow of machines, machine tools, and even the essential raw materials of the engineering trade.

The immediate consequence of the declaration of war was the dislocation of this trade. Germany had become a major buyer of Australian exports, and now she was out. British manufacturers, on whom Australia had relied for most of her imports, were no longer certain that they could fulfil Australian orders. Shipping was soon requisitioned for war purposes. Australian manufacturers, even those who produced for the domestic market, were overcome by an immediate sense of insecurity. The first impact of the war on the working class was that thousands lost their jobs—first of all in the maritime occupations, which depended on trade, then in the metal industry, which depended on imports, in coal-mining, which depended on exports, and in the light industries, which depended on their owners' confidence in the domestic market. The number of unemployed trade unionists jumped, between the second and third quarters of 1914, from 16,000 to 30,000—from 5·7 to 10·7 per cent of the membership of those unions which made unemployment returns.⁶ By December N.S.W. unionists estimated that eleven or twelve thousand workers had lost their jobs; the Melbourne Trades Hall Council claimed that there were 10,000 out of work in that city, hundreds of whom were demonstrating on the streets, and Trades Hall officials were warning the government that the men 'could not be blamed if they took the position into their own hands and did something desperate';⁷ in September, the Queensland Combined Unions Committee reported 5,000 unemployed, most of them members of the A.W.U. Throughout Australia there was widespread distress. Later, as government and private finance dried up, so unemployment spread among construction and building workers; and as the Federal government placed an embargo on the export of metals, so it spread to new groups of miners. For the adventurous or the patriotic, unemploy-

* Actually, the *Herald* (5 August 1914) said: 'It is well to accustom ourselves . . .,' but there seemed little doubt to whom they were talking.

ment was often an occasion for enlistment; for the majority, it was an occasion for bewilderment and a dignified approach to government or union authorities to find them jobs; for the militant minority, it was a confirmation of their disbelief in the politicians' promises of equality of sacrifice and a spur to their agitation for a reduction in working hours and for the right to work.

The cynicism of some unionists was not wholly unjustified: the outbreak of war was greeted by employers throughout Australia with the demand that, in the present state of uncertainty, existing awards be set aside and wages be allowed to find their own level. Clearly this was political dynamite, and the employers' proposals were not accepted; however, in all states, wage fixation came to a standstill with wages frozen at the pre-war level. In March 1915 Mr Justice Powers of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court praised all parties for their restraint, and commented: 'The people are loyally bearing their share of a burden cast on the Empire by the war, and are satisfied as long as possible to work on rates fixed before the war.'⁸ The restraint, however, did not last beyond the wave of price rises which hit the working class at about the same time that Mr Justice Powers was delivering his judgment.*

The wage freeze affected unionists in New South Wales more than elsewhere, and it was here that the major pressure developed. Under the 1912 Act, the determinations of the Wages Boards were operative for a maximum of three years, after which they lapsed; on the outbreak of war, the President of the N.S.W. Industrial Court suspended Wages Board hearings, with the result that, by the end of 1914, there were no determinations in operation for over a quarter of the Boards. Unionists were thus deprived of a legal shield on which they had come to rely.

The Labor Council protested against this suspension, and claimed the credit for the relaxation in January 1915, when all Boards except those covering government employees were instructed to reopen for business. The Council was anxious to do its patriotic duty, it said, and would willingly have accepted a continuation of the pre-war awards—if only the employers had frozen prices and rents; but as it was, unionists could scarcely be expected to refrain from wage demands.⁹ The January dispensation provided some measure of relief, but the reservation was extremely irksome to the unions of government workers.

The A.R.T.S.A. had, in October 1914, registered its 'indignant and vehement' protest against short time and retrenchments in the railways service, for which it blamed the Labor government's financial policy; its secretary had organized an Industrial Unions Committee (including

* Food and groceries price index (1911 = 1000): 1914 (four quarters): 1104, 1158, 1151, 1161; 1915 (four quarters): 1235, 1364, 1554, 1512 (*Labour Report*, No. 8, p. 34). After this the index flattens out, even falling slightly, until the post-war inflation.

the Railway Workers' and General Labourers' Union—the union of construction workers—and the A.W.U.) to consider this question, as well as some proposed amendments to the Arbitration Act which, it was claimed, discriminated in favour of the craft unions. This group did not hesitate to criticize the Holman government—the R.W.G.L.U. said that the unions had to fight just as hard for wages as they had done under the Liberals¹⁰—and, at the 1915 Conference of the N.S.W. Labor Party, they launched a frontal attack. It was the Premier himself who had given the Industrial Court the tip to impose the wage freeze, charged Hector Lamond, a powerful figure in the A.W.U., as he supported a motion for the 'severest censure [of the government] for allowing the workers to suffer . . . in this crisis'.¹¹ Holman denied that the government could have influenced the Court or would seek to do so; however this may have been, within a few weeks of the inconclusive conference debate (the censure motion was defeated, but by a narrow majority) the restriction had gone, and the Wages Boards of government employees went back to work.

New South Wales was not untypical; the general union response to the wage freeze (not surprisingly, considering the large numbers of unemployed) was political rather than industrial. In Victoria the Labor Party, despite the hopes occasioned by the Federal elections, remained in a hopeless parliamentary minority;* Trades Hall proposals to the Victorian government for state cultivation of unused land and an extensive programme of public works, and to the Federal government for an unemployment pension, were alike unsuccessful.¹² Adelaide reported widespread distress; the unemployed, however, were not making urgent demands on the Liberal government—they were pinning their hopes on the coming elections. A Labor government under Crawford Vaughan was returned with a comfortable majority, but it made little difference to the condition of the working class.

Labor's most spectacular victory was in Queensland, where a Liberal government had been in power since the Labor Party split in 1905. Led by T. J. Ryan,† Labor launched a devastating campaign against the unpopular Denham government in the 1915 elections. Queensland's 4,000-odd sugar-growers were up in arms against the dictation by the near-monopoly Colonial Sugar Refinery of the prices it would pay for

* Eighteen in a House of fifty-eight, after the December 1914 election.

† After standing as a Deakinite in 1903, Ryan was returned as Labor member for Barcoo in 1909; he succeeded D. Bowman as leader of the parliamentary party in 1912, with strong trade union support. He should not be confused with another T. J. Ryan, an engaging character who was gaoled during the 1891 strike and returned to Parliament in 1892, but refused to stand again in 1893, saying, 'The friends were too warm, the whisky too strong, and the cushions too soft for Tommy Ryan. His place is out amongst the shearers on the billabongs' (Spence, *Australia's Awakening*, p. 281).

their cane; the government rejected price-fixing legislation as socialistic, but Ryan promised it. With the outbreak of war and the onset of drought, food prices rocketed. It was widely believed that supplies were being deliberately withheld from the market by rings of producers and processors in which members of the government were personally interested; Labor promised price control. The government had ordered that adjustments in the wages and salaries of public servants be suspended; Labor promised to restore them. The trade unions had been complaining for years of the primitive state of Queensland's labour legislation; Labor promised them a new deal. Unemployment was widespread, especially in the meat industry (the meatworks were closing down because of non-delivery of cattle), in the building trades, and in mining; the government was committed to retrenchment, but Labor promised public works. The result was a landslide: twenty-two government seats were lost to the Labor Party and five to the newly-formed Farmers' Union; six of the eight Ministers of the Denham government lost their seats. The unionists were jubilant, but Ryan struck a cautious note. Addressing the Brisbane electors on the night of victory, he suggested that, now Labor had won, there would be many who would expect the moon; 'however,' he said, 'I am afraid they will have to be content with a few moonbeams'.¹³

The moonbeams nevertheless proved a more substantial diet than any other Labor government had offered its supporters, and the Ryan ministry did not exaggerate when, in 1918, it described its record during three years of office as 'an important work accomplished in the teeth of unprecedented difficulties [the war and the steady opposition of the Legislative Council] . . . the most sweeping list of legislative reforms yet achieved in the history of the State during a similar period of time . . .'.¹⁴

In many respects, the theory behind Ryan's programme anticipated what in recent years has become the common currency of Labor and Social Democratic parties throughout the world. It was not his intention to establish government monopolies by nationalizing existing enterprises, but rather 'to protect the public by competing with [private traders] on fair and efficient lines'.¹⁵ State enterprises were established in saw milling and in food production and distribution,* and were forecast in coal-mining and the exploitation of oil and iron ore resources; government works were carried out by day labour, with preference to unionists, rather than by private contract; sugar-growers were assured of stability by the acquisition of the whole of their crops at fixed prices; state-owned insurance and banking institutions were set up; what was

* The competition of the state butchers' shops was claimed to have resulted in a reduction of meat prices of some 40 per cent—a saving worth four shillings a week to the average family.

described as the 'most advanced arbitration system in Australia' was instituted, and an 8-hour working day was established by law. The government worked closely and amicably with the unions, consulting them on specific pieces of legislation and responding to such demands as that of the militant Meat Industry Employees' Union for government intervention to reopen the meatworks, which had been closed down by their private owners.

The Ryan government was the high water mark of Labor in politics; it skilfully exploited the favourable tactical situation created by the war dislocation, the ultra-conservatism of its predecessor, and the concurrent (but not mutually exclusive) grievances of workers, small farmers, and public servants to introduce government intervention in the economy on a scale which had not previously been seen, and which (except for the years of World War II) has not since been equalled. But even the Ryan government could not survive the contradictions and conflicts of loyalty which have proved endemic to Labor governments in Australia.

The Prices Referendum

With the best will in the world, it was not possible for the state governments to deal adequately with the economic problems confronting the nation. The major problem—financing the war effort—was unquestionably a matter for the Commonwealth; and this overrode the claims of the states (stimulated by trade union demands) for funds for public works. In the field which most directly concerned ordinary people—the supply and prices of commodities—the difficulties were insuperable.

An attempt was made in the early stages of the war to pass uniform legislation through the state parliaments to establish price-control machinery, but this was spiked in the Legislative Councils. The Federal Liberal government, in its last days, appointed a Royal Commission on prices, but it was given no executive powers and was dissolved by the Fisher government late in 1914. Trade union requests that the Federal government take over price control were rejected by Fisher on the grounds that local action was preferable and that in any case the Commonwealth did not have the necessary powers. Meanwhile, prices continued to rise. It may have been, as Scott, the historian of the home front, suggests, that the major causes were the drought-created scarcity of foodstuffs and the inflation caused by the rapid expansion of the note issue;¹⁶ but the labour movement clung stubbornly to its belief that the sources of the troubles were 'the hogs of society, the exploiting rascals of the people's everyday food, [who] are trading on misfortune and making the poor pay the bill'.¹⁷ To support their case, the labour propagandists pointed to the undoubted desire of food producers and especially processors to 'corner' supplies of certain commodities—meat,

sugar, and flour were most often mentioned—in order to take advantage of a rising world market.

For answer, the labour organizations returned to the proposals for constitutional reform which had already been rejected twice by popular vote—overwhelmingly in 1911, but narrowly in 1913.* The proposed amendments were designed to enable 'the people . . . to control Trusts, to ensure to all a fair and reasonable wage, to ensure the primary producer a fair and reasonable price for his produce, to protect themselves against the extortion of the Trusts, and to maintain Industrial Peace';¹⁸ and Fisher, in his 1914 policy speech, had specifically pledged that they would be presented again.

At the 1915 N.S.W. Labor conference, the state Premier had won a narrow victory over the unions' attempt to censure his government for its failure to cope with price increases; but when the unions came back with a resolution that the Federal government be asked to resubmit the referendum proposals, Holman, always a strong 'state rights' man, was badly beaten. Powerful support for the motion came from W. M. Hughes, the Federal Attorney-General, who was attending the conference—much to the annoyance of N.S.W. Ministers—as a delegate of the Carters' Union of which he was President; he argued strongly that recent High Court decisions had imposed serious limitations on the Commonwealth's powers, and the resolution passed without dissent.†

A similar demand had been raised within the Victorian party, and when the Commonwealth Labor conference met in Adelaide on 31 May 1915 it was two Victorian delegates who moved that the Federal government should put the referendum to the people as soon as possible. Holman made an ineffectual attempt to sidetrack the discussion on to unification, but Fisher made it clear that this was not at issue and that he hoped that the referendum would go ahead soon, as 'a vast number of the people of Australia were awaiting the passage of amendments of the Commonwealth Constitution which would protect their interests'.‡ Most dele-

* In 1911, 53 per cent of electors voted, about three to two against the proposals, only Western Australia voting 'Yes' on any of the six questions. In 1913, 74 per cent of electors voted, about fifty-one to forty-nine against; this time, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia voted in favour of all six questions.

† S.M.H., 8 April 1915. Hughes was probably thinking of the tendency of High Court decisions to limit the Commonwealth arbitration power, and of the recent decisions in *N.S.W. v. Commonwealth*, which upheld the right of a state government to acquire any property within its domain, regardless of Section 92 of the Commonwealth Constitution.

‡ *Report*, Sixth Commonwealth Labor Conference, p. 10. Fisher, Holman, and other politicians were present as delegates from the state organizations, not from the parliamentary parties. Indeed, non-parliamentary delegates tended to resent any claim by politicians for special consideration—cf. the reply of a Victorian delegate to the suggestion that Hughes be heard on the constitutional amendments: "This is not the place for an address from the Federal Attorney-General" (*ibid.*, p. 14).

gates had been mandated by their organizations to support the motion, and it was carried on the voices. Holman's gesture towards unification had been designed only to prepare the ground for the battle to come.

On the second day of conference, debate was resumed on the motion (as finally formulated by W. M. Hughes) 'that the proposed amendment of the Constitution should provide for the grant to the Commonwealth of power to regulate prices and acquire necessary commodities'.¹⁹ This was the real point of disagreement. Early in 1915, confronted with the failure of the wheat crop, the Labor governments of New South Wales and Western Australia had commandeered the available supplies and had prohibited wheat exports to the other states. The parliamentarian-delegates from these two states defended their government's policies, but the others were resentful, and Hughes and Fisher had the support not only of Victoria, Queensland, Tasmania, and (except for one delegate) South Australia, but of prominent trade unionists from the delinquent states. Despite the objections of the state politicians, the conference report records that Hughes's motion was carried unanimously.* The gap between trade unionists and politicians was clear, but on this issue the unionists were in alliance with the Federal ministry, which had a special interest in the matter.

The formation of a Federal Executive of the party had been under desultory consideration since 1905. It was finally set up by the 1915 conference; consisting of two delegates from each state, it was to act as 'the administrative authority in carrying out the decisions of the Inter-State Conference'.²⁰ Its first act when it met on 10 June 1915 was to ask the government to push ahead with the referendum.

Hughes introduced the Bills for the referendum in June; they were passed, but only after a stormy debate in which the Opposition accused him of fostering politically-motivated measures which could only divide the people at a time when maximum unity was necessary. December 11 was named as the polling day. Throughout the Commonwealth, conservative opposition was unanimous and loud. Business interests put their case for freedom from government intervention direct to Andrew Fisher, but he insisted that the Commonwealth must have these powers, while he reassured his own supporters that 'nothing short of an earthquake would prevent the . . . proposals being submitted to the people'.²¹

The rank and file of the party was jubilant. There was still some criticism of the government's failure to use the War Precautions Act to control prices, and considerable sympathy for Frank Anstey who had resigned from the Federal parliamentary party in protest against the government's financial policy and its use of the War Precautions Act

* What the reporter may have meant is *nem. con.* From the tone of the comments of the state politicians, it seems unlikely that they voted for the motion.

against left-wing critics, but branches and unions all over Australia acclaimed the referendum. The opposition was condemned as 'the fury of bandits, who feel that their campaign of robbery is about to be thwarted and brought to an end'.²² There seemed every chance that this time the increased powers would be granted. The public temper that had swept the Ryan government into office was not confined to Queensland.

But at the decisive moment the front weakened—and in Queensland. In August Sir George Reid resigned his post as Australian High Commissioner to Great Britain, and two names were canvassed to succeed him, Andrew Fisher and W. M. Hughes. In the event, Fisher, wearied by the continual divisions in caucus, particularly over certain amendments which the unions and the left wing of the parliamentary party were demanding to the Arbitration Act, went to London; Hughes became Prime Minister. Hughes had already begun to have doubts about the referendum, and had had discussions with leading members of the Opposition; now he convened a conference of state Premiers, five of whom were Labor men.

Meanwhile, pressure from a section of the Queensland A.W.U.,²³ which was deeply entrenched in the new Queensland government, had convinced T. J. Ryan that the referendum should be dropped. At the Premiers' Conference Ryan moved that this be done, in consideration for the Premiers undertaking to introduce legislation into their respective parliaments to transfer the required powers to the Commonwealth for the duration of the war and twelve months thereafter. Without reference to caucus or to the newly-constituted Federal Executive, Hughes accepted this offer; later he claimed that there had been no time for consultation, that, in the light of the states' offer, the referendum would have failed, and that a decision had had to be made on the spot. This done, Hughes took his decision to caucus for ratification; the majority of members agreed to the abandonment of the referendum, a measure which had aroused more enthusiasm than any other act of the war-time Labor government.²⁴

The opponents of the referendum were triumphant, but the labour movement was in uproar. It was obvious to both sides—as it must have been to the Prime Minister and the Premiers—that there was no prospect whatever of the upper houses in the state legislatures agreeing to the proposed transfer of powers.*

The *Worker* was not sure of its position. 'The most vicious tools

* In fact, only the N.S.W. Parliament passed the required legislation. In Queensland and South Australia it was rejected by the Legislative Councils, while in Victoria it failed in the Legislative Assembly. In the other two states, it was not introduced. In Queensland, this failure provoked Ryan into an unsuccessful attempt to abolish the Legislative Council.

of Vested Interests lurk in the shadows of those charnel-houses', thundered its strongly radical editor, H. E. Boote, 'where the bleaching bones of progressive measures bestrew the ground, and the mutilated remains of freshly-slaughtered victims proclaim that the blood-lust of the enemies of progress is as fierce as of yore.' But there was some cause for hope in the fact that 'the suggested transfer of powers by the states is due to the existence of Labor Ministries in all the States save Victoria. That is a circumstance which lifts the scheme at once right out of the category of things suspect, and gives it the hallmark of the Genuine Article.'²⁵ But the optimism of the *Worker* was not generally shared. Hostility to Hughes was most outspoken in the Victorian party, whence the strongest pressure for the referendum had come; he was denounced as an 'Imperial sycophant', and it was confidently predicted that he and Holman would, in the near future, be 'right with the crowd of political snobs and Tories to whom they rightfully belong'.²⁶

Straight after the announcement of the caucus decision the Victorians demanded an explanation from Hughes, but got none that satisfied them; thereupon they convened a meeting of the Federal Executive. When this body assembled in Melbourne early in January, Hughes was faced with a motion from the South Australian party which in effect censured the government for over-riding the decision of the party and ignoring the rights of the executive. Hughes's 'lengthy explanation' of his action cut no ice with the delegates, and an amendment endorsing the Federal government's action failed to find a seconder. The censure motion was carried, and the meeting adjourned until the following morning.

That night the factions worked overtime, and when the meeting resumed Hughes was again on top. A well-timed threat of resignation had, as it so often does, frightened the executive with its majority of parliamentarians into surrender.²⁷ The moves had been well worked out. Senator Givens, from the chair, suggested that the motion be recommitted. Olifent of South Australia, the mover of the motion, said that he had no objection. J. D. Fitzgerald, M.L.C., and Senator O'Keefe moved first the recommitment and then that 'the Executive regrets that the circumstances did not permit of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party consulting the Australian Political Labor Executive before assenting to the postponement of the Constitutional Referenda proposals'. Olifent asked for leave to withdraw his original motion. Hughes and Fitzgerald moved that leave be granted. The face-saving resolution was carried, only the two Victorian delegates and one of the Western Australians standing firmly by the original motion.

The South Australians, who had quite definite instructions from their party to move the censure, were allowed a let-out; they moved that Hughes be asked to call Parliament together (it had gone into

recess for six months immediately after the abandonment of the referendum) in order to re-submit the proposals. Hughes spared himself even the minor embarrassment of considering this request by advancing the quite specious argument that, since the loss of the Wide Bay seat in the by-election which followed Fisher's departure for London, the government no longer had a dependable majority in the House of Representatives.²⁸

Confronted with the pressure of the business lobby and the concern of some state Labor men for the constitutional powers of the states and their own power and prestige, the Federal government had caved in. Confronted with an outraged rank and file, Hughes had carried his fellow politicians with him, and had won the battle on the executive. But he had lost the war. The opposition to Hughes, which had until now been only a minority of the party, became the majority. To the withering rifle fire of the Victorian party and a number of the mass unions and the consistent sniping of a few militant Federal members was added the heavy artillery of the A.W.U. The *Worker*, which had in November still shown some belief in the good faith of the government, was asking in January:

Haven't we strength and influence enough left in our industrial unions and our political leagues to force our *parliamentary delegates* to carry out the instructions they received, and induce them to be faithful to the solemn pledges they gave us when we selected them for the vitally important work they are failing to perform? [My italics.]

In 1916 the Hughes government made a serious attack on the cost of living. Flour and sugar prices were subjected to control, by regulations gazetted under the War Precautions Act. A Prices Adjustment Board was set up, and was soon superseded by a Necessary Commodities Commission which expanded price control rapidly. But by now it was too late. The breach between the movement at large and the leading politicians was almost complete, and for the A.W.U. to pose the question of the movement's control over the men it had sent into office was to begin to answer it. Conscription added the final details to a picture, already well advanced, of a party which was disintegrating because of the irreconcilable attitudes prevailing among its members towards the war.

*'If You Want a 44-Hour Week, Take It!'**

The first eighteen months of the war were relatively quiet on the industrial front; widespread unemployment made any general use of

* The legend on a button worn by the marchers in the Broken Hill Eight-Hour Day procession, 7 October 1916. It was clearly of I.W.W. origin.

the strike weapon impracticable, and unionists relied rather on political pressure on the Labor governments, which ruled in the Commonwealth and (by mid-1915) in all of the states except Victoria, to save what they could out of the wreck. There is a relation between industrial militancy—the use of the strike to achieve economic ends—and the trade cycle, but it is not a simple one. In Australia and elsewhere, major industrial disputes seem *not* to coincide with times of maximum economic distress. The general rule seems to be that disputes in which the unions are on the defensive (that is, resisting wage cuts or a worsening of conditions or attempts to deny them recognition), which are often lock-outs rather than strikes, occur on the downturn of the economic cycle; and that disputes in which the unions are on the offensive (that is, for wage increases, shorter hours, recognition, and the closed shop), which are almost always strikes, occur on the upturn. A possible explanation is that the widespread unemployment which characterizes the trough of the trade cycle creates fears among unionists, first that a reserve of unemployed is also a reserve of strikebreakers, and secondly that if an industry is closed down by a strike it may not reopen—at least not with the same workers as caused it to be closed. Political action tends to replace industrial action at the lowpoint of the cycle: Labor governments are returned to office and are expected to act immediately and decisively to improve the conditions of the working class. If they are so unfortunate as to come to power before the cycle has reached its lowest point or in the early stages of a prolonged trough, they quickly lose their popularity and there is a swing towards the revolutionary groupings; but if they strike the cycle on the upturn, they are likely to remain in office for a considerable time, unless they fall out with the trade unions over the increasing strike action which accompanies this stage. At the peak of the cycle both industrial and political activity fall away; conservative governments tend to come to power and Labor to be a divided and ineffectual opposition, while the trade unions realize their demands by the peaceful means of legal determination or collective bargaining. This is a very sweeping generalization, subject to many qualifications; nevertheless, so far as any generalization of this order is possible, this seems to come closest to the truth.

The early stages of the war, then, were months of downswing and depression, and the trade unions were correspondingly quiet. Indeed, there was even some patriotically motivated response to the outbreak of war: two metal trades strikes, for instance, were called off by the unions concerned.

The only substantial exception was a prolonged strike on the southern coal-fields, where 2,700 men had walked off the job in May 1914,

in support of a demand for the abolition of the afternoon shift. The strike lasted for over nine months and was finally settled only when the unions and the mine-owners reached agreement on increased rates of pay for the disputed shift and its eventual abolition.²⁹ The mines, however, were a special case. The strike had started more than two months before the declaration of war, and when the export market for coal collapsed the mine-owners were not anxious for a resumption of work. On the other side, the traditional militancy of the miners—a product of the dangerous and arduous nature of their work, the consistently bad labour relations in the mines, and the sense of isolation and close fellowship which is a part of mining communities everywhere—held them back from suing for peace on the owners' terms.

Otherwise the trade unions were largely preoccupied with agitation against the wage freeze, for price control, and for the expansion of government works to provide jobs for the unemployed. Political pressure broke the freeze in 1916, when nearly half a million workers benefited by substantial wage increases. Most of these were due to a new series of industrial awards rather than to direct action; nevertheless, the depression-imposed straight-jacket was beginning to chafe.

The strikes of 1916 illustrated a recurrent theme in Australian labour history—the direct action of workers, driven by frustration or exasperation to down tools regardless of the wishes of their union leaders, an action which, for all its spontaneous and sporadic character, determined the fate of governments and trade union leaderships and changed the shape of the labour movement for years to come.

Appropriately—because the watersiders' union more than any other epitomized the conflict between politicians and trade unionists—the year opened with the waterfront in an unusual kind of upheaval.

From its foundation in 1902 the Waterside Workers' Federation had been dominated by Federal parliamentarians whose concern was as much for their own electoral interest as for the economic advantage of the watersiders.* Nevertheless, the W.W.F. had made some important advances through arbitration: following an interim award on wages, Mr Justice Higgins had brought down in December 1915 the first comprehensive Federal award for watersiders, which provided for a standard 44-hour week and many other long-sought conditions.

The *quid pro quo*—the no-strike order of the Council of the W.W.F. to its branches—had worked well until the 1915 inflation and the abandonment of the prices referendum, but then the rank and file began to move. It started with several small-scale disputes on the Mel-

*As at July 1915 the Federal Council of the W.W.F. consisted of W. M. Hughes (President), Andrew Fisher, four other M.H.Rs. and three senators, and seven others.

bourne waterfront over rates of pay; the shipowners appealed to the union to get the men back to work, but the union could do nothing. No sooner were these settled than the watersiders were refusing to load wheat for export: bread, they said, was selling at 'famine' prices, and they were not prepared to let any wheat go out of the country until bread prices came down. 'A little more direct action of this kind . . . would do more to reduce prices than all the tinkering of economists and politicians', commented the I.W.W.³⁰ Again the union officials were unable to enforce their will. Hughes was sure that the Wobblies were responsible: 'From the day they got into [the union] there has never been a trouble that they have not precipitated. . . . Not a penny of what the wharf laborer earns today . . . is due to the efforts of these infamous persons.'³¹ And he called on the Federal Council of the union to deal with the strikers—'at such a strenuous time as this [stoppages] cast a reflection on the whole of the W.W.F.'³² But it was to no avail; the Melbourne watersiders called off their ban only when the Victorian government ordered a reduction in the price of bread.

The Melbourne trouble was hardly over when unrest in other states caused the Federation (in April 1916, when Hughes was already overseas) to ask Mr Justice Higgins to release it from its award, but this was refused.³³ Three months later, North Queensland and Sydney ports were tied up on a wages issue. Mr Justice Higgins directed the Federation to pull its branches into line, but the Federal Council resolved unanimously (still in Hughes's absence) that it was 'utterly useless' to ask Federation members to work ships to or from a port where watersiders were on a strike or to alter its rules so as to compel branches to abide by the award.³⁴

After his return Hughes made a last attempt to restore his authority in the union. But by now the movement was quite out of hand; there was a general demand from watersiders for an increase in the hourly rate to 2s. 6d. which the shipowners conceded rather than have an Australia-wide strike on their hands.³⁵ Moreover, the argument about conscription was well under way, and the October 1916 Federal Conference of the union resolved that branches should be represented on Federal Council exclusively by 'working members or [branch] officials'.³⁶ Two months later—the Sydney branch having already voted for his expulsion—Hughes was deposed from his presidency.

The most bitter of all the 1916 disputes concerned hours of work—the demand of the Broken Hill miners for the 'Saturday half-holiday', which led to a general cessation of work.

Almost the whole pre-war output of Australian metals had gone to Germany, but with the outbreak of war this market was largely lost; the Broken Hill mines closed down and thousands of miners were thrown

out of work. There were massive demonstrations of unemployed, demanding that the government start relief works and using direct action methods against evictions and similar consequences of unemployment; an I.W.W. writer claimed that 'the organization was asked to assist by their militant tactics',³⁷ and a favourite song of the demonstrators was the I.W.W.'s

Tramp, tramp, tramp and keep on tramping,
Nothing doing here for you. . . .

However, by late 1914 all but three of the mines had reopened on half-time, and from early in 1915 full work was gradually resumed.

The 'long agreement' which had wound up the 1909 lockout was due to expire on 30 June 1915, and during March the A.M.A. notified the companies that it wanted to confer. Two months later the companies replied that, because of the state of the world metal market, 'the present is no time to engage in a discussion on any alteration of the rates of wages and conditions'.³⁸ The furthest they would go was to agree to an extension of the existing agreement for the duration of the war and six months thereafter. At Broken Hill the A.M.A. members, against militant opposition led by the 'revolutionary socialist'* J. J. O'Reilly, decided to accept this offer. But the Port Pirie men were up in arms; they threatened to shut down the smelters (thereby forcing the companies to close the mines too), and this time O'Reilly's motion to reject the companies' offer won almost unanimous support.

Confronted with this common stand, the companies' tactics were clear. The 1909 dispute had taught them the importance of driving a wedge between the two centres: if sufficient concentrates could be stockpiled at Pirie, they could sustain a long strike at the Barrier without any loss of production, particularly as the new marketing arrangements projected by the Commonwealth had not yet been completed. The companies tried to bluff the two sections of the A.M.A. into negotiating independently, but the union was determined to maintain the common front and presented its ultimatum—either a settlement, or work would cease at both Port Pirie and Broken Hill. The companies fell back on their second line of defence—an extra shilling per shift but no change in hours of work. It was an ingenious move; it offered something to Port Pirie and to the surface men at the Barrier (including the members of the craft unions) but nothing to the miners, the largest and most militant section of the A.M.A. In the event, it enabled the companies to stave off trouble for six weeks while they stockpiled concentrates; and when trouble did come the underground workers were for a time left on their own.

* In contemporary terms, this meant a member or supporter of the Australian Socialist Party.

The front was broken. The Pirie workers were prepared to settle for the extra shilling and withdrew from the dispute; while at the Barrier the underground men's decision to take the 44-hour week for themselves was endorsed only by a very small majority, and even this was lost when the companies threatened to close the mines altogether if the men persisted in the Saturday half-holiday. Defiantly, the miners announced their intention of continuing their action and declared that, if anyone were sacked, all would stop; they appointed their own committee to direct the operation, thus taking it out of the hands of their officials. This was a revolt of rank-and-file militancy against the most militant union leadership then existing in Australia.*

Saturday continued to be a half-holiday, but the companies did not act and the A.M.A. settled down to the non-committal position that it would 'neither condemn nor uphold' the underground men. This was a novel tactic; earlier, the Arbitration Court had threatened prosecution—but could the union be fined for a strike in which a section of its members was engaged, but from which the union had dissociated itself?

The Court was left with the problem of how to uphold its authority, the owners with that of how to prevent the 44-hour week. Mr Justice Higgins offered to hear the hours claim in February 1916, provided full work was resumed, and it seemed from his comments that the men would get what they wanted. Both the Broken Hill and the Pirie officials of the A.M.A. accepted the offer on behalf of the union, and even the miners' leaders agreed to recommend a resumption. The underground men graciously accepted the Court's offer—but continued to refuse to work on Saturday afternoon. This was the final challenge, and the companies accepted it: they announced that the 48-hour week would be strictly enforced. They achieved a part of their objective—the Pirie men were definitely out of the dispute. On the second Monday in January 1916, the miners who had absented themselves the previous Saturday were sacked, the other two shifts refused to start, and the strike—the outcome of Industrial Propaganda,³⁹ claimed the I.W.W.—was on.

Once work had stopped the Broken Hill front was solid, but elsewhere the position of the A.M.A. was weak. The condition for a quick victory was that the union should be able to tie up Port Pirie, but the plea of the Barrier delegates to the smelter workers was met by 'God Save the King' and three cheers for work; the A.M.A. declared Port Pirie 'black', but there was little trade union support for the ban. There was, from some craft unionists, a similar response at the Barrier itself. The stationary engine-drivers were against the strike, and the secretary of

* The President of the A.M.A. was M. P. Considine, also well known as a militant socialist, and the record of the union put it on the extreme left of Australian trade unionism.

their union stumped Australia denouncing the miners for holding up munitions production*—although his real motivation may have been more accurately expressed in his comment that the Broken Hill engine-drivers were 'fighting the battle of the whole of the members of this Federation against the enemies of our craft organisation'.⁴⁰ Otherwise most trade unions supported the stand of the miners, but their response was formal rather than enthusiastic (it was indeed described as miserable) and this was attributed to the patriotic spirit which prevailed among the workers. Dissatisfaction with the economic effects of the war was widespread but it had not yet extended to the war itself, and the appeal to patriotic sentiment was still a useful counter to the claims of class solidarity. The A.M.A. delegates were conscious of this isolation; instead of going first to the official organizations—so the N.S.W. Labor Council complained—they went to those 'who make a lot of noise, but give no financial or substantial support',⁴¹ that is, to the I.W.W. and the socialists. The A.M.A. President, speaking to the Australian Socialist Party, explained his union's attitude thus:

Labor politicians have been so long in Parliament that they have learnt to do nothing, unless they are forced to do it. There are men like the Labor politicians in the industrial organisations. . . . They are against us, but they are not prepared to say so because they know the rank and file are with us. It is up to you as individuals to do something to make your organisations help us.†

The radicals made good political capital out of the strike, but if external circumstances had not favoured the miners they would probably have been beaten. However, the Commonwealth had completed the new marketing arrangements, metals were urgently needed for munitions, markets were on the mend, and the stocks of concentrates at Pirie were soon reduced. W. M. Hughes, on the eve of his departure for London, did little to endear himself to unionists when he called on the Barrier men to disregard 'the advice of those German sympathisers who are insidiously active in fomenting disturbances'.⁴² However, his undertaking to seek an immediate hearing provided work was resumed foreshadowed the eventual settlement. The miners were reluctant to accept anything less than unconditional surrender, but advice came from all sides that their demand was certain to be conceded, and they

* The reference was to a munitions factory, recently opened at Broken Hill, which depended for its power supply on the plants at the mines, operated by members of the Engine Drivers' and Firemen's Association, but which never produced any munitions, either before or after the strike. In fact, for tactical reasons, the A.M.A. offered to permit the supply of power to the munitions plant, but the offer was refused.

† *Inter. Soc.*, 12 February 1916. The Labor Council in fact refused twice to endorse the strike; this resulted in I.W.W.-supported demonstrations in the public gallery which was then closed (*Direct Action*, 12, 19 February 1916).

finally accepted the government's offer. The Court heard their claim and duly granted them the 44-hour week as well as another valuable concession, a guaranteed minimum wage for contract miners. The surface workers, who had been forced into the strike unwillingly, and the Pirie men, who had refused to strike at all, were awarded the wage rise but not the reduced hours. There was some disappointment among the radicals that the miners had been 'pulled into the Court just when victory by direct action was within their grasp',⁴³ but by general consensus the miners' victory was a remarkable achievement for militant unionism. Certainly, it was the most considerable impact made by the I.W.W. on Australian industrial life.

Early in 1916, at the same time as Victorian watersiders were refusing to be bound by the close adherence to arbitration which their leaders urged, the miners on the southern coal-fields of New South Wales were taking a similar stand.

Coal-miners had first won the 8-hour day in 1886, but this was eight hours at the coal-face and the miners had for a long time been demanding the 'eight hours bank to bank'.* Besides, the limitation of hours did not apply to the surface men, and they wanted the eight hours too.

After many years of antagonism between the miners of the various fields, the result of the skilful use of divisive tactics by the mine-owners, the leaders of the northern and southern miners (J. M. Baddeley and A. C. Willis, both products of the British miners' union and the guild socialism associated with the London Labor College) had during 1915 persuaded their organizations to re-form the Australian Coal and Shale Employees' Federation. The Miners' Federation had maintained only a shadow existence since the 1909 defeat; now the new leaders hoped that it would act not merely as a co-ordinating body in case of disputes, as earlier federations had done, but as a directing body.

In November 1915 the new Federation had reached agreement with the mine-owners on rates of pay and other conditions and on the reference of future disputes to arbitration. Hours of work were the main outstanding difference; the miners had hoped that this would be resolved by legislation, but an Eight-Hours Bill was held up in the N.S.W. Legislative Council and the union was highly critical of the 'spineless attitude' of the Holman government.⁴⁴ On 3 January 1916 all 2,000 miners of the Illawarra (Southern) district struck work. This was a rank-and-file movement; the militants in the lodges, influenced by I.W.W. propaganda, wanted direct action, while their officials wanted

* This could mean a reduction in hours at the coal-face of anything up to one and a half hours a day.

the question to go to arbitration under the November agreement. For the moment, the south coast militants were isolated—their action was in advance of the feeling on other fields. The militant leaders of the revived Federation did not think that the time was ripe for a strike; they urged a resumption of work and reference of the dispute to the Court. A ballot was held, the miners voted two to one for resumption and the pits reopened.

The Legislative Council at last passed a Bill providing that the 8-hours bank to bank should be incorporated in future miners' awards; however, this legislation could not bind the Federal Court to which the miners' claim had been submitted. Mass meetings demanded an early hearing of the claim; the Illawarra men wanted an immediate strike, but were again restrained by the leaders of the Federation.⁴⁵ A few days later, a compulsory conference reached agreement on an increased hewing rate, but the hours question was still left with the Court; the Federation favoured accepting the agreement, but the southern district again rejected it. Finally, on 1 November all N.S.W. miners stopped work at the order of their Federation; they were quickly followed by miners in Victoria, Queensland, and Tasmania, only Western Australia holding out. In all, 11,500 men were involved. To the I.W.W. the breadth and solidarity of the strike were a triumph (the first of its kind in Australia) for their conception of industrial action: it showed, they said, 'the growth of the idea of "Industrial Control", the new philosophy of the new labor movement'.⁴⁶

Coal stocks were low and the Commonwealth commandeered all the available supplies, but within a fortnight the situation looked almost desperate. 'Nearly 30,000 men and boys are idle', reported one Sydney newspaper. 'Over 100 steamers are laid up. Trams and trains will stop if all coal is declared "black". In eight days Sydney will be in darkness. . . .'⁴⁷

In the N.S.W. Parliament the Labor opposition was demanding that the government act—preferably by taking over the mines and working them itself. This would do no good, replied Attorney-General D. R. Hall, who had followed Holman out of the Labor Party in the conscription crisis; ' . . . until the spirit of syndicalism is overthrown in this State, and the socialists are triumphant in the labour movement, there will be no hope of industrial peace by the extension of the functions of the State. . . .'⁴⁸

Alarmed by the threat to the war effort, the Prime Minister stepped in and called a compulsory conference; after a day and a half of hard talking, he persuaded the union to recommend to its members a return to work on the understanding that a special tribunal would sit to hear their claim on the day they resumed. The Federation organized a ballot, but it was boycotted by the men.

The coal position was by now desperate. Only essential industries were working and shipping was completely disrupted. On 27 November, without waiting for a resumption, Hughes appointed Mr Justice Edmunds of the N.S.W. Arbitration Court as a special tribunal to resolve the dispute. Three days later the decision was announced: the miners' claims were granted and the mines were to reopen immediately. Three weeks after the resumption all mine-workers were awarded substantial pay increases as well as the reduced hours, and the mine-owners were compensated by an equivalent increase in the selling price of coal.⁴⁹

As the I.W.W. weekly *Direct Action* said, it was a complete victory for industrial strength over arbitration, and no one was more conscious of this than Mr Justice Higgins. It was later claimed—and the claim was supported by Higgins J. but denied by the Prime Minister and Mr Justice Edmunds—that Hughes had instructed the commissioner to grant the men's demands. Perhaps there was no such clear direction, but there can be little doubt that there was at least an understanding, and no doubt at all that Mr Justice Higgins was right (so far as arbitration was concerned) when he called the whole procedure 'a most baleful precedent'.⁵⁰

The I.W.W. theme was noticeable as well in the wild-cat strike of shearers which spread through Queensland and New South Wales in the first weeks of the 1916 shearing season. In that year's ballot for the A.W.U. presidency an I.W.W. nominee had polled surprisingly well against the veteran Spence—so well that thereafter the Pastoralists' Union was 'doing its best to retain in office the present officials of the Australian Workers' Union, because the Industrial Workers of the World section of it has been getting completely out of hand'.⁵¹ At the 1916 A.W.U. Convention the militants, who were centred in the Queensland and Western (N.S.W.) branches, moved that the union abandon arbitration for direct negotiation (as the Meat Industry Employees' Union had already done, under syndicalist influence). The officials strongly opposed the motion, and succeeded in having a resolution carried that the union apply to the Commonwealth Arbitration Court for a new award.⁵² But, within a month, shearers in Queensland and western New South Wales were refusing work on the old conditions and demanding an increase in the shearing rate. Shearers' camps and outback towns were plastered with the forthright slogan: 'Give the warm weather and the blowflies a chance!'—a translation into pastoral terms of the syndicalist doctrine of sabotage. The union officials were successful in preventing a bid by the rank-and-file strike committee to force the pastoralists into a conference, but the movement was too strong, and the Queensland and a section of the N.S.W.

pastoralists had to concede the increased rates.⁵³ The A.W.U. officials were furious at this challenge to their authority, and set out to destroy the I.W.W. influence in their union. Whether it was their campaign which was successful, or that of the government against the I.W.W. as a whole, is not particularly important; what was significant was that rank-and-file militancy had by mid-1916 grown so extensive that it was able to challenge not only this powerful group of employers but the best entrenched bureaucracy in the Australian industrial movement—and to score an important victory.

In all these cases the spread of direct actionist ideas among the rank and file had led to strikes; and to the I.W.W. this action in opposition to the wishes of union leaderships demonstrated the good work of the militant minorities—'Within three years we have been able to prove that we are the power of the future'.⁵⁴ The I.W.W., with its slogan of 'let the boss pay the strike pay', continued to stress its preference for 'job action' rather than the traditional methods; nevertheless, they wholeheartedly supported the strikers once they had come out. The leaders of the Miners' Federation and the A.M.A. were militants and socialists, but they had tried to restrain their rank and file—from tactical considerations, because of the divisions in their ranks. The leaders of the Waterside Workers and the A.W.U. were moderates with a strong orientation towards Labor politics; they had tried to restrain their rank and file from political considerations and a commitment to arbitration. But such was the temper of this year, in which 1.7 million man days (the largest total yet recorded) were lost in industrial disputes, that no leadership was able to stem the tide of rank-and-file intransigence which grew in 1917 to a tidal wave. Two things were evident here: the narrowness of vision of the agitators whose slogans were taken up by the exasperated unionists, and the wide gap between the rank-and-file militants and even the most militant of leaders.

Straddling the Labor split of 1916, the two miners' strikes provide an interesting study in official Labor attitudes to industrial disputes. During the Barrier strike, Labor governments were in power in New South Wales and the Commonwealth and were critical of the miners and condemnatory of the I.W.W. agitators who were said to have fomented the dispute, while the A.M.A. was distrustful of, and bypassed, both the Labor governments and the N.S.W. Labor Council. The N.S.W. government, which had developed close connections with the Broken Hill Proprietary in the course of the negotiations for the foundation of the company's steelworks at Newcastle, did not intervene; its failure to act was one of the underlying themes of the 1916 industrialist revolt in the N.S.W. party, and precipitated demands from

Broken Hill (which later took concrete form) that independent industrial labour men should stand for Parliament.

By the time of the coal strike Hughes and Holman had been expelled from the Labor Party, but the governments were in a difficult position. Support for the miners was organized through official union channels, and a move against them would have created serious difficulties in the confused political situation which followed the Labor split. But even after the split the remaining Labor parliamentarians, fearing unfavourable electoral consequences if they were too forthcoming, were lukewarm in their attitude to the miners' demands. This timidity played a big part in the move in the Newcastle area, originating in the miners' organizations, for a reform of Labor pre-selections so that the unions might be better represented in the parliamentary party.

In both these strikes Hughes was concerned above all to keep working industries which he regarded as essential to the war effort. He intervened to get the disputes into the Commonwealth Arbitration Court. In effect he promised both metal- and coal-miners a satisfactory verdict if they would call off their strikes and go to the Court and he tried to put pressure on Mr Justice Higgins to make the appropriate awards. The pressure was successful in the Broken Hill case (while Hughes was overseas, which is perhaps significant), but in the coal-miners' case the judge refused to be pushed into an action which he regarded as detrimental to the dignity of the Court, and Hughes went over his head to appoint a special tribunal. Hughes's high-handed action caused resentment in New South Wales and was a factor in that government's uncompromising attitude during the 1917 general strike; it was also the start of the process which led, four years later, to the resignation of Mr Justice Higgins from the Arbitration Court.

The turmoil of 1916 arose out of the war-caused unemployment and inflation and the seeming inability of the parliamentary Labor Parties, the existing trade union leaders, and the arbitration system to offer any effective remedy. It is true, as many critics of the unions suggested, that I.W.W. men were present in strength at many of the sites of industrial unrest, but the I.W.W. was not in a commanding position in any union and it was not responsible for the strike wave—except in the sense that it provided the slogans on which working-class militancy settled. The strikers were far from accepting (or even understanding) the whole of the I.W.W. doctrine. With the exception of the watersiders' boycott tactics, the methods chosen by unionists to prosecute their claims were not those of the I.W.W.; they were rather the customary methods of trade unionism. What had happened was that economic circumstance and the frustrations of the war had created a mood of protest among the workers; their accepted leaders—whether for political or tactical reasons—were seeking to contain their action;

accordingly they turned to the most readily available ideology which seemed to express their immediate needs and from it took one phrase—direct action.

But revolutionaries are always optimists, and understandably the I.W.W. read more into the 1916 strikes than was justified: 'Let all take note, that the I.W.W. is too large a show for the master-class to obstruct; it is too young and strong for them to kill. We are here to stay, and stay right here we will, fighting the good fight, all the time and everywhere, until the world at last is free'.⁵⁵ Unhappily for the Wobblies, 'freedom' was not so immediately attractive to the mass of their fellow workers as were the Saturday half-holidays and the eight hours bank to bank.

The 'Industrialists' Take Over

The working-class revolt against the arbitration system and their political and industrial leaders exacerbated the running fight inside the N.S.W. Labor Party between parliamentarians and unionists. From 1902 to 1910, while the Party was in opposition and felt itself free to adopt a radical stance, relations between the industrial and political wings had generally been harmonious; but, from the formation of the McGowen government in 1910, they had steadily deteriorated. Except for the A.W.U., the mass unions had tended to stand aside from the political party, while the craft-union-dominated Labor Council had provided a flow of parliamentary candidates and political advice. But the grievances of the larger unions grew more acute, one of the most important being the provision in the party constitution setting a limit of four delegates to the annual conference from any one affiliated organization, thereby ensuring that the smaller unions and local organizations were permanently over-represented. There was, too, a continuing hostility about the sort of parliamentary candidates selected by the party machine. More and more these were small businessmen and professionals, people whose way of life and interests were, so the unions felt, well removed from those of the industrial workers whose allegiance they sought and whom they purported to represent.* From time to time there had been suggestions within the mass unions for the formation of a trade union party, one which would work for a more radical working-class programme, but nothing had eventuated.

Legislation for the 8-hour day and fair rents, to amend the Arbitration Act, and for state-owned coal-mines; the administration of the

* Compare the comment of the *International Socialist* (6 May 1916) that membership of the local Labor Leagues 'comprises many odd elements—shopkeepers, estate agents, small employers, landlords, and other small business men—who, only too frequently, join the party for their own aggrandisement. The representation that this polyglot membership begets is quite unsatisfactory to thoughtful and earnest Labor men.'

railways and tramways and of government works projects; the government's actions in subsidising the formation of a privately-owned steel-works and in letting a £4 million contract to a private company for railway construction—all these were fruitful sources of contention; and, overshadowing them all, was the demand (incorporated in the Labor platform but not realized) for the abolition of the Legislative Council, which had delayed, rejected, or emasculated many measures of interest to unionists since 1910. Unemployment, the wage freeze, and inflation brought these dissatisfactions to a head.

The 1915 bid by the A.W.U. to bring the parliamentarians to heel with a censure motion on wages and prices was frustrated by the skilful manoeuvring of the Premier, Holman, and his colleagues. Knowing that his position would be challenged, Holman 'took the precaution to pack the conference'.⁵⁶ His method was simple and effective: he set out to convince the local organizations and as many of the unions as he could that the A.W.U. was trying to take over the party machine and so put itself into a position to dominate the selection of candidates for the election which was due in 1916. When the conference assembled, Holman had the numbers.

Twelve months later, in a larger conference, the position was reversed. The A.W.U. had the support of the new delegates, representing unions like the A.R.T.S.A. which had paid up their affiliation fees in order to join in the fight; as well, it had won over some unions and local leagues which had in 1915 supported Holman. The stage was set by the growing criticism of the N.S.W. government's inaction in economic matters and over-enthusiasm for the war; the cast was moved into action by the 'Industrial Section of the Political Labor League'.

This curious creature was brought into being by a conference of unions convened by the A.W.U. in December 1915.* Its purpose was to ensure a block vote of union delegates on questions before the annual party conference and in the election of party officers. It did this by providing that the votes of every Industrialist at the conference must be overseen by two fellow-Industrialists, so that there would be no leakage; that every Industrialist who was a candidate for official position in the party must sign an undated letter of resignation, to be held by the officers of the Section; that membership of the executive of the Section and the party executive should be mutually exclusive.⁵⁷ With this organization behind it, the A.W.U. censure won,† and, when it

* As well as the A.W.U., unions identified with the Industrial Section included the Miners' Federation, the R.W.G.L.U., and the A.R.T.S.A. Growing craft union support was exemplified by the choice of the secretary of the Blacksmiths' Union as president of the Section.

† The vote (105 to 68) did not reflect the full extent of the hostility to Holman. Many delegates, although critical, were not prepared to go as far as censure.

came to the election of officers, the Industrialist ticket almost swept the board. Following the censure, Holman presented his resignation as leader of the parliamentary party to the conference, which, equally unprecedentedly, elected John Storey in his place; however, the Industrialists wanted to assert the control of the movement over its parliamentary representatives rather than to precipitate a split by forcing Holman out of the party; and, on their initiative, a compromise was reached that Holman should accept the censure but should continue in office on the understanding that the government would hold a referendum on the abolition of the Legislative Council in conjunction with the forthcoming elections.⁵⁸ To the new executive, what had been accomplished was 'the rescue of the movement from the Parliamentarians';⁵⁹ but, to the critics of Labor, it appeared that 'the Political Labor League had adopted enough of the I.W.W. policy and platform, implicitly in part and explicitly as regards the one great union, to become its creature'.⁶⁰

The charge that the Labor Party had become the creature of the I.W.W. was ludicrous—the I.W.W. was nowhere near strong enough, despite the assertions of anti-Labor publicists,⁶¹ to take over the party, nor was it interested in doing so. But it was not hard for the conservatives to make out a case: the Industrialists and the I.W.W. had in common an insistence on a class policy, an identification with militant tactics, and a critical attitude towards the war. However, the Industrialists were not anarchists; most of them had absorbed some of the basic ideas of syndicalism—industrial unionism as the principal instrument of working-class emancipation, a distrust of politicians and political compromise, a reliance on economic strength rather than the processes of law—but they still saw political action, the capture of the machinery of state, as essential to the creation of a new social order. This was the real significance of the 1916 conference of the N.S.W. Labor Party; it was not a triumph for I.W.W. 'boring from within' but the assertion of class interests, policies, and control over the supra-class, 'community' posture which had been increasingly adopted by the parliamentary Labor Party.

The Industrial Section, despite its closely-knit organization, was not a homogeneous group. The A.W.U., which had initiated the move, was a highly bureaucratized organization whose leaders were concerned with political objectives (including their personal parliamentary aspirations) rather than the industrial objective animating such unions as the Miners' Federation. Already the A.W.U. leaders were seeing their union, not only in the rule book but in reality, as 'embrac[ing] all within its ranks'. In 1913-14 the A.W.U. had swallowed half-a-dozen Queensland bush unions; in 1915 the Victorian United Laborers' Union had joined the ranks; now, negotiations were under way for the admis-

sion of the 12,000 members of the Railway Workers' and General Labourers' Union in New South Wales. Addressing the 1916 conference of that union, W. McCormack, the former secretary of the Queensland A.W.A. and now an official of the A.W.U., pointed to the political possibilities inherent in the growth-by-absorption of the A.W.U. In Queensland, he said, the union was so strong that half the Labor parliamentarians were the 'direct nominees' of the A.W.U.; this was 'the way to gain industrial control of the political machine'.⁶² The leaders of the A.W.U. saw the future of political labour in New South Wales in these terms. The leaders of the Miners' Federation especially, but also the leaders of most other unions associated with the Industrial Section, thought differently. They agreed with the A.W.U. on the need for trade union reorganization, but their idea of this was closer to the syndicalist concept of the one big union, based on industrial rather than local units; and they were not so much interested in moving in themselves on the political machine (which, in syndicalist fashion, they believed to be necessarily subject to corruption) as in creating a foolproof control of the politicians by the industrial wing.

It was this conflict of concepts which finally caused the Industrial Section to fragment, allowing the parliamentarians to reassert their control over the movement, but, for the moment, while the various interests ran parallel, the Industrialists were on top, and it was this which shaped the course taken by the party during the conscription crisis of 1916-17.

The Conscription Crisis

THE TIDE in the labour movement against conscription of men for the European war progressed with textbook precision from the radical minority through the trade unions to the Labor Party. A 'citizen defence force', based on compulsory military training, had been Labor policy since 1902 and Commonwealth policy since the Defence Act of 1909; however, the Act specifically excluded compulsory service outside Australia, and what the Commonwealth offered on the outbreak of war was an army of volunteers.

There was some feeling among socialists that sooner or later conscription would be introduced,¹ but this was not yet an urgent question; of greater importance for the moment was the propaganda against the war and voluntary enlistment:

Oh, the fight is on in Europe,
 And the mugs are wading in;
 There is room for you, dear brother,
 In the battle and the din;
 So enroll and leave behind you
 Home and wife and kiddies dear;
 Go where lead is free for breakfast,
 And the bayonet's prod will cheer.²

For the first twelve months of the war, radicals and pacifists kept alive their agitation, but in an atmosphere that was far from encouraging: 'Many of these pioneer anti-conscriptionists [and opponents of the war] were not of the Labour Movement; others were of the Left Wing of Labour. More or less, all were distrusted by the leaders of the Labour Party and of the Trade Unions.'³ Indeed, the initial enthusiasm of the Labor leaders was scarcely dimmed. Meeting soon after the Gallipoli landing, the first major Australian campaign, the delegates to the party's sixth Commonwealth Conference expressed their confident hope that 'during the coming year [the King's] reign will be crowned by victory for the British and Allied arms in the great war of freedom and the realisation of an enduring peace'.⁴

*The First Conscription Campaign**

The planned break-through to the Black Sea had, by July 1915, been pinned down on the slopes of Sari Bair; casualties were heavy, and the need of the Anzac brigades for reinforcements was great. In Australia the Universal Service League was formed to urge the need for conscription, and it attracted the support of prominent Labor and trade union enthusiasts for the war as well as that of the most influential leaders of conservative opinion. It was the campaign of the U.S.L. and the response of the government which changed anti-conscription from the vague warnings of a 'disloyal' minority of little popularity and less repute into a matter of decisive importance for the whole labour movement. Coinciding with the wartime economic and industrial troubles, the struggle over conscription polarized the movement, isolating the leaders, encouraging the spread of radical ideas among the rank and file, and forcing the moderate centre—now confined to a shrinking group of parliamentarians—to declare for one side or the other.

The War Census Bill, introduced by W. M. Hughes on 14 July 1915, was a measure designed to enable an accurate assessment of Australian resources, both human and material; its appearance precipitated the clash. The Prime Minister denied any intention of introducing conscription (although he added 'I do not say that the future may not hold within it possibilities which may shatter our present conception of what is necessary');⁵ but the War Census seemed to be a concession to the U.S.L. and Labor critics claimed that the inevitable consequence would be compulsion.⁶ Queensland and Broken Hill unions declared their opposition; the Melbourne Trades Hall Council had, however, rejected an anti-conscription motion just before the introduction of the War Census Bill, while the N.S.W. Labor Council did not even discuss the measure. The *Socialist* still found a lot of 'patriotic high-falutin' in the labour movement;⁷ but this was largely dispelled over the next six months.

In July the Victorian Socialist Party joined with other revolutionary groups to form the Anti-Militarist and Anti-Conscription League; this body had no sooner made its appearance than the Trades Hall Council was again involved in a discussion of the war. This time the socialist faction was just strong enough; a motion asking that the Imperial Government state its terms for peace was carried, after an amendment declaring confidence in the Federal government's handling of the war was defeated by fifty-one votes to fifty. The Council delegates, said one Melbourne newspaper, 'edge as closely as they dare to the border line of disloyalty'.⁸ During September, the Trades Hall Council

* 'Conscription' is used in the contemporary sense of compulsory enlistment for overseas service.

and a conference of Victorian unions both declared against conscription; the initiative came from members of the V.S.P. Victorian radicals were also involved in the No Conscription Fellowship, which the V.S.P. secretary (R. S. Ross) had helped to form; its president was a well-known member of the Labor Party and it enjoyed considerable support among the party branches. The Fellowship's aim was to encourage men of military age to pledge themselves in advance to refuse conscription; originally formed on pacifist principles, its socialist members won a narrow majority in September 1915 for removing from its pledge a reference to the sacredness of human life,⁹ thus throwing the organization open to all who opposed the war from whatever point of view.

The sequence of events was similar in New South Wales. The I.W.W. Club had invited the other radical groups to join it in an Anti-Conscription League, and, on 30 September 1915, a week after the League was officially launched, its supporters succeeded in having the N.S.W. Labor Council carry a motion rejecting conscription of manpower unless there was a corresponding conscription of wealth.* 'The tone of the debate', reported Labor Council Secretary E. J. Kavanagh, 'went to show that the consensus of opinion was that a man should not be compelled to give his life while the stay-at-home capitalist would lend his money to the country only when he was guaranteed a high rate of interest.'¹⁰ From the unions the debate passed to the Labor Party. Holman and several of his cabinet, as well as a number of prominent unionists, had lent their names to the Universal Service League; there had been 'sheaves of correspondence' from branches and unions protesting against this, and in mid-October the party executive resolved, by a substantial majority, to inform these senior members of the party that it was 'inadvisable for members of the Movement to publicly associate themselves with controversial issues upon which the Movement may be called upon to express an opinion'.¹¹ There was as yet no threat of sanctions, nor even any pronouncement against conscription, but the intention was clear: no such action was taken against members of the party who were just as public in their opposition to conscription.

Anti-conscription sentiment was thus spreading steadily when, towards the end of 1915, three events further consolidated the opposition of labour men generally towards the projects they believed the parliamentary leaders to be preparing.

The abandonment of the prices referendum on 28 October dispelled

* This qualified rejection was the position most often taken by trade unions at this time and indeed until conscription became an immediate issue in July 1916. Since many of those who moved for this policy were themselves socialist opponents of the war, it may be assumed that this formulation was used because it was calculated to appeal to a broad section of unionists who were angry about 'war profiteering' but were not yet opposed to the war itself.

any hope that the Commonwealth government intended to conscript wealth for the war effort. The effect on the movement was powerful: '[Hughes's] word could no longer be taken; and only his word stood between the people and Conscription'.¹²

Then, on the basis of the War Census, the Commonwealth Statistician reported that there were 600,000 'fit' men of military age available for recruitment.* The heroic Gallipoli campaign had petered out into a dispirited holding operation, and the evacuation was soon to begin; but in the seven months of bloody fighting the Australians had suffered nearly 28,000 casualties—close to 15 per cent of the total enlistments to that time. Now Hughes announced that it was his intention to raise an additional force of 50,000 men, as well as providing the 9,500 reinforcements needed each month to keep the existing units up to strength.¹³ There were widespread complaints that governments and private employers alike were practising 'economic conscription'—that is, that single men were being laid off or refused employment so that they would be forced to enlist; and there was the further fear of industrial conscription—the direction of labour at fixed wages, which had been embodied in the conscription measures recently passed by the British government.

Finally, a lively argument was precipitated by the decision of the War Council,† announced on 25 November 1915, to address three questions to every man of military age: Are you prepared to enlist now? Are you prepared to enlist later on? If not, why not? The Melbourne Trades Hall Council at first urged unionists to boycott the questionnaire, but, after pressure from the Waterside Workers and other unions influenced by Hughes, the motion was rescinded; a socialist-inspired motion for a boycott was defeated on the N.S.W. Labor Council; the Brisbane Industrial Council protested against the new recruiting methods, but divided equally on a proposal to withdraw trade union support from the Labor candidate in the by-election for Wide Bay, the seat vacated by Andrew Fisher on his departure for London.‡ The trade union movement was as yet far from unanimous, but the anti-government sentiment was growing.

* Scott, *Australia During The War*, p. 310: 'Men were deemed fit if they described themselves as being in good health, not having lost a limb, and being neither blind nor deaf'—a formula which certainly encouraged, if it did not initiate, the soldiers' folklore about medical examinations on enlistment.

† The Liberal Opposition had urged a National Government; Fisher had given them only a War Council, consisting of equal numbers of Government and Opposition members, which had no executive powers but served a useful propagandist function.

‡ The Labor Party lost the seat. The *Worker* attributed this to the 'ingratitude' of the farmers, but it seems more likely that the outspoken trade union opposition to conscription had adversely influenced patriotically minded electors. The recruiting cards had the desired effect: enlistment jumped from 9,000 in December 1915 to 22,000 in January 1916.

On 16 January 1916 the Prime Minister left Australia to visit London at the invitation of the Imperial War Cabinet. He departed in a flurry of denunciation of the I.W.W.—‘foul parasites [who] have attached themselves to the vitals of labour’—and of ‘people who babble about peace’.¹⁴ But he could not silence the debate. Late in January the Annual Convention of the A.W.U. unanimously supported an anti-conscription motion introduced by the radicals from Queensland and western New South Wales. (It is strange that there should have been this unanimity in the A.W.U. whose leaders were anything but radical and were secure in their control of the union machine; however, the spirit of nationalism, of freedom from old-world entanglements, was not dead in the A.W.U.—and, besides, the interests of the leaders, deeply involved in the power struggle inside the Labor Party, for the moment ran parallel with those of the radical anti-conscriptionists.) In March the Melbourne Trades Hall Council carried a socialist motion for the convocation of a Trade Union Congress to consider conscription;* a move to empower the Council to call a general strike was, however, defeated in favour of a ballot of unions in the event of the introduction of conscription. The question was ‘repeatedly’ before the N.S.W. Labor Council in the first half of 1916, usually introduced by the socialists in response to some new government hint or public campaign; each time, conscription was denounced as ‘opposed to the best interests of the community’, as ‘not necessary’, as meaning ‘the permanent establishment of militarism’ in Australia. This did not mean that the Labor Council was against the war, the secretary explained; it recognized that this was not a class war but a war of nations, a war of ‘Militarism versus Democracy’, but it was necessary to fight militarism at home as well as abroad—and that meant opposition to conscription.¹⁵

From the unions, the debate moved into the Labor Party, which had not yet (except for the delaying motion passed by the N.S.W. executive in October 1915) formally pronounced.

The A.W.U. having made its position clear, there was no doubt about the Queensland party. In March, the Labor-in-Politics Convention passed, without discussion or dissent, an A.W.U.-inspired resolution opposing the introduction of conscription, but rejected a left-wing

* *Labor Call*, 23 March 1916. There was an interesting tactical point in this, reflecting the alignment of forces in the trade union movement. The Trades Hall secretary proposed that the question be referred to a meeting of the Grand Council of Labor (consisting of delegates from the state Labor Councils) to be held on 15 May 1916. The socialist movers of the motion obviously felt that a stronger policy was likely to come from a congress at which unions were directly represented—including those large unions like the Miners’ Federation which were not affiliated to the Labor Councils—and insisted on their resolution for a Congress on 2 May.

proposal that advocacy of conscription be declared to mean opposition to the principles of the labour movement;¹⁶ this implied sanctions, and for this the party was not yet ready.

At the Victorian conference a few weeks later the Trades Hall influence was dominant; the union militants combined with the V.S.P.-oriented wing of the party to present the most direct challenge yet offered to the conscriptionist politicians. With one dissident, the conference pledged itself 'to oppose *by all lawful means* the conscription of human life for military service abroad', and directed all affiliated unions and local organizations to oppose all Labor parliamentarians who supported conscription; should this not suffice, the executive was instructed to refuse endorsement.¹⁷

In May the N.S.W. conference passed a similar resolution on the motion of Arthur Rae, who had lost his Senate seat in 1914 because of his outspoken opposition to the war. Holman and his followers objected strongly—they were already identified with the Universal Service League—but only a handful voted against the motion.¹⁸

The Victorian executive interpreted the anti-conscription resolution as authorizing them to seek a pledge from all Victorian parliamentarians (both State and Federal) to support this policy, and the Queensland executive followed them despite the rejection by the Queensland conference of a motion in these terms. Most of the politicians from these two states signed without delay—the majority were against conscription, and those who were not went with the strength. But in New South Wales the majority of cabinet was already committed to conscription; an election was due soon and party unity seemed an urgent necessity. After four weeks of negotiations a truce was agreed: the executive would postpone any further consideration of conscription, provided that members of parliament refrained from advocating it publicly.*

By now, the question had passed back to the industrial movement. Five Labor Councils and ninety-seven unions—not all, but 'the most powerful and the most militant unions'—credentialed delegates to the Interstate Trade Union Congress, which claimed to speak for 280,000 Australian unionists (near enough to half the total). The Congress declared its 'uncompromising hostility' to conscription, after defeating a South Australian amendment (for which only 50,000 votes were cast),† which in effect accepted conscription if the Federal government decided

* S.M.H., 1 July 1916. The *Herald* (5 January 1917) interpreted this as the executive 'coming to heel'—that is, agreeing that conscription should be an open question for members of the party. It is unlikely that either side so understood the executive's decision; at least, Holman did not claim this in his subsequent statements.

† Decision was by card vote, for the first time at an Australian labour or trade union conference.

that there was no other way of maintaining the Australian contribution to the war. Voluntary recruiting was supported, with 41,000 votes (the hard core anti-war group) against, and a motion calling on the Federal government to stop the robbery of the working class was carried unanimously. So far, these motions were purely declaratory; the conference then passed to their implementation. There was no argument about trade union support for sanctions against those parliamentarians who supported conscription; however, when it came to industrial action, the conference split. A militant motion directing a general strike in the event of conscription was narrowly defeated; in its place, the conference agreed on a ballot of unions—the position adopted by the Melbourne Trades Hall Council two months earlier.¹⁹ The Australian unions were fighting out one of the classic battles of the Second International—the use of the general strike for political ends. In the International the question of what the unions would do in the event of war had been largely academic; but now in Australia it was being fought publicly, and during a war, as a matter of immediate practical politics and a frontal challenge to the government. The breach between politicians and unionists was not yet so complete that the challenge could be made, but the closeness of the vote suggested that, unless the government retreated, the day was not far off.

Meanwhile, the campaign of the Anti-Conscription Leagues continued. There were some reservations on the part of the official labour organizations and some doctrinaire objections from the left,* but the tendency was for wider sections of the mass labour movement, political and industrial, to work more and more closely with the revolutionaries. It was not an easy task. Anti-conscription meetings were regularly attacked by angry soldiers, men in training or awaiting embarkation; the 'antis' were denounced from Parliament, press, and pulpit as cowards and traitors to the Allied cause; many of their leading propagandists were prosecuted under War Precautions Regulations which forbade statements likely to prejudice recruiting; their press was subject to severe censorship and on occasions refused transmission through the post. But, by July, as news of the first Battle of the Somme began to reach Australia, and in anticipation of Hughes's return from England, Labor and trade union anti-conscriptionists worked amicably and energetically with socialists and syndicalists in a campaign which grew stronger day by day.

* Thus both the Melbourne T.H.C. and the N.S.W. Labor Council early in 1916 withdrew the use of their premises from the Leagues, while the Melbourne branch of the A.S.P. refused to support the United Peace and Free Speech Society, on the grounds that it was 'partly bourgeois and wholly antagonistic to the principles of Socialism' (*Inter. Soc.*, 29 January 1916).

Relations between the Federal and N.S.W. Labor governments and the rest of the movement deteriorated rapidly as ministerial actions impeded and harassed the anti-conscriptionists. Hughes arrived back in Australia on 31 July 1916 to find a movement which was already hopelessly divided on the principal proposal he had to put to it, the demand of the Imperial War Cabinet for more men, which he now believed could only be met by conscription. The political correspondents were already speculating on the possibility of a split. Hughes would, it was thought, carry a large section of his party with him, and would get enough support from the Opposition to enable him to form a new government; but, as for the organizations outside Parliament, they 'are so completely opposed to conscription, and are so intent upon securing the dismissal of Commonwealth Ministers whose administration has displeased them, that it is hard to see how a split in the party can be avoided'.²⁰

Hughes's first public statements following his return contained no direct reference to conscription, to the great disappointment of the Universal Service League, the Opposition, and the daily press; however, he left little doubt about his intention in the minds of those who heard him. The conscriptionists were anxious that the Prime Minister should declare himself immediately; they were confident that, once he had spoken, the opposition would melt away. But Hughes knew better. While he was still in London he had written to his deputy Pearce regarding his fears of a possible German victory and his belief that the Australian forces should be increased. Pearce had interpreted this to mean conscription, and had asked the Labor Whip to sound out the members of caucus; meanwhile, he had himself consulted with a number of trade union leaders, but 'the result of these inquiries did not reveal enthusiastic support'.* However, Hughes did not believe that this reluctance was truly representative; he was confident of his ability to win the movement over to his way of thinking and he was not prepared to move publicly until he had made the attempt. So, when he and Pearce met, it was agreed that he should make no statement of his intention until he had talked to trade union leaders in Melbourne and Sydney.†

The Prime Minister met his cabinet in Melbourne on 9 August, but opinion was divided and no decision was taken.²¹ The Labor Caucus

* G. F. Pearce, *Carpenter to Cabinet*, p. 136. However, Pearce added, 'they certainly gave no indication of the bitter opposition that subsequently developed'.

† Ibid., p. 136. Pearce records that he deputised for Hughes in Sydney, and among others met the leaders of the Miners' Federation. 'They gave no indication of hostility . . . but asked that they should be kept fully informed of the Government's intentions. I learned long afterwards that they began to organise trades union opposition to conscription immediately after that meeting.' This is clearly inaccurate; union opposition was well advanced long before this.

was not due to meet until 24 August—a week before Parliament opened. In the intervening fortnight, the fight continued. In Sydney, Hughes made up his differences with Holman and reached agreement that they should 'take the plunge and try to commit labor'. Holman began to sound out the N.S.W. members, telling them that if they opposed conscription it would be the end of them politically—which seemed to them quite likely.²² The N.S.W. Labor Party held its first anti-conscription meeting in the Sydney Domain; estimates of the attendance varied between sixty and one hundred thousand, and the attempt of a party of soldiers to storm the platform was rebuffed.²³ Hughes addressed huge public meetings in Melbourne and Sydney, urging a more vigorous war effort, but still made no direct reference to conscription.

When cabinet met before the caucus meeting, Hughes proposed a referendum on compulsory overseas service. Later, he was criticized sharply for this, but in reality he had little alternative. Opinions were divided as to how many 'solid' anti-conscriptionists there were in the parliamentary party but the stand of the party executives in the eastern states had had a powerful effect; while Hughes might have got a Bill through the House of Representatives, it would 'certainly have been rejected in the Senate'.* An attempt to act by legislation or by regulation would have split both cabinet and caucus and might have resulted in a deadlock between the two Houses, which could only have been resolved by a double dissolution—a process which would have taken at least six months.† On the other hand, a referendum had many attractions: it appealed to the democratic sentiment of the party; it provided those caucus members who were not opposed in principle to conscription with a way around the party decisions; it enabled the Labor parliamentarians to avoid facing the electors. Above all, Hughes and his supporters believed that the popular vote would be overwhelmingly in his favour—an opinion which was shared even by his Labor opponents. The success of the referendum would not alter the law, but it would give the government a mandate. The party would be held together; the industrialists and 'disloyalists' would be put in their place and the authority of the parliamentarians restored; if the anti-conscriptionist minority were recalcitrant, they could be isolated and driven out. And

*Ibid., p. 137. Another conscriptionist Minister (W. Webster), however, said that Hughes 'had no chance of carrying it in the House of Representatives, even if the entire Opposition had stood solidly behind him'—which they would have done (*Argus*, 26 December 1917, quoted by L. C. Jauncey, *The Story of Conscription in Australia*, pp. 157-8).

† The alternatives were amendment of Section 49 of the Defence Act or a regulation under the War Precautions Act. The government was doubtful whether the W.P.A. empowered it to over-ride the specific prohibition in the Defence Act, and in any case a War Precautions regulation could have been disallowed by resolution of either House (M. Blackburn, *The Conscription Referendum of 1916*, p. 6).

indeed so it would have been—had Hughes's estimate of public opinion been correct.

By five votes to four, cabinet approved the appeal to the people; in caucus, after twenty hours of argument, 'the terms of the 1916 referendum were practically endorsed by a bare majority of one on the votes of those present'.²⁴ In Parliament, Hughes announced the terms of the compromise. The war situation was acute; the casualty lists for the last eleven days included 6,743 names. If the Australian forces were to be kept up to their present strength, 32,500 recruits were needed during September and 16,500 a month thereafter. If insufficient recruits came forward during September, single men would be called up for home service under the existing provisions of the Defence Act. A referendum on conscription for overseas service would be held in about eight weeks' time. But (and this was a partial answer to his critics) the government would not just conscript men; there must be equality of sacrifice, and they would not hesitate to compel the rich to sacrifice their wealth.²⁵ Two days later Parliament adjourned, so that the Prime Minister could make a formal bid for trade union and Labor Party support.

The tactics were clear. Hughes well understood that the source of the trouble was the trade union movement, so his first appeal was to the political wing where he could hope for whatever support was to be found. If he could carry this off, he might influence or at least isolate the unions. On the other hand, an initial rebuff by the unions would surely have an adverse effect on the political wing. His objective was an instruction from the movement to the parliamentary party to support him in the campaign for a 'Yes' vote, but he got away to an unhappy start. On 31 August—the night after the announcement of the referendum proposals in Parliament—he met with the Victorian executive, but 'not one voice outside his own said a word that night in support of conscription. Mr Hughes went home in high dudgeon'.²⁶ And there was little hope with the parliamentarians; the executive had kept almost all the Victorian caucus in line, even the party leader, George Elmslie, who was regarded with considerable suspicion because of his active support for recruiting; while not one of the Victorian members of the Federal caucus supported Hughes. As Holman said, the Victorian party was 'in a most unfortunate position, having, apparently, succumbed almost unanimously to the pressure brought to bear by the workers'.²⁷ The night after this defeat, Hughes tried his luck with the Melbourne Trades Hall Council; but Melbourne was the centre of the Interstate Trade Union Anti-Conscription Congress (whose secretary was now John Curtin), and the T.H.C. overwhelmingly rejected the referendum proposal.

The results in New South Wales were equally unsatisfactory. The N.S.W. executive had already, on the second day of the vital caucus meeting, abandoned its eight-week-old truce with the parliamentarians and demanded of all N.S.W. members, both State and Federal, that they declare themselves. However, Hughes was able to postpone the open breach; he appealed to the executive and to the Labor Council to defer their decision until he had had a chance to speak to them, and both agreed. At the special meeting of the executive Hughes pleaded his case eloquently, producing some of the private information on the war that he had gathered in England and throwing in for good measure a grave warning about the 'Yellow Peril' in the Pacific, but he was unable to convince his listeners and his proposals were defeated by twenty-one votes to five.²⁸ Later, Holman alleged—with justice—that the executive's decision had been pre-determined by the Industrialists.²⁹ Hughes had as little success with the Labor Council. The argument went on until midnight, the meeting was divided and discussion was adjourned, but it was clear that the majority were against the Prime Minister.³⁰ Only in the parliamentary party did Hughes have any substantial support. Holman and most of his cabinet were committed to the referendum, while the majority of the other caucus members were said to be fence-sitting, waiting to see how the vote went; if the electors declared for conscription, then they too would be conscriptionists.³¹ Meanwhile, party branches and unions in New South Wales were declaring their attitude, and the trend was strongly against the government. The Sydney Wharf Laborers' Union had followed Hughes for years; now 3,000 watersiders, at a special stop-work meeting, resolved almost unanimously to oppose the referendum.*

Finally, late in September, the N.S.W. executive expelled Hughes from the party, withdrew the endorsement of Holman and three other prominent conscriptionists, and decided on an ultimatum to those parliamentarians who had not yet replied to the demand that they make their position clear: 'Are you in favour of conscription or not? Plain answer, Yes or No.'³² Hughes, Holman, and their fellow sufferers protested vehemently against the disciplinary measures, but the party President replied—in reference to Hughes—that he had 'been treated just as he must have expected, and certainly as he deserved'.³³

The members of the N.S.W. caucus were reluctant to do anything which might widen the breach: with an election coming up, they felt a special concern for the fate of the government and the unity of the parliamentary party. They rejected a motion declaring opposition to conscription to be caucus policy, in favour of a further attempt to reach a compromise with the state executive. But the executive was

* Minutes, Sydney Branch, W.W.F., 14 September 1916. A move to depose Hughes as Federal President was, however, defeated.

adamant; not only did it reject the caucus request, but it withdrew the endorsement of five more members, including two Ministers. The majority of the parliamentary party had been prepared for a compromise on Western Australian lines—that conscription should be an open question*—but the efforts to reach an understanding broke on the intransigence of the movement outside. For the politicians, it was worth almost any sacrifice to keep Labor in power—and, to many, conscription did not even seem a sacrifice. But to most of the trade union movement a Labor government with conscription was next door to worthless, and to allow men to speak for conscription in the name of the labour movement seemed even more damaging than the loss of a government—in which many of them in any case had no great faith.

In Queensland, Labor had been in office for fifteen months; the parliamentary party was under continual pressure from the A.W.U. and the Brisbane Industrial Council, and its members were generally against conscription. Premier T. J. Ryan had also been in England; he returned a couple of weeks after Hughes and urged strongly the need for reinforcements, but he declared against the referendum. His party followed him, except for one Minister who resigned. It was not without hesitation that some at least of the parliamentary party took this stand; but again it was the pressure of the unions which 'swung the political wing into the fray'.³⁴

South Australia was the last of the parties to decide. The conference opened on 4 September, with conscription the main issue, and Labor Premier Crawford Vaughan chose this day to announce his support for the referendum. Hughes attended to put his case, and the conference endorsed the holding of the referendum; there was no mention of action against politicians who advocated a 'Yes' vote. The delegates also resolved their 'unswerving devotion to the Allied cause'—a courtesy which had been neglected in Victoria and New South Wales.³⁵ Thus conscription became an open question for South Australian parliamentarians, and seven of the eight members of the Federal caucus supported Hughes.

Behind the state Labor Parties stood the unions. In the eastern states it was the resolute opposition of the industrialists which determined the resistance of the party executives to Hughes's persuasion. In South Australia and Western Australia, where the unions were in a weaker position in the party machine and there was consequently no formal ban on politicians supporting the 'Yes' campaign, it was the unions which provided the backbone of the 'No' forces.

The most important of the union gatherings assembled in Melbourne

* The W.A. conference, the first to decide on the conscription issue, had given Labor parliamentarians a free hand; in the event, four of five W.A. senators and a majority of the state members, led by Premier John Scaddan, declared for Hughes.

on 23-4 September. It was convened jointly by the Trades Hall Council and the committee of the Interstate Trade Union Congress, and attended by delegates from 106 Victorian unions as well as visitors from all states except South Australia; the visitors said that the unions in their states had agreed in advance to be bound by the decisions of the conference. The vote was for militant action. The introduction of compulsory home service was condemned, and it was decided that stop-work meetings should be held throughout Australia on the day the call-up was proclaimed, to consider recommendations for further action.³⁶ Unofficially, it was reported that the conference had 'discussed a general strike through three sessions . . . *if we lose the referendum*. All sorts of rumors [were] about that the numbers will be faked, and the men sent to the front'.³⁷ Subsequently, John Curtin, the secretary of the Congress, announced that the stop-work meetings should be held on 4 October. To Hughes it seemed that the real purpose of the Congress was to foment a general strike and so prevent the vote being taken; the militants were hoping to bring about 'something approaching civil war', and he appealed to unionists not to be misled by 'reckless extremists, and by the secret enemies of Britain, who wish her to be defeated'.³⁸

A large number of N.S.W. unions stopped work for the day, including the wharflabourers, nearly all the metal tradesmen, some sections of railway workers, and coal-miners throughout the state. Direct actionists and other militants were prominent among the three thousand strikers who met in the Sydney Town Hall; however, the motion put to the meeting was moderate in tone—it demanded the withdrawal of the call-up notices, but did not propose industrial action against conscription. The chairman appealed to those present to rely on the ballot box, and the motion was carried without dissent.³⁹ At the Barrier, where there had already been one stoppage against conscription, the A.M.A. again closed the mines. 'Never before', records George Dale, 'was the enthusiasm equal to this great industrial protest'.⁴⁰ From Melbourne it was reported that 70,000 workers had taken part in the protest. In Brisbane, 'although . . . a few of the more timid unions did not partake in the demonstration, thousands of unionists marched in the procession from the Trades Hall. The protest was a powerful one and effectively demonstrated the bitter opposition of the workers of Brisbane to conscription'.⁴¹

To one Labor conscriptionist it seemed that the tactics of the 'antis' demonstrated the growing influence of an 'irresponsible and dangerous section led by the I.W.W.', but that the 'ghastly failure' of the strike proved that the rank and file were refusing to follow such leaders.⁴² To Mr Justice Heydon of the Industrial Court the direct challenge to government was 'essentially an act of civil war. . . . It

involves a revolution, a transfer of the means of government from the adult men and women of the Commonwealth to such of them as may be members of trades-unions.⁴³ A more sober estimate was given at the N.S.W. Labor Council's post mortem. Delegates from the unions which had stopped work condemned those which had failed to support them; one alleged that £33,000 had been spent to disrupt the strike. But, as its secretary pointed out, the Council had no power to instruct—all that it could do was to recommend and to rely on a sense of solidarity which was not always present.⁴⁴

The one-day stoppage was in fact conceived rather as a warning than a challenge. It owed something to the influence of the direct actionists but more to the Victorian socialists and the industrialists in New South Wales, and it fell far short of the I.W.W. conception of a general strike against conscription and war. It demonstrated the breadth of disillusionment with labour in politics; but it revealed that the majority of the industrial movement, including the giant A.W.U., was still prepared to rely on political action to achieve its ends—to resist conscription, yes, but only 'by all lawful means'. The split in the Labor Party was still too recent, and the new alignments still too obscure, for the mass of workers to feel that angry desperation which is a necessary condition for a general strike. That was to come ten months later.

Although the cabinet and caucus debates had revealed the depth of the division in the party, the parliamentarians were reluctant to formalize the split. The first crack came with Hughes's introduction, on 13 September, of the Bill for the referendum. The following day Hughes announced the resignation from his government of F. G. Tudor, a member of the Commonwealth Parliament since federation, party whip and party secretary to 1908, and Minister for Customs in Labor governments since then. Tudor had resigned because of his differences with the government over conscription.*

Twelve days later three of the leading anti-conscriptionists in Federal caucus called on those who opposed Hughes to declare themselves. Hughes replied by issuing a list of those Federal members who would be available for the 'Yes' campaign—four Ministers and seventeen others, with himself a total of twenty-two. Provoked by this, Tudor issued the opposition list—a total of thirty-four, but including no

* Pearce (*Carpenter to Cabinet*, p. 143) says that Tudor told him that he knew that conscription was right, but that 'Richmond [his electorate] won't stand for it'. This seems unlikely. The April-May resolutions against conscription were all directed to Tudor as well as to Pearce (as Acting Prime Minister), which suggests that Tudor was already then regarded as the leader of the anti-conscription faction in caucus.

Ministers. As the campaign proceeded, the remaining members of caucus made their positions clear, but there was still no formal split.

On the eve of the poll a stupid move by Hughes caused the resignation of three more of his cabinet. At a public 'Yes' meeting, Hughes had threatened that single men who had dodged the 2 October call-up would get 'the surprise of their lives' when they went to record their votes; he proposed that electoral officers be instructed to ask all apparently eligible voters whether they had presented themselves in response to the call-up. The Executive Council at first refused to endorse this proposal, but Hughes reconvened the Council at a time when only the conscriptionist Ministers could be present and the regulation was passed. Immediately, the three anti-conscriptionist Ministers (Senators Gardiner and Russell and W. G. Higgs, M.H.R.) sent in their resignations 'as a protest against what we consider to be the Prime Minister's undue interference with the conduct of the referendum'.⁴⁵ In the event the government withdrew the regulation, and the single men were left to cast their votes free of the threat of prosecution for draft-evasion; but Hughes's blunder had cut the cabinet neatly in half and had prepared the ground for the coming division in the parliamentary party.

The story of the last fervid weeks of the campaign is well known. The 'Yes' meetings, usually in local town halls, at which Labor conscriptionists could not get a hearing. . . . The 'No' meetings, often in the open air, at which 'young, able-bodied men, apparently of military age . . . held up their hands, and many of them both hands' in support of the anti-conscription resolutions.⁴⁶ . . . The intervention of Daniel Mannix, formerly of Maynooth and now Coadjutor-Archbishop of the Melbourne diocese, who, deeply distressed by the wrongs inflicted on his people during the Easter Rising, denounced the 'sordid trade war' and those who would conscript Australians to fight it.* . . . The denial of Mannix by most of his fellow-prelates and many influential co-religionists. . . . The refusal of the Queensland Governor to preside over meetings of the Executive Council so long as these included the new Minister for Railways who had told the Queensland Irish Association that 'every Australian recruit means another soldier to assist the British Government to harass the people of Ireland'. . . . The rumours that the Federal Government had relaxed the White Australia policy and that 250 'Asiatics' had already landed, and Hughes's description of this as an 'absolute and infamous lie'.† . . . The arrival off Fremantle of

* This is the phrase usually quoted. C. Bryan, *Archbishop Mannix, Champion of Australian Democracy*, pp. 68-72, reprints a version of the Archbishop's speech in which he is quoted as having spoken of an 'ordinary trade war'.

† S.M.H., 9 October 1916. J. T. Lang, *I Remember*, pp. 67 ff., claims credit for first thinking of the potential value of this story, which he suggests was the decisive factor in the success of the 'No' campaign.

a boatload of Maltese immigrants—indentured cheap labour, the unions said—and the diversion of the ship from eastern ports so that the anti-conscriptionists could not make political capital. . . . The civil disturbances at Broken Hill, the arrest of a number of I.W.W. members, and the formation of 'Labor's Volunteer Army' which pledged men of military age to resist conscription.* . . . The prosecution of conscientious objectors to the October call-up, and the savage comments of many of the magistrates who tried them: 'What—what! You say you object on the grounds of being a Christian? If everybody was like you, and sat down and did nothing, the Germans would soon be able to walk over us.' Application refused.⁴⁷ . . . The arrest of various members of the I.W.W. on charges of forgery, treason, murder, arson.

Of these colourful incidents, the last was the most significant. From the beginning, the conscriptionists had made every effort to identify the I.W.W. as the moving force of the 'No' campaign and to identify the Labor anti-conscriptionists with the I.W.W. Then into the middle of the campaign was thrown the arrest of one group of I.W.W. men on charges of forging and uttering large quantities of £5 notes, of another group on a charge of murdering a policeman, and of yet another group on charges of conspiring to burn down Sydney. 'Australians! These are leaders of the No Party', said one conscriptionist leaflet. 'Are they to be yours?'⁴⁸

Left-wing Labor men, who had opposed conscription even before the party decisions and had co-operated with the I.W.Ws. and other radicals in the Anti-Conscription Leagues condemned the arrests, charging collusion between the Commonwealth and New South Wales governments to ensure that the cases were timed for maximum political effect. The official machine, however, tried to escape the I.W.W. tag. Once the party had decided to oppose Hughes it had appointed J. H. Catts, M.H.R., formerly in charge of recruiting, to direct its 'No' campaign. Catts was an old antagonist of the I.W.W., and he formed a new organization, the No Conscription Council, which could enter the campaign unembarrassed by the taint of disloyalty attaching to the socialists and the I.W.W. When charges were made of I.W.W. associations, Catts replied that 'no person or organisation connected in any way with the I.W.W. is associated with us'.⁴⁹ This was literally true but its relevance was doubtful, for it could hardly be denied that, as a Sydney newspaper placard said on the eve of the poll:

I.W.W. ASSASSINS WANT YOU TO VOTE NO.⁵⁰

* The measure of the success of this was that only 206 men answered the call-up, while over 2,000 had enrolled in the L.V.A. (G. Dale, *The Industrial History of Broken Hill*, p. 219).

This section has been concerned not so much with the conscription controversy itself as with the internal politics of the labour movement's response. The anti-conscription campaign, at first very much the affair of an isolated and unpopular minority, coincided with growing working-class discontent, and anti-conscription became one (finally the most important) of the watchwords with which trade unionists challenged politicians for control of the movement. The primary motives were economic, and compulsory military service was early identified as a move by the 'exploiters' to inhibit the struggle of the workers against war profiteering. Besides, the exigencies of the power struggle within the party for the time brought the interests of the conservative A.W.U. bureaucracy into harmony with those of the militant industrialists and even the revolutionaries whom the A.W.U. leaders otherwise detested; together these elements carried enough weight to defeat the politicians and their 'national' policy. By polling day, 28 October, the breach in the labour movement was complete; all that remained for after the referendum was the formal divorce.

The Conscription Vote

The Commonwealth Constitution requires that any amendment to it must, before it can become effective, be approved by a majority of voters throughout the Commonwealth and by a majority of voters in a majority of states. Although the conscription referendum could have no constitutional effect, it was in these terms that most observers thought of the results, and in the event neither condition was satisfied. To contemporary radical opinion, the defeat of conscription seemed a result of the vigorous action of the labour movement and the solidarity of the working class. In part this was true, for without the labour movement's campaign Hughes's proposal would certainly have been endorsed—this was shown by the Western Australia result. But a closer examination of the voting reveals that one in three or four Labor supporters voted for conscription—more than enough to provide the government with a handsome majority—while it was the big swing against the government of Liberal voters in the countryside which saved the day for the 'antis'.

Since the Labor Party led the 'No' campaign in 1916, and their opponents (including those who had just been expelled from the Labor Party) the 'Yes', it seems reasonable to start by equating the 'No' vote with Labor and the 'Yes' vote with anti-Labor. Throughout Australia, thirty-two electorates which returned Labor candidates in 1914 and twelve electorates which returned Liberals voted 'No' in 1916, while ten Labor and twenty-one Liberal electorates voted 'Yes'. This not only confirms that the core of the referendum vote was on party lines, but

establishes the obvious fact that a proportion of voters on either side switched from their previous party allegiance.

If these electorates are broken down into eleven groups (Tasmania, and metropolitan and country electorates in each of the mainland states) it is possible to calculate (although not very precisely) the average swing of voters either way within each of these groups.

Overall, the 1916 'No' vote was 3·5 per cent lower than the 1914 Labor vote; only in New South Wales and South Australia did the Labor vote improve slightly, while in Victoria, Queensland, and Tasmania it dropped by 5 to 6 per cent and in Western Australia slumped disastrously by 25 per cent. These differences are of considerable political interest, but the more detailed analysis suggested above enables more significant conclusions to be drawn. Labor improved on its 1914 vote in only three of the suggested eleven groups of electorates—in Sydney and in the countryside of New South Wales and South Australia; everywhere else the Labor vote declined. But in all states except Western Australia the 'No' position was stronger in the country electorates than in the cities, and this was accounted for not by a small loss of Labor votes—Labor generally lost more heavily in the countryside than in the cities—but by a much larger gain of votes from the Liberals.* Labor lost least to 'Yes' in Melbourne and Sydney—indeed voters generally adhered more closely to their party allegiances in the cities than in the country—and gained most from the Liberals in the South Australian, New South Wales, and Queensland country electorates.

The Soldiers' Vote: This was at first not published separately. However, following republication in Australia of figures given in overseas papers which suggested that the soldiers had voted 'No', Labor pressure on the government produced the statement that 72,399 soldiers had voted for conscription (55·1 per cent) and 58,894 against (44·9 per cent). Assuming that these figures were correct, the pro-conscription majority must have come from men who had not yet tasted battle. It is known that Hughes's agents in London had been unable to hold successful 'Yes' meetings among the soldiers in France;† and it is certain the front-line soldiers voted strongly against conscription—Hughes was in fact preparing to publish advance figures of the soldiers' vote on the expectation that they would favour 'Yes', but was unable to do so. In all probability, the imperial authorities requested that these figures be not published because of the likely adverse effect on Allied morale.

The Women's Vote: Both sides made particular appeals to women voters, the 'antis' relying on such harrowing slogans as: 'Will you send

* This general tendency is even more marked when the predominantly mining and industrial electorates in the 'country' groups are set aside.

† Scott, *Australia During The War*, pp. 352, 379, comments very guardedly on this incident, but the implication is clear.

another woman's son or husband to his death?'⁵¹ It was thought that this propaganda might have had a considerable effect, but an analysis of the voting figures suggests this was not so.

The Roman Catholic Vote: Much attention has been paid to the possible effect of the Irish-Catholic vote on the referendum—quite understandably, considering the flamboyant part played by the Co-adjutor-Archbishop of Melbourne (the only high-ranking cleric to take such a stand) in the 'No' campaign. However, an examination of the voting suggests that any effect Dr Mannix may have had on the outcome of the referendum was strictly limited—that, if he did succeed in convincing many Roman Catholic voters to vote against conscription, he probably lost just as many Protestant votes to 'No'. There is no general correlation between Catholicism and the 'No' vote: New South Wales and Victoria, both with a higher than average Catholic element in their populations, behave oppositely, while the biggest movement towards 'No' came in the South Australian country electorates, where the proportion of Catholics was well below the average; in Melbourne, where Dr Mannix's activities were concentrated, the Labor vote fell substantially, while in Sydney, where Archbishop Carr carefully refrained from supporting Dr Mannix, the Labor vote rose.

The 'Labor Conscriptionists': The attitude adopted by the sitting members does seem to have had some slight effect on the voting. Of the thirty-six Labor seats for which an average swing can be calculated, thirteen were held by followers of Hughes and twenty-three by anti-conscriptionists. Of the thirteen only five favoured 'No' more than the average, while of the twenty-three, fourteen behaved thus; but in most cases the variation was not very big.

The 'German' Vote: The Military Service Referendum Act included a special provision that, in certain proclaimed areas where there was a high concentration of people of German origin or descent, the votes of such electors could be set aside and counted separately. Two areas were proclaimed—in south-eastern South Australia and in southern Queensland—and in both cases these votes overwhelmingly favoured 'No'. Whether this was because (as Jauncey romantically suggests)⁵² the German migrants were men of radical convictions who had left their native land to escape political repression or, more simply, because people of German origin, even if they disapproved of the Kaiser's foreign policy, did not want to have to fight against their countrymen, there is no doubt about how they voted or that their votes had a considerable effect on the overall result, especially in the South Australian country electorates.

What conclusions can be drawn from this analysis? The Labor Party suffered a drift of votes to 'Yes'—more in the country areas than in the

cities where the unions were powerful and the Labor campaign was concentrated—but was able to win sufficient votes in the rural electorates to defeat the government's proposals. That this was a vote against conscription rather than against Hughes was sufficiently indicated by the Federal elections which came only six months later; here the farmers swung back to the government, only to return to 'No' in the second conscription referendum in December 1917. Partly it was the German wheat-farming vote, but most significantly it was the N.S.W. pastoral vote, that carried the day for 'No'. Scott reports the fanciful suggestion that the farmers were terrorized into voting 'No', by threats of I.W.W.-type sabotage: 'You may win at the poll, but afterwards what about your woolsheds, homesteads, haystacks, barns and livestock?'⁵³ But even assuming the truth of the allegation, this greatly exaggerates the influence of the I.W.W. among rural workers. A more plausible explanation is the warning given by George Black, the N.S.W. Chief Secretary and a follower of Holman, a fortnight before polling day. He had had 'a good lot' of correspondence from the country, he said, and

the writers tell me that Mr Hughes's action in calling up the men is prejudicing conscription in the country districts, both with the employers and the men. In some places shearers have been called out of the sheds. In addition to that harvesting is going on, and there is a dearth of rural workers.⁵⁴

Ultimately, the defeat of conscription came down to this: a good season, and a shortage of labour, caused initially by the high enlistment of country men* and accentuated by the ill-advised call-up of 2 October. To most farmers, wheat unharvested and sheep unshorn, cattle unslaughtered and cows un milked—these were the worst of all possible evils, and the farmers voted against them. The radicals had won the labour movement to anti-conscription, and the labour movement, despite the defection of many of its most able and influential leaders, had carried the majority of the working class with it; but it was the non-Labor farmers who defeated the government's proposals.

The Aftermath: The Labor Split

Many members of the Federal caucus had hoped that, after the bitterness of the referendum campaign had died away, it would be possible for the opposing factions to reconcile their differences and re-unite. Indeed, this was the position taken by the Western Australian party and by the September conference of the South Australian party (although the council of the latter had, a few weeks later, resolved at

* The A.W.U., for example, claimed that 30,000 of its members were in the armed forces.

the instance of the A.W.U. and other unions that the advocacy of conscription was a violation of the principles of the movement).⁵⁵ But the gulf was already very wide: to the 'antis' the Labor conscriptionists were war-crazed imperialists, indistinguishable from the Liberal opposition; while, to the followers of Hughes, it seemed that their opponents were not just against conscription but were already 'hostile to the prosecution of the war effort'.⁵⁶

When caucus met on 14 November 1916 the anti-conscriptionists were full of their success and ready with their challenge. Almost without comment, a Queensland member moved want of confidence in Hughes's leadership; from the chair, Hughes ruled the motion out of order, but his ruling was dissented from—his opponents had the numbers.* An attempt was made to refer the fate of the ministry to the movement for decision; but while the acrimonious debate was still proceeding, Hughes and two of his most devoted followers reached the conclusion that they could not win, that 'it was palpably impossible to hold the party together . . . except at the price of surrender'—which might mean Australia's withdrawal from the war.⁵⁷ In a dramatic gesture, Hughes interrupted the debate and led twenty-four of his followers out of the party room. The forty who remained confirmed the expulsion of the Prime Minister, and elected F. G. Tudor as leader of the parliamentary party.

The formal seal was put on the split by the special interstate conference which met in Melbourne on 4 December to consider the party's future. The running was made by the Victorian delegates, with a motion for the expulsion of all those Federal members who had supported conscription or had left the Federal parliamentary party to form another party. Alone of the state organizations, the W.A. party had not made anti-conscription an article of faith, and its delegates had come to the conference with instructions to try to heal the breach. If this were to be done, the Victorian motion would have had to be split in two and a distinction made between those who had followed Hughes into his new party and those who had merely advocated conscription; this would not have affected the Federal situation, but it would have enabled the W.A. Labor conscriptionists to remain within the party. But the industrialists were on top, and they were out for blood. The original Victorian motion was carried by twenty-nine votes to four, three W.A. delegates and one from New South Wales opposing it, while the other three Western Australians abstained.⁵⁸

Provided the Labor conscriptionists could count on the continued support of the Liberal oppositions, they could still command sufficient

* This makes improbable Scott's suggestion (op. cit., p. 364) that even at this stage a majority could have been won for a compromise.

votes in the parliaments of the Commonwealth, New South Wales, and South Australia to continue to govern; however, it seemed to them that the defeat of the referendum meant that 'an election at that moment, with the reverberations of the conscription fight echoing in every corner, would probably bring in a government pledged to outright disaffection'.⁵⁹ Accordingly, in New South Wales where an election was due late in 1916, and in the Commonwealth where one was due in mid-1917, Holman and Hughes devoted their talents for political manoeuvre to extending the lives of their parliaments. The anti-conscriptionists, given new heart by a victory for which none of them had dared to hope until the last days of the campaign, were equally intent on forcing an early appeal to the electors.

The Commonwealth Parliament met on 29 November; Hughes announced himself as the leader of the 'National Labor Party'* and named his new Ministry, all of them Labor conscriptionists. His thirteen followers in the lower house, together with the Liberal opposition, gave him a comfortable majority, which was consolidated by the formation of the National Federation in January 1917 and of a coalition government the following month. However, there were nineteen Labor anti-conscriptionists in the Senate—a majority of two against him. By diligent use of persuasion and pressure—one senator even alleged bribery⁶⁰—Hughes succeeded in convincing three of the four Tasmanian Labor Senators that their health could not stand up to a strenuous parliamentary session:† one resigned and was by prior arrangement with Hughes⁶¹ replaced within a few hours by a former Tasmanian Labor Premier, a conscriptionist, who was appointed to the vacancy by the Tasmanian Executive Council, the state parliament not then being in session; the second retired to hospital; while the third went on a long sea voyage—to recover his health and to investigate trade possibilities in the Indies. Hughes had succeeded in having the House of Representatives pass a request to the Imperial Government to legislate to prolong the life of the Commonwealth Parliament; now he hoped to use his newly created majority to get a similar motion through the Senate. However, the two Tasmanian Liberal Senators refused their support, the motion was not brought forward, and Parliament was dissolved on 26 March 1917—but by this time Hughes was no longer so reluctant about the dissolution, for the N.S.W. election had intervened.

Holman had moved more quickly than Hughes towards a coalition.

* Apart from the parliamentarians who had followed Hughes, the new party consisted of a number of unions in Western Australia and a few in South Australia.

† This was perhaps not difficult, as Tasmania had voted strongly for conscription, and a Labor majority in the Senate could have meant a double dissolution in which the Tasmanian Labor senators would almost certainly have lost their seats.

When the N.S.W. Parliament reassembled in November, he was confronted with a no-confidence motion from the new Labor leader, Durack. The debate lasted all through the night and until 11 o'clock the following morning; the Labor rump reserved their bitterest invective for their former comrades, the nominal opposition playing little part except to cross the floor and vote for Holman, helping to defeat the censure motion by fifty-two votes to twenty-one. After three weeks of energetic horse-trading, in which positions were found for the former Liberal Opposition leader and for such of Holman's ministerial colleagues as could not conveniently be fitted into a coalition government, the Premier announced his new Ministry.⁶² Almost its first act was to introduce legislation for the prolongation of the life of the Legislative Assembly; however, the public response was unfavourable, the new Labor Opposition was divided, and Holman decided to risk an election. His political judgment was strikingly confirmed: the Nationalist coalition won fifty seats (in a House of ninety) to the Labor Party's thirty-three.

Elsewhere, the position was not as bad, from Hughes's point of view, as might have been feared. In Queensland, there had been only a handful of defections from the party; the Ryan government was still popular, 'No' had won in the referendum, and Hughes could have no great hopes. The Victorian party had also come through almost unscathed, but the state had voted for conscription, and the Nationalists had hopes of picking up seats. South Australia had voted decisively against conscription, and the party had, at a special conference called in February at the instigation of the unions, repudiated the conscriptionists, who had walked out and set up a branch of the National Labor Party;⁶³ most of the parliamentarians were with Hughes, but most of the unions and the popular vote were against him. The Labor split had gone deep in both Tasmania and Western Australia; Labor governments had been defeated in both states during 1916, and the prospects looked good. Adding it up after the referendum, Hughes could reckon on carrying Victoria, Western Australia, and Tasmania; now, with the N.S.W. elections, he could hope for that state as well—and that meant the Commonwealth. Accepting his defeat in the Senate with good grace, he dissolved Parliament and announced a Federal election for 5 May 1917. He appealed to his record as wartime Prime Minister and called on all those who wanted a 'win-the-war' policy to give him their votes; at the same time, he declared that his government would respect the popular decision and would make no further attempt to introduce conscription unless the military situation made a further appeal to the people imperative. For the Labor Party, Tudor claimed that he would conduct the war effort 'with vigour and determination'—and emphasized Labor's commitment to voluntary enlistment.

The results of the election far exceeded any expectations that Hughes and his followers could reasonably have had. In the biggest poll yet recorded in a Federal election (better than three out of four voters participated), the Nationalists scooped the pool in the Senate and improved their position by four seats (from forty-nine to fifty-three) in the House. Overall, the Labor vote dropped from its 1914 high-point of 55.1 per cent to 43.9 per cent. Labor polled best in Queensland and Victoria, where there had been least division in the party; and surprisingly poorly in South Australia where participation fell off sharply, the absention being greatest in the country areas and largely affecting Labor voters, except in the electorate of Angas, the main centre of the S.A. German population, where some 4,000 Liberal voters stayed away. Eleven ex-Labor conscriptionists defended their seats, nine of them successfully; Hughes moved from West Sydney, which he was sure to lose, to Bendigo, which he won comfortably from Labor. Two seats were won, also from Labor, by followers of Hughes who had not previously been in the House of Representatives. In addition, Labor lost six seats to candidates who, before the coalition, had been Liberals. Every one of the eight Labor seats which had voted 'Yes' fell to the Nationalists, while none of the twelve Liberal seats which had voted 'No' was captured by Labor (although the Labor vote increased substantially in some of them).

The 1917 election, coming at a time of great political confusion and on top of the intense emotions aroused by the news of the assaults and counter-assaults along the Hindenburg Line, was puzzlingly inconsistent in its voting pattern; there was not the regularity of movement which could be seen in the referendum. Personal factors were more than usually important because of the chaos caused on the Labor side by the recent split; Hughes's Labor supporters in the eastern states came largely from the country electorates and this helped to increase the uncertainty already felt, more strongly in the country than the cities, about Labor's attitude to the war.

The irregular and often contradictory data do not lend themselves to any firm conclusions. What seems to have happened was that, except for some drift, the hard-core working-class vote in the eastern cities was still solid for Labor; but to the slight drift was added a substantial middle-class vote which normally abstained and together these ate into the Labor percentages in the cities. In the industrial and mining centres outside the cities there was a considerable loss of Labor votes to the Nationalists, which reflected the polarizing influence of the 1916 strikes, the greater concern of country people for the war, and the greater middle-class pressure on the isolated mining communities; in these electorates there was an important shift of working-class votes as well as a considerably larger turnout of anti-Labor voters. Among

farmers, despite the opposition to conscription, there was an unwillingness to support a Labor Party which was increasingly trade union oriented, and the government's stocks had risen with its considerable successes in handling the marketing problems associated with wheat, wool, and sugar; the Labor vote in the farming electorates was considerably more stable than elsewhere, even in a few cases rising slightly,* but the anti-conscription sentiment was not carried through to the elections. The election results suggest that there was already, by mid-1917, a considerable section of working-class opinion, especially in the cities, which was at least unperturbed by allegations that the Labor Party was half-hearted in its approach to the war effort and was possibly even beginning to approve of a movement in this direction; the savage general strike which followed three months after the election, the important changes in Labor Party policy, the trend of by-elections, all confirm this suggestion.

* Only six of the seventy-five electorates showed an increase in the Labor percentage, all but one of them in the country.

The I.W.W. Twelve

THROUGHOUT the referendum and the election campaigns the conscriptionists, later the Nationalists, had sought to saddle the Labor Party and the anti-conscriptionists with the Industrial Workers of the World. As its influence had grown, the I.W.W. had increasingly become the *bête noire* of respectable opinion, conservative and labour alike. Deliberately and publicly, the I.W.W. affronted the accepted values of trade unionism and arbitration, ethics and religion, parliamentary democracy and the monarchy, the sanctity of property and the purity of the race. It was held responsible for the strike wave, for the defeat of the politicians by the industrialists within the Labor Party; most heinous of all, it was anti-conscription, anti-war, anti-British, pro-German—or so respectable opinion said. By the repetition of a familiar device—the slide from a few common characteristics to complete identity—conscriptionist propagandists, starting with the Prime Minister, sought to sheet these crimes home to the Labor Party as well. To the I.W.W. these allegations were a medal awarded for distinguished conduct in the class war: certainly they were disloyal—to capitalism; of course they encouraged strikes—against the system which robbed the workers of the proceeds of their labour; naturally they were against the war—a war which sent millions of wage-slaves to the slaughter so that their masters might grow fat. But to the Labor politicians the accusations were an embarrassing burden which they had to shed.

Reviewing its work in 1915, the I.W.W. was proud of its achievement:

The organisation has steadily pursued its propaganda of Industrial Unionism, and direct action. It has disposed of more revolutionary literature, and done more to alter the psychological outlook of the worker towards the present system of society, in the last twelve months than all the class war theorists have done in ten years. It has established the right of free speech in many centres where the word of the capitalist had been previously law. When workers were gaoled for asserting that right, it has created such a state of working-class public opinion that the politicians were compelled to open the

gaol doors and give public promises that there would be no repetition of the gaoling business.* And, above all, it has built up a press of its own,† and enrolled members so rapidly‡ that in every camp in Australia where toilers slave for a master there will be found to-day rebels carrying on the revolutionary work and hastening the coming of the One Big Union of labor.

Time is on our side; the class war is becoming more intensified; the chasm between the two classes is daily growing wider, and the need is becoming more apparent of an organisation that is not merely content with the theory of the class struggle as a subject to philosophise upon, with the co-operative Commonwealth as a distant and beautiful ideal, but is prepared to accept that struggle as a terrible reality and wage relentless war on those who would perpetuate it.¹

The very effrontery of the I.W.W., their willingness, even eagerness, to accept the consequences of their actions, won them the sympathy of a considerable section of the labour movement. A case in point was the prosecution in September 1915 of Tom Barker, a 28-year-old Englishman who had reached Australia and the I.W.W. by way of five years' service in the British army, and the great Waihi coal strike in New Zealand. Barker was charged with publishing a poster prejudicial to recruiting:

TO ARMS!!

Capitalists, Parsons, Politicians,
Landlords, Newspaper Editors, and
Other Stay-at-home Patriots.

YOUR COUNTRY NEEDS YOU IN THE TRENCHES!!

WORKERS,

FOLLOW YOUR MASTERS.

Defence counsel pleaded that, far from prejudicing recruiting, the poster would, if its advice were followed, encourage it; but Barker was convicted and sentenced to £50 or six months.§ There were immediate

* The reference was to the 'free speech' fights in Sydney, Newcastle, and Port Pirie, where itinerant agitators crowded the courts and (since they refused to pay fines) the gaols until their right to speak was conceded.

† *Direct Action* became a weekly in October 1915. Its circulation by then was between eight and nine thousand—four or five times that of any of the socialist papers.

‡ Membership figures are not known. The 'card-holding' membership was probably of the order of 1,500. 'Locals' had increased from four (Adelaide, Sydney, Broken Hill, and Port Pirie) at the beginning of the war to nine (the above, less Port Pirie, which had folded up, plus Fremantle, Perth, Boulder, Brisbane, Mount Morgan, and Melbourne) by the end of 1915.

§ *Direct Action*, 1 October 1915. On appeal, the conviction was quashed.

protests from the Brisbane Industrial Council, the N.S.W. Labor Council, and a conference of unions which was meeting in Melbourne to discuss the one big union: the Barker case had been incorporated into the growing union hostility to the parliamentary Labor Parties, and the feeling was reciprocated.

Just before he left for London in January 1916, Hughes had denounced the I.W.W. for its part in the Broken Hill 44-hours dispute and for the upsets in his own union, the Waterside Workers; by the time he got back in July the position was much worse. The 'direct action' slogan had spread to the pastoral industry and the coal-mines, even though the specific tactics were often not those advocated by the Wobblies, and there were dark allegations of I.W.W. responsibility for wild-cat strikes, 'go slow', and other forms of sabotage from the North Queensland sugar mills to the Government Clothing Factory in Melbourne, from the railway workshops in Sydney to the Trans-Australian Railways construction jobs in South and Western Australia. The idea of the one big union was almost universally accepted in the trade union movement, and anti-conscription, starting as the concern of the I.W.W. and the socialists, had become the official policy of the whole movement. By September 1916 the *Sydney Morning Herald* was complaining, with little exaggeration:

It is idle to deny the force and rapid spread of the doctrines of the I.W.W. They are spreading at a rate that is really appalling; and the war, and the slump that may follow, are giving and will give them an increased impetus. The actual membership of the I.W.W. organisation may seem insignificant, but its more or less constant followers in Sydney alone number between 20,000 and 30,000, and they are in numbers in all the unions—the more dangerous because the I.W.W. man is everywhere the most energetic as a doctrinaire, and the most enthusiastic.

Even if there had been no conscription referendum and no urgent need for a whipping-boy, this was no longer a challenge that could be ignored.

Conflict with the law had become a way of life for the I.W.W., and no one was greatly surprised (or especially concerned) when its members and sympathizers were charged with offensive behaviour, abusive language, or similar crimes. But, in August and September 1916, a series of arrests and trials in which I.W.W. men were involved presented the organization in a new light, one which was extremely useful to the government and the conscriptionists.

On 12 August, the N.S.W. police had warned the public of the widespread appearance of high-quality forged £5 notes.² Five days later, four men appeared in the Central Police Court, Sydney, charged

with forging and uttering. Among them was F. J. Morgan, a printer who worked on *Direct Action*. Early in September J. B. King, a prominent I.W.W., and the brothers Davis and Louis Goldstein, owners of a small tailoring business and the former another Wobbly, were also arrested. On 8 September, after the case had already been postponed three times, the accused, except for the Goldsteins, faced the Court. The Crown Prosecutor told the presiding magistrate that five thousand forged notes had been printed, of which only eight hundred had been recovered, and asked for a further remand. The magistrate reluctantly allowed this and, for the first time, granted the accused bail—of £400 each. Morgan's bail money was supplied by Davis Goldstein. During the next ten days the police worked hard on the Goldsteins, persuading them to turn informer—but in relation to other charges which were being worked up against the I.W.W. rather than in the forgery case, so that their connection with the police was for the time to be kept secret. The case reopened on 19 September, and this time the Goldsteins appeared among the accused. Morgan failed to answer to his bail; Davis Goldstein had warned the police that Morgan intended to skip but they had not acted, and the bail was estreated.*

No evidence was offered against one of the accused, who became the Crown's principal witness; after hearing the evidence, the magistrate ruled that Louis Goldstein had no case to answer and discharged him; however, Davis Goldstein and the remaining accused (all had pleaded not guilty) were committed for trial and released on £800 bail.

The following Saturday the I.W.W. premises in Sussex Street, Sydney, were raided by the police; great quantities of documents and literature were seized, and four men among the many who were found on the premises (Charles Reeve, Thomas Glynn, Peter Larkin,† and Jack Hamilton) were arrested and charged with treason—that they did (among many other things) 'feloniously and wickedly . . . compass, imagine, intent, devise or intend to levy war against the King within His Majesty's dominions'.³ Over the next fortnight eight more men were arrested on the same charge—Thomas Moore, Donald McPherson, William Teen, Bernard Bob Besant, William Beatty, and Morris Fagin in Sydney; Donald Grant in Broken Hill, where he was on a visit from Sydney; and J. B. King, out on bail in the forgery case. Reeve, Glynn, Larkin, Grant, and King were or had been full-time officials of the I.W.W.; Hamilton and Besant printed the organization's paper; McPherson was a wharflabourer; Teen had recently worked in the railways and had been a member of the Council of the A.R.T.S.A.; all, except Moore, were members of the inner circle of the I.W.W.

* Morgan was in fact smuggled out of the country by seamen members of the I.W.W.

† Peter Larkin was a brother of the Irish revolutionary James Larkin.

While these arrests were taking place and the detectives were working up their case, a police constable in Tottenham, a mining town in central New South Wales, was murdered—shot in the back through an open window as he sat working at his desk. Three arrests were made and, on 4 October, the coronial inquiry found that these men—Franz Franz (he was born in Australia of German parents, but the name was emphasized) and the brothers Roland and Herbert Kennedy—had done the murder. The Kennedys were well known locally as members of the I.W.W., and it was suggested that the murder arose out of a fracas a few days earlier, in the course of which the dead constable had booked Roland Kennedy for offensive language. According to the police witnesses, Roland Kennedy and Franz had admitted their guilt, the latter saying that he had been 'led astray by the I.W.W.'; Herbert Kennedy had, however, denied that the I.W.W. believed in assassination and had affirmed his innocence. All three were committed for trial on 18 October.⁴

The preliminary hearing of the treason case opened on 10 October, in a glare of publicity and with the passions of the conscription campaign at their highest pitch. The conscriptionists took full advantage of their opportunity, the Prime Minister setting the pace. At Ballarat on 9 October, Hughes, with a fine disregard of the laws of contempt of court, told his audience:

The I.W.W. and some other organisations [not specified] . . . not only preach but practise sabotage; that is to say, the wilful destruction of factories, machinery and plant. Nor do they stop even there; but, for reasons that will be obvious to every citizen of the Commonwealth in the course of the next few days, I will not now catalogue their crimes, except to remind the people of the Commonwealth that they are to a man anti-conscriptionists.⁵

At Bendigo, Hughes thrilled his audience by reading a letter written by the prominent socialist and peace advocate Adela Pankhurst* to Tom Barker, in which she said that it was the I.W.W. which had forced the Labor politicians to take a stand against conscription. At Hobart, on the day before it was submitted in evidence, Hughes produced a letter written by Frank Anstey, M.H.R., to Barker, at the time of the latter's prosecution over the 'recruiting' poster, in the course of which Anstey said: 'I am with you to the hilt. . . . Good luck to you.'⁶

Day by day the newspapers ran reports of the preliminary hearings cheek by jowl with stories about the conscription campaign. The 'antis' fought back vigorously: 'They don't attempt to besmirch other organized bodies in that way. They don't announce "Member of the Millions Club Arrested for Wife Beating"; or "Liberal Pickpocket Caught Red-Handed"; or "Methodist Communicant Convicted of

* A member of the British suffragette family.

Murder"; or "Conscriptionist Gets Five Years for Larceny".⁷ But much of the mud stuck.

The prosecution played on the theme stated by the Prime Minister; Lamb, K.C., reminded the Court (and the newspaper readers) that 'at the moment [when] the words of Mr Hughes were illuminating the minds of patriots, the blazing Co-operative Building was illuminating the skies over the city'.⁸ The accused were charged with treason, he said, but they might equally well have been charged with arson or conspiracy;* the gravamen of the charge was that these twelve men had conspired to burn down Sydney.

The case for the prosecution was made by four Crown witnesses—the Goldstein brothers, H. C. Scully, a chemist who claimed to have been an accomplice in the plans for incendiarism, and F. J. McAlister, a police informer inside the I.W.W.; their evidence was supported in some respect by that of police witnesses.

Pieced together, the essence of their story was that from the beginning of the war the I.W.W., as syndicalists and anarchists, advocates of direct action and sabotage and the 'propaganda of the deed',† turned towards arson. There had been discussions, in which Scully had participated, about the technique of fire-setting. After Barker's arrest in September 1915 there was much talk of using the 'black cat' and the 'wooden shoe'—cant terms for sabotage—to get him out of gaol. However, he was not imprisoned, and nothing came of the talk. In March 1916 Barker was again convicted of offences against the War Precautions Act; he was sentenced to twelve months, his appeal was dismissed on 4 May 1916, and he was sent to gaol. I.W.W. agitators publicly advocated sabotage to secure Barker's release ('For every day Barker is in gaol, it will cost the capitalists £10,000' were Donald Grant's famous 'fifteen words'‡) and, during June and July, there were five large fires in Sydney business premises, causing damage estimated at £500,000. Crown witnesses deposed that two of the accused had boasted to them of the I.W.W.'s part in some of these fires. Barker was freed by executive pardon on 7 August, after serving only three months of his sentence.

After the return of Hughes from England his proposals for conscription were debated throughout the labour movement. The I.W.W. urged sabotage as the best tactic ('Far better to see Sydney melted to

* The treason charge carried a possible death sentence. This charge was later dropped, and the men were charged with seditious conspiracy, conspiracy to commit arson, and conspiracy to secure the release of Tom Barker from gaol by unlawful means.

† However, this term, from the literature of continental anarchism, does not seem to have been used in Australia.

‡ 'Fifteen Years for Fifteen Words' was the sub-title of a pamphlet by H. E. Boote on Grant's case.

the ground than to see the men of Sydney taken away to be butchered for any body of infidels', said Peter Larkin on the Sydney Domain) and, on the night of Hughes's speech to Parliament, another serious fire lit up the Sydney skies.

During August and September the I.W.W. was engaged in serious preparations for further fires. The Crown witnesses gave evidence of conversations respecting fires, the purchase of fire-dope, the instruction of I.W.W. men in its use, the drawing of lots to select fire-setters. Between 8 and 12 September, it was alleged, there were no less than twelve attempts to start fires in Sydney business premises—none of them successful. During the raid on the I.W.W. hall, large quantities of cotton waste were found in the building (which also served as a printery), and one of the accused was said to have made an incriminating admission about this material. Three others of the accused were alleged to have had fire-dope in their possession at the time of their arrest.

It was an exhaustive case, supported by a wealth of circumstantial detail: the I.W.W. doctrine provided the motive; the possession of fire-dope created the opportunity; and the admissions proved the deed. The accused reserved their defence, and were committed for trial.⁹

Between the preliminary hearing and the trial the point was hammered home by the arrest in Western Australia, on the advice of the Commonwealth (*not* the New South Wales) authorities, of eleven members of the I.W.W. on charges of seditious conspiracy. The essence of the case was the same as that in Sydney; the accused had conspired to commit acts of sabotage, the destruction of property; however, no overt acts were alleged. Bail was refused to all the accused except one, and the trial was set down for 7 December.

Over these weeks, the forgery and murder trials were disposed of. The accused in the forgery case were convicted, except for Davis Goldstein who had given evidence in the conspiracy trial and in respect of whom the Crown entered a *nolle prosequi*; they were sentenced to from three to seven years.* Franz Franz and Roland Kennedy were found guilty of the murder of the constable at Tottenham and were sentenced to death; Herbert Kennedy was discharged.†

* One, J. B. King, appealed, but his appeal was disallowed.

† Of this case a writer in *Direct Action* (6 January 1917) said, 'It is a sad, and a mad, and a bad thing for a man, or men, to murder anyone—even a policeman. . . . But what about the hangman who committed two murders for nothing at all, but his blood money?' But of another case which occurred in these months—the arrest for the murder of a Greek shopowner named Pappageorgi of one James Wilson, who, according to the police, blamed the I.W.W. for his lapse into crime, the same writer said: 'Those workers whose brains are so deranged by the system as not to know the difference between social war and individual garrotting, are respectfully requested first to earn a stretch in gaol on their own responsibility, and on release to become agents for the police after the manner of their kind.'

By the time the Central Criminal Court proceedings opened in the arson case, the conscription vote had already been taken and 'No' had won. But the atmosphere was still highly charged: the community was hardly calm enough to look dispassionately at the issues raised in the trial; and it was even rumoured that on the morning the trial opened the presiding judge, Mr Justice Pring, was heard pacing his chambers and muttering agitatedly about the coming revolution.¹⁰

The Crown case added little to the evidence presented in the preliminary hearing. Half way through the trial, leading counsel for the defence returned his brief; he had been appointed Minister for Public Instruction by the Holman government. The defence decided against putting any of the accused into the witness box, and relied solely on cross-examination, the prisoners' unsworn statements from the dock, and defence counsel's final plea. The I.W.W. reply to the allegations was that the prosecution was the outcome of a conspiracy between the Commonwealth and N.S.W. governments to discredit the anti-conscription movement on the eve of the referendum; that the I.W.W. doctrine of sabotage meant not the destruction of property but the 'conscious withdrawal of industrial efficiency'; that the only evidence of incendiarism was that of four informers, one of them a police agent and the other three buying immunity from prosecution on various serious charges; and that the police had themselves concocted large parts of the evidence in order to secure a conviction.

Right to the last moment, the I.W.W. men were confident of an acquittal; following counsel's final plea, Tom Barker wrote: 'We are optimistic, and will never look back if the boys come out.'¹¹ Even after Mr Justice Pring's four-hour charge to the jury, which went strongly against the accused,* the atmosphere in the courtroom was hopeful. The jury was out for five hours, and during this time the prisoners spoke freely with their friends. The long minutes during which the foreman of the jury reported that he and his colleagues had found every one of the twelve guilty—one on one charge, four on two, and seven on all three—were all the greater shock. 'Wives, and mothers, and sisters of the accused broke into hysterical weeping, and some of the unfortunate men themselves were visibly affected', wrote one observer of the courtroom scene.¹²

Mr Justice Pring asked the prisoners whether they had anything to say before he passed sentence on them. 'Have I anything to say against a Star Chamber?' asked Peter Larkin. 'I am not guilty, even if all the juries in the world say I am. I leave it to my own class who know me

* Except in the case of Beatty, where Pring J. warned the jury that the sole evidence against the prisoner was that of an accomplice, and said: 'I do not say that you must not convict, but that you ought not to convict'. Nevertheless, Beatty was convicted on all three counts.

. . . and I say again "if my class condemns me I am prepared to take the medicine". Each of the twelve, from the dock, declared his innocence of incendiarism. They were agitators, members of the I.W.W., and what some of them had said could be interpreted, by the yardstick of capitalist justice, as sedition—this they were proud to admit. But, as Reeve, said, 'to think that my name as an industrialist is to be besmirched with such a foul crime as arson is something that revolts my nature'.¹³

It was no new experience for Mr Justice Pring to pass sentence in cases of this kind. In 1909 he had journeyed to Albury to try Tom Mann and others concerned in the Broken Hill lockout; in 1910 he had tried Peter Bowling; in 1911 he had tried the leaders of the Lithgow miners' strike. It was felt among those who sympathized with the Twelve that he had been specially selected to preside over this case; and certainly he brought to the case a profound conviction that ideas of social revolution were a dark and destructive force within the community.

To the prisoners, he said:

Each of you has attacked the verdict of the jury. I have only to say that in my opinion the jury has done no more than its duty. It has been extremely patient and careful throughout the case, and no one who has heard the evidence could possibly doubt the correctness of the verdict it has given. . . . You are members of an association which I do not hesitate to state, after the revelations in this case, is an association of criminals of the very worst type and a hotbed of crime. . . . One of your counsel has described the crime you are charged with as the act of devils, and I think he was right. I am going to pass sentence which I do not think personally is commensurate with the terrible crime you have committed, but I will rather lean to the side of mercy than of vengeance. . . .¹⁴

King—five years. Reeve, Larkin, Besant, Moore—ten years. Hamilton, Beatty, Fagin, Grant, Teen, Glynn, McPherson—fifteen.

Within a few weeks of the conviction of the Twelve, the Commonwealth government set out to smash their organization. On 15 December, Hughes introduced an Unlawful Associations Bill, the purpose of which was to declare the I.W.W. illegal. 'I say deliberately', he said, 'that this organization holds a dagger at the heart of society, and we should be recreant to the social order if we did not accept the challenge it holds out to us. As it seeks to destroy us, we must in self defence destroy it.'¹⁵ The Labor Party was critical: there were already ample powers to deal with treason and sedition in the state laws, and this Bill was so wide in its scope that it could be used against almost any opponents of the government. The party criticized—and then announced that

it would vote in favour. This was a dilemma which was later to become characteristic of Labor oppositions: in fact, they had serious objections to the Bill, but they felt that to oppose it would damage their credit with the electorate. It was, said a writer in the *Queensland Worker*, a contemptible business.

Twelve of the leading propagandists and organizers were serving long sentences for forgery and conspiracy; dozens of others were in for shorter terms; following the seizure of membership lists, many of the fellow-workers were out of a job; the organization was formally declared illegal; their paper was denied transmission through the post—but still the Wobblies were not destroyed. In *Direct Action* (which appeared almost without interruption) and from soap-boxes and stumps throughout Australia, its agitators continued to hurl defiance at the master class and the Rabelaisian 'collection of bunco-steerers, has-beens, dead-beats, homeless dogs, once-wassers, would-to-goddess, political mediocrities, municipal muddlers, oldest inhabitants, mouth-fighters, blue-eyed boys, work-shys, and slow-downers' who constituted the Nationalist Party.¹⁶ Throughout the most systematic harassing that any Australian working-class organization had undergone, the I.W.W.'s sense of itself as the first flowering of an inexorable historical process, and the quasi-religious fervour of its adherents, kept the organization alive and even growing until the final moment of physical suppression. It was a remarkable movement.

The immediate task was the release of the Twelve. The members formed themselves into 'Workers' Defence and Release Committees' (which became a legal front for the I.W.W. after the passage of the Unlawful Associations Act) and sought the assistance, financial and otherwise, of other sections of the labour movement. Agitators were despatched to the wharves and the workshops, the coal-fields and the metal mines, the railway construction camps, the meat-works and sugar mills of Queensland and New South Wales. The headlong passage of the Unlawful Associations Act produced only the declaration that 'the I.W.W. has no present intention of being closed up'.¹⁷

Their appeal was simple, directed to the class sentiment of the workers:

These vindictively sentenced men are men of our class; they lived among our class; worked with us and fought unceasingly for the uplift of our class. You know these men! You know from the evidence that they are not convicted nor sentenced on the strength of that evidence. This is the first stamp of the 'Iron Heel' in the face of Labor! . . . We, the working class, cannot afford to lose their services, and we are going to fight like tigers to see that the capitalist class does not keep them from us. Can we count on your help?¹⁸

They had three things in their favour: the hatred of the surviving labour movement for Hughes and Holman; the attempt to identify the anti-conscription cause with the I.W.W., which was soon about-turned to identify the release campaign with anti-conscription; and Mr Justice Pring's reputation as a judge who was strongly biased against labour. Against them was the suspicion of most of the movement that the Wobblies were in fact saboteurs, incendiaries, given to practising the violence and lawlessness they preached. But, within a few weeks of the conviction of the Twelve, their guilt or innocence had become almost irrelevant; what was important was their martyrdom.

At first, support came largely from those sections of workers who had been most subjected to I.W.W. agitation—miners, navvies, shearers, watersiders. Those who had moved into the vacant executive positions were optimistic: 'Unions here all ready, moving towards a general strike, and will make these arrests part of their grievance.'¹⁹ But the official trade union movement was cautious, confining itself to a demand for a Royal Commission to investigate the convictions, while the Labor Party had not yet moved, except to repeat its disclaimer of any link with the I.W.W.

The turning-point was H. E. Boote's article, 'Guilty or Not Guilty?' which appeared in the *Worker* of 7 December 1916. It was 'a worry for him, as the A.W.U. has reason to hate the I.W.W.',²⁰ but, with the union leadership purged of conscriptionists, he was much more his own master. The organized labour movement and the I.W.W., he proclaimed, had nothing in common 'but a desire to serve and save the exploited millions'. But during the referendum campaign it had served the conscriptionists' purpose to tar their opponents with the brush of I.W.W. criminality; and once this had been done the I.W.W. leaders had no chance of justice. The evidence against them was 'tainted', the court 'dominated by class partisanship', and the convictions 'a grave judicial scandal'.

Whether these men, or some of them, are guilty or not guilty of incendiarism, we do not know. But we are perfectly certain that the charge of exciting sedition, when levelled against industrial agitators, is only a weapon for repressing the expression of working-class discontent and upholding the moral code of exploitation. And we do not hesitate to declare the belief that, on the more serious charge of firing buildings, and of conspiring to secure the release of Barker by unlawful means, the evidence on which these men were convicted was ROTTEN through and through. . . . Organized Labor . . . should not rest until the prisoners are set free, or their criminality established, on testimony less grotesque, less tainted, and less obviously twisted and distorted to the needs of an unscrupulous prosecution.

There was no man more widely known and respected in the movement than Boote. He had been the foremost publicist for the 'No' cause; he was universally recognized as honest, courageous, and sincere; he was free of the suspicion of corrupt machine politics which clung to most of the A.W.U.; and the effect of his intervention was immediate. It gave the radicals new heart, cut the ground from under the feet of those who had been satisfied to accept the I.W.W.'s guilt, and stirred many to action who would otherwise have been reluctant or afraid to speak. More unions joined in the demand for a Royal Commission, though few would accept the suggestion of the Barrier A.M.A. that there should be a general strike until constitutional government was restored in New South Wales. In Victoria the Labor Party joined with the Trades Hall Council to hold a public protest meeting. This was the first break-through in the Labor Party, and it was not surprising that it came in Victoria rather than in New South Wales. But when a leading Broken Hill unionist told the N.S.W. parliamentary Labor Party that 'the I.W.W.'s are not going to serve the sentences, and if [they] did not attempt to release them, the workers would have to begin by tossing the politicians out and make room for someone who would put up a fight',²¹ he was not so much exaggerating as anticipating. The Barrier miners were as good as their word: at the next pre-selections, the miners' vote went overwhelmingly to P. J. Brookfield for the state seat and M. P. Considine for the federal; both were well known as militants in the 44-hours dispute and prominent advocates of the release of the Twelve.

The lawyers for the I.W.W. had filed notice of appeal on 8 December 1916. While the case was pending, Boote was charged with contempt of court over his article, 'The Case of Donald Grant'. The charge was dismissed, but the prosecution did not pass without comment; the labour movement felt strongly that much more serious contempts had been committed by Hughes and other conscriptionists while the men were awaiting trial, and had gone unpunished. The Appeal Court found that two of the Twelve—Glynn and McPherson—had been wrongly convicted on one count, and directed that their sentences be reduced to ten years, but otherwise the sentences were ordered to stand.

The failure of the appeal—'JUDGES REFUSE TO SCAB', headlined *Direct Action*—took much of the heart out of the campaign. The Defence Committee was satisfied that further appeals to 'the masters' court' would serve no good purpose. They appealed to the prisoners, who agreed; the Twelve were, the Committee portentously announced, 'now prepared to leave their destiny in the hands of the class to which they belong'.²² The Committee had, in fifteen weeks from early December,

raised over £1,000, distributed 160,000 leaflets and 10,000 pamphlets,* and organized hundreds of meetings for its speakers. They had enlisted the sympathies of a large number of unions, and were beginning to make inroads into the Labor Party. The A.W.U. Convention, too, had declared for a Royal Commission, despite the piquant reservation of its general secretary that the union should not lick the hands of those who were stabbing it in the back.²³ But they were not able to persuade the unions to take industrial action: once the immediate anger had passed, trade unions and parliamentarians alike turned to a political solution, the Royal Commission. The I.W.W. protested that no Commission could be impartial, complained of apathy, appealed rather sadly to the workers not to forget the men in gaol, but to no avail. When industrial action might have been possible there was not the support; now that they had won more support, the moment had passed. But the continued campaign had an important side-effect: the organization itself was given a tremendous boost. Members were recruited by the hundred—perhaps by the thousand, considering the casual way in which the Red Cards were handed out at a shilling a time. New locals were formed and old ones revived. The circulation of *Direct Action* soared to 12,000 and perhaps more by mid-1917. Thousands continued to flock to the I.W.W. meetings, to sing the songs and listen to the truths of the class war, industrial unionism, the lazy strike, and the Release of the Twelve. The Prime Minister was both exasperated and alarmed.

In July 1917 Hughes introduced a Bill to amend the Unlawful Associations Act, providing that associations defined as unlawful in the Act could be so proclaimed by the Governor-General (this got round the need to pass a new Act every time an illegal organization changed its name), their property seized, and their members gaoled for six months (this essential provision had been lacking in the first Act). Like its predecessor, this Bill was rushed through both Houses with a minimum of delay.²⁴ The Opposition was in the same cleft stick, and again they allowed the Bill to pass with no real fight.

Under the existing Act, the police had raided the I.W.W. Hall on 23 July. A meeting was in progress—a thousand men and women were inside and as many more outside in the street. The crowd was held and searched, the records and literature seized. The police found little to interest them (other than a large number of cards carrying the cryptic slogan: 'If water rots your boots, what will it do to your stomach?'—a new angle on sabotage) and no arrests were made. But the Wobblies knew that the new Act was the final test:

We will go to Long Bay. We will go through hell and fire and water, and insects like Hughes and all his slimy crawling satellites will

* Including 100,000 copies of Boote's 'Guilty or Not Guilty?'

never stay us. We will answer the call in our hundreds and our thousands, the spirit of the wealth producers who have toiled and groaned and died [within] us.²⁵

The end was not long in coming. No sooner had the I.W.W. been proclaimed under the new Act than they were raided again; the last issue of *Direct Action* (that of 18 August 1917) was seized, those present were arrested, and the hall was sealed. Nearly a hundred Wobblies answered the call; disdaining to conceal their membership,* one after another they mounted the stump to offer themselves as sacrifices for the movement; in batches of five or six, they appeared before Sydney's Central Police Court and proudly took their six months of 'building the structure of the new society within the gaols of the old'.† The movement which had declared politics impotent and the state a fraud was crushed by politics and the state. Its courage, its fervour, its biting humour, its uncompromising advocacy of the rights of the workers, and its total rejection of the values of bourgeois society had won for it the support and often the devotion of all kinds of people—footloose bachelors and settled family men, respectable workers and reputed criminals, men who fought with their poems and men who fought with their fists. But its existence was in the hearts of the few hundred who preached its message and the tens of thousands who listened; when the testing time came, devotion was not matched by organization, and the I.W.W. (Australian Administration) was out of business.

Except for their work for the Relief Fund and their continued propaganda, the contribution of the Wobblies to the release campaign was, after September 1917, marginal. It was by now accepted that only political pressure could get the Twelve out of gaol, and the leadership of the campaign necessarily passed to politicians and to trade unionists with access to the parliamentary Labor Party. More than ever convinced by his analysis of the evidence that the Twelve were victims of a frame-up, H. E. Boote renewed his demand that the case be reopened;²⁶ his eloquent pleading was taken up eagerly by those in the trade union movement who were already convinced and won many converts among those who were not; finally, he, along with E. E. Judd (a member of the Socialist Labor Party and a delegate to the N.S.W. Labor Council) persuaded the Council in January 1918 to appoint a committee of investigation.

* It was curious that the I.W.W., which had made a virtue of ignoring the law, should have preferred this death-by-immolation to the creation of an illegal organization. Surviving I.W.W. opinion rationalizes this as courage; but, for a serious revolutionary organization, it was stupidity. Tom Glynn later described it as 'misplaced bravado' (*Aust. Comm.*, 11 March 1921).

† This is John dos Passos's adaptation of the phrase from the I.W.W. preamble, in his novel, *U.S.A.*

Afraid that the police would get wind of this new challenge, Judd, who had been appointed investigator, went about his work quietly. His first move was to interview Scully, who was known to be dissatisfied with his share of the reward distributed after the convictions were secured,* and, it was thought, was likely to talk. In a series of statements Scully said that to his knowledge a number of the men were innocent of the crimes charged against them and that important parts of the prosecution's case had been concocted by the police. On Scully's suggestion, Judd then interviewed Davis Goldstein, who made similar allegations. From Scully and Goldstein, Judd's trail led to a detective who was said to be unhappy about his part in the trials and to a number of other people who were thought to have information supporting Goldstein's allegations of corruption and chicanery.

Early in July 1918 Judd was tipped off that Scully had been smuggled out of Australia by the police. He called his committee together hurriedly, and they deputed P. J. Brookfield to raise the matter in the House. The Attorney-General denied any knowledge of Scully's departure, but promised to make inquiries from the Federal government;²⁷ the Acting Premier allowed the statement to pass without comment, although, as it later emerged, he had in fact approved the payment of Scully's fare.²⁸

The next day, the Attorney-General returned to the House somewhat chastened.

This morning I proceeded to take steps to see that none of our officers did anything to arrange for [Scully's] deportation and to communicate with the Federal authorities on the matter, and I learned to my surprise that Scully left Australia last month. I shall go further and inform the House that Scully's passage from Australia was arranged for by the police. . . .²⁹

Under pressure, he announced the following day that the government would take steps to have Scully returned from the United States, and would appoint a Commission to inquire into the allegations against the police. The honours were with the campaigners for release—even without the official support of the Labor Opposition, they had forced the government to concede their principal demand, a reopening of the case.

A brief parliamentary recess gave the government time to recover from its initial shock and to get its tactics straight. It was committed to an inquiry, but it was determined that this should be defined as narrowly as possible. On 14 August the Attorney-General moved for the appointment of a commission 'to make inquiry relating to certain charges made against certain members of the New South Wales police

* Scully had instituted proceedings against the government claiming £2,000 for services rendered in securing the convictions.

force'.³⁰ The Opposition, which had been caught as much unawares as the government by Brookfield's disclosures, was by now convinced that there were sound reasons for questioning the validity of the convictions. They felt that they had nothing to lose by backing the demand for an inquiry—and quite a lot to lose, in the way of trade union support, if they failed to act. The Labor leader, John Storey, demanded that the terms of the inquiry be extended to cover the guilt or innocence of the prisoners, but on this the government refused to budge. They would not grant the wider terms of reference unless Brookfield produced new evidence which threw doubt on the convictions; Brookfield, supported by the Opposition, maintained that the evidence he had already produced was quite enough to warrant a full inquiry.

The Bill passed both Houses on the same day, and the Commission was given to Mr Justice Street of the N.S.W. Supreme Court. During the course of the inquiry, and following continued Opposition demands, the Attorney-General wrote to the Commissioner asking that he also report to the government if anything emerged which raised doubts as to the guilt of the convicted men; this the Commissioner agreed to do.³¹

The Street inquiry opened on 21 August 1918, sat for nearly fifty days, and took a thousand pages of evidence. The Commissioner's report was tabled in the Legislative Assembly in December 1918. It was a bitter blow to the release campaigners. They had believed that in the statements of Goldstein and Scully they held winning cards; however, the police got at Goldstein in the week before the Commission opened, and when he entered the witness box he recanted on his confession. Scully was harder to pin down: under cross-examination by counsel for the police, he insisted that he had given a statement to Judd in the terms alleged but said that this was not meant to be the literal truth—it was rather a series of notes suggesting further lines of investigation. The police solidly denied all the allegations of corruption and concoction of evidence, in testimony that was on the face of it well rehearsed, and even when the evidence against them was overwhelming. And on all points—although he confessed himself somewhat puzzled as to the motives of Goldstein and Scully and doubtful about some of the actions of the police—Mr Justice Street preferred the present stories of the two Crown witnesses to their previous confessions, and the evidence of the police witnesses to almost any of that given against them.

I have to report . . . that the charges of misconduct made against members of the police force . . . have not been established as a fact, and that nothing has been brought before me which raises any suspicion in my mind that misconduct, in fact, took place, though it could not be proved . . . [and] that no fresh facts have been elicited before me raising any doubts in my mind as to the guilt of the convicted men. . . .³²

The release advocates said that the difficulty was with the onus of proof: Mr Justice Street had accepted the position, as put by the Crown, that, since the police were in effect the accused parties, he could only 'refer adversely to the existing record of guilt if in the face of that record the innocence of the men in gaol had been more or less established affirmatively'; this, and his refusal to review the substantive evidence against the convicted men, had made the defence task impossible. Boote went so far as to describe Mr Justice Street as 'a blind judge'. But the real trouble was rather that the judge could not conceive of police corruption, of the police even embroidering a case to make it better, let alone fabricating a case altogether; and consequently, when evidence discreditable to the police was presented, he strained the facts to their utmost to allow the police a way out.

The government was jubilant: the administration of justice had been vindicated, and there at last was an end of the matter. The Opposition, from the outset half-hearted, now felt that they could do no more. From prison, one who had served with nine of the Twelve in various gaols reported that

The message given to me for industrial unionists on the outside . . . was that [the prisoners] are grateful for everything that has been done on their behalf, but that the immediate aim must be job organization and job control with its logical outcome, job action, to secure the release. Their desire is that members and sympathisers should get into and utilise every society and combination that is in a position to assist in that end.³³

The first round of the release campaign had been tough going, and it had seemed to prove the futility of political and legal action; the inquiry had been held and the men were still in gaol. If ever there was an occasion for direct action, sabotage, the general strike, this—as the remnant of Wobblies was quick to declare—was it; but there were few left to listen.

The General Strike

FROM the foundation congress at Paris in 1889, the general strike was one of the most bitterly argued issues in the Second International. On one side were the French, with their fragmented trade unions, their divided political movement, and their strong anarchist strain, who saw the general strike as the means of simultaneously hamstringing the state and breaking the hold of capitalism on the means of production; on the other were the Germans with their centralized trade unions and their growing representation in the Reichstag, who feared that the general strike would provide the state with an excuse to crush their movement. As the debate developed, the positions became clear. For the general strike, it was argued that the united strength of the workers was irresistible: labour was the sole creator of value, and, if the workers simultaneously withdrew their labour, capitalism could not survive. To this the French syndicalists and those German socialists who (like Rosa Luxemburg) were influenced by syndicalism later added a further argument: that, since the strike was the method of action spontaneously chosen by the workers, it could be expected to extend naturally, until it became the social revolution. Two main points were made in opposition; first, that if there was sufficient unity of purpose among the workers to make possible a general strike, this unity could equally well return a socialist majority at the polls (an argument put forward by the socialist parliamentarians); secondly, that the advocates of the general strike ignored the repressive powers of the bourgeois state and the need for political struggle to take over the state (a line favoured by the doctrinaire Marxists).

As industrialization spread in Europe and production was concentrated into bigger units, strikes grew more extensive. Instead of isolated local stoppages, whole industries ceased work: this was not the general strike as it had been understood but industrial action on such a scale as to precipitate new thinking about tactics within the labour movement. Beginning with the Belgian general strike of 1893 in support of universal suffrage, the European working-class organizations began

to use industrial methods for political ends. The debate took on a new orientation: the German leaders conceded that the general strike might be a useful defensive weapon—to resist, for example, reactionary attempts to destroy parliamentary democracy; many trade union theorists argued the superiority of short, big strikes in support of immediate demands over small, protracted ones; while the French and American syndicalists and the German minority continued to urge the general strike as the sword of the revolution. Finally, the Copenhagen Congress of 1910 saw European socialists awakening to the danger of war; the general strike came to be regarded (the Germans still dissenting) as the most effective means of working-class action against war.

Although Australian labour (except for the small socialist parties) maintained no official links with either the Second International or the International Trade Union Bureau, the argument over the general strike was not without its local echoes. The strikes of the 1890s had had many of the features which continental socialists associated with the general strike, but they had failed, and the unions had turned to politics. However, from 1907 unionism was confronted with the newly imported faith of the I.W.W. that emancipation could only be achieved by 'an organisation formed in such a way that all its members in any one industry or in all industries, if necessary, cease work whenever a strike or lockout is on in any department thereof, thus making an injury to one an injury to all'.¹ To the parliamentarians and the traditional trade union leaders the I.W.W. call to a general strike seemed (as it did to their European brethren) 'general nonsense': working-class unity could more conveniently be expressed through the ballot box, and, with the introduction of arbitration, the strike itself was an outmoded weapon.

Once the working class had experienced Labor governments and mass strikes, the I.W.W. critique of traditional tactics took on new significance. The weakness of the Barrier strike of 1916 was that it was not complete; the strength of the coal strike was that it tied up every mine; the political general strike received official union recognition (although far from universal support) in the struggle against conscription. But by now the I.W.W. was already reconciling itself to its minority position; despairing of ever knocking any sense into the hundreds of thousands of 'Scissor Bills'* who were the majority of the working class, its propaganda emphasized rather the lazy strike and the many varieties of industrial sabotage. The slogan of working-class

* Scissor Bill, he wouldn't join the union,
Scissor Bill, he says, 'Not me, by Heck!'
Scissor Bill, gets his reward in Heaven,
Oh! sure. He'll get it, but he'll get it in the neck.

—'Scissor Bill', by Joe Hill (*Songs of the I.W.W.*, p. 15).

solidarity—'an injury to one is an injury to all'—had gained wide currency, but the revolutionary import of the general strike had not. When the general strike came in 1917, it resembled the spontaneous spread of the revolutionary myth anticipated by French theorists, rather than the organized, climactic blow against capitalism envisaged by the American progenitors of the I.W.W.,² and it took the remnants of the Australian I.W.W.—who were in any case preoccupied with defending themselves against government suppression—as much by surprise as anyone.

The general strike of 1917—'the biggest industrial upheaval ever experienced in Australia'³—exploded out of a dispute in the Government Tramway Workshops at Randwick (Sydney) over an issue that was anything but clear, and not particularly important.* But such was the temper of railwaymen and workers generally that within a few weeks the handful of engineers who had originally struck had grown to nearly 70,000 workers—better than one in four of all N.S.W. unionists, although the A.W.U., the state's biggest union, was at no time involved in the strike.

Government employees, particularly those in transport, had substantial grievances: their pay compared unfavourably with that in private industry, they had for long been denied the benefits of arbitration, and now the war situation was imposing new strains on an already resentful body of workers. Drought and the difficulty of marketing the wheat crop, the free transport of troops and war materials, the rise in the price of coal following the 1916 strike, mounting interest bills, and higher wages† had converted a pre-war profit of £210,000, earned by the N.S.W. Railways and Tramways, into a loss, by 1916/17, of £406,000.⁴ Those in charge of the railways were faced with the characteristic dilemma of government enterprises in an inflationary situation (which was in this case accentuated by a serious loss of revenue): how to make ends meet without incurring the political liability of raising charges to an economic level. There are only two ways out of this: either losses must be met by subsidies from general revenue or costs must be cut. The government chose both, and this involved, in the words of the Railway Commissioners, 'increasing the engine miles per engine-man's shift . . . [and] sustained pressure upon the staff as a whole to obtain a fair individual and collective effort'.⁵ For the unions, one word was sufficient to describe (and to condemn) this policy: speed-up.

Its implementation brought an already heated situation to boiling

* This is my comment; contemporaries regarded the issue as both crystal clear and very important.

† Wages had not, however, risen commensurately with living costs.

point. In the early days of the war, railworkers had protested indignantly against retrenchments; although the government had been motivated primarily by the difficulty of raising loan money, the retrenchments were inevitably thought of as 'economic conscription'. The wage-freeze had caused bitter resentment, and the long delay in hearing railworkers' claims, even after the Wages Boards reopened in May 1915, left 'the whole of the service . . . seething with discontent';⁶ and when the Wages Board determination of a minimum daily wage of 8s. 9d. was finally announced, it was condemned as 'woefully inadequate'.⁷ The locomotive crews had a long-standing complaint against their work schedules, which involved them in being on the job for long periods for which they got no pay.⁸

Into this cauldron was thrown the Commissioners' determination to raise output in the workshops by introducing a system of job-records (the 'card system') which would enable them to cost each job more accurately and at the same time to investigate the individual performance of every worker. The Commissioners denied any intention of speeding up the conscientious worker and claimed that all they wanted to do was to improve the efficiency of the workshops and to weed out the incapable and the unwilling; the unions may not have known of the dictum of the founder of the science of industrial efficiency (the American Quaker F. W. 'Speedy' Taylor) that 'all employees should bear in mind that each shop exists first, last, and all the time, for the purpose of paying dividends to its owners',⁹ but they had heard of the 'Taylor system', and from June 1915 they were resisting its introduction.¹⁰

One of the Commissioners' worries was the spread of I.W.W. ideas through the services under their control. As early as February 1915 the journal of the 'Tramway Employees' Association had reported a serious discussion of the 'scientific strike' at a general meeting of the union. The majority of members were opposed to these tactics; however, the Association's secretary reported that 'a relatively large number . . . are inclined to view sabotage proposals seriously'.^{*} This was a rank-and-file move; later in the year the union executive declared itself in favour of 'legal and constitutional methods of redressing our grievances as against the tactics of the I.W.W. socialists and red ragers, who favor strike, direct action and sabotage'.¹¹

Early in 1916 Commissioner Milne complained publicly of posters which were appearing in the Randwick workshops:

SLOW WORK MEANS MORE JOBS

MORE JOBS MEANS LESS UNEMPLOYED

^{*} News clipping (source unnamed) in *I.W.W. Leaflets*, etc. Among the means suggested were the regulations strike, switching destination signs, slow running, cutting off the power.

LESS COMPETITION MEANS HIGHER WAGES,
LESS WORK, MORE PAY¹²

while Chief Commissioner Fraser personally observed men who were derisively going through the motions of working, but actually producing nothing.* In March, William Teen, later one of the I.W.W. Twelve, appeared on the Council of the Amalgamated Railway and Tramway Servants' Association as a delegate from the Randwick branch; a fortnight later he was dismissed from the service; in July he persuaded the A.R.T.S.A. Council to appoint a sub-committee to investigate the possible use of sabotage; the union's campaign to have him reinstated only ceased with his arrest for treason.¹³ In June 1916 the Commissioners again tried to introduce a job-card system at Randwick; this was frustrated by the refusal of the men to operate it and by direct pressure on the Minister for Railways through the Industrial Section of the Labor Party and the party executive.¹⁴ After the police raids on I.W.W. headquarters at the end of July and the seizure of membership lists, a handful of I.W.W. men (doubtless all who could be identified) were dismissed or suspended until they had signed a declaration that they were no longer in sympathy with the I.W.W.;¹⁵ this was not, however, likely to have inhibited the more determined:

The I.W.W. does not believe in capitalist morality. . . . We will say, act, and be anything the boss wants us to, if it will suit our purpose. . . . If the boss is going to force us to change our names, play the hypocrite, and tell lies in order to get a job, then upon him will be the blame, and not us.¹⁶

A.R.T.S.A. secretary Claud Thompson, a moderate who was already in trouble with his executive over his earlier support for the Universal Service League, panicked and demanded that two of the members of the union's council provide declarations that their names were not on the I.W.W. lists; he was forced to withdraw and apologize,¹⁷ and in December the union protested against the sentences passed on the I.W.W. Twelve, while expressing its 'total disagreement' with I.W.W. tactics.¹⁸ Early in 1917 Commissioner Fraser again complained of I.W.W. activities in the workshops—the workers had, he said, slowed down by 15 per cent in the last seven years. 'At the present rate', commented Tom Barker in *Direct Action*, '. . . the boss will be in dungarees about 1955. . . . [Slowing down] is a more effective way of dealing with the working class nightmare [of] unemployment than soup-kitchens and unemployment parades.'¹⁹ The steady pressure was,

* Curlew Commission, *Minutes of Evidence*, p. 9. This may well not have been ideologically motivated—it may have been no more than normal resentment against being watched.

however, too much for the A.R.T.S.A.; in March 1917 the annual conference resolved in favour of the expulsion of I.W.W. men who were members of the union.²⁰ Meanwhile the president of the Tramway Employees' Association had in December 1916 condemned I.W.W. infiltration; but *Direct Action* denied that there was any large number of I.W.W. men in the Association—it was rather that the idea of the One Big Union was at last 'beginning to bear fruit'.²¹

The facts of I.W.W. influence in the N.S.W. railways and tramways have been worth detailing because they are important to an understanding of the I.W.W.'s part in the general strike. It seems clear that there were some I.W.W. men in the government transport services, but they were few;* they had won a slight, but nothing like a majority, influence on the leading committees of the two main unions. I.W.W. concepts—particularly those of 'go slow' and working-class solidarity—were winning a growing number of adherents among railway and tramway workers, especially those in the workshops; but this did not imply acceptance of the whole range of I.W.W. tactics and ideology. Rather it was the substantial economic discontent which was expressed in the adoption of these I.W.W. slogans. Thus, the rank and file of the two unions tended to run ahead of their officials in their response to immediate situations.†

After the failure of the June 1916 attempt to introduce the card system, Chief Commissioner Fraser reached an understanding with the unions that there would be no changes in the conditions of work for the duration of the war, provided that the men were not immoderate in their wage claims. The men took this to mean that the card system would be abandoned. However, on 20 July 1917, without prior advice to the unions, a new system was introduced at Randwick. The engineers were the first to be affected; meeting on the job on 24 July, they decided—without reference to their union executive—that they would not work with the cards. That night in Parliament a Labor member warned the government of serious trouble ahead.²² Two days later the Electrical Trades Union raised the matter with the Labor Council, whose executive proceeded to discuss the dispute with the Amalgamated Society of

* A Nationalist M.L.A., who had apparently had access to the lists seized by the police, alleged shortly before the strike that there were six to twelve men who were or had recently been I.W.W. members still in government employ. (N.S.W. *Parl. Deb.*, Vol. LXVII, p. 248.)

† This was confirmed by the increasing isolation of Thompson on the A.R.T.S.A. executive as its composition changed to reflect more directly the feeling of the men on the job; by wild-cat strikes in the workshops and goods yards; and by the movement of tramways workers out of the T.E.A. into the A.R.T.S.A. which, notwithstanding the strictures of the left wing, was regarded as being the more militant of the two unions and the closer to current concepts of industrial unionism.

Engineers, which was not itself affiliated; the Society agreed to keep its men at work until a conference of all the unions concerned could be held, and a mass meeting of engineers accepted this while restating their determination not to work under the new system. The engineers sent a deputation to the Railway Commissioners on 28 July to ask them to withdraw the cards, but the Commissioners would not budge. The conference of unions was held on 30 July and was attended by delegates from the two principal railways and tramways unions, as well as from the eight metal trades unions and the four building trades unions whose members were involved. The union leaders 'were unable to restrain their members from ceasing work, and thus defying all Union authority',²³ and the conference resolved that unless the cards were withdrawn the strike would start on 2 August. The officers of the Labor Council refrained from voting, on the grounds that they would not be responsible for events over which they had no control.

Still hoping to avoid the strike, Labor Council secretary E. J. Kavanagh took a union deputation to the government; the Minister for Railways gave the standard reply—this was a departmental matter, and the unions would have to see the Commissioners. The deputation offered the Commissioners a settlement based on a continuation of work under the old conditions and the appointment of an independent tribunal whose findings the unions would undertake to accept, but the furthest the Commissioners would go was to promise an inquiry after the men had given the system a three months' trial. Kavanagh urged the strike conference to accept this offer, but the union delegates declared that it would be 'futile' to put such a proposal to the men; the strike decision was reaffirmed and the unions' ultimatum was delivered to the authorities on the morning of 1 August. Later in the day the union representatives met with the Acting Premier (G. W. Fuller) and the Minister for Labor (G. S. Beeby); it was the unions' impression that Fuller was prepared to compromise but that Beeby, a 'Labor renegade', was determined on a showdown.²⁴ The ultimatum was rejected, and, by the night of 2 August, 5,780 railway and tramway men had downed tools. A week later 30,000 men in New South Wales (including 21,000 railwaymen) were on strike; two weeks later, nearly 50,000 were out; the peak of 69,000 was reached when the strike was five weeks old.²⁵

The card system was a small issue to precipitate such a big strike. There is no doubt that the organization of work in the railway workshops was antiquated and inefficient. The introduction of some means of recording jobs was not unreasonable, and, even after the strike had been broken and the men forced to go back under the system, they still had no substantial complaints about the way it worked: there was only the rankling suspicion that there was worse to come, that

eventually the attempt would be made to force all to measure up to the pace of the fastest.* The Commissioners were, however, on weaker ground when they insisted that the introduction of the cards was an administrative measure which involved no change in the 'conditions of work', for how this term was to be defined was surely a matter for agreement rather than unilateral decision.

But neither side in fact believed that this was the real issue. For the unions, *The Striker* declared:

No sane man believes that it is the card system [the government is] troubling about. That is only the thin edge of the wedge intended to split Unionism, and bring about a general reduction in wages, longer hours, and more degrading conditions of labor. What has been the meaning of all Beeby's recent attacks on Unionism and his threats of new industrial legislation? The answer is to be found in the present industrial upheaval.²⁶

For their part the Nationalists regarded the strike as 'an organised attempt to take the reins of government out of the hands of those duly elected by the people to carry on the affairs of the country. . . . It is . . . a belated effort by those who were defeated [in the recent elections] to set aside the will of the people'.²⁷ More flamboyantly, for public consumption, the N.S.W. government proclaimed:

The Enemies of Britain and her Allies have succeeded in plunging Australia into a General Strike. For the time being they have crippled our Country's efforts to assist in the Great War. AT THE BACK OF THIS STRIKE LURK THE I.W.W. AND THE EXPONENTS OF DIRECT ACTION. Without realising it, many Trades Unions have become the tools of Disloyalists and Revolutionaries. . . . Who is for Australia and the Allies?²⁸

What was the truth of the matter? The government seems to have believed seriously that its authority was under challenge. No genuine industrial question was involved, the Acting Premier argued, and therefore the government could not be said to be against the unions; what was at stake was 'the uprearing of syndicalism, naked and unashamed'.²⁹ But whether this was so or not, it is clear that the dispute could have been resolved in industrial terms. The government could have accepted the unions' offer without any great loss of face, and probably without

*Curlew Commission, *Report*, p. xvi. It is remarkable that there was not stronger union objection to the system, if Commissioner Fraser's statement that, since the strike, the workshops were turning out fifty per cent more work with ten per cent less staff is to be believed (*Minutes of Evidence*, p. 5). But the secretary of the Tramway Employees' Association seems to have reflected the attitude of unionists (rank and file as well as leaders) when he told the Commission that the men 'thought that . . . the card system . . . must be intended to be used as a weapon of oppression rather than a system of costing' (*Minutes of Evidence*, p. 29; my italics). This was, it should be noted, after the system had been in operation for several months.

even sacrificing the card system; instead, and in the face of the certain knowledge that the dispute would spread, it chose to regard this as the occasion for a trial of strength. From beginning to end, it did not move from its original demand for unconditional surrender, and in this it had the full support of both the Commonwealth government and the employers' organizations. On the government side there were a number of factors at work; the fear of the growing militancy and strength of the unions; the resentment of former Labor men against the treatment they had received during the 1916 crisis; the knowledge of the insistent requests from the Imperial War Cabinet for more troops; and, underlying these, the recognition that the near-unanimous union opposition to conscription implied a serious threat to their most deeply-held objective, the successful prosecution of the war. The defeat of conscription had demonstrated the extent of the trade union menace; the Nationalist election victories had revealed the isolation of the unions; the dispute at Randwick merely provided the occasion for the confrontation.

What of the unions? While there is sound reason to think that the government welcomed the showdown, there is little evidence to support—and much to contradict—the government's contention that the unions were challenging its ability to rule. The circumstances of the origin of the strike hardly support the concept of an unscrupulous minority which, having taken over the leadership of the unions, was manipulating a mass of deluded and reluctant workers to overthrow the government; and the way in which the dispute spread confirms this estimate. E. J. Kavanagh stated the position succinctly in his report on the strike: 'the difficulty was not in getting men to come out, but to keep them in'.⁸⁰

In the first three days, the decision of the engineers to stop work was supported by other railwaymen, not by direction of their unions, but on their own initiative—either directly in sympathy with the strikers or because they would not work with non-union labour. Only on 5 August did mass meetings of the A.R.T.S.A. and the Sydney branch of the Locomotive Engine-Drivers' Association decide to withdraw all labour from the service; the following day, the Strike Committee declared a total railway and tramway stoppage, but this did not greatly affect the number of strikers—most of those who supported the strike were already out. The stoppage was most general among traffic and workshops employees; the salaried officers and many of the permanent way employees, scattered throughout the state, remained at work, and the A.W.U. did not call the construction workers out at all.

It was the same with the other large sections of workers who were involved—principally the miners, the road transport workers, and the maritime workers.

Three days after the strike started, four of the largest mines on the south coast closed down because there were no trains to carry the men to work; gradually, as other mines ran out of coal-trucks, they too ceased operations. This was the decision of the companies, not of the men. The first actual strike was at the Bulli pit, on 7 August, where the men refused to work because one of their number had travelled by train. A stop-work decision by the members of the Engine Drivers' and Firemen's Association, the stationary engine-drivers who supplied the power for the mines, affected all the northern pits, and, by 7 August, J. M. Baddeley, the president of the Miners' Federation, estimated that 9,000 miners were idle—and there had been no Federation decision for a stoppage. Over the next three days the delegates' boards on the three N.S.W. coal-fields decided that all those pits which were still working should close down, on the grounds that the coal they hewed might be handled by 'scab' labour in the railways; as the decision filtered back through the lodges, pit after pit stopped, until by 21 August the tie-up was complete. But this had not been directed by the militant leaders of the Federation; in fact Baddeley and A. C. Willis (the miners' secretary), who had led the successful 1916 strike, were against another strike at this time, because the tactical position of the miners—determined always by the stocks of coal at grass—was not good, and because the agreement which concluded the previous strike had stipulated that there should be no further stoppages for the three years it was to last. However, the decision of the men left the leaders no choice.

The coal-miners were joined—after the government had decided to introduce 'free labour' into the mines—by the metal-miners at Broken Hill, who voted, with only twenty-nine against, to strike in sympathy. The Barrier men, as was their tradition, demonstrated their solidarity on the streets; in the course of one of their processions they clashed with police who had been imported from South Australia to keep order; this special force was withdrawn after municipal workers refused to remove the night-soil from any police quarters or hotels where the police were served with food or drink.³¹

One of the few cases of a union executive taking the initiative was the direction of the Carters' Union to its members not to handle goods into or out of railway premises; however, it was the rank and file of the union which extended the dispute by refusing to handle goods to or from the waterfront when the watersiders stopped work on 9 August.

The wharflabourers were already in dispute with the shipping companies when the general strike broke out; their claim was pending for a variation of their award to provide for a minimum wage of 2s. 6d. an hour, and the delay was causing much dissatisfaction. The strike committee was anxious to keep the waterfront out of the dispute, but, at a stopwork meeting on 9 August, the 'apostles of the general

strike³² convinced the men that they should not return to work until the card system had been withdrawn; the wharf strike spread quickly to Newcastle and interstate. Two days later, the Seamen's Union instructed its members throughout Australia to stop work; this was an executive decision, but it too had the warm support of the members of the union. The coal lumpers had already decided at a mass meeting not to handle any coal destined for the railways, and from 13 August they stopped work altogether, even on the military transports.

Those unions whose members were engaged in the production and distribution of food placed themselves at the disposal of the strike committee, which decided against calling them out; but slaughtermen and retail butchers stopped work regardless.

The picture, then, was one of union after union moving into action, not because the leaders so ordered, but because the members so demanded.

I never hoped to live to see the workers so united [wrote H. E. Boote in the *Worker*]. . . . This revolt against governmental tyranny is a spontaneous manifestation of feeling. The men took matters into their own hands. The officers had nothing to do but voice the demands of the rank and file. . . . One after another the Unions rushed to the assistance of their mates who were attacked. They needed no prompting. They did not wait to be appealed to. With a passion for class loyalty as grand as unparalleled they took the field and swept to battle. . . .³³

Only after the government rejected on 8 August the proposal of the miners and other unions not yet on strike that Mr Justice Edmunds of the N.S.W. Industrial Court should arbitrate the dispute did these unions join the Defence Committee which then began to take a more active line. Many unionists, said Willis of the Miners' Federation, were urging a general strike, but 'the Committee intended to bring out the unions just as occasion warranted'.* But mostly the men anticipated the call. The tactical situation was not particularly favourable and the time was of the government's choosing, but the accumulated frustrations of the war years burst through the limits the union leaders tried to impose and spread over into the general strike.

There was this much to be said for the government's contention that the unions were seeking to overthrow its rule, that the N.S.W. Labor Council had commented in its June 1917 report that 'even with the Tories in office, there is nothing—except the workers' indifference—to prevent the governmental centre of gravity being shifted from Parliament House to the Union offices'.³⁴ But this was ideological bravado

* *Worker*, 16 August 1917. By 12 August Willis was being described (probably accurately) as the 'head of the strike committee'.

rather than practical threat, and in so far as the Acting Premier had any specific point of reference for his repeated claim that the unions had secretly planned a general strike, it seemed to be to the 1916 decision (which may have been re-affirmed early in 1917) to use this weapon in the event of conscription. Certainly there was no indication, despite the instruction of the party executive to the parliamentary party to support the unions, that the Labor Party had any such intention; the efforts of the parliamentarians were directed towards a quick settlement, as the Labor leader John Storey made quite clear: 'If it be possible for one to take no attitude, I will plead guilty to the offence. . . . The attitude labour representatives have taken in the past has been one of endeavouring to settle industrial difficulties without humiliating either side. . . . That is all we are asking for today.'³⁵ Not even the revolutionary socialists saw the strike as a serious challenge to the government; for both the Australian Socialist Party and the Socialist Labor Party its main significance was that, win or lose, the workers would get a valuable lesson in the need for industrial unionism³⁶—but the Workers' International Industrial Union,* the form of industrial organization favoured by both parties although they spread their favours between two rival factions, had fallen into a sectarian decline which the strike did nothing to arrest. And as for the I.W.W., its members were by now too busy lining up for their six months under the Unlawful Associations Act to take any important part in the strike. I.W.W. slogans appeared occasionally in the daily processions which the strikers held through the city streets, and no song could have been more appropriate than the popular

Casey Jones kept his junkpile running;
Casey Jones was working double time;
Casey Jones got a wooden medal,
For being good and faithful on the S.P. line.³⁷

But what remained of the I.W.W. was highly critical of the conduct of the dispute, which was far removed from their concept of a well-run general strike.

We must have scientific organization, which means all workers in the one industry in the one union and all industries linked up into one concrete body of the working class with a General Executive Committee controlling the whole dispute. This does not exist among the transport workers today. They have not even got a loose federation of all crafts which some call one big union. Almost a score of different unions are on strike, and each union seems to be trying to settle the trouble in its own little way. There is no

* The new name for the Detroit I.W.W., adopted in the United States in 1915 and in Australia in 1916.

publicity, and the great bulk of strikers know very little about what is going on. So far there has been no official mass meeting of all unions on strike and no responsible official has appeared on the platform to explain to the strikers what business is being transacted, and how the prospects are looking. No strike bulletins have been issued, and no leaflets or papers explaining the cause of the strike. . . . This very lax and inefficient system only spreads discontent among the men, and they at last become tired of hanging around doing nothing and hearing nothing, and getting dissatisfied, defeat will follow.³⁸

Most of these criticisms were well founded, but the unsystematic organization and the poor publicity had remarkably little effect on the morale of the strikers. Some railway and tramway workers (particularly in the traffic sections) began to drift back to work from 8 August, but the strike continued to grow for another four weeks, until finally the intransigence of the government, the evident weakening among the railwaymen, and the growing distress caused the Defence Committee to declare a surrender.

From the beginning the government had made it clear that it intended, if it could, to smash the strike. The distance between the parties was not great, but it became obvious in the first week that neither side would budge. On the fifth day (6 August) the government presented its ultimatum to the railwaymen: either return to work by 10 August or lose the 'special rights and privileges' (that is, seniority and superannuation rights) now enjoyed as government employees and face the prospect of the recruitment of volunteer labour to replace those on strike.³⁹ Anticipating that the unions would ignore this, the government advised the leading country centres of its intentions, and the local organizations of the Farmers' and Settlers' Association and the Primary Producers' Union busied themselves with organizing volunteers.*

A few hundred of the 21,000 striking railwaymen returned to work on 9-10 August, but not enough to affect substantially the thin emergency services the Railway Commissioners were attempting to provide. When it was apparent that there would be no large-scale resumption, the government announced that all men on strike were to be dismissed from the service, that application would be made to the courts to cancel the registration of the unions involved, and that volunteers would be introduced forthwith to operate public transport.

From 14 August, volunteer strike breakers were encamped in the Sydney Cricket Ground; later, other camps were opened at Newcastle and on the coal-fields and at Taronga Park, the site of the Sydney zoo,

* Countrymen were preferred because they were unlikely to have been influenced by militant unionism.

which drew from a contemporary ballad-monger the following indignant lines:

The monkeys at Taronga Park,
When they see these Loyalists' clothes,
Ointment please, we want no nuts,
Their paws up to their nose (smell).⁴⁰

The greatest number in the three principal camps at any one time was 4,244, reached on 2 September; in all, the government was able to organize some 170,000 man-days of strike-breaking labour (compared with three million man-days lost in New South Wales by men on strike) at a total cost of some £42,000.

Over the next two weeks the government set out to rationalize what public services could still be operated, by introducing gas and electricity rationing and by commandeering all coal stocks and coal-mines and all motor and horse-drawn vehicles and certain shipping; it also declared that no merchant should increase the price of foodstuffs over that prevailing on 1 August without prior approval. Confronted with the maritime stoppage, the Commonwealth government opened National Service Bureaus in the various states, through which volunteer labour was recruited to man the waterfront and the N.S.W. coal-mines.

The efforts of the government prevented a total power blackout, kept limited (and gradually expanding) transport services going, and ensured the distribution of the reduced food supplies which were reaching the city, but the dislocation was tremendous.

On 16 August three of the leading members of the Defence Committee (Kavanagh, Willis, and Claud Thompson) were arrested on charges of conspiracy; later, A. W. Buckley, M.L.A., was added to this group, and leading members of the seamen's and watersiders' unions were also arrested.* The arrests were only of symbolic significance—there was as yet little evidence of any serious weakening of the strikers' determination—but they may have helped to change the unions' position, for on 20 August the Strike Committee proposed the resumption of work under a modified card system, provided that there was no victimization.† The government, however, remained adamant—it would withdraw from neither its commitment to the card system nor its promise of preferential treatment for 'loyalists'. On 24 August, when over 2,000 railwaymen had already drifted back to work and the miners had rejected a final plea to resume, the government announced that it would negotiate no further with the Defence Committee. Bluff and

* Buckley was a former tramways employee and (he said for only a short time) member of the I.W.W. The trials took place in mid-November, well after the strike was over; none of those arrested was convicted.

† This was a secret feeler, which the unions publicly denied.

endurance are always important elements in a prolonged strike, and the government had the advantage in both. From 31 August—despite a great mass meeting on that day of metal trades unionists which resolved unanimously to continue the strike*—the Defence Committee began serious negotiations for a compromise, the Lord Mayor of Sydney acting as intermediary. The Mayor made several offers to the government, each conceding a little more, until finally the strikers were left with no other concessions than the immediate appointment of a Royal Commission into their grievances (except for the card system, which was reserved for investigation three months later, as the government insisted) and the right of appeal against the refusal of the Railways Department to re-employ them.

The government's rejection of the first compromise proposal was met by a Defence Committee statement that 'we are resolved to carry on the fight to the bitter end', and the threat that the A.W.U. and other unions would be asked to join in the boycott of 'black' goods.⁴¹ The threat was idle, however; the A.W.U. leaders had already made it quite clear that they had no intention of allowing their union to be drawn in. The Lord Mayor's final proposal, already an admission that the unions were beaten, drew from the government the curt comment that they had nothing to add to their previous offer, and that 'no good purpose will be served by continuing this correspondence'.⁴²

Finally, after two days of negotiations between the N.S.W. Industrial Commissioner and the Defence Committee, the unions agreed to return to work on the government's terms: the card system was to be retained; the 'loyalists' were confirmed in their positions; on the unions' request, a clause was written in that 'work shall be resumed without resentment, and employment offered without vindictiveness', but there was no qualification to the right of the Railways Commissioners to exercise absolute discretion in filling vacancies, other than the vague requirement that they should give 'prior consideration' to the claims of their former employees.⁴³ The surrender was unconditional and the government's victory complete; 'the Strike Committee, worn out by its ceaseless labors, depressed by the distress existing amongst the thousands of families that looked to it for aid, and relying upon certain verbal assurances which were conveyed to it from members of the Ministry, had given way'.†

As it was at the beginning, so it was at the end; the men, still more determined than their leaders, 'declared that they had been sold, and

* Reports of attendance varied from 5,000 to 8,000 of some 10,000 in the trade.

† H. E. B[ootle], *Worker*, 13 September 1917. The 'verbal assurances' were that the government should continue to recognize the unions, and that the old hands should be re-employed (though without any undertakings about victimization). Edmunds Commission, *Report*, p. xl.

... angrily denounced the action of their Executive'.⁴⁴ Those who reported for duty on 10 September found that they were required to sign application forms which gave them no rights at all over their conditions of re-employment;⁴⁵ many refused to sign, and left the job. There was uproar at the mass meeting of metal trades workers that night, and the chairman closed the meeting without putting the back-to-work motion to the vote—it would, he said, have been defeated by 4,000 votes to 1,000.⁴⁶ By the night of 11 September, 7,400 railwaymen—nearly half of those who had seen the strike through—had still refused to accept their defeat. The government was in no hurry—there was in any case insufficient coal on hand to resume full services—and the men were given ample time to savour the bitter fruit. Gradually the railwaymen, except for sections of the metal tradesmen, signed the re-admission forms; the metal trades unions first declared the strike off in private shops, and at last on 19 September, after the Defence Committee had thrown in its hand, in the railways.

The government was not content that the unions should concede defeat: as the Minister for Labour had told a meeting of 'loyalists' at the Sydney Cricket Ground, this was not merely 'a trial of strength between the Government and a few unionists'—the government was determined to break the grip of 'the revolutionary and extreme element' on the trade unions, to 'get the good, loyal, sane unionist back into the control of his own affairs'.⁴⁷ Railways Commissioner Fraser had already advised his departmental heads that there were 3,000 men who would not be re-employed when the strike was over, and in the event some 2,200 were refused their jobs (although most of these were subsequently declared eligible, so that by September 1920 only 440 remained on the blacklist of 'undesirables').⁴⁸

But this was not enough: the authorities had their own ideas about what sort of unions were wanted in the government transport services, and on the application of the Railways Commissioners the four unions most directly concerned had been deregistered by the N.S.W. Industrial Court on 23 August.* Now, a week after the strike was declared off, Commissioner Fraser told the departmental heads: 'The Government had no intention at all of having ... one big Public Service Union, but they do desire that the railway and tramway men ... should belong to various Public Service Unions—craft unions and that sort of thing'.⁴⁹ Above all, it was desired that government employees should not belong to unions whose membership extended beyond the public service. So

* Deregistration involved *inter alia* loss of rights to apply for or have enforced an industrial award; provided the union was strong enough, this would not necessarily have a serious effect, as it could use direct bargaining methods. But after the strike the N.S.W. unions were in no position to enforce their demands.

the Commissioners took six men off their normal duties and paid them for a total of 468 days to organize the new unions.⁵⁰ When the government was charged with this in the House, the Acting Premier denied all knowledge, in circumstances which caused Mr Justice Edmunds to describe his evasion as 'a deliberate attempt to suppress the truth'.⁵¹ With this backing, the new unions could hardly fail. The applications of the old unions for re-registration were refused during November, and six sectional unions, of the kind favoured by the authorities, were registered in their place.*

With the defeat of the railwaymen the reason for the strikes of miners, maritime workers, and carters had disappeared, but the resumption of work was not so simple. The government was determined that the services of the 'loyalists' should be retained, that it should be established once and for all that industry could run without the consent of the unions. The unions—especially after the harsh conditions imposed on the railwaymen—were for their part equally determined that there should be no victimization, that they should go back to work as a body and should not be compelled to work with 'scabs'.

On 10 September, the day the railwaymen began to report for duty, negotiations began between the government and the miners. The government offered a return to work on pre-strike conditions, provided that the miners refrained from declaring any pits 'black' (about twelve of the eighty-odd pits had already been reopened with free labour) and recognized the right of the government-appointed managers to exercise their discretion over whom they re-employed. The union refused to recommend acceptance of these terms, but conveyed them to the men, who turned them down almost unanimously.⁵² After another fortnight without wages the miners were feeling the pinch, and the Federation moved to reopen discussions; the government produced a detailed plan for establishing conciliation machinery in the coal industry but would make no concession on the question of victimization, and the Federation repeated its refusal. Sensing that the miners were beginning to weaken, the government called the union's bluff by advertising its intention to reopen the mines for anyone who wished to work, regardless of the union's attitude. Retreat was now inevitable; what was important was to keep it orderly, so that the union would not be destroyed. The miners resolved to accept the government's terms and to return to work in a

* One of the old unions was re-registered by legislation in 1918 and the other three in 1920; the surviving sectional unions amalgamated to form the National Union of Railwaymen; this division exists among N.S.W. railwaymen to the present. Two Royal Commissions (Curlewis J. in 1918 and Edmunds J. in 1920) sat on the railwaymen's grievances concerning the card system and victimization, but the last of the blacklisted strikers were not re-admitted to the service until 1925, and then only after successive Labor governments had legislated to this end.

body; the government, however, insisted that the men make individual application for re-employment, which they were finally forced to do before work was generally resumed.* The miners had lost eight or nine weeks' work; one pit was entirely staffed with 'free' labour;† some hundreds of volunteers were engaged in a dozen other pits and were given preference of employment following the resumption; some 350 miners had their applications for re-employment rejected; it was reported, however, that the volunteers were resigning from their jobs, doubtless suffering under that silent hostility which is always an effective way of dealing with an unwanted workmate, and nowhere more than underground. Badly beaten though they were, the miners had this consolation: they had returned with their union more or less intact and still the recognized organization of the men.⁵³

The watersiders were less fortunate. From the beginning of the strike they had been largely replaced by volunteers; an attempt by the Waterside Workers' Federation to call the strike off had failed when most of the branches had refused to obey the direction, and Mr Justice Higgins had cancelled preference in employment for the members of these branches.⁵⁴ On 19 September the Sydney branch had decided to call the strike off, but when the men applied for engagement the following day there was no work for them. A fortnight later, the Federation asked the shipowners to confer on a general resumption, but the owners refused; they had in the meantime instituted a new system of hiring labour under which, instead of the old system of casual work, most wharf lumping would be done by permanent hands, registered with the shipowners' Labor Bureau and paid a regular weekly wage.‡ To register, a watersider had to have 'a reasonably clean record and physical fitness' and no association with the I.W.W.; the Federal government had also instructed the shipowners that aliens were to be kept out of the maritime industry. Men wanting registration had to sign a declaration that they were not members of the Waterside Workers' Federation;§ those who were prepared to do this were given preference of employment and, by 5 October, over 2,000 men had so registered.

* There was some delay on the northern fields, when it seemed that some pits would be declared 'black'. When the government refused to open any pits unless all were manned, the northern miners were forced to give in too.

† Richmond Main, which had been handed over to the Victorian government to supply that state's coal requirements and was staffed with labour recruited in Victoria and protected by a special squad of Victorian police.

‡ The union's objection to this was that the wage (£3. 1s. 6d. a week) was considerably less than its members had been earning for the same hours at casual rates; the owners replied that this was offset by the increased security of the regular wage.

§ The owners claimed that this was because the Federation's award provided for casual rates; however, they certainly also desired the destruction of the Federation.

Only when there were more jobs than permanent men did the unionists get a chance at casual labour.

After one more unsuccessful attempt to persuade the owners to confer, the Federation was compelled to accept what little work was left to its members; and the position of the coal lumpers was much the same. The Coal Lumpers' Union was deregistered by the N.S.W. Industrial Court, and the Port Jackson Coal Workers' Union was registered in its place. The Commonwealth Court, however, refused to deregister the Waterside Workers' Federation, much to the disgust of the Prime Minister, who hinted that he was considering moving for the removal of Mr Justice Higgins as Chairman of the Court;⁵⁵ nevertheless, the N.S.W. Court registered the Permanent and Casual Waterside Laborers' Union as a rival to the Federation. The two 'loyalist' unions enjoyed the protection of the court and the preference of the employers and for a time they prospered—but at the price of a continuing bitterness of relations in the maritime industry which made nonsense of the pious hope expressed by Acting Premier Fuller that the men would 'forget what has happened during the last few months, and try to settle down to peaceable working conditions'.⁵⁶

As with the watersiders, the shipowners refused to negotiate with the seamen, who were forced on 8 October to present themselves for employment on the owners' terms. However, the Melbourne branch of the union refused to allow any ships to go to sea. The Commonwealth government intervened and, by regulation, cancelled that clause in the agreement between shipowners and seamen which provided for preference to unionists. Finally, the seamen—with the northern miners, the last to accept defeat*—withdrew their objections and surrendered unconditionally, and the strike was over.

The readiness of W. M. Hughes to take sides against the N.S.W. strikers contrasted sharply with his flat refusal to allow Mr Justice Higgins to arbitrate in a dispute in the Queensland Railways which was running concurrently with the N.S.W. general strike. The railway workers of North Queensland had struck against the refusal of the Queensland Industrial Court to make a wages increase retrospective. A conference of unions, called and financed by the Labor government, had agreed to the government's proposal for independent arbitration, and most of the strikers had voted to accept this settlement. The Townsville railwaymen, a centre of radical influence, refused, and the government warned them that unless they returned to work they would be sacked; faced with this threat, they capitulated.

* This caused some surprise; J. J. O'Reilly of the A.M.A. said that 'no one expected [the seamen] to stand so solid' (*Socialist*, 26 October 1917). Shortly afterwards the union elected a militant leadership.

Hughes entered this dispute at two points. First, when farmers had appealed to him for military protection to enable them to take over the railways, Hughes asked the Queensland Premier, T. J. Ryan, to provide police protection; Ryan replied coldly that there was no disturbance of public order in the north and that this was a state matter. Later, when Ryan had persuaded the railwaymen to accept the arbitration of Mr Justice Higgins and asked Hughes to make the judge available, the Prime Minister replied that the men were defying an award of the state Court and the Commonwealth could not intervene. His stand was in direct contradiction to the position he had taken over the N.S.W. dispute, where he had rejected all Opposition pleas for intervention, on the grounds that it was necessary that both parties should agree, and the N.S.W. government did not. In Queensland the parties did agree, but there was still no judge.

Cutting across the northern strike was the refusal of railwaymen at Wallangarra, the main junction between the N.S.W. and Queensland railways systems, to trans-ship any goods to or from New South Wales other than letter mail and passengers' luggage; the Queensland Railways Commissioner, on the instruction of the government, acquiesced in this and warned consignors that goods could not be handled. Hughes demanded action against the strikers and threatened to invoke penalties for breach of the mail contract with the Commonwealth. Ryan's answer was that the trouble had started in New South Wales, which had refused to go to arbitration, and that he had no intention of spreading it into Queensland by using coercion against the railwaymen.⁵⁷

The railways, more than any other part of Queensland's industry except the northern meatworks, were strongly infiltrated by syndicalist ideas; one Queensland Railways Union organizer was reported as telling his members that 'it was the object of unionism to so organise the working class that they would take possession of the means of production, which would be democratically controlled by the workers', while the Townsville secretary told the northern strikers that 'we have absolute control and I hope the time will come when the men will always be in control'.⁵⁸ The union was a warm critic of the Labor government. Yet Ryan, at a time of considerable tension, was able to stop the storm at the border. But this was not without its cost; the ultimatum to the Townsville railwaymen was one of the first signs of the conflict between unions and parliamentarians which was later to divide the Queensland Labor Party, as it had the N.S.W. party six years after Labor first took office.

From first out to last back, the strike lasted eighty-two days; nearly 100,000 workers were directly involved for a total loss of four million man-days and £2½ million in wages. In addition, an unknown number

of workers, certainly running into tens of thousands, lost their jobs or were put on short time because of coal shortages, power restrictions, and lack of transport. The Defence Committee in New South Wales raised £23,000 for the relief of strikers; thousands more were spent by individual unions. The N.S.W. government spent £100,000 to break the strike.⁵⁹ It was by far the biggest, the most costly, and the most disastrous strike that the Australian labour movement had yet known. What conclusions can be drawn from its defeat?

The origins of the strike were in mass working-class unrest rather than in the agitation of the revolutionary minorities. The strike bore no marks of I.W.W. sponsorship, planning, or leadership; indeed, the way in which it was conducted was specifically condemned by the I.W.W. This was in part because the I.W.W. had already been decimated by the government suppression; but, even had the I.W.W. leaders been free and the organization intact, it is almost certain that the outcome would have been no different. The revolutionary utopianism of the I.W.W., the faith in spontaneity, the disdain for the formal apparatus of the industrial movement, the emphasis on 'scientific' sabotage, all made the I.W.W. unfit to lead a serious major strike. From the wild-cat strike and irritation tactics on the job to what their own ideology saw as the outcome of their revolutionary struggle, the general strike, was a leap which neither their theory nor their organization equipped them to make.

For the unions as organizations the effect of the strike was shattering: 'Prior to the strike Trades Unionism had reached the highest pinnacle it had ever reached in this country. It took just twenty-seven years of hard work to bring it to that state of perfection. It was built up by arbitration and knocked down in twenty-seven days by direct action.'⁶⁰ The railways and tramways unions were impoverished, internally divided, and almost defunct; the wharflabourers' union was rendered impotent; the leadership of the Labor Council was discredited; the front of the A.W.U. and the other mass unions, created in the 1916 political crisis, was seriously weakened by the refusal of the A.W.U. to be drawn into the struggle.* The unions were far from happy about the timid role played by the Labor Party; but in their weakened condition there was little they could do about it. The strike called into question the traditional structure of the trade union movement, the new relations which had been established between the unions and the Labor Party, and above all the reliance on arbitration which had characterized the union movement since the turn of the century:

* O'Reilly of the A.M.A. said that there were 'only . . . three unions left really intact out of the whole thing—the Miners, the Seamen and the Coal Lumpers' (*Socialist*, 26 October 1917).

it was the starting-point for the important changes of the next four years.

Writing post-mortems in the *Worker*, H. E. Boote drew two lessons from the defeat: firstly, that 'henceforth no executive should have power to call a strike, or declare one off', that the unions must be run by their rank and file; and secondly that the unions must improve their organization and tactics, that the men must not be allowed to strike 'on impulse'.⁶¹ These were of course contradictory—the one relied on rank-and-file spontaneity, the other on centralization of the power of decision—and this contradiction reflected the confused thinking which followed the defeat.

It would have been more profitable (but less comforting) to analyse the causes of the failure. These were the lack of unity among railway-men—never at any time were more than about half of them on strike, which meant that the government had a solid base of experienced men on which to build their emergency services; the unchallenged support for the government in the countryside, which enabled the free recruitment of volunteers; the hesitations of the Defence Committee which allowed the strike to spread haphazardly rather than in the directions where it would hurt the most. This suggests that the necessary conditions for a successful general strike include a consensus of opinion among the working class about the aims of the strike and the need for militant action; sufficient support for, or neutrality towards, the working-class objectives among other sections of the population to make it difficult to recruit strike breakers; and a resolute leadership. In turn, this assumes two things: a common level of understanding of their situation among the working class, and a degree of popular disaffection such that government is no longer effective—which add up to the Leninist definition of a revolutionary situation.⁶² The rights and wrongs of a proletarian revolution may be argued; and whether, in a society such as Australia, these conditions could ever be realized is questionable; but the experience of the Australian working class in 1917 suggests that the judgment of Lenin, the most realistic of revolutionaries, was sound: that the conditions for a successful general strike are the same as those for a social revolution, and that in neither case can these be created by the revolutionary will. Rather, they are always a matter of a change in social circumstance which is beyond the control of those immediately involved. Given this change, its recognition and exploitation by revolutionaries might be decisive, but without it nothing can be done.

It was this blend of revolutionary will and realistic understanding that was lacking among Australian unionists in 1917; those who understood the reality of their situation were bemused by it or had an interest in perpetuating it, and were unable to transcend the present; while

those who looked to a revolutionary future were dazzled by it and lacked an understanding of what was presently possible. The moderates were arguing from self-interest or sectional interest, the revolutionaries from a utopian ideology; and their argument during the next four years, over theory and programme and tactics, was largely an abstraction which did little to further the goal they both professed—the emancipation of the working class from the imperatives of wage labour.

The Last Years of the War

TO LABOUR MEN, embittered by the recent calamitous defeat, it seemed that the general strike had been a 'carefully planned prelude' to the decision of the Commonwealth government to hold a second referendum on conscription, that the government had set out to crush the trade unions, the 'backbone' of the opposition to militarism.¹ But, attractive as this explanation seemed, it was not warranted by the facts. The labour movement had assumed, since the Federal elections, that Hughes would not rest content with his 1916 defeat, and there was strong evidence that the preparations for the second referendum had in fact begun before 7 November 1917, the date on which the cabinet decision was said to have been made,² but it seems likely that the immediate cause of this decision was the bloody fighting during August and September in the Third Battle of Ypres, which cost the A.I.F. the staggering total of 38,000 casualties, about one in three of all Australians at that time on the Western front.

It had not been a good year for the Allies: after the February Revolution the Russian front had collapsed; the Italian armies had suffered severe defeat; the spring offensive in France had been costly (the A.I.F. had suffered 17,000 casualties at Messines and Bullecourt); and now the renewed offensive had achieved a limited success, but at a crippling price. Meanwhile, the Imperial War Cabinet was demanding more and more men, and Hughes's advisers told him that 7,000 reinforcements would be needed every month if the five Australian divisions were to be kept at full fighting strength.* But the recruiting rate was falling steadily—from nearly 5,000 a month early in 1917 to 2,500 a month over the last quarter of the year; 'the general welfare became

* There was, earlier in 1917, some suggestion that Australia should raise a sixth division, but when the recruiting situation was examined it soon became evident that this was impracticable, and the idea was dropped. However, the proposals became known to the anti-conscriptionists; when they charged the government with this intention, Hughes foolishly denied that any such idea had been entertained. This denial of a truth for which the anti-conscriptionists had ample evidence told heavily against the government.

subservient to class and individual animosity', reported the Director General of Recruiting, 'and the trouble grew as the effects of war weariness began to make themselves felt'.³

The Second Conscription Referendum

In October, with Ypres, Hughes felt that (as Lord Carson remarked at the time in England) the necessary supply of heroes must be maintained at all costs. He was committed not to introduce conscription without a popular vote; Parliament had been in recess since 26 September (Labor spokesmen found this evidence of sinister intent); on 7 November he had cabinet authorize a War Precautions regulation providing for another referendum. Later, at Bendigo, he announced his proposals: voluntary recruiting should be continued, but any leeway between this and the target of 7,000 men a month should be made up by conscripting fit, single men between the ages of 20 and 44, the order of their induction to be determined by lot—the 'Lottery of Death', as the *Worker* later described it. To underline the seriousness of the occasion, Hughes declared repeatedly during the campaign that 'the Government must have this power; it cannot govern without it, and will not attempt to do so'.⁴ And to ensure that no 'pro-German' votes were allowed to affect the results, it was decreed that electors of 'enemy' origin, and the children of such men, should be disqualified from voting.

The anti-conscriptionists felt that there were 'fearful odds against us this time . . . with thousands disfranchised* and the trades unions weakened by a nine-weeks strike',⁵ but they threw themselves wholeheartedly into the campaign. The issue was fought even more bitterly than in 1916. On both sides the propaganda was outrageously far-fetched: for conscription, the Victorian Reinforcements Referendum Council published a leaflet, *The Anti's Creed*, charging their opponents with every sin against patriotism from sanctioning the shooting of Nurse Edith Cavell to approving the sinking of the *Lusitania*;† while, for the 'antis', A. W. Foster declared in *Ross's Monthly*: 'Husbands for our future brides under Conscription—Chinese, Japs., and Hindoos. . .'.⁶

In Brisbane, Hughes instructed the Commonwealth authorities to refuse transmission through the post to an issue of the Queensland *Hansard* recording anti-conscription speeches by Premier Ryan and his

* This referred not only to the disfranchisement of 'enemy' voters, but to the closure of the rolls on 10 November, only two days after the referendum was announced.

† Quoted by G. Baracchi, 'Anti-Conscription Memory', *Communist Review*, December 1937, pp. 11-12. Baracchi recalled that he was fined £50 and sentenced to three months' gaol for 'dealing with the "Anti's Creed", point by point', on the Yarra Bank, Melbourne.

Minister for Works; challenged by Hughes, Ryan later repeated his speech outside Parliament, was charged with making false statements about the war effort, and was acquitted with costs against the Commonwealth. A week later, a well-aimed egg was thrown at the Prime Minister as he was addressing a crowd gathered on the railway station at Warwick in Queensland. A fracas followed, but the local sergeant of police refused to arrest the egg-thrower, and the Queensland Premier refused to treat the affair seriously. The Prime Minister thereupon formed the Commonwealth Police Force.

In New South Wales, E. E. Judd, as indefatigable in this campaign as he was in the campaign for the release of the I.W.W. Twelve, scored a scoop when he published W. A. Holman's 'Secret Memorandum', a document which the N.S.W. Premier had circulated to his Cabinet earlier in the year advocating the use of 'economic factors' (the dismissal of single men) to encourage recruiting and the imposition of a stricter censorship to aid morale; Holman replied lamely that this was only a basis for discussion and that no action had been taken on his proposals, but the damage was considerable.⁷ Thousands of meetings were held, some of them to the accompaniment of the uproar and violence which had been a feature of the 1916 campaign; millions of pieces of propaganda were distributed; several of the most prominent anti-conscriptionists were prosecuted for offences under the War Precautions Act, usually for 'false statements'.^{*} It was a vigorous campaign on both sides, but the politics lacked the drama of 1916.

Where there had been denunciations, splits, expulsions in the Labor Party, now all were united. The trade unions still provided the core of the campaign in organization, propaganda, and money; but there was no division between industrialists and parliamentarians. There was, however, one important respect in which the official Labor campaign differed from that mounted in 1916. Whereas then the socialist and pacifist groups had played down their anti-war beliefs in order to present a common front against conscription, now the Labor Party had itself adopted much of the radical opposition to the war, and the official propaganda reflected this broader concern: 'Parents! Will your anguish be soothed by the knowledge that your votes have made other men and women childless? Widows! Will your sorrows be less if your votes have widowed other women, have orphaned other children?'⁸ The pacifist anabranche had now become the mainstream, despite the protestations of such Labor leaders as Ryan and Catts of devotion to the Allied cause.

As polling day drew near, last minute reports from the conscriptionist leaders in the various states suggest that the 'Yes' prospects were

^{*} As well as Ryan, those charged included J. H. Catts, M.H.R., leader of the official No Conscription Council, and one other M.H.R., two Senators, two Victorian M.L.As., and H. E. Boote.

good. On the 'No' side, feelings were mixed: some thought that the exposures of the government's inconsistencies and bad faith had ensured success, others that the loss of thousands of disfranchised voters would cost anti-conscription its slender 1916 margin.⁹ Had the anti-conscriptionists analysed more thoroughly their previous victory, they would perhaps have been more confident. Then it was the farmers' vote which had saved them the day; now reports from the country electorates suggested that, if anything, their position had improved.* And certainly there was no indication of any weakening in the cities. Together, these factors ensured the defeat of the second conscription referendum.

In the event, Victoria joined New South Wales, Queensland, and South Australia in giving a majority for 'No', while the overall margin more than doubled. The 'No' vote increased even in Western Australia and Tasmania—in fact, more substantially in those states than elsewhere; only in South Australia did it fall—in association with a sharp decline in turnout in areas where the regulation disfranchising 'enemy' voters had operated most stringently. Generally, the results showed a movement of 'Yes' voters to 'No', and, even more importantly, a substantial abstention of 'Yes' voters.† The service votes were reported as showing 52.5 per cent for 'Yes'—rather lower than in 1916; however, it seems certain that 'the boys in the trenches' voted heavily against conscription.‡

Reviewing his defeat, Hughes said:

The Nationalist party has failed . . . to arouse the democracy of the country to a sense of its duty, but it is not we who have failed, but the people of Australia. . . . I cannot forgive those [tens of thousands of] men who, grown fat on this war, pretended that they

* Compare the report of A. W. Blakeley, M.H.R. for the Western New South Wales electorate of Darling: 'Many of the most ardent conscriptionists of 1916 have gone cold, and will not work during this campaign' (*Worker*, 6 December 1917).

† The 'No' majority in 1916 was 72,476; in 1917, it was 166,588. In 1917, the turnout tended to fall less than, and the 'No' vote to improve more than, the average in Labor seats, and vice versa in Liberal seats, which suggests a return of 'Labor-Yes' voters to 'No' and an abstention of 'Liberal-Yes' voters; but this pattern was less regular in Liberal country electorates than in metropolitan, suggesting a stronger tendency among Liberal country electors to swing to 'No' than those in the cities. Of the six electorates which swung from 'Yes' (1916) to 'No' (1917), two were Labor metropolitan seats and three were Liberal country seats (the sixth was a Tasmanian seat). As votes from the services were not distributed among the electorates in 1917 (as had been done in 1916), the results at the two referenda are not comparable in detail.

‡ This was claimed by the anti-conscriptionists, and since there was an obvious propaganda value to be derived from a 'Yes' vote by the front-line units, and the government had the opportunity of taking this advantage, the claim seems justified. It was confirmed by C. McGrath, M.H.R. (Labor), who acted as a scrutineer at the services polling booth in London.

desired Australia to do her duty, and went to the ballot box and voted against her doing it.¹⁰

But neither defeat at the polls nor what he chose to regard as betrayal by some of his political supporters drove Hughes from office. Consistently with his pre-referendum pledge, the Prime Minister handed his resignation to the Governor-General—but with no recommendation as to his successor or request for a dissolution. In this he was supported by his party, which resolved that 'in view of the recent declared attitude of the official Labour party on the vital questions of the conduct of the war and peace . . . it will not support any course of action that will hand the Government of the Commonwealth over to the official Labour party'.¹¹ There was some support in the labour movement outside Parliament for an election to make 'a clean sweep of the conscriptionists',¹² but the parliamentary party was not so confident. In any event, the party was given no chance of testing the electorate; after a series of discussions with political leaders, including the leader of the Labor Party, the Governor-General called on Hughes to form a new administration.

The defeat of the referendum was a serious blow to Hughes, but he was both resourceful and resilient and he was more than a match for the few malcontents within his own party and for any of the Labor Party leaders excepting T. J. Ryan, who had emerged as the major figure on the Labor side. The labour movement itself had consolidated its forces during the campaign and had regained some of the ground lost in the general strike; but the unity it had established was precarious. New strains developed as the popular opposition to the war grew broader and penetrated into the leading bodies of the trade unions and the extra-parliamentary Labor Party.

The Demand for Peace

After great travail, the international socialist movement had at Basle in 1912 reached a clear understanding of what it was to do in the event of a general war: it was the duty of the working classes and their parliamentary representatives in the countries involved 'to intervene in favour of its speedy termination and with all their powers to utilise the economic and political crisis created by the war to arouse the people and thereby to hasten the downfall of capitalist-class rule'.¹³ The formulation was designedly vague, in order to reconcile the conflicting views of the German and French socialists and the Russian Bolsheviks on the general strike and other means of action against war; however, there was no question but that determined and immediate action was intended and agreed upon.

Unhappily for the working classes, the resolution of the socialists was shattered by the first cannon-fire. The majority of French, Belgian,

Russian, and English adherents of the Second International resolved that their countries had to be defended against German militarism and aggression; the majority of the German and Austrian social democrats resolved that they must oppose the invasion of their fatherlands by Russian barbarism and Tsarist autocracy; and those who thought otherwise were a very small minority, fighting what seemed for the first two years of the war very much a lost cause.

A war which involves the whole community cannot be prosecuted unless there is overwhelming support for, or at least acquiescence in, the war effort; but in the early months of the war there was no doubt of this on either side, and the minority of socialists who took their stand on the Basle resolution were overwhelmed by the patriotic fervour which swept through the working classes and the labour movements. Perhaps more importantly, the anti-war policy of the International presupposed the common action of the socialists in the belligerent nations; with the breakdown of the negotiations between the French and German socialists in the last hours of the crisis all hope of this vanished. There were, in the circumstances, only three possible courses of action: to co-operate with the bourgeois governments in national defence, to carry on a political campaign for a negotiated peace, or to prepare for insurrection. The 'majority socialists' in all the belligerent countries chose the first course; the opponents of the war were divided between the second and third. For the Russian Bolsheviks the choice was simple: since they were against the war, and since a public political campaign was impossible under the Tsarist autocracy, all that was left was insurrection—the policy of revolutionary defeatism, of turning the imperialist war into a civil war. But it was not so easy for the other European socialists. As Edward Bernstein had pointed out in the course of his argument with the orthodox Marxists of the German Social Democratic Party, 'the right to vote in a democracy makes its members virtually partners in the community',¹⁴ and so long as it was possible for the socialist opponents of the war to voice their opposition, they felt an obligation to restrict themselves to political activity designed to win the majority of their labour movements to their point of view.*

This indeed was the position taken by most Australian socialists; once the initial revulsion against the war began to be translated into practical politics, the central demand of the socialists was for a

* The only serious exception to this was the Liebknecht-Luxemburg group in the German S.D.P. (the Spartacists), and even so they were distinguished from other anti-war socialists more by the vehemence and consistency of their agitation than by the tactics they advocated. Otherwise, the 'Zimmerwald Left', as the revolutionary opposition was known, consisted of Polish and Balkan revolutionaries, who, like the Russians, suffered under autocracies, and minority groups from the neutral nations (see M. Fainsod, *International Socialism and the World War*, pp. 65-6, 87-90).

negotiated peace, and this reflected both their acceptance of the framework of bourgeois democracy and their awareness of the objective limitations to their action.

Among all the labour movements of the belligerent nations, that of Australia was, in the early days of the war, in a unique position. Generally, the decision facing the socialist and labour parties was whether or not (as minority oppositions) to support their governments' war budgets; but in Australia the Labor Party was the government, so that Australian labour was confronted not only with the ideological problem of its attitude to the war but with the practical political problem of loyalty to a government which it had created. There were other differences too: Australia was a long way from the scene of the fighting, and direct participation was limited to those who volunteered. And the political movement was already divided between the mass Labor Party and a number of fractional socialist parties standing in different relationships to the mass party. In Australia as elsewhere, the mass party opted with little hesitation for the war; and, as in Great Britain, the minority socialist organizations opted with almost as little hesitation against.*

In the pre-war socialist agitation against 'militarism' the lead had been taken by the doctrinaires of the Australian Socialist Party and the Socialist Labor Party, both centred in Sydney; the more flexible Victorian Socialist Party, with its strong attachment to the Labor Party, had divided between a pacifist (rather than a Marxist) opposition to all military service and a demand, akin to that of the French socialist Jaurès, for a 'citizen army' in which every citizen would retain his own rifle and ammunition and the officers would be elected. This difference of approach survived the outbreak of the war, even though the socialists were unanimous in their opposition. The A.S.P., once authentic news arrived, declared itself for Karl Liebknecht's position;† it was, it said, for 'an International Industrial and Political Union' of the working class which would refuse to go to war and would vigorously prosecute the class struggle;¹⁵ its members did not favour working with other opponents of the war because they found it 'inadvisable to support organisations which are partly bourgeois and wholly antagonistic to the principles of Socialism'.¹⁶

The Victorian socialists, on the other hand, called together in the first week of the war a private meeting of 'peace' bodies, and the fol-

* There was not in Australia any sizeable group of socialists who, like the followers of H. M. Hyndman in Great Britain, declared for the war.

† *International Socialist*, 12 February 1916. There was, of course, the important difference that Liebknecht was in a position to vote against the war credits, while the leaders of the A.S.P. were not.

lowing month an Australian Peace Alliance was formed. Its first manifesto, signed by the secretaries of the Melbourne Trades Hall Council and of five trade unions,* as well as by representatives of socialist and pacifist groups, and issued on 21 October 1914, opened pessimistically: 'At this stage of the war there is not much scope for speech or action by those whose only methods of achieving peace are an appeal to reason and common sense, the introduction of law and order into international relations, and the practice of international goodwill'. Nevertheless, the manifesto continued, certain things could be done: the opponents of war could combat chauvinism and could begin to prepare public opinion for a post-war settlement based on the arbitration of international disputes and all-round disarmament.¹⁷ Out of the confusion of statements emerging from the European socialists, the V.S.P. gradually evolved a policy, drawn largely from the manifesto of the British Independent Labour Party and the first public statement of the founders of the Union of Democratic Control,¹⁸ which it passed on to the Peace Alliance; in its first platform the Alliance raised the demands which were to remain the common currency of the socialist opposition in Great Britain and Australia for the duration of the war—for an international arbitration court, democratic control of foreign policy, the reduction of armaments and the nationalization of arms manufacture, and 'the termination of the present war at the earliest possible moment' on terms which provided for the self-determination of all nations and an end to the European 'balance of power'.¹⁹ At a public meeting on 15 February 1915 the Alliance suggested the ways in which these aims could be achieved: a statement from the governments of their terms for peace, thus opening the way for negotiation, and an early reference of the points in dispute to arbitration.† Consistent with this position, the V.S.P. was sceptical of the value of the meeting of neutral socialists, held at Copenhagen in January 1915, and urged a conference of socialists from the belligerent nations.

During the remainder of the year, socialists and pacifists joined in forming branches of the Alliance in the other mainland capitals—

* John Curtin, then secretary of the Victorian Timber Workers' Union and a member of the V.S.P., was one of the signatories.

† The 'speaker of the evening' at this meeting was F. Brennan, M.H.R., the first Labor parliamentarian to identify himself publicly with the movement for peace. Later, Brennan was joined by F. Anstey, M.H.R., who led a minority revolt against the authoritarian provisions of the War Precautions Act and subsequently withdrew from the Federal parliamentary Labor Party in protest, and M. Blackburn, a Victorian M.L.A. and a former member (and still a close associate) of the V.S.P., who refused to participate in the recruiting campaign 'unless I am first satisfied that the propertied class . . . are making a voluntary sacrifice proportionate—it cannot be equal—to the voluntary sacrifice our men are asked to make' (*Socialist*, 19 February 1915; *Labor Call*, 15 July 1915).

except in Sydney, where the socialists, still guarding their doctrinal purity, remained aloof. But as the more enthusiastic supporters of the war began to urge conscription on the government, the socialists, correctly calculating that there was a wider opposition to conscription than to the war, formed separate organizations for this purpose. In accordance with their different tactical conceptions, the V.S.P. members tended to confine their anti-conscription agitation to the immediate issue, while the followers of the A.S.P. often used anti-conscription platforms to expound their opposition to the war.

By the end of 1915 the Peace Alliance was firmly established. From the beginning it had proclaimed as one of its aims 'the organisation of the trades unions and workers' associations, with a definite view to ending war', and it was committed to action through the mass labour movement.²⁰ Discussing this, one official of the Alliance suggested three methods of working-class action—the general strike, the refusal to bear arms, and political agitation against war and preparations for war; of these, he found the last the most appropriate to the local situation.²¹ Operating on these lines, Peace Alliance supporters in the Melbourne Trades Hall Council presented a motion requesting the Commonwealth government to transmit greetings to workers in all the belligerent countries, and the plea that they should all act simultaneously to force their governments to declare the terms on which they would negotiate for peace. The motion was lost, but only on the casting vote of the president, in favour of an amendment referring the issue to affiliated unions for decision, whereupon the Peace Alliance carried its appeal directly to the unions.²² But this first major move into the mass labour movement was soon submerged in the growing trade union opposition to conscription.

The divergent points of view held by the opponents of war were expressed sharply at the first interstate conference of the Peace Alliance, held during Easter 1916.* The two N.S.W. delegates urged that the Alliance's platform be changed to provide for the control of foreign policy by an Imperial Parliament and the creation of an International Parliament, and for the elimination of the references to the special place of working-class organizations in the anti-war movement and to the early termination of the war; but the delegates from the other states preferred to appeal for an understanding that 'war can only be combated by international organisation' of the working class.²³ In an attempt to hold the organization together, the conference resolved that state councils should have the 'utmost freedom' of local action, but the N.S.W. group felt sufficiently strongly about its point to convert itself in June 1916 into the Australian Union of Democratic Control, with

* Eight delegates attended, representing the Peace Alliances of Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia, and Queensland.

a platform based on the principles rejected by the conference of the Alliance.²⁴

From the announcement of the conscription referendum, the energies of all sections of the extra-parliamentary labour movement and of the socialist and pacifist opponents of the war were thrown into this campaign. The various anti-conscription organizations, formed under radical auspices, were first in the field and continued to exist independently of (although on occasions acting jointly with) the official Labor No Conscription Committees.

These committees sought to escape the tag of disloyalty by stressing Labor's devotion to the Allied cause, but asserting that Australia could play its part most effectively as a food producer and by maintaining voluntary recruiting. But by the end of the referendum campaign it was apparent that the official Labor line was lagging behind opinion in the movement generally. The parliamentary advocates of 'No' had given a patriotic flavour to their campaign and had thus provided a cover of respectability for the radicals. By October 1916 anti-militarist agitators, who twelve months previously had been howled down and pelted with stones, were speaking to large, orderly, and enthusiastic audiences whose ears had been opened to their message by the immediate menace of conscription and by the growing dissatisfaction with the domestic consequences of the war.²⁵ Within the labour movement itself there had been important changes: the most ardent supporters of the war had been driven out of the party in the conscription split, and the leadership of the movement was passing into the hands of men who, if not already opposed to the war, were predisposed by their militancy towards this position. The flat rejection by the Allied powers on 30 December 1916 of the German peace feelers and President Wilson's proposals for a negotiated peace strengthened the feeling in Australia as elsewhere that, if any peace initiative were to be taken, it must come from the labour movement; ten weeks later the successful Russian revolution gave this tendency great heart. Meanwhile, on the left, the defeat of the conscriptionists in the Labor Party and the referendum victory had encouraged even the Sydney socialists to think that there might be some point in a united campaign for peace; the militant Anti-Conscription League decided to join the Peace Alliance in demanding that the government declare itself on the terms of peace.²⁶

The new mood first made itself felt in the industrial movement in resolutions of the Melbourne Trades Hall Council, the Brisbane Industrial Council, and the Queensland Branch of the A.W.U. calling on the Imperial Government to declare its peace terms.²⁷ In South Australia a special conference of the Labor Party, called at the instigation of the industrialists to discipline the conscriptionist politicians, refused to nominate official party delegates to the local recruiting committee.²⁸

The change was so marked that F. J. Riley, then secretary of the Peace Alliance in Melbourne, a member of the V.S.P. and of the Labor Party and a shrewd observer, was led to comment that 'there is a deep feeling of war weariness that if taken in hand can be developed and used to checkmate the jingoism feeling and ultimately bring about a stop-the-war feeling'. At the same time he was regretful that the parliamentary Labor Party did not yet recognize this; 'if [they] only knew it', he wrote, 'the time is ripe for a "Stop-the-war" agitation'.²⁹

This change was quite apparent (and quite alarming) to the Labor Party, too, and when the Alliance invitation to Labor organizations to appoint delegates to its second conference began to win acceptance the Victorian executive proscribed the conference.* The party leaders were reluctant to recognize what was happening, but Riley felt sure that 'some very drastic resolutions' would be carried by the forthcoming Victorian conference.

The conference had been postponed until June 1917, because of the Federal elections; and this—fortunately for the peace advocates—put it behind that of New South Wales. During the campaign the Federal Labor leader, Tudor, had disavowed any Labor sympathy for the growing anti-war sentiment, but by now its spread in the labour movement and into the Labor Party itself was a matter of public record and this undoubtedly had a considerable effect upon the electors. However, the industrialists who were in control of the N.S.W. party had already determined their position: if they had to choose between principle and electoral success they preferred principle, and a part of this was opposition to the war. The N.S.W. conference had before it a forthright resolution moved by A. C. Willis and Arthur Rae, declaring war to be the inevitable outcome of capitalism, asserting that 'peace can only be accomplished by the united efforts of the workers of all the countries involved', congratulating the Russian people on their revolution, and calling for an immediate international conference to negotiate a peace settlement along the lines made familiar by the Peace Alliance.³⁰ Storey, the parliamentary leader, protested that the British government was already doing all that was possible to bring the war to an end, but the industrialists were firmly in control and the resolution was carried unamended, with no one even bothering to call for a show of hands.³¹

The Victorian conference, which met soon after, was a different affair. The industrialists had strengthened their position in the party

* Riley, letter to M. Thorp, 13 April 1917 (F. J. Riley papers). The ban at first had little effect, but when Vida Goldstein, a prominent member of the Alliance, persisted in nominating for the forthcoming Federal elections (against the advice of Riley and the V.S.P.), the Labor executive was able to plead that the Alliance was opposing the endorsed Labor candidates (the ultimate sin in the Labor canon) and to persuade all but one branch to withdraw.

at the 1916 conference; for some years there had been a significant fraction of socialists present at the party conferences, and on this occasion a group calling themselves the Militant Propagandists had been canvassing in the unions and branches for support for a peace resolution; but there had been no substantial defection of politicians during the conscription crisis and they remained on this issue a strong conservative influence. In its report the executive expressed its hope for 'a speedy and successful termination of the war' and its conviction that victory could best be achieved by the continuance of voluntary recruiting. The socialists moved an amendment calling for an immediate peace 'without annexations or indemnities'; after a heated debate, they were beaten by seventy votes to sixty-six. However, later in the conference—significantly, after A. C. Willis had been called in to address them—the delegates adopted without amendment the resolution on peace which had already been carried by their N.S.W. comrades.³² Later, the N.S.W. resolution was endorsed by conferences of the South Australian and the Queensland parties, thus ensuring a majority for this policy at the Federal Conference which was scheduled for June 1918.

After these conferences the attitude of the labour movement to the war effort became even more ambiguous. The radicals pressed home their advantage in two directions: by urging Australian participation in the international conference which the Scandinavian socialists and the Russian Mensheviks were proposing should be held in Stockholm,* and by seeking the withdrawal of labour movement support from the recruiting campaign. On the other hand the supporters of the war, led by the parliamentarians but including a substantial section of trade unionists (notably the more conservative craft union leaders in the N.S.W. Labor Council and the Melbourne Trades Hall Council), accepted the June resolution but sought to assimilate it to the position taken by the British Labour Party and Trade Union Congress—that is, that these were the terms for which the Allies were in any case fighting and that they could only be secured by the unconditional surrender of German militarism. It was this basic difference which dominated the discussions within the labour movement between June 1917 and the Armistice, with the balance more and more swinging towards the opponents of the war.

Soon after the 1917 conference the Melbourne Trades Hall Council called on the party to direct members of parliament to take no further part in recruiting; this the party executive refused to do, and the socialist movers of the motion were prosecuted and fined for conduct

* Without being aware of the finer points of the argument between the advocates of the Stockholm Conference and the Zimmerwald Left, Australian socialists supported the former, and especially the line taken by the British socialists at the Leeds conference in June 1917.

likely to interfere with recruiting.³³ The party was thinking ahead to the Victorian elections, due towards the end of the year; but before these were held a Federal by-election for the Grampians seat (a Victorian mixed farming constituency) gave the party a chance to test its new policy on the electorate. This was a seat which Labor had picked up by a small margin in the 1914 landslide but had lost in a by-election in 1915. It had voted narrowly against conscription in 1916 but had given the Nationalists a comfortable majority in 1917. Now Labor was hopeful of winning the seat back. The party's manifesto reflected the new orientation:

The Labor Party is not for peace-at-any-price. . . . [But] the security of the British Empire is now beyond doubt, and all those of her people who desire a continuance of the war do so because they believe that the humiliation of Germany can prevent future wars. The Labor Party believes that so far from preventing future wars, the humiliation of a nation creates in its people a spirit of revenge, which breeds future wars. The German ruling classes can be left to the German people. . . . We favour the immediate cessation of the war and the calling of an International Conference to settle peace terms.³⁴

Labor did not win the seat, but it improved its vote; the time was not yet ripe to win elections on a peace policy, the *Socialist* commented, but it was better to stand firm on principle than to win by compromise.³⁵ At least, the result showed that the party's position was not worsened by the turn made by the June conferences. This was confirmed by the Victorian election. War policy was not a practical issue but inevitably it loomed large, and the Nationalists again fought as the 'win-the-war' party; in the event Labor won two seats but lost one by a narrow margin—that of Maurice Blackburn who, it was felt, was defeated because of his open opposition to recruiting and the war.

As news of the rebirth of internationalist sentiment among European socialists began to reach Australia, the local opposition to the war grew more intense. The Bolshevik revolution and the truce on the Eastern front were widely welcomed by almost all extra-parliamentary sections of the movement;* the socialists generally supported an international conference rather than the Allied socialist conference still favoured by the majority of the British and French movements, and the Labor conferences and the more important trade unions accepted this view. From the beginning of 1918 the most militant of the Australian industrial organizations—the Barrier A.M.A. and the Brisbane Industrial Council—were calling for a Commonwealth labour and trade union conference to put pressure on the government to declare itself for

* Little authentic news was available, since most international socialist publications had been declared prohibited imports by regulation under the War Precautions Act.

immediate peace negotiations, and later, when Hughes was about to leave for the Imperial Conference, to make it clear to the world that, in his demand for unconditional surrender, the Prime Minister did not represent a universal Australian opinion.

The Labor position was tested by the Governor-General's recruiting conference, called in April 1918 in the wake of the last desperate German offensive on the Somme. The Governor-General's invitation was extended to central trade union organizations as well as to the leaders of the parliamentary Labor parties; the Brisbane and Hobart councils formally refused the invitation and trade union representation generally was thin, although all the parliamentary leaders attended, as did the presidents of four of the state Labor Parties.*

Despite the Governor-General's appeal to those present to forget their recent differences, the shadows of the referenda and the general strike hung heavy over the conference. For the Labor Party the Federal leader, Tudor, demanded—and received—assurances from the Federal government concerning conscription (economic as well as military), the use of the War Precautions Act against political opponents, and the continued victimization of unionists; but even after these were given he made it clear that those Labor men present were there only as individuals and could not bind their organizations—a clear admission of the growing feeling against the war. The conference ended with a face-saving call to 'the people of Australia to unite in a whole-hearted effort to secure the necessary reinforcements under the voluntary system', which committed nobody to anything; the Australian consensus on the war was broken.³⁶ Tudor, Ryan, and other prominent Labor politicians continued to take part in the recruiting campaign, but to the accompaniment of mounting criticism from the movement, whose heart was no longer in the war.

This was revealed dramatically by 'one of the greatest controversies the Trade Union Movement has ever been engaged in'³⁷—the debate on the motion of the president of the N.S.W. Labor Council, who had attended the recruiting conference, for the endorsement of the conference resolution by the Council.

The move in the N.S.W. Labor Party for a negotiated peace had come not from the Labor Council unions but from the big unions like the Miners' Federation which were still outside the Council; the craft unions had played a prominent part in the anti-conscription campaigns, but had confined their pronouncements on the war to a belated endorsement of the 1917 peace resolution. Now, with this motion before the Council, E. E. Judd moved a long amendment which set out the

* The leaders of the Nationalist Party and the employers' organizations were of course invited too.

grounds of socialist opposition to the war and all of labour's grievances against the conduct of the Australian war effort, and concluded:

Therefore, whilst fully expecting anti-Labor forces to misrepresent and calumniate our action, we refuse to take part in any recruiting campaign, and call upon the workers of this and all other belligerent countries to urge their respective Governments to immediately secure an armistice on all Fronts, and initiate negotiations for Peace.⁸⁸

The debate lasted over several nights; John Storey intervened in support of the original resolution; the press agitation against Judd's 'disloyalty' led to large and noisy crowds in the visitors' gallery at the Trades Hall; finally, the gallery was closed and the motion was put and carried by 101 votes to 75.⁸⁹

The immediate result was a further attempt to form a Federation of Labor outside the Labor Council. The earlier attempts had had an industrial basis—the co-ordination of the activities of the mass and industrial unions which were not adequately represented by the craft union orientation of the Labor Council; now a straight political issue was involved—catering for the 'patriotic' unions. The attempt did not succeed; rank-and-file opinion was with Judd;* loyalty to the war effort was an inadequate foundation on which to build a trade union federation.

By the time the delegates to the 7th Commonwealth Conference of the Labor Party met in Perth on 17 June 1918 the policy of the Australian Peace Alliance had won majority support in the labour movement. It had been a long and arduous road along which the early protagonists of a negotiated peace had suffered some violence, some persecution, and a great deal of contumely and misrepresentation, but they had won through.

Commonwealth Labor conferences had in the past been very much the affair of the politicians—partly because they had the time to give to such meetings and (if they were Federal members) the considerable advantage of free railway passes throughout the Commonwealth; but for this conference there was a noticeably larger proportion of trade unionists among the delegates, and many of these were prominent on the left wing of the movement.†

The first substantive motion considered by the conference was one

* The general trend of rank-and-file union meetings, as reported in the *Worker*, was strongly in favour of Judd's resolution and against those union executives which broke away from the Labor Council.

† Among them were Willis and Rae from New South Wales, E. J. Holloway from Victoria, and John Curtin, now in Perth as editor of the *Westralian Worker* and acting as a proxy delegate for Tasmania.

for the endorsement of the 1917 peace resolution; this was carried unanimously. But from the beginning of the conference the N.S.W. delegates had been anxious to raise an issue, currently being debated by the N.S.W. party conference, which it was hoped would put teeth into the general peace resolution: the future attitude of the party to recruiting. The discussion revealed three lines of opinion: those (the minority) who wanted to maintain Labor support for the war effort; those who wanted an immediate break; and those who supported a conference motion against recruiting but wanted to refer the question to a rank-and-file ballot before any action was taken.* The report finally brought down by the sub-committee appointed to consider the party's attitude to the war reiterated the original Labor position of support for the liberty of small nations, for the honouring of treaties, and the maintenance of international law; however, it recommended that further 'official' participation in recruiting be subject to a clear statement by the Allies of their war aims' (which should include a declaration against annexations and indemnities) and to an adequate investigation of Australia's domestic manpower requirements. The sub-committee recommended that this proposal should go to a referendum of the membership.† The left wing realized that the inclusion of the word 'official' would allow the parliamentarians a way out of the motion—they would still be able to take part as individuals—and moved for its deletion. Tudor, who was present as Federal leader by invitation but had no vote, opposed amending the report; to insist that Labor parliamentarians take no part would put the party in a weak position. At first his view prevailed, but on being recommitted the amendment was carried by fifteen votes to seven. But even this did not satisfy the left wing, who wanted a clear and immediate decision against recruiting; here, however, they lost their majority, and their amendment to eliminate the rank-and-file ballot was defeated. When the final vote was taken, some of the left wing opposed the adoption because of their hostility to the ballot, but others (including Willis) felt that what they had achieved was better than nothing, and the motion was passed.⁴⁰

When the ballot came to be taken, an important group of N.S.W. parliamentarians and a couple of Victorians campaigned strongly against the conference recommendation, the former declaring that a vote against recruiting would be 'a distinct breach of faith with the electors and a base desertion of our soldiers'.⁴¹ Perhaps if the ballot had been carried through it would have caused another split in the party,

* Reference to constituent organizations or to the rank and file is a characteristic delaying tactic in labour movement affairs; it ensures that no action can be taken for some weeks or months, and has the appearance of being democratic.

† The move for a ballot came from T. J. Ryan; he was supported by South Australia and Tasmania.

but it was never completed: before the closing date, it was evident that the end of the war was near, that the Central Powers were about to capitulate, and the Federal Executive, with some relief, was able to call the ballot off.*

The initial Labor commitment to the war had undoubtedly reflected the sentiment of the great majority of working-class Australians as well as of other sections of the community, and the Australian contribution to the Allied armies, gathered entirely by voluntary recruiting, had been remarkable. In the early months, the minute opposition, motivated by pacifist or internationalist conviction, had seemed to most Australians at best lunacy and at worst rank treachery. But an important element in the working-class commitment was the belief that Australians were fighting to preserve what they had won in the way of social amelioration, and, despite the strong emotional ties with Great Britain, Australians were sufficiently far removed from the scene of the fighting to take a rather more detached view of the war policies of the Allied governments than was possible for their British or European fellows. Thus, when it began to seem that 'equality of sacrifice' was a disingenuous slogan behind which was hidden an assault by profiteers on their standard of life, and that this was condoned by men whom they had trusted, their reaction was angry and strong. From this it was only a short step to the belief that the refusal of the Allied governments to think in any terms other than unconditional surrender was nothing more than a cover for national aggrandizement.

The critical element in the working-class approach to the war derived from the situation in which they found themselves; the ways in which it found expression were provided by the radical minority. The underlying significance of the trade union revolt against political labour, which began with the abandonment of the price referendum in 1915, was the reassertion of class interests at a time when class differences had been exacerbated by the domestic consequences of the war and when the community consensus was beginning to break up. Its language was that of the syndicalists, the guild socialists, the I.L.P. socialists, the orthodox Marxists—yet it was not a revolutionary language. To put the question as the Bolsheviks had done at the Zimmerwald Conference in September 1915 and in Russia in November 1917 required not only that most workers should be convinced that they were being treated unjustly, or even that the war itself was an unjust war, but that they should be denied the possibility of expressing their protest; and although it was often claimed that Australian opponents of the war had less freedom

* *Worker*, 21 November 1918, reporting Federal Executive meeting of 6-9 November 1918. It was claimed that the partial result showed an 'overwhelming affirmative vote'.

of expression and action than did their English counterparts, the two conscription referenda were occasions on which the whole of Australia had to think and decide about major questions of war policy.

The two referenda enabled the anti-war opposition to strengthen its position in the labour movement tremendously, but at the same time they limited the character of this opposition to a prolonged struggle for political victory within the movement. The challenge was not a revolutionary onslaught on capitalism itself as was implied by the 1912 resolution of the International (which would in any case have had no chance of success), but a prolonged and determined agitation for the limited objective of winning the movement for a negotiated peace. That this was in Australian conditions successful was as much proof of the growing suspicion among Australian workers about the real aims of the war as tribute to the courage and tenacity of those who fought within the labour movement for the change of line.

The Changes in the Labour Movement during the War

The most significant change in the labour movement during the war years was the reassertion of class interests embodied in the victory of the Industrialists in 1916. But the trade unions in whose name the Industrialists spoke and acted were far from a united group. In the first place there was the division between the mass unions, which were the core of the Industrial Section,* and the craft unions centred in the N.S.W. Labor Council, although this was largely bridged by the militant victory in the Labor Council in 1918.† And then the Industrial Section itself was divided between the radical Miners' Federation, the A.W.U., whose leaders had fulfilled most of their ambitions in the post-1916 shake-up, and a group of more moderate unions led by the A.R.T.S.A. On the most important political issues of the war years—the attitude of the movement to conscription and the war—the Industrialists presented a united front to the politicians and won the Labor Council unions over to their side. But other issues revealed the fragility of their community of purpose. Thus, at the 1918 conference of the N.S.W. Labor Party, the left wing of the Industrialists was forced to compromise on its demand for the unconditional release of the I.W.W. Twelve and accept the majority proposal for a Royal Commission; while the A.R.T.S.A. was badly defeated in its bid to condemn the government's proposed legislation to re-register only nineteen of the

* From early in 1918 the Industrial Section was formally constituted and publicly acknowledged as the Industrial Vigilance Council of the Australian Labor Party.

† The militant victory was demonstrated by the election of J. S. Garden as secretary of the Labor Council following the retirement of E. J. Kavanagh, who had been elevated to the Board of Trade, on the same night as E. E. Judd's anti-war resolution was carried (*Worker*, 6 June 1918).

twenty-seven unions (the railway unions being among those left out) deregistered after the 1917 strike.⁴² This conflict was fought most bitterly in New South Wales but was common to the labour movement throughout Australia—although it did not always have such dramatic results.

Despite their internal differences, the Industrialists were strong enough to force a split in the parliamentary parties in 1916 and to re-establish the hegemony of the industrial wing, except in Victoria and Queensland where the parliamentarians almost unanimously opposed conscription and retained much of their influence over the party machine. What was remarkable about the split was that it scarcely went beyond the parliamentary party: the politicians who hived off with Hughes to join the Liberals in the Nationalist party had sadly miscalculated their support; they carried with them for the moment perhaps one in ten of Labor voters but practically nothing of the organized movement. Already by the end of 1917 the voting in by-elections and the Victorian election showed a strong movement back towards Labor, while the Queensland election of March 1918 was a triumph for the Ryan government.* In the South Australian elections the following month the Labor Party, which had lost nineteen of its twenty-three members in the conscription split, won back fifteen of their seats from the Nationalists. So striking were these successes and so attractive the prospects that the parliamentarians were greatly emboldened to urge the virtues of moderation on their militant industrial comrades.

Here, however, they confronted not only a more aggressive assertion of working-class economic demands—explicit in the new wave of wages and hours claims which swept out of the trade union movement as the war ended, and implicit in the intense interest in closer unionism—but the ideological commitment of the socialists, who had taken advantage of the war-time industrial and political crisis to entrench themselves in the mass labour movement. From their new vantage-points in the trade unions and the Labor Party the socialists looked at the post-war world with prophetic eyes:

I can see the worker awakened to the fact that he has the brains to control and manage the workshop. . . . He will, through educational propaganda, receive such a vision that will set the capitalist class thinking. He will awake, stand up and stretch himself, and marvel at his own powers, at present latent or subservient to another class. He will march forward united on the industrial

* It is interesting that the government lost four metropolitan seats, but gained seven in the country. This may have reflected a loss of middle-class city votes, frightened away by the radical economic policies of the government, but a solid 'sugar' vote for the government. The party emerged with forty-eight seats to the Opposition's twenty-four.

field to take and control that which he produces, NO MORE AND NO LESS. . . . He will put up his hand and cry halt, and say, 'No longer shall thou have power over me, I am free'; and as a free man will now use the instruments of freedom—'the plants of production'.*

* J. S. Garden in N.S.W. Labor Council, *Report*, 31 December 1918, p. 13. Garden was a Scots migrant, son of a non-conformist family, and himself at one time a lay-preacher. His phrases belonged to syndicalism, his tone of voice to the Old Testament, and his imagery to Will Dyson, the great Australian-born black-and-white artist whose cartoons for the London *Daily Herald* were widely reproduced in the Australian Labor press. This was not an unusual combination for the time, but it was soon to be replaced by the language of Lenin and the imagery of the German *Simplicissimus* and the American *Masses*.

Industrial Unionism and Industrial Unrest

THE POST-WAR HOPES of Australian socialists and militant trade unionists were concentrated in two utopian fantasies which at first seemed complementary but were later found to be contradictory: the one big union as first conceived by the fertile but doctrinaire mind of Daniel De Leon, who seemed to many the most original socialist thinker since Marx; and the Soviets of Workers' Deputies which had been created by the Russian revolutions. The hopes were high, but between the conception and the creation fell the shadow of a working class which was far from ready to transform minority dreaming into mass reality.

The One Big Union

The idea of industrial unionism and of the one big union had attracted some interest and support among trade unionists before the war; in the first years of the war it had been kept alive in the organization and agitation of the rival I.W.Ws. and in the theorizing of the socialist sects. And then the turns of economic circumstance and Labor politics, which had increased socialist influence and the militant spirit in the unions and union influence in the Labor Party, had again made the one big union a lively issue in 1916; but now it was trade union leaders themselves who were moving thus, rather than the two I.W.Ws. trying to impose their theories on the working class in opposition to the mass organizations.

In June 1916 in New South Wales informal meetings of representatives of the larger organizations, which were not affiliated with the Labor Council, began to discuss a 'union of unions'. The craft unions were invited to take part, but the Labor Council remained sceptical: if the one big union were to be accepted, the Council's Secretary reported, it would have to offer the unions something better than they already had; but what the scheme seemed to mean was the absorption of the existing unions by the A.W.U., which would cost them the autonomy on which they had always insisted in their dealings with the Labor

Council.¹ Nevertheless, the sponsoring unions went ahead with a conference, which, on the motion of the Secretary of the A.R.T.S.A., endorsed the principle of the one big union, to which the miners' delegates added 'based on industrial and allied trade lines'—a hit at the A.W.U.'s system of organization into regional branches.² The Labor Council was sufficiently stirred by this threat to its pre-eminence to seek again the affiliation of the mass unions, but the rival schemes for closer unionism remained in abeyance during the hectic activity of the conscription campaigns and the disastrous days of the general strike.

The obvious lesson of the strike defeat was the lack of any authoritative central organization—as the miners' secretary, A. C. Willis said, the strike had shown a one big union spirit but there had been no O.B.U. control—and, from the end of 1917, there was a new urgency and purposefulness in the plans for trade union reconstruction. The Labor Council debated a scheme for grouping the existing unions into industrial federations based on their 'trade affinity'—a device which would have left craft union exclusiveness undisturbed while creating some central authority to handle industrial disputes.³ But by now the militants were in a majority on the Labor Council, and, not unexpectedly, the vote favoured reorganizing the unions into the one big union. Meanwhile, the Miners' Federation had asked the Council to convene a congress of all N.S.W. unions to consider war and post-war problems; this was agreed to, and trade union reconstruction was put on the agenda.⁴

The Congress was held on 5 August 1918, and again there was a militant majority.* It was, said the new secretary of the Labor Council, J. S. Garden, in an enthusiastic report, 'the most momentous ever held' in Australia—'a true Australian Parliament, where the workers of the State gathered together to devise ways and means to liberate themselves'.⁵ Despite opposition from some of the craft unionists and the leadership of the A.W.U., the Labor Council's proposal for the One Big Union was endorsed.† In its statement of principles (the 'Preamble') and its structure the proposed new organization, to be known as the Workers' Industrial Union of Australia (W.I.U. of A.), relied heavily on the I.W.W. precedent. The ideas were those of the De Leonite W.I.I.U.‡ rather than of the Chicago school: the Preamble declared for revolutionary political as well as industrial action, which it defined as

* 141 delegates represented 79 unions at the Congress. For a report of proceedings, see *Worker*, 8 August 1918.

† 'One Big Union' (or 'O.B.U.') with capital letters signifies the official one big union, the Workers' Industrial Union of Australia.

‡ The similarity of names of the Workers' International Industrial Union (W.I.I.U.), the successor of the De Leonite I.W.W. Club, and the Workers' Industrial Union of Australia (W.I.U. of A.) is confusing, but the distinction is important and is further considered below.

'action to secure a complete change, namely, the abolition of capitalist class ownership of the means of production—whether privately or through the State—and the establishment in its place of social ownership by the whole community'.⁶ It gave pride of place to the union in the struggle for the abolition of capitalism, which it declared could only be accomplished 'by the workers uniting in one class-conscious economic organisation to take and hold the means of production', but it dropped, presumably in deference to those O.B.U. advocates who were also members of the Labor Party, the W.I.I.U.'s reference to the need for 'a distinct revolutionary political party governed by the workers' class interests'.⁷ However, the equation of state ownership with private capitalist ownership made it clear that nationalization of industry, as it had been practised, was not what the O.B.U. wanted; as later became apparent, the idea of the majority was social ownership and workers' control.

The inspiration of the Preamble was syndicalist: reporting on the Sydney decision to a subsequent conference of Victorian unions, Garden described the O.B.U. proposals as 'the cream of the thought of men like Debs, De Leon and Trautmann, adapted to Australian conditions'.⁸ But there was an important difference among the founders of the W.I.U. of A. concerning the nature and value of political action. As interpreted by E. E. Judd, an old member of the S.L.P., its sole purpose was to 'decree the abolition of the Class State with its Parliaments, and leave the conduct of the nation's production to the Central Administration [of the O.B.U.]; thereby replacing Class Governments . . . by an Industrial Parliament, composed of men and women elected from and by those in industry'.⁹ There was, however, sufficient latitude in the Preamble to allow Garden, Willis, and other Labor Party industrialists* to award Parliament a much more considerable role in their plans for the reconstruction of society: 'the shortest and easiest way to a real control by the producers lies in the socialisation of industries, and . . . therefore, there is obvious need for a party in Parliament which shall strive for such a goal'.† The structure of the union, dividing the whole of the economy and the working class into six great departments of production, and each department into a series of divisions corresponding to particular industries, was designed to facilitate immediately the organization of industrial conflict along 'scientific' lines (by making 'an injury to one the concern of all'), and ultimately to enable the

* That is, they were members of the Labor Party at this time; they broke away from the A.L.P. in June 1919.

† Garden in N.S.W. Labor Council, *Report*, 31 December 1919, p. 19. This was written after the break with the Labor Party, but all that had changed was the opinion of Garden and his associates as to what political party was needed in parliament.

administration of production by the union itself. The Congress concluded its work by appointing a committee, with Willis as President and Garden as Secretary and a good leavening of unionists of the revolutionary persuasion, to spread the W.I.U. of A.'s message 'of hope, of liberty, of freedom, of emancipation'.¹⁰

In Victoria the one big union was revived at almost the same time as in New South Wales, and with much the same results. A conference of unions in 1916 had revealed a similar division of opinion to that in the N.S.W. Labor Council. The blueprints were rather different—the Sydney industrialists advocated the dissolution of existing unions and the re-organization of the working class into an entirely new union, while their Victorian counterparts urged the amalgamation of the existing organizations into industrial departments subordinated to a central council—but the principle was the same: a tightly centralized 'class union' of all workers rather than a loose federation of autonomous craft and sectional unions, as was advocated by their opponents.¹¹ The rival proposals confronted one another at a further conference of Victorian unions in September 1918, but by this time the N.S.W. prophets were on the job, and Garden was able to plead both the desirability of a national organization and the support already pledged by the Miners' Federation, the A.R.T.S.A., and the N.S.W. Labor Council; and the conference, after detailed consideration by a series of committees, accepted the N.S.W. scheme, name, preamble, structure and all.¹²

By the end of the year the support for the O.B.U. seemed overwhelming. In Queensland the Industrial Council and a congress of unions had resolved in favour of the N.S.W. proposals. The Hobart Trades Hall Council had agreed that a national one big union was of 'paramount importance'. A further conference of N.S.W. unions, held in November 1918 and slightly more representative than the earlier one, had decided on an immediate propaganda campaign to launch the W.I.U. of A. A committee of the South Australian Trades and Labor Council had supported the W.I.U. of A., although there was some feeling among South Australian unions for amalgamation with the A.W.U.

This seemed sufficient to press ahead, and an all-Australian conference was convened for January 1919. The nineteen delegates from all states claimed to represent 'the great majority of the Unionists of Australia'.¹³ No one was present from the Miners' Federation, but this was not significant as they were already committed to the scheme; however, a conspicuous absentee was the A.W.U.—this, the largest of the Australian unions and itself an aspiring one big union, was having second thoughts about the W.I.U. of A. The January conference formally adopted the preamble and rules of the new union, declared the

weekly paper published by the N.S.W. committee, *O.B.U.*, to be its official organ, and appointed a provisional council centred in Victoria to conduct its affairs. The tactics to be followed by the council were, however, far from clear: it was proposed that shop committees should be formed wherever possible to carry out propaganda for the *W.I.U.* of A., and that arrangements should be made for existing unions to conduct ballots of their members on the question of the union joining the *O.B.U.*, but at the same time it was decided that membership application forms should be printed and distributed to the shop committees, and herein lay a major point of contention.¹⁴

There were in fact two lines of fire against the *W.I.U.* of A.: a radical critique from the socialists and the syndicalists on the left, and a moderate and often self-interested critique from the politicians, the craft unionists, and the *A.W.U.* bureaucracy on the right.

Although the *O.B.U.* leaders had borrowed heavily from *I.W.W.* theories in their plans for the *W.I.U.* of A., the old-time followers of the *I.W.W.* (in either of its shapes) were far from unanimous in their enthusiasm. With the reformation of the Detroit headquarters of the *I.W.W.* as the Workers' International Industrial Union, a group of Sydney members of the Australian Socialist Party had applied for and received a charter from the American headquarters to form an Australian administration of the *W.I.I.U.*; the Sydney *I.W.W.* Club had also reformed itself as the *W.I.I.U.* and nothing—neither the advice from America, nor the persistent demands of the Melbourne branch of the *W.I.I.U.*—could persuade these old rivals to sink their differences. However, the war-time struggles had brought together radicals of diverse affiliations and had succeeded in watering down their revolutionary purism; thus, E. E. Judd and some of his comrades from the Socialist Labor Party, as well as a number of active members of the *A.S.P.*, were now deeply involved in the official One Big Union.

A handful of *S.L.P.* diehards, who would have no truck with this attempt to graft their creed on to the existing trade union movement, tried vainly to hold the *W.I.I.U.* together, but the storm of industrial politics in New South Wales had swept past them, and, on 23 January 1921, a forlorn group of five—all that was left of the old *I.W.W.* Club—met to put the final seal on their failure. Sadly, they resolved to hand over the 'priceless . . . historical documents of the original administration in Australia of the Workers' International Industrial Union' to the Mitchell Library in Sydney, and to divide their remaining assets (3s. 1d., cash in hand) equally between the Socialist Labor Party and the Melbourne administration of the *W.I.I.U.*¹⁵

On the other hand, the militants of the Sydney branch of the *A.S.P.*, after their formation of a *W.I.I.U.*, had moved towards a purely

industrialist position, and at their 1918 annual conference had declared for the W.I.I.U. rather than an international socialist party as the primary instrument of the revolution.¹⁶ And when the N.S.W. trade union congress adopted the framework of the W.I.I.U. for its One Big Union, the A.S.P.'s weekly paper declared enthusiastically that the congress decisions were 'on paper . . . as near perfect as one could reasonably expect any scheme to be in its initial stage'; it remained only for the O.B.U. propagandists to educate the working class up to the level of their conception.¹⁷ But by the end of the year the A.S.P. had changed its mind again,* and had decided that the task of reconstructing the trade union movement could safely be left to the O.B.U. while they got on with the job of developing the class struggle on the political field; and they allowed their section of the W.I.I.U. to lapse.¹⁸

Their Melbourne comrades, who had taken over the Australian Administration of the W.I.I.U., were not so sanguine. There were, they felt, a number of important faults in the One Big Union: it was being built from the top down instead of the bottom up; its structure was based on trade rather than industrial sections, and therefore it made no provision for workshop branches; and it proposed to concentrate power in the hands of its leading committees.† Essentially, all these objections derived from the concept of a self-acting working class, creating, independently of the existing organizations, its own institutions through which it would be able to 'take and hold' the instruments of production. Clinging tight to this, the Melbourne W.I.I.U. carried on from where the Sydney groups left off, and began to recruit members in competition with the existing unions. By mid-1919 it had finally repudiated the link with the revolutionary parties (although not formally abandoning political action), its spokesman describing the A.S.P. and the S.L.P. alike as 'a dead hand upon the industrial nucleus of [the] necessary economic organisation'.¹⁹

The W.I.I.U. themes of building from below and the organization of the workers for 'job control' were tested at two points, and found wanting—on one occasion because of the impracticality of the theorizers, on the other because of external circumstance.

In 1919 the Victorian branch of the A.W.U. successfully blocked an attempt by a section of their members, employed on a dam construction site at Eildon, to break away and join the W.I.I.U.; the latter's propaganda had been effective, but its organization was sadly deficient.²⁰

* Under the influence, it was said, of one Moses Baritz, a member of the British Socialist Party, who had recently arrived in Australia.

† See J. A. Dawson in *Inter. Soc.*, 28 September 1918. The second of these objections was met by amendments made to the original constitutions at the January 1919 trade union congress, and from this time there was a greater emphasis in official O.B.U. publications on workshop organizations.

And in the same year the measure of 'job control' which the Queensland members of the A.M.I.E.U. (regarded by many one big unionists as a prototype industrial union) had been able to impose in the Alligator Creek and other North Queensland meatworks was destroyed by the introduction of non-union labour and the defeat of the subsequent bitter strike, while a Labor government stood by and watched.²¹ Between them, these two examples did much to convince interested unionists that the future of the one big union lay with the W.I.U. of A. The abortive Eildon episode had demonstrated once more the impossibility of 'dual unionism', of the attempt by the left wing to build a rival union, in the Australian situation; while Alligator Creek was further proof that even the most determined and united industrial action by a section of workers could be made ineffective by divisions within the labour movement, by government action, or by an unfavourable economic environment. More than ever, the answer to these dilemmas seemed to be the unification of existing unions into one organization with sufficient cohesion and power to impose its will on employers and politicians alike.

It was, however, the A.W.U. and the Labor Party which put the greatest obstacles in the way of the One Big Union—the A.W.U. because its officials feared that their union would be submerged and their positions of power in the labour movement destroyed, and the politicians because they feared the consequences of revolutionary trade unionism for their electoral prospects.

The A.W.U. bureaucracy, according to E. H. Lane, one of its most persistent critics, regarded the O.B.U. as 'an unscrupulous poacher on its preserves and a revolutionary menace to the "sane" moderate Labour movement'.²² It is not clear at just what point the A.W.U. officials decided not only that they would not be able to take advantage of this movement to enlarge their own empire, but also that the W.I.U. of A. threatened their very existence. In any event, they went unrepresented at the interstate conference in January 1919 which launched the W.I.U. of A. nationally. But their view was not universal in the A.W.U.: commenting on this conference, H. E. Boote said that many A.W.U. members had hoped that their union would become the centre of the One Big Union; however, the A.W.U.'s rules did not commit the union to social reconstruction, and its constitution meant that unions which did amalgamate with it retained their craft characteristics; the hope now was that the A.W.U. Convention would support the new W.I.U. of A.²³ The Convention was not in fact held; it met just as the influenza epidemic hit Sydney and dispersed immediately—indeed with undue haste, the critics suggested. By April the A.W.U. leaders were in open opposition to the W.I.U. of A.

The first sign of the break came with a statement from N.S.W. Labor leader John Storey on 22 March 1919, accusing 'Judd, Garden and Co.' of attempting not only to white-ant the trade unions and the Labor Party, but to impose the O.B.U. objective on the party at the coming state conference.* He claimed to speak for both Federal and State parliamentarians, and warned that those of his persuasion would organize against the attempts of the One Big Unionists to capture the conference. (Curiously, Boote in the *Worker* came out strongly against Storey, who could scarcely have taken this stand without the support of the A.W.U. officials.)

The storm broke a few weeks later. Prompted by the 'attempts . . . to create antagonism between the A.W.U. and the O.B.U.', the N.S.W. executive of the W.I.U. of A. wrote to A.W.U. General Secretary E. Grayndler claiming that Garden had been systematically misreported by the daily press and that the W.I.U. of A. really had no intention of recruiting individual members or of holding ballots among unionists (specifically the A.W.U.) without the consent of the union concerned.²⁴ A month later the union replied with a declaration of war. The Executive Council had now met, the officers said in a 'manifesto' to A.W.U. members, and had unanimously decided against the W.I.U. of A.: its preamble was practically identical with that of the I.W.W., which meant 'madness, direct action, sabotage, dissension, disruption, and destruction of the Union Movement'. However, the A.W.U. was not against the one big union as such: it would support it if it were organized 'upon Australian lines', that is, if it adhered (as the A.W.U. did) to political action and arbitration; and to this end 'the door of the A.W.U. is open to such of those existing Unions who decide for themselves that their industrial interests can be better served by their inclusion in our organization'.²⁵

After this, it was clear that the 1919 Labor conferences would be lively. Already the Victorian conference had rejected a bid by the secretary of the W.I.U. of A. to have the party adopt the O.B.U. preamble, in favour of Maurice Blackburn's motion that the party's objective should be 'the peaceful overthrow of the capitalistic system. . . . Collective ownership of the collectively used means of production. . . . Democratic control of industry'.²⁶ Now the same issue was to be debated in New South Wales.

The conference met amid great excitement; both factions had been organizing hard, and the atmosphere was embittered by the circulation (by the A.W.U.-parliamentary faction) of an anonymous leaflet entitled *The Pommie Takes Command—A Warning to Australian Workers*, a reference to the British origins of Willis, Garden, and

* The Industrial Section (see ch. 3) had adopted the O.B.U. objective four months earlier.

other prominent One Big Unionists. The debate which revealed the strength of the factions was on Willis's motion to provide for direct election of the party executive by members of local leagues and affiliated unions; this would, he claimed, eliminate all cliques in the party—including the Industrial Vigilance Council.* On Willis's side were the industrialists; against him were the politicians and the A.W.U. The motion was defeated, amid uproar, by 113 votes to 109.

But the real issue was the party's objective, and, for those who were calling into question the limited statement about 'the collective ownership of monopolies' which had served as the objective since 1905, what was involved was not just what the party should declare itself to be, but how it should act immediately to change society.† Drawing on his guild socialist background, Willis moved that the objective should become 'the establishment of a State of social democracy, in which the entire means of wealth production shall be owned and controlled by the community of workers industrially organised'. But this alone was not enough: everything on the party's platform which assumed the continued existence of capitalism (and thereby provided a refuge for the uneasy socialists of the parliamentary Labor Parties) should be discarded, and the new objective should be made the 'sole issue' at the coming elections. In this way, if the party won, there could be no doubt that it had a mandate to carry through the social revolution.

The debate was not prolonged. John Storey, for the parliamentary party, described Willis's proposal as a revolutionary platitude: Australia was already the most advanced country socially in the world, and there was no practical prospect of doing anything about capitalism for at least a quarter of a century; meanwhile, there were plenty of immediate reforms to occupy the party's time and to attract the electorate. A spokesman for the A.W.U. officials supported Storey and condemned those who were opposed to political action—by which he meant those who were against parliamentary reformism. Arthur Rae, a lone dissenter in the A.W.U. phalanx, supported the change, saying that it was about time that the Labor platform could be distinguished from that of the Liberals 'without a microscope'. Few other delegates spoke. The miners' leader threw out a final challenge to the moderates: 'You have either to justify yourselves, or else the new movement is coming in to take your place, whether you like it or not'. The motion was lost, by 127 votes to

* It would also have ensured the dominance of the large unions (including the A.W.U.) over the party machine, so long as the members of these unions could be persuaded to vote. That the A.W.U. officials would not support this move possibly indicated their uncertainty about how their own members would vote.

† In this sense, the challenge to the traditional view of the party was more fundamental even than that mounted by the leaders of the Triple Alliance at the 1919 conference of the British Labour Party, which was held a few weeks later (see R. Miliband, *Parliamentary Socialism*, pp. 68 ff.).

112. The next day, as a rowdy dispute over a minor point of procedure reached a tumultuous climax, the cry went up, 'One out, all out', and the militant delegates departed from the conference.*

The immediate consequence of the split was a rapid polarization of the movement in New South Wales. The O.B.U. conference which followed soon after the party conference revealed the serious effect of the break with the Labor Party and the A.W.U.: this time, there was less than a third of the number of delegates who had attended the first Congress, and the sharp decline was far from wholly attributable to the influenza epidemic, which was by now nearing its end. The new alignments were reflected by the conference decision that, if a union refused to take a ballot, and the nucleus of an industrial department could be formed, members should be enrolled in the O.B.U. regardless of the union's attitude;²⁷ and the movement's journal reported, over the rest of the year, the raids made by W.I.U. of A. organizers on the established trade unions and especially on the new enemy, the A.W.U. The A.W.U. leaders responded by denouncing the 'blowfly, maggot-creating, white-ant' tactics of the W.I.U. of A., and by exhorting their members to stand firm.²⁸

Meanwhile, Willis had led his followers into the formation of the Socialist Party of Australia, and then to a meeting in August with the other socialist groups† to consider forming a united party; but the conference was unable to agree on a name (the other groups wanted 'Revolutionary Socialist Party', which the Willis group thought bad tactics) or on the new party's relations with the W.I.U. of A., and the Labor Party rebels formed themselves into the Industrial Socialist Labor Party and began to recruit members and to seek trade union affiliates.‡

* Report, N.S.W. A.L.P. Conference (1919), *Worker*, 12, 19 June 1919. That the issue was seen as very much a matter of principle, which, as Arthur Rae had suggested some months earlier, would 'make or break' the party in N.S.W. and gravely affect its future in the Commonwealth (*Labor News*, 29 March 1919), is confirmed by the unanimity of the conference on immediate radical policies—condemnation of the Allied intervention in Russia; protests against the gaoling of the Soviet consul in Australia (Peter Simonoff) and against the deportation of radicals without trial; support for the striking seamen.

† The A.S.P., the S.L.P., and the Social Democratic League. (The latter had been formed in 1917 by a group of breakaways from the A.S.P. who wanted to practise the V.S.P. tactic of 'boring from within' the Labor Party.)

‡ For the initial conference of the breakaways, see *Worker*, 7 August 1919; for the unity discussions, see *Inter. Soc.*, 16 August, 13 September 1919. The S.L.P. was indignant that the Willis group should have pirated its name, while the A.S.P. condemned them as 'political buccaneers' who were accommodating themselves to a programme of 'palliatives'. There was, however, an important point in the disagreement over relations with the unions: the Willis group favoured trade union affiliation, while the A.S.P. (anticipating a later Communist attitude) said that a revolutionary trade union should advise its members to join the revolutionary party as individuals—the support of unionists, to be worth anything, must be conscious.

The rebels, however, with characteristic revolutionary optimism, had overestimated their support: two hundred delegates from local leagues and trade unions had attended their first conference, but most of these were already members of the militant minority and they failed to bring their branches and unions with them;²⁹ and there was only one defector from the ranks of the parliamentary parties—P. J. Brookfield, M.L.A., who represented the Broken Hill electorate of Sturt. This lack of substantial political support was thrust home by the failure of the I.S.L.P. in the December 1919 Federal elections, and the new party did not survive for long. Early in the New Year the political projection of the W.I.U. of A. (as the One Big Unionists had conceived their party) disintegrated, most (but not Willis) amalgamating with the Socialist Labor Party while the remainder waited their chance to re-enter the Labor Party.³⁰

The election defeat of the I.S.L.P. was an early expression of a continuing theme in Australian labour history: the failure of revolutionaries who have won positions of strength in the trade union movement to attract any considerable electoral support—and this without jeopardizing their position in the industrial organizations. The explanation lies partly in the strong traditional links between the Labor Party and the unions. These have managed to survive the most bitter conflicts between the two wings of the movement, largely because the party's structure has been sufficiently flexible in one regard to enable these conflicts to be expressed and fought out, and sufficiently rigid in another to ensure that the parliamentary parties have not been able to escape indefinitely taking action on matters about which the unions have felt really strongly. But perhaps even more important has been the continuing ability of Australian capitalism to meet sufficient of the immediate demands of the working class to prevent any substantial swing away from the party which has traditionally been committed to their piecemeal satisfaction.

The W.I.U. of A. remained on the outer for most of 1920, but the pressure of events was gradually forcing the warring factions of the industrial movement to reconcile their differences.

The most important factor—apart from the relatively successful actions for common economic objectives during 1919-20—was the failure of either side to achieve a clear victory. Throughout the year, the A.W.U. and the N.S.W. Labor Party tried hard to remove the left-wing leadership of the Labor Council. The high point of their effort was a conference of unions to consider ways and means of getting rid of Garden and his followers, but only fifty of the hundred-odd unions which were affiliated to the Council attended the conference, and among these there was a substantial minority which condemned political inter-

ference in the Council's affairs.³¹ The Council was, however, weakened by the disaffiliation of a number of unions which objected to the revolutionary tone of its pronouncements. Garden condemned this attempt by the A.W.U. to impose its will on the Council³² and declared the sponsors of the move to be 'traitors to the working class movement' who had proved themselves unwilling to allow their own rank and file to judge the issue.³³ But his counter-attack against the A.W.U. made little headway: an attempt to take the 44-hour week campaign out of the hands of the A.W.U. officials by means of an unofficial Council-backed 'A.W.U. Disputes Committee' was a failure,³⁴ and the raids on the A.W.U. membership, while they had a considerable propaganda effect, produced little practical result.

But the propaganda inroads were sufficient to worry the A.W.U. leaders: nearly a quarter of the forty-odd delegates to the 1920 Convention proved to be in favour of the W.I.U. of A., and they launched a savage attack on the A.W.U. bureaucracy which was checked but not ended by the dissolution in July 1920 of the Western (N.S.W.) Branch of the union, for long a centre of militant opposition.* Even more important, the A.W.U. leaders were beginning to feel a threat to their membership and their treasury. And, beyond this, even though there was little to suggest it at the 1920 Conference of the N.S.W. Labor Party, the A.W.U. officials had overplayed their hand in the party. Their nominees were defeated in the caucus ballot for places in the Storey Cabinet,³⁵ and an attempt by the principal A.W.U. spokesman in the N.S.W. caucus to get rid of two anti-A.W.U. Ministers by saddling them with charges of corruption failed miserably when a Royal Commission found that the allegations were quite without substance.³⁶ Unable to crush the W.I.U. of A. and more particularly the Labor Council, worried by a possible loss of membership and a nagging rank-and-file opposition, and facing a possible split with their parliamentary allies, the A.W.U. officials had by the end of 1920 sound reasons for wanting a reconciliation with the One Big Unionists.

The W.I.U. of A. leaders were similarly placed. Despite the apparent success of the movement, they had in fact achieved little. From Victoria and Queensland there had been professions of support but little practical action. In South Australia the unions had finally voted against sinking their separate identities in the O.B.U.³⁷ The January 1920 conference had found only thirteen unions—the Miners' Federation and twelve small craft unions—committed to the scheme.³⁸ And the negotiations of the major unions during the 1920 A.W.U. Convention had revealed

* An indication of the rift in the A.W.U. was the equal vote on the executive on this issue; the motion was only carried on the casting vote of President Blakeley (see statement of J. Cullinan, former secretary of Western Branch, *Inter. Soc.*, 11 September 1920).

that several of the most important—notably the Seamen's Union (which in August balloted in favour of a Transport Workers' Federation rather than the O.B.U.) and the A.R.T.S.A. (which in September joined with similar unions in the other states in the Australian Railways Union) were no longer prepared to merge in the W.I.U. of A. Two other important unions, the Ironworkers and the Watersiders, did decide in favour of the O.B.U. during the year, but without the support of kindred unions little could be done, and when the time finally came to set up the W.I.U. of A., the Mining Department was the only one which was officially launched.*

All this pointed to the impossibility of proceeding without the A.W.U.: given the affiliation of the majority of mass unions the craft unions might be expected (or could be forced) to fall into line, but without this—and the A.W.U. was the key—there was little prospect of success. Looking at the question quite practically, Willis had evidently drawn this conclusion by the middle of the year, when he disavowed yet another declaration by Garden of the W.I.U. of A.'s intention of poaching on A.W.U. preserves.³⁹ But at almost the same time there were the first indications that a new ideology might change the tactics of the W.I.U. of A., and by September the most active of the One Big Unionists (except for Willis, who clung to his guild socialism) had formed themselves into a Communist Party which took over from the Bolsheviks and the Third International a new strategy: the development of revolutionary mass action by the 'politicalization' of strikes and other mass struggles, under the direction of a tightly centralized revolutionary *élite*. An important part of this concept was participation in the existing mass organizations of the labour movement, no matter how far these might be from revolutionary programmes and theories, in order to convert them to the revolutionary purpose; this, together with the evident failure of the W.I.U. of A. as it had been conceived in syndicalist terms, sufficed to suggest a reorientation of the One Big Union and a new approach to the problem of the A.W.U.

The Year of Strikes

The years 1919-20 were not conducive to trade union disunity. The immediate post-war period was one of sharply rising prices and relatively stable employment, a situation which invited trade union action for wage increases; and the threat of deteriorating living standards, coming on top of the wartime discontents, exploded in the most costly series of strikes Australia had yet known. In 1919 some 6.3 million man-days were lost in industrial disputes, for a total wage loss of nearly £4 million;

* The Mining Department embraced the coal-miners' federation and the Barrier A.M.A.

in 1920, the figures were 1·9 million and £1·2 million.⁴⁰ In times such as these, when an often successful trade union offensive accompanied the short-lived post-war boom, the unions tended to draw together. It is the defensive actions which accompany an economic downswing, and the recriminations which follow defeat, which have contributed most to divisions within the trade union movement.

The principal contributors to this remarkable performance were the several maritime unions and the Broken Hill section of the Mining Department of the W.I.U. of A. (the former Amalgamated Miners' Association); the issues were wages, hours, and working conditions.

The seamen, particularly, were carrying a considerable cargo of grievances. They had made an important contribution to the war effort and had been almost the only Australian union which had made no wages claim in the war years, but they had not benefited from the gratuity awarded to those whose active service had been in uniform. The Navigation Act, passed by the Fisher government to regulate ship-board conditions, had never been proclaimed. The insistence of the shipowners that their coastal coal-ships run to tight schedules had resulted in several sinkings and considerable loss of life. An award of 1911 had established an 8-hour day for all seamen, but the men still had grievances over holidays, conditions of work, and especially wages. In December 1918 Mr Justice Higgins had awarded an 11 per cent increase—but the men had asked for 50 per cent, which they felt was well justified by the high and rising profits of the shipping companies. On top of this, the influenza epidemic had hit Australia; if a seaman fell sick at sea he was put ashore at the first port, without wages, to find his way to his home port at his own expense. Their case was a strong one.⁴¹

The election early in 1918 of Tom Walsh, a militant and socialist of long standing, as Federal Secretary of the union was a measure of the growing militancy of the seamen. Walsh lost little time in starting the fight for higher wages; the unsatisfactory arbitration case was quickly followed by a request to the Shipowners' Federation for a conference on wages and conditions aboard ship. This automatically involved the Federal government, since the Commonwealth had become a large ship-owner during the war. The conference met in April 1919; the union demanded a minimum wage of £14 a month for able-bodied seamen, shorter hours, decent living conditions and food, and adequate compensation for illness and death.⁴² Their claims were flatly rejected—on the government's initiative, it was felt, as several of the private companies were already paying the higher wage—and the men struck. 'The Government have thrown down the challenge . . .' said Walsh, 'and the trade unions will not hesitate to take it up. If the Government are

going to fight the trade unions, very well, let it be war, and we shall see who wins.⁴³

Reviewing the situation, Mr Justice Higgins declared that the main cause of the strike was 'the teachings of overseas theorists' (Walsh, like Willis and Garden, was British born) and urged that no concessions be granted under threat of direct action.⁴⁴ As the strike dragged on, coal stocks ran low in the eastern states, rail and tram services were cut, and thousands of factory workers were thrown out of employment. Food was short in North Queensland; the Ryan government asked the Commonwealth to allow it to run ships on the Queensland coast on the union's terms, but the Commonwealth refused.

Finally, the Melbourne Trades Hall Council, alarmed by the serious consequences of the strike for Victorian workers, stepped in and invited the 'key' unions (the miners, carters, and railwaymen, as well as the seamen) to join it in attempting a settlement. After discussions with the government, the combined unions agreed to recommend to the seamen that they resume work on the basis of the government's undertaking that an immediate conference be held; privately, the government indicated that most of the men's claims would be met. But by now Walsh had been gaoled, and meetings of seamen in all ports refused to go back to work until he was released.

Now it became a battle of prestige. The government, anxious to preserve face, was determined not to release Walsh until the strike was over and to cling to the Arbitration Court as the final arbiter. The seamen wanted to establish that they had scored a victory for direct action over arbitration and to humble the government by forcing the release of Walsh. The combined unions, having the government's assurance of a reasonable settlement, wanted to end the strike while it could still be won and before it got out of hand. At last, late in August, under pressure from their own and the combined unions, the seamen accepted the government's proposals and returned to work; the conference met, most of their demands were granted, and Walsh was released—as 'an act of leniency'—soon after.⁴⁵ It took another strike of Sydney seamen before all the companies agreed to accept the conditions of settlement, but finally the economic victory was complete. The political honours were about even—the government had preserved the decencies, but everyone knew that the seamen had won.

Elsewhere in the maritime industry, the Waterside Workers' Federation was fighting an unsuccessful running war for the abolition of the shipowners' Labor Bureaus, through which 1917 'loyalists' and returned servicemen were still being given preference in employment over unionists;⁴⁶ while marine stewards, cooks, and engineers succeeded, by a judicious mixture of direct action and arbitration, in forcing wage

ries.* It was a disturbed year on the waterfront, and the maritime unions, because of the reluctance of the government and the shipowners to confer, were generally supported by the rest of the labour movement. The 1919-20 maritime strikes were a conscious turn towards direct action; but this was moderated by the influence of the other unions, which eventually brought the parties to confer and compromise.

Broken Hill, notorious for the length of its industrial disputes, surpassed all its previous records with the strike of miners which began on 20 May 1919 and ended, four months after a formal settlement was reached, on 11 November the following year.

The trouble began when the carpenters employed in the mines stopped work on 22 April 1919 in support of a wages claim. Employed on timbering, they were key men in the industry, and the Mine Managers' Association threatened a general lockout if work were not resumed.⁴⁷ A week later they were joined by the members of the Engine-Drivers' and Firemen's Association, who were objecting to working with some of their fellows who had left the Association to join up with the Miners' Federation.⁴⁸

The demarcation dispute did not last long: despite their adherence to the One Big Union the miners agreed to recognize the E.D.F.A., and preparations were made to resume work. However, the mine managers announced that, as the carpenters were still on strike, it would not be possible to re-employ all the men at once. The miners and the engine-drivers looked on this as a lockout, and, as the three-year agreement which had ended the 1916 strike was due to expire in a few weeks, they drafted a log of claims which they submitted to the companies. When this was rejected, the miners, by a big majority, called a strike. The demands were those which had been incorporated in the log of claims: abolition of contract work and a minimum wage of £1 a day; abolition of the night shift; and, because of the prevalence of phthisis and other industrial diseases, a 30-hour week and adequate compensation for illness or death.†

* *Worker*, Jan.-Feb. 1920, *passim*. In the marine engineers' strike, the Commonwealth used what was at that time the unusual device of freezing the union's funds, a measure which the N.S.W. Labor Council described as 'one of the gravest attacks upon Unionism ever made in Australia' (N.S.W. Labor Council, *Report*, 31 December 1920, p. 9). This technique has since become standard practice.

† P. J. Brookfield and J. Wright, M.L.A.S. (*Worker*, 29 May 1919). The Barrier strike provided an interesting example of the sectarian socialist attitude to economic demands and industrial action. A leading member of the A.S.P. in Broken Hill said that these demands would mean 'an economic gain and a social advance'. W. J. Thomas, a leading A.S.P. theorist, replied that this comment revealed a 'colossal ignorance' of economics, for, even if the demands were won, they would not improve the workers' lot. More diplomatically, the *International Socialist* (22 November

There was a fatalistic air about the union's approach to the strike. It was apparent that the companies were in a good tactical position—they had large stocks of ore at grass, and with the end of the war the European metal market had collapsed. There was little prospect of an early compromise and both sides settled down for a long fight—the companies by allowing the water to rise in the mines, the men by demanding that the government open up public works in the area to provide alternative employment and by appealing to their fellow-unionists for financial support.⁴⁹

The two craft unions had soon had enough. In June, the engine-drivers decided to go back to work, pending a Court hearing. Three months later, the carpenters voted by a small majority to resume work. But still the miners were recalcitrant—as were the owners, even when J. M. Baddeley, the president of the mining union, threatened to extend the strike, declaring that it would be better for the industry to cease operations altogether than to continue under the existing conditions. Still trying to keep clear of the Arbitration Court, the union proposed a special tribunal on the industry with power to investigate the companies' finances; but the companies would have none of this.⁵⁰

Six months later—when the strike had already been going for a year and the men had lost close to £1½ million in wages—the Melbourne Trades Hall Council intervened and arranged a further conference, but the companies would not budge on the hours demand and the miners again rejected their terms.⁵¹ Finally it was left to the new N.S.W. Labor government to initiate the settlement. On government instructions, Mr Justice Edmunds, President of the Board of Trade, convened a compulsory conference. Both parties agreed in advance to his findings, but when these included a substantial reduction in hours the owners reneged.⁵² The following month, by agreement, the dispute was referred to a joint tribunal of owners and men. By September an acceptable compromise had been reached: the hours of work should be forty-four, whistle to whistle, provided that adequate provision was made for compensation for the disabled, but if not they should be thirty-five. The minimum wage was set at fifteen shillings a day—considerably less than the miners had claimed, but nevertheless a rise of two shillings.⁵³ But even this settlement did not end the troubles of the Barrier men. The metal market was still depressed and the owners were in no hurry to open the mines. It was not until mid-November—almost eighteen months after the outbreak of the strike—that the men began to go back to work; a month later, it was still reported that

1919), in an editorial note, agreed with Thomas's theoretical point, but said that the working class would inevitably be forced into strikes to defend its economic position, and that the paper did not want to weaken the workers' morale and therefore would not publish any more discussion of this sort during the strike.

the majority were unemployed and that distress was widespread.⁵⁴ By now the miners were feeling the pinch of the international economic crisis, and it was not until the economy began to pick up that anything like full employment was again known in Broken Hill. For all the remarkable solidarity of the men, it had been a tremendously costly strike—the men's loss in wages was of the order of £2½ million and the union was said to have spent £100,000 on strike pay⁵⁵—and there was little to show for it, unless it was confirmation of the lesson that the one big unionists were accustomed to draw from all sectional disputes, that the only solution was industrial unionism so that 'an injury to one' could in reality become 'an injury to all'.

Perhaps the most significant industrial issue of these immediate post-war years was the movement, headed by the craft unions, for the 44-hour week. Little had been done since the beginning of the century to alter working hours, except for the generally successful move to compress the 48-hour week into five and a half days, thus enabling workers to enjoy the 'Saturday half-holiday'. The shorter working week had often been canvassed as a way of providing jobs for the unemployed, but the times when this argument was most relevant were also the times when it was most difficult to do anything about it. The miners had won the 44-hour week by direct action during the war; now, with employment at a high level in the skilled trades, the craft unions took up the running.

As with the original 8-hours campaign, the building trades were in the lead: in Melbourne in January 1920 and in Sydney in March sections of building workers resolved to refuse work on Saturday mornings, thus returning to the tactic which had been successful in the earlier struggle.⁵⁶ The Master Builders threatened a lockout, and in New South Wales the Arbitration Court varied the bricklayers' award to reduce their wages by four hours' pay and fined the union £100 for participating in an illegal strike.⁵⁷

Building for the moment was booming, the building tradesmen were in a good bargaining position, and the unions ignored the employers' response. On 10 April 1920 a congress of N.S.W. unions met to plan their action. The O.B.U. advocates were concerned to demonstrate the efficacy of their prescriptions; the unions were grouped according to their industries and urged to go ahead, industry by industry, with the boycott of Saturday work.⁵⁸ The general strategy was to support action by the skilled workers, since there was considerable unemployment among labourers but a good demand for tradesmen.

Before this issue could be resolved, the A.W.U. was involved in a strike (the first for many years) to secure this advance for all its members. The A.W.U. leaders had repeatedly declared their adherence

to arbitration and their abhorrence of direct action, and a wartime ballot of members had overwhelmingly supported this position; but now they were forced to recant. The Queensland branch of the union had been granted the shorter week by the state Arbitration Court, but at the opening of the 1920 shearing season the Federal award, under which the rest of the union was operating, still had six months to run. No matter how much the officials might discount it, the danger of losing members to the W.I.U. of A. was always present, and the A.W.U. executive had little choice but to declare for the general application of the 44-hour week throughout the industry.⁵⁹

By negotiation with the pastoralists' organizations the union was able to extend the shorter hours to all states except New South Wales, and even here only a section of the state was holding out.⁶⁰ An effective two months' withdrawal of labour from the shearing sheds in central New South Wales finally brought the Graziers' Association into line, and the shorter hours were universally conceded.⁶¹

Meanwhile the building trades throughout the eastern states were continuing their Saturday morning boycott. There had been some lockouts and some resumptions of work, but the campaign was still alive, and it was now joined by metal trades workers in New South Wales. The New South Wales government ordered an investigation by the President of the Board of Trade (Mr Justice Beeby), who recommended legislation for the 44-hour week, immediately for the building trades and in six months' time for the metal trades. The time difference was justified by the greater reorganization involved for workshops and foundries, but the Labor Council had a different explanation. 'Why the difference?' asked Secretary Garden in his 1920 report. 'The Building Trades kept to their determination to take the 44-hour week. Because of that the Judge says: Give it to them at once. Because the Iron Trades were not so determined in their stand they have to wait six months. A wonderful lesson. . . .'

Despite (or, as the Labor Council would have argued, because of) the widespread direct action, it was by 'constitutional' means that most workers finally won the shorter working week. The movement which had started with the determined industrial action of the N.S.W. coal-miners and metal-miners in 1916 was completed by the mixture of direct action and legal process adopted by the A.W.U. and the skilled crafts in 1920; this combination of industrial strength and legal argument has since been a recurrent pattern in Australian industrial relations.

The concentration on working hours was in part due to the fact that many unions had come, in this period of rapidly rising prices, to accept the well-established Marxian dictum that there was little permanent gain to be had from wage increases but that significant improvement

could be won on the hours front,* that they had 'awakened to the fatality [*sic*]† of chasing the living wage [which] is like the endless chain—the faster you run, the quicker the chain goes, and you are progressing not one inch'.⁶² Nevertheless, wages discontent was widespread and persistent, and it was accompanied by the never-ending argument about whether wage rises followed or caused price increases. (The answer in these years—as in any period of price inflation—was both; money wages lagged behind the cost of living, and when adjustments were made they were as far as possible passed on to the consumer.)

Various remedies were canvassed in the unions, from a boycott of the products of 'profiteers' and a ban on the export of consumer goods like that operated for a time in 1915-16 to the organization of the one big union for the overthrow of capitalism, but none met with general support.⁶³ Nevertheless, the discontent was there, and rising along with the price level, and something had to be done about it. Prime Minister Hughes made a three-pronged attack on the problem and the industrial unrest which went with it in his policy speech for the 1919 Federal elections: he promised a Royal Commission into the basic wage, he foreshadowed amendments to the Commonwealth arbitration law, and he asked the people to support, in a referendum which was voted upon at the same time as the elections, a constitutional amendment which would give the Commonwealth powers to deal with monopolies and a general power over trade and commerce and industrial matters.‡ In the event, the referendum was defeated, both Labor and Nationalist parties being divided in their attitudes and advice. The arbitration law was amended to provide for a Commonwealth conciliation mechanism and a series of special tribunals with power to make determinations for particular industries; this so cut across the power of the existing Court that Mr Justice Higgins immediately submitted his resignation.§

* This was disputed by contemporary Australian adherents of Marx's theories on two grounds: that the successful move for forty-four hours was conditional on the immediate favourable tactical situation and therefore might not last long (in this they were right in the short run, but—as a glance at the history of the 8-hour movement could have told them—wrong in the long run); and that the reduced working hours would immediately be countered by employers' pressure for a greater intensity of labour (this was a more substantial point, and, in so far as intensity of labour was regarded as synonymous with hourly output, it was clearly correct, but this overlooked the effect of mechanization on productivity) (*Inter. Soc.*, 24 April 1920; *Rev. Soc.*, 6 November 1920).

† This is clearly a misprint for 'futility' but it is a happy error.

‡ The proposed changes were similar to but rather less extensive than those sought by the Fisher government pre-war and those canvassed but abandoned in 1915.

§ Labour movement reactions to this varied. The Federal parliamentary party and the A.W.U. and other pro-arbitration unions regarded the changes as evidence of Hughes's determination to get rid of a judge who had, in his twelve years as President of the Court, proved himself a friend of the workers. Left-wing opinion was reflected by the *Socialist's* comment (13 August 1920), 'Arbitration Tricksters Quarrel'.

But the real shock was the Basic Wage Commission, under the chairmanship of A. B. Piddington, which was directed to inquire into the present cost of living for a family of five and possible means of adjusting wages to meet changes in the cost of living. Pointing out that the Federal basic wage had never rested on a proper inquiry into what constituted an adequate living standard and what this would cost to maintain, the Commission proceeded to make such an investigation and came up with the astonishing finding that, to keep a man, his wife, and three children on an acceptable standard at current prices, £5. 16s. a week was necessary. Answering the second question, the Commission recommended quarterly adjustments of the wage to meet changes in the cost of living.*

The Prime Minister was horrified. To implement these findings would add something like £100 million a year to the annual wages bill, and this was unthinkable. Anticipating this reaction, the Commission had considered other possibilities and had proposed that the basic wage be fixed at £4—a living wage for a man and his wife—and that the Commonwealth raise, by what would now be called a pay-roll tax, sufficient funds to pay child endowment at the rate of 12s. per child; this would clearly cost far less, but even so the Prime Minister felt that it would need a deal of thought.⁶⁴

The Piddington Commission provided the unions with an ideal peg on which to hang their agitation for higher wages, but the immediate post-war militancy and optimism were already passing. The best that the federal unions could do, at their conference held on 4 December 1920 to discuss the government's refusal to implement the Commission's findings, was to pass what the *Socialist* justly described as a 'miserably weak' resolution which called on unions to keep the Piddington figures before Federal and State governments by propaganda, but proposed no stronger action.⁶⁵ The brief boom had passed its peak; the economy was moving into recession, unemployment was rising, the employers' counter-attack was developing, and once more the unions were swung from industrial action back into politics.

* *Report of Royal Commission on the Basic Wage*, Aust. Parl. Pap., 1920-1, Vol. IV, pp. 529 ff. This contrasted sharply with the recently announced finding of the N.S.W. Board of Trade that £4. 5s. was a living wage. On the wages-prices spiral, the Commission recognized that, if their findings were implemented, prices would rise, but argued that only part of the wage increase would be passed on, so that, with regular quarterly adjustments, this would have a diminishing effect.

Socialism and Communism

AN IMPORTANT PART of the new turn to politics was the creation of a new kind of revolutionary party, based on a new international model. The Russian revolution of March 1917 had been received enthusiastically by the Australian labour movement: it meant both the downfall of a notorious tyranny and the first challenge to the insane destruction of the European war, and the whole of the labour press, from the *Worker* to *Direct Action*, rejoiced in the triumph of the Russian democracy. The November revolution for a time went almost unnoticed: on the same day that the news of the storming of the Winter Palace reached Australia the Prime Minister announced the second conscription referendum, and the local news was of more vital concern to Australian radicals, who in any case knew little of the factional disputes of the Russian left. But two essential facts soon became clear and ensured an equally wide support for the new revolution—the workers had taken over the factories, and the Soviets had issued their call to the governments and the peoples to end the war. There was an intense curiosity about the new developments.

Almost the only people in Australia who knew what was happening were the Russian *émigrés*. These were radicals almost to a man, mostly refugees from 1905, and deeply involved in the fierce debates of the Russian labour movement.* With the Bolshevik victory and the appointment in January 1918 of Peter Simonoff (a former Broken Hill miner and now secretary of the Russian Association in Brisbane) as Russian Consul-General in Australia, the local Bolsheviks began to preach the truths of the revolution to Australian socialists. The picture was far from clear, but everyone agreed that the Russian workers were attempting, in Upton Sinclair's words 'humanity's first experiment in industrial

* A Union of Russian Immigrants (the 'Russian Association') had been formed in 1911; it published three papers—*Echo of Australia* (1912-13); *Izvestia* (1913 to its suppression in 1915); and *Workers' Life* (1915 to its suppression in 1918). The organization changed its name in 1919 to the Union of Russian Workers, which published a new paper, *Knowledge and Unity*.

self-government'.¹ Each group, however, saw in this a justification of its own position. The inheritors of the I.W.W. pointed the lesson of direct action; the A.S.P. emphasized the Marxian orthodoxy of the Bolsheviks; the S.L.P. made great play with an apocryphal story concerning Lenin's admiration for Daniel De Leon.

In the early months the most widely publicized of the pronouncements of the Soviet government (apart from its plea for peace) was the decree of 16 November 1917 on the control of industry by the workers engaged therein. The most widely circulated eye-witness accounts emphasized the new place and pride of the Russian proletariat in the process of production.² All this convinced Australian socialists and syndicalists alike that in essentials the Bolsheviks were fulfilling the hopes of the working-class movements, and their concern with the Russian revolution was twofold: to protect it against capitalist intervention, and to find out how it had been done. Australians could do little about the first of these except to demonstrate their solidarity—often by passing resolutions, sometimes by the public display of the symbol of the international revolution, the Red Flag;* but as more and more information emerged from Moscow, the second became a more practical question.

One conclusion that was drawn early by many Australian socialists was the importance of implanting revolutionary theories firmly in the mass labour movement; in Melbourne, late in 1917, W. P. Earsman, Guido Baracchi, and several members of the V.S.P. formed a Labor College under the aegis of the Victorian Railways Union and began to hold classes in economics, philosophy, and industrial strategy,³ and in 1919 Earsman took this movement to Sydney, where it found a home with the Labor Council.⁴ But there were still as many versions of just what the unionists were to be taught as there were socialist and syndicalist sects and splinter groups.

The end-of-the-war confusion on the left was by late 1919 even worse confounded. The A.S.P. had moved further away from industrialist theories and had begun a bitter argument with the De Leonite W.I.I.U., in the course of which the De Leonite organization in Sydney disappeared and the A.S.P. branch in Melbourne abandoned the party to concentrate on industrial propaganda through the W.I.I.U. The remnants of the I.W.W. in Sydney had formed themselves into the Industrial Labor Party, but this had split when a group of its members conceded the possibility of co-operation with other elements—even politicians—in the campaign for the release of the Twelve, and broke away to form the International Industrial Workers. This organization

* There were no Australian troops involved in the interventionary armies; the most the Australian government did was to prevent revolutionary *émigrés* returning to Russia, and to ban the flying of the Red Flag and gaol offenders.

did not prosper in Sydney, but in Melbourne it gathered in a group of former I.W.Ws. who had re-formed as the O.B.U. Propaganda League, and in Adelaide it captured the local branch of the A.S.P. for the pure anti-political faith. In Queensland a series of O.B.U. Propaganda Leagues brought together the militant industrialists. The V.S.P. was again torn between those who saw it as a 'ginger group' inside the Labor Party and those who wanted it to break the link. The 1919 breakaways from the N.S.W. Labor Party—the Industrial Socialist Labor Party—had disintegrated. Some remained outside the political organizations; others joined the S.L.P.; while Brookfield and the Barrier organizations which had followed him maintained an independent existence, later to emerge as another Industrial Labor Party: between them, however, these groups controlled the important W.I.U. of A. (the One Big Union). The S.L.P. held to its lonely path, steadfastly refusing all the attempts of the A.S.P. to inveigle it into an amalgamation but steadily losing members in the process. Between them these organizations had at most two thousand members, and the combined circulation of all their papers would have been between five and ten thousand copies,* but—so far as their theories permitted—they enjoyed an influence beyond their numbers. The V.S.P. was entrenched in the Melbourne Trades Hall Council and the Victorian Labor Party. The industrialists were in control of the miners' and seamen's unions, the N.S.W. Labor Council, and the Brisbane Industrial Council; they were influential in the railways and waterfront unions and in many craft unions, and had even made inroads into the A.W.U.; and from these vantage points they had won a foothold in the Labor Party. Into this tangle of organizations, theories, and tactical conceptions there was dropped, late in 1919, the 'New Communist Manifesto'—the declaration of principles and policy of the inaugural congress of the Third International, convened by the Bolsheviks and held in Moscow in March 1919.†

The question, according to the International, was this:

Shall the whole of working humanity become the feudal bond-servants of the victorious Entente bourgeoisie, which, under the name of a League of Nations, aided by an 'international' army and an 'international' navy, here plunders and murders, there throws a crumb, but everywhere enchains the proletariat, with the single aim of maintaining its own rule? Or will the working class take into its own hand the disorganised and shattered economic life and make certain its reconstruction on a Socialist basis?⁵

* Except that, for a very short time, the circulation of the O.B.U. *Herald* (the organ of the W.I.I.U.) reached over 10,000.

† This was first issued in Australia by the V.S.P. in December 1919, under the title *The New Communist Manifesto of 'The Third Internationale'* (Bolshevist and Left Wing Socialists); a more complete version, *Manifesto of the Communist International*, was issued by the Communist Party of Australia in 1921.

The Manifesto spent some time in suggesting the methods by which the implied solution might be realized. First of all, it was political action which was envisaged—but of a new kind, mass action, the spontaneous action of workingmen which, because of the direction given to it by the revolutionary vanguard, would bring the workers into conflict with the bourgeois state and would therefore take on a political character, until finally capitalism would inevitably plunge into crisis, the bourgeois state would be destroyed, and the proletarian state—the dictatorship of the proletariat—be established in its stead.

Inherent in this revolutionary mass action were three further concepts: the subordination of all immediate interests to the struggle for power, but participation in all immediate struggles in order to give them this orientation, and the creation of a centralized, disciplined party which would direct its activity to these ends. And further, involved in this new tactic was the repudiation of the sectarian isolation of the old left-wing (the A.S.P.), the anti-political dogma of the syndicalists (the I.W.W. and its offshoots), and the parliamentary illusion of the 'centre' socialists (the V.S.P.).* The new party had a hazardous course to steer.

The Formation of the Communist Party

For revolutionaries throughout the world, the ideas of the Bolsheviks acquired great prestige—not only as an explanation of the victory of their Russian comrades but as a magic prescription for their own success. The sufficient condition for the social revolution became the pronouncement of the appropriate Leninist incantations. So in Australia the A.S.P., at its conference in December 1919, declared its allegiance to the Third International and announced 'its *immediate aim* [to be] the dictatorship of the proletariat, with all political power in the hands of the working class. In its manifesto, *Australia and the World Revolution*, it denied that any improvement in the condition of the working class was possible under capitalism, repudiated all 'immediate demands', affirmed that its attitude towards 'all other political organisations, whether alleged socialist or avowed defenders of the present social order, is one of scathing criticism and militant opposition', and declared its immediate purpose to be 'agitation . . . to arouse the workers, education to enlighten them, and organisation to marshal them for the conquest of state power'.⁶ The A.S.P., from the beginning of 1920, turned itself to this considerable task.

* Although this was implicit in the C.I. Manifesto, it was spelled out in detail in a series of documents emerging from the International and the Bolsheviks, of which the most important were Lenin's *State and Revolution* and 'Left Wing' Communism (published in Australia in 1920 and 1921); *To the I.W.W.: A special Message from the Communist International* (1920); and the various 'Theses' of the C.I., especially the *Theses on Tactics* (1921).

Meanwhile in Melbourne a Communist group had been formed by syndicalists like Baracchi, the editor of the I.I.W. paper *Industrial Solidarity*, Russian émigrés, and the left wing of the V.S.P., and during twelve months this group made a determined effort to capture the Socialist Party for the Third International. From September 1919 the V.S.P. was involved in discussion about the possibility of amalgamating the socialist and industrialist organizations throughout Australia into one united party, and this debate inevitably raised the question of the nature of the party. An attempt to change the name of the V.S.P. to 'Communist Party' was defeated, but later a Communist motion for the reorganization of the party on the lines of 'direct action [in both] political and industrial fields and no compromise (recognising only revolutionary politics)' was carried; however, at a further meeting, when the moderates had rallied their forces, this was reversed by the successful motion of R. S. Ross, the retiring party secretary,* 'that the Party continue on its present lines of action'.⁷ The Communists did not give up easily: they sought to reinforce their faction with new recruits, but the moderates more than matched them at this. Simonoff, the Bolshevik Consul, joined in with a trenchant attack on Ross and his followers entitled 'The Eunuchs of Also-Marxism'.⁸ But finally the Communists were defeated; the local branch of the party in which they had concentrated was expelled, their spokesmen were removed from the party executive, and their members were declared to be ineligible to belong to the V.S.P.⁹

As well as providing a new creed for the socialist sects, the Bolshevik concept of mass action provided those revolutionaries who were embedded in the mass organizations—the trade unions particularly—with a new approach to, and a justification for, the organization and direction of their activity. For these men, centred in the N.S.W. Labor Council and the One Big Union movement, what was important was not so much the doctrine as the creation of a cohesive organization which could 'direct and control through its members every industrial dispute and disturbance of the workers, keeping always in mind the same end—social revolution—and trying to utilise every spontaneous action of the workers for that one end'.¹⁰ The O.B.U. militants, together with Tom Glynn and a number of other ex-I.W.Ws., formed a secret Communist group in August or September 1920, in close co-operation with the Melbourne group, and issued their own manifesto. This was not unlike the A.S.P.'s December 1919 declaration, but there were two significant differences: a more definite emphasis on participation in mass

* Ross's views were cogently put in his pamphlet, *Revolution in Russia and Australia*; the burden of his argument was that the methods of the Russian revolution were determined by the Tsarist autocracy and were inapplicable to the Australian democracy.

industrial struggles (as in the passage quoted above), and no denunciation of other political organizations.

These points did not seem at the outset particularly important to the members of the A.S.P., who first adopted the anonymously-issued manifesto and then invited its sponsors to join them in a conference to launch the Communist Party on 30 October 1920. The 'united' party, however, lasted only six weeks; the A.S.P. withdrew its representatives from the newly constituted executive, alleging personal ambitions on the part of the 'Trades Hall' group,* and declared themselves to be the Communist Party. There were now two parties, with separate headquarters, executives, and weekly newspapers, each claiming allegiance to the International.†

The magic of the word 'Communist' was sufficient in itself to stimulate the formation of groups in the other capital cities, on the N.S.W. coal-fields, and in North Queensland, in which all the existing radical groups except the V.S.P. and the S.L.P. participated.‡ But the argument between the 'Trades Hall' and the 'Goulburn Street' parties remained a stumbling-block. The phenomenon of a number of small groups, each claiming to be the one true disciple of Bolshevism, was not confined to Australia, and from its inaugural congress the International demanded that these groups unite. In the local situation the Trades Hall party was in the stronger position, since it was not so intent on doctrinal rectitude and could therefore legitimately claim to be more interested than its Goulburn Street rival in amalgamating the two organizations.§ At least, this was how the Communists outside Sydney saw the issue, and most of them declared for the Trades Hall.

The argument was obscure and often unpleasantly personal, with accusations of self-seeking, fact-twisting, and misuse of funds tossed recklessly from side to side. But there were substantial points at issue—the two already noted, and the proper attitude of Communists towards industrial unionism. The Goulburn Street party accused Garden

* A.S.P. nominees were defeated for the positions of secretary of the new party and editor of its paper. (W. P. Earsman and Tom Glynn were appointed.)

† *Aust. Comm.*, 24 December 1920. This was the paper of the 'Trades Hall' C.P.; later (13 May 1921) it became simply *The Communist*. The A.S.P. or 'Goulburn Street' C.P. changed its *International Socialist* to *International Communist* from the beginning of 1921.

‡ Apart from its usual objections to amalgamation with the other socialist bodies, the S.L.P. was opposed to the C.P. acceptance of the inevitability of violence and to its advocacy of secret ('illegal') organization, both of which it claimed opened the way for *provocateurs* (*Rev. Soc.*, 6 November 1920). But this intransigence cost the S.L.P. many members—e.g. the whole of its Balmain branch, which included many of the leading members, defected to the C.P. (*ibid.*, 2 April 1921).

§ The Goulburn Street party finally reached the point of insisting that the Trades Hall group be liquidated and that its members apply individually for admission to their party (*Aust. Comm.*, 24 June 1921).

and Earsman of being 'opportunistic' in their approach to the trade union movement and the Labor Party, of sacrificing revolutionary principle in order to win positions in the unions, or to reach agreement with such reactionary organizations as the A.W.U.,¹¹ and were in turn condemned as 'sectarians' with no real understanding of Communist tactics.¹² Goulburn Street also accused the Trades Hall party of admitting to membership people who were syndicalists rather than communists, and here they were on more secure ground. The International, in its appeal to the I.W.W., had made clear its points of difference with the syndicalists—specifically the need for political action and the establishment of a 'workers' state'—as well as its agreement on the need for 'an industrial administrative body, which will be something like the General Executive Board of the I.W.W.',¹³ to organize production. Glynn had accepted most of these points, but in the *Australian Communist*, of which he was editor, he argued that such a conjunction of events as had occurred in Russia might never happen elsewhere, and that therefore industrial unionism was the appropriate means of bringing about the collapse of Australian capitalism.* Such ideas were anathema to the old A.S.P.¹⁴

The International, however, was more flexible. Despite the doctrinal differences, it was anxious not to cut itself off from any potential adherents except the 'patriotic' socialists and the 'centrists', who in any case were not really potential adherents; it recognized differences in principle between its position and that of the syndicalists but regarded the I.W.W.s. as sincere revolutionaries, while it insisted (perhaps disingenuously) that there was nothing to keep the 'left' Communists and other Comintern supporters apart. Accordingly it demanded (as it was doing in other countries) that the parties unite, and went so far as to send a secret emissary to Australia to try to bring this about—but without success. Even when it threatened non-recognition of any Australian group—a powerful weapon when the title 'Section of the Third International' was a decoration to be worn with pride—the Goulburn Street party stood on its dignity and refused amalgamation.

Finally, it was the Trades Hall group which won the day.† Their

* *Aust. Comm.*, 31 December 1920. Glynn, together with J. B. King, later in the year broke away from the C.P. to form the Industrial Union Propaganda League, a pure industrialist organization, and began (1 December 1921) to republish *Direct Action*. There was a temporary *rapprochement*, following a 'unity conference' in February 1922, when the C.P. agreed to recognize the I.U.P.L. as the Australian section of the Red International of Labor Unions, provided that it subordinated itself to the party; but this did not last long—the ideological gap was too wide—and Glynn and King finally left the C.P. in March 1922.

† The turning-point was the new line adopted by the Third Congress of the C.I., which, under the slogan 'Right down into the masses', declared that the post-war revolutionary impetus had come to a stop and urged a policy of increased

central organization was not as strong as that of their rival, but they had the support of the majority of Communists outside Sydney and above all they had far more influence in the mass labour movement; purity of doctrine could not compete with the capacity to influence events—besides which, they were closer to the current line of the International. To this accident of the formation of the Communist Party by the trade union militants who were in positions of strength in the industrial movement the party owes much of the character it still has—that of an organization whose power is on the industrial rather than the political side of the movement, and whose major function is to act as a militant fraction within the unions.

Trade Unions and Politics: The Socialist Objective

Specifically, the formation of the Communist Party was a response to the Bolshevik victory and the belief among Australian revolutionaries that the inevitable and rapid spread of the world revolution would require, for its local fulfilment, the development of a Bolshevik-type organization in Australia. In more general terms, it was part of the turn back to politics which accompanied the rapid deterioration of the economy from the second half of 1920. As the *Proletarian** said in April 1921:

The workers now lie in the slough of a great industrial depression, slack is the demand for their labor-power, and, in these conditions, vain the hope of an improvement in their lot by the methods of the everyday struggle. . . . The conditions are now ripe for the workers to pass beyond the narrow confines of [this] struggle to the broad field of revolutionary political action. . . .

The general argument was sound; all that was wrong with it was the identification of the minority of working-class activists with the class as a whole, and the assumption that the political action, when it came, would be revolutionary.

The Australian recession was the product of post-war readjustment and of world crisis. Employment of ex-servicemen had been accomplished with only minor dislocation, but the re-entry of manufactured imports created difficulties for many industries which had been developed or expanded during the war. At the same time, Australia's export earnings were hit by the collapse of the metal market, the failure to

Communist activity in every kind of working-class organization, especially the unions. The Goulburn Street party refused to attend a further conference; its largest (the Sydney) branch broke away and joined the Trades Hall party (*Communist*, 24 February, 30 June 1922).

* This, the first Communist (in the modern sense) journal to be published in Australia, commenced publication in Melbourne in June 1920; it was edited by Guido Baracchi who had previously been editor of the I.L.W.'s *Industrial Solidarity*.

regain pre-war coal markets, and the fall of world prices for primary products; while the difficulty of raising funds in London restricted employment opportunities for unskilled workers. The consequences were, from late 1920, rapidly rising unemployment, growing employer resistance to trade union demands, and the beginnings of an employer counter-offensive.

It was not that they were against trade unionism, the employers explained; on the contrary, they welcomed craft unionism, but it was their not unfamiliar desire to 'help the sober, decent worker' get rid of Bolshevism, I.W.W.-ism, sabotage, go-slow, and job control—and in the process to bring hours and wages back to a level which was more acceptable to themselves. If there was no other way to do it, then industry would have to be stopped.¹⁵

The first fruit of this policy was the shipping lockout. Late in 1920 the marine stewards had struck for an 8-hour day, and inevitably this had involved the seamen. The shipowners chose to make this a trial of strength, and even when the stewards conceded defeat they refused to allow the seamen to man the ships until their union agreed to relinquish the gains it had made by direct action in 1919 and the hated practice of 'job control'—which meant that the union had to agree to a reduction in the size of crews and a corresponding increase in the work load.¹⁶

At the same time metal-miners were hard hit by the reluctance of the Broken Hill companies to reopen their mines and by the closure of copper mines in Queensland, South Australia, and Tasmania; while, with unemployment mounting, there was a drift of labour to the coal-fields and a general introduction of short time.

On the wages front, the Commonwealth Arbitration Court rejected a trade union application for the implementation of the findings of the Piddington Commission; while, towards the end of 1921, the N.S.W. Board of Trade found for a reduction in the N.S.W. basic wage, and there was general employer resistance to the 44-hour week. What was threatened, the trade unions felt, was 'an unprecedented reduction of the standard of living and the social status of the workers',¹⁷ and they reacted accordingly.

A powerful front of unions—the Labor Councils and the federal unions of land transport and maritime workers—met the shipping lockout with a revolutionary challenge to the employers and the government. 'Carefully deliberating on the disabilities and limitations of the working class movement in this country,' they declared, 'and anticipating the threadbare argument that the working class are not ready, we state emphatically, to safeguard the Movement from disaster, the time for battle is now.' But there must be no repetition of the '1917 fiasco'; the unions must form a Council of Action, empowered 'to

order a cessation of work, or to take any action deemed necessary', and 'to organise the forces to take charge of and regulate food necessary for the working class to live'.* The bluff was for the moment successful; the Commonwealth government relented on its previous unwillingness to appoint a tribunal to consider the shipping dispute, and within five days the trouble was over.¹⁸

On another level, the unions returned to their attempts to build the One Big Union. Substantial left-wing pressure at the 1921 A.W.U. Convention strengthened the desire of the A.W.U. officials for a *rapprochement* with the W.I.U. of A., and in March 1921 new negotiations were opened between the A.W.U., the miners, the A.M.I.E.U., the W.I.U. of A., and the recently formed Australian Railways Union.† There was some Communist criticism of this move—the A.W.U. was committed to parliamentary action and to arbitration‡ and was mainly concerned to divert the discontent of its rank and file—but this came from Glynn and his fellow syndicalists;¹⁹ Garden had had a change of mind, and now believed that the A.W.U. could 'take its place at the head of the rural workers and pastoral departments of the O.B.U. . . . without . . . losing any of its identity, or any loss of status by the officials',²⁰ while the miners' leaders had long been convinced of the impossibility of building the One Big Union from the bottom up. The conference decided on the formation of an Australasian Workers' Union with a preamble and structure like that of the W.I.U. of A. but with two new features which drew heavy fire from the left: a 'White Australia' membership clause, and a provision for tight central control over industrial action. However, the majority of the Trades Hall Communists were now convinced of the necessity of working within (and therefore with) the A.W.U. and other 'reactionary' unions, which they justified by Lenin's pronouncement that the desire 'to create . . . brand-new clean little "workers' unions"' was 'ridiculous and

* Report of All-Australian Industrial Conference, 17-23 February 1921, quoted in N.S.W. Labor Council, *Report*, 31 December 1921, pp. 11-12. The idea of the 'Council of Action' was borrowed from a similar organization, formed by the British trade unions and Labour Party in August 1920 to take action in the event of British intervention in the Soviet-Polish war. Commenting on the obvious similarity with the Russian Soviets, the *Proletarian* (March 1921) warned: 'Revolutionary situations without doubt produce Soviets; Soviets, on the other hand, cannot produce revolutionary situations.'

† The Seamen's Union and the Waterside Workers' Federation were reported also to support the conference.

‡ In a ballot at the end of 1920, in which about 20 per cent of the members had voted, the A.W.U. had supported continued adherence to arbitration by 16,000 votes to 10,000.

childish nonsense'; and, as the Australasian Workers' Union was born, the Workers' Industrial Union of Australia passed quietly away.*

These preoccupations reflected, in considerable measure, the industrialist dissatisfaction with the performance of labour in politics. In the last months of the war the trend in by-elections had been toward the Labor Party, but two new and virtually unknown factors were involved in the post-war elections—the emergence of an independent party claiming to represent the farming interest, and the ex-service vote. The Federal Labor Party was taking no chances; in its policy for the December 1919 election it offered to the workers social services and to the farmers rural credits and insurance against natural disasters,† and did its best to top the big Nationalist bid for ex-service support. The resulting programme of palliatives was described by the *Socialist* as 'a barren and spiritless production', and indeed it did little to revive the flagging trade union enthusiasm for the party.²¹ The Labor vote fell slightly from its 1917 level; however, the entry of the Country Party took votes from the Nationalists rather than from Labor; this enabled the party to show a net gain of five seats over the previous election, but this was not enough for a majority. The hopes of the politicians had been high, the campaign had been energetic, and the disappointment was correspondingly great: the workers were not sufficiently intelligent to realize their servitude, said H. E. Boote bad-temperedly—they 'didn't want a Labor victory';²² while the *Revolutionary Socialist* commented resignedly that 'the sheep have voted for their slaughterers'.²³ On the left, it seemed that the party had brought defeat on itself by its own timidity; however, it was the performance of Labor governments in New South Wales and Queensland, rather than the deficient election promises of the Federal party, that most disturbed trade unionists.

A major issue between the N.S.W. unions and the parliamentary party

* See *Aust. Comm.*, 18 March 1921, which called on the W.I.U. of A. to urge its supporters to reject the new organization. The quote from Lenin is from '*Left Wing*' *Communism*, a work to which Garden referred freely in justifying his position. This clear disagreement may have prompted Glynn's resignation as editor (announced 25 March 1921). Criticism of the 'reactionary' provisions of the Australasian Workers' Union constitution continued, but the accepted position was that Communists should work for amendment from inside rather than standing outside to 'sling muck'. This was the real point at issue between the Goulburn Street and the Trades Hall Communists, and represented the decisive victory of the 'boring from within' tactic—or, at it was now known, 'permeation'—over the earlier 'dual unionism' or 'building from below', of the W.I.U. of A. which the Goulburn Street C.P. still advocated.

† *Worker*, 9 October 1919. T. J. Ryan, who had been invited by the Commonwealth Conference of the A.L.P. to enter federal politics, was campaign director. It was expected that Ryan would after a short time replace Tudor as leader, but he died in 1921, aged only forty-five, before this could be realized. For policy statement, see *Worker*, 13 November 1919.

was the continued imprisonment of the I.W.W. Twelve. Despite the adverse decision of the Street Commission, the militants had kept the question alive in the party, while, outside the official structure, a representative committee continued to raise sufficient funds to support the dependants of the three married prisoners.* Now, with an election impending, the Labor Council, by seeking pledges from candidates to support unconditional release, made the issue 'the pre-eminent one before the elections'.²⁴ The Labor Party replied that it was prepared to order a further investigation in order 'to allay public suspicion', but that to go further might 'cost Labor its otherwise assured victory . . . because it [would give] the unthinking electors the idea that Labor is opposed to law, order, and justice whereas quite the opposite is the fact'.²⁵ When the results were known, the parliamentary party found that it could only take office with the support of two independent labour members who were pledged to unconditional release; and they, along with a section of caucus, pressed the new government hard.

Knowing that the N.S.W. bench was opposed to a further inquiry, the Premier, John Storey, turned after some delay to 'a junior judge . . . from a junior state'²⁶—Mr Justice Ewing of the Tasmanian Supreme Court. The Commission was issued on 15 June 1920 and the report was tabled six weeks later. The findings of Mr Justice Ewing were much more to the taste of the defence than had been those of Mr Justice Street. Six of the Twelve were declared to have been improperly convicted; four were declared to have been properly convicted of seditious conspiracy, but not of the other charges, and to have been sufficiently punished; J. B. King's sentence of five years' imprisonment for seditious conspiracy, cumulative on the three he was already serving for forgery, was deemed excessive; Charles Reeve alone was declared to have been properly convicted of arson and conspiracy, and his sentence was deemed reasonable.²⁷ Mr Justice Ewing had little evidence before him that had not been available to the previous inquiry, but what there was helped him to describe the principal Crown witnesses, Scully and the brothers Goldstein, as 'liars and perjurers, . . . men who, whenever it served their own ends, and irrespective of the consequences to other persons, would not hesitate to lie, whether upon oath or otherwise'.²⁸ He concluded that there was indeed a conspiracy to burn down buildings in Sydney, in which some members of the I.W.W. (and the informers) were implicated, but that the evidence connecting the prisoners (except for Reeve) with this conspiracy was insufficient, or insufficiently reliable, to support their conviction. Beyond this, he thought it likely that there had been an attempt to manufacture evidence against the prisoners—

* Minutes of Relief Committee of the Dependants of the I.W.W. Men. Nearly £1,000 was raised between 1918 and 1920—sufficient to pay each of the three families £2 a week.

but this he attributed to the three informers. Mr Justice Street had already found against a police conspiracy to secure convictions and Mr Justice Ewing was not prepared to overrule his brother judge—and so rejected the only feasible explanation of the manufactured evidence. On 4 August 1920, the gates of Long Bay gaol opened for ten of the I.W.W. Twelve.

The continued imprisonment of King and Reeve was the only blight on the celebrations. It was a delicate question for the government: Storey, under heavy pressure, would undoubtedly have liked to let them out, but he could not plead the Ewing Report as he had been able to do with the others. In November 1920 the government reached a private understanding with the Defence Committee that Reeve and King should be released, on condition that they left the country. Unfortunately for the prisoners, the Commonwealth government refused to issue the necessary passports. Finally, in August 1921, King was quietly released by executive pardon, and three months later Reeve, the last of the Twelve, was freed.

The Twelve had from one to eleven years of their lives for which to thank political action, and the politicians were not slow to point the moral:

The men would still be in jail, with no prospect whatever of liberation, had the Labor Party been defeated at the polls. . . . Labor's victory in New South Wales was the culminating point of the agitation for release. That is something to be made a note of by all sorts of people who never give it a thought and by a number of others who don't want to give it a thought. . . .²⁹

Justice depended on who was administering it, and that in turn depended on which party formed the government of the day—and the cause of political action was vindicated. But such a comment was already redundant: there was little remaining belief in the anti-political dogmas of the I.W.W., and what the militants were now asserting was that the kind of political diet the Labor Party was offering did not satisfy their revolutionary appetites.

This was one issue the industrialists won; generally, they were not so successful. The Storey government, said the new Premier, had been returned with 'only half a mandate', and it would have to 'go slow, shaping such a course as it considers *the people as a whole* want it to steer at the present time . . . by degrees, with the consent of the electors, to reconstruct the social system gradually, and make conditions happier and better for the workers'.³⁰ This emphasis on community interests was hardly calculated to appeal to the industrial wing, and in fact Storey applied his 'go slow' policy with some thoroughness. The new

parliament met fleetingly in April, recessed until September, sat until November (accomplishing 'next to nothing', charged the *Worker*),³¹ and then proposed to go into recess for a further six months. It was true that the government lacked a stable majority in the lower house and faced a hostile Legislative Council, but this was scarcely an adequate excuse to offer the unionists—better that the government should go down fighting than that it should hang on impotent. The N.S.W. executive (since 1919 dominated by the A.W.U. machine, which had its own grievances against the parliamentary party) demanded that the government convoke parliament and get on with its programme—abolition of the Legislative Council, abolition of the 'loyalist' bureaus on the waterfront, re-registration of the unions 'victimized' in 1917, legislation for the 44-hour week. Parliament did in fact meet before the planned date; the government got through legislation to implement the favourable Board of Trade finding on the 44-hour week and to get the deregistered unions back into the arbitration process, but even this did little to relieve the trade union pressure. The *rapprochement* between the A.W.U. and the Labor Council militants was well advanced, and both groups maintained a consistent attack throughout 1921. The motives of the trade union critics of the N.S.W. parliamentary Labor Party were not always above suspicion, but there can be no doubt of their persistent hostility.

A similar conflict of interests was also developing within the Queensland party, where the situation was more confused than in New South Wales because the A.W.U. operated less as a monolithic machine, but less acute because the forces were less evenly balanced and the A.W.U. quickly established its hegemony.

A successful A.W.U. move in 1916 for direct trade union representation on the party executive was an indication of the union's dissatisfaction with its place in the party machine; however, the record of the Ryan government for the time smoothed over the rift. The Union's position in the parliamentary party was strengthened by the 1918 elections, and its hold was made absolute by the resignation of T. J. Ryan to enter Federal politics* and his replacement as Premier by E. G. Theodore, the strong man of the A.W.U. By the 1920 Convention all was sweetness between the A.W.U. and the Labor Party; the *Worker* reported that, contrary to expectations, there were practically no divisions 'on the big questions of method and control'.³²

There was, however, a subterranean opposition from the militant-led Brisbane Industrial Council and Queensland Railways Union as well as from rank-and-file critics in the A.W.U.

* Ryan was asked to enter Federal politics by the Queensland executive, among other Labor organizations. As he was never an A.W.U. man, it seems likely that this was not the straight forward tribute to his political capacity that it was generally said to be.

The argument was the same as in New South Wales, but the A.W.U. made all the difference to its outcome. In Queensland the A.W.U.'s big membership in the pastoral, mining, and sugar industries ensured its supremacy, whereas in New South Wales its strength was matched by that of the mining, metal, transport, and maritime unions and it was a declining force. In the one case, what the A.W.U. said went; in the other, it was forced into a shifting sequence of factional alliances, and its influence, though considerable, was subject to its need for allies. Everywhere the A.W.U. bureaucracy was more and more identifying itself with parliamentary preferment; in Queensland this meant that the industrialist critics of the political machine could only be a permanently protesting minority, but in New South Wales the critics could on occasions—especially if they could drive a wedge between the A.W.U. and a substantial section of the parliamentary party—make their demands effective.

Together, the lingering anti-political overtones of One Big Unionism, the overt trade union dissatisfaction with Labor policies, the new Communist challenge, and the continuing failure of the Labor Party at elections were quite sufficient to convince active Labor men that the time was overdue for a review of the party's objective and platform and its relations with the industrial wing.

At the 1919 Commonwealth Conference the Victorian delegates had urged the adoption of a more forthright objective such as that recently adopted by their state conference, which called for the 'peaceful overthrow' of capitalism and the establishment of collective ownership and democratic control of industry; in an uneasy compromise, the conference had accepted this formulation but retained in pride of place the old declaration in favour of 'the cultivation of an Australian sentiment, maintenance of a white Australia, and the development in Australia of an enlightened and self-reliant community'.*

Then, early in 1920, the Melbourne Trades Hall Council had embarked on an extended discussion of the future organization of labour, and had resolved for a guild-socialist kind of solution—an immediate demand for the control of socially-owned industry by boards representative of the government, the community, and the workers directly

* For the Victorian conference, see *Worker*, 24 April 1919. At the Commonwealth conference T. J. Ryan led the opposition to changing the objective, claiming that it might be an embarrassment at the coming elections, to which a Victorian spokesman replied that the party was losing support because the existing objective was outdated. In the clause about 'an Australian sentiment', one change was made. 'White Australia' was substituted for the old reference to maintaining 'racial purity'—an attempt to redefine the original racism of Australian labour in cultural-economic terms (*Worker*, 26 June 1919).

involved.³³ From the Trades Hall this new objective had gone to the 1920 Victorian Labor conference, which had adopted it.³⁴

But the Victorians were not satisfied. The N.S.W. split and the loss of the miners, the seamen, and a number of smaller unions, and the disappointing results of the Federal and N.S.W. elections, had convinced them that more decisive action was necessary. The Federal officers—both Victorians—called their executive together, and the executive decided on a national congress of trade unions to meet with it 'to formulate a forward industrial policy, with a view to its adoption and execution by the Australian Labor party with the support of the unionists and Labor sympathisers of Australia'. The movement had lost its momentum; it needed an infusion of industrial energy; somewhere there had to be found the 'genius and statecraft' which would restore its earlier *élan*.³⁵

Some of the unions which the Labor leaders were especially anxious to win back—notably the miners—were at first suspicious of the conference because of its A.L.P. origin, but finally they were persuaded to attend. It was officially claimed—although this was almost certainly an exaggeration—that, when the conference assembled on 20 June 1921, the 210 delegates represented all of Australia's 700,000 trade unionists. The largest single group came from the A.W.U., but untypically it spoke with several voices; the decisive influence was that of the leaders of the mining union.

Opening the Congress, the Victorian chairman told the delegates that the A.L.P. was well aware that 'the mass was not satisfied with the programme and objective' of the party, and he invited particularly discussion of the demands for workers' control of industry which had arisen in the British and European labour movements and the solutions propounded by the Communist International.

The first question was the objective. The miners' representatives took little part in this debate, taking it for granted that socialism was to be the goal of the movement and being more interested in how it was to be accomplished and administered, and it was a Victorian who moved 'that the socialisation of industry, production, distribution and exchange be the objective of the Labor Party'. Even the A.W.U. officials were now prepared to concede the necessity for a radical change. One did say that the 'thing' before the conference 'does not matter a damn' and that the delegates ought to get down to practical questions such as launching an effective daily newspaper in the Labor interest, but the President of the union more shrewdly conceded the objective, saying that the important question was the means by which it was to be implemented (on which he held out no hopes of agreement). There was no effective opposition to the motion, and it was carried on the voices.

The major debates were those on the reports of the 'ways and means' committee and the committee on industrial organization. Although an A.W.U. man, J. H. Scullin, moved the adoption of the first of these, it was clear from the discussion that Willis, the miners' secretary, was the moving spirit in the committee; and it was Baddeley, the miners' president, who moved the industrial report.

The conference was decisively radical in the policies and militant in the tactics it advocated; the moderate minority, consisting of traditional A.L.P. men and old-time craft unionists, was overwhelmed. But the majority was anything but homogeneous. It included left-wing A.L.P. men (largely from Victoria, and either members of or influenced by the V.S.P.); two groups of Communists (the larger faction headed by J. S. Garden* and a smaller group led by Jacob Johnson of the Seamen's Union); the industrialists, whose spokesmen were Willis and Baddeley; and, for most purposes and despite the several parliamentarians among its delegates, the A.W.U.

An analysis of the voting figures on the various resolutions which revealed the political affiliations of the delegates suggests that, of the 150 or 160 delegates who were present at any one time, the industrialists accounted for perhaps fifty votes, the A.L.P. left for forty, the A.W.U. for thirty, the Garden Communists for twenty, and the Johnson Communists for perhaps five. (This group might be better described as the Walsh Communists, after Tom Walsh, the seamen's secretary. Walsh's sister-in-law, Sylvia Pankhurst, led a small 'left-Communist' faction in Great Britain which was the inspiration for the line advanced by Johnson.) There were only ten or fifteen delegates who took a consistently right-wing position. *Proletarian* (July 1921) identified a right wing of 'orthodox labourites' who did not mind much what the party's policy was, so long as it was not too extreme; a centre of "advanced" Labourites and Socialists, who believed that capitalism could be overthrown by parliamentary means; and a left wing consisting largely of Communists from New South Wales. It was, said *Proletarian*, 'the first big Labor congress . . . in which a Communist wing made itself felt';³⁶ J. S. Garden, however, drew attention to the 'overwhelming majority' of the 'moderates' and to the wide differences of opinion within the militant 'vanguard'.³⁷

As the conference proceeded, the aims and the sources of inspiration of these groups became clear. The A.L.P. politicians and the A.W.U. leaders wanted to consolidate trade union support behind the party and were prepared to accept (at least in words) a socialist objective and a

* Garden had, earlier in the year, been re-elected secretary of the N.S.W. Labor Council by seventy-nine votes to forty, against an A.W.U. man (*Worker*, 3 February 1921).

militant programme to implement it. They had few ideas of their own, played little part in the debate, and were content to let the industrialists and the Communists make the running, trying only to stop them getting out of hand. The A.L.P. Left, sympathetic to guild socialism, wanted to graft on to the party a socialist policy, which they believed could be achieved by parliamentary means provided that the active support of the industrial organizations could be secured. The industrialists, influenced by the near-syndicalist wing of British trade unionism embodied in the Triple Alliance, wanted social ownership of industry and workers' control; they accepted the necessity of parliamentary action to achieve these ends and were quite content for the Labor Party to adopt this programme while holding over the party's head the threat that, if it failed to meet their requirements, they would set up in competition. The Garden Communists, in line with Comintern policy, wanted to 'permeate' the Labor Party and the unions and win them for a revolutionary repudiation of bourgeois democracy and for the dictatorship of the proletariat; to achieve this they were prepared to compromise, accepting as much of their programme as they could get and staying inside the mass organization to work for more. The Johnson Communists opposed any compromise with 'reformist' politics and trade unionism: 'We know full well that we can get nothing under the present system, and no-one has done more to show that this is so than the seamen'.

The major sources of unionist dissatisfaction with the A.L.P.—the failure of Labor governments to cope with increasing unemployment and declining living standards by radical social reconstruction, and the unsympathetic administration of nationalized industries—were clearly revealed by the debates. Delegates condemned the 'betrayal' of working-class interests by the parliamentary parties and the refusal of the party to campaign for socialism, while the miners' leaders made it quite clear that they had no intention of accepting nationalization 'under the Parliamentary methods that exist today'. The demand for more far-reaching social change was formulated in the report of the 'ways and means' committee: nationalization of banking and the principal industries, control of the nationalized industries by boards on which both the workers directly involved and the community at large would be represented, and the establishment by these boards of a Supreme Economic Council which would plan and co-ordinate the whole of the national economy. There was general agreement among the conference majority for this: it represented as much of the Bolshevik experiment as was acceptable to all but the traditionalists of the movement.* The difficulty arose over implementation.

The industrialists were satisfied that parliamentary means would

* As well as guild socialism, there had been much discussion of workers' control as practised in Russia (news of the practical abandonment of this had not yet

suffice for the nationalization of industry. As Willis said: 'If you cannot get political power without resorting to violence, it is no good asking people to vote. Instead . . . we should be here discussing . . . the formation of a Red Army'. But he was confident that sufficient political support could be won. However, once the control of industry had been handed over to the Supreme Economic Council, parliament would, the industrialists believed, be redundant; and they wanted the industrial organizations, through a Council of Action elected from the Congress, to take direct responsibility for implementing its decisions 'irrespective of the Federal [Labor] Party or any other'. Here they ran into opposition from the politicians and the A.W.U., who demanded that this question be handed over to the party. Faced with certain defeat, the industrialists compromised. They agreed that, although the Council of Action would have sole responsibility for giving effect to the decisions on industrial matters, it should co-operate with the party on socialization. They had already made it clear, however, that this qualified support would be conditional on the party's acceptance of the new programme, and they succeeded in getting agreement for the recon-vocation of the Congress if the party failed to act.

It was possible for the industrialists, despite their suspicions, to reach this compromise because there was agreement on the central point—the use of parliamentary means. The difference with the Communists went much more to the heart of the matter. Confronted with the committee's declaration in favour of using both industrial and parliamentary means, M. P. Considine, M.H.R. (representing the Broken Hill miners) condemned the report as 'a Menshevik platform [which] stands for bourgeois control by [?] of] the workers on the political field and bogus control by the workers on the industrial field'. He and Garden moved an addendum to the report of the 'ways and means' committee, declaring that the parliamentary system should be used 'only as a temporary weapon to systematically expose the true nature and hamper the operations of Capitalism and . . . as a medium of working-class propaganda and education'. This, as Willis and others were quick to point out, implied an insurrectionary move to seize power, and this they were not prepared to accept. Despite the threat of the Communists to oppose the adoption of the report if their point were not conceded, Considine's motion was overwhelmingly defeated. The threat turned out to be a bluff. The Communists were primarily concerned to preserve the unity of the conference and the positions they had already won,* and, when the final vote was taken on the socialization report, they supported it.

reached Australia); see, e.g., the diagrammatic presentation of the 'plan of the Economic Organisation of Soviet Russia' in *Proletarian Review*, September 1920.

* Garden (*Aust. Comm.*, 8 July 1921) spoke of the early suspicion felt by most delegates for the Communists, who had had to work hard to overcome it.

The parliamentarians were not, however, to be left to rest in peace. As well as the sword of reconvoction which was hung over their heads, the report called on the party to make socialization a fighting plank of its platform, demanded that all parliamentarians be 'active propagandists' for the new objective, and urged the party to open its doors to 'all schools of working class thought'—a move which was originally designed to secure the readmission of the expelled industrialists but was later extended to provide for the affiliation of the Communist Party to the A.L.P.

To the industrialists it seemed that the economic organizations of the working class were necessarily the prime movers in social reconstruction; so after drawing their blue-print for the new social order they turned to a consideration of the structure of their own organization, and here they adopted the Australasian Workers' Union. Nationalization alone meant no more than the substitution of 'state capitalism' for the private employer; the industrial organization would ensure that the workers were in a position to look after their own interests, to determine working conditions, and to direct production through their Supreme Economic Council.

Encouraged by the near unanimity of the Congress and convinced that the crisis engulfing capitalism presaged great revolutionary changes, many delegates shared the optimistic belief of both Willis and Garden that they could, if they so desired, bring about the downfall of Australian capitalism in two or three months. But the real state of mind of the mass of unionists was perhaps revealed more accurately by the repeated stress on discipline as one of the main advantages of the One Big Union, put most frankly in one Communist's comment that 'an autocracy must be set up to force the working class to stick to anything that was in their interests'. The Congress majority knew that their ideas were in advance of those of a large part of the working class, but they were confident that, given the right programme and organization, they could carry through their decisions.³⁸

On the whole, the Communists regarded the Melbourne Congress as a considerable advance. It had thrown a 'theoretically incorrect light' on the questions before it and had shown a 'bias toward reform methods', but it had done much to unify the industrial movement, had opened up important avenues for revolutionary propaganda, and had shown 'how far even the moderate section were moving to the left'.³⁹ Reflecting the Communist conviction that their strength and that of the industrialists must be used to keep the political movement in line, the N.S.W. Labor Council resolved 'to form an industrial group that will be able to exercise decisive influence over parties claiming to represent the working class'.⁴⁰ The stated intention of this 'Organised Workers' Group'* was

* Formed at a conference of fifty-four N.S.W. unions, presided over by Willis.

the direct nomination of candidates for parliament by the industrial movement,⁴¹ but it was in reality a whip held over the head of the coming Commonwealth Labor Conference and it went out of existence when the recommendation of that conference for the readmission of the various breakaway groups was put into effect.

In the view of Garden and the majority of the Trades Hall Communists, the road to revolution was through the mass organizations of the working class—they even spoke of the possibility of a 'fusion' with the industrialists and the Labor left wing—but for other revolutionaries this involved an unacceptable compromise. The *International Communist* declared that the effect of the Melbourne Congress would be to 'take the sting out of the working-class movement by attempting to get it to rely upon the A.L.P. for the solution of its problems, instead of on its own power of mass action', and that Garden and his supporters had become 'apologists' for the A.L.P.;⁴² the *Revolutionary Socialist* said that the purpose of the Congress had been to breathe new life into 'the discredited A.L.P.';⁴³ while, for Tom Glynn and his fellow syndicalists in the C.P., the association of the majority of their party with the A.W.U. and the A.L.P. was adequate justification for their breaking away to form the Industrial Union Propaganda League.⁴⁴

There was indeed some basis for this criticism in the approach of the Labor left wing to the decisions of the Congress: these were, said R. S. Ross, the 'lines we MUST travel'—for, if not, the movement must 'accept the so-called Communist methods of civil war for dictatorship'.⁴⁵ But to the hard-headed politicians of the N.S.W. Labor executive this danger seemed remote: they were more concerned with the possible loss of their machine to the revolutionaries than with the prospect of losing their followers to the revolution. The N.S.W. executive, forced by this threat to call off the war with the parliamentary party, reached agreement that their party should oppose the adoption of the Melbourne decisions; and they found ready allies in Queensland. Both groups were frightened that a radical swing by the A.L.P. would 'help the Nationalists by providing them with a new election catch-cry'.⁴⁶

As the original invitation of the Federal executive to the unions had promised, the decisions of the Melbourne Congress were submitted to a Commonwealth Conference of the A.L.P. The conference met in Brisbane on 10 October 1921,⁴⁷ and proceeded immediately to discuss the objective. The adoption of the Melbourne objective was moved by W. J. Riordan, President of the Queensland branch of the A.W.U. The opposition was led by the Queensland Premier, Theodore, and J. H. Catts, M.H.R., from New South Wales; their argument was that the wholesale nationalization of industry was impracticable, that the con-

cept of workers' control rather than 'community' control involved the abolition of parliamentary institutions, that the most the party should aspire to was the nationalization of such industries as were guilty of 'exploitation'.* Surprisingly, they were joined in opposition by Maurice Blackburn of Victoria, who spoke strongly in favour of the existing objective which he had first introduced at the Victorian conference two years earlier. But all the amendments were defeated and the Labor Party committed itself, by twenty-two votes to ten, to 'the socialisation of industry, production, distribution and exchange'.

The conference then passed to ways and means. It was again Riordan who moved the adoption of the Melbourne decision that 'industrial and parliamentary machinery' be utilized to achieve the objective. And again Theodore led the attack—if they adopted the Melbourne proposals, they might as well call themselves the Communist Party; it would inevitably lead to a split and 'the end of the Labor Movement'. An amendment to qualify the proposed methods by the adjective 'constitutional' was debated hotly and finally carried by twenty-one votes to ten.

The Melbourne decision for 'the nationalisation of banking and all principal industries' was adopted, after the defeat of an amendment moved by Maurice Blackburn to confine this to industries which had reached the monopolistic stage. The decision for the control of nationalized industries by boards representative of the workers and the community was carried, Blackburn moving unsuccessfully for complete industrial self-government.

Following the objective, the most significant debate was that on the proposal for 'the establishment of an elective Supreme Economic Council by all nationalised industries', moved by J. H. Scullin, the mover of the original 'ways and means' motion at the Melbourne Congress. Theodore reserved his most bitter attack for this occasion: the proposal was a dogmatic projection of Russian and I.W.W. doctrines and would mean the abandonment of parliament; the movement should stick to its well-tried methods, by which it was already proceeding as fast as the workers would permit. Scullin denied that his motion had been dictated by any outside revolutionary movement: experience had shown that there must be self-government in nationalized industries—the workers must share in the responsibility for their success. 'All over the world the capitalist system [is] breaking down', he warned. 'If something [is] not done, chaos [will] eventuate, bringing about that revolution by force which [we are] trying to avoid.' His motion was carried, by twenty-one votes to twelve.†

* 'Exploitation' was used in the sense of 'sweating', or of 'profiteering' by monopoly practices or market manipulations, rather than in the Marxist sense.

† On the motion for the socialist objective, five Victorian, three Queensland, six South Australian, six Western Australian and two Tasmanian delegates had voted in

But Theodore's resources were far from exhausted. The recommendation of the Melbourne Congress had been that these proposals should be the fighting platform—that is, that they should constitute the party's electoral programme. This was hitting the politicians where it hurt most, and the N.S.W. and Queensland parliamentarians were successful in having the question referred to a committee on which the right wing secured a majority. With only one dissenter, R. S. Ross,⁴⁸ this committee recommended that socialization should become the party's 'objective', that the 'methods' already agreed upon by the conference should be regarded as an amplification of the objective, and that the 'fighting platform' should be headed by that trusty stand-by, 'the cultivation of an Australian sentiment. . . .' It was a brilliant coup, rescuing the parliamentarians from what had seemed inevitable defeat.

There was an outcry from the left wing. Blackburn moved to amend the report so that socialization would become 'the first plank of the fighting platform'; the adoption of the new policy was a waste of time, he said, 'if it was to be relegated to the obscurity of a pious objective'.† The Theodore report, however, provided an escape route for those reluctant delegates who had been mandated by their state organizations to support the Melbourne decisions; the amendment was defeated, and the report adopted.

Finally, the conference adopted a resolution moved by Blackburn as a qualification to the new objective, declaring that the purpose of collective ownership was to prevent 'exploitation' (a return to the stand of Theodore and Catts at the beginning of the conference) and that the party 'does not seek to abolish private ownership even of any of the instruments of production where such instrument is utilised by its owner in a socially useful manner and without exploitation'. But the motion was carried by only fifteen votes to thirteen, and the chairman ruled that, as it was not supported by an absolute majority of the registered delegates, it could not be included in the platform; it therefore remained an 'interpretation'.⁴⁹

Even without the 'Blackburn interpretation' it was apparent that the aspiring revolutionaries had lost the day. The Melbourne Congress

favour; six New South Wales, three Queensland and one Victorian (Blackburn) against. On this motion, the right wing gained three votes from Western Australia and one from Queensland, but lost one from Queensland and Blackburn (who opposed the motion but had been mandated to vote for it). E. H. Lane was added to the left wing, as a proxy for Tasmania.

† Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*, pp. 258-9. This motion seems inconsistent with Blackburn's position on other questions; however, all the accounts agree that he moved it. A possible explanation is that, having adopted a guild socialist position, Blackburn had regarded the majority proposals as leading to over-centralization, but disapproved even more strongly of the right wing's evident intention of burying socialism altogether.

had been called so that the dissident industrial organizations could tell the party that purported to speak for them, that claimed their allegiance and their loyalty, what they expected of it; the unions had spoken forthrightly and to an unexpected degree in unison; and now the highest authority in the party had, by a neat piece of conjuring, changed their socialist tiger into a sacred cow. In part it was the machine which beat them; the Federal conference, for a short while in the hands of the unions, had reverted to the politicians whose first interest was in attaining office. This process had been facilitated by the split in New South Wales, which had left some of the most powerful unions outside the party; and the power of the politicians had been consolidated by the repair of the breach between the A.W.U. and the parliamentary parties. The unions did not have the numbers at the Commonwealth conference and the mandates that the delegates had been given could not block every chance of escape. But beyond this was something even more far-reaching; the industrialists were leaders without an army—at least one that was prepared to fight for them on the political field. Support for militant industrial action was one thing, support for revolutionary politics another. The one depended on a mass discontent with existing circumstances, but equally on the belief that the immediate circumstances could be changed for the better; the other depended upon the savage anger that can only arise from frustration and despair. And not even in the unhappy condition of 1921 did the mass of Australian workers accept that the future in the world they knew was without hope. The revolutionary formulae were available in great abundance and they were not without merit; what was missing was the revolutionary ferment which alone could transform them from words into actions, and finally into institutions.*

* Compare the oblique warning of *Proletarian* (August 1921) to those Communists who were optimistic about the outcome of the All-Australian Trades Union Congress: '... it is well to remember that it is possible for an action to be [a] perfectly safe line of tactics for a fairly developed sound revolutionary movement which, on the other hand, would be a disastrous line of tactics for a poorly developed and weak revolutionary movement, and that we, in Australia, have quite a task before us in the work of building a movement before it reaches the stage where it can be described as a fairly developed and sound revolutionary movement'.

The Working Class in 1921

THE WAR and immediate post-war years saw the beginnings of a major change in the Australian economy and in the composition of the working class. Before the war, Australia had depended largely on Europe for manufactured goods, and particularly for the products of heavy industries; with the war the supply had almost dried up, and local industries began to emerge to fill the gap. The opening of the Newcastle steelworks provided a heavy industry base for Australian manufacturing, and it was calculated that by 1919 some four hundred new items were in production, ranging from typewriter ribbons to aircraft engines.¹ The value of manufacturing production, which had risen steadily through the war years, jumped dramatically immediately after the war; secondary industry, which had hitherto accounted for about a quarter of the total value of all goods produced in Australia now accounted for about one-third. A decisive break with Australia's pastoral and agricultural beginnings was in the making.

This change was reflected in the census of 1921: for the first time those engaged in secondary industry clearly outstripped in numbers those engaged in primary production. This was largely due to the sharp decline in gold and other metal mining, but there was also a fall in employment in the pastoral industry. Overall, since 1911, the 'industrial' section of the population had grown by nearly 160,000 (27·6 per cent compared with a population increase of 22 per cent). The most striking change had occurred in New South Wales, which had emerged as the leading industrial state, with nearly a third of its breadwinners engaged in industry, and supplying nearly two-fifths of all Australian breadwinners in this category. Primarily this was due to the rapid growth in heavy industry—the metal trades and the supply of power. Throughout Australia, nearly 25 per cent more workers were employed in factories, the average size of which was steadily increasing and which had twice as much power at their disposal as before the war; employment in transport (especially in the railways) had risen sharply, and the number of coal-miners had increased by nearly one-third—almost all in New South Wales (see Appendices I and II).

If the comparison is made with 1901, the trend is even more obvious. In these two decades, the number of employees engaged in manufacturing had increased by over 80 per cent (heavy industry increasing substantially faster than light industry), those engaged in distribution and in professional occupations had almost doubled, and those engaged in transport and communications had grown by two-thirds. But workers in the pastoral industry and in agriculture had risen by only about one-third, while those engaged in mining had been cut in half. The centre of gravity of the working class, especially in New South Wales, was swinging steadily away from primary industry (with the major exception of coal) to the metal trades, manufacturing, and transport (see Appendix I).

As with the population statistics, so with the labour movement: the war and post-war years saw the consolidation of a new pattern of Australian unionism, which was to prevail until the 1950s. From the loose federations of craft unions (the Labor Councils) and the massive organizations of pastoral workers and metal miners, the dominant positions in the trade union movement passed to the coal-miners, the railwaymen, seamen, and watersiders, the engineers and ironworkers. This was not a straightforward process; on the contrary, there was much jockeying for position and a continual change in alignments and alliances, but the general direction was clear.

The characteristic feature of Australian unionism during these years was the creation of fewer and bigger unions. The major job of enrolling workers into the unions had already been done in the eight or ten years before the war, so that by 1914 over half of all adult male employees, and about one in ten of all females, were unionists.* The main concern now was the perfection of organization by the amalgamation of unions within the same industry, the federation of kindred unions in the various states, and the creation of stronger central organizations—the process generally known as ‘closer unionism’—so that, while there was a significant decrease in the number of separate unions between 1914 and 1921, there was a substantial rise in the number of interstate unions. The proportion of unionists covered by such unions increased from 68·0 per cent to 80·8 per cent, while the proportion of unionists who belonged to unions with a total membership of 10,000 or more grew from 33·7 per cent to 48·0 per cent (see Appendices III and IV).

To describe this process fully would require a detailed examination of the histories of many individual unions and central union organiza-

* *Labour Report*, No. 6, p. 11. The degree of unionization was high by international standards: cf. the percentages of unionists in the populations in 1914: U.K., 8·92; U.S.A., 2·48; Germany, 3·20; France, 2·60; Australia, 10·59.

tions, which is beyond the scope of this work; however, it is possible to isolate the main themes.

In a number of occupations there were rival unions competing for members, and attempts were made, often by the central bodies, to bring the rivals together. However, as well as the union officials' vested interest in their positions, there was often an ideological basis for the division, one of the dual unions being more militant than the other and the members dividing according to their attitudes to trade union tactics.

The depreciation of the old skills, the increasing size and complexity of modern industry, and the better organization of the employers suggested the desirability, expressed in the quasi-syndicalist propaganda for industrial unions, of the various crafts employed in the same industry, or of the workers in allied industries, joining in the one organization; but the results were generally disappointing. Occasionally the enthusiasts for industrial unionism, growing tired of the procrastination of the craft unions, tried to short-circuit the process by forming industrial unions in opposition to the existing organizations, but such ventures soon proved over-optimistic. The reasons for the failure were not hard to see: the established officials were obstructive, while the members in many cases clung to their craft exclusiveness—not so much now as an assertion of craft pride as a defence against the encroaching machine.

The movement for the federation of kindred unions was more successful. Where some national organization already existed (for example engineers, printers, watersiders), the federal bodies were given full-time officials and enhanced powers; where none existed (for example railway workers), one was created. Often an important element in this was the desire to become registered with the Commonwealth Arbitration Court and so eligible for a federal award, but this advantage (which largely derived from the accident of Mr Justice Higgins being President of the Court, as critics of federation were quick to point out) was not the only factor. For a union like the Miners' Federation, which was in no sense committed to arbitration although quite prepared to make use of the system if it seemed likely to be of some immediate value to the miners, the purpose of federation was to increase the union's industrial strength. The union might pursue its aims through the courts rather than by direct action, but the threat implied by its industrial strength must always underlie any recourse to the law.

Empire-building was an important factor in closer unionism, especially with the A.W.U. This union was well represented in the parliamentary Labor Parties, and every accession of members (and their yearly dues) reinforced its position, both within the Labor Party and as an electoral machine. The profit, however, was not all on the side of the A.W.U. bureaucracy: for many unionists the advantages of

linking up with the largest and most influential of all the Australian unions seemed overwhelming, and there were a substantial number who argued that the whole trade union movement should march under the A.W.U. banner. There were special advantages for unskilled workers—the amalgamation of other mass unions with the A.W.U. saved them buying a ticket in a new union each time they moved on to a new kind of job. In this way the A.W.U.—despite its losses in the pastoral industry—maintained its position, increasing its total membership although at the expense of its cohesiveness.

Finally the rivalry between craft and mass unions dominated all discussion of the remodelling of the central trade union organizations. The structure of the various metropolitan and provincial Labor Councils,* from 1913 loosely linked in the Federal Grand Council of Labor, was unsatisfactory to the mass unions for several reasons: first, the constitutions of these organizations were weighted in favour of the smaller craft unions; second, the major unions were organized on a federal basis, but the Labor Councils were not equipped to handle federal disputes, while the Grand Council had no power to act, except at the request of its state constituents; third, the craft unions were generally concerned to prevent strikes, while the mass unions wanted central organizations which could (if necessary) wage industrial warfare more effectively. Accordingly, the unions of miners, railwaymen, seamen, and wharflabourers, and the A.W.U. generally remained outside the Labor Councils, on occasions attempting to form their own central organizations. The anti-conscription trade union conference of June 1916 and the All-Australian Congress of June 1921, at both of which the unions were represented directly rather than through the Labor Councils, demonstrated that this could be a useful form of organization for immediate purposes but left nothing permanent behind it. The Council of Action, set up by the 1921 Congress, did not long survive the circumvention of the socialist objective by the Commonwealth Labor Conference, while the Australasian Workers' Union came to grief on the refusal of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court to grant it registration.† Six years later, however, these conferences provided a precedent for a permanent Australian Council of Trade Unions.

* In 1914 there were twenty-six central organizations of this kind throughout Australia, to which were affiliated 668 trade unions and trade union branches (*Labour Report*, No. 8, p. 16).

† This refusal was occasioned by the terms of the application submitted by Senator J. Barnes, then President of the A.W.U. and the newly appointed secretary of the Australasian Workers' Union (for which position he had defeated A. C. Willis). The application went beyond those occupations covered by the unions which had agreed to join the new union (the A.W.U., which had balloted by 19,000 to 4,000 to link up, the miners, and the watersiders) and thus invited, from unions whose fields of operation were invaded, a plea to deny registration, which the Court granted.

After two decades of growing control of the labour movement, industrial as well as political, by parliamentarians, the major change of the war years was the reassertion by the mass unions of trade union independence of and control over the political party, and through this the parliamentary parties. Stemming from the 1916 conscription crisis, this change had gone farthest in New South Wales, with the formation of the Industrial Section and the establishment of its hegemony over the party apparatus. In South Australia, where, as in New South Wales, a large section of the parliamentarians had gone over to conscription, control of the party machine had also passed almost exclusively to the industrialists. In Victoria, where the defections had been very few, the unionists had improved their position; however, the politicians were still influential, although more influenced by socialist ideas than elsewhere.* Only in Queensland, where a new Labor government was in power and a close working agreement had developed between the A.W.U. and the parliamentary party, were the politicians still on top. In all these states the new position of the trade unions was formalized by increased trade union representation at conferences and on the party executive.

The resurgence of mass union influence brought with it a revival of socialism in the Labor Party. Lacking the disaffected intelligentsia which European Marxists had seen as providing a revolutionary vanguard for the mass labour movement, the unions of unskilled workers had been the major source of socialism in the Australian movement, and, understandably, this had a strong syndicalist orientation. But, so far as there was any mass support in the industrial movement for this ideology, it was because socialism served to define an independent working-class position; the expectation of any practical outcome was largely confined to leaders of mass unions who had been elected to their positions because of their militancy rather than their socialism. There was little sign of mass interest in the 1921 debate on the socialist objective and less sign of any mass revolutionary upsurge.

The ascendancy of the industrialists was in any case unstable, and this for two reasons: because the requirements, or what the politicians conceived to be the requirements, of the electoral situation drove the latter towards a modification of the radical stand forced on the party

E. H. Lane (*Dawn to Dusk*, pp. 271-2) suggests that this was a conscious move by the A.W.U. bureaucracy to sabotage the O.B.U., which had been forced on them by their members; however, it seems more likely that it was an unsuccessful attempt at wholesale cannibalism.

* This continuing radical tone of the Victorian party was in large measure due to the fact that it had not yet been called on to govern. Then and for many years after, the distribution of seats in Victoria was loaded heavily in favour of the country voters who (unlike those in New South Wales and Queensland) were fairly strongly anti-Labor.

by the industrialists, and because there were conflicts of interest and intention within the trade union front itself.

The electoral experience of the Labor Party has always been that any substantial split in the parliamentary party is followed immediately by a loss of votes, as the defectors carry with them a section of regular Labor voters and the uncommitted voters swing away from weakness; however, the movement away has almost always been followed by a gradual drift back of habitual Labor voters. Even though the breakaway group may have been driven out because of its refusal to go along with a radical policy, the survivors have normally tried to moderate the party's policies so as not to frighten away those who are drifting back,* thus reinforcing the constant tendency of Labor parliamentarians to temper their programme to non-working-class groups in an attempt to create an image of a community rather than a class party.† So it was after the conscription split. The immediate effects were the severe Labor defeats in the Federal and N.S.W. elections in the first half of 1917; subsequent elections showed a steady movement back, even though its slowness caused continuing concern.

But the movement was sufficient to encourage the parliamentarians to urge—if possible to enforce—the virtues of moderation on their militant industrialist comrades. The 1919 split and the establishment of A.W.U. control—although it was accompanied by tensions between the A.W.U. and the parliamentary party—ensured that moderate policies were followed in New South Wales. The divisions within the Queensland A.W.U., and the establishment by the Theodore group of its dominance, had a similar result. Between them, and with the tacit support of substantial sections of the party in other states, these groups were able, in the absence of any great mass concern, to divert the decisions of the 1921 trade union congress into safe obscurity: and when, on the initiative of A. C. Willis in October 1921, the Council of Action accepted the verdict of the Brisbane A.L.P. conference, the fate of the socialist objective (if indeed it had ever had any other prospect than this) was sealed.

In July 1918 a bewildered reader wrote to one of the many revolutionary papers of the day: 'Is it not almost heart-breaking to see the multitude of little cliques, each at the throat of the other? One wonders where

* This tendency has operated in contemporary Australian politics in relation to the Democratic Labor Party; however, the continued independent existence of that party (the usual pattern has been for the breakaway group to merge with the conservatives) has offset this.

† The opposite tendency did not operate—i.e. there was no indication of any modification of the party's policy in a radical direction in order to win back left-wing breakaways, the principal reason for this undoubtedly being that they never presented an electoral threat.

the hell the working class are getting to.'² His alarm was not without foundation: the atmosphere on the far left was, to say the least, foggy. The worker who was not satisfied with the Labor Party could at that time, or within the next thirty months, join the V.S.P., the A.S.P., the Q.S.L., the S.D.L., the S.L.P., the I.S.L.P. or one (but not both) of the two C.Ps.; if his inclination was anti-political there were the I.L.P., the I.I.W., the O.B.U.P.L., and the I.U.P.L.; and if he wanted to reorganize the trade unions there were the W.I.I.U. and the W.I.U. of A. For reading he could choose between O.B.U. and *One Big Union Herald*; *The People*, *The Proletariat* and *Proletarian Review*; *Solidarity* and *Industrial Solidarity*; *Socialist*, *International Socialist*, and *Revolutionary Socialist*; *Australian Communist* and *International Communist*; and even a revived *Direct Action*—as well, of course, as official papers like the *Australian Worker* and the *Queensland and Westralian Workers*, *Labor News* and *Labor Call*. Unhappily—as Dwight Macdonald said of American radicals at a later period—'the smaller the sect, the more grandiosely optimistic its propaganda usually was'.

Much of this proliferation of organizations was a product of doctrinal in-fighting and the personal enmity it engendered; but, among the bitter squabbles over the precise dividing lines to be drawn between the dozen Industrial Departments of a non-existent One Big Union, there were some questions of practical significance. The most important of these were the proper attitude of revolutionaries to the mass labour party and the existing trade unions, the rival merits of political and industrial action, the perennial argument between the advocates of physical force and moral force, and, in the trade union field, the fundamental tactical difference between 'dual unionism' and 'boring from within'. Despite these disputes, there were wide areas of agreement—all had opposed the war, all stressed the importance of industrial unionism, all urged the immediate necessity of the social revolution; but there was little or no agreement about how these objectives were to be realized, and there was a continual traffic in membership as the impatient sectaries passed from one organization to another in the hope of finding quick fulfilment of their revolutionary dreams.

Finally, the shining example of the Bolsheviks and the practical success of the Communists in permeating the mass organizations attracted the bulk of the revolutionaries into the Communist Party, leaving the Socialist Labor Party, the Workers' International Industrial Union, the Victorian Socialist Party, and a revived Industrial Workers of the World as dwindling sects in which the social revolution no longer existed in organization or in propaganda, in strikes or in votes, but only in the minds of a handful of ageing and dispirited sectarians.

For these were the lessons that the revolutionaries had learned from these years: that spontaneity is no substitute for organization and that

purity of doctrine is cold comfort beside the rewards of practical success. In the agitation against conscription and the war and for the release of the Twelve, for the One Big Union and the socialist objective, socialists and syndicalists alike had discovered that the organizations of the mass labour movement were not irredeemably damned—this not because of the few who led them, but because of the mass who inhabited them—and that, given the right circumstances and the right levers, they could be moved. During the great strike struggles the revolutionaries had discovered both the potential strength and the existing weaknesses of the industrial organizations. And in the course of fighting these battles and making these discoveries, the most vigorous and least dogmatic of the revolutionaries had found themselves, almost without knowing it, in positions of great influence within the mass labour movement, and their revolutionary dreaming seemed to take on a new reality. They had not yet learnt the final limitation on the action of Australian radicals: that at most they could provide the slogans, tactics, forms of organization within which the mass of the working class would prosecute its immediate demands. But they were confronting the hardest of all revolutionary questions: how to work for amelioration without compromising the revolutionary objective, how to pursue that objective without inhibiting immediate advance. It was this ability to link the demands of the day with ultimate social reconstruction which had ensured the success of the Russian revolutionaries, and it was to their theories that Australian revolutionaries turned in the post-war years to provide their practical experience with a new ideological gloss.

These, then, were the working class and the labour movement in 1921. To end here is to end at a high point in the history of the movement. A great deal had changed; both the working class and the labour movement were very different in 1921 from what they had been at the beginning of the century; but nothing was finalized by 1921. The 44-hour week was lost, not to be regained for many years. Unemployment persisted, and for a time real wages were driven down. The One Big Union disintegrated in the struggle for position and power, and the socialist objective was sacrificed to the presumed prerequisites for electoral success. The Labor Party continued on its moderate faction-ridden way, with the parliamentarians usually in control, sometimes supported, sometimes opposed by the declining power of the A.W.U., generally counting on the moderate craft unions but continually challenged by the growing mass unions of the new industrialized economy. Beyond the Labor Party stood the Communist Party, its firm adherence to the strategy of the Comintern and the interests of the Soviet state ensuring continued life but at the same time continued political isolation, while its flexibility of tactics within an uncom-

promising assault on capitalism guaranteed its place in the economic organizations of the working class.

This labour movement was a unique social institution: above all it was a movement in which large numbers of people, joined in voluntary organizations, acted in a way that was historically significant. In its political aspect the movement was subject to the self-interest of politicians, the adoption by Labor governments of a supra-class posture, the conflict of interests within the political machine; but it could not escape its own history, and the demands for the satisfaction of working-class interests and for revolutionary solutions were continually renewed. In its industrial aspect it was subject to the interests of many trade union leaders in political careers, the conflict of sectional and craft organizations and interests, the ebb and flow of mass working-class sentiment; but the industrial organizations were essentially class organizations and to this starting-point they continually returned. The institutions of the labour movement were the means by which workingmen were challenging the right of *élites* to determine their fate, and for these institutions it could legitimately be claimed that they were, however laboriously and imperfectly, 'forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old'. For so long as there are workingmen to feel discontent with their economic situation and their social status, with their alienation from the instruments of production and the goods they produce, so long will there be a movement to ameliorate their condition and to right their wrongs. And so long as this movement creates its own institutions, objectives, programmes, leaders, so long will there be conflict of interests, compromise, corruption—and men within it who protest.

Notes

1 LABOUR IN 1900

- ¹ *State Socialism and Labour Government in Antipodean Britain*, p. 4.
- ² See N. G. Butlin, *The Shape of the Australian Economy, 1861-1900*, and *Some Aspects of Australian Capital Formation, 1861-1900*.
- ³ T. A. Coghlan, *Statistical Account of the Seven Colonies of Australia* (1893), p. 304.
- ⁴ Resolution of the Sixth Intercolonial Trades Union Congress, 1889, in R. N. Ebbels, *The Australian Labor Movement, 1850-1907*, p. 100.
- ⁵ Evidence of T. D. Hay, General Secretary of the Australasian Institute of Marine Engineers, to Royal Commission on the 1890 strike (Ebbels, op. cit., p. 119).
- ⁶ Report of Sydney Defence Committee (Ebbels, op. cit., p. 151).
- ⁷ Preface to A.W.U. Rules (W. G. Spence, *Australia's Awakening*, p. 75).
- ⁸ Objects of the A.W.U. (Spence, op. cit., p. 73).
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 76.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-4.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 74, 75.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 614.
- ¹³ Ebbels, op. cit., pp. 101-2.
- ¹⁴ Butlin, *Shape of the Australian Economy*, p. 3.
- ¹⁵ *Worker*, 17 February 1900.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 10 February 1900.
- ¹⁷ Reports of these and other actions are in the *Worker*, 1900-1, *passim*.
- ¹⁸ Sydney District Council, Australasian Labour Federation, *Report*, 31 December 1899; Sydney Labor Council, *Report*, 21 February 1901.
- ¹⁹ *Worker*, 9 June 1900.
- ²⁰ Ebbels, op. cit., p. 207.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 151.
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 206. My italics.
- ²³ Spence, op. cit., p. 616. My italics.
- ²⁴ Ebbels, op. cit., p. 150.
- ²⁵ Spence, op. cit., p. 598.
- ²⁶ Ebbels, op. cit., p. 152.
- ²⁷ G. F. Pearce, 'The Trades Hall', *Review of Reviews*, 19 November 1904, p. 458.
- ²⁸ Spence, op. cit., p. 350.
- ²⁹ Quoted by T. A. Coghlan, *Labour and Industry in Australia*, Vol. IV, p. 2194.
- ³⁰ Spence, op. cit., p. 429.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 313.
- ³² Dr Quick, M.L.A., member for a mining electorate (Vic. *Parl. Deb.*, Vol. XLVI, p. 1363).
- ³³ *Worker*, 3 February 1900.
- ³⁴ Report of Federal Labor Conference, *ibid.*

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- 35 Report of N.S.W. Labor Conference, *ibid.*
- 36 E. H. Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*, p. 30.
- 37 *Queensland Worker*, quoted in Ebbels, *op. cit.*, p. 165.
- 38 *Ibid.*
- 39 Quoted by L. Ross, *William Lane and the Australian Labor Movement*, p. 172.
- 40 'The Vag' [T. Batho], *Random Ramblings*, p. 7.
- 41 C. M. Barlow (secretary of the P.L.L. in 1896), letter to *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 27 February 1901.
- 42 *People*, 6 January 1900.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 14 July 1900.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 6 January 1900.
- 45 Lane, *op. cit.*, p. 54.
- 46 T. Tunnecliffe, *Socialism: Its Aims and Objects*, p. 6.
- 47 *Victorian Labor Federation: Declaration and Rules*, pp. 2-4.
- 48 *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- 49 Donald Macdonell, general secretary of the A.W.U., 'The Labor Movement', *Worker*, 22 December 1900.

2 INDUSTRIAL AND POLITICAL LABOR, 1900-1914

- 1 *Labour Report* (1914), No. 5, p. 62.
- 2 Sydney District Council, Australasian Labour Federation, *Report*, 31 December 1899.
- 3 Sydney Labor Council, Minutes, November 1901 to February 1902, *passim*.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 13 June 1905, 27 February 1906.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 8 March 1906.
- 6 Sydney Labor Council, *Report*, 30 June 1908.
- 7 *Report*, 1909 N.S.W. P.L.L. Conference (*Worker*, 27 January 1909).
- 8 *Worker*, 29 April 1909.
- 9 *Worker*, 14 April 1910.
- 10 This account is based on the reports in the *Worker*, 11 November 1909 to 17 February 1910.
- 11 W.W.F. Minutes, 10, 19 November 1909.
- 12 See *Reports of Commonwealth T.U.C.*, November 1902, and Commonwealth Labor Conference, December 1902.
- 13 Quoted by W. A. Baker, *The Commonwealth Basic Wage*, p. 5.
- 14 W. G. Spence, *History of the A.W.U.*, pp. 118 ff.
- 15 Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*, pp. 119-21.
- 16 Quoted by T. Nelson, *The Hungry Mile*, pp. 38-9.
- 17 Sydney Labor Council, *Report*, 30 June 1908.
- 18 *Inter. Soc.*, 11 November 1911.
- 19 W.W.F. Minutes, 27 April, 4 May 1914.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 26 June 1914.
- 21 See G. Dale, *The Industrial History of Broken Hill*, pp. 109 ff.
- 22 *Tom Mann's Memoirs*, pp. 229-33.
- 23 *Report*, 1909 N.S.W. T.U.C., pp. 14 ff.
- 24 Dale, *op. cit.*, p. 141.
- 25 *Official Strike Bulletin*, No. 1, 31 January 1912. (This account of the strike is based on the *Bulletin*.)
- 26 Letter of a Brisbane special constable, in *The Tyranny of Trade Unions, by One Who Resents It*, p. 178.
- 27 14 March 1912.
- 28 *Strike Bulletin*, 20 February, 9, 18 March 1912.

NOTES CHAPTER 2

- 29 E. L. Batchelor, M.H.R. (*Worker*, 28 January 1909); compare W. G. Spence's description of the Fisher government as having 'the most truly national policy ever presented' (*Report*, 1910 A.W.U. Conference, *Worker*, 19 January 1910).
- 30 P. Heagney (Secretary, Melbourne T.H.C.), Preface to *Report*, Third Commonwealth Political Labor Conference (1905), p. 4.
- 31 S.M.H., 17 August 1908.
- 32 N.S.W. Labor Platform, 1891 (Spence, *Australia's Awakening*, p. 598).
- 33 See N.S.W. Labor Platform, 1909 (Land Reform) (Spence, op. cit., pp. 600-1); decisions of 1914 N.S.W. P.L.L. Conference (*Worker*, 12 February 1914).
- 34 E.g. at 1911 N.S.W. P.L.L. Conference (*Worker*, 3, 9 February 1911).
- 35 E.g. *Report*, 1902 Commonwealth T.U.C., p. 24.
- 36 N.S.W. P.L.L. Conference, 1909 (*Worker*, 11 February 1909). The Federal Party supported a similar exemption (*ibid.*, 1 April 1909).
- 37 *Worker*, 9, 16 January 1913, 6, 12 February 1913.
- 38 *Report*, Third Commonwealth Labor Conference, 1905, p. 22.
- 39 *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20; *Report*, 1906 N.S.W. P.L.L. Conference (*Worker*, 8 February 1906).
- 40 See *Report*, Fourth Triennial Labor-in-Politics Convention, 1905; T. O'Sullivan, *Reminiscences of the Queensland Parliament*.
- 41 *Worker*, 8 September 1900.
- 42 A. Fisher (*Worker*, 4 February 1909).
- 43 *Worker*, 6 May 1909.
- 44 N.S.W.L.C., *Report*, 31 December 1910, p. 7.
- 45 Hector Lamond, in the *Worker*, 13 February 1913.
- 46 N.S.W.L.C., *Report*, 31 December 1913, p. 24.
- 47 S.M.H., 16 May 1914.
- 48 *Report*, p. 14.
- 49 'Whither?' by 'Touchstone' (H. E. Boote) (*Qld. Worker*, 18 April 1903); reprinted as a leaflet by the Brisbane Social Democratic Vanguard.
- 50 *Report*, Fourth Triennial Labor-in-Politics Convention, 1905.
- 51 See *Worker*, 4, 11 February 1905.
- 52 *Socialism as defined in the Australian Labor Party's Objectives and Platform* (Report of the Reid-Holman debate, April 1906), p. 42.
- 53 *Australia's Awakening*, pp. 594, 446.
- 54 *The Case for Labor*, pp. 85, 89.
- 55 *People*, 10, 17 February 1900.
- 56 *Annals of the A.C.P.*, pp. 10-11, 14-15; P. J. O'Farrell, *Harry Holland*, pp. 20 ff.
- 57 See De Leon, *The Burning Question of Trade Unionism and The Preamble of the I.W.W.*
- 58 'The Political and Industrial Situation in Australia' (*The Nineteenth Century*, September 1904, p. 480).
- 59 *Socialist*, 2 April 1906.
- 60 *Socialism* (July 1905), p. 26.
- 61 *Tom Mann's Memoirs*, pp. 202-3.
- 62 *Constitution of the I.W.W. Club*, p. 10.
- 63 Minutes, V.S.P., 1908, *passim*, especially 7 July, 2 September, 28 October.
- 64 *Ibid.*, 30 December 1908, 4 January 1909.
- 65 *Inter. Soc.*, 9 July 1910.
- 66 *Ibid.*, 23 July 1910.
- 67 *Ibid.*, 6 April, 11 May 1912; Minutes, V.S.P., 28 February, 29 May, 17 June 1912.
- 68 For a detailed description of the scheme, see W. E. Trautmann, *One Great Union*
- 69 *Worker*, 11 November 1909.

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- 70 *Report*, 1908 N.S.W. T.U.C., pp. 20 ff.; *Worker*, 14 April 1910.
- 71 J. H. Catts, M.H.R., then secretary of the A.R.T.S.A., unidentified newscutting in I.W.W. Leaflets, etc.
- 72 Dora B. Montefiore in *Inter. Soc.*, 8 April 1911.
- 73 W. Rosser to secretary, Sydney I.W.W. Club, 3 December 1908.
- 74 *Tom Mann's Memoirs*, pp. 239 ff.
- 75 *Ibid.*, p. 241.
- 76 Preamble of the (Chicago) I.W.W. See V. St John, *The I.W.W.: Its History, Structure and Methods*.
- 77 I.W.W. Club, Minutes, 9 December 1908, 14 July 1909; *Inter. Soc.*, 10 September 1910.
- 78 P. Christensen to H. J. Hawkins (Secretary, Sydney I.W.W. Club), 18 May 1911 (I.W.W. Correspondence, etc.).
- 79 Christensen to Hawkins, 18 May, 7 June 1911. (E. A. Moyle, first president and later secretary of the Adelaide local, put the first meeting at 24 May and the early membership at sixteen; letter to G. G. Reeve, 23 June 1911.)
- 80 I.W.W. (Chicago) Minutes, Sydney, 26 November 1911; *Inter. Soc.*, 2 December 1911.
- 81 D. Mallon to G. G. Reeve, 23 July 1911 (I.W.W. Correspondence, etc.); compare H. L. Denford, secretary of the Sydney local (*Inter. Soc.*, 13 January 1912).
- 82 Minutes, I.W.W. Club (Detroit), 15 May, 26 June 1912.
- 83 *Inter. Soc.*, 1 June 1912.
- 84 See letter of G. G. Reeve to Mitchell Library, Sydney, 9 February 1916 (I.W.W. Correspondence, etc.).
- 85 *Report*, Interstate Congress of T.L.Cs., 1913, p. 40.

3 THE LABOUR MOVEMENT AND THE WAR

- 1 See G. F. Pearce, *Carpenter to Cabinet*, pp. 71 ff.
- 2 *Labour Bulletin*, No. 8, pp. 294-5.
- 3 *Worker*, 6 August 1914.
- 4 *Socialist*, 5 March 1915.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 28 August, 4 September 1914.
- 6 *Labour Report*, No. 6, p. 17.
- 7 *Socialist*, 22 January 1915.
- 8 *Labour Bulletin*, No. 9, pp. 62-4.
- 9 N.S.W. Labor Council, *Report*, 30 June 1915.
- 10 *S.M.H.*, 20 March 1915.
- 11 *Daily Telegraph*, 9 April 1915.
- 12 *Socialist*, 19 February, 19 March 1915.
- 13 This statement of the election issues is based on T. O'Sullivan, *Reminiscences of the Queensland Parliament*, and M. G. Birrell, *T. J. Ryan and the Queensland Labor Party*. Ryan's comment is quoted by Birrell at p. 38.
- 14 *Socialism at Work*, p. 118.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- 16 E. Scott, *Australia during the War*, pp. 503, 635.
- 17 W. Wallis in *Labor Call*, 15 July 1915.
- 18 *Amendment of the Constitution: Federal Referendums: The Case for and Against* (1913), p. 44.
- 19 *Report*, Sixth Commonwealth Labor Conference, p. 17.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- 21 *Labor Call*, 15 July 1915, 10 February 1916.

- 22 Ibid., 22 July 1915.
- 23 See J. F. Hannan to the 1916 Victorian Conference of the Labor Party, *Labor Call*, 4 May 1916.
- 24 See *Labor Call*, 10 February, 4 May 1916.
- 25 *Worker*, 11 November 1915.
- 26 *Labor Call*, 2 December 1915, 13 January 1916.
- 27 M. Blackburn, *The Conscription Referendum of 1916*.
- 28 This account of the Federal Executive meeting is based on the full report of the two Victorian delegates to the Victorian Executive, which ordered that the report be printed (*Labor Call*, 10 February 1916).
- 29 *Labour Bulletin*, No. 8, p. 248; No. 9, p. 53.
- 30 *Direct Action*, 19 February 1916.
- 31 *West Australian*, 18 January 1916.
- 32 W.W.F. Minutes, 11 January 1916.
- 33 Ibid., 19 April 1916.
- 34 Ibid., 30 August 1916.
- 35 S.M.H., 30 September 1916.
- 36 W.W.F. Minutes, 15 November 1916.
- 37 *Direct Action*, 1 October 1914.
- 38 Quoted by Dale, *Industrial History of Broken Hill*, p. 174.
- 39 *Direct Action*, 15 January 1916.
- 40 *Worker*, 27 January 1916.
- 41 N.S.W. Labor Council, *Report*, 30 June 1916.
- 42 Quoted by Dale, op. cit., p. 199.
- 43 Dale, op. cit., p. 206.
- 44 *Worker*, 13 January 1916.
- 45 S.M.H., 21 July 1916.
- 46 *Direct Action*, 11 November 1916.
- 47 Sydney Sun, 14 November 1916, quoted in N.S.W. *Parl. Deb.*, Vol. LXVI, p. 2693.
- 48 N.S.W. *Parl. Deb.*, Vol. LXVI, p. 2694.
- 49 *Labour Report*, No. 7, p. 510.
- 50 Quoted by Scott, op. cit., pp. 675-6.
- 51 Falkiner, M.H.R., a member of the Council of the Pastoralists' Union, in Aust. *Parl. Deb.*, Vol. LXXXII, p. 337.
- 52 *Worker*, 9 February 1916.
- 53 *Labour Bulletin*, No. 13, p. 41; No. 14, p. 148.
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9 SOCIALISM AND COMMUNISM

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NOTES CHAPTERS 9-10

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- ⁴⁶ Lang, *I Remember*, p. 141.
- ⁴⁷ For Report, see *Worker*, 20, 27 October 1921.
- ⁴⁸ See Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*, p. 258.
- ⁴⁹ Lang, *I Remember*, p. 142.

10 THE WORKING CLASS IN 1921

- ¹ See C. Forster, *Industrial Development in Australia, 1920-1930*, pp. 4 ff.
- ² *Solidarity*, 27 July 1918.

Appendices

APPENDIX I

Population According to Occupation

Occupation*	1891		1901		1911		1921	
	'000	%†	'000	%	'000	%	'000	%
Professional	85	6.2	112	6.8	147	7.4	202	8.7
Domestic	159	11.6	202	12.2	203	10.2	210	9.1
Commercial	168	12.3	224	13.6	291	14.6	356	15.3
Transport and Communications	93	6.8	123	7.5	159	8.0	208	9.0
Industrial	419	30.7	429	26.0	569	28.7	726	31.2
Primary Producers	419	30.7	536	32.5	609	29.9	600	25.8
Independent	23	1.7	22	1.4	26	1.2	21	0.9
Breadwinners	1366	100.0	1648	100.0	2004	100.0	2323	100.0
Dependants	1808		2125		2451		3113	
Population	3174		3773		4455		5436	

Source: Reports, Commonwealth Census, 1911 and 1921.

* This classification of occupations, adopted for the 1891 colonial censuses, was maintained for the censuses of 1901, 1911, and 1921.

† Occupational category as percentage of breadwinners.

APPENDIX II

Factories and Factory Employment

	Factories No.	Total workers '000	Average per factory	Factories employing over 100		Total h.p. employed '000
				% total factories	% total workers	
1885	8,632	105	12.2	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
1890	8,903	133	15.0	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
1895	8,247	134	16.2	N.A.	N.A.	57*
1901†	11,143	198	17.7	N.A.	N.A.	74*
1906	11,581	229	19.7	3.4	35.5	212
1911	14,455	312	21.6	3.6	38.4	344
1916‡	15,010	317	21.1	3.6	42.7	530
1921	17,113	387	22.6	3.8	42.9	742

Sources: T. A. Coghlan, *The Seven Colonies of Australasia*, 1901-2; *Commonwealth Year Book*, Nos. 1, 6, 11, 15.

* Figures for New South Wales and Victoria only.

† Before 1901 the figures for the numbers of factories are inadequate because different definitions were employed in the different colonies.

‡ The 1916 figure represented a fall from the 1913 peak.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX III

Trade Unions and Trade Unionists

Unions				Membership			
Total No.*	Separate organiza- tions	No. for which m'ship avail.	Unions for which m'ship avail.	Estim. total m'ship '000	% incr. (5 yrs.)	Unionists as % of bread-winners†	
1891	124	N.A.	72	31.9	54.9	—	4.0
1896	134	N.A.	83	34.1	55.1	0.4	—
1901	198	N.A.	139	68.2	97.2	76.4	5.9
1906	302	N.A.	253	147.0	175.5	80.6	—
1907	323	N.A.	286	172.3	194.6	—	—
1908	378	N.A.	334	212.5	240.5	—	—
1909	419	N.A.	375	244.7	300.2	—	—
1910	482	N.A.	442	277.0	302.1	—	—
1911	573	N.A.	542	355.0	364.7	107.8	18.2
1912	621	408	621	433.2	—	—	—
1913	710	432	710	497.9	—	—	—
1914	712	430	712	523.3	—	—	—
1915	713	415	713	528.0	—	—	—
1916	705	392	705	546.6	—	49.3	—
1917	747	389	747	564.2	—	—	—
1918	767	394	767	581.8	—	—	—
1919	771	394	771	627.7	—	—	—
1920	796	388	796	684.5	—	—	—
1921	796	382	796	703.0	—	28.6	30.3

Source: *Commonwealth Labour Report*, Nos. 2, 12.

* Includes all unions operating within only one state, together with all state branches of interstate unions. The next column, 'Separate Organizations', adjusts this by eliminating state branches and counting interstate unions as one unit.

† Breadwinners include employers and self-employed, who are not normally eligible for union membership.

Note: The Commonwealth Statistician (see *Commonwealth Labour Report*, No. 2) states that the early figures in this series are very inadequate, but that they improve progressively to 1911, and that from 1912 they may be taken as accurate.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX IV

Trade Union Structure

(a) *Percentage of unionists in unions of various sizes*

	Under 1,000	1,000— 5,000	5,001— 10,000	Over 10,000
1912	14.1	32.4	23.0	30.5
1913	15.3	24.9	24.4	35.4
1914	14.9	27.5	23.9	33.7
1915	13.1	28.5	23.1	35.3
1916	12.5	26.4	20.8	40.3
1917	12.8	23.1	25.6	38.5
1918	12.5	25.1	17.7	44.7
1919	11.3	26.9	15.2	46.6
1920	10.4	28.8	14.9	45.9
1921	10.1	25.5	16.4	48.0

(b) *Interstate Unions*

	Unions		Membership of interstate unions	
	Separate Unions	Interstate Unions	No. '000	%
1912	408	72	280	64.6
1913	432	78	352	70.8
1914	430	79	356	68.0
1915	415	81	380	71.9
1916	392	81	412	75.4
1917	389	94	456	80.8
1918	394	95	469	80.6
1919	394	95	498	79.3
1920	388	99	543	79.4
1921	382	101	568	80.8

Source: *Commonwealth Labour Report*, Nos. 9, 13.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX V

Wages, Prices, Real Wages

	<i>Money wages</i>	<i>Cost of living*</i>	<i>Real wages</i>	<i>Real wages (adjusted for unemployment)</i>
1891	848	973	872	830
1896	816	823	991	928
1901	848	880	964	945
1906	866	902	960	940
1907	893	897	996	986
1908	900	951	946	934
1909	923	948	974	963
1910	955	970	985	974
1911	1000	1000	1000	1000
1912	1051	1101	955	946
1913	1076	1104	975	970
1914	1081	1140	948	912
1915	1092	1278	854	813
1916	1144	1324	864	854
1917	1226	1318	930	907
1918	1270	1362	932	921
1919	1370	1510	907	889
1920	1627	1785	911	894
1921	1826	1697	1076	1002

Source: Commonwealth Labour Report, Nos. 2, 14.

* Cost of living for 1891 and 1896 for Sydney only; from 1901, for Commonwealth.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX VI Unemployment

	Unions			Unemployed*	
	No. reporting	M'ship '000	'000	%	% unemployed in census
1891	25	6	0.6	9.3	7.5
1896	25	4	0.5	10.8	—
1901	39	9	0.6	6.6	6.5†
1906	47	11	0.8	6.7	—
1907	51	13	0.8	5.7	—
1908	68	19	1.1	6.0	—
1909	84	21	1.2	5.8	—
1910	109	33	1.9	5.6	—
1911	160	68	3.2	4.7	4.5
1912	464	224	12.4	5.5	—
1913	465	251	16.1	6.5	—
1914	439	251	22.3	8.3	—
1915	465	273	25.7	9.3	—
1916	470	292	16.8	5.8	—
1917	459	297	20.3	7.1	—
1918	475	309	17.5	5.8	—
1919	459	317	20.5	6.6	—
1920	450	351	22.1	6.5	—
1921	436	370	40.5	11.2	6.8‡

Sources: *Commonwealth Labour Report*, Nos. 2, 14.

* Unemployment figures are derived from trade union returns; these were very scrappy for the early years, but, according to the Commonwealth Statistician, are reasonably complete from 1912. They do not include strikers.

† New South Wales and Victoria only.

‡ 1921 was a year of sudden shifts in the employment level; the big discrepancy between the *Labour Report* figure (which is an average for the year) and the census figure may be because the census was taken at a good time of the year.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX VII

Strikes

	<i>Industrial disputes No.</i>	<i>Workers involved '000</i>	<i>Man-days lost '000</i>	<i>Wages lost £000</i>	<i>Strikers as % of total employees</i>
1913	208	50·3	623·5	287·7	4·2
1914	337	71·0	1090·4	551·2	5·1
1915	358	81·3	583·2	299·6	6·9
1916	508	170·7	1678·9	967·6	14·8
1917	444	174·0	4599·7	2594·8	15·0
1918	298	56·4	580·9	372·3	4·8
1919	460	157·6	6308·2	3951·9	12·5
1920	554	155·6	1872·1	1223·7	12·2
1921	624	165·1	956·6	757·0	12·5

Source: Commonwealth Labor Reports, Nos. 2-12.

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A. M. MCBRIAR

Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Melbourne

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